POOR READING DEVELOPMENT AMONGST GRADE SIX LEARNERS IN SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

by

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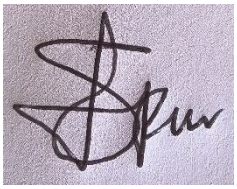
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to both my late maternal and paternal grandparents, as well as to my siblings, parents and son.

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation titled "*Poor reading development amongst Grade six learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa*" hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum Studies, has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.



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M.R. MOETJI **Date**

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ABSTRACT

Poor reading development is one of the biggest challenges that learners face in schools. It has become one of the dominant sociological imperatives, as poor reading skills lead to many educational and social problems at rural primary schools in Limpopo Province. The purpose of this study was to explore the causes of poor reading development among Grade six learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. This multiple case study addressed this knowledge gap by exploring the lived experiences of six teachers in Sekhukhune East District. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and observations. This study revealed reading development challenges faced by learners such as grammar and spelling, pronunciation, punctuation and vocabulary. Furthermore, the study revealed factors inhibiting teachers and learners from effective teaching and learning of reading such as lack of resources and motivation, poor instructional leadership, poor foundation, teaching methods, resources and language interference, internal and external policy influence, environmental factors, socio-economic factors and parental involvement. The study recommends that teachers should use teamwork, technology, stakeholders' assistance and teaching methods and extra lessons to address learners' reading development challenges. The study further provides eight recommendations relating to curriculum developers and the Department of Basic Education, and implications for future research.

Keywords: English Language Teachers; Sepedi Language Teachers; reading; reading development; Grade six learners

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
ANA	Annual National Assessment
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
C2005	Curriculum 2005
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CBE	Complementary Basic Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DEAR	Drop Everything and Read
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFAL	English First Additional Language
EST	Ecological Systems Theory
LiEP	Language-in-Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Teaching and Learning
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NES	National School Effectiveness Study
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NAEYC	National Association for the Education of Young Children
OBE	Outcomes-Based Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PSRIP	Primary School Reading Improvement Plan
RANA	Reading and Numeracy Activity
RESEP	Research on Socio-Economic Policy
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SA-SAMS	South African School Admission Management System
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SGB	School Governing Body
SHL	Sepedi Home Language
SLT	Sepedi Language Teacher
SMT	School Management Team
SPTD	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma
SSR	Sustained Silent Reading
TREC	Turfloop Research Ethics Committee
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The history of politics in South Africa has negatively influenced the quality of education and literacy (Day, Sammons & Gorgen, 2020). In an effort to enhance teaching and learning after 1994, educational reform resulted in the implementation of several curriculum models, including Curriculum 2005 (C2005), the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and currently the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), introduced at various stages (Eyitayo, 2022). Noticeably, with each curriculum reform or revision, *inter alia,* the government of South Africa aimed to provide quality education for all but to, address the issue of illiteracy. This could be done by using literacy and reading campaigns (for example, Drop All and Read 2015, Read to Lead in 2015, National Reading Strategy in 2009, etc. Despite these efforts implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), literacy levels, specifically the ability to read for meaning among learners is still reported to be low (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS, 2023). The results from PIRLS support teachers' beliefs that learners do not have well-developed reading abilities (Olifant, Cekiso & Rautenbach, 2019).

Research by Olifant *et al*. (2019), and Khoza-Shangase and Mophosho (2019) conducted in a rural province of South Africa evaluating learners' reading performance in English and Setswana, revealed that learners performed poorly in reading comprehension in both languages. It was also reported that most learners perform extremely poorly in literacy assessments, especially primary school learners in comparative and standardised international and national assessments (Olifant, et al., 2019). The most recent PIRLS report revealed that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners were unable to read for comprehension in English as First Additional Language in 2021 (Van Staden, Roux & Tshele, 2023). Consequently, South Africa ranked last out of 57 countries that participated in the study. Noticeably, the problem of poor reading development is not solved by progressing learners to higher Grades. The PIRLS 2023 report shows that 56% of Grade 6 learners in South Africa have not achieved the lowest benchmark in tasks where they had to find information or replicate

essential information in-text (Van Staden *et al.,* 2023). According to PIRLS 2023, the Limpopo Province Grade 6 learners were rated the second lowest performers, (Van Staden *et al.,* 2023).

The National School Effectiveness Study (NES) (Taylor, 2011) for Grades 3-5 and the Annual National Assessments (ANA) (DBE, 2011) for Grades 1-6, literacy test scores at the national average level of 30-35% have been the standard for the nation (Khosa, 2022). The Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ, 2017) report showed that results on analytical reading and reading levels in all nine provinces in South Africa were low. Limpopo province performed poorly, with only 0.7% of the learners capable of reading analytically (Van der Berg, Wills, Selkirk, Adams & Van Wyk, 2019).

Despite the initiatives being implemented, the outcomes observed did not improve reading for comprehension scale. The National Reading Strategy emphasised the significance of teaching learners how to read at an early age and provided adequate reading resources for all languages. However, PIRLS 2016 and 2021 showed slight improvements, with over 78% (2016) and 81% (2021) of Grade 4 learners unable to read for comprehension (Van Staden et al., 2023). The Drop All and Read campaign ensured schools had a special time for reading only. The monitoring of Drop All and Read campaign was not successfully implemented because teaching time was sacrificed, which led to learners performing poorly (DBE, 2018). The PSRIP was implemented in over 1,600 schools, which had limited impact in foundation phase reading points where thorough training and written lesson plans were practiced (Spaull et al., 2020), but these improvements were not adequate to change national trends. The Read to Lead campaign improved community and school-based reading events, dispersed books, and enhanced support for teachers. However, autonomous assessments found no important reading improvements or outcomes on literacy, particularly in rural provinces such as Limpopo and Eastern Cape (World Bank, 2021).

In addition, the Parliament of South Africa's Portfolio Committee on Basic Education delegation 2024 assessment of schools' readiness observed that most schools in the Sekhukhune district were overcrowded, had problems relating to admissions and some infrastructure concerns. These observations may disturb reading development in learners.

Noticeably, South Africa's literacy crisis remains a pressing challenge, with national and international assessments showing that the majority of learners are unable to read for meaning by the end of the early grades (DBE, 2023; Spaull & Pretorius, 2022). This has far-reaching consequences for learners' academic progression, as poor foundational reading affects learning performances and worsens educational inequality, and reduces long-term employment prospects (Spaull & Pretorius, 2022). The education system of South Africa has made radical changes towards online learning; thus, learners will require reading skills early to be able to find relevant academic information on the internet. Teachers emphasise that overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching and learning materials, and learners' poor early reading skills delay the teaching of reading successfully (Dagada, 2022). Policymakers have responded by prioritising literacy improvement through initiatives such as the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) and the National Reading Plan hoping that these assist learners to be able to read (DBE, 2022). Communities and civil society organisations also recognise reading as a key driver of social flexibility, encouraging culturally appropriate learning materials and greater parental involvement.

As evident from this background information, South Africa has a reading challenge among learners. Of concern is that despite various initiatives to develop reading in schools, South African learners continue to perform poorly in reading. As such, the researcher felt that it was important to investigate the causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners. Therefore, this study sought to contribute to reading in South Africa by exploring reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Reading is a crucial skill that aids learners in finding and communicating information. Reading proficiency influences the teaching and learning process. Reading proficiency evaluates the ability to comprehend, apply and analyse text to attain objectives, acquire knowledge and potential, and actively engage in society, as reported in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2021). Reading requires decoding abilities, which means that learners have the ability to translate the written letters and words into meaningful sounds to understand what they are reading. Developing decoding skills leads to comprehension, which is understanding text, interacting with text, and ultimately enjoying the text. Despite the significance of

reading in teaching and learning, the reading performance of South African learners is below the PISA (2021) and PIRLS (2023) benchmarks. South African learners' reading proficiency has come under scrutiny because of their subpar performance compared to their peers internationally (University of Pretoria, 16 May 2023). In PIRLS (2023), the results obtained by South African Grade 6 learners depicted a dismal picture of their reading abilities. Most learners were unable to read for meaning (PIRLS, 2023). This is even more evident in the rural province of Limpopo where a mere 0.7% of learners in Grade 6 are able to read for meaning. This study sought to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District Limpopo Province, South Africa. The researcher argues that once context-based causes of poor reading are known, direct interventions to solve such problems might be more productive and efficient.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study's significance is threefold, namely: theoretical, empirical and practical.

1.3.1 Theoretical Significance

The theoretical value of this study on poor reading development will inform academic stakeholders about the intellectual, linguistic, pedagogical and social systems that contribute to challenges in reading development in South Africa. This study further expands the current literature on poor reading development, thereby strengthening the basis for the initiation of better reading development interventions, instructional practices and policy decisions aimed at enhancing reading capabilities among learners.

1.3.2 Empirical Significance

This study contributes to the reading development of learners, especially the 2024 cohort of Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. As teachers' lack of support for learners with reading difficulties is recognised, this could be improved. Curriculum specialists/subject advisors will benefit from this study in addressing barriers contributing to poor reading development in the Sekhukhune East District once the dissertation is made available to the District Director after official publication.

. The findings may assist participant schools in identifying intervention and support needed for teachers, learners and school management team (SMT) in addressing factors that hinder learners from acquiring good reading skills, such as the correct use of punctuation, spelling, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Additionally, the findings will

provide complementary educational practices to learners with special needs. By outlining these critical issues through empirical research, this study may guide policymakers and educational stakeholders on effective solutions to improve reading.

1.3.3 Practical Significance

This study might assist education stakeholders with ways to solve reading challenges, mainly to equip primary school learners with basic reading skills irrespective of their abilities and learning challenges. Teachers will be made aware of the need to apply practical teaching strategies such as teaching vocabulary, and the use of synonyms and antonyms to extend learners' vocabulary so that they can recognise more words, which will increase their reading fluency. This study's recommendations are intended to inform policy reforms, promote effective teaching methodologies, and inspire stakeholder teamwork, eventually nurturing an all-inclusive educational environment that enables reading development and academic achievement for learners in the Sekhukhune East District.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question for this study was: *What are the causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners?*

1. Which challenges do Grade 6 learners experience in reading?
2. What are the factors contributing to reading challenges among Grade 6 learners?
3. Which measures can be used to improve learners' reading adeptness?

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Research objectives in qualitative research serve the purpose of maintaining focus of the research, guide data collection, and provide criteria for evaluating findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study intended to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To identify challenges that Grade 6 learners experience in reading;
2. To examine factors contributing to reading challenges among Grade 6 learners;
3. To propose measures to improve learners' reading adeptness.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section gives a synopsis of the research methodology followed in this research. This includes the research paradigm, research approach, and research design. In addition, research methods, such as population and sampling, data collection methods, data analysis are also outline. The final two sections relate to quality criteria and ethical considerations applied in this research study.

1.6.1 Research Paradigm

Erciyes (2020) defines a paradigm as a certain set of assumptions that bring inquiries that lead us in valid research. This study adopted the interpretivist paradigm because it allowed the researcher to acquire knowledge by seeking out experiences and participants' views in a certain social context that would answer the research questions (Darby, Fugate & Murray, 2019).

1.6.1 Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach focuses on comprehending the question of research as a humanistic or idealistic approach (Singh, 2021). The researcher used this approach to understand teachers' thoughts, beliefs, interactions and experiences on challenges faced by Grade 6 learners in reading in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.

1.6.2 Research Design

A multiple case study design was adopted for this study as it guided the researcher to explore the phenomenon of poor reading skills in context, using different sources for data collection (Swedberg, 2020). This approach is used to research the phenomenon in depth in the real-world context (Yin, 2018). The researcher employed it because the study involved an exploration of a single case of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners to gain more understanding of the problem. The aim of applying an exploratory research design was to discover meaningful themes that define the root of the problem and can lead to future research and theory development (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

1.7 RESEARCH METHODS

1.7.1 Population and Sampling

The population for this study was the language teachers and learners from primary schools situated in Sekhukhune East District. The participants teaching in three

primary schools in three circuits, were selected from this population through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to purposely select the participants who were the best representatives in providing information pertaining to the phenomenon under study (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). In this study, both Home Language (Sepedi) and First Additional Language (English) Grade 6 teachers and learners from one school in each of the three circuits were sampled. Thus, the participants consisted of six First Additional Language teachers. These participants met the requirements for purposive sampling as they were teaching in schools which reported poor reading results.

1.7.2 Data Collection Methods

In this study, data were generated using semi-structured interviews and observations. During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked questions pertaining to the phenomenon under research to elicit data from the participants' perspectives (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). To deepen data extracted from the teachers' responses from the semi-structured interviews, observations were also conducted as a further method of collecting data. Learners were observed during reading lessons in their classes.

1.2.3 Data Analysis

Data in this study were analysed using thematic data analysis. Thematic data analysis refers to a procedure whereby the researcher identifies patterns or main themes from the data collected which are significant for the study and can address the research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher followed the six phases of data analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2021). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory inspired the formation of themes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For instance, themes were created based on which microsystem, mesosystems exosystem, and macrosystem aspects that cause poor reading development.

1.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

Nyathi (2018) recommends four aspects to be addressed in trustworthiness namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

1.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is ensuring that the findings of the study are truthful and accurate. In ensuring credibility, the researcher used member checks (McKim, 2023). The

researcher triangulated findings by using semi-structured interviews and observations. The peer debriefing strategy was employed, where the researcher's supervisor reflected on the research process, data collection and preliminary findings for improved research quality (McMahon & Winch, 2018).

1.8.2 Transferability

Transferability is being able to use transfer or apply the findings to another study. Transferability was maintained by providing a thick description of how well the research context fits with other contexts by stating the purpose of the study and by aligning the literature with the problem (Nyathi, 2018).

1.8.3 Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and reliability of the findings. To achieve dependability, the researcher adopted stepwise replication and code re-code strategies. In stepwise replication, the researcher analysed the data separately with the supervisor and addressed the differences to improve dependability. The researcher also used the code re-code strategy, which is a research method that involves coding data, waiting for a period of time and then recoding the data and comparing the two data sets. The same data were coded on a new document with a week's gap in between to check if the highlighted points were noticed again (Lisle, Merenda & Gabbard, 2020).

1.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is a measure of how dependable and credible the findings are. Confirmability was maintained through direct quotation of participants' responses from original transcripts rather than the reporting on the researcher's ideas (Eldh, Årestedt & Berterö, 2020). In this study, the researcher used triangulation through analysing data collected from teachers' semi-structured interviews and observation checklists.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations in research are important because it protects participants, ensures the integrity of research and upholds academic standards. The following research ethics were maintained in this study:

1.9.1 Permission to conduct research

Ethical clearance certificate to conduct this study was sought from the University of Limpopo Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). Permission to conduct research was also granted by the school principals and the Limpopo Department of Basic Education.

1.9.2 Voluntary Participation

The participants were informed about the study and all that was involved. Participants' right to withdraw from the study was discussed. Data were collected in an environment that was physically and mentally safe.

1.9.3 Informed Consent

The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants and the principals of the participating schools (Arifin, 2018). Participants signed consent forms, learners signed assent forms to be observed in the classroom, and parents signed consent forms for their children to be observed by the researcher.

1.9.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Codes were used to represent participants and schools, and each were assigned pseudonyms such as SLT1, SLT2, SLT3 and ELT1, ELT2 and ELT3, as recommended by Itzik and Walsh (2023). Personal information is not published in this report.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter one introduced the study; outlined the overview of the study and its significance. The following chapter discusses and reviews relevant literature relating to the study at international, regional and national levels.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of international regional, national and provincial literature on reading development in schools. This chapter is based on the concept of reading, reading status in schools, learners' reading difficulties, causes of poor reading, measures to improve reading, the benefits of reading skills and the consequences of poor reading development.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF READING

This section presents literature on the meaning of reading, the history and development of reading, approaches to reading and challenges in reading proficiency and comprehension.

2.2.1 The Meaning of Reading

Reading has been conceptualised by various authors and researchers as a complex cognitive process that involves decoding symbols to derive meaning and facilitate communication. Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) define reading as the ability to combine letters to form syllables, use syllables to construct words and organise words into meaningful sentences that develop coherent and informative texts. This foundational definition emphasises the mechanics of reading, which are essential for comprehension and further learning. PIRLS defines reading as a fundamental skill transitioning from 'learning to read' to 'reading to learn', emphasising its role in academic success and lifelong literacy development (Mullis & Martin, 2019). PIRLS incorporated innovative digital tools to assess and advance global reading comprehension during the pandemic, highlighting the dynamic nature of reading literacy in modern contexts (van Staden *et al.,* 2021).

2.2.2 The History and Development of Reading

Historically, the practice of reading has evolved from oral traditions, where texts were meant to be read aloud, to silent reading in the modern era (Trinh Thi Ha, 2025).

Globally, reading development has its roots in formal education systems established in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Industrialised nations prioritised reading in schools to foster economic growth and public engagement (Spiel *et al.,* 2018). The Nordic

Council of Ministers (2024) report that countries with strong reading programmes such as Finland and South Korea, emphasise early interventions and resource allocation, demonstrating the importance of systemic support in fostering reading skills.

In Africa, the colonial era left a legacy of inequalities in educational development, with rural areas often neglected (Ricart-Huguet, 2021). Reading instruction was largely tied to religious missions, focusing on basic reading rather than promoting comprehensive reading skills (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018). Roy, Huq and Rob (2020) indicated that post-liberation efforts aimed to increase access to education, but challenges such as limited resources, teacher shortages and multilingual settings impeded progress. Recent initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063, emphasise improving reading levels by addressing systemic obstacles (Tanyu, 2024).

In South Africa, Chikoko and Mthembu (2021) report that the history of reading development is closely linked to the apartheid regime, which systematically underfunded schools in rural and black communities. Yet, Walker, Pearce, Boe, and Lawson (2019) reported that since 1994, efforts have been made to redress these inequalities. Issues such as overcrowded classrooms, unqualified teachers, unqualified management and insufficient access to learning materials have hindered the progress of reading development throughout South Africa (Arendse, 2020). The Department’s initiatives, such as the National Reading Strategy (DBE, 2008), revised in 2022, and the introduction of the Foundation for Learning Campaign, aimed to promote reading proficiency, but the gap between policy and implementation remains wide (Spaull & Pretorius, 2022).

2.2.3 Approaches to Reading

Reading approaches have diversified over time. Hoover and Tunmer (2020) categorised ‘Simple View of Reading’ into two primary components: decoding (recognising written words) and linguistic comprehension (understanding their meaning). A recent framework proposed by McCandlish (2024), ‘Reading Rope’, illustrates reading as an intertwining of foundational skills (for example, phonemic awareness, decoding) and higher-order cognitive skills (for example, comprehension, fluency).

2.2.4 Challenges in Reading Proficiency and Comprehension

Despite what is known in terms of the meaning, history and approaches to reading appear to be challenges that impede this process. Reading comprehension enables learners to process and understand text meaningfully. According to Park (2020)'s quasi-experimental design study conducted in a suburban area in South Korea, comprehension involves recalling critical details, making inferences and forming judgements - skills that are crucial for academic success. However, Westwood (2018) states that a lack of exposure to diverse reading materials and insufficient classroom support can hinder the development of these skills. Spencer and Wagner (2018) identified specific reading comprehension deficits among learners, where despite proficiency in decoding, they struggled to make sense of the text. These challenges show the multifaceted nature of reading and the need for tailored teaching approaches.

Reading for comprehension remains a reading difficulty across the globe. Indonesia's critically low reading competence is influenced by multiple factors, including limited reading programmes, insufficient access to engaging reading materials and a heavy reliance on rote learning within the education system (Renandya, Hamied & Nurkamto, 2018). In Indonesia, a survey research indicates that more than half of all teachers and head teachers possess only a 'novice' proficiency level in English, scoring between 10 and 250 on a 990-point scale (Renandya *et al.*, 2018). While specific statistics on English proficiency levels among teachers in various countries are limited, it is noteworthy that approximately 80% of English teachers worldwide are second language or foreign language speakers. According to Deng, Zhang and Mohamed (2023), schools in China show a demand for proficient English teachers, which has led to a preference for native English-speaking teachers over non-native counterparts.

Carter *et al*. (2024) assert that there is little development in English reading in Indonesian primary schools because the focus is on cultural lessons and learners have little prior knowledge relating to English as their second language. Regarding the negative outcomes associated with poor reading, Al-Yagon and Margalit (2019) noted that struggling readers frequently experience low self-esteem, which lowers their academic performance. Additionally, a learner's ability to solve problems is hindered by their level of reading for comprehension, as this is necessary for effective problem

solving (Mokoena, 2019). Park (2020) explains that reading comprehension is the ability to recall crucial specifics and form judgements and in order to engage in a democratic process such as getting a job, passing a test, or finishing school, these linked skills are helpful.

Syahabuddin, Yusny, and Zahara (2019) state that reading comprehension is one of the most difficult aspects of learning English in South African schools. Lack of prior knowledge also relates to reading comprehension that is below average (Spencer & Wagner, 2018). Spaull and Pretorius (2019) report that although most of the learners learn in English, they might not grasp everything they read in different English language texts. According to Nepando (2018), poor reading ability leads to learners failing to attain a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications, limiting their active participation in the economy. Spencer and Wagner (2018) found that learners present with specific reading comprehension deficits. These learners struggle to comprehend what they read despite the teacher's use of reading methods that are usually regarded as successful. It is usually the same learners that struggle with verbal language.

2.2.5 Reading Status in Schools

Despite of the different challenges associated with reading development in schools, countries have adopted different mechanisms to improve the status of reading in schools. Kenya has made efforts to improve reading outcomes with a programme called *Tusome* ('Let's Read' in Kiswahili), which focuses on providing textbooks and enhancing teacher training (Nguya, 2019). The initiative has shown promising results, with significant improvements in early-grade reading. However, regional inequalities and resource shortages persist, particularly in marginalised areas. Nigeria faces significant literacy and reading challenges due to large class sizes, a lack of trained teachers and limited access to books, especially in rural areas (Nguya, (2019). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2017), 58% of Nigerian children in primary schools struggle with basic reading skills. An initiative called the Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) targets early reading by training teachers and introducing locally relevant reading materials; however, challenges persist due to funding and implementation gaps (UNICEF Nigeria, 2021).

Ghana's Complementary Basic Education (CBE) programme aims to address the reading gap among out-of-school children (Shinohara, 2021). The programme incorporates culturally relevant teaching methods and materials to improve reading skills in local languages. Learners in this programme exhibit better reading fluency compared to their peers in traditional schools, highlighting the importance of language alignment in literacy education (Hwa, Kaffenberger & Silberstein, 2020). The review above illustrates that regionally, the struggle with foundational reading is exacerbated by socio-economic factors and systemic inefficiencies. However, innovative programmes such as *Tusome* in Kenya and CBE in Ghana demonstrate that targeted, well-implemented interventions can yield positive results.

In South Africa, Grade 7 results and poor reading achievement in lower grades can be traced through the South African School Admission Management System (SA-SAMS). The progression policy allows for learners to move on to the next grade without reaching the full level of competency expected in the current grade. This is a concern as Cekiso (2024) indicates that progressed learners are found to be ill-prepared to eventually handle the severity of higher-level studies at tertiary institutions, due to their low levels of reading proficiency. The DBE Annual Report 2020/2021 revealed the number of underperforming schools in the country. The results show that underperforming schools in Limpopo increased from 692 in 2018 to 735 in 2019 (DBE, 2020). This might well mean that the problem of poor reading development in South Africa is escalating.

2.3 PEDAGOGICAL READING DIFFICULTIES IN SCHOOLS

Reading development is a fundamental component of educational success, and challenges in this area can have far-reaching implications for learners' academic and personal growth. Reading is a multifaceted act demanding several years of practice to perform well. Bright (2021) states that effective reading comprises understanding, fluency, expertise in essential strategies and enthusiasm.

Pedagogical reading difficulties are obstacles that arise when teaching reading to students. Merga (2019) opines that struggling readers find it difficult to make meaning of text. Phala and Hugo (2022) pointed out the significance of teaching reading in the Foundation phase as a determinate of reading development in Grades 1-3. This section presents various reading difficulties identified in the literature, namely, listening

as a challenge to poor reading development, grammatical and spelling barriers and pronunciation, punctuation, and vocabulary.

2.3.1 Listening as a Challenge to Poor Reading Development

Reading development is represented by two basic components, namely, decoding (word recognition) and listening comprehension. This accounts for differences among learners about reading comprehension throughout development (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). The most dominant, yet rarely attended challenge, which contributes to poor reading development, is listening skills (Hasib, 2022).

2.3.2 Grammar, Spelling and Pronunciation

Grammar and spelling are crucial elements of reading development, as they significantly impact on learners' reading comprehension and fluency. Berry and Ernestus (2021) highlight the direct relationship between learners' ability to identify grammatical functions and their spelling skills. Researchers have found that errors in spelling often result from difficulties in recognising grammatical forms which, in turn, affects comprehension (Rahmanian & Kuperman, 2019). Shanahan (2019) emphasises the importance of teacher collaboration in addressing these issues and teachers need to work together to provide consistent and effective grammar and spelling instruction. Poor spelling and grammar not only hinder learners' ability to construct coherent sentences but also contribute to reading difficulties and comprehension issues (Demme, 2023).

Grammar and spelling are fundamental components of reading proficiency, impacting learners' ability to decode and comprehend texts (Chamalaun, Mirjam, & Ernestus, 2021). Demme (2023) points out that the interrelationship between grammar and spelling is crucial; errors in either can disrupt reading fluency and comprehension, as spelling is a core predictor of writing success. Teachers often report that grammatical issues are a significant barrier to reading, particularly in the South African context, where diverse linguistic backgrounds add complexity to grammar instruction (Nell, 2020).

Barnett, Connelly and Miller (2020) found that spelling and grammar errors in early education are strongly associated with long-term reading difficulties. Johnson and Walters (2019) advocate for early and consistent instruction in these areas to prevent future reading challenges. Effective grammar and spelling instruction is, therefore,

crucial for improving reading proficiency and preventing long-term literacy issues (Celik, 2019).

In South Africa, Jones, Moyo and Pillay (2020) found that many South African learners have foundational reading challenges, which are exacerbated by inconsistent grammar instruction and limited exposure to quality educational materials. This issue is further affected by the country's linguistic diversity, which requires learners to master home languages and first additional, leading to inconsistent grammatical skills and spelling errors (Nag, Vagh, Dulay & Snowling, 2019).

Pronunciation is integral to reading development, as it affects the learner's ability to decode and comprehend texts. According to Jiang, Smith and Carter (2021), pronunciation encompasses the production and perception of individual sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation. Effective pronunciation ensures accurate communication and enhances reading fluency. Zahra *et al.* (2024) emphasise the importance of phonetic and phonological aspects of speech in reading development. As Munro (2018) points out, accurate pronunciation is crucial for intelligibility and confidence in reading, while poor pronunciation in turn, affects the learner's ability to read fluently and comprehend texts, which may lead to reduced reading comprehension (Munro, 2018). Okoro and Nwafor (2022) found that in Nigeria, learners often face difficulties with spelling and grammar due to insufficient instructional resources and support.

In South Africa, pronunciation difficulties are common due to the country's linguistic diversity. Lin, MacLeod and Pollock (2023) noted that non-English speaking learners frequently struggle with English pronunciation because of their internalised home languages. This difficulty is compounded by inconsistent pronunciation instruction and limited exposure to native English speakers, leading to persistent pronunciation errors (Henderson & Ndlovu, 2022). Caisaguano Tigasi (2024) explains that the impact of these errors is significant, as poor pronunciation can affect reading fluency and overall comprehension.

Pronunciation challenges are not unique to South Africa. In Kenya, Mwangi (2020) found that learners face difficulties with English pronunciation because of the differences between English and the local language, which is Swahili. Mwangi (2020)

found this issue is influenced by inadequate pronunciation instruction and limited exposure to English-speaking environments.

2.3.3 Punctuation

Punctuation plays a vital role in clarifying the meaning of written language. According to Corr, Coleman, Sheldrick and Bunyan (2022), proper use of basic punctuation marks, such as commas, full stops and exclamation marks, helps readers understand the envisioned meaning of texts. Misuse or omission of punctuation marks can lead to confusion and miscommunication (Gibson, 2023). Effective teaching of punctuation is crucial for improving learners' ability to comprehend and engage with written texts. This was confirmed by Taylor and Evans (2021) when they found that misinterpretation of text could be ascribed to a lack of explicit instruction, learners reading sentences too quickly and a failure to understand the purpose of punctuation.

In Ghana, Gyau (2020) found that learners struggle with applying punctuation rules, which impacts their reading comprehension. Additionally, international research supports the importance of punctuation in reading development. Suliman (2019) found that punctuation requires clear instruction and regular practice to ensure learners understand the purpose and application of punctuation marks.

2.3.4 Vocabulary

International research reveals the critical role of vocabulary in reading development. An extended vocabulary is a key predictor of reading comprehension and overall literacy development. Morris and Huggins (2023) posit that learners with an extensive vocabulary are better equipped to understand and engage with texts. Bauer and Tang (2022) emphasise that explicit vocabulary instruction is essential for improving reading comprehension. Their study suggests various strategies for enhancing vocabulary knowledge, including the use of graphic organisers and contextual learning of explicit vocabulary instruction and targeted support. Brooks, Clenton and Fraser (2023) assert that an extensive vocabulary brings about enhanced performance in reading comprehension and in engaging more meaningfully with texts. This highlights the need for explicit vocabulary instruction to improve learners' reading comprehension and overall academic performance (Wang & Clark, 2023). Wagner and Quinn (2019) found that limited vocabulary knowledge significantly affects learners' reading comprehension. In Zimbabwe, Tembo (2024) found that learners struggle with vocabulary acquisition because of inadequate instructional resources and limited exposure. This implies that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often have

fewer opportunities to develop an extensive vocabulary, impacting on their overall literacy skills (DBE, 2020). Despite various studies on pedagogical reading difficulties in schools, there appears to be no known specific study that has looked at the causes of poor reading development in Grade 6 in the Sekhukhune East district, hence, the undertaking of this study.

2.4 CAUSES OF POOR READING

Various factors may affect learners' reading development, as found by Shumba and Gada (2018) in Zimbabwe. These include the family's socio-economic circumstances, level of poverty, availability of resources, teacher capability, parents' level of education, parental participation and the parents' attitudes toward education (Shumba & Gada, 2018). According to Dolean *et al.* (2019), poverty in the home may have a substantial influence on a learner's academic performance. When learners from low-income households arrive at school, their basic needs are usually unmet. For example, parents might not have sufficient income to buy their children food and stationery, and therefore reading materials such as story books are viewed as luxury items. This means that learners from low-earning households are mostly not exposed to reading leisure (Dolean *et al.,* 2019). Although a learner's family background does not determine the learner's academic achievement, Munir *et al.* (2023) found that a consistent number of learners from low-income households make insufficient academic progress and even leave school prematurely.

2.4.1 Socio-Economic Factors

In reviewing international literature, socio-economic circumstances were found to be a contributing factor in the early stages of learning in Indonesia, the United States and the United Kingdom (Muttaqin, 2018). Bradley (2022) reports that children from low-income families in the United States often enter formal schooling at an academic disadvantage compared to their more affluent peers. Similarly, the United Kingdom has one of the lowest spending levels on preschool education among advanced economies, which contributes to achievement gaps between children from different socio-economic backgrounds (Macmillan & Tominey, 2023). The exposure to learning when children are still young and the environment in which they grow matters significantly (Yoshikawa *et al.,* 2020). The motivation and proper food, health and shelter received from parents or primary caregivers, give learners a sense of personal competence (Gao, Tadesse & Khalid, 2022). Lervag *et al.* (2019) conducted a study in Romania wherein 7- to 9-year-old learners from severely poor backgrounds were

sampled and compared to Romanian and non-Romanian children with a higher socio-economic standard (SES). The children from poor SES performed poorly in reading and some of the challenges were absenteeism from school. This could be ascribed to a lack of means to reach school or even proper meals, and water to get ready for school (Lawson, Hook & Farah, 2018).

2.4.2 Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in reading development. In South Africa, Chimbutane (2018a) examined language barriers in multilingual classrooms, highlighting how socio-cultural factors impact reading development. Khoza-Shangase and Mophosho (2018) identified speech-language as a significant barrier to reading proficiency in South African schools. Munnik and Smith (2019) provide insight into parental perspectives on reading development in South African schools, revealing that socio-cultural factors influence parental involvement and support. This aligns with findings by Van der Berg *et al.* (2019) in their discussion on the need for context-specific interventions that consider socio-cultural and linguistic diversity in schools.

Family instability was also found to be a contributor to academic underachievement, including reading development. According to October (2023), divorce and family relocation, lack of a permanent residence, drug or alcohol misuse, chronic illness, violence, unemployed parents and parent illiteracy significantly affect concentration of learners in school, which reduces the development of their reading abilities. A study conducted by Izatullah, Nasir and Gul (2022) in Pakistan, found that vocabulary, language comprehension, proper language usage, proper sentence structure, reading, and spelling are all areas of language abilities that are closely associated with academic achievement.

2.4.3 Emotional Factors

Mitkovska and Popeska (2020) argue that motivation is a key factor in a learner's learning. Motivation determines the learner's attitude towards learning and holds the capacity for overcoming disturbances in order to learn. Srirahayu, Nurpratama, Handriana and Hartini (2021) found that Indonesian learners' interest in reading electronic books was not dependent on social influence or gender, but rather on each learner's emotional strength. Self-confidence and emotional adaptability are prerequisites for reading readiness (Srirahayu *et al.,* 2021). If learners are forced to read prematurely (that is, being pushed to do academic tasks), they may acquire unfavourable attitudes toward reading. Studies show that learners' failure to read

might lead to dread, worry, and low self-esteem, which are counter-productive in the acquisition of reading skills (Srirahayu *et al.,* 2021).

2.4.4 Overcrowded Classrooms

A study by Venketsamy (2023) found that large class sizes and overcrowding negatively affect the quality of education, making it challenging for teachers to provide adequate reading support to learners and manage resources effectively. Similarly, West and Meier (2020) highlighted that rising learner-educator ratios in South Africa have led to larger class sizes, which can impede effective teaching and learning. Normal adherence to the recommended ratio of learners per class will allow for more interaction between the teacher and learner, resulting in quality teaching and learning (Venketsamy, 2023). Likuru, Laurian and Mwila, Prospery (2022) report that optimal teaching is not possible in overcrowded classes. Vaughn and Fletcher (2020) caution that high learner-teacher ratios, combined with poor physical conditions and inadequate facilities for teaching and learning, with neither library nor print-rich classrooms, have a detrimental effect on reading instruction.

2.4.5 Cooperation Between Home and School

Chen, Kong, Gao and Mo (2018) point out that a learner's motivation to read is not enough. Chand and Chand (2024) concur with Chen *et al.* (2018) to emphasise that the school, as well as the parents, should encourage a good attitude toward reading. Yet, teachers report that parents do not encourage their children to read at home. Boonk, Gijselaers, Ritzen and Brand-Gruwel (2018) underscore the impact of the home on children's reading ability, asserting that children who have literacy experiences from birth have an advantage in vocabulary development, reading and comprehension over those who do not have literacy influences at home. They concluded that children from households where the parents' reading levels and habits are low are more likely to have less motivation to read.

According to Boonk *et al.* (2018), teachers reported a reluctance among colleagues to read a variety of texts in the classroom. This would stimulate learners to have an active interest in reading a range of texts (Brown, Palincsar & Purcell, 2020). In the South African context, Dolean *et al.* (2019), Alfred, Kiggundu, Musa and Wamaungo (2023) and Ngozwana, Machobane, Chauke and Lepholletse (2024)found that parental involvement is crucial to academic achievement. Unfortunately, the three studies mentioned also found that socio-economic factors impact on parental involvement. Dolean *et al.* (2019) investigated how SES affects reading proficiency, revealing that

learners from disadvantaged backgrounds often face greater challenges in developing reading skills. This puts more pressure on the teacher and the school to assist the learner with reading.

2.4.6 Educational Policies and Curriculum Implementation

International studies have shown that ineffective curriculum design and lack of support for teachers impact substantially on the development of reading. Santana, Davis and Joseph (2020) found that rigid adherence to standardised curricula without flexibility for differentiated instruction can hinder reading development, especially among diverse student populations. The report emphasises the importance of adaptive teaching methods tailored to individual learning needs to enhance reading proficiency. When learners do not receive personalised reading strategies for their specific learning barriers, most will not succeed (Trikoz, 2022). Ganapathi (2018) reports that it is mainly in poorly resourced primary schools that differentiated instruction is not offered, as teachers do not have enough reading materials to cater for varying learning needs. Numerous studies show the relationship between poor curriculum implementation and challenges in reading development. A study by Piper *et al*. (2018) on early primary school reading in Kenya and Uganda, argues that poor reading development can be caused by unrealistic expectations in education policies. Similarly, Lyytinen (2019) opines that a lack of awareness regarding the impact of language on learning to read has affected education policies in Sub-Saharan Africa. Furthermore, a report by the World Bank (2022) discusses unrealistic expectations in education policies and the impact thereof on reading development, emphasising the need for policies that align with classroom realities. Kaviti (2018) states that a curriculum is usually developed with no focus on different linguistic and cultural circumstances of African learners. Therefore, the medium of instruction usually is a language that learners do not speak fluently. Furthermore, Govender (2018) argues that insufficient training of teachers and lack of support lead to ineffective curriculum implementation as teachers struggle to adjust to curriculum modifications while dealing with overcrowded classrooms. Therefore, most learners from rural schools in Africa struggle with reading fluency and comprehension.

In South Africa, the challenges in reading development among primary school learners is a daily concern. Motseke, Maja and Meeran (2024) state that the implementation of programmes designed to address reading and curriculum policies in schools is frequently unreliable, especially in disadvantaged villages. Baloyi (2020) discusses the

impact of outcomes-based education (OBE) on curriculum changes, noting that while the curriculum has evolved, challenges in implementation persist. Ajani (2021) examined teachers' experiences with CAPS and found that, while CAPS provides a structured approach to education, practical challenges often hinder its effectiveness in improving reading development.

Although the DBE develops policies such as CAPS to improve the standard of education in South Africa, a gap exists between the policy and implementation. According to Sepadi and Molapo (2024), teachers generally have a positive outlook on the revised curriculum policy. However, teachers encounter difficulties with inadequate resources, such as shortages of teachers, textbooks, and overcrowded classrooms.

Educational policies and curriculum implementation also play a significant role in reading development. The Primary School Reading Improvement Plan (PSRIP), implemented by the Department (DBE, 2019), aimed to address reading deficits through targeted interventions and policy initiatives. However, The PSRIP has managed to provide English Language Teachers with teaching material either through soft or hard copy (National Education Collaboration Trust, 2023). However, training needs to be provided towards full implementation. Spaull (2023) indicates that basic literacy among children in South Africa has declined, highlighting the persistent nature of these challenges.

The Department of Basic Education has introduced a policy of progression of learners in public schools to ensure that learners repeat a grade for their benefit or are progressed otherwise (Veriava & Ally, 2021). However, Senoge (2023) reports that this policy has brought many challenges in schools since it is not fully implemented as SMTs were not sufficiently trained on its implementation. The policy stipulates that learners should not spend more than four years in a phase. Therefore, learners who have repeated a grade in each phase must be progressed to the next grade with necessary support (Mogale & Malatji, 2023). The School-Based Support Team (SBST) should keep a file on the learner and meet with the learners' parents to discuss the support the learner needs. However, a study by Mpanza and Govender (2022) found that SBSTs often find it difficult to provide adequate support to learners, which leads to learning difficulties, including reading difficulties, in higher primary school grades.

In summary, this section's review hints at socio-economic, socio-cultural, and emotional factors, overcrowded classrooms**,** poor cooperation between home and

school educational policies, and curriculum implementation as the main causes of poor reading development in schools in different countries, including South Africa. However, despite the coverage of South Africa, the context in the country is important. As such, it could not be assumed that Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East district are experiencing the same challenges when no known study has examined them. This study sought to address this knowledge gap by exploring poor reading development of Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East district, Limpopo province, South Africa.

2.5 MEASURES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF READING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

This section of the literature review reports on different measures to improve the quality of reading in primary schools. These measures are as follows:

1. Improve the understanding of language issues,
2. ECD as the cause of poor reading development,
3. Teacher collaboration,
4. Mentoring and coaching,
5. Reading interventions,
6. Instructional practices,
7. Stimulating reading interest, and
8. The adoption of technology/digital tools.

2.5.1 Improve the Understanding of Language Issues

One of the first issues to consider with the teaching of reading is the language policy. Within the South African context, the policy on language is that all learners from Grades 1 to 3 learn in their home language and on entering Grade 4, they transition to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), which could be English or Afrikaans, according to the Language-in-Education Policy (DoE,1997). As reported by Wildsmith-Cromarty and Balfour (2019), the timing of switching to English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is crucial. This move has caused major issues with language and reading development once the learners move into the Intermediate Phase. Murray and Christison (2019) argue that reducing language difficulties experienced by most learners will require language policies informed by true classroom experiences.

Against this background, the quality of teaching languages in the Foundation Phase must be enhanced by improving the standard of Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities (NAEYC, 2022; Reswari &Syakuro, 2024). Lennox, Westerveld and Trembath (2018) recommend that all South African children should have access to ECD facilities that are regularly monitored and adequately supported to provide a solid foundation for learning. A study by Hammond (2024) revealed the importance of early-grade literacy interventions.

The Vietnamese language reading improvement programme focuses on reading and spelling. Therefore, learners are taught to combine phonemes for reading and segments for spelling (Pham & Snow, 2021). Trinh Thi Ha (2021) proposed a number of measures to influence the teaching on reading comprehension in order to improve the quality of reading for the Grade 1 learners.

Piper *et al.* (2018) recommended that instructional programmes should be flexible and inclusive, addressing the individual needs of learners who may have gaps in foundational literacy skills. In a related study, Nag *et al.* (2024) found that reading interventions that use systematic phonics instruction significantly improve literacy levels in low- and middle-income countries.

2.5.2 ECD as a Possible Cause of Poor Reading Development

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) for children from birth to four years focuses on closing foundational gaps, but its implementation is unreliable, notably in rural areas with lack of reading resources (DBE, 2021). Many rural ECD centres do not have adequate resources, trained teachers and appropriate learning tools to support early literacy development (DBE, 2020a). Consequently, a study conducted by Roberts *et al.* (2022) indicates that when evidence-based practices are applied consistently, it can significantly enhance the reading skills of learners in early grades by focusing on foundational reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics and vocabulary development.

2.5.3 Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration plays a vital role in improving reading development. Oczkus (2018) indicates that collaborative efforts among teachers can lead to sharing a range of reading strategies and instructional practices, and sharing of books, posters and other resources, which would lead to an effective implementation of a reading intervention. Myeni (2022) reports that a supportive and collaborative classroom

environment can enhance learners' motivation and engagement in reading but cautioned that the effectiveness of such an environment depends on the quality of teacher collaboration and the resources available.

2.5.4 Mentoring and Coaching

According to Ali, Wahi and Yamat (2018), explicit fluency coaching which is dependent on teachers' teaching skills, entails providing learners with personalised feedback on their reading. This means that coaching and mentoring can assist learners with reading aloud, fluency, pronunciation and reading for meaning (Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018).

Mudzielwana (2020) explains that reading involves both the cognitive (the intellect) and the emotional (the emotions) sense of a reader. Therefore, a positive and comfortable reading environment must be created as well since the emotional domain has a huge influence on how the cognitive domain will function. Chow, Hui and Chui (2018) suggest that teachers need to devise creative and interesting reading activities to improve learners' attitude towards reading. Hedgcock and Ferris (2018) contend that teachers who allow learners to read for enjoyment, seize every chance to introduce learners to reading, and do all in their power to make reading as pleasurable as possible and cultivate a lasting love for reading. More importantly, the teacher must provide age-appropriate materials that give learners purpose for reading. This may involve reading fiction books at an age-appropriate level from the library, an article about their favourite programme, or even reading gaming instructions (Kucirkova, 2019).

2.5.6 Reading interventions

Various interventions targeting the improvement of reading are proposed by different scholars and governments. This subsection presents interventions such as Drop Everything and Read (DEAR). This is a programme where a whole school is expected to practice reading in and outside the classroom. The Room to Read programme is an intervention implemented to promote reading in primary schools through the development of functional libraries and training teachers to practise different types of reading during the library period.

2.5.6.1 Drop Everything and Read

Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) is a literacy programme which motivates all educational stakeholders to create time to read any reading material in a day. This programme is mostly practised in primary schools that need to promote a positive

reading environment. Time is set aside according to availability on the school's timetable, but the aim is for all teachers and learners to cease their daily activities and read for 15 to 40 minutes. DEAR assists in developing a culture that promotes reading and the enjoyment of reading (Angelia *et al.*, 2024).

2.5.6.2 Room to Read

The Room to Read programme focuses on nurturing foundational learning skills such as enhancing reading development for learners from poor communities (roomtoread.org). The Room to Read Literacy Programme, launched in 2000 has been implemented in 23 countries, giving over 45 million learners thus far access to reading opportunities. The programme focuses on training and coaching teachers, advocating for books in local languages, and providing schools with ideas to design and improve libraries (roomtoread.org).

2.5.7 Instructional Practices

Effective instructional practices are pivotal in fostering reading development. According to Johnson and Williams (2022), evidence-based reading programmes are crucial for struggling readers. A synthesis of best-evidence programmes by Johnson and Williams (2022) indicates that interventions such as phonics-based instruction and structured reading curricula can significantly improve reading outcomes. In South Africa, Van Staden (2019) examined the impact of reading interventions in the Foundation Phase, revealing that targeted interventions tailored to learners' specific needs can enhance reading proficiency. Deacon, D'Angiulli and Kirsch (2018) compiled a meta-analysis of reading interventions, emphasising the importance of adapting strategies to diverse learners. This aligns with the findings of Clement and Otieno (2024) that confirm phonics-based instruction, when effectively implemented, can enhance reading proficiency in Tanzanian primary schools.

2.5.8 Stimulating Reading Interest

Govender (2018) considers reading a fundamental skill that every learner should possess. Hence, every effort should be made to promote the development of reading in children from an early age. According to Brown (2021), the influence of parents and friends on children is far greater than that of schools and teachers, which means that reading interest should be nurtured firstly in the home with parental involvement. This follows on findings by Chen *et al.* (2018) that reading development is dependent on social class and parental support.

According to McGinnity *et al.* (2022), the development of reading for children between the ages of 3 and 9 in Ireland is determined by parental involvement. The same authors further found that gender wise, boys are more prone to struggling with reading than girls, even when parents assisted with reading.

Jubaidah, Asrul and Amaniarsih (2024) point to fixed, standardised reading methods which have been used for years in schools as enhancers of good reading development such as the Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) strategy which increases learners' reading interest because learners have free choice of reading material and read independently. Huettig and Pickering (2019) showed that continuous reading breeds great readers. This means that the development of a good reading habit is critical as it will ensure intellectual growth and practical reading success. According to Hill (2020), reading books teach learners new things about new places, helps to solve problems, increases vocabulary and validates their own reasoning, enabling them to think more objectively about what is acceptable and unacceptable in society. Similarly, King (2021) explains that the greatest advantage of reading is the ability to comprehend, rather than pass judgement.

2.5.3 The Adoption of Technology/Digital Tools

The role of technology in enhancing reading development is noteworthy. Beers (2019) explored the potential of technology to engage learners in improving reading skills. Similarly, Kohnke (2020) showed that technology can enhance language learning, by providing additional resources and tools for reading instruction. Tasneem (2022) highlighted the effectiveness of technology-enhanced instruction in improving reading comprehension, suggesting that digital tools can complement traditional teaching methods. Technology has the ability to provide a variety of learning games and applications for learning. It is, therefore, advisable to make use of educational applications which cater for different cognitive levels, making it a flexible resource. For instance, learners who struggle with reading need to be able to access interactive and engaging experiences through tools like e-books, audiobooks, text-to-speech features, educational apps, and simple phonetic games (Roberts *et al.,* 2022).

Technology caters for visual and auditory learners simultaneously, saving instructional time. Chadijah *et al*. (2023) endeavoured to enhance learners' reading capabilities through the use of electronic gadgets for fast reading and reading for understanding. Although learners preferred the electronic method since it is easy to use, the findings

revealed average results on both the pace of reading as well as reading comprehension. However, the effectiveness of technology in reading development depends on its integration into the curriculum and the availability of resources. Haleem, Javaid, Qadri, and Suman (2022) emphasise that while book access and digital tools can support reading development, these resources must be accompanied by effective teaching practices and parental involvement to achieve significant improvements.

Literature reviewed indicates that there are various measures used to improve reading development in schools. This study argues that any measure developed to improve reading development should align with the context of the problem. Hence, rural schools such as those in the Sekhukhune East district may be having unique challenges that measures presented here may not solve. Consequently, a study of this nature was conducted to explore poor reading development of Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East district and suggest contextual recommendations to solve such challenges.

2.6 THE BENEFITS OF READING SKILLS

Smith and Johnson (2019) consider reading a foundational skill that has the ability to shape individuals and communities in profound ways. Beyond individual achievements, good reading skills elevate community standards by fostering informed citizenship and contributing to economic development through literate citizens. Cultivating an interest in reading enriches intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning, creating a ripple effect that influences societal progress and economic stability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This review explores these dimensions, emphasising the transformative power of literacy on both individual and communal levels.

2.6.1 Learners' Personal Growth

Medranda-Morales, Mieles and Guevara (2023) assert that well-developed reading skills enhance cognitive abilities, such as critical thinking and comprehension, which are essential for academic success. Similarly, Cekiso (2024) found that skilled readers often possess greater self-confidence, because they gain a sense of accomplishment from understanding what they read and engaging with various texts. This self-assurance can positively influence other areas of personal development, including

emotional regulation and social interactions. This shows that reading skills are crucial for the personal growth of learners, especially in the context of Grade 6 learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo, South Africa, where poor reading development is evident.

2.6.2 Reading and Improved Academic Achievement

Huettig and Pickering (2019) outline the benefits of reading as the ability to make predictions about texts, and an enhanced understanding of the spoken language. Pretorius and Stoffelsma (2017) state that learners who struggle with reading may find it challenging to interpret tasks and, as a result, perform poorly in written assessments. This highlights the importance of incorporating reading interventions and strategies within the classroom to enable learners to become independent readers and self-reliant in their studies.

2.6.3 Advantages of Having Interest in Reading

According to Cremin (2020), learners who attain an avid reading interest, read books and printed matter not only for information purposes but also for pleasure; they create their own reading activities and improve their capabilities even further. This aligns with the impact of reading on personal identity, as found by Broom, Chavez and Wagner (2021), that the reading of books is beneficial to one's character identification and personal validation. Therefore, whenever children read for pleasure, their reading ability improves; reading is a lifelong habit that improves both language ability and boosts confidence (Krashen, 2019). Huettig and Pickering (2019) elucidate that reading exposes learners to new information and improves their syntactic knowledge or the understanding of the arrangement of words in a sentence.

2.7 CONSEQUENCES OF POOR READING SKILLS

The primary school years form the period in which learners learn to read (DBE, 2011). Stranovska and Gadusova (2020) caution that should the skill of reading not be mastered, the learner may develop low self-esteem and may not be motivated to keep learning to read. Thus, lack of developed reading skills causes a variety of educational, economical and health consequences for society as a whole, as indicated below (World Literacy Foundation, 2023).

2.7.1 Lack of Literacy Skills Later in Life

Ryu and Fan (2023) caution that low literacy levels in adults reduce their chances of furthering their education or gaining employment, causing strain on their economic circumstances. The health impact mostly affects individual learners. A study

conducted in Australia by Boyes, Tebbutt, Preece and Badcock (2018) found that poor reading abilities have a negative impact on learners' mental health. The impact can be internal, causing anxiety and depression, or it can impact the learner externally, such as misconduct or ill-disciplined acts in the classroom (Boyes *et al.,* 2018).

2.7.2 Effect of Illiteracy in Society

Children who miss the opportunity to acquire basic reading skills become less participative in social activities that would benefit themselves and the country as well (Wilson *et al.,* 2023). Robinson-Doyle (2022) views illiteracy as a curse to humanity because it brings about risks such as hunger, humiliation, epidemics, and disorder. As stated by Malik (2018), the economy of a country depends on the education of its citizens. Khan and Ahmad (2022) conducted a study in rural areas of Pakistan and found that an illiterate person usually is unaware of the consequences of illiteracy. An illiterate person apparently does not realise the burden that is placed upon the government, usually because the illiterate person does not contribute positively to society in the form of employment (Cree, Kay & Steward, 2022).

Illiterate people cannot make informed decisions during election campaigns to vote for the advancement of society and the communities in which they live. They may not be able to collect complex information and understand it. They may not be able to participate in disputes and reasoning and become involved in high-level decision-making processes effectively offering solutions, not adding to the problems. They must be able to read and understand information fully if they are to engage in true dialogue and become part of the processes of conflict resolution and negotiation (World Bank, 2022; Spaull & Pretorius, 2019).

2.7.3 Effect of Illiteracy on the Economy

Cheng, Wu, Liu and Li (2018) suggest that poor reading development has a negative relationship with the economy, because in an economy where most people are unemployable due to illiteracy, the government suffers when it must provide the population with welfare, such as housing and social relief stipends. Poor reading development among learners reduces their ability to gain critical skills needed for meaningful employment, leading to a lack of productivity and perpetuating cycles of poverty (Nyathi, 2021). Additionally, illiteracy affects entrepreneurial potential, as it hampers individuals' ability to comprehend financial documents, analyse market trends or manage businesses effectively. Communities with high levels of illiteracy often experience slower economic growth due to underutilisation of human resources

and diminished innovation. Addressing challenges in reading development is, therefore, essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and ensuring sustainable economic progress.

As evident in this literature review chapter, there is a lot of research covering diverse areas of reading development in different contexts. Noticeably, most of this research focused on urban and suburban schools using the quantitative approach, creating a gap in rural schools such as those in the Sekhukhune East district. The necessity for context-specific, qualitative, empirically supported research that looks at factors that contribute to poor reading development is highlighted by this gap. Hence, this study sought to explore the possible causes of poor reading development among the Grade 6 learners in Sekhukhune East District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the study outlines the theoretical framework that served as a lens through which poor reading development among Grade 6 learners was explored.

2.8.1 Explanation of a Theoretical Framework

In qualitative research, the theoretical framework acts as a foundation structure that guides the study's entire research process from design to data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theoretical framework provides a lens through which to interpret data, defining the key concepts and relationships within a study. It comprises a set of theories and concepts that shape the researcher's understanding of the phenomena being studied, helping to clarify the research questions and hypotheses (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The framework informs the analysis of data by offering a perspective that connects the research findings to existing knowledge, often drawing from established theories or models to interpret the findings in a meaningful way (Tracy, 2024). Framing the study within a theoretical context allowed the researcher to critically examine how the findings relate to broader theories or social structures.

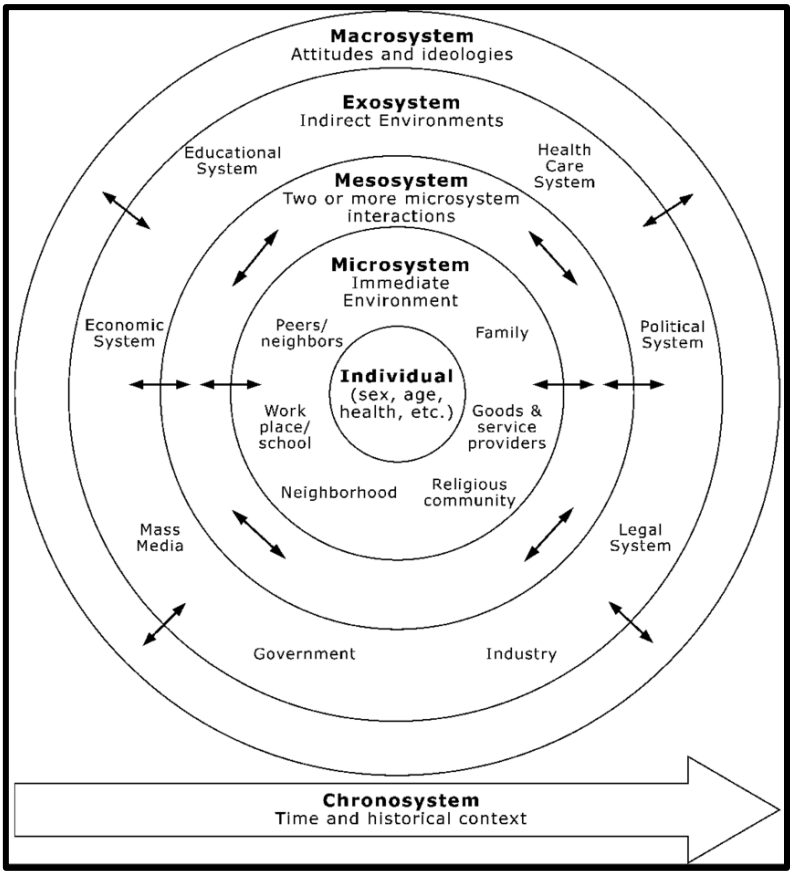
2.8.2 The Importance of a Theoretical Framework

In this study to answer the research question: *What are the causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners?,* Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) offered a multidimensional insight into how different settings affect learners' reading skills. This theory outlines the significance of the direct and wider environmental influences, such as family, school, community, and societal contexts in moulding reading development (Antony, 2022). The study used this framework to

explore possible causes of challenges in reading development at different levels from family involvement, teacher-learner interactions, and educational policies, and considering the impact of poor reading skills beyond the school. This framework proved valuable in categorising the findings of this study. This layered understanding made the Ecological Systems Theory especially applicable in addressing the multifaceted problem of poor reading development among the Grade 6 learners.

2.8.3 Overview of Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explains how human development is affected by various levels of environmental relations (Bermas, Capati & Calubayan, 2024). In this study, the learners' growth was moulded by four nested systems that surrounded them, each system interacting with the other. The systems in this framework are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Figure 2.1 shows Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of human development:



(Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_systems_theory)

Figure 2.1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

The microsystem represents the closest, most direct environments such as peers, family and school (Rudasill, Snyder, Levinso, & Adelson, 2018). The mesosystem refers to the interconnectedness between the learner's family setting and the school environment. The exosystem involves outside situations that incidentally impact on the learner, such as a parent's employment setting (Guo & Lee, 2023). The macrosystem signifies the wider cultural, social and policy settings that may influence the learner's life, yet the learner has no control over it. The chronosystem emphasises how both individual and environmental changes over time affect a person's growth and development (Burakgazi, 2025). This system includes significant life events, transitions and historical events that can influence the individual at different stages of life (Mayer, 2018). For example, the impact of a child growing up during a national crisis or experiencing the divorce of their parents can have long-term effects on their development, as these events alter their environment and social interactions. The layers in the EST helped the researcher to understand the causes of poor reading development, as the participants shared their experiences and helped the researcher develop a broader view of the barriers to reading development.

2.8.4 The Elements of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of 1979 (EST), divided into five systems, namely: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, indicates the layers that affect the learner's development at various levels, directly and indirectly. It clearly shows the learner at the centre, encircled by five separate concentric circles, each demonstrating a system: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem.

2.8.4.1 Microsystem

The microsystem refers to the immediate environment where a child directly interacts, such as the home, school and peer groups (Rudasill *et al.,* 2018). In the context of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners, the home environment plays a crucial role in terms of the availability of reading resources; parental involvement and reading support at home (Georgiou & Zang, 2024). Parents that motivate their children to read have a positive impact on their children's reading skills, contrary to a parent who cannot read and does not see the importance of encouraging their children to read (Mahlangu & Mtshali, 2024). In the school setting, the interactions between

teachers and learners, and fellow learners are important elements of the microsystem. Inexperienced teachers and schools with inadequate reading resources may cause difficulties in reading.

2.8.4.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the interconnectedness among various microsystems. For instance, the relationship between the school setting and home setting (Bayat, 2023). Teamwork among parents and teachers is crucial in learners' reading development. A learner whose teacher communicates with the parents regarding reading needs and support, is likely to progress well and eventually master the skill of reading. Alternatively, if there is poor or no communication between teacher and parents, the learner may face difficulties in reading and not reach full potential in the development of reading skills (Kamal & Illiyan, 2021). Therefore, good communication between school and home is crucial in supporting learners' reading development.

2.8.4.3 Exosystem

The exosystem involves the outside settings, which indirectly affect the child, such as the parent's workplace, the accessibility of public reading resources and wider economic problems (Guo & Lee, 2023). A parent's commitment to work may affect the time the parent has to spend on supporting the child's reading (National Education Association, 2021). Other factors such as poverty may cause, for example, limited access to reading materials and affordability of extra lessons (Gay, Sonnenschein, Sun & Baker, 2020).

The resources and facilities in the community form an essential part of the exosystem (Guo & Lee, 2023). Communities that have operating libraries provide learners with a place to read and study after school in the afternoon, and during school holidays (Mugwisi, Jiyane & Fombad, 2018). Communities with no library may hinder learners' reading progress as this means that learners will be limited to reading only during school hours. Therefore, the exosystem highlights the significance of exterior influences on a child's acquisition of reading skills.

2.8.4.4 Macrosystem

The macrosystem encompasses broader societal and cultural influences, including economic conditions, cultural beliefs and educational policies (Burakgazi, 2025). Regarding challenges in reading development among Grade 6 learners, the cultural

attitudes towards literacy and education in the broader society can shape both school practices and parental engagement. For example, if reading is not highly valued within the community, or should a lack of cultural emphasis on education exist, learners may not prioritise reading (Akhmetova, Imambayeva & Csapó, 2022). Cultural norms surrounding literacy can influence how much effort schools, parents and communities put into fostering reading skills (Purcell-Gates, 2020). In schools with limited resources and funds, learners may face difficulties in developing good reading skills (Tadesse & Muluye, 2020). Therefore, addressing poor reading development requires policy-level interventions that prioritise literacy education and provide necessary resources (Wingate, 2018).

2.8.4.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem addresses the dimension of time in human development, highlighting how life changes over time and how these transitions affect individuals' development (Guo & Lee, 2023). In the case of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners, the chronosystem can be seen in how shifts in society, education, or even individual life events impact learners' literacy development over time. For example, changes in an educational policy can disrupt the learning environment, affecting access to resources and the structure of schooling (Asumadu, 2019). The timing of curriculum changes can have long-term effects on learners, especially those already at risk of falling behind in their reading development (Angrist *et al.,* 2021).

For instance, if a new curriculum or literacy intervention is introduced mid-year or after a significant period of educational disruption, learners may not have adequate time to adjust or benefit from the changes (Spaull & Pretorius, 2023). Similarly, the experiences of the learners' families such as job loss, relocation or changes in parental involvement also reflect the influence on the learner's chronosystem (Guo & Lee, 2023). Bonotto (2023) found that shifts in the environment over time can either worsen or alleviate existing challenges to reading development, underlining the need for timely and sustained interventions.

2.8.5 Justification for the Choice of the Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a wide-ranging framework for understanding the varied factors that affect a child's development, and pertaining to this study, the child's reading development. The theory shows that a child's development is affected by a set of interacting systems, each playing a critical role in

determining lived experiences and consequences. This theory was deemed appropriate for exploring poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explored the multifaceted nature of reading as a complex cognitive process involving decoding, comprehension, and communication, highlighting its evolution from oral traditions to modern silent reading practices. The chapter discussed the critical role of early intervention, effective teaching strategies, and the need for resources. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory provided a framework for understanding the environmental factors influencing poor reading development. The chapter emphasised the profound impact of reading on academic success, personal growth and community development. The next chapter outlines the research methodology for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter offered a review of existing literature on reading. The theoretical framework supporting the study was also discussed. This chapter explains the application of research methods used in this study.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the specific procedures and techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic in a research study.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

Interpretivism, as one of the paradigms used in research, aims to understand the meaning that participants apply to their various social contexts such as classroom experiences and interactions with others and the environment (Davies & Fisher, 2018). Interpretivism postulates that reality is shaped by those who experience it because it is socially constructed (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). In this study, interpretivism deals with the individual experiences of participants in their respective contexts, providing a holistic insight of encounters experienced by participants. This paradigm allowed for the effective use of qualitative methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and observations, which enabled the researcher to gather rich data in different settings. The importance of employing interpretivism in this study was that it provided a lens to identify primary causes of poor reading development. Effective approaches tailored to address reading problems experienced by Grade 6 learners, as well as teachers' needs were also identified.

3.2.2 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define qualitative research as a research approach that attempts to understand issues in sociocultural contexts. This approach endeavours to acquire participants' perceptions, experiences, and emotions by exploring the difficulties they come across through narratives, interviews, and observations. Thus, the qualitative approach relies on verbal accounts, and not on figures and statistics to present a phenomenon, as it is the case with quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative research method was applied in this study with the purpose of collecting qualitative data from six Grade 6 language teachers from different circuits in Sekhukhune East District regarding their experiences on the possible causes of poor reading development among their learners. Questions compiled for the semi-structured interviews allowed for answers which brought a wide range of productive academic information, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The views and suggestions by the participants, including the researchers' experiences during the data collection process, provided vital information about causes of poor reading development. The researcher collected data relating to the research questions with the intention of developing meaningful themes from analysed data. Therefore, the qualitative research approach enabled the fulfilment of the objectives of the study: firstly, to identify challenges that Grade 6 learners experience in reading, secondly, to examine factors contributing to reading challenges among Grade 6 learners. Thirdly, to propose measures to improve learners' reading adeptness.

3.2.3 Research Design

A multiple case study was used as research design in this study. Multiple case study research enables researchers to compare individual cases, depict a range of characteristics and extremes to add depth, and comprehend a wide phenomenon without sacrificing the uniqueness of the individual case studies (Adams et al., 2022). The researcher adopted a multiple study design to identify causes of poor reading development among the Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District schools.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods are systematic approaches used to collect, analyse, and interpret data in scientific investigations.

3.3.1 Population

Population refers to the entire group of individuals, objects, or events sharing common characteristics that a researcher aims to study and generalise findings to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The Sekhukhune East District consists of four clusters and 16 circuits with 279 primary schools. Three circuits with one school in each were the research context. The researcher chose this population because of the identified problem of poor reading among learners.

3.3.2 Sampling

According to McCombes and Van den Eertwegh (2019), sampling in qualitative research does not necessarily amount to many participants, as the researcher purposively opts for participants who meet the requirements for answering the research question. This study was conducted in three circuits. In each circuit, one primary school was sampled. From the individual schools, two teachers were selected through purposive sampling. This brought the number of participants to six teachers. The teachers selected in each school were those teaching Sepedi Home Language and English First Additional Language in Grade 6.

3.3.3 Data Collection

Data collection is described by Mertins (2018) as the process of gathering data relevant to the research problem under investigation. Qualitative research data collection instruments were employed to prompt for fruitful information for this study on causes of poor reading development amongst Grade 6 learners. The researcher used semi-structured interviews and observations to gather data for the study. Observations were conducted in the Grade 6 classrooms during regular reading periods, while semi-structured interviews were conducted in school board rooms where it was quiet to conduct interviews uninterruptedly.

3.3.3.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are regarded as a powerful tool in data collection in qualitative research, as it permits the researcher to collect in-depth information from the interviewees (Ruslin *et al.,* 2022). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain information from the six participants regarding the possible causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners. The questions and prompt questions were compiled to meet the purpose of the study (see Appendix I). These questions were open-ended to allow participants to provide insightful responses (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The six participants were informed of the confidentiality of their responses, and that it would be used for the purpose of this research study only. The researcher visited the schools on the dates arranged with the management of the school. The semi-structured interviews were recorded on a cell phone with the permission of the interviewees. The recordings were downloaded onto a laptop, and transcribed verbatim almost immediately after the interviews, to ensure that the responses were still fresh in the mind of the researcher, in case some responses were

unclear on the recording (McMullin, 2021). Teachers were interviewed in English, but one teacher from School A was not comfortable with English, as the participant teaches Sepedi, and felt that responses could be stated more clearly in Sepedi. This participant's (SLT1) recording was translated to English during the transcription stage, for easier analysis of data.

3.3.3.2 Observations

This is a traditional way of collecting data in qualitative research. It provides the researcher with a descriptive analysis of data by observing aspects of environment which have an impact on the achievement of poor reading (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell & Ranfagni, 2023). The researcher arranged beforehand with the language teachers to visit their classrooms for one hour. An observation checklist (see Appendix J) was used to ensure that the same aspects were observed in all the classrooms.

3.3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis involves the process of reviewing the data collected to produce information that will answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews and observations were used to collect data from teachers and their interaction with learners during reading lessons. Therefore, the researcher employed qualitative thematic analysis to analyse data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Themes were developed in conjunction with the aspects of the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The researcher employed six phases of analysing the data thematically, as described by Braun and Clarke (2022). The phases are outlined as follows:

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with data: The researcher became immersed in the data for the purpose of being familiar with the breadth and depth of the content. The transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews and the observation reports were read and re-read to become familiar with the data from the gathering process.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes: The data were organised into meaningful groups with themes driven by the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979). The researcher grouped the data according to themes and coded the themes according to the EST.

Phase 3: Searching for themes: Data were sorted into various potential broader codes. The emerging themes were recoded into meaningful subthemes, which had more than two responses supporting the idea.

Phase 4: Reviewing themes: This process involved merging, separating and cancelling the themes which lacked supporting facts. The researcher proofread the information under each subtitle. If it was irrelevant, it was deleted, and some responses were repositioned.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes: The researcher identified the nature of the theme and defined the type of data each theme carried. The subtitles were renamed for proper meaning of the theme.

Phase 6: Producing the report: This phase entailed making a last analysis and compiling this final report (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher presented all the themes in Chapter 4 of the report, informed and guided by the research questions and the theoretical framework.

3.4 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Trustworthiness ensures the rigour and reliability of qualitative research, focusing on the accuracy and validity of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is achieved through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo, 2020). Establishing trustworthiness strengthens the study's contribution to knowledge and its impact on practice and policy.

3.4.1 Credibility

Credibility promotes internal validity of the information about the study (Shufutinsky, 2020). To ensure credibility, the researcher used member checks to allow participants to comment on the interpreted data to ensure that their responses were not misreported or interpreted in a biased manner. The researcher also adopted the triangulation method of collecting data wherein participants were interviewed about the causes that hinder reading development in Grade 6. Classroom observation was used as data collection method to confirm correspondence of responses from the semi-structured interviews with what is being practised in the classroom (Nyathi, 2018). The peer debriefing strategy was applied where the insights and perceptions of my supervisor from the Curriculum Studies Department were considered before drawing conclusions (Kandasamy, Hua & Sultan, 2022). Peer debriefing is a qualitative

research strategy where a researcher engages with a peer to critically examine and reflect on the research process, ensuring rigor and minimising bias (Kandasamy *et al.,* 2022). The ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) on human development was used to describe and validate data collected.

3.4.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are transferable to other situations (Drisko, 2025). It focuses on the applicability of the findings to similar contexts. This was achieved through thick description of the data collection process and data analysis. Transferability was maintained by emphatically stating the purpose of the study to align the literature with the problem (Spiers & Reilly, 2019). The study outlined contextual factors, namely, the circuits, number of participating schools, and the participants who contributed to the data collected (Spiers & Reilly, 2019).

3.4.3 Dependability

Shufutinsky (2020) explains that dependability is ensured through rigorous data collection techniques, processes and analysis that are well-documented. To ensure dependability in this study, the researcher ensured consistency of data by analysing data separately, and with the supervisor, and addressed differences. The researcher also used the code re-code strategy wherein same data were coded on a new document a week later, to confirm whether the highlighted codes emerged again.

3.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the criterion used to establish the independence from prejudice in the research procedure and findings (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo & Gonzalez, 2018). Confirmability ensures that findings are interpreted from the data collected, rather than the researcher's viewpoint or ideas (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability aims to ensure objectivity. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and cross-checked data collected from the two methods.

3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In conducting this study, strong emphasis was placed on adhering to ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of participants. The following ethical considerations were maintained throughout the research process to uphold integrity and ensure the credibility of the findings.

3.5.1 Permission to Conduct Research

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) at the University of Limpopo (See Appendix A). Permission to

conduct the study at public schools was requested (see Appendix B) and obtained from the Limpopo Department of Basic Education (See Appendix C), and Sekhukhune East District (see Appendix D).

3.5.2 Voluntary Participation

The participants were informed in detail about the purpose of the study and what would be required of them. It was explained to the teachers that their participation would be voluntary and that they could leave the study at any time, without penalty. It was further explained that they would not receive any benefits in the form of monetary rewards, promotion, or special privileges because of their participation.

3.5.3 Risk of Harm

This study did not focus on sensitive issues, and the teachers were not expected to share information from their private lives, only experiences in the classroom. Yet, the researcher was prepared to refer participants who showed signs of distress during the data collection period, for counselling.

3.5.4 Informed Consent

The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants. Thus, the participants knew beforehand that they would be expected to participate in a semi-structured interview, and that the researcher would need to observe at least one of their lessons in the classroom. This information enabled the teachers to make an informed decision regarding their participation in this study (see Appendix F). It was further explained to the teachers that they may leave the study at any given time without penalty, even if they had signed the consent form (Arifin, 2018). Although learners were not interviewed, and the researcher did not interact directly with the learners, consent was obtained from their parents that they may be observed in the classroom and learners signed assent forms (See Appendices G1, G2 and H).

3.5.5 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participating schools, teachers and learners were assigned pseudonyms to anonymise their identities, as recommended by Braun and Clark (2022). Information that could lead to the identification of the schools and the teachers is not published in this report. Pseudonyms such as SLT1, SLT2, SLT3 and ELT1, ELT2 and ELT3 were used to represent participants and schools, namely, School A, School B, and School C (Heaton, 2022).

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the methodology applied to this research study, and the justification for each method used. The procedures for data collection and analysis were explained in detail. Ethical considerations of the study were outlined. The next chapter presents the findings from data collected.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the causes of poor reading development among the Grade 6 learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The previous chapter detailed the methodological aspects applied to this study. This chapter presents the findings derived from the analysis of data. The data were generated from the semi-structured interviews and transcribed by the researcher and the transcriptions were confirmed by the interviewees. Observation checklists were used in the lesson observations in the classrooms. This data was also analysed and used to cross-check data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. The data collected in this study aimed to answer the main research question was: *What are causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 primary school learners?* and the following sub-questions:

1. Which challenges do Grade 6 learners experience in reading?
2. What are the factors contributing to reading challenges among Grade 6 learners?
3. Which measures may be used to improve learners' reading adeptness?

4.2 PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were six primary school language teachers as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Teachers' profiles

Code Name	Subject	Highest Qualification Obtained	Years Of Experience
English Language Teacher One (ELT1)	English FAL	BEd. Honours	32
Sepedi Language Teacher One (SLT1)	Sepedi HL	BEd. Honours	36

Code Name	Subject	Highest Qualification Obtained	Years Of Experience
English Language Teacher Two (ELT2)	English FAL	SPTD	19
Sepedi Language Teacher Two (SLT2)	Sepedi HL	BEd.	3
English Language Teacher Three (ELT3)	English FAL	ACE EDU MAN	25
Sepedi Language Teacher Three (SLT3)	Sepedi HL	BEd. Honours	6

The first three teachers are teaching Sepedi Home Language (SHL) while the remaining three teachers are teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL). In terms of qualifications, SHL teachers were more qualified than the EFAL teachers,

4.3 DATA PRESENTATION

The findings of this study are presented in Table 4.2. These findings were created after data were analysed through the thematic analysis approach. The data is presented as three themes and sub-themes, as indicated in Table 4.2:

Table 4.2: The themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 1: Challenges learners experienced when reading	1. Grammar and spelling 2. Vocabulary 3. Punctuation 4. Pronunciation
Theme 2: Factors contributing to reading challenges	1. Lack of resources and motivation 2. Poor instructional leadership 3. Poor foundation 4. Teaching methods and language interference 5. Internal and external policy influence 6. Environmental factors 7. Socio-economic issues 8. Parental involvement

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Theme 3: Measures and strategies used to improve reading	1. Use of technology 2. Stakeholders' assistance 3. Teachers' methodological strategies 4. Extra lessons

4.3.1 Theme 1: Challenges Learners Experienced When Reading

Grade 6 learners seem to experience challenges that affect their reading development. These challenges include grammar and spelling, vocabulary, punctuation, and pronunciation.

4.3.1.1 Grammar and spelling

There was consensus among participants in this study that learners experience difficulties in grammar and spelling. Teacher ELT3 stated the difficulty in the use of grammar as follows:

> *Sentence construction needs knowledge of grammar, but if you do not have adequate grammar or adequate comprehension of grammar and all the grammatical rules, then it becomes difficult to form and read sentences.*

Grammar and syntax are the basics of language that learners need to understand before other aspects of language can be developed with good reading skills. The main difficulty learners are faced with in reading was found to be spelling problems. ELT1 remarked:

> *I think poor spelling from the learners and slow reading as well as recognising the sounds and the letters are the early indicators of difficulty for learners.*

From the researcher's observations of independent reading in the classroom, the following problems were observed: a learner could not read the title of the story well. The learner then read the first sentence and could not continue reading, so he stopped. Another learner in Sepedi failed to read sounds such as "ka" and "ke".

Teacher ELT1 explained:

> *Okay learners have the problems with the spelling, it contributes a lot to reading difficulties and slow reading which leads to the reversal of words. Another*

reading problem learners experience concerns learners reading without knowing the meaning of the words. For example, you are in the class you have words such as ghost, imagination, and sacred, which learners just read without knowing the meaning of them.

This was made evident by a learner from School C who read “no” as “on”. Learners reverse words and they omit letters when reading. Two learners from School C could not read at all, while most learners showed less knowledge on reading sounds and sentences fluently.

Teacher ELT2:

The phonics is the challenge where learners are not able to connect sounds with written letters, and the letter combination. It involves the recognition of sounds that letter represents and blending sound to read words as well as the language processing. Language processing involves the understanding of the meaning of the words and how they are used in sentence and paragraph. It is a complex set of skills that includes vocabulary of higher order thinking.

Learners struggled to read words in sentences and sentences in paragraphs. They struggled with the arrangement of words to make meaning of a situation. Due to the lack of a good foundation, learners were challenged by grammar in Grade 6.

Teacher SLT3 remarked:

Mmmhhhh what I have realised is that learners have a problem with phonetics. This might mean that they had a problem with it even from the foundation. Phonetics or phonological awareness is mostly a problem in these learners so that is the specific cognitive problem that I have realised.

4.3.1.2 Pronunciation

Learners in all the schools struggled with pronunciation of words in Sepedi and English. Teacher ELT1 from School A said:

In English, the challenges are pronouncing of the words. The way we pronounce some of the words, it becomes a challenge to learners and again, in Sepedi, there are words that are used which are not used to the learners. They don't use this kind of words but in our books are there which demands them to

go deeper, and they must refer to their parents to get the synonym of the very same word.

During observation sessions, the researcher noticed that most learners pronounced words incorrectly. The words seemed completely unfamiliar to learners. For example, a learner from School C did know how to pronounce the word "*morago*" in Sepedi and the syllable "*fa*" in the "*sefahlego*", the sound came out as "*ba*" as well as letter "*e*" in the word "*lebelela*". The second learner did not know letter "*y"* in the word "*yena*" and sound "*ye*" instead the pronounced it as "*ena*". Participant SLT1 stated:

The first thing when you are talking to a child asking her to read, she keeps quiet not knowing, what can she start to say even if you write that word and ask her to pronounce that word to pronounce the letters is, the letters appear in the "b" Or "p". They do not know the difference between sounds.

When children cannot read, parents tend to transfer them to another school, believing teachers from the initial school did not do justice to their children. Yet very often, it is the same parents who do not help their children with reading. Participant SLT2 remarked:

Others can call sounds, yes, but others cannot. It is not all of them. I can say sounds; they can pronounce them, but not all of them. Also, one thing I'm thinking is a problem is learners coming from other schools, you'll find that it is giving us a problem because if you did not start with them from the beginning, you don't know what problem they are coming with from the schools which they were at you find that you don't know where to start with that learner. They come knowing nothing at all and they are old with age.

Learner 2 from School A did not pronounce the letter "s" in most words and in the word imaginations, she further failed to spell the word frightened. Similarly, learner 3 failed to pronounce the words "climb" and "journey". The problem of pronunciation goes beyond failing the reading of words correctly and meaningfully. ELT3 remarked:

The learners are unable to know the sound of letters in English, and they are not inspired. For an example, they cannot understand the soft C and the hard C. They cannot understand the hard G and to the soft G. This is a problem in Grade 6. My focus now is Grade 6. I focus on the letters and sound recognition.

I tried to teach the struggling learners the phonics, recognition of words, teach vocabulary and the repetition of word sounds homophones and so on, so that the learners at the end of this year will be able to know how to read.

Learners cannot read the “g” in grade, and in “giraffe”, thus failing to pronounce words successfully. They either always read it as soft or as hard sounds in all the words. The problem with pronunciation was also experienced in School B by the Sepedi teacher when the teacher stated:

How they pronounce the words, they produce words that rhyme is not good. I think match of some spoken and written words. Uhh how they pronounce the letters, how they write the letters, numbers, and words. The specific noo not this one, recognise some familiar words in point I think that is the issue.

The researcher’s classroom observations confirm this. During independent reading observation sessions, learners pronounced words poorly, for example, one learner from School B in Sepedi pronounced the word “*kudu*” as “*kodu*”, the word “*swanetše*” as “*swantse*” while one learner read “*ngam*e” as *“ngwame*” and “*ngwako*” as “*ngako*”. This was also the case with spoken language.

4.3.1.3 Punctuation

The Grade 6 learners seemed to have very little understanding of the purpose of punctuation in reading, as reported by SLT1:

Ohm … punctuation marks I can say they have experience others not all of them, because in the beginning when we start to teach, we start with them, punctuations of language, nouns, so that they can know what this punctuation means and the other one as well, question mark. We are trying to help them to know those punctuations. Even though others still have confusion of not knowing, what a comma means when they are reading because they must know that it prolongs the word they should not stop.

One learner from School A in English was confident in reading but paid little attention to the punctuation marks. The learner did not read louder at an exclamation mark. Another learner from School C disregarded all punctuation marks. She missed all the full stops and commas. Learners from School B also disregarded punctuation marks when they read without any stops or changes of tone.

However, there were learners who did well with the use of punctuation, as reported by Teacher SLT2:

> *They punctuated very well, were there is a…. at the end of the sentence, although not all the learners used punctuations well*

4.3.1.4 Vocabulary

Learners did not know the meaning of words they have read. According to the researcher's observation, learners read to satisfy their teachers. However, most of them did not read with understanding.

> *The meaning of the words, I can also say they are still having confusion, but we are trying to explain while reading. Let me take an example and say on comprehension passage you have read about a certain passage, and do you find that there is a word that they do not know. I tried to write on a chalkboard and explained to them what the meaning of the word is just like before when I was teaching them when I told them about "swimming" and what does it mean? and I was also trying to explain using hand gestures to explain it better"* (SLT1).

SLT2 stated that:

> *Learners cannot. They perform very bad in reading. They cannot read. They cannot read well and then they perform very bad in orals.*

Learners completely lose interest in reading words they do not know the meaning of. From the researcher's observations, most learners from the three schools did not want to read because they had little understanding of meaning of the words that they were supposed to read. However, the few learners that possessed a good vocabulary, volunteered to read. Most of the learners fail reading in their second language; they do well only in the spoken language. Since vocabulary is a problem, learners failed to read a baseline evaluation passage containing only a bit more information from the previous grade. According to ELT2, learners did not perform well in the baseline evaluation. The participant reported as follows:

> *Uhh Texts. Out of 100%, I think 60% can, but 40% approximately cannot. I give them the baseline. I see this from the baseline from the Department of Basic Education early in January, where some of the learners scored higher marks*

while others have less marks. Not all half a class can read with comprehension response text, but others are still struggling.

The researcher verified this statement in the classroom observation when ELT2 presented shared reading. The teacher presented the story very well. The topic was introduced, and the learners had to read. Most of them did not read with understanding, while others did not read at all. Learners found words such as “adventure” and “interrupted” impossible to read. During question time, most of the learners did not participate. The teacher asked basic questions on the elements of a short story namely: title, characters, setting, plot, and author, and only a few learners raised their hands and attempted to respond to the questions. The teacher made a mind map of the story and allowed learners to make inferences and visualise the story. Still the learners struggled with the vocabulary of short story elements and content. The teacher had to repeat the question in Sepedi for learners to understand and respond. Good vocabulary means reading for understanding. This is how ELT3 realised that learners read with low understanding of the text. The participant stated:

Uh sometimes, you can see on the face of a learner yes, you are reading but you do not really understand the things that you are reading. Uh, it shows even in the context of words sometimes when you do not understand a word, but you are not able to understand the whole sentence. You are able to put a word, or you are able to find a word that is synonymous to the word that you do not understand but what shows that these learners do not even understand or comprehend the texts that they are reading. Sometimes is that uh when they come across the word that they do not know the meaning of the sentence is lost which shows that they do not understand or comprehend the things that they are reading because they are unable to make contextual analysis of what they are reading.

The participant further concluded that:

So, for learners to understand what they are reading or for learners to perform better in reading, they need to understand what they are reading but if learners are not able to comprehend what they are reading, then this impacts their reading performance altogether.

The Sepedi language teacher from school C showed that learners are also still experiencing difficulties with vocabulary and they eventually get frustrated with compound words. The participant said:

> *Uh let me base my knowledge on vocabulary before I base it on anything else with vocabulary. Therefore, when a learner is not able to understand, for example, we even have compound word in English, which are words that are made-up of two other words, so when we have issues with the vocabulary, then this is going to disturb the whole ability of the learner to read. Because if you cannot really read a small word, then you are not going to be able to read a big word or a word that comes from small words. So, sentence construction requires sorry. Word construction and word understanding require proper vocabulary or knowledge of vocabulary.*

ELT3 also added that:

> *Normally, learners are unable to put words together. They make a lot of mistakes when spelling the words and usually even the poor vocabulary. Therefore, they miss even the basic words, what the word means and how to use it in a sentence. That is what we used to spot on learners that are having difficulties.*

The researcher observed that learners were unable to combine words into sentences because they do not know the meaning of words and the use of articles.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Factors Contributing to Reading Challenges

The second theme identified factors that challenge the development of reading. A number of factors emerges and ranges from resources to parental involvement.

4.3.2.1 Resources and motivation

The findings from the interviews with teachers revealed that one of the main causes of inhibiting the development of learners' reading skills is the lack of resources. Resources for reading include reading books, classroom book corners, school libraries and community libraries, all of which motivate and encourage a culture of reading. ELT3 indicated that there was no community library available to assist learners and

their families after school hours. There was also no community computer centre. The teacher stated:

> *No, we do not have a community library; we do not even have a community hall. So, a library is literally very far-fetched. We do not have that in our community and that just demotivate the learners because even the one we have in our school is too small to cater for all the learners. Therefore, if maybe we had the library in the community, then maybe some learners will be catered there but we do not have a library in the community or even a computer centre or any huge centre that learners can do.*

The researcher's observations confirmed that although some schools did have libraries, they were not well-stocked. Teachers have a few shelves with books in the staffroom and/or classrooms which is not adequate for the large numbers of learners enrolled in schools. As a result, ELT1 suggested the value of a community library:

> *Yeah, if learners do not have access to a community library it can contribute a lot to the failure of reading.*

ELT1 also reported on the lack of resources for the development of reading skills:

> *The lack of library or reading material at school contributes a lot and in fact, the last point I may say parents have low level of education contributes a lot to the Grade 6 learners.*

The researcher observed that in most schools, learners only using the DBE workbooks because there is shortage of interesting library books, readers, as well as textbooks. The situation of a shortage of books is critical. Teachers and learners suffer because of it. Most learners only get a chance to read a short story when the teacher decides to use it as an activity. Thus, there is no opportunity for them to read a story of their choice at home. Parents may not have the means to buy reading material for their children, even though it is common knowledge that learners attending public schools in these circuits are from poor or average-income family backgrounds.

ELT1 reported on contributory factors in terms of resources:

> *The resources are not enough in the essence that remember we buy resource according to the norms given to the school by the department. If they give you*

very little depending on the enrolment that you have. It is not going to be easy for the school to purchase enough resources, they must check on their budget and since we are from a very poor background. To call the parents and say can you afford to do 123? They will give you reasons that we don't have money that is the challenges we are facing resources are not enough.

Teachers are proactive in terms of devising means to find resources for the learners, for example, in some cases; teachers would make copies of the story being read from books other than the DBE books. Even schools that have received funds, make photocopies of books to have a copy per desk rather than per learner, because the funds were insufficient. However, obstacles are encountered at each school, as reported by SLT2:

That one we have a big challenge like I have mentioned already, we have shortage of books. We have shortage of resources. Learners do not have books where they can read. We do not have a library in our school where they can go during the break and enjoy reading the books that they love. The only thing that they can read is the workbook and the textbook.

This is a very small school compared to other schools in the circuit. ELT1, from a larger school, stated low funding as a problem. This shows that schools need funding to operate well, irrespective of size. Apart from a lack of resources, schools have irrelevant reading material. ELT3 emphasised that:

We do not have as many resources but we have a library, which is motivating for learners. However, the books in the library some of them are written in Sepedi that affects learners' English reading ability. We also have resources, but they are not enough motivate learners to read English or even help them in reading English.

In this case, the participant indicated lack of resources but barriers to reading development were evident. This makes it even more difficult to resolve the issue of challenges in reading development in this district. Reportedly, the reading material provided by the government is insufficient to motivate learners to read. The English teacher finds it difficult to obtain books at varying levels of difficulty. This might cause teachers to lose the motivation to teach. As such, the issue of motivation is broad. It affects the teachers, the learners, and the parents. Although books in the home

language of the learners can help them to connect better with texts, encouraging a stronger sense of ownership and engagement, limited exposure to first additional language books may hinder learners' ability to reach a level of proficiency in English.

English is the LoLT from Grade 4 upwards, including tertiary institutions. Thus, a shortage of books and exposure to English will limit learners' academic success. Sepedi home language resources are reportedly sufficient at School C. Yet, the researcher observed that most learners are still struggling to read in Sepedi due to comprehension ability and vocabulary that need attention. The learners speak Sepedi at home and were taught in Sepedi from Grade R to Grade 3 in all the learning areas. Even with a wide variety of resources being printed in Sepedi, the development of reading skills is still a problem. There seems to be a lack of intrinsic motivation and a lack of interest in developing reading skills. It could be that the value of reading is not invested in them by their parents and the surrounding community ELT3 from School 3 highlighted the importance of relevant resources, the availability and effectiveness of resources in developing reading skills:

> *The teachers must work hard to come with the flash cards as effective resources for struggling learners into classrooms so that the learners will become familiar with the learning material.*

Teachers in public rural schools often face difficulties in accessing relevant and engaging reading materials for their learners. Instead of relying solely on government supplies, which may be limited or delayed, teachers can take the initiative to develop their own reading materials that cater to the needs and interests of their learners. This may include collaborating with colleagues, specifically those interested in languages, to share resources and ideas and adapting existing materials to suit the learners' level of development. This initiative can help teachers to provide their learners with relevant content and enhance their learning experiences.

4.3.2.2 Poor instructional leadership

Teachers were asked in the semi-structured interviews on how the school management influences reading development of learners in their schools. Teachers' responses indicated that ideas and requests for materials had been put forward to management; however, none have been implemented or addressed. This is a

challenge as teachers do not have influence on the management of school finances. As ELT1 stated:

> *Remember the school leadership is the one that takes decision. In whatever we might be looking if ever. I am a Grade 6 educator and there is something that I need I have to submit to the school leadership to buy it for me, but if they don't support that; learners will never cope, for example. There is a plan of having a library then I went to the school leadership and give them that idea of having a library in our school so that it can allow our kids to come and have access to particular books and then maybe their response is negative. Then it is going to be like that; so, we must get full support from our leadership. They might buy some books to read for fun and by so doing, they can even have some whatever something like competition at our school. We may have some trophies to encourage learners to participate so that they may have an interest of reading by giving them some awards and that one must be derived from the school leadership.*

During the interview, this teacher stated that there are insufficient books in the library for leisure reading. Therefore, a suggestion was made for trophies to be acquired, to initiate competitions which would encourage learners to read more. SLT2 stated the importance of the SMT in the day-to-day management of a school, overseeing the quality of teaching and learning and supporting teachers:

> *Leadership practice significantly and positively influences this direct experience, including for example offering the intellectual stimulation. Providing individual support and providing appropriate models of the best practice and belief considered fundamental to the organisation.*

ELT2 reported unsatisfying experiences with the school leadership in terms of support where reading is concerned. ELT2 responded as follows:

> *I think the school management failed because they lack strong teamwork support from educators. Educators sometimes took a long time to come together and identify this problem and come up with a solution. I can say poor communication between the parents and the teachers also contribute to this problem.*

Teachers reported that a lack of teamwork and communication was one of the barriers to reading development in schools. The lack of communication regarding reading proposals could be a lack of interest from management to invest in the teacher's idea. ELT3 responded:

> *Alright, so how is school is structured comes from the leadership or the management of the school. If school leadership does not support certain programmes that have to do with reading, then that slows down the progress of the learners so that is how school leadership would affect how learners learn to read English.*

The teacher reported that the SMT has full power and control over finances, and therefore the SMT may be seen as hindering reading development when they choose to not apply funds to the acquisition of books or support programmes to assist learners in developing their reading skills.

SLT3 indicated how the focus of the SMT affects what happens in the school:

> *Okay, thank you for the question once more. If people were different. You have your own interest; I have my own interest. So, if we have a segment of people in the management that do not see this reading as a compelling issue other than let's say maybe mathematics, then obviously whatever our plan is being made, to try and improve the result as soon as far as reading is concerned, they are going to be difficult being implemented and on resources. We all agree that the learners are different, they don't learn the same way, others are visual learners, others learn by hearing, while others are kinaesthetic and learn by doing but then when we go to reading, there is no kinaesthetic involved; the there's no visual involved there. Therefore, the learners are just all expected to sit down and read. Now we are depriving those who have different abilities of learning a chance to learn; now we're only catering for those who can speak to the text itself so there is no visual aid there*. (SLT3)

SLT3 emphasised that, based on own experiences of teaching language, support is needed to address the diversity of learners and how they learn. The SMT must consider the differing needs of learners in Grade 6 when giving them appropriate support.

4.3.2.3 Poor foundation

Most language teachers provided similar responses relating to challenges leading to poor reading development. They mentioned that learners did not receive adequate teaching at Foundation Phase level and as a result, there is a poor foundation to reading. In many cases, learners fail in learning to read; they failed to acquire the basics of reading while showing little interest in learning and attempting to read. From the researcher's observations, most learners, especially male learners, seem to have developed a passive aggression towards learning to read.

ELT2 explained the issue of poor foundation:

> *I think the Grade 6 learners entered the Intermediate Phase not knowing high frequency words, simple words in English. So, they failed to form simple words. For an example: there, for, from. These are difficult for Grade 6 learners and then the letters of alphabet and consonants. This is a problem in Grade 6. The learners are unable to read because they cannot use vowels to create words. Learners are unable to identify simple words ear and eyes and so on, which was supposed to be taught grade in Grade 1 in the Foundation Phase.*

This study established that poor reading performance is a concern to teachers, but it is not in the power of the Grade 6 language teachers to fully own the learning progress of their learners, there should be reading development through all grades. This was supported by SLT1 who said following:

> *Let me say they lacked foundation they cannot read this, land us, all of them. They are the same. They cannot address their problem because they could have failed previously from their lower grades' classes in foundation phase classes … they lacked proper guidance.*

A further issue highlighted by teachers is the progression policy which does not allow a learner to repeat a grade twice in one phase. Parents do not show concern; they just want their children to be allowed to go to the next grade. Teachers lament that parents are not fully involved in their children's education and do not even collect end-of-term reports or make inquiries about their children's performance. The same applies to determining whether they are progressed or not.

The statements indicate that when learners reach Grade 6, there is a marked learning gap in content which originates in the previous grades. The researcher observed during the classroom sessions that learners struggle to recognise and decode unfamiliar words, they experience language barriers, they have a limited vocabulary and incomplete phonetic awareness. These factors show the importance of a strong foundation that should be established in the early years of learning. Gaps in knowledge can widen, making it harder for learners to develop to their full potential. These challenges seem to be overlooked by the SMT. SLT3 acknowledged that learners have missed basic instruction in the Foundation Phase. During the semi-structured interview, the participant responded to the question on challenges faced by learners with reading in Grade 6 by saying:

> *Okay, thank you for the question, Ma'am. So, the challenge that we normally have with the Grade 6 learners is usually reading for understanding. You would find that even those that are able to read, they're only reading as if they are going through the test without understanding it. This traces back to the foundation that they have, because you would bear with me that in the Foundation Phase there are a lot of topics that the learners must cover, your phonetics, your letters and all that but the challenge usually traces back to the learners' different abilities. So, if the learners at their Foundation Phase, they were in an environment that did not cater for different learning abilities, then it overlaps to Grade 6, them being unable to read for understanding and also having challenge with phonetics.*

SLT3 mentioned the teaching environment should cater for the different learning abilities in the Foundation Phase. However, this does not seem to be the case in many schools. For instance, teachers at one school in the Foundation Phase identified the issue of overcrowded classrooms and learners with special needs that need more attention. Some of these learners do not have parents that can assist. They also complained about the workload not allowing time to reflect on individual learner progress. ELT2 raised the issue of the effect of COVID-19 on the development of reading:

Some of the learners can write and read but those who struggle with reading, I think are those maybe on the impact of COVID-19, because I think they were in grade in Foundation Phase one, COVID-19 prevailed in our country.

The participants reported that the effect of COVID-19 is still being experienced. These learners were in Grade 2 when COVID-19 caused schools to close. The curriculum was trimmed, and learners did not attend school fulltime and that alone directly affected content they should have learned. The participants reported that learners got high marks and percentages of adjustments to ensure that they progressed to the next grade.

4.3.2.4 Methods of teaching reading

Any problem always has two sides. As much as the learners have barriers to developing grade-appropriate reading skills, there appeared to be a concern about the teaching of reading in the preceding grades. SLT2 identified a number of issues that are considered challenges:

We are facing the challenges ma'am in Grade 6 for reading. Most of the learners can't read, I think the problem is the issue of… we don't have many resources in our school and the parenting and the method of teaching.

From responses of participants as well as the researcher's observations during shared reading, factors, such as resources and teaching methods, have an effect on the development of reading skills. SLT1 explained that to assist learners in understanding a story, lack of resources meant that the teacher used hand gestures to assist learners in understanding a word better. From the researcher's observation, this really helped the learners in gaining vocabulary and understanding the story contextually.

Some methods for teaching language appear to be a teacher's personal style; however, dialects or language spoken in other areas has an influence on learners' understanding. SLT3 indicated that the influence of dialects in the learning process and on learners' reading performance, said:

The challenge that we have, especially for us who are teaching home language is the dialects you would find that Miss Moetji is coming from a different area of the province and she is teaching the same subject to the learners from a different environment or rather say, from a different boundary. So, the language

they use or the culture behind the language is not the same. So, you find that there is a lot of misunderstanding between the teacher and the learners themselves.

From the researcher's analysis, this means that the teacher must be aware of dialects in African languages and refer to the curriculum which states that standard Sepedi should be used in the classroom. Standardising Sepedi allows for consistent communication across different regions and contexts, including education. As SLT1 remarked:

The first thing when you are talking to a child asking her to read, she keeps quiet not knowing, what can she start to say even if you are right that word and ask her to pronounce that word to pronounce the letters is, the letters appear in the B or P they don't know the difference between sounds. The way I pronounce words with accent from a different area might cause confusion to the learners comparing it to their spoken language.

SLT3's response was:

It touches back to the one where we spoke about dialects. For instance, the Sepedi that we use in this section is different from Sepedi that is being used where you come from and then if a teacher from your village comes to my village to teach, obviously you will have different backgrounds and culture, and when you come, the first happen to at least match your language means they're going to do a push the culture. Same applies to me when I'm from this area to your area, I would need to divorce to an extent of my cultural background in terms of my language and adopt you so that there would be fluency between the learners and the teacher.

This finding emphasises that language teachers should not only be those who majored in languages at university level, but rather those from the local community. Methods of teaching are important to ensure the development of reading skills. If a teacher uses a teacher-centred approach in the teaching of English and Sepedi, it also hampers the practical acquisition of the language by the learners. Besides teaching methods being one of the challenges identified by teachers, it appears to be a major contributory factor to reading failure among Grade 6 learners. ELT3 articulated that:

Mmmh, there are different or many methods of teaching learners and uhh each teachers' different methods teach their child so now teaching methods are most clear and they are mostly not structured by the teacher themselves. Because even when you prepare a lesson plan, you have to state the teaching method. So, it needs to be a teaching method that already exists, because you cannot just come up with your own if maybe, for example, teachers were allowed to teach in the best way they can or in the best way they think they would be progress in the classrooms. So, now the teaching methods that have been stipulated for us to use are very restricting and they affect how a learner learns and the other thing is not all teaching methods work for all learners and if a classroom is full of learners, for example, in my class there is about 70 learners that's how overly crowded our classes are. You find that the method of teaching that I am using most of the time or on a certain day only works for a certain number of learners and not for the others uhh and there is also time constraints you cannot now divide your methods because now there is also the issue time so our teaching methods may be uh affecting how our learners learn the language but now a method that works for this learner will not work for the next learner so we need to able to interchange the methods but so far the methods do affect how our learners learn English.

ELT2 in responding to the question of early indicators or predictors of reading difficulties in Grade 6 learners, said:

Yes, the first time when the learners entered Grade 6, I gave them. I've tried to revise them with the previous grade for example, reading a short passage only to find that lot of learners cannot even read from the beginning of grade 6, revising on previous work done with learners is a very good teaching method, before you can run a baseline test.

Teachers show that they are trying to support and teach learners to read, but as much as they must follow school and curriculum policies, the process becomes ineffective. According to an English teacher from School C, classes are overcrowded with 70 learners in a class, which makes lesson delivery problematic. The methods suggested in the policy document are effective to a point but are not appropriate for large-sized

classes. Therefore, instructional methods must be developed by teachers to best suit their context.

SLT1 raised the point of teaching aids:

> *I can say that the methods of teaching, the teaching methods. One other thing I can say is that. What is hindering us is that we, the teachers of today, we are no longer bringing teaching aids which shows learners that this is a table, for example. Perhaps if I'm showing them with this table that it is there or if I come with anything that shows that this thing is existing? We do not come with the teaching aids If we're teaching learners with something that they can see, it's better. It will help them to know what it is.*

It would therefore seem that teachers cannot rely on the policies but need to devise strategies that assist in teaching in difficult contexts working with other teachers to complement pre-existing teaching methods. ELT2 from School B indicated that not only can the Grade 6 teachers help learners, but they also need to get assistance from the Foundation Phase teachers to narrow the knowledge gap effectively. ELT2 responded as follows:

> *Yes, the teaching method for this curriculum, specifically for Grade 6, must be changed. They must work together with the Foundation Phase by using flash cards pasting commonly used words using drilling methods. And, back to basic writing, for example handwriting on weekly basis in Grade 6. I think this will help improve writing skill.*

ELT2 believes that collaboration within phases can be effective since learners have not yet developed age-appropriate reading skill. ELT1's response was in the same vein:

> *Let me say we have got different types of teaching methods I may not say a particular method contribute a lot to the failure of reading it lies to the teacher. If you know your things and to have been trained to teach learners, you will check which methods suit you well. That is why I said methods are many as a teacher. You must choose the one that you think will suit you the best and give you the positive results.*

The preceding verbatim quotations are teachers' responses regarding the contributing factor, specifically instructional practices towards poor reading development. Teachers hold different views on how various instructional practices that can be used to develop learners' reading skills.

4.3.2.5 Internal and external policy influence

The teaching of reading is guided by various policies from the Department of Basic Education. The prime policy is the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. ELT1 and SLT1, from School A, reported in their interviews that their school has received adequate training on the implementation of the CAPS curriculum.

The participant teachers outlined several factors arising from externally developed policies such as CAPS and district policies and those that were developed at school level. These policies affect each teacher differently.

ELT1 *from School A:*

> *Yeah, the policy is well organised. Particularly for CAPS because we have got an insight of it. It will even direct you to a reader book and they will give you a page for the learners to read so that is why I said the CAPS is well done. It directs the teacher; it helps the learners because sometimes we may have those reader books only to find you're not using them but, in the CAPS, it will give you the name of the book and even the page and the name of the story that the learners must do that day. So that is why I said I support what the CAPS is saying* (ELT1).

ELT1 views CAPS as relevant and well guiding and can assist in the teaching of reading. ELT2 also has a positive view of the CAPS document, but identifies the issue of a poor foundation:

> *I think the curriculum is structured in such a way that learners are doing practical things. For an example, investigation without basic knowledge of reading, so, this is a problem because the learner first of all, when you investigate something, you're going to read and as a result, lack of basic from the Foundation Phase in reading*.

SLT1 also commented on the poor foundation and its effect on the learners:

On reading CAPS, I don't see any problem. The problem is the children. The curriculum CAPS do not have a problem … the problem is our children; our children do not listen.

The CAPS document works with the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP), which outlines the minimum core content and skills teachers should cover. ELT3 from School C raised an issue with the use of the ATP for reading. The ATP is considered troublesome in terms of the expected pace and the choice of content for teachers to teach within this specified period:

So, with CAPS we have uhm what we call an ATP. It is derived from the whole CAPS or how CAPS is designed. Now, the ATP paces you. It paces you in how you teach learners and when to teach a certain thing and how to move on to the next thing or rather when to move on to the next thing. So, it is almost like how the policies work; they restrict you or they limit you to certain things because now when you are told that you have only a week to teach a certain thing, this means after a week whether or not the learner has learnt you need to move on because you are paced and also sometimes question papers come from the district or the circuit office which means that they are to set as according to how they told to teach. This now affects the progress because you have to be fast paced and to the next thing without learners having understood what you were doing. So, these affect their reading and writing abilities as well because you move before they are a firm or stand in what they were supposed to learn.

ELT3 explained that it is mandatory for the teachers at their school to follow the ATP, even though they see that some learners are completely lost. The same learners will comment that they were not taught certain content, once they have written the assessment set by the District Office. These learners feel immensely discouraged after the experience as explained by ELT3:

Because you are paced and sometimes question papers come from the District or the Circuit Office which means that they are set according to how they teacher should teach. This now affects the progress because you have to be fast-paced and to the next thing without learners having understood what you were doing, uuhm, so, this affects their reading and writing abilities.

The ATP and the external factor at District level has a negative influence on learners' development of reading skills. Learners need to learn at their own pace to ensure understanding, especially in the case of struggling learners. SLT1 explained how this school has developed a policy on how to support learners with reading challenges:

> *The policy is there, which we have drawn up, which says that the learners must remain during sports period to give them one hour to help those learners who cannot read. We also held a meeting and tried to draw up a policy that shows that learners who cannot read must try to help those who cannot manage with that one hour, during weekends such as holiday, if a teacher can come and help learners can come. There was one teacher who has volunteered and has already started.*

This response shows that the SMT and language teachers have taken steps to establish an afternoon reading programme. However, implementation remained a challenge with barriers coming from both the learners and the teachers. ELT2 from School B acknowledged that there are policies that promote reading development at their school:

> *Yes, it has increased since we have got the written policy work whereby the learners arrive and write last week's homework due. And they read during morning devotions in front of the learners to promote reading at our institution.*

Teachers in this school ensure that learners are up to date with schoolwork, even if they were absent from school. ELT2 from School B commented on programme implemented by the Department to improve learners' reading skills:

> *We have a policy from the Department of Basic Education where we go for a workshop on this problem. PSRIP-Primary School Reading Improvement Plan and then we have the resources to use. Lesson plan. All the material relevant to eradicate this problem of reading.*

The policy was implemented to promote primary school learners' levels of reading and provides teachers with resources and lesson plans for effective language teaching.

4.3.2.6 Environmental factors

As indicated earlier, high enrolment in schools has resulted in large numbers of learners being crowded into classrooms that are designed to accommodate 40

learners. ELT3 complained about overcrowded classrooms. Overcrowding is a contributing factor to poor reading development. The participant finds it difficult to attend to all learners that cannot read. Learners tend to become part of a larger group of struggling readers in a class where individual attention is lacking, as opposed to being in a small class where they are easily spotted by others as not being able to read and given the relevant attention, which make them feel more confident. ELT2 indicated that Grade 6 learners were reluctant to learn with the use of flash cards, saying flash cards are meant for the Foundation Phase. This shows that the environment should be conducive to learning and that teachers should create resources that are grade-appropriate to support learners in the development of their reading skills.

4.3.2.7 Socio-economic issues

The data collected revealed factors influencing reading development such as socio-economic problems. These are exosystemic through the lens of ecological systems theory, as they indirectly affect learners' experiences. In addition, some micro and mesosystem issues affecting their learners' interest and progress in education are also outlined.

ELT3 stated:

> *Right uuhh how you present yourself in class and how… We cannot control how learners are affected by their home. For example, if a learner comes from a poverty-stricken household, you cannot control the level to which their poverty affects them in class. And you find that some children come from a poverty-stricken household. Those are things that affect them in class and no matter how good a teacher you are, you can only do so much in trying to get a child out their mind if they are maybe thinking too much out of their home situation. This then means that there are times where you are teaching, and a learner is not even able to hear anything. Or there are times that you are trying to show a learner how to read certain things and the learner is not paying attention because they are too involved in their thoughts and you know maybe where they come from or sometimes you find that a parent is not involved and you know how nice it is when you work with parents on the progress of learners because then you are not. We only get so much time in class. Parents spend*

most their time at home with their learners. You find that after school, if you teach something in class and after school the learner does not do anything to review or check the thing that you taught This solidifies everything that you're trying to teach, and it puts it concrete in their minds. So, parents' involvement is one of the socio-economic issues that we have in our school as well as poverty in our community we have a lot of that those things affect how quick a learner learns or how quickly they grasp reading content so yeah.

Poverty influences a learner's ability to learn. Poverty could mean poor nutrition, lack of basic resources, frequent absences from school due to family needs, difficulty concentrating in class and limited parental support. The response from ELT3 shows a lack of collaboration and communication between home and school settings, which could mean lack of parental involvement, and support.

SLT2 reported that learners are also affected by the same mesosystem factors, as parents do not collaborate with teachers:

It does contribute. For example, if the mother of the learner or the parent of the learner is working far away from the school, who is going to teach them manners, after school lesson no one, if the learner is staying with the grannies some of the grannies they can't read, some they can't write, so the learner will have a difficulty of reading, because that learner, they won't be doing the homework, and the class works. I think that affects the learners in…. that produces the poor reading in learners. It does contribute because sometimes you give learners a project and ask a learner to do this and do this and do that. The learner will come and tell you that my mom or my aunt can't read or write, that is why I did not do the project that also I think it also affected the learner.

Parents' level of education appears to be an issue affecting learners' reading development. This was stated by SLT3, because learners do not receive support with reading at home. Apparently, parents are barely able to read themselves. Parents also do not feel equipped to assist struggling learners at home because of their low level of education. Learners admit they only read at school but watch television at home, albeit English programmes. SLT3 also touched on the issue of poor socio-economic standard and how it negatively affects learners learning:

Wow. Uh, obviously when we start talking about socioeconomic factors, now we're talking about affordability. Learners are not all gifted the same way, but for them to be able to be entered in remedial classes now we are starting to stop to talk about extra costs. So, if the parents cannot afford to take the learner to the remedial. This is to the enrichment classes that is a big problem; learning aids we have limited resources in the public school. Obviously, the learners only have one textbook; if you are lucky sometimes one textbook is shared by five learners, so it is a problem so if the parents are unable to afford some of the basic things they can use like flash cards, your scribbles screens that you use for the vocabulary of a learner, it becomes a problem and then if the learner comes from a, who has bad social economic status, obviously that means they spend less time with their parents because their parents are always out hunting for food and basic needs. That means that parents will have less time to assist the learner with your phonetic, how to combine two letters. How do you call them? You know, such things.

The teachers indicated the correlation between families with poor socio-economic status and educational support, which requires funds for their children. Furthermore, parents also lack time to teach their children as they are always working to provide the basic needs for their children. ELT2 has suggested that parents hold a negative attitude towards education. This means they choose to favour other events over education:

I think the problem is according to my understanding, parents in this community are having negative attitude to school as a result of matching mining industry in the area; they are focusing on searching for jobs for mining. Parents' value of education impacts negatively to learners. They do not care about the outcome of the school, what the school expects. So, there is a higher level of alcohol abuse by the parents, sisters and brothers in the local community. uuh these are some, these are the example of what I have seen from the learners' problems.

ELT2 had more to add on socio-economic problems from personal observations.

Yes, some of the learners are from a poor home environment, parents are unemployed. So, as a result, I think this causes stress and other social problem e.g., lack of food in the family. This can contribute to poor learning of our kids.

Asked about how parental education affects learners' reading performance, participant ELT2 responded:

Okay… reading failure this is a serious problem because some of the parents do not even come and collect learners' reports. They do not come to the school meeting. I think the learners lack support from the parents because they do not check how the learners progress by seeing this poor school meeting attendance and the negative attitudes towards the school. As a result of emerging mining industry, they think if you complete Grade 8 you can work in the mine. So, I think this is a negative impact to the learners in the community.

ELT2 added:

So, there is a higher level of alcohol abuse by the parents, sisters and brothers in the local community uuh these are some, these are the example of what I have seen from the learners' problems.

It would seem the problem of poor reading development has roots in the home, where parents do not see the value of education. Parents do not fully understand what education means for their children, and the children do not see education as necessary for a brighter future. There is no motivation to learn; rather it discourages learners from learning to read. Societal problems such as alcohol abuse and unemployment affect learners with undesirable consequences.

4.3.2.8 Parental involvement

Responding to questions on parental involvement, the participants reported that it is a major problem that not only learners face, but also teachers.

ELT1 answered:

The first challenge that I have realised is that we lack parental support, our kids lack parental support, or no parental support at all you find that learners do things at their own. Parents did not show concern of with their children's reading performance.

The researcher would like to add here that even when the consent forms were sent to the learners' parents, the teacher emphasised that they needed to return it signed within the following week. Yet it took much longer for all the learners to submit.

ELT2 added:

> *I think the problem is according to my understanding is that parents in this community are having negative attitude to school as a result of matching mining industry in the area they are focusing on searching for jobs for mining. Parents' value of education impacts negatively to learners they do not care about the outcome of the school, what the school expects.*

ELT1 responded:

> *I may say parents have low level of education contributes a lot to the grade six learners."*

This appeared to be the problem in all the schools I visited including the school in which I am working. Learners who cannot read stay with very old guardians who never went to school or young parents who did not complete Grade 12. Their response to why homework was not completed or assistance with reading at home is similar. The learners explain that their mothers do not understand the homework, but they are ignorant about books that learners collect at school.

ELT3 stated:

> *Even the Department of Basic Education gives the learners learning material, some of the learners they just collect the material and then put them at home. For example, the learners receive a workbook only to find on quarterly base when you check some of the learners do not complete the work. So, I think this needs the parents to help the learners but as a result nothing.*

The researcher observed independent reading sessions during class visits, and it was evident that parents did not help learners with reading as part of their homework. When the teacher asked a learner about who assists him with reading homework, who he lives with, he said there is no-one to help him as his parents are at work. The teacher is saddened by this because this learner has the potential to excel. This is a serious situation to the extent that one teacher from School C (ELT3) said:

Right uuhh how you present yourself in class and how… we cannot control how learners are affected by their home. For example, you cannot also control how involved a parent is in their children's education. So, you find that some parents are not as involved as they should be. Sometimes you find that a parent is not involved, and you know how nice it is when you work with parents on the progress of learners because then you are not. We only get so much time in class; parents spend most their time at home with their learners after school. If you teach something in class and after school, the learner does not do anything to review or check the thing that you taught. Chances are the following day they would have forgotten what you were teaching but if you are working well with parents when they get home, the learners their parents try to get them together and help them with their homework and their schoolwork. This then solidifies everything that you're trying to teach, and it puts it concrete in their minds. So, parents' involvement is one of the socio-economic issues that we have in our school.

Most of the learners observed in the classroom by the researcher, did not know how to read at all and although some tried, they did not read with comprehension. This showed that learners received very little to no assistance from their parents at home.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Measures and strategies used to improve reading

Measures and strategies are regarded as a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim, which in this case, is the development of reading skills appropriate to Grade 6 level.

4.3.3.1 Use of technology

Considering limited resources, teachers are open to using technology to develop reading skills. SLT2 from School B acknowledged the use of technology in the classroom:

I think learners of these days enjoy technology. So, I think they will pay more attention if we can use technology to help them to read.

ELT1 also saw the benefits of integrating technology in the teaching and learning process:

It can play an important role but since I have said we are from a very poor background. It is difficult for the school to purchase laptops or whatever whereby learners will be engaged on that even us as educators, we don't have those things. So, for supporting the school itself with laptops or whatever is going to be difficult but it is a good idea if the government may involve that, it will play a very important role to the kids because they will be exposed on that.

In rural areas that are plagued with poverty, access to technology is a problem. The need for laptops was reported as problematic for both the teachers and the learners due to lack of funds although it is much needed. ELT2 suggested that the use of television will have a positive effect on learners' reading skills:

Yes, if we can have television … if you have a television to show them certain programmes. Showing learners reading and then when they're watching the learners reading on that television, he now knows that other learners are doing so. He will also have courage to copy or mimic those learners knowing he will also be able to read.

SLT2 from school C responded positively about the use of technology in the classroom:

We can download the programmes because there are programmes where they teach learners, they use phonics to teach learners to read the sounds. I think we can if we have technology, and we have the laptops or the tablets that can help because we can give each learner tablet and then we download those programmes so that learners can be helped.

ELT2 reported that the mining industry supports schools with technology:

Uuhh from the earlier on I have indicated that mining also supports the school with the laptops and computer as to teach the learners how this works and then we are still actually waiting for the mining industry to come up and then support the learners who are in foundation phase in Mathematics and literacy actually to fight this problem of reading and writing.

Teachers highlighted the benefits of having technological resources. ELT1 supported the need for tablets and laptops, and stated:

Uuh remember the issue of technology is something which learners are more interested on it. It can contribute a lot because it shows you a very good picture at the same time of that thing you're doing and whatever we talk about. Let's say a cow, it can show you a cow a picture of the cow the learners will be able to have that interest.

Technology caters for different learning styles. ELT3 outlined the significance of gadgets in the following response:

Alright so what I have realised is that some learners are visual people and others are just audio people. So, when we incorporate computer-assisted programmes in our education. This can help those who are more visual than they are audio helped or rather those who are just visual learners because these learners are different. I have already mentioned and as you well know ma'am so when we come up with ways that have to do with computer, these learners might be helped, because also what I have realised is that children are just intrigued and interested in things that have to do with the computer. So, I think that also computer related staff can help strengthen their attention span when we use computers in the classrooms. They can also be more attentive than they are when you are just there in class and uuhh they bring change in that hearing the same person everyday can be quite tiring so when you come and play maybe let's say a YouTube video that is educational, you give them a break from listening to just you and they are able to now listen to a certain interesting video maybe it's a different person speaking or like there is a different song on YouTube that's educational … those things can help learners not only with their attention span but also generally learning how to read and write.

SLT1 suggests another way in which to motivate learners to read:

Showing learners reading and then when they are watching the learners reading on that television; he now knows that other learners are doing so. He will also have courage to copy or mimic those learners knowing he will also be able to read.

SLT1 suggests that television encourages and stimulates learners' interest in reading.

4.3.3.2 Stakeholders' assistance

The teachers have indicated other stakeholders could help in assisting learners to read. ELT1 stated the need for parents and the Department of Education to help teachers in teaching learners how to read. The participant remarked as follows:

> *The other stakeholders, I think stakeholder number one parents must involve themselves, but if our parents are far away, it's going to be difficult, we know the teachers, the one who used to be with the kids most of ours but when they're away from the school? Parents must play their role; so, the parents must play their role teachers must play their role. Learners themselves must help each other. There are also the rules and even the Department of Basic Education must play a role to make sure that these learners succeed.*

The teachers suggested that all stakeholders need to assist in supporting the reading development of learners. Parental support would be one of the solutions to reading development among the Grade 6 learners as well as support from the Department. SLT1 asked for extra support from the Department, stating that assistants in the classroom played a major role for a temporary period in helping learners with reading development. This participant said:

> *Yes, they were there before when the government provided us with assistance, but now no during that time of assistance. Let's say I went to the sports; they remain and help learners with reading and others would realise that the learners are not doing anything with a certain and opt to come and ask ma'am, can I please assist these learners with reading. They were making them rich by that time it was getting better, but now that they are no longer there as they are no longer getting enough help like before.*

While School A struggled with parental support in reading, School B received help from parents in the absence of assistance from the DBE.

SLT2 said:

> *There are parents who are helping learners during the after-school lessons and I have mentioned before, they are in the community. They are teacher graduates who are helping learners with reading and writing.*

In School C, the Department of Basic Education appointed a learner support agent who helps to address the problem of reading and all other challenges that might be barriers to learning. Unfortunately, only one agent was appointed permanently. Therefore, additional support is still needed because the school has a high learner enrolment.

ELT3 stated:

> *Fortunately, the Department of Basic Education gave us post the one who is specialist in learners, special needs in education who supports learners who struggle. Ee are working together to address this problem of reading. Social problems, economic problems all the learners and parents work with him effectively at our institution.*
>
> *The school has this programme; they call it Reading Champions. It is in the library. So, they have a rotational system where they take the learners to the library. They read for fun, and the parents have organised this community. I am not sure if it is the school-based community where they help their learners after school to read and to write.*

In this school, the *Reading Champions* programme was implemented in the library and comprised of fun reading assisted by parents to improve reading skills. ELT3 suggested strategies to involve parents in the education of their children:

> *Well, some of the parents are not bad. So, some of the parents are able to help here and there, there was even a parent-involving programme. There was a programme that involved parents in the reading and writing of learners and some of the parents were really dedicated to the programme and other stakeholders. Other companies such as Room to Read come here and offer us help in a form of books and as well the circuit. The people from the circuit come up with programmes that help us in trying to improve our learners' reading and writing so those are the other stakeholders: the circuit, the companies that help provide us with books and parents that are actively involved in the learning their children.*

Teachers noted that involving relevant stakeholders in assisting learners in the development of their reading skills.

4.3.4 Sub-Theme 4: Methodological Strategies

The six Grade 6 teachers outlined the teaching strategies they use in the classroom to assist learners in the development of their reading skills. ELT1 from School A specified a range of strategies that could be used; for example, predictions:

> *Uh I must encourage learners to make connections to predict what will happen next. As a teacher, I will make sure that together with the kids let's predict what you think will happen when looking at those pictures and the topic itself and to visualise the scene. As a teacher, I must visualise it.*

A further strategy is that of dramatising the content:

> *As a teacher I must change my voice. If ever there is a lion, it roars. I must behave like that, and I think I will be doing it; I will be intervening in what is expected of me and monitor one's understanding while reading and asking questions based on the text and that is the thing. I think I will be making reading a success but if you just read you don't ask questions based on that text it becomes boring yes.*

Arranging learners into groups is a way in which proficient readers assist learners who have difficulty in reading:

> *When we are helping them with reading, we can group them into groups to read or they can come one by one in the forefront, knowing that when the other one is reading, the other one must also read. I encourage when the other learner is seeing his friend, or her friend reading will also try to start the reading or in groups tell them to read. And they read in groups. Thus, the courage we are giving them.*

When completing a comprehension passage, it is important that learners understand the vocabulary. This can be done prior to the learners beginning with the work:

> *Let me take an example and say on comprehension passage. You have read about a certain passage, and you find that there is a word that they don't know. I tried to write on a chalkboard and explained to them what is the meaning of the word just like before when I was teaching them when I told them about swimming*

and what does it mean? I was also trying to explain using hand gestures to explain it about doing what?

SLT2 shared the strategies used in the classroom*:*

I make sure that I print lots of activity on the Internet and a lot of short stories and give them to learners so that they can read or maybe 2-3 times a week read, enough theory and then after three days I go to the classroom and ask about what they have read about.

ELT2 maintained that the use of flash cards would assist learners with sight words and the development of vocabulary:

According to my experience, I tried to use the flash cards and then some learners say this thing is for Foundation Phase Grade 2. Therefore, they were not geared to actually listen to what I am saying but at the end of the day I group them into groups to identify the learners who struggle and give them support by giving them flash cards and the notes.

ELT2 outlined the point, which adds to teaching learners reading by stating:

The teachers must work hard actually to come up with flash cards, to come up with effective resources for the strictly struggling learners in their different classrooms.

ELT2 is compelled to use the ATP to guide the Grade 6 reading lessons:

Yes, classroom situations some educators do not use flashcards, as indicated by saying that this is for Foundation Phase. They are focusing on ATP to cover the content of ATP for Grade 6 forgetting to integrate the struggling learners with those who are working well in Grade 6. The focus here is for the learners who are doing Grade 6 they are… The teachers work, according to the level of ATP, not forgetting the fact that the learners need flash cards and other relevant reading materials to eradicate reading.

SLT3 outlined the teaching strategies implemented to help learners struggling with reading:

Everything must be fun; it has to be fun. Uh if for one myself, as a teacher, I am teaching the learners to read, but then I am not enjoying it, how would I expect

them? What right do I have to expect them to enjoy it if I do not enjoy it myself. So, they must learn everything from me. I have to enjoy it. I must make it enjoyable for them; so, the learners have to relate to the stories I am telling. The same material, the material that I'm using this side might not work if I were to move to go to Pretoria, let's say Pretoria because I'm teaching different people so I have to teach them using materials that they can relate to the learners here. So, I have to tailor my material to things that interest the learners so that they can enjoy this reading process.

Creating a positive learning environment and interesting reading materials would assist learners in the development of reading skills. However, learners need to be confident and ready to learn. Therefore, ELT3 focused on building learners' confidence:

We try to make it comfortable for the learners to read. As I have mentioned in the beginning, there is a little bit of a problem in their confidence and confidence is a very huge thing when a person learns something because if you are going to learn to read but you are silent then it defeats the purpose. So, as a language teacher, I try to make my learners understand that it is okay to be wrong; it is okay to not grasp a certain thing at a time that you were expecting to have grasped it. Uuh, we have confidence building sessions that are very helpful as well as coming up with different ways of trying to learn sometimes. We sing syllables so that they stay in their minds or in their heads and sometimes we just make a whole period a reading period. So, we dedicate time to reading and we also dedicate ourselves to building our confidence so that we can be confident in reading.

SLT2 from School B also emphasised that teachers must improve their teaching approaches as follows:

Ohh. I think some of the teachers, we do not use the teaching methods, we do not encourage learners to read aloud to read text repeatedly to support the influence. Provide opportunities for students to read and talk about the text. Yeah, the curriculum design I think increases student outcomes. As it plans for the alignment of students' full curriculum.

This teacher suggested that reading aloud and reading text repeatedly as well as discussing the content, can be one of the best methods to teach learners to read. SLT3 from School C also acknowledges that learners have different learning abilities. Therefore, the methods should be varied as well. This participant stated:

> *Now the question is if learners are different, they have different abilities. How could you expect that a learner that is achieving would understand a speech, a whole hour speech? and the learner that is struggling will also understand the same speech. It is not practical, and the teaching method needs to be looked at whereby we employ the learner-centred approach as opposed to the teacher-centred approach where the teacher preaches, demonstrates, reads and everything. The learners need to do these things for themselves. The teacher needs to support them as a facilitator. If there is a text that needs to be read, the teacher should not read it. You let the learners read and then you correct them. When you need to do that. I think that would work for us.*

The teachers that participated in this study suggested a learner-centred approach to be employed, rather than a teacher-centred approach so that learners become engaged in the full presentation of the lesson.

4.3.4.1 Extra lessons

In addition to formal class lessons, teachers offered solutions to assist learners struggling with reading. One of these solutions is extra lessons.

ELT1 stated:

> *As a Grade six language teacher, once I identify those learners with problems, I may set a time to remain behind with them, after school an hour is okay. Early in the morning before the start of the school, an hour is fine again, I may arrange with the school. This is cool with the SGB inviting the parents of those learners having some extra classes over the weekend. It may assist a lot then after school, I may take learners to the library and teach and assist them. Because they will be in a controlled number. Let's say in my Grade six I have 54 learners, then only 7 have got this problem. Then I may have enough time with them being seven, then quietly sure at the end of the day they will do well.*

ELT1 suggests supporting learners by teaching learners who have problems with reading after school hours or in the morning before actual lessons commence and address the reading difficulties. SLT1 from School A said that the importance of extra lessons is a suggested solution at their school to eradicate the problem of reading in the school.

> *We can call parents and call a meeting; we tell the parents here are the learners; we have a problem. We are asking for help from them; let's help each other. We told them that here in the school we have a reading problem. Just like when we are saying they must remain after school or they must come on Saturdays, they must give learners permission to come and themselves at home help us with assisting learners with reading.*

This suggestion of extra lessons was made to parents during a meeting by the Grade 6 language teacher. Most of the parents agreed to the extra lessons; however, learner attendance gradually dwindled until the programme came to a halt. SLT2 mentioned that learners are helped through extra lessons in the community from unemployed teacher graduates.

> *There are parents who are helping learners; they are helping us especially during the after-school lessons and as I have mentioned before, they are in the community. There are graduates, teacher graduates who are helping learners with reading and writing.*

ELT2 supported reading using extra time available to focus on struggling learners as follows:

> *I think we need to work as a team from Grade R to Grade 6 as to identify the problem that the learners experience earlier; for example, read every day before lesson, before you start lesson. Ask learners to read a passage, small piece of writing before and then repeat reading words loudly to improve the learners' ability to read.*

The implementation of effective teamwork among the phases to support learners with different content corresponding to their level of understanding was deemed one of the solutions. ELT3 indicated how the school assists in improving Grade 6 learners' reading skills:

Uuh we used to have an after-school type of programme where we identified learners who cannot read and write properly and we decided as teachers that we would stay with them in the school premises for about 30 minutes every day to help them so that was one of the strategies that we came up with or implemented in helping the learners read and write and it was a bit effective. It was effective. However, it came to a halt when some of the teachers had more commitments after work than they used to have. So, the manpower was not there; the labour was not enough, but it was a very effective strategy that we used to use.

SLT1 explained the solution they implemented in their school to ensure learner attendance as follows:

Yes, after school so that they can start reading but it is not possible that's why you hear me saying it can only be possible on Wednesday during Sports time. Yes, it is a better time, but the one-off remaining with learners during after-school they leave mostly yes.

However, SLT1 noted the following challenges that inhibit the successful implementation of extra lessons:

Children do not have time to remain after school because we have learners who stay far. They are being disturbed by the transportation, which brings them. You find that they are saying the transport is leaving them so when you are supposed to remain with others to read after school it could be one of the inhibitors.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This study used two methods of collecting data, namely: semi-structured interviews and observations. Learners were observed doing shared reading with their teachers and doing independent reading individually. Six teachers were interviewed and reading lessons were observed by the researcher. Learners read in both Sepedi Home Language and in English First Additional Language. The responses from the participants were insightful, as are the solutions that the teachers proposed. The next chapter provides a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the findings from this study with the aim to answer the research questions. The findings which were presented in Chapter 4 are discussed in this chapter. The findings outline the challenges faced by learners and teachers and their suggested solutions to the problems they face both internally and externally while teaching learners how to read. Recommendations are directed to language teachers, the Department of Basic Education and curriculum and policy developers. This chapter also presents implications for upcoming studies.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

This study focused on poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District. Specifically, it explored difficulties, contributing factors and possible solutions and measures pertaining to poor reading development. The main research question for this study was: *What are the causes of poor reading development among Grade 6 primary school learners?*

The sub questions were:

1. Which challenges do Grade 6 learners experience in reading?
2. What are the factors contributing to reading challenges among Grade 6 learners?
3. Which measures can be used to improve learners' reading adeptness?

5.3 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The researcher followed the phases of Braun and Clarke (2022) to analyse the data and developed the following three main themes:

Theme 1: Challenges learners experienced when reading

Theme 2: Factors contributing to reading challenges

Theme 3: Measures and strategies used to improve reading

The themes are discussed in conjunction with the sub-themes, and according to Bronfenbrenner's EST, which was the research paradigm for this study.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Challenges Learners Experienced When Reading

The four sub-themes are discussed to clarify this theme.

5.3.1.1 Grammar and spelling

The study revealed that learners made many spelling errors because of an inability to identify grammatical function forms. Most of the teachers in this study stated that the Grade 6 learners struggle with grammar. They associated it with spelling problems which leads to poor comprehension and reading difficulties. According to Chamalaun *et al*. (2021), a direct relationship exists between learners' grammatical functions, identification and spelling. The inability of learners to identify grammatical functions and its impact on spelling and comprehension can be linked to the microsystem, where interactions with teachers directly shape learning outcomes. Additionally, the mesosystem is affected when there is poor communication or collaboration between the school and the home. Failure to address these foundational language issues, compound learners' reading difficulties. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are predictors of academic success in language (Reed, 2023). Furthermore, Arabacı (2023) points out that poor spelling and grammar can hinder learners' ability to think critically and analyse information. This aligned with the finding in this study because teachers indicated that poor spelling contributed immensely to reading difficulties and the inability to read with comprehension.

5.3.1.2 Vocabulary

The findings of this study show that Grade 6 learners' limited vocabulary significantly delays their reading development and reading for understanding. Al-Khasawneh (2019) found that learners with a limited vocabulary struggle to read with understanding. Brevik (2019) explains that explicit vocabulary instruction helps with enhancing reading comprehension. Seemingly, the Grade 6 learners' difficulties with vocabulary affect both first and second languages. Learners' limited vocabulary falls within the microsystem, where the quality of instruction and interactions with teachers directly affects language acquisition. The learners observed in this study had difficulty constructing sentences and understanding compound words. Peters (2018) found that

a lack of teaching resources, and inadequate exposure to literature cause limited vocabulary. Furthermore, insufficient vocabulary has been found by Pretorius and Stoffelsma (2017) as commonplace in learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. These authors noted that children from disadvantaged areas often have limited exposure to rich language environments, which contributes to vocabulary deficiencies. The findings of this study indicated that socio-economic factors may limit learners' exposure to diverse vocabulary, as the learners hail mostly from low socio-economic backgrounds.

5.3.1.3 Punctuation

In this study, it was found that most Grade 6 learners failed to read text with the intended meaning attached to it, because they ignored punctuation marks. Libadi (2019) defines punctuation as the correct use of marks to clarify the meaning of written language. It involves the use of orthographic marks such as a full stop, question mark, exclamation mark, comma and semicolons. Taye and Mengesha (2024) recommend that deliberate attention be paid to punctuation instruction to address the challenges learners face in reading. Learners' struggles with punctuation reflect challenges within the microsystem, where teachers' instructional methods of punctuation directly influence learners' understanding.

5.3.1.4 Pronunciation

The Grade 6 language teachers reported that learners struggle with sounds, syllables and the pronunciation of words. Burns and Seidlhofer (2019) clarify that pronunciation refers to the sound system of a language. As explained by Pennington and Rogerson-Revell (2019), pronunciation involves acoustic, phonetic and phonological aspects of speech, including the production and perception of individual sounds, rhythm and intonation patterns. Difficulties with pronunciation among Grade 6 learners relate to the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's EST, as it reflects the direct influence of teachers' instructional methods and classroom interactions on language development. During shared reading observation sessions in English, the researcher realised that the problem with pronunciation in learners may stem from the teachers' pronunciation of certain words with a Sepedi sound and accent. The Grade 6 English teachers are Sepedi home language speakers. There is a need to improve the teaching of phonological awareness. The difficulties learners face in distinguishing between

sounds, such as the soft "c" in "city" and the hard "c" in "cat," points to a lack of phonetic awareness. Without this foundational understanding, and without role models in proper pronunciation, learners will struggle to pronounce words correctly, influencing their reading proficiency.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Factors Contributing to Reading Challenges

A number of sub-themes are discussed to clarify this theme.

5.3.2.1 Lack of resources and motivation

The findings of this study clearly show the negative effect on the reading development of Grade 6 learners when there is no home support. All the teacher participants in this study reported that the Grade 6 learners lacked motivation to sustain their reading interest either from teachers, parents or intrinsic motivation. This study further revealed a significant lack of educational resources in schools in the Sekhukhune East District, which greatly hinders the development of reading skills. Schools do not have sufficient materials such as textbooks and readers. The schools in this district do not have adequate libraries and are drastically under-resourced with technological devices, affecting the quality of education provided. Mohammed and Amponsah (2018) and Boonk *et al*., (2018) concur that factors contributing to poor reading skills include low motivation from teachers and parents, and a lack of reading resources at home and/or at school. These factors relate to the mesosystem of the EST, as it involves interaction between school and home, while impacting on the learner. Benting and Valle (2023) emphasise the significance of home support on children's reading ability. Therefore, the findings of this study are confirmed by the findings by Karamage (2024) that the availability of resources and teaching materials may affect learners' interest and may cause poor reading in primary schools.

5.3.2.2 Poor instructional leadership

The impact of poor instructional leadership was identified in the findings of this study as a barrier to reading development (Mngo & Mngo, 2018). They asserted that poor instructional leadership leads to poor reading development. Naidoo (2021) explains that instructional leadership in schools involves the guidance and management provided by the SMTs. This relates to findings by Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (2021) that decisions taken by those in leadership positions, for example to deny or grant requests for funding, can directly influence the reading development of learners. Deficient school management affects a learner at the mesosystem level. When the

SMT denies funding to much-needed reading resources, it can demoralise teachers, because the teachers are tasked with the development of learners' reading skills. Therefore, it is regrettable that in Sekhukhune East District, ineffective instructional leadership has been found to be a barrier to improving reading skills among Grade 6 learners.

5.3.2.3 Poor foundation

A primary factor contributing to poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, was found to be a poor foundation for reading skills. The findings of this study identified inadequate teaching that learners received in their early educational years resulting in a lack of foundational reading skills, specifically during the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3). The participant Grade 6 teachers in this study voiced concerns about this knowledge gap that is now proving detrimental to learners' reading in higher grades. This knowledge gap in learners' reading foundation relates to both the micro- and mesosystems because the immediate family must motivate and support the learner, and the school must assist in addressing the knowledge gap that now exists.

The Foundation Phase is instrumental in setting the groundwork for reading skills. It seems that many learners in Sekhukhune East enter the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6) without having mastered basic reading skills. This is partly due to the progression policy instituted by the Department (DBE, 2012). In addition to foundational deficiencies, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted teaching and learning. This resulted in loss of teaching time because learners attended school on a rotational timetable. This also meant that teachers could not embark on intervention strategies to fill the knowledge gap due to limited class time. Oczkus (2018) found that consistent practice and reinforcement of basic reading skills significantly improve learners' reading proficiency. As reading practice did not continue at home during the pandemic, most of the Grade 6 learners are currently lag behind in their reading development.

5.3.2.4 Teaching methods, resources and language interference

Poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in the Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, is a multifaceted problem. Nel and Muller (2019) also emphasise the adoption of teaching strategies that cater for different learning needs. However, the findings of this study revealed that teachers face more challenges that include not

only teaching methods, but also inadequate resources, the influence of dialects and cultural backgrounds. The lack of resources impact on the mesosystem as it is experienced at school level. One of the significant challenges highlighted by teachers is the lack of resources and teaching aids. This lack of resources often forces teachers to rely on outdated or less engaging teaching methods, which tends to be teacher-centred and do not hold the learners' interest. Markina and Garcia (2022) state that a learner-centred approach, which emphasises active participation and engagement is more effective than traditional teacher-centred methods. The learner-centred approach encourages learners to read aloud, engage in group discussions and participate in hands-on activities that promote critical thinking and comprehension. However, Grade 6 learners struggling to read exhibit low self-esteem and are therefore reluctant to participate in class.

Ahmad, Aisyah, Prasetyo and Putranto (2024) found that effective use of teaching aids, such as flashcards and other visual materials, can enhance reading comprehension and engagement among learners. Therefore, teachers need access to a variety of resources to implement more interactive and engaging teaching methods. Rajaram (2021) advocate for the implementation of evidence-based reading programmes such as phonics-based instruction and a structured reading curriculum. The findings of this study shows that ATPs often restrict teachers from implementing personalised teaching methods. The Grade 6 teachers feel that teaching time is mapped out and that no time is left to experiment with different teaching methods. Another significant factor affecting reading development is the influence of dialects and cultural backgrounds. Cultural backgrounds impact on the learner's exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the language barrier can lead to misunderstandings and confusion, as learners may struggle to grasp the nuances of a language that differs from their own. In South Africa, where multiple languages and dialects coexist, this concern is particularly pronounced. Chimbutane (2018a & b) found that language interference and dialectal differences can significantly impact learners' reading abilities, especially when teachers are not native speakers of the learners' home language.

5.3.2.5 Internal and external policy influence

The Grade 6 language teachers have expressed concern regarding internal and external policies affecting reading development among Grade 6 learners. Policies,

including CAPS and school-level initiatives, impact on teaching and learning in different ways. The CAPS policy affects the learner in the macrosystem, since it is developed at a national level, the wider community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The CAPS policy is recognised for its structured approach, offering clear guidelines to teachers on the content to be taught and assessments to conduct (DBE, 2011). Apart from CAPS, schools have attempted to address reading difficulties by compiling their own policies. The school policies affect learners in the mesosystem since the policies are developed within the school and become a school culture. Such policies include initiatives aimed at assisting struggling readers by using after-school programmes and sports periods for extra reading sessions. However, implementation has proven to be difficult, due to both teachers and learners' availability.

Furthermore, external policies from the Department also play a significant role in shaping reading instruction. Such a policy is PSRIP, a Departmental-initiated programme designed to enhance reading skills among primary school learners (DBE, 2019). This programme provides teachers with resources, lesson plans and training workshops aimed at improving reading proficiency. The ATP derived from CAPS presents another layer of policy influence. Concerns were expressed regarding the ATP's rigid pacing, which dictates the timing and sequence of teaching content (DBE, 2023). Piper *et al.* (2018) identified misalignment between educational policies and classroom realities as a key contributor to poor reading development. The findings of this study concur with these authors because a serious concern among Grade 6 language teachers is the progression policy (DBE, 2012). This policy prevents learners from repeating any grade twice in a phase, whether it is the Foundation Phase, or the Senior Phase. Consequently, learners may progress from the Foundation Phase without having acquired the necessary reading competencies, exacerbating reading challenges in higher grades.

5.3.2.6 Environmental factors

Grade 6 learners seem reluctant to engage with reading tools such as flashcards, because they associate flashcards with Foundation Phase learning. This perception can result from a classroom environment that may not be supportive or encouraging, potentially leading to feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy among learners. Van der Merwe (2021) cautions that peer dynamics and the potential for ridicule in a

classroom setting can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy. Even a teacher's use of humour in pointing out underperformance, even if unintended, can contribute to a negative learning atmosphere (Wenham, 2019).

Van der Berg *et al.* (2019) found that overcrowded classrooms are a significant impediment to personalised learning and can contribute to a lack of learner engagement, as well as motivation. The teachers in this study shared their concern over overcrowded classrooms, as many of them teach large numbers of learners in overcrowded classrooms every day. The rigid pace of the ATP is compounded by external factors such as standardised district assessments, which leads to a sense of defeat among learners who are unable to keep pace with the curriculum. While the district's intention is to maintain high educational standards, the uniform assessments and rigid pacing often fail to accommodate different learning needs, particularly learners struggling with foundational skills (Jansen & Christie, 2021).

5.3.2.7 Socio-economic factors

Lervag *et al.* (2019) report that children who suffer from poor socio-economic backgrounds usually do not have access to nutritious food and water, and these children often perform poorly academically, including in their reading. The findings of this study confirm the impact of socio-economic background on reading development among Grade 6 learners, because learners from poor socio-economic households find it difficult to concentrate in class. According to Sibanda (2021), it is because these learners are preoccupied with their home circumstances and therefore do not devote their full attention to the lessons. This deficit is categorised as an exosystem factor (Smit & Hay, 2020). Moreover, this study found that socio-economic conditions such as unemployment and alcohol abuse in the community contribute to an unfavourable home environment, impacting negatively on learners' motivation to learn and their reading performance. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), socio-economic factors may lead to certain societal influences, as was found in this study.

5.3.2.8 Parental involvement

The findings of this study revealed that parents are not as involved with their children's reading development as the teachers need them to be. This lack of engagement can be attributed to various socio-economic factors, including parents' work commitments and limited educational backgrounds, which often prevent them from effectively

supporting their children's academic needs (Khalid & Singal, 2023). A lack of parental support influences learners in the mesosystem, which encompasses the interaction between home and school environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Adelabu and Mncube (2023) found that parental involvement is desirable for the learner and teachers alike.

Van der Berg *et al.* (2019) point out that parental involvement is often minimal in communities where parents are preoccupied with socio-economic challenges. This lack of parental involvement is compounded by poor communication between parents and teachers, making it difficult to effectively identify and address learners' learning needs. Adelabu and Mncube (2023) points out that learners are affected by their parents' low literacy levels, with parents often being unable to assist with assignments, projects and reading homework. Wilder (2023) explored the impact of parental involvement on reading development and found that learners with active parental support are more likely to experience academic success.

According to Mőller *et al.* (2021) and Lervag *et al.,* (2019), parents' negative attitudes toward education impact on learners' motivation to learn. The mining industry in the Sekhukhune East District provides jobs to local people with little or no education. Unfortunately, this does not help to motivate learners to learn and in terms of this research study, improve reading skills to read at a grade-appropriate level. In this context, the absence of parental involvement not only contributes to poor reading development but also perpetuates a cycle of educational disadvantage, where learners receive inadequate support at home. Therefore, improving parental involvement, particularly in low socio-economic communities, is essential for fostering better educational outcomes and breaking the cycle of poor reading skills that many learners face in the district. In addition, Jeynes (2018) emphasises the importance of parental engagement in children's reading activities. It suggests that parents who read with their children or encourage reading at home contribute positively to literacy outcomes.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Measures and strategies used to improve reading

Four sub-themes are discussed to clarify this theme.

5.3.3.1 Use of technology

The incorporation of technology in educational settings has become a widely discussed strategy to enhance learning outcomes, particularly in improving reading skills among learners. In the Sekhukhune East District, teachers have recognised the potential of technology to address the problem of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners. Despite recognising the importance of traditional reading materials, the participant teachers in this research study emphasised the transformative potential of technology in classrooms. The use of digital devices such as tablets, laptops and televisions were proposed to make learning more engaging and accessible for learners. However, in view of financial constraints, government intervention could significantly aid in acquiring necessary technological resources. The teachers suggest that a technological approach will not only foster a sense of motivation among learners but also help to break the monotony of traditional classroom teaching methods, as proposed by Beers (2019).

The teachers agree that technological tools cater for different learning preferences, accommodating both visual and auditory learners. Cevikbas and Kaiser (2022) point out that the inclusion of educational videos, interactive games and digital reading platforms can help to maintain learners' attention and provide a more personalised learning experience. This diversity in teaching methods can lead to improved cognitive engagement and better retention of reading skills (Ali & Razali, 2019). Including technology in the classroom aligns with the microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), as the integration of digital tools will directly influence learners' reading skills and learning experiences. Additionally, technology can strengthen the mesosystem by providing new ways for collaboration between schools, families and the broader community, enhancing the learner's support system for academic success.

5.3.3.2 Stakeholders' assistance

Improving reading skills among learners requires the collaborative efforts of various stakeholders, including parents, the Department and community members. A heartening finding of this study was that unemployed teacher graduates in the community volunteer to provide extra lessons. These graduates assist learners with reading in the afternoons after school, supplementing the efforts of the language

teachers. This community-driven approach not only provides additional resources but also helps to build a culture of learning beyond the confines of the school. The involvement of such stakeholders influences the learners' mesosystem by strengthening the connections between the school, home and community environments, creating a more supportive network for reading development. In addition, the collaboration of these stakeholders contributes to the exosystem, where external factors such as community resources shape the educational opportunities available to learners.

When parents participate in their children's education by providing reading support at home, learners demonstrate greater motivation and improved reading skills (Zou *et al.,* 2023) Therefore, creating programmes that encourage parents to take an active role in their children's reading activities is a fundamental step in addressing reading challenges. The Department has a significant role to play in providing resources and assistance to schools in the Sekhukhune East District. This includes the provision of reading materials, training of teachers and the implementation of programmes that focus on reading development. Deacon *et al.* (2018) found that dedicated reading specialists or assistants in schools can lead to significant improvements in learners' reading abilities, particularly for struggling readers. The Department is the stakeholder that has the authority to appoint reading specialists and assistants at schools in South Africa.

5.3.3.3 Teachers' methodological strategies

The matter of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners is a prevalent concern in many educational districts, including the Sekhukhune East District of Limpopo Province, South Africa. To combat this problem, teachers have applied various teaching strategies to improve reading skills, comprehension, and learner engagement. The experiences and insights shared by the six Grade 6 teachers are discussed in 5.3.3.3.1 to 5.3.3.3.7 and show effective strategies that can be adopted to address reading difficulties.

5.3.3.3.1 Heterogenous grouping

Teachers reported to use heterogenous grouping when teaching reading to learners. Teachers group learners with mixed abilities and have them read aloud in front of their peers, which builds confidence and fluency (Namaziandost, Homayouni & Rahmani,

2020). This method is effective because it uses the social aspect of learning, allowing learners to benefit from observing their peers and receiving immediate feedback.

5.3.3.3.2 Prediction and visualisation

The other finding reported in this study as a measure was prediction and visualisation. This strategy is recommended by Harrison (2022). By encouraging learners to make predictions about what will happen next in a story, based on pictures and context, the teacher helps them to develop critical thinking skills and an anticipatory approach to reading.

5.3.3.3.3 Asking questions

Teachers also used questions as a measure. The practice of asking questions based on the text ensures that learners are not passive readers but active participants in the learning process, which is crucial for successful reading development (Rajaram, 2021).

5.3.3.3.4 Building vocabulary

Teachers also used vocabulary building to address reading challenges in their classrooms. Unfamiliar vocabulary and vocabulary extension is addressed by writing such words on the chalkboard and explaining the meanings to learners. This method underscores the importance of contextual vocabulary instruction in improving reading comprehension (Hansen, 2024).

5.3.3.3.5 Adapting materials

Teachers in this district adapt teaching materials to meet the diverse needs of their learners, as recommended by Tomlinson and Jarvis (2023). These materials include supplementary reading materials, such as printed activities and short stories. By providing learners with additional reading material, teachers can offer varied reading experiences that cater for different interests and reading levels. This study found that teachers offer differentiated instruction, which requires tailored reading matter. By focusing on the unique needs of each learner and providing individualised support, teachers can create an environment in which all learners can succeed. The teachers' adherence to the CAPS policy while ensuring that struggling learners receive the

necessary support underscores the balance between curriculum goals and personalised teaching.

5.3.3.3.6 Peer tutoring

In peer tutoring, teachers in this study reported that they pair struggling learners with those who are more proficient, highlighting the importance of peer collaborative education. Additionally, this study found that by modifying reading materials to align with the interests of the learners, teachers can make reading more appealing. For example, incorporating topics such as local culture, music and community events into reading materials can help learners relate to the content, making learning experiences more relevant and enjoyable (Chow *et al.*, 2018; Goldberg, 2021).

5.3.3.3.7 Evidence-based reading programmes

As evident in Chapter 4, teachers in this study reported that they use various reading programmes to improve reading in Grade 6. Evidence-based reading programmes, such as phonics instruction, and supported by proper teacher training for effective implementation (Van Staden, 2019) proved successful in this district. However, the findings reveal a gap where teachers rely on improvised strategies and lack access to systematic, evidence-based interventions, with challenges in aligning their methods to diverse learner needs and overcoming constraints from curriculum demands. Teaching strategies relate to the microsystem in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, as the direct interactions between teachers and learners shape the learners' reading development. These strategies also affect the mesosystem because of the integration of school practices and classroom experiences, home and community environments, enhancing overall support for reading growth.

5.3.3.4 Extra lessons

The matter of poor reading development among Grade 6 learners in Sekhukhune East District has prompted teachers to adopt various strategies, including extra lessons, to address this issue. Extra lessons relate to the microsystem in the Ecological Systems Theory, as they provide focused, individualised instruction that directly impacts learners' reading development through teacher-learner interactions. Extra lessons, both within and beyond regular school hours, have been recognised as a critical

approach to providing targeted support to struggling learners (Tomlinson & Jarvis, 2023).

Huettig and Pickering (2019) emphasise that continuous reading helps learners become avid readers. Additionally, a smaller group setting allows teachers to modify their instruction to individual needs, nurturing a more supportive and conducive learning environment. According to Van Staden (2019), small group instruction in reading programmes holds positive outcomes in improving learners' reading fluency and comprehension. The Grade 6 teachers highlighted the importance of involving parents and the community in the initiative to provide extra lessons to struggling readers. There is a need for collaboration with parents, suggesting meetings where teachers and parents discuss strategies to support learners at home. Despite the benefits of extra lessons, teachers identified several difficulties that hinder their successful implementation. These difficulties include logistical issues, such as transportation that prevent learners from staying after school. Many learners rely on transportation that leaves immediately after school hours, making it difficult for them to participate in extra lessons. Collaboration among teachers across different grade levels is another key strategy for improving reading skills. The findings of this study show the importance of teamwork among teachers from Grade R to Grade 6 to identify reading challenges early and provide continuous support. Currently, such collaboration is not in place. De Witt and Lessing (2018) encourage collaboration among teachers across grade levels to enhance the effectiveness of reading interventions.

5.4 SUMMARY

The study found that poor grammar and spelling are significant barriers to reading comprehension and academic success. These findings are aligned with the findings of Chamalaun *et al.* (2021) and Linnel *et al.* (2020) that found the inability to identify grammatical functions correlates with spelling difficulties, which in turn affect comprehension, which is linked to critical and analytical thinking. Insufficient foundational skills in grammar and spelling have broader implications, contributing to low academic achievement across subjects and diminishing learners' confidence. This issue is exacerbated by limited teamwork and collaboration between Grade 6 language teachers and Foundation Phase teachers for the identification of struggling readers and the need for support. Language teachers in this district often teach in a

language that is their second language, resulting in inconsistent pronunciation, which sets poor models for learners to follow. The study also found that learners show limited understanding of the purpose of punctuation, and this impacts not only reading fluency, but also reading comprehension. A central finding of the research is the significant impact of limited vocabulary on reading comprehension. Learners' insufficient vocabulary leads to poor performance in both first and second language reading tasks. This corresponds with findings by Spielvogel (2018) on the importance of explicit vocabulary instruction to improve comprehension. Harmon and Wood (2018) posit that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of reading comprehension skills, and learners with an extensive vocabulary engage more meaningfully with texts.

This study revealed a significant deficiency in educational resources, including textbooks, libraries and digital materials that hinder reading development. Mohammed and Amponsah (2018) emphasise that a lack of resources, combined with poor motivation from teachers and parents, contribute to poor reading abilities of learners. Insufficient educational resources not only affect learners' academic performance but also demotivates teachers, as they struggle to engage learners with irrelevant or inadequate materials. The importance of a library both at school and in the community was raised (Mojapelo, 2018).

Furthermore, poor instructional leadership has been found to be a barrier to effective reading development in the Sekhukhune East District. The lack of support from SMTs for innovative teaching methods and resource allocation hampers the implementation of effective reading programmes. Moreover, the rigid structure of ATP restricts teachers from employing personalised teaching strategies that cater for diverse learning styles. The strategies employed by the teachers in the Sekhukhune East District reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing poor reading development among Grade 6 learners. From building confidence in learners and creating a positive learning environment, to seeking support from the Department and other stakeholders, these teachers strive to promote reading development, to lead to overall academic success.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the challenges faced by Grade 6 learners with reading in the Sekhukhune East District.

5.5.1 Recommendation One

Schools need to ensure that vocabulary is included as part of lesson planning, while motivating teachers to use different teaching methods and referring to practical examples to emphasise the meaning of words. The departmental heads of languages in schools should encourage teamwork between Grade 6 language teachers and Foundation Phase teachers to create effective teaching resources that will improve spelling and grammar. The Department should consider arranging workshops that will develop teachers' knowledge on how to teach grammar, spelling, pronunciation, phonetic awareness and improve learners' reading comprehension. Schools need to engage the parent body and introduce community programmes that support reading development at home.

5.5.2 Recommendation Two

To enhance reading development in the Sekhukhune East District, the Department in collaboration with private companies in the community need to supply primary schools with educational reading materials and access to digital reading tools. Such materials include libraries, technological reading gadgets and textbooks that will further reading development in schools. According to Karamage (2024), schools that have access to adequate reading materials produce learners with good reading skills compared to other schools with poor or no reading materials.

5.5.3 Recommendation Three

Effective instructional leadership is essential for fostering an environment that supports reading development. SMTs should recognise the importance of reading as a foundational skill critical to academic success. Klinck, Thutulwa and Pelser (2023) emphasise the importance of supportive management practices in enhancing reading proficiency through resource allocation and programme implementation. Schools should arrange regular meetings between teachers and management to ensure effective communication and collaboration. Such meetings will not only ensure transparency, but also enable the successful implementation of reading programmes and other academic initiatives.

5.5.4 Recommendation Four

Teachers should focus on reinforcing basic reading skills such as vocabulary and phonetic awareness in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) to ensure that learners have a solid foundation before progressing to higher grades. Hirsch (2019) advocates the importance of mastering fundamental literacy skills to prevent challenges in subsequent academic stages. Additionally, remedial programmes should be offered to provide additional support to learners who may have missed out on essential skills during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.5.5 Recommendation Five

To cater for the diverse learning needs of learners in the Sekhukhune East District, teachers should adopt personalised and interactive teaching methods that engage learners and foster reading comprehension. The rigidity of ATPs related to CAPS should be addressed to allow teachers the flexibility to experiment with innovative teaching strategies tailored to their learners' specific needs. Makeleni and Sethusha (2022) emphasise the importance of adaptable teaching methods in improving reading outcomes, suggesting that a learner-centred approach is more effective than traditional teacher-centred methods.

5.5.6 Recommendation Six

Engaging parents and communities in the educational process is crucial for enhancing reading development. Parents should be encouraged to participate in their children's learning by providing reading materials at home and engaging in reading activities with them. Community-based reading programmes and reading workshops can be organised to raise awareness about the importance of reading and equip parents with the skills needed to support their children's literacy development. Mohammed and Amponsah (2018) emphasise the role of motivation from parents in improving reading abilities, highlighting the need for a collaborative approach to literacy development.

5.5.7 Recommendation Seven

Education policies should be reformed to focus on learners' holistic development rather than mere academic progression. The current policies that restrict learners from repeating a phase more than once, even if they lack the necessary skills, should be revisited. Policymakers should consider implementing policies that allow for more flexibility in grade progression, enabling learners to master foundational skills before advancing to higher grades.

5.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings of this study offer areas for future research which can further clarify the challenges around the problem of poor reading development in primary schools. Areas that require further research include the availability of reading resources at schools, the use of technological tools, reading programmes and libraries, and the impact thereof on reading development in schools.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Poor reading development among the Grade 6 learners in Sekhukhune East District was found to be a broad topic. The findings revealed a need for strategies to be implemented to improve the reading skills of learners, as this will benefit not only learners, but also communities, and ultimately, the country. Based on the findings, recommendations to address the problem of reading development were made in this chapter.The applications to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory were indicated to show that most factors that impact reading development in learners do not stem from within the learners but are external forces beyond the learner’s control. Therefore, educationalists and society have a joint responsibility to make reading and learning possible for all children, and in the interest of each community in which the learners find themselves.

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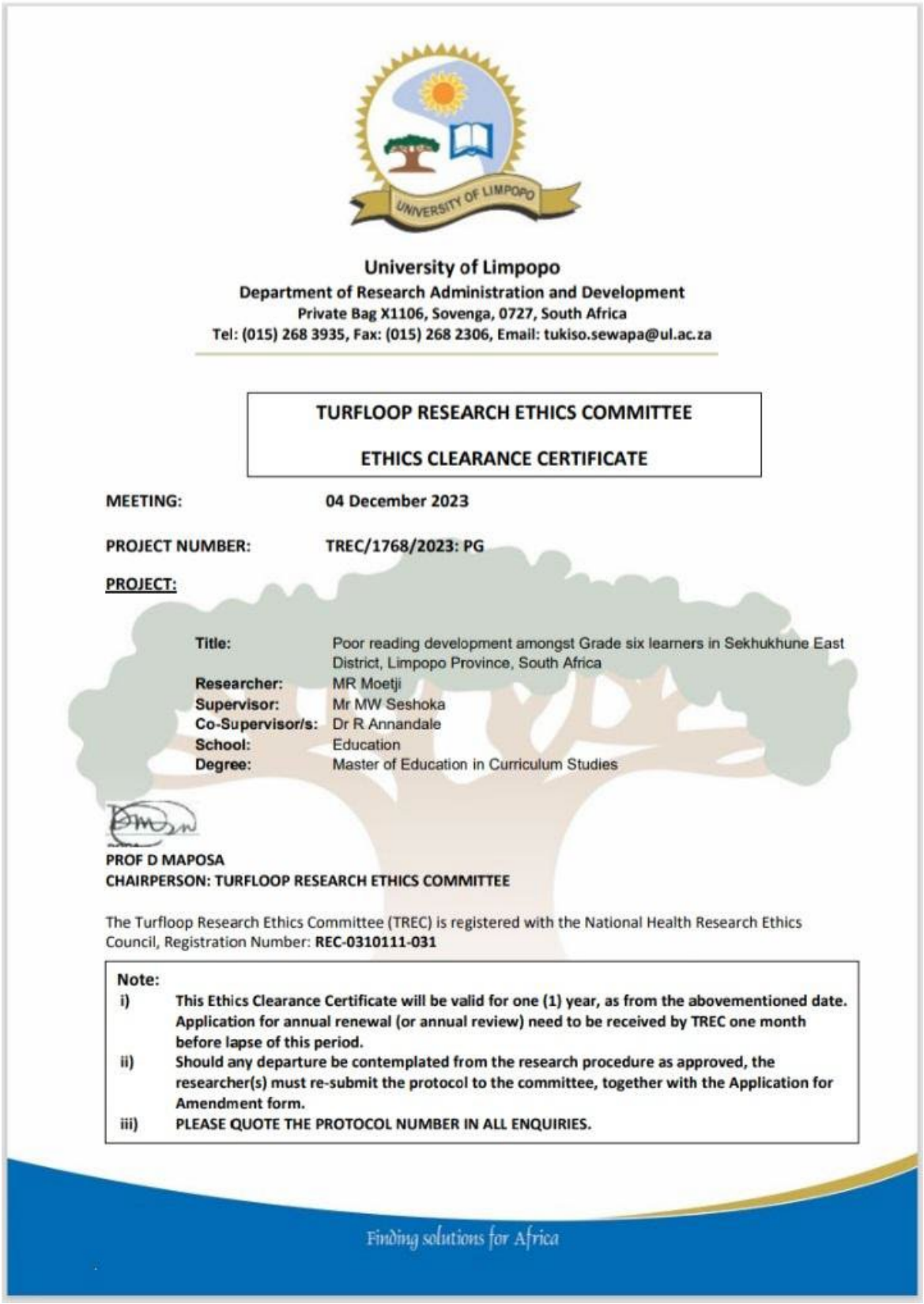
APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance Certificate



University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: tukiso.sewapa@ul.ac.za

TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: **04 December 2023**

PROJECT NUMBER: **TREC/1768/2023: PG**

PROJECT:

Title:	Poor reading development amongst Grade six learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa
Researcher:	MR Moetji
Supervisor:	Mr MW Seshoka
Co-Supervisor/s:	Dr R Annandale
School:	Education
Degree:	Master of Education in Curriculum Studies

PROF D MAPOSA
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: **REC-0310111-031**

Note:

i) **This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.**

ii) **Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.**

iii) **PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.**

Finding solutions for Africa

Appendix B: Permission to Conduct Research Limpopo Department of Education

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: Makola MC Tel No 015 290 9448 E-mail MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Moetji MR
MABOTJA VILLAGE STAND NO: 493
0751
rebeccamo14@gmail.com

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"POOR READING DEVELOPMENT AMONGST GRADE SIX LEARNERS IN SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA."**

3. The following conditions should be considered:

3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

3.2 Arrangements should be made with the District or Circuit Office and the School concerned.

3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.

3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected)

3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

15/02/2024

Dr. Makola MC **Date**

Director: IPR & R

15/02/2024

Mashaba KM **Date**

DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

The heartland of Southern Africa development is about people

Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Research Sekhukhune East District

Confidential Information - This is for official consumption

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT-DISTRICT ON THE RISE

REF: 2/2/4 ENQ: MADITSI RD Tel: 013 231 0103 DATE: 29/02/2024

To: **The Principal**

Cc: **Circuit Manager**

FROM: **MAKOLA MS- DISTRICT DIRECTOR**
SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS WITHIN THE SEKHUKHUNE EAST DISTRICT

1. The above matter has refers.

   Kindly be informed that Moetjie MR studying Master of education in curriculum studies at the university of Limpopo is granted permission to conduct research at your school.

2. Condition attached to permission are:

   - Participation is voluntary.
   - Information collected will only be used for study and remain confidential.
   - No names should be written on questionnaire.
   - Participants are free to withdraw anytime during the process.

NB: DATA COLLECTED AND ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE MUST BE DONE ONLY DURING BREAKS AND AFTER TEACHING HOURS

3. The district Director wishes you well as you continue to assist her.

MAKOLA MS
DISTRICT DIRECTOR

6/3/2024
DATE

Subject: Permission to conduct research in Schools within Sekhukhune east District
83 Aloe Street, 2314 Extension4, Aloe Ridge West, BURGERSFORT, 1150, P/Bag X 9041, BURGERSFORT, 1150

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people!

Appendix D: Letter to the Principal

Request to conduct research study for Master of Education in Curriculum Studies in your school.

I **Moetji Mmaphuti Rebecca (201635526)**, the student for masters in curriculum studies education at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus). I am writing this letter to make a plea to conduct my research study in your school. The research topic is **Poor reading development amongst grade six learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province.** The research is the requirement for the degree of Masters (M.Ed) in Curriculum Studies at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus).

The data will be collected in a form of classroom observation from learners with their teachers, semi-structured interviews from teachers only during the academic year 2022-2024. The participants' confidentiality will be respected.

Hoping for a positive response.

Kind regards	Approved by:
Ms Moetji M. R	Principal
Signature	Signature
_____	_____
Date:	Date:
_____	_____

Appendix E: Teachers' Consent Form

I, _____ (participant name), authorise that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

The researcher explained the study to me, and I understood it.

I have asked questions I needed clarity on, and I am ready to participate.

I am aware that I am volunteering, and I have the right to withdraw from the study.

I am mindful that the conclusions of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I admit to the recording of the semi-structured interview.

Participant Name & Surname_____

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname

Mmaphuti Rebecca Moetji

_____ _____

Researcher's signature Date

Appendix F1: Parent's Consent Form

I, _____ (participant's parent name), confirm that the person asking my consent to allow my child _____ (learners name) to take part in this research. The researcher has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

The researcher explained the study to me, and I understood it.

I comprehend that my child's participation is intended and that they are free to stop participating if needs be.

I am mindful that the conclusions of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my child's participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I admit that my child can be observed doing independent and shared reading.

Participant Name & Surname _____

_____ _____

Participant's parents' Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname

Mmaphuti Rebecca Moetji _____

_____

Researcher's signature Date _____

Appendix F2: Foromo Ya Tumelelo Ya Batswadi

Nna_____(leina la motswadi) ke a netefatša gore ke dumelela _____(leina la ngwana), e lego ngwana waka wa mphato wa bo tshela gore a raloke karolo ka ga nyakišišo ye. Monyakišiši o nhlaloseditše ka ga nyakišišo ya gagwe ya tša thuto le mohola wa yona. Ke kwišišitše seo nyakišišo ye e lego mabapi le sona.

Ke a kwišiša gore go tšea karolo ga ngwana waka ke ga go ithaopa, ebile a ka kgona go tlogela ge a sesa ikwa gabotse.

Ke a tseba gore di nhla tšeo di hwetšwago gotšwa nyakišišong ye ditlo phatlalatšwa marangrang a inthanete bjalo ka sengwalo seo se lego molaong sa tša thuto le lesedi mohlala, athikhele. Eupša tshedimošo ya sephira mabapi le tša thuto le maina a ngwana waka dika se tšweletšwe pepeneng.

Ke a dumela gore ngwana waka a ka bogelwa a bala ka go ikema le go bala le morutiši wa gagwe.

Motswadi wa ngwana

Mosaeno_____ letšatšikgwedi_____

Moetji Mmaphuti Rebecca (monyakišiši)

Mosaeno _____ letšatšikgwedi_____

Appendix G: Learners' Assent Form

I, _____ (participant name), confirm I will be a formal participant to take part in this research. The researcher has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

The researcher explained the study to me, and I understood it.

I am aware that I am volunteering, and I have the right to withdraw from the study.

I am mindful that the conclusions from this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I approve to be observed doing independent and shared reading.

Participant Name & Surname _____

Participant Signature _____ Date_____

Researcher's Name & Surname

Mmaphuti Rebecca Moetji

_____ _____

Researcher's signature Date_____

Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interviews for teachers

Name of Participant	
Contact Details	
Gender	
Position in the school	
Grade teaching	
Number of years in the grade	
Highest qualifications	

Interviewer's Details

Name of Interviewer	
Contact of Interviewer	
Date of Interview	
Place of Interview	
Duration of Interview	

1. Which challenges do Grade 6 learners experience in reading?

Prompts

1. What is the prevalence of reading difficulties among learners in grade 6?
2. What are the early indicators or predictors of reading difficulties in grade 6 learners?
3. What specific cognitive processes (e.g., phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, comprehension) contribute to reading difficulties in learners? How do these processes interact and impact reading performance?

4. How do language-related factors (e.g., vocabulary knowledge, grammar, syntax) influence reading difficulties in learners? What are the specific challenges faced by learners in the home and first additional languages?

2. What are the factors contributing to reading failure among grade 6 learners?

Prompts

1. What role do school-level factors, such as school leadership, resources, policies, and support systems, play in reading failure among grade 6 learners?
2. How do different instructional practices, such as teaching methods, curriculum design, and classroom environment, influence reading failure among grade 6 learners?
3. What role does language acquisition play in reading failure among grade 6 learners? How do factors like first language proficiency, second language acquisition, and language barriers affect reading outcomes?
4. To what extent do socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, parental education, and access to educational resources, contribute to reading failure among grade 6 learners?

3. Which measures may be used to improve learners' reading adeptness?

Prompts

1. What instructional support do learners receive for reading?
2. Which strategies are available and effective in dealing with poor reading?
3. What programmes are available in the school to support reading?
4. How can technology-based interventions (e.g., computer-assisted programmes, educational apps) be utilised to support learners with reading difficulties? What are the advantages of incorporating technology into reading interventions?

5. How do you as a language teacher intervene in making reading a success?
6. Who are other stakeholders involved in supporting learners in reading?
7. What measures do you suggest can be put in place to address the problem of poor reading?

Appendix I: Observation checklist

Checklist of observations				
Focus area	**Criterion**	**Yes**	**No**	**Comment**
Infrastructure	Does the school have conducive classroom/s for the reading?			
	Does the school have a library?			
Independent reading	Do learners appear to be motivated from home or school?			
	Do learners read well with fluency?			
	Is good learning behaviour adopted in class?			
	Is the teacher creating a reading friendly environment?			
Shared reading	Are the learners reading along with the teacher?			
	Are they showing understanding of the book?			

Checklist of observations				
Focus area	**Criterion**	**Yes**	**No**	**Comment**
	Does the presentation meet the requirements of shared reading?			
Reading materials	Are the readers books available and enough for the learners?			
	Is the reading material suitable for grade 6? And cognitive level			

Appendix J: Language Editing Certificate

ZEE EDITING AND PROOFREADING SERVICES

PO BOX 663 THOLONGWE 0734

LANGUAGE MATTERS

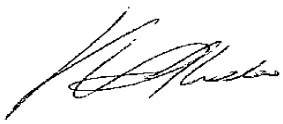
20 August 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **"Poor Reading Development Amongst Grade Six Learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa" by Mmaphuti Rebecca Moetji** has been edited and proofread for grammar, spelling, punctuation, overall style and logical flow. The edits were carried out using the "Track changes" feature in MS Word, giving the author final control over whether to accept or reject effected changes prior to submission, provided the changes I recommended are effected to the text, the language is of an acceptable standard.

Please don't hesitate to contact me for any enquiry.

Kind regards



Prof Hlaviso Motlhaka (BEDSPF-UL, BA Hons-UL, MA-IUP: USA, PhD-WITS, PGDiP-SUN)

Cell number: 079-721-0620/078-196-4459
Email address: hlavisomhlanga@yahoo.com

Appendix K: Turnitin Report

Poor reading development amongst grade six learners in Sekhukhune East District, Limpopo Province, South Africa

ORIGINALITY REPORT

12%	10%	10%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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