

**An Investigation of the Reading  
Levels of Intermediate Phase  
Learners in Motupa Circuit,  
Limpopo Province**

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the Dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of Master of Education has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been fully acknowledged.

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MP Ramalepe

30 August 2013

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## DEDICATION

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This dissertation is dedicated to my late grandmother and my mother, who have been my inspiration, and to the rest of my family for their support through this journey.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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Firstly, I would like to thank God for having been with me throughout the journey of my studies. I also like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr TE Mabila and Mr TN Manganye, whose invaluable, unequalled support and guidance made this study possible. There are a number of people, who contributed towards the completion of this study: my son Redibone A Ngwako Ramalepe, who assisted in accessing some journals on reading from the internet; Mr Baloyi R S, to whom I would go for a second opinion; and Mr Mohale A B, who would willingly read the dissertation and offer valuable suggestions.

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## ABSTRACT

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There is a general outcry from the Department of Education (DoE) and universities with regard to the levels of reading/literacy of learners entering university, as the standard of reading levels seems to be a recurring issue in most of the South African schools. The problem of students' poor reading skills in primary schools is usually carried over into secondary schools and higher education institutions as underlying cause of many students struggling to cope academically. Despite the introduction of several measures and guidelines, most learners remain functionally illiterate. In 2008, a National Reading Strategy (NRS) was put into place by the DoE: the aim of which was to promote a nation of life-long readers and life- learners. Well-developed reading skills are central to successful learning across the curriculum. The study examined the reading levels of the intermediate phase learners in the rural areas of Limpopo province. Following case study procedures, the study examined natural occurring reading of grade five learners in the intermediate phase. Collected data included observation, video tapes of learners while reading grade prescribed texts and interviews with intermediate phase educators. A descriptive quantitative discourse analysis of learners' reading and descriptive qualitative case study analysis were employed. The researcher takes the reader into the ordinary South African rural classroom, discusses findings and analysis, followed by suggested recommendations.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

ANA	Annual National Assessment
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CEPD	Centre for Education Policy Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DCT	Dual Coding Theory
DEFs	District Education Forums
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
EFAL	English First Additional Language
ELoLT	English as a Language of Learning and Teaching
ESL	English Second Language
FFLC	Foundation for Learning Campaign
HOD	Head of Department
IT	Information Technology
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
MLA	Monitoring Learning Achievement
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
NEIMS	National Education Infrastructure Management System
NRS	National Reading Strategy
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSI	Reading Strategy Instruction
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SGBs	School Governing Bodies
SMT	School Management Team
STDV	Standard Deviation
UNISA	University of South Africa
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

'The effectiveness of an education system is judged by the literacy (and numeracy) levels that its learners achieve' (Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009:54). Hence, reading is a life-long skill that must be taught to achieve eventual success in life. However, the reading ability of South African intermediate phase learners is cause for concern, not only for the Department of Education (DoE)<sup>1</sup>, but also for the public and the performance and growth of the economy as well. Reading is a prerequisite for effective learning in the schooling life of any learner. The DoE showed its concern about the state of affairs by launching the Foundations for Learning Campaign in February 2008 (henceforth FFLC). It is worth noting that in South Africa, one can still find young people in the bank queuing to be helped with filling in a bank withdrawal slip. Time that is lost while helping such clients is worth a fortune. Many of our day-to-day tasks require reading, for example, doing shopping and following directions. In this age of Information Technology (IT), the inability to use a computer is regarded as being illiterate in some quarters. Many of the learners cannot read fluently. The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) grades R – 9, Languages – English Home Language, (DoE, 2003a:92) mentions that 'reading is the foundation for writing and a means of lifelong learning'. Hence, the school remains the fundamental centre of teaching and learning in today's ever-busy society. Nevertheless, the role of all other stakeholders remains vital. Reading, as part of language skills, forms and is the critical component of each learning area.

Being able to read in English is vital, as it is the language of learning and teaching in most schools in South Africa. In addition, English remains the language of trade and commerce in most countries of the world. 'Universally, English is the dominant language of communication, academia, business, and technology' (Nel & Theron, 2008:203–219).

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Education (DoE) split into two after the 2009 national and provincial elections, forming the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the Department of Basic Education (DBE). To avoid confusion, throughout this study 'DoE' refers to the department before the split in May 2009.

This study sought to investigate the reading/literacy levels of intermediate phase learners in English First Additional Language (EFAL) and explore the perceptions of educators with regard to levels of reading/literacy of their learners. Potterton (2008:15) argues that in fairness to teachers, implementation of curriculum changes (and consequently changes in teaching practice) are only some of the modifications expected in schools. A myriad of new policies and regulations, which teachers had to come to grips with, large classes and the stronghold of traditional practices on teachers, contribute to the fact that the curriculum is not always successfully translated in the classroom.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

There is a general outcry from the DoE and other stakeholders (such as Universities) with regard to the levels of reading/literacy among South African learners. For example, the minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga, once lamented, "Many of our schools are dysfunctional. South African learners exit the foundation phase without the basic literacy and numeracy skills required to succeed later on", (Sowetan, 2010:12). To categorically state the problem clearly, one can quote recent reports from the media, which lament the following fact, "Kids cannot read or write, study shows pathetic state of primary school education" (Waldner, 2011:1). Furthermore, Waldner (2011:10) reveals, "South African schoolchildren are shockingly illiterate ... since the literacy rate for grade 3s is 35% and for grade 6s it is 28% this raises this problem in a more concrete manner". In addition, 'an analysis of Annual National Assessment (ANA) results conducted from 2006 onwards reveal that learners' performance in the Intermediate Phase on Mathematics and Language is not as expected to be according to Grade level and age cohort' (DoE, 2012:3).

According to the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) research results (Mullis, Martin, Kennedy & Foy 2007), 78% of South African children have not developed the basic reading skills required for learning by the time they reach Grade 5. Results of these various tests indicate that there is a problem of poor reading ability in South Africa. Bharuthram, (2012:207) points out that, the problem of the students' poor reading skills in primary schools is usually carried over into secondary

schools and inadvertently higher education institutions, as many students, who enter higher education, struggle to cope academically.

In summary, for the researcher, the investigation of this problem is necessary, considering the lamentation of Minister Motshekga, “the low levels of literacy and numeracy in primary schools are worrying precisely because the critical skills of literacy and numeracy are fundamental to further education and achievement in the world of both education and work”. The Minister for Basic Education further explained the problem. “As a country we use the performance of pupils at the end of their 12-year schooling, to measure the health of our education system... this cannot be right because it does not allow us to comprehend deeply enough what goes on lower down in the system on a year-by-year basis” (Mohlala, 2012:14).

Against this background, the researcher sought to explore reading levels of the intermediate phase learners in grade 5. Additionally, the outlined problem motivated the researcher to conduct a study that endeavours to achieve the following aim and objectives:

### **1.3 Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to investigate the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in Motupa Circuit, Bolobedu area of Limpopo Province.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

Objectives of this study are to:

- Determine the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in grade 5 Motupa Circuit, Limpopo Province;
- Assess the comprehension ability of intermediate phase learners in grade 5, in Motupa Circuit;
- Determine the afterschool reading activities of grade 5 learners in Motupa Circuit; and
- Assess the perceptions of intermediate phase educators about reading levels of their learners in grade 5.



## **1.5 Research Questions**

The main research question for this study is:

What are the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in Motupa Circuit, Bolobedu area of Limpopo?

The sub-questions for this study are as follows:

- What are the reading levels of grade 5 learners in Motupa Circuit?
- What is the comprehension ability of grade 5 intermediate phase learners?
- What are the perceptions of intermediate phase educators about the reading levels of their grade 5 learners?
- What are the afterschool reading activities of grade 5 learners in Motupa Circuit?

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study will gather empirical data about the learners' reading/literacy levels that will be useful to policy makers, as previously alluded to, reading leads to the eventual success of the learner in life. In addition, this study could influence language teachers and curriculum designers to equip learners with a lifelong paramount skill and thereby enhance economic growth by providing a functionally literate workforce.

## **1.7 Methodology**

The research methodology employed in this study is drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. The mixed method was necessitated by the use of an error-count test administered to learners. This led to quantification of the error-count test results.

### **1.7.1 Research population and sample**

The study was conducted in Motupa Circuit, Mopani District in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The research population consists of 19 primary schools with

approximately 2400 intermediate phase learners. As this is a case study, the research sample is drawn from a group of individuals in three schools in Motupa Circuit. The research sample is the learners, who are purposefully selected. The size of the sample is restricted by logistical factors and limited resources faced by the researcher in conducting a large-scale study. The researcher investigated the reading levels of the intermediate phase learners in grade 5. For the purpose of the study, English First Additional Language (EFAL) is given priority over the home language, as it is the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT). The EFAL educators from the selected schools are also included in the sample, through informal interviews, using an open-ended interview guide (see annexure D).

### **1.7.2 Delimitation of the study**

This study could have been limited by the use of a video recording instrument within the classroom. In order to delimit this, the researcher first used such instruments for short time-slots during classroom periods before the actual recording of the data. This ensured that learner's anxiety, and mistrust was reduced to a minimum. In addition, the purpose and process of the study was thoroughly explained to all selected participants and EFAL educators to remove any suspicion or fear. This encouraged honest responses from educators. The Principal of the selected school was also briefed about the purpose of the study. The study was restricted to the schools in the Motupa Circuit, area of Bolobedu in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. It would have been desirable to include all the schools in the circuit, however, that was not possible within the scope of this study as the research only concentrated on three primary schools. The small sample was certainly a limitation of the study, however, an extended and on-going data collection process and triangulation made it possible for the researcher to make an informed investigation.

### **1.7.3 Ethical considerations**

The research was conducted at public schools that fall under the control of the Government; therefore, permission was given by those in authority, namely, the

Head of the Department of Education (HOD) in Limpopo Province (see annexure E), circuit manager and principals of the selected schools. All the responses were treated confidentially in line with established consideration for research data handling and dissemination, for example, all participating respondents are anonymous.

### **1.8 Definition of Key Concepts**

There are key terms that bring about certain concepts, which apply to this study and therefore need to be clarified, to avoid confusion with regard to their daily use:

- Reading,
- Reading levels,
- Grade level reading, and
- Functional literacy.

### **Reading**

Various scholars defined “reading”, however, the researcher seeks to quote Grove and Hauptfleisch (1982:2) who define reading as “...the meaningful interpretation of the written word”. They add that the act of interpreting the written word is achieved through visual perception, whereby the word and its meaning are recalled in the brain. Beyond that, the ability to attach meaning to what has been read is influenced by the reader’s experience and language proficiency.

Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009:56) explain that reading comprises two main components, viz. decoding and comprehension. Decoding refers to the code-based processes involved in translating the written symbols on the page into identifiable chunks of language, while comprehension refers to the processes that assign meaning to the text as a whole. Thus, reading requires that in the foundation phase there should be a brisk and steady development of lower level decoding processes involving orthographic, phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic skills.

## Reading levels

Grades 4 - 9 Assessment Guidelines for Languages (DoE, 2003(b):39) envisages that a learner should be able to read a passage (prepared and unprepared) using voice projection, fluency, expression and other strategies for spoken presentation. The DoE's (2008:37) document titled *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades Handbook* states that, "there are three reading levels (from the strongest to the weakest): which are; **independent, instructional** and **frustration level**. However, Moloi and Chetty (2011:7) identify eight reading levels, which are:

1. Pre-reading,
2. Emergent Reading,
3. Basic Reading,
4. Reading for Meaning,
5. Interpretive Reading,
6. Inferential Reading,
7. Analytical Reading, and
8. Critical Reading.

In this study, the researcher employed the three reading levels as defined by *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades Handbook* to investigating learners' reading levels.

## Grade level reading

The *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades Handbook* (2008:37) further stipulates, "Learners making fewer than five errors while subjected to error count tests are reading at their grade level. Learners making between 5 and 10 errors are reading below grade level and need more practice, learners making more than 10 errors need help and are reading far below the grade level".

## **Functional literacy**

Functional literacy and functional numeracy are used to indicate whether an individual has acquired sufficient numeracy and literacy skills, such that he or she is able to use those skills in everyday life satisfactorily. For example, a functionally literate learner should be able to read a simple text and extract meaning or interpret common everyday units of measurement.

### **1.9 Overview of Chapters**

The study is divided into the following five chapters:

**Chapter 1** provides the introduction and background to the study. It contains the statement of the problem as well as aims, objectives and research questions. The research population and sample and the delimitation of the study are also dealt with in this chapter.

**Chapter 2** deals with the theoretical framework and the literature review relating to the study. In this chapter, the researcher explores the opinions and findings of other scholars in relation to the topic under research.

**Chapter 3** explores the research methodology and design of the study. It also reveals how the research methodology and design were applied in this study. In addition, it explains how data were collected in the study.

**Chapter 4** explores and analysis the findings. Furthermore, the researcher interprets the findings of the study.

**Chapter 5** deals with a brief overview of the study, findings, as well as recommendations and conclusion.

## **1.10 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the study in detail. Being able to read at grade level is a prerequisite skill for the eventual success of every learner. The researcher in this chapter explicitly discussed the statement of the problem, aims of the study, research questions as well as research population and sample. Focus was also put on the delimitation and ethical considerations of the study. It concluded by eliciting the division of chapters.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

There are three well-known theories of reading. These are the traditional, the cognitive as well as the metacognitive and Dual Coding Theory (DCT). According to Dole, Duffy, Roehlerand and Pearson (1991), in the traditional view of reading, novice readers acquire a set of hierarchically (*bottom-up*) ordered sub-skills that sequentially build toward comprehension ability.

#### 2.1.1 Traditional and cognitive theories of reading

In the traditional theory, readers are viewed as passive recipients of information in the text. The cognitive theory of reading or the '*top-down*' model is in direct opposition to the '*bottom-up*' or *traditional* model. Conversely, Nunan (1991) as well as Dubin and Bycina (1991), argue that the psycholinguistic model of reading and the top-down model are in exact concordance.

#### 2.1.2 Metacognitive and DCT

This study is located within the metacognitive and DCT of reading. In summary, according to Block (1992), in the metacognitive view, there is no debate on "**whether reading is a bottom-up, language-based process or a top-down, knowledge-based process.**" It is also not problematic to accept the influence of background knowledge on both L1 and L2 readers. Research has gone even further to define the control readers execute on their ability to understand a text. The source has referred to this as metacognition, which involves thinking about what one is doing while reading. Klein, Peterson and Simington (1991) state that strategic readers attempt the following while reading:

- Identifying the purpose of the reading before reading, and
- Identifying the form or type of the text before reading.

"In the DCT connectionist views have produced a form of grammar called cognitive grammar" (Langacker, 1987). Cognitive grammar simplifies the field by rejecting the rule-governed model of mind and language and replacing it with an associational

model. In this model, networks of association evolve with the experience of the individual including linguistic associations. The DCT is a theory of general cognition that addresses reading in all its psychological aspects. Few theories offer this scope and have achieved its broad base of empirical support (*Ibid*, 1987).

More significantly, from the DCT point of view, cognition is not seen as essentially verbal. Cognitive grammar assumes that mental representations can be imagistic. Language processing is a matter of matching words with mental representations and mental models of reality that may be in the form of imagery. Imagery is, therefore, an important substratum of language in the form of experience-based knowledge of the world, to which language refers, rather than a propositional deep structure with innate origins.

Mohlala quotes a statement by the director of Read for Africa who contends, “Most teachers are still spending too much time teaching one isolated letter instead of using an integrated and stimulating approach”. (Mohlala, 2012:14). In addition, Mohlala reports, “There is a theory, which emphasis connection between sound and picture and according to the proponents of this theory, one of its principles is that letters are pictures of sounds”. (Mohlala, 2012:14).

DCT principles have been extensively applied to teaching reading comprehension throughout history, often intuitively. Sadoski and Paivio (2001) reviewed the history of teaching text comprehension from ancient times to modern and found an alternation between emphasis on the abstract and the verbal (e.g., outlines, epitomes) and the concrete and the imaginal (e.g., object lessons, imagery training). The use of induced mental imagery to enhance student understanding and learning has gained an increasing record of acceptance. The general conclusion of both of these reviews is that instructions to form mental images significantly enhance the reading comprehension and memory of both children and adults in various ways. Bharuthram, (2012:205) reports that, research in applied linguistics and reading research show a strong correlation between reading proficiency and academic success at all ages, with numerous experts, such as Nunes (1999) as well as

Townsend and Turner (2000) agreeing that poor reading skills lead to poor academic performance, which in turn adversely affects students' overall development.

In summary, DCT can provide a coherent account of the critical role played by language concreteness in reading comprehension. The evidence cited poses problems for theories, which propose that all language is mentally encoded in abstract, propositional form. Furthermore, DCT can provide experimental predictions about the comprehension and recall of concrete and abstract texts, and about the integration of both concrete and abstract texts, in a theoretically consistent and parsimonious ways.

## **2.2 Reading in South African Schools**

Recently, a number of South African scholars have conducted studies related the standard of reading in the intermediate phase. The NRS (2008) explains that, the Systemic Evaluation revealed that in the intermediate phase, 14% of learners were outstanding in their language; however, 23% were below the required competence for their age level. According to the *Trends in Education Macro-Indicators* (2009), 48.6% of Grade 6 learners in the Western Cape could read and write at the appropriate level. However, in schools previously classified as 'white', 86.4% met the standard in comparison to just 24.2% in formerly 'black' schools. Bharuthram (2012) informs that DBE reported that the 2011 ANA results had declined since testing in 2008. In 2008, 36% of Grade 3s scored under 35% in literacy, while in 2011 the figure increased to 45%. A comparison between the 2008 Grade 3 results and the 2011 Grade 6 results also suggests a worsening performance. For instance, while 36% of 2008 Grade 3s scored under 35% in literacy, in 2011 57% of the Grade 6s scored under 35% (DBE, 2011). Bharuthram (2012) further explains that the problem of the students' poor reading skills in primary schools is usually carried over into secondary schools and inadvertently higher education institutions, as many students, who enter higher education struggle to cope academically.

Scholars, such as Nel and Theron (2008:219) are of the opinion that many ESL learners experience barriers to learning, because of limited English proficiency. NCS grades 4-9 Assessment Guidelines for Languages, (DoE, 2003(c):39) envisages

that a learner should be able to read a passage (prepared and unprepared) using voice projection, fluency, expression and other strategies for spoken presentation. Condy (2008:610) indicates that in December 2005, the South African national Grade 6 intermediate phase systematic evaluation report stated that 42.1% of all Grade 6 learners were working and achieving on grade literacy level. Ten years into democratic governance, the Grade 6 learner assessment confirmed that the legacy of apartheid had affected the educational achievements of the children in the country deeply. The PIRLS (2007) report summarised the findings from South Africa's participation, which took place in South Africa between 2004 and 2007. The research assessed the reading skills of Grade 4 learners, where a total of 40 countries and 45 education departments participated. South Africa achieved the lowest score of all the education departments. This means that South African learners are performing far below par when compared to learners from even some of the poorest countries in the world. These results imply that there is a crisis in the whole of the South African education system, and that this crisis is most serious among learners in rural schools.

Oberholzer (2005:96) state that generally, the view among teachers as well as educational psychologists and anyone involved in the field of education, is that reading plays a crucial role in a child's academic success. The Foundations for Learning, Government Gazette, No. 30880 (2008:4), stipulates that all primary schools will be expected to increase average learner performance in Literacy/Language and Numeracy/Mathematics to no less than 50% indicating an improvement of between 15% - 20% in the four years of the campaign. In addition, it emphasises that by 2011 all learners should be able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of Literacy and Numeracy. NRS (2008) maintains that good readers need access to good reading material. Learners need access to appropriate reading books throughout the school year, and they should be able to take books home in order to practise reading. Magazines and other materials can also enrich the reading experience, and encourage the whole family to engage in reading. The Department is organising campaigns to provide schools with good reading materials – books, magazines and even comics!

“Education as a whole received the lion’s share of the national budget - R165 billion for 2010-11. Higher Education and Training acquired R23.3 billion and Basic Education R127 billion” (Dibetle & Mohlala, 2010: 2). In 2012-2013, once again, education received the largest share of the national budget - R207 billion. Minister of Finance, Pravin Gordhan announced, “About three-quarters of the funds are set aside for education, about R152.1billion, would go to Basic Education” (Waldner, 2012:6). However, Van der Berg (2004) reports that inputs, such as more money, more teaching materials and learning aids as well as smaller class sizes are not crucial factors in school performance. The author continues by stating that the most powerful factors determining how well a school functions are the quality of the principal, the level of teacher commitment and the extent of community involvement. Walker, Rattanavich and Oller (1992:2) argue that the reason why so many children fail to read has more to do with what goes on in school than with what the children bring to school.

The Teacher’s Guide for the Development of Learning Programme proclaims that context, which ensures that teaching and learning is appropriate to the needs that exist in the community, school and the classroom, is important (DoE, 2003(c):3). In other words, reading should not be taught in a vacuum, it should be contextual. For example, reading about the famous people in USA, rather than the local hero next door could result in a failed attempt to teach reading. To this effect, Machet and Tiemensma (2009:59) argue that, without the proper educational stimulation and encouragement from the home, the school and the community, most learners will not develop a reading habit and engage in voluntary reading.

Adcock (2002:6) indicates that a lexical schema might fail an African reader, who has never left his tropical homeland. When given a story about a heavy snowfall in Russia, this reader may experience problems with comprehension, because of his lack of experience with snow. However, this may not have a direct bearing on the inability of learners to read, as there are a multitude of different ideas and strategies to enhance the reading abilities of the learners. Specific solutions apply to specific situations. Reading more about foreign experiences is like divorcing language from context.

The issue discussed above depends on the learners' levels of reading/literacy, of which the researcher sought to explore. In South Africa, traditional approaches to teaching literacy, in both the mother tongue as well as a second language, had always viewed language in terms of many small discrete units, which comprised syntax and phrasing, phonics, spelling, grammar and punctuation. These skills were taught with the idea that students would learn various discrete units of language in isolated ways, often by repetition and drill, and that language learning developed by progressing from smaller to larger units. Only later in their development would students understand how these discrete units could be put together to create a coherent language structure. The problem with these theories was that they tended to divorce language from considerations of purpose and meaning (Condy, 2008:610). This is further highlighted by Prinsloo and Stein (2004), who claim that the influences of behaviourism (Skinner, 1957) as well as versions of Piaget's (1962) modelling of cognitive stages, led researchers and educators to conceive reading as the acquisition of a series of discrete perceptual skills, particularly that of phonics-recognition, preceded by a range of perceptual and response skills. These could be taught/acquired and mastered by children in sequence.

However, Singh (2009) maintains that the teaching of phonetic sounds is a pre-reading prerequisite. This source describes phonetics as sounds and syllables that, when put together, formulate words. Practice of phonetic sounds eases children into reading. Therefore, the teaching of phonetic sounds is a pre-reading prerequisite. This is done by starting with simple sounds and moving on to sounds that are more complex.

To this, the Foundations for Learning, Government Gazette, No 30880, (2008:11) stipulates that every teacher in the foundation and intermediate phase will spend at least 30 minutes daily on reading for enjoyment. It expands by explaining that formal teaching allocation for literacy (Languages) is 1 hour 30 minutes per day and 7 hours 30 minutes per week in grade 4, 5 and 6. The implication is that educators have enough time for teaching reading. However, the large number of learners in classes makes the effective use of time to support ESL learners with barriers to learning difficult. Van Wyk (1999:83) reveals that educators believe the quality of their

teaching and interactions with learners, decline with an increase in the size of the class.

The state of reading in the intermediate phase does not depend only on the daily reading activities that take place in the classroom. Nel and Theron (2008:217) maintain that many of the parents are illiterate and cannot therefore read to their children, even in their mother tongue, and definitely not in English, to develop their children's literacy; most of these parents possess an inadequate English proficiency and would therefore not be able to develop and stimulate their children's English. The researcher will explore whether the state of reading is impacted by the parental role.

Collier (1990:617) declares that learners may not be fully literate in their mother tongue, leading to difficulties in learning to become literate in English. Assessment Guidelines for Languages maintains that learners should be able to transfer the literacies they have acquired in their Home Languages to their First Additional Language. (DoE, 2003(c):3). Formal literacy learning is far more difficult than informal social learning. Furthermore, the source mentions that research findings indicate that to acquire successful second language literacy, second language learners have to first master strategies for negotiating meaning in print in their first language. To negotiate meaning in print cannot be accomplished without the required levels of reading/literacy in either home language or EFAL. Hargrove, Church, Yssel and Koch (2002) uphold that, as the reading demands increase, children with poorly developed reading skills fail to meet the challenges of the secondary education curriculum. Research has shown that children, who read effectively have access to numerous sources of written material, in turn, it enables them to increase their vocabulary and their language skills (Krashen, 1993).

It should be noted that one of the objectives of this study is to determine the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in grade 5, Motupa Circuit in the Limpopo Province. In the next section, the researcher explored reading in a typical rural school.

### **2.3 Reading in Rural Schools of Mopani District, Limpopo**

Condy and Donald (2005:3) mention, “Despite structural transformations in the post-apartheid education system, many schools still experience substantial social and educational disadvantages”. The educational disadvantages are even worse in the rural areas when compared to urban areas. According to the National Education Infrastructure Management System: National Assessment Report published by the Department of Education in 2007, “many rural schools still lack clean running water, electricity, libraries, laboratories and computers. More than one-quarter of the schools in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo have more than 45 learners per classroom, these are not easy conditions, in which to provide a sound education for young people” (Gardner, 2008:13).

Foundations for Learning, Government Gazette, No 30880, (2008:11) stipulates that, for reading, every teacher must have sufficient resources to ensure effective teaching and learning for literacy. These should include wall charts, phonic friezes, writing materials, and suitable apparatus for teaching concepts, textbooks, reading series, workbooks and writing materials.

According to the findings of Pretorius and Mampuru (2007), South African schools are not well resourced with libraries and if they exist, there are hardly any books. Meanwhile, recent reports from the media, which lament, “Bigwigs behind Limpopo books bungle: Whistle-blower claims tender process was not followed” (City Press, 2012:8). This clearly is an indication that some learners in Limpopo are likely to get reading books late in the year or not get them at all.

According to Pretorius and Mampuru (2007), only 27% of South African schools have libraries. This state of affairs is exacerbated by the fact that, reading material in African languages is not easily accessible, if not unavailable. NRS (2008:8) further states that the majority of schools in the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) survey in 1999 had no access to libraries. This affected the quality of teaching and learning negatively. Results of the survey were as follows:

- Schools surveyed in South Africa in 1999 - 25,145;

- Schools with no space for libraries - 22,101;
- Schools with libraries, but no books - 3,388;
- Schools with stocked libraries - only 1,817 (that is just over 7% of the schools in South Africa).

According to the *National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS)* drawn from *Education Statistics in South Africa 2009* published by the DBE in November 2010, the situation in terms of school libraries in Limpopo Province reflected the information in the table below:

Public Ordinary Schools	Schools with no library space, no library materials & no librarians	Schools with space but no materials nor librarians (un-stocked libraries)	Schools with no materials and no librarians	Schools with a Stocked Library
3 988	3 694	197	3 891	97

**Table 2.1 School Libraries in Limpopo - 2010**

Nationally, the situation in terms of school libraries was as shown in Table 2.2:

Public Ordinary Schools	Schools with no library space, no library materials & no librarians	Schools with space but no materials nor librarians (un-stocked libraries)	Schools with no materials and no librarians	Schools with a Stocked Library
<b>24 699</b>	<b>19 344</b>	<b>3 451</b>	<b>22 796</b>	<b>1 903</b>
<b>100.00%</b>	<b>78.32%</b>	<b>13.97%</b>	<b>92.29%</b>	<b>7.71%</b>

**Table 1.2: School Libraries in South Africa - 2010**

According to NEIMS (2009) in terms of having no library space at all, the two worst affected provinces were Eastern Cape (90.4%) and Limpopo (92.6%).

Since 2008, the ANA has revealed that grades 3 and 6 learners are unable to read and count at their appropriate level. Mafenya (2011), the senior district manager of Mopani, during an address to school principals, said that, of the 19 primary schools in Motupa Circuit, only one school performed at an appropriate level in 2010. The

average percentage for 2010 ANA results at the school under study is reflected in the table below.

Grade	English First Additional Language	Mathematics
4	35%	40%
5	10%	12%
6	24%	21%

**Table 2.3: 2010 ANA Results - School A**

The NRS (2008) informed that its desired outcome was that all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3. After all, all learners should develop reading and comprehension skills according to the requirements of each grade level.

The researcher explores conditions, under which teaching reading takes place. Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009:69) state that reading can develop reading, and reading can only develop if children have texts to read. NRS (2008:9) stipulates that conditions and dilapidated classrooms hinder the implementation of the NCS. High learner-educator ratio, combined with poor physical conditions and inadequate facilities for teaching and learning, such as inadequate instructional materials, make it even more difficult to deliver quality education.

Maswanganye, (2010:22) elicits that there is a misunderstanding about the educators' role in teaching reading in the NCS. In addition, the author adds that most educators believe they do not have to teach reading, but to facilitate the process for learners to teach themselves to read. On the other hand, Klapwijk (2012:192) claims that, with specific reference to Reading Strategy Instruction (RSI), research indicates that teachers change with some difficulty. Macdonald (2000) postulates that many educators are no closer to helping their learners achieve literacy, despite the terminological dexterity of the new curriculum.

The NRS (2008) identifies the following as the critical role players in teaching learners to read: the learner, the teacher, the parents as well as the community and

the DoE at all levels. Mohlala (2012:14), rightly mentions, “Teachers and parents are the most important resource and it is what they do with the text that ultimately determine how effective a child or new reader responds to reading” This emphasises the role played by parents to help learners improve their reading. “Reading bedtime stories to children enables them to develop an interest in reading” (Pretorius & Machet 2004 cited in Singh, 2009:103). Furthermore, Machete and Tiemensma, (2009:62) add that many learners might not read for pleasure in South Africa, because they do not have access to reading materials in their home language. Gardner (2008:21) explains it is very important that all learners, including rural and urban children, acquire deep skills in one language, preferably their home language, before proceeding to learn another. “Given the high levels of illiteracy among adults and the infrequent exposure to languages like English at fluent and competent levels, rural children have little opportunity to live, think and work in a language environment beyond that of their mother tongue” (Gardner, 2008:20).

Oberholzer, (2005:15) maintains that, although other mediums of instructions are used, much of the learning takes place in the form of reading, whether it be reading from the chalkboard, a text book or one’s own written work. Reading plays a pivotal role in the conveying of information and new knowledge. “Reading is a prerequisite skill for effective and efficient functioning in today’s modern world” (Oberholzer, 2005:14). *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades* (DoE, 2008:36) mentions that reading needs to be assessed to determine:

- The progress that learners have made; and
- Whether the reading programme is at the correct level for the intended learners.

It is against this background that the researcher investigated reading/literacy levels among the intermediate phase learners. This investigation should be helpful to increase the learners’ levels of reading by suggesting recommendations to policy makers to this effect.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher looked into the three major theories of reading. These are; the traditional theory, the cognitive and the metacognitive. The researcher explored the different available literature related to the state of reading levels in the intermediate phase in South Africa. Additionally, the researcher investigated the challenges associated with reading. Learning to read in the early years requires both decoding and comprehension, which play an important role in the process of learning to read. Literature in general, affirms that reading is a complex process, which requires cognitive development that would lead to word recognition, decoding and comprehension. From literature, it became clear that the bottom-up decoding and top-down comprehension skills are critical elements for effective reading.

In the following chapter, attention is paid to the research methodology and design, as how these were implemented to execute this study. The chapter also discusses the characteristics of the sample as well as the validity and reliability of instruments used in the study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher presents the research methodology, which was applied to conduct the study. It also clarifies how the research methodology was applied to investigate the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in grade 5. Research methodology encompasses the complete research process: the research approaches, procedures and data collection or sampling methods used (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:74). Therefore, the aim of research methodology is to understand the process and not the product of scientific inquiry (Cohen & Manion, 1994:39).

The research methodology for this study is drawn from both the qualitative and quantitative paradigms. Thus, the approach employed in this study is popularly known as a mixed method research approach.

Creswell (2009:1) defines a qualitative research “as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting”. Schurink (2003:3) states that people conducting qualitative research tend to collect their data through sustained contact with people in settings where subjects normally spend their time.

On the other hand, Creswell (2009:4) defines quantitative research as the means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. The design of this study is clarified in details in the following sections.

### **3.2 Design of the Study**

Fox and Bayat (2007:70) mention that case study is not merely concerned with describing what is being observed, but to search, in an inductive way, for consistent regularities and recurring patterns. In addition, the duo mentions that case study refers to thoroughly studying of an individual or a group or an institution. In other words, case study centres on a single individual or limited number of individuals. Tellis (1997) defines case study as a descriptive, non-experimental research design

that studies a bounded system, which could be a child, a teacher, or a classroom. The aspect of boundedness determines the scope of the study by clarifying what is included in and excluded from it.

As a case, this study was confined to only three (3) schools in the Motupa Circuit wherein a group of learners were investigated. Furthermore, Tellis (1997) mentions that, single-case studies are also ideal for revelatory cases, where an observer may have access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible. In this study, a group of learners were investigated by collecting information from within the natural learning context. Creswell (2009:1) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on a complex, holistic, picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.

The methodological design is the logic, through which a researcher addresses the research questions (Mason, 2002:30), and gains data from the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:157). As previously indicated, the researcher in this study used case study design and in addition, it should be noted that this research assumed there was a problem with regard to reading levels of the intermediate phase learners as it crystallised in the statement of the problem. Hence, the researcher explored and investigated the intermediate phase learners' reading levels through observing (learners) and interviewing (teachers) subjects of the research in their own teaching, learning and home context.

Of the four types of research designs, namely, conceptual research, qualitative research, quantitative research, and a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research designs, which serve as a blueprint for fulfilling objectives and answering questions, the quantitative-qualitative mix was chosen for this study. The combination of these research paradigms, in the design of this study, was mainly informed by the nature of the research questions, which emanated from the research problem stated earlier in Chapter 1. This choice was also in line with Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007:115) who point out that, during the data analysis stage, quantitative data can facilitate the generalisability of qualitative data and shed new light on qualitative findings. Alternatively, it can play an important role by interpreting,

clarifying, describing, and validating quantitative results, as well as through grounding and modifying. Creswell (as quoted by Maree, 2007:261) defines the mixed methods research as a procedure for collecting, analysing and “mixing” both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study to understand a research problem more completely. In the next sub-sections, the researcher presented a data collection matrix, which explains in detail how the quantitative-qualitative design of the study materialised.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Data Collection Instrument(s)</b>
What are the reading levels of intermediate phase learners in Motupa Circuit, Bolobedu Area of Limpopo Province?	Qualitative & Quantitative	Selected Reading Text Observation Checklist
What are the reading levels of grade 5 learners in Motupa circuit?	Quantitative	Observation Checklist Learners' Test
What is the comprehension ability of grade 5 intermediate phase learners?	Quantitative	Learners' Test
What are the afterschool reading activities of grade 5 learners in Motupa Circuit?	Qualitative	Learners' diaries
What are the perceptions of intermediate phase educators about the reading levels of their grade 5 learners?	Quantitative & Qualitative	Interview schedule

**Table 3.1: Data Collection Matrix**

From the above data collection matrix, it becomes obvious that the quantitative approach to the research design was used in a number of stages, to quantify the learners' reading levels. Percentage and frequency tables (descriptive statistics) were used to present the results of the data, which was collected through the observation checklist and the learners' test, in order to answer the first two questions as presented by the data collection matrix above. In addition, this approach was used also for the analysis of the open-ended interviews, which was administered to the educators. More specifically, the researcher used an error-count test, through

which data were presented and analysed with the aid of descriptive statistics. There are various types of descriptive statistics; frequencies, central tendencies and variability and correlations. In this case, the researcher used descriptive statistics through presenting and applying frequencies based on counting mistakes committed by learners while reading the given text. Seliger and Shohamy (1990:214) mention that, frequency counts can be reported verbally by describing how frequently a phenomenon occurred among certain groups of learners, by quoting the frequencies raw or as percentages, or through a frequency table or on a graph.

On the other hand, the researcher employed the qualitative data approach to investigate, analyse and report specifically questions 2, 3 and 4 of the study. In addition, qualitative analysis was complementarily employed for the handling of data in certain aspects of questions 1 and 5 of the study.

### **3.3 Research Population and Sample**

The research population and sample are as shown and discussed in Chapter 1. The research population and sample were drawn from Mopani District in Limpopo Province. There are five municipal districts in Limpopo, one of which is Mopani. Mopani district is situated in the northeast of Limpopo Province, South Africa. The major towns found in this district are Tzaneen, Phalaborwa, Hoedspruit, Modjadjiskloof and Giyani. The research population and sample were drawn from Motupa Circuit, found 22 kilometers to the northeast of Tzaneen. Motupa is one of the 24 circuits found in Mopani District in Limpopo Province. The circuit has 19 primary schools. Due to practical considerations, such as accessibility and travelling costs, only three (3) schools were conveniently selected for the study. The selected schools' combined learner total is 1900. The schools have 194 grade 5 learners, 105 learners in grade 5 from the selected schools were recruited as the sample. Convenience sampling, as a type of non-probability sampling, was done. Participants were selected because of their accessibility. The schools are non-fee paying Quintile 1 schools, which serves a socio-economically disadvantaged community found in a rural area of the former Lebowa homeland.

	<i>No of learners</i>	<i>No of learners in grade 5</i>	<i>No of learners sampled</i>
School A	1112	113	60
School B	427	39	20
School C	361	42	25
Total	1900	194	105

**Table 3.2: Number of Learners Sampled**

Most of the parents work far from home in big cities, while children are looked after by either their siblings or grandparents. Learners in the selected schools are North-Sotho and Tsonga-speaking, with North-Sotho comprising 85% of the school population. The learners' ages range from 10 to 13 years.

For the purpose of the study, EFAL is given priority over the home language, as it is the LOLT in most of the South African schools. The context of the study was the classroom and home situation of the learners. The EFAL educators from the selected schools were also included in the sample to ensure that the researcher could conduct an in-depth investigation as permitted by case study.

### **3.4 Data Collection Instruments**

As already indicated in the data collection matrix, the following data collection instruments were used to collect data in this study:

- (1) A carefully selected text from a prescribed textbook;
- (2) A video-tape recorder;
- (3) A structured observation checklist (error-count test);
- (4) A learner's test;
- (5) Learners' diaries; and
- (6) An open-ended interview schedule.

These data collection instruments are discussed in detail in the following sub sections below:

### **The reading text**

A carefully selected reading text was used to determine the reading levels of intermediate phase learners. The text was selected from a current prescribed textbook for intermediate phase learners in grade 5. The book was authored by Karen Russel and published by Macmillan Education Ltd & Macmillan South Africa (Pty) Ltd, 2003. This book is planned and arranged according to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). The selected text is about **dinosaurs**, extinct terrestrial reptiles that lived a million years ago. Although the text was selected from material already prescribed for this grade of learners, prior to its application, it was subjected to the Flesch-Kincaid (F–K) scale to determine its readability and suitability for the learners’ grade. The Flesch–Kincaid scale was designed by Rudolf Flesch as an instrument to measure and indicate comprehension difficulty when reading a passage of contemporary academic English. To date the usefulness of this scale has been confirmed by a number of authors, researchers and organisations worldwide (Felsch, 2012).

A teachers’ handbook, titled *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades* (DoE, 2008:36) explains, “Reading levelling tests are short, general tests used to assess the reading levels of a class”. There are different types of levelling tests that can be used. These are error count tests, cloze procedure tests and observing reading behaviour tests. In this study, the researcher enlisted the use of a text that suited the categories of error count tests and reading behaviour observation tests. This allowed the researcher to apply error-count and behaviour analysis to the selected test.

The *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades Handbook* (2008:37) crucially mentions that with “error-count tests”, for a given text at their level, “learners making fewer than five errors are reading at their grade level. Learners making between 5 and 10 errors are reading below grade level and need more practice. Learners, who err more than 10 times need help and are reading far below their grade level. Applying

the tests according to these approaches ensured that data collection was triangulated and compared to the researcher's observations as well as teacher perceptions for firm conclusions.

### **A videotape recorder**

A videotape recorder was used to record learners' reading activities in the classroom setting. To administer this, the researcher arranged with concerned educators to avoid interfering with the normal teaching time. Data from the tape recorders were transcribed and organised according to emerging themes. Thereafter, the data were categorised and conclusions drawn. Secondly, the data obtained through the video recording were subjected to an error-count and reading behaviour analysis to make conclusions about learner abilities and reading levels.

### **A structured observation checklist (error-count test)**

A structured observation checklist was used to observe learner abilities through conducting error-count test. A checklist was employed to categorise and describe reading errors as well as behaviours of the learner participants. The researcher also used the error-count test by employing descriptive statistics (frequencies) analysis, which led to the results of the study. Some of the items, which were contained in the observation checklist, are reflected as an example. The researcher had to observe and then state yes or no to questions such as:

- Does the learner read with the correct pronunciation?
- Is there voice projection?
- Does the learner read fluently?
- Does the learner observe the following punctuation marks: Full stops, Commas, Exclamation marks and Question marks?

The selected text, which was used for the error-count test, was read during the first and fourth term of the academic year. As earlier indicated, school "A" has 113 grade 5 learners, divided into two classes with each class having 55 and 58 learners respectively. School "B" has 39, while school "C" has 42 grade 5 learners respectively. In all, the three schools have 194 grade 5s, of which 105 learners were purposefully selected for observation, while reading. As this number of learners was

substantially high, the researcher divided them into manageable groups and arranged different dates for each one of them. Care was taken to ensure that there was no interference with the normal teaching and learning time at the schools. The researcher used the observation checklist for error counting. As already alluded to in 3.4.1, given a text at their level and grade, learners making fewer than five errors are said to be reading at their grade level. Learners making between 5 and 10 errors are said to be reading below their grade level and need more practice. Learners making more than 10 errors are said to be in need of help and are reading far below their grade level.

### **A learners' test**

The aim of this test was to assess the comprehension ability of the intermediate phase learners, which would reveal their overall reading levels. The data obtained through the learners' test was subjected to performance analysis where low performance indicates poor reading skills and comprehension levels. The following are examples of the items contained in the learners' test.

- When did the dinosaurs live on the Earth?
- Why are there no photographs of dinosaurs?
- What is an archaeologist?
- How long was the Apatosaurus in centimetres?

### **Learners' personal diaries**

Learners' personal diaries were used to collect data about learners' activities after school hours. Fisher (1992:62) rightly indicates, "Continuity between home and school is seen as important, both in encouraging parents and children to share in their reading". Parents are the primary caregivers of the child (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2005) and therefore need to play an important role in the support of the ESL learner, who experiences barriers to learning, because of limited English proficiency. Machet and Tiemensma (2009) explain that, if parents, teachers and the broader environment support children's literacy, then it would be possible for them to

develop a voluntary reading habit, and thus strengthen and develop their literacy skills. Hence, the conclusion, “Connections between the home, school and community should be made to support children in their literacy learning and increase their motivation to read” Machet and Tiemensma (2009: 73). The data obtained through the learners’ diaries were analysed using discourse analysis, whereby emerging themes were classified and categorised to draw conclusions.

All research respondents (i.e. grade 5 learners) were asked to keep personal diaries wherein they recorded anything related to reading activities while at home. The researcher explained to the research respondents (learners) how to record reading activities in their diaries. The process began on the second week of February. The researcher visited the two classes on a weekly basis to motivate and remind learners to record all their reading activities while at home. The researcher then scrutinised only those diaries of the research respondents (learners), who were videotaped while reading. The following is the template, which was given to learners as a guide to fill in their personal diaries during their after school hours.

	Learning area	Type of activity	Reading involved
Time	English First Additional Language		e.g. I read about
	Social Science		
	Life Orientation		
	Any other Learning Area taught through the medium of English		

**Table 3.3: Learner Diary Template**

Learners were free to fill in time other than those specified above and format their choice in recording any reading activities after school hours. In addition, they were allowed to record any other reading material they had other than work related to school.

## **An open-ended interview guide**

Tellis, (1997) mentions that, interviews are one of the most important sources of case study information. The interview could take one of several forms: open-ended, focused, or structured. In an open-ended interview, the researcher could ask for the informant's opinion on events or facts. This could serve to corroborate (confirm formally) previously gathered data.

To explore educators' perceptions about the learners' reading levels, the researcher employed the use of an open-ended interview guide, to probe for more information. Educator respondents were briefed about the aim of the interview to remove any doubts they might have had. They were also assured of the confidentiality of the interviews. Appointments were secured with all the intermediate phase educator respondents for the interview sessions. The actual interview sessions with each of the selected intermediate phase educators took place on the school premises during school hours, however, teaching time was never compromised. Each of the interview session took between 8 and 15 minutes.

It was envisaged that the open-ended questions would produce some qualitative and quantitative data, which would ensure triangulation. Stake (cited in Tellis, 1997) states that the protocols used to ensure accuracy and alternative explanations are called triangulation. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes. In case studies, this could be done by using multiple sources of data, hence, the researcher interviewed intermediate phase EFAL educators as additional source of data. (See annexure D).

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

To ensure the trustworthiness of the results for the study, the data collection and analysis of the study were triangulated. Hence, the data collected through the various instruments described above were analysed qualitatively using the following strategies:

- First, through discourse analysis, thematic analysis was applied to examine the data collected from conducting teacher interviews. Data from the tape recorders was transcribed and organised according to emerging themes. Thereafter the data was categorised and conclusions drawn.
- Secondly, the data obtained through the video recording was subjected to error- and reading behaviour analysis to draw conclusions about learners' abilities and reading levels. A checklist was employed to categorise and describe reading errors as well as behaviours (see, annexure B).
- Thirdly, the data obtained through the learners' test was subjected to performance analysis where low performance indicated poor reading and comprehension levels vice versa.
- Finally, the data obtained through the learners' diaries was also analysed using discourse analysis whereby emerging themes were classified and categorised to draw conclusions.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Following the mixed methods research (qualitative and quantitative research paradigm), the study took place within the confines of case study. In gathering data, a case study allows the researcher to concentrate on a group or individual or a single institution. In this study, the researcher dealt with a group of learners from one institution.

Data collection instruments and their application were clearly stated in this chapter. The researcher also described how these data collection instruments were applied in the study. In the following chapter, the researcher focuses on analysis and interpretation of data collected by means of instruments discussed in Chapter 3.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data and findings in relation to the research question and objectives outlined earlier. Following case study procedures, the study examined grade 5 learners' reading levels in the intermediate phase, occurring in a natural setting. Observation of learners, while reading, took place during the first and fourth terms; collected data included video tapes.

In his introduction, *Education in the Rural Areas*, Gardner (2008:7) points out,

The Constitution, the South African Schools Act and various other education policy documents say that all South African learners should have access to the same quality of learning and teaching, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities. However, this is not yet the case. Many people and their schools, particularly but not only in rural areas, struggle with real difficulties such as the lack of classrooms, poor access to services such as water and electricity, no landline telephones and hence no Internet, very few public or school libraries and the like. Many of these problems are linked to socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, and they have a direct influence on the quality of education that is available to children.

The situation outlined by Gardner in the above statement, still prevails in most of the South African schools, especially in the rural areas, as demonstrated by findings in this study. Among others, the above state of affairs, as shown by Gardner, has a negative effect on learners' reading level in the intermediate phase.

Data relating to learners' diaries about reading activities at home had to be collected over a period stretching from the first term to the third. As indicated in Chapter 3, all the research respondents were briefed about the project. Learner respondents were also familiarised with the use of a video-recorder to avoid delimitation of the study. All the data collection instruments had to be applied sequentially. In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings of the data collected, through the research instruments introduced in Chapter 3.

## 4.2 Findings from Error-Count Tests

### School A

As already alluded to in 2.3 above, the NRS (2008) elicited that its desired outcome is that all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3. It should be noted that Motupa Circuit is situated in a rural area and therefore, neither former model c nor better-resourced schools are to be found. Hence, all the schools under study are quintile 1. All selected learners from the three schools were subjected to error-count tests by using an observation checklist. **School A** has 113 grade 5 learners and 60 learners were selected for the error-count test.

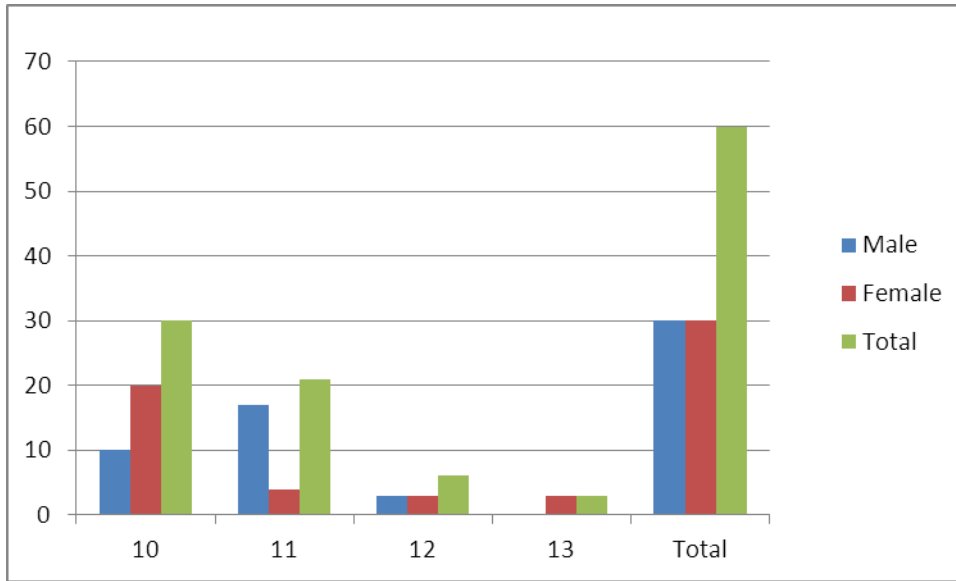
The researcher applied descriptive statistics for the purposes of determining how often certain phenomena occurred while learners were reading. The researcher employed quantitative data analysis strategies. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105) explain that validity in quantitative data might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of data.

The researcher established the learners' age to ascertain whether it was in accordance with their grade level. Distribution of learners, according to age at **School A**, is reflected below.

Age	10	11	12	13	Total
Male	10	17	3	0	30
Female	20	4	3	3	30
Total	30	21	6	3	60
Percentage	50%	35%	10%	5%	100%

**Table 4.1: Distribution of Learner's Age - School A**

Figure 4.1 on the next page reflect that in **School A**, learners between the ages of 10 and 12 years were recorded as 50% at 10 years of age and 35% at 11 years, thus they can be regarded as at appropriate age in grade 5. Only 5 % of the learners were found to be above the appropriate age in grade 5, which is 13 years.



**Figure 4.1: Distribution of Learners' Age - School A**

Learner Number	Score	Learner Number	Score
1	12	31	4
2	7	32	7
3	6	33	8
4	10	34	4
5	3	35	11
6	6	36	9
7	4	37	7
8	6	38	9
9	3	39	8
10	6	40	7
11	10	41	5
12	9	42	6
13	10	43	3
14	10	44	9
15	3	45	8
16	8	46	8
17	12	47	10
18	10	48	7
19	7	49	8
20	10	50	8
21	1	51	8
22	6	52	7
23	4	53	4
24	9	54	11
25	7	55	8
26	3	56	9
27	8	57	3
28	8	58	9
29	9	59	9
30	6	60	8

**Table 4.2: Error-Count Test Results - School A**

Below is the summary of the result from the Error-Count Test: (School A)

Total Number of Learners (N)	60
Total scores	435
Average	7.25
STDV	2.53

Table 4.3: Summary of Error-Count Test - School A

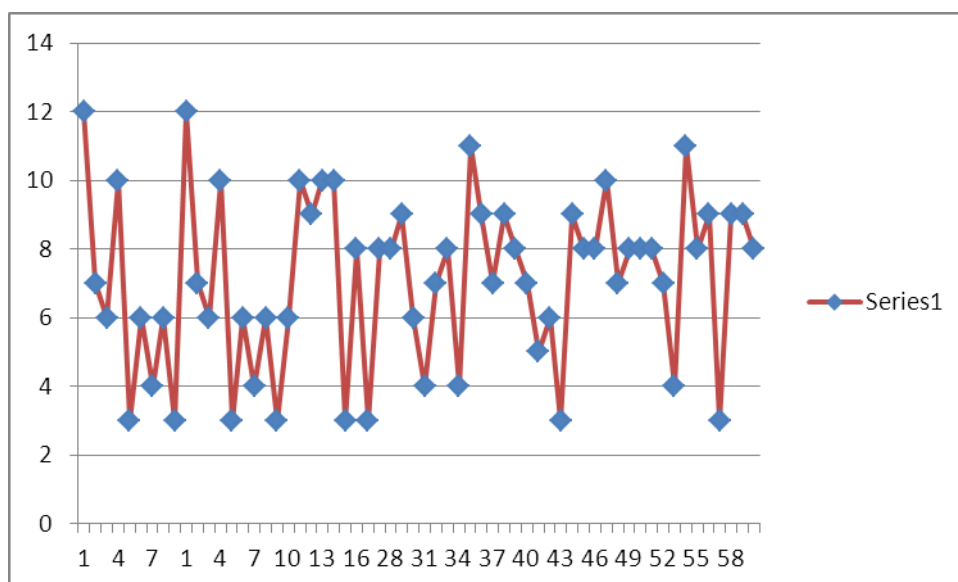


Figure 4.2: Distribution of Error-Count Scores - School A

The average score of grade 5 learners in **School A** in Table 4.2 is 8.37%, which means that a large number of learners, that is, 43 out of 60, scored between 6 and 10. It should be noted that the higher the score, the higher the number of errors committed, hence, 72% of the learners received a score of between 6 and 10. This is an indication that the intermediate phase learners were reading below the appropriate grade level and age cohort. Furthermore, the Standard Deviation (STDV) is 8.90, which provides some evidence that intermediate phase learners' reading in grade 5 reflected a great variation in terms of their level of reading.

Sadly, 4 learners scored between 10 and 12 errors out of the 12 possible errors. They were thus regarded as reading far below the grade level. Only 13 learners read at the appropriate grade level and that constitute only 22% of all learners.

The results are interpreted as follows:

- Learners making fewer than five errors were reading at comfortable grade level.
- Learners making between 5 and 10 errors were reading below grade level.
- Learners, who make more than 10 errors were below the grade level and were reading far below par.

In the table below, results of the error-count test are shown in terms of frequency and percent.

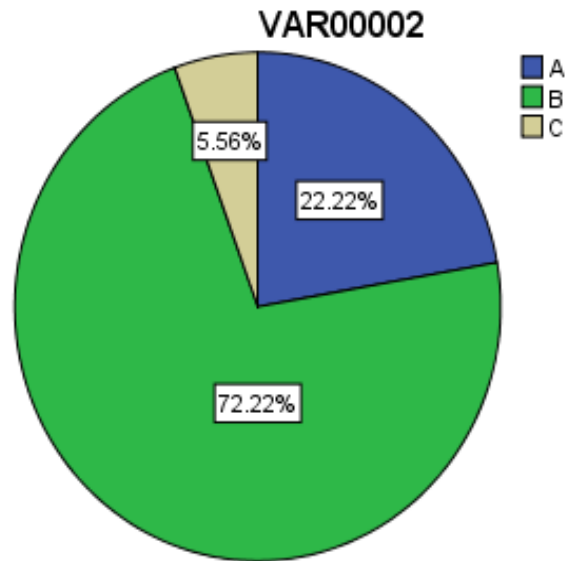
<i>Levels</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Cumulative Percentage</i>
A	13	22	22.2
B	43	72	94.4
C	4	6	100
Total	60	100	100

**Table 4.4: Levels of Reading - School A**

**A.** represents learners, who scored between 1-5 and are reading at grade level (independent reading).

**B** represents learners, who scored between 6-10 and are reading below grade level (instructional reading).

**C** represents learners, who scored above 10 and are reading far below grade level (frustrational reading).



**Figure 4.3: Error-count test results - Summary School A**

- In the figure above, “A” represents 13 of the 60 learners. These are learners who read at the appropriate grade level. This is 22% of the grade 5 learners.
- “B” represents 43 of the 60 learners. These are learners, who read below grade level. This is 72% of the learners.
- “C” represents 4 learners out of the 60, who are reading far below the grade level. This is 6% of the learners.

The most frequently occurring score in the distribution is 8, which also indicates that many learners got a higher score. This is in line with the STDV, which, as mentioned earlier is, 8.90. The higher score for a large number of learners, as already alluded to in the preceding paragraphs, reflected that the majority that is twelve in number, committed eight errors.

### **School B**

The school has 432 students and 39 grade 5 learners. Of these, 20 learners (10 males and 10 females) were selected for observation during an error-count test. Below is distribution of learners according to age at **School B**.

<i>Age</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	1	5	3	1	10
Female	2	6	1	1	10
Total	3	11	4	2	20
Percentage	15%	55%	20%	10%	100

**Table 4.5: Distribution of Learners' Age - School B**

The following table shows the raw score for sampled learners at school “B”.

<i>Learner Number</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Learner Number</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	12	11	11
2	5	12	9
3	6	13	7
4	7	14	6
5	3	15	3
6	8	16	9
7	9	17	11
8	8	18	8
9	3	19	7
10	4	20	10

**Table 4.6: Error-Count Test Results - School B**

<i>Total Number of Learners (N)</i>	20
Total scores	146
Average	7.3
STDV	2.74

**Table 4.7: Summary of Error-Count Test - School B**

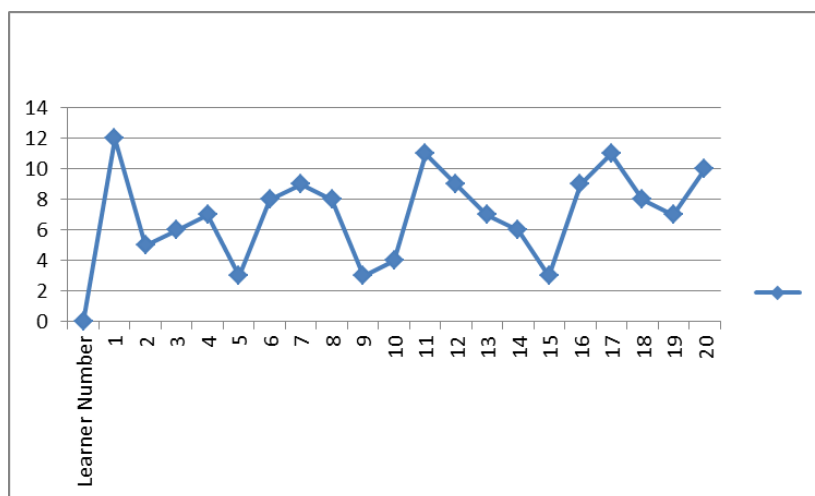
In **School B**, 4 of the 20 learners could be slotted into level A, they read at grade level wavering with only between 1 and 4 errors. Their learner numbers were 1, 4, 5 and 9; constituting 20% of the learners, subjected to error-count test. Once again, it should be noted that the low score is an indication that there are learners who can

read comfortably at grade level. However, 13 of the 20 learners faltered with between 5 and 10 errors and that amounts to 65% of the learners, undertaking the error-count test. This result correlates with that of **School A**, where the percentage of learners, whose reading is below their age cohorts and grade level, settled at 72%, a difference of only 7%. Here-under is Table 4.8, which reflects levels of reading proficiency at **School B**.

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	4	20
B	13	65
C	3	15
Total	20	100

**Table 4.8: Levels of Reading - School B**

The average score of grade 5 learners in **School B** is 7.3%, which reveals that a large number of learners scored between 6 and 10. As already indicated above, the higher number of errors committed, indicates that learners at **School B** were reading below the appropriate grade level and age cohort as learners in **School A**. 65% of the learners at **School B** got a score of between 6 and 10. However, school A was the worst at 72 percent. Combined, learners, who read below the grade level and those, who read far below the grade level is 16, which constitute 80% of the population. The STDV at **School B** is 2.74. This means that the levels of reading at **School B** are almost at the same level. The Table below depicts the most frequently occurring scores in **School B**.



**Figure 4.4: Distribution of Scores - School B**

## School C

**School C** has 47 grade 5 learners and 25 were selected for error-count test. **School C** learners' age distribution in grade 5 is in line with the relevant age cohorts, as the majority of the learners constitute 32%, which is the highest of the other age group. Only 8% at age 14 and 4% at age 15 of the learners were found to be above the expected age in terms of grade 5. The following table reflects **School C** grade 5 learners' age distribution.

<i>Age</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	0	2	4	4	2	1	13
Female	2	5	4	1	0	0	12
Total	2	7	8	5	2	1	25
Percent	8%	28%	32%	20%	8%	4%	100%

**Table 4.9: Distribution of Learners' Age - School C**

The table below depicts the raw score of the error-count test for **School C**.

<i>Learner Number</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Learner Number</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	12	16	6
2	12	17	8
3	10	18	10
4	2	19	9
5	4	20	9
6	4	21	8
7	10	22	7
8	12	23	9
9	4	24	7
10	9	25	9
11	6		
12	12		
13	9		
14	4		
15	3		

**Table 4.10: Error-Count Test Results - School C**

<i>Total Number of Learners (N)</i>	25
Total scores	195
Average	7.8
STDV	3.0

**Table 4.11: Summary of Error-Count Test - School C**

In **School C**, 25 learners were selected as a sample. The average score for **School C** is 8, as shown in Table 4.11 above. However, the standard deviation for **School C** stands at 3, and, unlike in **School A**, the standard deviation is lower. It reveals that learners are reading at almost the same level. However, a worrying factor is that a large number of learners, 60%, are reading below their age cohorts and grade level as shown in the table below.

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
A	6	24
B	15	60
C	4	16
Total	25	100

**Table 4.12: Levels of Reading - School C**

What is even more disturbing is that 16% of the learners at **School C** are reading far below their age and grade level, that is, frustrational level. In Figure 4.5 below, "1" represents learners, who read at grade level and that is only 24%; "2" represents learners, who read below the grade level and that is 60%; "3" represents learners, who read far below the grade level. In total 76% of the population at **School C** read below the grade level, that is, learners, who read below the grade level and those, who read far below the grade level.

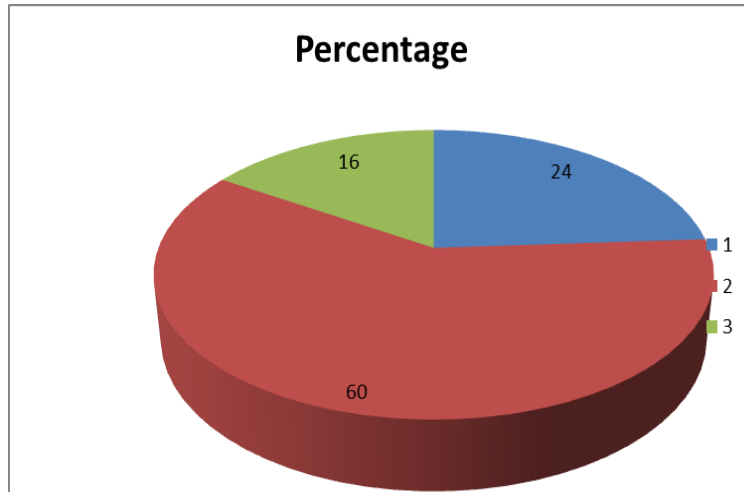


Figure 4.5: Error-count Test Results - Summary - School C

The most frequently occurring score in the distribution for **School C** is 9, as shown in Figure 4.6 below. Once again, this indicates that many learners obtain a higher score, which means many errors were committed.

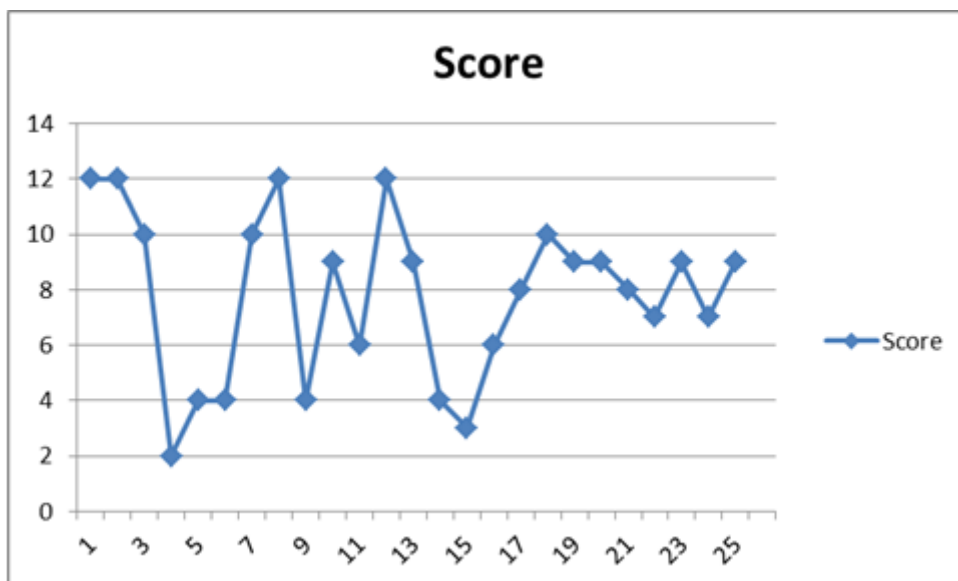


Figure 4.6: Distribution of Error-count Results - School C

### 4.3 Overall Distribution of Age of the Sampled Learners from the 3 Schools and Summary of Error-Count Test

Overall distribution of sampled learners from the 3 schools is shown in the table below.

Age	10	11	12	13	Total
Male	13	30	9	3	55
Female	24	15	7	4	50
Total	37	45	16	7	105
Percentage	35%	43%	15.%	7%	100%

**Table 4.13: Distribution of Learners' Age - All Schools**

Total Number of Learners (N)	105
Total scores	776
Average	7.4
STDV	2.67

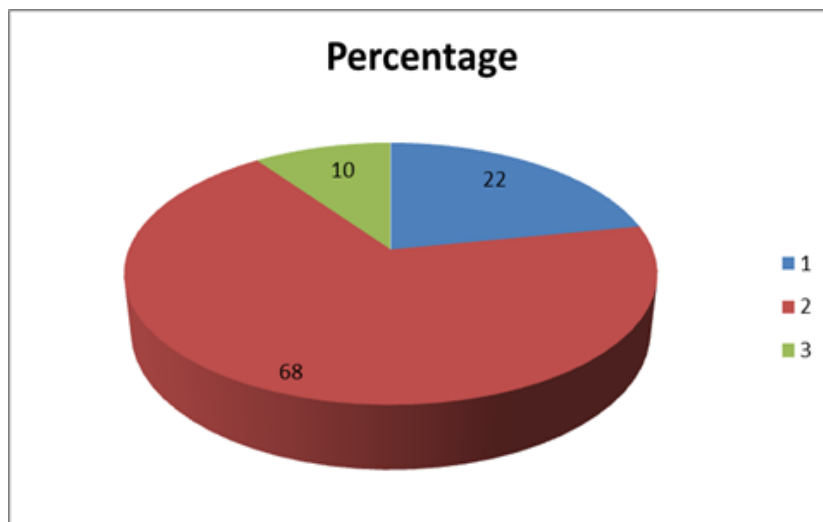
**Table 4.14: Summary of Error-Count Test - All Schools**

The overall average score for the three schools is 7.4. However, this can be misleading as the STDV of the three schools are 2.53, 2.74 and 3.0 respectively. This reveals that learners are not at the same reading levels. The STDV shows greater variation in reading levels of the intermediate phase learners in grade 5, especially at **School C**. This is in line with Spaul (2011:26), who reports that South Africa has both the second-best 16 performing province (Western Cape), and the worst performing province (Limpopo) of all 40 provinces of the SACMEQ. This provides some evidence that South Africa has the greatest variation/inequality in student performance, as revealed by STDV of the error-count test in this study. Therefore, the average score of 7.4 could be misleading. On the following page, the levels of reading proficiency for the three schools under study are depicted.

<b>Levels</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
A	23	22
B	71	68
C	11	10
Total	105	100

**Table 4.15: Levels of Reading - All Schools**

As already indicated in the table above, 23 learners were able to read fluently at grade level and that is only 22% of the learners; 71 of the 105 learners, tested, from the 3 schools could not read at the required grade level and that equate to 68%. Learners, who at best could be described as shameful and disheartening panned out at 10%. Additionally, learners, who read below the grade level and those, who read far below the grade level were 82, which equated to 78% of the sample population. The figure below shows the overall reading proficiency in terms of percentages at the schools under study.



**Figure 4.7: Summary of the Level of Reading**

#### **4.4 Researcher's Observations of Learners' Reading**

Following, is the synopsis of the researcher observation while learners were reading grade prescribed texts.

A common fault of the 71 below average readers of the 105 sample learners was **mispronunciation**, **stumbling** and **stopping** at every few words as well as **non-**

**observation of punctuation marks.** This equates to 68% percent of the population in the study, who are reading below the grade level and age cohorts.

## **School A**

Learner “1” was a male aged 11. He focused on page 33, while he was supposed to read page 32. He ended up murmuring a few words of the last sentence of paragraph 2 on page 32. He actually never read, as he seemed to have memorised the sentence.

Learner “2” was a female aged 10. She read fairly well, but went on to commit seven errors. “*There were*”, was pronounced as “*theyaweya*”. She mispronounced about ten words. Besides mispronunciation, she did not observe several punctuation marks. She was not relaxed and there were no signs of any rhythmical and/or expressive manner of reading. This is how she read paragraph 2 on page 32:

*[We know...us...we know because archaeologists have found their bones under the grow...grow. Apology...apology are seentists who dig up old bones to learner about life in the past.*

*When a dinosaur died everything rotted away except its bones Over my...my year, sand and soil b...b...blow...blew over the bones and covered them. Slowly over thousands of years, the bones turned into rock. It is the rocks that archaeologists dig up We call these rocks fose]*

The researcher believes that most of the errors committed by learners could be emanating from reciting ba; be; bi; bo; bu home language syllables in the foundation phase. This hampers the learners’ abilities to associate certain letters of the English alphabet with their sounds.

Learner “3” was a male aged 10 and was quite eager to read. However, he committed numerous errors with regard to mispronunciation and non-observation of punctuation marks. He read word for word and stumbled a lot along the way, ending up by committing numerous errors and this made him fall under the group of learners, who were categorised as reading below the grade level. Following is a transcription of his reading:

*[Dinosaurs lived on the earth 100 million year ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take photographs... photographs of dinosaurs. So who...who do we know that the dinosaurs once lived?*

*We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists are see... (the learner was unable to pronounce the word scientists and paused until the researcher came to his rescue)...seentists who dig up old bones to learn about la...life in the past*

*When a dinosaurs did, eve...everything ro...rotted away except its bones Over many years, sand and soil blew over the bones and cove...covered them. Slow, over thousands of...of years the bones toned into rock. It is these rocks that archaeologists dig dig up. We can...call these rocks fairseals.]*

Learner "4" was a female aged 10. She looked frightened and was inaudible. The researcher realised that, the inaudibility was employed to hide her jumping of words that she could not read or pronounce.

She reads almost all the words with the wrong pronunciation. She pronounced, "there were" as "theyaweya" twice, "died" as "did" and "neck" as "nick". Her inaudibility, perhaps, was for the purpose of (the researcher suggests) hiding her jumping of words she could not read and/or pronounce. This is how she read:

*[Dinosaurs lived on the...eh 100 million year ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There... were... no... cameras...to take photo photographs of the di dinosaurs. So, how do we know that the dinosaurs ounce lived*

*We know know know because... (the learner paused until the researcher helped her in pronouncing the word archaeologists) [...archaeologists have find the bones under the grownd. Archaeologists are... (once again the learner paused because she could not pronounced the word scientist) [ ... seentist who dig up old bones to learn about life in the past*

*When a dinosaurs did, everything rotted away eh...ex...except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil bl over the bones and cov them Slow, Slow over thousands of years...of years the bones toned into rock. It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up. We call these...]( the researcher stopped the learner and requested her to sit down as she was having difficult time in pronouncing the words in the text).*

This learner committed ten of the 12 possible errors. She pronounced the word “*turned*” as “*toned*”. It clearly demonstrates the influence of the traditional drill of the vowels “a, e, i, o, u” in the foundation phase. In addition, it underwrites that learners know the sound of the letter “u” in the home language, but fail to realise that the same letter can sound quite differently in English, when combined with other letters. In other words, the learner is not able to relate the sound of the words as represented when various combination of letters of the alphabet are formed. Pretorius and Mokhwesana, (2009:54) indicate that, unlike English, African language orthographies are phonetically transparent. Letter-sound relationships are usually practised through basic consonant-vowel syllable structures used to build up words, hence, the famous syllable routines, which African children typically recite from the chalkboard: *ba, be, bi, bo, bu; ma, me, mi, mo, mu.*

This is what Macdonald, (2000:128) sub-titled, “***Some things change, some things remain the same***”. This source furthermore reports that not a great deal has been written about African education, but it has always been characterised as learning by rote. Perham (1974:46-7) quoted in Macdonald (2000:128) gives a vivid historical illustration of the above as follows:

“In 1929 the following observations were made about teaching and learning in an African school:

“We then went up to run up to a village to see a bush-school. ... We told the teacher to carry on. She was a young, loud voiced, stout African girl. At the top of her voice, in slow, laboured words, she bellowed with suitable gestures:”

*Dees ... ees ... ma... HAD*  
They screamed the repetition:  
*Dees ... ees ... ma ... NAWSE*

The reading book - alas! - was an English one, wholly un-adapted to their use, and dealing mainly with objects and events that would always be foreign to them ... Mr Ker asked one of the children to read. He read well. Then Mr Ker held the book upside down. The boy seemed to think something was wrong, but at a second order, continued with the story.”

As already indicated earlier, the above is clearly demonstrating rote learning, which still takes place in most of the South African rural schools. The researcher confirms that this kind of learning is still the norm in the foundation phase at the schools under study.

The *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades Handbook* (2008:13) crucially states that, learners must understand that each letter has a name, but it may have a number of different sounds, for example, the letter “a” stands for different sounds in the words cat, car and cake. This could be aggravated by the fact that in English there are 26 letters of alphabet, 44 sounds (phonemes) and 120 graphemes (letters and combination of letters), hence this could explain, why phonemic awareness phonics are such laborious exercises.

Learner “5” was a female aged 10. She committed only three errors, which were, mispronunciation of the word “*archaeologist, fossils and imagine*. In terms of the number of errors committed, learner “5” read at the grade level. Interestingly, learner “5” was one of the very few learners, who achieved 40% in the written test, which was meant to investigate the learners’ comprehension of the meaning the read text conveyed.

Learner “7” was a girl aged 11 and the following was the transcription of her reading:

*[We...know...because archeo...archo...logist have fond their b...bonas under the ground arocheologis are seentist who dig up old bonies...bonies to lean about leaf in the past. When a dinosaur did,..eh..., every.. thin gro... ro..rotted a... a...away...lowly, over...eh...though... thoughtsands of years, the bonies turned into rock It... it...is... this rock that a...archeologist dig up. We call this rocks fourseal.]*

Learner “8” was a boy aged 10 and below is the transcription of how he read paragraph 1 and 2 on page 32:

*[Dinasaur living on the Earth en million years ago. In those days the were no people to draw dinosaurs. The were no cameras to take photographs of the dinosaurs. So who do we know that the dinosaur once lived? We know because airocheologist have fond their bonies under the ground Airocheologist...airocheologis...airocheologisare see...see...see...seentist who dig up old bonies...bonies to lean about leaf in the past.*

*When a dinosaur died, everything rotted away except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil  
blew over the bones and covered them. Slowly, over thousands of years, the bones  
turned into rock. It is this rock that archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks  
fossils.]*

Learner “9” was a girl aged 10. The second sentence of the text is, “There were no  
cameras to take photographs of the dinosaurs”. She read the sentence as:

*[theyaweya... theyaweya... no no... cameras to take take take photographs of the dinosaurs  
So who do we you know that the dinosaurs once lived]*

She did not observe punctuation marks, such as full stops or the question mark. She  
stumbled quite often and read word for word. After she finished reading the given  
text, the learner was asked to read items 1 to 4 under A on page 33 and this was  
how she read items 2 and 3;

*[How do you know that dinosaurs once lived on the earth?  
What is an archaeologist?]*

She pronounced the sound “K” in the word “*archaeologist*” was pronounced as “ch”  
as in the word “*church*”.

Learner “10” was a boy aged 11 and he was only able to utter the word *dinosaurs*.  
This could, probably because he had been listening to other learners while they were  
reading.

Learner “11” was a female aged 13 and she could not read a single word and looked  
terrified. She literally kept quiet. She actually began to sob by the time she left for her  
seat.

Learner “12” was the best in terms of reading word-for-word in **School A**.

*[Dinosaurs... lived...lived on the on the...earth 100 million years ago. In those days... there were  
no people to draw...dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take...photographs of the...dinosaurs.  
So, who...how do we now...know that the dinosaurs... once lived  
We know... because arch..arch..archaeologists have...found their bones under the ground.  
Archaeologists are scientists who dig up old bones to learn about life in the past.]*

*When a...di...dinosaurs did, everything ro...ro...rotted away eh...eh...ex...except its bones  
Over many year...years, sand and soil b...blew over the bones and co...covered them. Slowly,  
over though...thou... thousands thousands thousands of years the bones...toned into rock. It is  
these rocks that...archaeologists dig up We call these rocks fols.*

*Archaeologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and...eh...eh... imagine what the creatures loo...  
looked like.*

*The biggest dinosaurs in southern Africa was the Apa Apa Apatoso Apatoso Apatosaurus  
Apatosaurus. Archaeologists... have... found its... fossil bones in the the the e... Eastern  
Cape. The... Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long Its long neck helped it to eat... leaf...  
from the tops of trees.]*

Learner "16" was a boy aged 10 and he read as follows:

*[We know because archeologist have fond their bonas under the ground aereocheologis are  
seentist who dig up old bonies...bonies to lean about life in the past.*

*When a dinosaur did, everthing rotted away except its bonas. Over many years, sand and soil  
blair over the bonies and cover...red them. Slowly, over thoughtsands of years, the bones  
turned into rock. It is this rock that archeologist dig up. We call this rocks furshels.]*

Learner "18" looked quite reserved and read inaudibly. He lacked the vigour and zeal. Like many of his classmates, he did not have the confidence and this demonstrated his inability to read. The researcher tried to motivate the learner to read aloud, but was unsuccessful.

Learner "24"

*[Dinosaurs... liv...lived on the on the...earth 100 million years ago. In those days there were no  
people to draw...dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take...photographs of the...dinosaurs.  
So, who...how do we now...know that the dinosaurs... once live*

*We know... because arch..arch..archaeologists have found their bones under the ground.  
Archaeologists are seentist who dig up old bo... bones to learn about life in the past.*

*When a dinosaurs did, everything ro...rotted away eh...eh...ex...except its bones Over many  
year...years, sand and soil b...blew over the bones and co...covered them. Slowly, over  
thu...thou... thousands thousands thousands of years the bones...toned into rock. It is these  
rocks that...archaeologists dig up We call these rocks fols.*

*Archaeologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagine what the creatures loo... looked like. The biggest dinosaurs in southern Africa was the Apa Apa Apatoso Apatoso Apatosaurus Apatosaurus. Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in the Eastern Cape. The... Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long. Its long neck helped it to eat... leafs from the tops of trees.]*

Only 13 of the sixty 60 learners in **School A** did not do word-by-word reading and in terms of the number of errors committed, were reading at the grade level.

All the selected learners had a problem with pronouncing of one or two, if not 80% of the words appearing in the text. The most common error made by learners was mispronunciation of the following word found in the read text; “*archaeologists*”, which was pronounced as “*cha*” as in “*chamber*”. The word “*scientists*” was mostly pronounced as, “*seentist*”; and “*bones*” as “*bornes*” or “*bonus*” by some. All the selected learners were unable to pronounce the words; *blew*, *fossils*, *creatures*, *southern* and *turned*. “*Thousand*”, was pronounced as “*thoughtsand*”. To the astonishment of the researcher, most of the learners were able to pronounce the sound “fo” in the word “*photograph*”.

## **School B**

**School B** has 39 learners in grade 5 and 20 learners were selected for the error-count test while reading. Following is what the researcher observed while learners were reading grade prescribed text. Only 4 learners from **School B** read fairly well, though they had problems in pronouncing the words “*archaeologists*” and “*scientists*”. “*Archaeologists*” is pronounced as “*achology*” with the “*k*” sound as in the word “*psychology*”, whereas “*scientists*” is pronounced as “*seentists*”. Eight learners’ reading was transcribed and these were learner numbers 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 18.

Below is the researcher’s observation while learner number “3” was reading:

Learner number 3 stood quietly holding the book close to his face in his hands. He looked frightened. After some time, the researcher requested him (the learner) to

start reading from paragraph two of the text. The learner was only able to repeat after the researcher [*we know because archaeologists have found their bones...*] and was not able to continue reading. The researcher concluded that the learner could not read, after he had tried to persuade him (the learner) to read. The learner was given more time, but the researcher realised it would only demoralise and embarrass him in front of his peers, the learner was requested to take his seat. Learner numbers 4 and 5 read fairly well, though their reading was not error-free.

#### Learner "6"

*[Dinosaurs lived on the on the earth 100 million years ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take photographs] (the learner said [for] instead of the preposition [of]) [the dinosaurs. So, how do we now know that the dinosaurs once lived?*

*We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists are seentist who dig up old bo bones to learn about life in the past*

*When a dinosaurs did, everything rotted away except its bones Over many years, sand and soil below...blew over the bones and covered them. Slower...slowly, thousands thousands thousands of years the bones toned into rock. It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up We call these rocks fossils.*

*Archologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagine what the creatchis looked like*

*The biggest dinosaurs in South Africa was the Apatosaurus Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in the Eastern Cape. The Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long. Its long nick helped it to eat leafs from the tops of trees Can you imagine live at the same time as the dinosaurs The dinosauors were enorm and many of them eat meat You cold be their lunch!].*

#### Learner "8"

Learner number 8, a male, aged 11, was requested to start reading from paragraph number three of the text and this is how he read:

*[When a dinosaurs died, everything rotted away except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil blew over the bones and cover...red them. Slowly, thousands of years the bones turne...turned into rock It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils. Archologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagine what the creature loo...loo...ked like.*

*The biggest dinosaurs in southern Africa was the Apato Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in] (the learner jumped the article [the]) Eastern Cape. The Apato was about 12*

*metres long. Its long neck helped it to eat leaves from the tops of trees Can you imagine living at the same time as the dinosaurs? The dinosaurs were enormous and many of them eat meat You could be the lunch!].*

#### Learner "12"

Learner number 12 was a female aged 10 and this is how she read:

*[Dinosaurs lived on the on the earth 100 years million ago. In those days there were no people to draw Archaeologists. There were no cameras to take photographs of Archaeologists. So, how do we now know that the dinosaurs once lived?*

*We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists are scientist who dig up old bones to learner about life in the past.*

*When a Archaeologists died, everything rotted way except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil blew over the bones and covered them]. (The learner jumped the following sentence; Slowly, thousands of years the bones turned into rock.) [It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils. Archaeologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagine what the creatures looked like*

*The biggest dinosaurs in Southern Africa was the Apatosaurus. Archaeologists have found its fossil in the Eastern Cape. The Apatosaurus was about 12 metres ago. Its long neck helped it to eat leaves from the tops of trees Can you imagine living at the same time as the archaeologists , the archaeologists were enormous and many of them a...at meat. You could be their lunch].*

#### Learner "13"

Learner number 13 was female aged 10 and she read as follows:

*[Dinosaurs lived on the on the air 100 million years ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There we no cameras to take photographs of the dinosaurs. So, how do we know that the dinosaurs on lived?*

*We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists...Archaeologists are social...social social scientists who dig up older bones to learner about life in the past.*

*Whan dinosaurs died, everything rot away except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil below over the bones and covered them. Slow, over thousands of years the bones turned into rock It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up We call the rocks fossils.*

*Archaeologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and images what...what the creatures looked like.*

*The biggest dinosaurs in Southern Africa was a Apatos. Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in the ee...ee...Eastern Cape. The Apatos was about 12 metres long. It long nick hel...ped it to eat leafs from the tops of trees.]*

#### Learner "14"

The reading below was done by a female learner aged 11. She initially hesitated to come to the front to read. The researcher had to persuade the learner to come forward. This is how she read the text:

*[Di...di...saur...on the eh...and ago the... were no...no people to do...draw the no ca ...came...cameras]* (her murmuring died into emphatic silence. The researcher could not afford to let her go on as she stood silently without making any effort to continue reading.)

Learner "16" was a female aged 10.

*[Dino lived on the on the earth 100 million years ago. Then those days there were no people to draw democracy. There we no cameras to take photography of the democracy. So, how do we now that the democracy on lived?*

*We know because archaeologists have pho...found their bones under the grow...ground. Archaeologists...Archaeologists are who up oh bo...bones to learn about life in the past.*

*When I di...saur...dee, everything rot away except its bones.]* (Her reading, slowly began to faint) *[Over many yeh, sand and so below blew over the bones and covered them].*

### **School C**

#### Learner "1"

Learner 1 was a male aged 14 years. He kept on looking at the researcher and in the book until the researcher called him closer to indicate where he was supposed to read. He murmured a few words, which were inaudible. His facial expression revealed that he could not recognise a single word from the text.

#### Learner "4"

Learner 4 was a female aged 11 years. She appeared quite relaxed and looked confident. She read fluently and committed only two errors by overlooking full stops and the question mark.

### Learner “7”

Learner 7 was a male aged 12 years. This is how he read:

*[Dinosaurs... lived... on the on the... earth 100 million years... ago. In those days there were...were... no...no people to to draw di di dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take take]* (the learner could not pronounce the word photographs and the researcher had to help the learner). *[photographs of the dinosaurs. So, who... how do we now know that the dinosaurs once lived].* (The researcher had to call the learner closer indicate to him where to read after the learner had paused for some time. The learner had to repeat after the researcher) *[We know because... archaeologists... have found... their bones... under the ground. Archaeologists are seentist who dig up old bo bones to learn about life in the past]* (The learner was actually saying the words from the text copying the researcher without reading or locating them from the text.) *[When... a... dinosaurs did, every...everything rotted away e...e...except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil b...blee...blew over the... over the bones and cover...covered them. Slowly, thousands thousands of...of...years the bones toned into rock. It it is these rocks that ah..ah...ah...a archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils.]* (The learner kept on looking at the researcher as if he said, let me sit down. Indeed, the researcher dismissed the learner so that he could sit down.

### Learner “10”

Learner 10 was a male aged 10 years. Following is the transcription of his reading:

*[Dinosaurs lived on Learner A the on the earth 100 million years ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take photographs of the dinosaurs. So, how do we now know that the dinosaurs once lived?*  
*We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists are seentist who dig up old bo bones to learn about life in the past.*  
*When a dinosaurs died, everything rotted away except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil blew over the bones and covered them. Slowly, thousands thousands thousands of years the bones toned into rock. It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils.*  
*Archaeologists can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagine what the creatures looked like.*

*The biggest dinosaurs in southern Africa was the Apatosaurus. Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in the Eastern Cape. The Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long. Its long neck helped it to eat leafs from the tops of trees.]*

#### Learner "11"

*[Dinosaurs lived on the on the earth 100 million ago.] (The learner jumped the word "years".) [In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. The were no cameras to take photographs of the dinosaurs. So, who do we know... know that the dinosaurs once leaf] The learner did not observe the question mark.*

*[We know because a...a...archologists have found their bones under the ground. Arch...Archology are seentist who dig up old b... bones to learn about life in the past.*

*When a dinosaurs died, everything rotted away e...except its bones. Over many year...years, su...sund and soil b...blew over the bon and covered them Slowly, thousands thousands thousands of years the bones toned into rock It is these rocks that archologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils.*

*Arch...Archology can look at dinosaurs fossils and imagineh what the cre...creatures looked like*

*The big dinosaurs in south Africa was the A...A...Apto...saurus. Archology have found its fossil bones in the Eastern Cape The A...Apto...Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long Its long neck helped it to eat leafs from the tops of trees.]*

#### Learner "12"

Learner 12 was a female aged 12 years. She looked at the opposite page and the researcher could deduce that the learner could neither read nor recognize a single word.

#### Learner "13"

Learner 13 was male, aged 13 years and this is how he read the first paragraph:

*[The...the...Di...di...nosaurus...li...li...lived o...on] (the learner stopped reading, scratched the back of his head, and smiled at the researcher. That he could not read did not seem to be a problem to him. The researcher had to come to his rescue by reading the last part of the first sentence of the first paragraph in the text, however, the learner was unable to repeat after the researcher as he murmured some words inaudibly.) [on the e..earth... 100 million years ago... In those*

*days there...the... were no people to...draw dinosaurs]. (The learner's body language was unstable as he kept on moving his hands up and down. The researcher had to ask the learner to sit down.)*

#### Learner "14"

Learner 14 was a female aged 11. She looked relaxed as she came forward. It was encouraging to listen to her. She read fluently committing negligible errors. She, like learner 4, read at the grade level and age cohorts.

#### Learner "19"

Learner 19 was a male aged 11 years and this is how he read:

*[Dinosaurs lived on the... ] the learner skipped the word earth) [100 million years ago In those days the were no people to draw dinosaurs. There were no] (the learner jumped the word cameras) [to take photographs of the dinosaurs. So, who do were now that the dinosaurs once life?*

*We know because archeologists] (the sound "k" in the word "archaeologists" was pronounced "ch" as in the word "church") [have found their bones under the ground Archeologists are seentist who dig up old bo bones to learn about life in the past.*

*When a dinosaurs died, everything row away except its bones. Over many years, s...sa...sand and soil blow over the bones and covered them. Slowly, thousands of years the bones toned into rock. It...is...these...rocks...that acheologists dig up We call these rocks fossils.*

*Achaeologists ca...ca...can lo...lo...look]. (The researcher asked the learner to sit down as there were very long pauses in between the words of the text while he read.)*

Learner 24 was a female aged 12 years.

*[Dinosaurs on the on the earth 100 million years ago. I...I... tho...though... days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There no cameras to photographs of the dinosaurs. So, how...so who do we now know that the dinosaurs once lived*

*When know because a...a...a...archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Ara...archaeologists] (the learner skipped the word "are") [seentist who...who... dig up...up old bo bones at le...le... learn a...a...a...about li...li...life in the the past.*

*When ] (The learner was struggling and the researcher decided that she should stop reading.)*

#### **4.5 Findings from the Learners' Test**

The test, as already alluded to in 3.4.3 above, was conducted to investigate the learners' comprehension of the reading text. The test was administered to all the learners in grade 5 from the 3 schools in the intermediate phase, to avoid being biased, however, data for investigating the learners' comprehension was collected from the learners, who were elected to do the error-count test. Here, learners were expected to answer items based on the text from the grade prescribed book. The learners' test was marked and the average percentage was 32%, which indicates poor reading and comprehension levels and vice versa. In fact, they cannot comprehend what they cannot read. Low performance indicates that the subjects of the research are reading below the grade level than is expected by the NRS (2008), which envisages that its desired outcome is that, all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3.

#### **4.6 Findings from the Learners' Personal Diaries**

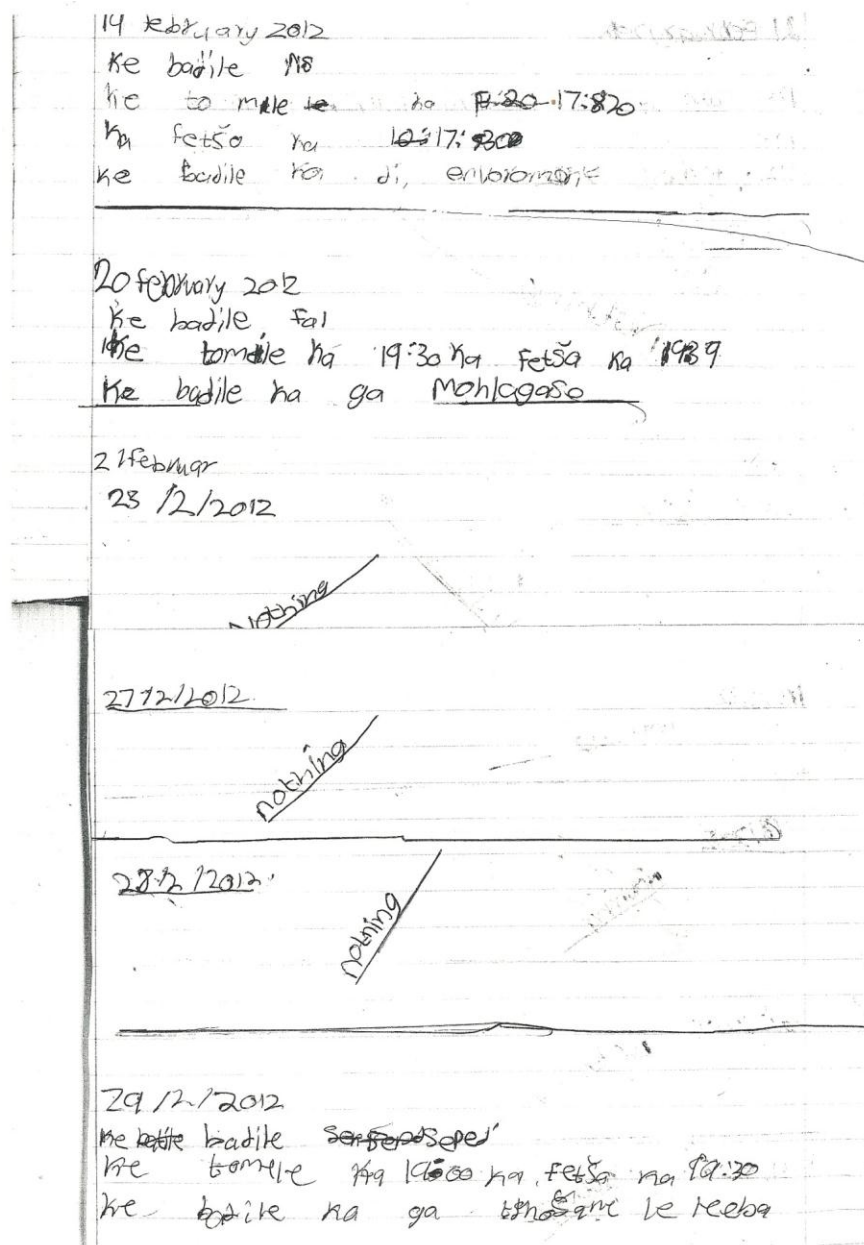
Learners' personal diaries were used to collect data about learners' activities after school hours. This helped the researcher to investigate activities that were related to reading after school hours. The information contributed to the picture of the role that can be played by parents, to enhance their children's reading level. According to Squelch and Lemmer (1994:93), parent involvement is the participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities, to improve their children's education. A study by McQuillan, cited by Krashen (2004), took into account the access to public and school libraries and the number of books available in learners' homes, and he concluded that if children had access to reading materials from any of these sources, they would be much more likely to become voluntary readers.

Learners' after school reading activities could best be described as almost non-existent. All grade 5 learners had to keep diaries of all reading activities done after-school hours, but only a few were able to do so. Those learners, who kept the diaries did not write as pages of their diaries were either blank or had minimal information. The researcher kept data of the learners' diaries from among the selected learners,

who were involved in the error-count test, as already indicated, only a few learners were able keep diaries.

The following are excerpt from some of the pages from learners' diaries:

Learner "G" – School A



In the above excerpt, the learner did not do any home activities that were related to reading while at home from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> of February. This was also the trend in subsequent weeks, for which learners were asked to keep personal diaries in relation to reading activities while at home. In terms of the error-count test, this learner committed 6 errors and therefore read below the grade level.

Learner "B"

my personal diary 2012		Letsoalo	Winy	<sup>Kgoro</sup> mabjea
LO	6h PM	kebadila	sereto	se LO
sepedi	8h P.m 9h a.m	kebadila kebadila	sereto sereto	se sepedi se fal
fal				
Ems				
maths				

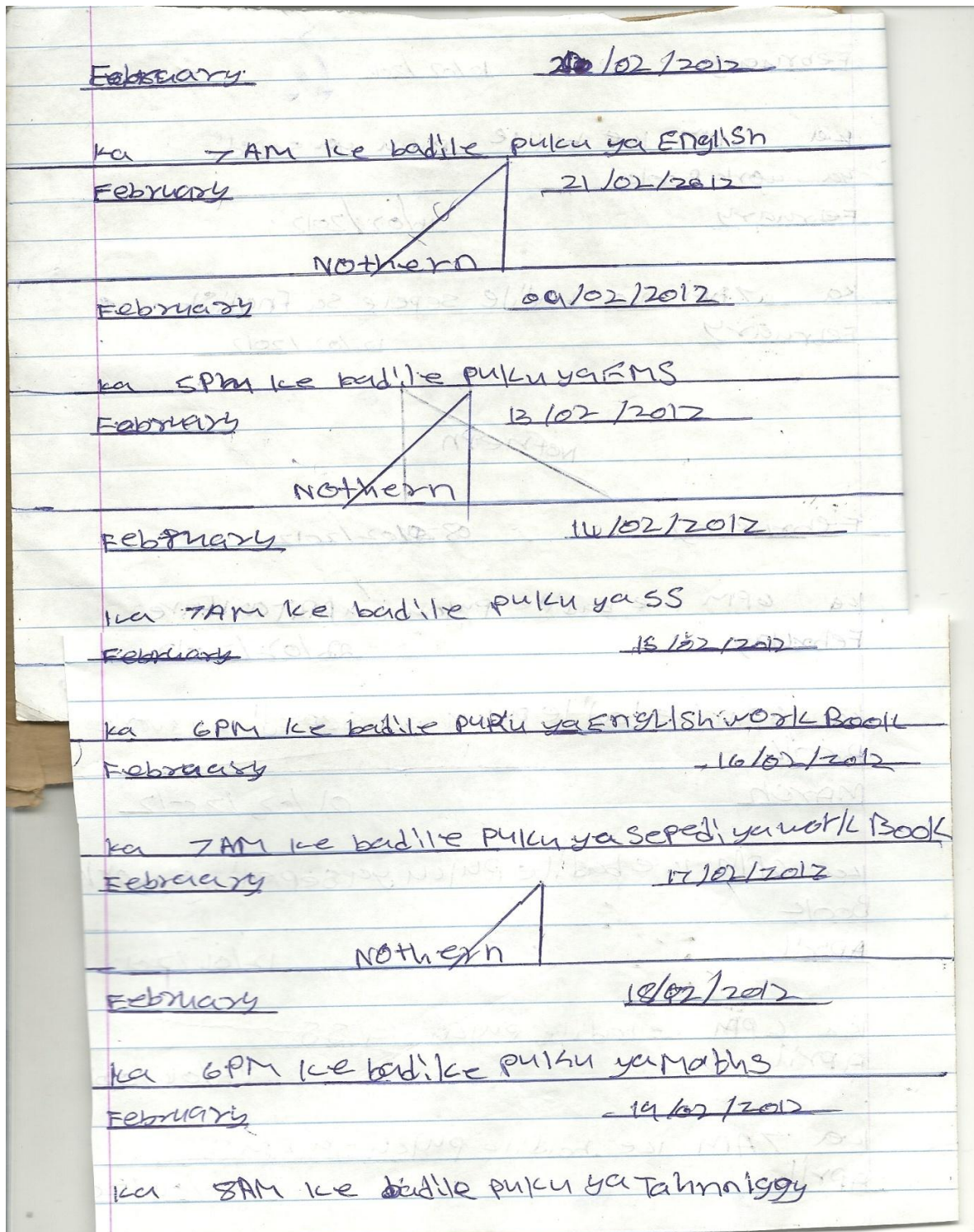
DEPT. OF EDUCATION LIMPOPO  
**MABJE-A-KGORO P.SCHOOL**  
 14-02-2012  
**HOD (SNR. INSP. & HASE)**  
 P.O. Box 7414, Tzaneen Mall 0855

Learner "B" read fairly well but went on to commit seven errors; in addition, her diary bore evidence that nothing had been recorded in learning areas of which the medium was English.



The above learner's handwriting bares testimony to the number of errors he committed during the error-count test, in which he scored 9. This was complemented by spaces wherein *nothing* was written to proof that no reading activities were done at home.

Learner "O" – School A



14-02-2012

He badile puku ya sepele  
diphutsole.

le puku ya dipalo.

He badile diphutsole -

15-02-2012

He badile puku ya E.M.S. le ya F.A.  
2 le diphutsole. Jo se E.M.S. le  
3 le diphutsole in F.A.

17/02/2012

He badile puku ya dipalo. Ho h  
ya leho.

He badile in puku ya EMS

19/02/2012

~~He badile dipuku~~

He badile dipuku. Ho mana. He  
He badile puku ya dipal  
He badile le puku ya EMS

In the above excerpts, “*nothing*” was written as “*northern*”, “*Sepedi*” as “*sepele*” which in fact refers to any prescribed book. “*Dipalo*” was written as “*dipal*”. Most learners did not observe punctuation marks while they were executing the error-count test as it was evidenced by lack of it in their diaries. The handwriting leaves a lot to be desired.

Based on the above evidence from the learners’ diaries, the researcher concluded that, indeed, grade 5 learners do actually read below the grade level and age cohorts. The researcher believes that learners cannot write what they cannot read.

#### 4.7 Findings from Interviews with Educators

The researcher conducted an open-ended interview with EFAL educators in the intermediate phase to explore the educators’ perceptions about their learners’ reading levels. Other educators, who offered other learning areas through medium of English in the intermediate phase, also formed part of the educator respondents.

The table below indicates the distribution of educators’ age.

	<i>Educators Age</i>			
	30-39	40-49	50-59	Total
Male	1	2	0	3
Female	0	3	1	4
Total	1	5	1	7
Percentage	14%	72%	14%	100

**Table 4:16: Distribution of Educators - Age**

Recently Pretorius and Mokhwesana, (2009: 56) reported,

There are many other contributory factors that immediately come to mind, including poverty, generally low adult literacy levels, the apartheid legacy of poor schooling for black children, poorly resourced schools, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate teacher training. Many of these are macro level factors, which are unlikely to change in the foreseeable future and over which schools and teachers have little control. However, there are also many factors within the school and classroom context over which teachers do indeed have control. These relate to the time and effort spent

providing opportunities for learners to practice reading and building positive attitudes to books and reading.

The teachers' responses were:

The researcher, "What would say is your learners' reading level?"

Educator-respondents "A", "B", "C", "D", "F" and "G" admitted that their learners' reading level was below the grade-level. Only educator-respondent "E" was sceptical, as she did not have a clear answer to the question. Educator-respondent "A" attributed this to the fact that after Grade 3, the language of learning and teaching is English as well as the OBE, while educator-respondent "B" blamed less work that is done in grade 4. Asked what the learners reading level was, the educator-respondent replied,

*"The reason is that, I am teaching grade 4, in grade 5, even our government is aware, it seems as if, much work was not done".*

The researcher, *"In other words, Sir, you want to tell me that the learners' reading is below the grade level?"*

Educator-respondent "B", *"Ya! Eh! Actually they are not reading at the grade level".*

On the provision of reading time on the timetable, educator-respondent "B" responded, *"Provision is there even though it is not followed, eh! Learners just read during normal period time, ah! I, we don't follow it".*

The table below shows the amount of classroom time, which should be allocated for the learning programme in the Intermediate Phase.

<i>Reading time in the Intermediate Phase</i>		
Grade 4 to 6	Subject	Hours
	F.A.L	Five (5)

**Table 4.17: Classroom Reading Time - Intermediate phase**

The researcher, *“Do your principal and School Management Team (SMT) help you to improve the learners reading level?”*

Educator-respondent B, *“Ah! According to me, we don’t have, if you ask them something in order to help the learners to read, they will just say, we are waiting for the government, learners don’t have enough resources for reading, they use the old ones they found”.*

On the question of learners reading for leisure, he said, *“Ja, I use to give books, reading books, but I, I normally, just do it looking at my programme”.*

The researcher, *“Do you have a school library?”* Educator-respondent B, *“No”.*

The above is a clear admission by the respondent that educators do not adhere to the DoE’s appeal to arrange an additional half-hour per day to “Drop All and Read”. This campaign is meant to create a culture of reading in the classroom and in the school. Everyone – from learner to teacher, principal and support staff – can be seen reading for enjoyment for half an hour a day. If learners enjoy reading, this will raise literacy levels and improve the ability of learners to learn.

Educator-respondent “C” blamed the lower level of reading on non-usage of English as a means of communication in the classroom and within the school premises by both educators and learners. Educator-respondent “C” went on to say that, almost 90% of the learners could not read and as a result, were unable to do word-sums unless it was explained to them in their home language. Hence, Probyn’s research (2001) in township schools on the current practice of using English as medium of instruction demonstrated the stress that teachers (and learners) experience from teaching (and learning) through the medium of a language, in which they were not able to communicate freely. Many of the teachers were not fluent speakers or readers of English, but they were expected to teach in English (Pretorius 2002:173–174).

Responding to the question, *“Is there anything you can do to improve your learners’ reading level?”*

Respondent “C” replied,

*“I try to communicate with learners through English, but this does not help as almost all the educators, including the principal, communicate with learners in their home language”.*

On the question of time allocated for reading, educator-respondent “A” acknowledged that she would try to use it (time) effectively as indicated on the timetable. Educator-respondent “B” acknowledged that time for reading was there but he categorically said that it was not being followed. He used the pronoun [we]. He blamed this on teacher workload and administrative burden. Educator-respondent “A” blamed lower reading levels on the transition from grade 3 to 4.

In the open question on learners’ home-background, all educator-respondents explained that learners did not receive help at home, because many parents cannot read while other learners’ parents were simply not there to help.

Regarding the learner prescribed text, item 6, educator-respondent A and C felt that they were of the appropriate level, while educator-respondent A felt that the texts were above the learners’ level of comprehension.

On whether the learners’ reading level was dwindling, item 7, all the respondents admitted that it was unfortunately the case.

#### **4.8 Analysis of the Findings**

In this section, the researcher focuses on the analysis and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data were obtained by presenting and interpreting various themes and findings, which emerged from the data collected through open-ended interviews with educators. The data obtained by means of the qualitative research approach were processed by transcribing the interviews and analysing the findings according to different themes. The data obtained by means of

the quantitative research approach were subjected to frequencies and percentages analysis.

#### **4.8.1 Analysis of the findings from the Error-Count Test**

An analysis of the results of the error-count test, while learners were reading revealed that 82 learners, which is 78% of the population, read below the grade level. This was confirmed by the higher number of scores obtained. However, the overall average percent of 8.03 of the error-count test could be misleading as there was a greater variation in terms of learners' level of reading as revealed by the STDV at the three schools.

#### **4.8.2 Analysis of data from Learners' Test**

The performance of the learners in the test reveals that they could not read and comprehend the prescribed text. High performance could have been evidence that, indeed, learners could read and comprehend the prescribed text.

#### **4.8.3 Analysis of data from Learners' Personal Diaries**

In showing the importance of the relationship between the learners' home and the school, Vygotsky quoted in Prinsloo and Stein, (2004:69) argue,

Children's early hands-on experiences with language and literacy in everyday social activities are seen to give rise to the internal mental processes that they use to do the intellectual work of reading and writing activity.

On the other side, Macdonald, (2000:20) points out,

Educational legislation in South Africa makes no provision for a committee or council at local level to oversee the welfare and quality of education in an entire village or community, in which there is usually more than one school.

The researcher holds the opinion that after school activities related to reading, complement what goes on at school. This was evidenced by diaries belonging to learners "E" and "O", who read fluently, while being observed during the error-count test, despite their poor handwriting.

#### **4.8.4 Analysis of data from Open-ended Interview with Educators**

The teachers' verbal responses were transcribed and divided into natural meaningful units, which led to themes. Qualitative analysis of the educators' responses was found to be consistent with the quantitative findings, especially on learners reading below the grade level. This is a clear confirmation by educators that, indeed, grade 5 learners definitely read below the appropriate and grade level. The general perception of educators in relation to intermediate phase learners in grade 5 is as outlined below:

Learners' reading level was below the grade level. The following factors emerged as causes for this state of affairs:

- Lack of enough work in the foundation phase;
- Lack of learner support materials in the form of reading books;
- Schools operating without libraries;
- Lack of extra reading activities done after school hours, while being home supervised by parents at home;
- Lack of implementation of reading strategies as recommended by NRS;
- Lack of support by the principal and the SMT; and
- Grade 4 being a transition class (using of FAL as a language of teaching and learning for the first time).

With regard to the last bullet in the preceding paragraph, the situation could best be understood in the light of what was reported by the Task Team for the Review of the Implementation of the National Curriculum Statement Final Report (October 2009).

The problems around language stem from the first years of schooling. Both reports of teachers and research show that many schools are delaying the introduction of English until Grade 3 – the year before learners are expected to learn through the medium of English (Prinsloo, 2009). Students' proficiency in English by the end of Grade 3 is not sufficient for them to make the transition to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in Grade 4. The quality of both mother tongue and English instruction has been questioned in the early grades (De Klerk, 2000). While policy states that English is to be taught alongside mother tongue from Grade 1, in practice there is confusion as to when English is to be introduced. Part of this can be attributed to the emphasis on mother tongue instruction (especially in the Language

Policy). There is also confusion around how additive bilingualism, the official policy informing the way in which mother tongue and the LOLT is managed in instruction, is implemented in practice. But the confusion around the teaching of English from grade 1 may also have arisen from the lack of clarity around the Foundation Phase Learning Programmes. Whereas the policy says that English should be taught as a subject from grade 1 to grade 3 to all learners who will be using English as the Language of Learning from grade 4.

Regarding the first point in the factors listed above, which is 'lack of enough work in the foundation phase' - it is, perhaps worth pondering about what Macdonald, (2000:119-120) pointed out,

In designing the new curriculum, the processes of early literacy were entirely ignored, and so for example, the 1997 Policy Document excused itself from the task by saying that *the skill of teaching reading* is beyond the scope of the LLC Specific Outcomes statement. It is common knowledge, that there were no junior primary school specialists on the original curriculum design team, and that is why this caveat was made. No attempt anywhere was made to give an account of the processes of early literacy: dare one think that senior school language teachers thought that the process was of little consequence?

The findings accentuate that, educators, even though they have been provided with clear guide-lines on how to teach reading by "Teaching Reading in the Early Grades, A Teacher's Handbook" as well as Foundations for Learning Campaign, do not follow or implement what is required of them. The NRS (2008) maintains that its main goal is to improve the reading competence of learners. Its aims are to improve the reading levels of all learners in the country by making educators know precisely how to help learners to achieve satisfactory reading levels, and where necessary, ask for extra professional support.

"Despite evidence of the benefits of reading instruction, it seems that teachers seldom teach reading strategies explicitly in South African schools, thereby depriving learners of the strategies they need to think about the process of meaning making when they encounter texts" (Klapwijk & Van der Walt, 2011:27).

## **4.9 Conclusion**

The implications from the responses by educator-respondents and the results from observing learners while reading concur and confirm that, indeed, intermediate phase learners in grade 5 read below their grade level and age cohorts. Statistically, this is evidenced by 64% of the learners committing 6 and 10 errors, which meant that their level of reading is below the expected level and standard. The average number of errors committed by a sample of the population is 8.03, while 78% of the sample population read below the grade level. The next chapter presents a discussion and summary of the findings as well as suggested recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the researcher presents a summary of the findings, conclusions and the suggested recommendations based on the data collected and findings in Chapter 4. The purpose of this study was to:

- Investigate the intermediate phase learners' reading level in grade 5 in Motupa Circuit, Bolobedu area of Limpopo Province.

Moses and Van der Berg, (2007:1) report,

Despite massive resource shifts to poorer schools, poor South African children have not made much progress in learning and indeed still perform much worse than many more weakly resourced schools in other Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) countries, whose parents are less educated and poorer than their South African counterparts are.

An analysis of the findings of the study in Chapter 4 bares testimony to the report as given by Moses and Van der Berg in the above quotation. As mentioned earlier on, the analysis of the findings followed the conventional analytic techniques using statistical as well as narrative analysis. The researcher summarized the findings of the study in relation to research questions and objectives of the study. This is followed by drawing conclusions as well as recommending possible solutions. The conclusions drawn from the findings provide answers to the research sub-questions as mentioned in Chapter 1:

- What are the reading levels of grade 5 learners in Motupa circuit?
- What is the comprehension ability of grade 5 intermediate phase learners?
- What are the perceptions of intermediate phase educators about the reading levels of their grade 5 learners?
- What are the afterschool reading activities of grade 5 learners in Motupa Circuit?

## 5.2 Summary of the study

**Chapter 1** introduced the study by giving the general orientation. This was done by delineating the aim and objectives of the study. The statement of the problem, which prompted the researcher to under-take this study, was also spelled out in Chapter 1. Furthermore, the chapter reflected the significance of the study in terms of contributing positively towards issues relating to reading and thereby providing a literate work force for the country.

**Chapter 2** dealt with the theoretical framework and the literature review relating to the study. The current state of reading in the South African schools was explored while paying attention to conditions, under which it is taking place.

**Chapter 3** discussed the research methodology as well as the characteristics of the research sample in depth.

**Chapter 4** focused on the results obtained from both the quantitative and qualitative data. Findings and analysis of the results were explored and presented in depth in this chapter.

## 5.3 Recommendations

The reading levels of grade 5 learners in the intermediate phase are, as revealed by the investigations in this study, below the grade and expected level. Based on the responses of the educator respondents as well as statistical results from the observations of the learners while reading, the researcher concluded that the following be recommended:

- **Phonological awareness and development**

This should be an on-going exercise that is not only dealt with in the foundation phase, as learners still experience problems with regard to phonemes and phonological sound recognition in the intermediate phase. “Research has consistently shown that a lack of phonemic awareness is one of the most important reasons why many children initially have difficulty learning to read”. (Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009:57). The findings revealed that there is a lack of phonological awareness in the intermediate phase learners as they (learners) were unable to recognise sounds represented by a combination of letters, for example, “*thousand*” was pronounced as “*thoughtsand*”.

- **Implementation and monitoring**

The study also revealed that there is little or no implementation of policy as recommended by FFLC, (2008). This campaign maintained that, during 2008 to 2011, it sought to create a national focus on improving the reading, writing and numeracy abilities of all South African children, within which the Reading Toolkit provided practical, back-to-basics guidelines on the planning of an effective Reading Programme in the classroom. Despite FFLC recommendations, learners are still reading below the expected level of the grade and age level as confirmed by educator respondents, whose qualitative analysis has consistently supported the quantitative findings, especially on the work that is being done in the foundation phase, in particular, grade 4, wherein all learning areas are taught through the medium of English.

Educators simply do very little in implementing what is required of them by the FFLC, and they are not fully monitored by those responsible. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) suggests the following grid, which gives an indication of how teaching time could be allocated to the different language skills per week.

<b>Time</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
1 hour	Shared reading (for Listening purposes)  Discussions on the text using appropriate language structures (Speaking)	Shared writing – establishing a frame  Group and guided writing	Shared reading (a new text or continuation of a text read previously)  Discussions on the text using appropriate language structures (Speaking) Group guided reading (including individuals)	Shared writing – reflecting on progress and specific skills  Group and guided writing – peer and or teacher reviews of planning or writing	Shared reading (a new text or continuation of a text read previously)  Discussions on the text using appropriate language structures (Speaking)  Comprehension exercise (every second week) using the same

**Table 5.1: Reading Time Grid - Intermediate Phase**

- **Doing away with rote learning**

The CAPS document reiterates one of the *National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12* general aims, which is to:

Give expression to the knowledge, skills and values worth learning in South African schools. This curriculum aims to ensure that children acquire and apply knowledge and skills in ways that are meaningful to their own lives. Item c bullet no 2 under general aims of the South African Curriculum further states that one of the principles is; “active and critical learning: encouraging an active and critical approach to learning, rather than rote and uncritical learning of given truths”.

The researcher is of the opinion that in most of the rural school, the focus is still very much on recitation and repetition rather than on the learners’ reflection of meaning making. Indeed “most learners in the elementary and middle grades learn best if they are involved in meaningful activities that require the use of concrete, manipulative materials, such as educational equipment” (Pietersen, 2006:414). It became clear during the observations of learners’ reading activities that they had memorised letters of alphabet and their sounds in their home language and this negatively influenced the reading of EFAL texts. Hence, meaningful activities that require the use of concrete objects should be emphasised in the foundation and through to the intermediate phases. This should be specifically so, because the researcher believes:

- **Learning and education are influenced by socio-economic conditions**

Socio-economic development of the community is the bedrock of education. To this, Gardner (2008:9) points out that the poorest and least-developed rural communities are those that were located in the former homelands, particularly in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. This study was conducted in some rural areas of Limpopo. Therefore, its findings confirm the point raised by Gardner. This point is also clearly demonstrated by learners’ diaries. Learners, who were able to keep diaries, were among those, who read fairly well at grade level.

- **Participation by community members in matters of formal schooling is essential**

The importance of participation by community members in matters of formal schooling was also raised in the *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education, published by the Department of Education in 2005*. According to the report, local government and School Governing Bodies (SGBs) need to work together in the interests of schools, to promote reading and elevate learners' standard to the equivalent age level. In the Eastern Cape, for example, District Education Forums (DEFs) have been established. These DEFs promote co-operative management of basic facilities and services for schools and the broader school communities. Hence, the researcher is in total agreement with Mokhwesana and Pretorius (2009:68) when they explain:

We need to recognize that reading is a learned skill; it is also a socially constructed form of behaviour. How well children read in school, how much they read and whether or not they enjoy reading are a direct reflection of what is happening in the schools and classrooms that these children inhabit.

In addition, from a socio-cognitive perspective associated with Vygotsky, children's early hands-on experiences with language and literacy in everyday social activities are seen to give rise to the internal mental processes that they use to do the intellectual work of reading and writing (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, reading should be seen as a socio-cultural activity of participation in socially constituted practices.

- **Provision of reading materials**

Learners cannot speak if they are not provided with opportunities to do so. The same applies to reading. If you want them to read, you must provide them with reading materials and opportunity to read. Late delivery, shortage and/or supply of wrong reading materials worsen the problem. The problem of a lack of textbook-access is now commonly accepted in the South African research literature. For example, in Hoadley's (2012:11) review of the classroom-based literature research in South Africa, one of the dominant descriptive features of primary schools is "a lack of print materials in classrooms, especially

textbooks.” The recent Limpopo textbook saga is a living testimony in this case. It was also confirmed by the educator respondents in this study. Reading books are a fundamental pedagogical tool especially in poorer, text-deprived schools located in the rural areas.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

Although there are many issues of contention, in educational research, reading levels in the intermediate phase, remain a burning issue at the heart of all stakeholders in South Africa. The study revealed that, despite the fact that a number of strategies have been introduced to improve reading in South African schools; intermediate phase learners’ reading level leaves much to be desired. For example, as already mentioned in Chapter I, the ANA, has revealed that grades 3 and 6 learners are unable to read and count at their appropriate level since 2008. This was also confirmed by the literature review, hence, the study sought to establish the actual reading level of the intermediate phase learners in grade 5.

“Well-developed reading skills are central to successful learning across the curriculum. Learners develop proficiency in reading and viewing a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, including visual texts. Learners recognise how genre and register reflect the purpose, audience and context of texts. Through classroom and independent reading, learners become critical and creative thinkers” (CAPS Intermediate Phase English home language).

Gardner, (2008) is of the following opinion,

Languages are not only about getting something done or for reaching a specific goal. They carry cultural loads and histories, and they shape how people think and understand the world. In South Africa, current language in education policy is to maintain the home language (also referred to as the mother tongue) while providing access to the effective use of at least one additional language.

Thus, accessing the effective use of at least one additional language, which in this case is English, may not be accomplished without the required reading level that is envisaged.

Du Plessis and Louw, (2008) note that, First Language (L1) education alone may not be sufficient and that all South Africans need to have access to a language with broader communication functions, enabling interaction in all spheres of life. “South Africans cannot afford to isolate themselves globally as far as culture and technology are concerned. The electronic media, internet, arts, cinema, and popular music expand and enrich the learners’ world and offer limitless opportunities for personal growth.”

In addition, Du Plessis and Louw, (2008) point out,

Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of L1 education in South Africa, the acquisition of English needs to be managed effectively. Language planning in education therefore needs to include language acquisition planning, especially the planning of the acquisition of English as a Language of Learning and Teaching (ELoLT). While South Africa is in the process of building an inclusive education system, educational support professionals, such as speech-language therapists, are urged to work in collaboration with preschool teachers as a team to provide ... preschool learners with a solid foundation in both L1 and English for lifelong learning and development

It is in accordance with the above quotation that reading levels in the intermediate phase should be revamped following the suggestions recommended in this study. Further studies should be conducted to investigate why, copious numbers of our learners, still read at a much lower level than other less resourced countries, such as Botswana.

However, educational resources alone cannot ensure the successful development of reading levels in learners. Much will depend on the quality of instruction provided by the teachers, who use material and implement policies as required by the authorities.

The study has revealed that, among others, the following, could help improve reading levels in schools and in the intermediate phase in particular:

1. Ongoing phonological awareness and development;
2. Implementation and monitoring;
3. Doing away with rote learning;

4. Learning and education are influenced by socio-economic conditions;
5. Participation by community members in matters of formal schooling; and
6. Provision of reading materials.

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# The following are the data collecting instruments for the study:

## 1. ANNEXURE A: Reading text 1

### Annexure A: Text 1 Dinosaurs

The text that shall be read by the learners whilst the researcher uses the structured observation checklist for error counting and reading behavior.

Name of learner: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender M / F Age \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: Mabje-a-kgoro Primary School

Grade : 5

Learner's home language: \_\_\_\_\_


#### Reading Ease

According to the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease, the text hereunder scored **70.20** on the scale (a higher score indicates easier readability; scores go from 0 to 100) and therefore, the text is suitable for grade 5 learners.


Dinosaurs lived on the Earth 100 million years ago. In those days there were no people to draw dinosaurs. There were no cameras to take photographs of dinosaurs. So how do we know that the dinosaurs once lived?

We know because archaeologists have found their bones under the ground. Archaeologists are scientists who dig up old bones to learn about life in the past.

When a dinosaur died, everything rotted away except its bones. Over many years, sand and soil blew over the bones and covered them. Slowly, over thousands of years, the bones turned into rock. It is these rocks that archaeologists dig up. We call these rocks fossils.



Imagine living at the same time as the dinosaurs. They were enormous, and many of them ate meat. Lunch!



Archaeologists can look at dinosaur fossils and imagine what the creatures looked like.

The biggest dinosaur in southern Africa was the Apatosaurus. Archaeologists have found its fossil bones in the Eastern Cape. The Apatosaurus was about 12 metres long. Its long neck helped it to eat leaves from the tops of trees.

Annexure A Text 2 The Cape vultures

The text that shall be read by the learners whilst the researcher uses the structured observation checklist for error counting and reading behavior.

Name of learner: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender M / F Age \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: Mabje-a-kgoro Primary School

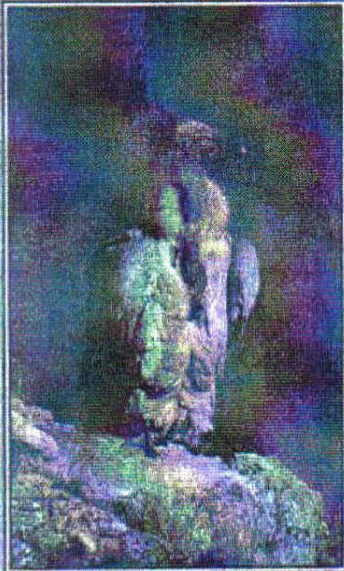
Grade : 5

Learner s home language : \_\_\_\_\_

The text below was subjected to the Flesch–Kincaid" (F–K) Reading grade level scale and was found to be suitable for grade 5 learners as the results are at 70.41

Scores can be interpreted as shown in the table below.

Score	Notes
90.0–100.0	easily understandable by an average 11-year-old student
60.0–70.0	easily understandable by 13- to 15-year-old students
0.0–30.0	best understood by university graduates



There used to be many Cape vultures living in southern Africa, but now these birds are rare. The Cape vulture used to live and feed in the open veld, but now there is not enough veld left. Land that used to be open veld now has many farms and factories.

Farms and factories need electricity, which means that there are many electric wires and poles across the country. Cape vultures often try to land on these wires and the electricity kills them.

Vultures feed on animals that have been killed by other animals, such as lions and cheetahs. Fewer animals are killed for food, so there is less food for the vultures.

Conservationists are trying to save the Cape vulture with 'vulture restaurants'. These are places where they leave a dead animal for the vultures to eat. The conservationists break up bones with hammers and leave the small pieces of bone around the dead animal. The adult vultures take the pieces of bone home to their chicks.

Conservationists hope that the vulture restaurants will stop the Cape vulture from becoming extinct.

Many Cape vulture chicks die because their bones and wings are too weak. They need calcium from their food to make their bones and wings strong. When an animal has been killed in the veld, hyenas chew the bones of the dead animals and leave small pieces of bone lying around. Cape vultures used to take these pieces of bone back to their nests and feed them to their chicks. The bones were full of calcium. But now it is very difficult for the chicks to get the calcium that they need. If their bones and wings aren't strong enough, they fall out of their nests when they try to fly. Since Cape vultures nest on high cliffs, the chicks fall a long way to their death.

**ANNEXURE B:**

**Structured observation checklist (error count test) for learners while reading grade prescribed material**

School: \_\_\_\_\_ . Date \_\_\_\_\_

Learner: \_\_\_\_\_

Age of learner: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade: Five (5)

Learner's home language: \_\_\_\_\_

- |                                                                 |         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Does the learner read with the correct pronunciation?        | Yes \No |
| 2. Is there voice projection?                                   | Yes \No |
| 3. Does the learner read fluently?                              | Yes \No |
| 4. Does the learner observe the following punctuation marks:    |         |
| 4.1 Full stops (.)                                              | Yes \No |
| 4.2 Commas (,)                                                  | Yes \No |
| 4.3 Exclamation marks (!)                                       | Yes \No |
| 4.4. Question mark (?)                                          | Yes \No |
| 4.5 Quotation marks (“”)                                        | Yes \No |
| 5. Does the learner read in a rhythmical and expressive manner? | Yes \No |
| 6. Does the learner show a relaxed reading posture?             | Yes \No |
| 7. Does the learner stumble and or stop at a few words?         | Yes \No |
| 8. Does the learner do word-for-word reading?                   | Yes \No |

Results of the above to be interpreted as follows:

- Learners making fewer than five errors are reading at comfortable grade level.
- Learners making between 5 and 10 errors are reading below grade level.
- Learners making more than 10 errors are below the grade level and are reading far below par.

## ANNEXURE C:

### Learners' personal diaries for recording reading activities after school reading

The following is the template used by learners to record activities relating to reading after school hours. NB: Learners were at liberty to fill in time other than those specified above, with a format of their choice in recording any reading activities after school hours. Supply any other reading material that you read at home, other than school work.

Time	Learning area	Home work	Type of activity	Reading involved
5PM -- 6PM	English First Additional Language			e. g. I read about ...
6PM – 7PM	Social Science			
7PM -- 8PM	Life Orientation			
8PM – 9PM	Natural Science			
9PM – 10PM	Any other Learning Area taught through the medium of English			

Table 25: Template for learners' personal diaries

## **ANNEXURE D:**

### **Open-ended interview guide for exploring EFAL educators' perceptions about learners' reading level in the intermediate phase**

1. How would you grade your learners' reading level?  
(a) Below grade level, (b) at grade level, (c) above grade level.
2. Do you have any reason for your choice above?
3. Do you make provision for reading activities on the time-table? If yes, how often and are these sufficient?
4. Is there a record of the learners' performance on reading?
5. Do both the principal and the SMT assist you with improving the learners' reading level and if so, how?
6. Do you think the learners' home-background has an impact on the learners' reading level and if so, how?
7. Please supply your comments regarding prescribed texts for learners?
8. In general, would you say the level of reading is improving or dwindling in the intermediate phase?
9. In general, do you think media does impact on the state of reading in the intermediate phase and how?
10. What would you do to improve your learners' reading level?
11. How often do your learners read for leisure?
12. Does the school award merit certificates to best readers?

**ANNEXURE E: Permission by HOD to conduct research in Mopani District of Limpopo**



**LIMPOPO**  
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Enquiries : Nemalili Eastern(Manager: Office of the HOD)  
Tel Ext. : (015) 290 7702

Date : 18 February 2011.

Mr.M.P.Ramalepe  
P.O.Box 4319  
Ga-Kgapane  
0838

*Email:rapeter@webmail.co.za*

Dear Sir

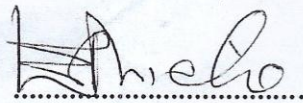
**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: MOPANI DISTRICT, MOTUPA CIRCUIT (RAMALEPE M.P; Student No: 200306183)**

1. Thank you for your letter dated the 08 January 2011. We are indeed humbled by the interest displayed by you on matters which of course affects our Education system.
2. In the light of your request, i therefore grant you permission to conduct research for your Master degree in Language studies (University of Limpopo). It is however important to indicate that prior arrangements to conduct the latter should be arranged in advance so that teaching and learning is not sacrificed.

1

3. Once more, we wish you all of the best in your studies and assure you of our cooperation in this regard.

Yours Sincerely



Benny Boshielo  
Head of Department-Education  
Limpopo Province

18 February 2011

Cc: Senior General Manager: Mr.M.Thamaga  
District Senior Manager (Mopani): Dr.L.L.Mafenya

**ANNEXURE F: EDITOR'S CONFIRMATION LETTER**

**SOLI DEO GLORIA  
EDITOR'S CONFIRMATION LETTER  
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

I hereby state that I have edited the document:

**An Investigation of the Reading Levels of Intermediate Phase Learners in Motupa  
Circuit, Limpopo Province**

**M P Ramalepe**

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Education**

in the

Department Language Education

**School of Education**

**University of Limpopo**

Supervisor: Dr TE Mabila

February 2013

*Disclaimer*

*At time of submission to student, language editing and technical care was attended to as requested by student and supervisor. Any corrections and technical care required after submission is the sole responsibility of the student.*

Kind Regards

Dr J P Sammons  
D.Litt.et Phil (University of Johannesburg)

SOLI DEO GLORIA  
Language Editing

Email: [sdgproofed@gmail.com](mailto:sdgproofed@gmail.com)  
DATE: 22 February 2012