

**EVALUATION OF LITERACY TEACHING
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS
OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE
(2008)**

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CONTENTS	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xvi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xvi
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xxvii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xx
1. Background and objectives	xx
2. Research approach and timeframe	xxii
3. Research methods	xxiii
4. Structure of the report	xxiv
5. Main findings and conclusions	xxv
6. Recommendations for enhancing the Literacy Strategy	xxx
7. Implications of the recommendations	xxxii
8. Key features of a literacy model for the Province	xxxiii
CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, SCOPE AND AIM OF THE EVALUATION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Origin of and background to the evaluation	2
1.2.1 Learner performance assessment and evaluations	3
1.2.2 Limpopo Province’s School Transformation Programme and Literacy Strategy	5
1.2.3 Theoretical weakness of literacy debates which inform the National Curriculum Statements	6
1.3 Scope and purpose of the evaluation	8
1.3.1 Literature review	10
1.3.2 Evaluation of learner support material	10
1.3.3 Tracking the provisioning and availability of learning materials	10
1.3.4 Brief review of teachers’ literacy training	10
1.3.5 Inclusion of Grade 4 and reading and writing across the curriculum	10
1.3.6 Partnership and collaboration	11
1.3.7 Stakeholder participation	11
1.4 Aims and objectives of the evaluation	11
1.5 The research approach	12
1.6 The structure of the report	13
1.7 Outline of chapters	13
<u>PART 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW</u>	15
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY	16
2.1 Research ethics	16
2.1.1 Approval of all studies	16
2.1.2 Information sheets and consent forms	16

2.2	Main elements and stages of the study	17
2.2.1	Research Reference Group	18
2.2.1.1	First Research Reference Group meeting	19
2.2.1.2	Second Research Reference Group meeting	20
2.2.1.3	Third Research Reference Group meeting	20
2.2.1.4	Fourth Research Reference Group meeting	21
2.2.2	Piloting the instruments and procedures, and training	21
2.2.3	Revising procedures, instruments and sampling, and refresher training	21
2.2.4	Main study – information collection	22
2.2.4.1	Detail on elements of the main information-collection period	22
2.2.5	Data processing, analysis and report writing	23
2.3	Capacity development and training	24
2.3.1	Pre-pilot training	24
2.3.2	Piloting process itself	24
2.3.3	Refresher training	24
2.4	Data-collection procedures during the main study	25
2.4.1	Fieldwork organisation	25
2.4.2	School visits	25
2.4.2.1	The process of gaining access to schools and classrooms	25
2.4.2.2	Classroom observations and classroom document reviews	26
2.4.2.3	Teacher questionnaires	28
2.4.2.4	Teacher focus-group interviews	28
2.4.2.5	School principal questionnaires	28
2.4.2.6	School conditions and school document review	29
2.4.2.7	School Management Team and School Governing Body/parent interview schedules	29
2.4.2.8	Data-collection reports	29
2.4.3	District-office visits	29
2.5	Sample selection	29
2.6	Methods and data sources	30
2.6.1	Teacher education	36
2.7	Data-processing and analysis	38

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE FIELD OF LITERACY TEACHING	40
3.1 Introduction	40
3.2 Language learning and literacy development theory and research	41
3.2.1 Linguistics, Language Learning and Literacy Development	41
3.2.2 Language policy, language planning and gaps amongst the branches of linguistics	42
3.2.3 Defining the language acquisition/learning terms in African contexts	43
3.3 Literacy in formal school education	45
3.3.1 Post-apartheid curriculum development and literacy theory	45
3.3.2 Literacy and Language Policy in the South African Curriculum	49
3.3.3 Gaps between early literacy and academic literacy	52

3.4	Overview of the literature	54
3.4.1	Language Education Policy in Africa – since the 1953 UNESCO Report	55
3.4.2	Current research: Implementation of policy through different language and literacy models	56
3.4.3	Summary: models which work in African settings	58
3.4.4	Further international research on reading	59
3.4.5	Summary of the international research on reading	60
3.5	International and African Research: the gap between learners who study in the Mother Tongue and those who switch to English medium	60
3.5.1	What happens where there is an early transition to the L2?	61
3.5.2	Recent South African Research	62
3.5.3	Significance of the findings from the recent literacy studies in multilingual settings	65
3.6	Conclusion: literacy, quality education and optimal opportunity for cognitive development	66

PART 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: CONTENTS AND QUALITY OF LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE LIMPOPO PRIMARY SCHOOLS **69**

CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE/S OF TEACHING AND LEARNING **71**

4.1	Extent to which School Governing Bodies and parents select school language policies.	72
4.1.1	What language policies do parents/guardians at the schools want and support?	74
4.2	The Limpopo primary schools' language-in-education programmes	76
4.2.1	Learners' home language/s	76
4.2.2	The language/s of public administration/social events at schools	78
4.2.3	Language/s of learning and teaching (LOLT): what principals and teachers reported and what was observed in classrooms	78
4.2.4	Teaching of English as First Additional Language (FAL)/L2	81
4.2.5	Teachers' proficiency in the language/s of instruction	83
4.3	Are the Limpopo primary schools' language-in-education programmes in Grade 1-4 classrooms aligned with DoE's policies?	84

CHAPTER 5: LITERACY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS **88**

5.1	Socio-economic contexts and physical environments	88
5.1.1	Schools' socio-economic contexts	88
5.1.1.1	School history	88
5.1.1.2	School locations	88
5.1.1.3	Family and community background	89
5.1.2	School physical environments	91
5.1.2.1	School buildings and grounds	91
5.1.2.2	School size and type	92
5.1.2.3	Teacher:learner ratio and number of classrooms	92
5.1.2.4	Feeding schemes	93
5.1.2.5	Teaching resources	93
5.2	Grade 1-4 Classrooms	94
5.2.1	Class size	94
5.2.2	Classroom conditions	95

5.3	Are the social contexts and physical environments of schools and in classrooms conducive to Grade 1-4 language and literacy learning and teaching?	95
5.4	School and classroom environmental support for literacy development	97
5.4.1	Developing a book and reading culture	97
5.4.1.1	School libraries	98
5.4.1.2	Use of texts in assembly	98
5.4.1.3	Textual material on display on classroom walls	99
5.4.1.4	Classroom book collections	100
5.4.1.5	Learners' access to and use of book collections and other bound material during classroom observations	101
5.5	Do school and classroom environments promote and enhance Grade 1-4 mother-tongue and first additional language literacy development?	101
CHAPTER 6: LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT MATERIAL		103
6.1	Availability and use of textbooks and readers in schools	103
6.1.1	Textbooks and readers used by teachers in the Limpopo study	103
6.1.1.1	Home Language	103
6.1.1.2	First Additional Language (FAL)	104
6.1.1.3	Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills textbooks	106
6.1.2	Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners in class and at home	108
6.1.2.1	Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners in class	108
6.1.2.2	Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners at home	112
6.2	Availability and use of other textual learning and teaching support material in classrooms	113
6.3	Selection of learner support material for schools	113
6.3.1	Teacher and LDoE satisfaction with the quality of textbooks / readers	113
6.4	School management of learner support material	115
6.4.1	Schools' inventory of textbooks, readers and other learning material	115
6.5	Is there effective provisioning, availability and utilisation of across-the-curriculum mother-tongue and first additional language learner and teacher support material in schools and classes?	116
CHAPTER 7: TIME ON TASK AND TASK DEMANDS		119
7.1	School organisation and management of time on task	119
7.1.1	Time registers	119
7.1.2	Disruptions to teaching and catching up time lost to teaching	119
7.1.3	Teacher absence and supervision of classes when teachers are absent	120
7.1.4	Teachers' late arrival	122
7.1.5	Interruptions during classroom teaching	122
7.1.6	Learner absenteeism	122
7.1.7	Learner late arrival and discipline	123
7.2	Teachers' use and management of time in class	125
7.2.1	Monitoring and pacing of learning	125

7.3	Learners' opportunities to read and write	126
7.3.1	Learners' writing opportunities	126
7.3.1.1	Availability of writing implements and material	126
7.3.1.2	Sources and types of writing tasks	127
7.3.1.3	Across-grade progression in writing demands	130
7.3.2	Learners' reading opportunities	133
7.3.2.1	Types of reading opportunities	133
7.3.2.2	Types of reading demands	134
7.3.2.3	Across-grade progression in reading demands	136
7.4	Do schools and teachers organise and manage time on task and instruction so as to maximise learners' opportunities to participate in grade-level reading and writing tasks in mother tongue and First Additional Language in class?	136
 CHAPTER 8: LITERACY TEACHING		141
8.1	Did teachers develop learners' concepts of print and printed material?	142
8.2	Did teachers provide opportunities and strategies for learners to self-correct when reading?	144
8.3	Did teachers develop learners' reading comprehension skills?	145
8.4	Did teachers deliberately develop learners' vocabulary and spelling?	148
 CHAPTER 9: LITERACY PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT		151
9.1	Do school management teams and teachers systematically structure and ensure delivery of Grades 1-4 Home Language/L1 and First Additional Language Learning Programmes along a developmental pathway?	151
9.1.1	Grade 1-4 teachers' Home Language and First Additional Language Learning Programmes	151
9.1.1.1	Coverage	151
9.1.1.2	Progression	153
9.1.2	Teachers' structuring of Grades 1-4 Home Language and First Additional Language Learning Programmes	154
9.1.3	School management teams' management and monitoring of internal coherence in the sequencing of literacy and language curriculum planning and delivery across grades and phases	154
9.1.3.1	Managing curriculum planning and pacing	155
9.1.3.2	Ensuring that there is enough reading and writing across all Learning Areas	156
9.1.3.3	Monitoring curriculum delivery	157
9.2	How regular and individualised is assessment and recording of Grade 1-4 learners' Home Language/L1 and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability?	157
9.2.1	Assessment records	158
9.2.2	Marking of learners' workbooks	159
9.2.3	Recording Grade 1-4 learners' Home Language and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability	159

CHAPTER 10: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS	161
10.1 Progress reports provided for parents/guardians	161
10.2 School meetings to discuss children’s academic progress	162
10.3 Homework	163
10.4 Parents’ expectations for and of their children	164
10.5 Barriers to parental involvement and expectations	165
10.6 Are schools and teachers involving Grade 1-4 parents/guardians as much as possible in their children’s academic performance and literacy development?	167
CHAPTER 11: TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR IN-SERVICE PRIMARY-SCHOOL TEACHERS	169
11.1 Are Grade R/1-4 teachers sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified for language and literacy teaching?	169
11.1.1 Teaching experience	169
11.1.2 Teaching qualifications	170
11.1.3 Tertiary teacher-training institutions attended	171
11.2. Are School Management Teams sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified to manage primary curriculum phases?	173
11.2.1. School Management Team experience	173
11.2.2 School Management Team qualifications	174
11.3 Are SMTs and Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from Limpopo Department of Education?	175
11.3.1 Curriculum planning, pacing and delivery	175
11.3.1.1 SMT curriculum training	175
11.3.1.2 Teachers’ curriculum training	176
11.3.2 Learning Area knowledge and skills	178
11.3.3 Assessment and pedagogy	179
11.4 What is district-level capacity for supporting Grade 1-4 teachers?	181
11.5 Are Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from other INSET providers?	183
11.6 What in-service training and support is requested for Grade 1-4 teachers?	186
11.7 What do teachers’ teaching practices and understandings of language and literacy teaching tell us about the language and literacy training received and needed?	187
11.7.1 Teachers’ understandings of the relationship between language and learning	188
11.7.2 Teachers’ understandings of literacy teaching	189
11.8 Development and education required by the primary-school teachers	194
CHAPTER 12: UNIVERSITY-BASED TEACHER-EDUCATION PROVISION	195
12.1 History and current capacity of Limpopo teacher-training institutions	196
12.2 Implications of this macro- and institutional period of flux for teacher supply	199

12.3	The preparation of pre-service teachers to teach literacy in elementary and secondary schools in the Province of Limpopo¹	200
12.3.1	Introduction	200
12.3.2	Investigating teacher preparation for literacy instruction in the Province of Limpopo	202
12.3.2.1	University of Limpopo: teacher training for literacy instruction	202
12.3.2.2	University of Venda: teacher training for literacy instruction	205
12.3.3	Conclusion: quality of teacher training with regard to literacy instruction	208
12.4	Analysis of the findings on literacy in teacher education	208
12.5	Preliminary strategic pointers pertaining to the capacity of teacher-training institutions to provide the required primary-school teacher development and education	209
12.6	Concluding remarks	210
 <u>PART 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		212
CHAPTER 13: MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS		213
13.	Conclusions	218
13.1	Extant positive features in schools	218
13.2	Constraining factors	220
 CHAPTER 14: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS		230
14.1	Recommendations for enhancing the Literacy Strategy	230
14.2	Implications for the LDoE in the articulation and implementation of its generic Literacy Model	240
14.3	Time frames and costs	242
14.4	Core features of a Literacy Model for Limpopo Province	245
 REFERENCES		272

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1:	Information sources and methods	31
Table 2.2:	Number of districts visited, number of district interview schedules completed and number of respondents	33
Table 2.3:	Number of schools visited and classrooms observed by district	33
Table 2.4:	Number of school-level instruments completed	33
Table 2.5:	Designation/portfolio of SGB members interviewed	34
Table 2.6:	Number of teachers per grade that completed the teacher questionnaire	34
Table 2.7:	Number of Grade 1-4 teachers per district that completed the teacher questionnaire	34
Table 2.8:	Teacher numbers by gender	35
Table 2.9:	Number of classroom observation, ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ classroom observation schedules and classroom document reviews completed	35
Table 2.10:	Number of ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ classroom classroom observations in each district	35
Table 3.1:	Current international phenomena: wrong language education models, theory, methodology, research	54
Table 4.1:	SGB influence in decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels	73
Table 4.2:	Principals’ reports on general parent body influence in decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels	74
Table 4.3:	SGB reports on general parent body influence in decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels	74
Table 4.4:	Grade level at which SGB/ parent focus groups believe parents / guardians/caregivers want English (or Afrikaans) as FAL first introduced for oral communication	75
Table 4.5:	Grade level at which SGB/ parent focus groups believe parents / guardians/caregivers want English (or Afrikaans) as FAL first introduced as a subject	75
Table 4.6:	Grade level at which SGB/ parent focus groups believe parents / guardians/caregivers want children to learn subjects mainly in English/Afrikaans	75
Table 4.7:	Principals’ reports on majority home language/s of learners at their schools	76
Table 4.8:	Principals’ reports on minority home language groups at their schools	76
Table 4.9:	Teachers’ reports on the home language of the majority of learners in their classes	77
Table 4.10:	Researchers’ reports on the home language of the majority of learners in the classes observed	77
Table 4.11:	Principals’ reports on language/s of public administration and social events at the primary schools	78
Table 4.12:	Principals’ reports on the language/s of instruction at their schools	78
Table 4.13:	Researchers’ reports on languages used by Grade 1-4 learners to write in their Home Language (L1) workbooks and/or portfolios	79

Table 4.14:	Number of Foundation Phase teachers who reported mainly using learners' home language for teaching Numeracy by grades	79
Table 4.15:	Number of Grade 1-3 teachers who reported using home language for teaching Life Skills	79
Table 4.16:	Principals' reports on grade in which FAL (English/Afrikaans) is first introduced for oral communication	81
Table 4.17:	Principals' reports on grade in which FAL (English/Afrikaans) is first introduced as a subject (with reading and writing)	82
Table 4.18:	Teachers' reported home/first languages	83
Table 4.19:	Extent to which teachers reported speaking/reading/writing English outside of school	84
Table 4.20:	Extract of proposed strategy for literacy in primary schools summary of curriculum requirements for Grades R-3	86
Table 5.1:	School location	88
Table 5.2:	School poverty index ratings	89
Table 5.3:	Principals' reports on learners' type of housing	91
Table 5.4:	Principals' report on parental educational levels	91
Table 5.5:	Principals' reports on shortage of Foundation Phase teachers	93
Table 5.6:	Principals' reports on availability of particular teaching resources and facilities	93
Table 5.7:	Teachers' reports on class size	94
Table 5.8:	Average number of learners per grade present during observations	95
Table 5.9:	Classroom conditions and facilities according to classroom observations	95
Table 5.10:	District reports on provision of funds/budgets for purchasing books for reading for pleasure	98
Table 5.11:	Amount of learning material on display on classroom walls	99
Table 5.12:	Sources of learning material on display on classroom walls	99
Table 5.13:	Types of books available in classroom book collections	100
Table 5.14:	Classroom book collection languages	100
Table 5.15:	Type of books or other bound material (besides textbooks / readers) most and least commonly handled by learners during the observation period	101
Table 6.1:	Publishers of home-language readers that teachers showed researchers	104
Table 6.2:	Publishers of home-language textbooks that teachers showed	104
Table 6.3:	Publishers of the FAL readers that teachers showed researchers	105
Table 6.4:	Publishers of FAL textbooks that teachers showed researchers	105
Table 6.5:	Publisher of Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks that teachers showed researchers	106
Table 6.6:	Publishers of textbooks/readers reportedly most used by teachers	106
Table 6.7:	Textbooks/readers most commonly seen being used during the classroom observations	107
Table 6.8:	District reports on availability of textbooks/readers for learners	108
Table 6.9:	Teachers' reports on the number of textbooks/readers available for use in LAs	108
Table 6.10:	Number of classroom observations where home language (L1) and FAL and/or Numeracy/Maths textbooks/readers were used and there was one copy per learner	109

Table 6.11:	Number of observations where Life Skills, Social Science, and Natural Science textbooks were used and there was one copy per learner	109
Table 6.12:	District reports on the availability of Foundation Phase Numeracy and Life Skills mother-tongue textbooks	110
Table 6.13:	Teachers' reports on the number of textbooks available in mother-tongue for Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills	110
Table 6.14:	Language of Numeracy/Mathematics, Natural Science, and Social Science textbooks used by learners during classroom observations (Gr 1-4)	111
Table 6.15:	Number of teachers who believe they have enough copies of textbooks/readers available for use in LAs	111
Table 6.16:	SMT reports on whether every Foundation Phase learner has own textbooks and readers	112
Table 6.17:	Number of SMTs that reported that every Foundation Phase learner at their school has own Numeracy and Life Skills textbook in mother tongue	112
Table 6.18:	Teachers' reports on where class textbooks/readers are usually kept overnight	112
Table 6.19:	Number of teachers who reported that they found the readers / textbooks used appropriate for their learners in terms of grade level	114
Table 6.20:	Teachers' reports on how appropriate they found the readers / textbooks they use for their learners in terms of language level	114
Table 6.21:	Information in LSM "asset" records for all grades for 2006	115
Table 6.22:	Number of teachers who reported having any training in using the textbooks/readers they use for different LAs	117
Table 7.1:	SMT group reports on how classes are covered when teachers are absent	121
Table 7.2:	Evidence of unattended classes during school visit	121
Table 7.3:	Evidence of teachers arriving late for school during school visits	122
Table 7.4:	Evidence of teachers' speedy return to classes after breaks during school visits	122
Table 7.5:	Evidence of learner late arrival during school visits	123
Table 7.6:	Evidence of learners' speedy return to classes after break	124
Table 7.7:	Methods of giving writing/written tasks during the observation period ordered from most to least commonly observed	127
Table 7.8:	Extent to which learners completed any writing/written tasks during the observation period	127
Table 7.9:	Types of writing/written tasks in which learners were involved during the observation period and extent of learner involvement	128
Table 7.10:	Frequency of learners completing specific types of writing exercises in their Home Language (L1) workbooks and/or portfolios	128
Table 7.11:	Frequency of learners completing different types of writing exercises in FAL workbooks and/or portfolios	129
Table 7.12:	Across Grade 1-4 comparison of types of writing/written tasks in which all or most learners in the class were involved during the observation period	130

Table 7.13:	Comparison of Grade 1-4 writing demands made on learners in home-language workbooks/portfolios	130
Table 7.14:	Reading opportunities occurring during the observation period ordered from most to least commonly observed	133
Table 7.15:	Comparison of occurrences of particular reading opportunities in Grades 1-4 during the observation period	134
Table 7.16:	Types of reading tasks learners were involved in during the observation period and extent of learner involvement	135
Table 7.17:	Extent to which expository and narrative texts were read during the classroom observations	135
Table 7.18:	Number of observations where learners were engaged with reading expository text that related to other learning areas	135
Table 7.19:	Comparison of types of reading demands made on all or most learners in Grades 1-4 classes during the observation period	136
Table 7.20:	Time use during classroom observations	137
Table 7.21:	Number of observations where learners appeared to be repeating off by heart or repeating after others when reading aloud	139
Table 8.1:	Extent to which teachers used learning material in ways that develop learners' concepts about print and printed material during the classroom observation	143
Table 8.2:	Extent to which learners themselves handled books or any other bound material during observations	143
Table 8.3:	Number of cases where there was evidence of any learners handling and/or using readers and/or textbooks/booklets during the observation period	144
Table 8.4:	Extent to which the teacher handled error by providing opportunities for learners to self-correct when reading aloud during classroom observations	145
Table 8.5:	Strategies for self-correcting that were modelled or provided by teachers in classroom observations	145
Table 8.6:	Type and extent of teacher questioning about the meaning of text during classroom observations	146
Table 8.7:	Extent to which teachers cued or drew learners' attention to main ideas in extended texts during classroom observations	146
Table 8.8:	Extent to which teachers explicitly taught learners how to interpret and 'read' extralinguistic devices during classroom observations	146
Table 8.9:	Extent to which teachers cued learners to use illustrative devices so as to understand the extended texts they read during observations	147
Table 8.10:	Extent of learner involvement in making sense of text during the classroom observations	147
Table 8.11:	Extent and type of learner involvement in summarising or retelling what they have read during classroom observations	147
Table 9.1:	Scope of teachers' home language Learning Programmes/work schedules	151
Table 9.2:	Extent to which teachers' Home Language Learning Programmes provided details of the content and skills to be covered	152

Table 9.3:	Extent to which teachers' Home Language learning plans showed evidence of planned progression in sequencing of content and skills	153
Table 9.4:	Evaluation of average total time that SMTs reported as allocated for literacy/language (HL and FAL) per week for Grade 1-3	156
Table 9.5:	Number of marks/assessment tasks recorded in teachers' record books for each learner for Home Language in August/September 2007	158
Table 9.6:	Number of FAL marks/ assessment tasks recorded in teachers' record books for each learner in August/September 2007	158
Table 9.7:	Number of Home Language reading, writing and oral activities/ tasks assessed in teachers' record books	159
Table 10.1:	Principals' reports on frequency of school meetings for parents/guardians	162
Table 10.2:	Teachers' reports on how often learners are given written home-language homework	163
Table 10.3:	Teachers' reports on how often learners are given reading home-language homework	163
Table 10.4:	Teachers' reports on number of minutes' reading home-language homework learners are given	164
Table 10.5:	Teachers' reports on how often learners are given Numeracy homework	164
Table 10.6:	Evidence of homework given in classroom observations	164
Table 10.7:	Greatest barriers to parents/guardians/caregivers from involvement in children's academic education according to SGBs	166
Table 11.1:	Teacher reports on years of teaching experience	169
Table 11.2:	Grades that teachers said they have taught over the years	169
Table 11.3:	Teachers' reports on their qualifications	170
Table 11.4:	Teachers' reports on their areas of specialisation	171
Table 11.5:	Teachers' reports on which tertiary institutions they had received their formal professional training and qualifications from	171
Table 11.6:	Senior teachers'/SMT members' reported number of years teaching prior to appointment to SMT	173
Table 11.7:	Grade 1-4 teacher positions at school	173
Table 11.8:	Senior teachers'/SMT members' number of years in current position on SMT	174
Table 11.9:	Senior teacher/SMT member qualifications	174
Table 11.10:	Senior teacher/SMT specialisations	174
Table 11.11:	SMT reports on LDoE NCS training received	176
Table 11.12:	District reports on extent of curriculum planning, pacing and delivery support and guidance for primary-school teachers in districts in 2006/2007	177
Table 11.13:	District reports on extent to which guidance and support with Learning Area knowledge and skills have been provided to primary-school teachers in districts in 2006/2007	178
Table 11.14:	SMT reports on Grade R/1-4 teachers' support from LDoE workshops	179
Table 11.15:	Number of teachers who reported that they had attended in-service/professional support or guidance through LDoE workshops in 2006/2007 for various Learning Areas	179

Table 11.16:	District reports on the number of Foundation Phase teachers per year observed teaching	180
Table 11.17:	Principals' reports on district and circuit officials' visits to schools in 2007	180
Table 11.18:	Policy target for number of days of district support per primary school each year	181
Table 11.19:	District reports on the number of district/circuit curriculum advisors with formal qualifications in training Foundation Phase teachers in reading and writing	182
Table 11.20:	Number of primary schools each district office oversees	182
Table 11.21:	Principals' reports on in-service support provided in their schools in the past four years	183
Table 11.22:	Teachers' reports on other (non-formal) in-service/professional development education and training (besides DoE) attended in 2005/2006/2007	184
Table 11.23:	Teachers' ratings of the usefulness of INSET and professional development	185
Table 11.24:	District officials' opinions on types of in-service/professional development education and training support still needed by Grade 1-4 teachers	186
Table 11.25:	Grade in which teachers believe learners can make a successful transition to learning subjects mainly in English/Afrikaans	189
Table 11.26:	Teachers' reports on the number of own books at home	193
Table 12.1:	Age brackets derived from teacher responses	198
Table 14.1:	Costs of the implications for the implementation of the Limpopo Department of Education's Generic Literacy Model	242

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1:	Graph, adapted from a longitudinal study of Thomas & Collier (1997) involving 220 000 students in the USA showing what can be expected of students' performance across the entire school system	61
Figure 3.2:	South African Grade 6: MOI achievement by home language and province	63
Figure 3.3:	Mathematics achievement by home language and province	63
Figure 3.4:	Comparison of achievement: multiple-choice and constructed-response items	64

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1:	Irish Aid, LDoE, UL, HSRC explorations (notes on meetings)	248
Appendix 2:	Consent form	258
Appendix 3:	Research Reference Group Terms of Reference	261
Appendix 4:	Extract from Snow, C, Burns, S., & Griffin, P (eds)	266
Appendix 5:	Key features of the Limpopo Department of Education's School Transformation Programme (STP) and Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools	270

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABET:	Adult basic education and training
ACE:	Advanced Certificate in Education
ADEA:	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AL:	African languages
B Ed	Bachelors degree in Education
BICS:	Basic interactive communicative skills
BLE:	Bilingual education. In South Africa, mother tongue instruction plus a second language as a subject.
BTL:	Breakthrough to Literacy (The Molteno Project)
BtE:	Bridge to English (The Molteno Project)
CALP:	Cognitive academic language proficiency
CEA:	Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) (University of Pretoria)
CEO:	Chief Executive Officer
CEPD:	Centre for Education Policy Development
CPTD:	Continuing Professional Teacher Development
CR:	Constructed-response (items, or open-ended items)
DCI:	Acronym of the former name for Irish Aid
DET:	Department of Education and Training (under apartheid – African)
DoE:	Department of Education
ECD:	Early Childhood Development
EFAL:	English (as) First Additional Language
EFL:	English (as a) Foreign Language
ELT:	Experiential Language Teaching (approach)
EMIS:	Education Management Information Systems
ESL:	English (as a) Second Language
ESSD:	Education, Science and Skills Development (HSRC research progr.)
FAL:	First Additional Language
FEDSAS:	The Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools
FET:	Further Education and Training (Grades 10 to12)
FL:	Foreign language
FP:	Foundation Phase
GET:	General Education and Training (Reception year to Grade 9)
Grade R:	Reception Year
HL:	Home Language
HEI:	Higher Education Institution
HoA:	House of Assembly (under apartheid ‘white’)
HOD:	Head of Department
HoD:	House of Delegates (under apartheid Indian)
HoR:	House of Representatives (under apartheid ‘coloured’)
HSRC:	Human Sciences Research Council
IA:	Irish Aid
IEP:	Integrated Education Programme
INSET:	In-service education and training
IP:	Intermediate Phase
IPET:	Initial Professional Education of Teachers
IQMS:	Integrated Quality Management System
JET:	Joint Education Trust (formerly; now JET Education Services)
KZN:	KwaZulu-Natal (Province)

L1:	First language or ‘mother tongue’, also sometimes called ‘home language’
L2:	Second language, in this context the second language learnt at school
LA:	Learning Area
LAS:	Learning area specialist (now curriculum advisor)
LDoE:	Limpopo Department of Education
LIEP:	Language-in-education policy
LOI:	Language of instruction
LoLT:	Language of learning and teaching
LSM:	Learner support material
LTSM:	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
M&E:	Monitoring and evaluation
MC:	Multiple-choice (questions)
MEC:	Member of the Executive Committee/Council
MLA:	Monitoring Learning Achievement
MoI:	Medium of instruction
MT:	Mother tongue
MTE:	Mother-tongue (medium) education
NAPTOSA:	National Association of Professional Teachers of South Africa
NASG:	National Association of School Governing Bodies
NCS:	National Curriculum Statements
NGO:	Non-government Organisation
NPDE:	National Professional Diploma in Education
OBE:	Outcomes-based education
PANSALB:	Pan South African Language Board
PEU:	Professional Educators Union
PGCE:	Post-Graduate Certificate in Education
PIRLS:	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PLC:	Chapter 12?/
PRESET	Pre-service education and training
PTA:	Parent Teacher Association
REC:	Research Ethics Committee (of the HSRC)
RNCS:	Revised National Curriculum Statements
RNE:	Royal Netherlands Embassy
RRG:	Research Reference Group (of the present project)
RTI:	Research Triangle Institute
SABC:	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACMEQ:	Southern [& Eastern] Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SADTU:	South African Democratic Teachers’ Union
SAOU:	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie (South African teachers union)
SAPA:	South African Publishers Association
SES:	Socio-economic status
SGB:	School Governing Body
SLA:	Second-language acquisition
SMT:	School Management Team
SP:	Senior Phase
SRN:	School Register of Needs
STP	School Transformation Programme (of Limpopo Province)
TEFL:	Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TEP:	Teacher Education Programme (a current large research programme run by a consortium funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy)
TESL:	Teaching English as a Second Language
TIMSS:	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UIE:	UNESCO Institute of Education
UK:	United Kingdom
UL:	University of Limpopo
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIVEN:	University of Venda
WITS:	University of the Witwatersrand

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation of literacy teaching in primary schools in Limpopo has been conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in conjunction with the University of Limpopo as contracted by the Limpopo Department of Education and Irish Aid.

The overarching **aim** of the study is to improve the quality of literacy teaching and hence overall academic achievement in Limpopo Province. Of major concern for the Department of Education in Limpopo is poor literacy and numeracy achievement as witnessed in several national and provincial systemic assessments conducted nationally in which Grade 3, Grade 4 and Grade 6 learners have been tested since 1999 (e.g. DoE, 2005).

1. Background and objectives

Attempts to address low learner achievement in the Province have materialised in several interventions including a comprehensive School Transformation Programme which articulates issues such as curriculum development, whole-school evaluation, school-development planning, school governance, and literacy development. The Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE), in collaboration with the Khanyisa Education Support Programme, has developed and formulated a proposed Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools (Francis *et al.*, 2005). This document provides direction to and guides the improvement of literacy in respect of classroom-teaching approaches, teacher training and support, resource provision, language-policy inputs, community support, and monitoring and evaluation. (More detail is presented in Appendix 5.)

The Literacy Strategy is embedded in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (DoE, 2002) which supports a communicative and whole-language approach to language teaching. A focus on the ‘whole language approach’ to teaching reading places an emphasis on reading whole passages of meaningful and authentic text and is based on an assumption that all children can and will be able to learn to read naturally. A communicative approach to language teaching is one which “emphasizes authentic communication where the purpose of using language is to interpret, express and negotiate meaning” (Baker, 2002:222).

However, whole-language and communicative methodologies and theoretical approaches have emerged in countries with high levels of literacy, where people are surrounded by easily accessible printed materials and where it is possible for children to have both a rich exposure to early-literacy practices at home and also early childhood education. Such children arrive at primary school with early-literacy skills already developed. In South Africa, especially the Limpopo Province, the majority of learners do not live in communities with high levels of literacy and printed materials are not readily available. Many primary school children come from homes where parents’ or guardians’ reading levels are far too low for them to help them even with beginning reading and learning to read. Furthermore, although the NCS documentation refers to literacy teaching and development in loose ideological (incl. “state of the art”) terms, it does not explain the mechanics of literacy teaching which teachers are now expected to follow. Indeed, none of the current policy, curriculum or curriculum-support documents actually operationalise communicative and whole-language approaches to literacy and exactly what it is that teachers need to do in the classroom in order to ensure that learners can read and write.

What has become evident through the series of systemic assessments in South Africa over the last decade, is that the whole language approach and more laissez-faire approaches to literacy development, in conjunction with the communicative approach to language teaching, are having seriously negative effects on the education of the majority of children who are from socio-economically disadvantaged communities. Evidence is that the gap between children from the middle-class and previously advantaged communities and those from more vulnerable communities is increasing.

The Limpopo Literacy Strategy is also embedded in the Language in Education Policy (LIEP) (DoE, 1997b) and the NCS. LIEP, following the international research and empirical evidence on bilingual education in multilingual contexts, places emphasis on literacy in mother tongue and the use of mother tongue medium education (MTE) for as long as possible with the addition of at least one other language which would complement rather than replace the mother tongue. In other words, within a language education paradigm called ‘additive bilingualism’. For the majority of learners in the South African education system, this has been interpreted as Home Language (mother tongue/L1) plus English². Provision is made in the LIEP for a variety of additive bilingual models and language maintenance programmes where fully-fledged bilingual models were impractical.

Yet, from the outset there has been a discontinuity between the understandings of additive bilingual education in language in education policy (LIEP) and how it had been pre-figured in the NCS (specifically Curriculum 2005/C2005). Although it was not explicitly stated as such, C2005 was understood to encourage teachers, curriculum advisors, and provincial departments to apply mother-tongue literacy in the Foundation Phase, followed by a switch to English medium in Grade 4, one year earlier than under the old Department of Education and Training (DET) system prior to 1994. In C2005 there was no reference to reading, writing, phonics and handwriting, leading teachers to neglect these. A switch to a second-language medium as early as Grade 4 means that the principle of additive bilingual education had given way to transitional bilingualism (a temporary, transient form of bilingual education in which the mother tongue is removed as a medium of instruction). For the most part, African Language speaking children are currently provided with three years of MTE followed by a switch to English medium in Grade 4. However, we found this was not the case in the Limpopo Province.

In recognition of the discrepancy between practice and the principles of additive bilingual education, in October 2006 the Minister of Education indicated that MTE will be extended to a minimum period of six years.

The primary **objective** of this research report is to provide a clear set of recommendations to inform the finalisation of the Limpopo Literacy Strategy and the development of a generic literacy model for the Province. This objective is accompanied by a series of other objectives identified as follows:

- The identification and interrogation of any successful literacy practices in schools.

² In South Africa the majority of learners do not speak English in their homes. In rural communities, English is often seldom heard and, in many parts of the Limpopo Province functions as a foreign language rather than as a *lingua franca*. Afrikaans is more commonly heard, for that matter.

- The identification and interrogation of any unsuccessful literacy practices in schools.
- The identification of gaps in terms of educational provision and support of literacy in schools.
- The identification of any gaps which may arise in the publication of learner support materials (LSMs).
- An analysis of teacher education course design and provisioning of literacy within the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). (The two HEI's in Limpopo, University of Limpopo (UL) and University of Venda (UNIVEN) offer teacher education at different levels. UL offers teacher education at secondary school level while UNIVEN offers early childhood and primary school teacher education programmes.)
- The involvement in the research of various stakeholder communities via representatives who are regularly updated on the research process and findings.
- Involvement of staff of HEIs, especially, University of Limpopo, in the research activities.
- Active capacity-building activities amongst senior students at the Universities of Limpopo, and Venda (fieldwork training, monitoring and mentoring of fieldwork research activities).
- Ensuring international research compatibility and validity.
- Dissemination of the findings to the clients and more broadly if appropriate.

2. Research approach and timeframe

The research project comprised two main phases:

Phase 1

Phase 1 ran from July 2006 to March 2007. It comprised all the preliminary discussions about the nature and extent of the project, reaching formal agreement about these, setting out procedures and vehicles for future interaction, reviewing the literature to clarify the theoretical underpinnings of the field of literacy teaching, developing and submitting the research instruments and outlines of the intended methodology, sample and design, and having all of these amended appropriately and endorsed.

Phase 1 essentially ensured that all stakeholders, literacy development materials and other information available, and teaching strategies used, were identified correctly with a view to further information collection, and that project mechanisms were set up properly (such as a Research Reference Group or RRG). Key stakeholder groupings in the RRG and wider process included policy makers, service providers, Limpopo Education Department officials (e.g., Chief Director Curriculum, procurement and EMIS directorates, ECD coordinators and practitioners), teacher unions, language committees/boards, Khanyisa, publishers, school governing body associations, and the funding agency, to name a few.

Phase 2

The main activities of Phase 2 started towards the end of July 2007. Phase 2 work comprised the final adjustments to and preparation of data-collection instruments, the sampling of participating schools and the individuals involved from these, the recruitment, composition and training of research teams, the information collection itself, data capturing and cleaning, data analysis and report writing. Essentially Phase 2 comprised an empirical project designed to link the quality of literacy materials and literacy practices in use, and other conditions of learning and teaching in schools,

Districts and the two HEI's in Limpopo that offer teacher education, to the literacy achievements and performance outcomes of learners, and also with the intentions of the curriculum. Data collection in Phase 2 took place over four weeks from 20 August until 14 September 2007.

In general terms, the empirical study has also been approached in a way that promotes partnership and collaboration. The research project included a focus on development and capacity building in the field of contemporary literacy programme evaluation and related activities in the province. This was achieved by functioning as a research consortium between the HSRC and University of Limpopo, in order to share research capacity and expertise, and build research capacity, including in literacy research methodologies.

The research undertaken during the course of this study has thus been analysed and interpreted through a variety of quantitative and qualitative instruments and processes. The research agency, HSRC, included in the study:

- a range of stakeholders from Limpopo province during the lifespan of the study (c.f. the Research Reference Group),
- its research partner, University of Limpopo, and
- several nationally and internationally recognised literacy and education research specialists.

3. Research methods

For the purpose of the study, information about relevant issues was collected through intensive classroom-based observation and interviews with a purposive sample of teachers, school management and governing body members, departmental officials, and other stakeholders. Aspects of the facilities and infra-structure at schools were observed, especially those related to the provision of learning materials. Policy documents at the various levels of the education system were reviewed, and a selection of literacy materials were analysed for levels of difficulty and compatibility with curriculum requirements. Additional information on INSET courses and interventions was collected for analysis.

Methods took the form of

- a) A review of the literature clarifying the theoretical underpinnings of the field of literacy teaching as and where pertinent to Limpopo Province. The review draws on the most recent and relevant psycholinguistic and language-acquisition research, as well as the most recent state-of-the-art research reports on literacy and language education in Africa.
- b) Empirical studies of Grade 1-4 classes at twenty primary schools and five District Offices conducted over four weeks and collecting qualitative and quantitative data. Each school was visited for two days by one team of researchers. Purposive sampling was employed with the aim of getting a sufficiently representative sample of schools subscribing to different literacy programmes in the province at as productive and economic numbers as possible. Senior researchers visited District Offices when collecting data at those schools situated nearest to each of the five District Offices. District visits took place after school hours on day one or two of the school visits.
- c) Data collection on teacher-training practices in Limpopo as part of the study required an understanding of the HEI capacity for teacher education in the Province, particularly in relation to the training of sufficient teachers who are able to teach reading and writing skills in primary education.

- d) Data analysis which entailed learning more about and describing what will be argued to be the prevailing situation in Limpopo from empirical findings.
- e) Synthesis of data drawing on the review of the literature and the empirical findings to make explicit links between school-, classroom and District-level language and literacy practices and Limpopo Province's poor learner attainment in reading and writing.

Eleven **data-collection instruments** were developed to collect school-, classroom- and District-level data. Instruments included a generic consent form for each participant to sign once.

School-level instruments included:

- A school principal questionnaire.
- A school conditions and school document review instrument.
- A school management team focus-group interview schedule.
- A School Governing Body, parent and community stakeholders focus-group interview schedule.
- A report on all the data collection at each school.

Classroom-level instruments included:

- A 'generalist' classroom observation schedule.
- A 'specialist' classroom observation schedule which included a review of the Home Language (L1) and First Additional Language (L2) documents of teachers whose lessons were observed.
- A teacher questionnaire.
- A teacher focus-group interview schedule.

District-level instruments included a District focus-group interview schedule and document-review.

The research team adopted two approaches to the collection of data on literacy teacher education in the province. A set of instruments were prepared for the University of Venda (UNIVEN) by the HSRC literacy specialist and the external, international consultant, Professor Alidou, Alliant International University, San Diego, an expert on literacy in West Africa and the USA. UNIVEN offers early childhood and primary school teacher education programmes. Professor Alidou also developed a set of interview instruments for the University of Limpopo (UL) which offers teacher education at secondary school level.

Prior to going out into the field to collect data, all fieldworkers attended fieldwork training workshops to prepare them for the data-gathering process and programme. Detailed administration manuals or instructions, as well as sample sets of all instruments, forms and other background materials were provided to each research team member.

4. Structure of the report

The report is structured in the following way

Chapter 1 frames the report which comprises three parts:

Part 1: Chapters 2 and 3: Describes the research methodology and provides a review of the theoretical underpinning of the field of literacy teaching (Heugh, 2007). The literature review is intended as a resource for policy makers, Department of Education

officials, researchers, tertiary teacher-education institutions and school management. The research design for the empirical study is underpinned by the theoretical understandings developed in the review.

Part 2: Chapters 4 to 12: Presents the empirical findings on the contents and quality of literacy practices in twenty Limpopo Primary Schools and five Limpopo Department of Education Districts, and on the contents and quality of university-based literacy training in teacher-education provision. Reference is made to ideas discussed in the literature review in the findings of the empirical work.

Part 3: Chapters 13 and 14: Draws conclusions and makes recommendations for a generic literacy model and the Literacy Strategy for Limpopo Province.

5. Main findings and conclusions

The **literature review** identified reliable and conclusive research that shows that successful learning of a second language in formal education settings, such as schools, is dependent on:

- a) successful development of mother tongue literacy (specifically reading and writing) over a minimum of a six year period; and
- b) well-resourced teaching and learning of the second language for six years as a subject, before this language can safely replace the mother tongue as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).

The literature shows that if South African students are to achieve their democratic right to equity in education and access to further education and/or the formal economy, then there are fundamental educational principles which have been identified in the international research. These principles must be upheld if learners are to be guaranteed equal access to meaningful education. The evidenced-based principles include a chronological sequence of establishing stable foundations for learning as follows:

- Strong mother tongue/home literacy and language development is essential for the development of literacy and the kind of academic language skills learners will need to access in the international language, which is English in South Africa.
- Strong mother tongue/home language literacy is also necessary for the development of a strong foundation in numeracy and other areas of the curriculum which are being taught while the international language is being learnt as a subject.
- When learners are sufficiently bilingual and biliterate in the mother tongue and the FAL (e.g. English) and they are able to use both languages interchangeably for learning, it would be possible to switch to English medium mainly. The research tells us that it is only in such circumstances that learners will simultaneously be able to keep up with the curriculum, and achieve at an academic level equivalent to learners who have English as a home language.
- Equity in education, and educational opportunity which is equal to that offered learners internationally are the twin primary goals of the South African education system. It is therefore imperative that the research-evidenced principles are followed in order to achieve the twin goals.

The **empirical study** identified a number of factors as supporting or constraining language and literacy teaching and learning in Limpopo primary schools.

Supporting factors

Some of the conditions in primary schools and Grade R/1-4 classrooms and predispositions of teachers and learners that are supporting factors which make improvements possible are that:

- The appearance of most primary schools demonstrates a positive attitude of staff, learners and the community towards schools and schooling in Limpopo Province. No classes are taking place outside under trees. In general learners are provided with reasonably supportive physical classroom environments evidenced through the condition and general cleanliness of the classrooms. Grade R classes and school nutrition programmes are in place in most of the sample schools.
- In Grade 1-4 classes, high levels of learner absenteeism and late arrival at the start of school and after break does not seem to be a significant factor limiting learning time. Learner behaviour does not appear to be a problem in class and most learners pay attention to their teachers.
- Most teachers instructed Grade 1-3 learners in their mother tongue and it is easier for children to develop reading and writing skills and basic concepts when their home language is used. Most teachers' home language is the same as the learners', thus most demonstrated proficiency in learners' home language when using it as the language of instruction.
- Schools try to involve parents/guardians/caregivers in children's academic education through school meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress. Teachers' home language is the same as that of most parents'/caregivers in the community schools serve. School and teachers are reporting to parents or guardians on children's progress by means of marks or symbols on a term-by-term basis.
- Most teachers have classroom documents such as mark books and Learning Programmes. The willingness with which teachers offer up their lessons and classroom records for external scrutiny is a significant and positive sign for the future.

Constraining factors

Findings indicate that key factors are severely constraining literacy instruction, learners' language and literacy development and attainment in systemic testing, these are that:

- Learners' family-based or out-of-school opportunities to learn school knowledge and literacy skills are limited. Poor literacy rates amongst children's main caregivers often make it difficult to involve parents/guardians in children's literacy development.
- Although most schools offer Grade R, almost half do not apparently have staff with Early Childhood Development (ECD) specialization to teach the reception year. Evidence is that Grade R teachers do not have the necessary training for this level, and that at school level, Grade R is regarded more as a child-care rather than an age/education level appropriate facility. Researchers noted that a number of Grade 1-4 learners seem to lack the early reading-related skills usually developed during this pre-school year and are consequently not ready to make the most of opportunities to read made available in early primary classrooms.
- The maximum sizes of early grade classes in some schools are untenable in particular for literacy and language teaching. The largest classes in each grade ranged from 57 in Grade 1, 90 in Grade 2, 83 in Grade 3, and 112 in Grade 4. Large classes pose great challenges for Grade 1-4 teachers and place constraints

on learning because of the amount of time that teachers can devote to individual learners. In particular, large classes constrain teachers' monitoring and assessment of individual reading. In other countries (e.g. in Northern Europe and North America), learners who are expected to learn through their second language/FAL are seldom in classes of more than 30 students.

- School Governing Bodies and parents in general do not understand that:
 - i. Successful literacy and language development is essential for academic achievement across the curriculum.
 - ii. Successful home language development, continued throughout primary school, is an essential component of successful second language development in education, and also academic achievement across the curriculum.
 - iii. Premature termination of home language development in primary school will prevent successful second language development and academic achievement across the curriculum.
 - iv. Literacy and language development needs to proceed in both home language and the second language simultaneously and it takes time, at least to the end of primary school, for this to be well established in each language.
 - v. Every moment counts (i.e. that every opportunity to encourage reading and writing in home language and an additional language needs to be taken during and after school hours).
- The lack of alignment among education department policy documents in regard to language policy and its implementation results in contradictory or ambiguous interpretation at all levels of the system. This has led to confusion amongst officials, schools and teachers and contributes to misapplication or delayed introduction of the First Additional Language and precipitous switch from home language to (usually) English medium. In most of the Limpopo primary schools, there appears to be a delayed introduction to English FAL as a subject, usually in Grade 3, followed by a switch to English medium (LoLT) in Grade 4 in schools. Although instruction in the first three years of schooling is in learners' home language, the transition to learning all subjects in English/ Afrikaans is not gradual but takes place in Grade 4 even though English/ Afrikaans (as First Additional Language) is not, in most cases, being taught as a subject (i.e. with reading and writing) from Grade 1. What is not made sufficiently clear in the Language in Education Policy document and in its interpretation through the NCS is that if learners begin the FAL in Grade 3, they will only be ready to switch to English medium by Grade 9. So if the introduction to English is delayed, and learners are expected to switch within a year or two, they are being faced with an impossible hurdle of transition to English with only 12% to 24% of the necessary language learning incubation timeframe in place. The NCS implicit endorsement of a transition to English by Grade 4, means that it is encouraging transition to English within a subtractive bilingual paradigm and before the language learning incubation period had been completed. Therefore if schools opt for the late introduction of English FAL in conjunction with the NCS' transitional bilingual model, learners will get even less exposure to English as FAL than in the past, and therefore less time for the language learning and incubation process to take root.
- The study shows that learners' poor academic achievement from Grade 4 onwards cannot only be attributed to learning in English (as the FAL or second language) but also to ineffective mother tongue/home language literacy and language teaching practices in schools and classrooms from Grade R onwards. Teachers are

uncertain about how to approach the teaching of reading and writing and what strategies to use for teaching literacy. They appear to have suffered a loss of confidence in good common sense approaches to teaching reading and writing, and are confused by ambiguous and contradictory debates about which approach the new curriculum expects them to follow (e.g. they appear to believe that phonics has fallen out of favour, and furthermore don't know what the 'whole language' approach means in practice). If the current, insubstantial, interpretation of the 'whole-language' and 'communicative approach' to literacy and language teaching continues to dominate official curriculum documentation, teachers will remain confused and learners will be unlikely to achieve the levels of literacy needed for the complex, decontextualised knowledge presented in text book and reference materials which are required reading in later grades.

- There is insufficient evidence of teachers directly and explicitly developing learners' literacy skills. Most teachers are not well-informed about the relationship between mother tongue acquisition and development, second language learning and development and learning across the curriculum. Most teachers' instructional practices do not indicate a clear understanding of the role of written language (reading and writing, i.e. strong academic literacy) in relation to the curriculum beyond the Languages/Literacy learning area.
- Most learners in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases are not receiving adequate opportunities to develop strong literacy in either the mother tongue or English (where this is the First Additional Language, or FAL). Learners are not doing enough writing and reading in either the home language or the First Additional Language. The pace and level of work in most Grade 1-4 classes is not tied to curriculum requirements. The pace set for completing written tasks is much too slow and learners should be working on much more challenging reading and writing tasks/activities. Learners are not provided with sufficient opportunities to practice reading extended narrative or expository text aloud through individual guided practice and to construct their own sentences and/or produce their own extended text. This makes it unrealistic to expect them to cope with the academic and linguistic demands of the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards. They would not have developed sufficiently strong reading and writing skills to manage the curriculum in either the mother tongue or English (FAL). They also would not have acquired sufficient listening and spoken understanding of English (FAL) to understand the content of the curriculum, should this be transmitted through English. At best, learners would be able to understand concepts, information and procedures which teachers could transmit through spoken discourse in either the mother tongue or a local language used in the community.
- There is a lack of a book and reading culture in schools and classrooms and limited opportunities for learners to handle and read a range of books. Schools and classrooms are not print-rich environments. They certainly do not indicate that literacy is valued or reflect recognition of the importance of providing learners with maximum exposure to a great variety of reading opportunities. Most learners do not have easy physical access to available story books, magazines, 'information' or non-fiction books and other reading material in relevant languages. There is little evidence of learners being given opportunities to independently handle and 'read' available books.
- There is inadequate provision and poor management, inventories and use of available learning and teaching support material. There are insufficient copies of

textbooks and readers for each child in a class to have his/her own copy in Grade 1-4. Available readers and textbooks are not being distributed to learners in class. Neither are 'older' readers and textbooks being used as much as they could be by teachers as support material where newer books are not available.

- Teachers are not keeping close enough track of each learner's reading and writing ability and progress to have comprehensive knowledge of individual differences. Most teachers do not have reading and writing assessment records that provide ongoing constructive and useful information and notes specific to the status of individual learners' literacy levels.
- Language Learning Programmes are not sufficiently co-ordinated by Heads of Departments and do not reflect progression in terms of the development of specific literacy (especially reading and writing) activities, knowledge and skills across grades and phases. Teachers' language Learning Programmes are not structured in terms of the attainment of specified targets for the acquisition of language and literacy skills through assessment. Teachers are likely to simply copy out sections of the curriculum statements by hand without understanding how to translate these into workable Learning Programmes. That the School Management Teams (SMTs) do not recognise this practice as being problematic would suggest that SMTs do not themselves understand what a Learning Programme is and how it would differ from the generic statements in the NCS.
- Curriculum coverage and delivery is not sufficiently controlled and monitored by HODs and district/circuit officials through checking the amount and type of work in learners' workbooks and through observing learners reading.
- Parents/guardians are not involved as much as possible in their children's academic and literacy development. Most learners are not being given homework. In particular, they are not being given any form of reading homework on a daily basis. Over half of the schools do not play a role in Adult literacy (ABET) or family literacy.
- Limpopo DoE Districts appear to be constrained by the limited number of school support personnel for supporting Foundation Phase teachers specifically with literacy development. Most teachers said they have received no specialised practical training on how to teach reading and writing in classrooms from the LDoE. There is a need to build the LDoE and in-school expertise to support Foundation Phase teachers with literacy development in the home language and the FAL.
- The most extensive non-government/development agency support of literacy in Limpopo Province appears to have been mediated via the Molteno Project to the end of 2005. However, the research team found little residual evidence (teacher practices and/or teaching resources) of this support in the sample of schools investigated in this study. (It has to be said that Molteno Schools were not specifically targeted.) There was no evidence from teachers that district or circuit officials followed up on the continuation of any Molteno or other intervention.
- The Limpopo tertiary teacher training system currently lacks the capacity to provide the kind of formal primary teacher education, development and expertise required. There is no evidence of HEI offered in-service teacher education which would adequately prepare teachers for the teaching of reading and writing in primary schools of the province. There is a need to build the capacity of Limpopo Higher Education Institutions in the field of teacher training in order to provide the kind of formal primary school teacher development and education required.

- Only 15% of SMT members and 12% of the sample Limpopo primary teachers surveyed have post-graduate degrees. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2006 found that learners taught by language teachers who reported having post-graduate degrees showed an ‘improved overall mean performance’ in comparison to learners whose teachers were not as well qualified. (Howie et al., 2007: 50). The implication is that primary teachers require further teacher education, support and incentives to improve language and literacy teaching expertise and attainment in the Province.

In conclusion, the data collected in the sample of primary schools in Limpopo Province clearly demonstrate that

1. The quality of literacy instruction and literacy opportunities that most Grade R – 4 learners have is clearly limiting literacy development; and
2. A delayed introduction to English FAL as *a subject*, usually (late) in Grade 3, followed by a switch to English medium (LoLT) in Grade 4 means that most learners are being faced with an impossible hurdle of transition to English as a medium of instruction. Under such circumstances, learners can only be expected to achieve very poorly and are unlikely to successfully engage with the rest of the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards.

6. Recommendations for enhancing the Literacy Strategy

Nine key recommendations³, drawn on evidence from the literature review and findings in the empirical study, serve as a framework for strengthening a Literacy Strategy.

Recommendation 1: Optimise the pre-school literacy benefits of Grade R.

Recommendation 2: Create literacy enriched school and classroom environments.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that every learner is provided with a set of his/her own textbooks and readers and strengthen school management and control of Learner Support Material.

Recommendation 4: Clarify and explain the rationale and research evidence for strong literacy development in multilingual settings to key stakeholders and monitor appropriate application in school language and literacy policies, schools and classrooms.

Recommendation 5: Ensure that every learner is provided with optimal opportunities to engage in a variety of grade-appropriate and cognitively demanding reading activities and writing tasks in class. The volume and quality of written work undertaken by learners in each of the learning areas should be regularly checked by SMTs and curriculum specialists from the district office.

Recommendation 6: Improve the quality of literacy instruction, planning and assessment by: setting expected levels of performance, intensifying

³ The presentation of these in Chapter 14 comprises much more detail and should be consulted.

and expanding in-service training and support; and offering incentives for improving language and literacy attainment.⁴

Recommendation 7: Overhaul primary teacher education programme design and delivery, increase the supply of well-trained Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers, and build literacy expertise in the Province by offering incentives for early grade teachers to study post-graduate degrees⁵.

Recommendation 8: Foster home learning environments which support early literacy and family-based or out-of-school literacy opportunities.

Recommendation 9: Link the Limpopo Department of Education's Literacy Strategy to the National Department of Education's Literacy Campaign.

Chapter 14 of the report elaborates more fully on each of the above recommendations. Included are specific clusters of activity by identified roleplayers within estimated timeframes and broad budgetary implications or envelopes.

7. Implications of the recommendations

The main **implications** of these recommendations for the Limpopo Department of Education are that a carefully sequenced and coherent plan needs to be formulated in order to address both underachievement in literacy and educational achievement in provincial schools. The plan needs to include the following elements:

1. Policy decisions on literacy and language development. This includes the Generic Literacy Model.
2. Informing the public.
3. Drawing up of an explicit Development Plan for the Literacy Model for Limpopo Province, which includes:
 - a. a clear set of guidelines and regulations,
 - b. a realistic timeframe and budget, and
 - c. a monitoring and evaluation component.
4. Collaboration and or dialogue with national and other provincial DoEs in regard to the re-alignment of the Language in Education Policy and the NCS in relation to language and literacy development across the entire curriculum. In particular, this requires in and for Limpopo Province:
 - a. Spelling out a practical approach to the teaching of reading and writing in the home language including:
 - i. detailed, properly trialled language and literacy work schedules for teachers with explicit activities and standards, pace setters and assessment points included. LSTM and textbooks that are directly linked and tied to the schedules' objectives.
 - ii. carefully guided lesson plans, with specific tasks and skills outlined with examples.

⁴ The footnotes made in Chapter 14 with regard to this recommendation should be taken note of in particular, along with some of the discussion in Section 1.2.2 and Appendix 5.

⁵ The intention would be to increase the level of expertise of teachers who would remain teaching in Foundation Phase classrooms. Care should be taken to avoid the situation where teachers with further qualifications are moved into senior, non-teaching, roles in the schools. It is vital that the level of expertise of teachers actually teaching in these classrooms is upgraded.

- iii. samples for each learning outcome and assessment standard in the curriculum statements per grade.
- iv. omitting vague and confusing references to the ‘communicative’ and ‘whole-language’ approaches to literacy and language development.
- b. Clarifying the relationship between the development of literacy and language in the home and first additional languages, and ensuring that both receive consistent, adequate attention throughout the primary years of school.
- c. Clarifying the relationship between the development of literacy and language across the whole curriculum, i.e.
 - i. that literacy and language development is an important feature of learning Mathematics, Physical Science, Human and Social Sciences, and so on,
 - ii. as well as of the Language/s Learning area.
- 5. Collaboration with national and other provincial DoEs in regard to aligning the Adult Literacy Campaign with the school-based Literacy Strategy.
- 6. Collaboration with HEIs in order to ensure that the HEIs are sufficiently sensitised to the current teaching and learning requirements of school children in Limpopo schools. This requires:
 - a. New or significantly overhauled Literacy Teaching Programmes within teacher education;
 - b. Inclusion of literacy and language development components which infuse every teacher education area/subject specialisation.
 - c. Regular monitoring and evaluation of teacher education programmes and delivery.
- 7. Budgeting for on-going in-service teacher education for literacy and language development.
- 8. Collaboration with publishers about reducing the cost of school readers and textbooks, and establishing more cost-effective mechanisms for supply, in order that each learner can take books home on a daily basis.
- 9. Upgrading the expertise of education officials at District and Circuit level so that they are in a position to offer appropriate support to schools and teachers.
- 10. Ensuring that literacy/language development advisors to Limpopo Province have the necessary expertise to offer advice, and this should include:
 - a. Adequate experience, themselves of teaching in primary and or secondary schools.
 - b. Theoretical and research based expertise in literacy development in mainstream / system-wide schools.
 - c. Theoretical and research based expertise in first and second language acquisition.
 (see also Alidou *et al.*, 2006; Heugh *et al.*, 2007).
- 11. Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation is conducted by independent research teams which include the expertise mentioned above, in addition to longitudinal, quantitative research instrument development and analysis.

The envisaged implementation support from Irish Aid over the next number of years is precisely the mechanism required now to capitalise on, maintain and even accelerate the impetus that has been generated up to this point. It would be ideal to tailor this as a regular consultative process aimed at working out the operational details accompanying adjustments and further concretisation of the Literacy Strategy document of the Province.

Most of the recommendations and implications itemised require a reorganisation of and more efficient use of existing human and material resources and current investment in education. They do not require additional expenditure. Table 14.1 in Chapter 14 outlines a suggested timeframe and set of mechanisms for financing the establishment of a provincial literacy model which would be designed to re-tool of literacy and education in the primary schools of Limpopo Province.

8. Key features of a literacy model for the Province

Data from the literature review and the evidence from the field data (school sites and communities, circuit, district and provincial education offices, HEIs, and agencies involved in interventions in Limpopo) have been brought together for the articulation and implementation of a generic literacy model for Limpopo Province.

Key features of a model are:

- I.** Explicit teaching of Home Language literacy (or language used most widely in the community) beginning in Grade R with an emphasis on extended reading and writing from second half of Grade 1 continuing across the curriculum to the end of the Intermediate Phase (preferably end of Senior Phase)
- II.** Introduction of the First Additional Language (usually English) in oral form at the beginning of Grade 1. Introduction of FAL literacy (reading and writing) by middle of Grade 1 (beginning of Grade 2 at the latest) taught by teachers who can model the use of this language at the necessary level of proficiency and who use explicit literacy and language teaching strategies, building up to regular extended reading and writing activities by the end of Grade 2.
- III.** Extending literacy teaching and development across the curriculum. All teachers include explicit reading and writing of the kinds of expository texts which are used in the subject/discipline of study (e.g. science, social sciences, mathematics etc.). Building up to regular use of extended reading and writing in each subject/learning area by the end of Grade 3 in the home language, and incrementally advanced through the Intermediate and Senior Phases.
- IV.** Training and supporting Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading and writing in the home language and the FAL. Training and supporting teachers for other disciplines to develop reading and writing in other subjects, in the home language, at least to the end of the Foundation Phase, preferably to the end of the Intermediate Phase. Training and supporting teachers to use bilingual teaching methodologies, including for the development of reading and writing in the home language and English, across the curriculum, during the Intermediate and Senior Phases.
- V.** Emphasis on ‘time on task’, i.e. efficient use of teaching and learning timeframes
- VI.** Emphasis on placing books in learners’ hands every day during class time and for taking home to read.
- VII.** Daily homework for reading, writing and numeracy from day 1 (if not literally, very early anyway) in Grade 1 to the end of primary school.
- VIII.** Public awareness of the value in family literacy practices and development. Dovetail the schools’ Literacy Model with the Adult Literacy Campaign.

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| <p>IX. Setting explicit and realistically attainable targets for improved reading and writing levels in Limpopo primary schools.⁶</p> <p>X. Establishing assessment measures for evaluating improvement of expected levels of performance.</p> <p>XI. Establishing strong accountability: through leadership in schools, districts and the LDoE; and through a system of incentives and rewards (e.g. development grants) for reaching the targets.</p> |
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The literacy model and its components require simple but conscientious effort on the part of all stakeholders. Schools could begin to implement seven of the components of the Literacy Model with immediate effect. There would be no reason to delay their immediate application. Component number IV, teacher education and support, requires the greatest amount of support and attention from the Department and other interested parties. This component, in combination with the key implications of the recommendations for strengthening the Literacy Strategy, will require further carefully planned attention from the Department. Components IX, X and XI also require the Department's leadership. The priorities are particularly:

- Provisioning of effective Grade R teachers and classrooms [incrementally by 2012]
- Clearly outlined teacher guides for the teaching of reading and writing across the entire school curriculum [by end of 2008]
- Major revisions to teacher education and teacher development [by end of 2008]
- Major focus on high quality, regular and ongoing teacher support from LDoE [incremental improvements to reach optimal delivery by 2010]
- Major focus on the delivery of books into the hands of learners [begin 2008, optimal delivery by January 2010]
- Establishing the checks and balances for targets, assessment and accountability [by July 2008].

It is these priorities which would take more time and additional resources, and the urgency is such that the department is advised to ensure that the three target dates, end of 2008, 2010, and 2012 are met. It needs to be emphasised that the teaching of reading and writing effectively is entirely dependent on consistent, regular practice, every day, in every lesson, throughout school. There are no short-cuts and it requires dedicated attention from every teacher educator and teacher. It also depends on dedicated on-going support of the department and co-operation with the community.

A concerted effort needs to be made by all stakeholders (the LDoE, schools, teachers, parents and other community members) to support literacy development and ensure that children learn to read and write well in their early years. Provision of adequate literacy opportunities in formal education is an absolute necessity for any democratic system which is concerned with educational parity and social equality. Students need to be afforded the best opportunities for optimal cognitive development to prepare them for life beyond the school system. Without high level reading skills, they will end up marginalised and excluded from a wide range of opportunities beyond school.

⁶ See acknowledgement in Section 1.2.2, 14.1 and 14.4 (Recommendation 6 and footnotes) and Appendices 1 and 5 of the contributions already made by the Department through its School Transformation Programme and Literacy Strategy, in particular relating to objectives and targets set and monitored so far.

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, SCOPE AND AIM OF THE EVALUATION

1.1 Introduction

This evaluation of literacy teaching in Limpopo has been conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in conjunction with the University of Limpopo (UL) as contracted by the Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE) and Irish Aid.

Concerns about poor literacy achievement in schools of Limpopo Province, a decade after the introduction of new post-apartheid education policy and curriculum, have given rise to this study. The degree to which learners develop strong literacy skills for use in formal education directly impacts on their achievement across the rest of the curriculum. Literacy is traditionally and most commonly understood to fall under the area of language teaching and learning in the education system. However, formal academic literacy is required and integral to the entire curriculum, therefore if school learners do not develop strong reading and writing skills which will give them meaningful access to the curriculum, then they lose ground in relation to learners who do acquire these skills, and they will leave school ill-prepared for the requirements of contemporary society beyond school.

Concerns regarding poor literacy achievement in Limpopo need to be understood against a background of socio-political and educational change in South Africa as well as developments in the broader African and international contexts. Poor achievement in literacy is not peculiar to Limpopo Province or South Africa: there are concerns about poor literacy in other contexts as well. However, the extent to which this is a concern in Limpopo may very well be more accentuated than elsewhere, particularly since national government invested heavily in new education policy and curriculum in the late 1990s.

Given the extensive resources and attention given to the implementation of new curriculum policy and the implementation since 1998 of Curriculum 2005 (C2005) (DoE 1997a) and then the Revised National Curriculum Statements (DoE 2002), renamed the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) in 2006¹, there has been an expectation that education provision would reduce the socio-economic inequities inherited from the past. Furthermore, it was anticipated that literacy achievement, and hence overall academic achievement, would show a significant improvement in comparison with pre-1994 education of all school children, and most especially, African children. However, this has not been the case, and extremely disappointing data has emerged from systemic studies, particularly in regard to Limpopo Province.

In a recent Cabinet media statement, released during the first week of December 2007, concern was expressed that vast increases in spending on school education over long periods of time had not been accompanied thus far by learner performance improvements. In addition, the release of the PIRLS 2006 findings (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) on 29 November 2007 by the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment at

¹ Curriculum Development in South Africa has gone through three stages since 1994. In 1997 Curriculum 2005 (C2005) was introduced, this was revised in 2002 and came to be known as the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). In late 2006, the curriculum was formerly renamed, the National Curriculum Statements (NCS). Henceforth in this report we shall refer to the NCS, unless it is necessary to refer to the earlier documentation.

the University of Pretoria highlights the fact that South African learners in Grade 4, and even Grade 5, performed poorest compared to the Grade 4 learners from all participating countries (Howie, Venter, Van Staden, Zimmerman, Long, Scherman & Archer, 2007).

Within this context, Limpopo Province presents unique phenomena in terms of educational challenges that have to be addressed. At least five of the nine official African languages are spoken among learners and their parents in the Province. Many parents in Limpopo Province do not have adequate levels of literacy themselves and appropriately qualified teachers are scarce. Several interventions, in addition to the LDoE's implementation of C2005 and the NCS, have been undertaken in Limpopo Province, specifically in regard to early literacy teaching and school management. Yet the nature and extent of the impact and effects of these interventions remain unclear.

New knowledge which might be able to pinpoint: (a) successes, blockages or shortcomings in the system, programme design, delivery and resources; and (b) also possible solutions for improving literacy achievement, would be important for Limpopo Province. Furthermore, it may also have significance for other provinces in South Africa, and may even have significance for the sub-continent and continent. The primary purpose of this evaluation and report is therefore to identify some of the likely causes of low achievement in literacy and offer explicit recommendations on how to start overcoming many of the largest current challenges.

In the evaluation process for this report, the HSRC investigated aspects of literacy teaching against the background of existing provincial and literacy development policies; the history, dynamics and facilities pertaining to teacher training; the contents and use made in the classroom of learning materials; and the literature documenting the latest theoretical positions and research findings. For the purpose of the evaluation, information about relevant issues was collected through intensive classroom-based observation and interviews with a purposive sample of teachers, school management and governing body members, departmental officials, and other stakeholders. Aspects of the facilities and infra-structure at schools were observed, especially those related to the provision of learning materials. Policy documents at the various levels of the education system were reviewed, and a selection of literacy materials were analysed for levels of difficulty and compatibility with curriculum requirements. Additional information on INSET courses and interventions, was collected for analysis.

1.2 Origin of and background to the evaluation

The Limpopo Department of Education (LDoE) and Irish Aid (IA) have had a longstanding relationship in the Limpopo Province. This relationship is premised on many factors, not least of which was the development agency's desire to apply effort where it would make significant qualitative difference in the education of poor children. Such a situation applies to Limpopo. It is one of the poorest, most remote, densely populated and under-developed provinces in the country. Conditions of schooling, in particular, are in dire need of improvement, with infrastructure, learner performance, and basic reading and writing abilities a few cases in point. Irish Aid, through the Fhatuwani Programme, based in Polokwane, has invested heavily in Limpopo Province, particularly in relation to a particular literacy teaching intervention, the Molteno Project's *Breakthrough to Literacy* (BTL). Part of Irish Aid's interest in the current evaluation is that BTL be included in the study.

This study follows on from, articulates with and strengthens a number of educational initiatives in Limpopo, in addition to BTL. These include, for example, the HSRC study on language and admission policies at schools, the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) study on assessment resource banks, including such for language in the Foundation Phase, and the LDoE's Grades 3 and 6 systemic and other learner performance evaluations. The latter includes assessments through the Integrated Education Programme (IEP) and the Khanyisa programme. Khanyisa worked with and assessed a first group of learners from 100 schools as part of the Province's School Transformation Programme and Literacy Strategy (covered more fully in Section 1.2.2). IEP comprised learning and teaching and school development in 185 schools from three districts in Limpopo (as part of 700 schools in four provinces of the country). IEP was funded and managed through RTI (USAID). It included pre- and post-intervention assessment in Numeracy/Mathematics, Literacy, and Science and Technology of Grades 3 and 6 learners from 18 schools (a 10%-sample) in Limpopo by JET Education Services during 2006.

1.2.1 Learner performance assessment and evaluations

Of major concern for the Department of Education in Limpopo is poor literacy and numeracy achievement as witnessed in several national and provincial systemic assessments conducted nationally in which Grade 3, Grade 4 and Grade 6 learners have been tested since 1999 (e.g. DoE, 2005). The results of a national Grade 3 literacy study conducted in 2001 and 2002 were so disturbing that the national DoE delayed the release of the findings. Newspaper reports reveal that 46% of Grade 2 and 3 learners at national level do not have sufficient literacy skills' for their grade level and learners scored 30% overall in numeracy (mathematics) (Monare, 2003).

These statistics mirror closely those of the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) study conducted amongst Grade 4 learners as part of a joint UNESCO, UNICEF and DoE initiative a few years earlier. This study showed that learners scored 48% for literacy and 30% for mathematics (numeracy) (Strauss, 1999: Table C1).² The provinces with the highest concentration of rural people performed most poorly. Worst of all was Mpumalanga with a 33% score for literacy. Census 2001 shows that Limpopo (33.4%) and Mpumalanga (27.5%) provinces have the highest percentages of people with no education whereas Gauteng (12.6%) and the Western Cape (11.2%) have the highest percentages of people with tertiary education (StatisticsSA, 2003: p.44-45). Pretorius and Ribbens (2005) showed from another study that only 35% of Grade 6 students in the Western Cape scored above 50% for literacy.

Since the most recent literacy studies involve young learners who entered the school system several years after the transfer of power, and subsequent to the introduction of new curriculum changes phased in from 1998, it is difficult to account for the dismal literacy and numeracy performance.³ Harley (2003) points out that although more young

² The 1999 study measured all students, except L1 speakers of Afrikaans, in English. The approximately 75% L1 speakers of African languages were expected to demonstrate literacy in English although they had switched language medium to English only 6 months earlier (plus/minus 20 school weeks).

³ Researchers have indicated that the poor literacy levels are in relation to children from all linguistic communities. Observations in early primary classrooms where most children are speakers of African languages (ALs) are that teachers are unduly affected by the washback effect of the change of medium from AL to English in Grade 4. They wonder why they should have to ensure that children can read and write in the AL when they will be required to change to English and hence have to learn to read in English only from Grade 4 onwards. Thus the principle of mother-tongue literacy in the foundation years is seriously compromised.

people are staying in school for longer periods than they were during apartheid, this does not, however, mean that literacy rates are improving. However, as Bourdieu (1991) and many others have pointed out elsewhere, the effects of state practices, inherited from the past, outlive the political lifespan of governments. One should therefore have anticipated that although literacy and educational levels might not improve immediately after the introduction of democracy, they would at least remain on a par with those during the last years of the former political dispensation. What one did not expect was a substantial decline in proficiency, which the current early and school-leaving literacy trends show (Heugh, 2007).

Harley's (2003:10-11) discussion shows that the number of people with no education has in fact increased in recent years and that the increase is particularly noticeable amongst women.⁴ KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo and Mpumalanga are the three provinces with the highest proportion and numbers of people without any education, and also a very high incidence of people living in rural areas. This is coupled with significant levels of unemployment, HIV/AIDS and an increase in the number of AIDS orphans. In sum, those who are most at risk educationally, economically and in terms of health are rural women, including girl orphans taken out of school, and this trend appears to be worsening rather than improving in South Africa.⁵

The explanation for these trends has troubled the experts for some years. The relationship between literacy and cognitive development and the processes by which children are able to develop academic literacy in formal education, remains a sorely neglected field and one which is inadequately understood. This is particularly so in situations where children are expected to switch to English medium at the very point that the cognitive demands of literacy across the curriculum rapidly increase (e.g. Pretorius and Ribbens, 2005).

The recent PIRLS findings (Howie *et al.*, 2007) may shed more light on attempts to differentiate between recent and past factors. One of the advantages of the way in which these PIRLS findings have been analysed and are reported, is that it shows the standings by learner test language separately. Some of the nuances observed relate to the indigenous languages spoken in Limpopo. Of all the learners speaking indigenous African languages in South Africa, those (and girls always outperformed boys) who wrote the test in Setswana outperformed all the others, while those who wrote the test in Xitsonga, were ranked third (after Sesotho). However, the results of only one other language group were lower than for the Sepedi test results, while those for Tshivenda appeared in the middle ranges.

Analyses of the marks of learners for whom the test was in the same language as their home language were equally insightful (as compared to a test language different from their home language). As expected, English- and Afrikaans-speaking learners who wrote the test in their own languages performed best. Also for those who wrote the English or

⁴ In late 2007, the DoE launched a National Literacy Campaign for adult learners. The current Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, has revived the intention signalled by the former Minister, Kader Asmal, upon his appointment in late 1999, to mount a mass literacy campaign. Even if mass campaigns have failed elsewhere (see Rassool, 1998; 1999), a public commitment towards literacy would raise the level of consciousness about the issue and stimulate debate and a quest for new solutions which is likely to impact positively on literacy in primary schools as well as within adult communities and education more generally.

⁵ The increased gendered discrepancy in relation to people without any schooling referred to above appears to be related to the traditional role of young girls/women taking on the care-giver role in families affected by HIV/AIDS.

Afrikaans tests, the difference between first language (mother-tongue) learners and second language (non-mother tongue) learners was far greater than for those learners who wrote African languages as first or second languages, with mother-tongue writers always performing best.

Only with regard to Grade 5 Tshivenda test performance, though, was writing the test in their mother tongue not an advantage above writing it in a language different from the mother tongue language. It is not clear why these learners with a home language other than Tshivenda would perform better in Tshivenda compared to Tshivenda-speaking learners themselves, but worth exploring, according to the PIRLS researchers. Also for the Xitsonga test marks (Grade 5) the difference or overlap between home language and test language made virtually no difference. Education authorities, managers, policy makers and researchers will be keen to study the detailed country report for South Africa intended for release in the first half of 2008. An additional observation was also made during the accompanying presentations at the launch of the PIRLS results relating to the fact that South African learners seem to make substantive gains, more so than in the few comparative countries for which data were available, from Grade 4 to Grade 5 performance levels.

Essentially the PIRLS findings show that reading literacy achievement in Afrikaans and English for learners instructed in their mother tongue and for learners not instructed in their mother tongue vary in expected, strong ways. This differs from the much smaller effects for literacy achievement in African languages observed when analysing the tests in terms of whether or not learners wrote the test in their mother tongue.

1.2.2 Limpopo Province's School Transformation Programme and Literacy Strategy

Attempts to address low learner achievement in Limpopo Province have materialized in several interventions including a comprehensive School Transformation Programme⁶ which articulates issues such as curriculum development, whole-school evaluation, school-development planning, school governance, and the like. The Programme operates through the mode of multi-functional teams. Literacy development forms part of the Programme. (In Appendix 5, more detail is provided about the comprehensive way in which the relevant participants within and outside the Limpopo Department of Education, through its School Transformation Programme (STP), go about improving the problem of low learner achievement. At the appropriate places in Chapter 14, and mainly where key features of (improvements to) the proposed literacy model are discussed and recommendations are formulated, further cross-references are made to specific elements of the STP.)

In this context, the Limpopo Department of Education, in collaboration with the Khanyisa Education Support Programme, has developed and formulated a *Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools* (Francis *et al.*, 2005) for the Province.⁷ This strategy document provides direction to and guides the improvement of literacy in the Province in respect of classroom-teaching approaches, teacher training and support, resource provision,

⁶ "School Transformation: A manual for multi-functional teams", and "Along an unexamined journey it is not worth travelling: Reflections on the implementation of a School Transformation Programme in Limpopo Province".

⁷ "Let's talk, read and write about ourselves and our world: A proposed strategy for literacy in primary schools".

language-policy inputs, community support, and monitoring and evaluation. One of its strengths lie in being a revisable five-year strategy which is monitored against learner performance baselines. (Again, Appendix 5 is used to provide slightly more detail about the positive features of the present version of the strategy. Also in this case appropriate cross-references are made to specific elements of the literacy strategy in Chapter 14, mainly where (improvements to) key features of the proposed literacy model are discussed and recommendations are formulated. In addition, Appendix 1 also provides more information about targets set and achieved as evaluated from 2004 to 2006.)

The provincial Literacy Strategy is embedded in the NCS (DoE, 2002) which supports a communicative and whole-language approach to language teaching. It is also embedded in the Language in Education Policy (LIEP) (DoE, 1997b) which encourages additive bilingual approaches and the use of mother-tongue education (MTE) for as long as possible. Although the NCS has interpreted this to mean three years of MTE followed by English, for speakers of African languages, the Minister of Education, in recognition of the discrepancy between practice and the principles of additive bilingual education (discussed in Chapter 3) indicated in October 2006 that MTE would be extended to a minimum period of six years. One of the implications of this is that literacy, a core component of language development, should be interrogated to at least the end of Grade 6.

Although the Literacy Strategy presents an enabling environment for supporting literacy interventions, it does not in itself spell out a clearly defined literacy methodology and approach to the teaching of literacy in the Province. This is largely because the South African debates on this matter are ambiguous, contradictory and often ill-informed, and lack clarity (e.g. Macdonald, 2002; Nyquill-Herbert, 2004a, b; Ablaze, 2006).

1.2.3 Theoretical weakness of literacy debates which inform the NCS

None of the current policy, curriculum or curriculum-support documents spell out exactly what it is that teachers need to do in the classroom in order to ensure that learners can read and write. They do not (even) explain how to operationalise the communicative and whole-language approaches to literacy. The national DoE has been ill-advised to discard explicit and direct approaches to literacy teaching, especially the teaching of phonics, with the adoption of the whole-language orientation to literacy (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3).

While some criticisms of earlier literacy-teaching practices have a considerable degree of merit, there have also been overly zealous recommendations to dismiss many strategies which are essential to the systematic and incremental teaching of reading and writing. This is especially the case for children from poor socio-economic backgrounds. Earlier tried and tested methods, recommended elsewhere and based on very large-scale and multi-year studies (e.g. Snow *et al.*, 1998) have been incorrectly labeled as conservative, and have been discarded as unfashionable. The whole-language debates, while very interesting, simply do not explain in practical terms what teachers need to do. Where models and materials are identified for use, these tend to be based on models developed in the already highly literate societies of the United Kingdom (UK), North America, Australia and New Zealand. The whole-language debates and documents available in South Africa, however, do not offer practical alternatives to replace the methodologies which teachers had been using prior to the start of C2005 in 1998.

Whilst the whole-language and communicative approaches may be effective in countries with high levels of literacy and where people are surrounded by easily accessible printed materials, they are also based on the assumption that the majority of learners speak English. In South Africa, and especially in Limpopo Province, the majority of learners do not live in communities with high levels of literacy and where printed materials are readily available. They do not speak English in their homes. Not only this, English is often seldom heard in rural communities and functions in many parts of the Province as a foreign language rather than as a *lingua franca*. This means that programmers based on methodologies and theoretical approaches to literacy which have emerged from other, very different contexts, do not necessarily translate easily into interventions which suit the needs of learners in contexts such as Limpopo Province.

Teaching methods as practiced in classrooms exist together with the materials which accompany them. It is thus not possible to evaluate literacy methodologies without evaluating the materials and programmers through which they are mediated. Such materials, in the South African education context, are almost without exception packaged in the form of a programme, in this case, a literacy programme. The literacy methods in Limpopo Province have been delivered via teacher-education programmers, publishers' materials, and specific literacy programmers.

Subsequent to the processes which led to the publication of the curriculum documentation in South Africa, C2005 and the NCS, it has become widely accepted within national education and in several provincial education departments that literacy is not an area of the curriculum which is confined to the Foundation Phase (Grades R, 1, 2 and 3).

It would be more accurate to conceptualize 'literacy' as a process involving cognitive and language development which continues throughout the education system. Whilst there has been an emphasis on early literacy, which was influenced mainly by early childhood concerns with constructivist and whole-language approaches to literacy popular in Britain in the early 1990s (e.g. Bloch, 1997), literacy development in fact extends far beyond Grade 3. The purpose of literacy methods in early primary education is not merely to teach learners to read (early readers) and write anecdotal notes and simple narrative texts. The purpose is to ensure that learners will be able to read materials across the curriculum at least from Grade 4 onwards. It is also to ensure that learners can write texts for different purposes with confidence.

Literacy in education is a process which requires a long and systematic incubation period. It is also not a (set of) discrete skill(s). It involves the development of a complex set of language skills, including reading and writing, and articulates with other aspects of language learning, namely, speaking and listening (see also Pretorius, 2002, 2005; Nyquil-Herbert, 2004b, Abadzi, 2006). It includes the development of critical analytical skills and the understanding of spoken and written language in social contexts. As such it requires thorough programme design informed by language-acquisition theory and research evidence. If unstructured and inexplicit discussion documentation, with often misguided or misunderstood and loose theory, and/or invalid and unreliable research claims, is passed on to teachers and education officials, irreparable damage can be done to a system within a relatively short period of time.

Indeed, a growing understanding within the national DoE and some provincial departments of education has been that literacy development needs to be more

comprehensively understood and attended to in the years beyond Grade 3. HSRC discussions with senior Limpopo Department of Education officials indicated that this understanding is shared by them. Officials themselves have emphasised that literacy needs to be considered far more widely than Grades R to 3. The Literacy Strategy for the Limpopo Province has been produced on a similar understanding. These positions, in turn, are entirely within the current international understanding of literacy development.

1.3 Scope and purpose of the evaluation

The timing of this evaluation coincided with the completion of a literacy teaching intervention that was supported by Irish Aid in Limpopo, namely Breakthrough to Literacy (BTL). BTL was implemented in Grade 1 classes in all primary schools in Limpopo between 2003 and 2005, and was due for an evaluation at the end of 2005. However, LDoE and Irish Aid (the clients) judiciously called for a system-wide evaluation of literacy provision, rather than a specific evaluation limited to BTL interventions. They invited research proposals to undertake this task, based on the following:

Objective:

The primary objective is to provide a clear set of recommendations to inform the finalisation of the provincial Literacy Strategy and the development of a generic literacy model for the Province.

Specific Tasks and Expected Outputs:

1. Develop an appropriate methodology and evaluation instruments/tools for assessment, in consultation with DCI⁸ and LDoE. Methodology requires critical reflection of gender sensitivity within the different literacy teaching methods/tools.
2. In consultation with the Fhatuwani Project Manager, identify the stakeholders to inform the assessment, including educators, learners, relevant LDoE officials, relevant National DoE officials, literacy service providers and the producers of literacy teaching methods and tools.
3. Review the relevant documents and secondary information on literacy teaching methods and tools, as well as literacy teaching and the status of literacy in Limpopo Province.
4. Identify and briefly describe the various literacy teaching methods and tools used in the Province, including BLT.
5. Conduct an assessment of literacy teaching methods and tools used in the Province, including BLT.
6. Facilitate a workshop to present and discuss the findings and implications of the assessment with the LDoE and other stakeholders.

Additional Requirements:

1. Work in close collaboration with the Fhatuwani Programme Manager based in Polokwane, as well as other stakeholders of partners that DCI of LDoE deems it necessary to involve in the assessment.
2. Agree to a detailed work plan and budget with clear timeframes and indicators to monitor progress of the work with DCI and the LDoE before commencing with the assessment.

⁸ Acronym of the former name for Irish Aid

3. Field a dedicated team with the requisite expertise, skills and experience to ensure completion of the assignment within the agreed timeframe and to the high quality standards of DCI and LDoE.

Subsequent to a series of consultative meetings, it was agreed amongst the clients (LDoE and Irish Aid) and the contracted service providers (HSRC and University of Limpopo) that the evaluation would focus on the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) which included the BTL intervention, and would also include teacher-education provision in the institutions of higher education (HEIs) and other literacy- and language-development programmes and materials used across the Foundation and into the Intermediate (Grades 4-6) Phases. This evaluation, therefore, has not been designed to offer an evaluation of BTL in particular, but an evaluation of the set of literacy-teaching approaches which are currently evident in Limpopo schools.

This agreement would allow some client alignments in terms of policy development, and future collaboration and interventions in the Province. It should lead to the formulation of a coherent proposal for an integrated literacy teaching plan in Limpopo and this should feed back into the current versions of the provincial school-transformation model and literacy-development strategy.

Additional areas of interest to the evaluation were identified subsequent to and during deliberations between the donor agency, the client, and interested research service provider(s). The outcomes of the following two meetings made particular contributions:

- A meeting with Irish Aid, the Senior Manager for Curriculum Development at LDoE, and University of Limpopo (UL) on 26 July 2006 indicated the desirability to have academics from a local tertiary institution on the research team. Their local presence in Limpopo, responsibility for teacher training, more immediate knowledge of conditions and practices in schools in Limpopo, existing research capacity and mandate, and also need to develop more research capacity, were all strong factors in support of the decision to make UL an integral part of the research team.
- The subsequent exploratory visit to Limpopo from 4 to 6 September 2006 involved many parties in a number of informative discussions, and included HSRC staff, the provincial Irish Aid convenor, University of Limpopo, Khanyisa, and LDoE officials (the MEC, EMIS, ECD, Curriculum and Books Directorates, etc.). A central issue agreed on was that all important stakeholders should participate in the work to ensure ownership and sustainability of the outcomes of the intended study and evaluation. (See Appendix 1 for an annotated report on the programme and contents of this visit.)

Some important shifts in approach or focus since the issuing of the original Terms of Reference for the research arose. Essentially the scope of the evaluation study was expanded to allow for a much more thorough investigation of as many as possible of the current literacy-teaching dynamics, including policies, teacher-training issues, classroom practices, access to and the provision and use of materials, and community preferences, to name a few, in order that the research might better inform the improvement and implementation of the provincial Literacy Strategy. The evaluation was to focus on the relative contribution and strengthening of existing literacy-teaching materials and methods, within their complete and integrated context, in an effort to formulate coherent, sustainable solutions. All the above affected the conceptualisation of certain aspects of

the intended study, as summarised below. These changes mainly arose from the two meetings recorded above between representatives from Irish Aid, LDoE, HSRC and UL.

1.3.1 Literature review

A review of the literature clarifies the theoretical underpinnings of the field of literacy teaching as and where this is pertinent to Limpopo Province. It draws on the most recent and relevant psycholinguistic and language-acquisition research, as well as the most recent state-of-the-art international research reports on literacy and language education, especially in Africa.

1.3.2 Evaluation of learner support material

The study also incorporates an evaluation of existing learner support materials (readers and textbooks) which are used in schools in Limpopo Province in order to assess whether or not the literacy demands of the materials are aligned with what learners need to be able to read in Grades 3 and 4. This evaluation also makes it possible to assess the extent to which learners are able to read these materials. (Two additional reports on this matter accompany the Main Report.)

1.3.3 Tracking the provisioning and availability of literacy materials

In addition the study traces important elements of the provisioning and availability of literacy materials and programmes.

1.3.4 Brief review of teachers' literacy training

A limited review of university-based literacy training in teacher-education provision was attempted, alongside the collection of data on LDoE and other providers' support of literacy in the Province.

1.3.5 Inclusion of Grade 4 and reading and writing across the curriculum

The study was expanded to include Grade 4 learners and teachers and reading and writing across the curriculum.

As elaborated earlier, the study comes at a time when new knowledge about the relationship between literacy and learners' ability to learn across all areas of the curriculum, and hence succeed in formal education beyond the Foundation Phase, is becoming available. It is now evident that it is almost impossible to assess the durability and or efficacy of any literacy intervention in the Foundation Phase until learners reach Grade 5 to 6. Literacy methods, incorporated into literacy programmes or materials in the Foundation Phase, should be based on a clear purpose of ensuring that learners are ready to read materials in several genres from Grade 4. Thus a thorough evaluation of any literacy method as it is mediated through materials and teacher-training activities, needs to consider the extent to which it is linked to the requirements of reading and writing in other areas of the curriculum beyond Grade 3 (i.e. at the very least in the beginning of the Intermediate Phase).

The particular demographics of Limpopo and the high percentage of rural communities present particular challenges for the development of appropriate literacy methodologies, materials and programmes. As discussed earlier, the issue becomes more complex when learners are expected to change from mother-tongue education (MTE) and mother-tongue (MT) literacy to a second-language education system, as happens for most speakers of African languages in Grade 4. Grade 4 is the point at which, for many learners, there is a

significant step upwards in terms of expected volume of reading as well as the different genres of reading required by different subjects/Learning Areas. There was thus a need for the study to account also for the longer-term effects of Foundation Phase policies and practices in terms of the transfer (or not) of language and literacy skills related to cognitive demand at the interface between the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. An evaluation of literacy methods which are used in the Province needed to focus on the literacy (reading and writing) needs of the learners of the Province and to evaluate the extent to which the teaching methods meet these in terms of enabling reading and writing across the curriculum.

1.3.6 Partnership and collaboration

In general terms, the study has been approached in a way that promotes partnership and collaboration. The research project included a focus on development and capacity building in the field of contemporary literacy programme evaluation and related activities in the Province. This was achieved by functioning as a research consortium between the HSRC and University of Limpopo, in order to share research capacity and expertise, and build research capacity, including in literacy research methodologies. Irish Aid exercised its prerogative to ensure the optimal mix of research partners from those who had expressed interest in the study after its announcement. The purpose was to strengthen resources in the Province in order to facilitate literacy development initiatives which are less dependent on external providers or expertise.

1.3.7 Stakeholder participation

Education policy and legislation also inform decisions of key officials. Knowledge of and rationales for literacy provision inform decisions and actions of literacy providers. The debates and thinking which steer these stakeholders needed to be identified and spelt out in the evaluation study. Informants for this included relevant LDoE officials; officials of the National DoE; literacy service providers; producers (publishers) of literacy teaching methods and tools (e.g., materials); teacher development/education providers; teacher unions; and relevant donor/development agencies.

The fact that the client (LDoE) and development agency (Irish Aid) are separate entities, and that many other stakeholders, such as providers of literacy teaching materials, the Khanyisa programme responsible for provincial and literacy development strategies, teachers, etc. are involved, explain a decision to work through a Research Reference Group (RRG). This further served to engage with and ensure that maximum benefit was gained from existing expertise in the Province, especially language education expertise, and knowledge of the indigenous languages.

All the above changes in scope and purpose were expected to increase the value of the study, and were accepted by stakeholders without any principled reservations. However, a number of practical considerations and implications in terms of the execution of the work had to be accepted. These are outlined in Chapter 2 under 'Methodology'.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The overarching aim of the evaluation study is to improve the quality of literacy teaching and hence overall academic achievement in Limpopo Province. This aim was specifically understood to involve or require processes which would identify the cause of any obstacles to the teaching of literacy effectively in Limpopo Province and would culminate

in the articulation of practical, effective solutions based on sound theoretical and empirical evidence.

The second aim is to ensure that inequities (socio-economic, linguistic, etc) in regard to educational provision, as these are manifested in literacy teaching and learning, can be identified and recommendations made to eliminate these.

The study has been conducted in terms of the explicit terms of reference for the study, namely: “The primary objective is to provide a clear set of recommendations to inform the finalisation of the provincial Literacy Strategy and the development of a generic literacy model for the Province” (LDoE and Irish Aid 2005). The primary objective is accompanied by a series of other objectives which may be identified as follows:

- The identification and interrogation of any successful literacy practices in schools.
- The identification and interrogation of any unsuccessful literacy practices in schools.
- The identification of gaps in terms of educational provision and support of literacy in schools.
- The identification of any gaps which may arise in the publication of learner support materials (LSMs).
- An analysis of teacher education course design and provisioning of literacy within the HEIs.
- The involvement in the research of various stakeholder communities via representatives who are regularly updated on the research process and findings.
- Involvement of staff of Higher Education Institutions, especially, University of Limpopo, in the research activities.
- Active capacity-building activities amongst senior students at the Universities of Limpopo, and Venda (fieldwork training, monitoring and mentoring of fieldwork research activities).
- Ensuring international research compatibility and validity.
- Dissemination of the findings to the clients and more broadly if appropriate.

1.5 The research approach

The operational, practical or concrete elements of the research approach are all discussed in detail in Chapter 2 as part of the methodology of the study. At this point only a very brief remark or two are made about the research approach followed.

In terms of the research procedures as such, the study aimed to obtain a focused and targeted (or purposive) view of literacy teaching and learning practices and related dynamics within classrooms, schools on the whole, and the circuit/district offices having jurisdiction over the schools. This research or evaluation information, derived from an empirical investigation of literacy teaching and its many infrastructural elements, would be situated against

- the context of a broad information basis comprising overviews of related key aspects such as the history and context of teacher training in the Province;
- the cognitive content of literacy materials (textbooks specifically) across a spread of grades and Learning Areas;
- appropriate theories and research findings from relevant literature; and obviously

- any existing literacy development policies and strategies.

These various elements of the broader approach to the research procedures would be implemented by collecting the required information from selected participants by means of appropriate instruments.

In-depth information collection, with a largely qualitative focus (i.e. avoiding large-scale stratified or random sampling, and generalising statistically to the provincial population), was the indicated preference. The nature of the study and its objectives, and other practical limitations, precluded considering any experimental or quasi-experimental, or even post-hoc designs, to try and evaluate the relative success of selected literacy-teaching strategies and methodologies at this point. As a result, a limited number of site visits (just over 20) of two days in duration each by specialist teams of four, would occur. During these, techniques of observation, document review, structured interviews and focus-group interviews would be paramount. As far as possible, relevant responses would be pre-coded for some quantitative benefits in terms of analysis, but lots of qualitative information and analysis would remain in the cases of samples of learner work (writing and reading), digital recordings and photos, extended responses, etc.

The details of the sample and instruments are covered more completely in Chapter 2 under Methodology.

1.6 The structure of the report

This report has been structured in the following way:

Chapter 1 **frames the rest of the report which comprises three parts:**

Part 1 (Chapters 2 and 3): Describes the research methodology and provides a review of the theoretical underpinning of the field of literacy teaching (Heugh, 2007). The literature review is intended as a resource for policy makers, Department of Education officials, researchers, tertiary teacher-education institutions and school management. The research design for the empirical study is underpinned by the theoretical understandings developed in Chapter 3.

Part 2 (Chapters 4 to 12): Presents the empirical findings on the contents and quality of literacy practices in 20 Limpopo primary schools and five Limpopo Department of Education districts, and on the contents and quality of university-based literacy training in teacher-education provision. Reference is made to ideas discussed in the literature review in the findings of the empirical work.

Part 3 (Chapters 13 and 14): Draws conclusions and makes recommendations for a generic literacy model and the Literacy Strategy for Limpopo Province.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 introduces the study and its aim which is to improve the quality of literacy teaching and hence overall academic achievement in Limpopo Province.

Chapter 2 provides details of the research methodology and methods adopted. It describes data-collection instruments, sampling and data collection procedures as well as data analysis. **Chapter 3** outlines the current theory and understanding of literacy teaching and development in the early and primary school years of children, as these are relevant in other African countries and particularly in relation to Limpopo Province in South Africa.

Chapter 4 presents empirical findings on the language/s of teaching and learning (LOLT) evident in 77 Grade 1-4 classrooms in a sample of 20 Limpopo schools. **Chapter 5** describes the particular social contexts and physical environments in which the primary schools are situated and the extent to which school and Grade 1-4 classroom environments promote and enhance literacy development. **Chapter 6** presents findings on the provision, availability and use of textbooks and readers and other textual support material in the schools and classrooms. **Chapter 7** examines the organisation and management of time on task, in particular, the extent to which Grade 1-4 teachers maximise learners' opportunities to participate in appropriate reading and writing tasks for their grade level. **Chapter 8** focuses on dimensions of literacy instruction in the sample of Grade 1-4 classrooms, including the development of concepts of print and printed material and comprehension skills. **Chapter 9** presents findings on school management and teachers' planning for delivery of literacy and language curricula and evaluation of literacy learning. **Chapter 10** examines parental expectations and the extent of parental involvement in the schools, particularly their involvement in literacy activities. **Chapter 11** describes the in-service support and training provided for and still needed by Grade 1-4 teachers and primary Phase Heads of Departments. **Chapter 12** discusses university-based literacy training in teacher-education provision. It provides an analysis of teacher education course design within Limpopo Higher Education Institutions and explores the capacity of Limpopo tertiary teacher-training institutions to provide the kind of primary-school teacher development required.

Chapter 13 identifies key factors constraining literacy instruction, learners' language and literacy development and literacy attainment in systemic testing. **Chapter 14** makes a set of recommendations for the development of a generic literacy model for the Province and enhancing the provincial Literacy Strategy in Limpopo. It concludes with the implications of the recommendations.

**PART 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE
REVIEW**

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The detailed and more technical contents and outcomes pertaining to the methodology adopted for this study are discussed in this chapter. These contents conventionally require setting out elements of the design (also see Chapter 1 on this), discussing the information-collection instruments, describing how sampling is done and which participants are involved, and the procedures followed to collect and study the information collected, including the approach followed during data analysis, report writing and related dissemination.

2.1 Research ethics

2.1.1 Approval of all studies

The HSRC has a strong central Research Ethics Committee (REC), entering its fifth year of full operational functioning in 2008. This committee sits monthly, and no study is given official approval, or receives formal protection from the REC, if not submitted to and discussed by the committee beforehand. The REC reports to the HSRC Council, and comprises two to three representatives from each research programme in the HSRC, but also a range of experts from outside the HSRC. These experts include the chairperson¹, as well as a number of other people with appropriate experience, qualifications and knowledge about the legal and other aspects related to research ethics.

Like all other applications, this project was submitted to the relevant monthly REC meeting a week in advance, and covered the sufficiently completed application form (on which the study's objectives, methodology, sample/respondents, information-collection instruments, risks and benefits, and a number of related matters were summarised); the complete proposal for further background; the intended research instruments; and the appropriate information sheets and consent forms to every research participant according to each mode of data collection (e.g., document review, focus groups, interviews, etc.).

Once properly discussed, research teams are normally provided an opportunity to give further clarification, and make slight or bigger improvements to the ethical conduct components of the work, before official approval. This project was approved after very few minor adjustments had been made and clarifications had been given.

2.1.2 Information sheets and consent forms

People should not be expected to participate in research without their knowledge and consent. The HSRC adheres to a formal process of informing participants about: the fact and nature of the study, any benefits or risks anticipated, levels of effort required by participants, compensation provided, confidentiality and anonymity information and/or guarantees, the nature and fate of the data collected, feedback processes, etc. All of these matters have to be reflected on an official information sheet and conveyed to respondents through related processes. As evidence of having gone through such a process, and to enable any respondent to follow-up or query any matters of conduct or uncertainty arising from the study, a copy of this information sheet is left with each participant. The

¹ Formerly Prof Peter Cleaton-Jones from WITS Medical School, and presently Dr Doug Wassenaar from the University of KZN, who both specialise in national and international ethical issues, training, capacity development, consultation, etc.

information sheet includes the contact details and numbers of the principal investigator, and/or his/her research manager, the secretary of the REC, as well as a toll-free ethics line. Appendix 2 to this report contains a copy of the forms approved for and used in this study.

Once satisfied that a respondent was ready to participate in an informed manner, voluntarily, without coercion, and knew that he/she was free to terminate participation or refuse to answer any question, he/she signed a document in evidence of such consent. Provision is made for dealing with special cases such as sound or visual recordings, focus-group interviews and their lack of confidentiality guarantees, etc., and records are kept of this too.

In this study, all of these protocols were strictly observed. The team was able to develop a generic combined information sheet and consent form that would enable participants to receive information once, and sign once for their appropriate participation. For teachers, especially, this may have involved observation of their classrooms, participation in a structured interview and the subsequent completion of an interview schedule, document review, and a focus-group interview. These forms declared that participation in the study was voluntary and that no participants were being forced or coerced to take part in the study. The forms stated that all completed instruments would be treated as confidential and that the identities of participants would remain anonymous.

Every fieldworker was required to know the contents of the consent form, and trained accordingly. A slightly flexible process was also followed according to the practical arrangements with and unique circumstances prevailing at each school. As a result, the study was sometimes explained up-front to the whole school-management team, or to the principal and all the intended participants (followed directly by formal signing of the consent forms), or to each individual participant (with signing then of consent forms), or some variations in between. All of this tailored the mode of informing and negotiating with participants on their prospective involvement and contributions, and allowed them to decide on and confirm their voluntary participation. In all instances the two information pages were left with each participant to keep and read in detail. The signature or consent pages were retained by the researchers, and this activity formed part of the detailed checklist of activities and materials retrieved that teams had to sign off before leaving a school.

2.2 Main elements and stages of the study

Because of the consultative nature of the study, work has taken place in phases to allow incremental decision making. This means that the findings and preliminary reports from earlier stages helped inform the design and methodology of later ones. The clear focus on the needs of the client required a strong concentration on policy recommendations at the end, so that sustainability and ownership of the benefits of the study can be ensured.

The evaluation project comprised two main phases, each with its own tangible outputs or deliverables.

Phase 1

Phase 1 ran from July 2006 to March 2007. It comprised all the preliminary discussions about the nature and extent of the project, reaching formal agreement about these, setting

out procedures and vehicles for future interaction, developing and submitting the research instruments, text-analysis method and outlines of the intended methodology, sample and design, and having these amended appropriately and endorsed.

Phase 2

Initial intentions had been to have Phase 2 activities start by about April 2007. However, this did not come to fruition as result of the lengthy illness of a key team member (the HSRC language specialist), and also later because of the labour action and teacher strikes in the schools during the second term of 2007. As a result, the main activities of the Phase 2 empirical work had to be re-scheduled to start towards the end of July and in August 2007. Thus Phase 2 essentially followed from August to December 2007. The delays mentioned would also entail that the final submission of the findings and reports would roll-over into January to March 2008, after the first versions of the various preliminary and draft products had virtually been completed by the end of December 2007. Analysis of the Grade 4 materials also took place then.

As already suggested by the foregoing, Phase 2 work then comprised the final adjustments to and preparation of the data-collection instruments, the sampling of participating schools and the individuals involved from these, the recruitment, composition and training of research teams, the information collection itself, data capturing and cleaning, data analysis and report writing.

2.2.1 Research Reference Group (RRG)

One major challenge anticipated by the researchers was that of keeping the various participants and role players, each with their own diverging roles and interests, involved, interested, and committed to the common benefits of participation in the project, as sustainability is a central objective of the study. Phase 1 of the research project essentially ensured that all stakeholders, literacy development materials and other information available, and teaching strategies used, were identified correctly with a view to further information collection, and that project mechanisms were set up properly (such as a Research Reference Group or RRG).

The project's methodology and information-collection procedures were developed iteratively though consultation not only within the formal RRG mechanism, but even wider on a needs basis. Key stakeholder groupings in the RRG and wider process included policy makers, service providers, Limpopo Education Department officials (e.g., Chief Director Curriculum, procurement and EMIS directorates, ECD coordinators and practitioners), teacher unions, language committees/boards, Khanyisa, publishers, school governing body associations, and the funding agency, to name the central clusters.

More specifically, the RRG included formal representatives from the following institutions: Limpopo Language Services within the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture; the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB); Limpopo Department of Education (General Manager Curriculum Development and Support, and representatives on GET, ECD, Governance, etc., as required); the *Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie* (SAOU) (South African teachers union), which represented NAPTOSA, PEU & SAOU affiliates; the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU); Fhatuwani programme of Irish Aid in Limpopo; Irish Aid in Pretoria (Health & Education Programme Advisor); University of Limpopo (head of the Department of Language Education); Integrated Education Programme (IEP); Khanyisa; the National Association

of School Governing Bodies (NASG); the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS); the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Venda; and the South African Publishers Association (SAPA), with the latter through a decentralised process of consultation. Appendix 3 comprises the text of the terms of reference for the functioning of the RRG.

As much as possible relevant information of various kinds and from a range of sources was collected (in Phase 1a, up to early 2007), and presented, discussed and interpreted (as Phase 1b, up to the end of July 2007) with a view to making and effecting decisions about the design, methodology, sample and instrument development for Phase 2. Some of the criteria applied with regard to empirical information collection for the project included concretisations of the following:

- good quality learning materials (in terms of appeal, correctness, contextual appropriateness, real-life relevance, durability, etc.);
- full coverage of the curriculum by learning materials;
- appropriate fit in terms of cognitive demand between learning materials and curriculum contents (learning outcomes for the relevant grades and Learning Areas);
- synchronised progression of the cognitive demand made by materials on learners across grades and education stages (especially from the Foundation to the Intermediate Phases);
- appropriate fit between learning materials and curriculum contents, on the one hand, and teacher-training programme contents, strategies and practices, on the other hand;
- appropriate links between the cognitive levels of demand of the materials and the curriculum, on the one hand, and the level at which curriculum enactment is achieved during classroom practice (teaching and learning) as such, on the other hand; and
- equivalence between learning materials in terms of different language versions per grade in respect of cognitive demand, curriculum coverage, etc.

Essentially this information laid the theoretical foundation for the evaluation and had been incorporated in the evaluation design.

2.2.1.1 First Research Reference Group meeting (RRG 1)

The pre-work referred to thus far on outlining the project design features, instrument design and contents, and sampling, formed the main agenda for the first RRG meeting. As a result, a preliminary consultative workshop was conducted for all members of the research team and Reference Group towards the end of March 2007. It took place as a two-day workshop on 19 and 20 March 2007.

After communicating the intended course that the research team had set for the study, the team left with detailed indications as to any required improvements and amendments, and went ahead developing the early draft versions of instruments and specifying other methodological details in preparation of a second workshop² that was to be held to keep all the participants informed.

² Although in terms of content and process this activity formed part of Phase 1 still, the timelines and contents of Phases 1 and 2 became somewhat blurred at this stage (see reasons elsewhere).

2.2.1.2 Second Research Reference Group meeting (RRG 2)

This meeting took place on 26 July 2007 in Polokwane, and was well attended by all stakeholders, and especially those representing Irish Aid (Pretoria and Polokwane), the Human Sciences Research Council (Dr Tshilidzi Netshitangani and Dr Cas Prinsloo), the Limpopo Department of Education (Ms Onica Dederen and others from her team), and the various regular labour, school governing body and other representatives. The business of the meeting mainly comprised submitting and explaining the intended sample and instrument contents that had been prepared for the imminent pilot period. A second important aspect was making arrangements (getting ‘clearance’, as it were) for going ahead with the on-site work, which would also include identifying the sites to be visited, also by means of working through district- and circuit-based channels and processes.

The result was the completion of all the instruments which were then piloted through an exercise which took place in three schools from three different districts, and in one circuit office, from 30 July to 3 August 2007. Through this process it was learnt which elements of the data-collection process had been too lengthy and which elements of the instruments involved unnecessary duplication and could be streamlined to make information collection more manageable for both the research team members and the participants. A decision was also taken to involve only post-graduate students (and not under-graduate students) in the research for reasons of protocol as well as expertise. The essential changes to the instruments at this point involved shortening the classroom-observation instruments and teacher questionnaire, while simultaneously splitting the observation instrument into a specialist part for administration by a senior team member, and a general part for completion by a post-graduate student, with both these parts now comprising relevant document reviews as well as observation elements, which had been separate previously.

A data-collection protocol (administration manual) and all instruments were consequently finalised for full-scale data collection. Final procedures and instruments were then approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the HSRC and the data-collection instruments were printed for the extended empirical work with the eventual sample during Phase 2 (see “Sample selection” later in Section 2.5). A further decision taken was to reduce the intended sample of 24 schools in the main study period to 20. This decision was based on important insights gained in the pilot as to what was feasible and realistic and taking into consideration cost and the necessity of buying some time for adjusting between the pilot and Phase 2 so as to allow for some retraining time, and so as to optimize the best possible data-collection process within what could be afforded.

2.2.1.3 Third Research Reference Group meeting (RRG 3)

This meeting took place on 5 December 2007 in Polokwane, and was again as well attended as one could hope for this late in the school year. Participation was very constructive, especially in terms of sharpening the procedures and formulations related to the contents of the report in process of completion.

The meeting’s agenda comprised four main aspects. The first was to give a progress report on the outcome of the empirical work thus far. Then the envisaged structure of the report, according to which the findings would be written, were presented and discussed rather extensively and productively. Third, some preliminary impressions from the findings were shared, albeit not at all integrated and concrete in terms of recommendations. The final item was to set delivery and target dates and do some

planning for the final steps of dissemination and release, as well as the fourth RRG meeting, towards February 2008.

2.2.1.4 Fourth Research Reference Group meeting (RRG 4)

In a discussion during January 2008 between the main representative from each of the three concerned institutions in the project, namely Limpopo Department of Education, Irish Aid and HSRC, it was considered to have a more diverse, but targeted, set of dissemination activities as part of final consultations about the findings. These would entail separately sharing (at least relevant sections of) the report for discussion and feedback with representatives from the five or six main clusters of stakeholders that had representation throughout on the RRG (i.e., publishers, school governing bodies, training institutions, curriculum, ECD, labour, etc.). It was initially thought that a presentation to the MEC and Head of the Department for Education in Limpopo during February/March 2008, based on the final draft of the report, would precede such discussions. However, the final decision was to adhere to having the final RRG event first as planned.³

2.2.2 Piloting the instruments and procedures, and training

During the week of 30 July to 3 August 2007, a very intensive training and piloting session was arranged. This was accommodated by the University of Limpopo (specifically Prof. Molefe Ralenala), and rendered a mass of very useful achievements and information, with minimal contingencies to take care of, given the high-pace and high-volume nature of the event.

A training component comprised the first half of the week, and included about eight students and six senior staff members from both the University of Limpopo (Language and Multilingual Teaching Departments) and the University of Venda, as well as a team of about eight senior staff and associates from the HSRC. The HSRC staff and the external consulting members handled various parts of the training, and also prepared for their team leadership and monitoring roles. Prof Hassana Alidou (African research fellow from Niger), Dr Carol Macdonald and Dr Cheryl Reeves, all specialists in the field of language and literacy teaching and classroom practice and observation, took a major share of this work, while the HSRC team focused on the methodology- and logistics-related aspects. This part of the week not only prepared the team for its work, but also served broader research-capacity development purposes, especially for the post-graduate and other senior students and less-experienced academic staff members. Some instrument refinements were also accomplished during this stage.

The empirical piloting component tested the procedures, instrument contents, time schedules, team capacity and composition, and various related matters, when three teams of six to eight people each visited a school each during two full days during the second half of the pilot week. Regular debriefing sessions were worked into the programme.

2.2.3 Revising procedures, instruments and sampling, and refresher training

Based on the very useful feedback, observations and lessons learnt in the field and through the training sessions during the pilot week, the final school programme and team composition were determined. Interwoven with this, the main change that was made to the instruments, apart from various fine-tuning elements to all the items and instruments, comprised recombining what had been separate classroom observation schedule and

³ At the time of producing this part of the text, this event would occur by the middle of April 2008.

classroom document review instruments into two integrated observation and document review instruments, but split into two different levels of complexity of focus. The latter implied that the senior HSRC and university researchers/academics would be responsible for the more complex information related to classroom dynamics and practices, while the post-graduate students would observe and note more regular and static, albeit very important, prevalence and existence matters.

The ideal team size was also established to be four members, being two academics or researchers, one each from a university and the HSRC, and two senior students.

Arrangements were also finalised all along with the schools that were identified to participate. The sample was adjusted downwards slightly from the intended 27 schools to 20 schools, with a lot of the information from the three pilot schools remaining relevant. These decisions accommodated the requirement to have very in-depth site visits of two full days per school, with three teams of four people being in the field for four weeks throughout, collecting the most appropriate and relevant information in the most productive way.

Because of the nature of some of the adjustments to the sample and team composition, two new Tshivenda-speaking post-graduate students had to be trained, and all six the retained post-graduate students from the pilot study had to be given some refresher training on the changed procedures and information-collection contents immediately before the main study could commence. (Also see Sections 2.2.4 and 2.3 below.)

2.2.4 Main study – information collection

This phase covered extended empirical information collection, mainly through district and school visits and classroom observations, to establish the extent, content and success of existing literacy-teaching strategies. Document collection and review, the completion of questionnaire and interview schedules, doing observations and completing observation schedules, and the collection of selected learner-performance data, all formed part of the design. Essentially Phase 2 comprised an empirical project designed to link the intentions of the curriculum, the quality of literacy materials and literacy practices in use, other conditions of learning and teaching in schools, and the literacy achievements and performance outcomes of learners. Phase 2 also entailed collecting data on teacher-training practices in Limpopo. Data collection in Phase 2 took place over four weeks from 20 August until 14 September 2007.

Once the preliminary findings of the study had become available (in essence, the first discussion draft of this report), the HSRC was to hold a workshop inviting all important stakeholders to comment on the interpretations, conclusions and recommendations made. This would assist in improving the formulations of feedback and proposals to the Department. Any appropriate additional dissemination strategies were also to be pursued at that point.

2.2.4.1 Detail on elements of the main information-collection period

The fieldwork, as indicated above, was rolled out as planned during the four weeks of 20 August to 14 September 2007. The first two days of the main period of fieldwork were devoted to evaluating the teacher-provision and training aspects at the University of Venda, and also to provide refresher training to all the teams, but also to two new post-graduate students from the University of Venda. They were recruited in the meantime to

accommodate the need for having only senior students and for working in the Vhembe (Tshivenda-speaking) area of Limpopo.

The eventual sample comprised three schools each from the districts of Greater Sekhukhune, Waterberg and Vhembe, five schools from Mopani, and six from Capricorn. A wide range of coverage across school sites, home and official languages, locations, etc., as key research variables was accomplished, and the team was confident that substantive and legitimate conclusions would be forthcoming about many of the salient factors and features of the study. The fieldwork coverage also comprised an even spread of Grade 1 to 4 classrooms, materials and practices. Grade R classrooms were included where possible, and besides literacy and language teaching as such, relevant activities and materials related to Numeracy, Life Skills and other Learning Areas and contents across the curriculum were also included. A core feature was to keep an eye on the dynamics pertaining to majority and minority home-language prevalences in schools.

Visits to the five district offices, with an interview with the district manager and/or other senior members there, and which also included some document review and site observation, were included in this main fieldwork period. One district (Mopani) could not be reached during the fieldwork period because of difficulties in securing an appointment with the relevant officials because of their tight schedules. However, the interview schedule was completed afterwards during a follow-up round of conversations by telephone, e-mail and fax.

It has to be noted that many contingencies arose as the weeks went by, but in retrospect can be said to have been dealt with optimally and in such a way that information collection and the sample was not affected in any significant manner. (These contingencies would include changes to the schedule and availability of senior team members from the partners from the academic organisations, owing to institutional factors outside the control of any individuals.) In only an exceptional single case or two did school schedules require a school replacement or some adjustment, mostly in the early phases of arrangements. It has to be noted that the collaboration, assistance and reception from both district and circuit offices and officials, and in particular from school principals and their staff, throughout testified to unparalleled measures of support and generosity. These participants only deserve the highest praise and gratitude.

2.2.5 Data processing, analysis and report writing

The data capturing and cleaning (integrity checking), as well as the calculation of frequencies and other descriptive statistics, have been completed by about 12 October 2007, and this can also be seen as a major task accomplished well.

Simultaneously, the senior HSRC report-writing team members agreed on the report outline and their respective authorship responsibilities, and the target of 31 October 2007 was set for having gone through the first iteration and for arriving at a first version that could be tested for gaps, completeness and next steps, before the integrative parts of the writing were tackled. The latter would then start focusing on the implications and recommendations to derive from the evaluation.

At the same time, the review of Grade 4 textbook materials was completed by the external collaborator, and clarified by the other literacy specialist (from the HSRC).

An overview is given further below in Sections 2.4 to 2.6 of the more technical aspects pertaining to the achieved methodology, sample (respondents), instrument administration, etc.

2.3 Capacity development and training

Besides the interactive involvement of the RRG members and the research partner (University of Limpopo) in a general sense, as already mentioned a number of times, specific capacity-development objectives were inserted in particular into the following activities: pre-pilot training, the piloting process itself, the refresher training before the main study, and the main study itself. Participants included many more than the eventual fieldwork team members. Even a few undergraduate students initially attended some of the pre-pilot training sessions, together with additional lecturers. The eight post-graduate students forming part of the teams throughout the data-collection, junior academic staff (pertaining to research methods in general), and also senior academic staff (in terms of overall research management processes) formed the main participants (and beneficiaries).

Prior to going out into the field to collect data, all fieldworkers attended a fieldwork training workshop to prepare them for the data-gathering process (and programme). Detailed administration manuals or instructions, as well as sample sets of all instruments, forms and other background materials were produced to each research team member.

2.3.1 Pre-pilot training

This took place over a stretch of two days, and comprised dedicated sessions (some almost in the form of academic lectures) to communicate the theoretical principles and practical requirements behind the fieldwork procedures, with an emphasis on matters such as ethics, protocol, reliability, instrument management, team composition and roles, coding, focus-group interviews, etc. It also meant going through the objectives, design and methodology aspects of this particular study in very fine detail, as well as each item from each instrument. Clarification of roles, completion of and instructions towards handling administration documents, claims, contracts, indemnities, and the like, were also covered.

2.3.2 Piloting process itself

Once the pre-training was accomplished, a period of two to three days was used in three teams of seven to eight members to test out not only the instruments, but also the information-collection procedures as such. In addition to having discussions on site within every team during the day, as well as in the vehicles on route to and back from the venues, joint debriefing sessions were also held at the end of every day. Valuable exchanges of insights, suggestions for improvement, but also teasing out all the arguments behind every element and proposed change, occurred during these sessions. Participants, especially inexperienced ones, gained valuable insights into the process of justifying everything one does in a study like this.

2.3.3 Refresher training

After a quick turn-around period of about two weeks, the teams were ready to embark on the main study, and convened again for a four-hour refresher session. This was designed to alert them to changes in the instruments and some broader procedural issues, as well as to reconfirm the other principles and methodology behind the study.

As related already, for two new Tshivenda-speaking team members, this session comprised their full initial training during a separate session in Thohoyandou before commencing with the main period of information collection.

2.4 Data-collection procedures during the main study

Researchers conducted studies of Grade 1-4 and Grade R classes, where they existed, at 20 schools and of five district offices over four weeks. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected.

2.4.1 Fieldwork organisation

At the outset, when the piloting and instrument refinement still had to commence, the research team for the school- and district-office visits comprised 20 members: six HSRC researchers; four university staff members; seven post-graduate students; and three consultants. The HSRC and some of the other members of the team have vast experience in organising large-scale fieldwork programmes.

2.4.2 School visits

2.4.2.1 The process of gaining access to schools and classrooms

The LDoE provided up-to-date contact details. Permission for every school and other visit was negotiated and arranged beforehand by the principal investigator and deputy project leader from the HSRC's office. This took place through the LDoE project coordinator, as well as the appropriate district and circuit managers. Every participating school beforehand received detailed confirmations about the date and duration of visits, the participants required to contribute, the effort of involvement of each of them, the types of activities and documents the team needed to be exposed to, and the team composition and numbers. A detailed document spelled out the technical contents of what was required from various participants during any given visit and informed schools of the intended dates of the school visits. Prior to visits each school was phoned a number of times to confirm details, to keep them informed of the pending activities, and to make sure teams had addresses and school hours correct.

The teams were compiled in such a manner as to provide hands-on mentoring and capacity development right through the two days at each school. A senior HSRC staff member (or its consultant) acted as convenor of the team of four. This person was responsible for overall protocol, distributing the instruments, overseeing the scheduling at a school, and in the end making sure that every item was covered in time, and that all the instruments were duly completed, labelled and returned, with the consent forms. There was also a quality control element to it. A senior academic (from UL or UNIVEN) served as the second senior team member. In parallel, these two senior people each paired with a post-graduate student, and between them they shared the classroom observation for the first part of each day, after which they divided the remaining interviews, document reviews and whatever else remained, between them in line with circumstances at the school. As a result, everyone for almost all of the time had another person at hand to clarify uncertainties and the way forward as the fieldwork unfolded.

The value of working in this way was that everyone at their own level got hands-on exposure to the dynamics and contingencies at stake when rolling out a study of this kind, with a mentor at hand to clarify developments as they unfolded. Deliberate efforts were

made throughout to have discussions to interpret underlying dynamics and research contents wherever opportunities arose.

Each school was visited for two days by one team of researchers comprising four members (in one case five members, and in one case three, to take contingencies into account). Two members were senior researchers (of whom there was always at least one HSRC researcher and usually one university-based researcher), and two were student researchers (in a single case or two there were one student and three senior researchers).

Over the two-day period the two student researchers and two senior researchers in pairs observed two classrooms each from Grade 1, 2, 3 and 4. (In some schools, a senior researcher also requested to observe a Grade R class where this existed at the school.) The senior researchers who observed classes also: (a) examined some of the classroom records/documents of each of the teachers whose lessons were observed; and (b) conducted a focus-group interview with the Grade R/1-4 teachers whose lessons were observed. In addition senior researchers:

- a) administered the school principal questionnaires;
- b) completed a school-document review and school-level observation sheet;
- c) conducted the SMT focus-group interview; and
- d) conducted the SGB/parent focus-group interview.

The student researchers:

- a) administered questionnaires to each of the teachers whose lessons were observed;
- b) completed a review of each of the teacher's classroom book collections where these existed; and
- c) conducted focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the Grade R/1-4 teachers at each school.

The division above was treated with some flexibility according to local circumstances and demands, in that the post-graduate students sometimes became involved in some of the activities outside their core assignment.

Day two of the school visits was also used for "mopping up" any missing data from the first day.

On arrival the research team introduced themselves to the school principal, or in his or her absence, to the deputy/person acting as principal, or a member of the SMT, and explained the purpose of the study. The latter was emphasised to centre around establishing the effect that language and literacy and LSM support to schools, and the needs they still had, had on current literacy-teaching practice. Team leaders briefly outlined their data-collection plans for principals and allocated and co-ordinated the activities of all researchers in each team to ensure that all data collection was covered.

2.4.2.2 Classroom observations and classroom document reviews

On both days of the school visit, one of the two post-graduate student researchers and one of the two senior researchers in each team were tasked with observing one classroom for the first two hours of the instructional school day. The rationale for this was that: (a) the first two hours of the teaching day were assumed to be the most productive in terms of literacy and numeracy teaching; and (b) observing for a fixed two-hour time period would allow for greater comparability of literacy practices and exposure across grades and

schools. Researchers were thus tasked with going to classrooms at the start of the instructional day and observe what happened during the first two hours of the timetabled teaching time (even if no actual teaching took place). If the first break occurred before two hours of instructional time had passed, then the researchers were to complete their observation period after break to make up exactly two hours of observation.

As the plan was to observe the first hours of teaching, researchers had to do their best to reach all schools at the start of the school day. This meant that they needed to know exactly where each school was located before the day of the visit to reduce the likelihood of delays finding a school, and to know when assembly took place.

Although researchers did their very best to reach schools at the start of the school day and to establish exactly where each school was located before the day of the visit, researchers sometimes got lost or had trouble locating schools, or they misjudged the distance and time it would take to get to schools because of poor roads and other conditions. Then, unfortunately, getting into classrooms for observation immediately was not possible in all cases.

Delays on the first day were also caused sometimes by the fact that school principals set up a meeting with the research team and/or formally introduced them to teaching staff. Logistical arrangements at the school also sometimes delayed researchers' arrival in classrooms. Some teachers took time to organise their classrooms, for example, to prepare a place for the fieldworkers to sit during the observation. In some cases, the whole class was sent to the toilet at the start of the day. One or two teachers arrived at school five or ten minutes late, or the school started late because the principal and staff were having a meeting. A couple of teachers insisted on spending time looking for their Learning Programmes or other classroom documents for the document review before they started teaching. As a result of unavoidable delays researchers arrived in classrooms too late to observe the first five minutes of the first lesson in 15 (19%) of the 77 observations. This is not considered to be a severe threat to the reliability or validity of the data.

On the first day of the school visit, one student researcher and one senior researcher observed a Grade 1 class and the second student researcher and senior researcher a Grade 2 class. On the second day of the school visit, one student researcher and one senior researcher observed a Grade 3 class and the second student and senior researcher a Grade 4 class. If it was not possible to observe Grade 1 or 2 on the first day, then arrangements were made to observe a Grade 3 or 4 class instead and to observe the grade that was not observed on day one on day two. If there was more than one class for a grade, the lessons of only one teacher for each grade were observed.

During the observation, researchers used a pencil to write on the observation schedule using erasers when adjustments/amendments needed to be made as the observation progressed. However, it was only possible for them to finalise and complete some sections after the observation had been completed. Where necessary, mother-tongue student researchers assisted senior researchers with translation during observations.

Once the observation period was over (or during break if this occurred before the two hours had passed), the student researchers (doing the ‘generalist’ observations) asked the teachers if they could review the classroom book collection if this existed.⁴

For the classroom document review, senior researchers (doing the ‘specialist’ observations) asked teachers for their year/term plans for Home Language (L1) and First Additional Language (FAL); records of learner assessment in 2007; progress report/s provided to parents/guardians; and at least five learner workbooks (for example, exercise books and portfolios) for Home Language and First Additional Language for the grade observed. Workbooks and/or portfolios sometimes needed to be collected from learners during or at the end of the observation period.

Although the intention was to observe all of the 20 teachers from each of the four grades, one Grade 4 class was not available for classroom observation on the day scheduled as learners were busy writing a test. In two other cases, for logistical and research capacity reasons, researchers were not able to complete ‘specialist’ observations schedules. For the document review, however, researchers were able to access and examine the workbooks and/portfolios of a Grade 4 class where both ‘specialist’ and ‘generalist’ observations schedules were not completed.

2.4.2.3 Teacher questionnaires

Each of the student researchers arranged to administer the teacher questionnaires to the Grade 1, 2, 3 and 4 teachers after their lessons had been observed. As far as possible this was done in ways that did not disrupt classes, for example, during free periods or breaks, and in some cases entailed interviewing staff in the afternoon after school had closed for learners.

2.4.2.4 Teacher focus-group interviews

Ideally the Grade R/1-4 focus-group interviews included those teachers whose lessons were observed. However, in isolated cases this was simply not feasible, so senior researchers interviewed those teachers who were available during the time slot. Participants were asked if the interview could be recorded for data-collection purposes.

2.4.2.5 School principal questionnaires

Senior researchers in each team completed the questionnaire with the school principal at each school. If the principal was not available, the questionnaire was completed with the deputy principal/a senior teacher/HOD (i.e. another member of the school management team). Other members of the SMT or other delegated staff were sometimes involved in assisting with completing certain sections of the questionnaire.

⁴ Provision was also made for making digital sound or image recordings (photo, video). Photo or video images were made by those individual senior team members who had their own equipment. As a result, it was not meant to be analysed systematically, or reported on extensively, but served a support purpose to those who used them. In terms of research ethics, anonymity and confidentiality undertakings had to be honoured too, and these would not at present be published further. Digital sound recordings were also made of three learners from each grade reading a few prepared short sentences in their mother tongue from a laminated picture card. These were used to get a sense of their mastery and fluency in reading, and learners were selected to reflect strong, intermediate and weak skills levels. The recordings were also not analysed systematically and reported on separately, but used to confirm other classroom observations. These can be used for secondary data analysis should the need arise.

2.4.2.6 School conditions and school document review

The school conditions and school document review was completed by senior researchers independently of the school principal or staff.

2.4.2.7 SMT and SGB/parent interview questionnaires

Senior researchers interviewed senior teachers/members of the school management team responsible for overseeing Grade R, 1, 2, 3, and 4 and also conducted focus-group interviews with a group of as many as possible of the members of the School Governing Body, other parent body - such as Parent-Teacher Association, or available parents and/or other interested community stakeholders. If necessary, researchers translated interview questions into parents' home language to facilitate the interview. One HOD and/or a teacher were also included in the SGB/parent focus group for translation/interpreting purposes, depending on the home language of the senior researcher who conducted the interview. (Some interviews could therefore be conducted in the vernacular in cases where the researcher was fluent in it.)

2.4.2.8 Data-collection reports

Before leaving the school, team leaders checked that the required number of all the categories of instruments and consent forms had been collected and recorded the result on a data-collection form. At the end of the visit, researchers thanked the principals for their co-operation and assistance.

Note: At the very beginning of the main fieldwork period, in case teams found that they could not manage to collect all the data in the time available at each school, they were allowed to leave unaccomplished the following data collection items if a choice had to be made:

- SGB interview questionnaire
- Teacher focus-group interview.

However, this happened in at most two instances, as the teams came up to speed quickly. As a result, no significant data gaps arose, and the consistency, reliability and validity of the data are not considered to be under any threat.

2.4.3 District office visits

Senior researchers visited district offices when collecting data at those schools situated nearest to each of the five district offices. District visits took place after school hours on day one or two of the school visits. The district interview was conducted with the District Manager or one or more key officials in the district who would be able to facilitate easy access to information and documents about the district's role in supporting primary schools and teachers and providing information about the school-support service providers.

2.5 Sample selection

Sampling of schools for Phase 2 was done so as to ensure representation and near-exhaustive coverage of possibly important scenarios or configurations around literacy teaching delivery. The research team also requested the use of all relevant data sets from the LDoE, including data from the Grade 3 and 6 systemic evaluations, and data which illustrated clusters of schools where learners perform well and clusters of schools where learners perform less or least well. It was important for this evaluation to identify both promising or well-functioning classroom literacy practices as well as those which

encounter serious challenges, in order to see if such a split goes hand in hand with provision patterns regarding literacy materials, and perhaps even learner performance levels. However, it has to be noted that this element is a post-hoc design feature, and would only be looked at after the fact. The main reason for this is that time, scope and resource features prevent this study from having an experimental design, whereby effects and causes could be controlled and isolated.⁵

Purposive sampling was employed with the aim of getting a sufficiently representative sample of schools subscribing to different literacy programmes in the Province at as productive and economic numbers as possible. The school sample comprised schools participating in or implementing at least one of the literacy programmes and also schools which were not involved at all. The involvement of schools in various/different school-improvement programmes was also factored in. In addition, individual participants at the schools drawn for the study were carefully selected to cover the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase grades to be targeted for data collection, and to include teachers; learners; and parents/school governing body members. To this effect, the EMIS division from LDoE provided a printout of the list of all the more or less 2 200 schools teaching Foundation Phase in Limpopo. This list comprised the normal contact details (mail and physical addresses, principal, telephone and fax numbers), as well as information pertaining to the official LOLT, the home languages of learners, school size (learner numbers) and the poverty index by district and circuit.

The HSRC was as a result able to select schools/districts as the outcome of a long process of purposive sampling aimed at ensuring coverage of a wide range of conditions and factors, including the various home languages spoken in Limpopo, the availability of learner performance data, coverage of all five Limpopo districts, as well as urban and rural conditions, multi-grade teaching, minority and majority language distributions, school size, and a few other typical research variables.

2.6 Methods and data sources

The central information elements of the overall evaluation, their sources and the instruments through which data have been collected, are summarised in Table 2.1.

⁵ In all these evaluations (systemic, Khanyisa programme, and IEP) schools had been sampled too. The practical challenges of overlaying these various samples would become difficult quickly.

TABLE 2.1: INFORMATION SOURCES AND METHODS

Type and contents of information	Respondents or sources of information	Method used in collection and analysis (instrument)
Research findings and theoretical models	Literature	Literature review
Learning and teaching support materials contents and quality	Publishers and other providers of LTSMs. LDoE, DoE officials; donors	Document review, content analysis. Interview schedules
Contents and quality of literacy teaching practices	Classrooms, schools, teachers (teacher practice). Principals, parents, SGB.	Classroom observation, including some video-, audio- and photo recording, and pre- and post-review (de)briefings. Interview schedules.
Contents and quality of teacher training programmes	Teacher training departments (UL and UNIVEN). Principals Parents	Document review and content analysis, focus-group and individual interviews
Learner and school performance records	LDoE, districts	Printouts of relevant statistics, marks, etc.

A total of 11 data-collection instruments were developed to collect school-, classroom- and district-level data and were used for this dimension of the study.

School-level instruments included:

1. A school principal questionnaire containing seven sections covering: school details; parent and home profile; school enrolment, class size, and teaching staff; school language policy; availability of physical resources, especially teaching resources and management of learner support material; instructional timetabling and procedures for monitoring time on task; teaching support from the Limpopo Education Department and from sources other than the LDoE.
2. A school conditions and school document-review instrument comprising two parts. Part 1: comprises a brief review of the school environment. Part 2: comprises a) a document review of the school's inventory of textbooks, readers and other learning material; and b) confirmation that each school had - a copy of the Limpopo Literacy Strategy (draft) and a Language policy as decided by the School Governing Body.
3. A school management team focus-group interview schedule. This instrument consists of six sections covering senior teacher/SMT experience and qualifications; language/s of instruction; availability of learner support material; timetabling and time on task; curriculum planning, monitoring of curriculum delivery, and learner assessment procedures; teaching support from the Limpopo Education Department and from sources other than the LDoE.
4. A school governing body, parent and community stakeholders focus-group interview schedule. The questionnaire consists of 18 questions that relate to the involvement of parents/guardians at the school.

Classroom-level instruments included:

5. The 'generalist' classroom observation schedule. Part 1 comprises an observation schedule consisting of six sections covering the teaching and learning

environment; time on task and homework; the use of books, booklets and magazines and other learning material; language/s of instruction; opportunities to write and read. Part 2 comprises a review of the classroom book collection of each teacher whose lessons were observed.

6. A 'specialist' classroom observation schedule consisting of three parts. Part 1 comprises a classroom observation schedule with five sections covering time on task; availability and use of learning material; use of code-switching; opportunities to read and write; and literacy development. Parts 2 & 3 respectively comprise a review of the Home Language (L1) and First Additional Language (L2) documents of teachers whose lessons were observed. The five sections cover reviews of the teacher's Learning Programme/work schedule; record of assessment of each learner and progress report/s provided to parents/guardians; learners' workbooks and portfolios; the timetable of the class observed; and researcher comments on the document retrieval process.
7. A teacher questionnaire consisting of seven sections covering teacher details and biographical information; class size and language profile; language/s of instruction; availability and use of learner support material; time on task and homework; teaching support from the Limpopo Education Department and from sources other than the LDoE; including three open-ended questions (translated into the three main languages of the Province) where teachers are required to write their answers.
8. A teacher focus-group interview schedule consisting of six open-ended questions relating to the development of learners' reading and writing skills; language/s of instruction; learning support material; and support from the Limpopo Department of Education.

The district-level instruments included:

9. A district focus-group interview schedule and document-review instrument, intended for key officials in each district, consisting of four sections covering school and teaching support from the district; issues around the language of instruction and introduction of First Additional Language; procurement and distribution of learner support material; and some open-ended questions.

Data-collection report for each school

10. The tenth instrument took the form of a report on the data collection at each school.

Consent forms

11. A generic consent form for each participant to sign once.

Data collection took place over the period of four weeks from 20 August until 14 September 2007. The frequency tables in the remaining part of this chapter provide an overview of the data collected.

In Table 2.2, the district sample and respondents are reflected

TABLE 2.2: NUMBER OF DISTRICTS VISITED, NUMBER OF DISTRICT INTERVIEW SCHEDULES COMPLETED AND NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

Number of districts	Number of district interview schedules completed	Number of participants
5	5	11

The designations of the officials interviewed across the five districts and reflected in the participants column of Table 2.2, are as follows:

- Two District Senior Managers
- Two Circuit Managers
- Two Curriculum Advisors
- Two District Education Coordinators
- One Early Childhood (ECD) Coordinator
- One Further Education and Training (FET) Coordinator
- One Deputy Chief Education Specialist.

Table 2.3 reflects the school and classroom sample sizes.

TABLE 2.3: NUMBER OF SCHOOLS VISITED AND CLASSROOMS OBSERVED BY DISTRICT

District	Number of schools visited	Number of classrooms observed
Vhembe	3	8
Waterberg	3	12
Capricorn	6	24
Greater Sekhukhune	3	12
Mopani	5	21
TOTAL	20	77

Table 2.4 shows the numbers of the various school-level instruments completed by the respective participants and collected by the research teams.

TABLE 2.4: NUMBER OF SCHOOL-LEVEL INSTRUMENTS COMPLETED

Schools visited	Principal interview schedules	School conditions and document review schedules	SMT interview schedules	SGB/parent interview schedules
20	20	20	18	20

A total of 15 principals and three acting principals were present during the School Management Team (SMT) focus-group interviews. In the few exceptional cases (not more than two or three) where principals were not available due to other school and family responsibilities, other members of the SMT were interviewed for purposes of the school principal interviews.

A total of 49 SGB members and two non-SGB parents were interviewed across the 20 primary schools. Focus-group interviews were meant to be conducted with School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents and interested community stakeholders. However, most of the schools were unable to draw in other members of the general parent body for the interviews, ostensibly due to parents' work commitments.

Table 2.5 shows the designations of participants across the 20 schools for purposes of the SGB/parent interviews.

TABLE 2.5: DESIGNATION/PORTFOLIO OF SGB MEMBERS INTERVIEWED

Designation	Number interviewed (n=51)
Chairperson of SGB	8
Treasurer of SGB	5
Secretary of SGB	7
Parent Representative on SGB	7
Parent non-SGB member	2
Other (SGB teacher component)	22

Information on the Grade 1-4 teachers who participated in the study was collected through the teacher questionnaire which was administered to Grade 1-4 teachers across the 20 schools.

Table 2.6 reflects the number of teachers that completed the teacher questionnaire per grade.

TABLE 2.6: NUMBER OF TEACHERS PER GRADE THAT COMPLETED THE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Grades	Teacher questionnaires
Grade R	-
Grade 1	20
Grade 2	20
Grade 3	20
Grade 4	20
TOTAL	80

Table 2.7 reflect the number of teachers from each of the Limpopo Department of Education's districts that completed the questionnaires.

TABLE 2.7: NUMBER OF GRADE 1-4 TEACHERS PER DISTRICT THAT COMPLETED THE TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

District	Number of teachers (n=80)
Vhembe	12 (15%)
Waterberg	12 (15%)
Capricorn	23 (29%)
Greater Sekhukhune	12 (15%)
Mopani	21 (26%)

Table 2.8 provides a gender breakdown of these Grade 1-4 teachers.

TABLE 2.8: TEACHER NUMBERS BY GENDER

Gender	Number of teachers n (valid ⁶)=71
Male	4 (6%)
Female	67 (94%)

In all 79 ‘generalist’ classroom-observation instruments were completed and 77 ‘specialist’ classroom-observation instruments. However, for the analysis of classroom practices, data were only included where data sets from both the ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ classroom observation instruments were available. In other words, data from a total of 77 Grade 1-4 classroom observations across the 20 schools was used for the purposes of analysis. For the document review, however, researchers were able to access and examine the workbooks and/portfolios of a Grade 4 class where both ‘specialist’ and ‘generalist’ observations schedules were not completed. This data was included in analysis of work done in workbooks and/portfolios. The number of classroom observations, completed ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ classroom observation instruments and classroom document reviews per grade is reflected in Table 2.9.

TABLE 2.9: NUMBER OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION, ‘GENERALIST’ AND ‘SPECIALIST’ CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEDULES AND CLASSROOM DOCUMENT REVIEWS COMPLETED

Grades	Number of classroom observations	Number of generalist <u>and</u> specialist instruments completed	Classroom document reviews
Grade R	8	-	-
Grade 1	20	20	20
Grade 2	20	19	19
Grade 3	20	19	19
Grade 4	19	19	20
TOTAL	87	77	78

Table 2.10 provides the number of Grade 1-4 ‘generalist’ and ‘specialist’ classroom observations per district.

TABLE 2.10: NUMBER OF ‘GENERALIST’ AND ‘SPECIALIST’ CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS IN EACH DISTRICT

District	Number of teachers
Vhembe	9 (12%)
Waterberg	12 (16%)
Capricorn	24 (31%)
Greater Sekhukhune	12 (16%)
Mopani	20 (26%)
TOTAL	77

Teacher focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the Grade R/1-4 teachers in attendance were completed at 19 of the 20 schools. The total number of respondents that participated was 93. The numbers of them teaching at the various grade levels were the

⁶ Where the numbers differ for respondents who completed an instrument and for those who responded to any given item in it, the latter is recorded and labelled the “valid” sample size or “n”.

following: 9 teaching at Grade R level; 16 each teaching at Grade 1 and Grade 2 level respectively; 22 teaching at the level of Grade 3; and 27 teaching at the level of Grade 4. Three teachers could not be assigned to a grade level as this information was either not correctly recorded, or because someone not teaching at the level of Grade R to 4 sat in as interpreter, or for some other reason. The average number of teachers participating per school was 4 or 5, although three cases were also recorded where 6 teachers comprised the focus-group discussion, while in one school each, 7 and 8 teachers respectively were present. At the low end of the range, in two schools the group comprised only 3 teachers. In the final school, the focus-group topics were discussed with just one teacher.

2.6.1 Teacher education

Part of the study required an understanding of the Higher Education Institutions' (HEI) capacity for teacher education in the Province, particularly in relation to the teaching of sufficient teachers who are able to teach reading and writing skills in primary education. The two HEI's in Limpopo, University of Limpopo (UL) and University of Venda (UNIVEN) offer teacher education at different levels. UL offers teacher education at secondary school level while UNIVEN offers early childhood and primary school teacher-education programmes. Consequently, the research team adopted two approaches to the collection of data on literacy teaching/training in the Province. A set of instruments were prepared for UNIVEN by the HSRC literacy specialist and the external, international consultant, Professor Alidou. Secondly, Professor Alidou developed a set of interview instruments for UL. HSRC researchers were to visit Thohoyandou between 20 and 22 August and hoped to be able to visit and collect information from the Education Department at the University of Venda.

Since UL was part of the research consortium, all liaison with UL staff was effected through Professor Ralenala, the head of the UL research team involved in this project. HSRC invited the participation of UNIVEN's Department of Education in the study through various mechanisms:

- Invited participation in the Research Reference Group from November 2006 onwards;
- Liaison between the lead UL researcher, Professor Ralenala, and UNIVEN from December 2006 onwards;
- Participation of a UNIVEN staff member as a senior researcher and UNIVEN students as fieldworkers on the study;
- Correspondence between HSRC and the Department of Education at UNIVEN prior to the field visits between 20-22 August 2007.

HSRC forwarded written requests for the field visit and meetings and data collection, including opportunities to engage with staff, as follows:

1. A meeting with the HOD, to collect some baseline data on student numbers, courses, etc.
2. A meeting with teacher-education staff to explain the study and relate this to other research in Africa.
3. A focus-group interview with staff to explore the approaches to training for literacy of the department and to identify the challenges and possible solutions for the Province.
4. Observation/participation in any teacher-education class which may include ECD, Foundation Phase, and literacy/language development during this time.

HSRC took the liberty of suggesting the following programme and timetable, and invited Education Department staff to finalise times and dates. The following programme and data-collection procedures were advanced to UNIVEN:

Meeting of HSRC staff with Head of Department

*Monday 20 (afternoon) or Tuesday 21 (morning) - time to be agreed
Approximately: 60 - 90minutes.*

Request course outlines and programme documentation, and student enrolment data from the Head of Department, Dr MP Mulaudzi.

We are especially interested in the course outlines, reading lists and any other documentation on primary-school educational courses which relate to Literacy and Language Development (especially the teaching of reading and writing in Grade R, Foundation, Intermediate and Senior Phases where possible).

Meeting with Teacher Education Staff and informal seminar by Professor Alidou

*Time to be decided – at a time convenient to the Department (any time between 14:00h
Monday 20 August – late afternoon Tuesday 21 August late afternoon)*

Professor Alidou, Alliant International University, San Diego, an expert on literacy in West Africa and the USA, will, on behalf of the HSRC, introduce the study, an Evaluation of Literacy Teaching in Limpopo Schools, and would be pleased to share her experience of issues related to teaching of literacy (reading and writing) in primary schools in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali. [This would take approximately 90 minutes.]

Focus group meeting and interview with HOD and teacher educators at the University of Venda

(Especially staff involved in ECD, Foundation and Intermediate Phase teacher development.) [Approximately two hours].

Time to be decided – Tuesday 21 or Wednesday 22 August

Departmental staff would be asked to share their own experiences with teaching literacy for pre-service and in-service teachers. We would like to address the following questions.

- 1) How do you prepare pre-service teachers for teaching literacy and language development in primary schools?
- 2) Which are the courses which specifically focus on literacy and language development? [e.g. Please specify in relation to PGCE, ACE and B Ed programmes.]
- 3) How would you describe the literacy approaches that you promote and use in your programmes?
- 4) Do you include an emphasis on literacy development in the preparation of Intermediate (and Senior) Phase teachers? If so, can you elaborate?
- 5) Do you collaborate with Limpopo schools with regard to promoting literacy in African languages and English? Describe the nature of the collaboration and how often does it occur?
- 6) Please explain how you implement the teaching practice component of teacher education?
- 7) To what extent are student teachers mentored or paired with experienced and well-prepared teachers?
- 8) Do you produce any materials which support literacy for primary school students and teachers?
- 9) If so, in which languages do you produce reading materials for school students

- and their teachers, and at which levels?
- 10) What type of materials (genres) do you produce?
 - 11) How do you disseminate your materials?
 - 12) Do you organise professional development training for teachers who are using the materials you produced?
 - 13) Do your staff members organise in-service training for literacy for school teachers?
 - 14) How do the training programmes that you offer contribute to literacy development in the mother tongues of children and adults in Limpopo Province?
 - 15) What are language and literacy issues and challenges you identify in Limpopo communities and schools?
 - 16) The national and provincial Departments of Education have been conducting systemic assessment of literacy in Limpopo schools and the findings are particularly worrying. In your view what would be the three most important factors which contribute towards poor learner performance (in literacy and or language development)?
 - 17) Do you have any possible solutions that you would like to recommend to the Department of Education?

Teacher Education - Observation of Course teaching (if possible)

At a time which is convenient to the Department (between afternoons of Monday 20 and Wednesday 22 August)

Two members of the team would need to observe classes in which student teachers are being trained by *UNIVEN* staff, if possible.

The meetings between HSRC researchers and University of Limpopo staff engaged in teacher education and literacy were less formal since UL does not prepare primary school teachers. Professor Alidou conducted the semi-formal interviews and participated in a seminar and discussions with staff and post-graduate students in order to elicit information about the approaches to literacy education at this institution.

The contributions and record that Professor Alidou made after these interviews and site visits have been worked into this report and appear in Chapter 12.

2.7 Data processing and analysis

Data management forms an important part of any project, and the research team took responsibility for data capturing, cleaning and analysis. Data collected using various instruments during the fieldwork were captured and then cleaned in preparation for analysis and report writing. The quantitative (coded) responses from the formal instruments were captured by an outside agency making use of the HSRC's minimum standard of 100% verification. This means that every response is captured twice, compared afterwards, and discrepancies then rectified from the original. In addition to this, the HSRC itself, and also in the process of data capturing, as negotiated with the service provider, set parameters for the values in every field whereby it becomes possible to identify and correct any value not possible or allowed.

In terms of more quantitative work, such as those expected to arise from questionnaire information, interviews and document reviews, it was possible to calculate certain frequencies directly, and cross-tabulate those according to certain contextual variables on which information was also available. In addition, certain open responses and other

information from the instruments was coded, and similarly analysed by means of frequency distributions and cross-tabulations.

With regard to qualitative analysis of materials in terms of content, cognitive level and compliance with the NCS and Language in Education policy requirements, expert judgment was made by professional team members. In addition parts of responses were keyed in verbatim, and further coded or categorised according to pre-determined rubrics and criteria.⁷

In Chapter 3, the theoretical understandings underpinning the empirical research are elaborated on.

⁷ For content analysis software packages such as ATLAS TI or NUDIST can be used. However, the nature of the present study, and the low number of respondents, made this an unproductive option.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF THE FIELD OF LITERACY TEACHING

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report outlines the current theory and understanding of literacy teaching and development in the early and primary school years of children, as these are relevant in African countries and particularly in relation to Limpopo Province in South Africa. The section will begin with working definitions of the terminology which is currently used in both the international literature and as they are used in the South African context. Where different terms are used, both the international and South African ones are used together in order to allow for comparisons and linkages to be made by the reader/s.

The purpose of this section of the report is to provide an up-to-date account of the research and theoretical work in this domain and the current situation in South Africa, so that the reader has an opportunity to have this background knowledge before reading the following sections which deal with the collection of literacy practices data from the field and relevant stakeholders (i.e. district, circuit, school and classroom sites). The section will conclude with a summary of what is known about good practices for optimal literacy development in school education. Once the findings of the fieldwork study have been analysed later in the report, they will be compared with what is known about optimal and good practice which have been identified in this section.

For the purpose of this study, the term language education includes formal systematic literacy teaching and learning in both the language subjects (learning areas) classrooms as well as in the other subjects/learning areas (i.e. across the curriculum). Some authors prefer to treat language education and literacy as two separate processes. However, we regard language as including reading and writing along with speaking and listening, and there has been a long tradition in the literature of a similar understanding. However, it is also our understanding that reading and writing require particular emphasis in both the teaching of languages as subjects (languages learning area) and in all other parts of the school curriculum (other learning areas).

We do not, in this study, focus on the kinds of literacies which people acquire informally, outside of the school setting (e.g. understanding gestures and signs, and other social practices). A new dimension to the theory, emanating from Britain and North America, which regards literacy as a set of social practices and which is broader than the formal reading and writing activities in classrooms, includes both 'critical literacies' and 'social literacies' (e.g. Street, 1995; Prinsloo & Brier, 1996; Martin-Jones & Jones, 2000). This literature has added to the debates and discussions about literacy in recent years. Theorists who have immersed themselves in this research argue that traditional notions of school or academic literacy may be elitist or discriminatory along class-based lines. They call for a wider understanding of literacy which includes acknowledgement of literacy practices beyond academic texts and they draw attention to the tendency to privilege formal school literacy. The earlier focus on reading and writing for academic purposes has been incorrectly labelled a 'narrow functional approach' to literacy. However valid they are for a broader understanding of literacy, critical and social literacies have been only partially understood in the South African debates, and therefore sometimes cloud practical literacy

teaching and learning issues which are most important in developing countries.¹ Children still need to read and write, and this holds true now more than ever before.

Children who enter school engage in various educational activities, including the formal development of their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The hard reality is that unless children develop the formal school or academic literacy to a sufficiently advanced degree, they will be excluded from democratic participation in both civil and public sectors beyond school. Furthermore, the major concern of educational authorities, development agencies and parents at present is to focus on the development of the kind of written literacy which students need in order to facilitate their successful passage through the education system and into either further/higher education or economic activity beyond school. The focus, therefore, in this study is on formal literacy teaching and learning opportunities in schools in order that all learners are afforded the same and best opportunities of optimal cognitive development to prepare them for life beyond the school system. In a nutshell, the emphasis here is on the development of strong reading and writing practices for pleasure and across the curriculum. Included in this is the necessity of being able to read critically (i.e. understand intention, nuance, point of view, different genres and styles, etc.) as well as the necessity to understand and use spoken discourse from critical perspectives. Provision of adequate literacy opportunities in formal education is an absolute necessity for any democratic system which is concerned with educational parity and social equality.

A considerable body of literature is available in regard to the development of strong literacy amongst young learners and primary-school children, and a summary review of the most relevant information which is based on solid contemporary research on the relationship between language and cognition is presented below.

3.2 Language learning and literacy development theory and research²

Internationally, and particularly in Africa, there are shortcomings in the research, theory and practice of language teaching, which includes literacy as the major component (see e.g. Alidou, 2003). This arises as a result of divergent directions taken by the various branches of linguistics: sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and applied linguistics, over the last decade or two.

3.2.1 Linguistics, Language Learning and Literacy Development

The following is a brief explanation of those aspects of linguistics which are important in order to understand the academic fields which inform language education.³ It needs to be emphasised that language education includes literacy development, from early literacy to comprehensive academic literacy by the end of formal education. At the same time literacy development is an on-going process, which does not come to an end, but rather continues throughout life, under enabling conditions.

¹ The National Curriculum Statements (DoE, 2002a, b; 2003) include a broad set of terms about social literacies and informal literacy practices in defining what is meant by literacy. Most teachers, teacher educators and even departmental officials are likely to be confused by the definition and assume that reading and writing are skills which are no longer as important as they were in the past. The effect may be to deflect attention away from explicit teaching of reading and writing.

² This section is an edited extract from Heugh, Benson, Bogale and Gebre Yohannis, 2007.

³ The explanations which follow have been tailored to the needs of this particular study and are not intended for scientific or specialised academic documents.

Sociolinguistics is the field of linguistics which explores the relationship between **language and society**, language and power, language policy, and how different linguistic communities make use of and manage the linguistic rights and resources at their disposal.

Psycholinguistics includes the study of **how people learn language/s** and the relationship between language and cognition (thinking). It is an important area of study if one needs to understand how children learn their mother tongue and second languages used in the immediate or local environment. It is an important area of study if one needs to understand how children and adults learn second languages in more formal contexts like a school setting. The study of second-language acquisition (SLA) is particularly important in African contexts where students are expected to learn through a second or foreign language which is not learned in the local community, but within the restricted domain of a formal classroom setting.

Applied linguistics includes the study of how to teach languages. It includes a focus on the methodology of **language teaching**, the **design of language-teaching programmes**, **textbooks** and other learning materials. It also includes **terminology development and lexicography** (making of dictionaries). The last set of activities falls under what is known as corpus planning. In recent years, the second- and foreign-language teaching programmes [e.g. Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)] have become a very large industry in Britain, the USA and Australia. Similar developments have occurred in France with French Second Language and in Portugal with Portuguese Second Language industries, and in many contexts the business of teaching languages has become synonymous with the term 'applied linguistics'.

3.2.2 Language policy, language planning and gaps amongst the branches of linguistics

Language policy is usually the responsibility of government, however in democratic societies, other participatory stakeholders find opportunities to inform policy. Stakeholders include civil society and those who study socio-, applied and psycholinguistics. Language policy is usually implemented through a set of language planning activities.

Adequate or successful *language planning* needs to draw from all three branches of linguistics. It needs to draw from the language policy decisions about which languages will be used for particular purposes in the education system. Therefore, it needs to draw from *sociolinguistics*. It also needs to draw from *applied linguistics* in order to meet some of the requirements of corpus planning, materials production, programme design and teacher education. Finally, it needs to draw from *psycholinguistics* and second language acquisition in order that the learning programmes are closely connected to what is currently known about **how languages are learnt** in formal educational contexts.

What has happened is that the three branches of linguistics have become increasingly specialised over the last twenty years and they have developed along divergent paths. A movement towards what is known as critical linguistics, involving socio- and applied linguistics since the early 1990s, has drawn scholars away from psycholinguistics particularly in the Anglophone world. The study of psycholinguistics and second-language acquisition (SLA) became unfashionable in the English-speaking world (e.g. Street 1995, Martin-Jones & Jones 2000, McNamara 2001). In the meantime, the SLA

research in this field has continued, particularly in Scandinavia, Germany, Netherlands, Eastern Europe, Israel and in some institutions in Canada and the USA (e.g. De Keyser, 2003, Doughty, 2003, Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003, Kroll & Sunderman, 2003).

Unfortunately, many of the specialists working particularly in ESL (English Second Language) lost touch with SLA developments and thus programmes have been designed for the teaching of ESL without the necessary context of understanding the contemporary research in the area. This is particularly the case in regards to language studies in African multilingual contexts. It has been assumed that language teaching methodologies used in MT contexts are equally valid in second or foreign language contexts. However, it is important to note that there are significant differences between language learning in first, second and third or foreign language contexts:

The field of SLA is, on the whole, interested in describing and understanding the dynamic processes of language learning ... under conditions other than natural, first language acquisition (Norris & Ortega, 2003:718).

The indications are that whereas the acquisition of the first language (L1) or mother tongue (MT) may accommodate an extensive range of implicit language-learning processes, the learning of a second language in a formal school setting requires an accommodation of explicit teaching (e.g. De Keyser, 2003, Doughty, 2003). This is particularly the case for communities: where there are low levels of community literacy; limited access to written materials beyond the school; and where the L2 of formal education is used in restricted domains, and there are few opportunities for L2 learners to communicate directly with L1 speakers (see also Watson-Gegeo, 2004, and Valdés, 2005). Textbooks and other learning materials available to L2 learners show that somehow learners are expected to be able to read cross-curricular text in the L2 when this is pitched at a literacy and cognitive level way beyond the second-language proficiency of the students – and often also of the teachers.

3.2.3 Defining the language acquisition/learning terms in African contexts⁴

A brief explanation of terms used in language education, as they are relevant to African education systems follows:

Mother tongue (MT) = First Language (L1) = Home Language (HL)

Most people use the term mother tongue to mean the first language/home language of the student. Everywhere in the world, students who study in their mother tongue are better able to learn to read and write efficiently, understand mathematical concepts, and develop high levels of academic competence, than those who are not able to study in the mother tongue. In multilingual countries in Africa, many children grow up in bilingual or even multilingual communities, and the mother tongue may actually be a bilingual or multilingual mother tongue (i.e. these children have a repertoire of languages which allows them to use any or all of these languages for high-level communicative functions). This means that in some instances students come to school with bilingual/multilingual competencies which may mean that they have a multiple mother-tongue competency upon enrolment at school. They also enter formal education with a wide vocabulary and complex implicit understanding of the structure of the language/s they use in their immediate communities.

⁴ The terminology is defined here specifically for the purpose of educational contexts in African countries, not for high-level academic functions.

Second language (L2)

In most parts of the world, people learn a second language which is widely used in local, regional or national contexts. This L2 is used for several purposes in society and often functions as a *lingua franca* to bridge communication gaps between different linguistic communities, and is used regularly in places or contexts like local government offices, hospitals, shops, radio, TV, etc. This language can be used as the language of learning and teaching or medium of instruction (MoI), especially when it follows on from sound MTE. Under certain circumstances, where there are high levels of multilingualism (many small communities using different languages living in close proximity to one another) it is possible for students to attend school in a second language which is closest to the home language or one which the learner already knows well.

Third language (L3)

This term is not as well known as its companion terms, L2 or foreign language (FL). It refers, however, to an additional language, which is often used in another local or regional community. In multilingual contexts, school systems often require students to learn an L3 as a subject. The South African NCS refers to this language as the Second Additional Language.

Foreign language (FL)

Languages which are considered to be significant for international communication are often highly prized in African countries. In the former colonies of Britain, France and Portugal, these languages have become fairly widely used in high-level governance, upper levels of the economy and higher education in the main administrative centres (e.g. in Dakar, Maputo, Nairobi and Johannesburg). However, they remain very far removed from most people in smaller towns and rural areas. In countries which did not experience a long British colonial history (e.g. Ethiopia and Namibia) the preferred international language, English, is known by so few people that it remains a foreign language. The functional use of a foreign language is limited in civil society. It may be used for very high-level functions, e.g. legislation, university education, and international affairs. However, the FL does not function as a viable *lingua franca* in the everyday lives of people (e.g. in: hospitals, clinics, police stations, other local government offices, shops; on: radio and TV). It is extremely difficult/unlikely that such a language can function as a viable language of teaching and learning at school level. To all intents and purposes, English functions as a foreign language in rural parts of South Africa, particularly in Limpopo Province.

Additional languages

Along with outcomes-based education terminology, and following trends in the UK and Australia, the South African curriculum documentation deviates from the standard internationally used terminology [second language and foreign language] and uses the terms First Additional Language and Second Additional Language. The NCS uses the term First Additional Language in the context of teaching and learning a second language. The term Second Additional Language is used in the context of a third or a foreign language. It needs to be noted that the term ‘additional’ language was introduced outside of South Africa and developed for entirely different linguistic contexts. Its use therefore in South Africa may not be appropriate, firstly. Secondly, an additional language is not, elsewhere, regarded as one which can or should be used as the medium of instruction for a majority of learners in a country.

The use of the term additional language may be confusing at another level because where English may be regarded as the First Additional Language (i.e. second language/L2) for educational purposes in rural areas of a province like Limpopo, the methodologies and learning materials used for teaching this language may arise from second-language methodology (English as a second language/ESL), but the context is not one in which such methodologies may work effectively. It may be more effective to recognise that English in such contexts is to all intents and purposes a third or foreign language and that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methodology may be more effective.

3.3 Literacy in formal school education

The development of literacy in formal education is closely linked to education policy and the curriculum. It is necessary to understand the theoretical orientations which inform education policy in South Africa in order that literacy teaching can be understood in this context and then evaluated from a comparative perspective.

3.3.1 Post-apartheid curriculum development and literacy theory

One of the immediate tasks of the new government in South Africa was to initiate a process of educational transformation immediately after the first democratic election. By 1995 the process of streamlining 18 different departments of education into one national Department of Education had been realised for the purpose of ensuring educational equity for all students. A new curriculum development process and a separate language-in-education policy process were underway through consultative mechanisms. In February 1997 national government announced a new, outcomes-based national curriculum for schools, Curriculum 2005, or C2005 (DoE, 1997a). This was based on contemporary liberal and international educational theory, known as ‘constructivist’ or discovery learning. In July the same year a new language-in-education policy was also announced. In order to ensure compatibility with the ‘constructivist’ approach to the curriculum, what is known as the ‘whole language’ approach to literacy and language education had been included in the curriculum, and was implicit in emphasis given to ‘communicative language teaching’ in both C2005 and the Language-in-Education Policy for Schools, hereafter referred to as LIEP (DoE, 1997b).

Both C2005 and LIEP emphasised mother-tongue literacy and mother-tongue education plus the teaching and learning of a second language, within a language education paradigm called ‘additive bilingualism’. However, from the outset there was a discontinuity between the understandings of additive bilingual education in language in education policy (LIEP) and how it had been pre-figured in C2005. LIEP, following the international research and empirical evidence on bilingual education in multilingual contexts, placed emphasis on literacy in mother tongue and the use of mother-tongue medium education (MTE) for as long as possible with the addition of at least one other language which would complement rather than replace the mother tongue. This has been interpreted in the education system as Home Language (mother tongue/L1) plus English for the majority of students. Provision was made in LIEP for a variety of additive bilingual models and language maintenance programmes where fully-fledged bilingual models were impractical. In the meantime, the trialling of C2005 began in early 1998, and although it was not explicitly stated as such, C2005 was understood to encourage teachers, curriculum advisors, and provincial departments to apply mother-tongue literacy in the Foundation Phase, followed by a switch to English medium in Grade 4, one year earlier than under the old Department of Education and Training (DET) system prior to

1994 (from 1991 onwards). A switch to a second-language medium as early as Grade 4 means that the principle of additive bilingual education had given way to transitional bilingualism (a temporary, transient form of bilingual education in which the mother tongue is removed as a medium of instruction).

By early 2000, the then Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, launched a review of the curriculum and signalled a similar process for language policy. The revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS) Grades R⁵- 9 (DoE, 2002a) were released in May 2002. The RNCS, renamed National Curriculum Statements in 2006 (hereafter referred to as NCS), retained a restricted interpretation of the language policy along with the ‘whole-language’ approach to literacy and language teaching. For the most part, African Language speaking children have been provided with three years of MTE followed by a switch to English medium in Grade 4.

The ‘whole-language approach’ to reading is based on an assumption that all children can and will be able to learn to read naturally, as frequently claimed by early childhood educators in South Africa. Owing to a series of systemic assessments in South Africa over the last decade, it is clear that the whole-language approach, and more laissez-faire approaches to literacy development, in conjunction with the communicative approach to language teaching, are having seriously negative effects on the education of the majority of children who are from socio-economically disadvantaged communities and the gap between children from the middle-class and previously advantaged communities and those from more vulnerable communities is increasing.

The focus on the ‘whole-language approach’ to teaching reading places an emphasis on reading whole passages of meaningful and authentic text as opposed to teaching reading and writing as a series of separate skills, decoding text and using graded readers.⁶ The communicative approach to language teaching is one which “emphasizes authentic communication where the purpose of using language is to interpret, express and negotiate meaning” (Baker, 2002:222). These have become popularised and have featured prominently in the curriculum and policy documents of education systems in North America, Australia, New Zealand and Britain (mainly English dominant countries). There are two major reasons why these theories may not sufficiently cater for learners in South Africa. Firstly, the theories arose from contexts in which learners encounter a considerable amount of text in their environments (e.g. posters, maps and timetables in public transport systems, easily accessible newspapers, magazines and books). At no point were these theories based on conditions in developing countries which are characterised by low levels of literacy and minimal opportunities to encounter text (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa and specifically in areas such as Limpopo Province in South Africa). Nevertheless, because academics and educators in South Africa have historically taken their lead from British and other Anglophone country sources, the current National Curriculum Statements (NCS) (DoE, 2002a & b) have been influenced by both the ‘whole-language approach’ and the ‘communicative language learning’ approach. The second reason why these theories may not be sufficiently sensitive to the needs of the majority of learners in South Africa, and hence in Limpopo Province, is that they were not developed in contexts where the majority of learners are speakers of African languages, and they were not developed to ensure a solid foundation of mother-tongue

⁵ R = reception/pre-school year.

⁶ For a useful explanation see Baker, 2002:324ff.

literacy with English as a complementary or second language for purposes of academic literacy. In other words, we have been attempting to make language theory and models, which were designed for mother-tongue speakers of English in other countries or minority communities who use other languages, fit the South African education system where 92% of learners are mother-tongue speakers of languages other than English. A further difficulty, with the communicative approach, is that many educators have mistakenly understood this approach to favour spoken and listening skills above reading and writing. Serious critiques of both the constructivist or discovery learning orientation of the NCS and whole-language approach to literacy teaching are now emerging, as in the following:

An example of misunderstood constructivism comes from South Africa. Here teachers were renamed facilitators...Students were supposed to create knowledge on their own and pass it on to others...Likewise, students were no longer supposed to learn reading and writing. Instead they had to negotiate meaning and understanding. So, a lot of people understood this as not requiring reading and writing (Nykiel-Herbert, 2004a, 2004b, in Abadzi, 2006:76).

Unfortunately, there has been a decade of lobbying against what was called, behaviourist and skills-based approaches to teaching of reading and writing, often by educators who themselves had little experience of teaching in African contexts, and were limited by minimal experiences with their own children who grew up in middle-class, English-speaking communities, as for example in:

The emergent literacy or whole language perspective which, as I have stated, guides my thinking sees young children constructing their own literacy in personally useful and meaningful ways as part of developmental, personal, social and cultural learning processes (Bloch, 1997:4)⁷ Here, working in collaboration with my ... colleagues, I have adapted, developed and applied some of the theoretical and practical insights I gained in Britain for use in multilingual African contexts (Bloch, 2006:8-9)

There are two fundamental errors in this thinking. The first is that one cannot easily adapt an approach designed for children in highly literate and well-resourced communities in the developed world for children in vulnerable, multilingual African contexts. The second is that such a process should never be recommended unless there is empirical and reliable evidence to demonstrate that it works. Other literacy and early childhood experts, with more extensive expertise across Africa and other linguistically diverse settings argue that the whole-language approach is too unstructured and does not sufficiently scaffold such learners. Instead, more explicit and structured teaching strategies are required in the developing world and where children from disadvantaged backgrounds are in school (e.g. Snow *et al.*, 1998; Macdonald, 2002; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004b; Alidou *et al.*, 2006 and Abadzi, 2006). See Appendix 4 for an extract from: Snow *et al.*, 1998.

Abadzi (2006:36ff) explains learning to read from a neuroscience perspective, as ‘“tricking” the brain into perceiving groups of letters as coherent words’ and that in order to do this, a great deal of practice is required. According to the latest research, if a reader is to understand a sentence, one has to read it fast enough for the memory to make sense of it. If one struggles to read a sentence and takes too long, one’s memory loses track of what the sentence is about and it has to be re-read and probably re-read again. She argues

⁷ A publication which documents the emergent literacy of the author’s daughter as this developed in middle-class suburbia in highly literate Britain during the early 1990s. Such circumstances do not offer valid comparisons with diverse, rural or multilingual contexts in African settings.

that children need to read at least 45-60 words per minute in order to understand a passage of text and that they need to do this by the end of Grade 2. Some languages are more difficult to learn to read than others, and English is the most difficult of all European languages to read. The research furthermore indicates that where there is a high percentage of children who cannot read at Grade 2 level or above, this is an indication of poor teaching of reading and writing rather than a result of poor nutrition or poverty.⁸

Partly as a result of South African experts' familiarity with research written in English, the research conducted in Europe, Asia, Central and South America, in other international languages and in other multilingual contexts, did not sufficiently inform the thinking in this country in the years leading up to 1994 and in the period of curriculum revision. Elsewhere, there was a growing understanding of: the relationship between language and cognition, language acquisition and psycholinguistics. These fields of enquiry have opened up a new body of knowledge which has direct relevance for South Africa and other developing countries in which diverse linguistic communities coexist. This knowledge indicates that the 'whole-language approach' and the 'communicative language learning' approach are not sufficiently robust for learners in poor or disadvantaged contexts. It indicates that far more explicit teaching of literacy skills and far more explicit and systematic teaching of both the mother tongue and the second language are required. It furthermore distinguishes between acquisition in the mother tongue and the learning of a second and/or third language. Contrary to a contemporary misconception which has been prevalent in South African debates for the last 10 years, the learning of a second language in a school setting is completely different from the development of the first language which the child hears from the date of conception and acquires through a complex set of experiences informally, prior to enrolling at school. Therefore, language and literacy programmes and materials need to be based on an understanding of the differences between first-language acquisition and second-language learning.

Scholars who work with psycholinguistics and language acquisition (e.g. Baker, 2002; Cummins, 1996; Krashen; 1996) have published similar findings to those of Abadzi (2006) who argues that although a second language like English should be taught from as early as possible, it should not be used as a medium of instruction until such time that the student knows it well enough to use complex vocabulary and sentence structure. Students who learn in the mother tongue double their vocabulary during each year of school to reach up to 40 000 words by Grade 5 (Abadzi, 2006:51). However, she suggests that with a vocabulary of between 2 000 and 3 000 words, learners who must use English L2 as a medium may be able to make sense of much of the curriculum. As long as learners can understand 95% of the vocabulary items they need to read, they will be able to work out the meaning of the remaining 5% of items (Snow *et al.*, 1998). But, in order to keep up with learners who use the L1 as a medium, the L2 learners need to learn between 1 000 and 2 500 new words each subsequent year (Abadzi, 2006:51 ff), and this is only possible with specifically targeted and direct teaching methods and programmes. This is unlikely in less-structured discovery learning or constructivist approaches.

In other words, current curriculum documentation as discussed above and as critiqued by Macdonald (2002) may need to be theoretically strengthened and offer detailed

⁸ It needs to be noted that in Limpopo Province, all primary-school children receive a wholesome, cooked meal during the day, and that despite impoverished conditions, malnourishment is an unlikely impediment to educational success in this province.

explications of how teachers should go about the business of teaching reading and writing. An excellent example of the kind of document which is helpful to teachers, teacher educators, and education officials is the report on *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow *et al.*, 1998 – see Appendix 4 for an extract). Teacher-education programmes need to reflect a stronger, more systematic approach to literacy teaching and learning in both the mother tongue and in English (for most learners), and across all areas of the curriculum. The methodologies will need to differ depending on whether the mother tongue/home language or the second language is being used.

3.3.2 Literacy and Language Policy in the South African Curriculum

Following the discussion above and an introduction to the South African curriculum and language-policy documentation (see Chapter 1 above), a number of clarifications are required. In the ideal world policy is closely informed by reliable evidence-based research and thoroughly interrogated theory. The Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997b) is based on the best theoretical and evidence-based research available at that time.⁹ It focuses on the principle of additive bilingual education which requires a minimum of six years of mother-tongue education plus a minimum of six years of learning a second language before the second language can be safely used as a medium of instruction. In situations which are not well-resourced (teachers without a sufficiently high level of proficiency in English and insufficient supply of reading and learning materials), learners may require a longer period to learn enough English. They may require at least eight years of mother-tongue education while the second language is being taught as a subject, before the second language can be used as a medium of instruction.

In the revised NCS, however, although the term additive bilingual education is incorporated in the documentation, the documentation deviates from the theoretical basis of the paradigm and only subtractive-transitional bilingual¹⁰ models of education are spelt out for speakers of African languages. Mother-tongue literacy is emphasised to the end of Grade 3, after which the underlying assumption is that students, except for L1 speakers of Afrikaans, will switch to English, and this is at least three years before it would be possible for most learners to make the switch.¹¹ The re-implementation of transitional-subtractive bilingual education, inadvertently, continues to disadvantage speakers of African languages. It offers more reduced opportunities for Home Language (MT/L1) literacy and conceptual development than did even the last years of apartheid education when the switch to English medium on paper took place a year later, in Grade 5. It simultaneously offers reduced opportunity to learn enough of the second language, English, for most learners, before they would be expected to switch to English medium. The language education policy (DoE 1997b) and as interpreted in the new curriculum documents, stipulates that a second language need only be introduced from Grade 3 onwards as the First Additional Language (FAL). Although many schools have introduced the FAL earlier, others have followed the policy and delayed this until Grade 3. In order for this component of the policy to work well, English as the FAL would need to be taught by teachers who have at least an advanced proficiency in English, and

⁹ Education policy requires regular monitoring, evaluation and adaptation where necessary.

¹⁰ Transitional and subtractive bilingual education are systems which remove the mother tongue as the medium of instruction before learners have had an opportunity to learn the replacement language well enough to use this as a medium of instruction.

¹¹ Although the NCS does not include any explicit instruction that learners should switch to English in Grade 4, the absence of any other explicit possibility for speakers of African languages means that no alternative is suggested or provided for in the curriculum statements.

students would need to have a minimum of six years of learning English before they would be ready to switch to English medium.

Therefore, if learners only begin English as the FAL in Grade 3, they would be ready to switch to English medium by the end of the GET band, i.e. Grade 9. If they were to begin to learn English in Grade 1, they might be ready to switch to English by Grade 7, under optimal conditions (specialist English language teaching and learning materials).

However, as implicit in the NCS documentation, mother-tongue/home-language speakers of African languages who begin to learn English as a subject (learning area) in Grade 3, are expected to switch after only one year of learning English. Under the best possible scenario in terms of the NCS, learners may be able to begin learning English as a subject in Grade R or Grade 1. In this case they may have three years of learning English as a subject before they are expected to switch to English medium. An impossible hurdle is therefore placed in front of learners who are expected to switch to English medium after only one to three years of learning English as a subject. Most serious is the implication regarding literacy. There is no way that the majority of such learners would have enough English to be able to cope with the literacy demands of the curriculum in English from Grade 4 onwards. There is no way that these learners would be sufficiently familiar with 95% of the lexical items in text-books or other learning materials which is necessary for comprehension of text.

Even though Minister Asmal placed great emphasis on the contribution of Edward Said's key-note address at a major DoE conference in 2001, where Said focussed on the role of lifelong literacy development, reading and using several languages (Said, 2001), this impetus has not been carried forward in the curriculum documentation. From Grade 4 the emphasis is on English Second Language (ESL, but known in the South African documentation as English First Additional Language, or EFAL) literacy, and especially for the purpose of teaching mathematics and science (DoE, 2001) rather than the extensive and critical literacy experiences called for by Said. What is disappointing is that it follows a well-worn path of similar approaches, each of which has failed elsewhere in Africa, despite the scholarly advice of, for example, Bamgbose (2000), Mazrui (2002), Obanya (1999), and Ouane (2003).

A key curriculum-support document which should inform teachers about how to teach literacy and develop language is the *Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes, Foundation Phase* (DoE, 2003). The explanation of the communicative approach to language teaching included in the curriculum documentation (e.g. DoE, 2003:49) includes information about language acquisition and language learning which is theoretically incorrect and this is a serious matter which may have negative consequences for language and literacy development in the Foundation Phase. The curriculum documentation gives teachers the impression that language acquisition is a subconscious process and language cannot therefore be consciously learned, and it suggests that "We learn a First Additional Language and develop that language in much the same way as we learn our Home Language ... All languages are acquired in much the same way" (DoE, 2003:50).

The literature on Second-Language Acquisition (SLA) and psycholinguistics, discussed earlier and below, has overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and this is especially the case where learners are only exposed to the second language for a minimal period of time

in a formal classroom situation and where limited exposure to the language is possible in the local environment outside of school. In such cases, second-language teaching methodology needs to be particularly explicit, systematic, and incrementally graded.

In addition, the current itemised criteria for assessment in the Languages Learning Area statement for First Additional Language (L2, i.e. ESL, which applies to the majority of students) show different criteria expected for each grade depending upon whether the L2 is taken as a subject or whether it is to be used as a medium of instruction/language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Students who will use English L2/FAL as a medium/LoLT have more onerous requirements for each assessment level than do those who simply take L2 as a subject. For example, in Grade 9, if one uses ESL as a medium one is expected to have a reading vocabulary of 7 500 words (according to the NCS, although in reality learners need a vocabulary which is far more extensive than this in order to make sense of the requisite reading materials across the whole curriculum¹²). If one has L2 as a subject only, the NCS requires one only has to have a reading vocabulary of 6 000 words and so on (DoE, 2002b:100-101). Thus L1 speakers of English and Afrikaans have lower expectations placed upon them (they are expected to have a narrower vocabulary range at each level, since these students have L1 education throughout and do not need the additional vocabulary and linguistic proficiency required of a student studying in the L2).¹³ In other words, although this was not intentional, mother-tongue speakers of African languages have significantly more difficult educational burdens to carry than do those who are speakers of English and Afrikaans. This means that unequal expectations are required of students from different language backgrounds. Those who come from African-language backgrounds face far more difficult educational challenges than do learners who are home-language speakers of English or Afrikaans.

The *Teacher's Guide for the Development of Learning Programmes*, furthermore, does not offer any concrete examples of how a teacher should teach literacy or language, or even what specific activities to include in a typical lesson. The document is useful as a background and contextual resource, but offers no practical guidance for teachers. Given that the definition of literacy is so broad and opaque, the absence of sample lesson plans which include the content, is a grave omission in the South African context.

The curriculum documentation, collectively, demonstrate two phenomena. The first is that literacy and language learning theory has been misinterpreted by the authors of this part of the curriculum and confusing, ambiguous and incorrect information has been

¹² Macdonald (pers. com., 2007) points out that the NCS documentation seriously underestimates the actually required vocabulary range per grade. This insight arises from the Threshold Project Report and research (Macdonald 1990). By implication this means that the real discrepancy between what learners require in terms of their linguistic reservoir and what they may be able to draw upon, is much wider than commonly understood by the curriculum design teams. The curriculum at Grade 6 suggests that if one is to use English as FAL and LoLT, one needs 5 000 words (learning outcome 3) or 5 500 words (learning outcome 6). However, the Project for the Study of Alternative Education's multilingual science dictionary identified about 4 500 words just for one learning area, Natural Science at Grade 6. By implication far more lexical items would be required for the other parts of the curriculum, and therefore the estimated numbers of items listed per grade in the NCS is seriously under-represented.

¹³ On an even more fundamental level of inequality, the vocabulary range identified in the 2002 post-apartheid education documentation for students who will learn through the L2, i.e. African students, is substantially lower than the requirements under apartheid. Almost inconceivably, this means that apartheid education offered a comparatively more enriched curriculum to African children. So instead of offering a 'better' education to black children now, the menu is more restricted and less enabling of access to higher education than before.

presented to the entire education sector on this matter (see also Macdonald, 2002; Nykiel-Herbert, 2004a, 2004b; Abadzi, 2006). The second phenomenon is that English is seen as the inevitable language of educational replacement for speakers of African languages. The knock-on effect of this is that publishers cannot (or do not) risk producing educational materials in African languages without guaranteed sales. Teachers cannot risk teaching more effectively through African languages since there is no material support for this. The DoE, having disposed of all the apartheid-period resources in African languages after 1994, has been incorrectly advised that there is insufficient terminology in African languages to make textbook production in these languages a reality (see Mahlalela-Thusi & Heugh, 2004).¹⁴ Parents from the more or less 75% majority of speakers of African languages recognise the current lack of educational materials in their languages and try to move their children into the best resourced English-medium state schools (approximately 6% of schools nationally) or the 2% of privately funded schools. The statistics demonstrate that this movement is possible only for a lucky few and the resultant pressure on the well-resourced English-medium schools distorts the reality that most parents would, given the option, prefer well-resourced bilingual schools (De Klerk, 2002a, 2002b; PANSALB, 2001).

Two provinces, Limpopo and the Western Cape, have taken the initiative to begin working on a language and or literacy policy and strategy, in order to meet the specific needs of the province. The *Proposed Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools* (Francis *et al.*, 2005) for Limpopo province offers a useful background document for understanding the broad context of literacy issues in the province. This helps to unpack a little further the notion of literacy in the curriculum documentation, but it needs to include the next logical step, which is to make explicit for teachers how to teach reading and writing in practical everyday terms and with sample lesson plans which include reading and writing activities. To date, however, there is no document available to provincial education authorities and teachers which make explicit the kinds of guidelines and specific activities which would develop mother-tongue literacy, second-language (FAL) literacy, and the kind of literacy required across the curriculum. There is no contemporary document which teachers can use and which offers them clear, practical assistance with how to teach reading and writing effectively.

3.3.3 Gaps between early literacy and academic literacy

Recent research is showing clear signs of serious weakness in the understanding of how children develop strong literacy skills (e.g. Pretorius, 2002; Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005). The popularity of the communicative approach to language teaching places great emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Although the communicative approach places equal weight on reading and writing, it has certainly become obvious in some Southern African countries that teacher educators and teachers have come to understand the communicative approach as placing more emphasis on what Cummins (e.g. 1984, 1992 etc.) has called 'basic interpersonal communication skills' or BICS. Less emphasis is placed on the academic reading and writing skills of students. Yet it is these which are the highly prized language skills that will either open the gates to higher education or remain as impenetrable barriers to access and equitable participation at higher levels in Africa.

¹⁴ That the print media have recently increased publication in African languages demonstrates that it is both possible in terms of available terminology and profitable.

Literacy programmes generally place emphasis on learning to read simple narratives in the first two to three years of school. This is usually in the MT elsewhere in the world. Towards the end of the third or fourth year of school, literacy in MT loses emphasis in African countries. The curriculum, however, requires students to be able to read increasingly complex texts from Grades 4 onwards, and students are expected to ‘read in order to learn’. The texts across the curriculum include complex language structures, tenses and hypotheses, which are seldom found in simple readers. Students who continue to study in MT experience difficulty in managing to adjust to the complex texts across the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards. For those students who are expected to change from MT to another language as medium of instruction at the same time or within a year or two, the academic literacy and cognitive leap which has to be made is almost impossible.¹⁵

In order to be able to read and understand the text, one needs to have a reservoir of knowledge from which to draw. This reservoir comprises a set of experiences about the world as well as spoken and listening knowledge of the language/s in one’s immediate environment. In particular, one needs a substantial knowledge of vocabulary and structure of the language. When one starts to read, one is faced with signs, symbols and graphics which represent information. These have to be decoded in at least two ways: firstly in order to make meaning, and secondly for what each symbol or sign represents (individually or in particular patterns). Many people mistake the ability to recognise letters [A B C D, or a b c d, etc.] and to recognise the patterns of symbols which represent spoken words in a language one knows well, to imply that learners can use this [superficial] decoding skill in a second or other language. The ‘transfer’ of literacy skills from one language to another requires more than a transfer of decoding skills (recognition of letters and a minimal number of words). Once one can read and understand text in one language, one can transfer the reading and understanding processes to another language **providing that** there is a sufficient reservoir of knowledge in the second language (i.e. sufficient listening and spoken knowledge of vocabulary, sentence structure, context and subject matter) in order to read with understanding. Reading is far more complex than learning the techniques of decoding letters or even sounding out strings of letters which have been placed together. These only make sense if one has some knowledge of the vocabulary and structure of the language already. The international literature (discussed below) shows that in most situations, learners can begin learning to read in a second language almost immediately after the onset of literacy in the mother tongue, as long as there is sufficient linguistic input in the second language to make this feasible, and as long as the reading material is graded at the appropriate language level of the learner.

Macdonald (1990) demonstrated that students, who make the change in medium, from an African language at Grade 5, have at best about 700 words in English, yet they are expected to manage to learn with a curriculum of at least 7 000 words in Grade 5. Apart from only having about 10% of the vocabulary items they need, students do not have a sufficient grasp of the linguistic structure of the language. It is simply impossible for students to read with meaning or learn effectively or even at all when they do not have the necessary language skills to do so. At this point in time, in South Africa, most speakers of African languages are expected to change to English medium in Grade 4, after a maximum of three years of learning English as a subject. This is at least one year earlier than under the last years of apartheid rule.

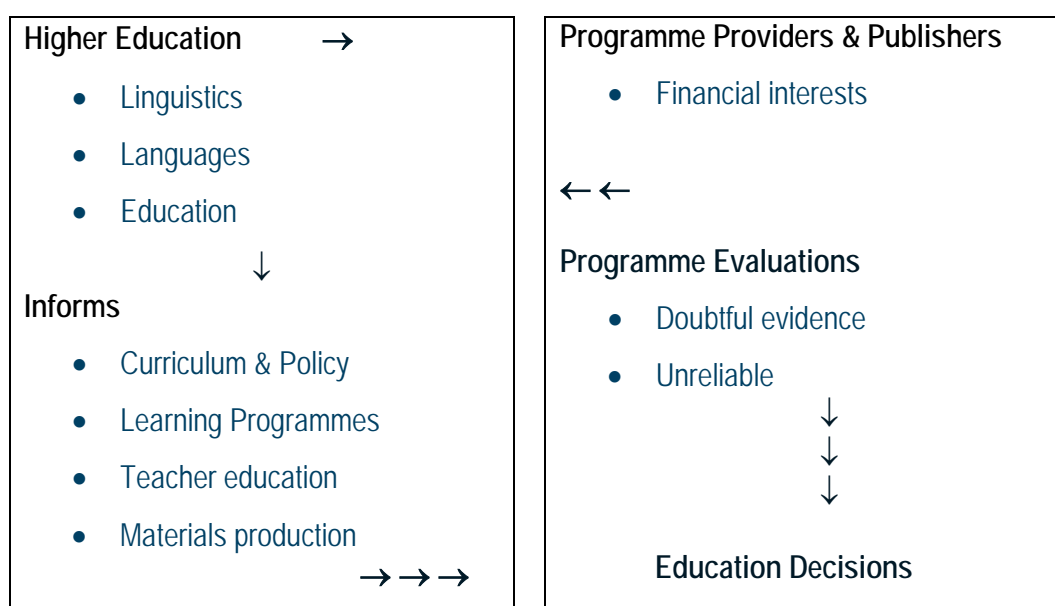
¹⁵ Also referred to as CALP, or cognitive academic literacy proficiency.

Under the best possible circumstances it would be realistic to expect these learners to have about 500 words in English by the beginning of Grade 4, and an understanding of simple, single-clause sentences written in the simple present tense. It would therefore be reasonable to expect such learners to read carefully graded readers (narratives and other simple texts) which gradually expand this reservoir of vocabulary. The curriculum and learning materials from Grade 4 onwards, however, anticipate that learners have an understanding of complex sentences with main and subordinate clauses, future, past, conditional and continuous tenses, as well as a vocabulary of at least 5 000 words. Consequently, the mismatch between what most learners have been prepared to read and write in their second language and what they are expected to do in order to keep abreast of the curriculum, is very significant. It is not possible for learners to read and make sense (meaning) of vocabulary which is packaged in complex sentences for approximately 90% of the curriculum in Grade 4, if this is presented in the L2/FAL. For a while, learners may attempt to learn written patterns by rote and reproduce these on paper, but is unlikely to result in adequate literacy and academic achievement in the longer term. In any event, learners will not be able to keep up with the demands of the curriculum as it increases at each level of school. (Many university students, even, still try to rely on rote learning.)

3.4 Overview of the literature¹⁶

A number of studies which focus on literacy development and language education policy have been conducted in countries across sub-Saharan Africa in the last five years. These have brought to the fore significant data which can better inform policy and educational management decisions. The schematic diagram in Table 3.1 below illustrates the relationship, as found in Africa, between the language and education experts and how these, in combination, influence policy and planning decisions. Unfortunately, many of these influences have inadvertently resulted in language and literacy programmes which are not suitable for children in poor or developing contexts, like Limpopo Province.

TABLE 3.1: CURRENT INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENA: WRONG LANGUAGE EDUCATION MODELS, THEORY, METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH



¹⁶ Sections 2.3-2.6 draw from Heugh, 2006a & b and Heugh, Benson, Bogale & Gebre Yohannis, 2007.

3.4.1 Language Education Policy in Africa – since the 1953 UNESCO Report

One of the most influential reports on language education, the UNESCO *Report on the Use of the Vernacular Languages in Education* (UNESCO 1953), provided the international education context with a clear pedagogical principle, namely that school pupils need to begin their formal education in the mother tongue (MT). From the available literature and research evidence at the time, it was thought that it would take about two to three years to establish strong MT reading and writing skills, and that it might be possible and advisable to change over to the use of one of the international languages, e.g. English, French, Arabic, etc., from the third or fourth year of school. We now know through newer research on language and learning (see below) that it takes between six to eight years to learn enough of a second language in formal school environments before this language can be used as a medium of instruction.

Until 1965, most former British Colonies used four to six years of MT medium followed by English medium. In those days, missionaries and highly trained MT speakers of English taught small numbers of students, often from the upper echelons of African society. The combination of teachers who were MT speakers of English plus the small elite group of students resulted in educational success. In the former Francophone or Lusophone (Portuguese) colonies, the colonial administrations were not supportive of MT education (MTE) and expected the few elite students to have their education entirely through the colonial language. Consequently, most school children have not been able to understand very much of what was required of them in the classroom and only a very small percentage of people in the former French or Portuguese colonies (mainly in West Africa, Angola and Mozambique) have completed both primary and secondary school. This means that a very small percentage have academic expertise and expertise in an international language.

The recent UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE) and Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) Report on Mother Tongue and Bilingual Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Alidou *et al.*, 2006) shows that education systems of Africa have largely turned towards Europe and North America for guidance on their language education policies and practices. This is particularly the case in relation to the use of the international languages English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Colonial administration, accompanied by education systems (even if delivered to a small African elite), were serviced by programmes and materials (textbooks) designed in Europe for students who lived there. Largely these were brought to Africa and used in different contexts where the language competencies of students do not match or resemble those in Europe. The practice in Africa of making use of programmes and materials designed in European contexts, where the international languages are dominant and where they are spoken and used by majority populations in their daily lives has not facilitated educational success in Africa. Essentially, most African countries have engaged and continue to engage with the wrong language-educational models. They are using ones which match neither the educational nor the language needs and aspirations of the learners, their parents and broader society. Since independence, direct control of Africa by the former colonial powers has been replaced by more subtle forms of indirect control. Phillipson (1992), Mazrui (2002), and several other scholars from the continent, point out that the use in Africa of educational programmes and materials designed for European students, continues a form of neo-colonial social, educational and economic dependency and control. Mazrui, particularly, urges that a multi-pronged plan needs to be activated in Africa, to ensure that the models and programmes which can work in Africa are identified

and shared across sub-Saharan Africa. The plan includes research conducted by African scholars who are very well informed by international research, but who also have a very clear understanding of how the contexts of the continent require educational responses which are different from those in Europe, North America, and Asia.

In summary: at this time in 2007 most countries in sub-Saharan Africa used one to three years MT followed by English, French or Portuguese medium. This constitutes progress in the Francophone and Lusophone countries, where zero use of MTE is being changed to accommodate one, two or three years of MTE and bilingual programmes (e.g. MT and French) and this is a change in a positive direction. However, there is reverse (negative) planning in Anglophone countries where MTE has been reduced from four to six years to fewer than four years. Whichever approach is undertaken, MT continues to be phased out too rapidly as the medium of instruction and the academic achievement of students is poor and disappointing. Across the continent we find that the education systems of most countries continue to demonstrate the following:

- Poor levels of literacy achievement
- Poor numeracy/mathematics and science achievement
- High failure, repetition and drop-out rates
- Wastage of expenditure on education models which cannot succeed in Africa.

Only a few students can and do succeed in a rapid change to the use of a second or foreign language as medium of instruction.

3.4.2 Current research: Implementation of policy through different language and literacy models

In this report, we refer only to those models which have direct relevance to the situation in Limpopo Province of South Africa. There have been many studies conducted in different African countries over the last few decades which have researched different literacy, mother-tongue and bilingual education programmes and models. Many of these studies include anecdotal reports, self-reported data, and research instruments which lack validity and reliability. In addition, evaluations of interventions are frequently compromised though inept or inappropriate relationships between the programme provider and the evaluator. In other words, many of the studies and evaluations are neither independent nor scientific. The recent UIE-ADEA stocktaking study, which was prepared ahead of the meeting of African Ministers of Education during the ADEA Biennale in Libreville, Gabon, March 2006, offers the most up-to-date analysis of current language-education policy, models and programmes.¹⁷ The UIE-ADEA (Alidou *et al.*, 2006) study found that:

- Students in initial mother-tongue and early bilingual programmes followed by a transition to French, Portuguese, or English by Grades 2 or 3, show positive achievement over Grades 1 to 3 (e.g. Benson 2000, Hovens 2002). This early success has been (mis)understood by some researchers and many other education stakeholders to suggest that early transition to the international language is a viable option in Africa. There are countless evaluations of such programmes which show the early success, e.g. in Mali (Traoré, 2001), Niger (Halaoui, 2003) and Zambia (Sampa, 2003). This achievement, however, starts to slow down in Grades 4 and 5. By Grade 6 any positive effect of the early mother-tongue

¹⁷ This part of the report draws substantially from Heugh, 2006a & b in Alidou *et al.*, 2006. The entire report is available electronically and therefore only a summary of the findings is presented here.

programme seems to wear off and learners' achievement starts to decline as found, for example, in Mali (Traoré, 2001), Niger (Halaoui, 2003) and Zambia (Allsop *et al.*, 2005). This phenomenon has also been found and very carefully documented in recent longitudinal studies of learners in different kinds of mother-tongue and bilingual programmes in North America (Thomas & Collier, 1997, 2002). We now know that language interventions need to be tracked longitudinally at least as far as Grade 6 in order to see the durability of their impact on achievement of learners in the school system. It cannot be assumed that the positive effect of initial mother-tongue and early transition to a second or foreign language as medium extends further than about Grades 3 to 4. Claims of success beyond Grade 3 and which are not substantiated by evidence to Grade 6 should not be viewed as reliable.

- No early-exit (from the MT) and transition to a second language (early-exit bilingual) model has been able to demonstrate lasting educational achievement for the majority of pupils in countries anywhere in the world. Only very few select students have ever been able to thrive educationally in such educational situations, and only when the teachers have 'native-like' or 'near native-like' proficiency of the second language, and class sizes are small (Alidou *et al.*, 2006).
- The Six Year Primary Project in Ife, Nigeria (1970-1976) shows that 6 years of MTE accompanied by very well trained teachers, specialised teaching of English as a subject, and new effective text books (learning materials) are sufficient to ensure that students keep up with grade-appropriate curriculum and also learn enough English language as a subject to make a successful transition to English medium in Year/Grade 7 (e.g. Bamgbose, 2000, 2004).
- More than 50% of learners never get to secondary school in African countries. Low enrolment, high repetition and dropout rates contribute to this. Although so few students remain in the system to the end of secondary, there has been no systematic study which has examined the extent to which the use of a medium of instruction, which neither students nor teachers can understand well, impacts on attrition vs retention in the system.
- In countries where there is a high throughput¹⁸ rate in secondary schools, like South Africa, there have been studies which do show the correlation between high levels of achievement and mother-tongue education, and low levels of achievement and premature use of a second language as medium of instruction. For example, from 1955-1975 when African-language speaking students had eight years of MTE followed by transition to mainly English medium the overall pass rate at the end of secondary school increased to reach 83,7% in 1976, and the pass rate in English as a subject reached 78% in 1978. However, the number of years of MTE decreased from eight to four years from 1977, and this was followed by a serious drop in achievement in English as a subject and across the entire curriculum. The pass rate in English as a subject fell to 38,5% by 1984, and by 1992 the average overall pass rate for African students at the end of Grade 12 dropped to 44% in 1992 (Heugh, 2003). More recent evidence is discussed below.
- Earlier research on bilingual education in South Africa in the 1930s and 1940s shows that students who have MTE throughout primary school plus bilingual secondary education (MT plus a second language as two mediums of instruction

¹⁸ Since the advent of OBE, it seems to have become very difficult to fail students; any failures are referred to district level who almost inevitably says that the learner should be promoted. This puts teachers in an increasingly difficult position as learners move up through school.

in secondary school) can outperform students who are in MTE only programmes. In other words, students gain academic and cognitive benefits from such programmes (Malherbe, 1943). Additional research demonstrated that there were benefits in regard to social cohesion associated with these bilingual models. After 1948 the South African government phased out dual-medium education and there were noticeable signs of social fragmentation after this.

- The early research on dual-medium education in South Africa has been followed by longitudinal studies of Ramirez *et al.* (1991) and Thomas & Collier (1997, 2002) in North America. These later studies confirmed the findings of the Malherbe study more than fifty years earlier. Students in two-way immersion/dual-medium bilingual models of education can benefit from dual-medium education. Where there are learners who speak both languages in the same classroom, dual-medium education can facilitate higher levels of achievement of students than they would normally expect in MTE-only classrooms.
- Other evidence from students in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as Afrikaans-speaking students in South Africa, shows that learners who study in MTE throughout and also have very good teaching of a second or foreign language as a subject for at least eight years, can develop very high levels of proficiency in the second language by the end of secondary school. They can develop sufficiently high levels of proficiency in the second language, i.e. English, in order to study through this language at university.

3.4.3 Summary: models which work in African settings¹⁹

The findings of evidenced-based research in Africa are consistent with those which emerge from scientific studies from elsewhere. A careful examination of the existing research on models of language education which have been tried out and are currently practiced in Africa shows us, both from African and other international data, that:

- Six years of MTE, followed by transition to a second language, can succeed under very specific and well-resourced conditions.²⁰
- Eight years of MTE, followed by transition to a second or foreign language, can succeed under less well-resourced, but nevertheless adequate conditions in Africa.
- MTE throughout primary followed by dual-medium education can work in situations where both languages are used by students in the local community, and where there are students from the two different language backgrounds in the same classroom.
- MTE throughout primary and secondary plus very well-resourced teaching of the second/international language as a subject may best prepare students for entry to university and the use of the international language as a MoI in study beyond school (university, teacher training, etc.).

¹⁹ There is a significant body of literature on various different types of bilingual education models in other parts of the world, including those in very well-resourced conditions, like Canada, where immersion French and English programmes have been run for some, but not the majority of, students for the last 30 years. Since such models are not considered appropriate or applicable to African conditions they are not reviewed here. However, they can be traced in the literature survey for the UIE-ADEA report (Alidou *et al.*, 2006).

²⁰ One of these is that the L2 should be widely used for official functions in society. Another is that the L2 should be taught by expert/specialised teachers who have an advanced proficiency in English.

3.4.4 Further international research on reading

A considerable volume of research has been and continues to be conducted on reading. In this section we highlight the most significant of the findings. Perhaps the most important finding, and despite the advances of modern technology and even the allure of new literacies studies which advance the notion that formal reading of academic texts may be class-based and discriminatory, it has been found that high levels of competence in **reading is essential for the modern world**.

Without high-level reading skills, students will end up marginalised and excluded from a wide range of opportunities beyond school. More than ever before, people spend working hours behind computers and in front of an overload of information on the Internet. One needs to have high-level reading skills which allow one to select, prioritise and make meaning of the information which pours out of ever increasing information technology. This is all the more reason why teachers need to know how to teach reading well. Useful reports on this topic are: *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow *et al.*, 1998) and *Teaching Reading Well* (International Reading Association 2007).

To this end, the research shows that it is vital to **make ‘every moment count’** and to maximise ‘quality instructional time’. A further report, prepared in collaboration amongst nine educational bodies in the USA (American Association of School Librarians *et al.*, 2007), is an important document for any educational planners concerned with literacy development for the 21st century.

In terms of South African and particularly the concerns of Limpopo Department of Education, it has also been found that ‘reading for pleasure’ is such a significant indicator of educational success, that it may mediate social disadvantage. In other words, **reading for pleasure** has been found to counteract many of the educational disadvantages which poverty brings to children and students. The implication in developing contexts is that if children are able to develop independent reading habits which they find enjoyable, this would help them to achieve better at school (OECD, 2002; Clark & Rumbold, 2006). The further implication is that the supply of books should be prioritised.

Evidence from those who work with psycholinguistics and second-language acquisition have found that children and students from poor communities require **explicit teaching of reading and writing** (e.g. Snow *et al.*, 1998; Macdonald, 2002; De Keyser, 2003; Dougherty, 2003; Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Valdés, 2005 and Abadzi, 2006).

We have known for many years that **parents’ involvement** in their children’s education is one of the critical indicators for success. We have also known for many years that parents who read to their children every day, foster good literacy practices which impact positively on success in school. New research identifies the nature of the kind of parental involvement which has the best impact on their children’s success as follows: creating a structured environment for homework, correcting homework (e.g. reading, spelling, times tables), reading to/with children, organising outings with children, and fathers sharing the parenting activities with mothers (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). If children live in communities where parents cannot offer this kind of support, then the onus falls on the education system to adopt compensatory measures²¹ to foster strong reading practices amongst learners.

²¹ It is still uncertain whether such compensatory measures can actually measure up to the preferred model.

3.4.5 Summary of the international research on reading

The international literature and research currently shows that:

- reading skills are necessary for equity, job prospects, and survival in the modern world;
- reading for pleasure may outweigh socio-economic factors in educational success (OECD 2002);
- reading may therefore leverage social change;
- teachers have to be well-trained to teach reading;
- every moment of teaching and learning time has to be used to full advantage of learners.

Children and students in education systems in sub-Saharan Africa require:

- explicit teaching of reading and writing;
- teachers who are even better prepared for teaching literacy in developing contexts than elsewhere, since students may not have adequate exposure to print outside of the school;
- accessible reading materials (books).

3.5. International and African Research: the gap between learners who study in the mother tongue and those who switch to English medium

The research in Africa, discussed above, shows that most programmes which offer MT/bilingual literacy followed by transition to second/international language indicate that learners are making similar kinds of progress between Grades 1 and 3. Progress slows down sometime in Grade 4 and then disappears by Grade 6. This evidence has been clearly shown elsewhere. The graph (Figure 3.1), adapted from a longitudinal study of Thomas & Collier (1997) involving 220 000 students in the USA, shows what can be expected of students' performance across the entire school system.²²

Although the Thomas and Collier study was conducted in the well-resourced conditions of schools in the USA where teachers are well-trained and have university qualifications, class sizes are small, and students have learning materials, second-language learners do not succeed in early transition to English. The only students who do achieve and even outperform students who study only in the MT, are those students who are in longer MT programmes which are accompanied by strong teaching of the second language as a subject; or MT for at least six years plus dual-medium bilingual education from Grades 7 onwards.²³

²² Adapted by Marise Taljaard, HSRC, 2006.

²³ There are two exceptions to this: English L1 speakers in French immersion programmes in Canada (see Helle, 1995); and Asian students who immigrate to other countries and have been found to exhibit extraordinary academic success no matter which programme they enter. However, there remains no system-wide example of success in L2 or FL mainly education systems.

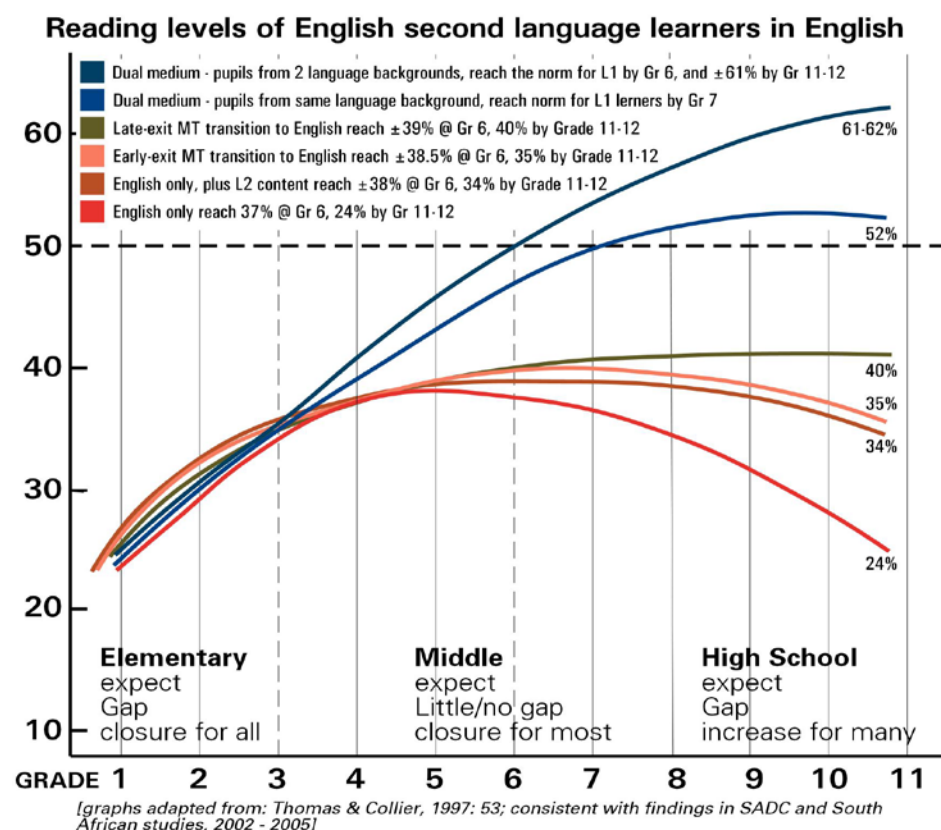


Figure 3.1: Graph, adapted from a longitudinal study of Thomas & Collier (1997) involving 220 000 students in the USA showing what can be expected of students' performance across the entire school system.

It is not surprising therefore, that students in Africa from less well-resourced education systems than their peers in the USA, achieve even less well in similar programmes on this continent. What we now know very clearly from both the African research and that from other, better resourced school systems, is that students require a minimum of six years of MTE plus very good (specialised) teaching of the L2 (English) before it is possible for large numbers to succeed in a system which changes over to L2 English medium. We also know from the South African research and other research in Guinea Conakry (late 1970s) as well as in Somalia during the 1970s, that eight years of MTE, under less well-resourced conditions may also be sufficient preparation for students to be able to make the transition to English or another second or foreign language.

3.5.1 What happens where there is an early transition to the L2?

In the Thomas & Collier graph shown above, it is clear that the achievement of students who change to L2 MoI early slows down during Grades 4 to 5 and that from about Grade 6 their achievement begins to go on a rapid decline. Alternatively, the gap between their achievement and that of students in MTE programmes increases dramatically.

These findings are borne out in several recent studies in African settings. A recent study of the Southern [& Eastern] Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality II

[SACMEQ II] which assessed literacy levels of Grade 6 learners in 14 Southern and Eastern Africa countries shows that (Mothibeli, 2005):

- 55%+ students have not attained the minimal level of literacy;
- only 14,6% have reached the desired level of literacy.

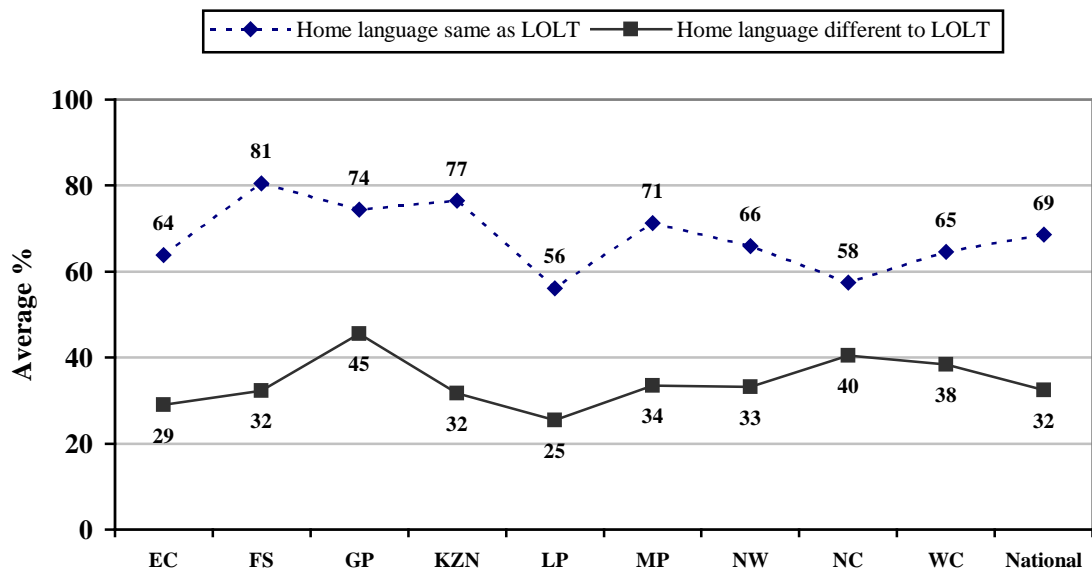
Most students in these countries are in early-exit from MT and transition to L2 programmes. If only 14,6% of students have reached the desired level of literacy, one can predict that only this small cohort has any meaningful access to secondary school. The rest are likely to drop out of school and hence the system is geared towards extensive wastage.

Current exceptions to this occur in Tanzania and Ethiopia. Students in Tanzania have an African language, Kiswahili, throughout primary school. In Ethiopia, each region has interpreted an eight-year mother-tongue policy slightly differently. However, in two regions, Oromo and Tigray, the regional language is used as medium of instruction to Grade 8, the official working language of government, Amharic is taught as a subject throughout, and English becomes the medium of instruction from Grade 9. It is these students who are demonstrating successful educational achievement in their national systemic assessment at Grade 8, as well as national examinations at Grade 10 and Grade 12. Students who are in programmes with fewer than six years of MTE do not reach the same level of achievement as those who have eight years of MTE. Those who have only four years of MTE show the lowest levels of achievement.

3.5.2 Recent South African Research

Systemic assessment analysed by the HSRC for the DoE in South Africa shows further correlations between low achievement and L2 medium by Grade 6, and higher achievement and MTE in language and mathematics.

In the graph in Figure 3.2 it is clear that students who study in their MT outperform those who study in the L2 on the literacy/language assessment. The gap between the two cohorts of students is narrowest in two provinces where the MT speakers are also from rural and very poor socio-economic groupings. Even when students come from such communities, MTE is still a significant indicator of achievement.



[LOLT = language of learning & teaching. Note gap in achievement of MT/Home Language and non-MT student achievement.]

Figure 3.2: South African Grade 6: MOI achievement by home language and province (DoE, 2005: 77)

Achievement in mathematics follows a similar pattern. Those who learn in MT achieve significantly better than those who do not study in the MT. Again also, those from rural and very poor socio-economic conditions, but who also study in the MT, continue to outperform those who come from similar conditions but who study in the L2. See Figure 3.3.

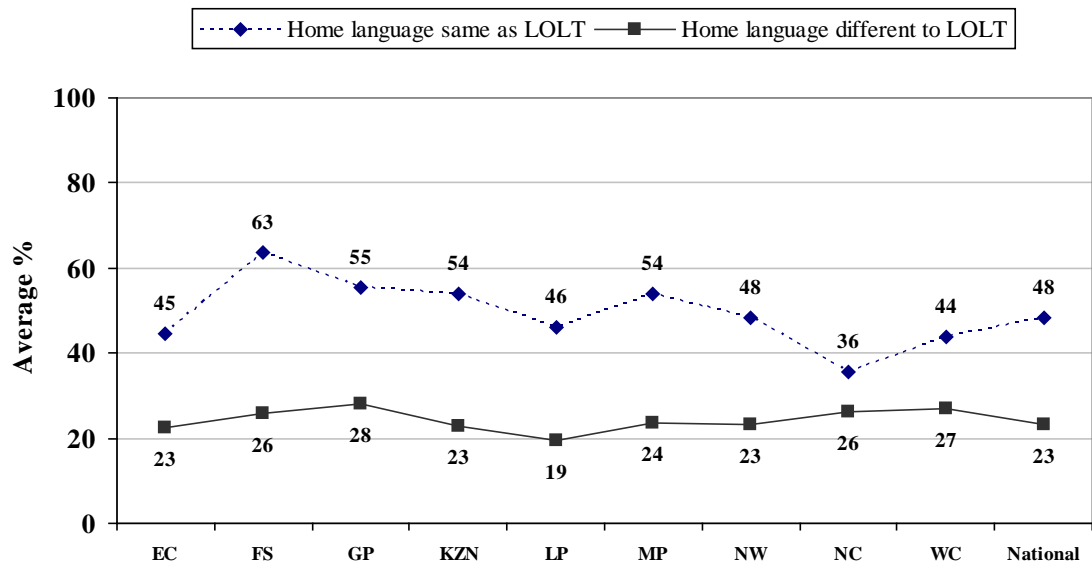


Figure 3.3: Mathematics achievement by home language and province (DoE, 2005: 82)

Findings from a recent HSRC study of 75 000 Grade 8 learners in one province in South Africa during 2006 illustrate further information which is important for education planners to note, as reported in Figure 3.4.

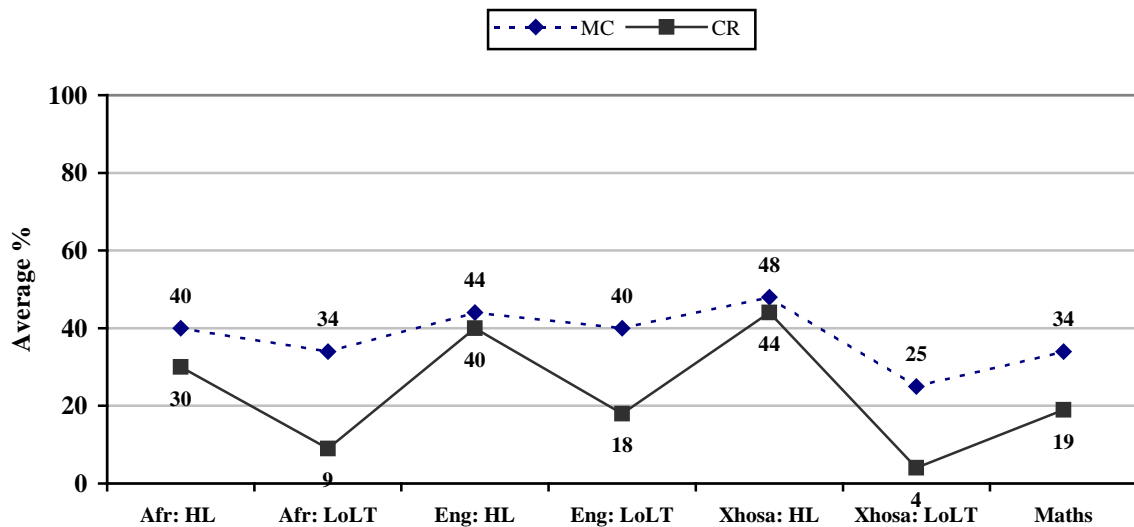


Figure 3.4: Comparison of achievement: multiple-choice and constructed-response items (Heugh, Prinsloo, Diedericks, Herbst & Winnaar, 2007)

There are three significant issues to note in the graph in Figure 3.4. Firstly, there is a significant difference in achievement between student responses to multiple-choice (MC) questions and the responses to constructed-response (CR) (open-ended) items. Secondly, students were better able to answer questions designed to measure their knowledge and understanding of their own mother tongue as a subject. Thirdly, they were less able to answer questions which were based on reading material from other areas of the curriculum. This helps us to understand the degree to which students can use the medium of instruction (MoI)/language of learning and teaching (LoLT) for making meaning of the broader curriculum. It also helps us to understand whether or not learners have developed an adequate level of academic literacy.

Close analysis showed that students at Grade 8 level had trouble in providing well-constructed, logical sentences and answers to questions. They were better able to construct logical sentences when answering questions which would normally be found in the mother tongue as a subject curriculum. They were less likely to be able to construct logical responses to questions which applied to reading material in other subjects across the curriculum, especially when tested in a language which is not the mother tongue.

When they needed to answer questions, based on a passage which would normally be found in history, geography and biology textbooks or learning materials, their ability to offer well-constructed and logical answers declined considerably. The students whose responses were weakest of all were the Xhosa MT speakers who were reading and answering questions in their L2, English. These students only scored an average of 4% on this test for the constructed-response items linked to text across the curriculum. This means that the students did not understand the language of the material across the curriculum and could therefore not respond adequately to this. The next lowest achievement came from MT speakers of Afrikaans who are predominantly from very poor, rural communities plagued with social problems.

The relevance of this research for Limpopo Province is that it illustrates the difference between what is possible in the mother tongue and what is not possible when a language other than the mother tongue is used as LoLT across the curriculum at Grade 8. It further demonstrates the degree to which learners experience enormous difficulty in their academic literacy functions at this level of the school system.

3.5.3 Significance of the findings from the recent literacy studies in multilingual, settings

In both the SACMEQ II and the South African studies, students who are MT speakers of African languages, have had a maximum of three years of MTE followed by a switch or transition to English (sometimes Portuguese or French) medium. In both sets of studies, students in Grade 6 who are studying in their L2 have very poor levels of achievement in literacy/L2 language (usually English). The achievement in English is so weak that they are unlikely to be able to understand very much of the whole school curriculum from this point onwards. In fact, they are likely to fall further and further behind. The Grade 8 study shows that L2 students (Xhosa-speaking students with English MoI) have serious difficulty with reading and writing when faced with text that they would find in history, geography and biology textbooks. Although the Xhosa students achieved fairly well in their MT, Xhosa as a subject (48% on multiple-choice questions and 44% on open-ended questions) they only achieved 25% on multiple-choice questions based on language across the curriculum in English, and 4% on open-ended questions, also in English, in this section of the test. This means that they will understand very little of the curriculum where it is taught through English as a second language at this point and there is little reason for these students to remain in school. On the other hand, their achievement in their mother tongue as a subject shows that they are able to function relatively successfully in this language.

The pieces of a puzzle, which can now be put together, are found in the following studies involving both different language education models and closer examination of the relationship between language and cognition:

- The early study on dual medium and MTE education in South Africa (Malherbe 1943) shows that MTE throughout primary followed by dual-medium education in secondary can assist students to achieve better than MTE-only MoI in secondary.
- The Six Year Primary Project in Nigeria (e.g. Bamgbose 2000) shows that six years of MTE plus good teaching of English as a subject is sufficient in very particular and well-resourced African settings.
- Eight years of MTE followed by English medium for African students South Africa (Heugh 2003) is sufficient in somewhat less well-resourced conditions.
- African-language speaking learners who switch from MTE to English MoI by Grade 5 know and can use only about 10% of the necessary English vocabulary and sentence structure they require for the curriculum at that point. This results in high repetition and dropout rates (Macdonald 1990).
- The longitudinal studies in the USA of Ramirez *et al.* (1991) and Thomas & Collier (1997, 2002) trace student performance in different language education models per grade, and show that only those with at least 6 years of MTE can catch up with MTE-only students. Similar to the findings of the Malherbe study, those who have five to six years of MTE followed by dual-medium/two-way immersion education also overtake MTE-only students in language and mathematics in secondary school. (These studies were conducted in very well resourced systems in the USA, which are not like those found in Africa.)

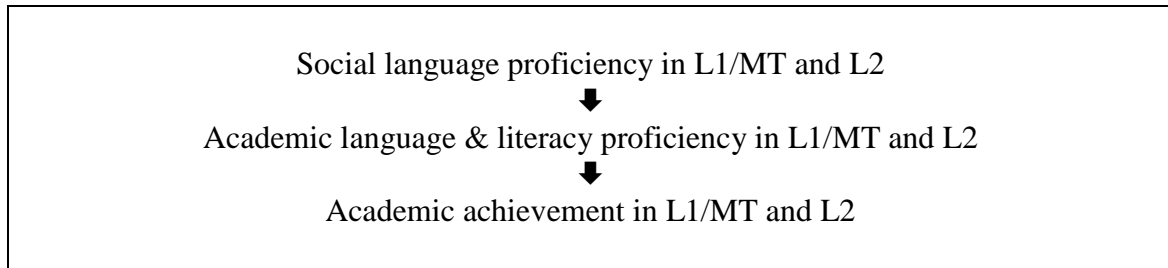
- The SACMEQ II study (Mothibeli 2005) shows extremely poor student L2 literacy achievement in Grade 6. This is a multi-country study where most students have switched to L2 MoI too early (by Grade 3-4).
- The Grade 6 study (DoE 2005) and Grade 8 study (HSRC 2007) in South Africa compare MTE and L2 students' achievement in literacy/language and mathematics. There is a significant gap in literacy achievement between students who study in MT and those who study in L2.
- The Grade 8 South African study shows the gap between academic literacy in the second language when assessed as a MoI/LoLT across the curriculum, and the academic literacy in the mother tongue as a subject. This study also shows us that academic language required of subjects across the curriculum is more difficult than the academic language needed for language as a subject. Therefore, the use of a language which is not the MT for subjects across the curriculum increases the level of difficulty of these subjects considerably.

What these studies show us is that students need at least six years of MTE and literacy in well-resourced conditions while they are also taught the L2 as a subject, focusing on literacy in the L2, by highly competent speakers of the L2, before they are ready to switch to L2 LoLT/MoI. They also show us that in less well-resourced situations, students can also achieve well where they have eight years of MTE accompanied also by very good teaching of the L2 as a subject. Under these conditions, students could make the transition to English-medium education and achieve well in secondary school. We also know from the experience of Afrikaans MTE students in South Africa and students in many countries of Central and Northern Europe that MTE throughout primary and secondary education plus very good teaching of a L2 or foreign language, like English, prepares students sufficiently well to be able to study through English at university or college.

3.6 Conclusion: Literacy, quality education and optimal opportunity for cognitive development

The international framework concerns regarding education, viz. UNESCO's *Education for All* goals, prioritise the issue of quality and the delivery of quality education. The pursuit of quality education has occupied much of the research of the last five years. The purpose of education is not to teach any particular language. It is to facilitate the 'optimum cognitive development of learners'²⁴ and to provide access to a broad curriculum which includes, at the very least: literacy/language and mathematics. The international research has found that there is no short cut to the provision of quality education, access and equity. In order for students to succeed in formal education, they need to develop strong academic literacy in order to comprehend and grapple with the entire curriculum. First- and second-language acquisition research shows a continuum in the relationship between language and cognition (thinking skills) from informal and social uses of language to increasingly more complex academic uses of language in order that high levels of academic achievement can be reached, as illustrated below (informed by the work of Cummins, 1992; Thomas & Collier, 1997; Gottlieb, 2006).

²⁴ The 2005 Education for All Global Monitoring Report identifies "learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems" and the primary condition for quality education (UNESCO, 2004:19).



In an apt observation in the UIE-ADEA Report, Wolff argues that: ‘Language is not everything in education but without language everything is nothing in education’ (Wolff 2006). It needs to be recognised that in order to achieve parity or equality of opportunity in education, children from poor socio-economic backgrounds require greater explicit attention towards the teaching of literacy than do many children from more affluent or advantaged backgrounds. One cannot assume that a ‘one size fits all’ learners. Children from less advantaged backgrounds require enriched teaching and learning opportunities in order for them to achieve parity of opportunity with their more advantaged peers (e.g. Abadzi, 2006, UNESCO, 2005).

Most often, children from affluent backgrounds are only required to become fully literate in their mother tongue (home language/first language/L1). If they are required to study a second language (L2) this is usually only as a subject. Quite the opposite is true in developing contexts where people who speak several different languages coexist. In these contexts, most children tend to be poor and are expected to become fully literate in a language other than their mother tongue, and they are also expected to learn a second language (L2) well enough to use this language as a medium of instruction across the curriculum. This places a significantly unequal educational burden – and this is shown in the present study – on these children. Most educational planners have not fully understood the extent of this burden and the implications it has for the whole education system, which includes learners, teachers, teacher educators, learning materials production, and assessment.

For this reason it is all the more important that the education system ensures that the best possible literacy and language learning methodologies and resources and the best trained teachers are available to learners who come from vulnerable, developing or disadvantaged backgrounds. Macdonald (2007, personal communication) emphasises that the consequences of **not** having an explicit reading and writing policy for **teachers** are grievous (see also Macdonald, 2002).

Successful and optimum cognitive development of learners in bilingual or multilingual African settings is dependent upon solid mother-tongue or first-language development and consolidation followed by very sound development of the second language which is added to mother-tongue development, but does not replace the mother tongue for cognitive development (e.g. Cummins, 1982; Snow *et al.*, 1998; Baker, 2002).

By definition, this language development both requires and is dependent upon what is known as cognitive and academic literacy development. This in turn is dependent upon plentiful opportunities for:

- extended reading and writing in both the MT/HL and L2;

- extended reading and writing for different purposes, contexts and genres (e.g. for science, literature, history, geography etc.) in both the MT/HL and L2;
- explicit teaching of academic literacy in each subject/learning area;
- teacher education and support for academic literacy development (for teachers who teach mathematics, science, history, geography etc., as well as for language teachers);
- teacher education and support for contexts where learners need to make use of their mother tongue and English for learning (i.e. bilingual/multilingual teacher education methods and practices);
- learners' use of their own (individual) copies of books/bound reading materials at school and at home.

To date, no shortcut to solid development of high-level literacy skills has been found anywhere in the world. Instead, all attempts to short-circuit MT literacy and to fast-track English literacy in situations where learners come from poor socio-economic backgrounds have failed. This is despite the vast industry of second-language programmes and materials which have been produced for this purpose.

The next part of this report, Part 2, presents empirical findings on the contents and quality of literacy practices in the sample of 20 Limpopo primary schools. Discussion in Chapters 4 to 11 make reference to ideas discussed in this literature review.

PART 2: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS: CONTENTS AND QUALITY OF LITERACY PRACTICES IN THE LIMPOPO PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Part 2 presents qualitative as well as quantitative data from Phase 2 findings from the visits to five Limpopo Department of Education district offices and 20 Limpopo primary schools as well as to two Limpopo tertiary teacher-training institutions, the Universities of Venda and Limpopo.

The aims of Part 2 are to provide an overview of primary-school language and literacy teaching in Limpopo; and a comparative description and assessment of literacy teaching methods and materials presently in use in schools. The goal is to make recommendations arising from the findings towards the Provincial Literacy Strategy and the development of a generic literacy model for the Limpopo Province.

Part 2 of the evaluation report describes:

- learners' home languages and language/s of teaching and learning (Chapter 4);
- physical school and classroom environments and the provision of literacy-rich classroom and school environments (Chapter 5);
- the provisioning, management, availability and use of learning and teaching support material in schools and classrooms (Chapter 6);
- schools' and teachers' organisation and management of time on task and learner participation in reading and writing in class (Chapter 7);
- teachers' literacy and language practices and methods for teaching literacy (Chapter 8);
- teachers' organisation and management of their language and literacy Learning Programmes and the role of school management teams in curriculum planning and in monitoring of curriculum delivery (Chapter 9);
- teachers' organisation and management of language assessment (Chapter 9);
- parental/caregiver expectations and involvement in learners' academic education and progress (Chapter 10);
- district and circuit roles in school and teaching support and information about other primary school-support service providers and teachers' understandings of literacy teaching (Chapter 11);
- provisioning of literacy training within Limpopo Higher Education Institutions (Chapter 12).

Information on Grade 1-4 school language and literacy teaching was mostly collected through 77 classroom observations conducted across the 20 schools, as well as through reviews of the Home Language (L1) and First Additional Language (FAL) classroom documents of the teachers whose lessons were observed. Part 2 reports on data collected using the 'generalist' and 'specialist' observation schedules. The analysis is based on those literacy and language practices that researchers focused their attention on during the observation period. Part 2 also incorporates data collected through the 80 teacher questionnaires and through document reviews, the school questionnaire administered to the principal at each of the 20 schools, the teacher focus-group interviews conducted with as many as possible of the Grade R-4 teachers at each school, focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other

parents and with School Management Teams (SMT) at each school. Data from the focus-group interviews with District Managers and/or other key officials in the five district offices has also been included.

Part 2 of the report has been structured so as to address the following key questions:

- What language policies do parents/guardians at the schools want and support? Are the Limpopo primary schools' language-in-education programmes in Grade 1-4 classrooms aligned with DoE's policies? (Chapter 4)
- Are social contexts and physical environments of schools and in classrooms conducive to Grade 1-4 language and literacy learning and teaching? Do school and classroom environments promote and enhance Grade 1-4 mother-tongue and first additional language literacy development? (Chapter 5)
- Is there effective provisioning, availability and utilisation of across-the-curriculum mother-tongue and first additional language learner and teacher support material in schools and classes? (Chapter 6)
- Do schools and teachers organise and manage time on task and instruction in class so as to maximise learners' opportunities to participate in reading and writing in mother-tongue and first additional language in class? (Chapter 7)
- Do teachers directly and explicitly develop learners' mother-tongue and first additional language literacy skills in class? (Chapter 8)
- Do school management teams and teachers systematically structure and ensure delivery of Grades 1-4 Home Language/L1 and First Additional Language Learning Programmes along a developmental pathway? How regular and individualised is assessment and recording of Grade 1-4 learners' Home Language and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability? (Chapter 9)
- Are schools and teachers involving Grade 1-4 parents/guardians as much as possible in their children's academic performance and literacy development? (Chapter 10)
- Are Grade 1-4 teachers sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified for language and literacy teaching? Are School Management Teams sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified to manage primary curriculum phases? Are SMTs and Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from Limpopo Department of Education? What is district-level capacity for supporting Grade 1-4 teachers? Are Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from other INSET providers? What in-service training and support is requested for Grade 1-4 teachers? What do teachers' teaching practices and understandings of language and literacy teaching tell us about the language and literacy training received and needed? (Chapter 11)
- What is the current capacity of the Limpopo tertiary teacher-education system to deliver the kind of formal primary teacher development and education required? (Chapter 12)

CHAPTER 4: LANGUAGE/S OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

This chapter discusses the languages/s of learning and teaching evident in Grade 1-4 classrooms in the sample of Limpopo primary schools.

According to the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for the Grades R-9 Languages Learning Area (DoE, 2002), the South African national Department of Education's language-in-education policy (LIEP) 'follows *an additive approach to multilingualism*' (our italics) where linguistic diversity is highly valued and where, to quote:

- All learners learn their home language and at least one additional official language.
- Learners become competent in their additional language, while their home language is maintained and developed.
- All learners learn an African language for a minimum of three years by the end of the General Education and Training Band. In some circumstances, it may be learned as a second additional language ('Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9', DoE, 2002, p.4)

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for General Education and Training or Grades R-9 Languages Learning Area (2002:5) further recommends that 'learners' home language should be used for learning and teaching wherever possible', 'particularly in Foundation Phase where children learn to read and write.' Foundation Phase includes Grade R/Reception Year to Grade 3. However, DoE policy also gives School Governing Bodies 'the responsibility of selecting school language policies that are appropriate for their circumstances and in line with the *policy of additive multilingualism*' (our italics).

As stated in Chapter 3, essentially a multilingual additive language programme is one in which a second language is acquired without any weakening of learners' first language. Learners' first or home language is maintained throughout schooling to ensure that bilingualism or the ability to use two or more languages for all purposes develops. In an additive bilingual programme, the ultimate goal is not one but two target languages. In other words, bilingual education programmes are designed to develop learners' proficiency in two languages.

As also explained in more detail in the literature review, the theory underlying additive multilingualism is based on research which suggests that the level of academic competence learners reach in a second language depends to some extent on the stage of development reached in their first language. In other words, it is the underlying levels of cognitive proficiency developed through using the first or 'home language' that allows cognitive skills (including reading and writing skills) from one language to be more easily transferred to a second or additional languages. This implies that learners need to learn to think and function (e.g. read and write) in their home language up to a certain threshold if they are to reach academic proficiency in a second language as well (Luckett, 1995). The theory is that, in contexts where a child's home language is other than the language of instruction, the likelihood of learning difficulties is increased if instruction in the second language begins before the child has acquired adequate levels of proficiency in their first language.

The literature review in Chapter 3 outlined research, such as that of Ramirez (1991) and Thomas and Collier (1997; 2002), which indicates that, under ‘ideal conditions’, it takes learners entering bilingual programmes at the age of six to seven between six and eight years of learning to develop the academic proficiency in a second language necessary for it to be used as the sole language of learning (or medium of instruction). Thus research suggests that under ‘ideal’ or ‘optimal’ conditions for FAL/L2 acquisition, learners need a minimum of six years of home language/L1 maintenance (Heugh, 1995). The most recent research conducted in Africa shows that learners can only switch to English medium after six years of mother-tongue education which is accompanied by specialised teaching of the second language (e.g. English). If the conditions are not ideal and the English language teachers do not have ‘near native-like proficiency’ in English, then most students will need at least eight years of mother-tongue education before they are ready to switch to English medium (Alidou *et al.*, 2006).

Hence the NCS for Grades R-9 Languages Learning Area (p.5) document further states that ‘where learners have to make a transition from their home language to an additional language as the language of learning and teaching, *this should be carefully planned*’ (our italics):

- The additional language should be introduced *as a subject* in Grade 1 (our italics).
- The home language should continue to be used alongside the additional language for as long as possible (p.5).

However, currently the situation in most primary schools in South Africa, where the majority of learners’ home language is an African language, is that learners are instructed in their mother-tongue until the end of Grade 3. From Grade 4 onwards, although learners continue learning their home language as a subject, they are taught all other subjects through the medium of English (or Afrikaans) (Howie, 2003). In essence this means that the language programme in use is essentially a subtractive one where the ultimate goal is to replace learners’ L1 as the language of learning by the end of Grade 3. According to the NCS, in these circumstances, learners are supposed to be taught English (or in some cases, Afrikaans) *as a subject* (First Additional Language) from Grade 1. It needs to be noted that although NCS documentation imply both that learners should learn the additional language from Grade 1 and that transition will normally take place by Grade 4, that these do not meet the requirements of additive bilingual programmes.

In the Limpopo study we were interested in:

- the extent to which School Governing Bodies are responsible for selecting school language policies (4.1) and what language policies parents/guardians at the schools want and support (4.1.1);
- establishing whether the sample of Limpopo primary schools’ language-in-education programmes in Grades 1-4 are aligned with DoE’s language-in-education policies (4.3); and the extent to which English/Afrikaans is being taught as a First Additional Language in Foundation Phase (4.2).

4.1 Extent to which School Governing Bodies and parents select school language policies

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked how much influence their School Governing Bodies had in decisions about what language/s should be used at different

grade levels. Forty percent (eight) of the 20 principals said ‘a great deal’ and three (15%) said ‘some’ whilst nine (45%) reported that SGBs had ‘little or no’ influence.

In focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the schools, 19 out of 20 schools said that SGBs and parents are involved in children’s academic education through meetings on school policy (e.g. language policy, homework policy, learner assessment policy). SGB/parent focus groups were specifically asked how much influence the SGB and the general parent body respectively have in decision-making about what languages should be used at different grade levels (as opposed to simply endorsing/accepting DoE policy). Table 4.1 shows SGB reports.

TABLE 4.1: SGB INFLUENCE IN DECISIONS ABOUT LANGUAGES TO BE USED AT DIFFERENT GRADE LEVELS

Degree of influence	Nr SGB/parent focus group responses n = 20
A great deal	7 (35%)
Some	3 (15%)
None	9 (45%)

Forty-five percent of the SGB/parent focus groups said that their SGBs had no influence over decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels. Thirty-five percent of the focus groups said that their SGBs had a great deal of influence. Table 4.1 shows that SGB reports on SGB influence confirm the data provided by school principals. However, it is important to note that a number of the members in the SGB/parent focus groups interviewed were not parents but teachers and members of school management teams (SMTs) including principals who are members of the SGB. As school staff these stakeholders may feel they have more influence over the LOLT.

Indeed, in the principal questionnaires, 40% of the principals said they felt they had ‘a great deal of influence’, whilst 25% felt that they had ‘some influence’. Only 35% reported having ‘no or little influence’. On the other hand, when School Management Team members were asked in SMT focus-group interviews how much influence senior teachers/HODs have in decisions about what languages should be used for instruction at different grade levels, 56% of the SMT groups indicated that they have ‘no influence at all’. Only 17% believed that they have ‘a great deal of influence’, and 28% felt they had ‘some influence’.

Perhaps most telling is that, when researchers asked to see a copy of each school’s Language Policy as decided by the School Governing Body (as opposed to guidelines provided by the DoE) for the school-conditions and school-document review instrument, only 53% (10) of 19 primary schools were able to provide researchers with schools’ own language policies. Just under half (47%, or 9) were not able to show their School Language Policy. Data appears to confirm that roughly half the school’s SGBs have no/little say in school language policies. Of interest here is that, when SGB/parent focus groups were asked whether their schools played a role in providing SGB workshops, 50% of the groups said that school management did not provide this kind of input. Furthermore, none of the 20 principals (in principal questionnaires) reported that language issues are ‘often’ discussed at SGB meetings. Forty-five percent of the

principals said they are ‘sometimes’ discussed at SGB meetings and 55% said they are ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ discussed.

Table 4.2 shows principals’ reports in principal questionnaires on general parent body influence over the language/s of instruction. More than half (11) of SGB/parent focus groups indicated that the general parent body has no say in decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels.

TABLE 4.2: PRINCIPALS’ REPORTS ON GENERAL PARENT BODY INFLUENCE IN DECISIONS ABOUT LANGUAGES TO BE USED AT DIFFERENT GRADE LEVELS

Degree of influence	Number of principals n = 20
A great deal	8 (40%)
Some	3 (15%)
None	9 (45%)

Table 4.3 shows SGB/parent focus-group reports on general parent-body influence over the language/s of instruction. More than half (11) of SGB/parent focus groups indicated that the general parent body has no say in decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels.

TABLE 4.3: SGB REPORTS ON GENERAL PARENT BODY INFLUENCE IN DECISIONS ABOUT LANGUAGES TO BE USED AT DIFFERENT GRADE LEVELS

Degree of influence	Number of SGB/parent focus-group responses n = 20
A great deal	7 (35%)
Some	2 (10%)
None	11 (55%)

Evidence is that roughly half the sample of primary schools’ general parent body has little or no influence over the schools’ language-in-education programmes.

4.1.1 What language policies do parents/guardians at the schools want and support?

In the focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the schools, interviewees were asked which grade level they thought that parents/guardians at their school wanted English/Afrikaans¹ first introduced for oral communication. The majority (15) of the 20 SGB/parent focus groups said that they believed that the general parent body wanted this to take place in Grade R or Grade 1. Table 4.4 shows details.

¹ While English and Afrikaans are possible choices as FAL, in most instances the choice is English, and in our sample only one school used Afrikaans as medium.

TABLE 4.4: GRADE LEVEL AT WHICH SGB/PARENT FOCUS GROUPS BELIEVE PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS WANT ENGLISH (OR AFRIKAANS) AS FAL FIRST INTRODUCED FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION

Grade	Parent group responses n = 20
R	9 (45%)
1	6 (30%)
Lack of consensus in group	1 (5%)
Not applicable in the school	2 (10%)
Don't know	2 (10%)

In the SGB/parent focus-group interviews, interviewees were also asked when they thought most parents/guardians wanted English first introduced as a First Additional Language (i.e. as a subject with reading and writing). Table 4.5 shows details of the responses.

TABLE 4.5: GRADE LEVEL AT WHICH SGB/PARENT FOCUS GROUPS BELIEVE PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS WANT ENGLISH (OR AFRIKAANS) AS FAL FIRST INTRODUCED AS A SUBJECT (I.E. WITH READING AND WRITING)

Grade	Parent group responses n = 20
R	3 (15%)
1	4 (20%)
2	1 (5%)
3	4 (20%)
4	1 (5%)
Lack of consensus in group/ Not applicable in the school/ Don't know	7 (35%)

Interviewees were then asked when they thought most parents/guardians wanted children to learn school subjects mainly in English/Afrikaans. The majority (60%) of SGB/parent focus groups said that they believed that the general parent body wanted this to take place before Grade 4. Table 4.6 shows details.

TABLE 4.6: GRADE LEVEL AT WHICH SGB/PARENT FOCUS GROUPS BELIEVE PARENTS/GUARDIANS/CAREGIVERS WANT CHILDREN TO LEARN SUBJECTS MAINLY IN ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS

Grade	Parent group responses n = 20
R	4 (20%)
1	3 (15%)
2	1 (5%)
3	4 (20%)
4	3 (15%)
Lack of consensus in group/ Not applicable in the school/ Don't know	1 (5%)

4.2 The Limpopo primary schools' language-in-education programmes

We were interested in the extent to which classes in the sample of Limpopo primary schools are being taught in their home language and are being taught their school's first additional language as a subject. We wanted to establish:

- the home-language profiles of learners in the Limpopo classes (4.2.1);
- the language/s of public administration/social events at schools (4.2.2);
- the language/s of teaching and learning in Grades 1-4 classrooms (4.2.3);
- when English as a first additional language is first introduced (4.2.4); and
- teachers' proficiency in the language/s of instruction (4.2.5).

4.2.1 Learners' home language/s

'Majority' and 'minority' language groups in schools

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked to report on the home language/s of majority groups of learners at their schools. None of the schools reported that English or Afrikaans were home languages of majority groups. Table 4.7² provides details. Principals also reported on minority language groups in their schools. Table 4.8 provides information obtained. Data in Tables 4.7 and 4.8 demonstrate the extent of linguistic diversity amongst learners in the sample of Limpopo primary schools. Twenty-eight percent of the schools said that more than four percent of their learners use two or more languages equally at home.

TABLE 4.7: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON MAJORITY HOME LANGUAGE/S OF LEARNERS AT THEIR SCHOOLS

Language	Number of schools
Sepedi	14
Xitsonga	5
Tshivenda	3
Setswana	2
isiNdebele	2
Sesotho	1
SiSwati	1
isiZulu	1
isiXhosa	0

TABLE 4.8: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON MINORITY HOME-LANGUAGE GROUPS AT THEIR SCHOOLS

Language	Number of schools
Sepedi	6
Xitsonga	9
Tshivenda	10
Setswana	5
isiNdebele	4
Sesotho	4
SiSwati	6
isiZulu	11
isiXhosa	5
English	2
Afrikaans	3
Other	2

² Data trends in Tables 4.7 to 4.10 also resulted from the areas from which schools were sampled.

'Majority' language groups within classes

Tables 4.9 and 4.10 provide available information on learners' language background in classes. Table 4.9 provides information accessed through the use of the teacher questionnaire administered to 80 teachers.

TABLE 4.9: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON THE HOME LANGUAGE OF THE MAJORITY OF LEARNERS IN THEIR CLASSES

Language	Number of classes n = 80
Sepedi	48 (60%)
Xitsonga	16 (20%)
Tshivenda	8 (10%)
Setswana	4 (5%)
isiNdebele	4 (5%)
Sesotho	0
SiSwati	0
Afrikaans	0
isiZulu	0
English	0
isiXhosa	0
Other	0

In 60% of the classes, teachers said the majority of learners' home/first language was Sepedi.

According to teachers' reports English/Afrikaans was not the home/first language of the majority of learners in any of the classes.

Table 4.10 provides information provided by researchers through the 77 classroom observations. Data mostly support the information provided by teachers.

TABLE 4.10: RESEARCHERS' REPORTS ON THE HOME LANGUAGE OF THE MAJORITY OF LEARNERS IN THE CLASSES OBSERVED

Language	Number of classes n =77
Sepedi	49 (64%)
Xitsonga	16 (21%)
Tshivenda	5 (6%)
Setswana	4 (5%)
isiNdebele	1 (1%)
Don't know	2 (3%)

Multilingual classes

Thirty six (56%) out of 64 teachers reported that there were learners in their classes who used two or more languages equally at home. Teachers' estimates of the number of learners where this applied ranged from 1 to 21 within a class with an average of five in a class.

Fifty four (78%) out of 79 teachers reported that learners in their class came from different language backgrounds. According to teachers' reports, 27 (34%) of the classes had *more than two* language groups in the class. One teacher reported that there were

eight language groups in her class. According to teachers' reports, the majority of classes had at least two language groups. A third of the classes had more than three language groups.

4.2.2 The language/s of public administration/social events at schools

The principal questionnaires asked principals various questions about the language of public communication in schools. Table 4.11 shows their responses to these questions.

TABLE 4.11 PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON LANGUAGE/S OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND SOCIAL EVENTS AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Language/s reportedly used by principal to communicate	Number of principals	
	English/Afrikaans	Mother tongue
With teaching staff as a group (e.g. in staff meetings) n=20	18 (90%)	2 (10%)
Individual teachers n=20	9 (45%)	11 (55%)
Learners as a body (e.g. in assembly) n (valid)=19	4 (21%)	15 (79%)
Learners as individuals n (valid)=18	5 (28%)	13 (72%)

In the 'school-conditions and school-document review' instrument, researchers noted what language/s were mainly used: a) to make public announcements from the office on the school loudspeaker/classroom intercom; and b) by the principal or person who led school assembly. Of 10 valid observations, public announcements from the office on the school loudspeaker/classroom intercom at four schools were in English. In one case two or more languages were used equally. In five (half) of the schools announcements were made in the mother tongue. Of 19 valid observations, the principal or person who led school assembly used English at three schools. In four schools two or more languages were used equally. In most (12) cases assembly was led in the mother tongue.

4.2.3 Language/s of learning and teaching (LOLT): what principals and teachers reported and what was observed in classrooms

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked to provide the official languages of instruction at their schools. Table 4.12 provides this information.

TABLE 4.12: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON THE LANGUAGE/S OF INSTRUCTION AT THEIR SCHOOLS

Language	Number of schools*
English	20
Sepedi	12
Xitsonga	4
Tshivenda	1
Setswana	1
isiNdebele	1
Sesotho	0
SiSwati	0
Afrikaans	0
isiZulu	0
isiXhosa	0

* Most schools have more than one LOLT

According to principals, the majority of schools use English and Sepedi as the languages of teaching and learning. None of the schools use Afrikaans, Sesotho; isiZulu; isiXhosa or SiSwati.

Home language LOLT

Table 4.13 provides information on teachers' reports (from the teacher questionnaire) on the language/s that their learners' used in their Home Language workbooks and portfolios.

TABLE 4.13: RESEARCHERS' REPORTS ON LANGUAGES USED BY GRADE 1-4 LEARNERS TO WRITE IN THEIR HOME LANGUAGE (L1) WORKBOOKS AND/OR PORTFOLIOS

Language	Number of classes n (valid)=71
Sepedi	43 (61%)
Xitsonga	13 (18%)
English	5 (7%)
Tshivenda	5 (7%)
Setswana	3 (4%)
isiNdebele	2 (3%)

Foundation Phase Numeracy and Life Skills LOLT

Tables 4.14 and 4.15 provides teacher self-report data on the LOLT for Numeracy and Life Skills in Grades 1-3.

TABLE 4.14: NUMBER OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS WHO REPORTED MAINLY USING LEARNERS' HOME LANGUAGE FOR TEACHING NUMERACY BY GRADES

Grade	Number of teachers
Grade 1 n =20	18 (90%)
Grade 2 n =19	14 (74%)
Grade 3 n =19	14 (74%)

TABLE 4.15: NUMBER OF GRADE 1-3 TEACHERS WHO REPORTED USING HOME LANGUAGE FOR TEACHING LIFE SKILLS

Grade	Number of teachers
Grade 1 n =20	19 (95%)
Grade 2 n (valid)=18	16 (89%)
Grade 3 n =19	14 (74%)

The majority (not all) of Grade 1-3 teachers said they use mother-tongue instruction for Numeracy and Life Skills.

In theory, although Grade 1-3 classes had timetabled periods allocated for different Learning Areas (LAs), in practice, because there was one class teacher who taught all/most LAs, it was not always clear during classroom observations when each Learning Area actually started and ended during the two-hour observation periods. Nevertheless, from the information that researchers provided:

- Approximately three quarters (the majority) of the 77 teachers whose lessons were observed taught **Language and Literacy Home Language (L1)** during the observation period.
- Researchers observed **Numeracy/Mathematics** being taught in just over half of the observations.
- **First Additional Language** was taught during approximately a third of the observations.
- **Life Skills**, which applies in Grades 1-3, was taught during roughly 15% of the observations.
- **Natural Sciences**, which applies in Grade 4 only, in about 5%.
- Teachers taught **Social Sciences**, which applies in Grade 4 only, during less than 5% of the 77 observations.
- **Other** Learning Areas/subjects were taught in less than 5% of the observations.
- Four Foundation Phase teachers (one Grade 1, two Grade 2, and one Grade 3) reportedly adopted an **integrated approach** where it was difficult to distinguish the boundaries between the different Learning Areas.

Nevertheless, classroom observation data indicate that in the majority of cases, Grade 1-3 teachers and learners use mother tongue in teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions in Numeracy and Life Skills.

Grade 1

- One Grade 1 teacher said that s/he used English as the main medium of instruction for teaching **Numeracy** and **Life Skills**. Another Grade 1 teacher reported that s/he uses mother tongue and English equally to teach **Numeracy**.

Classroom observations

- Of the 15 cases where teachers taught **Numeracy** during the classroom observation, 14 used learners' home language and one mainly used English.
- In all four recorded cases where Grade 1 teachers taught **Life Skills**, teachers used learners' home language.

Grade 2

- One Grade 2 teacher reported that s/he uses mother tongue and English equally to teach **Numeracy**. Two teachers said they used English when teaching **Numeracy** and **Life Skills**. One Grade 2 teacher said s/he used English for teaching **Numeracy** but learners' home language for teaching **Life Skills**.

Classroom observations

- Of the 12 recorded cases of Grade 2 teachers teaching **Numeracy** during the classroom observations, eight teachers mainly used learners' mother tongue, three teachers mainly used English, and one teacher used a bilingual approach (two or more languages equally).
- Records on five Grade 2 teachers who taught **Life Skills** during the observation period show that the teachers mainly used learners' home language for instruction.

Grade 3

- Two Grade 3 teachers said they used English for teaching **Numeracy** and **Life Skills**. Two Grade 3 teachers said they used mother tongue and English equally when teaching **Numeracy** and **Life Skills**. One Grade 3 teacher said s/he used mother tongue and English equally to teach **Numeracy** but used home language

for teaching **Life Skills**. Another Grade 3 teacher said s/he used mother tongue and English equally to teach **Life Skills** but home language to teach **Numeracy**.

Classroom observations

- Of the nine recorded cases where Grade 3 teachers taught **Numeracy** during the observation, eight of these teachers used home language/mother tongue and one mainly used English.
- In all three of the reported cases where Grade 3 teachers reportedly taught **Life Skills** during observations, teachers mainly used learners' mother tongue/home language.

Grade 4 Mathematics, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences LOLT

- Available teacher self-report data indicated that Grade 4 teachers either use English, or use mother-tongue and English equally when teaching **Mathematics** and **Natural and Social Sciences**.

Classroom observations

- Of the six reported cases where Grade 4 teachers were observed teaching **Mathematics**, three teachers mainly used English for teaching and three mainly used learners' home language/mother tongue.
- Of the three reported cases where Grade 4 teachers taught Natural Sciences, during observations, two teachers used mainly English and the third mainly used learners' home language/mother tongue.
- Of the four cases where Grade 4 teachers taught **Social Sciences**, two mainly used English and two mainly used learners' mother tongue.

Code-switching

The criterion for 'code-switching' was that teachers spoke at least one or two sentences in, for example, Xitsonga, and then another few sentences in another official language. There was evidence of the teacher code-switching (alternating between two languages) 'extensively' when explaining unfamiliar words or ideas to learners in only 5% of the 77 classes during the observation period. In 12% of the classes there was evidence of 'moderate' code-switching on the part of the teacher. In 83% of the classes there was minimal or no evidence of code-switching.

4.2.4 Teaching of English as First Additional Language (FAL)/L2

In the principal questionnaire, principals were asked when

- First Additional Language was first introduced for oral communication;
- FAL was introduced as subject (i.e. reading and writing); and
- learners made the transition to learning subjects mainly in English.

Tables 4.16 and 4.17 show their reports.

TABLE 4.16: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON GRADE IN WHICH FAL (ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS) IS FIRST INTRODUCED FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION

Grade	Number of principals n (valid) = 18
1	4 (22%)
2	9 (50%)
3	3 (17%)
4	2 (11%)

Half of the school principals reported that this occurred in Grade 2.

TABLE 4.17: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON GRADE IN WHICH FAL (ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS) IS FIRST INTRODUCED AS A SUBJECT (WITH READING AND WRITING)

Grade	Number of principals n (valid) = 19
1	1 (11%)*
2	3 (16%)
3	9 (47%)
4	5 (26%)

* A former HoA/Model C school

Available data indicates that in 47% of the sample schools FAL is only introduced as a subject in Grade 3 and in 16% of the schools for the first time in Grade 4.

Nineteen of the 20 principals reported that learners at their school make the transition from learning in their home language to learning mainly in English in Grade 4. The principal at the only former Model C/House of Assembly school in the sample said that English was used from Grade 1 onwards.

In the teacher questionnaire, Grade 1-4 teachers were similarly asked whether:

- a) First Additional Language (English) was first introduced for oral communication only in their grade;
- b) FAL was introduced as subject (i.e. reading and writing) in the grade they taught; and
- c) learners made the transition to learning subjects mainly in English in the grade they taught.

However, data collected through the teacher questionnaire indicates that most teachers had difficulty distinguishing subtle differences between each of the above. For example, some teachers said that the first two or all of the above took place in the grade they teach. In most cases teacher questionnaire data on this aspect proved to be unreliable. This topic, though, is quite important, because teachers' degree of mastery of these concepts will have an impact on how they deal with choices about language usage in the classroom. It may also largely determine their contributions to discussions and decisions at school level on the matter.

In the *classroom observations*:

- Three **Grade 1** teachers taught English FAL during the observation period.
- Available data show 3 of the **Grade 2** teachers taught English FAL.
- Four **Grade 3** teachers were observed teaching English FAL.
- Eight **Grade 4** teachers taught English and two taught Afrikaans. One Grade 4 teacher used a bilingual approach (two languages equally) for teaching English.

In more than half of the FAL lessons observed, learners mainly used English in teacher-learner interactions. In about a quarter of the lessons learners used their home language and English equally in teacher-learner interactions. Learners mainly used their home language to interact with the teacher in four lessons.

In just over a half of the FAL lessons that were observed, learners used mother tongue in learner-learner interactions. Learners mainly used English in learner-learner interactions in just under half of the FAL lessons observed. There was one lesson in which learners used two or more languages equally when interacting with their peers.

Researchers were able to access FAL workbooks/portfolios for 35 of the 77 Grade 1-4 classes observed. In 34 (97%) of the 35 cases, learners used English to write in their books. In one class the learners used Afrikaans.

Data indicate that, in most of the Limpopo primary schools sampled, English as First Additional Language is not being taught *as a subject* from Grade 1. This predicts that learners' readiness for the use of English as LOLT will be delayed by at least two years.

4.2.5 Teachers' proficiency in the language/s of instruction

Principals (in 19 principal questionnaires) maintained that the home language/s of teaching staff at their schools 'always' or 'mostly' matched the home language/s of learners. In 72% (13) of the 18 SMT focus-group interviews, senior teachers' responses indicated that the home language of the Foundation Phase (Gr. 1-3) teaching staff at their schools 'always' matches the home language of their learners. Twenty two percent (4) of 18 SMT groups said that it 'mostly' matches; and only 1 group said it 'sometimes' matches learners home language.

Information from the teacher questionnaires on teachers' home language (Table 4.18) and the language of the majority of learners in classes (Table 4.9 and 4.10, Section 4.2.1) indicate a reasonably high degree of home language 'match' between the teachers and classes.

TABLE 4.18: TEACHERS' REPORTED HOME/FIRST LANGUAGE/S

Language	Number of teachers n = 80
Sepedi	44 (55%)
Xitsonga	16 (20%)
Tshivenda	8 (10%)
Afrikaans	3 (4%)
Setswana	3 (4%)
Sesotho	2 (3%)
isiNdebele	2 (3%)
isiZulu	2 (3%)
English	0
SiSwati	0
isiXhosa	0

At least half of the teachers' first or home language is reportedly Sepedi. None of the teachers said that their home language is English. Three teachers said their home language is Afrikaans.

Where researchers felt competent enough to rate teachers' degree of proficiency in the language of instruction during observations, the majority of teachers' proficiency was at least rated as 'good', with some regarded as 'excellent'.³ Researchers rated only three

³ Perhaps an inflated evaluation, as many observers' mother tongue was not English.

teachers' proficiency as 'poor/inadequate'. Of these, two Grade 4 teachers' proficiency was rated as 'inadequate' when English was used as the language of instruction during the observation, and one Grade 3 teacher's proficiency in Afrikaans was rated as 'inadequate.' There is thus some evidence that some Grade 4 teachers' proficiency in English/Afrikaans may not be as good as it needs to be.

Table 4.19 reflects the extent to which Grade 1-4 teachers reported using English outside of school.

TABLE 4.19: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS REPORTED SPEAKING/READING/WRITING ENGLISH OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL

Extent	Number of teachers who speak English outside school n (valid) = 79	Number of teachers who read English outside school n (valid) = 79	Number of teachers who write English outside school n (valid) = 77
All/most of the time	7 (9%)	40 (51%)	27 (35%)
Sometimes	62 (78%)	37 (47%)	41 (53%)
Hardly ever/never	10 (13%)	2 (3%)	9 (12%)

It seems that larger proportions of teachers are likely to spend all or most of their time to read and write English outside of school than they are to speak it.

4.3 Are the Limpopo primary schools' language-in-education programmes in Grade 1-4 classrooms aligned with DoE's policies?

Our observations show that most of the Limpopo primary schools in the sample appear to be using mother tongue as the LOLT up to Grade 3. However, the issue of multilingual classes and accommodating linguistically diverse learners in one class is clearly a challenge requiring teachers and schools to respond to and address a number of concerns in relation to mother-tongue language of instruction. In the teacher focus-group interviews and teacher questionnaires, some teachers commented on difficulties experienced in this respect. A related issue raised in some teacher groups was that some *'learners spoke a different dialect at home.'* For example, in one case, the language of learning and teaching was Sepedi but teachers said learners used *'a Lobedu dialect at home and do not call Sepedi words correctly'*.

Data also reveal that learners in most of the Limpopo primary schools sampled are officially taught all subjects through the medium of English from Grade 4 onwards, albeit with a good degree of code-switching. Thus the language-in-education model most evident in the schools sampled is one where, within the first three years of schooling, learners need to reach a certain threshold in mother-tongue literacy and language learning for transition into English in Grade 4. In other words, by the end of Foundation Phase, learners require adequate levels of proficiency in FAL (English) if they are to cope when they are taught all other Learning Areas in this language from Grade 4 onwards when the curriculum becomes more subject-focused.

Our data show that, although the Limpopo primary schools we surveyed appear to be following national policy by using mother tongue as the LOLT up to Grade 3, English (as First Additional Language) is not, in most cases, being taught *as a subject* from Grade 1. In many cases FAL is only introduced as a subject in Grade 3. This means that, in the

years prior to Grade 4, most of the Foundation Phase learners are getting far less exposure to English as a subject (with reading and writing) than the three years that are implied in the NCS.

This finding suggests that, in this respect, School Governing Bodies, schools and/or teachers are either misinterpreting, misunderstanding or resistant to the theory behind an additive approach to bilingual education and, consequently, are misapplying both the language policy as set out in the South African national Department of Education's 'Language in Education Policy' (1997) as well as the NCS guidelines on when the first additional language should be introduced.

Certainly evidence is that language issues and the rationale behind home language instruction in early years with a gradual transition to usually English (potentially also, but seldom, Afrikaans) are not being adequately explained to, properly understood and discussed by School Governing Bodies and the general parent body.

As elaborated in Chapter 3, confusing and ambiguous information is presented in various documents. For example, although the National DoE's Language Policy (DoE, 1997) states that all learners shall be offered *at least* one approved language as a subject in Grades 1 and 2 (our italics) and infers that English as FAL is introduced as an additional language for African-language learners from Grade 1 or 2, it also states that a second language need only be introduced as a subject from Grade 3 onwards as the First Additional Language (FAL). The policy document had been intended to offer schools some latitude rather than to prescribe a one-size fits all model. What has not been understood clearly is that if learners begin the FAL in Grade 3, they will only be ready to switch to English medium by Grade 9. So if the introduction to English is delayed, and learners are expected to switch within a year or two, they are being faced with an impossible hurdle of transition to English with only 12% to 24% of the necessary language learning incubation timeframe in place.

The ambiguous or misunderstood signals of the Language in Education Policy document are compounded by the messages implicit in the NCS documents. Although the NCS gives the impression that it is consistent with additive bilingual education, this is not so. The NCS's implicit endorsement of a transition to English by Grade 4, means that it is encouraging transition to English within a subtractive bilingual paradigm and before the language-learning incubation period had been completed.

Therefore if schools opt for the late introduction of English FAL in conjunction with the NCS' transitional bilingual model, learners will get less exposure to English as FAL, and less time for the language-learning and incubation process to take root. Under such circumstances, learners are expected to achieve very poorly.

Indeed the proposed strategy for literacy in Limpopo Primary Schools (Francis, 2005:13) reinforces this notion in the summary of time allocation curriculum requirements for Grades R-3 shown in Table 4.20.

Officials from four of the Limpopo districts indicated in the district interviews that their districts had a lot of influence in decisions about what language/s should be used at different grade levels in primary schools. Four of the five districts groups interviewed reported that, in their districts, primary school learners *officially* make the transition from

learning in their home language to learning mainly in English in Grade 4. One district group said that this transition occurred in Grade 3. Only one district group reported that English as FAL is officially first *introduced* for oral communication in Grade 2. Two district groups reported that this only happens in Grade 3, and two other groups maintained that this only happened in Grade 4. Whilst two districts maintain that English as First Additional Language is officially introduced as *a subject* (i.e. with reading and writing) in Grade 2, three other districts say this only happens in Grade 4.

TABLE 4.20: EXTRACT OF PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS SUMMARY OF CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADES R-3

Grade	%	Time per week	Notes
R,1 AND 2	40%	8.8 hours	Must offer at least one language, preferably the home language
3	40%	10 hours	Must offer two languages, one must be the LOLT

The fact that the responses of district officials to questions about their particular district’s language-in-education programmes differed across the five districts is of significance. Whilst it is possible that district officials also experienced difficulties in distinguishing subtle differences between questions about the introduction of FAL for oral communication, FAL as a subject, and transition to English, the data potentially reflects confusion even at district level arising from the ‘cross-signals’ in or misinterpretations and misapplication of the various policy documents, spelling much uncertainty and even more serious consequences at schools.

In their summary of factors found to effect learner ‘success’ from the international research literature Muller with Roberts (2000) found that one of the factors common across developed and developing country contexts is ‘policy coherence’– policies ‘must be mutually supporting and not contain contradictory elements’ (Fuhrman, 1993, in Muller with Roberts, 2000: 11). Essentially, for school reforms ‘to work’, there first has to be alignment between education department curriculum policy documents.

In four of five interviews with district officials, officials said that amongst the types of LDoE school management support provided in 2006 and/or 2007 was ‘developing and formulating a language and literacy policy and practice that ensures that the medium of instruction is appropriate and responsive to the needs of school’s learners.’ Four of the five districts also confirmed that this kind of school-management support is still needed ‘to a great extent’. Of further interest is that, when schools were asked to show researchers copies of the Limpopo Literacy Strategy for the school-document review, 89% (17 of 19) primary schools were not able to show researchers a copy.

As elaborated in the literature review, the ability to use language for higher levels of content and cognitive demands, for example, ‘to describe’, ‘to compare’, ‘to record’, ‘to classify’, ‘to predict’ or ‘to evaluate’, and the ability to read and write, is dependent on the sort of linguistic, literacy and learning experiences made available to learners as they acquire language, literacy and knowledge. The inability so often evident in learners from the Grade 4 level upwards (when schooling becomes more subject-matter focused) to cope with increasingly complex reading and writing, cognitive and content demands, even when they are learning in their home language, is ultimately linked to prior linguistic, literacy and learning experiences they have had at home and/or at school.

Children of highly literate and educated families are more likely to have the kind of literacy and linguistic experiences that help scaffold academic literacy at home than learners whose families' 'everyday' language use and literacy practices are less likely to include the kind of linguistic and literacy experiences that helps develop academic literacy. For the latter learners, it is crucial that teachers and textbooks deliberately develop their academic language and literacy proficiency through a more cognitive approach to teaching rather than through an 'everyday' communicative approach used when developing more 'general' or 'everyday' language skills.

By implication, unless Limpopo learners' Grade 1-3 teachers are intensively developing their learners' literacy and language proficiency in both their home language and English as FAL through a strongly **cognitive** approach to literacy instruction (as opposed to the **communicative** approach as currently interpreted in South African education), learners are highly unlikely to achieve adequate levels to cope with the more complex literature, cognitive and content demands they are expected to encounter in Grade 4.

'Optimal conditions' for FAL/L2 acquisition, include, amongst other things, wide availability and use of well-designed textbooks and other material and cognitively demanding tasks in mother tongue and the first additional language, as well as grade teachers who have the resources of knowledge and the competence to mediate school-related knowledge at the Grade 1-4 level, specifically in terms of literacy and numeracy. In South Africa in the 1980s, the HSRC's Threshold Project (Macdonald, 1990) focused on problems experienced by junior primary schools in apartheid-period DET schools in Standard 3 (Grade 5) when learners were expected to cope with the demands of suddenly 'crossing the threshold' to learning all their subjects through the medium of English. This research revealed that teachers' classroom practices and their poor understanding of textbooks (Langhan, 1992) all worked against learners achieving adequate cognitive development.

In the Chapters that follow, we try to gauge the extent to which:

- a) Foundation Phase learners are being equipped to cope with the literacy, linguistic and academic demands of Grade 4; and
- b) Grade 1-4 learners are being equipped to cope with the literacy, linguistic and academic demands of a first additional language medium of instruction curriculum.

We do this mainly by describing the literacy opportunities and learning experiences of learners in the classroom observations and then evaluating the quality of Home Language, First Additional Language and across-the-curriculum literacy practices in the Limpopo schools and classrooms. For example, in Chapter 6 we raise some of the difficulties that Limpopo teachers reportedly encounter when English is first introduced as a subject only in Grade 3. Teachers complained that available readers are '*too difficult for learners*' because they are based on the assumption that learners have completed earlier grade series and have had exposure to FAL in previous grades.

Before we discuss issues around the provisioning, availability and use of Learning and Teaching Support Material, Chapter 5 first provides a description of learners' educational environments and the extent to which schools and classrooms are creating 'literate' learning environments.

CHAPTER 5: LITERACY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Chapter 5 describes the socio-economic contexts and physical environments in which the Limpopo primary schools are situated. It examines the extent to which the sample of Limpopo school and classroom environments: a) are conducive to Grade 1-4 language and literacy learning and teaching; and b) promote and enhance Grade 1-4 mother-tongue and first additional language literacy development.

5.1 Socio-economic contexts and physical environments

5.1.1 Schools' socio-economic contexts

5.1.1.1 School history

In Chapter 1 we made reference to 'the effects of state practices, inherited from the past' that 'outlive the political lifespan of governments'. In South Africa, school effectiveness studies such as that of Crouch and Mabogoane (1998) have shown that a school's being a former 'black' school, that is, a former Department of Education (DET) or 'homeland' school, negatively affects pass rates in Grade 12.

In the Limpopo primary-school study, principal reports in the principal questionnaires showed that 60% (12) of the schools were run by the DET prior to 1994 and 40% (eight) by former 'homeland' ('independent state') education departments.¹

5.1.1.2 School locations

The 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie *et al.*, 2007) showed that, in South Africa, the mean achievement of schools located in suburban areas was 'substantially higher than rural schools by more than 100 points'.

On each school visit in the Limpopo study researchers completed a 'school conditions and school document review' instrument which comprised a brief description of each school environment including its location.

Data in Table 5.1 show that only 20% of the sample of Limpopo primary schools are located in formal township areas where there is more likely to be access to essential amenities and resources as well as employment. Eighty percent of the sample of primary schools is located in rural areas or informal 'squatter' settlement areas where easy access to various kinds of infrastructure, community facilities and employment opportunities is less likely.

TABLE 5.1: SCHOOL LOCATION

Location	Number of schools n = 20
Deep rural area	8 (40%)
Rural farming area or village	7 (35%)
Formal 'township' area	4 (20%)
Informal/'squatter' settlement	1 (5%)
Low-density suburban	0 (0%)
High-density urban (high-rise buildings, flats)	0 (0%)

¹ One of the former schools turned out to have been a former HoA / Model C school.

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked how far their schools are from the nearest public library. Seventy percent of the principals said the nearest library was more than 15 kilometres away from the school. Fifteen percent of the principals said the nearest public library was less than 5 kilometres away. Fifteen percent said that the closest library was five to ten kilometres away. In contrast, in the focus-group interview with as many as possible of the SGB members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the schools, interviewees complained about the non-existence of libraries in the areas where learners live.

In principal questionnaires, the Limpopo principals were also asked to estimate the distance to tertiary institutions from their schools that provide any kind of formal certified in-/pre-service teacher training and qualifications. On average principals estimated that the nearest teacher-training tertiary institutions are roughly 90 kilometres from their schools with distances ranging from 3 to 180 kilometres.

5.1.1.3 Family and community background

Internationally school-effectiveness studies have shown that social and economic factors are strong predictors of school success. In line with school effectiveness research internationally, a number of South African studies (for example, Anderson *et al.*, 2001 and Case & Deacon, 1999) have shown significant correlation between learner performance in school and socio-economic class, household wealth and parental education. In particular, studies such as PIRLS have shown that home and family background affects learners' reading performance.

School's community poverty index, school fees and socio-economic status of learners

Table 5.2 shows the sample of primary schools' current poverty index/rating according to principal questionnaire data.

TABLE 5.2: SCHOOL POVERTY INDEX RATINGS

Quintile	Number of primary schools n (valid) = 19
1	5 (26%)
2	3 (16%)
3	7 (37%)
4	2 (11%)
5	2 (11%)

In South Africa a school's community poverty index is a composite measure made up of a number of poverty indicators which are combined. It essentially reflects the level of financial contribution that parents can make in the form of school fees on a monthly or annual basis to their children's education. This also determines how much of the burden the state has to carry on its own. Because there are many such communities, whatever budget is available is distributed over a very large number of such schools, rendering eventual assistance rather limited at this time. Schools are in the process ranked in terms of this index from poorest to best off. Although this was done in the past at the provincial level, it is considered better practice to compile such list nationally, so that poverty determination and measures are equitable across the whole country. The first 20% of such schools, taken from the end of the poorest, will fall in the so-called first of five quintiles (division of the whole into five equal groups). As a result, schools are described as Quintile 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 schools, with the latter the most affluent, relative to the rest. Given

that there are almost 28 000 schools in South Africa, with a majority (around 60% to two-thirds, that is) serving primary-school learners, and that a very large portion of them come from poor communities, even the lower parts of the Quintile 5 bracket would not exactly be affluent by any standards.

Seventy nine percent of the sample schools' current poverty index ratings are one, two or three.

Six of the school principals reported that their schools' poverty rating had changed in the past year. Of these, one reported that the school's previous rating had changed from four to three and another said the school rating had changed from three to four. One school principal reported a change from four to one; another from five to three; and one other from two to one.

Some potential causes of this could be events such as vast outflows of learners and/or their parents from/in township communities to new accommodation, jobs and ex-Model C suburban schools nearby, on the back of sudden shifts up the family-income ladder because of new business or job opportunities, especially in the provincial government bureaucracy. As this would affect the more able families, the remaining families would become on average much poorer. The implications of this for school assistance may be substantial. For instance, only the poorest of the poor schools are designated as no-fee schools, which would rely totally on government for both their running (salaries and premises) and other basic academic costs (learning materials). Shifts down the ladder may sound the death knell for such schools.

School fees have been used as a proxy indication for low average community wealth by researchers in South Africa (for example, Van der Berg and Burger, 2002; Reeves, 2005) because the South African Schools Act allowed SGBs to set school fees with the proviso that 'schools cannot set fees that are more than one-thirtieth of the combined annual gross income of the parents of more than a tiny proportion of the school's pupils' (Seekings, 2001a: 183).

Sixty one percent of the Limpopo primary-school principals reported that school fees were less than R100 a year or that their schools were 'no-fee schools'. Only 39% said that school fees were R100 or more – one schools' fee was reported as R100; two schools' fees R120; one as R150; one as R160; and one as R200 per year. The only annual school fee over R200 was R2 320 per year (a school with a poverty index rating of three²). Data thus indicates, with the exception of one school, that all the schools in the Limpopo sample served low-SES communities.

The principal questionnaire asked school principals to indicate the type of houses in which the majority of learners at their schools reside. Three of the 20 principals said there was 'no majority type', i.e. types were mixed. Table 5.3 shows data provided by the other 17 principals.

² Middle-class parents came from far for their children to attend this school, and hence were able to afford the fees.

TABLE 5.3: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON LEARNERS' TYPE OF HOUSING

Type of housing	Number of schools n (valid) = 17
Shack or informal dwelling	2 (12%)
Hut or mud house	6 (35%)
Semi-permanent or wooden house	1 (6%)
Permanent or stone or brick house	8 (47%)

More than half (53%) of the principals reported that the majority of learners at their schools live in shacks, informal dwellings, huts, mud houses, semi-permanent or wooden houses.

Parental education levels

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked to broadly indicate the educational level of the *majority* of parents/guardians of learners at their schools. One principal said there was no majority level at the school, i.e. levels were mixed. Table 5.4 shows reports on the other 19 schools.

TABLE 5.4: PRINCIPALS' REPORT ON PARENTAL EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

Education level	Number of schools n = 19
Unschooling	4 (21%)
Primary schooling only	6 (32%)
Some high schooling but not completed	7 (37%)
Completed high school	2 (10%)
Post-school further education	0 (0%)

According to data obtained from 19 school principals, the majority of parents/ guardians of children at 90% of the schools did not complete high school. More than half of these schools (53%) reported that the majority of parents/guardians had not even reached high school.

5.1.2 School physical environments

Although physical environmental conditions of schools such as teacher:learner ratios have not necessarily been shown to correlate with learner performance, school physical conditions reflect both the availability of school facilities and resources and the principals' and schools' efforts to use and care for existing facilities and resources. Poor physical conditions in schools and classrooms can affect teacher commitment and morale adversely.

5.1.2.1 School buildings and grounds

Researchers (using the 'school conditions and school document review' instrument) deemed that only 35% of the schools visited had well-maintained, clean and neat school buildings and grounds. Nevertheless, the state school buildings and grounds of 60% of the schools were described as 'satisfactory with only some signs of disrepair and untidiness'. Only one of the schools visited was deemed as 'in a state of disrepair and/or general untidiness (e.g. litter, many broken windows, etc.)'.

5.1.2.2 School size and type

Reports in the principal questionnaires showed that the average enrolment at the sample of schools in 2007 was 615 with learner enrolment ranging from 177 to 1020. Fifty five percent of the school principals reported having more than 600 learners. The lowest grade at 85% of the schools is Grade R and the highest grade at 19 of the 20 schools is Grade 7. Only one of the schools is a combined primary and high school where the highest grade taught is Grade 12. Noteworthy is that data from the principal questionnaires show that 17 (85%) of the 20 schools offered Grade R. Most of the research-based literature on successful literacy achievement in schools emphasises the importance of the sound development of pre-literacy skills, early literacy and family, home and community literacy practices (e.g. Snow *et al.*, 1998).

However, most early reading schemes and literacy programmes used in South Africa are based on approaches to reading and writing which have been developed in Northern European and North-American countries where it is possible for children to have both a rich exposure to early literacy practices at home and also early childhood education. Such children arrive at primary school with early-literacy skills already developed. The importance of Grade R classes in primary schools in socio-economic conditions which pose a high risk to education, such as in Limpopo Province, cannot be underestimated. Grade R classrooms are the sites in which teachers and the school community need to invest in very carefully planned and focused preparation of early literacy. Without this happening, learners will enter Grade 1 under-prepared for efficient literacy development, and the achievement gap between these learners and those who enter Grade 1 with well-established literacy skills will widen inexorably throughout primary schooling. In other words, learners who do not attend Grade R, or are not taught by a highly competent Grade R teacher, are likely to be at a serious disadvantage in relation to children who have had both good Grade R teaching and a home environment which supports early literacy. The implication is that in poor environments, the importance of Grade R and good Grade R teaching, is even more significant than in those situations where children come from more affluent or literacy-advantaged homes (see also Abadzi, 2006; Clark, 2007).

5.1.2.3 Teacher:learner ratio and number of classrooms

According to data from principal questionnaires the average teacher:learner ratio at the sample of primary schools in 2007 was 1:35. The highest reported ratio was 1:44. It is important though to note that the teacher:learner ratio is not necessarily an indicator of the size of classes. School management may use teaching staff inefficiently and class sizes may actually be large because of classroom shortages or shortages of particular specialist teachers. Sometimes two teachers share one classroom.

According to principal's reports in principal questionnaires, on average the primary schools had 14 usable classrooms. The average enrolment at schools was 615. This implies one classroom per 44 learners. Eleven (55%) schools had fewer than 15 classrooms whilst nine (45%) had at least 15 classrooms. However, the number of classrooms ranged from a minimum of six (for 621 learners or one classroom for 104 learners) to a maximum of 24 (for 1062 learners, again suggesting one classroom per 44 learners). Thus although all the principals said there were no 'open air' classrooms (where classes had to take place outside under trees), the data show that some schools are short of classrooms.

Furthermore, only 40% of the Limpopo primary school principals stated that their schools were *not* short of Foundation Phase (FP) teachers whilst 60% reported shortages of teaching staff at this level. Table 5.5 shows principals' reported shortages of Foundation Phase teachers.

TABLE 5.5: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON SHORTAGE OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS

Number of Foundation Phase teachers short	Number of principals
1	6 (30%)
2	3 (15%)
3	1 (5%)
4	1 (5%)
5	0 (0%)
6	1 (5%)

5.1.2.4 Feeding schemes

Nineteen of the 20 schools said they had school feeding schemes operating five days of every school week. The research team took particular note of the efficient delivery of meals and drinking water to learners in the research sample. The majority of learners in the sample did not show signs of severe malnutrition and hunger cannot be regarded as a serious impediment to learning or achievement in these schools.

5.1.2.5 Teaching resources

Table 5.6 provides details of principals' reports in the principal questionnaire on availability of teaching resources at the school. According to principals' reports more than half the primary schools did not have Mathematics kits; computers for teaching and learning in working order; and overhead projectors in working order.

TABLE 5.6: PRINCIPALS' REPORTS ON AVAILABILITY OF PARTICULAR TEACHING RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

Resources	Number of schools where available	Number of schools where not available
Science kits n (valid) = 19	11 (58%)	8 (42%)
Mathematics kits n (valid) = 18	8 (44%)	10 (56%)
Computers for teaching and learning in working order n = 20	8 (40%)	12 (60%)
Overhead projectors in working order n (valid) = 19	4 (21%)	15 (79%)
At least one photocopier/duplicating facility in working order n = 20	18 (90%)	2 (10%)
At least one CD player/audio tape recorder in working order n = 20	14 (70%)	6 (30%)
At least one DVD player/TV/video recorder in working order n = 20	13 (65%)	7 (35%)
Strongroom/s for protecting resources against theft n (valid) = 19	14 (74%)	5 (26%)

More than half the schools reportedly had science kits; a photocopier/duplicating facility; CD player/audio-tape recorder; DVD player/TV/video recorder in working order; and strongroom/s for storage. However, only 15% (3) of the principals reported that their schools have an insurance policy to cover theft or vandalism of valuable equipment.

5.2 Grade 1-4 classrooms

Physical environmental factors that are supportive for language and literacy instruction and learning in Grade 1-4 classrooms include having sufficient space to arrange reading and writing and other activities, good lighting, useable chalkboards and a clean classroom (Savage, 1999; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsay, 1995; Weinstein, 1992; MacAuley, 1990). Although research evidence of correlations between learner performance and class size is scant, class size does affect the quality of the classroom environment and very large classes clearly pose particular challenges for teachers.

The following are findings on this aspect of the sample of Limpopo primary classrooms.

5.2.1 Class size

According to principals' reports, the average class size³ in Foundation Phase is 42. Fifty five percent of the principals reported class sizes of less than 41. However, the 'average' class sizes that principals reported at their schools ranged from 20 to 65. Only one principal reported the existence of multi-grade classes at the school. In this case only the Grade R and Grade1 classes are combined.

In the teacher questionnaires, 80 teachers reported on the size of their classes. Table 5.7 shows their reports.

TABLE 5.7: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON CLASS SIZE

Number of learners	Number of classes n=80
> 60	13 (16%)
50-59	8 (10%)
40-49	23 (29%)
30-39	23 (29%)
20-29	10 (13%)
10-19	2 (3%)
< 10	1 (1%)

The average class size, according to teachers' reports, is 45. However, teachers' reports on the number of learners in their classes ranged from 7 in the smallest class to 112 in the largest class.

Fifty five percent of the teachers said that they had at least 40 learners in their class.

A quarter (26%) of the 80 teachers said they had *more than* 50 children in the class.

On average 40 learners were present in class during the classroom observations although the number of learners actually present in classes during observations ranged from 7 to 112. Table 5.8 provides details.

³ Again note the difference between the physical presence of a given number of learners in a classroom ('class size' here), and the overall teacher:learner ratio in a school.

TABLE 5.8: AVERAGE NUMBER OF LEARNERS PER GRADE PRESENT DURING OBSERVATIONS

Grade	Average number present in class	Minimum size	Maximum size
Grade 1 n (valid) = 18	36	7	57
Grade 2 n (valid) = 16	38	14	90
Grade 3 n = 19	41	22	83
Grade 4 n (valid) = 17	45	9	112

Classroom-observation data indicates that the size of classes increased in successive grades.

The maximum sizes of classes in each grade range from 57 in Grade 1, 90 in Grade 2, 83 in Grade 3, to 112 in Grade 4.

5.2.2 Classroom conditions

All the lessons that researchers observed took place in classrooms. There was no evidence of teaching having to take place outside (for example, under trees, etc.) or of teaching taking place in mud structures. Table 5.9 provides essential details on classroom conditions and facilities from classroom observations.

TABLE 5.9: CLASSROOM CONDITIONS AND FACILITIES ACCORDING TO CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Eighteen (24%) of 76 classrooms were so over-crowded that the teacher/learners could not walk easily between the desks/tables.
There was inadequate desk space for all learners to write comfortably in 21 (27%) of 77 classrooms.
There was inadequate seating space for all learners in the class in 11 (14%) of 77 classrooms.
Twelve (16%) of 76 classrooms were without burglar bars and adequate security for teachers to store books/learning material safely in the classroom.
There were more than two broken windows in 10 (13%) of the 77 classrooms.
The chalkboard was not usable in 6 (8%) of 76 classrooms.
There was inadequate lighting for reading/writing in 3 (4%) of the 77 classrooms.
There was no cupboard/storage space at all for learner support material/books in 9 (12%) of the 77 classrooms.
There was no carpet or mat for children to sit on (e.g. for story time) in 68 (88%) of the 77 classrooms. ⁴

5.3 Are the social contexts and physical environments of schools and in classrooms conducive to Grade 1-4 language and literacy learning and teaching?

Data confirms that the sample of Limpopo primary schools are mostly located in predominantly poor communities with low levels of literacy and limited access to books and other print material. Most of the schools are located in rural areas or informal ‘squatter’ settlement areas and the majority of learners at most schools live in shacks,

⁴ While the research team did expect that Grade R to Grade 3 classrooms would have story-telling / reading mats, this was not expected of all Grade 4 classrooms.

informal dwellings, huts, mud houses, semi permanent or wooden houses. In most cases the nearest library is more than 15 kilometres away from the school. Most parents/guardians of children at the majority of the schools did not complete high school.

However, evidence in South Africa is that there are 'very poor schools' that, 'when compared to schools in the same socio-economic bracket', perform 'above expectations' at the end of Grade 12 (Taylor *et al.*, 2003:64). Indeed it is in these contexts that the effects of good schooling can have a greater influence on learners' academic outcomes because instruction, in particular reading instruction, 'depends primarily on what the child encounters in school' (Stevenson, Lee & Schweingruber, 1999:251).

Certainly physical conditions in most of the Limpopo schools and classrooms were adequate for language and literacy teaching and learning to take place. For example:

- The condition of school buildings and grounds of 60% of the schools were deemed 'satisfactory';
- 85% of the 20 schools had Grade R classes;
- 95% of the schools had daily feeding schemes;
- More than half the schools reportedly had a photocopier/duplicating facility; CD player/audio tape recorder; DVD player/TV/video recorder in working order; and strongroom/s for storage;
- More than half the primary schools reportedly did not have overhead projectors in working order;
- In 76% of the observations, classrooms were not over-crowded and there was sufficient space for the teacher/learners to walk easily between the desks/tables;
- In 86% of the observations, there was enough seating space for all learners in the class;
- In 73% of the observations, there was sufficient desk space for all learners to write comfortably;
- In 84% of the observations, classrooms had burglar bars and adequate security for teachers to store books/learning material safely in the classroom;
- In 87% of the observations, there were no or fewer than two broken windows;
- In 92% of the observations, classrooms had usable chalkboards;
- In 96% of the observations there was adequate lighting in the classroom for reading/writing;
- There was a cupboard/storage space for learner support material/books in 88% of the classrooms observed;
- All classrooms were deemed to be clean enough.

However, in at least 14% of the 77 classrooms observed, physical conditions were less than adequate. In some cases, the room was too small to accommodate the class. In one class none of the learners had desk space. Some learners had to write sitting on the floor, whilst others, who had chairs, had no tables and used their laps to write on. In another class some desks were broken and learners could not use them. In some classes there was not enough storage space as cupboards were too small. Teachers had to use boxes to store learners' exercise books and teaching material. In a number of classes, researchers noted that locks on cupboards were broken. Some classrooms appeared untidy and disorganised and it seemed that teachers were using them to store 'old' resources and material that were no longer being used.

There was a carpet or mat for children to sit on (e.g. for story time) in only nine (12%) of the classrooms where classes were observed. Seven of the classrooms where there were mats were Grade 1 classrooms; one was a Grade 2 classroom; and one Grade 4. The lack of carpets or mats evident in most classrooms, particularly at the Grade 1 and 2 level, suggests that 'story time' or similar shared reading experiences with the teacher are not a common feature of most teachers' language and literacy instruction.

The maximum sizes of classes in each grade are clearly untenable, ranging from 57 in Grade 1, 90 in Grade 2, 83 in Grade 3, and 112 in Grade 4. Certainly research evidence mostly supports smaller classes than these maximum sizes for children in Grade R-3, particularly in classes with children with learning difficulties (Robinson, 1990; World Bank, 1995 in Muller with Roberts, 2000). Whilst in some cases, school management appear to be using available teaching staff inefficiently, some schools clearly have classroom shortages and others pointed to a shortage of Foundation Phase teachers. Whatever the reason behind such large classes, class sizes of over 50 clearly pose great challenges for Grade 1-4 teachers and place constraints on learning, particularly because of the amount of time that teachers can devote to individual learners. Furthermore, even working on the basis of allocating only one square metre per learner in a classroom, the average classroom is simply not large enough to accommodate a class of more than 45 learners.

5.4 School and classroom environmental support for literacy development

School and classroom environments reflect what learning is valued (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992). Exposure to a literacy-rich school and classroom environment indicates that literacy is valued and is vital for children's literacy development (Baumann & Duffy, 1997; American Association of School Librarians, 2007). A print-rich environment reflects a recognition of the importance of providing learners with maximum exposure to a great variety of reading opportunities in class and at school.

5.4.1 Developing a book and reading culture

Learners develop a book and reading culture through opportunities to handle and read a variety of picture books, storybooks, non-fiction books and magazines. However, exposure to books outside of school cannot be taken for granted in predominantly poor communities with low levels of literacy and limited access to books and other print material. In contexts where learners get hardly any out-of-school exposure to books, 'real' books should thus be an indispensable part of schools' and teachers' reading programmes. Children are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards reading in school and classroom environments where they are provided with opportunities to experience the joy and the pleasure of reading.

School and classroom environmental factors that promote a reading and book culture and enhance literacy development include:

- availability of and access to school libraries (American Association of School Librarians, 2007);
- opportunities to self-select fiction and non-fiction books from libraries (American Association of School Librarians, 2007);
- textual material on the school and classroom walls;
- availability and use of picture books, story books, non-fiction books, dictionaries and magazines in mother-tongue language (catering for learners from diverse language

backgrounds where this is the case) and English/Afrikaans (as First Additional Language/s) (Baumann & Duffy, 1997);

- classroom book collections, box libraries or equivalent with reading material that is physically accessible to learners, for example, on open shelves (Neuman & Celano, 2001).

5.4.1.1 School libraries

Research indicates that in developing country contexts, resources that have been identified as important determinants of school effectiveness include school libraries. In fact the World Bank (1995) lists the following, in decreasing order of importance: libraries, time-on-task, homework, textbook provision, teacher knowledge, teacher experience, laboratories, teacher salaries, and class size (in Muller with Roberts, 2000). In PIRLS 2006, learners in schools with libraries with ‘the most books’ achieved much higher scores (‘a difference of 300 points’) ‘compared to schools with the least books’.

In the principal questionnaires, the Limpopo primary school principals were asked whether their schools had a library or resource centre that was used for this purpose. Only six (32%) of 19 principals reported that this facility was available. One school said that the school had a library/resource centre but that this was used for other purposes.⁵

In open-ended questions with district officials, however, some officials mentioned that some schools are provided with mobile libraries. It seems that the case may be that only ‘*Grade R learners borrow from these libraries.*’ What was not clear was whether these mobile libraries are ‘book’ and/or toy libraries, as some interviewees said there are not ‘*enough toy libraries for all clusters*’.

In the interviews with district officials, participants were asked if primary schools in the respective districts receive LDoE funds or budgets for purchasing books for reading for pleasure. Table 5.10 shows the variety of responses across the five districts.

TABLE 5.10: DISTRICT REPORTS ON PROVISION OF FUNDS/BUDGETS FOR PURCHASING BOOKS FOR READING FOR PLEASURE

Portion of primary schools supported	Number of districts
All	0
Most	1
Some	0
Only non-fee schools	0
None	2
Don't know	2

Only one district group confirmed that most schools in their district are provided with funds/budgets for purchasing books for reading for pleasure.

5.4.1.2 Use of texts in assembly

In the ‘school conditions and school document review’ instrument, researchers noted whether learners used hymn books or song sheets in assembly. Although learners sang in assembly, the use of hymn books/song sheets was noted in only one school.

⁵ Not unlike the situation in a pilot school, that potentially had two libraries. One was used to store old textbooks and served as a staffroom for male teachers. The second accommodated unused story books, etc.

5.4.1.3 Textual material on display on classroom walls

In the classroom observations, researchers were asked to gauge the amount of textual material on display on the classroom walls that was appropriate for the grade level, visually meaningful, and that could be read by learners while they were sitting at their tables/desks. Table 5.11 shows the findings.

TABLE 5.11: AMOUNT OF LEARNING MATERIAL ON DISPLAY ON CLASSROOM WALLS

Amount	Number of classrooms n=77
20 or more items	50 (65%)
11-20 items	18 (23%)
10-5 items	3 (4%)
Fewer than 5 items	6 (8%)

Thirty five percent (approximately one third) of the classrooms observed had fewer than 20 items on display. Table 5.12 indicates the sources of material on display.

TABLE 5.12: SOURCES OF LEARNING MATERIAL ON DISPLAY ON CLASSROOM WALLS

Source	Number of classrooms where there was evidence of
Teacher-made material (valid) = 76	64 (84%)
Commercially-made (incl. NGO/DoE) material n = 77	65 (84%)
Learner's work on display n = 77	37 (48%)

Fifty-one (69%) of 74 valid records of classroom observations showed that material on display *within individual classrooms* was predominantly teacher-made.

What follows is a ranking from *most common* to *least common* forms of textual material on display in the classrooms observed, i.e. material that Grade 1-4 learners could read while sitting at their tables/desks. (Researchers were not looking for evidence of equipment or manipulables for teaching Numeracy/Mathematics such as abaci, counters, etc.).

1. Letters of the alphabet (81%)
2. Words matched to pictures (79%)
3. High frequency words (73%)
4. Numbers (74%)
5. Months (64%)
6. Calendar for current year (63%)
7. Bulletin/news board (62%)
8. Days of the week (58%)
9. Classroom rules (50%)
10. Signs (42%)

On average classrooms observed displayed six of the above with the number on display ranging from all ten items (in nine cases) to none of the above (in one case).

Researchers noted that most classrooms also had timetables on display. A few classrooms had road-safety rules, a clock, a map/s, posters on shapes and colours, or on various religions, or with faces and names of government ministers. One classroom had drawings

of hands demonstrating sign language for the deaf with relevant words or letters. A number of classrooms had other textual material not specifically related to ‘learning’, such as birthday charts, duty rosters for learners (e.g. cleaning lists), or the school’s mission statement.

Observation records show that:

- material in English was on display in most classrooms [in 58 (81%) of 72 valid records];
- bilingual material was evident in only six (8%) of 71 observations;
- the most common African-language material on display overall was Sepedi – 30 (42%) out of 72 valid records.

In the teacher questionnaires and focus-group interviews some teachers complained about the lack of mother-tongue display material in particular in minority-group home languages, for example: *‘a lack of Sesotho material’*.

5.4.1.4 Classroom book collections

In the principal questionnaires 45% of the school principals reported that their schools had classroom book collections or box libraries. Fifty five percent said that their schools had none.

A classroom book collection, box library or equivalent was evident in 48 (63%) of 76 classrooms observed. There was no evidence of classroom book collections in 28 (37%) of the 76 classrooms where this data was recorded.

TABLE 5.13: TYPES OF BOOKS AVAILABLE IN CLASSROOM BOOK COLLECTIONS

Type	Percentage of 48 classroom collections where more than five were available
Story books (mainly text)	75%
Picture books	60%
Magazines	42%
Information books (expository)	40%

In the 48 classrooms where book collections were available, collections consisted mainly of story and picture books (narrative text). Table 5.14 shows the language/s in which books were available.

TABLE 5.14: CLASSROOM BOOK COLLECTION LANGUAGES

Language*	Number of collections n = 48*
Mostly English	44 (92%)
Mostly Sepedi	26 (59%)
Mostly Afrikaans	7 (15%)
Mostly Setswana	3 (6%)
Mostly Xitsonga	7 (15%)
Mostly Tshivenda	2 (4%)
Mostly isiNdebele	1 (2%)
Mostly SeSotho	0 (0%)
Mostly SiSwati	0 (0%)
Mostly isiXhosa	0 (0%)
Mostly isiZulu	0 (0%)

* These were meant to be mutually exclusive response items. However, in some cases researchers indicated more than one ‘majority’ language set, e.g. ‘mostly English’ and ‘mostly Sepedi’.

Forty four (92%) of the 48 classroom book collections mostly had books available in English.

Twenty six (59%) of the 48 collections had books mostly available in Sepedi.

5.4.1.5 Learners' access to and use of book collections and other bound material during classroom observations

During the observations learners in very few classes were seen to handle picture or story books, or magazines. Table 5.15 shows results of our observations.

TABLE 5.15: TYPE OF BOOKS OR OTHER BOUND MATERIAL (BESIDES TEXTBOOKS/READERS) MOST AND LEAST COMMONLY HANDLED BY LEARNERS DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Type of books/other bound material learners themselves actually handled during the observation period	Number of classes
Picture books n (valid) = 74	8 (11%)
Magazines n (valid) = 74	8 (11%)
Story books n (valid) = 74	5 (7)%
Non-fiction or information books n (valid) = 74	0
Dictionaries n (valid) = 74	0

Learners were not seen handling or using dictionaries or non-fiction/informational books during any of the observations.⁶

5.5 Do school and classroom environments promote and enhance Grade 1-4 mother-tongue and first additional language literacy development?

Broadly speaking, **researchers did not note school and classroom environments that particularly promoted and enhanced literacy development or a reading and book culture.** For example, three quarters of the school principals reported that their schools do not have libraries that are in use. The use of hymn books/song sheets (i.e. text) in assembly was noted in only one school.

Most Grade 1-4 classrooms observed in the Limpopo primary schools gave the overall impression of having a range of textual material (such as wall charts, pictures or texts made by the teacher; commercially-made wall charts/pictures/texts; signs; high frequency words; words matched to pictures; vowels; letters of the alphabet; and numbers) on *display on the walls*. Some classrooms were 'colourful' and had a range of well-displayed appropriate material.

Nevertheless, some of the display material had clearly been up for a long time and needed to be replaced or removed. Furthermore, the most common source of learning material on classroom walls was the teacher (i.e. hand-made by teacher). A problem with this is that teachers sometimes spelt words incorrectly or provided incorrect or inaccurate information or material. For example, in one class, the teacher had drawn a map of Southern Africa 'free-hand' rather than by tracing it. As a result, the map was very

⁶ The discussion in Chapter 3 would suggest that these children would not in any case be able to make any productive use of informational books.

misleading and inaccurate. Teachers definitely needed more commercially-produced *learning* material for their classroom walls. There was very little evidence of bi-lingual print material on display or of posters that accompany readers or textbooks. Less than half the classes had any examples of learners' own work on display.

There were classrooms where *book collections*, consisted of picture books, story books and magazines in English/Afrikaans and learners' mother tongue. Nonetheless, there is clearly a need for more mother-tongue and English/Afrikaans reading material with appropriate settings and engaging illustrations. In particular, there is a need for non-fiction/informational books and dictionaries with appropriate language, levels and colourful pictures.

In terms of access and use, most classroom book collections were neither 'on view' nor easily accessible to learners – rather, books were kept out of sight in storage cupboards. Whilst security and safety may have been barriers to achieving this goal in some classrooms, the impression gained from the observations is that, where there was a book collection, most learners were not being provided any opportunities to handle or select the books themselves. Most learners were not being provided with reading experiences with a wide variety of genres of 'real' books (in particular a range of non-fiction books including dictionaries) in schools and classrooms.

In Chapter 6 we discuss the provisioning, availability and utilisation of across-the-curriculum mother-tongue and First Additional Language learner and teacher support material in schools and classrooms.

CHAPTER 6: LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT MATERIAL

Meta-analyses and research syntheses of evidence from international school effectiveness studies (for example, Schmidt *et al.*, 2001; Muller with Roberts, 2000; Creemers, 1996) show that the four classroom-level factors consistently associated with high achievement are:

- the availability of textbooks and other learner support material;
- the quality of teaching and teacher expertise;
- time on task and the cognitive demands made of learners; and
- opportunity-to-learn, that is, ‘curriculum exposure’ or the knowledge and skills actually made available to learners in classrooms.

Chapter 7 of this report will discuss findings on time on task and the writing and reading demands made on learners or the literacy learning opportunities made available to learners in relation to grade-level requirements. Chapter 8 discusses the quality of literacy instruction in the classrooms. Chapter 9 elaborates on language and literacy curriculum planning and teachers’ assessment of literacy learning. This chapter presents findings on the provision, availability and use of textbooks and readers and other textual support material in the sample of Limpopo schools and classrooms.

6.1 Availability and use of textbooks and readers in schools

Well-structured series of textbooks and readers that cover the grade curriculum and that sequence and address progression of core literacy and language skills, concepts and content across grade levels and learning phases provide crucial resources for teachers both in covering the curriculum and in planning lessons. They help bring structure and coherence to individual teacher’s lesson and term and year planning (Ensor *et al.*, 2002).

Well-designed textbooks and readers arrange successive activities and exercises in terms of increasing cognitive and conceptual complexity. Later activities consolidate and build on earlier ones and earlier activities prepare children for the language, concepts and reading and writing demands they will come across in later tasks (Macdonald, 2007). The systematic use of a good series of textbooks and readers in class thus sets up a pedagogic trajectory or ‘pathway’ for both teachers and learners (Ensor *et al.*, 2002). Reading series that are designed to foster increasing reading independence, and textbook series that consolidate and build on learning and language experiences from one book to the next should thus form a core component of primary school teachers’ learning programmes, particularly Foundation Phase literacy programmes (Chall, 1990; 2000).

6.1.1 Textbooks and readers used by teachers in the Limpopo study

In the Limpopo study, Grade 1-4 teachers were asked to show researchers the learner textbooks and readers that they *most* use with their classes. The following is the information provided:

6.1.1.1 Home Language

Home Language (L1) readers

Fifty nine (74% or three quarters) of the 80 teachers surveyed were able to show researchers copies of the **Home Language readers** they ostensibly use with their classes.

Table 6.1 provides the names of the publishers of the readers shown and the number of these teachers who said they used publications by the various publishers for teaching their classes.

TABLE 6.1: PUBLISHERS OF HOME LANGUAGE READERS THAT TEACHERS SHOWED RESEARCHERS

Publisher	Number of teachers n (valid) = 59
Maskew-Miller Longman	21 (36%)
Phumelela	10 (17%)
Kagiso Education	9 (15%)
MacMillan	5 (8%)
Shuter & Shooter*	5 (8%)
Nasou-Via-Afrika	3 (5%)
Vivlia	2 (3%)
NAM Publishers	2 (3%)
Clever books	1 (2%)
Kalahari Production & Booksellers	1 (2%)
Best Books	1 (2%)

* One teacher showed two readers – one published by Phumelela and one by Shuter & Shooter.

Just over a third of the teachers said they use publications by Maskew-Miller Longman.

Home Language textbooks

Thirty nine (36% or just over a third) of the 80 teachers surveyed showed researchers copies of the **Home Language Textbooks** they reported using with their classes. Table 6.2 show the publishers of HL textbooks shown to researchers.

TABLE 6.2: PUBLISHERS OF HOME LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS THAT TEACHERS SHOWED

Publisher	Number of teachers n=39
Maskew-Miller Longman	12 (31%)
Phumelela	7 (18%)
Kagiso	7 (18%)
MacMillan	3 (8%)
Shuter & Shooter	2 (5%)
NAM Publishers	2 (5%)
Clever Books	2 (5%)
Educum	1 (3%)
Scorpion Publications	1 (3%)
Nasou-Via Afrika	1 (3%)
A M Molefa PR Madiba (sic)	1 (3%)

Almost a third of the teachers said they used publications by Maskew-Miller Longman.

6.1.1.2 First Additional Language (FAL)

FAL readers

Thirty of the teachers surveyed showed researchers copies of the FAL readers they reportedly use with their classes. Table 6.3 provides the publishers of the FAL readers shown.

TABLE 6.3: PUBLISHERS OF THE FAL READERS THAT TEACHERS SHOWED RESEARCHERS

Publisher	Number of teachers n=30
MacMillan	6 (20%)
Maskew-Miller Longman	5 (17%)
Kagiso	4 (13%)
Molteno*	3 (10%)
Oxford	3 (10%)
Shuter & Shooter	2 (7%)
Phumelela	1 (3%)
NAM publishers	1 (3%)
Bateleur Publishers	1 (3%)
Best Books	1 (3%)
Heinemann	1 (3%)
JUTA	1 (3%)
Clever Books	1 (3%)

* Some of the books that researchers saw were 'old' Molteno books - as early as the late 1970s and the 1990s – before Maskew Miller became the Molteno publisher. There may thus have been some confusion on the part of researchers about Molteno publications and Maskew-Miller publications. It was difficult for some of the fieldworkers to distinguish between the newer Molteno materials published by Maskew-Miller Longman and the older ones published under Molteno's brandname (e.g., De Jager Haum earlier, and Oxford for readers).

Just over a third of the teachers said they use publications by MacMillan or Maskew-Miller Longman.

FAL textbooks

Twenty five of the teachers surveyed showed researchers copies of the **FAL** textbooks they reportedly use with their classes.

TABLE 6.4: PUBLISHERS OF FAL TEXTBOOKS THAT TEACHERS SHOWED RESEARCHERS

Publisher	Number of teachers n=25
Oxford	5 (20%)
Maskew-Miller Longman	5 (20%)
Clever Books	3 (12%)
Kagiso	2 (8%)
MacMillan	2 (8%)
Best Books	2 (8%)
Molteno*	1 (4%)
Shuter & Shooter	1 (4%)
Heineman	1 (4%)
Nasou-Via-Afrika	1 (4%)
Hodder & Stoughton	1 (4%)
Action Publishers	1(4%)

* Maskew Miller became the Molteno publisher. This was probably an 'old' Molteno book.

Forty percent of the teachers said they used publications by Oxford or Maskew-Miller Longman.

6.1.1.3 Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills textbooks

Forty-four (55% or just over half) of the teachers surveyed showed researchers copies of the Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks they reported using with their classes.

TABLE 6.5: PUBLISHERS OF NUMERACY/MATHEMATICS TEXTBOOKS THAT TEACHERS SHOWED RESEARCHERS

Publisher	Number of teachers n=44
Maskew-Miller Longman	7 (16%)
Heineman	6 (14%)
Clever Books	6 (14%)
Best Books	4 (9%)
Kagiso	4 (9%)
ACE	3 (7%)
JUTA	3 (7%)
Nasou-Via-Afrika	2 (5%)
Shuter & Shooter	2 (5%)
Centaur	1 (2%)
Rostrum	1 (2%)
Bateleur Books	1 (2%)
Khanyisa Education Programme	1 (2%)
Interpak Books	1 (2%)
NAM Publishers	1 (2%)
MacMillan	1 (2%)

Almost a third of the teachers said they used publications by Maskew-Miller Longman and Heineman.

Thirty two (53%) of the 60 Grade 1-3 teachers surveyed were able to show researchers the Life Skills textbooks they reported using with their classes.

Tables 6.1 to 6.5 provided information from those teachers who were able to show researchers copies of the books they use with their classes. Table 6.6 below provides a summary of publishers of Home Language, FAL, Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills textbooks/readers most commonly shown by the teachers.¹

TABLE 6.6: PUBLISHERS OF TEXTBOOKS/READERS REPORTEDLY MOST USED BY TEACHERS

Home language (L1)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics	Life Skills (Gr 1-3)
Readers n=59	Textbooks n=39	Readers n=30	Textbooks n=25	Textbooks n=44	Textbooks n=32
Maskew-Miller Longman 21 (36%)	Maskew-Miller Longman 12 (31%)	MacMillan 6 (20%)	Maskew-Miller Longman & Oxford 5 (20%) each	Maskew-Miller Longman 7 (16%)	Maskew-Miller Longman 12 (38%)

¹ Data from interviews with district officials seems to confirm that more commonly used publications are those of Maskew-Miller Longman, MacMillan and Oxford.

However, Table 6.1 to 6.5 also show that a wide variety of different textbooks and readers are being used across Grade 1-4 classes. This has implications because, as Macdonald (2007) points out, ‘different texts prepare learners in different ways’. A well-structured series shows clear progression of difficulty, and because the vocabulary or content complexity, etc. is developed incrementally, it is important that the series are used in a set sequence.

Table 6.7 provides data on Home Language and FAL books actually seen² being used during the classroom observations.

TABLE 6.7: TEXTBOOKS/READERS MOST COMMONLY SEEN BEING USED DURING THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Learning area	Number of classes	
	Reader	Textbook
Home Language/Literacy	Maskew-Miller Longman – 15* (41% of n=37 observations) (* 11 of which for Gr 1) [Followed by Macmillan with 8]	Maskew-Miller Longman – 10* (34% of n=29 observations) (* 8 of which for Gr 1) [Followed by Macmillan with 4]
FAL	Maskew-Miller Longman – 3 Kagiso – 3 (each 20% of n=15 observations)	Maskew-Miller Longman – 16* (62% of n=26 observations) (* one was an Afrikaans textbook)

The Maskew-Miller Longman readers and textbooks are dominant. They largely have been identified as Molteno *Breakthrough* materials, although some of them could again be older works. However, in three cases in each “reader” and two cases in each “textbook” cell, Kagiso³ materials were also pointed out by the observers to be newer *Bridge to English* Molteno materials. In all this would point to the use by certain teachers of Molteno materials as readers during the HL classroom observations, and their predominant use by teachers as textbooks during FAL classroom observations. In addition to the very low incidence (ranging from 15 to 37 incidences out of almost 80 observed sessions) of the observed use of literacy materials in classrooms by teachers, in the form of readers and textbooks respectively, the low use made of readers by teachers during FAL classroom observations was of particular concern. Should one want to assume that lessons would normally either be a grammar lesson, or a more general reading lesson, and therefore add the total row observations together, one would have observed literacy materials-based activity in just over 80% of the HL observations, but in only 50% of the FAL observations, which may remain problematic in the case of FAL. Of even greater concern is that this situation does not translate into any good incidence of learners handling and using readers and textbooks during observations. This is discussed in Section 6.1.2. Assessing the actual (value of the) use of readers and books by teachers in the observations can be difficult when the learners themselves don’t actually have/use the books.

² The trends reported in Table 6.7 should be interpreted with caution. Some observers were found to have included uncritically the titles of books that teachers may merely have shown them after the lesson, assumedly claiming to have used them in the preparation, but not necessarily in the presentation of the lesson. Over-reporting could have occurred in this way.

³ Who took over from De Jager Haum.

6.1.2 Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners in class and at home

Providing individual learners with access to their *own* textbooks and readers presents readily available work for them, and makes it possible for individuals to work ahead on their own in class. It also makes it possible for teachers to give learners class- or homework and helps teachers cope with large classes.

6.1.2.1 Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners in class

In interviews with district officials, participants were asked whether every Foundation Phase (Grade 1-3) learner in each of the five districts' primary schools has their own textbook and/or reader in 2007 for Home Language; First Additional Language; Numeracy; and Life Skills. Table 6.8 reflects the responses, which are disconcerting.⁴

TABLE 6.8: DISTRICT REPORTS ON AVAILABILITY OF TEXTBOOKS/ READERS FOR LEARNERS

Number of district responses	HL reader	HL textbook	FAL reader	FAL textbook	Numeracy textbook	Life Skills textbook
Yes	2	2	2	2	2	2
No	1	1	1	1	1	1
No consensus	2	2	2	2	2	2

The teacher questionnaires asked Grade 1-4 teachers how many of the textbooks/readers were actually available for learners themselves to use in their classes. Table 6.9 provides this data.

TABLE 6.9: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON THE NUMBER OF TEXTBOOKS/ READERS AVAILABLE FOR USE IN LAs

Number available	Number of teachers					
	Home language (L1)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics	Life Skills (Gr 1-3)
	Readers n=57	Textbooks n=53	Readers n=39	Textbooks n=41	Textbooks n=52	Textbooks n=48
None/only one copy for the teacher	15 (27%)	15 (28%)	17 (43%)	23 (56%)	30 (58%)	32 (67%)
Copies for learners but not enough for each to have a copy	21 (37%)	19 (36%)	13 (33%)	9 (22%)	11 (21%)	7 (15%)
One /own copy per learner	21 (37%)	18 (34%)	9 (23%)	9 (22%)	11 (21%)	9 (19%)

Just over a third of the teachers reported that there were copies of Home Language readers and textbooks for learners but not enough for each to have his/her own copy. Just over a third reported that there was one copy per learner.

More than half the teachers reported having no or only a copy for the teacher of Life Skills and Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks. This is a devastating finding because Life Skills fans out into most of the Learning Areas in the Intermediate Phase, and Life Skills should be just as robust as the other two LAs in the Foundation Phase.

⁴ Also in view of the fact that district officials often felt that factors outside of their control were to blame.

Table 6.10 provides information from the *classroom observations* on the number of classes where one copy of Home Language and FAL readers/textbooks and Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks was available per learner (when used in class).

TABLE 6.10: NUMBER OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS WHERE HOME LANGUAGE (L1) AND FAL AND/OR NUMERACY/MATHS TEXTBOOKS/READERS WERE USED AND THERE WAS ONE COPY PER LEARNER

Number of observations				
Home language (L1) (Grades 1-4)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics (Grades 1-4)
Readers n=35	Textbooks n=18	Readers n=8	Textbooks n=13	Textbook n=13
11 (31%)	6 (33%)	2 (25%)	2 (11%)	4 (31%)

Each learner had his/her own **Home Language reader** in just under a third of the classes where readers were used during the observation period.

Each learner had his/her own **Home Language textbook** in approximately a third of the classes where textbooks were used during the observation period.

Each learner had his/her own **Numeracy/Mathematics textbook** in just under a third of the classes where textbooks were used during the observation period.

Each learner had his/her own **FAL reader** in a quarter of the classes where FAL readers were used during the observations.

Each learner had his/her own **FAL textbook** in 11% of the classes where FAL textbooks were used during the observations. Once again the final two observations are of grave concern.

Table 6.11 provides information from the *classroom observations* on the number of classes where one copy of the Life Skills, Social Science or Natural Science textbooks was available per learner (when these were used in class).

TABLE 6.11: NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS WHERE LIFE SKILLS, SOCIAL SCIENCE, AND NATURAL SCIENCE TEXTBOOKS WERE USED AND THERE WAS ONE COPY PER LEARNER

Number of observations		
Life Skills (Grades 1-3) n=7	Social Sciences (Grade 4 only) n=3	Natural Sciences (Grade 4 only) n=2
0	0	1

In the few cases where **Life Skills** and **Social Sciences** books were used during the observations, none of the classes had one textbook available per learner.

One class evidently had one copy of the **Natural Sciences** textbooks per learner.

In the interviews with district officials, researchers asked officials in each district whether every Grade 1-3 learner in their district had their own Numeracy and Life Skills textbook in the mother tongue. Table 6.12 shows the number of districts that reported that this was or was not the case.

TABLE 6.12: DISTRICT REPORTS ON THE AVAILABILITY OF FOUNDATION PHASE NUMERACY AND LIFE SKILLS MOTHER-TONGUE TEXTBOOKS

Grade	Learning Area	Yes	No	Don't know
Grade 1	Numeracy/Maths	2 districts	3 districts	0
	Life Skills	2 districts	3 districts	0
Grade 2	Numeracy/Maths	1 district	3 districts	1 district
	Life Skills	1 district	3 districts	1 district
Grade 3	Numeracy/Maths	1 district	3 districts	1 district
	Life Skills	1 district	3 districts	1 district

The teacher questionnaires also asked teachers specifically about the availability of *mother-tongue* versions of Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills books for learners. Table 6.13 provides a summary of teachers' reports.

TABLE 6.13: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON THE NUMBER OF TEXTBOOKS AVAILABLE IN MOTHER-TONGUE FOR NUMERACY/MATHEMATICS AND LIFE SKILLS

Number of mother-tongue textbooks available	Number of classes	
	Numeracy/Maths (Gr 1-4) n (valid)=62	Life Skills (Gr 1-3) n (valid)=52
None/only one copy for the teacher	53 (85%)	44 (84%)
Copies for learners but not enough for each to have own copy	3 (5%)	3 (6%)
One copy per learner	6 (10%)	5 (10%)

The majority of teachers reported that, in their classes, no *mother-tongue* versions were available for learners for **Numeracy/Mathematics** and **Life Skills**.

Table 6.14 provides data on the language used in the Numeracy/Mathematics, Life Skills and Natural Sciences books used by learners in the *classroom observations* (regardless of learners having a copy for themselves or sharing copies).

TABLE 6.14: LANGUAGE OF NUMERACY/MATHEMATICS, NATURAL SCIENCE, AND SOCIAL SCIENCE TEXTBOOKS USED BY LEARNERS DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS (Gr 1-4)*

Language used	Number of observations			
	Numeracy/ Mathematics textbook (Gr 1-4) n=12	Life Skills textbook (Grades 1-3) n=7	Natural Science textbook (Grade 4 only) n=3	Social Science Textbook (Grade 4 only) n=1
English	6 (2 of which were Gr 4 classes)	3	2	1
Afrikaans	0	0	0	0
Sepedi	2	1	1	0
Setswana	0	0	0	0
Tshivenda	1	1	0	0
Xitsonga	3	2	0	0
Bilingual (2 or more languages)	1	0	0	0

* This is regardless of whether there was one copy per learner or whether learners had to share copies.

Classroom observation data seem to confirm teachers' reports on the lack of availability of *mother-tongue Numeracy/Mathematics* and *Life Skills* books for use by learners in class.

Teachers were also asked whether they thought they had enough copies of the textbooks/readers for their classes. Table 6.15 below shows that the majority of teachers said that, in their opinion, they did not have enough copies of textbooks and readers available for use in class, and indeed needed more.

TABLE 6.15: NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO BELIEVE THEY HAVE ENOUGH COPIES OF TEXTBOOKS/READERS AVAILABLE FOR USE IN LAs

Number of teachers					
Home language (L1)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics	Life Skills (Gr 1-3)
Readers n=62	Textbooks n=52	Readers n=38	Textbooks n=42	Textbooks n=56	Textbooks n=51
15 (8%)	18 (35%)	11 (29%)	13 (31%)	11 (20%)	8 (16%)

A number of teachers said that they make copies of pages of books for learners. In Chapter 7, we show that, during the classroom observations, many teachers used the chalkboard to write exercises for learners to complete.

In the 18 SMT focus-group interviews, school management was asked whether every Foundation Phase learner in their school had their own Home Language, FAL, Numeracy and Life Skills textbook/reader in 2007. Table 6.16 shows their responses.

TABLE 6.16: SMT REPORTS ON WHETHER EVERY FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNER HAS OWN TEXTBOOKS AND READERS

Learning Area	Number of SMTs that said “yes”	Number that said “no”
Home language (HL) n(valid) = 18	7	11
First additional language n(valid) = 15	5	10
Numeracy n(valid) = 17	5	12
Life Skills n(valid) = 16	5	11

SMT groups were also asked whether every Foundation Phase learner had their own Numeracy and Life Skills textbook in the mother tongue. Table 6.17 shows their reports.

SMT responses as reflected in Tables 6.16 and 6.17 appear to confirm shortages in most schools.

TABLE 6.17: NUMBER OF SMTs THAT REPORTED THAT EVERY FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNER AT THEIR SCHOOL HAS OWN NUMERACY AND LIFE SKILLS TEXTBOOK IN MOTHER TONGUE

Learning Area	Grade 1 n (valid) = 16	Grade 2 n (valid) = 12	Grade 3 n (valid) = 16
Numeracy	6	5	3
Life Skills	5	5	3

6.1.2.2 Availability of textbooks/readers for use by learners at home

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked where LSM/textbooks/readers that are currently in use at the school are kept during term time. Twenty five percent of the principals said that they are kept on the school property but not in classrooms. Forty percent reported that teachers keep them in their classrooms. Only 35% (7) said that learners have them and take them home.

In the teacher questionnaires, teachers reported on where class LSM was kept overnight. Table 6.18 shows their responses.

TABLE 6.18: TEACHERS’ REPORTS ON WHERE CLASS TEXTBOOKS/ READERS ARE USUALLY KEPT OVERNIGHT

Place	Number of teachers n (valid) = 79
On school property but not in classroom, e.g. storeroom/library	12 (15%)
Kept in classroom	59 (75%)
Learners take them home	7 (9%)
Other*	1 (1%)

* One teacher said she took her own copies home.

Most teachers said that learners are not allowed to take books home.

During the observations there was evidence of learners in only 11 classes being allowed to take any textbooks or readers home.

6.2 Availability and use of other textual learning and teaching support material in classrooms

Other textual material (besides books/booklets – for example, loose worksheets, posters, etc.) was used for teaching during 54 (72%) of 75 observation periods where this data was recorded. Half of the material that was used was teacher-made. The other half was commercially-produced (this included material from NGOs or the DoE). In 67% of the cases the material was used by the teacher for teaching as opposed to 48% of the cases where the material was actually given to learners to use.

Seventy five records show that 60 (80%) classes received no pre-prepared handouts (notes) on any of the work covered.

6.3 Selection of learner support material for schools

In the teacher focus-group interviews, teachers indicated that selection of LSMs by themselves or the school was influenced by whichever publishers had visited the school or nearest multi-purpose centre, and which sample copies of materials they could access. Sometimes, book orders were based on an arbitrary selection from a book list, and sometimes based on prior knowledge of a publisher or series. However, teachers indicated that they did not feel equipped to make a reliable selection nor did they indicate that they had the necessary knowledge or expertise to inform the selection process. This is for two reasons. First, they never get to physically see the full range on the list, and make a comparison. Secondly, they never developed the capacity, because regardless of what they ordered, the circuit office often takes it upon themselves to order the same books for all their schools.

Four of the five districts indicated (in the interviews with district officials) that Foundation Phase teachers in their districts are supplied with information on educational publishers. In open-ended questions, district officials said that exhibitions of Foundation Phase textbooks and readers are held. Only one of the five districts reported that their district usually recommends textbooks or readers for the Foundation Phase. However, four groups of district officials said that their districts usually make the final decision about which particular textbooks or readers are supplied to schools.

Indeed, district officials in all five districts specified that amongst the types of LDoE school-management support provided in 2006 and/or 2007, but that was also still needed ‘to a great extent’ in schools, is ‘developing systems for selecting teaching and learning support material that are appropriate and responsive to the needs of schools’ learners.’

6.3.1 Teacher and LDoE satisfaction with the quality of textbooks/readers

Of interest is that, when asked to respond to a range of possible barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools in the district interviews, none of the districts identified ‘poorly designed textbooks/readers that do not provide enough support to learners and teachers’ as the biggest barrier. Two district groups said it was a barrier but not the biggest barrier and two districts specified that it is not a barrier at all.

In the teacher questionnaires teachers were asked to comment on the usefulness of the textbooks/readers they use, specifically, whether they found the books appropriate for

their learners in terms of: a) the grade level (not too easy/difficult); and b) the language level for their learners. Table 6.19 shows the findings.

TABLE 6.19: NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO REPORTED THAT THEY FOUND THE READERS/TEXTBOOKS USED APPROPRIATE FOR THEIR LEARNERS IN TERMS OF GRADE LEVEL

Home language (L1)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics	Life Skills (Gr 1-3)
Readers n=56	Textbooks n=42	Readers n=30	Textbooks n=27	Textbooks n=43	Textbooks n=34
40 (71%)	34 (81%)	18 (60%)	20 (74%)	35 (81%)	25 (74%)

Data from the teacher questionnaires indicate that, in general teachers thought the books they used were appropriate for their learners' grade level but that some teachers are least satisfied with the *grade level* of available FAL readers (i.e. some teachers either found them 'too difficult' or 'too easy'). Table 6.20 shows teachers' views on language levels of textbooks/readers.

TABLE 6.20: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON HOW APPROPRIATE THEY FOUND THE READERS/TEXTBOOKS THEY USE FOR THEIR LEARNERS IN TERMS OF LANGUAGE LEVEL

Home language (L1)		FAL		Numeracy/ Mathematics	Life Skills (Gr 1-3 only)
Readers n=50	Textbooks n=43	Readers n=23	Textbooks n=25	Textbooks n=42	Textbooks n=32
36 (72%)	35 (81%)	15(65%)	20 (80%)	27 (64%)	20 (63%)

In their responses to the teacher questionnaires, most teachers said that they thought the language level of books they used were appropriate for their learners. Data indicate that some teachers are less satisfied with the *language level* of available FAL readers, Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks and Life Skills textbooks.

However, in the open-ended questions on the teacher questionnaire and in the focus group interviews, some teachers complained about the quality of some mother-tongue books, for example, '*Sepedi books are not of a good standard*'. Others said that '*the standard of material is too high*' and textbooks are '*too difficult for learners' age*'; '*reading material should suite the grade for which they are intended*'; '*reading material is too difficult and should be simpler*'; '*reading books in First Additional Language are too difficult, there may be simpler books such as Day-by-Day*'. In one case, a Grade 2 teacher said that '*the Grade 2 English reader is too difficult for learners because it assumes that learners have completed the Grade R and Grade 1 readers in the series when learners have had no previous exposure to English*'.

At least two researchers found that teachers were using Numeracy/Mathematics textbooks for an earlier grade than the one they were teaching (i.e., a Grade 2 textbook for Grade 3 learners). When questioned about this, the teachers said that learners could not read nor understand the English language content of the grade appropriate materials.

For an expert evaluation of existing learner support materials (readers and textbooks) which are used in schools in Limpopo Province in order to assess whether or not the

literacy demands of the materials are aligned with what learners need to be able to read in Grades 3 and 4, refer to the separate materials review technical reports (Macdonald, 2007). One report covers Grade 1 to 3 materials, and the other Grade 4.

6.4 School management of learner support material

Properly maintained school inventories of textbooks, readers and other learning material ensure maximum availability and efficient processing, distribution and retrieval of textbooks and other material.

6.4.1 Schools' inventory of textbooks, readers and other learning material

For the Limpopo study, researchers completed a 'school conditions and school document review' instrument which comprised a review of each school's inventory of textbooks, readers and other learning material. Although researchers were able to obtain inventories of textbooks, readers and other learning materials at 70% (14) of the 20 schools, most were not proper inventories but files with invoices and requisition forms. Table 6.21 shows the type of records mostly and least commonly kept.

In most cases where there were 'inventories', records were kept of delivery/acquisitions. Roughly half of the inventories seen had the number ordered and some form of distribution record.

TABLE 6.21: INFORMATION IN LSM "ASSET" RECORDS FOR ALL GRADES FOR 2006

Type of information in records	Number of inventories that showed/did not reflect this information for all grades	
	Yes	No
Number ordered n (valid) = 12	6 (50%)	6 (50%)
Delivery/acquisitions (number received) n = 14	10 (71%)	4 (29%)
Total number of copies available n = 14	6 (43%)	8 (57%)
Distribution record (who the LSM/books were given to) n (valid) = 13	7 (54%)	6 (46%)
Retrieval (number returned) n = 14	6 (43%)	8 (57%)
Condition (e.g. poor; usable/fair; good/new) n = 14	2 (14%)	12 (86%)
Number written off or lost n = 14	3 (21%)	11 (79%)
What happened to material no longer in use n (valid) = 11	2 (18%)	9 (82%)

In the principal questionnaires, 12 (76%) of the principals reported that their schools have secure storeroom/s for storing textbooks and other learning support material safely against theft. Six (33%) said their schools did not have this facility.

District officials in all five districts specified that amongst the types of LDoE school-management support reportedly provided in 2006 and/or 2007, but that was also still needed 'to a great extent', is that of 'developing systems for ordering, securing, storing, issuing, monitoring, retrieving and caring for teaching and Learning Support Material.'

6.5 Is there effective provisioning, availability and utilisation of across-the-curriculum mother-tongue and first additional language learner and teacher support material in schools and classes?

Most of the Limpopo Grade 1-4 classrooms visited seemed to have a shortage of readers and textbooks for learners, especially mother-tongue versions in Grade 1-3. Most teachers said they had insufficient copies of books for their classes. In the classroom observations, there was evidence of obvious shortages. In many cases, either only the teacher had a copy of the book/s used, or there were too few copies for each learner to have his/her own copy.

When asked to respond to a range of possible barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools in the district interviews, only one district group identified the 'lack of availability of mother-tongue textbooks/readers for learners' as one of the biggest barriers whilst four district groups said that although this was a barrier 'it was not the biggest barrier'. However, in the teacher focus-group interviews, teachers in each school stated categorically that a lack of reading materials (readers) and textbooks was a key reason for learners' poor literacy achievement. Teachers blame the Department for non-delivery of an adequate supply of LSMs. Most claim that although book orders are forwarded to the Department towards the end of each school year, the schools seldom receive any of the book orders. Alternatively, if they do receive books, these are not the ones which were ordered by the school.

In the interviews with district officials in each of the five districts, none of the participants were able to provide the number of primary schools in their district that have not yet received all the Foundation Phase textbooks or readers that they ordered for use in 2007. It is possible that textbooks and readers are more available than it appeared at the schools visited but that schools or teachers are not distributing available books to their classes on the grounds that learners might damage them or lose them. It may be the case that, although class sets of textbooks/readers are available, learners themselves are simply not getting access to the books for use in class. Certainly researchers noted that 'older' textbooks and reader that were still usable were evident in some classrooms but were not being used by teachers. Teachers did not regard these as potential alternative material where newer books were not available.

Nevertheless, what is clear from the study is that not enough learners are getting to handle books themselves. Instead, as we will see in Chapter 7, teachers use photocopies of pages of books, or, more commonly, write exercises for learners on the chalkboard. This reduces learners' opportunity to handle bound material and develop a concept of print and printed material. Learners have insufficient direct exposure to the textbooks and readers and are consequently deprived of opportunities to find out how books work. Learners who complete work in class ahead of others cannot easily be given additional tasks to carry on with (impacting on pacing in class). Furthermore, very few classes are allowed to take books home which means that learners are denied opportunities to read or work independently at home.

There is also an implicit risk in teachers selecting single activities or exercises from one book or combinations of books and using them independently. This is that, unless teachers are consciously structuring and building links between the tasks that they give their learners, tasks may not be sequenced sufficiently coherently to develop literacy. Teachers may select tasks randomly so that they are given to learners as a series of

disconnected exercises or activities rather than in a systematic and developmentally challenging fashion. This course of action means that a cognitively based approach to learning is not possible – a grave error, but one which teachers are not aware of.

There was not much evidence of the same series of textbooks and readers being used across grades within schools. Indeed, an essential dimension of training for teachers in the use of textbooks or readers should be providing guidance in the ways in which series, chapters and tasks are structured and linked to each other and of the ways in which series that cover more than one grade level are designed to assist with progression from one grade to the next. Conceptually a well-constructed series reflects clear progression in terms of difficulty, as already noted in the previous paragraph.

In focus-group interviews with district officials from the five districts, officials in one district maintained that all primary school teachers in their district had been provided with support and guidance in regard to the use of Teaching and Learning Support Material in class. Three of the district groups said that this type of support had been provided to most teachers. Only one group reported that this kind of support and guidance had not been provided to teachers in their district.

However, data from the study showed that 61% of 76 teachers said they had had no training in using the textbooks/readers that they use with their classes. Thirty (39%) of 76 teachers reported that they had received some training in using the textbooks/readers that they used. Forty six (61%) said they had had no training. Table 6.22 provides teachers' reports on training received for textbooks/readers in different Learning Areas. (Training is difficult to provide in far-flung areas because it is only allowed in the afternoons after schools have closed, i.e. usually between 13:00 and 15:00. The need for training illustrates the inadequacy of PRESET for the teachers.

TABLE 6.22: NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO REPORTED HAVING ANY TRAINING IN USING THE TEXTBOOKS/READERS THEY USE FOR DIFFERENT LAs

Learning Area	Number of teachers
Home language n (valid) = 64	21 (33%)
FAL n (valid) = 48	10 (21%)
Numeracy/Maths n (valid) = 58	17 (29%)
Life Skills (Gr 1-3 only) n (valid)=48	8 (17%)
Social Sciences (Gr 4 only) n (valid)=10	2 (20%)
Natural Sciences (Gr 4 only) n (valid) = 9	1 (11%)

Data also indicates that school management and control of textbooks and other learner support materials need to improve.

In Chapter 7 we discuss the extent to which schools and teachers are organising and managing time on task and instruction so as to maximise learners' opportunities to participate in language and literacy learning. Findings demonstrate the impact that a lack of individual textbooks and readers has on learners' opportunities to read and write in

class. In Chapter 8 we illustrate some of the ways in which learners' lack of readers and textbooks constrains teachers' literacy teaching.

As we will also show in the next chapter, there was little evidence in the Limpopo classrooms of learners copying notes or taking down dictated notes in any of the grades. In most classes teachers are not using textbooks and are writing exercises *not* notes on the chalkboard. Without handouts or their own copies of textbooks to take home, most learners had no permanent record of work covered in class. This raises concerns about how learners review work covered, learn for tests or prepare for other forms of assessment.⁵

⁵ Cases were observed where handouts had been pasted into A4 exercise books, but these were handed back to the teacher.

CHAPTER 7: TIME ON TASK AND TASK DEMANDS

In Chapter 7 we examine the Limpopo schools' and teachers' organisation and management of time on task. In particular, we provide details on Grade 1-4 teacher's organisation and management of instruction in class so as to maximise learners' opportunities to participate in grade-level reading and writing in mother tongue and First Additional Language.

The term 'time on task' generally refers to the time learners spend in classrooms. School-level management problems and inefficiency, such as staff meetings taking place during timetabled teaching time, cause disruptions to time on task in class. Teacher and learner attendance at school also impact on time on task in class. Time may also be lost because a teacher attends to his/her private responsibilities. High levels of learner absenteeism and late arrival at school reflect less time on task in class - learners who are frequently absent or late have less exposure to teaching than their peers (Reeves, 2001). Obviously outside interruptions during classroom instruction also need to be minimal (American Association of School Librarians, 2007).

In South Africa researchers have reported loss of time to teaching for example through staff and other meetings, teacher/learner absenteeism, teachers using class time to mark learners' work, etc. (Taylor and Vinjevold, 1999; Seekings, 2001). Teaching time is also lost because of funerals/memorial services, cultural/sporting events and teacher attendance at training workshops (Reeves, 2001). Although not the main focus of the Limpopo study, Section 7.1 discusses some of the school-level factors that do and do not appear to be impacting on time on task in the sample of Limpopo classrooms.

7.1 School organisation and management of time on task

During the two-day school visits, researchers observed the extent to which teachers arrived late for school and returned speedily to their classes after break. They noted interruptions and disruptions from outside during the classroom observations. In addition, researchers asked other role players in the schools about the extent to which teacher late-coming and attendance at school and in class were problems at their schools. Staff were asked if and how their schools usually made up time lost to teaching as well as how Grade R/1-4 classes were supervised when teachers were absent.

7.1.1 Time registers

Seventy six percent of the principals (in the principal questionnaires) maintained that they keep school records of teaching time or days missed in log books or time registers as opposed to some other type of record such as simply making a note of it on a calendar.

7.1.2 Disruptions to teaching and catching up time lost to teaching

Principals were asked how many days were lost because of teachers' strike action in 2007. On average principals reported that 16 days had been lost to teaching due to industrial action but responses ranged from 10 to 22 days. When asked how many days had been lost to teaching at their schools in total in 2007 excluding the strike action, principals' reports indicated an average a loss of two days with the number of days ranging from 0 to 10 days.

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked to estimate the number of days of teaching time usually lost *in a term* because lessons are missed because of specific activities/events. On average the primary school principals reported that:

- one day per term is lost to funerals/memorial services;
- two days per term are lost to cultural/sporting events;
- four days are lost a term to teacher attendance at training workshops.

Principal's estimates indicate that, in general, more teaching days at the sample of primary schools are lost to teacher attendance at training workshops than to funerals or sporting/cultural events. However, in the SMT focus-group interviews, 94% of the SMT groups reported that teacher absence from school because they are attending training workshops is 'rare or uncommon'. Only 6% said that it is 'fairly common'.

Normal timetables were seldom disrupted during our school visits. Overall, these kinds of activities did not appear to impact significantly on teaching time *during the research period* at each of the schools. (Being observed sometimes results in a halo effect.)

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked how their schools make up lost teaching time for Grade 1-4 learners when teaching days are missed. Forty five percent of the 20 principals acknowledge that the school does not make up lost time at the level of the Foundation Phase. Thirty percent of the 20 principals maintained that the school day is extended after school; only one (5%) principal said that the school extends teaching time into the school holidays. None of the principals said that the school extends teaching into breaks. Four (20%) principals reported that the school uses 'other' means to catch up.

In the teacher questionnaires just over half (53%) the teachers claimed that, when school days are lost or lessons missed, lost time is usually recovered by extending teaching time so lessons run after school. According to Grade 1-4 teachers' reports, the second most commonly reported method of making up lost time at this level is giving learners extra homework (23% of teachers). However, as we will see in Chapter 10, there was little evidence in the classroom observations of teachers giving homework during the course of 'normal' teaching. Only 12% of the teachers acknowledged that they had no way of making up missed lessons or lost teaching time with Grade 1-4 classes. Researchers' observations were that most teachers were anxious to leave the school at the end of the regular school day.

It seems that in most cases respondents provided socially desirable responses and that, either time is not made up at the Grade 1-4 level, or, under exceptional circumstances (for example, after the recent national strike action), the school day may have been extended to recover time lost.

7.1.3 Teacher absence and supervision of classes when teachers are absent

Eighty three percent of the SMT groups said that teacher absence from school for reasons other than attending training workshops was also 'rare or uncommon'; 6% said that it was 'very common'; and 11% 'fairly common'.

Eighty nine percent of the SMT groups said that the issue of teachers not being present in their classes was also 'rare or uncommon'; 6% said that this was a 'very common' occurrence at their school; and 6% said it was 'fairly common'.

Eighty nine percent of the SMT groups said that it was ‘rare or uncommon’ for teachers at their school to leave before school officially closed for teaching staff; 11% said it was ‘fairly common’. Of interest is that, when SMT groups were asked what time their schools officially closed for Foundation Phase teachers (*not* learners), responses varied from 12h00 as the earliest to 14h45 as the latest.

In SMT focus-group interviews, interviewees were asked how Grade 1-4 classes are most commonly covered if their teachers are absent. Table 7.1 shows that, in most cases (67%), SMTs said that classes in the same grade are combined. The second most common strategy was for a teacher to substitute and keep the class busy with school work.

TABLE 7.1: SMT GROUP REPORTS ON HOW CLASSES ARE COVERED WHEN TEACHERS ARE ABSENT

How classes are covered	Number of SMTs n = 18
Teacher substitutes and keeps class busy with school work	4 (22%)
Classes in the same grade combined	12 (67%)
Classes in different grades combined	1 (6%)
Teacher substitutes but no school work given	0 (0%)
Learners have to be left unattended in the classroom	0 (0%)
Learners have to be sent home	0 (0%)
Other	1 (6%)

For the ‘school conditions/school environment’ instrument, researchers noted the extent to which classes were left unattended during the course of the school visit. Data on Table 7.2 suggests that in most of the sample schools, none of the classes observed were left without teachers during the research visit.

TABLE 7.2: EVIDENCE OF UNATTENDED CLASSES DURING SCHOOL VISIT

Number of classes	Number of schools n = 20
Many	0 (0%)
Some	2 (10%)
A few (1 or 2)	2 (10%)
None	16 (80%)

However, researchers did report evidence of other unattended classes in schools including Grade R classes.

In the teacher questionnaires, 85% of teachers said that their class is never left unsupervised if they are absent from school. Nevertheless, the impression gained is that most respondents gave socially desirable responses and the form of supervision is not always very effective in terms of learners’ ‘time on task’. In fact it emerged in discussions with some teachers that by ‘supervision’, teachers meant that another teacher or staff member simply ‘popped in’ every now and again to check that learners were not getting out of hand.

7.1.4 Teachers' late arrival

In the 18 SMT focus-group interviews, SMT members were asked how widespread teacher late arrival was at their school. Eighty nine percent of the SMT groups said it was 'rare or uncommon', whilst 11% said it was 'fairly common'.

For the 'school conditions/school environment' instrument, researchers noted the extent to which they observed teachers arriving late for school during the two-day visit. Teacher late arrival appeared to be quite a big problem at three of the 20 schools as is reflected in Table 7.3.

TABLE 7.3: EVIDENCE OF TEACHERS ARRIVING LATE FOR SCHOOL DURING SCHOOL VISITS

Extent of teachers arriving late	Number of schools n = 20
All/most	3 (15%)
Some	2 (10%)
A few	1 (5%)
None	14 (70%)

Researchers also noted the extent to which teachers at schools returned to their classes speedily after break during the school visits. Table 7.4 shows that teachers at most schools went straight to their classes and that this did not appear to be a major problem at any of the schools.

TABLE 7.4: EVIDENCE OF TEACHERS' SPEEDY RETURN TO CLASSES AFTER BREAKS DURING SCHOOL VISITS

Number of teachers who returned speedily to their classes after break	Number of schools n (valid) = 19
All/most	16 (84%)
Some	2 (11%)
A few	1 (5%)
None	0 (0%)

7.1.5 Interruptions during classroom teaching

During the course of classroom observations, interruptions from outside such as intercom announcements did not impact significantly on time on task in most classes. There were *more than three* interruptions from outside the classroom during the observation period in just 7 (9%) of 76 observations. Nevertheless, there was *at least one* interruption from outside during the observation period in almost half (37, or 49%) of 76 of the observations.

7.1.6 Learner absenteeism

In the SMT focus groups, 50% of the groups reported that learner absenteeism at their school is 'rare or uncommon'; 17% said it is 'very common'; and 33% 'fairly common'. On average the sample of 80 teachers reported in the teacher questionnaires that two learners in their class are absent per day. Teachers' reported numbers of absentees per day ranged from zero to 12. In the majority of the classroom observations there was little evidence of high levels of learner absenteeism. Of course trends over longer periods could not be ascertained accurately in this way.

In open-ended questions in the teacher questionnaires and in focus-group interviews, however, teachers in a couple of schools reported that learner absenteeism is a problem at their particular schools. In one or two cases teachers pointed out that learners ‘*drop out and come in and out of the school during the academic school year*’. A further issue raised by a few teachers was that their schools ‘*kept admitting new learners during the academic year*’. Both aspects lead to continuity issues.

In the focus-group interview with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the schools, respondents at one school mentioned that girl children often leave school to fetch child grants. They claimed that older girls have babies on purpose so that they can receive the child grant from the Social Development Department. It is unlikely though that these children are in Grade 1-4.

7.1.7 Learner late arrival and discipline

In the SMT focus-group interviews 11% of the groups said that learner late arrival for school was ‘very common’ at their school; 44% said it was ‘fairly common’; and 44% said it was ‘rare or uncommon’. For the ‘school conditions/school environment’ instrument, researchers noted the extent to which learners in general arrived late for school during the two-day visit. According to this data, learner late-coming appeared to be a big problem at two of the 20 schools as is reflected in Table 7.5.

TABLE 7.5: EVIDENCE OF LEARNER LATE ARRIVAL DURING SCHOOL VISITS

Number of learners arriving late	Number of schools n (valid) = 19
All/most	2 (11%)
Some	6 (32%)
A few	6 (32%)
None	5 (26%)

On both days of the school visits, researchers in each team tried to observe Grade 1-4 classes for the first two hours of the instructional school day. As explained in Chapter 2, getting into classrooms for observation at the start of the day was not possible in all cases. As a result of unavoidable delays researchers arrived in classrooms too late to observe the first five minutes of the first lesson in 15 (19%) of the 77 observations. Nevertheless, in the 62 observations where researchers were present in the classroom at the start of the teaching day, they were able to establish the number of learners who arrived more than five minutes late.

There was *no* evidence of Grade 1-4 learners arriving more than five minutes late for the first lesson in 50 (81%) out of 62 available observation records. Learners arrived more than five minutes late in 12 (19%) of the 62 observations. In the latter 12 (19%) observations, the average number of latecomers was three with the number of latecomers ranging from one to a maximum of eight learners.

Learner absenteeism and late arrival at the start of school thus did not appear to be a significant factor limiting learning time in the majority of Grade 1-4 classrooms in spite of many learners’ impoverished backgrounds.

Researchers also noted the extent to which learners returned promptly to their classes after break during the school visit. Table 7.6 shows that this did not appear to be a major problem at any of the schools.

TABLE 7.6: EVIDENCE OF LEARNERS' SPEEDY RETURN TO CLASSES AFTER BREAK

Number of learners who returned speedily to their classes after break	Number of schools n = 20
All/most	17 (85%)
Some	3 (15%)
A few	0 (0%)
None	0 (0%)

None of the school principals (in the principal questionnaires) reported that their schools had severe discipline problems which undermine teaching and learning. Eight (40%) said their schools had occasional problems but were generally orderly whilst twelve (60%) said that their schools were well-controlled with very few discipline problems.

During our classroom observations, learner behaviour certainly did not stand out as disrupting teaching in most classes. For example,

- There was *no* evidence during *any* observations of learners being inattentive for *all/most* of the observation period.
- In 62 (81%) of 77 classrooms *all/most* learners in the class paid attention and listened in class most of the time, for example, when the teacher was instructing and when other learners were responding.
- In 14 (18%) of the 77 observations, researchers indicated that *all* learners in the class *always* paid attention and were never disruptive during the entire observation period.
- In 15 (19%) of 77 observations, there was evidence of learners *not* paying attention and listening in class *some* of the time.
- In 51 (67%) of the 76 observations, there was *no* or *minimal* internal noise or disturbances.
- There was a great deal of noise *within* the classroom causing distraction and disturbances for learners in only three (4%) of 76 observations.¹

Therefore, our observations were that the Grade 1-4 children were generally attentive and appeared rather well-disposed towards learning. Noise from inside most classrooms was low. Classes may of course have been reacting to the presence of researchers in the classroom. Certainly, in the teacher questionnaires and focus-group interviews a few teachers complained about learner discipline or said that they '*can't control learners because they can't use corporal punishment*'; or commented on learners' lack of concentration. However, we suspect that boredom may be a key factor for some learners and that this is a consequence of slow pacing in class, the low levels of cognitive demand of tasks, as well as learner under-preparedness. These issues are discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

¹ There is research evidence that noise from inside classrooms cause distractions for certain learners (Bettenhausen, 1998).

7.2 Teachers' use and management of time in class

'Time on task' is also reflected in teachers' use and management of time in class so that all learners are optimally engaged in challenging school work (Reeves, 2001). A characteristic of effective classroom practices is a high rate of learner time on task. In the study of Limpopo primary schools the main focus was on teachers' use of time in class.

7.2.1 Monitoring and pacing of learning

A key interest in the study was thus the extent to which time was lost to learning and literacy development through poor monitoring and pacing of work in class. In classroom observations researchers observed whether teachers were:

- monitoring whether learners are actually doing the work they are supposed to be doing;
- responding to learners who were not paying attention or disrupting teaching;
- not allowing learners who are struggling to slow down the whole class;
- giving learners challenging grade-appropriate tasks and not under-estimating their abilities so that they are simply practicing or reproducing what they 'can already do';
- accurately assessing the amount of time that learners should take to complete tasks so that curricular time is not lost because too much time is allocated for tasks;
- providing more competent learners with opportunities to continue with more difficult tasks so that they are not wasting time waiting (Reeves, 2001).

In 65 (93%) of the 70 classes where learners were given tasks, the teacher monitored all learners and checked that they were doing what they were supposed to be doing. Monitoring of learners was not evident in only five (7%) of 70 observations where learners were given tasks.

The teacher ignored and did *not* respond to learners who were not paying attention or disrupting teaching in only two (3%) of 63 observations. (In 14 (18%) of the observations, there was never any need for teachers to respond to their behaviour.)

However, a trend that was evident in Limpopo classrooms was that, although teachers monitored learners when they were busy with work, the pace set for activities and tasks was very loosely regulated by teachers.

- In 44 (57%) of 77 observations the teacher *often or sometimes* tended to give too much attention to individual learners/groups so that other learners were left unattended or waiting too long.
- In 19 (28%) of 67 observations the teacher did *not* give learners who were struggling additional 'corrective' attention/assistance. In 10 (13%) of 77 observations, *no* learners appeared to need any additional 'corrective' attention suggesting that the work they had been given was too easy for them or was revision work.
- In 45 (66%) of the 68 observations where learners were given tasks, the teacher did *not* give additional or new tasks to learners who had completed their tasks and were coping well.
- In 32 (52%) of 62 observations teachers *mostly* paced activities and tasks at the rate of slower or the weakest learners in the class *all or most* of the time. (In 7

(9%) of the 77 observations, researchers indicated that no tasks were given to learners during the entire two-hour observation period.)

Although the slow pace that was evident may be attributable to under-preparedness on the part of learners in some classes, learners would certainly have been more challenged if activities and tasks, particularly written work, had been more tightly paced by teachers. According to researchers' reports, the pace in most classes clearly needed to be tied more closely to the requirements of the curriculum (how much work needed to be covered in the grade) rather than to the pace set by the majority or slowest learners in the class (Reeves, 2005). Also evident was a lack of individualised pacing. In most classes, learners were treated 'homogenously' as if they were all at the same level even when this was clearly not the case (cf. also Ensor *et al.*, 2002).

7.3 Learners' opportunities to read and write

A particular focus of this Limpopo study is the amount of time learners spent engaged in two of the most important skills that they have to master in the primary grades - reading and writing.

Primary school teachers need to manage their classes so as to maximise full participation in reading and writing by all learners. In order to achieve optimal levels, they need to:

- ensure that learners have appropriate writing implements and reading and writing material;
- provide learners with reading and writing tasks that are aligned with the literacy and language curriculum requirements for their grade level;
- provide *all* learners with as many opportunities as possible to practise reading and writing independently as well as through guided practice;
- maintain on-task writing and reading behaviour;
- ensure that learners have regular *individual* practice reading and writing narrative and expository texts for different purposes, contexts and genres (e.g. for science, history, geography, as well as literature).

7.3.1 Learners' writing opportunities

This section provides information on the writing opportunities made available to learners during classroom observations.

7.3.1.1 Availability of writing implements and material

In 56 (77%) of 73 classroom-observation records, all learners had writing implements (pens/sharpened pencils) and in 17 (23%) observations, more than half the learners had pens/pencils. There were no reported cases where less than half of the class had writing implements. In 66 (90%) of 73 classroom observations, all learners apparently had books or paper on which to write but in seven (10%) no or less than half the learners had either books or paper on which to write. In 66 (88%) of 75 classroom observations, learners mostly wrote work in exercise books.

In open-ended questions in the teacher questionnaires and teacher focus-group interviews, a few teachers complained about: the '*lack of exercise books*'; shortage of '*pencils*' for learners at their schools. Other teachers commented that learners '*forget to bring writing material such as pencils and sharpeners*'. Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the type of books provided, especially '*writing books provided for writing lessons*'. For

example, a Grade 3 teacher said ‘Grade 3 learners should be using A4 fine ruled exercise books instead of A3 ruled books’.

7.3.1.2 Sources and types of writing tasks

Table 7.7 provides the source of written tasks provided to learners during lesson observations.

TABLE 7.7: METHODS OF GIVING WRITING/WRITTEN TASKS DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD ORDERED FROM MOST TO LEAST COMMONLY OBSERVED

Writing task	Number of observations
1. Completing exercises from the chalkboard individually n (valid) = 70	47 (67%)
2. Completing loose worksheets individually n (valid) = 70	24 (34%)
3. Completing loose worksheets in pairs or groups n (valid) = 71	21 (30%)
4. Completing exercises from textbooks individually n (valid) = 71	20 (28%)
5. Copying notes from the chalkboard/overhead individually n (valid) = 71	18 (25%)
6. Completing exercises from the chalkboard in pairs or groups n (valid) = 71	17 (24%)
7. Copying text from a textbook or other learning material individually n (valid) = 71	12 (17%)
8. Taking down notes dictated by the teacher n (valid) = 68	13 (19%)
9. Completing exercises from textbooks in pairs or groups n (valid) = 71	7 (10%)

The most commonly observed method of giving writing task to learners was for the teacher to write exercises on the chalkboard which learners then completed individually.

Table 7.8 provides researchers’ reports on the extent to which learners were involved in completing any writing or written tasks at all during observations.

TABLE 7.8: EXTENT TO WHICH LEARNERS COMPLETED ANY WRITING/WRITTEN TASKS DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Number of learners	Number of classes n (valid) = 75
All learners in the class	50 (67%)
More than half	14 (19%)
About half	5 (7%)
Less than half but at least a quarter	3 (4%)
Less than a quarter	1 (1%)
None	2 (3%)

In two (3%) of the 75 observations, no learners were engaged in any writing tasks at all during the observation period. In a third (30%) of the 73 cases where some writing tasks were given, *not all* (i.e. only some) learners in the class were required to complete the writing/written tasks.

Table 7.9 provides the types of tasks in which learners were engaged during observations.

TABLE 7.9: TYPES OF WRITING/WRITTEN TASKS IN WHICH LEARNERS WERE INVOLVED DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD AND EXTENT OF LEARNER INVOLVEMENT

Extent of learner involvement	Number of classes (n = 77)								
	Writing vowels/ letters/ syllables/ numbers	Writing 1 or 2 words	Writing 3 to 10 words	Writing more than 10 words	Writing 1 or 2 sentences	Writing 3-5 sentences	Writing more than 5 sentences	Copying extended texts	Writing own extended text
All/most learners	20 (26%)	29 (38%)	30 (39%)	16 (21%)	15 (19%)	12 (16%)	5 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
More than half	5 (6%)	6 (8%)	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
About half	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	1 (1%)	4 (5%)	5 (6%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
Less than half but at least a quarter	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Less than a quarter	1 (1%)	7 (9%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
None	48 (62%)	31 (40%)	38 (49%)	56 (73%)	54 (70%)	56 (73%)	66 (86%)	75 (97%)	74 (96%)

Data indicate that the task that learners were most commonly involved in was writing individual words. Hardly any learners were involved in writing extended text. In the light of what was termed desirable in Chapter 3, this is a matter of great concern.

Researchers also examined learners' exercise books and/or portfolios where these were available, to see how frequently learners completed different types of writing tasks in their Home Language and FAL workbooks and/or portfolios. Tables 7.10 and 7.11 show the findings.

TABLE 7.10: FREQUENCY OF LEARNERS COMPLETING SPECIFIC TYPES OF WRITING EXERCISES IN THEIR HOME LANGUAGE (L1) WORKBOOKS AND/OR PORTFOLIOS

Tasks	Number of pieces of classwork in workbooks				
	>40 pieces of work	20-40 pieces of work	10-20 pieces of work	<10 pieces of work	Never
Letters, vowels/ syllables n (valid)=68	6 (9%)	10 (15%)	7 (10%)	20 (29%)	25 (37%)
Whole words n (valid)=68	9 (13%)	16 (24%)	23 (34%)	19 (28%)	1 (1%)
Short sentences/ phrases n (valid) =67	2 (3%)	13 (19%)	24 (36%)	24 (36%)	4 (6%)
Long sentences n (valid)=67	1 (1%)	3 (4%)	11 (16%)	31 (46%)	21 (31%)
Whole paragraphs n (valid)=66	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	17 (26%)	48 (73%)
Longer extended texts such as letters/essays n (valid)=65	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	6 (9%)	58 (89%)

Table 7.10 shows that:

- 48 (71%) of 68 workbooks/portfolios had *ten or more pieces* of written work comprising whole words;

- 39 (58%) of 67 workbooks/portfolios had *ten or more pieces* of written work comprising short sentences or phrases;
- 45 (60%) of 68 workbooks/portfolios had *no or fewer than ten pieces* of written work comprising letters, vowels/syllables;
- 52 (78%) of 67 workbooks/portfolios had *no or fewer than ten pieces* of written work comprising long sentences;
- 65 (98%) of 66 workbooks/portfolios had *no or fewer than ten pieces* of written work comprising whole paragraphs;
- 58 (89%) of 65 workbooks/portfolios had *no pieces* of written work comprising longer extended texts.

Table 7.11 shows that:

- 21 (59%) of 36 workbooks and/portfolios had *ten or more pieces* of written work comprising whole words;
- 19 (52%) of 36 workbooks/portfolios had *ten or more pieces* of written work comprising short sentences or phrases;
- 28 (80%) of 35 workbooks/portfolios had *no or fewer than ten pieces* of written work comprising letters, vowels/syllables;
- 32 (89%) of 67 workbooks/portfolios had *no or fewer than ten pieces* of written work comprising long sentences;
- *None* of the FAL workbooks/portfolios reviewed had *more than ten pieces* of written work comprising whole paragraphs;
- *None* of the FAL workbooks/portfolios reviewed had *more than ten pieces* of written work comprising longer extended texts.

TABLE 7.11: FREQUENCY OF LEARNERS COMPLETING DIFFERENT TYPES OF WRITING EXERCISES IN FAL WORKBOOKS AND/OR PORTFOLIOS

Tasks	Number of pieces of classwork in workbooks				
	>40 pieces of work	20-40 pieces of work	10-20 pieces of work	<10 pieces of work	Never
Letters, vowels/syllables n (valid)=35	3 (9%)	2 (6%)	2 (6%)	13 (37%)	15 (43%)
Whole words n (valid)=36	1 (3%)	9 (25%)	11 (31%)	12 (33%)	3 (8%)
Short sentences/phrases n (valid)=36	1 (3%)	2 (5%)	16 (44%)	12 (33%)	5 (14%)
Long sentences n (valid)=36	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	17 (47%)	15 (42%)
Whole paragraphs n (valid)=36	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (22%)	28 (78%)
Longer extended texts such as letters/essays n (valid)=36	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)	34 (95%)

Thirty one (53%) of 59 classes did not appear to have Home Language portfolios. Fifteen (54%) of 28 Home Language *portfolios* made available to researchers, had *fewer than ten pieces* of work for the year.

In 11 classes where FAL *portfolios* were made available to researchers, 10 (91%) had *fewer than ten pieces* of work for the year.

7.3.1.3 Across-grade progression in writing demands

Table 7.12 provides classroom-observation data on the writing demands made on learners across Grade 1-4. It shows that:

- The most common form of writing opportunity occurring during observation periods for **Grade 1** learners was writing 3 to 10 words.
- The most common form of writing opportunity occurring for **Grade 2** and **Grade 4** learners was writing one or two words.
- The most common form of writing opportunity occurring for **Grade 3** learners was that of writing one or two words or writing 3 to 10 words.
- There is slight evidence of ‘progression’ across Grades 1-4 in that learners in a few more Grade 3 and 4 classes than Grade 1 and 2 classes were involved in writing sentences during observations.

TABLE 7.12: ACROSS GRADE 1-4 COMPARISON OF TYPES OF WRITING/ WRITTEN TASKS IN WHICH ALL OR MOST LEARNERS IN THE CLASS WERE INVOLVED DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Writing opportunity	Number of observations where opportunity occurred for all/most learners in class			
	Gr 1 n = 20	Gr 2 n = 19	Gr 3 n = 18	Gr 4 n = 20*
Writing vowels/letters/syllables/ numbers i.e. could include Numeracy/Maths	7 (35%)	6 (32%)	4 (22%)	3 (15%)
Writing 1 or 2 words	6 (30%)	9 (47%)	9 (50%)	5 (25%)
Writing 3 to 10 words	8 (40%)	6 (32%)	9 (50%)	7 (35%)
Writing more than 10 words	3 (15%)	2 (11%)	7 (39%)	4 (20%)
Writing 1 or 2 sentences	4 (20%)	2 (11%)	7 (39%)	2 (10%)
Writing 3 to 5 sentences	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	4 (22%)	5 (25%)
Writing more than 5 sentences	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (17%)	2 (10%)
Copying extended texts	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Writing their own extended text	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

* One teacher showed two readers – one published by Phumelela and one by Shuter & Shooter.

Table 7.13 provides grade-level comparisons (in sub-tables by grade) of the type of writing demands made on learners in their home-language workbooks/portfolios.

TABLE 7.13: COMPARISON OF GRADE 1-4 WRITING DEMANDS MADE ON LEARNERS IN HOME-LANGUAGE WORKBOOKS/ PORTFOLIOS

Grade 1

Pieces of work this year	Letters, vowels, syllables n = 20	Whole words n (valid) =19	Short sentences/ phrases n (valid) =19	Long sentences n (valid) =19	Whole paragraphs n (valid) =19	Extended text n (valid) =19
>40	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
20-40	6 (30%)	8 (42%)	3 (16%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
10-20	4 (20%)	5 (26%)	9 (47%)	3 (16%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<10	4 (20%)	5 (26%)	2 (11%)	4 (21%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
Never	3 (14%)	0 (0%)	4 (21%)	11 (58%)	18 (95%)	19 (100%)

TABLE 7.13: COMPARISON OF GRADE 1-4 WRITING DEMANDS MADE ON LEARNERS IN HOME-LANGUAGE WORKBOOKS/ PORTFOLIOS (contd)

Grade 2

Pieces of work this year	Letters, vowels, syllables n (valid) =17	Whole words n (valid) =16	Short sentences/ phrases n (valid) =16	Long sentences n (valid) =16	Whole paragraphs n (valid) =16	Extended text n (valid) =16
>40	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
20-40	3 (18%)	6 (38%)	4 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
10-20	1 (6%)	4 (25%)	5 (31%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<10	7 (41%)	4 (25%)	7 (44%)	9 (56%)	2 (12%)	0 (0%)
Never	6 (35%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (31%)	14 (0%)	16 (100%)

Grade 3

Pieces of work this year	Letters, vowels, syllables n (valid)=17	Whole words n (valid) =17	Short sentences/ phrases n (valid) =16	Long sentences n (valid) =16	Whole paragraphs n (valid) =16	Extended text n (valid) =15
>40	2 (12%)	4 (24%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
20-40	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	3 (19%)	2 (13%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
10-20	2 (12%)	8 (47%)	7 (44%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	1 (7%)
<10	3 (18%)	4 (24%)	5 (31%)	9 (65%)	7 (44%)	3 (20%)
Never	9 (53%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	8 (50%)	11 (73%)

Grade 4

Pieces of work this year	Letters, vowels, syllables n (valid)=14	Whole words n (valid) =16	Short sentences/ phrases n (valid) =16	Long sentences n (valid) =15	Whole paragraphs n (valid) =15	Extended text n (valid) =15
>40	1 (7%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
20-40	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
10-20	0 (0%)	6 (38%)	3 (19%)	3 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
<10	6 (43%)	6 (38%)	10 (63%)	9 (60%)	7 (47%)	3 (20%)
Never	7 (50%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	3 (20%)	8 (53%)	12 (80%)

The above data show very little evidence of grade-level progression in task demands especially related to writing long sentences, paragraphs and extended text as reflected in the summary below:

Writing letters/vowels/syllables

- 65% of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing letters/vowels/syllables.
- 24% of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing letters/vowels/syllables.
- 29% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing letters/vowels/syllables.
- 7% of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing letters/vowels/syllables.

Writing whole words

- 74% of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing whole words.
- 75% of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing whole words.
- 76% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing whole words.
- 56% of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing whole words.

Writing short sentences/phrases

- 68% of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing short sentences/phrases.
- 56% of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing short sentences/phrases.
- 69% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing short sentences/phrases.
- 38% of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing short sentences/phrases.

Writing long sentences

- 21% of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing long sentences.
- 13% of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing long sentences.
- 38% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing long sentences.
- 20% of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing long sentences

Writing paragraphs

- None of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing paragraphs.
- None of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing paragraphs.
- 6% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing paragraphs.
- None of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing paragraphs.

Writing extended text

- None of the **Grade 1** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing extended text.
- None of the **Grade 2** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving extended text.
- 7% of the **Grade 3** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing extended text.
- None of the **Grade 4** classes had more than ten pieces of work in workbooks and/or portfolios involving writing extended text.

7.3.2 Learners' reading opportunities

In Foundation Phase classrooms one would expect reading activities to constitute the major portion of literacy activities. Successful reading development is dependent on practice in reading – the more learners practise, the more developed their reading skills will become. Foundation Phase teachers in particular need to ensure sufficient practice in reading aloud and silently so as to provide learners with opportunities to develop the ability to rapidly decode and/or recognise words. Frequent exposure to words in continuous text helps recognition of the words become automatic.

7.3.2.1 Types of reading opportunities

In nine (12%) of the 77 two-hour observations in the Limpopo primary schools *no* reading opportunities occurred for any learners at all. Six of the observations where no reading opportunities at all occurred were Grade 3 classes and three were Grade 2 classes.

Table 7.14 provides an indication of the most and least common opportunities made available to learners in those observations where reading opportunities were provided to learners.

TABLE 7.14: READING OPPORTUNITIES OCCURRING DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD ORDERED FROM MOST TO LEAST COMMONLY OBSERVED

Reading opportunity	Number of occurrences
1. Whole class reading aloud without the teacher n (valid)=67	47 (70%)
2. Teacher reading aloud to the whole class n (valid)=65	45 (69%)
3. Whole class reading aloud together with the teacher n (valid)=66	39 (59%)
4. Individual learners reading aloud to the rest of the class n (valid)=68	38 (56%)
5. Learners reading aloud together in groups n (valid)=66	28 (42%)
6. Individual learners reading aloud to the teacher who monitors them for guided reading n (valid)=66	28 (42%)
7. Teacher leading reading with the class following silently n (valid)=66	21 (32%)
8. Individual learners reading aloud to others (partners/groups) n (valid)=66	20 (30%)
9. Learners reading aloud together in pairs n (valid)=66	14 (21%)
10. Individual learners reading silently independently n (valid)=67	13 (19%)

Data show that the most common forms of reading opportunities occurring for learners across the whole sample of grades were ‘whole class reading aloud together’ and/or ‘the teacher reading aloud to the whole class.’ The least common was ‘individual learners reading silently independently.’

Table 7.15 provides a breakdown of the occurrence of these reading opportunities per grade. It shows that:

- The most common form of reading opportunity occurring for **Grade 1** learners was the whole class reading aloud together with or without the teacher.
- The most common form of reading opportunity occurring for **Grade 2** and **Grade 4** learners was the teacher reading aloud to the whole class. The prevalence of teachers reading aloud to the whole class in Grade 4 may well be a consequence of the shift to English as the language of instruction.
- The most common form of reading opportunity occurring for **Grade 3** learners was that of individual learners reading aloud to the rest of the class but this was the case in less than half the classes observed. Furthermore, data suggest that

Grade 3 learners were provided with (approx. 20%) fewer reading opportunities than Grade 2 and 4 learners, and (approx. 30%) fewer reading opportunities than Grade 1. This possibility and probable reasons for it need to be investigated further.

- There is slight evidence of a shift between Grade 1 and Grade 3 from mostly ‘communal’ reading to more individual reading in some classes although this may have been the case only for more competent readers.

TABLE 7.15: COMPARISON OF OCCURENCES OF PARTICULAR READING OPPORTUNITIES IN GRADES 1-4 DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Reading opportunity	Number of observations where opportunity occurred in grade			
	Gr 1 n=20	Gr 2 n=19	Gr 3 n=19	Gr 4 n=19
Teacher reading aloud to the whole class	12 (60%)	14 (74%)	4 (21%)	15 (79%)
Teacher leading reading with class following (silently)	7 (35%)	4 (21%)	2 (11%)	8 (42%)
Whole class reading aloud together with the teacher	14 (70%)	13 (68%)	4 (21%)	8 (42%)
Whole class reading aloud without teacher	14 (70%)	13 (68%)	7 (37%)	13 (68%)
Learners reading aloud together in groups	13 (65%)	6 (32%)	3 (16%)	6 (32%)
Learners reading aloud together in pairs	5 (25%)	5 (26%)	1 (5%)	3 (16%)
Individual learners reading aloud to others (partners/groups)	8 (40%)	6 (32%)	2 (11%)	4 (21%)
Individual learners reading silently independently	4 (20%)	3 (16%)	1 (5%)	5 (25%)
Individual learners reading aloud to the rest of the class	12 (60%)	9 (47%)	8 (42%)	9 (47%)
Individual learners reading aloud to teacher who monitors them for guided reading	11 (55%)	6 (32%)	3 (16%)	8 (42%)
Total	<u>100</u> 200 (50%)	<u>79</u> 190 (42%)	<u>35</u> 190 (18%)	<u>79</u> 190 (42%)

7.3.2.2 Types of reading demands

Table 7.16 provides an indication of the types of reading task that learners were involved in during the observations. It shows that:

- During the observation period *all/most learners* in classes were most commonly involved in reading one or two words.
- In more than half of the observations *no* learners were required to read more than ten words.
- In more than half of the observations *no* learners in the class were required to read more than one or two sentences.
- In just under three quarters of the classroom observations *no* learners in the class read more than three to five sentences.
- In more than three quarters of the classes *no* learners read more than five sentences.
- Extended texts were not read during the classroom observations in the majority of classes.

TABLE 7.16: TYPES OF READING TASKS LEARNERS WERE INVOLVED IN DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD AND EXTENT OF LEARNER INVOLVEMENT

Extent of learner involvement	Number of classes (n=77)							
	Reading vowels/ letters/ syllables/ numbers	Reading 1 or 2 words	Reading 3 to 10 words	Reading more than 10 words	Reading 1 or 2 sentences	Reading 3 to 5 sentences	Reading more than 5 sentences	Reading extended text
All/most learners	28 (36%)	42 (55%)	37 (48%)	18 (23%)	24 (31%)	12 (16%)	9 (12%)	13 (17%)
More than half	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	2 (3%)	1 (1%)
About half	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Less than half but at least a quarter	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)	1 (1%)
Less than a quarter	4 (5%)	1 (1%)	2 (3%)	4 (5%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)	3 (4%)
None	40 (52%)	26 (34%)	29 (38%)	47 (61%)	45 (58%)	54 (70%)	59 (77%)	59 (77%)

Table 7.17 provides information on the extent to which expository (informational) or narrative (story) text was read by learners in those classes where read. In general, expository or informational text is more complex than narrative (story) texts.

TABLE 7.17: EXTENT TO WHICH EXPOSITORY AND NARRATIVE TEXTS WERE READ DURING THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent of learners' engagement with extended text during observation period	Number of classes	
	Expository (informational) texts n=77	Narrative (story) texts including poetry or plays n=77
Extensively – most of the time	4 (5%)	4 (5%)
Moderately – some of the time	8 (10%)	12 (16%)
Minimally – hardly any of the time	4 (5%)	5 (6%)
Not at all	61 (79%)	56 (73%)

A small number of classes were provided with opportunities to read expository text for Life Skills, Numeracy/Mathematics, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences. Table 7.18 provides information on the extent of learner engagement with reading expository text relating to Life Skills, Numeracy/Mathematics, Natural Sciences or Social Sciences.

TABLE 7.18: NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS WHERE LEARNERS WERE ENGAGED WITH READING EXPOSITORY TEXT THAT RELATED TO OTHER LEARNING AREAS

Life Skills (Grades 1-3) n=17	Numeracy/ Mathematics n=20	Social Science (Grade 4 only) n=5	Natural Science (Grade 4 only) n=6
9	4	1	3

7.3.2.3 Across-grade progression in reading demands

Table 7.19 provides grade-level comparisons of the type of reading demands made on learners during classroom observations.

TABLE 7.19: COMPARISON OF TYPES OF READING DEMANDS MADE ON ALL OR MOST LEARNERS IN GRADES 1-4 CLASSES DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Reading opportunity	Number of observations where opportunity occurred for all/most learners in the class			
	Gr 1 n=20	Gr 2 n=19	Gr 3 n (valid)=18	Gr 4 n=19
Reading vowels/letters/syllables/numbers	11 (55%)	7 (37%)	7 (24%)	3 (16%)
Reading 1 or 2 words	11 (55%)	11 (58%)	11 (38%)	9 (47%)
Reading 3 to 10 words	13 (65%)	7 (37%)	11 (38%)	6 (30%)
Reading more than 10 words	6 (30%)	2 (11%)	6 (21%)	4 (21%)
Reading 1 or 2 sentences	7 (35%)	4 (21%)	7 (24%)	6 (32%)
Reading 3 to 5 sentences	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	5 (17%)	5 (25%)
Reading more than 5 sentences	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (14%)	3 (16%)
Reading extended text	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (17%)	8 (42%)

There is some evidence in the data of some ‘progression’ in terms of reading demands across the 4 grades in that more Grade 3 and 4 than Grade 1 and 2 classes were involved in reading sentences and extended text during the observations. However,

- Data show that learners in **Grade 1** classes were most commonly involved in reading three to ten words during the observation period.
- Learners in **Grade 2** classes were most commonly involved in reading one or two words.
- Learners in **Grade 3** classes were most commonly involved in reading one or two words or three to ten words.
- Learners in **Grade 4** classes were most commonly involved in reading one or two words. Of note is that reading extended text occurred second most frequently.

7.4 Do schools and teachers organise and manage time on task and instruction so as to maximise learners’ opportunities to participate in grade-level reading and writing tasks in mother tongue and First Additional Language in class?

Although school-level factors did not appear to be impacting significantly on time on task in the sample of Limpopo classrooms, the trend evident in most of the Limpopo schools and classes observed was that teachers are not organising lessons for optimal reading and writing practice. For example, 67% of teachers wrote exercises on the chalkboard - a laborious and time consuming practice which wasted time in class and also meant that competent learners who completed work ahead of the class could not easily be given additional work. It also reduced learners’ opportunities to engage with extended texts and written instructions as, when this occurs, teachers usually tell learners what is required or printed (rather getting them to refer to and read the text) because it is simply too labour intensive for teachers to copy out extended text or write instructions out on the chalkboard.

At the end of each observation period, researchers attempted to estimate the proportion of time learners had spent on various activities to indicate ‘weighting’ in terms of time use. Table 7.20 shows their reports.

TABLE 7.20: TIME USE DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Frequency of occurrence	Listening n (valid)=70	Speaking n (valid)=70	Reading n (valid)=70	Writing n (valid)=69	Drawing n (valid)=68	Waiting n (valid)=70	Look at picture n (valid)=68
Most the time	30 (43%)	9 (13%)	13 (19%)	11 (16%)	2 (3%)	5 (7%)	1 (1%)
Some of the time	35 (50%)	33 (47%)	27 (39%)	44 (64%)	8 (12%)	33 (47%)	19 (28%)
Very little/ hardly any time	4 (6%)	23 (33%)	20 (29%)	8 (12%)	6 (9%)	19 (27%)	20 (29%)
No time	1 (1%)	5 (7%)	10 (14%)	6 (9%)	52 (76%)	13 (19%)	28 (41%)

The following ranking from most to least time indicates the ‘weighting’ or proportion of time learners spent on various activities during most observation periods.

1. Listening
2. Writing
3. Speaking
4. Reading
5. Waiting
6. Looking at pictures
7. Drawing

Given that 40 weeks are available for teaching in a school year and that researchers estimated that learners were spending more time on writing/written activities in most classes than they did on speaking, reading or drawing tasks, what was surprising was how little written work most classes had in their literacy and language workbooks.

What was very evident from the classroom observations is how slowly many learners actually worked on tasks during the lessons, and how some learners seem to have ‘mastered the art’ of procrastination by appearing to be occupied when they were, at most, simply slowly copying out exercises or writing the date, underlining, etc. In short, most learners took a long time to begin let alone complete tasks. Neither was there much evidence of teachers regulating the pace at which they worked, for example, by urging learners to ‘pick up the pace’.² Hence, although outwardly more time may have been spent on writing/written activities during most observation periods, in reality, in most classes more instructional emphasis was given to listening and speaking. In other words, the accent was on oral rather than literacy skills.

In particular, our observations showed that learners were not being given adequate opportunities to read. Incidences of the whole class reading aloud together were the highest. There was little evidence of individual learners in the class reading aloud and of learners spending as much time reading texts as individuals as they did reading ‘communally’ with others. Evidently in most classes, individual learners were not getting sufficient practice in reading for word recognition to become rapid and accurate. Learners

² Teachers often complained that their learners were very slow, not feeling they could do anything about it.

in most classes made little use of informational or expository text. They had limited exposure to the language of explanation and a range of contents and syntactic structures even in mother tongue.

In 31 (42% or more than a third) of 73 cases, researchers noted that learners were mostly engaged at *very* low levels of cognitive challenge in terms of literacy development for their grade level. For example, in one Grade 1 class, learners were mostly engaged only in writing the numbers 6, 7, 8, 9. In another Grade 2 class learners spent 45 minutes chanting and repeating a small selection of Xitsonga words. After this they shared a piece of paper with a few words such as ‘TV’ and ‘cellphone’ written on it and had to read the words in groups. One person from each group was then asked to write one word on the chalkboard, while the others sat and waited. There was ‘excessive repetition’ during the session.

In a Grade 4 class, the teacher read text but never provided learners with opportunities to read aloud to the class or each other in Home Language or First Additional Language. In a Grade 1 class, the class simply repeated sentences in unison after the teacher from a story written on the board. In another Grade 1 class, learners were mainly required to write the names of the days of the week in response to simple closed questions such as “What day is it today?” In a Grade 2 class, learners spent most of the time cutting pictures out of magazines and newspapers. In a Grade 4 class, both lessons observed were entirely oral. The interaction between the teacher and learners comprised ‘lower-order questions’ and ‘collective responses.’ ‘Learners did no reading or writing at all.’ Another Grade 4 class spent time on sound-letter relations, more appropriate to Grade 1 level.

In a Grade 3 class learners were required to suggest appropriate landmarks to draw on maps. They suggested ‘buildings’ such as ‘a school’ but also inappropriate landmarks such as ‘flowers’ and ‘TV’. The teacher treated all answers as equally valid instead of explaining or asking why ‘flowers’ would not be good landmarks for maps. In a Grade 4 class ‘the teacher did all the work.’ She read a story from a big picture book more suited to Grade R or 1. Learners were not engaged in reading themselves but were involved in singing a song and were required to occasionally chorus answer ‘yes’. In a Grade 1 class where the teacher was using *Breakthrough to Literacy*, she was still doing ‘*Stage 1: Occupation tasks*’ which include matching and colouring in.³

Indeed fairly low reading and writing demands were made overall on the learners in the sample of Limpopo primary classrooms. For example, the reading and writing tasks learners were most commonly involved in during the two-hour observation periods entailed reading or writing *fewer than ten* individual words or short sentences and phrases. There was little evidence in most classes of learners reading and writing more than five sentences or any extended text in the observation period. In most cases, learners were engaged at lower levels of cognitive challenge in relation to literacy and language curriculum requirements for their grade level. Researchers did note that in a number of the classes learners already seemed familiar with the work done during the observations. It seemed that, because they were being observed, teachers lacked the confidence to teach new work to learners and mainly revised work already covered. Teachers also often do

³ In contrast, in one Grade 1 class all learners wrote at least ten sentences and one girl wrote a story comprising about one A4 page of text. One Grade 4 class learnt about contractions in English such as I am, I’m. A Grade 1 teacher dealt with difficult concepts such as shapes, number, counting, months, weather, seasons and engaged learners in extensive word and vocabulary development.

this when being observed, because it makes the children seem more competent than they usually are, when dealing with new work.

In addition, researchers' reviews of learners' workbooks confirmed that, in general, reading and writing tasks need to be more challenging. The low reading and writing demands made on learners and slow pacing of writing tasks may well be attributable to under-preparedness on the part of many or some learners in classes. Certainly a number of Grade 1-4 learners do not appear to have mastered the foundational competencies that should have been developed in their pre-school year/s and/or preceding grades. Indeed, as Table 7.21 shows, in more than a third of observations where learners read aloud, at least half the class appeared not to be engaged in reading at all but in simply repeating what was read by others.

TABLE 7.21: NUMBER OF OBSERVATIONS WHERE LEARNERS APPEARED TO BE REPEATING OFF BY HEART OR REPEATING AFTER OTHERS WHEN READING ALOUD

Extent	Number of classes	
	Repeating the text off by heart without actually engaging in reading n (valid)=49	Repeating what was read by the teacher or other learners who could read without actually engaging in reading n (valid)=50
All/most learners	7 (14%)	12 (24%)
More than half the class	8 (16%)	6 (12%)
About half the class	3 (6%)	4 (8%)
Less than half the class but at least a quarter	2 (4%)	6 (12%)
Less than quarter	9 (18%)	11 (22%)
None	20 (41%)	11 (22%)

- In at least a third (18 or 36%) of 49 observations where learners read aloud, half or more than half the learners appeared to be repeating the text off by heart without actually engaging in reading.
- In 22 (44%) of 50 observations where learners read aloud, half or more than half the learners appeared to be repeating what was read by the teacher or by other learners who could read, without actually engaging in reading.

These learners seemingly lack essential foundational reading knowledge as well as the early reading-related skills that usually develop when children are read to at home or during their pre-school year(s). They may not yet have developed a concept of print and may have absolutely no clue as to how the teacher and other learners are reading. They may not be able to recognise and discriminate letters from one another (alphabetic principle) and may not yet have grasped that spoken words are divided into sounds and that these sounds can be linked to form words (phoneme awareness). They may not yet be able to use the knowledge of letters and words that they have learnt to anticipate the most likely letters in words, or, they may simply not be able to apply these important reading skills rapidly and accurately enough to recognise words (NICHD, 2000). These findings are a matter of grave concern.

It seems that most teachers needed to more accurately determine *why* children in their classes are not learning to read and write and to know how to help those who have not

reached the levels they should have or are not progressing beyond their current levels simply because they have not had the opportunities to learn what they require. Teachers need to be able to distinguish between learners who have simply not received the necessary instruction and typically *need more and better direct and explicit teaching and practice in particular reading and writing skills* (Chall, 2000) and those learners who had genuine reading and writing disorders best addressed through specialised remedial programmes.⁴

Teachers do need to go beyond their learners' current levels of competence and not orientate tasks towards the 'lowest common denominator' in their classes. What is also clear from our observations is that most of the Limpopo primary teachers could be doing much more to maximise full and equal participation in reading and writing by all learners in their classes. Not to do so is creating problems for children as they move up through the grades. In some cases, large classes made it difficult and demanding for teachers to involve the whole class. Certainly teachers were constrained by shortages in the number of copies of textbooks and readers available. Every class needs to have enough sets and copies of books for each learner in the class to have his/her own copy so that more individual reading can take place and the pace of writing and reading tasks can be speeded up.

In Chapter 8 we present findings on the extent to which the sample of teachers appear to be directly and explicitly developing learners' mother-tongue and first additional language literacy skills in class.

⁴ Remedial programmes in African schools largely don't exist, and so children with difficulties simply get passed up from grade to grade, becoming less and less capable and losing virtually all their self-confidence.

CHAPTER 8: LITERACY TEACHING

This chapter focuses on literacy instruction in the Grade 1-4 Limpopo classrooms.

Whilst there are usually a small number of children in most classes who seem to learn to read and write fairly easily once they are exposed to text regardless of the approach to literacy teaching that their teachers use, in the majority of cases learners' reading and writing skills do not develop naturally simply through exposure to text (Adams, 1993, Adams *et al.*, 1998). This is because individual letters on a page are abstract and meaningless in and of themselves. For their meaning to be deciphered ('decoded'), the reader has to link letters to abstract sounds (phonemes), blend them together and pronounce them as words (Donaldson, 1993). Thus most learners require direct and explicit teaching of essential reading and writing skills. This is particularly the case for learners from poor communities with low levels of literacy and limited access and exposure out of school to books and other print material. However, such learners' needs are often not addressed in schools (Rose, 2002).

Reading and writing are the core skills required for learning other school subjects. Rose's (2002:1 & 2) research on the literacy development of indigenous learners in Australia shows that what usually happens in schools is that 'teaching practices in early primary years implicitly assume and evaluate orientations to written ways of meaning that highly literate parents scaffold their children into before starting school.'. Moreover, these orientations are 'more or less hidden' from early-grade teachers as well as those who train such teachers. Consequently, inadequate provision is made for learners who have 'not gained the prerequisite orientations' to reading before they start school. Then, because each phase of schooling 'assumes and evaluates orientations to meaning acquired' in previous grades and phases, 'it is primarily the children of highly literate families that acquire elaborated codes' required for meaningful reading. Children from other families are 'less likely to do so, most particularly children from oral cultural backgrounds' (Rose, 2002:2).

Instead 'the pacing of school curricula accelerates through upper primary and secondary schooling, ensuring that the gap between the most and least successful' learners widens (Rose, 2002:3). By secondary school, 'well-practiced operational skills' in reading, writing, and numeracy are simply assumed, and 'the pacing of the curriculum content, linked to evaluation timetables', ensures that there is no time to teach basic skills in numeracy and literacy. Because teaching and evaluation in senior school is 'explicitly focused' on written or 'textual performance' and learning the content of texts (for example mathematics or science content) rather than on *how to* read and write texts, skills in reading and writing are no longer taught (Rose, 2002:3). The implication is that, if children do not learn to read and write in early primary years, they probably never become literate.

It is therefore crucial that early-grade teachers who teach learners from poor communities (such as the Limpopo Grade 1-4 teachers) teach learners to use both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' reading and writing strategies and adopt highly structured and systematic teaching of reading and writing that includes all the major components of literacy instruction (e.g. Alidou *et al.*, 2006; Abadzi, 2006; Snow *et al.*, 1998).

Chapter 8 focuses on four key dimensions of literacy instruction in the sample of Limpopo classrooms, namely, teachers' explicit and deliberate development of learners':

- concepts of print and printed material (8.1);
- strategies for self-correcting when reading (8.2);
- comprehension skills (Snow *et al.*, 1998) (8.3); and
- vocabulary and spelling (8.4).

In discussing these findings, we attempt to answer the question: **Are teachers directly and explicitly developing learners' mother-tongue and first additional language literacy skills in class?**

8.1 Did teachers develop learners' concepts of print and printed material?

In contexts where learners have no or limited pre- or out-of-school exposure to books, teachers need to make a particular point of assisting learners to develop a concept of print and print material. For example, learners should be encouraged and required to:

- identify the title, author, illustrator of books;
- identify the front/back/cover of books or the beginning and end of books;
- identify the bottom/top of pictures/pages;
- find page numbers;
- point to print;
- identify where text begins/the beginning of a sentence;
- identify the left page before the right;
- show that print moves from left to right (the left to right approach of text);
- identify the first and last part of a story/paragraph, etc.;
- identify punctuation such as question marks, use of inverted commas and possessives and contractions such as let's;
- identify lower case and capital letters;
- use contents pages, chapter headings, subheadings, indexes;
- understand how and in which sequence to read supplementary text or illustrations in relation to the main text (e.g. in boxes, tables, and graphs adjacent to the main text; or pictures with captions, etc.);
- read with appropriate intonation and expression.

By implication, learners need to handle books themselves and teachers' own behaviour needs to model how learners should treat books and read texts and to demonstrate that books and reading are valued (Savage, 1999; Weinstein, 1992).

In the Limpopo study, researchers observed teachers' use of learning material to develop learners' concepts of print and print material both implicitly by the way they handled and treated books including exercise books, and explicitly, for example, by showing learners that print moves from left to right, that pages turn from right to left.

In 35 (80%) of 44 observations where books, including exercise books, were handled during the observation period, teachers did *not* model or demonstrate how learners should treat, handle and care for books.

Table 8.1 reflects the extent to which teachers used learning material in ways that develop learners' concepts about printed material.

TABLE 8.1: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS USED LEARNING MATERIAL IN WAYS THAT DEVELOP LEARNERS' CONCEPTS ABOUT PRINT AND PRINTED MATERIAL DURING THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Extent	Number of observations n (valid)=48
Extensively	3 (6%)
Moderately	6 (13%)
Minimally	5 (10%)
Not at all	34 (71%)

Most teachers did not develop concepts about print or print material during the observations. Hardly any references were made by teachers to, for example, punctuation such as the use of inverted commas for reported speech, page numbers, or even the left-to-right approach to text.

In 38 observations where teachers themselves read any form of extended texts aloud, researchers reported that 30 teachers read with suitable intonation and expression. However, data show that few teachers spent time developing concepts about print and printed material. We believe this situation was exacerbated by the fact that so few books, actual textbooks and readers or other bound material were made available to and handled by learners in most classes as is reflected in Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

TABLE 8.2: EXTENT TO WHICH LEARNERS THEMSELVES HANDLED BOOKS* OR ANY OTHER BOUND MATERIAL DURING OBSERVATIONS**

Proportion of learners who got to handle any books/other bound material	Number of classroom observations n (valid)=73
All learners	28 (38%)
More than half	11 (15%)
Less than half	3 (4%)
None	31 (42%)

* Including textbooks, readers, picture books, story books, etc.

** E.g. booklets, magazines.

Table 8.2 shows that *all* learners in the class did not get to handle books/booklets in 62% of the observations.

According to researchers' reports, learners were observed handling readers in less than half the observation periods and textbooks and/or booklets in less than a quarter of the observations.

TABLE 8.3: NUMBER OF CASES WHERE THERE WAS EVIDENCE OF ANY LEARNERS HANDLING AND/OR USING READERS AND/OR TEXTBOOKS/BOOKLETS DURING THE OBSERVATION PERIOD

Number of classes	Number of cases
Readers n (valid) = 74	28 (38%)
Textbooks n (valid) = 74	16 (22%)
Booklets n (valid) = 75	14 (19%)

8.2 Did teachers provide opportunities and strategies for learners to self-correct when reading?

In the Foundation Phase, reading programmes need to include components of phoneme awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension (NICHHD, 2000; Snow *et al.*, 1998). Although ultimately the goal of reading is for children to understand what they read, the ability to derive meaning from text is dependent upon the ability to read fluently. When reading continuous text, sounding out individual words, reading slowly, ‘stop-start’ reading or reading word-by-word makes comprehension difficult. The meaning gets lost simply because it takes too long for the reader to read each sentence. Fluency depends on fast, accurate decoding and word recognition (Abadzi, 2006; Snow *et al.*, 1998).

In order to learn how to read continuous text fluently, learners need to be able to apply alphabetic knowledge, knowledge of high frequency words (basic verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, articles and obvious nouns e.g. in English - *the, a, at, in, of*) and to use their knowledge of the language they are reading to anticipate subsequent letters. Insufficient prior knowledge of a language makes reading very difficult for learners to self-correct, and learners need to be paying the minimum of attention to unnecessary details of print for reading to ‘work’ as a language (Macdonald, 1991).

An important aspect of reading development thus is teachers’ handling and feedback on learner error when they are reading extended text; whether teachers give learners opportunities to self-correct, in other words to work out that they have made a mistake when reading and correct mistakes; and whether teachers model or provide a range of strategies for self-correcting. For example, through:

- identifying words so that the learners can recognise them on sight in future;
- encouraging learners to sound out words;
- suggesting that learners skip or read past difficult words and then go back and guess; or
- helping learners recognise an unfamiliar word’s similarity to words that they already know.

In the Limpopo study, in classes where learners were given opportunities to read aloud during the observations, researchers indicated that most teachers provided learners with opportunities to self-correct as is reflected in Table 8.4.

TABLE 8.4: EXTENT TO WHICH THE TEACHER HANDLED ERROR BY PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNERS TO SELF-CORRECT WHEN READING ALOUD DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Number of observations n (valid)=45
Most of the time	17 (38%)
Some of the time	18 (40%)
Never	10 (22%)

Table 8.5 shows that the dominant strategy for self-correcting promoted and modelled was that of sounding out a word.

TABLE 8.5: STRATEGIES FOR SELF-CORRECTING THAT WERE MODELLED OR PROVIDED BY TEACHERS IN CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Skip or read past difficult words, then go back and use the context/meaning in which word is embedded n (valid)=51	Use a word's similarity to words that are already know n (valid)=50	Sound out a word n (valid)=56	Guess a word n (valid)=50
Often	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	20 (36%)	2 (4%)
Sometimes	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	15 (27%)	4 (8%)
Once or twice	1 (2%)	2 (4%)	5 (9%)	6 (12%)
Never	45 (88%)	45 (90%)	16 (29%)	38 (76%)

However, as discussed in Chapter 7, in most classes, learners were mainly involved in reading isolated words rather than continuous text. This would account to some extent for the fact that, in the observations, teachers mainly encouraged learners to 'self-correct' by sounding out words.

8.3 Did teachers develop learners' reading comprehension skills?

A key interest in the Limpopo study was whether teachers were assisting learners to develop the language-across-the-curriculum skills which prepare them for the linguistic demands of reading expository extended text and of changing over from learning content or subject matter in their mother tongue and having English as one subject. Hence a particular focus of the 'specialist' classroom-observation schedule was on the extent to which teachers were directly developing learners' reading comprehension skills.

Strategies for making sense of text include the use of closed (information retrieval) as well as open (predictive, inferential, opinion-type) questions to understand text. For example, getting learners to:

- identify the theme or main idea in a passage or story;
- summarise or retell what they have read in linear as well as causal terms (showing cause and effect);
- use text to support their statements.

Other important aspects of developing reading comprehension skills are teachers' responses to learners' responses and whether and how teachers elaborate on these responses. Teachers also need to cue and teach learners how to use extralinguistic devices such as pictures, diagrams, graphs and tables for understanding text and to help to clarify meaning.

Tables 8.6 to 8.11 provide information on the abovementioned aspects of Limpopo primary-school teachers' development of learners' reading comprehension skills during the lesson observations.

TABLE 8.6: TYPE AND EXTENT OF TEACHER QUESTIONING ABOUT THE MEANING OF TEXT DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Number of observations	
	Closed questions (information retrieval) n (valid)=41	Open predictive/inferential/ opinion/imaginative questions n (valid)=35
A lot	23 (55%)	3 (9%)
Some	9 (22%)	7 (20%)
None/hardly any	9 (22%)	25 (71%)

In those observations where learners were asked questions about text, teachers mainly asked closed questions.

TABLE 8.7: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS CUED OR DREW LEARNERS' ATTENTION TO MAIN IDEAS IN EXTENDED TEXTS DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Number of observations n (valid)= 31
Often	3 (10%)
Sometimes	4 (13%)
Once or twice	4 (13%)
Never	20 (65%)

Most of the Limpopo teachers (78%) never or hardly ever cued or drew learners' attention to main ideas in extended text when this was read during classroom observations.

TABLE 8.8 EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS EXPLICITLY TAUGHT LEARNERS HOW TO INTERPRET AND 'READ' EXTRALINGUISTIC DEVICES DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Number of observations n (valid) = 73
Extensively	9 (12%)
Moderately	11 (15%)
Minimally	9 (12%)
Not at all	44 (60%)

There was no or hardly any evidence of teachers teaching learners how to interpret and read illustrative devices in 53 (72%) of 73 observations.

TABLE 8.9: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS CUED LEARNERS TO USE ILLUSTRATIVE DEVICES SO AS TO UNDERSTAND THE EXTENDED TEXTS THEY READ DURING OBSERVATIONS

Extent	Number of observations n (valid) = 31
Often	3 (10%)
Sometimes	7 (23%)
Once or twice	5 (16%)
Never	16 (52%)

Most teachers (68%) never or hardly ever directly cued learners to use illustrative devices such as illustrations or tables *as tools for understanding extended text* (for example, by cueing them to use illustrations in conjunction with text).

TABLE 8.10: EXTENT OF LEARNER INVOLVEMENT IN MAKING SENSE OF TEXT DURING THE CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent of learner involvement	Number of observations			
	Identifying and/or re-stating the main theme/idea/principle n (valid)=29	Retelling/ summarising what they have read n (valid)=29	Discussing/ responding to pictures/ illustrations n (valid)=28	Using pictures/ illustrations as clues for understanding text n (valid)=28
All/most learners	6 (21%)	1 (3%)	6 (21%)	7 (25%)
More than half the class	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
About half the class	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	1 (4%)
Less than half the class but at least a quarter	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
Less than quarter	2 (7%)	4 (14%)	1 (4%)	1 (4%)
None	20 (69%)	21 (72%)	17 (61%)	17 (61%)

In the few classrooms where learners were involved in making sense of text (including stories), the most common approaches were to involve learners in discussing or responding to pictures and illustrations, or in using pictures/illustrations as clues for understanding.

TABLE 8.11: EXTENT AND TYPE OF LEARNER INVOLVEMENT IN SUMMARISING OR RETELLING WHAT THEY HAVE READ DURING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

Extent of learner involvement	Number of observations			
	In linear/sequential terms n = 8	In causal terms n=8	Orally n=9	In writing n=9
Mostly	2	0	6	0
Sometimes	4	3	3	5
Not at all/hardly	2	5	0	4

In the isolated cases where learners were required to retell or summarise what they had read, the most common form of learner involvement was to retell (for example, the story or plot) *orally* in *linear/sequential* terms (i.e. and then..., and then.../sequencing events).

In 11 (62%) of 18 classes learners' responses to teachers' (mainly closed) questions about text were generally appropriate. In seven (39%) classes learners' responses to questions about text were generally inappropriate and not based on the text read.

In 16 (64%) of 25 recorded cases teachers always or mostly responded to and acknowledged learners' responses to questions about text. However, in 18 (69%) of 26 recorded cases teachers seldom or never unpacked or elaborated on learners' responses. This is a pervasive practice (cf. e.g. Macdonald, 1990). It is most alarming when a child has made a mistake and the teacher just passes over it. It seems clear that this strategy makes the class feel insecure, and consolidates the teacher's power.

In essence, only a few teachers were seen to be directly developing learners' reading comprehension skills during observations. Although some teachers asked information-retrieval type questions, most teachers spent very little time teaching learners strategies for making sense of extended texts or stories. When extended text was read in class, learners were most often required to discuss or respond to pictures or illustrations. Although there was evidence of some teachers making use of illustrations, they were not really integrating illustrative devices into the *reading* of texts and getting learners to use them for understanding text. Neither was there much evidence of teachers developing learners' visual literacy by explicitly teaching them how to interpret and read illustrations and other extralinguistic devices.

In almost all classes, teachers did not directly assist learners to develop strategies for independently interpreting and understanding extended text or other more complex representations. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that learners in so few classes were themselves engaged in reading extended narrative or expository texts and had their own textbooks.

8.4 Did teachers deliberately develop learners' vocabulary and spelling?

Teachers also need to assist learners to develop and increase their vocabulary (Abadzi, 2006) and, obviously, to spell accurately and quickly.

In the Limpopo classroom observations, researchers looked for evidence of 'general' vocabulary development and spelling development. The following are the findings:

- In 38 (52%) of 73 observations no general vocabulary development (i.e. learning new words and meanings) in learners' home language took place. For example, there was no evidence of learners making lists or 'dictionaries' with new words.
- There was no evidence of any spelling development in 44 (61%) of 72 observations. A researcher observed that, in one class, incorrect spelling in Grade 4 learners' work was not even pointed out or corrected by the teacher.

The inability evident in Grade 4 learners to understand what they are reading (even those who are learning in their home language) when they are confronted with increasingly complex text across the curriculum, is ultimately linked to their background knowledge of conceptual language (Garraway, 1994). Primary school teachers (and textbooks) need to begin to provide overt access to new concepts and terms through subject-specific vocabulary and words and through explicit teaching of academic literacy in each Learning Area. Thus another important aspect of literacy development is developing terminology relating to the various Learning Areas (the 'language' or vocabulary of mathematics,

history, science), for example, terms such as ‘add’, ‘subtract’, ‘divide’, and ‘multiply’. Obviously this usually entails teaching new concepts and knowledge.

In the Limpopo classroom observations, researchers looked for evidence of ‘specialist’ vocabulary development in home language and in the First Additional Language.

- In 45 (65%) of 69 valid observation records, there was no evidence at all of development of ‘specialist’ vocabulary or terminology related specifically to other Learning Areas (i.e. the language of mathematics, history, geography, or science, etc.).
- In 21 (70%) of 30 of the cases where there was evidence of explicit development of Learning Areas’ vocabulary or terminology, this was never done bilingually (i.e. in mother tongue and their First Additional Language).
- There was no evidence in 60 (87%) of 69 classes’ Home Language workbooks/portfolios of learners keeping ‘dictionaries’, glossaries or lists of home-language words relating to the development of subject-specific concepts or vocabulary. Only two classes’ workbooks/portfolios showed any evidence of learners keeping bilingual lists of vocabulary or terminology.
- There was no evidence at all in 29 (81%) of 36 classes’ workbooks/portfolios of learners keeping ‘dictionaries’, glossaries or lists of FAL words relating to the development of concepts or vocabulary.

Examples of ‘general’ and ‘specialist’ vocabulary developed during observations include comparisons such as big-small, tall-short, and fat-thin. Other words included: laptop; telefoni (cellphone); rhadiyo (radio); thelefoni (telephone); fekese (fax); e-mail; public phone; thelebisine (television); khompfutara or khomphutho (computer); xihaha-mpfuka (aeroplane); xitimela (train); parts of a bicycle such as seat, pedal, lamp, brake and frame; web; shadow; wedding party; names of domestic animals (katse or cat, and cow); names of wild animals; diaparo (clothes), such as tye (tie), borokgwana (small trousers), tlelafo (glove), and jeresi (jersey); members of the family, such as mma (mom), dad, uncle and grandmother; friend; nurse; ngaka (doctor); food; money; kgalema (to reprimand); house; farm; essential nutrients; healthy living; mathematical concepts such as ‘names’ of numbers (1 to 100), plus, minus, subtract, divide, multiply, multiplication, addition, graph, and fractions; parts of the human body; types of food; types of grain; types of insects; Gauteng; Johannesburg; Lesotho; names of shapes; noun; verb; and types of transport.¹

Where there was evidence of spelling development, some examples of spelling taught are: Ma-khu-lu (grandmother); sellfoni; thekisi (taxi); vuswa (porridge); ngaka; moropa (drum); Thursday; ship; grid; com-bi-nation; and bicycle.

In summary, although there was evidence of ‘general’ vocabulary development in a number of the Limpopo classes, there was little evidence of spelling development or the development of more specialized terminology or conceptual language. Few classes were given opportunities to begin to develop the enriched extended language of mathematics, science, geography, history, etc. either in mother tongue, in additional languages or bilingually during the observations.

¹ However, note the dominance of simple concrete words, existing largely in the domain of general knowledge, and therefore easily used in class discussion. There is no evidence of abstract words.

We conclude from these findings that not much direct or explicit literacy teaching is taking place in most of the Limpopo classes. The data also indicates that the scale of exposure to vocabulary (even pedestrian vocabulary) and text falls way below what should be expected at each grade level observed. In Chapter 9 we discuss the extent to which school management teams and teachers are systematically structuring and ensuring delivery of Grades 1-4 mother-tongue and First Additional Language Learning Programmes. Lockheed and Levin (1993, in Gilmour, 1997:10) used case studies of five developing-country contexts to establish that other important determinants of school effectiveness besides 'instructional materials', 'time for learning', 'teacher professionalism' and 'teaching practices' include, 'a well-developed curriculum' (i.e., scope, sequence and appropriate pacing) and 'opportunity-to-learn'.

CHAPTER 9: LITERACY PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT

In this chapter we present findings on Limpopo primary teachers' and school management teams' (SMT) planning for delivery of the literacy and language curriculum; as well as teachers' evaluation of literacy learning. As elaborated earlier, systematic reading and writing instruction in primary schooling is crucial in helping low socio-economic status learners to develop essential reading and writing skills. By implication, literacy and language instruction needs to be thoughtfully planned along a developmental trajectory across grades and learning phases. Thus the first part of this chapter attempts to answer the following question:

9.1 Do school management teams and teachers systematically structure and ensure delivery of Grades 1-4 home language/L1 and First Additional Language Learning Programmes along a developmental pathway?

9.1.1 Grade 1-4 teachers' Home Language and First Additional Language Learning Programmes

Teachers' literacy and language plans need to incorporate the teaching of all necessary language and literacy skills such as syntactic and grammatical skills, and phonemic, fluency, comprehension, and spelling skills. Essentially teachers need:

- well-organised literacy and language programmes that describe specific reading, writing and oral activities that reflect clear progression in levels of difficulty;
- structured plans that target the acquisition of specific reading, writing and language skills;
- targeted goals for learner's reading, writing and language achievement; and
- literacy and language assessment points integrated in programmes.

Most of the Limpopo Grade 1-4 teachers were able to show researchers their **Home Language** and **First Additional Language** Learning Programmes (where the latter applied). Researchers assessed the quality of Learning Programmes by examining plans in terms of coverage and progression.

9.1.1.1 Coverage

Over half (56%) of 70 **Home Language** Learning Programmes made available for researchers to scrutinise showed planning for the whole year as is evidenced in Table 9.1.

TABLE 9.1: SCOPE OF TEACHERS' HOME LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAMMES/ WORK SCHEDULES

Covers	Number of plans n (valid)= 70
1 term	1 (1%)
2 terms	2 (3%)
3 terms	3 (4%)
A year	39 (56%)
Other	8 (11%)
Unable to ascertain from the plan made available	8 (11%)
No programme made available	9 (13%)

Eleven (52%) out of 21 records on **First Additional Language** Learning Programmes made available to researchers outlined plans for the whole year (as opposed to 1, 2 or 3 terms).

In 25 (63%) of 40 cases where **Home Language** was taught as a subject during the observation period *and* Home Language Learning Programmes were made available to researchers as well, the work or content covered during the lesson’s observation appeared to be in line with the work outlined and indicated for the time of the term or year in the plan. Similarly, in 7 (64%) of 11 cases where **FAL** was taught during the observation period and FAL Learning Programmes were made available to researchers as well, the work or content covered during the lesson’s observation appeared to be in line with the work outlined for the time of the term or year in the plan.

Furthermore, in 43 (68%) of 63 cases, the time allocated for **Home Language** on the class timetable either fully or to a large extent ‘matched’ the time actually spent on the Learning Area during the observation period. In most cases the time allocated for **FAL** on the class timetable also either fully or to a large extent ‘matched’ the time actually spent on the Learning Area during the observation period (where FAL was observed during the observation).

In spite of this, in researchers’ assessments, the work in learners’ **Home Language workbooks and/or portfolios** indicated that teachers were either barely covering the curriculum for the grade or only managing to cover it to some extent in 38 (58%) of 65 classes. The work in learners’ **FAL** workbooks and/ portfolios similarly indicated that teachers were either barely or only managing to cover the curriculum to some extent (18 or 64% of 28 classes). Evidence is that most learners are not getting the opportunities to learn the literacy and language skills required by the curriculum.

On the one hand, researchers found that most of the Limpopo Grade 1-4 teachers’ Learning Programmes were consistent with what was covered in the classrooms indicating that teachers are covering work as intended. On the other hand, more than half of the available Learning Programmes were far ‘too general’ or provided rather ‘sketchy’ details on the content and reading and writing skills to be covered. Few programmes were extensively developed or considered specific enough. Most programmes simply comprised lists of Learning Outcomes and the associated Assessment Standards copied out from the Curriculum Statements. Table 9.2 provides information on the extent of detail in learning programmes.

TABLE 9.2: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS’ HOME LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAMMES PROVIDED DETAILS OF THE CONTENT AND SKILLS TO BE COVERED

Extent	Number of plans n (valid)=63
Extensively	10 (16%)
Moderately	17 (27%)
Minimally	13 (21%)
Not at all	23 (37%)

- 36 (57%) of 63 available **Home Language** Learning Programmes provided ‘no’ or ‘minimal’ details on the content and skills to be covered.

- 17 (68%) of 25 available **FAL** Learning Programmes were assessed as providing no or minimal details on the content and skills to be covered.

Researchers observed that:

- reading activities for learners were not specified in 37 (64%) of 50 available **Home Language** Learning Programmes;
- writing activities for learners were not specified in 35 (64%) of 50 **Home Language** Programmes;
- 40 (73%) of 55 **Home Language** Learning Programmes made no specific reference to developing any terminology relating to other Learning Areas (for example, the ‘language’ or vocabulary of mathematics, history, science);
- an assessment plan (dates or points for evaluating learners) was not integrated into 41 (67%) of 61 **Home Language** Programmes.

Similarly:

- reading activities for learners were not specified in 18 (64%) of 25 available **FAL** Learning Programmes;
- writing activities for learners were not specified in 18 (64%) of 25 **FAL** Programmes;
- oral activities for learners were not specified in 18 (64%) of 25 **FAL** Learning Programmes;
- 19 (76%) of 25 **FAL** Learning Programmes made no specific reference to developing any terminology relating to other Learning Areas (for example, the ‘language’ or vocabulary of mathematics, history, science);
- an assessment plan (dates or points for evaluating learners) was not integrated into 18 (64%) of 25 available **FAL** Programmes.

In several instances teachers appeared to re-use previous years’ Learning Programmes (tippexing out the year’s date and overwriting it with that of the current year). This practice appears consistent with that of the handwritten transcription of the NCS, rather than the development of a Learning Programme. The teachers’ strategy of transcribing the NCS coupled with a lack of detail in the Learning Programmes point towards their lack of understanding of what it is that they are supposed to be doing.

9.1.1.2 Progression

Table 9.3 shows that 37 (63%) of 60 **Home Language** Programmes showed ‘no’ or only occasional evidence of planned progression in sequencing of content and skills in terms of content and cognitive complexity.

TABLE 9.3: EXTENT TO WHICH TEACHERS’ HOME LANGUAGE LEARNING PLANS SHOWED EVIDENCE OF PLANNED PROGRESSION IN SEQUENCING OF CONTENT AND SKILLS

Extent	Number of plans n (valid)=60
Always	6 (10%)
Mostly	17 (28%)
Sometimes	11 (18%)
Never/ barely	26 (43%)

Seventeen (65%) of 26 **FAL** Learning Programmes showed ‘no’ or only occasional evidence of planned progression in sequencing of content and skills.

9.1.2 Teachers’ structuring of Grades 1-4 Home Language and First Additional Language Learning Programmes

Most teachers’ Learning Programmes did not reflect progressive, sequential, targeted goals for literacy and language achievement, and most did not have assessment points integrated into them. Generally programmes did not show clear progression in terms of difficulty, and planning did not reflect systematic developmental challenges. It seems that in many cases, the curriculum is planned (and consequently mostly implemented or made available to learners) as a series of fragmented and disconnected components and activities. Work in learners’ workbooks indicated that many learners are not getting the language and literacy learning opportunities they require to be adequately prepared in subsequent grades. Indeed in the focus-group interviews with district officials, interviewees from two districts estimated that less than half the Foundation Phase teachers in their districts usually finish covering the current curriculum for Home Language (L1), FAL and Numeracy by the end of the school year.¹

What is evident is that most Grade 1-4 teachers need much more assistance in planning their language and literacy Learning Programmes or schemes of work if learner under-preparedness in language and literacy development in subsequent grades is not to become cumulative (as also noted before by Hoadley, 1999; Reeves, 2005).

In primary schools, heads of departments (HODs) are generally considered responsible for overseeing particular curriculum phases, more specifically Foundation Phase or Grades 1-3, and Intermediate Phase or Grades 4-7. In Section 9.1.3 we discuss the provision of this form of in-school support for Grade 1-4 teachers. We examine the extent to which SMTs in the sample of Limpopo primary schools appear to be supporting teachers with the important task of curriculum planning and delivery.

9.1.3 School management teams’ management and monitoring of internal coherence in the sequencing of literacy and language curriculum planning and delivery across grades and phases

Curriculum planning and delivery is difficult to achieve without the necessary documents. In South African schools a copy of the National Curriculum Statements is critical for curriculum planning and implementation. In the SMT focus-group interviews all SMT groups maintained that each Grade R/1-4 teacher at their school had been provided with his/her own copy of all the NCS for the grade they teach.

As primary phase heads, HODs should be focusing their attention on ensuring that all learners ‘experience a sequence of instruction’ that exposes them to learning in a systematic and developmentally challenging fashion over their whole primary school career (Smith, Smith & Bryk, 1998:12). One of the key functions of school management should be to ensure that teachers are covering the grade requirements and keeping to literacy curriculum objectives by pacing their teaching. In particular, HODs need to ensure that enough time is being spent on all the different aspects of literacy teaching

¹ Also of interest is that two of the five districts reported that they did not know how many Grade 1-3 teachers usually cover the curriculum in these Learning Areas. According to researchers’ notes, one district responded that this was ‘not applicable in the Foundation Phase’.

across learning phases. In order to plan for this, they need to know how much time is available for covering the curriculum in the different Learning Areas.

9.1.3.1 Managing curriculum planning and pacing

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked what the minimum number of days of contact time is per learner per year at the school²). Only 13 of the 20 principals provided answers. Ten of these principals stated that the minimum number of days of contact time per learner per year at school is 196. One principal maintained that it was 156 days; one said it was 203 days and another said it was 200 days.

According to data in the principal questionnaires, 19 of the schools follow the same timetable every week. Only one principal reported that the timetable at his/her school runs in a six-day cycle.³ In terms of the National Education Policy Act (1996), the formal teaching time per school week is 35 hours. The time set out for Grades R, 1 and 2 is 22 hours 30 minutes, and for Grade 3, it is 25 hours. The NCS states that, in the Foundation Phase, 40% of instructional time should be allocated to literacy and language teaching and learning. This means that, in Grade 1 and 2, at least nine hours should be allocated to literacy and language per week, and in Grade 3, at least ten hours should be allocated. Keeping in mind that the designated total number of hours for literacy are spread across L1 and FAL, one can then attempt to establish if schools met minimum requirements.⁴

In the SMT focus-group interviews, SMT members were asked to provide (without looking it up) the number of hours timetabled per week/ cycle for Grade R/1-3 Home Language and First Additional Language. In addition to SMTs from five schools who could not provide the hours timetabled for Home Language and/or FAL per week/cycle in Grade R/1-3, proper information could also not be recorded and analysed for two more schools. (In the case of one school each there also seems to have been some confusion pertaining to the provision and recording of the required information for HL/L1 for Grade 1, and FAL for Grades 1-3. This may have been a terminology issue. Nevertheless, in aggregating times by grade level across L1 and FAL, one could assume the totals were correct.) As a result, 65% of the SMTs (13 of 20) were able to provide the number of hours allocated per week/cycle for literacy and language teaching in Grades 1-3.

The outcome of analysis of the time-allocation information is reflected in Table 9.4.

The figures were evaluated against the minimum of 9 or 10 hours on average per week respectively required with regard to Grades 1 and 2, on the one hand, and Grade 3, on the other hand. For those schools for which complete responses were available, it appears that almost 75% of the (reported) time allocations for Grade 1 were in line with regulations, while just below 70% of them were in line for Grades 2 and 3.

² According to DoE calendars on the Internet: it should have been “(199) 195” days in 2007 for inland provinces (with days for teachers appearing in brackets).

³ This did not influence other calculations, as its time-allocation information was incomplete anyway.

⁴ Sharing this time (between L1 and FAL) puts these learners at a disadvantage relative to learners who start off on the firm footing of learning (through) their mother tongue.

TABLE 9.4: EVALUATION OF AVERAGE TOTAL TIME THAT SMTs REPORTED AS ALLOCATED FOR LITERACY / LANGUAGE (HL AND FAL) PER WEEK FOR GRADES 1-3

Language / grade	Against achievement of stipulated minimum hours	Number of schools
Grade 1 (n=13)	9 or more hours per week	10
	Fewer than 9 hours per week	3
Grade 2 (n=13)	9 or more hours per week	9
	Fewer than 9 hours per week	4
Grade 3 (n=13)	10 or more hours per week	9
	Fewer than 10 hours per week	4

SMTs did not always appear to know the minimum time-allocation requirements straightaway. It may therefore be difficult for them to assist teachers in planning their curriculum delivery and ensure or monitor its coverage. An additional concern would be the 25% to 30% of the cases where under-allocations were actually reported.

9.1.3.2 Ensuring that there is enough reading and writing across all Learning Areas

Another of the key tasks of school management is to ensure that teachers are keeping to the literacy objectives. Indeed, the PIRLS 2006 data show that South African learners at schools that reported having school-based statements of a reading curriculum are likely to achieve better scores (Howie *et al.*, 2007:44).

In the principal questionnaires, 53% (9 of 17 valid responses) of the sample of primary-school principals maintained that their schools do have formal policies stating how much written work has to be completed by each grade and Learning Area each year. Forty seven percent of the principals said that a formal policy was not available in their schools.

However, in the SMT focus-group interviews it proved difficult for most of the SMT members interviewed to remember how many pieces of written work have to be produced by Grades R-4 learners in 2007 for both HL and FAL. SMT group members in 22% (4) of the sample schools admitted that they do not know many pieces of written work are to be completed by Grade 1-4 learners at their schools in 2007 for HL and FAL. In one school there was lack of consensus amongst SMT members as to how many pieces of written work have to be completed.

Figures that were provided by different SMT groups interviewed varied greatly across primary schools. In many cases the impression gained by researchers was that respondents were simply guessing. Hence the reliability of responses provided is considered doubtful. For example, numbers provided ranged from 16 to 140 for Grade R (HL), 16 to 180 for Grade 1 (HL), 16 to 203 for Grade 2 (HL), 16 to 203 for Grade 3 (HL), and 16 to 252 for Grade 4 (HL). All SMT groups, with the exception of one school, reported that their school did not offer FAL in Grade R/1. At the only school where SMT members said that FAL (English) was offered in Grade R and 1, the SMT maintained that the learners are expected to complete 16 pieces of written work in 2007. SMT's reported number of FAL pieces of written work to be completed by learners in Grades 2-4 ranged from 16 to 203.

It seems that many of the SMTs have not properly considered the importance of setting and communicating grade-level written work and reading requirements and/or expectations to teachers.

9.1.3.3 Monitoring curriculum delivery

HODs / SMT members also need to monitor teachers' progress on covering the grade-level curriculum requirements.

In the 18 SMT focus-group interviews, 50% of the SMTs said that monitoring teachers' progress on covering the curriculum takes place more than once a term. Twenty-five percent said teachers' coverage is checked at least once a term. Twenty-five percent of the SMTs reported that coverage is checked once or twice a year.

The majority of SMT focus groups (56%) reported that they use a combination of methods to check for curriculum coverage. Seventeen percent said they monitor by checking the teachers' Learning Programmes/work schedules. However, planned programmes reflect the intended rather than the implemented curriculum. Eleven percent of SMTs said they mainly monitor coverage by checking learner assessment. However, this reflects the assessed curriculum as opposed to the implemented curriculum. Eleven percent of SMTs said they monitor coverage through classroom visits or observations – not the most reliable means of determining the opportunities to learn that have been provided to learners across the school year.

None of the SMTs said that the *main* method used is to check learners' workbooks – one of the most reliable methods of monitoring time on task and learners' access to the curriculum that is supposed to be made available to them.

The first part of this chapter thus highlights the need to build the grade-level and phase-level expertise of primary school Heads of Departments/ Phase Heads in ensuring and monitoring internal coherence in the sequencing of curriculum (specifically literacy) planning and teaching over each school year and across the Foundation and Intermediate Phases (Reeves, 2005). In Chapter 11 we discuss the support and training that has been provided to SMTs for this task.

In the second part of this chapter we describe Grade 1-4 teachers' evaluation of literacy learning in an attempt to answer the following question:

9.2 How regular and individualised is assessment and recording of Grade 1-4 learners' Home Language/L1 and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability?

Teachers' knowledge of individual learners' ability and progress is crucial for tracking each learner's literacy development. Regular monitoring and recording of learner progress makes it possible for teachers to differentiate between individual learner's ability. Teachers need to monitor and keep track of each learner's reading and writing progress through:

- a language and literacy (reading and writing) assessment plan that is easy to manage and provides useful information;
- keeping running records of learners' oral reading and the types of errors they make when reading aloud;

- regularly marking learners’ written/ writing class work;
- regular reports on children’s reading and writing progress.

In the Limpopo study we were interested in the extent to which assessment and recording of Grade 1-4 learners’ mother-tongue and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability was regular and individualised. Researchers thus checked the number of Home Language and FAL marks or assessment records kept for each learner, the type of literacy and language activities or tasks that had been assessed, and teachers’ marking of learners’ workbooks.

9.2.1 Assessment records

In the 18 SMT focus-group interviews, groups were asked how often formal assessment of learners takes place for HL and FAL in Grades R/1-4. Although there were some SMTs who did not know, the majority of the SMTs reported that formal assessment of HL takes place more than once a term. The rest of the groups said that formal assessment takes place at least once a term or once a year. The following are percentages of SMT groups who reported that formal assessment of FAL takes place more than once a term at their school for Grade R – 10%, Grade 1 – 15%, Grade 2 – 25%, Grade 3 – 40%, and Grade 4 – 45%.

Researchers were able to examine the assessment records of 62 Limpopo teachers. Tables 9.5 to 9.7 shows findings on the number and type of assessment records kept per learner.

TABLE 9.5: NUMBER OF MARKS/ ASSESSMENT TASKS RECORDED IN TEACHERS’ RECORD BOOKS FOR EACH LEARNER FOR HOME LANGUAGE IN AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2007

Number of tasks	Number of record books n (valid)=62
0	5 (8%)
1-2	9 (15%)
3-4	14 (23%)
5-9	19 (31%)
10-19	9 (15%)
More than 20	6 (10%)

Although most SMT members said that formal assessment of HL is taking place more than once a term, there were fewer than five marks/ assessment records for **Home Language** recorded for each learner in August/September 2007 in 28 (45%) of 62 record/mark books made available to researchers. Only 25% of the records had ten or more marks or records for HL.

TABLE 9.6: NUMBER OF FAL MARKS/ ASSESSMENT TASKS RECORDED IN TEACHERS’ RECORD BOOKS FOR EACH LEARNER IN AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2007

Number of tasks	Number of record books n (valid)=28
1-2	5 (18%)
3-4	13 (46%)
5-9	4 (14%)
10-19	2 (7%)
More than 20	4 (14%)

Indications are that, in most cases, formal assessment of FAL takes place less often than reported by SMT groups. There were fewer than 5 marks/ assessment records for each learner in FAL recorded for 2007 in 18 (64%) of 28 record/ mark books made available to researchers.

TABLE 9.7: NUMBER OF HOME LANGUAGE READING, WRITING AND ORAL ACTIVITIES/ TASKS ASSESSED IN TEACHERS' RECORD BOOKS

Tasks	Number of record books					
	0	1-2	3-4	5-9	10-19	More than 20
Reading activities n (valid)=46	7 (15%)	14 (30%)	14 (30%)	6 (13%)	3 (7%)	2 (4%)
Writing activities n (valid)=43	6 (14%)	13 (30%)	12 (28%)	5 (12%)	6 (14%)	1 (2%)
Oral activities n (valid)=42	7 (17%)	12 (29%)	12 (29%)	8 (19%)	2 (5%)	1 (2%)

In those cases where researchers were able to ascertain the type of activities or tasks that had been assessed:

- 35 (76%) of 46 record books showed fewer than five assessment records or marks specifically for Home Language *reading* activities/ tasks per learner;
- 31 (72%) of 43 records showed fewer than five assessment records or marks for Home Language *writing* activities or tasks; and
- 31 (74%) of 42 record books showed fewer than five marks or assessment records for Home Language *oral* activities or tasks.

9.2.2 Marking of learners' workbooks

In 53 (76%) of 70 classes' **Home Language** workbooks/portfolios, there was evidence of the teacher always or mostly marking learners' work with ticks and crosses (not just a signature). However, in 45 (66%) of 68 classes' L1 workbooks/ portfolios, evidence was that learners only sometimes, hardly ever or never did corrections.

In 28 (82%) of 34 classes' **FAL** workbooks/portfolios, there was evidence of the teacher always or mostly marking learners' work with ticks and crosses (not just a signature). In 21 (75%) of 28 classes' FAL workbooks/ portfolios, there was evidence that learners only sometimes, hardly ever or never did revisions or corrections.

Classroom-observation data showed that, in-class *reading assessment* tended to be based on the class as a whole through the whole class reading aloud in 'unison' and through 'collective' responses to teachers' questioning rather than through assessment of individual learner's reading, responses or comprehension. This is an entirely inappropriate way for teachers to assess reading. It makes it very difficult for the teacher to distinguish between individual learners' status as readers, give individual feedback on error and respond in ways that move them beyond their current levels of ability and progress.

9.2.3 Recording Grade 1-4 learners' Home Language and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability

Most of the Limpopo teachers were able to show records of individual learner's language and literacy assessment. Most records took the form of marks or symbols. Most teachers appear to maintain these records on a term-by-term basis (in some cases, more frequently

and in others more ‘randomly’). Most teachers also marked learners’ written work in their exercise books regularly.

However, the amount and types of tasks assessed was uneven across schools and there was little evidence that individual learner’s reading and writing progress is being charted/tracked in a variety of ways. There was no evidence of the teacher keeping daily or running records – for example, of types of reading errors made by individual learners during guided reading. There did not seem to be any evidence of individual learner records that were linked to the different levels of readers or series of readers attained. There was no recorded evidence of teachers keeping literacy ‘checklists’ on each learner, for example, keeping track of the letters and/or number of words that each learner had learnt. Overall, there was not that much individual differentiation of learners in teachers’ monitoring and assessment records. The use of symbols rather than individual marks, comments and quantitative information seems to lend itself to a more ‘impressionistic’ judgment on the part of teachers and less individualised and specific form of assessment.

Meta analyses of performance-based research in India by Govinda and Varghese (1993) and Mexico by Schmelkes (1996 both in Gilmour, 1997: 11), identified ‘strengthening learner evaluation’ as important for improving school effectiveness in both these country contexts.

In Chapter 10 we examine the extent to which the sample of Limpopo schools and teachers are informing Grade 1-4 parents/guardians on their children’s academic progress and involving them in their literacy development.

CHAPTER 10: PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

In this chapter we try to determine the extent of parental involvement in their children's academic development in the sample of Limpopo primary schools, particularly their involvement in literacy activities.

Most schools consider it difficult to improve academic performance without parental support and parental involvement in children's education is generally considered key to learner attainment. Elsewhere in this report, attention is drawn to recent research which confirms the significance of parental involvement, particularly in relation to reading and literacy development. It has been found that 'reading for pleasure', something which is encouraged by active parental involvement, is a stronger indicator of academic success than are other socio-economic variables such as social class, family size and education level of parents (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Not surprisingly, lack of parental participation in learners' instruction is more common in schools serving low socio-economic status communities. Difficulties in contexts where there are poor literacy rates amongst children's main caregivers (especially mothers) include involving parents/guardians in their children's homework and literacy development, particularly in the lower grades. A related difficulty is reporting to parents on children's academic progress and performance, in particular their reading and writing progress or lack thereof.

In their review of performance-based research in developing countries, Simmons and Alexander (1980, in Gilmour, 1997:10) found that 'homework done by students, the physical conditions of home study, and the amount of reading done at home are significant predictors of student achievement'. Certainly homework is a significant means of increasing time on task for learners, for catching up with lost time, and for extending the school day. However, enormous challenges for many teachers in South Africa are learners' poor socio-economic home circumstances and the low levels of formal education and poor literacy rates amongst parents or guardians which mean that their main caregivers cannot help them with homework. Many primary-school children come from homes where parents' or guardians' reading levels are far too low for them to help them even with beginning reading and learning to read. A further difficulty often encountered is ensuring that books that are taken home are returned.

In the next sections we present findings in the Limpopo schools on:

- progress reports provided to parents (10.1);
- parent meetings to discuss children's academic progress (10.2);
- homework (10.3); and
- related matters such as parental aspirations for their children, and barriers to parental involvement (10.4 to 10.6).

10.1 Progress reports provided for parents/guardians

Forty four (44) of the Limpopo Grade 1-4 teachers were able to show researchers examples or evidence of the kind of progress reports on **Home Language** made available to learners' parents or guardians. According to researchers' reports in 35 (81%) of 43 cases, reports provided meaningful symbols, marks or percentages. However:

- In 35 (83%) of 42 cases, reports provided no informative or constructive comment specifically about learners’ **Home Language** reading ability.
- In 36 (86%) of 42 cases, reports provide no informative or constructive comment specifically about learners’ writing ability in **Home Language**.
- 36 (88%) of 41 reports, offered no information or constructive comment about learners’ **Home Language** development and proficiency.

Nineteen teachers were able to show researchers examples or evidence of the kind of progress reports on **FAL** made available to learners’ parents or guardians. Researchers’ reports on 17 of these show that although 15 (88%) of the reports provided meaningful symbols, marks or percentages:

- 16 (94%) reports provided no informative or constructive comment specifically about learners’ reading ability in **First Additional Language**.
- 16 (94%) reports provide no informative or constructive comment specifically about learners’ writing ability in **First Additional Language**.
- None of the reports offered specific information or constructive comment about learners’ **First Additional Language** development and proficiency.

10.2 School meetings to discuss children’s academic progress

In the focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the 20 schools, respondents at 19 (90%) schools reported that their school involves parents/guardians/caregivers in children’s academic education through school meetings with teachers to discuss their children’s progress.

In the principal questionnaires, the 20 principals were asked how often their schools hold meetings inviting Grade R/1-4 parents/guardians to discuss their children’s attendance, progress and performance with their teachers. Eighty percent (16) of the principals said that their schools hold such meetings every year. Fifty percent said that school meetings take place at least once a term. Table 10.1 shows other details on the frequency of school meetings.

TABLE 10.1: PRINCIPALS’ REPORTS ON FREQUENCY OF SCHOOL MEETINGS FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

How often meetings are held	Number of principals n=20
More than once a term	4 (20%)
At least once a term	10 (50%)
At least twice a year	1 (5%)
At least once a year	1 (5%)
Never	4 (20%)

In the teacher questionnaires, 41 (68%) out of 60 teachers confirmed that they had attended a meeting called by their school to discuss children’s progress with learners’ parents/guardians in 2007. Nineteen (32%) of the 60 teachers reported that their schools had not held any meetings for parents to discuss learners’ progress in 2007.

In the focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the SGB members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the schools, respondents at:

- 19 (95%) of 20 schools said their schools also involve parents/guardians/caregivers in their children’s academic education through meetings with teachers to discuss **individual** learners with **academic difficulties**;
- all 20 (100%) of the schools reported that the school also involves parents/guardians/caregivers in their children’s academic education through meetings with teachers to discuss individual children’s **behaviour and/or discipline**.

10.3 Homework

In the focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the SGB members and other parents or community stakeholders,

- 16 (89%) groups out of 18 valid cases claimed that their school involved parents/guardians in supervising children’s homework (e.g. signing homework books, support with daily reading practice);
- 18 (90%) of the SGB/parent groups at the 20 schools maintained that the school involved parents in ensuring that children come to school properly prepared (e.g. with the right books and writing material, etc.) and on time.

We were particularly interested in the degree to which the sample of Limpopo primary schools and teachers try to involve parents/guardians in children’s literacy development as well as the extent to which textbooks and readers are taken home and returned. In the teacher questionnaires, most teachers gave the impression that they regularly gave learners homework as is demonstrated in Tables 10.2 to 10.5.

TABLE 10.2: TEACHERS’ REPORTS ON HOW OFTEN LEARNERS ARE GIVEN WRITTEN HOME-LANGUAGE HOMEWORK

Frequency	Number of teachers n=80
Every day	16 (20%)
3-4 times a week	22 (28%)
Once or twice a week	33 (41%)
Less than once a week	2 (3%)
Never	7 (9%)

TABLE 10.3: TEACHERS’ REPORTS ON HOW OFTEN LEARNERS ARE GIVEN READING HOME-LANGUAGE HOMEWORK

Frequency	Number of teachers n (valid) = 78
Every day	18 (23%)
3-4 times a week	15 (19%)
Once or twice a week	22 (28%)
Less than once a week	4 (5%)
Never	19 (24%)

Twenty four percent of the respondents said they never give reading homework as opposed to 9% who said they never give writing/written literacy/language homework.

However, our classroom observation data strongly suggest that all the above data on homework reflect socially desirable responses that are not a true reflection of the situation in most of the schools. Certainly, information from the classroom observations, provided in Table 10.6, shows little evidence of homework being checked or given in the classes.

TABLE 10.4: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON NUMBER OF MINUTES' READING HOME-LANGUAGE HOMEWORK LEARNERS ARE GIVEN

Number of minutes	Number of teachers n (valid)=53
> 30	7 (13%)
15-30	28 (53%)
< 15	18 (34%)

TABLE 10.5: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON HOW OFTEN LEARNERS ARE GIVEN NUMERACY HOMEWORK

How often	Number of teachers n (valid)=65
Every day	15 (23%)
3-4 times a week	16(25%)
Once or twice a week	23 (35%)
Less than once a week	2 (3%)
Never	9 (14%)

TABLE 10.6: EVIDENCE OF HOMEWORK GIVEN IN CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

There was evidence of written homework being checked and marked in 10 (14%) of the observations. n (valid)=72
There was some evidence of the class being given some form or reading homework in 9 (13%) of the observations. n (valid)=68
There was evidence of the class being given some form of writing homework (not drawing) in 10 (14%) of the observations. n (valid)=69
There was evidence of the class being given some form of spelling homework in 5 (8%) of the observations. n (valid)=65

Learners were given homework in very few of the observations. Without doubt evidence from the observations is that most Grade 1-4 teachers in the sample of Limpopo primary schools seldom give their learners reading-related homework. There was no clear evidence of learners being allowed to take books from *classroom book collections* home and little evidence of them having to practice reading pages of their readers at home. Judging by the amount of work in learners' language and literacy exercise books, it seems unlikely that learners are spending much time on written tasks at home.

Another factor found to be associated with learner achievement in international research besides teacher quality, textbooks, opportunity to learn, time and parental and community involvement, is high expectations for children (Scheerens, 1992; Reynolds *et al.*, 2002; Teddlie *et al.*, 2002). In other words, parental involvement in children's education *and* high expectations and aspirations for their children are generally considered key to learner attainment. The next section of this chapter thus considers how far most parents/guardians in the Limpopo schools expect their children to study at or after school.

10.4 Parents' expectations for and of their children

In the focus-group interviews with as many as possible of the School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders at each of the 20 Limpopo schools:

- more than half (55%) of the SGB/parent focus groups said that *most* parents/guardians at their school expect their children to study at college/university after high school;
- 35% of the SGB/parent focus groups said that *most* parents/guardians at their school expect their children to finish high school but not to study further;
- only 5% of the SGB/parent focus groups said that *most* parents/guardians at their school expect their children to continue to high school but not necessarily to finish high school;
- 5% of the SGB/parent focus groups said that there was no majority expectation at their school and that, as far as they knew, parental expectations varied.

In Section 10.5 we discuss perceived and real barriers to involving parents/guardians in the Limpopo schools. In Section 10.6 we discuss whether, given these barriers, the sample of schools and teachers are involving Grade 1-4 parents/guardians as much as possible in their children's academic progress and literacy development (American Association of School Librarians, 2007).

10.5 Barriers to parental involvement and expectations

Barriers identified in the focus-group interviews with SGB members, SMT members and teachers include:

- Lack of resources, responsibility and accountability;
- Poor attendance at parent meetings;¹
- Inability to support homework, particularly the capacity to assist with reading homework;
- Low expectations in terms of children studying further after school because of poverty.

Resources, responsibility and accountability

In the focus-group interview with as many as possible of the SGB members and other parents/guardians or community stakeholders at each of the schools, respondents were asked to identify the greatest barriers to parent/guardian involvement in children's academic education. Table 10.7 provides the number of schools where SGB/parent focus groups said that each of the options provided was or was not a barrier. Options are ranked from the most to the least commonly identified barriers.

Table 10.7 shows that:

- more than three quarters of the SGB/parent groups said parents/guardians at their schools had limited educational and financial **resources**, time, and skills to support their children's education;
- more than half the SGB/parent groups reported that all or some of the general parent body believe that **responsibility** for their children's academic achievement rests solely on the school's shoulders and/or that their children's academic performance is not a top priority because they have other more pressing concerns. The SGB/parent group at one school said that the majority of the parents (caregivers) are young girls who are still in secondary school. *'Those mothers are*

¹ Parents may not be living at home, or work far away, or be unable to pay taxi fares for coming to meetings.

immature and irresponsible and they don't support their children with academic work.';

- more than 50% of the SGB/parent groups indicated that parents/guardians at their school do not seem to feel entitled to make demands on the schooling system or to hold teachers **accountable** for their children's lack of academic progress and performance.

TABLE 10.7: GREATEST BARRIERS TO PARENTS/GUARDIANS/ CAREGIVERS FROM INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC EDUCATION ACCORDING TO SGBs

Barrier	To a large or some extent	Not a barrier
Parents/guardians/caregivers do not have the financial and human resources to offer children academic enrichment outside of school (e.g. extra lessons; other resources such as books, computers; access to public libraries; etc.) n=20	17 (85%)	3 (15%)
Low levels of parents'/guardians'/caregivers' formal education means they cannot help their children with reading, writing and homework n=20	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
Parents/guardians/caregivers do not have time to assist their children with school work (e.g. because they have to walk long distances to collect water; both parents work full-time or live elsewhere; there are younger children to care for at home; etc.) n=20	15 (75%)	5 (25%)
Parents/guardians/caregivers believe that the school is entirely responsible for their children's academic progress and performance n=20	14 (70%)	6 (30%)
Children's academic performance is <i>not</i> a high priority for parents/guardians/caregivers (for example, learner behaviour is more important for them) n (valid)=18	12 (67%)	6 (33%)
Parents/guardians/caregivers are not sufficiently critical about the quality of education that their children are receiving and do not demand that deficiencies (e.g. lack of readers, story books, home language textbooks) are addressed by the LDoE n (valid)=18	11 (61%)	7 (39%)
Parents/guardians/caregivers do not question the competence of teaching staff when they should n=20	11 (55%)	9 (45%)
Parents/guardians/caregivers do not feel confident about communicating with teaching staff who are seen as professionals of a higher social status n (valid)=19	8 (42%)	11 (58%)
Parents'/guardians'/caregivers' limited English-language proficiency makes communication with the school difficult ² n (valid)=19	2 (11%)	17 (89%)
School staff's limited proficiency in the home language of learners makes communication with parents/guardians/caregivers difficult n=20	0	20 (100%)

Attendance at parent meetings

In the focus-group interviews with School Governing Body (SGB) members and other parents or community stakeholders, respondents in 55% (11) of the groups said that parents' attendance at school meetings to discuss children's academic performance is usually poor. Forty five percent (9) of the groups reported that poor attendance is not a problem. The suggestion made during such discussions was that, because the literacy levels of the parents/guardians are low, they do not realise the importance of attending such meetings. Another explanation offered for poor attendance was lack of transport, particularly as most parents/guardians do not own cars.

² If they are able to actually visit the school this is not a real disadvantage.

In open-ended questions in the teacher questionnaires teachers similarly reported that *'parents don't respond when teachers call them to a meeting to discuss their children'*.

Homework

The main reasons cited by teachers in the teacher questionnaires and focus-group interviews for not giving homework are that parents and guardians are not sufficiently literate or educated to assist their children and that learners cannot be trusted to return readers or textbooks if they allow them to take them home. Teachers claimed that if learners are given books to take home, they don't look after them properly or they leave the books at home.

One teacher said that most of her learners are not living with their parents but with their grandmothers/grandparents³ and there is no one to supervise or make them read even if they are given reading homework. Teachers complained that learners do not do homework if it is given. A common refrain was that parents or guardians *'do not cooperate and do not make children do their homework so children come to school without having done their homework.'* A Grade 1 teacher said learners are *'too young and lose their homework'*. Another Grade 1 teacher said that her learners were *'still struggling to write'* so she cannot give them written homework.⁴ One teacher said there was no need to give homework as her class *'did enough work at school'*.

Teachers also acknowledged that learners *'cannot do reading homework'* even if they or their parents/carers are able and motivated to do reading homework because they don't have their own copies of books or reading material at home as readers are kept at school. One teacher said that there is *'no point in giving reading homework to learners who cannot read as only the capable ones can practice alone at home.'* Some teachers commented that, in any case, *'there are not enough readers for each learner to take his/her own copy home.'* In the SGB/parent focus-group interviews, groups at three schools cited lack of learner support material as a barrier to parental involvement in learners' academic development.

Expectations

Findings indicate that the main reason for parents/guardians not expecting the children to study further after school is poverty. Many families do not have money to pay for children's further education. In many cases parents may feel that it is better for children to work after completing high school in order to gain an income. (They may also be unaware largely of student loans and bursary schemes.)

10.6 Are schools and teachers involving Grade 1-4 parents/guardians as much as possible in their children's academic performance and literacy development?

It seems that most of the sample of schools and their SGBs expect little if any real participation from the general parent body and that it is mainly SGB parents who are active members of the school 'community'. For example:

- 89% (17) of 19 SGB/parent focus groups reported that their schools do not play any role in providing parenting classes;

³ The situation can be much more complex, because of the increasing number of child-headed households.

⁴ Previously policy has also existed that Grade children didn't get homework.

- Although 18 (90%) of 20 SGB/parent groups said that they assist with educational outings or chaperoning on field trips, it was clear that this kind of involvement is confined to SGB members only and does not involve the general parent body;
- The majority 18 (90%) of the 20 SGB/parent focus groups reported that no learners' parents/guardians are involved as volunteer classroom assistants.

Neither was there any real sense of schools being accountable to the general parent body for learner attainment. Although most (84%) SGB/parent focus groups said that parents/guardians at their schools respect the professional competence of teaching staff, it appears that few parents/guardians feel they have the right to intervene in issues pertaining to instructional quality.

In addition, schools and teachers do not appear to communicate high academic or literacy expectations of and for learners to the general parent body and learners themselves. Schools and teachers need to be very aware of the vital role they play both in setting high expectations for learners and through communicating these expectations to parents/guardians and their students. According to leading researchers of key features of effective schools, schools' and teachers' high expectations of learners can make a significant difference to learner attainment (Scheerens, 1992; Reynolds *et al.*, 2002; Teddlie *et al.*, 2002). Certainly our classroom observation data (see Chapter 7) showed that most of the Grade 1-4 teachers have low reading and writing expectations for learners in their classrooms.

Most SGBs/parent focus groups endorsed the view that learners' family-based or out-of-school opportunities to learn school knowledge and literacy skills are very limited. Yet, 55% (11) of 20 SGB/parent focus groups reported that their schools do *not* play a role in Adult literacy (ABET) or family literacy whilst only 45% (9) said that schools did play a role in ABET/family literacy. Seventy percent (14) of the 20 groups said that their schools do not play a role in English/Afrikaans second-language classes for adults whilst 30% (6 groups) said that their schools played a role in L2 classes.

Typically the sample of Limpopo schools all report to parents through school reports and school meetings. Most of the school reports to parents/guardians seen by researchers had symbols, some had individual marks but very few had substantive comment/s on different aspects of learner's language and literacy development. There was also little evidence of learners being given homework. Crucially, evidence is that most of the primary schools and teachers surveyed are not managing or trying to maintain any kind of home reading programmes. This places an even greater responsibility on teachers to maximise reading development in class and again signals the importance of providing learners with maximum exposure to a great variety of reading opportunities in class and at school.

In Chapter 11 we examine the extent to which schools and teachers are sufficiently and appropriately prepared and supported by the instructional system for the challenging task of Grade 1- 4 language and literacy teaching in these contexts.

CHAPTER 11: TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR IN-SERVICE PRIMARY-SCHOOL TEACHERS

In this chapter we:

- examine the extent to which the Grade R/1-4 teachers and School Management Teams (SMTs) in the sample of Limpopo primary schools appear to be appropriately qualified and experienced for their tasks as primary school teachers and Heads of Departments (HODs)/Phase Heads (Sections 11.1 and 11.2); and
- describe the in-service support and training provided for and still needed by Grade 1-4 teachers and primary phase HODs/Phase Heads (Sections 11.3 to 11.7).

11.1 Are Grade R/1-4 teachers sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified for language and literacy teaching?

11.1.1 Teaching experience

Table 11.1 provides Grade 1-4 teachers' reports (from the teacher questionnaires) on the number of years teaching experience they have had.

TABLE 11.1: TEACHER REPORTS ON YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Years	Number of teachers n (valid)=78
1-5 yrs	8 (10%)
6-10 yrs	6 (8%)
11-15 yrs	12 (15%)
16-20 yrs	17 (22%)
21-30 yrs	31 (40%)
> 30 yrs	4 (5%)

Table 11.2 shows the number of teachers who reported that they had taught various grades over the years.

TABLE 11.2: GRADES THAT TEACHERS SAID THEY HAVE TAUGHT OVER THE YEARS

Grades taught*	Number of teachers
ECD/Reception year	
R	6
(Rest of) Foundation Phase	
1	51
2	48
3	43
Intermediate Phase	
4	52
5	38
6	29
Senior Phase	
7	26
8	3
9	0

Grades taught*	Number of teachers
Further Education and Training	
10	1
11	0
12	1

* Teachers indicated more than one grade in a Phase.

Most of the Grade 1-4 teachers were well-experienced. Eighty two percent of the Grade 1-4 teachers said they have more than 10 years teaching experience. More than half said they had taught Grades 1-4 over their teaching years.

11.1.2 Teaching qualifications

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked to rank the importance of the various criteria when appointing new teaching staff at their schools. Fifteen principals ranked teacher qualifications as ‘most important’.¹

In Chapter 5 we saw that data from the principal questionnaires showed that 85% (17) of the 20 schools offered Grade R. However, of great significance is that only 53% (9) of the principals from those schools that offered Grade R said that they had teacher/s qualified to teach the reception year, in other words, staff who had Early Childhood Development (ECD) specialisation.² In contrast, two schools reportedly had qualified staff but did not offer Grade R.

In the teacher questionnaires, 73% of the Grade 1-4 teachers reported that they had a Matric/Grade 12 plus a three or four year teaching qualification. Table 11.3 provides information on the sample of teachers’ highest teaching qualifications.

TABLE 11.3: TEACHERS’ REPORTS ON THEIR QUALIFICATIONS

Qualification	Number of teachers n (valid)=78
Teacher diploma/certificate without Matric/Gr 12	3 (4%)
Matric/Gr 12 plus a 1- or 2-year teacher diploma/certificate	8 (10%)
Matric/Gr 12 plus a 3-year teacher diploma/certificate	35 (45%)
Matric/Gr 12 plus a 4-year teaching qualification (diploma, certificate and/or degree)	22 (28%)
Post-graduate degree after a first degree (i.e. Honours, Masters, or Doctorate after a first degree)	9 (12%)
Other (1 specified ‘Nursing’)	1 (1%)

Table 11.4 provides information from teacher questionnaires on teachers’ areas of specialisation.

¹ Other criteria ranked (in order of frequency) as most important by principals were: years of experience; proficiency in local languages; and knowledge of the local community.

² This is very important, because if not trained, teachers tend to try and teach the young children as if they were in an easier version of Grade 1.

TABLE 11.4: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON THEIR AREA OF SPECIALISATION

Specialisations*	Number of teachers
Early Childhood Development (ECD)	6 (8%)
Foundation Phase	55 (72%)
Intermediate Phase	22 (29%)
None of the above	9 (12 %)

* Some of the primary-school teachers considered themselves ECD **and** Foundation Phase specialists, or Foundation **and** Intermediate Phase specialists, or specialists in all three phases and thus indicated more than one option.

The majority of the teachers consider themselves trained Foundation Phase specialists, and as such should have received the kind of literacy training required for this level.

11.1.3 Tertiary teacher-training institutions attended

This section provides the names of the tertiary institutions where teachers received their formal training and qualifications, the years in which teachers completed their formal professional qualifications, and satisfaction with the institutions attended.

Of the 75 teachers who provided information in the teacher questionnaires on the years in which their training was completed, 51% (38) had completed at least one of their formal professional qualifications between 2000 and 2007 (i.e. after 1999) or were currently enrolled for study at a tertiary institution. Forty nine percent had completed their last formal professional qualification before 2000.

Seventy seven of the 80 teachers provided information on the tertiary institutions where teachers said they had received their professional teaching qualifications and training or institutions where they are currently enrolled. Table 11.5 provides the names of the various tertiary institutions.³

TABLE 11.5: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON WHICH TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS THEY HAD RECEIVED THEIR FORMAL PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS FROM

Tertiary institutions	Number of teachers*
University of Limpopo/University of the North (UNIN)	22
UNISA	13
VISTA	12
University of Pretoria	9
Hoxani College	9
Mokopane College	7
Sekhukhune College	6
University of Venda	5
Dr C N Phatodi	5
Kwena-Moloto College	5
Johannesburg University/RAU	4
Tshisimani College	4
Naphuno College	4
Tivumbeni College	3

³ It was difficult to verify the authenticity of all the entries. As a result they were left as offered, and some may be informal INSET institutions and not tertiary-training sites proper.

Tertiary institutions	Number of teachers*
Modjadji College	3
Tshwane University of Technology	3
Potchefstroom University	2
Mamokgalake Chuene	3
Potchefstroom Onderwys College	1
Bochum College	2
Makhado College	1
Chisimani Teacher Training College	1
Lemana College	1
Shingwedzi College	1
Soweto College	1
Bathesda College	1
Azaliah College	1
Thabamopo College	1
TUT (sic)	1
Lefarane College	1
Ndebele College	1
Kathorus	1
SACTE	1
Tlhabane College	1
Mphohedi College	1
NKP (sic)	1

* A number of teachers said they had attended and received qualifications at two or more different institutions.

In the teacher questionnaires all respondents rated the training and education they received at the various tertiary institutions as ‘excellent’ or ‘satisfactory/adequate’.⁴ Only one of the teachers rated the formal professional teaching training they had received (an NPDE at Lyceum College) as ‘of little use’.

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked which is/are the nearest tertiary institution(s) to their schools that provide any kind of formal certified in/pre-service teacher training and qualifications. Thirteen principals named the University of Limpopo, five named the University of Venda, and seven named other institutions. Principals were then asked to rate their satisfaction with the teacher training offered at the nearest tertiary institutions to their schools. A total of 14 principals gave ratings for the University of Limpopo or the University of Venda. Of the four principals who gave ratings for University of Venda, two said the training offered was ‘excellent’ and two said it was ‘satisfactory’. Of the ten principals who provided ratings for the University of Limpopo, two felt the training was ‘excellent’, seven rated it as ‘satisfactory’, and one felt it was ‘poor’.

In response to the question: *Are Grade R/1-4 teachers sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified for language and literacy teaching?* indications are that the majority of the sample of Grade 1-4 teachers is appropriately qualified and experienced. Nevertheless, only 12% of the sample of Limpopo primary-school teachers reported having post-graduate degrees. The PIRLS 2006 study found that learners taught by language teachers who reported having post-graduate degrees showed an ‘improved overall mean performance’ in comparison to learners whose teachers were not as well qualified (Howie *et al*, 2007: 50). Furthermore, although 85% of the schools offered

⁴ These attributions cannot be taken at face value as respondents would not fully be in the position to judge.

Grade R, almost half did not have appropriately trained ECD staff. If this is the case in most schools across South Africa, this could account for the PIRLS 2006 (Howie *et al.*, 2007) findings that point to unevenness in the quality of pre-school education in South Africa. Indeed in Chapter 7, we noted that a number of Grade 1-4 learners seemingly lack essential foundational reading knowledge and the early reading-related skills usually developed during this pre-school year.

11.2 Are school management teams sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified to manage primary curriculum phases?

In the SMT focus-group interviews, SMT members who were interviewed were asked to report on their qualifications and experience. SMTs in most primary schools comprise the principal, deputy principal and heads of department.

11.2.1. School Management Team experience

On average SMT members said they had 14 years teaching experience prior to their appointment as members of SMTs. The minimum number of teaching years reported was four and the maximum 30 years. Table 11.6 shows that the majority of members said that they had more than 13 years experience.

TABLE 11.6: SENIOR TEACHERS’/SMT MEMBERS’ REPORTED NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING PRIOR TO APPOINTMENT TO SMT

Number of years	Number of SMT members n(valid)=56
Less than 13 years	21
13 years and more	35

Data thus indicate that most SMT members in the sample of Limpopo schools were very experienced as teachers before they were appointed to management positions. However, data from teacher questionnaires administered to Grade 1-4 teachers in the sample of schools as reflected in Table 11.7 below, showed that the majority of teachers did not hold senior positions in the schools. Only 14% were senior teachers or Heads of Department. Data suggests that a small percentage of Heads of Department are currently teaching Grades 1-4. (HODs generally teach the final-year learners from a school phase.)

TABLE 11.7: GRADE 1-4 TEACHER POSITIONS AT SCHOOL

Position	Number of teachers n (valid)=78
Principal/acting	0
Deputy	0
Senior teacher/HOD	11 (14%)
Teacher	66 (85%)
Other (one Grade 1 teacher was a ‘financial clerk’)	1 (1%)

Table 11.8 below reveals that more than half of the SMT members interviewed said they have been in management positions for 5 to 30 years. Of these, 25% reportedly have 5 to 10 years experience, 23% reportedly have 11 to 20 years experience, while 10% reportedly have 21 to 30 years experience in management.

TABLE 11.8: SENIOR TEACHERS’/SMT MEMBERS’ NUMBER OF YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION ON SMT

Number of years	Number of SMT members n(valid)=56
Less than 5 years	23
5 to 10 years	14
11 to 20 years	13
21 to 30 years	6

Data indicate that more than half the SMT members had at least five years’ experience in school management. According to data from principal questionnaires on average the primary school principals had been head teachers of the particular schools for 13 years. More than half (55%) said that they have been principals of the schools for more than 10 years. The number of years ranged from one year to 32 years.

11.2.2 School Management Team qualifications

Data from SMT focus-group interviews show that the majority of SMT members at the sample of Limpopo schools are appropriately qualified with 43% saying that they have matric plus a three-year teacher diploma or certificate; and 38% saying that they have a matric plus a four-year teaching qualification. Only 4% said they hold a matric plus a one- or two-year teacher diploma or certificate and only 15% say they have post-graduate degrees. Numbers are reflected in Table 11.9 below.

TABLE 11.9: SENIOR TEACHER/SMT QUALIFICATIONS

Qualifications	Number of SMT members n(valid)=53
Teacher diploma or certificate without having achieved Matric	0
Matric plus a 1- or 2-year teacher diploma or certificate	2
Matric plus a 3-year teacher diploma or certificate	23
Matric plus a 4-year teaching qualification (diploma, certificate and/or degree)	20
Post-graduate degree (i.e. Honours, Masters, or Doctorate after a first degree)	8

Most of the SMT members reported that they specialised in primary-school education with 38% having specialised in the Intermediate Phase and 25% in the Foundation Phase. Only 6% said they had specialised in Early Childhood Development. Table 11.10 shows senior teachers’ reports on their areas of specialisation in their training.

TABLE 11.10: SENIOR TEACHER/SMT SPECIALISATIONS

Specialisations	Number of SMT members n(valid)=52
Early Childhood Development	3
Foundation Phase	13
Intermediate Phase	20
Other (University Education Diploma-UED, Secondary Teachers Diploma-STD)	16

In response to the question: *Are School Management Teams sufficiently and appropriately experienced and qualified to manage primary curriculum phases?*, 31% of the senior teachers interviewed said they have University Education Diplomas (UED) and

Secondary Teachers Diplomas (STD). Thus, whilst most HODs seem to be appropriately qualified and experienced for the management posts they hold, almost a third of the SMT members interviewed said they had not specialised in primary-school education. This raises some questions about their ability to manage primary-school curriculum phases (Foundation and Intermediate Phase), specifically young children's literacy development.

The next part of this chapter discusses SMTs' and Grade 1-4 teachers' in-service training and support from the Limpopo Department of Education and LDoE districts' capacity to provide the kind of support required by SMTs and teachers.

11.3 Are SMTs and Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from Limpopo Department of Education?

In Chapter 9 we concluded that SMTs and teachers need to be assisted with planning and delivering Grade 1-4 language and literacy Learning Programmes or schemes of work much more carefully if learner under-preparedness in language and literacy development in subsequent grades is not to become cumulative. In this section we present findings on the extent to which the LDoE has provided in-service support and guidance for:

- Curriculum planning, pacing and delivery (11.3.1);
- Learning Area knowledge and skills (11.3.2); and
- Assessment and pedagogy (11.3.3).

11.3.1 Curriculum planning, pacing and delivery

Obviously the implementation of a new curriculum, Curriculum 2005 since 1998, and then the Revised National Curriculum Statements (RNCS), later re-named the NCS in 2006, has meant that school managers and teachers have had to become familiar with each set of new documents.

As teachers and SMTs, many primary-school HODs would have been familiar with content-based syllabi and experienced challenges understanding and implementing an outcomes-based curriculum. In 11.3.1.1 we discuss SMT curriculum training from the Limpopo DoE. Macdonald (2002) pointed out that there was a particular problem with C2005 which specifically ignored the teaching of reading and writing. Less well experienced teachers were puzzled by this omission and tended to down play literacy as a result.

11.3.1.1 SMT curriculum training

The (revised) NCS were designed to clarify and explicate the grade-level content and skills required in different Learning Areas, including literacy. Nevertheless, in the Limpopo sample, it can be assumed from the large number of SMT members who have been in teaching for more than 13 years, that most HODs would have needed support and guidance not only with how to manage curriculum planning and delivery but also with how to interpret the new curriculum documents.

Five district offices oversee the delivery of curriculum in schools in the Limpopo Province, namely, Vhembe, Capricorn, Greater Sekhukhune, Waterberg and Mopani. In the interviews with district officials, officials in all five districts reported that support has been provided to all schools in their districts for developing the capacity of school management teams (e.g. HODs) to manage curriculum delivery, i.e. curriculum planning

and monitoring curriculum coverage. However, there are contradictions between the reports by district officials and SMT members on this. The latter should perhaps prevail.

In the SMT focus-group interviews, SMT representatives were asked how much training they had received from the LDoE on interpreting or applying the NCS. Table 11.11 shows their responses.

TABLE 11.11: SMT REPORTS ON LDoE NCS TRAINING RECEIVED

Days training received	Number of SMT N (valid)=18
None	8 (44%)
Less than half a day	1 (6%)
Half a day	0 (0%)
One day	0 (0%)
2-5 days	5 (28%)
6-10 days	2 (11%)
More than 10 days	1 (6%)
Lack of consensus amongst SMT members	1 (6%)

Data shows that, in SMT focus interviews, 44% of the sample of SMTs asserted that they have had no training at all.

Although district officials in all five districts maintained (in the district interviews) that LDoE school management support for ‘developing the capacity of school management teams to manage curriculum delivery had been provided in 2006 and/or 2007, officials in all five districts also agreed that this type of support is still needed ‘to a great extent’. Officials from all five district offices and the majority of the SMT groups were in agreement that more training and development on how to interpret, manage and monitor delivery of the new curriculum is required in schools.⁵

11.3.1.2 Teachers’ curriculum training

In the five district interviews, officials were asked about the extent to which this type of in-service support and guidance has been provided to primary school teachers in their districts in 2006/2007. Table 11.12 provides the information obtained.

In the interviews, district officials were asked about the extent to which primary schools in their districts have received HL, FAL, Numeracy and Life Skills guidelines to assist Foundation Phase teachers with curriculum delivery (planning and coverage of the curriculum / Learning Programmes). Three of the district groups maintained that all schools in their districts had received guidelines for all four Learning Areas. Another group reported that most of their district’s schools had received such guidelines. Curiously, one group reportedly said that ‘*curriculum guidelines have not been developed as this was not applicable in the Foundation Phase*’.

⁵ In one district the official said that it was impossible to reach all the schools (about 500), partly because of the large number, and partly because they have so many adviser posts unfilled.

TABLE 11.12: DISTRICT REPORTS ON EXTENT OF CURRICULUM PLANNING, PACING AND DELIVERY SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR PRIMARY-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN DISTRICTS IN 2006/2007

Types of guidance and support	Number of districts			
	All primary school teachers	Most teachers	Some teachers	Not provided
Curriculum delivery (planning and coverage)	0	3	2	0
Ensuring that the number of hours or percentage of time allocated for Learning Areas is actually used for that purpose	2	0	1	2
Time on task management in class	1	1	1	2
Ensuring that there is enough reading and writing across all Learning Areas	1	1	1	2

In the teacher questionnaires, 70 (88%) of the 80 teachers confirmed that they had received some form of training on how to use and implement the NCS. Eighty percent of these teachers reported that LDoE officials had provided the NCS training (as opposed to other INSET providers or SMTs). However, 10 (12%) Grade 1-4 teachers reported that they had not received any such training. Furthermore, in the teacher focus-group interviews, teachers in each case stated that they did not receive any or enough support from the Department in regard to translating the curriculum into understandable teaching content.

In contrast, when asked to respond to a range of possible barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools in the district interviews, none of the districts identified ‘insufficient information about what should be taught in each grade in the National Curriculum Statements’ as a barrier. In fact three district groups specified that it is ‘not a barrier at all’.

In the first part of this chapter we asserted that one of the most reliable methods of checking curriculum pacing and delivery is to examine work done in learners’ workbooks. District officials were thus also asked about the extent to which district/circuit staff usually examined Foundation Phase learners’ workbooks at each school each year. Although one district maintained that workbooks in all schools are checked, the situation in most districts appears to be that only some or no workbooks are checked. Again the reliability of information from observations at school level should prevail.

When asked for their opinions on the biggest barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools, none of the districts identified ‘insufficient time on task in class to cover the curriculum’ as the biggest barrier. Three district groups said that this was a barrier but ‘not the biggest barrier’ and one district group reported that this is ‘not a barrier at all’. What is not clear is the basis upon which district officials assess curriculum pacing and delivery, since they appear not to be visiting schools frequently enough.

Finally, in the open-ended questions in interviews with district officials, some respondents observed that, because ‘the NCS sets out the language across the curriculum approach’, districts themselves have ‘no specific strategies’ developed around the issues of how much writing and reading has to be completed in each grade and Learning Area

per year. This is a serious omission given that inexperienced or poorly-trained teachers need as much guidance as possible.

In Chapter 7, we presented evidence indicating that, in most of the sample of classes observed, learners are neither covering grade-level requirements nor doing enough writing and reading.

11.3.2 Learning Area knowledge and skills

In the five district interviews, officials were asked about the extent to which this type of in-service support has been provided to primary-school teachers in their districts in 2006/2007. Table 11.13 summarises the information provided.

TABLE 11.13: DISTRICT REPORTS ON EXTENT TO WHICH GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT WITH LEARNING AREA KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS HAVE BEEN PROVIDED TO PRIMARY-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN DISTRICTS IN 2006/2007

Types of support/guidance	Number of districts			
	All primary school teachers	Most teachers	Some teachers	Not provided
Literacy and Language content knowledge	1	1	1	2
Specialised practical training on how to teach reading and writing in classrooms	0	0	1	4
Language competency of teachers who teach in a second or third language	0	2	1	2
Use of language to develop learners' conceptual understanding in the various Learning Areas (developing specialist/technical language and terminology to help learners understand key concepts)	0	2	1	2
Numeracy/Mathematics content knowledge	1	2	0	2

In the SMT focus-group interviews, members were asked whether Grade R/1-4 teachers at their schools had received any in-service training/professional support or guidance through LDoE workshops in 2006/7 specifically for Home Language; FAL; Numeracy/Mathematics; and Life Skills.

Two (11%) of the 18 SMT focus groups interviewed said that Grade 4 teachers at their school had attended **Home Language** workshops. Only four (22%) of the 18 SMT groups interviewed said that Grade 3 teachers at their school had attended LDoE HL workshops. Five (28%) of the SMTs reported that Grade 2 teachers had attended HL workshops. Six (33%) of the 18 SMTs said that Grade 1 teachers at their school had attended HL workshops. Only one SMT reported that their school had Grade R HL workshop support from the LDoE.

Table 11.14 shows SMT responses on whether Grade R/1-4 teachers at their schools have attended LDoE workshop for FAL, Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills. The data indicate that teachers at only a few schools have received this kind of in-service professional support and guidance in 2006 or 2007.

TABLE 11.14: SMT REPORTS ON GRADE R/1-4 TEACHERS' SUPPORT FROM LDoE WORKSHOPS

Learning Area		Number of SMTs				
		Grade R	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
Life skills	Yes attended workshops	1	5	4	3	5
	No workshops	13	13	14	15	13
Numeracy/Mathematics	Yes attended workshops	2	3	3	3	3
	No workshops	12	15	15	15	15
FAL	Yes attended workshops	0	1	3	4	4
	No workshops	8	11	13	13	14

The teacher questionnaire also asked teachers to provide details of LDoE workshops they had attended in 2006 and 2007 on Home Language, First Additional Language, Numeracy/Mathematics and Life Skills. Table 11.15 shows details of their responses.

TABLE 11.15: NUMBER OF TEACHERS WHO REPORTED THAT THEY HAD ATTENDED IN-SERVICE/PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT OR GUIDANCE THROUGH LDoE WORKSHOPS IN 2006/2007 FOR VARIOUS LEARNING AREAS

Learning Area	Number of teachers
Home Language/Literacy n (valid)=71	23 (32%)
Numeracy/Maths n (valid)=65	11 (17%)
FAL n (valid)=53	9 (16%)
Life Skills (Grade 1-3) n (valid)=56	8 (17%)

Most teachers said they had not attended LDoE workshops in HL, Numeracy/Mathematics, FAL or Life skills. In the teacher questionnaires, only three of the Grade 4 teachers said that they had attended Natural Science workshops.

According to data from the teacher questionnaires, the support or guidance teachers had received at LDoE workshops was mostly rated as 'satisfactory'. Nevertheless, in the focus-group interviews teachers revealed that they are very dissatisfied with their perceived lack of support from the Department specifically in regard to literacy teaching.

When district officials were asked in the interviews how often they ask for feedback from primary schools and/or teachers on the in-service support provided, officials from three districts indicated that this did not happen at all. Only one district group said that they ask for feedback 'most of the time'. The fifth district group said that no district-based in-service support was provided.

11.3.3 Assessment and pedagogy

In Chapter 9 we noted that: a) reading assessment in particular at the Foundation Phase is reliant on teachers' professional judgment; and b) that very large classes constrain individual reading assessment.

In open-ended questions in district-level interviews, some officials reported that one aspect of district's work in primary schools related to the implementation of the NCS that was not going well was '*the way educators address the assessment standards*'. '*Some*

teachers do not adhere to policy with regard to assessment.’ ‘There is no continuous assessment’ and ‘the district is not managing that’.

In the five district interviews, officials were asked about the extent to which this type of pedagogical guidance and support had been provided to primary-school teachers in their districts in 2006/2007. Three districts maintained that support and guidance with learner assessment practices and with coping with large or over-crowded classrooms had been provided to most (but not all) teachers in their districts. One district group said some teachers had received this type of guidance/support. One district reported that this kind of guidance/support had not been provided. However, in the open-ended questions, district officials reported that support for assessment was also provided through the provision of item banks for learner assessment.

In the focus-group interviews district officials were asked how many Foundation Phase teachers per year are usually observed teaching by district/circuit staff. Table 11.16 shows responses for the five districts signifying that this is not happening to any great extent.

TABLE 11.16: DISTRICT REPORTS ON THE NUMBER OF FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS PER YEAR OBSERVED TEACHING

Number of teachers observed	District (n=3)	Circuit (n=2)
All	0	0
Most	1	0
Some	2	1
None	0	1

Principals in the principal questionnaires reported on the number of times education officials from their district office and circuit had visited their schools during the year and the number of times anyone from the district /circuit had observed teachers teaching in 2007. Thirty percent of the principals said that district officials had visited their school in 2007 whilst 75% reported that circuit officials had visited in 2007. Table 11.17 shows the details.

TABLE 11.17: PRINCIPALS’ REPORTS ON DISTRICT AND CIRCUIT OFFICIALS’ VISITS TO SCHOOLS IN 2007

Number of times	Number of principals (n=20)	
	District	Circuit
More than three times	2 (10%)	9 (45%)
At least three times	1 (5%)	0 (0%)
At least twice	1 (5%)	3 (15%)
At least once	2 (10%)	3 (15%)
Never	14 (70%)	5 (25%)

However, only two school principals said that district officials had observed teachers teaching in 2007 and two reported that circuit officials had observed teachers teaching.

In the teacher questionnaires, 75 (94%) of the 80 Grade 1-4 teachers reported that no one from the district/circuit office had observed them teaching this year (2007). Seventy four (93%) of the 80 teachers reported that no one from the district /circuit office had observed their learners reading in 2007.

In Section 11.4 we discuss the districts’ capacity for delivering the level of support required to primary schools and teachers.

11.4 What is district-level capacity for supporting Grade 1-4 teachers?

In district interviews officials were asked to provide the policy target for the number of days of district/circuit support to be provided per primary school per year. Responses across the four available districts varied as is reflected in Table 11.18 below.

TABLE 11.18: POLICY TARGET FOR NUMBER OF DAYS OF DISTRICT SUPPORT PER PRIMARY SCHOOL EACH YEAR

District	Target number of days of district support	Target number of days of circuit support
District A	120	120
District B	No policy target	No policy target
District C	19	17
District D	No policy target (depends on availability of curriculum advisors)	No policy target (policy is still being developed)
District E	Lack of consensus amongst respondents	Lack of consensus amongst respondents

Two groups of district officials asserted the existence of district policy targets. Although District C officials said that the target number of days of support from the district is 19 days and for circuits 17 days, officials said support took the form of workshops per school clusters rather than visits to individual schools. Respondents from one district said that their district supports individual schools via the circuit offices who send curriculum advisors to schools but interviewees were not able to reach consensus on the targeted number of days of circuit support per school. One group said that support is given to schools via circuit offices who send curriculum advisors to schools when and as they are available.

Nevertheless, according to information provided by district officials in the interviews, on average district/circuit office support⁶ is provided twice per year to each school in their districts. Although in open-ended interview questions, some district officials expressed the view that school-based workshops or visits are more effective than cluster-group meetings or workshops, it seems that most of the support is provided through cluster-group meetings/workshops. Constraints that some district officials pointed out in open-ended interview questions are that: a) there is insufficient time to train teachers because *‘they cannot be away from their classes for many days’*; and b) the *‘lack of transport’*.

In the interviews, district officials were asked how well-prepared they felt most district- and circuit-level school-support personnel are for supporting Foundation Phase teachers. Only one district group reported that district personnel are ‘very well-prepared’ for supporting Foundation Phase teachers whilst another district group felt that their district personnel were ‘sufficiently prepared’. Three district groups said that district personnel in the districts were ‘inadequately or under-prepared’ for supporting Foundation Phase teachers. The only district groups that responded to the question about circuit personnel felt that circuit-level personnel in their district were ‘inadequately or under-prepared’.

⁶ Interpreted as occasions more or less structured as site visits intended to provide required assistance.

District officials were also asked how many district and circuit curriculum advisors have formal qualifications specifically in training Foundation Phase teachers in reading and writing. Table 11.19 shows their responses.

TABLE 11.19: DISTRICT REPORTS ON THE NUMBER OF DISTRICT/ CIRCUIT CURRICULUM ADVISORS WITH FORMAL QUALIFICATIONS IN TRAINING FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS IN READING AND WRITING

District	Number of district curriculum advisors with formal qualifications	Number of circuit curriculum advisors with formal qualifications
District A	Don't know	Don't know
District B	9	0
District C	6	6
District D	Don't know	Don't know
District E	2	10

The number of district and circuit officials with formal qualification in training teachers in reading and writing reportedly varies from 9 to 12 per district. However, two groups of district officials said they 'don't know'. Nevertheless, in response to open-ended questions district officials said that the shortage of subject advisors needs to be addressed if district-level work in primary schools is to improve. They expressed concern about the slow rate of appointment of appropriately qualified staff.

Table 11.20 provides reports from interviews with district officials on the number of primary schools (with Grades R/1 to 7) that each district is responsible for.

The figures in Tables 11.19 and 11.20 indicate that Limpopo districts are indeed constrained by the limited number of school-support personnel for supporting Foundation Phase teachers specifically with literacy development.

TABLE 11.20: NUMBER OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS EACH DISTRICT OFFICE OVERSEES

District	Number of schools
District A	522
District B	321
District C	501
District D	447
District E	387

In the open-ended questions in the interviews, officials said that, because districts/circuits do not have the capacity to assist all primary schools and teachers in raising literacy levels amongst learners, districts have had to 'outsource' this training to other experts. Nevertheless, LDoE curriculum literacy and language advisors work closely with other service providers in training teachers how to teach reading and writing. In the interviews, four groups of district officials said that the in-service training activities in schools by LDoE are 'mostly' or 'always' co-ordinated with the work of other in-service training providers in order to avoid overlap. One district group said they did not know if LDoE in-service training activities in schools are co-ordinated with the work of other in-service training providers.

In the next part of Chapter 11 we discuss the support and guidance provided by sources besides the LDoE.

11.5 Are Grade 1-4 teachers provided with sufficient and appropriate in-service support from other inset providers?

In district interviews, officials were asked which other in-service providers, including colleges and universities, are working with Foundation Phase (FP) teachers in schools in their districts. Officials from all five districts reported that *Breakthrough to Literacy* (Molteno) and *Khanyisa* were working with teachers in their districts. Four of the five districts reported that *READ*, *Bridge to English* (Molteno), and the *Integrated Education Programme* (IEP) worked with teachers. One district reported that Higher Education Institutions in Limpopo were working with Foundation Phase teachers. In response to open-ended interview questions, district officials also maintained that ‘*enrichment programmes such as Khanyisa and IEP are impacting on teaching and learning.*’

In the principal questionnaires, principals were asked whether their schools are on any funded development programme (e.g. *Khanyisa*, *Irish Aid*, *Integrated Education Programme/IEP*, etc.). Fourteen (70%) of the principals asserted that their schools were not on any development programme. Six (30%) of the 20 principals confirmed that their schools were or had been on such programmes. Three of these principals specified the programme as *IEP*. One principal said the school was on the *Khanyisa* programme. One principal specified ‘*Irish Aid*’ and ‘*Fhatuwani*’. One principal did not name the programme.

Principals were also asked to name the in-service professional development education and training institutions/organisations/service providers (including institutions of higher education) that have worked in their schools in the past four years (i.e. 2004 to 2007). Twenty eight percent maintained that no external training had been provided. Seventy two percent said that their school had received support. Table 11.21 shows the details.

TABLE 11.22: PRINCIPALS’ REPORTS ON IN-SERVICE SUPPORT PROVIDED IN THEIR SCHOOLS IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS

Name of institution/NGO	Number of principals n=20
Breakthrough to Literacy (Molteno)	6 (33%)
Integrated Education Programme (IEP)	3(17%)
Khanyisa	1 (6%)
Higher Education Institutions in Limpopo	1 (6%)
Higher Education Institutions outside Limpopo	0 (0%)
READ	0 (0%)
Breakthrough to English (Molteno)	0 (0%)
Old Mutual	0 (0%)
Other	2 (11%)
None provided	5 (28%)

In the teacher questionnaires, 47 (61%) of 77 teachers reported that they had attended other in-service/professional development education and training (i.e. not LDoE) in the past four years. Table 11.22 provides details on their responses.

TABLE 11.22: TEACHERS' REPORTS ON OTHER (NON-FORMAL) IN-SERVICE/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING (BESIDES DoE) ATTENDED IN 2005/2006/2007

INSET providers	Number of teachers that attended (n=47)
Integrated Education Programme (IEP)	19
Breakthrough to Literacy (Molteno)	13
Bridge to English (Molteno)	3
Khanyisa	2
READ	2
SAOU	2
University of Limpopo	1
University of Venda	1
Tshwane University of Technology	1
UNISA	1
University of Potchefstroom	1
Lyceum College	1
Phalaborwa Foundation	1
Shoma Ramano Mbulaheni Training Centre	1
Gapbuster Learning Centre	1
Shingwedzi (Maths?) Centre	1
Other	1

* Some teachers said they had attended INSET courses provided by two or three different providers.

When Grade 1-4 teachers were asked in the teacher questionnaires about INSET attended, the two most commonly cited providers were the *Integrated Education Programme* and Molteno *Breakthrough to Literacy*. Very few of the teachers reported attending *READ*, *Bridge to English*, and Khanyisa workshops.

Key foci of the *Integrated Education Programme* (IEP) include improving education management and governance, integrating HIV/AIDS issues into the schools, and increasing the numbers of teachers in mathematics and science.

The Molteno Project has developed two language and learning programmes, *Breakthrough to Literacy* and *Bridge to English*. The *Breakthrough to Literacy* programme focuses on the acquisition of initial literacy skills in African languages. The primary objective of the *Bridge to English* programme is to assist learners to move from mother-tongue literacy to English literacy. A secondary objective is to pave the way for English as language of learning and teaching. However, only 13 (16%) of the sample of 80 teachers (in the teacher questionnaires) reported attending *Breakthrough to Literacy* training and only three (4%) of the teachers reported attending *Bridge to English* training.

In the interviews with district officials, some respondents observed that, although not working in all schools, *READ* addresses the issue of reading for pleasure by providing books and encouraging teachers and learners to read. Only two of the teachers (in the teacher questionnaires) reported attending *READ* workshops.

In the principal questionnaires, 45% (9) of the principals reported that in the past four years their schools had received Grade R/1-4 learning support material/books from publishers, NGOs or other service providers (besides the LDoE).

Table 11.23 provides teachers' ratings (from the teacher questionnaires) of the usefulness of the training and support received from other INSET providers.

TABLE 11.23: TEACHERS' RATINGS OF THE USEFULNESS OF INSET AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INSET providers	Focus and length	Usefulness (n)
Integrated Education Programme (IEP) n=19	Outcomes-based curriculum – 10 months	Very useful (1)
	Numeracy – 20 days	Very useful (1) Useful (4)
	Numeracy – 5 days	Very useful (1)
	Learning Programme work schedule assessment - 25 days	Very useful (4)
	Lesson plan/work schedule – 3 days	Very useful (2) Useful (2)
	Curriculum planning – 2 days	Very useful (1)
	Assessment – 3 days	Very useful (1)
	Assessment, lesson plan – 2 days	Useful (1)
	How to use book – twice a week	Not rated
Breakthrough to Literacy (Molteno) n=13	Approach to literacy – 2/3 days	Very useful (6) Useful (2)
	Set 1 and planning (sic) – 4 hrs	Some use (1)
	Work schedule – 2 days	Very useful (1)
	Literacy home language -2 days	Very useful (1)
	To read and write – 3 years (assumed to be intermittent)	Rating not provided (2)
Bridge to English (Molteno) n=3	Lesson plan and assessment – 3 days	Useful (2)
	Listening and speaking – duration not provided	Useful (1)
Khanyisa n=2	Literacy and Numeracy – 1 day	Very useful (1)
	Home language and literacy – 1 week	Very useful (1)
READ n=2	Reading and writing – duration not provided	Very useful (1)
	The importance of reading and teaching reading - once a week for six years	Very useful (1)
SAOU n=2	Foundation Phase & assessment – 2 days	Very useful (2)
University of Venda n=1	Numeracy – 2 days	Very useful (1)
Tshwane University of Technology n=1	School management	Useful (1)
UNISA n=1	Research programme – 2 days	Useful (1)
University of Potchefstroom n=1	Learners with special needs – 2 hrs	Very useful (1)
Phalaborwa Foundation n=1	Numeracy for basic operation – 23 hrs	Useful (1)
Shoma Ramano Mbulaheni Training Centre n=1	NCS – 1 year	Very useful (1)
Gapbuster Learning Centre n=1	HIV/Aids – 1 week	Very useful (1)
Shingwedzi (Maths?) Centre n=1	RNCS – 2 days	Very useful (1)

Table 11.23 shows that:

- Of the 18 teachers who rated *IEP* training, 11 rated the training as 'very useful', seven rated it as 'useful' (as opposed to 'very useful' or 'some/little use').

- Of the 11 teachers who rated Molteno’s *Breakthrough to Literacy* training, eight said it was ‘very useful’, two said it was ‘useful’ and one said it was of ‘some use’.
- All three of the teachers who rated *Bridge to English* training rated it as ‘useful’.

When asked to respond to a range of possible barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools in the district interviews, none of the districts identified ‘inadequately prepared and trained teachers’ as the biggest barrier. One district group said it was a barrier but not the biggest barrier and three districts specified that it is not a barrier at all. We see this perception as a matter of concern.

In Section 11.6 of this chapter we outline the kind of in-service training and support that respondents requested.

11.6 What in-service training and support is requested for Grade 1-4 teachers?

District officials were asked in the interviews which types of in-service/professional development and training support they think Grade 1-4 teachers still need to a great extent. Table 11.24 shows the responses emerging from the five districts.

TABLE 11.24: DISTRICT OFFICIALS’ OPINIONS ON TYPES OF IN-SERVICE/ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND TRAINING SUPPORT STILL NEEDED BY GRADE 1-4 TEACHERS

Types of in-service/professional development education and training support needed	Number of districts n=5	
	Yes	No
Literacy and Language content knowledge	5	0
Numeracy/Mathematics content knowledge	5	0
Curriculum delivery (planning and coverage)	5	0
Coping with large classes or overcrowded classrooms	5	0
Use of Teaching and Learning Support Material (TLSM) in class	5	0
Language competency of teachers who teach in a 2 nd or 3 rd language	5	0
Use of language to develop learners’ conceptual understanding in the various Learning Areas (developing specialist/technical language and terminology to help learners understand key concepts)	5	0
Learner assessment practices	5	0
Ensuring that the number of hours or percentage of time allocated for Learning Areas is actually used for that purpose	4	1
Time on task management in class	4	1
Ensuring that there is enough reading and writing across all LAs	4	1
Specialised practical training on how to teach reading and writing in classrooms	4	1

In the SMT group interviews, members were asked to identify the knowledge and skills gaps in Grade R/1-4 teachers’ teaching competence most in need of development and support. SMTs identified a need for ‘*training in interpreting policy documents, especially NCS*’; ‘*developing children’s reading skills*’; ‘*lesson-plan development*’; ‘*application of assessment strategies and record keeping*’; ‘*content knowledge*’; ‘*implementing NCS teaching methodology*’; as well as ‘*managing large classes*’. In their view teachers also needed assistance with ‘*teaching creatively*’ and improving their ‘*motivation to teach*’. They said that schools and teachers also need more ‘*follow-up on training given on the implementation of NCS*’ and ‘*regular school visits by LDoE curriculum specialists*’. However they stressed that other forms of support required included ‘*resources such as*

relevant policy documents (NCS) and LTSM; 'home language print material'; 'computers'; 'Breakthrough kits'; and 'additional classrooms'.

Our focus-group interviews with teachers showed that they are suffering from: a) a sense of hopelessness (*'parents can't help as they are not formally educated'; 'learners live with grandparents, not parents';* young learners *'can't cope with reading and writing and are emotionally immature'; 'parents don't come to meetings at school';* a policy of social promotion or as teachers put it: *'pass one pass all'*); and b) a sense of abandonment by the Department (*'no-one comes to visit us'; 'no workshops'; 'no books'; 'classes are over-crowded'; 'teachers at this school have not received any school-support visits or workshops from the Department. The principal and staff have got along on their own'*). The responses from the teachers also point towards a deep alienation from or lack of ownership of the curriculum. Teachers appear to believe that the NCS has thrown out or devalued the teaching activities and sets of expertise which they might have had prior to 1997/2002 and has not replaced these with practical and meaningful alternatives.

Whilst district officials maintained some of the biggest barriers to improving learner performance in primary schools include: *'multilingualism'; 'the attitude of the teachers'; 'over-crowded classrooms';* and lack of availability of mother-tongue textbooks/readers for learners, teacher recommendations (in the teacher focus-group interviews) to the Department in regard to support and guidance needed to improve literacy achievement in Limpopo can be categorised as follows:

- Provision of books (readers and text books) to each learner;
- Circuit and district officials need to visit schools and teachers on a regular basis to address difficulties which arise, and to demonstrate methodologies and classroom activities;
- Regular provision of school-based and circuit-wide workshops which focus on practical guidelines, activities and strategies for the teaching of reading and writing (and the rest of the curriculum);
- Clustering of schools in order to share expertise;
- Revision of curriculum documents to make them user friendly (with explicit activities and standards and pace setters included) for teachers;
- Provision of teacher guides;
- Elimination of over-crowding of classrooms; and
- Review the 'pass one pass all' policy (where learners may only repeat once per three-year phase in GET).

Data shows that the majority of Grade 1-4 teachers should (at the very least in their pre-service formal training) have received training to prepare them for literacy teaching. In Section 11.7 of this chapter, we discuss teachers' understandings of language and literacy teaching in an attempt to answer the following question:

11.7 What do teachers' teaching practices and understandings of language and literacy teaching tell us about the language and literacy training received and needed?

In identifying primary-school teacher development needs as well as the kind of preparation teachers require, we attempted to assess Grade 1-4 teachers' understandings of:

- the relationship between language and learning (11.7.1); and

- literacy teaching (11.7.2).

11.7.1 Teachers' understandings of the relationship between language and learning

In the teacher focus-group interviews teachers were unanimous that English First Additional Language (i.e. as a subject, not a medium of instruction) needs to be introduced earlier than Grade 3, usually in the first year of school, whether this is Grade R or Grade 1. They expressed concern that the learners do not have a sufficient grounding in English by the end of Grade 3 to manage the transition to English medium in Grade 4, for speakers of African languages.

The focus-group interviews also showed that teachers are divided, however, about the advantages and disadvantages of the use of two languages for learning and teaching (i.e., mother tongue, and then English from Grade 4 for most learners).

- a. Some teachers think that the use of two languages is helpful as one can use the mother tongue to explain difficult concepts once the transition to English has taken place.
- b. Others think that the use of two languages creates confusion in the minds of learners.
- c. Most teachers believe that there should be a transition to English medium as soon as possible owing to the washback effect of English medium higher up the system (i.e. if one does not have English early enough, one will not cope with the pressure of the whole curriculum in English in the Senior Phase and onwards).
- d. Some teachers recognise that learners do not understand the content of the lessons in English medium from Grade 4 onwards. Some identify the more difficult Learning Areas in terms of English as: Natural Science and Human and Social Science. Some teachers believe that Mathematics, because it is less language dependent, is easier to manage through English than other Learning Areas. Some were able to suggest a staggered transition to English on a subject-by-subject and grade-by-grade basis.
- e. Only a few teachers recommend a later or delayed transition to English (after Grades 6 or 7).

In the teacher questionnaires, 63% of 76 Grade 1-4 teachers said that they believe that their learners can make a successful transition from learning subjects in their home language to learning subjects mainly in English/Afrikaans in grades lower than Grade 4.

Table 11.25 provides details from the teacher questionnaires of when Grade 1-4 teachers think their learners can make a successful transition to mainly learning in English/Afrikaans.

It shows that 87% of 76 Grade 1-4 teachers said that they believe that their learners can make a successful transition from learning subjects in their home language to learning subjects mainly in English/Afrikaans in grades lower than Grade 5.

TABLE 11.25: GRADE IN WHICH TEACHERS BELIEVE LEARNERS CAN MAKE A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO LEARNING SUBJECTS MAINLY IN ENGLISH/AFRIKAANS

Grade	Number of teachers n (valid)=76
Grade R	4 (5%)
Grade 1	12 (16%)
Grade 2	13 (17%)
Grade 3	19 (25%)
Grade 4	18 (24%)
Grade 5	4 (5%)
Grade 6	3 (4%)
Grade 7	3 (4%)

What was clear is that teachers do not understand the link between mother-tongue and second-language acquisition. Most are not well-informed about the relationship between language and learning. Most are not well-informed about the relationship amongst mother-tongue acquisition and development, second-language learning and development and learning across the curriculum. Most do not indicate a clear understanding of the role of written language (reading and writing, i.e. strong academic literacy) in relation to the curriculum beyond the Languages/Literacy Learning Area. This is a matter of grave concern because teachers will simply resort to teaching English as they were taught, that is principally through small ‘isolated’ or ‘disconnected’ exercises.

11.7.2 Teachers’ understandings of literacy teaching

In the focus-group interviews a number of teachers expressed uncertainty about to how to approach the teaching of reading and writing and what strategies to use for teaching literacy. Data from the teacher questionnaires signalled that some teachers are confused about how children learn to read and write or are unsure about why some of their learners are not making much progress. Teachers also appeared unclear as to how and even *whether* they as teachers could help learners who were experiencing difficulties learning to read and write. Certainly what we noticed from the classroom observations, teachers’ curriculum plans, and the work covered in learners’ workbooks, is that most of the teachers’ teaching of writing and reading lacked a clear sense of direction.

Researchers further noted that a number of learners did not seem to be able to engage in reading even at the most basic levels. This was evident in classroom observations where the whole class read aloud together and in some tape recordings that were made of individual learners’ reading. In the teacher questionnaires and focus-group interviews, whilst some teachers acknowledged that, *‘teachers lack literacy teaching skills’*, others assumed that the ‘problem’ lay mostly in deficits in the learners themselves. For example, teachers pointed out that learners *‘lack reading and writing ability’*; *‘can’t read, write and listen’*; *‘lack concentration’*; *‘forget easily’*; *‘are irresponsible’*; *‘do not grasp quickly’*; and *‘take too long to write even a short activity’*.

Teachers across Grade 1-4 complained that learners in their classes *‘do not understand sounds and vowels’*; *‘are unable to combine vowels and consonants when reading’*; *‘can’t say sounds properly’*; *‘don’t understand how same sounds are pronounced in different words, even though they look the same’*; *‘have poor pronunciation’*; *‘take time to pronounce words’*; *‘cannot differentiate between sounds such as hl and tlh in words’*; *‘don’t know sound-letter relationships’*; *‘write what they hear’* (i.e. phonetically); *‘cannot*

differentiate between b p d, or a u n, or g q; *'reverse letters – write b instead of d, g instead of a, f instead of t*'; *'write letters upside down*'; and *'do not leave spaces between words*'. This and other data suggest that teachers do not sufficiently realise that, if learners are coming into their classes with little prior understanding of concepts related to print awareness, letter knowledge and the purpose of reading, then their literacy programmes need to be designed to 'close these gaps' by including such foundational reading and writing skills. Indeed correlation studies have identified phoneme awareness and letter knowledge as the two best predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first two years in school (NICHD, 2000). At the same time, learners also still need to develop the requisite reading and writing skills for the grade they are in so that they are adequately prepared for successive grades.

Certainly our classroom observation and tape recordings of learners' reading indicate that: a) Grade 1 (and R) teachers may not be spending enough time developing phonological awareness and basic concepts about print, e.g. showing learners that print moves from left to right; and b) Grade 1 (and R) learners may not be spending enough time learning to identify individual letter names and sounds and developing an understanding of the alphabetic principle and letter knowledge (e.g. recognising and discriminating individual letters from one another) (NICHD, 2002; Snow *et al.*, 1998).

In the interviews some teachers did speak about the need for *'rhymes and songs for learners to read and sing*'. What is in doubt is whether all teachers are sufficiently aware of the purpose behind these types of activities and the fundamental role they play in developing learners' phonemic awareness and in providing them with practice in hearing the different sounds that make up words before reading begins. Rhyme through singing songs, reading books and playing games (such as matching pictures that begin and end with same sound), is very useful for providing pre-reading training in hearing the similarities in sounds, for distinguishing beginning, or vowel and ending sounds and for segmenting words into individual sounds. Teachers need to understand that, because oral speech, unlike written words, does not consist of the separate sounds in words, learners may still need to become conscious that words are made up of distinct sounds, rather than whole units (Adams, 1993; Snow *et al.*, 1998; NICHD, 2000).

In the focus-group interviews and the teacher questionnaires teachers also complained that their learners *'don't know how to hold a book*'; *'don't use punctuation properly*'; *'do not use capital letters and understand that you start a sentence with a capital and end it with a full stop*'; *'don't start writing at the margin – even start writing in the centre of the page*'; *'even start writing in the middle of their exercise books instead of the beginning*'; or *'jump lines when writing when they don't have to or don't jump lines when they should*'. Most teachers did not appear to realise that, because their learners come to school and class with no or hardly any prior (or out of school) exposure to books and print, teachers have to be extremely conscientious about assisting them to develop a concept of print and an awareness of the conventions of writing and print material. Data indicates that teachers may be taking too much for granted because some of these aspects seems so obvious to them. Furthermore, the curriculum statements do not stress such aspects.

Teachers also appear to need to be more aware that learners' understanding of the relationship between speech and print and of the alphabetic principle has to be explicitly developed (NICHD, 2000; Abadzi, 2006). They need to ensure that learners can recognise

and discriminate the shape of letters from one another, that they learn letter names, and that they have plenty of practice in recognising and printing both capital and lowercase letters with reasonable accuracy. Teachers need to develop learners' grapho-phonetic knowledge (how alphabet letters/graphemes are linked to sounds/phonemes) by teaching them how to 'pronounce the sounds associated with letters' (Macdonald, 1991:44) and how to translate the abstract symbols of print (letters and combinations of letters) into sounds and how to blend sounds together to pronounce and write words. They need to point out correct pronunciations and give learners sufficient practice in correctly repeating words they have mispronounced. They need to help learners work out spelling to sound correspondence so that learners become so aware of sound segments and combinations of letters, the order of sounds and letter probabilities and so that they can generalise their knowledge from familiar words to unknown words (Oakhill, 1993).

In Chapter 8 we showed that, in general, researchers did not observe much explicit teaching of reading happening in most of the Limpopo classes. Apart from two literacy teaching strategies identified by teachers in the focus-group interviews in a few of the schools ('bring back penmanship', and 'phonics works') teachers' inability to identify specific literacy-teaching activities which they themselves might introduce indicate a loss of faith or confidence in their own common-sense knowledge of classroom teaching, specifically literacy teaching and language development.

Teachers' confusion about how to approach literacy teaching may be attributable to exposure to different schools of thought about how reading should be taught and the debates around 'a whole-language approach' to reading instruction versus what some of teachers' termed 'a phonics approach' (Chall, 2000; Abadzi, 2006). In the teacher interviews, a few teachers said they 'recommended a phonics approach' because 'a phonics approach is best'. While in the past, there was a tendency amongst many South African teachers to make phonics instruction virtually the sole component of their literacy-teaching programmes or to place too prolonged an emphasis on phonics instruction, this does not mean that there is no longer any place for direct teaching of reading and writing or phonics.

Instead, it now seems that some teachers need to be advised that systematic instruction in phonics-orientated techniques should remain an important component of their literacy teaching.⁷ Our lesson observations indicate that a number of teachers may have adopted an unstructured approach to teaching phonics by mainly requiring learners to read individual words and encouraging them to sound out words they did not recognise. Data collected through classroom observations, teacher focus-group interviews and teacher questionnaires suggest that teachers may be under the impression that the DoE view is that direct phonics instruction is no longer an essential part of literacy programmes. Teachers need to know that learners' chances of learning to read (particularly low socio-economic status children) are improved when a structured approach to teaching phonics is adopted (i.e. when phonics elements are explicitly and sequentially taught) as compared to when phonics elements are randomly pointed out as and when they crop up in words (NICHHD, 2000; Chall, 2000).

On the other hand, it is important that teachers are aware that, if properly taught, most learners require instruction focusing on phonics-orientated techniques for a relatively short time. They need to understand that children who have acquired phonics skills and

⁷ Phonics is systematic in the African language, so it is not difficult to teach, and yields significant rewards.

already know letter-sound correspondence do not require the same amount and intensity of phonics instruction as those learners who have no or hardly any letter-sound knowledge (NICHD, 2000; Chall, 2000). Most importantly, they need to understand phonics instruction as a means to reading continuous text. They need to know that they can place too much emphasis on teaching letter-sound relations and not enough on providing learners with opportunities to put them to daily use in reading and writing activities. As learners learn letter-sound relationships, they need practice in applying phonics knowledge and skills accurately in their own reading and writing (Chall, 2000; NICHD, 2000; Snow *et al.*, 1998).

Teachers may not fully comprehend that recognising and writing words and matching pictures to words should also form only one aspect of their learners' literacy programmes. For example, other aspects, besides practicing phonics and spelling skills, include vocabulary development (learning new words, their meanings and practicing using them); reading and writing phrases; learning about the grammatical structure of text; and practice in the accurate application of all these literacy skills so as to develop fluency in reading and writing whole sentences and extended text (Chall, 2000; NICHD, 2000; Snow *et al.*, 1998).

Teachers need to be very aware that, if learners do not learn to read continuous text accurately and with enough speed, then they will have enormous difficulty making sense of expository or narrative text because they will lose track of the sense of the sentence (Snow *et al.*, 1998; Chall, 2000; NICHD, 2002; Abadzi, 2006). They need to understand that, in addition to learning how to 'sound out' new and/or unfamiliar words, learners must become very proficient: a) in using phonic knowledge to rapidly and accurately decode larger units of print; and b) in automatic word recognition because the ability to gain meaning from print is dependent on reading quickly and accurately, in other words, reading fluently.

Children vary in the amount of practice they require to develop fluency. However, research has shown that the average child needs between 4 and 14 exposures for the recognition of a new word to become automatic (NICHD, 2002). In addition, it is important to emphasise that learners have to be able to understand the words they are reading. They need to have prior aural/oral knowledge of at least 95% of the vocabulary items they need to read in order to make sense of a text (Snow *et al.*, 1998; Abadzi, 2006). Therefore it is vital that teachers understand that they need to provide children with plenty of opportunities to read extended text at their reading level and that the text provides specific practise in the skills and words they need to learn. Our classroom data showed that most teachers are not involving learners in reading continuous text. As a result there are few opportunities for them to develop fluency or for teachers to assist them in developing age-appropriate comprehension skills. On the other hand, 'progress in higher level cognitive skills' such as comprehension in reading 'is slowed down when (reading) basic skills are not automatic' (Chall, 2000:125).

In the teacher questionnaires and focus-group interviews, teachers complained that children in their classes '*are unwilling to read*'; '*lack confidence*'; '*are lazy to read*'; '*read softly*'; '*lack interest*'; and '*lack motivation to read*'.⁸ Naturally learners who are weak at reading, will find reading aloud in class humiliating and soon become reluctant to

⁸ These are examples of the teachers' propensity to blame learners.

read. Teachers in contexts where there are low levels of parental literacy should realise that they as teachers have to take responsibility for deliberately developing positive attitudes towards reading. Teachers need to motivate learners to read by providing them with opportunities to experience the wonder, enjoyment and pleasure of books through shared reading experiences. By reading with expression, teachers can create a sense of the excitement, joy, anticipation and fun that can be gained from reading. However, they also need to constantly foster an interest in books as sources of fascinating information by providing learners with experiences that help them understand the purposes of reading and the importance of reading for learning (American Association of School Librarians *et al.*, 2007).

Essentially, the sample of Limpopo teachers did not all seem to understand why their literacy programmes need to include ‘code-based’ components as well as ‘literature-based’ components. Even if their learners cannot read or decode with accuracy, their interest in books and reading must be sustained and fostered through looking at picture books and listening to stories or text being read. But very importantly, the provision of interesting and entertaining shared reading experiences *must not be confused with the teaching of reading*. Teachers do build learners’ self-confidence in reading through positive feedback on their attempts at reading but, most importantly, confidence is built through systematically and deliberately developing reading ability and by providing learners with opportunities to achieve mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to perform reading activities at their grade level.

In essence, teachers’ confusion or current lack of clarity about the mechanisms and processes required for teaching literacy is understandable. The NCS documentation refers to literacy teaching and development in loose ideological terms and does not explain the mechanics of literacy teaching which teachers are now expected to follow. The departmental officials charged with mediating the new curriculum do not themselves appear clear about what is needed by teachers or learners. Teachers appear to have understood that old practices have fallen out of favour with both national and provincial departments, but they do not know what exactly it is that replaces these.

Finally, in the teacher questionnaires teachers were asked how many of their own books they have at home (not counting school textbooks, study material or textbooks, library books or magazines or newspapers). Table 11.26 provides details on this.

TABLE 11.26: TEACHERS’ REPORTS ON THE NUMBER OF OWN BOOKS AT HOME

Number of books	Number of teachers n (valid)=79
> 100	5 (6%)
50-100	7 (9%)
20-50	20 (25%)
1-20	40 (51%)
None	7 (9%)

Significantly, 85% of the learners’ literacy teachers reported that they have fewer than 50 of their own books at home, which can hardly be seen as reflecting an interest in, and love for, books and reading on the part of Grade 1-4 teachers themselves.

Clearly teachers require the necessary in-service *support* and *incentives* to improve the quality of literacy instruction and make changes both through professional training that better prepares them for teaching language and literacy and through adequate provision of teaching and learning support material, specifically books. In Section 11.8 we outline the kind of teacher development and education programmes required.

11.8 Development and education required by the primary-school teachers

In short, the research team found little residual evidence among teachers of the in-service support purportedly provided in the sample of schools investigated. Our research findings point towards primary-school teacher development needs and expansion or modification of teacher-education programmes. Specifically they point towards a need to thoroughly interrogate and restore the development and preparation of teachers for:

1. Structured and systematic teaching (not facilitation) of reading and writing from Grade R/1 to at least the end of the Intermediate Phase (Grade 6), preferably to the end of the Senior Phase (Grade 9).
2. Structured integration of reading and writing across the curriculum in mother tongue (L1).
3. Specialised teaching of the second language, especially where this language will at some point become the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).
4. Structured use of both mother tongue and English (deliberate use of bilingual methodology) where appropriate.
5. Structured inclusion of how teachers should teach literacy in each Learning Area of the curriculum (i.e. literacy teaching across the whole curriculum).

In the next chapter, we discuss the current capacity of the Limpopo tertiary teacher education system to provide and support the kind of formal literacy training required.

CHAPTER 12: UNIVERSITY-BASED TEACHER-EDUCATION PROVISION

This chapter analyses teacher-education course design and provisioning of literacy training within Limpopo Higher Education Institutions and explores the capacity of Limpopo tertiary teacher-training institutions to provide the kind of primary school teacher preparation and development required.¹ The research team required information about how HEIs go about the preparation of teachers for:

- Structured and systematic teaching (not facilitation) of reading and writing from Grade R/1 to at least the end of the Intermediate Phase (Grade 6), preferably to the end of the Senior Phase (Grade 9).
- Structured integration of reading and writing across the curriculum in mother tongue.
- Specialised teaching of the second language, especially where this language will at some point become the language of learning and teaching (LoLT).
- Structured use of both mother tongue and English (deliberate use of bilingual methodology) where appropriate.
- Structured inclusion of how teachers should teach literacy in each Learning Area of the curriculum (i.e. literacy teaching across the whole curriculum).

Owing to difficulties in obtaining information directly from some of the stakeholders in Limpopo Province, the HSRC drew on the research of a number of parallel HSRC teams and projects related in some ways to the current study. A set of these attends to work in the so-called Teacher Education Programme (TEP), covering many teacher supply and demand issues, including training. The TEP comprises a suite of projects inside and outside the HSRC conducted as part of a consortium funded by the Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE). Institutions such as the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) and the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment (CEA) at the University of Pretoria are some of the other participants. The final releases of findings from this study are expected during the rest of 2008, and early in 2009. The wealth of data from these studies is such that they have direct bearing on the literacy study, and have therefore been drawn upon. One such case is the matter of an overview of teacher-training institutions and the history of transformation. Because this is the topic of a study currently being wrapped up, an attempt has been made to capitalise on this by extracting information and knowledge that is already in the public domain from communications between colleagues. Sources will not yet be cited formally here in anticipation of official releases and references. In a few isolated cases some detailed figures from sources such as the 2004 Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education Report, CEMIS data, etc. are cited.)

The contribution that follows endeavours to locate current provincial teacher-training infra-structure and practices:

- within the broader context of national developments in the area;
- in terms of some specifics and unique features applicable to Limpopo; and
- to the specific former and current training institutions in Limpopo.

¹ It had been intended that a much more extended historical study on teacher-education orientations towards literacy in Limpopo Province be included in this chapter. Regrettably, key informants declined invitations to provide the documentation or other data which could have been included for analysis.

This is followed by the inclusion of an independent mini-report by Professor Hassana Alidou, Alliant International University, San Diego.

12.1 History and current capacity of Limpopo teacher-training institutions

The country is still witnessing a very large-scale overhaul and remake of its Higher Education Institutions landscape. With the specific aspect of teacher training in mind, this process can be said to have ranged over a variety of modes of restructuring, characterised by unique local shapes, extents and impacts. The changes have been ranging from simple to complex restructuring, and from one-off to revisited and repeated interventions.

In terms of the degree or extent of integration, subordination, amalgamation or cessation, a wide variety of influences on institutions occurred, depending on the individual institution. At the less harsh side, this could have entailed internal restructuring of existing facilities, leaving roleplayers and institutions largely intact, with realignment of practices and curriculum contents with OBE and C2005 perhaps the most intense activity. Broadly speaking, at the next levels of intensity, all former colleges of education were incorporated into existing or recently re-amalgamated higher-education institutions. Topping all of this, the recent three- to four-year period saw the formalisation of institutional arrangements through another round of internal processes, which nevertheless resulted in a variety of outcomes in terms of realigning, creating or terminating faculties, departments and schools, based on the local outcomes at any given institution.

Some institutions were spared protracted and repeated cycles of restructuring, and others not. A common outcome was that once the first dust had settled, most institutions eventually had to have another internal round of ‘smoothing over’ and adjustment of functioning issues.

The Limpopo Province historically had two universities. Both were established adjacent to or as part of the former homelands, and were initially mainly tasked to train administrators for the homelands.

The University of Venda (UNIVEN)

The University of Venda (for Science and Technology) was established in 1982 in the Venda ‘homeland’ in the town/city of Thohoyandou (www.univen.ac.za/history.php; 14 Dec 2007). It experienced rapid growth to 1994, and sported a full range of courses straddling the humanities, social sciences, natural and applied sciences. Accelerated transformation commenced in 1994, and culminated in a shift to science and technology in 1995. In 2002 the Department of Education mandated its transformation into a comprehensive university offering career-focused programmes. Community needs at local, regional, national, continental and international levels were always of key importance. Some changes to the size and shape of the curriculum followed, and the staff component expanded further in terms of numbers and quality.

The University of Limpopo

The University of Limpopo (UL) (formerly known as ‘Turfloop’, and then the University of the North) was established in 1960 about 30 kilometres north-east of Polokwane, close to the larger apartheid delineated ‘homeland’, Lebowa. As a result of political motivation, an instrumental approach was followed pertaining to the courses offered, as the intention

never was to provide a full menu of academic development. Staff retention has always been a problem at the University, as, since 1994, many academics and teachers preferred better-paying and higher-status posts in the bureaucracy. In any case, with a current staff complement of between 35 and 45, spread over eight departments, not enough teachers can be trained even nowadays by the School of Education, whatever the favourable gender, race or language-composition elements and qualification levels are sought after and achieved.

When the incorporation of former teacher-training colleges was gazetted in 2000, the then five Limpopo colleges of Mapulaneng, Giyani, Makhado, Mokopane, and Mastec² had to be incorporated as sub-divisions of universities/technikons. The subsequent process to achieve this lacked any pro-active plans to let it happen in cordial, transparent, negotiated and organised ways. Soon student and staff resistance or apathy led to severe diminishing of the throughput of those students who had been in the pipeline at the start of the changes. Estimates have it that fewer than 500 of what could have been more than 2 000 students survived the restructuring. In the end, not even one staff member may have been taken over. The remaining university facilities may also not have been conducive to simulated classroom activity, exposure to teaching practice, etc., thus placing a further damper on the efficiency with which the previous dispensation could be converted into the new.

The net effect of the geographical and numbers issues raised in this part of the report, is that it also became more and more difficult for aspiring teachers from rural areas to study at accessible and affordable institutions, relevant to their and the learners' socio-economic and cultural profiles.

The turbulent history of struggle prior to and immediately after 1994, with the student body very active and the staff body often divided, was continued in the nature of the restructuring of the University of Limpopo. Characterising Turfloop as having a history of divisions between former white, Afrikaans, conservative staff and some of the supportive black staff, on the one hand, with a new generation of black staff with more enlightened theoretical and political motivations, on the other hand, might offer a brief contextualization of the ideological tensions that prevailed. These also manifested in intense jockeying for posts and seniority.

In evidence in Limpopo generally has been the rather more complicated process of (repeated) internal restructurings, as well as institutional mergers, and also the incorporation of teacher-training colleges. The end product was having a Humanities Faculty within which the School of Education, with its eight departments, was/is located. These departments were: Language Education; Education Management; Education Studies; Education Psychology; Physical Education; Mathematics, Science and Technology Education; Curriculum and Professional Studies; and Adult Education.

At the level of teacher-education activities, such an arrangement reduced the role that the University of Limpopo's School of Education could play in terms of access to or powers over institutional, managerial and financial arrangements and outcomes. Conspicuous by

² In some of the interview and questionnaire data that the HSRC had retrieved as part of the present study, many more colleges are mentioned, such as Modjadji, Bochum, Hoxani, Sekhukhune, Dr CN Phatudi, Tshisimani/ Chisimani, Naphuno, Mamokgalake, Kwena-Moloto, Tivumbeni, Lemana, Shingwedzi, Ndebele, and about 10 others.)

its absence is a strong priority on teacher training for early childhood and primary school, which may further contribute to dwindling student numbers in this area. Recent statistics seem to suggest that a waning number of about 1 000 students are enrolled in total for the pre-service or initial National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) every year, with another almost 400 in the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) course, and about 600 in the relatively new B Ed qualification. It also has to be noted that the registration figures are skewed very sharply towards second and successive year students, and there are not many new intakes.

The B Ed numbers fall far short of 2 000 graduates a year, and the recently completed institutional review by the Commission for Higher Education may bring about further rationalisation if the preliminary findings are confirmed in the final report to suggest that UL lacks the capacity to grow the School and its Departments effectively. The numbers of ACE and B Ed students per specialisation area also show a dearth of language and literacy students compared to areas such as Mathematical Literacy, Science and even Life Orientation. Curricula and approaches to teaching have also been criticised by the Ministerial Committee for not being up to standard, e.g., by focusing on rote learning too much. An anomaly from their report, given Minister Pandor’s call for six years of mother-tongue teaching, is the Committee’s description of the vernacular as an inappropriate subject or course choice. Be it as it may, the most recent HEMIS figures show that as few as 600 teachers may come out of the Limpopo teacher-training system per year. Thus, a large task is left to UNIVEN. The position of the latter in rescuing the whole Province, however, poses strong questions in terms of their physical location in the Province (difficult access), and being situated within a largely Tshivenda-speaking area, which may have an unintended, negative impact on other language groups.

In aggravation of the argument above about the decreasing number of new teachers joining the system, some findings from the current study further raise alarm. One such instance is information from the teacher questionnaire on teacher age in the schools in the study that suggests that the current Grade 1-4 teacher population is heading for retirement fast as very few were under the age of 30 in the sample.

TABLE 12.1: AGE BRACKETS DERIVED FROM TEACHER RESPONSES

Age	Number of teachers n (valid)=79
Under 25	0 (0%)
25-29	2 (3%)
30-39	17 (22%)
40-49	35 (44%)
50-59	24 (30%)
60 or more	1 (1%)

Forty seven percent of the teachers said they were under 46 years old. Fifty three percent said they were over 45. Ninety seven percent of the teachers were over 30 years of age. Seventy six percent were over 40. Only 3% were younger than 30.

Also in Chapter 5 it is shown that 60% of the school principals (in the principal questionnaires) reported shortages of teaching staff at the Foundation Phase level. Table 5.5 in Chapter 5 shows principals’ reported shortages of Foundation Phase teachers.

Furthermore, although 85% of the schools offered Grade R, almost half did not have appropriately trained ECD staff.

From the completed interview with the Head of Department of Teacher Education at UNIVEN for this Limpopo study, it seems that:

- UNIVEN has only three staff qualified in literacy development/a language-teaching specialisation.
- About 270 students are said to be enrolled in B Ed (Foundation Phase).
- About 150 students are in B Ed (Senior Phase/Secondary school).
- About 135 students are early post-graduate (mainly B Ed Hons (Education Management)).
- About 90 students study M Ed (Education Management).
- Another about 140 are in the post-graduate certificate in education.

One of the bigger potential problems experienced is the language mismatch between courses delivered in English, and the reality that teachers will teach through the home languages of their learners in the Foundation Phase.

12.2 Implications of this macro- and institutional period of flux for teacher supply

Teacher enrolments for initial teacher education³ have dropped dramatically throughout. The enrolments in Foundation Phase teacher-education programmes are far too low for the requirements of the Limpopo Province's school system. The Foundation Phase is regarded as the bedrock of teaching and learning, and which, if not successfully provided, will have dire consequences for the Province, and country more generally. It would also fly in the face of recent UNESCO (see Monitoring Learning Achievement) reports on the importance of this period in the lives of learners.

Implications for curriculum content and teaching practices

At policy level, it had been necessary after 1994 to shift away from the fundamental pedagogics approach to the new OBE-based, locally relevant, learner-centred, interdisciplinary, inclusive curriculum and teacher-education methodology. This resulted in new allocations and distribution of financial and human resources. This in turn was subject to the prioritisation given to in-service, initial and post-graduate training. In hindsight it has become clear that an unintended consequence is that initial teacher education has been neglected in favour of upgrading existing teacher qualifications. The kind of teacher education upgrading programmes themselves have lacked a focus on imparting real skills and efficiencies, and they have become seen as a way to improve career paths and salary issues at the level of individuals. This is not, however, a phenomenon peculiar to South Africa or Limpopo Province. This phenomenon has been identified in many other parts of the world in the last decade or two.

The new focus impacted on the system at programme-design, course-content and methodology levels. The focus on the new curriculum terminology, management and policy took priority, while simultaneously, the focus on practical classroom activities, tasks and strategies (the core business of teaching), receded into the background. In particular, practical teaching skills and sound and effective pedagogy in literacy and

³ Given the historical and institutional profiles provided earlier, this can be assumed to be mainly effected by dynamics pertaining to UNIVEN, as UL was not a strong roleplayer here anyway.

language development as the most fundamental elements of earlier and later learning, have lost emphasis.

The negative impact on actual teaching and learning practices has been compounded by a serious loss to the system of significant numbers of experienced teacher educators and the combined expertise which they held, during the structural adjustment of higher education in South Africa. Along with this, some eroding of research capacity followed with dire consequences for the scientist-practitioner model favoured in many disciplines, as one good way to improve the quality of day-to-day practice in the classroom (e.g. to identify learners struggling with work, and/or the aspects of work struggled with).

12.3 The preparation of pre-service teachers to teach literacy in elementary and secondary schools in the Province of Limpopo⁴

In this section, an attempt is made to answer the question about how (well) pre-service teachers are presently being prepared for their task to teach literacy in the schools of Limpopo Province.

12.3.1 Introduction

Studies conducted worldwide show that there is a high correlation between literacy and academic performances of students. Limited literacy skills are in most cases predictors of underachievement and academic failure among school-aged children and adolescents. The Alliance for Excellent Education conducted a longitudinal large-scale study of students' performance in the United States. The results of the study indicated that students who do not or cannot appropriately read at grade level are at a greater disadvantage, and increasingly likely to experience underachievement and failure. Poor literacy skills also prevent these students from accessing or keeping up with the content area curriculum (2003). Similar situations are found in African countries (Alidou *et al.*, 2005). Walter (2005:385) evaluated a bilingual education programme in Eritrea. With regard to reading assessment, his study shows that primary-school students at all levels show weak skills in reading connected to academic texts. Students have more difficulty in upper grades (Grade 4 to Grade 5) where they have to read and use texts for informational and academic purposes. Most of the research studies on literacy in most Sub-Saharan African countries indicate that efforts are directed towards the development of basic literacy skills in adult literacy and literacy in primary schools. In primary schools, the attention is specifically on teaching children word recognition, reading-out-loud and reading stories about more familiar topics, and very limited attention is given to developing more independent readers of context-free, informational and cognitively demanding texts (i.e. academic language) even though this type of reading competence is needed in order to learn effectively beyond the foundational phase. This situation is observed whether children are taught exclusively in a second language such as the official language of their countries or bilingually in their native languages and the official languages as it is done in primary schools in the Province of Limpopo in South Africa. In order to remedy this situation adequately, it is important to promote effective literacy policies, curriculum and practices at all levels of the educational system. Empowering teachers is a key to promoting effective literacy instruction and learning in the classrooms.

⁴ Section 12.3 comprises an independent mini-report, compiled by Prof Hassana Alidou, for this study.

According to Jane Medwell (Wray & Medwell, 1998) high quality literacy teaching demands high quality literacy teachers. It is therefore important to empower teachers with regard to teaching effectively literacy at all levels of the educational system. Therefore, it is important that education systems and school districts provide both pre-service and in-service teachers opportunities to develop a strong knowledge base and competencies in teaching literacy. In effective teacher-education programmes, literacy teaching is viewed as a critical component of the curriculum. Therefore pre-service teachers are adequately taught theories and various reading and writing methods in order to prepare them to teach literacy as an independent subject as well as a subject taught across disciplines at all levels in both the foundational phases and other levels from primary school up to the end of high school. In effective teacher-preparation programmes, literacy courses integrate a systematic and explicit teaching of reading and writing.

According to Moats (2001), the inadequate teaching of reading and literacy in general is related to the assumption that “*anyone who can read can also teach reading*” (p.2). This assumption suggests that reading is a natural process that unfolds if children are read to and given appealing literature. While there is no doubt that reading for pleasure increases one’s ability to read and write, one needs to be able to read independently. Such support is particularly crucial for students who are coming from environments where literacy is minimally used or promoted. Another problem that accounts for the ineffectiveness of literacy instruction is related to the quality of most of the teacher preparation. Moats argues that the preparation of teachers for teaching reading and writing is often too short and inadequate. She specifically stated:

“Their [teachers] preparation in literacy instruction is too brief, too general, too shallow, or too dependent on ideas not supported by research”.(p.2)

During their investigation of reading instruction in South Africa a group of researchers under the leadership of Moll and Drew (2007) found that there is no training for specialist reading teachers. Instead the teacher-preparation programmes prepare mostly generalist teachers. Most teacher-preparation programmes provide few reading and writing courses. Literacy has also become a very politicised subject. Therefore a variety of literacy theories and practices are implemented without examining whether they rely on research-based principles or whether they contribute to helping children develop academic literacy skills. In African countries, a lack of resources and/or expertise has often influenced the reliance on literacy programmes and methods which do not necessarily take into consideration the socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the majority of children. Most African pupils come from non-literate environments (literacy practices are limited at home and in the communities) and the dominant languages of instruction are not their mother tongues. Coming to school gives them the opportunity to develop literacy skills and it is mostly in school that they use these skills. For most primary-school children, the textbooks they use in school are the main reading materials they have access to. In many circumstances, they cannot take these books home. Writing is also limited to the activities conducted in schools and the take-home assignments which are often limited to writing words or very short sentences. It is also important to take into consideration the backgrounds of the parents.

Another matter to consider is that in African contexts such as the Province of Limpopo, the majority of parents cannot read and write either in the home language or in English. Because of this situation, children rely heavily on their teachers for developing literacy

skills. So the role of the teachers is central to the promotion of literacy in African contexts such as the Province of Limpopo.

In order to provide all children an opportunity to develop as effective readers regardless of their linguistic, socio-cultural and economic backgrounds, Duffy and Hoffman (1999) suggest that teacher-education programmes should resist the reliance on a narrowly defined paradigm and they should develop effective literacy programmes and courses which integrate a variety of reading and writing methods in the curriculum of the teacher-training programmes.

12.3.2 Investigating teacher preparation for literacy instruction in the Province of Limpopo

In order to examine the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of literacy in primary schools in the Province of Limpopo, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa conducted a large-scale qualitative study in several schools in August 2007. The HSRC contracted an independent literacy expert familiar with literacy teaching across Africa, the Middle East and the USA, to participate in the study, contribute to refining the data-collection instruments and to conduct specific aspects of the research, especially literacy-teacher education. In this regard, this researcher was involved in examining how teacher-education programmes prepare pre-service teachers for the teaching of literacy teaching in elementary schools. Attempts were made to collect relevant information through focus-group interviews with teacher-educator staff who are responsible for teaching literacy courses at the two HEIs in the Province. Accessing relevant curricular documents in order to develop a broader view about the literacy curriculum was also attempted. The main purpose of this part of the investigation was two-fold:

- to determine the quality of literacy instruction (training) at the higher education level;
- to determine the quality of the literacy components of the teacher-education curriculum.

In order to respond to the main research questions, the HEI curricula for education were requested and focus-group interviews were conducted with university staff members from the University of Limpopo and the University of Venda. The teacher-education programme courses are published on the University web-site, but were not made available in hard copy form. At the University of Venda, a literacy class was also attended in order to observe how pre-service teachers are taught literacy courses.

12.3.2.1 University of Limpopo: Teacher training for literacy instruction

Literacy teaching at the School of Education of the University of Limpopo was examined too even though this university is more involved in preparing secondary-school teachers. A focus-group interview was conducted with three faculty members who specialise in English and Sepedi language teaching. They explained to us the structure and main mission of the different language programmes. They also responded to specific research questions which are related to their literacy activities.

At the University of Limpopo, the School of Education has developed three types of programmes (pre-service, in-service and post-graduate programmes). Students can specialise in one of seven disciplines:

- Adult Education

- Centre for Education Policy Studies
- Curriculum & Professional Studies (Language Education, Educational Technology, Educational Management and Curriculum)
- Mathematics, Science & Technology Education
- Educational Psychology & Special Education
- Educational Studies
- Life Orientation.

An examination of the various programmes and the course description indicates that literacy instruction does not hold a prominent place in their respective curricula. The focus is on general education courses and language teaching (English, French and African languages). Literacy is discussed as a topic in the curriculum and the course entitled, 'language education'. It needs to be noted that this institution does not provide primary-school teacher education, and this is one reason why there is no specific focus on literacy which has traditionally been understood as part of early childhood, primary and adult education only.

The place of literacy in the teacher-training curriculum

The language-related courses and literacy are taught in the School of Languages and Communication Studies. In this school, three main programmes offer language and literacy courses: through the English Department; within a jointly run double programme in Contemporary English Language Studies (CELS) and Multilingual Studies (MUST); and through the Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre. In all these, the focus is on language teaching at the secondary-education level or the community level (i.e. adult education). The main courses which integrate literacy are taught from highly theoretical and ideological perspectives as stated in the course descriptions⁵ presented below. They do not include literacy-teaching methods at primary- or secondary-school level. The courses include:

CELS 302: Critical language awareness

'This module will introduce learners to the various models of language developed to raise awareness of language as a tool for the exercise of power. Starting from the position that language is not neutral, the module will interrogate texts from the point of view of various subject positions and train students to develop a resistant mode of reading. They will also be trained to produce texts from different reading positions.'

MUST 302: Critical approaches to multiliteracies

'This module will enable students to move beyond simplistic notions of literacy to gain both understanding and skill in producing multimodal texts. Numeracy, visual and spatial literacy as well as academic literacy will be addressed as key concepts that will enrich their knowledge of the relation between verbal and other elements of text. The critical perspective taken in CELS 302 will also inform this multilingual module.'

A number of courses are designed as enhancement reading and composition courses for struggling college students. They are the following:

CELS 131 B: Basic academic literacy in English

MUST 131 B: Basic academic literacy in Northern Sotho

⁵ http://www.unorth.ac.za/FacultySchools/sch-lang/Programmes/BA_cels.html, accessed 12/15/2007.

CELS 132 B: Advanced academic literacy in English
MUST 132 B: Advanced academic literacy in an African language.

The Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre focuses on the promotion of Sepedi language, community-based literacy and mass communication and publication in Sepedi. The main goals of the centre are presented below:

- to establish collaboration with writers' associations, individual authors, publishing houses;
- to encourage journalistic careers through language-awareness campaigns;
- to work with the media studies department at UL to ensure that more students with qualifications in Sepedi are trained to write and report in the language to increase newspapers for Sepedi for those who can't read English well;
- to encourage writing for different types of readership, e.g. children's literature, school books, comics, magazines, etc.;
- the SABC or any radio station and newspapers can be involved in planning and organising competitions with the hope to motivate writers further;
- government announcements to include Sepedi (the PLC can ensure co-operation in this regard).

Focus-group interview with University of Limpopo faculty members (from CELS and MUST, and the Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre)

Three faculty members from the Contemporary English Language Studies (CELS) and Multilingual Studies (MUST) joint programme and the Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre participated in the focus-group interview. They stated that they do not prepare primary-school teachers in general. Each one of their respective programmes focuses more on secondary and adult education. They specifically offer remedial English courses for college students and community-based literacy (Sepedi language). Therefore, the three programmes do not include courses related to teaching reading and writing or literacy methods. However, staff who run the CELS and MUST programmes as well as the Coordinator of the Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre stated that they contribute to the promotion of literacy in primary schools in the Province of Limpopo through on-site professional development training they organise for teachers in Polokwane and other schools in the Province of Limpopo. They particularly promote reading for pleasure and other professional development activities. They stated that most of the workshops or professional development training are organised in collaboration with the Province of Limpopo Department of Education, and local, national and international not-for-profit organisations which are involved in promoting reading, writing and literacy in all the national languages used as means of instruction in the primary schools in the Province of Limpopo. The three staff interviewed also believe that all the community-based literacy activities which they are promoting have a positive impact on school-level literacy.

While the three participants said they could not respond to the specific questions related to literacy teaching in primary schools in the Province of Limpopo, one of the participants had worked for the Molteno Project before, and by virtue of this also knew about the existence and promotion of their Breakthrough to Literacy method in the schools. No further identification of the characteristics of this particular literacy method or any evaluation of its effectiveness was made, however.

From the focus-group interview conducted with faculty members from CELS, MUST and the Sepedi Language Research and Development Centre and the examination of the University of Limpopo teacher-education programme, it was concluded that literacy instruction (pedagogy) does not hold an important place in the teacher-training curriculum of the respective programmes. The language programmes examined emphasise mainly language teaching from a linguistic and theoretical perspective (descriptive of African languages in particular and ideological approaches to literacy) and adult education.

12.3.2.2 University of Venda: teacher training for literacy instruction

In the Province of Limpopo, the University of Venda is the main institution of higher education which is training primary-school teachers. Therefore the research team tried to investigate the preparation of pre-service teachers with regard specifically to the teaching of literacy by conducting a focus-group interview with faculty members who teach literacy courses. A literacy class was also attended⁶ in order to obtain a sense of how lecturers in general teach pre-service teachers literacy courses. We are extremely grateful to this lecturer for volunteering for the observation.

Focus group interview

Four teacher educators who teach literacy and numeracy courses were identified by the Director of the teacher-education programme. Among them one faculty member specialises in numeracy instruction, another one in early childhood education and two in elementary education.

Right at the beginning of the focus-group interview, the university staff was told about the purpose of our visit and the focus-group interview. They seemed aware of the evaluation project.⁷ The interview session was organised in two phases. During the first phase we made a presentation about the current research and we responded to our colleagues' questions about our research, teaching and publications. During the second phase of the interview, it was their turn to respond to our research questions. They responded to the broad questions related to the situation of teachers and children, language policy and the new curriculum implemented from Grade R-9 in South Africa. They also requested a day to read the research questions in order to respond in writing.⁸ They made this suggestion as they did not have time during the interview and their respective programme was under review by a higher education review committee. Before distributing the interview questions to individual faculty members again, we read together the interview questions in order to make sure we shared the same understanding.

With regard to how pre-service teachers are prepared to teach reading, writing and literacy in the Foundation Phase of elementary school, the four faculty members interviewed stated that they used mainly the "*Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9 (School) Languages: English-Home Language*" published by the Department of Education as their main literacy curriculum. As it is an official document, they said

⁶ By the international literacy expert and two HSRC research specialists undertaking the visit.

⁷ They had been involved in the project through the Research Reference Group, had had regular contact with Professor Ralenala (UL), and had received correspondence from HSRC in regard to setting up the meetings and interviews, prior to the arrival of the researchers.

⁸ The research questions had been sent to the department head the previous week by the HSRC, along with a request that they be circulated amongst the relevant staff.

they want to make sure that all pre-service teachers master this curriculum before they finish their studies at the University of Venda.

With regard to the quality of literacy teaching in the Province of Limpopo's primary schools, all four the faculty members stated that teachers and students are facing serious difficulty with the English language. Two faculty members suggested that the focus on outcomes-based instruction accounts for some of the literacy problems children are currently facing. Teachers are expected to teach reading and writing through this approach even though most children do not possess the basic reading and writing skills. They stated that they do not teach the pre-requisite knowledge base about reading and writing. They also added that not all in-service teachers have received effective professional development training with regard to teaching from an outcomes-based approach. The faculty members said due to these problems, children have difficulty developing the basic reading skills in both their home language and English.

The following day, we returned to campus to collect the responses to the interview questions. Unfortunately, the University of Venda faculty were not able to respond to the interview questions. Since we were not able to collect data related to the specific research questions included in the focus-group interview guide, we tried to collect from faculty members their literacy course syllabi in order to analyse their contents. We were promised this set of data. Unfortunately, they did not provide the syllabi. Therefore we had to leave the University of Venda without the responses to all our questions.

Classroom observation

One of the faculty members volunteered to teach a literacy class during our visit in order to demonstrate how the new literacy curriculum was taught. This person explained to us that s/he is not a literacy specialist even though s/he teaches a couple of the literacy classes. The faculty member was very hesitant to invite us into her/his classroom partly because s/he did not feel confident about her/his English language proficiency. S/he repeatedly stated that s/he felt insecure about teaching literacy and shy about speaking English, and was indeed anxious during the session. Although we feel uncomfortable about the discussion of this classroom since the lecturer is not a literacy teacher, what happened in the class so perfectly mirrored the impression researchers were getting from the SMTs and teachers themselves that it seemed useful to retain it for illustrative purposes. We are indebted to this lecturer for providing us with the opportunity to observe the class as it provides valuable insight into issues arising that need to be addressed around teacher training for outcomes-based education.

The classroom observation lasted one hour. It was carried out in English. Twenty four students attended the session. The focus of the session was a review of "Learning outcomes 1-3" for Grade R-3. The language used was English and the learning outcomes studied related to teaching English language. Prior to class, students were asked to read these outcomes and learn how to "unpack them". Therefore during the session we attended, the faculty member read each learning outcome and asked students questions in order to verify their understanding.

○ *What went on during the session?*

The lecturer read each outcome and the students responded to any questions posed by the lecturer. The following dialogue (sentences are produced *verbatim*) illustrates the classroom interactions we observed:

Lecturer: Let's read Grade R Learning Outcome 3 Page 16 "*Reading and viewing*". Let's unpack Learning Outcome 3.

Classroom: Silence.

Lecturer: Who can read Learning Outcome 3.

Student 1: The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.

Lecturer: Good. Let's unpack it. When (do we know) this; when the learner does what? Who can respond?

Student 2: We know this when the learner uses visual cues to make meaning.

Lecturer: Yes. We know this when the learner uses visual cues to make meaning. Great! Let's hear another person. We know this when the learner ...? Let's unpack learning outcome 3! (Laugh.) They are shy... OK, great ... you (Name of student 3).

Student 3: We know this when the learner uses illustrations to understand simple caption in story books.

The dialogue presented above went on the entire hour and was characterised mainly by memorisation, repetition and chorus responses on the part of both the lecturer and the students. The same strategy was used over and over by the lecturer to solicit students' responses. Students' responses were re-iterated each time but the meaning of the outcomes and assessment criteria were not elaborated upon and students were not shown how to apply knowledge in real-classroom situations. Neither were they asked to show how they would apply the new knowledge or skill. In this context it was very difficult for the observer to determine whether both the faculty member and the student teachers clearly understood the meaning of the learning outcomes and the methodological suggestions related to how to achieve them in real classrooms.

○ *What have we learned during the classroom observation?*

The English language proficiency of both lecturers and student teachers can indeed be a factor that accounts for the quality of interaction and the type of teaching methods observed in the class we attended. The faculty member we observed used English most of the time to teach. However, sometimes she switched to her home language.⁹ The use of home language occurred when the faculty member or students seemed to have some difficulty understanding a particular sentence included in the book. During our visit to the University of Venda, we often had to rely on our colleague who speaks the regional African language to explain our questions. Limited English proficiency may hinder, indeed, faculty members' and student teachers' ability to effectively unpack the learning outcomes included in the new curriculum. Therefore, faculty members seem to adopt a safe way or traditional way to teach the new curriculum. Unfortunately, through such approach it is very difficult to determine whether students understand and are able to implement the new language and literacy curriculum in an effective way.

⁹ Students and lecturers may much more or largely use the mother tongue when not observed.

There are issues related to OBE directly. The faculty member we interviewed stated that s/he attended the training for OBE. However s/he suggested that s/he needs more training in order to teach the new curriculum effectively.

12.3.3 Conclusion: quality of teacher training with regard to literacy instruction

Pre-service teachers are not well-prepared to teach reading and writing at all levels of the education system. During the data-collection sessions undertaken in both the teacher-training programmes and in the schools, faculty members and teachers told us they were not trained as reading and writing specialists. They are originally trained as generalist teachers in the Foundation Phase. Moll and Drew (2007), speaking about South African teachers' competence with regard to the teaching of reading, stated:

Our very first discussion focused on the title for this paper. Initially we had thought that the paper should be called 'Teaching reading teachers to teach reading.' During the discussion it was noted that this title suggests that our teachers are specialist reading teachers, which is not the case. They are generalist teachers in the Foundation Phase (FP). This raised questions about whether there is time in the programmes to train teachers adequately in the teaching of reading, whether they are 'specialist' enough, and whether we would like to see more specialization. (p.1)

In order to remedy the problems related to faculty members' and teachers' competence in teaching reading and writing we share the view of Moll and his colleagues. The HSRC research team arrived at the same conclusion and argues that there is a serious need to train reading and writing specialists. In addition, it is also important to evaluate the current teacher-training curriculum in order to integrate a solid literacy component, especially since the teacher is such a critical factor in promoting quality education. It is recognised that literacy achievement is essential for learning among both children and adults. Therefore, to improve the educational experiences of pupils and promote effective learning and success among them, teachers must be empowered by giving them an opportunity to develop a strong theoretical and pedagogical knowledge base and skills about the teaching of literacy. All pre-service teachers should be well-prepared to teach effective reading and writing in the languages of instruction in elementary schools. The teacher-preparation programmes must expand their literacy curriculum in order to integrate varieties of literacy-teaching theories and methods. Practical demonstrations of reading and writing strategies are important elements which should be highly promoted in the teacher-preparation programmes.

12.4 Analysis of the findings on literacy in teacher education

A number of significant changes to teacher education over the last decade have resulted in consequences which have eroded the capacity and expertise of teacher educators in the Province. The rationalisation of teacher-education institutions to the point that there is only one which now offers ECD and primary-school teacher education is a matter of serious concern. Secondly, the emphasis placed on the terminology, outer frame and management of outcomes-based education has resulted in the displacement of teaching methodologies and practices from the core business of teacher education.

Reluctance on the part of teacher educators to participate in the data collection for this part of the study is understandable. The HSRC had indicated clearly, through telephone, e-mail and faxed communication that the intention was to collect data on literacy teacher-

training curriculum, materials, methodologies, etc. The researchers were not able to locate or find evidence of any coherent courses, materials and programmes which are designed to train primary-school teachers how to teach reading and writing in Limpopo Province. The short observational (ethnographic) account of the classroom interaction outlined in Section 12.3 above is consistent with what the research team found in discussions with teachers, school management teams, and close scrutiny of teachers files and records for learning programmes. Teachers, school management teams and teacher educators in Limpopo Province appear to have suspended their own understanding of simple reading and writing activities and buried them under the mantle of a discourse about outcomes-based education, which they do not fully understand. Hence, the parrot-like chanting of tracts from the NCS documents in the teacher-training classroom, and the copying out by hand of extracts from the NCS by teachers into their files, without the extrapolation of this discourse into meaningful classroom-based activities. Many of the SMT members have recently been on further education programmes offered in the Province and these appear to be geared towards management issues which involve superficial procedures for monitoring teacher and learner progress inside classrooms. There was a notable absence of confidence about the question of reading and writing in all discussions and interviews with respondents. Occasionally, a teacher would tentatively say that s/he thought that 'phonics' and 'handwriting' were important aspects of literacy teaching which had been jettisoned by outcomes-based approaches. Because these two aspects appeared to have been jettisoned, a great deal of damage has been done to a thorough literacy programme which should have been in place.

It is clear from the findings that teacher education needs to be thoroughly overhauled in order to ensure effective literacy in this Province. In summary, there need to be dedicated programmes which foreground literacy-teaching methods for all primary-school teachers, and most especially for early childhood and Foundation Phase teachers. Literacy techniques and strategies need to be included in the training of all primary-school teachers so that teachers will be able to help their learners to develop the skills to read the complex, often decontextualised material found in mathematics, science and social science textbooks. The issue of the mismatch between the language of training and the language through which teachers will teach needs to be addressed, as does the matter of attracting more teachers into the profession.

12.5 Preliminary strategic pointers pertaining to the capacity of teacher-training institutions to provide the required primary-school teacher development and education

The low and decreasing intake of new student teachers in Limpopo, especially those in the areas of language and literacy teaching at the Foundation Phase level, including ECD, coupled with many problems related to the appropriateness and quality of teaching processes and subject contents, are causes of great concern. Included in the above in particular are student teacher and teaching lecturer numbers and practices pertaining to the indigenous African languages or vernaculars of the Province.

These general conditions and trends appear to be heading towards dire teacher and knowledge shortages in the foreseeable future. This, in turn, will have a serious impact on successfully improving literacy teaching and learning in the primary school, and later, to the benefit of those learners currently being failed by the system.

Any policy and strategic interventions that have to be conceived as matters of urgency, have to acknowledge the thrust of the new National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development. The latter is driven by the following four “principles”:

- ❖ The Norms and Standards for Educators (2000) aptly describe teachers’ roles as specialists in:
 - their Learning Areas,
 - teaching and learning,
 - assessment,
 - curriculum development,
 - leadership, administration and management,
 - lifelong scholarship and learning, and
 - professionalism (with community, citizenship and pastoral roles).
- ❖ Teachers are the essential drivers of good quality education (competent, professional and reflective).
- ❖ National and provincial education departments should provide the enabling environment.
- ❖ Teachers take responsibility for their self-development (including IQMS participation).

In terms of the new National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development, mentioned above, with its newly formulated IPET/CPTD framework (Initial Professional Education of Teachers; and Continuing Professional Teacher Development), all the related conceptual and pedagogical needs and clarifications, quality assurance, incentives, pathways (and recognition and approval of teacher education programmes), also have to be worked out at the level of Limpopo Province.

The latter charge demands strenuous efforts to address the needs of literacy teaching and learning in Limpopo.

12.6 Concluding remarks

Much of what has been found and reported thus far as the outcomes of a provincial study may have national implications. Strong central interventions are required, for instance, in terms of guidance as to how issues of pedagogical theory can be solved and agreed on. Cognitive psychology and psycho-linguistics seem to suggest that children have a natural propensity between the ages of two to eight years, even without very formal pedagogy or intervention, to abstract the bulk of the rules of literacy, grammar and language and to learn to communicate competently in two or even three languages! However, this happens only under optimal and highly favourable conditions, relating mostly to parental capacity and exposure to sufficient materials and opportunity. The challenge would be to find out how to capitalise on these innate abilities of children under the problematic conditions of deprivation that the majority of our children and their contexts still suffer from. It is posited that it can only happen by very well-considered measures, interventions and approaches in schools, of which all important facets dovetail well towards the single objective of successful literacy teaching and learning.

An important aspect of fit is that the course charted should fit in with and aid community profiles, needs and capacity, especially in terms of its own literacy development, access to public libraries, culture of reading, parental motivation, etc.

A great deal of effort also has to come from schools and teachers. This has to be imbedded again in substantive theory (in terms of depth and consensus), and the conscious and purposive development of literacy as a learning outcome, not only in the L1 Learning Area (or BICS) sense, but also for additional languages and learning areas (or in the CALP sense). The reality of South Africa and a globalised economy driving this is that the majority of citizens, workers, and middle-, senior- and post-school students are reluctant to study/work in their home language for any length of time.

Another key aspect is an integrated approach to the respective roles of, but collaboration between, the DoE (national and provincial) and academic institutions to clarify professional issues around skills, pedagogy, classroom practice, etc. This does or should not exclude schools and teachers, assuming the establishment of a wide array of mechanisms through schools, teachers, labour, SGBs, etc.

The funding models applied to/by HEIs will also determine many training and other outcomes in very specific ways.

Chapter 13 draws on the review of the literature and the empirical findings presented in Chapters 4 to 12 to make explicit some of the links between school- and classroom-level language and literacy practices and Limpopo Province's poor learner attainment in reading and writing. We then conclude by making recommendations for the Limpopo Literacy Strategy in Chapter 14.

PART 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 13: MAIN FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter draws on evidence from the literature review and findings in the empirical study to draw conclusions. Before concluding, however, the following vignette derived from data collected in the study serves to illustrate key factors that appear to be constraining and supporting literacy teaching and learning in Limpopo primary schools and classrooms. The description provides 'typical' features of schools and classrooms visited.

School location and community socio-economic status

The school is located in a rural area or informal 'squatter' settlement area with limited access to various kinds of infrastructure and community facilities. For example, the nearest public library is more than 15 kilometres away from the school and the nearest teacher-training tertiary institution is roughly 90 kilometres from the school.

The school's community poverty index rating is either 1, 2 or 3. The majority of learners at the school live in shacks, informal dwellings, huts, mud houses, semi-permanent or wooden houses. The majority of parents/guardians of children at the school did not complete high school or may not even have reached high school.

School's physical conditions and resources

The lowest grade at the school is Grade R and the highest Grade 7. However, Grade R teachers may not have appropriate ECD training. Approximately 615 learners are enrolled at the school and the teacher:learner ratio is 1:35. There are 14 usable classrooms (i.e. a classroom:learner ratio of 1:44).

The state of the school buildings and grounds is satisfactory with only some signs of disrepair and untidiness. The school has science kits; a photocopier/duplicating facility; CD player/audio tape recorder; DVD player/ TV /video recorder in working order; a strongroom; a secure storeroom for keeping textbooks and other learning support material safely against theft; as well as a school feeding scheme operating five days of the school week. The school does not, however, have enough Mathematics kits; computers for teaching and learning; or overhead projectors in working order. Neither does it have an insurance policy to cover theft or vandalism of valuable equipment.

School fees are less than R100 a year, or the school is a 'no-fee school'.

School's language policy

The official languages of instruction at the school are the home language of the majority of learners (typically Sepedi) and English. Learners make the transition from learning in home language/L1 to learning all subjects mainly in English in Grade 4. The language-in-education model at the school is thus one where, within the first three years of schooling, learners need to reach a certain threshold in mother-tongue literacy and language learning before transition into English in Grade 4 is attempted. However, English as First Additional Language is not even taught as a subject (i.e. with reading and writing) from Grade 1. Rather, English as First Additional Language is first introduced as a subject in Grade 3.

Although a Language Policy as decided by the School Governing Body (as opposed to guidelines provided by the DoE) is available, the SGB believes it has only 'some' or no real influence over decisions about the language/s of instruction to be used at different grade levels. Language issues are 'sometimes', 'rarely' or 'never' discussed at SGB meetings and the general parent body has little or no input on decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels.

School time on task management

Teacher late arrival at the school is reportedly 'rare or uncommon'. It is also reportedly 'rare or uncommon' for teachers at the school to leave before school officially closes for teaching staff. In Grade 1-4 classes, learner absenteeism and late arrival at the start of school does not seem to be a significant factor limiting learning time. Most teachers and learners at the school appear to return promptly to their classes after break.

The principal keeps school records of teaching time or days missed in a log book or time register. However, in general, time lost to teaching is not made up at the Grade 1-4 level. In more unusual circumstances (for example, after teacher strike action), the school day may be extended to recover time lost. Grade 1-4 classes are reportedly never left unsupervised if their teachers are absent from school. Nevertheless, the form of supervision does not appear to be very effective in terms of learners' 'time on task' and 'supervision' may simply entail another teacher or staff member 'popping in' to the classroom every now and again to check that learners are not getting out of hand.

School environmental support for literacy and language development

The principal reportedly mainly uses English/Afrikaans when addressing the teaching staff as a group (e.g. in staff meetings) but generally uses the regional home language when speaking to individual teachers. The home language is usually used to address learners as a body (e.g. in assembly) and as individuals and to make public announcements from the office on the school loudspeaker / classroom intercom.

The school environment is not print-rich. It does not particularly promote and enhance literacy development or a reading and book culture. For example, the school does not have library or resource centre that is used specifically for this purpose and, although learners sing in assembly, hymn books/song sheets are not used.

School Management Team

Most SMT members have a Matric plus a three- or four-year teaching qualification specialising in primary-school education.

The school principal has been principal for more than 10 years. Most members of the SMT have been in management positions for at least five years, and most had 14 years teaching experience prior to their appointment as members of management.

Classrooms

Grade 1-4 teachers

The teacher is female and over 30 years of age. She has Matric plus a three- or four-year teaching qualification and more than 10 years teaching experience.

Learners' home language/s and the language/s of teaching and learning

There are at least two language groups in class. The mother-tongue of the majority of the class is most likely Sepedi. There are, however, likely to be other learners in the class that came from different language backgrounds.

If the class is a Grade 1-3 class, the teacher mainly uses the home language of the majority of learners for teaching. If the class is a Grade 4 class, the teacher mainly uses English for teaching. When the home language of the majority of learners is used as the language of instruction the teacher's proficiency is perceived to be 'excellent' or 'good'. (This may be an optimistic rating, as pointed out before.) Grade 1-3 learners use mother-tongue in teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions. Grade 4 learners mainly use English in teacher-learner interactions but mainly use mother tongue in learner-learner interactions. There is a fair degree of evidence of the teacher code-switching (i.e. of the teacher speaking at least one or two sentences in, for example, Xitsonga, and then another few sentences in English).

Class size and physical classroom conditions

There are approximately 40 learners present in the class (with an average of two learners absent). If the class is Grade 1, then there may be slightly fewer learners (about 36) but if it is a Grade 4 class, there may a few more learners (approximately 45).

The classroom is not over-crowded and has sufficient space for the teacher/learners to walk easily between the desks/tables. There is sufficient desk space for all learners to write comfortably and enough seating space for all learners in the class. The classroom has burglar bars and adequate security for teachers to store books/learning material safely in the classroom.

The classroom is reasonably clean. There is no or only one broken window. The classroom has a usable chalkboard, adequate lighting for reading/ writing, a cupboard/ storage space for learner support material/ books. There is no carpet or mat for children to sit on (e.g. for shared reading with the teacher or story time).

Management, availability and use of learning and teaching support material

A record of textbooks, readers and other learning material is available at the school although this actually takes the form of a file with invoices and requisition forms.

Textbooks or readers used by the teacher for teaching in the classroom are likely to be publications by Maskew-Miller Longman, Oxford, Heineman and MacMillan. The teacher has had no training in using the textbooks/ readers that she uses in her class.

If learners are given copies of readers or textbooks, they have to share books as not enough copies are available for each learner to have his/her own copy. Available textbooks or readers are kept in the classroom cupboard overnight and learners are not allowed to take them home. Learners do not get any pre-prepared handouts (notes) on work covered in class and are very unlikely to be required to copy notes on work covered from the chalkboard / overhead projector / textbook / other learning material individually or to take down notes dictated by the teacher. They mainly tended to do exercises written on the chalkboard.

There are 20 or more textual items on display on the walls. These are most likely to include letters of the alphabet; words matched to pictures; high frequency words; numbers; months; and a calendar for the current year. Textual material on display is both teacher-made and commercially made but predominantly teacher-made. It is unlikely that there are examples of learners' own work on display. Material on display is in English and in the mother-tongue of the majority of learners. There is no bilingual material on display. Some of the display material has clearly been up for a long time and needs to be replaced or removed.

A small classroom book collection, box library or equivalent is available but out of sight and stored in the classroom cupboard. The collection consists of story and picture books (narrative text) but no non-fiction/ informational books and dictionaries are available.

It is unlikely that the children themselves get to handle any books including textbooks, readers, picture books, story books, or other bound material such as magazines in class. If they do have opportunities to handle bound material, the material they handle is most likely to be a home-language reader.

Other learning material besides books or booklets - for example, loose worksheets or posters - is used for teaching in class. The material used is either teacher-made or commercially-produced (including material from NGOs or the DoE) but is more likely to be used by the teacher herself for teaching as opposed to being given to learners to use.

Time on task and learners' opportunities to read and write

There are unlikely to be learners who arrive more than five minutes late for the first lesson

of the day. Most learners pay attention and listen in class and, if there are any learners who are not paying attention or are disrupting teaching, the teacher responds to the situation. There is no or minimal internal noise and no or few disturbances from within the classroom. There is probably no or a maximum of one interruption from outside the classroom.

Learners spend most of the time listening to the teacher and slightly less time writing, some time speaking and less time reading.

All or most learners are engaged in some form of written task. They may get a loose worksheet but are most likely required to complete exercises written on the chalkboard individually. All learners have writing implements (pens/ sharpened pencils) and books or paper on which to write and learners mostly write work in exercise books.

Nevertheless, given that 40 weeks are available for teaching in a school year, what is surprising is how little work the class has in their workbooks by August/September. The main reason is that the pace of work in class is very loosely circumscribed by the teacher so most learners work extremely slowly on written or writing tasks. Although the teacher monitors all learners and checks that they are doing what they are supposed to be doing when the class is busy with tasks, she tends to pace writing activities and written tasks at the rate of slower or the weakest learners in the class. She often or sometimes gives too much attention to individual learners or groups whilst other learners who have completed tasks and are coping well, sit and wait instead of being given additional or new tasks to complete.

On the other hand, learners may not require much attention from the teacher because the work or task the class has been given is too easy or undemanding. Indeed there is a 42% chance that reading and writing demands made on learners are of a very low level in relation to the literacy requirements for their grade level. Learners are most likely required to write a maximum of 10 words or to write letters (e.g. vowels) or numerals in the first two hours of the school day. It is unlikely that they are required to write a whole sentence and very unlikely that they are required to write any form of extended text.

The most common forms of reading opportunities occurring for learners in class are 'whole class reading aloud' (together communally with or without the teacher) and/or 'the teacher reading aloud to the whole class.' The class is most likely required to read a maximum of 10 individual words in the first two hours of the school day. Learners may, in some cases, read a sentence or two but are unlikely to be required to read more than two sentences. Where learners read aloud together, some learners in the class appear to be repeating what is read after the teacher or by other learners who can read or repeating the text 'off by heart' without actually engaging in reading.

Only a few learners get to read aloud as individuals to the rest of the class. It is very unlikely that each learner will get to read individually to the teacher while she monitors them for guided reading. It is also very unlikely that any learners are required to read extended text or that the teacher reads any extended text to the learners.

Learners are also very unlikely to be given any reading, writing or spelling homework. Thus, no written completed homework needs to be checked and marked in class.

Literacy instruction, planning and assessment

Where books or bound material, including exercise books, are handled in class, the teacher is unlikely to model or demonstrate how books should be treated, handled and cared for, for example, through the way the teacher herself handles books. Neither does the teacher explicitly develop learners' concepts about print or print material – for example, by identifying the front/ cover of books, or the title, author, illustrator, contents page, index, page numbers, chapter headings, subheadings in books, or by showing that print moves from left to right, that pages turn from right to left, or identifying punctuations,

capitals, etc. If (unusually) the teacher does read extended texts to learners, s/he may read with intonation and expression.

In the unlikely event of any learners themselves being required to read extended text aloud, the teacher probably provides opportunities for learners to self-correct. The only strategy for self-correcting modelled and promoted by the teacher is that of sounding out a word.

The teacher does not directly develop learners' reading comprehension skills. For example, she is unlikely to cue or draw learners' attention to the main ideas in the text read or to explicitly teach them how to interpret and 'read' illustrative devices such as pictures or graphs. It is unlikely that she asks learners questions about the meaning of text, but should this occur, the teacher usually asks closed (information retrieval) questions which mainly involve learners in discussing or responding to pictures and illustrations. Furthermore, although the teacher responds to and acknowledges learners' responses to her questions about the text, she seldom or never discusses or elaborates on their responses.

In the very unlikely event of learners being asked to retell or summarise what they have read, the most common form of learner involvement is for them to retell the story or plot (for example) *orally* in linear/ sequential terms (i.e. and then..., and then... / sequencing events).

There is some deliberate 'general' vocabulary development (i.e. learning new words and meanings) specific to learners' home language/L1 that takes place. Nevertheless, learners are unlikely to make lists or 'dictionaries' of new words learnt and their meanings. It is unlikely that there is any development of 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology related specifically to other Learning Areas (i.e. the conceptual language of mathematics, human and social science, history, geography, or natural science, etc.) and there is no or very little explicit development of spelling.

The teacher's Home Language and First Additional Language Learning Programmes (if FAL is taught as a subject) show planning for the whole year. However, Programmes comprise lists of Learning Outcomes and the associated Assessment Standards copied out from the Curriculum Statements and do not specify reading, writing and oral activities. Moreover, there is little evidence of planned progression in sequencing of content and skills in terms of increasing or developmental complexity and assessment points are not integrated into plans. Although the teacher appears to be keeping to her plans (these are interpreted rather shallowly), work in learners' workbooks and portfolios show that learners are not covering the curriculum for their grade level effectively.

Monitoring of the teacher's progress on covering the curriculum by the School Management Team takes place more than once a term. However, the SMT does not play a significant role in ensuring that there is enough reading and writing across all Learning Areas or in setting, specifying and communicating grade-appropriate reading and writing requirements to the teacher.

The teacher regularly marks written work in learners' language and literacy workbooks and keeps some assessment records for Home Language (HL) and FAL. By August/September, there are a maximum of nine marks or records recorded for HL and fewer than five marks or records for FAL (in grades where this is taught) for each learner. Individual learner's reading progress is not tracked in a variety of ways through running records. Because every learner in the class does not regularly read individually to the teacher for guided reading so that she can monitor and record their individual progress, it is difficult for the teacher to accurately differentiate between learners' reading levels.

Home school interface, parental involvement and expectations

Progress reports are provided for parents/guardians. These provide marks or symbols but

lack substantive or constructive comments on learners' reading, writing and language ability and progress. The school also tries to involve parents/ guardians/ caregivers in children's academic education through school meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress although parental attendance tends to be poor.

Staff members' perceived barriers to parental involvement and support for children's academic performance include a lack of resources for parents/ guardians to offer enrichment (such as extra lessons or remedial reading) outside of school; an inability to assist with homework because of low levels of formal education and/or lack of time to assist children because of other more immediate and pressing needs; and the belief amongst parents or guardians that responsibility for children's education lies entirely with the school and teachers. The school does *not* play a role in Adult Literacy (ABET) or family literacy. Apparently, although most parents/ guardians expect their children to finish high school, they have low expectations in terms of children studying further after school because of poverty.

In-service training and support for staff

The teacher has received some form of training from the LDoE on how to use and implement the National Curriculum Statements (NCS). She has, however, received no specialised practical training on how to teach reading and writing in classrooms from the LDoE. Nor has she attended LDoE workshops for Home Language, Numeracy/ Mathematics, First Additional Language, Life skills or Natural Sciences in 2006 or 2007. District/circuit staff have not observed her teaching. Ostensibly the main reason behind the lack of support is a shortage of subject advisors and the limited number of school-support personnel for supporting Foundation Phase teachers specifically with literacy development.

In-service professional development institutions/ organisations/ service providers (other than the LDoE) have worked in the schools or with teachers in the past four years (i.e. 2004-2007). These are most likely to be the *Integrated Education Programme (IEP)* and/or *Molteno Breakthrough to Literacy*.

13. Conclusions

The study has identified positive features as well as constraining factors in schools.

13.1 Extant positive features in schools

The following *positive features* were found to be present in schools and classrooms. Such factors essentially provide a departure point for improving literacy instruction and learners' literacy development.

- A Language in Education Policy is available at most of the schools.
- The state of most of the schools' buildings and grounds is 'satisfactory with only some signs of disrepair and untidiness'.
- The average teacher:learner ratio at the schools is 1:35 and the classroom:learner ratio 1:44.
- Most schools have Grade R classes.
- No classes are taking place outside under trees, etc.
- School nutrition programmes are in place in most schools five days a week.
- In most schools resources for teaching including science kits; a photocopier/ duplicating facility; CD player / audio tape recorder; DVD player /TV /video

recorder in working order; a strongroom and a secure storeroom for keeping textbooks and other learning support material safely against theft, appear to be adequate.

- In Grade 1-4 classes, high levels of teacher and learner absenteeism and late arrival at the start of school and after break do not seem to be significant factors limiting learning time.
- Most parents/guardians at most schools expect their children to at least finish high school.
- More than half of the principals have been principals of the schools for more than 10 years.
- The majority of School Management Team members at the schools were very experienced as teachers when they were appointed to management positions saying that they had more than 13 years experience prior to their appointment as members of SMTs. More than half the SMT members have five or more years experience in school management. The majority of SMT members are appropriately qualified and have a Matric/Grade 12 plus a three- or four-year teaching qualification, and most specialised in primary-school education.
- Most of the Grade 1-4 teachers have a Matric/Grade 12 plus a three- or four-year teaching qualification. Most have more than 10 years teaching experience and have taught Grades 1-4 over their teaching years. The majority consider themselves trained Foundation Phase specialists, and as such should have received the kind of literacy training required for this level.
- In general learners appear to be provided with reasonably supportive physical classroom environments. This was evidenced through the availability of adequate lighting, space, and the condition and cleanliness of the classrooms.
- Most classrooms had some display of textual and other material on the walls.
- Learner behaviour did not appear to be a problem in class - most Grade 1-4 learners paid attention to their teachers.
- Most teachers instructed Grade 1-3 learners in their mother tongue and it is easier for children to develop reading and writing skills and basic concepts when their home language is used.
- Most teachers' home language is the same as the learners', thus most demonstrated proficiency in learners' home language when using it as the language of instruction. However, it is not clear how the needs of learners who speak minority languages are met.
- Learners in most classes had writing implements and exercise books or paper to write on.
- Most teachers are focusing on ensuring that their learners can recognise and read words. Some teachers are encouraging learners to sound out words.
- Some teachers are encouraging learners to use illustrations although not necessarily for interpreting and understanding text.
- Teachers are developing learners' 'general' mother-tongue vocabulary to some, albeit limited, extent.

- Closed questions about the meaning of text are being asked in a few classes at least.
- Schools try to involve parents/ guardians/ caregivers in children's academic education through school meetings with teachers to discuss their children's progress.
- Schools and teachers are reporting to parents or guardians on children's progress by means of marks or symbols at the end of each term.
- Teachers' home language is the same as that of most parents/caregivers in the community that schools serve.
- Most teachers have classroom documents such as mark books and Learning Programmes.
- Monitoring of teachers' progress on covering the curriculum by the School Management Teams generally takes place at least once a term.
- Teachers whose language and literacy plans were available were keeping to their plans.
- The willingness with which teachers offered up their lessons and classroom records for external scrutiny is a significant and positive sign for the future. In 56 (82%) of 68 cases, researchers described teachers' retrieval of required Home Language classroom documents as 'very organised' or 'fairly well organised'. In general all or most of the requested Home Language (L1) documents were readily available for review. Only 12 (18%) of the cases were found to be 'very disorganised' and most documents were difficult to obtain or not readily available. In the majority of cases teachers' retrieval of First Additional Language classroom documents was similarly 'very organised' or 'fairly well organised'. All or most of the requested FAL documents (where this applied) were readily available for review. Only a small number of teachers were found to be 'very disorganised' so that documents were difficult to obtain or not readily available.
- Sixty one percent of the teachers reported that they had attended other in-service/ professional development education and training (other than Limpopo Department of Education) in the past four years.
- Pride in the appearance of the schools (well-kept gardens) and environmental awareness is evident in most primary schools. This demonstrates a positive disposition of staff, students and the community towards schools in Limpopo Province.

It is the above conditions in schools and classrooms and predispositions of teachers and learners that make improvement possible.

13.2 Constraining factors

Findings also indicate that the following key factors severely constrain literacy instruction, learners' language and literacy development and literacy attainment as in evidence in the results of systemic assessment and testing:

- 1. Learners' family-based or out-of-school opportunities to learn school knowledge and literacy skills are limited.**
 - The majority of parents/ guardians of children at most schools did not complete high school and may not even have reached high school. Poor literacy rates amongst children's main caregivers also often make it difficult to involve parents/ guardians in children's literacy development.
 - The nearest public library is usually more than 15 kilometres away from schools.

- 2. Although most schools offer Grade R, almost half do not apparently have staff with Early Childhood Development (ECD) specialisation to teach the reception year.**
 - Researchers noted that Grade R classrooms tended to be physically set up as if they were Grade 1 classrooms, rather than reflecting the kinds of classroom resources, materials and activities required at Grade R level. Furthermore, exercise books and even portfolios tended to look much as one would expect them to appear for Grade 1 learners. It appeared as if learners in Grade R were being offered a preview of Grade 1 curriculum and activities rather than the necessary focus on opportunities for language development (listening, speaking, early reading and writing). The same activities would be repeated in Grade 1. This would suggest that Grade R teachers do not have the necessary training for this level, and that at school level, Grade R is regarded more as a child-care rather than an age-/ education-level appropriate facility.
 - Researchers also noted that when a staff member was absent from school, the Grade R teacher would be most likely to be asked to substitute for the absent teacher and the Grade R learners would be left unattended for large parts of the day.
 - Researchers noted that a number of Grade 1-4 learners seem to lack the early reading-related skills usually developed during this pre-school year and are consequently not ready to make the most of opportunities to read, as made available in early primary-school classrooms.

- 3. The maximum sizes of early-grade classes in some schools are untenable particularly for language and literacy teaching.**
 - A quarter of the teachers said they had *more than* 50 children in the class. The largest classes in each grade ranged from 57 in Grade 1, to 90 in Grade 2, 83 in Grade 3, and 112 in Grade 4. Such class sizes are too large to facilitate successful literacy and language development in Limpopo Province. It needs to be noted that in other countries (e.g. in Northern Europe and North America), learners who are expected to learn through their second language/ FAL are seldom in classes of more than 30 students.

4. **School Governing Bodies and parents in general do not understand that:**
- a) **Successful literacy and language development is essential for academic achievement across the curriculum.**
 - b) **Successful home language development, continued throughout primary school, is an essential component of successful second-language development in education, and also academic achievement across the curriculum.**
 - c) **Premature termination of home-language development in primary school will prevent successful second-language development and academic achievement across the curriculum.**
 - d) **Literacy and language development needs to proceed in both home language and the second language simultaneously and it takes time, at least to the end of primary school, for this to be well-established in each language.**
 - e) **Every moment counts (i.e. that every opportunity to encourage reading and writing in home language and an additional language needs to be taken during and after school hours).**
- DoE policy gives School Governing Bodies ‘the responsibility of selecting school language policies that are appropriate for their circumstances and in line with the policy of additive multilingualism’. Yet, most SGBs believe they have only ‘some’ or no real influence over decisions about the language/s of instruction to be used at different grade levels. Language issues are reportedly ‘sometimes’, ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ discussed at SGB meetings and the general parent body at most schools have little or no input on decisions about languages to be used at different grade levels.
 - The NCS for Grades R-9 Languages Learning Area document state that ‘*where learners have to make a transition from their home language to an additional language as the language of learning and teaching, this should be carefully planned*’ - ‘*the additional language should be introduced in as a subject in Grade 1*’ and ‘*the home language should continue to be used alongside the additional language for as long as possible*’. In contrast, in most of the Limpopo primary schools, there appears to be a delayed introduction to English FAL as a subject, usually in Grade 3, followed by a switch to English medium (LoLT) in Grade 4 in schools. Although instruction in the first three years of schooling is in learners’ home language, the transition to learning all subjects in English/ Afrikaans is not gradual but takes place in Grade 4 even though English/ Afrikaans (as First Additional Language) is not, in most cases, being taught *as a subject* (i.e. with reading and writing) from Grade 1.
5. **The lack of alignment among education department policy documents in regard to language policy and its implementation results in contradictory or ambiguous interpretation at all levels of the system. This has led to confusion amongst officials, schools and teachers and contributes to misapplication or delayed introduction of the First Additional Language and precipitous switch from Home Language to (usually) English medium.**
- What is not made sufficiently clear in the Language in Education Policy document and in its interpretation through the NCS is that if learners begin the FAL in Grade 3, they will only be ready to switch to English medium by Grade 9. So if the introduction to English is delayed, and learners are expected to switch within a year or two, they are being faced with an impossible hurdle of transition to

English with only 12% to 24% of the necessary language-learning incubation timeframe in place. The ambiguous or misunderstood signals of the Language in Education Policy document are compounded by the messages implicit in the NCS documents. Although the NCS gives the impression that it is consistent with additive bilingual education, this is not so in practice. The NCS's implicit endorsement of a transition to English by Grade 4, means that it is encouraging transition to English within a subtractive bilingual paradigm and before the language-learning incubation period had been completed. Therefore if schools opt for the late introduction of English FAL in conjunction with the NCS's transitional bilingual model, learners will get even less exposure to English as FAL than in the past, and therefore less time for the language-learning and incubation process to take root. Under such circumstances, learners can only be expected to achieve very poorly.

6. There is insufficient evidence of teachers directly and explicitly developing learners' literacy skills. Most teachers do not understand the link between mother-tongue and second-language acquisition and are not well-informed about the relationship between language and learning. They are not confident about teaching children to read, uncertain about how to approach the teaching of reading and writing and what strategies to use for teaching literacy.

- Teachers are not explicitly developing learners' concepts of print and printed material, nor are they demonstrating that they themselves value books. For example, few teachers ask learners to identify where text begins or the beginning of a sentence; the first and last part of a story or paragraph, etc. Few teachers: demonstrate punctuation, upper and lower case etc.; point to print and show how it moves from left to right or that the left page comes before the right and how one 'reads down the page'; and model how to handle and care for books.
- Besides providing learners with opportunities to recognise, work out and self-correct when they have made a mistake when reading extended text, teachers are not providing learners with a variety of strategies for self-correcting when reading continuous text other than sounding out words.
- Teachers are not teaching learners to use texts as sources of information and are not developing their reading comprehension skills, for example, by asking open predictive, opinion-type questions about illustrations or text as well as information-retrieval questions; by getting learners to identify the main theme or idea, retell the story or plot and/or discuss characters; and by unpacking or elaborating on learners' responses to questions about text.
- Teachers are not spending time doing phonics and thus also not enough time teaching learners to spell accurately and quickly.
- Teachers are not developing learners' background knowledge of conceptual language and 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology related to Learning Areas (i.e. the conceptual language of mathematics, human and social science, history, geography, or natural science, etc.) through good expository teaching and by involving learners in reading well-structured expository texts in the various Learning Areas. Learners are not keeping lists, 'dictionaries' or 'glossaries' with new words/vocabulary including 'specialist' vocabulary or terminology related to

other Learning Areas (i.e. the language of mathematics, human and social science, history, geography, or natural science, etc.).

- Most teachers are confused about how children learn to read and write or are unsure about why their learners are not making progress. They are unclear as to how and even whether they as teachers can help learners who are experiencing difficulties learning to read and write. They appear to have suffered a loss of confidence in good commonsense approaches to teaching reading and writing, and are confused by ambiguous and contradictory debates about which approach the new curriculum expects them to follow (e.g. they appear to believe that phonics has fallen out of favour, but they don't know what the 'whole-language' approach means in practice).
- Most teachers are not well-informed about the relationship between mother-tongue acquisition and development, second-language learning and development and learning across the curriculum. Most do not indicate a clear understanding of the role of written language (reading and writing, i.e. strong academic literacy) in relation to the curriculum beyond the Languages/ Literacy learning area. Most teachers believe that there should be a transition to English medium as soon as possible owing to the increasing demands of English medium higher up the system (i.e. it is mistakenly believed that if one does not have English early enough, one will not cope with the pressure of the whole curriculum in English in the Senior Phase and onwards). In practice, there is a delayed introduction of English as a subject and then a sudden transition to English in many schools, long before learners have had an opportunity to learn enough of English to manage the transition.

7. The pace and level of work in most Grade 1-4 classes is not tied to curriculum requirements. Learners are not being given adequate grade-appropriate opportunities to develop strong reading and writing expertise in their mother tongue or First Additional Language.

- Learners' workbooks and portfolios show that learners are not covering the curriculum for their grade level to any significant extent.
- Most teachers do not pace written or writing work effectively. The pace set for written tasks is much too slow.
- Because there is also a lack of individualised pacing, learners are treated 'homogenously' as if they are all at the same level even when this is clearly not the case. For example, most teachers did not give additional or new tasks to learners who had completed tasks and were coping well.
- The form of supervision of Grade 1-4 classes when their teachers are absent is not dealt with in terms of learners' 'time on task'.
- In most classrooms learners should be working on much more challenging reading and writing tasks/ activities.
- Teachers are not providing learners with sufficient opportunities to construct their own sentences and/or produce their own extended texts. Some are not providing any opportunities for extended writing.
- There is no evidence of teachers encouraging a sense of the 'processes' involved in planning, drafting, writing and editing text.

- Learners hardly spend any time reading in class and few opportunities are provided or available for them to read at home or out of school.
- Individual learners are not provided with opportunities to practise reading extended narrative or expository text aloud through guided practice.
- Teachers do not ensure that *all* learners' focus their attention on actually reading text rather than repeating words or phrases after the teachers or other learners in class.

8. There is a lack of a book and reading culture in schools and classrooms and limited opportunities for learners to handle and read a range of books.

- Schools are not print-rich environments and they certainly do not reflect recognition of the importance of providing learners with maximum exposure to a great variety of reading opportunities.
- Most learners have no or limited opportunities to experience and explore the pleasure of literature, develop an interest in, and love for, books or to find out how books work.
- Most schools do not have a library or resource centre that is used specifically for this purpose.
- Classroom book collections lack non-fiction or informational books or dictionaries.
- Most learners do not have easy physical access in class to available story books, magazines, 'information' or non-fiction books and other reading material in relevant languages. There is little evidence of learners being given opportunities to independently handle and 'read' available books.
- Classroom environments are also not particularly print-rich. There is little evidence of regular changing or updating classroom posters. Few classrooms appear to have current displays of learner-generated materials.
- Bilingual or multilingual material is not on display on walls in most classrooms.

9. There is inadequate provision and poor management and use of available learning and teaching support material. There are insufficient copies of textbooks and readers for each child in a class to have his/her own copy in Grade 1-4.

- School management and inventories of textbooks and other learner support materials is inadequate.
- In particular, Grade 1-3 learners are not being provided with mother-tongue versions of textbooks.
- Available readers and textbooks are not being distributed to learners in class. Neither are 'older' readers and textbooks being used as much as they could be by teachers as support material where newer books are not available.
- Most learners are not allowed to take any readers, textbooks or any other books home.

- There is not much evidence of the same series of textbooks and/or readers being used across grades within schools and teachers do not seem to have embraced the notion of working through readers in series sequentially with their learners.
- In spite of the fact that most learners have no textbooks of their own, they have no other permanent record of work covered in class in the form of notes or handouts.

10. Teachers are not keeping close enough track of each learner’s reading and writing ability and progress to have comprehensive knowledge of individual differences.

- Most teachers did not have reading and writing assessment records that provided ongoing constructive and useful information and notes specific to the status of individual learners’ literacy levels. In particular, teachers are not keeping running records of how well individual learners are reading, learners’ oral reading and the types of errors they make when reading aloud. Essentially there is insufficient monitoring of learners through guided individual reading.

11. Language Learning Programmes are not sufficiently co-ordinated by Heads of Department and do not reflect progression in terms of the development of specific literacy (especially reading and writing) activities, knowledge and skills across grades and phases. Neither is curriculum coverage and delivery sufficiently controlled and monitored by HODs through checking the amount and type of work in learners’ workbooks. Teachers’ Language Learning Programmes are not structured around the attainment of specified targets for the acquisition of language and literacy skills through assessment.

- Teachers’ language teaching and teaching of writing and reading lacks a clear sense of direction.
- Language Learning Programmes do not describe and reflect progression in terms of the development of specific literacy activities within and across grades.
- Assessment points do not form an integral part of language Learning Programmes.
- School Management Teams are not setting and communicating Grade R/1-4 level written work and reading requirements and/or expectations to teachers.
- Researchers found that SMTs and teachers had collaborated to ensure that every teacher had a file populated by Learning Programme sections. There was evidence that SMTs checked teacher files regularly. However, it needs to be made clear that the documentation which falls under the title Learning Programme, seldom, if ever, resembled what is required of a Learning Programme. While the files had the appearance of conforming with requirements, the content did not. What needs to be reiterated here is that the research team found that teachers had simply copied out sections of the curriculum statements by hand without understanding how to translate these into workable Learning Programmes. That the SMTs had not recognised this practice as being problematic would suggest that SMTs do not themselves understand what a Learning Programme is and how it would differ from the generic statements in the NCS.
- None of the SMTs said that the main method used to monitor teachers’ progress on covering the curriculum is to check learners’ workbooks.

12. Parents/caregivers are not involved as much as possible in their children's academic and literacy development. Most learners are not being given homework. In particular, they are not being given any form of reading homework on a daily basis.

- Over half of the schools do *not* play a role in Adult Literacy (ABET) or family literacy whilst only 45% play a role in ABET/family literacy.
- Parents' attendance at school meetings to discuss children's academic performance is often poor.
- Schools and teachers do not communicate high academic or literacy expectations of learners and parents/ guardians.
- Apparently most parents/ guardians do not feel they have the right to intervene in issues pertaining to instructional quality.

(The low parental involvement in learners academic development could be attributed partly, or even largely, to teachers not trusting children to take books home, and furthermore not expecting parents or other caregivers to be able to monitor whether homework is being done correctly.)

13. Limpopo DoE districts appear to be constrained by the limited number of school-support personnel for supporting Foundation Phase teachers specifically with literacy development.

- Teachers said they have received no specialised practical training on how to teach reading and writing in classrooms from the LDoE.
- Teachers revealed that they are very dissatisfied with their perceived lack of support from the Department specifically in regard to literacy teaching.

14. Only 15% of SMT members and 12% of the sample of Limpopo primary-school teachers have post-graduate degrees.

- The PIRLS 2006 study found that learners taught by language teachers who reported having post-graduate degrees showed an 'improved overall mean performance' in comparison to learners whose teachers were not as well qualified (Howie *et al.*, 2007: 50). The implication of this is that teachers require further teacher education and support.

15. The Limpopo tertiary teacher-training system currently lacks the capacity to provide the kind of formal teacher education, development and expertise required.

- Only one of the two Higher Education Institutions offers Early Childhood Education (ECD) and Primary Teacher Education programmes. The research team found that the teacher-education emphasis at this institution was placed on the curriculum policy documentation and that there was no evidence of a clear theoretical or pedagogical orientation towards the preparation of teachers for the tasks of teaching reading and writing.

- The other HEI prepared teachers for secondary education and therefore does not focus on literacy teaching at ECD or primary school level.
- Pre-service teacher education in Limpopo is currently not preparing teachers for literacy teaching adequately.
- There is no evidence that HEIs offer in-service teacher education which would adequately prepare teachers for the teaching of reading and writing in primary schools of the province.
- The most extensive non-government/ development agency support of literacy in Limpopo Province appears to have been mediated via the Molteno Project to the end of 2005. However, the research team found little residual evidence (teacher practices and/or teaching resources) of this support in the sample of schools investigated in this study. There was no evidence from teachers that district or circuit officials followed up on the continuation of any Molteno or other intervention.

In summary, the following are main findings and conclusions:

- Learners' family-based or out-of-school opportunities to learn school knowledge and literacy skills are limited.
- Although most schools offer Grade R, almost half do not apparently have staff with Early Childhood Development (ECD) specialisation to teach the reception year.
- The maximum sizes of early grade classes in some schools are untenable in particular for early-grade literacy and language teaching.
- School Governing Bodies and parents in general do not understand that:
 - a) Successful literacy and language development is essential for academic achievement across the curriculum;
 - b) Successful home language development, continued throughout primary school, is an essential component of successful second-language development in education, and also academic achievement across the curriculum;
 - c) Premature termination of home-language development in primary school will prevent successful second-language development and academic achievement across the curriculum;
 - d) Literacy and language development needs to proceed in both home language and the second language simultaneously and it takes time, at least to the end of primary school, for this to be well-established in each language.
 - e) Every moment counts (i.e. that every opportunity to encourage reading and writing in home language and an additional language needs to be taken during and after school hours).
- The lack of alignment among education department policy documents in regard to language policy and its implementation results in contradictory or ambiguous interpretation at all levels of the system. This has led to confusion amongst officials, schools and teachers and contributes to misapplication or delayed introduction of the First Additional Language and precipitous switch from home language to (usually) English medium.
- There is insufficient evidence of teachers directly and explicitly developing learners' literacy skills. Most teachers do not understand the link between mother-tongue and second-language acquisition and are not well-informed about the

relationship between language and learning. They are not confident about teaching children to read, uncertain about how to approach the teaching of reading and writing and what strategies to use for teaching literacy.

- The pace and level of work in most Grade 1-4 classes is not tied to curriculum requirements. Learners are not being given adequate grade-appropriate opportunities to develop strong reading and writing expertise in their mother tongue or First Additional Language.
- There is a lack of a book and reading culture in schools and classrooms and limited opportunities for learners to handle and read a range of books.
- There is inadequate provision and poor management and use of available learning and teaching support material. There are insufficient copies of textbooks and readers for each child in a class to have his/her own copy in Grade 1-4.
- Teachers are not keeping sufficiently close track of each learner's reading and writing ability and progress to have comprehensive knowledge of individual differences.
- Language Learning Programmes are not sufficiently co-ordinated by Heads of Department and do not reflect progression in terms of the development of specific literacy (especially reading and writing) activities, knowledge and skills across grades and phases. Neither is curriculum coverage and delivery sufficiently controlled and monitored by HODs through checking the amount and type of work in learners' workbooks. Teachers' language Learning Programmes are not structured around the attainment of specified targets for the acquisition of language and literacy skills through assessment.
- Parents/caregivers are not involved as much as possible in their children's academic and literacy development. Most learners are not being given homework. In particular, they are not being given any form of reading homework on a daily basis.
- Limpopo DoE districts appear to be constrained by the limited number of school-support personnel for supporting Foundation Phase teachers specifically with literacy development.
- Only 15% of SMT members and 12% of the sample Limpopo primary teachers have post-graduate degrees.
- The Limpopo tertiary teacher-training system currently lacks the capacity to provide the kind of formal teacher education, development and expertise required.

Chapter 14 concludes this report by making recommendations based on these conclusions.

CHAPTER 14: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 14 concludes this report by making a set of recommendations for the development of a generic Literacy Model for the Limpopo Province and for enhancing the provincial Literacy Strategy in Limpopo. The chapter also outlines some of the implications and requirements for the model.

14.1 Recommendations for enhancing the Literacy Strategy

The following key recommendations serve as a framework for strengthening a Literacy Strategy which informs the articulation of a generic Literacy Model for Limpopo Province:

1. Optimise the pre-school literacy benefits of Grade R.
2. Create literacy-enriched school and classroom environments.
3. Ensure that every learner is provided with a set of his/her own textbooks and readers and strengthen school management and control of Learner Support Material. By the same token, learners must be taught a responsible attitude to these books.
4. Clarify and explain the rationale and research evidence for strong literacy development in multilingual settings to key stakeholders and monitor appropriate application in school language and literacy policies, schools and classrooms.
5. Ensure that every learner is provided with optimal opportunities to engage in a variety of grade-appropriate and cognitively demanding reading activities and writing tasks in class. The volume and quality of written work undertaken by learners in each of the learning areas should be regularly checked by SMTs and curriculum specialists from the district office.
6. Improve the quality of literacy instruction, planning and assessment by: setting expected levels of performance; intensifying and expanding in-service training and support; and offering incentives for improving language and literacy attainment.
7. Overhaul primary-school teacher-education programme design and delivery, increase the supply of well-trained Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers, and build literacy expertise in the Province by offering incentives for early-grade teachers to study post-graduate degrees.¹
8. Foster home learning environments which support early literacy and family-based or out-of-school literacy opportunities.
9. Link the Limpopo Department of Education's Literacy Strategy to the National Department of Education's Literacy Campaign.

Recommendation 1 - Optimise the pre-school literacy benefits of Grade R.

Children in contexts where quality home learning literacy experiences are limited benefit the most from well-designed ECD literacy programmes that ensure they are ready for primary school. The implication is that in poor environments, the importance of Grade R and good Grade R teaching, is even more significant than in those situations where

¹ The intention would be to increase the level of expertise of teachers who would remain teaching in Foundation Phase classrooms. Care should be taken to avoid the situation where teachers with further qualifications are moved into senior, non-teaching, roles in the schools. It is vital that the level of expertise of teachers actually teaching in these classrooms is upgraded.

children come from more affluent or literacy advantaged homes (see also Abadzi, 2006, Clark, 2007).

- The importance of Grade R classes in primary schools in socio-economic conditions which pose a high risk to education, such as in Limpopo Province, cannot be underestimated. Grade R classrooms are the sites in which teachers and the school community need to invest in very carefully planned and focused preparation of early literacy. Without this happening, learners will enter Grade 1 under-prepared for efficient literacy development, and the achievement gap between these learners and those who enter Grade 1 with well-established literacy skills will widen inexorably throughout primary schooling. In other words, learners who do not attend Grade R, taught by a highly competent teacher, are likely to be at a serious disadvantage in relation to students who have had both good Grade R teaching and a home environment which supports early literacy.² It is important to note, however, that most early-reading schemes and literacy programmes are based on those designed in Northern European and North American countries where it is possible for children to have both a rich exposure to early literacy practices at home and also early childhood education. Currently in South Africa only about 8% of children arrive at primary school with early-literacy skills already developed. Limpopo schools' Reception year programmes need to take into account learners' home literacy experiences.
- All Grade R teachers need to be adequately trained to address differences in reading readiness amongst learners so that all their learners are ready for Grade 1. This has very serious implications for teacher education in Limpopo Province. Grade R teachers who will work in environments of low community literacy require additional or specialised training.
- Grade R classrooms need to be adequately resourced with educational-age and level-appropriate equipment and materials. These would include picture and story books for the teacher, and many manipulables (e.g. puzzles) and suitable peripherals for the children, placed all around the classroom.
- Grade R also needs to be more effectively articulated and integrated with the Foundation Phase (for example, through joint meetings between Grade R and Grade 1 teachers) so that there is greater continuity and ECD is not seen as 'separate from' early primary education. The 'bridge' between pre-school and Grade 1 should thus be strengthened.
- The success of a school's ECD programme should be monitored, for example, through Grade R learners' readiness for Grade 1, and through retention or drop-out rates in primary school.

Recommendation 2 – Create literacy-enriched school and classroom learning environments.

A print-rich school environment indicates that literacy is valued and provides learners with maximum exposure to a great variety of reading and writing opportunities at school.

- School and classroom environments need to have and display as much printed material as possible (for example, through sign posting the 'office' or print material on corridor walls). Schools and teachers could be much more creative in this regard. They also need to ensure that libraries, available books and print material are more accessible and used effectively so that learners are provided with reading experiences with a wide variety of genres of texts and books at

² Very good Grade 1 teaching is essential under all circumstances.

school and in classrooms. Learners' written work needs to be prominently displayed in classrooms and around the school in order to encourage both reading and writing.

- There should be provision by the Limpopo Department of Education of library and good quality and relevant classroom book collections that include non-fiction books, as well as good textual display material in a range of South African languages, and including bilingual (or multilingual where appropriate) material for school and classroom walls.

Recommendation 3 – Ensure that every learner is provided with his/her own set of textbooks and readers and strengthen school management and control of Learner Support Material.

- The LDoE should ensure that textbooks and readers are provided for every learner and confirm that each learner has in fact received his/her own copies of all textbooks and readers. This is more important in environments where there are few if any books for learners to use at home. Where schools are reluctant to release books into the hands of learners, LDoE should engage with SMTs in order to facilitate this process as a matter of urgency.
- Schools' management of LSM and record keeping needs to be strengthened through properly maintained school inventories of textbooks, readers and other learning material so that schools can ensure maximum availability and efficient processing, distribution and retrieval. Information recorded should indicate number of copies ordered and received; the total number of copies available and their condition; distribution and retrieval records; the number written off and what has happened to material no longer in use. School management needs to be assisted to use this recorded information to keep track of material and plan orders accordingly.

Recommendation 4 – Clarify and explain the rationale and research evidence for strong literacy development in multilingual settings to key stakeholders and monitor appropriate application in school language and literacy policies, schools and classrooms.

In particular, stakeholders need to understand that if learners are to achieve their democratic right to equitable education and access to further education and/or the formal economy, then there are fundamental educational principles which have been identified in the international research. These principles must be upheld if learners are to be guaranteed equal access to meaningful education. This means that the objective is to offer more or less the same quality of access that privileged children have.

The evidenced-based principles include a chronological sequence of establishing stable foundations for learning as follows:

- Strong mother-tongue/home-literacy and -language development is essential for the development of literacy and the kind of academic language skills learners will need to access in the international language, which is English in South Africa.
- Strong mother-tongue/home-language literacy is also necessary for the development of a strong foundation in numeracy and other areas of the curriculum which are being taught while the international language is being learnt as a subject.

- Strong FAL literacy and language teaching (i.e. English for most learners) is essential. Teachers need to have requisite high levels of English language proficiency if they are going to be able to model English language effectively enough for their learners. This is non-negotiable if the education policy insists on a transition to English medium/LoLT after six to eight years of home-language medium.
- If and when learners are sufficiently bilingual and biliterate in the mother tongue and the FAL (e.g. English) and they are able to use both languages interchangeably for learning, it would be possible to switch to English medium mainly. The research tells us that it is only in such circumstances that learners will simultaneously be able to keep up with the curriculum, and achieve at an academic level equivalent to learners who have English as a home language. We need to make it plain that the expectation that some learners need to change from one language to another, as a medium of instruction at any point of the school system, places an unfair burden on them compared with those learners who continue with mother-tongue education throughout. It means, therefore, that such learners require additional quality language-education support if they are to succeed.
- Equitable educational opportunity and educational opportunity which is equal to that offered learners internationally are the twin primary goals of the South African education system. It is therefore imperative that the research-evidenced principles are followed in order to achieve the twin goals.

The data collected in primary schools in Limpopo Province clearly demonstrate that children are not being given adequate or grade-appropriate opportunities to develop strong reading and writing expertise (literacy) in their mother tongue. Moreover, there appears to be a delayed introduction to English FAL as a subject, usually in Grade 3, followed by a switch to English medium (LoLT) in Grade 4. Reliable and conclusive research shows that successful learning of a second language in formal education settings, such as schools, is dependent on:

- a) successful development of mother-tongue literacy (specifically reading and writing) over a minimum of a six-year period; and
- b) well-resourced teaching and learning of the second language for a minimum of six years as a subject, before this language can safely replace the mother tongue as the LoLT.

If these two criteria are met in Limpopo schools, it may be possible for learners to use the second language successfully as a medium of instruction (LoLT) after six to eight years of learning English as a subject. However, given that this range occurs during the Senior Phase of the current curriculum, it may be more realistic to aim for mother-tongue education to be retained throughout primary school (to the end of Grade 7). A gradual introduction of bilingual pedagogy (systematic use of both mother tongue plus English medium), gradually implemented from Grade 4 to 7, would be a practical strategy to sustain mother-tongue education while at the same time enhancing English language development and teaching. For example, it might be advisable to begin teaching mathematics and science bilingually in Grades 4 and 5, followed by Social Science in Grades 6 and 7. This would give both teachers and learners an opportunity to focus in a gradually incremental manner on teaching and learning in both languages. It would facilitate increased attention on both content and language learning in both languages, and in so doing it would also foster increased opportunity for academic literacy development.

If the criteria of six to eight years of mother-tongue education are not met (main medium of instruction to the end of Grade 7 with gradual introduction of English medium for up to but not more than 50% of the teaching time in mathematics, science, social science after Grade 4), learners will not be able to use the second language as a medium and they will be unlikely to successfully engage with the rest of the curriculum.

- The LDoE needs to use effective advocacy (e.g. make use of hard evidence from the existing research that demonstrates the benefits of mother-tongue instruction) in ensuring that the rationale behind home-language instruction in early years with a gradual transition to English/Afrikaans is adequately explained to and properly understood by departmental officials, teachers, school governing bodies and parents/guardians. This is important in order that the various stakeholders understand the link between mother-tongue and second-language acquisition.
- To avoid confusion, there needs to be greater clarity, less ambiguity and complete alignment between information presented in all Education Department policy documents.³

Recommendation 5 – Ensure that every learner is provided with optimal opportunities to engage in a variety of grade-appropriate and cognitively demanding reading activities and writing tasks in class. The volume and quality of written work undertaken by learners in each of the learning areas should be regularly checked by SMTs and curriculum specialists from the district office.

Most students in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases are not receiving adequate opportunities to develop strong literacy in either the mother tongue or English (where this is the first additional language). Learners are not doing enough writing and reading in: the home language, the first additional language, or other subjects/learning areas. Researchers found very limited literacy opportunities and learning experiences for learners in most of the classes observed and this makes it unrealistic to expect learners to cope with the academic and linguistic demands of the curriculum from Grade 4 onwards. They would not have developed sufficiently strong reading and writing skills to manage the curriculum in either the mother tongue or English (FAL). They also would not have acquired sufficient listening and spoken understanding of English (FAL) to understand the content of the curriculum, should this be transmitted through English. At best, students would be able to understand concepts, information and procedures which teachers could transmit through spoken discourse in either the mother tongue or a local language used in the community. But this is not nearly enough. Therefore:

- The pace of written work in class needs to be tied much more closely to curriculum requirements (how much work needs to be covered in the grade) rather than to the pace set by the majority or slowest learners in the class, in both the mother tongue/home language and also in the FAL, usually English.
- Teachers need to ensure there is enough time for all learners to practice new reading, writing and spelling skills, in the mother tongue/home language⁴ and in the FAL, usually English.
- There should be daily individual reading and writing and every learner in each class should regularly read to the teacher for monitored guided reading, in both the mother tongue/home language and the FAL, usually English.

³ This has obvious implications for national education policy documentation.

⁴ Parents or other members of the community can be recruited to listen to some daily individual reading, in order to help the teacher who would not be able to listen to enough reading from each learner.

- Large early-primary classes constrain opportunities for individual reading aloud and reading and writing assessment. Class sizes of 50 plus clearly pose enormous challenges for Grade R/1-4 teachers and place constraints on literacy exposure, particularly because of the amount of time that teachers can devote to guiding and monitoring individual learners' reading. There should be no more than 40 learners in all Grade R/1-4 classes so that teachers are not simply engaged in 'crowd control' management.
- Wherever possible, circuit and district officials and SGBs should encourage members of the school communities to volunteer time to assist Foundation Phase teachers during the literacy part of the day, so that the teachers can work with smaller groups, while the community members assist with other groups. These community volunteers could be given the status of 'school literacy teacher aides' (or a more suitable title decided by LDoE).
- Teachers should constantly be referring learners to their textbooks in all Learning Areas when teaching.
- Teachers need to be providing children with extensive opportunities to read extended/continuous text at their reading level, to develop fluency and grade-appropriate comprehension skills, vocabulary and conceptual language. Although historically this has been seen as part of the responsibility of the language teachers, this is equally the responsibility of the teachers of all subjects/learning areas. The language teacher cannot teach the necessary literacy skills for every subject of the school curriculum and learners will not achieve their full potential unless each teacher focuses on the kinds of literacy necessary for the relevant subject/learning area and the particular writing genres of that subject/learning area. Teachers of other learning areas need training and support in the methodology and strategies to develop the vocabulary and sentence structures peculiar to those disciplines.⁵
- Teachers need to foster an interest in books as sources of information as well as provide learners with opportunities to experience the wonder, enjoyment and pleasure of books through shared reading experiences. This applies to reading materials such as short stories, novels, poetry and plays in the language learning area classes as well as to expository (e.g. non-fictional) texts in social science and other learning areas, where relevant.
- School leadership and circuit/district officials should be ensuring that learners are being given enough time to practice new reading and writing skills and that there is effective use of time in class, for example, by checking the amount and type of work in learners' workbooks and observing learners reading.
- Learners should be writing a variety of texts in their mother tongue/home language and FAL (usually English) workbooks. Single word/cloze exercises should be used very sparingly because these do not enhance literacy development. Whole-sentence exercises and paragraph writing should be firmly in place by the end of Grade 1 and continued thereafter. From Grade 2 onwards, learners should be writing a sequence of paragraphs on a regular basis, and so on.
- Learners should be writing full sentences and paragraphs in other learning areas (i.e. Life Skills) from Grade 2 onwards. The development of literacy in Life Skills would establish a firm base for building the academic reading and writing skills required in at least six other learning areas from Grade 4 onwards. Cloze exercises

⁵ For example, teachers may be supported by dictionaries of concepts and lexical items which learners should know for each subject, at each grade, for mathematics, science, etc.

should be used sparingly as these do not enhance strong literacy development across the curriculum.

Recommendation 6 – Improve the quality of literacy instruction, planning and assessment by: setting expected levels of performance; intensifying and expanding in-service training and support; and offering incentives for improving language and literacy attainment

The study shows that learners' poor academic achievement from Grade 4 onwards cannot only be attributed to learning in English (as the FAL or second language) but also to ineffective mother-tongue/home-language literacy and language teaching practices in schools and classrooms from Grade R onwards. Early primary school teachers require the necessary incentives and in-service support to improve the quality of literacy instruction both through professional training that better prepares them for teaching language and literacy and through adequate provision of teaching and learning support material, specifically books.

- Early primary teachers' understanding of how children learn to read and write needs to be developed and strengthened. Grade R teachers require specialised training to facilitate literacy amongst learners from communities which experience impoverished levels of literacy. Grade 1 teachers should be properly prepared for children who have not benefited from a Reception year and have not developed requisite pre-reading and writing skills. Early primary/Foundation Phase teachers need to be trained to recognise when learners lack foundational understanding of concepts related to print awareness, letter knowledge and the purpose of reading. They need to be able to 'close gaps' in essential reading and writing skills whilst still developing the requisite reading and writing skills at grade level so that learners are adequately prepared for the subsequent grade. This applies to teachers across the curriculum, i.e. teachers need to understand that literacy development needs to take place during Literacy, Numeracy and Life Skills parts of the day. Intermediate Phase teachers need to understand that literacy development needs explicit attention across the whole of the curriculum, not just in the Language Learning Area. This will be a challenge to the Department, since most highly qualified and experienced teachers do not currently understand how to use the literacy opportunities in their domain/s.
- Teachers need to understand the relationship between language and learning and of the role of written language (reading and writing, i.e. strong academic literacy) in relation to the curriculum beyond the Languages/Literacy Learning Area, and the relationship amongst mother-tongue acquisition and development, second-language learning and development and learning across the curriculum. It is crucial that teachers and textbooks deliberately develop academic language and literacy proficiency through a more cognitive approach to teaching rather than through an 'everyday' communicative approach used when developing more 'general' or 'everyday' language skills.⁶ Early-grade teachers must engage in the coherent, systematic and on-going development of learners' literacy and language proficiency through a strongly cognitive approach to literacy instruction, in both mother tongue/home language and the FAL (usually English).

⁶ Although researchers did not see evidence of the 'communicative approach' as it is understood in the international literature, the researchers found that teachers used some old-fashioned structuralist approaches and a misunderstood notion of the 'communicative approach', namely that it involves informal, loose, spoken language.

- If the current, insubstantial, interpretation of the ‘whole language’ and ‘communicative approach’ to literacy and language teaching continues to dominate official curriculum documentation, teachers will remain confused and learners will be unlikely to achieve the levels of literacy needed for the complex, decontextualised knowledge presented in text books and reference materials which are required for reading in later grades. Teachers thus need to appreciate the role of effective teaching of reading the different genres of text across the curriculum. This means that teachers need to be aware of how to advance effective reading skills by using well-structured expository texts for each of the learning areas for which they are responsible.⁷ This will contribute towards the efficient development of conceptual language and ‘specialist’ vocabularies of the various Learning Areas. The LDoE needs to provide guidelines in this regard for how teachers can manage multilingual classrooms, for example: with bilingual/multilingual vocabulary development; dual-medium classroom strategies; when, where and how code switching may be used judiciously; when, where and how languages should be kept separate; etc.
- Schools and teachers need to be assisted with planning and delivery of Grade R/1-4 language and literacy Learning Programmes or schemes of work that reflect progression in terms of the development of specific literacy activities within and across grades if learner under-preparedness in language and literacy development in subsequent grades is not to become cumulative. Teachers need more support with regard to translating the curriculum into understandable teaching content, skills and everyday classroom activities and practices. This could be done through detailed, properly trialled and tested language and literacy work schedules for teachers, with explicit activities and standards, pace setters and assessment points included. LTSM and textbooks could be directly linked and tied to the schedules’ objectives.⁸ This also applies to other learning areas where detailed schedules should similarly include the development of language/vocabulary for that discipline. Primary school Heads of Department/Phase Heads need more training and development in how to interpret, manage and monitor delivery of the new curriculum and in ensuring and monitoring internal coherence in the sequencing of curriculum (specifically literacy) planning and teaching over each school year and across the Foundation and Intermediate Phases.
- Teachers need to know how to monitor and record learners’ individual progress in ways that make it possible to truly differentiate between their reading and writing levels so that they can be more responsive to individual learner’s needs and so that they are able to identify children genuinely in need of specialised remedial assistance.⁹ There needs to be regular and individualised assessment and recording of Grade 1-4 learners’ Home Language and First Additional Language literacy progress and ability. The policy of automatic promotion has to be dealt with in ways that prevent children from simply being moved up each year without seriously addressing problems which will prevent them from achieving adequate levels of literacy.

⁷ Teachers need to know how to mediate the text of their particular subject / learning area to their learners and to ensure that concepts have been well-explained and understood.

⁸ Teachers need to know how far and how much needs to be covered in an average lesson, per week, per term, and during the year.

⁹ Teachers are not equipped to deal with remedial work themselves and this would need to be referred to remedial specialists.

- Teachers need more classroom-based support and regular monitoring and the shortage of subject advisors will have to be addressed if district-level work in primary schools is to improve. The LDoE needs to recruit and appoint adequate and appropriately qualified staff for supporting early-grade teachers with literacy development. There has to be much more follow-up support and practical advice for School Management Team members and Foundation and Intermediate Phase teachers. Circuit and district officials should visit schools, teachers and classrooms on a regular basis to address difficulties which arise, and to demonstrate methodologies and classroom activities.
- The capacity and quality of support provided by the LDoE and various service providers should be carefully monitored and assessed through performance targets as well as feedback from teachers and schools. School leadership and teachers should be involved in setting realistically attainable but specific grade-level requirements and targets for improving reading and writing/literacy attainment levels in primary grades.¹⁰

Recommendation 7 – Overhaul primary-school teacher-education programme design and delivery, increase the supply of well-trained Grade R and Foundation Phase teachers, and build literacy expertise by offering incentives for early-grade teachers to study post-graduate degrees.

The research findings point towards the need to expand and comprehensively modify primary teacher-education programmes. Specifically, they point towards a need to attract people to the teaching profession and also to interrogate and thoroughly retool primary teacher-education programmes. What is required, is a theoretical and methodologically systematic approach to literacy teaching in both the mother tongue/home language and the FAL, usually English. This would include the upgrading of teacher educators' expertise as well as teacher-education programme design and delivery, as follows:

- Structured and systematic teaching (not facilitation) of reading and writing from Grade R/1 to at least the end of the Intermediate Phase (Grade 6), preferably to the end of the Senior Phase (Grade 9), in the mother tongue/home language. The objective is that learners should reach a high level of academic reading and writing in the home language by end of Grade 9 in order that they have the educational and linguistic scaffolding necessary for further education and training.
- Specialised teaching of the second language, especially where this language will at some point become the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Teachers should be prepared to introduce the FAL **orally, no later than the beginning of Grade 1**. Teachers should be prepared to **introduce reading and writing in FAL (usually English) no later than the beginning of Grade 2**, but preferably in the second half of Grade 1.

¹⁰ In terms of expected levels of performance (see also the arguments and information presented elsewhere, such as in Section 1.2.2 and in Appendix 5), teachers need more support with regard to translating the curriculum into understandable teaching content, skills and everyday classroom activities and practices. This could be done through detailed, properly trialled and tested language and literacy work schedules for teachers, with explicit activities and standards, pace setters, competencies, achievement levels and assessment points at each grade level included. More concrete expositions would be necessary, for instance, of vocabulary targets (word-counts), activities, techniques, material selection and use, minimum volumes for class- and homework, the length and complexity of language (writing) production within assignments given to learners in reading, writing, listening and speaking, as integrated across mother-tongue and additional languages, across grades (and school phases) and learning areas.

- Structured and systematic use of bilingual teaching methodology and classroom strategies. Teachers should be trained to understand the theory and practice of bilingual and multilingual education. This would include the deliberate use of both mother tongue and FAL (usually English) where appropriate. The objective here is to enhance learners' comprehension of and engagement with the curriculum in ways which will allow them to read and write at an advanced level, and to ensure that should they need to write academic text in English, they have been thoroughly prepared to do so.
- Structured inclusion of how teachers should teach literacy in each learning area of the curriculum (e.g. the terminology, language structures and genres of writing particular to mathematics, science, social studies, etc.). Foundation Phase teachers should be trained to do this in their own home language or a home language widely used in the community in which they will teach. Intermediate and Senior Phase teachers should be trained to do this in two languages. Wherever possible, this should be their own home language or a language used widely in the community in which they live, plus English.

There is a need to build the capacity of Limpopo Higher Education Institutions in the field of teacher training in order to provide the kind of formal ECD and primary school teacher development and education required. There is also need to build the LDoE and in-school expertise needed to support Foundation Phase teachers with literacy development in the home language and the FAL. Teacher-educators may need to be recruited and/or re-trained for this through carefully selected and implemented 'training of trainers' programmes. These should only be administered by technical experts conversant with how learners in African, multilingual settings, develop high levels of literacy in both home and additional languages.

Recommendation 8 – Foster home learning environments which support early literacy and family-based or out-of-school literacy opportunities.

Most of the research-based literature on successful literacy achievement in schools emphasises the importance of the sound development of pre-literacy skills, early literacy and family, home and community literacy practices (e.g. Snow *et al.*, 1998). Studies have shown that children's pre-school experience with print and books are precursors for success in reading in primary school. In the 2006 PIRLS study, for example, a positive relationship was found between Grade 4 learners' reading proficiency and parental engagement of children in pre-school literacy activities (Howie *et al.*, 2007). In addition, it is important to note that Flouri & Buchanan (2004) have found that parental involvement in children's literacy development is a stronger indicator of success than other variables, such as social class, family size or parents' educational background. In other words, home learning environments that offer enriching language and literacy opportunities can have a greater effect on children's language and literacy development than socio-economic status.

- An enormous effort needs to be made by the LDoE, schools and teachers to inform parents/guardians of the importance of involving pre-school and primary children in pre-reading/-writing activities and of the ways in which literacy development can be realistically supported in their particular context and community. For example, parents/guardians (and teachers) can be made more aware of how caregiver-child verbal interactions and other language activities at home, such as nursery rhymes, story telling and songs, can enhance children's

vocabulary and language development. All caregivers need to understand that young children require exposure to the most enriched use of language possible. This means the language/s known best by the older family and community members. Caregivers need to understand that it is better to provide enriched language modelling in the home or community languages rather than stilted, limited and impoverished exposure to a poor model of English. The larger the vocabulary and range of speech registers and structures the child knows upon entry to school, the greater the chances of academic success in both the home language and English, when this is formally introduced as a school subject. Caregivers can be encouraged to involve children in reading (e.g. by helping them to learn the letters of the alphabet, playing with letters and numbers, providing opportunities to experience the pleasure of reading picture books or other available material), and writing (e.g. by encouraging them to draw, colour in, paint, print letters; or getting them to experiment with spelling words that they hear or see).

- Primary schools and teachers need to be much more creative about aspects of literacy and language development and homework in which parents/guardians or others in the community, including community organisations, can be involved. For example, those community members, organisations, parents/guardians, older siblings and learners who are able to, could be involved in and encouraged to listen to, read to, and read together with, young school children.¹¹

Recommendation 9 – Link the Limpopo Department of Education’s Literacy Strategy to the National Department of Education’s Literacy Campaign.

Given that learners’ literacy development needs to be supported in the home, it is very important that family and adult literacy are encouraged and supported. LDoE is advised to establish a strong link between a school-based literacy development drive alongside an adult/family literacy campaign in the Province as a two-pronged initiative which would be mutually supportive. To this end, a productive and mutually supportive partnership with the national DoE’s adult Literacy Campaign would be important.

14.2 Implications for the LDoE in the articulation and implementation of its generic Literacy Model

The main implications or requirements for this framework for strengthening the Literacy Strategy for the Limpopo Department of Education are that a carefully sequenced and coherent plan needs to be formulated in order to address both under-achievement in literacy and educational achievement in provincial (state) schools. The plan needs to include the following elements:

1. Policy decisions on literacy and language development. This includes the generic Literacy Model.
2. Informing the public.
3. Drawing up an explicit Development Plan for the Literacy Model for Limpopo Province, which includes:
 - a. a clear set of guidelines and regulations,
 - b. a realistic timeframe and budget, and
 - c. a monitoring and evaluation component.

¹¹ Even if parents cannot themselves read, they can contribute to their children’s literacy development by telling stories and listening to their children read.

4. Collaboration and or dialogue with national and other provincial DoEs in regard to the re-alignment of the Language in Education Policy and the NCS in relation to language and literacy development across the entire curriculum. In particular, this requires in and for Limpopo Province:
 - a. Spelling out a practical approach to the teaching of reading and writing in the home language including
 - i. detailed, properly trialled language and literacy work schedules for teachers with explicit activities and standards, pace setters and assessment points included. LSTM and textbooks that are directly linked and tied to the schedules' objectives.
 - ii. carefully guided lesson plans, with specific tasks and skills outlined with examples.
 - iii. samples for each learning outcome and assessment standard in the curriculum statements per grade.
 - iv. omitting vague and confusing references to the 'communicative' and 'whole language' approaches to literacy and language development.
 - b. Clarifying the relationship between the development of literacy and language in the home and first additional languages, and ensuring that both receive consistent, adequate attention throughout the primary years of school.
 - c. Clarifying the relationship between the development of literacy and language across the whole curriculum, i.e.
 - i. that literacy and language development is an important feature of learning Mathematics, Physical Science, Human and Social Sciences, and so on,
 - ii. as well as of the Language/s Learning area.
5. Collaboration with national and other provincial DoEs in regard to aligning the adult Literacy Campaign with the school-based Literacy Strategy.
6. Collaboration with HEIs in order to ensure that the HEIs are sufficiently sensitised to the current teaching and learning requirements of school children in Limpopo schools. This requires:
 - a. new or significantly overhauled Literacy Teaching Programmes within teacher education;
 - b. inclusion of literacy and language development components which infuse every teacher education area/subject specialisation; and
 - c. regular monitoring and evaluation of teacher-education programmes and delivery.
7. Budgeting for ongoing in-service teacher education for literacy and language development.
8. Collaboration with publishers about reducing the cost of school readers and textbooks, and establishing more cost-effective mechanisms for supply, in order that each learner can take books home on a daily basis.
9. Upgrading the expertise of education officials at district and circuit level so that they are in a position to offer appropriate support to schools and teachers.
10. Ensuring that literacy/language development advisors to Limpopo Province have the necessary expertise to offer advice, and this should include:
 - a. adequate experience, themselves, of teaching in primary and or secondary schools;
 - b. theoretical and research-based expertise in literacy development in mainstream/system-wide schools;
 - c. theoretical and research-based expertise in first- and second-language acquisition; and

- d. good management of school resources, specifically the handling of books by teachers and learners.
(see also Alidou *et al.*, 2006; Heugh *et al.*, 2007).
11. Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation is conducted by independent research teams which include the expertise mentioned above, in addition to longitudinal, quantitative research instrument development and analysis.

14.3 Timeframes and costs

Most of the recommendations and implications itemised in 14.1 and 14.2 above require a reorganisation of and more efficient use of existing human and material resources and current investment in education. They do not require additional expenditure. The following table will outline a suggested timeframe and set of mechanisms for financing the establishment of a provincial literacy model which would be designed to re-tool literacy education in the primary schools of Limpopo Province.

TABLE 14.1: COSTS OF THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S GENERIC LITERACY MODEL

	Activity	By whom	Timeframe: indicates length of time necessary to effect	Cost implications
1	Policy decisions on literacy and language development: Spelling out of the Literacy Model for Limpopo Province: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including priorities & considerations. 	MEC in conjunction with small informed team.	<i>Short-term</i> 1 month	Same as for any policy implementation.
2	Informing the public	MEC & LDoE	<i>Ongoing</i>	Regular practice, can be done in co-operation with media: print, radio (widest coverage) and TV. Public media may carry most costs.
3	Drawing up of an explicit Development Plan for the Literacy Model for Limpopo Province, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a clear set of guidelines and regulations, a realistic timeframe and budget, and a monitoring and evaluation component. 	LDoE in liaison with small informed task team.	<i>Short-term</i> 1 month following policy decision	Preparation for the model has been undertaken in the comprehensive study of Literacy in Limpopo schools. The recommendations set out above provide guidelines which may require accompanying regulations. No additional costs for LDoE labour. Minimum costs for 1-2 experts x 20 days each.

	Activity	By whom	Timeframe: indicates length of time necessary to effect	Cost implications
5	Collaboration with national and other provincial DoEs in regard to aligning the adult Literacy Campaign with the school-based Literacy Strategy.	MEC & LDoE	<i>Medium to long term</i>	This should not result in any additional costs and would be covered by normal collaborative activity, per the regular budget.
6	Collaboration with HEIs in order to ensure that the HEIs are sufficiently sensitised to the current teaching and learning requirements of school children in Limpopo schools. This requires: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. New or significantly overhauled Literacy Teaching Programmes within teacher education; b. Inclusion of literacy and language development components which infuse every teacher-education area/subject specialisation. c. Regular monitoring and evaluation of teacher-education programmes and delivery. 	LDoE	<i>Short, medium and long term – ongoing</i>	This should not incur significant additional costs. It is normal practice to review, update and amend teacher-education programmes and this should be part of HEIs own budgets. However, it is necessary for there to be sufficient dialogue and collaboration to ensure the most effective co-operation. HEIs are responsible for identifying research gaps and/or contemporary research projects. Monitoring and evaluation should occur through the HEI review process, but it would be advisable for LDoE to negotiate further monitoring and evaluation with the HEIs. This may incur additional expenditure.
7	Budgeting for on-going in-service teacher education for literacy and language development.	LDoE	<i>Ongoing</i>	This would form part of regular budgeting – it is not an additional item.
8	Collaboration with publishers about reducing the cost of school readers and textbooks in order that each learner can take books home on a daily basis.	LDoE	<i>Ongoing</i>	Part of normal budget
9	Upgrading the expertise of education officials at district and circuit level so that they are in a position to offer appropriate support to schools and teachers.	LDoE	<i>Ongoing</i>	This should be part of regular budgetary planning in education.
10	Ensuring that literacy/language development advisors to Limpopo Province have the necessary expertise to offer advice, and this should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Adequate experience, themselves, of teaching in primary and or secondary schools. 	LDoE	<i>Where applicable</i>	Additional costs when necessary.

	Activity	By whom	Timeframe: indicates length of time necessary to effect	Cost implications
	b. Theoretical and research-based expertise in literacy development in mainstream/system-wide schools. c. Theoretical and research-based expertise in first- and second-language acquisition.			
11	Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation is conducted by independent research teams which include the expertise mentioned above, in addition to longitudinal, quantitative research instrument development and analysis.	LDoE		Additional costs when necessary.

14.4 Core features of a Literacy Model for Limpopo Province

The research which was undertaken during the course of this study has been analysed and interpreted through a variety of quantitative and qualitative instruments and processes. The research agency, HSRC, included in the study:

- a range of stakeholders from Limpopo Province during the lifespan of the study (cf. the Research Reference Group),
- its research partner, University of Limpopo,
- several nationally and internationally recognised literacy and education research specialists.

The evidence from the field data (school sites and communities, circuit, district and provincial education offices, HEIs, and agencies involved in interventions in Limpopo) has been brought together in a comprehensive set of findings, and recommendations for the strengthening of the Literacy Strategy, and also for the articulation and implementation of a generic Literacy Model for provincial schools. It needs to be emphasised that this model and its components require simple but conscientious effort on the part of all stakeholders. Complicated solutions are not required.

The evidence of this report leads towards a crystallisation of the features of such a model as follows:

<p>I.</p> <p>Explicit teaching of Home Language literacy (or language used most widely in the community) beginning in Grade R with an emphasis on extended reading and writing from second half of Grade 1 continuing across the curriculum to the end of the Intermediate Phase (preferably to the end of the Senior Phase)</p> <p>II.</p> <p>Introduction of the First Additional Language (usually English) in oral form at the beginning of Grade 1 Introduction of FAL literacy (reading and writing) by middle of Grade 1 (beginning of Grade 2 at the latest) Taught by teachers who can model the use of this language at the necessary level of proficiency And who use explicit literacy and language teaching strategies, Building up to regular extended reading and writing activities by the end of Grade 2</p>

III.

Extending literacy teaching and development across the curriculum
All teachers include explicit reading and writing of the kinds of expository texts which are used in the subject discipline of study (e.g. science, social sciences, mathematics etc.)
Building up to regular use of extended reading and writing in each subject/learning area by the end of Grade 3 in the home language, and incrementally advanced through the Intermediate and Senior Phases

IV.

Training and supporting Foundation Phase teachers to teach reading and writing in the home language and the FAL
Training and supporting teachers for other disciplines to develop reading and writing in other subjects, in the home language, at least to the end of the Foundation Phase, preferably to the end of the Intermediate Phase
Training and supporting teachers to use bilingual teaching methodologies, including for the development of reading and writing in the home language and English, across the curriculum, during the Intermediate and Senior Phases.

V.

Emphasis on 'time on task',
i.e. efficient use of teaching and learning timeframes

VI.

Emphasis on placing books in learners hands every day during class time and for taking home to read

VII.

Daily homework for reading, writing and numeracy from day 1 in Grade 1 to the end of primary school

VIII.

Public awareness of the value in family literacy practices and development
Dovetail the schools' Literacy Model with the adult Literacy Campaign

IX.

Setting explicit and realistically attainable targets for improved reading and writing levels in Limpopo primary schools.¹²

X

Establishing assessment measures for evaluating improvement of expected levels of performance.

XI

Establishing strong accountability: through leadership in schools, districts and the LDoE; and through a system of incentives and rewards (e.g. development grants) for reaching the targets

Conclusion

Schools could begin to implement seven of the components of the Literacy Model with immediate effect. There would be no reason to delay their immediate application. Component number IV, teacher education and support, requires the greatest amount of support and attention from the Department and other interested parties. This component, in combination with the key implications of the recommendations for strengthening the Literacy Strategy, will require further carefully planned attention from the Department. Components IX, X and XI also require the Department's leadership. The priorities are particularly:

¹² The substantive contents that are already part of the two mentioned School Transformation Programme documents and the Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools (see Section 1.2.2 and Appendices 1 and 5) is acknowledged. Particular note is (and has to be) taken of the objectives and targets that have already been set, in particular those relating to learner performance achievement, that have so far also been monitored.

- Provisioning of effective Grade R teachers and classrooms [incrementally by 2012].
- Clearly-outlined teacher guides for the teaching of reading and writing across the entire school curriculum [by end of 2008].
- Major revisions to teacher education and teacher development [by end of 2008].
- Major focus on high quality, regular and ongoing teacher support from LDoE [incremental improvements to reach optimal delivery by 2010].
- Major focus on the delivery of books into the hands of learners [begin 2008, optimal delivery by January 2010].
- Establishing the checks and balances for targets, assessment and accountability [by July 2008].

It is these priorities which would take more time and additional resources, and the urgency is such that the Department is advised to ensure that the three target dates, end of 2008, 2010, and 2012 are met. It needs to be emphasised that the teaching of reading and writing effectively does not depend on new-fangled, flashy ‘tricks and treats’. It is entirely dependent on consistent, regular practice, every day, in every lesson, throughout school. There are no short-cuts and it requires dedicated attention from every teacher educator and teacher. It also depends on dedicated ongoing support of the Department and co-operation with the community.

**APPENDIX 1:
IRISH AID, LDoE, UL AND HSRC EXPLORATIONS
(NOTES ON MEETINGS)**

1. Notes: Meeting at University of Limpopo on 4 September 2006

- Attendance

Irish Aid Limpopo: Michael Maliavusa

HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr Kathleen Heugh, Dr Cas Prinsloo

UL: Prof Molefe Ralenala, Dr Jo M Makua, Ms W Gaba Moleko, Ms E Steinbach

LDoE: Onica Dederen (curriculum)

- Dr K Heugh: Introduce proposal and background
 - Literacy programme delivery (resilience over longer term, on withdrawal of teams)
 - Irish Aid: Evaluation required; residual effects; cost-benefit over medium term
 - LDoE: Desires own literacy approach (=> solid methodology; teacher training)
 - Appropriate interface between curriculum (NCS) and programmes/policy/strategy
 - Language and concept acquisition
- Moving towards clarifying respective roles
 - Two concept papers required (review of literature)
 - Review of materials (1st in Eng; 2nd in African languages)
 - Psycho-linguistic perspectives (learn to read; read to learn)
 - February 2007 workshop – instrument development
 - Planning towards Phase 2
 - Review of classroom implementation
 - Reference group/Steering committee: including parent opinion/needs; consultant from Africa) → to ensure buy-in and ownership
 - (- Early mother-tongue instruction accepted as strong basis for any later concept formation, and switches to more languages/LOIs, say at Gr 6 ← → parallel language development, etc.)

N (total population) = +/- 3 000 (schools with Foundation Phase)

Sample has to be large enough and representative enough (→ credible findings)

UL – preferences and skills and capacity:

- Not too isolated segments (would reduce capacity development) [best for allocation of resources; also for mutual planning; and for learning mutually from each other]
- Specify deliverables (sub-contracting)
- African languages / school communities (Afrikaans?) {Onica – database}
- => “parallel processing”
- Information that team requires from DoE for Phase 1 (sample frame- variables) SRN data , Mr Mateta (Senior manager EMIS) Through Onica - 5 districts
- Fieldworkers (observers – careful for post-graduates – trained and skilled and quality assured well)

- Availability during 2007 – March bad, Mar/Apr, and May good
- Types of instruments and their development – (from sources and instruments in project proposal)
 - Systemic assessments? Gr 3, 6 (to identify ivy league and otherwise beforehand), CASS (Continuous Assessment)
 - Own LDoE Kanyisa 1st 100 schools already done, 2nd 100 schools soon
 - Even teacher competence testing was done
- PIRLS? Gr 4
- Provincial transformation model

UNIVEN teaches Foundation Phase teachers

UL – has some ACE programme students and lecturers

Curriculum Advisors of LDoE – focus on Gr 8 and 9, & FET as subject specialists

(Phase organisers/planners: Numeracy, Literacy & Life Skills together, for ECD only)

{IEP – Integrated Education Programme}

Requisitions (Book) Unit purchase records (get)

- MEC meeting

Approach – honesty and openness

2. Notes: Meeting at LDoE - 5 Sep 2006

- Attendance

Irish Aid Limpopo: Michael Maliavusa

HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr Kathleen Heugh, Dr Cas Prinsloo

UL: Prof Molefe Ralenala

LDoE: Onica Dederen (curriculum)

LDoE: ECD/Foundation Phase Group (ECD convenors and officials from districts and circuits) – Assisting teachers through training and support on curriculum

Also some Phatuwani coordinators

- Introduction by Onica Dederen

Interventions – gaps – improvements – policy/strategy

- Presentation (Powerpoint) by Dr Kathleen Heugh
- Discussion

Importance of “training” teachers before implementation, and orienting principals.

Extent to which BTL has gone/is going to scale? Etc

- Only Grade 1 (BTL 1) – [In Gr 1, and 1st 3 months of Gr 2]
- Grade 2&3: ? (i.e. BTL 2&3) No [Then schools get material from other publishers]
- All schools except ex-Model C (<50)
- (for all Languages – (English?,) Setswana, isiZulu, Xitsonga, Sepedi, Tshivenda, isiNdebele)
- Home languages of learners are available in 10th-day statistics

3. Notes: Brief presentation to MEC - 5 Sep 2006

MEC: What does project need from MEC office/Education Department?
Dr Heugh: Advocacy & mobilisation; invitations to stakeholders to participate.

Official launch? - Use the February 2007 workshop
- Make it a conference
- 21 February 2007 International Mother-tongue Day

MEC fully supports - strengthening and consolidating what we already have
- Pioneering an approach or value chain
- Community and parental empowerment (traditional leaders)

4. Discussion afterwards (READ) - 5 Sep 2006

Michael Maliavusa emphasises discussing / disseminating Limpopo Literacy Strategy (still a draft only)

Concern raised (READ): Root cause of poor performance = too early introduction of English (in contrast to rather expanding the use of mother tongues)

We need clarification of definitions/terms: “evaluation”, “literacy”, (literacy) “development”, “ECD”

5. Notes: Meeting with Michael Maliavusa - 5 Sep 2006

- Attendance

Irish Aid Limpopo: Michael Maliavusa
HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr K Heugh, Dr C Prinsloo
UL: Prof Molefe Ralenala

- Handling an increasingly big project
 - Dealing with suspicions and resistance
 - Need to find a way of sharing a common understanding of the LDoE draft Literacy Strategy
 - Not ignore Khanyisa and IEP
 - Build the programme into the LDoE, to be sustainable and lasting
 - Base proposal on these foundations and assumptions of ensuring things are done well/ completely
(with an exclusive set of stakeholders on board in a Steering Committee)
(2010 as first horizon; then the final horizon of 2014, for Irish Aid)
 - Change original ToR to accommodate all the changes (expansion of scope)
 - No shortcuts, no isolation of any parties/stakeholders
- Proposal

Let us go back to drawing board (on the basis of a summary of the findings and inputs of the present set of meetings, propose an expansion of the project/programme)

i.e, produce a realistic Phase I, even extending much deeper into 2007, and only then construct Phase II.

[HSRC approach dovetails well with its notion of “Implementation networks” (CEO)]

- Next steps:
- Report findings of 4-6 September 2006 explorations to Irish Aid
 - Ask Irish Aid for expansion/extending the work (schedule and cost)
 - Have another meeting(s) in Pretoria soon
 - Produce new budgets for:
 - Constituting a Reference Group
 - The workshop (to plan further, to launch the strategy)
 - Still include as large part as possible of literacy and materials reviews

Reiterate that we have to slot in with Khanyisa draft Literacy Strategy (becoming the final version)

Check critically: Service providers (READ / Molteno) on Steering Committee (ADEA Report Gabon)

Optimal size of Steering Committee, and representation channels in clusters of stakeholders:

- Not too large
- Who pays for which meetings/activities? (Participants for some?, LDoE, IA)
(Latter two will discuss and decide)
- Suggest Onica Dederen as chair/secretariat (but retain in HSRC costing for the time being)

Task is bigger than anticipated => has financial implications => this is what's at stake (list) => re-budget and re-conceptualised Phase 1

Meet soon (next week) in Pretoria with IA on budget (required soon, to start drawing on it)

6. Notes: Meeting at LDoE Book Unit - 6 September 2006

- Attendance

HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr K Heugh, Dr C Prinsloo

LDoE: Onica Dederen (curriculum)

LDoE: Book Unit (Mr Masongane?)

- Introduction with Onica Dederen

Checking back regarding mother-tongue-materials – Some serious information is coming through confirming suspicions that no/little Foundation Phase materials for Mathematics and Life Skills are available / ordered in mother tongue; but only in English.

- Exploring turnovers of materials procured

	Gr R	Gr 1	Gr 2	Gr 3	Gr 4	Gr 5-6
Literacy						
In English						
In HL/MT						
Numeracy						
In English						
In HL/MT						
Life Skills						
In English						
In HL/MT						

Summaries/totals are available from system (by publishers/suppliers, by title)

Catalogues show the available titles (FP, IP)

Eventually we have to cross-check orders @ usage at schools in sample

Maskew-Miller is topping the list (for all the Grades, and BTL)

Then Nassau

Then MacMillan

Heinemann

Oxford

JUTA

Difference between teacher resource books (one per teacher), and learning materials (textbooks and readers for learners) [LDoE is stopping the practice of moving items from latter to former]

HSRC has to write up a request of the summary of printouts from the system we would require

Procedure/process implemented: Onica Dederen supplied (Ms Terisa Maartins for Gr 4 up to GET)

Evaluation criteria: Onica Dederen provided (and/or Terisa)

Submission procedures for Publishers on wanting to supply new materials: Onica Dederen/Terisa Maartins provided

[Typed and electronic versions supplied by Terisa Maartins]

[Specimen items of materials have to be sourced from the Publishers directly]

{As recent as 1st semester, NCS-aligned Gr 2 and Gr 3 materials from Molteno for BTL have not been produced / distributed yet}

Screeners and authors are sometimes the same persons, resulting in risk of bribes/favours (authors to screeners, and also publishers/authors among schools)

There is still indecision between national and provincial levels of DoE about who screens the materials

We have to know/see most commonly ordered materials (and others identified) – HSRC will formulate a request (but after next item)
(1st request – LdoE identifies most commonly turned over items)

Contact details:

Mr ZR Maswanganye
082 803 1571
015 290 7715
Maswanganizr@edu.norprov.gov.za

Currently Gr 8 and Gr 9, and Gr 11 (for new NCS phasing in) are prioritised. Topping up for other grades, such as Gr R, initially flagged, and Gr 1 to 3, are being shelved for screening decisions 1st, before executing more/new orders.

Ms Martins: “Mr Mohlongo can provide more detail about literacy programmes”

Contact details:

015 290 7972
maartinst@edu.norprov.gov.za

- Follow-up interviews required

- Ms Theresa Martins

- Slotting in with Godwin Khosa and others re “Literacy Strategy in Primary Schools” (from draft to final)

Original terms of reference

- Reference to Literacy Strategy and finalisation of generic model

How strongly does this still hold as objective of our study?

Embedded in the school transformation model/strategy, prioritising FP as the logical starting point (with serious challenge of literacy (and numeracy) development), and then phasing into GET and FET all along.

Khanyisa and IA previously sorted out territorial structures. IA sent a delegation to meet MEC, LDoE, etc. to confirm their role. This has been addressed sufficiently and a common drive and strategy are being pursued again as far as we could establish. It does spell out or suggest that coordination, involvement, communication, etc. are of the utmost importance to keep everyone on the same page. In a way, Khanyisa operates most at the level of policy and strategy, while Curriculum Department is responsible for broad operational management overall, and IA for very specific Foundation Phase on the ground guidelines and facilitation of the literacy parts.

BTL and learner performance have to meet in the new school reform and literacy models.

Khanyisa’s literacy model and activities do not cover classroom implementations and evaluations of the use of literacy materials and approaches. As a model (set of values, principles and intents), however, it is almost complete as it is.

It has been “piloted”/implemented in a set of 100 schools. (In this sense, it is still a “draft”.) But the only thing that is actually being waited for, is National DoE to announce up to which grade level literacy development should reach. Next 100 schools will follow. Training and implementation included teachers and curriculum advisors or LASs.

[Khanyisa’s own systemic evaluation (2005, Gr 3; 2006, Gr 6; in 1st 100 schools) data is available from Onica, done after national systemic evaluation. Focused remedial interventions would follow on that, especially curriculum management, including support from district office, LASs, SMTs, and HODs.]

School profiles were produced for these individually participating schools.

{One of Khanyisa’s outputs, not yet addressed, is donor coordination.}

In Provincial Steering Committee (of LDoE), and Provincial Management Committee (of IA), both Khanyisa and IA sit everytime.

7. Notes: Meeting with Godwin Khosa (Khanyisa) - 6 September 2006

- Attendance

Irish Aid Limpopo: Michael Maliavusa

HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr K Heugh, Dr C Prinsloo

UL: Prof Molefe Ralenala

Khanyisa: Godwin Khosa

- Introduction by Dr K Heugh

The IA-commissioned study (evaluation of literacy development materials / approaches, including classroom practices).

It will/has to be within the context of provincial literacy development and school reform strategies.

It will operate under the auspices of a strong, representative Steering Committee structure (LDoE, Khanyisa, Language Boards/Committees, publishers, service providers, funder / Irish Aid, etc.).

A strong implementation-driven collaboration towards the end (including M&E) is expected, and also an advocacy campaign in the parent and community environments.

Godwin Khosa - expected duration of project? (Dr K Heugh - two years)

- Inputs from and discussion with Godwin Khosa

Good to see that oscillating debate is starting to take focus / shape.

Literacy strategy origins: Initially to re-skill teachers.

In discussion with Phatuwani, it was realised that to question status quo will be important, as not only teachers' teaching methods, and the materials they use, are at stake, but a whole host of integrated factors that has to be prioritised.

LDoE initiated a literacy improvement strategy. This started encapsulating various factors into one document. They borrowed from the British experience (increased reading time, for instance).

Further interventions in area of reading and writing (learners and teachers) were foregrounded.

Acknowledged literacy improvement in language as subject, but also other subjects.

School transformation programme as a whole got reviewed in late 2005, and early 2006, and even August 2006. Also parts of the Literacy Strategy. May 2006 saw clear commitments to improve learner performance in literacy and numeracy, through target setting; come to fruition. Baseline – systemic 39%/40% (went up to >46%), 22% (also >) for Mathematics. Achieved in 2 years in 100 schools (2004-6).

Sustainability, and wide coverage (to scale) remain key.

Managerial aspects are also key (targets set about volume/frequency of reading / writing, targets set for assessments, etc. (Requires a 10 %-point increase.)

Paragraph reading (10% increase).

Curriculum coverage (< pacesetters) with very little monitoring in past, but to be increased.

Common assessment (to get to certain standards and serve as benchmarks).

Managerial issues:

- introduce professional development – peer interfaces
- SMTs have to monitor various class-level indicators
- enforcing learner attainment strategy of Department.

Re-skilling teachers is almost impossible with lack of resources.

Decision was taken to adopt more advocacy interventions.

Would also develop common learning programme resources in clusters of schools in conjunction with districts and circuits.

Acknowledge and foster the role of various levels in the system in curriculum delivery.

Matthews Makgamatha: asked about teacher development for classroom delivery.

Godwin Khosa responded: this remains a gap. Since 1996, and it is expected to continue up to 2010, main effort is to merely get everyone up to speed with NCS. Continuous development centres are being set up.

Some technical assistance problems also remain.

[Godwin Khosa will ask Prof Jaap Kuipers to mail us the complete School Transformation Strategy document.]

Michael Maliavusa emphasises the aspects of sound methodology, systems, infrastructure, management and funds as integral to progress.

Godwin Khosa:

Points out that a big risk to all programmes like the present lies in staff changes, easily able to reduce the usefulness of any initiative. This underscores the importance of a well-constituted and well-functioning steering committee.

The current status of the Literacy Strategy – it still has to be evaluated after its implementation in the first 100 schools. It focuses energy on:

- numeracy,
- literacy,
- curriculum management, and
- school development planning.

- Next steps

- Require as much information as possible that could serve to describe the current baseline.

- Re-drafting the 1st Phase 1 proposal document.

- More visits and consultations have to take place in October/November to tie down reference group functioning.

- February 2007 sees the presentation and discussion of methodology, literature and research instruments.

Godwin Khosa emphasises: present work, strategising, and interventions continue, also i.t.o. up-scaling, and, as cleared with MEC, the developmental growth of the Literacy Strategy, Language Policy, and School Reform Strategy.

8. Notes: Brainstorming on Phase 1 milestones and broad scheduling - 6 September 2006

- Attendance

HSRC: Matthews Makgamatha, Dr K Heugh, Dr C Prinsloo

Dr K Heugh will:

- e-mail her Powerpoint slides, and
- the noted results of the brainstorming notes made in the car on way back from Polokwane.

APPENDIX 2

CONSENT FORM

**[For school principals, members of school management teams and governing bodies, educators, and district/circuit officials, as relevant]
Evaluation of Literacy Teaching in the Limpopo School System**

Hello, I am Dr Cas Prinsloo (or, representing him) from the Human Sciences Research Council (or the University of Limpopo or Venda). The HSRC is a national research organisation. We are undertaking an evaluation of literacy teaching in Limpopo primary schools on behalf of the Limpopo Department of Education. In this process, we look at aspects of literacy teaching in the context of provincial and literacy development policies, teacher training, and the provision and use of learning materials.

For this purpose, we collect relevant information from the principals, school management and governing body members, and some Grade R to 4 teachers from 24 schools in Limpopo, and their district and/or circuit offices. These schools were selected to cover a wide range of conditions and factors, including the various home languages spoken in Limpopo, the availability of learner performance data, coverage of all five Limpopo districts, as well as urban and rural conditions, multi-grade teaching, minority and majority language distributions, school size, and a few other typical research variables. School or classroom functioning in itself did not play a role, and will not be evaluated for any individual staff member or school.

We would like to: observe which facilities and infrastructure are available at schools, especially related to the provision of learning materials; review policy documents at the various levels of the education system, as well as some literacy materials; and observe some classroom practices. We hope that the findings will benefit the Limpopo province, but possibly also the whole country in the future. This could happen through refinements to any existing literacy teaching strategy and related policy documents.

Please understand that **your participation is voluntary** and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether to participate or not, is yours alone. However, we would really appreciate it if you do share your thoughts with us. If you choose not to take part in answering any questions, or in providing us access to some documents, you will not be affected in any way whatsoever. If you agree to participate, you may stop me at any time and tell me that you don't want to go on. If you do this there will also be no penalties and you will NOT be prejudiced in ANY way.

We may need to record your name initially. This allows us to link the information from respondents from different levels (e.g., the same school, district, or learning area). However, we undertake to remove any identifying details at the earliest possible point from records and datasets, and not to identify any individuals or schools in reports and other presentations. We will use unique identification numbers in the datasets, and any codelists or keys to them will be stored separately. Should one wish to illustrate certain points through vignettes (small examples), appropriate "pseudonyms" (false names) will be used for schools or respondents. All completed instruments and linkage lists will be treated as confidential and dealt with accordingly. Also the eventual datasets will be treated likewise. This implies that only the principal researcher and single members of the

team will have access to the information, which will be kept in locked offices and/or password-protected electronic files/PCs. In the datasets and eventual reports, no one will be able to link you to the answers you gave to individual questions. Only the researchers will have access to the unlinked information. The information will remain confidential and there will be no “come-backs” from the answers you give.

It will take about an hour to complete any interview, questionnaire or document review session. Although a classroom selected for observation will be visited for two hours, teaching can go on as normally during most of the time. Some educators or school management staff may be asked to participate in more than one procedure. This depends on their roles at the school. In providing any answers or information, we request that you are as open and honest as possible. Very few questions or pieces of information may be of a personal and/or sensitive nature. You may choose not to answer these questions or provide such information. I will also be asking some questions that you may not have thought about before, and which also involves thinking about the past or the future. We know that you cannot be absolutely certain about the answers to these questions but we ask that you try to think about them. When it comes to answering these questions, there are no right and wrong answers.

If I ask you a question that makes you uncomfortable, we can stop and talk about it. Ms Onica Dederen (General Manager for Curriculum Development and Support, Limpopo Department of Education) coordinates the study from the side of the Department. She would also be prepared to address any queries you may have. If you wanted to raise something about the technical content of the research, you can contact the principal investigator, Dr CH Prinsloo, at 012 302 2307. If it is about the research process, you can use our free-call ETHICS LINE number 0800 212 123, or contact the secretary of the HSRC’s Research Ethics Committee, Ms J Botha, at 012 302 2009, or through her, its chairperson, Dr Doug Wassenaar.

As soon as the preliminary findings are available towards the end of the year, we will hold a workshop to which all important stakeholders are invited to make inputs about the correctness of our interpretations, and the conclusions and recommendations we make. This would assist us in improving the formulations of our feedback and proposals to the Department. We will pursue any appropriate additional dissemination strategies at that point too. The day-to-day functioning of this project is also overseen by a Research Reference Group comprising wide representation from members of labour unions, language boards, publishers, the department, school governing body associations, and the funding agency, to name a few.

CONSENT

I hereby agree to participate in the research and evaluation project about literacy teaching in Limpopo. I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop completing the questionnaire or the document review activities at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project of which the purpose is not to benefit me personally.

I have received the telephone numbers or details of persons to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise during the completion of the questionnaire or the document review.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I understand that, if at all possible, feedback will be given to me on the results of the completed research. (This may be through the school principal or school governing body.)

Signature

Capacity *

Date

** E.g., principal, circuit manager, SGB member, Gr 1-4 educator, Foundation Phase HoD)*

Important note:

In the case of the school management team, school governing body or educator focus-group interviews, the research team requests that the discussion be treated as confidential and that each one's opinion and person is kept confidential by all participants. However, we cannot guarantee that it will happen, and must rely on the co-operation of all participants in this group.

Consent for any audio-visual records

Please sign below in cases where a researcher wants to make use of audio-visual recordings. The research team undertakes to transcribe any [sensitive*] audio-visual material as soon as possible, remove the names of the respondents from it, store it safely, and destroy it within a year of the release of the final report.

** That is, where people can be recognised, and whose identity will be protected.*

Signature

Capacity **

Date

*** E.g., principal, circuit manager, SGB member, Gr 1-4 educator, Foundation Phase HoD)*

APPENDIX 3:

RESEARCH REFERENCE GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE



A
Research Reference Group
To
Support Literacy Teaching Evaluation

Third Version



Document prepared by M M Makgamatha with input from colleagues at the HSRC, UNILIMPOPO, LDoE & Irish Aid



Abbreviations Used

ECD	Early Childhood Development
EMIS	Education Management Information System
FEDSAS	Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools
GET	General Education and Training
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
IEP	Integrated Education Programme
LdoE	Limpopo Provincial Department of Education
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
NASG	National Association of School Governing Bodies
PANSALB	Pan South African Language Board
RRG	Research Reference Group
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SAOU	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNILIMPOPO	University of Limpopo
UNIVEN	University of Venda

Establishing a Research Reference Group

Background

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), in collaboration with the Department of Language Education (University of Limpopo), has been contracted to conduct an evaluation of literacy teaching in the Limpopo school system. The main goal of this evaluation is to carry out research on the various literacy practices in the Foundation Phase (that is, Grade R to 3) with the aim of making recommendations towards, (1) finalising the Draft Literacy Strategy of the Limpopo Provincial Department of Education (LDoE), and (2) developing a generic literacy model for the province. These recommendations will be informed by the Limpopo provincial and the South African national contexts, and the international best practices.

Research Team

The literacy teaching evaluation project team comprises researchers from the HSRC and the University of Limpopo (UNILIMPOPO), with the HSRC being the lead organisation. Where necessary, other experts are being sub-contracted to add value to the process.

Consultations for stakeholder participation

The evaluation is a research-based initiative which demands wider consultation with various role players and stakeholders in education in the Limpopo province. This is to ensure broader stakeholder participation and accountability in the formulation and implementation of evaluation processes, and in shaping the evaluation outputs (for example, evaluation criteria, instruments and reports).

Prior to the commencement of the evaluation, the research team consulted with the various stakeholder organisations working within the LDoE and those allied to it. The purposes of these consultations were, among others, to introduce the evaluation project to the stakeholders and to inform them about the research team's intention of establishing a Research Reference Group (RRG). The stakeholders consulted are:

- (a) The various sections of the LDoE in Polokwane (office of the MEC, ECD, book unit, EMIS);¹
- (b) The five districts of the LDoE (Vembe, Mopani, Capricorn, Sekhukhune and Waterberg);
- (c) Teacher unions, namely the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) and the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersnie (SAOU);
- (d) Language Services section of Limpopo province's Department of Sport, Arts and Culture);
- (e) The education development programmes, namely the Fhatuwani Programme², Khanyisa and Integrated Education Programme (IEP);
- (f) Organisations of school governing bodies represented by the National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASG) and the Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS);
- (g) Teacher training institutions represented by the University of Venda (UNIVEN) and the University of Limpopo (UNILIMPOPO).³

The RRG is to be established in order to support and advise the Research Team throughout all the phases or stages of the evaluation.

¹ The literacy teaching evaluation project is driven through the office of the General Manager: Curriculum and Support within the LDoE.

² The evaluation is conducted under the auspices of the Fhatuwani Programme of Irish Aid.

³ UNILIMPOPO is represented in the Research Team.

Membership and representation on the RRG

The composition and the function of the RRG should be guided by the following:

- (a) Membership to the RRG is voluntary and members will not be remunerated for their participation in the RRG. Where necessary and justifiable, RRG members will be reimbursed for travelling and accommodation expenses related to their participation in the RRG.
- (b) With the exception of the main client, namely the Limpopo Provincial Department of Education, all relevant bodies/organisations/stakeholders will be represented by only one representative at any given point in time. In order to ensure continuity of representation, the same person should preferably participate in the various activities/meetings throughout.
- (c) Representatives will be expected to consult more widely within their organisations or “constituencies” to ensure that the views/standpoints of the relevant body/organisation/stakeholder are represented, and not individual views/standpoints of representatives.
- (d) RRG meetings/discussions will be facilitated by a member of the Research Team, in close consultation and coordination with the Limpopo Department of Education.

Proposed terms of reference for the RRG:

The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the RRG will be finalised at a stakeholder meeting on 19 March 2007. At this stage, the proposed ToRs for the RRG are as follows:

- (a) The participation of the RRG will be required throughout the life of the project, up until the final report is compiled and finished. While preparations for the project have been going on from the middle to the end of the year 2006, the actual research activities will be implemented throughout the remainder of 2007.
- (b) The RRG will assist the research team in its work through providing critique and guidance as required by local (Limpopo province) and national (South African) policies and context.
- (c) The RRG will inform the evaluation project in regard to, amongst others, (1) the evaluation/research methodology (process and procedures) to be employed; (2) linguistic/cultural composition of the school communities in the province; (3) gender equity issues; and (4) the types of schools in the province (for example, urban, rural, farm, multi-grade, etc).
- (d) The RRG will contribute to the finalisation of research products (for example, research instruments, and research reports).
- (e) The RRG will participate in consultative colloquia dedicated to obtaining stakeholder feedback, comments and inputs.
- (f) No research project management support will be required from the RRG as this will be the responsibility of the Research Team.

Criteria followed in selecting potential RRG members

One of the key considerations in the establishment of the RRG is the tight time frame within which the evaluation is to be carried out. The RRG therefore has to be relatively small, yet broadly representative stakeholder group that can work efficiently to fulfil its role and responsibilities within tight time frames. The following criteria were applied to the selection of stakeholders to participate in the RRG:

- (a) Stakeholders had a relationship with the LDoE;
- (b) Stakeholders were consulted during 2006 and showed interest on serving on the RRG;

- (c) There is a relationship between the interests represented by a particular body/organisation/stakeholder and the objectives of the research/evaluation

On the basis of these criteria, the following stakeholders were identified for participation on the RRG :

Table: Proposed Stakeholder Representation on the Research Reference Group

RRG Representation ⁴	Affiliation and/or Focus	Number of Participants
Limpopo Provincial Department of Education	GET (including Early Childhood Development or ECD)	1
	Curriculum Support	1
	Governance	1
Fhatuwani Programme	Education Development Projects	1
Khanyisa Education Support Programme	working in Limpopo province	1
Integrated Education Programme (IEP)		1
Department of Sports, Arts and Culture	Language Services	1
Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB)	Limpopo Provincial Office	1
University of Venda	Primary teacher education training institution	1
South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU)	Organised teacher unions	1
Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersnie (SAOU)		
National Association of School Governing Bodies (NASG)	School Governing Bodies	1
Federation of Governing Bodies of South African Schools (FEDSAS)		1
Total Number		13

NB: Both HSRC and the University of Limpopo are part of the research team and will automatically participate in the RRG.

Broader stakeholder membership allied to the LDoE will still be given the opportunity to participate in open colloquia or seminars, to comment on the study products (e.g. study reports) before such products are finalised.

Communication between the RRG and the research team

The day to day running of the project is the responsibility of the research team. To ensure that the project is effectively run, the research team will be responsible for:

- (a) Notifying the RRG members in advance about the meetings and activities wherein their participation is required.
- (b) Send materials to the RRG members ahead of time to allow members to consult more widely within their organisations / “constituencies” in advance of RRG meetings.

⁴ The eventual representatives (excluding team members from HSRC/UL) were: Ms Onica Dederen (LDoE, with representatives for curriculum, ECD and GET as required, e.g., Ms Mohlaba, Ms Moemi, Ms Farisani, Mr Mbhalati, Mr Mulaudzi); Ms Annelize Fourie (Irish Aid); Mr Michael Maliavusa (Fhatuwani - Irish Aid Limpopo); Mr John Buhrmeister (IEP); Ms Agnes Mawela (Dept of Sport, Arts and Culture); Mr Godwin Khosa (Khanyisa); Ms Joyce Madiba (PANSALB); Mr Sarel du Toit (SAOU); Mr George Mudumela (SADTU); Ms Jane Radzilani / Mr M Patrick (NASG); Mr Faan Visagie (FEDSAS); Dr Peter Mulaudzi (UNIVEN); Mr Dudley Schroeder (SAPA, consultation only).

APPENDIX 4:

EXTRACT FROM: SNOW, C., BURNS, S., & GRIFFIN, P. (EDS.) 1998. *PREVENTING READING DIFFICULTIES IN YOUNG CHILDREN. (A REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE PREVENTION OF READING DIFFICULTIES IN YOUNG CHILDREN, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL AND NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES). WASHINGTON, DC: NATIONAL ACADEMY PRESS.*

<http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/reading/>

One of the most comprehensive studies of reading and young children is the Snow *et al.* (1998) Report. Its recommendations, summarised in the extract below, are particularly pertinent to Limpopo Province, and indeed the other provinces of South Africa, in the current context of underachievement in reading and writing.

Literacy Instruction in First through Third Grade

Given the centrality of excellent instruction to the prevention of reading difficulties, the committee strongly recommends attention in every primary-grade classroom to the full array of early reading accomplishments: the alphabetic principle, reading sight words, reading words by mapping speech sounds to parts of words, achieving fluency, and comprehension. Getting started in alphabetic reading depends critically on mapping the letters and spellings of words onto the speech units that they represent; failure to master word recognition can impede text comprehension. Explicit instruction that directs children's attention to the sound structure of oral language and to the connections between speech sounds and spellings assists children who have not grasped the alphabetic principle or who do not apply it productively when they encounter unfamiliar printed words.

Comprehension difficulties can be prevented by actively building comprehension skills as well as linguistic and conceptual knowledge, beginning in the earliest grades. Comprehension can be enhanced through instruction focused on concept and vocabulary growth and background knowledge, instruction about the syntax and rhetorical structures of written language, and direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarising, predicting, and monitoring. Comprehension also takes practice, which is gained by reading independently, by reading in pairs or groups, and by being read aloud to.

We recommend that first- through third-grade curricula include the following components:

- Beginning readers need explicit instruction and practice that lead to an appreciation that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud. Fluency should be promoted through practice with a wide variety of well-written and engaging texts at the child's own comfortable reading level.

- Children who have started to read independently, typically second graders and above, should be encouraged to sound out and confirm the identities of visually unfamiliar words they encounter in the course of reading meaningful texts, recognising words primarily through attention to their letter-sound relationships. Although context and pictures can be used as a tool to monitor word recognition, children should not be taught to use them to substitute for information provided by the letters in the word.
- Because the ability to obtain meaning from print depends so strongly on the development of word recognition accuracy and reading fluency, both of the latter should be regularly assessed in the classroom, permitting timely and effective instructional response when difficulty or delay is apparent.
- Beginning in the earliest grades, instruction should promote comprehension by actively building linguistic and conceptual knowledge in a rich variety of domains, as well as through direct instruction about comprehension strategies such as summarising the main idea, predicting events and outcomes of upcoming text, drawing inferences, and monitoring for coherence and misunderstandings. This instruction can take place while adults read to students or when students read themselves.
- Once children learn some letters, they should be encouraged to write them, use them to begin writing words or parts of words, and use words to begin writing sentences. Instruction should be designed with the understanding that the use of invented spelling is not in conflict with teaching correct spelling. Beginning writing with invented spelling can be helpful for developing understanding of the identity and segmentation of speech sounds and sound-spelling relationships. Conventionally correct spelling should be developed through focused instruction and practice. Primary-grade children should be expected to spell previously studied words and spelling patterns correctly in their final writing products. Writing should take place regularly and frequently to encourage children to become more comfortable and familiar with it.
- Throughout the early grades, time, materials, and resources should be provided with two goals: (a) to support daily independent reading of texts selected to be of particular interest for the individual student, and beneath the individual student's frustration level, in order to consolidate the student's capacity for independent reading and (b) to support daily assisted or supported reading and rereading of texts that are slightly more difficult in wording or in linguistic, rhetorical, or conceptual structure in order to promote advances in the student's capabilities.
- Throughout the early grades, schools should promote independent reading outside school by such means as daily at-home reading assignments and expectations, summer reading lists, encouraging parent involvement, and by working with community groups, including public librarians, who share this goal.

Promoting Literacy Development in Preschool and Kindergarten

It is clear from research that the process of learning to read is a lengthy one that begins very early in life. Given the importance identified in the research literature of starting school motivated to read and with the prerequisite language and early literacy skills, the committee recommends that all children, especially those at risk for reading difficulties, should have access to early childhood environments that promote language and literacy growth and that address a variety of skills that have been identified as predictors of later reading achievement. Preschools and other group-care settings for young children often

provide relatively impoverished language and literacy environments, in particular those available to families with limited economic resources. As ever more young children are entering group-care settings pursuant to expectations that their mothers will join the work force, it becomes critical that the preschool opportunities available to lower-income families be designed in ways that support language and literacy development.

Preschool programs, even those designed specifically as interventions for children at risk of reading difficulties, should be designed to provide optimal support for cognitive, language, and social development. Within this broad focus, however, ample attention should be paid to skills that are known to predict future reading achievement, especially those for which a causal role has been demonstrated. Similarly, and for the same reasons, kindergarten instruction should be designed to stimulate verbal interaction, to enrich children's vocabularies, to encourage talk about books, to provide practice with the sound structure of words, to develop knowledge about print, including the production and recognition of letters, and to generate familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading.

Children who will probably need additional support for early language and literacy development should receive it as early as possible. Pediatricians, social workers, speech-language therapists, and other preschool practitioners should receive research-based guidelines to assist them to be alert for signs that children are having difficulties acquiring early language and literacy skills. Parents, relatives, neighbours, and friends can also play a role in identifying children who need assistance. Through adult education programs, public service media, instructional videos provided by pediatricians, and other means, parents can be informed about what skills and knowledge children should be acquiring at young ages, and about what to do and where to turn if there is concern that a child's development may be lagging behind in some respects.

Education and Professional Development for All Involved in Literacy Instruction

The critical importance of the teacher in the prevention of reading difficulties must be recognised, and efforts should be made to provide all teachers with adequate knowledge about reading and the knowledge and skill to teach reading or its developmental precursors. It is imperative that teachers at all grade levels understand the course of literacy development and the role of instruction in optimising literacy development.

Preschool teachers represent an important, and largely underutilised, resource in promoting literacy by supporting rich language and emergent literacy skills. Early childhood educators should not try to replicate the formal reading instruction provided in schools.

The preschool and primary school teacher's knowledge and experience, as well as the support provided to the teacher, are central to achieving the goal of primary prevention of reading difficulties. Each of these may vary according to where the teacher is in his or her professional development. A critical component in the preparation of pre-service teachers is supervised, relevant, clinical experience providing ongoing guidance and feedback, so they develop the ability to integrate and apply their knowledge in practice.

Teachers need to be knowledgeable about the research foundations of reading. Collaborative support by the teacher preparation institution and the field placement is

essential. A critical component for novice teachers is the support of mentors who have demonstrated records of success in teaching reading.

Professional development should not be conceived as something that ends with graduation from a teacher preparation program, nor as something that happens primarily in graduate classrooms or even during in-service activities. Rather, ongoing support from colleagues and specialists, as well as regular opportunities for self-examination and reflection, are critical components of the career-long development of excellent teachers.

APPENDIX 5:

KEY FEATURES OF THE LIMPOPO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME (STP) AND STRATEGY FOR LITERACY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The School Transformation Programme (STP)

A unique feature of the STP adopted by Limpopo (also accepting its ever-evolving status at the time of writing this) is the integration and coherence it achieved over time and across roleplayers (or domains).

In the first instance, the programme managed to identify and take further any positive developments in education that had been worked out and highlighted over many previous decades. These include: the need to perceive teacher-focused training and development within context and as sets of integrated activity; the (whole-)school development emphasis on sustainable change and improvement within communities of learners and parents immediately pre-1994; the system-based imbeddedness of school dynamics within especially district and provincial (and other) structures that became possible once the democratisation and integration of the system became a reality in the middle 1990s, largely as a force of centralisation and standardisation; and the subsequent current implementation thrusts aimed at substantive continued transformation on all fronts. The present phase in particular integrates policy, structures, local demand at school level, curriculum, governance, management, community involvement, and the accompanying processes and values mainly related to strategic, reflective, and assessment modalities.

In the second instance, the domains and roleplayers have been brought together in the STP and focused towards quality and success as a set of interacting functions arranged as concentric circles around important central features. As a result, learners are surrounded by the facilities and resources, activities and processes, structures, and much more, that would support successful learning (and their own general welfare). These elements also include leadership, management and governance through school management teams and school governing bodies, support and involvement from the broader community, and especially measures and means to ensure curriculum delivery. Circuit, district, provincial and national structures exist to facilitate all the foregoing. A keystone is making the programme operational through multi-functional teams.

The deployment of these teams and the strategy as a whole embody, towards optimal coherence in the model for school transformation, (i) the various operational areas (leadership, management, governance, curriculum, learner welfare and community development), (ii) roleplayers (principals, school management teams and governing bodies, parents, the community, educators and learners) and (iii) strategic leverage points (attitudes and values, clustering of schools, peer-support to professional staff, common learning programmes and assessment, and the multi-functional teams) designated as the three dimensions within which the programme is being operationalised. All training, materials, team composition decisions, action plans and structures are derived from this framework. A range of formats, templates, procedures and techniques has been made concrete and available, almost as a toolkit, through the "Manual" part of the STP documents referred to above.

Strategy for Literacy in Primary Schools

The strategy document sets its own purpose as that of providing “guidelines and action points on how best to improve” literacy in the Province and to “assist in bridging the gap between delivery of the RNCS (NCS) and the different programmes and strategies for Literacy”. Specific reference is made throughout to the existing situation, the intended one, and the steps required to move from the one to the other. The elements of listening and speaking, in support of developing the reading and writing skills elements, are accepted as the four main components of a united endeavour. As such, literacy is recognised as the toolkit that learners require to unlock (or “read”) their future world. It comprises the required equipment for achieving positively in terms of learners’ coping with the demands of all further learning/schooling, the economy and broader society. It is therefore also key to personal development and growth.

Within the strategy, a number of important sub-components are addressed. These include: different approaches to literacy (in articulation with the NCS for Grades R to 9 in particular, and attending to classroom teaching practices to some extent⁵); teacher training and support (in order to enhance the human resource capacity of the system, particularly amidst the challenges of multilingualism, and putting the focus on appropriate and flexible analysis and satisfaction of needs across grades, phases and learning areas, applied competences, user-friendly training materials, classroom support and mentoring, orientation or induction programmes, continuous development, the establishment of resource centres and sites, and own reading behaviour); resource provision (including improved availability and access at teacher and learner level, a relevant spread across the indigenous languages, central facilitation and regular monitoring); language-policy inputs (especially the relation between conceptual growth among learners and literacy levels in two or more relevant languages, and the related questions about the most appropriate languages (and level of introduction) selected as learning areas and for learning and teaching, and the resulting implications relating to examinations and assessment, and learner support materials); community support (with children and parents valuing and sharing a culture of reading, also for enjoyment, and including specific school- and classroom-based techniques as well as attempts to increase adult literacy levels); and monitoring and evaluation (to ensure that the literacy initiatives and achievements stay on track at provincial and school level, with the central foci being the implementation and success of the strategy at an overall level, and in terms of teacher competence and learner achievement).

A specific appeal is made in the strategy to everyone at whichever level of the system to take appropriate ownership of and responsibility for their role in the pursuit and achievement of the relevant part(s) of its implementation.⁶

⁵ A balanced approach to Foundation Phase practices (“all methods that work”) is followed, with emergent literacy, phonics, sentence, language experience, and in principle, also the text-based, communicative, critical, social, academic and inclusive elements, present in a systematic and informed (own emphasis) way. During the Intermediate and Senior Phases, the text-based, communicative, critical, social, academic and inclusive approaches obviously become much more central and structured.

⁶ If any critical comment could be made at this point, although the objectives and outcomes of the strategy are fairly tightly formulated, it would be that the operational side of the programme is being left at a level of detail short of what would be desirable to enable the participants at the levels closest to the learners in terms of direct classroom interaction to feel secure about their roles.

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