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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education
ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AHA	American Hyperlexia Association
ANA	Annual National Assessment
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
FAL	First Additional Language
FFL	Foundations for Learning
GRD	General Reading Disability
HED	Higher Education Diploma
HoD	Head of Department
HPS	Health Promoting School
IDEA	Disabilities Education Improvement Act
IEA	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
ILST	Institution Level Support Team
INLNS	Integrated National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
INSET	In-Service Training
JPTD	Junior Primary Teachers Diploma
L1	First Language

L2	Second Language
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LRM	Lexical Restructuring Model
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
NAEP	National Assessment of Educational Progress
NCS	National Curriculum Statements
NEEDU	National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
NILNS	National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
NINDS	National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke
NRS	National Reading Strategy
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Strategy
PTC	Primary Teaching Certificate
QIDS-UP	Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme
QLTC	Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign
RCD	Reading Comprehension Deficits
S-RCD	Specific Reading Comprehension Deficits
SAL	Second Additional Language
SAMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring
SERT	Self-Explanation Reading Training
SETA	Sector Education Training Authority
SMT	School Management Team

SPTD	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VA	Visual Attention
WRD	Word Reading Deficit

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading in English in Mondlo Ward Vryheid District. It further explored factors that affect learners' reading. The sample consisted of 36 learners who are poor readers. These learners were selected from educators' reading assessment record sheet. It also consisted of nine English language educators with a minimum of five years post-qualifying experience, principals of selected schools because they are curriculum managers at school level and one English language subject advisor.

The study focused on three primary schools in Mondlo ward Vryheid District, which were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Qualitative research was chosen as the research method, with phenomenology as the research design. Data collection instruments consisted of structured observation schedule, unstructured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted in participants' schools. The focus group discussions were conducted with learners and educators soon after the unstructured interviews at the participants' schools. The subject advisor was interviewed in her respective office. Data analysis consisted of a thematic approach. Common themes were identified in participants' responses.

The findings highlighted factors which cause learners' reading problems. The factors include various physical factors, little attention to reading skills, lack of print-rich environment, insufficient reading time, poor teachers' and learners' communicative competence in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching. Educators were of the view that repeated curriculum changes within a short period of time without proper training of educators has an effect on learners' reading performance. The study revealed that reading is adversely affected by the poor learning conditions in which learners find themselves in because there was a strong relationship between socio-economic factors and reading ability. On that account, the implication is that reading will not improve in Intermediate Phase learners if learning conditions do not improve.

The study recommends that the Department of Education pay more attention to pre-service and in-service training of educators so that educators are more knowledgeable in all reading components.

Key concepts

Intermediate Phase; challenges in English reading; components of reading; qualitative research; phenomenology

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The inability of many learners in the Intermediate Phase to develop effective reading skills in English is a cause for concern. Struggling readers are forced to make adaptations in various spheres of society in order to survive. According to Therrien (2004), at least one in five learners has significant difficulty in reading. Lenski (2008) argued that literacy development in the Intermediate Phase is just as important and requires as much attention as that of beginner readers.

The government is paying more attention to improving the English language from grade 4 to 6 because learners performed poorly when tested for their ability to read (Department of Education [DoE], (2008:5). A systemic evaluation of language competence in 2005 reflects that 68% of learners were below the required competence. Mohlala (2008:15) reported that according to 2008 Evaluation Assessment Tests for Reading only 15% of learners achieved the required literacy level, and approximately 4% of learners experience a neurological problem with reading. The government has also introduced Annual National Assessments (ANA), which are standardised national assessments for language. The severity of the situation was cemented by 2006 South African learner achievement results from Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, which is an international assessment study of reading, implemented for the first time in South Africa during 2005 with a sample of grade 4 and grade 5 learners. The results indicated that learners in both grades were battling to develop the reading literacy competencies needed to make a successful transition to reading to learn in the latter primary school years. South Africa participated again in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011:14). The findings indicated that South African learners performed poorly in literacy. The data analysis provided by the 2013 and 2014 ANA also reflected poor performance in English in the Intermediate Phase.

Figure 1.1: The average percentage marks per grade in the Intermediate Phase learners achieved in First Additional Language (FAL)

GRADE	2012	2013	2014
4	34	39	41
5	30	37	47
6	36	46	45

Figure 1.1 reveals that there is a slight improvement in grade 5 with average performance increasing about 10% in 2014, but it is still below 50%. Learners struggle to respond to questions that require the use of their own words Department of Basic Education [DBE, 2014:11].

Research studies demonstrate that learners with reading challenges have difficulty with inference and prediction-type questions. Some researchers have studied reading challenges which stem from the deficits in phonic awareness, poor decoding skills or word recognition problem. The status quo of reading in South African schools depends on reading skills that are developed in the Foundation Phase of schooling using home language. In the Foundation Phase, much emphasis is placed on teaching decoding skills, but this is often done in a superficial and de-contextualised way. In the Intermediate Phase, reading is largely presumed to be developed, as learners can decode texts. Learners who have not yet mastered reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase will not be able to transfer their home language reading skills in English.

Another area in which the learners experience difficulties in reading comprehension is poor word recognition or an inability to decode, and some of the learners failed to comprehend although they are able to read accurately and fluently. Learners with reading problems struggle to comprehend text due to an inherent breakdown in necessary cognitive mechanism. Learners possess the tools to process information, but for some inexplicable cause, they cannot do it accordingly because they lack appropriate strategies. They also exhibit significant deficits in necessary comprehension strategies for evaluating text coherences. Most learners experience lack of reading proficiency and become de-motivated and psychologically affected, which promote high failure rate. The figures in Figure 1.1 reflect the magnitude of the challenge still facing the sector, and they confirm that there is a great need for support.

In South Africa, there has been a dearth of research outlining reading practices, especially in the Intermediate Phase. It thus becomes necessary to investigate factors that might contribute to poor reading skills.

1.2 Analysis of the problem

According to the Language Policy Act No. 27 of 1996, a learner in the Foundation Phase – which is grade R to grade 3 – must be offered one official language as a home language, as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), which is isiZulu. They must also be offered one official language as a subject, which is English, because it is assumed that the learning of more than one language should be a general practice and principle in South Africa.

The Intermediate Phase starts from grade 4 to grade 6, which is the transition between the Foundation and Senior Phase. This is where many challenges are experienced because in this

phase, learners start using English as the LoLT in these grades. Additionally, many content subjects are introduced and all of them in English by different educators, unlike in the Foundation Phase, where the learner was taught by a single teacher and in their home language. Acquired language is learned better than learned language because the learner must concentrate in order to understand (Hammer, 1999:37), which is difficult for learners because there is a difference even in the letter combination between home language and English. The decoding method that the learner uses to decode words in home language does not apply in the second language. The criteria for assessment often underestimate learners' academic progress potential because they are expected to comply with promotion requirements.

The foregoing aggravates performance in learners because the ability to read becomes a challenge which causes frustration and low self-esteem. This is especially the case if reading is in an additional language. Sadly, even parents are unable to support their children because they are poorly versed in this language; some parents cannot even speak the language. Lemmer (1996:155) stated that parents might feel ill-equipped to assist with homework, and cooperation between the parent and school is largely restricted because parents feel inferior.

1.3 The statement of the problem

The inquiry attempted to ascertain what the realities are concerning reading of English and possible solutions that can be provided to redress reading challenges. The research shed light on the role of the curriculum and the method of teaching reading in English.

1.4 Aim of the study

This study aims to

- explore the challenges faced by learners in reading;
- shed light on the role of teachers and the school in improving the English language in learners; and
- recommend what the best instructional materials and theories of teaching are which will help improve the reading competence of learners in the Intermediate Phase.

1.4.1 Research aims

The following are the research aims of this study:

- to investigate challenges faced by learners in reading in the Intermediate Phase
- to identify challenges associated with reading
- to provide information about issues and challenges experienced by learners with reading problems
- to make meaningful contributions and guidelines on how to improve reading
- to give an overview of teaching conditions in which learners find themselves

The results of the study will help the Department of Education, as appropriate answers to challenges faced by learners in English reading will be provided.

1.4.2 Research questions

The main research question is:

What are the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading English language?

It is envisaged that this study will provide answers to the following pertinent sub-questions of the research focus:

1. To what extent does reading affect academic performance?
2. What are the teaching conditions in which learners find themselves?
3. How can guidelines be developed on improving reading in the Intermediate Phase?

1.5 Theoretical framework

Reading literature has resulted in several theories to improve reading. These theories have been widely accepted and used, yet no theories exist which can sufficiently describe and explain how people accomplish the complete task of reading. The study will focus on bottom-up and top-down theories because successful reading requires both bottom-up and top-down comprehension process.

1.5.1 Bottom-up theories

The fundamental insight is that reading is a process of responding to printed text and essentially consists of decoding the graphic symbols to arrive at the meaning. Words are processed individually and sequentially, and meaning is derived directly from them. A bottom-up approach to reading requires the learner to match letters with sounds. According to Stanovich (1980), the bottom-up model describes information as a series of stages that transforms the input and passes it to the next stage without feedback. It offers very little with regard to the notion of comprehension.

1.5.2 Top-down theories

In the top-down theory, comprehension is the major category. Top-down models teach learners to be readily introduced to literature as a whole. Instead of teaching learners to read words only, the top-down theory encourages students to focus more on understanding the main idea of a passage than understanding every word (Ekwall & Shanker 1989:4).

1.6 Preliminary literature review

The literature review in this study is an explication of possible challenges to the development of reading in the Intermediate Phase. Gagne (2006:1-3) identified general reading as the inability to process phonetically that include word guessing and the ability to read simple phonetic words. It is important for learners to develop basic language skills. Most educators believe that they do not have to teach reading skills but only need to facilitate the process for learners to teach themselves to read (DoE, 2008:8).

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwala (2002:310) stated that it is important for a learner to have adequate vocabulary in order to understand a language because reading is about written language; therefore, a learner must understand forms and grammar. Burnham and Jones (2004:310) brought out that the learning environment needs to be free from distracters so that the learner with special needs can concentrate on it. Other authors (Hugo, 2002:88-89; Machet and Pretorius, 2003:8) pointed out that reading is very important for learners to read properly in order to acquire knowledge, so as to acquire decoding skills.

From the above brief literature review, it is clear that learners in the Intermediate Phase battle with numerous barriers in acquiring reading skills in school.

1.7 Essential components of good reading

There are five essential components of good reading that children must be taught in order to learn to read (National Institute of Child Health Development [NICHD], 2000). Adults can help children to be good readers by systematically practising the following components:

- a) Phonemic awareness instruction designed to teach children the ability to focus on, manipulate, and break apart the sounds (or phonemes) in words
- b) Phonics – instruction designed to help readers understand and apply the knowledge of how letters are linked to sounds (phonemes) to form letter-sounds (grapheme-phoneme) correspondences and spelling patterns
- c) Fluency – instruction, primarily through guided oral reading that reinforces the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and proper expression
- d) Vocabulary – instruction, both explicit and implicit, in order to increase both oral and print knowledge of words, a critical component of comprehension and reading
- e) Comprehension – instruction that teaches students to actively engage with and derive meaning from texts they read

Learning to read occurs in stages (Pretorius, 2012). In the early stages of learning to read, children learn the alphabets, letter-sound relationships, recognise high-frequency words, and read simple texts containing language and thought processes within their frame of reference. There is a gradual increase in higher-order processing skills with age. At the start of grade 4, where learners switch from home language instruction to English, reading becomes a tool for learning. At this stage, learners' language, knowledge and vocabulary need to expand. Reading instruction in the Intermediate Phase needs to go beyond five components of reading because the challenges that learners face in reading the expository texts of the Intermediate Phase are distinctively different from those they experience in reading the storybooks of primary grades. As learners move through schooling, from primary to Intermediate Phase, the sort of educational knowledge they are expected to have becomes more complex and further removed from their daily concrete experiences. Thus, the language that is used to construct knowledge is different from the language that is used to construct the commonsensical knowledge of everyday ordinary life.

Phonemic awareness

Children need to be taught to hear sounds in words, and that words are made up of the smallest parts of a sound or phonemes. They need to recognise and use individual sounds to create words. According to Luthy & Stevens (2011:1) phonemic awareness is important because

it improves reading and acknowledges that the relationship between phoneme awareness and reading awareness is strong, and phonemic awareness develops with literacy instruction, and it also develops phoneme awareness and improves reading acquisition.

Phonics

Children need to understand the relationship between written letters and spoken sounds. They need to be taught the sounds' individual printed letters and groups of letters and the groups of letters make. Knowing the relationship between letters and sounds helps children recognise familiar words accurately and automatically, and to decode new words. Perfetti (2011) put phonology at the heart of reading process.

Reading fluency

Reading fluency is the ability to read with fluency and accuracy and the main purpose for the learner is to derive meaning from the text (Bender, 2004:191) When reading is dysfluent, students need to use a significant portion of their cognitive effort on decoding. The literature review indicates that repeated reading improves reading fluency. Children must develop the ability to read texts accurately and quickly in order to understand what is read. When fluent readers read silently, they recognise words automatically, and when a fluent reader reads aloud, they read effortlessly and with expression. Readers who are weak in fluency read slowly, word by word and spend much effort decoding, to the point that they miss the meaning of the text.

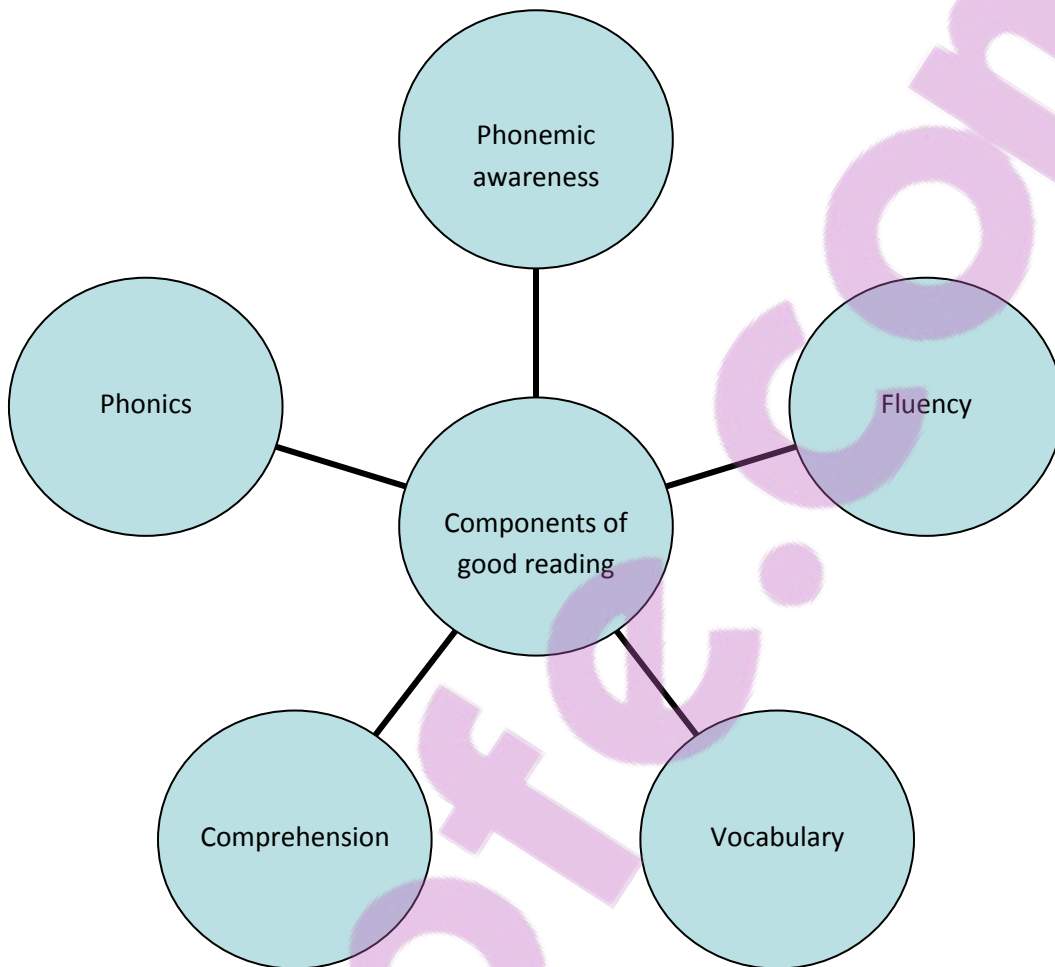
Vocabulary development

It is very important for children to learn the meaning and pronunciation of words and actively expand their knowledge of written and spoken words and how those words are used. The larger/stronger the child's spoken vocabulary, the more background knowledge that child will bring to his or her reading experience (Stahl & Mokenna 2006: 63).

Reading comprehension

According to some authors (Cain & Oakhill, 2007:30; Sousa, 2005:90; Bender, 2004:180) reading comprehension relies on spoken language comprehension. Children need to acquire strategies to understand, remember and communicate what they have read. Learners who are in control of their own reading comprehension become purposeful readers. Good readers visualise what is happening in the story while they read. The more the reader knows and learns about a topic, the easier he or she understands the latter passages of that topic.

Figure 1.2: Five key areas of reading



Learners must be taught the components in Figure 1.2 in isolation but through an integrated balanced approach. Educators should help learners to understand the relationship among these key areas and how they relate to reaching the goal of good reading.

1.8 Strategies to improve reading

There are many strategies aimed at improving the reading ability of struggling readers which offer the best opportunity for making a difference to learners' reading abilities. These strategies are discussed next.

1.8.1 Strategies to improve reading comprehension

The goal of reading comprehension is to enable learners to use strategies independently when reading. Reading comprehension strategies are the conscious steps that readers use to make sense of text, and it is an integral facet and thus important for struggling readers who often do not comprehend the material that they are expected to read at school. Struggling readers, therefore, require assistance in the development of comprehension strategies. According to Baumann and Kame'enui (2012:47), it is stated that better reading comprehension leads to reading pleasure and is often the beginning of a lifelong journey of reading. Struggling readers should have the following skills (Fairbairn and Winch, 2000):

- the ability to summarise the main idea
- the ability to remember important details
- good word-, phrase- and sentence-recognition skills
- the ability to predict outcomes and follow instructions
- the ability to follow the writer's structuring techniques and meaning
- the ability to draw conclusions

1.8.2 Strategies to improve reading fluency

Aldeson (2000:147) stated that learners experience three types of challenges with regard to reading fluency, which are as follows:

1. Many learners read too slowly.
2. Some learners cannot adjust their reading speed according to circumstances.
3. Some readers read so fast that they show no comprehension of what they have read.

Fawcett and Rasinski (2008:156) suggest a number of explicit strategies to improve reading fluency:

Independent reading

Learners of all ages need opportunities to read for their own purposes as well as for school assignment purposes. The Department of Education has stated that compulsory time for *drop*

everything and read must be scheduled. Ekwall and Shanker (2000:160) maintained that time set aside for independent reading has increased struggling readers' reading fluency.

Teacher modelling

According to Fawcett and Rasinski (2008:161), teacher modelling allows learners to gain an internal sense of fluency. The teacher can demonstrate to learners by reading using the appropriate expression and pace. The educator can assign a section of a textbook to be read, and learners must apply the strategies they have observed from the teacher.

Assisted reading

Assisted reading involves learners; reading a text while simultaneously hearing it read to them by fluent readers. Alderson (2000:2) pointed out that the integration of seeing a text while simultaneously listening to it can have a positive impact on learners; ability to recognise the words accurately, and fluency.

1.8.3 Strategies to improve vocabulary

Brain power words

In this strategy, learners are asked to preview different sections of a text and to identify words that are difficult but seem essential to understanding the subject. Learners must identify unknown words that seem important in unlocking the meaning of the text. After choosing the words, learners go back to the text and try to establish the meaning by using contextual clues (Richek & McTague 2008:202).

Find that word

This strategy is aimed at learners in the Intermediate Phase. Learners are asked to record words they are studying when they encounter them in reading and speech. This enables learners to see the words in different contexts and thus deepens their vocabulary knowledge. Learners are given a list of target words and are asked to look for them. When learners see or hear a word, they are asked to write down the sentence in which the word appears (Richek & McTague 2008:202).

1.8.4 Strategies to improve attitude towards reading

Learners with a positive attitude towards reading will spend more time on a reading activity. A negative attitude towards reading usually develops in a home where the parents do not read; a positive attitude towards reading is cultivated in a home where reading matter is freely

available. These parents read for themselves and read to their children (Richek & McTague 2008:203).

1.9 Factors that influence reading

1.9.1 *A culture of neglect*

Currie (2004:4) stated that people live in a culture that makes it all too easy for learners in the Intermediate Phase to define themselves as “failures and losers who do not fit in well with their families and schools”. He is supported by Lenski (2008:47) who posited that the current structure of schooling does little to nurture struggling readers once they are in the Intermediate Phase.

1.9.2 *Motivation to read*

The lack of motivation to read is one of the most frequent contributions to struggling readers’ lack of achievement. This is the view of Taylor, Pearson, Harries and Gacia (1995:89) who explained that learners with little motivation to read are often disengaged from learning and avoid reading, because unmotivated learners do not spend time reading, their progress tends to be slower than that of other learners who do read. Lenski (2008:42) agreed that “The act of avoiding reading sets the stage for further reading failure, which can result in learned helplessness. Therefore they lose the motivation to try to read difficult texts”

1.9.3 *Reading strategy instruction*

Cambourne (2004:120) asserted that one of the main reasons for the large number of struggling readers in the Intermediate Phase is that reading strategies are not demonstrated effectively to learners. Therefore, educators must provide learners with the skills and strategies to comprehend complex texts through explicit instruction.

1.9.4 *Multilingualism*

Lenski (2008:98) stated that learners who are not proficient in a language find it difficult to read academic texts that are written for the Intermediate Phase. In South Africa, classes typically consist of learners from diverse backgrounds. According to Ramphele (2009:58), many learners who are learning to speak either of the two main official languages in their mother tongue struggle to learn the LoLT and also struggle to learn how to read.

1.9.5 *Learners from diverse cultural background*

Lenski (2008) submitted that there is a variety of reasons why struggling readers experience difficulty with reading. Some learners come from backgrounds not consistent with the school culture. People convey their ideas through language. Gxilishe (2009:17) argued that all the accumulated knowledge value systems, aspirations, beliefs, history, and identity find expression

through language. Ramphela (2009:22) explained that current approaches alienate children from their cultural roots.

1.10 Research method and design

The problem was explored using a literature review and empirical investigation. The literature review entailed the identification and analysis of documents containing information related to the stated problem.

1.10.1 Empirical investigation

In the empirical investigation, a qualitative approach was used with emphasis on a phenomenological research design approach. The qualitative methods focus on aspects of meaning, experience and understanding, and that study of human experience is approached from the viewpoint of research participants (Brink, 2006:10). According to McMillan & Schumacher (2010:343), there are five methods of gathering data: observation, interviews, questionnaires, documents review, and use of audio-visual materials. The qualitative research method requires the researcher to become the research instrument (Maritz & Visagie, 2010:9). The choice of qualitative research for this research is the result of a nature of the problem – challenges faced by intermediate learners in reading. The study involved a case study. In a case study, the data analysis focuses on a specific phenomenon which the researcher wishes to investigate in depth (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2003:275; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:398).

Marshall and Rossman (2006:2) described qualitative research as a form of inquiry that explores phenomena in their natural setting and uses multi-methods to interpret, understand, explain and ascribe meaning to them. It was decided to employ a qualitative approach because this method would suit the interpretive-interactional approach. Interviews are the most widely used data collection strategy in qualitative research (Drew, Hardman & Hosp, 2008:189).

1.10.1.1 Population sampling

According to Creswell (2008:110), sampling is the process of finding people to gain access to a study and to establish a rapport so that participants provide relevant data. The sample for this study consists of three schools which offer Intermediate Phase levels and with typical reading problems out of 36 primary schools in Mondlo Ward. Principals of selected schools were purposefully selected because they are the immediate managers to English educators and learners with reading problems. Nine English language educators were purposefully selected because they have in-depth knowledge of learners' reading problems, and 36 learners with reading problems were purposefully selected from educators' reading assessment record sheet,

as they are a suitable target group of the study to demonstrate the evidence of the researcher. One English language subject advisor was purposefully selected because he or she is the supervisor of all the selected schools where the study was conducted. The total number of participants was 49. The researcher believed that the participants were able to describe their experiences fully and thus contribute to the purpose and objectives of the investigation.

1.10.2 Data collection techniques

Data collection method consisted of classroom observation, interviews, and focus group discussions. In this study, unstructured in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants in their respective schools in line with the qualitative research paradigm.

Focus group discussions were conducted with the participants in their respective schools. A focus group discussion presents a more natural environment than that of the individual interview. Morgan (in Punch, 2004:177) posited that a hallmark of a focus group is the explicit use of group interaction found in the group.

1.11 Trustworthiness of the research

The following were used to increase the trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 2008):

- credibility
- transferability
- dependability
- confirmability

1.12 Ethical considerations

In this research, the researcher made sure that participants' confidentiality is considered. The method of obtaining data was described to participants as well as the intended use of the data. Participants voluntarily answered the questions.

1.13 Definition of terms

Challenge

A challenge is a situation where one is faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person's ability (Cambridge

Dictionary, 2016). Challenges are factors which learners find difficult to cope with in academic performance, and these are factors which are difficult to address and put significant demands on learners in the Intermediate Phase.

Learner

A learner is a person who has not yet reached adulthood or maturity. Such a person still has to be educated and learn from an adult or primary educator – usually in a formal learning situation. For the purpose of this study, it refers to any person enrolled in an educational institution who is obliged to receive education in terms of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996.

Reading

Reading is a foundational skill on which all formal education depends (Jhingran, 2011:17). This is a process through which the reader makes a personal connection with a text to construct meaning. Reading and responding to a text are integral parts of language learning. Effective readers employ a wide repertoire of meaning-making strategies that they can deploy independently with a range of texts. Effective readers understand and remember what they read. They can summarise and discuss the content and demonstrate their comprehension of the text, and they can read with good expression, intonation, pitch, and phrasing. This means that the reader must connect information from the written text in order to understand a message.

Reading problems

This term is used to refer to an unexpected failure in learning to read. It is when a learner is unable to read with understanding. Learners with reading problems read word by word, have poor pronunciation, omit words, have an inadequate vocabulary, and their reading speed is slow. As a result, comprehension becomes poor, and they have severe word recognition difficulties which are related to varied shortcomings in phonological and visual processing.

Intermediate Phase

It is the level a learner reaches after the Elementary Phase. Intermediate Phase starts from grade 4 to grade 6, with the chronological age spanning from 10 to 14 years. This phase is where a learner is supposed to be taught in the second language as the medium of instruction in all the subjects.

1.14 Plan of study

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

This is an introductory chapter in which the problem statement, aims of the study, methodology, clarification of concepts, and the order of the study is discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter deals with a literature review and contains theories relevant to the topic. It also reviews the work of previous researchers and relevant literature on reading and writing English. Moreover, a variety of reading problems are listed and elaborated, and possible causes of such reading problems are pointed out.

Chapter 3: Research methodology and design

This chapter focuses on the research methodology, where issues such as research design, data collection technique, data analysis and presentation, population and sample, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations are discussed.

Chapter 4: Presentation, analysis, and interpretation

This chapter presents the research findings as well as data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

This chapter provides the summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter provided the background which motivated this research. The problem statement, research questions and research aims were described. The preliminary literature review, significance of the study, as well as a brief summary of the research design have been elaborated. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework as well as a review of related literature on challenges faced by learners in English reading in the Intermediate Phase.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an introduction and background to this study. This chapter is a review of literature relevant to this study. According to Nel, Nel & Hugo (2012:89), reading is a critical tool for mastery of all subjects and one of the best predictors of long-term learning achievement. If children do not learn to read, they cannot succeed in life. Polloway, Patton, Loretta and Jenevie (2013:114) indicated that the acquisition of reading skills is a challenging task for children. To prevent reading difficulties, every learner ought to take high-quality balanced reading instruction at elementary levels and be assisted in acquiring all reading skills.

The goal of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of reading problems in learners in the Intermediate Phase. Researchers in reading confirm that reading consists of five essential components of reading, i.e. phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. To understand reading problems, it is important to comprehend the components and skills enabling a learner to read. Reading problems can result from different specific issues or from a combination of physical weaknesses experienced by a learner. This study planned to investigate the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learner in reading.

2.2 Theoretical rationale of reading and reading problems

Reading is a complex process involving a variety of skills which the learner must acquire. A review of literature indicated that there is no single, absolute definition of reading. Reber (1995:638) defined reading as the process by which information is extracted from printed text. It goes on to reveal that this process is extremely complex and is dependent on two critical aspects, namely:

- The written format of the word and the reader's ability to decode the phonetic relationship between the letters on the page and the sounds of the spoken language
- A semantic/syntactic process that has to do with the meaning of the words which are being pronounced

Kamhi and Catts (1989:5) defined reading as thinking guided by the print and regard the definition of reading which focuses on the skill of transforming printed words into spoken words (decoding). Lerner (2006: 11) argued that for the beginner reader, word recognition and reading comprehension are important, whereas for older readers, underlying or indirect reading comprehension becomes more important.

Some researchers have studied difficulties which stem from the deficits in phonemic awareness, poor decoding skills or word recognition problems in acquiring reading skills. According to Polloway *et al* (2013:114), the acquisition of reading skills is a challenging task for children. As opposed to oral language acquisition, reading acquisition has been characterised as an “unnatural” process.

To prevent reading difficulties, every child ought to take high-quality balanced reading instruction at elementary levels and be assisted in acquiring all reading skills. Reading theories and models are consulted to explain and illustrate how the aspect of reading can be presented to a learner.

2.2.1 Bottom-up theory

Bottom-up processes refer to the ability of a reader to move from letter to letter, to word, to phrase and finally to sentence. The bottom-up approach usually focuses on teaching sound-symbol correspondences in language (e.g. c-a-t for cat); they are characterised by direct teaching of a sequence of skills (Polloway *et al*, 2013:118).

According to this approach, the letters, words and sentences are translated to speech, and once this has materialised, meaning comes automatically when language ability and cognitive background are utilised. Learners start from a low level of analysis and go on to a high level of analysis by recognising letters, then processing to words and meanings, and eventually integrating them in sentences which the reader can understand (Gunning, 2010:7).

To achieve the aforementioned, the reader has to have phonic skills and visual short-term memory skills. These skills broaden holistically to include analytical, perceptual skills, and whole word recognition skills. In the bottom-up approach, students learn the nuts and bolts of reading and assemble them into a whole. Proceeding from the bottom of the process, they learn letter sounds by translating the letters into speech sounds, then piece the sounds together to form individual words and blend them into whole words to arrive at an understanding of the author’s message (Gunning, 2010:8).

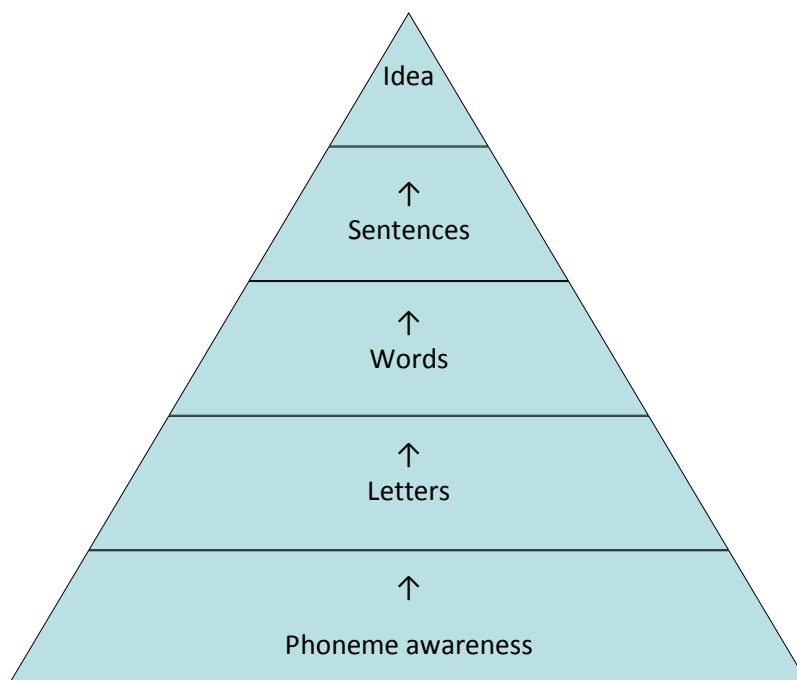
This popular model of the reading process hypothesises that the human mind functions like a computer and that visual input is sequestered in the mind of the reader. The term automaticity implies that readers have a limited ability to shift attention between the processes of decoding and comprehending. If readers are bogged down with decoding text, they will not be able to comprehend the message; meaning is obtained along the process, but the overall meaning is achieved at the end of the live process (Harris, 2005:26).

According to Gunning (2010:11), a reader who is a poor decoder focuses so much of his attention on phonics and other sounding out strategies that he has little brainpower left for

comprehending. The sound symbols can cause frustration when the reader decodes from print to language sound. Fluent readers can rapidly focus on the message because decoding no longer demands their attention capacity.

Although bottom-up theories of the reading process well, there is certainly more to reading than decoding. To become readers, students must compare their knowledge and background experiences to the text in order to understand the message. According to this theory, the reading material is more important than the person reading. Norton (2007:8) stated that the bottom-up theory is text-based because it focuses more on the information provided by the text than the input from the reader's experience.

Figure 2.1: Illustration of bottom-up approach



2.2.2 Top-down theory

In contrast to the bottom-up approach, which follows an inductive working strategy (from the part to the whole), there is a top-down approach, which follows a deductive working strategy (from the whole to the part). The reader starts from the top, which represents meaning (high-level information) and uses this to help lower-level analysis of words. The top-down approach represents the school of thought of psychologists which regards reading as a process that moves from the whole to the parts.

Landsberg, Kruger & Nel (2005:140) highlighted that the reader starts from the top, which represents meaning and uses this to aid lower-level analysis of words. Instead of processing the sentence letter by letter, readers use as few cues as possible to comprehend written text (Gunning, 2010:8). The focus is on meaning and contextual usage, and the instruction is initiated by reading whole stories with teacher assistance. Through reading whole stories and by using their knowledge of language patterns, students learn individual printed words and letter-sound relationships. Children learn to read and write by being immersed in meaningful literacy activities (Gunning, 2010:8). Top-down processes involve conceptually driven information processing. Readers draw on prior knowledge to predict what they might find in a text and to construct meaning while learners read.

The top-down theory in contrast to the bottom-up theory assumes that the process of translating print to meaning begins with the reader's prior knowledge and experience in order to construct meaning (Vacca, Vacca & Gove, 2000:28-29). The argument was that the ability to decode letters and words, as it is stated by bottom-up theory, is not sufficient for proficient reading. According to the top-down approach, reading is referred to as being a psycholinguistic guessing game in which readers use their background knowledge to predict the meaning of a sentence based on the cognitive information and a learner's ability to hypothesise enables the learner to confirm his or her choice.

The top-down theory proposed that reading comprehension depends almost on the reader's prior knowledge of the topic of the text. The background knowledge of the topic of the text is important to construct the meaning (Harris, 2005:25). Mature readers perceive words as different parts of meaning instead of a set of letters, and they are able to recognise words automatically. Learners making use of a top-down approach may ignore text information and lose the author's message because of using their own predictions. Learners are inclined to pay little attention to the printed material.

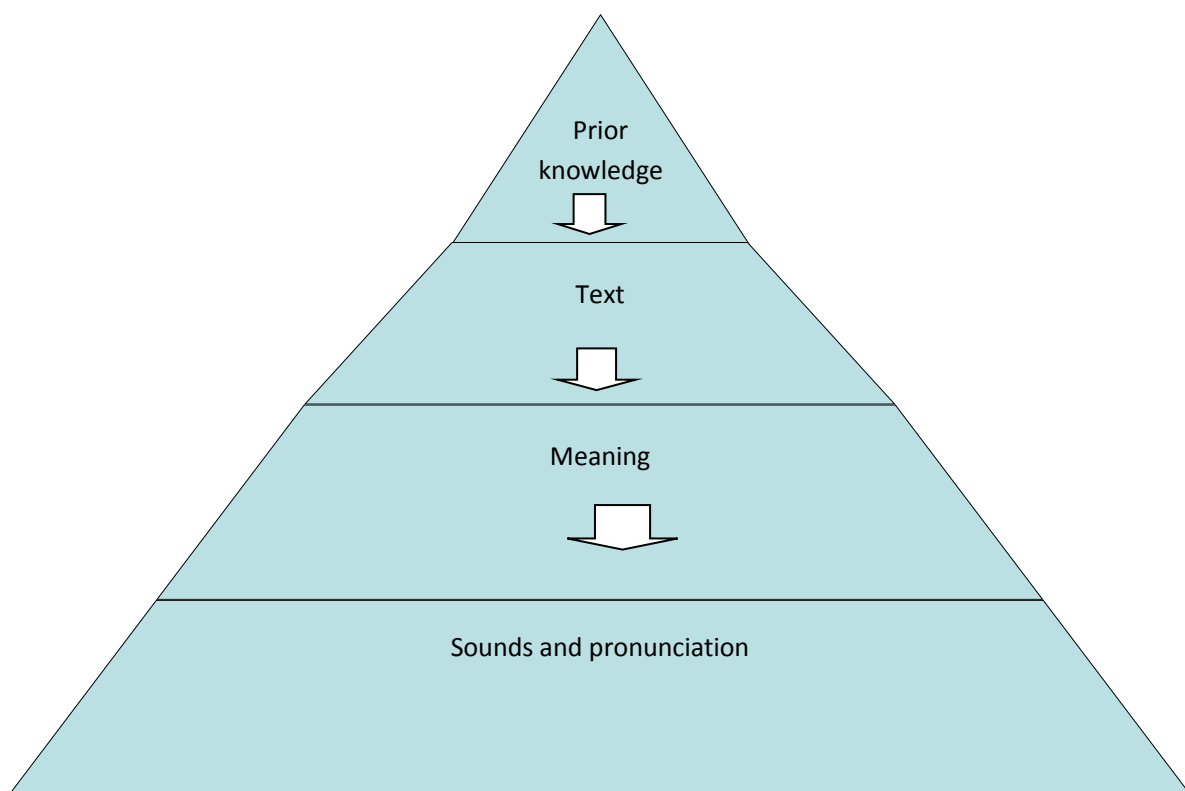
The bottom-up approach focuses on decoding issues, whereas the top-down view emphasises using background knowledge, interpretation and predictions, drawing conclusions, monitoring comprehension, and clarifications of reading. Beginning readers rely on the context to recognise words. However, the idea that readers need context to recognise unfamiliar words has been refuted by a considerable number of study functions. Stanovich (2000:97) suggested that as readers become more skilled at recognising words, they do not need context to identify words. Poor readers have a problem in recognising a new word they are trying to identify and overuse context clues to identify unfamiliar words (Caldwell, 2007:135).

The top-down theory adopts a constructivist approach. According to this approach, learning occurs when learners are actively involved in as process of meaning and knowledge, and that a

learner's understanding of concepts will depend primarily on their mental construction (Brown, 2000:11). Piaget and Vygotsky are described as constructivists.

Constructivists stated that understanding a text is a constructive process because learners construct meaning while reading (Smith, 2002:31). As readers read, they are actively involved in considering what is being read, linking the information they are obtaining from the text with already known concepts. It is believed that the level of the reader's engagement with the text depends on how difficult the text is.

Figure 2.2: Illustration of top-down theory



2.3 Models of reading

2.3.1 Interactive model of reading

According to Gunning (2010:12), the interactive model views reading as an interaction between top-down and bottom-up processes, implying that both print and background knowledge are important in reading a process because readers do not proceed from letter to words and to meaning in a step-by-step fashion. However, it is rather engaged in a parallel processing so that readers simultaneously use knowledge of language as contextual and letter-sound cues. On the other hand, although the hypothetical constructs bottom-up processing and top-down processing were useful heuristics in conceptualising earlier models of reading, it is probably better to leave them behind lest they unhelpfully polarise a description of how mental processes interact with text features in reading.

Gunning (2010:12) proposed a bottom-up model of reading that looks at information processing from lower-order to high-order stages. Readers, according to top-down models, utilise all sources of knowledge to make predictions and hypotheses about the text. The bottom-up and top-down models of reading represent a linear model of the reading process, that is, information flows in one direction from lower- to higher-level processing. In an interactive reading model, the reader engages actively in the reading process. Reading is not purely hierarchical skills and sub-skills but rather an interactive coordination of vision.

Stanovich (2000:99) postulated that if one element of the reading process is not working well, or has adequate data, the other elements compensate for it. This means the syntactic level could assist the reader in identifying unknown words. Furthermore, Rumelhart (1977) stated that interactive reading models offer insight into the learning process of reading as well as providing educators with ideas on how readers understand and approach the task of comprehending text differently.

This most widely accepted models of reading posit on interaction of a variety of processes, beginning with the lightning-like, automatic recognition of words. This initial process of accurate, rapid, and automatic recognition of vocabulary frees the mind to use several simultaneous processes involving reasoning, knowledge of the topic to construct meaning (Richards *et al*, 2010:12).

The most effective programmes for struggling learners include a strong decoding component along with plenty of opportunities to apply skills by reading. Efficient readers simultaneously use background knowledge, facility with language, going comprehension of a selection, and decoding skills.

2.3.1.1 Advantages of the interactive approach

Gunning (2010:98) discussed the following advantages of the interactive approach:

- It is flexible; reading can either start with the letter or with the meaning because information from the one influences the other simultaneously.
- It emphasises both visual and non-verbal aspects of reading. Word detail gets enough attention to enable the learner to gain the correct meaning. The limitations of word identification in isolation are also reorganised; therefore, words are also identified in the whole context.
- It inhibits poor reading, for example, overuse of phonics and own interpretations.
- It caters for learners with different reading behaviour, for example, if learners are inclined to use their own interpretations, they learn to attend more to print by means of phonics and word attack skills.

The most important advantage is that it allows a learner with encoding problems to compensate by means of comprehension and vice versa, and thus, it caters for the analytic as well as the global reader.

2.4 Development of reading ability

Reading involves five components of reading coming together namely, phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (see Section 1.7).

2.4.1 Phoneme awareness

A phoneme is a unit of significant sounds in a given language. Polloway *et al* (2013:125) referred to phonemic awareness as the knowledge that words are comprised of individual sounds that can be identified, segmented, blended and manipulated to create new words. Phonemic awareness involves the auditory and oral manipulation of sounds. Luthy and Stevens (2011:1) referred to it as the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds (phoneme) in spoken words. Once a learner has phonemic awareness, he or she can be able to spell or read different words.

Phonemic awareness has been shown to be both a reliable predictor of reading achievement and a key to beginning reading acquisition of all the procedures in learning to read and write words. Learners should be taught how to break long words into syllables. Phonemic awareness is the ability to blend, divide and use the phonemes in spoken words because phonemic awareness is the understanding that language is composed of small sounds called phonemes.

According to National Reading Panel (NRP), intervention that target phonemic awareness improves word reading, pseudo-word reading, and reading comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). Before children learn to read, they must be able to identify the sounds with words.

If a learner has a problem with phonemic awareness, the learner must participate in music programmes. Several studies show that musical training is positively associated with reading development. Children who participate in music programmes that address listening skills for both music and phonological ability perform better on tests of phonological awareness (Rauscher and Hinton, 2011; Tsang & Corad, 2011).

Phonemic awareness training is a significant step towards the development of a positive impact on reading. Moreover, lack of phonemic awareness results in difficulty in learning to read.

2.4.2 Influences on early phonemic awareness

In considering developmental influences on phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge and vocabulary have been proposed as critical. Alphabetic knowledge has been theorised by many to be a primary driving force in the emergence of phonological sensitivity. The role of vocabulary in phonemic awareness can be derived from the lexical restructuring model (LRM), which states that learner's first store words in their mental lexicon holistically, and as more items are added, increased segmental representation becomes necessary so that similar sounding items are not confused with one another.

2.4.3 Phonology

Phonological awareness is the ability to reflect and manipulate the phoneme segments of speech. It is a sound system consisting of phonemes which have a specific sequence in accordance with set rules in order to form words. Reading development is related to phonology and word reading. A phonological processing difficulty most often manifests itself in deficient phonemic awareness, which involves detecting sounds in words, and a phonologically coding deficit, which is a difficulty in using the sounds of a word to help remember that word. Learners who are deficient in phonological awareness have difficulty with language in an abstract way (Gunning, 2010:36).

Phonological awareness is important in early reading acquisition. According to Ma and Crooker (2007:53), this means hearing and understanding the different sounds and patterns of spoken language, and includes the different ways oral language can be broken down into individual parts.

As a component of academic competence, proficiency in phonological perception is required for listening if learners are studying other subjects through the medium of second language (L2), and at least intelligible pronunciation is needed for speaking in most educational settings. Proficiency in phonological perception and intelligible production are essential for successful spoken communication (Saville-Troike, 2012:150).

2.4.4 *Phonological representation of a word in a sentence*

Phonological representation of a word in a sentence holds the words in working memory long enough for comprehension to occur. Working memory is the system that temporarily stores information during reading. It holds all the information that a learner is thinking about (Gunning, 2010:28).

During this process, the readers work out the collective meaning of the chain of words in memory and the meaning's contribution to their overall understanding of the conversation or text. If a reader cannot hold the clause or sentence in working memory long enough to construct meaning, then comprehension is severely disrupted (Richards & Bamford, 2010).

2.4.5 *Phonological awareness*

Phonological awareness is the ability to reflect on and manipulate the phonemic segments of speech, and it includes an awareness of sound units such as words within sentences, syllables within words, and phonemes within syllables and words, but it excludes the written word. Vocabulary growth is a prerequisite in the learner's literacy; thus, the learner must be exposed to an environment where he or she can acquire more vocabulary (Sawyer & Fox, 1991:2). According to Scheule and Boudreau (2008) phonological awareness is the ability to analyse the sound structure of language and phonological awareness directly associated with the manipulation of individual sounds.

Some learners understand that the printed word is a representation of the spoken language, but they have difficulty in breaking this up. Phonological awareness difficulty is mostly pointed out as an indicator of reading difficulties. Little or no phonemic sensitivity may be pointed out as the cause of reading difficulties (Sousa, 2005:33).

It is widely held that this awareness develops from sensitivity to words and syllables to eventual smaller segment awareness of individual speech sounds, referred to as phonemic awareness. Phonological awareness has also been conceptualised with reference to the cognitive complexity and level of conscious awareness involved (Sousa, 2005:33).

Phonological awareness is seen as developing from an implicit sensitivity to an explicit awareness. Implicit awareness is typically associated with word and syllable sound patterns and explicit awareness with manipulation at the level of the phoneme (Stanovich, 1992).

2.4.6 Vocabulary

Vocabulary or word knowledge usually refers to the ability to understand the meaning of words. It is referred to as depth of vocabulary or breadth of vocabulary, which simply means how many words a person knows. An adequate vocabulary is needed to be able to apply strategies to comprehend a text.

Vocabulary is the foundation of reading comprehension. A good vocabulary is probably the single most important skill associated with good reading educational researchers. This includes knowing the meaning of the words and how to pronounce them correctly.

According to Richards and Bamford (2010:150) vocabulary knowledge includes the meaning of the word, the semantic relationships with other words, syntactic patterning, collocations, and pronunciations. If one does not know what the words on the page mean, one cannot fully know what one is reading. Richards and Bamford (2010:150) stated that reading is an important part of all but the most elementary of vocabulary.

For Intermediate Phase learners, reading offers a portal of exposure to many words which can be learned incidentally, but considering that spoken discourse is associated with more frequent words and lower type-token ratios than written discourse, it would be optimistic to expect to learn a wide vocabulary from only spoken discourse. Written discourse tends to use a wide variety of vocabulary, making a better resource for acquiring a broader range of words. If a learner has a limited understanding of vocabulary, he or she will have a limited understanding of the concepts, which will limit the level of understanding of the content.

Vocabulary is the most important level of knowledge for all learners to develop – whether they are aiming primarily for academic or interpersonal competence. There is a core of high-frequency words in a language that everyone needs to learn, but beyond that, which specific vocabulary elements learners are most likely to need depends on whether it is going to be used primarily for academic or interpersonal functions. The core vocabulary in every language includes function words, a limited set of terms that primarily carry grammatical information (Saville-Troike, 2012:146).

Polloway *et al* (2013:147) elaborated that students acquire vocabulary from exposure to vocabulary, for example, in texts that they read, with repeated encounters, and with vocabulary increasing learning.

2.4.7 Sight words

Anderson & Pearson (1984) described sight vocabulary as words that a reader automatically pronounces and recognises at sight. Acquisition of sight words depends on frequent reading opportunities, the level of difficulty of reading material, or the learner's learning potential. Ekwall & Shanker (1989) called these words sight vocabulary, but they make a clear distinction between sight vocabulary and vocabulary, with sight vocabulary being equivalent to sight words, and vocabulary on its own referring to the words a learner understands. Children also learn to read through the look and say method. They remember what whole words look like and can say them as sight words.

2.4.8 Reading fluency

Fluency is defined as the ability to read text accurately and quickly. Expressions are essential if students are to understand what they read (Polloway, *et al*; 2013:137). Reading provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension, and can be achieved through repeated oral reading.

Proficient readers are those who are aware of the purpose of reading and approach the reading with that purpose, and they use a variety of strategies that have proved useful for them in the past when reading similar texts. McEwan (2002:89) explored reading fluency and its relationship with a good sight word vocabulary and concluded that it can be improved in various ways; however, the key approach should be enlarging the learner's sight word vocabulary.

The aforementioned can be done by creating a language-rich environment and exposing the learners to new words continuously. Sight words can be described as words that have been phonetically decoded by the reader and have been read frequently. Anderson (1984:209) described sight words as words that a reader automatically pronounces and recognises on sight. Acquisition of sight words depends on frequent reading opportunities, the level of difficulty of reading material, or the learner's learning potential. Poor reading fluency is the primary cause of reading comprehension failure. Fluent readers need a massive vocabulary that is rapidly, accurately, and automatically accessed. Lack of such a vocabulary may be the greatest single impediment to fluent reading. Children learn a large number of new words in their first language by guessing their meanings in context while they read.

Incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large-scale vocabulary growth (Richards and Bamford 2010:17). Second language readers who read masses of variety and interesting material can increase their vocabulary knowledge.

2.4.8.1 Building reading fluency

Reading fluency building should involve texts that are fairly challenging and learners must have experience with the words in the text. Learners must be allowed to preview the text (Walpole & McKenna, 2007:70). Children learn to be fluent in an environment that supports reading as communication. In a mindless situation where children take turns in a round-robin fashion, little constructive is accomplished. In round robin reading, children often do not view their role as tellers of a story or as communicators of information. Instead, their role is to be word perfect (Vacca *et al*, 2000:200). Vacca *et al* (2000:200) also stated that the emphases during oral reading must be on communication and comprehension, not word-perfect renderings of a reading selection.

- **Strategies that can foster reading fluency**

Repeated readings

Repeated readings mean simply having a child reading a short passage from a book more than once with differing amounts of support. Learners choose short selections from stories that are difficult enough that they are not able to read fluently and read the passage several times silently until they are able to read it fluently. Studies on repeated readings fall into two categories: *assisted* repeated readings, in which students read along with a live or taped model of the passage, and *unassisted* repeated readings, in which the child engages in independent practice (Vacca *et al*; 2000:202).

Automated reading

According to Vacca *et al* (2000:204), automated reading is referred to as listening while reading a text. An automated reading programme employs simultaneous listening and reading (SLR). Browne (2007:69) supports tape-assisted reading because this is a reading instruction method where an audiotape is used with a fluent reader as a guide. With this method, the learner reads the text to themselves. The learners will then listen to the reader on the tape and silently follow by pointing to the words in the book. The learners may repeat this exercise several times until they manage the text independently. Sometimes it takes a while for learners to get accustomed to working with the tape recorder and it takes practice to coordinate learners' eyes and ears in following along with the text.

Choral reading

Choral reading is defined as the reading of poetry that makes use of various voice combinations and contrasts to create meaning or to highlight the tonal qualities of the passage (Vacca, *et al*;

2000:209). Choral reading increases reading fluency and provides a legitimate, fun way for children to practise and reread a text.

The NICHD (2000) research synthesis report National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000) has emphasised repeated reading as essential. Repeated reading to an adult was more effective than repeated reading to a peer, and it was also found that interventions that include modelling fluent reading had a stronger effect than those where students simply read and reread on their own.

2.4.9 Reading comprehension

Gillet, Temple & Crawford (2006:242) defined reading comprehension as making meaning from text. This is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing the meaning through interaction and involvement with written language.

To learn to decode, a child must be able to manipulate the sound structure of speech and to understand that words are composed of phonemes, the smallest segments of speech. Children who have difficulty in learning to decode have specific deficits in phonological processing, the ability to manipulate the sound structure of language.

Without being able to understand that the letters in words are related to phonemes, children have difficulty becoming proficient decoders, which negatively impacts their reading comprehension. Many studies support the contribution of word reading to reading comprehension. Research has established that word reading deficit (WRD) adversely influences reading comprehension, and there is little debate that children who have WRD will also have reading comprehension deficits (RCD). One apparent reason that WRD leads to RCD is that it is difficult to glean information from text without the ability to sound out words accurately, particularly for young children just learning to read.

Adequate reading comprehension depends on other cognitive skills beyond word decoding, including reading fluency, language comprehension, and other higher-level skills. The ability to read words quickly and accurately either in isolation is critical for reading comprehension. Lack of fluency increases demands on other cognitive processes such as verbal working memory and results in difficulty with comprehension.

In an attempt to improve reading comprehension theories such as schemata theory, counts on readers' experience, knowledge of language and syntactic structure have occurred. This theory suggests that the extent of people's knowledge about a topic influences how much they can learn by reading the passage. Reading comprehension is the main reason for reading. Reading comprehension is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing the meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. If an individual has trouble understanding

spoken language, it is highly unlikely that he or she will comprehend written language. Knowledge and skills involving vocabulary, background information, grammatical structures, metaphorical language, and inferential reasoning must be applied in a coordinated manner to understand connected text. The more the reader knows and learns about a topic, the easier he or she understands the latter passages on that topic (Anderson 'and' Pearson, 1984).

Reading comprehension of written and spoken language involves both bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing requires prior knowledge of the language system and interpretation of physical cues. Prior knowledge provides a scaffold for understanding new terms and integrating new information into a coherent conceptual framework. Knowledge of vocabulary is needed to recognise words and to understand what they mean; knowledge of phonology is needed to recognise words and to understand what they mean; knowledge of morphology is needed to interpret complex lexical elements as well as to perceive grammatical information that is carried by inflections; knowledge of syntax is needed to recognise how words relate to one another and how they are constituted as phrases and clauses; knowledge of non-verbal elements of speech is needed; and knowledge of discourse structure is needed to interpret stretches of language that are longer than a single sentence (Saville-Troike, 2012:163).

Sufficient prior knowledge is needed for interpretation of meaning. At an early stage of learning, top-down processing can compensate for linguistic limitations to some extent by allowing learners to guess the meaning of words they have not encountered before. For both first language L1 and L2 speakers, top-down processing utilises prior knowledge of content, context, and culture. Content knowledge is background information about the topic that is being read about; new information is perceived and interpreted in relation to this base. On the other hand, context knowledge includes information learned from what has already been read, an understanding of what the writer's or speaker's intentions are, and the overall structure of the discourse pattern being used. It allows predictions of what is likely to follow, and how the information is likely to be organised (Saville-Troike, 2012:164).

Reading comprehension is not just a combination of strategies and skills; it also involves dialogic interactions with the author, the text, and the readers. It should therefore be redefined as dialogic and dialectic processes between the reader, the text, and the imagined author. Culture knowledge subsumes content and context in many ways but also includes an understanding of the wider social setting within which acts of reading and listening take place (Saville-Troike, 2012:164).

2.4.9.1 The difference between skilled readers and less-skilled readers

The ability to recognise words varies between skilled and less-skilled readers. Less-skilled readers are slow in word recognition and generally weak at rapid and automatic syntactic

processing because they develop an overt knowledge before they achieve proficiency reading. They also struggle in processing more complex ambiguous sentences in particular, due to their limited syntactic knowledge. Skilled readers seem to have the ability to process sentences in a rapid and voluntary way because of their high reading fluency. In contrast, less-skilled readers give too much attention to higher cognitive predictions. Poor competence can strictly limit the development of readers' abilities in cognitive and meta-cognitive strategy, which seem to affect the less-skilled reader's comprehension.

Another difference between skilled readers and less-skilled readers is background knowledge. Skill readers apply their background knowledge while reading for better comprehension, while less-skilled readers tend to focus on reading as a decoding process (Devine, 1984:99).

Skilled readers tend to make inferences that repair conceptual gaps between clauses, sentences, and paragraphs, whereas less-skilled readers tend to disregard gaps and fail to make the inferences necessary to fill in the gaps. Skilled readers have a larger vocabulary than poor readers, as a result of a more constant and greater exposure to the printed word. Skilled readers' word recognition skills appear to be greater than those of the less-skilled readers; their lexical access is easier if printed words are recognised and they are better able to infer new meanings from context if they recognise new words while reading texts.

Compared to skilled readers, less-skilled readers do not activate deeper background knowledge necessary for understanding at sentence-level thematic relation when lexical links are not available in the text. Skilled readers activate a rich network of knowledge, even when they try to understand anomalous-un-associated sentences.

Some of the characteristics that distinguish skilled readers from less-skilled readers include the ability to recognise words quickly and automatically, steady eye movement, ability to activate background knowledge, make inferences, resolve anomalies, and monitor their comprehension.

2.4.10 Word recognition

Word recognition is a process by which readers match a written representation of words with their sound and is basic to all levels of reading (Walpole & McKenna, 2007:49). Unless individuals can recognise words and their meaning, reading is impossible. Word recognition involves the process of attempting to say a word based on the sounds of the word's letters or the shape of the word or the context of the word and pronunciation of the word correctly, mentally recognising it as a meaningful idea. Gough (1972:225) stated that word recognition is the foundation for the reading process because before meaning can be attributed to what is read, the reader must first recognise the word; the more a learner can recognise the word, the faster he or she can read. Stanovich (1992:418) indicated that word recognition is strongly

related to reading acquisition. According to Frith (1995:28-29) readers go through the following set of stages of recognition:

- Logographic reading: Learners are not able to read letters in the word, but they associate features with the word. They recognise a word as a whole.
- Transitional alphabetic reading: This stage covers the early first grade in which learners begin to read words by their letters.
- Alphabetic reading: Learners are now looking at words in terms of spelling patterns, not just one letter to one sound, but rather by familiar patterns.

Readers who recognise words automatically and without word analysis can pay attention to meaning. Stanovich (1991:418) also emphasised that word recognition is strongly related to the speed of initial reading acquisition. Word recognition also increases the reading comprehension ability. If learners do not recognise many words automatically, they will not fully experience the sudden increase in reading rate and fluency in reading (Gillet, Temple & Crawford, 2006:42). The greater the word recognition difficulty, the more words are closed by means of sheer guessing. The guessing will obviously become wilder when the reader is unable to follow and maintain coherence and even reading instruction which is flawed by an extreme focus on word-by-word reading or a lexical approach. When word recognition is delayed, jumbled or blocked, the text can become fragmented, and the messages can disintegrate unless learners have conscious controls in place to scaffold their understanding.

Word recognition also increases reading comprehension and fluency in reading (Gillet, Temple & Crawford, 2004:42). Lack of phonemic awareness contributes to word recognition problems; therefore, it is important for educators to assist learners to develop phoneme awareness for learners' first language in order to transfer the reading skill to second language. Acquiring a lexical system of representations that permits efficient word recognition is an essential part of learning to read. Additionally, there is a continuous increase in the absolute number of orthographically addressable entries referred to as word-specific representations.

2.4.10.1 Building word recognition

Word recognition forms the basis of reading and is a follow-up to phonemic awareness, which is the requirement for reading. Walpole & McKenna (2007) stated that in the pre-alphabetic phase, children recognise words through environmental or visual cues that are not related to processing relationships between letters and sounds.

Once children learn their letter names and sounds, they tend to recognise words by looking only at the initial letters. When alphabet knowledge is more developed, children enter a full

alphabetic phase. During this phase of word learning, they process each letter and sound sequence, and they can sound out all regular consonant-vowel-consonant words. In this phase, readers are able to recognise words directly from the texts. The challenges in reading occur when a learner is not able to recognise words (Dela, 1994:134). Some learners with reading problems demonstrate early and persistent problems identifying words.

2.4.10.2 Word recognition allows lexical access

Lexical access is the automatic calling up from memory of the word's meanings and its phonological representation (Stanovich, 1992:4). Contextually appropriate meanings, both semantic and syntactic, are related to words. Lexical access, like word recognition, is below the level of consciousness, is automatic and rapid. If lexical access fails, the reader has to slow down and give conscious attention to linking the orthographic representation of the word with possible semantic and syntactic interpretations.

Factors contributing to word recognition problems

Word recognition is a requirement for the reading action. Problems in reading occur when a learner is not able to recognise words (Dela, 1994:134). Most learners who experience reading failure demonstrate early and persistent problems in learning how to accurately identify printed words.

Many learners with a learning disability have severe word recognition difficulties which are related to various deficits in phonological and visual processing. Short-term memory is often unable to carry the load and/or time which these learners require to translate word by word, print into speech, thereby causing them to lose track of the coherence and meaning.

- **Lack of alphabetic knowledge**

The first pre-alphabetic phase depicts pre-readers before they have learned much about alphabets. Their knowledge of letters and phonemic awareness is limited and results in difficulties understanding and applying the alphabetic principle in decoding unfamiliar words. Learners who have not learned the sound correspondence in words are essentially non-readers when it comes to recognising words from letters.

- **Lack of phonemic awareness**

Intermediate educators' role is to assist learners to develop phoneme awareness because it is the foundation on which reading knowledge is built (Stahl & McKenna, 2006:51). Learners who do not understand the function of the letters of the alphabet because of didactic deficit might develop word recognition problems. The same sequence of letters may indicate different sounds when it occurs in different positions within a word. Learners who do not have phonological awareness skills experience difficulty in recognising words. Oral and written language difficulties may determine whether the reader has reading difficulties characterised by poor phonological awareness.

Logographic readers often give no response at all when faced with a word they do not know because they do not have a strategy for sounding out words (Gillet *et al*, 2006:28). The ability to recognise, distinguish and reproduce phonemes would certainly provide one possible reason for the difficulty in primary reading skill, and these learners fall behind in their phonemic awareness. Most learners with reading problems do not develop phonological awareness; as a result, they use complex visual cues to recognise words and rely on guessing unknown words, for example, when the learner reads the word "grid", it could result in him reading "grade". (Stahl & McKenna, 2006:51).

- **Multiple bases for comprehension difficulties**

There is general consensus that the ability to recognise words depends on decoding skills and listening comprehension. Sabatini *et al* (2012:102) revealed that the Simple View of Reading is widely accepted. Hence, reading comprehension deficits (RCDs) can stem from weaknesses in either or both of these two components. When considering the nature of comprehension problems of general reading disability (GRD) and specific reading comprehension deficits (S-RCD) learners, too little attention has been paid to this (Sabatini *et al*, 2012:102). It can be hypothesised that the understanding of spoken language requires the availability of stores of knowledge of different kinds of information, plus the accurate and efficient processing of information in various ways (Sabatini, *et al*; 2012:10).

2.5 Approaches to training the reader

According to McNamara (2004), the first approach is to train the reader to ask more and better quality questions, while the second approach is to provide instruction reading general reading strategies that promote better meta-comprehension and better processing. McNamara (2004) examined the benefits of a reading strategy intervention called Self-Explanation Reading Training (SERT) using five reading strategies, which are comprehension monitoring, paraphrasing, making bridging inferences, predictions, and elaborations.

Comprehension monitoring enables the reader to recognise a failure of understanding, and it is this recognition that triggers the use of additional active reading strategies. Paraphrasing helps readers to remember the surface structure of the text by transforming it into more familiar ideas. Making bridging inferences improves comprehension by linking the current sentence to the material previously covered in the text. Inference occurs when the learner uses the ideas and information explicitly stated in the selection, intuition and personal experience as a basis for conjectures and hypotheses (Ekwall & Shanker, 1989:143).

Readers also use prediction to anticipate the content either by guessing what is coming next or by reminding themselves to watch out for some particular item that will aid comprehension. Finally, readers are encouraged to associate the current sentence with their own related prior knowledge using an elaboration strategy. Self-explanation involves reading a section of text aloud, usually a sentence and explaining what it means. SERT provides readers with training to use reading strategies that help the reader to make inferences while reading and self-explaining difficult text (Sabatini *et al*, 2012:102).

2.5.1 Schema

Researchers such as Zintz & Maggart (1986:279) agree that all readers have schemata which are the building blocks of cognition and which increase with experience gained from events, actions, emotions, roles and objects, and can be complemented by reading. A learner with limited schemata will probably have great difficulty comprehending what he or she is reading, as he or she may have limited schemata for concepts. According to Sousa (2005:52), schemata are important in helping to comprehend text. Learners use schemata to interpret cause and effect, to compare and contrast, and to make inferences about the author's meaning.

2.5.2 Meta-cognitive strategy

Meta-cognitive strategy is a self-regulatory strategy whereby learners are conscious of their own thinking and can coordinate, monitor, and assess their own learning process. This means that they monitor their understanding of what they are reading to make sure that they understand. Effective reading requires readers to monitor their comprehension while reading; therefore, an inability to use the meta-cognitive strategy results in poor reading (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986).

To understand the reading process, it is also important to consider a meta-linguistic strategy, which is described as the ability to think about the nature and function of language. Meta-cognitive skills involve both decoding and comprehending processes, for example, knowledge about language strategies. To read, a learner must understand the language they are reading.

Reading also needs knowledge of syntax; hence, it is important that a learner be able to integrate phonemes, words, and sentences into a meaningful pragmatic whole and that he or she know the important relationship between reading comprehension and recall of information (Swanepoel, 1985:49-51). If the learner does not have meta-cognitive awareness and his or her knowledge of different types of text is inadequate, he or she will experience problems reading with comprehension.

Language and music are two predominant ways that humans communicate and express themselves through listening and producing sound. Language and music development both consist of communicative modes and are both aurally and orally transmitted, contain phonetic, syntactic and semantic components which develop early in life, are socially interactive, and use tones and rhythm as media. According to Horn (2009:16), music may support the education of learners with difficulties in reading and in areas of cognitive development. Musical intelligence can be defined as a talent for listening, recognition and remembering patterns, which are also fundamental to learning to read.

According to Le Roux and Loubser (2002:23) music may be applied in areas of difficulty in literacy development. Music as an intervention strategy relies on the use of the following natural abilities of the learner:

- sound discrimination
- memory
- concentration
- eye movement
- cognitive development

Auditory awareness, auditory discrimination, and auditory sequencing are, among others, important components of listening skills that may be used to enhance the learners' reading ability. Le Roux (2002:96) also pointed out that auditory perception is the mental registration of sensory stimulus, and learning to read demands the ability to hear similarities and differences between sounds in order to speak, understand & read. Auditory discrimination is the ability to differentiate similarities and recognise differences between letters and words which sound similar.

2.5.3 Reading fluency strategies

Fluency develops gradually over a considerable period of time and through substantial practice. Therefore, the ability to read fluently comes from practising to read, and that can only happen with familiarity of words. Readers must know how to divide sentences into chunks, which include phrases and clauses, to be able to read with expression. Reading with fluency, therefore, involves more than merely understanding syntax and sentences (Gillet and Temple, 2000:287).

Gillet and Temple (2000:287) and Hart and Risley (2003:5) found two approaches on teaching fluency, which are guided repeated oral reading and independent silent reading:

- Guided repeated oral reading: This is reading of the passage aloud several times, with the support of the educator. There is proof that this strategy of reading practice results in improved word recognition, speed, accuracy, fluency, as well as comprehension.
- Independent silent reading: In this approach, the reader has to read silently on his own with little or no support from the educator.

Sousa (2005:86) brought out that silent reading does not improve reading as such, but improves vocabulary & the enjoyment of reading. Therefore, the positive outcome is that those learners who engage in independent reading for about 10 minutes per day read more than 600 000 words per year compared to learners who do not read independently.

Reading aloud to learners is important because an educator's demonstration of fluent reading allows learners to listen to how words are pronounced and how voice changes are made to make sentences of the story. The next step is then for learners to follow with read aloud so as to improve their reading fluency. Researchers (Browne, 2007:69; Sousa, 2005:86; Gillet & Temple, 2000:287) discovered several methods to develop and practise reading aloud:

- Shared reading: This is where interactive reading exercises take place and the educator guides the learner while reading from a big book. As the learners read together, the educator points at the words as they are read. Another way of shared reading is where the educator and learners take turns to read, improving their fluency as they read the story word by word.
- Learner-educator reading: In this method of reading, the educator takes the lead followed by the learner. This is a one-on-one instruction method and learners have to practise their reading until they can read the text fluently.
- Tape-assisted reading: Browne (2007:69) supports tape-assisted reading because this is a reading instruction method where an audiotape is used with a fluent reader as a guide. The learners will then listen to the reader on the tape and silently follow by pointing to the words in the book. The learners may repeat this exercise several times until they manage the text independently.
- Unison reading: Learners may read, preferably a short text, with the educator, and then the educator requests the learners to join at words which are familiar to them. The aim is to get all the learners to read the text independently.
- Reading variations: This method allowed learners to read aloud in unison. Choral reading with the educator's voice leading and providing the model is an excellent way of practising oral reading.

2.5.4 Reading comprehension strategy

Catts and Kamhi (2005:208) and Mercer and Mercer (2001:262) suggested the following guidelines and strategies that may be helpful in increasing the readers' language comprehension skills:

- When a learner has difficulty following directions, establish eye contact and maintain attention prior to presenting information. Cue the learner to listen by using silent pauses or instructions to listen to or look at the educator. This will help to establish a mental set for listening.
- Present new concepts in as many modalities as possible, for example, auditory, and visual.
- The learner may act out sentences to increase an understanding of the relationship between semantic role and word order.
- Teach specific memory strategies, for example, visual imagery, clustering and grouping information, as well as forming associations to help the learner organise, categorise and store new information for later retrieval.
- To enhance the learners' recall and memorisation of new vocabulary, use the keyword method in which familiar words are associated with each new concept or word.
- Reading is more than remembering exact words from the text; it also involves reading and adding to their knowledge.
- Self-questions help the learner to make hypotheses, draw analogies from experience and set some purposes and guidelines.
- Learners have to integrate information across texts, add information by making inferences to build cohesion, and use structure to organise their comprehension.
- Learners have to monitor their reading, and educators should not be looking at what is wrong with them, but how they can alter instructions to make them more successful in learning to read.

2.6 Prior knowledge

Gillet, Temple & Crawford (2006) defined prior knowledge as the understanding of new information in light of known information. Prior knowledge plays a pivotal role and an integral component of comprehension, in that it helps in the coherent understanding of printed text and in creating new knowledge. Harvey & Goudvis (2000:10) asserted that readers normally bring their previous knowledge and experience to reading, and as a result, comprehension is enhanced when they concentrate on the connection they make between the text, their lives, and the world.

Understanding a reading text is almost impossible without prior knowledge because prior knowledge includes vocabulary, general background of the text which promotes comprehension. Comprehension draws on the reader's prior knowledge of the language of the world. The integration between prior knowledge and text information is instrumental for the comprehension process. The construction of meaning depends on the reader's knowledge of the language. Readers need more than just a random collection of vocabulary knowledge in order to construct meaning (Richards & Bamford 2010:15).

2.7 Reading acquisition

From birth through preschool, young children begin to acquire a basic understanding about reading through home experiences with print (Vacca *et al*, 2000:67). During the first year, children are often heavily dependent on the non-linguistic cues involved in communication such as gestures, actions, facial expressions, gaze, and tone of voice. Some of the early sounds include involuntary grunts and sighs. Smiling begins within the first few months as an involuntary muscle spasm (Brown, 2000:17). Gradually, children realise that smiling and crying can elicit responses from other people; hence, they begin using them as a conscious behaviour. From the second month, children start using cooing sounds. Babies start experiencing with their vocal organs, producing shrieks, murmurs, growls and shouts at the age of four to seven months (Brown, 2000:18).

2.7.1 Cooing

According to Oats & Grayson (2004:1) the cooing stage is recognised by a number of different non-speech-like sounds that infants produce. Sousa (2005:16) highlighted that the children as young as three days can distinguish their mothers' voice from other voices. This ensures that babies are receptive to the speech sounds of the person who is most likely to interact with them the most.

Even though the ability to produce speech sounds is present from birth, the ability to produce a sound that resembles human speech only emerges gradually as a result of maturational changes, during the first two months. At a later stage, children undergo a period of learning names for things in a dominant strategy from their social environment (Berko-Gleason, 1989:42).

2.7.2 Babbling stage

The babbling stage begins when children are six months old. At this stage, they begin to explore the ability of their vocal organs and soon discover that they can make loud and soft noises. The early period of babbling is unintentional and therefore not communicable. This early stage of bubbling often involves reduplication of sounds, such as reproducing vocalisations containing repeated sequences of consonants and vowels. At this stage, the child is able to use consonants like “k” and “g” together with high vowel “i” and “u” (Brown, 2000:20).

From about nine-month-old babies, babbling consonants and vowels are not repeated but vary from syllable to syllable. During this stage, children also learn to imitate the stress or intonation patterns of sentences. Children often babble in the play situations and can link the word with the same consistent event, e.g. object and action.

According to Brown (2000:21), the later stage of babbling claims that certain forms start being used fairly consistently in certain contexts, accompanied by eye contact with the caretaker. Babbling stage is mainly characterised by the auditory receptive language. The English language has 40 phonetic units for the child to master – some are simple, while others are much more difficult. Sousa (2005:17) indicated that children’s first utterances will include those sounds that are easy to produce. If the child is not babbling up to the age of 10 months, parents may expect language problems, which could lead to reading problems at a later stage.

2.7.3 One-word phrase

The one-word stage is the period from the child’s first word to the time when the child starts to put two words together. This period can last from one to two years. Children’s first words follow the same articulation patterns of bubbling, that is, a preference for duplication and open syllables with the difference that words have a fairly stable form and are used to communicate a particular meaning (Tintswalo, 2007:19).

There is a close relationship between infants’ use of first word and their experiences of hearing words by adults in conversation with them. Early words arise from situations where the children hear the same words being used in a consistent way to describe particular objects and

events. At this stage, the child can comprehend words, e.g. own name, mom and dad, toys and pet.

2.7.4 Two words

According to Foster-Cohen (1999:38), the period between 15 months and two years marks the beginning of the two-word stage. Children now tune the unique structural properties of the language they hear around them but often come up with creative utterances, which suggest that children are unconsciously constructing utterances according to some pattern, although this pattern may differ from the rules and patterns of adult grammar. Two words phrase consist mainly of combinations of content words such as nouns and verbs. They usually carry the main semantic load in sentences, e.g. “mom food” meaning “I want food”. Children at this stage enjoy having stories read to them, and they can learn eight to ten words per day.

2.7.5 Sentences

Brown (2000:27) claimed that the length of children’s sentences increase gradually throughout preschool and early school years, as they learn the syntactic rules necessary for using functional words and creating more complex sentences. Children from different linguistic backgrounds achieve linguistic competence at more or less the same age, usually at six years old, regardless of structural differences between languages. By the time children start school, they have internalised the majority of the rules of the language of their environment. At this stage, a child can understand most sounds of their native language. Awareness of certain letters increases and the child can use more words to express him or herself using the correct word order.

2.7.6 Pre-alphabetic phase

During three to four years of age, the stage identifies itself with the child becoming aware of the alphabetic code and is able to tell a story. The child uses sentences of four to five words in length and has a vocabulary of about 1 000 words and can become aware of alphabetic code. The child will be able to remember and pronounce words by connecting visual cues. The hearer will be able to understand much of the speaker’s sentences. By this stage, the child may name at least one colour and understand the concept of words. The child will be able to know several nursery rhymes and can add new words which are visually similar (Sousa, 2005).

2.7.7 Partial alphabetic phase

The stage during four to six years of age involves the ability to use sentences of six to eight words, and at this stage, the child has a vocabulary of about 2 000 words and their text comprehension increases. By this time, the child will be able to tell the sequence of events and

recognise common opposites such as short or long and can know the letters of the alphabet. The child will also ask many questions now and be able to distinguish between opposite sides and even count up to 10.

2.8 Stages of reading acquisition

Children continue their literacy development as they enter school through a variety of learning experiences that allow them to experiment with language and develop early reading skills in preschool and first grade (Vacca *et al*, 2000:70). Learning to read based on developmentally appropriate practice takes on a more formal nature throughout the primary grades. From the time children enter third grade, literacy instruction emphasises the development and use of strategies to become independent and productive readers (Vacca *et al*, 2000:70). Although reading is a continuously developing ability that emerges from a child's experience with oral language and expands as the child progresses through grades, reading can be divided into stages (Gunning, 2010:10).

Stage 1: Emergent literacy

The term *emergent literacy* refers to the gradual process children go through as they develop an understanding of written language (Vacca *et al*, 2000:168). During the emergent literacy stage, students generally learn the function of print and may develop phonological awareness. Towards the end of this stage, children may be able to read signs and labels (Gunning, 2010:10).

Stage 2: Early reading (grades K-1)

At this stage, learners begin using their knowledge of letter-sound relationships and context to decode printed words. Many struggling readers are at this stage. Learners at this stage need direct instruction in necessary decoding skills; they also need materials that are age-appropriate but that reinforce the phonics elements they are learning (Curtis & Long, 1999).

Stage 3: Growing independence (grade 2-3)

Curtis and Longo (1999) stated that as the process of decoding becomes automatic, learners are able to read about 3 000 words. Learners with challenges in reading may spend an inordinate amount of time sounding out words. Their reading rate is very slow and may be painfully dysfluent. These learners need many opportunities to read materials that are relatively easy for them (Gunning, 2010:10).

Stage 4: Reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase (grade 4-6)

The stage of reading to learn is marked by the wide application of word attack and comprehension skills. Greater emphasis is placed on comprehending and text. Struggling

readers may have acquired the necessary decoding skills; they may have difficulty with the vocabulary and conceptual load of the materials. They need systematic instruction in vocabulary, morphemic analysis, contextual clues, and dictionary skills. They need help with comprehension and study strategies (Gunning, 2010:11). In this phase, reading is highly contextualised and largely integrated. The selection of reading content is underpinned by the fact that in this phase learners are beginning to understand detailed relationships between reading materials, incidents, and circumstances.

2.9 Factors that impact reading

The ability to learn to read adequately is not merely determined by a learner's ability to acquire reading skills but also by factors within a learner's environment. These factors are discussed below.

2.9.1 Cognitive factors

According to Sadker & Sadker (2005:36), individual learners have different ways of perceiving, organising and retaining information. In some learners, the span of attention is narrow, whereas some learners can pay attention to many things at once. Learners with cognitive ability do well with decoding but have difficulty with comprehension. Reading level should match the level of cognitive ability, and reading leads to fuller development in vocabulary and syntax and may also promote greater cognitive efficiency. Cognitive ability affects language development, meaning learners with mental retardation are slower to develop language and show a depressed rate of vocabulary development. Delayed language development may hinder reading development (Gunning, 2010:27). Intellectual impairment causes problems and difficulties in all aspects of learning, and learners affected in this way show low performance in reading.

Learners with a very limited cognitive ability may never learn to read. Learners in the Intermediate Phase who can understand language typical of third graders should be able to read, and reading leads to fuller development in vocabulary and syntax and may also promote greater cognitive efficiency (Gunning, 2010:28).

2.9.2 Educational factors

Vellutino, Scanlon, Sipay, Small, Pratt, Chen & Denckla (1996) stated that instructional deficits were at the heart of reading difficulties. Most of the learners classified as poor readers made substantial progress in a carefully planned instructional programme. Vellutino *et al* (1996) also brought out that most children at risk of having difficulty with reading overcome these risk factors when instructed in a well-planned literacy programme in preschool and a small number needed additional help at first grade in order to overcome risk factors.

Using inappropriate materials that are especially too difficult is also a major educational factor in reading difficulty. This results in a frustrated, angry and negative behaviour in a learner.

Lack of instruction is also a major factor in reading difficulty, and poor instructional planning can also be a factor in reading problems (Gunning, 2010:52). Instructional pace implies that learners do not read the same content at the same reading speed, as some learners need more time to learn than others do. In a classical teaching situation, learners with reading problems are unable to cope with the teaching pace.

2.9.3 Physical development

Burns, Roe & Ross (1992) stressed the importance of good health, visual acuity, eye coordination, and auditory acuity. The latter three aspects are important for visual and auditory perception, memory and discrimination, which enable the learner to read. Sousa (2005:127) also postulated that the crucial developmental stages of learners are sitting, walking, babbling, and speech, but if there is a delay in the development stages, this may lead to reading difficulties.

Motor coordination is related to directionality and kinaesthetic tactile development, which are important for reading and writing. Development of motor coordination skills enables the learner to hold the book correctly and to turn the pages. These skills are learned in early years where the pupil is given the opportunity to manipulate objects and books. A learner is ready to read when he or she is reasonably well adjusted emotionally, has gained background experience and attitudes, has reasonable language development, and his or her self-concept and physical state is intact.

The readiness period does not end when reading begins but continues as the child moves on into reading. The learner must develop readiness for each new reading task he or she has to learn. According to Ekwall & Shanker (1989:8), where a learner is pushed into reading without having developed a specific degree of readiness, he or she may become negative about reading, experience failure anxiety or become frustrated when reading. Because of that, creative thinking and problem-solving are discouraged, and the pupil becomes fatigued. Also, he or she develops a negative attitude towards reading.

Age, gender, visual motor or visual perceptual skills are not predictive of reading success. Some learners learn to read without having adequately mastered these prerequisites, while others who have mastered them do not master reading (Ekwall & Shanker, 1989:8).

2.9.4 Neurological factors

All learning, including the ability to learn to read, is neurologically based. Neurological factors may include specific congenital factors such as specific developmental problems, birth problems, the effects of specific illness or infection, untreated or uncontrolled epilepsy, and head injuries (Donald, *et al*; 2002:341). The reading process is a complex human task that acquires an intact and well-functioning brain and central nervous system; a neurological dysfunction can destroy reading ability (Lerner, Caldwell & Jennings, 2010:61). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), a problem that affects the ability to concentrate, is caused by neurological problems (Lerner *et al*, 2010:61). The most severe instances of reading difficulty are caused by a variation in neurological development (Gunning, 2010:46).

2.9.4.1 Hearing impairments

Auditory acuity as defined by Ekwall & Shanker (1989:9) is the ability to hear various sounds frequently at various intensities of loudness. The goal of discriminating letter sounds and words is founded on many types of listening exercises (Spache, 1983:4). The child must be able to discriminate pitch, loudness, duration, and rhythmic patterns or sequences of sounds. These auditory skills are also essential to phonic and structural analysis in order to discriminate the pitches of letter sounds of vowels and consonants (Spache, 1983:4). Hearing impairment can result in reading problems. According to Kapp (1996:326) hearing impairment is caused by the deterioration of the auditory cells of the organ of corti. Loss of hearing is usually not the same on all frequencies.

Ekwall & Shanker (1989:125) stated that in auditory perception impairment, the learner will have a problem in making some mental association with sounds in the environment. In auditory discrimination impairment, certain frequencies can be clearly heard, others poorly and some not at all. A learner can easily hear speech but will have difficulty in understanding speech; therefore, Ekwall & Shanker (1989:323) affirm the importance of being able to discriminate between similar sounds in order to reproduce sounds especially when using phonic skills while decoding words because if one sound is changed into another, it could change the meaning of the word.

To be able to recognise words and to read, the learner should also remember which grapheme is associated with which phoneme. Poor readers often find it difficult to read by means of sounding, as they forget one sound from the next, which will lead to poor comprehension. Poor readers are often inclined to only notice certain words which will lead to misreading and loss in contextual meaning. Learners with an auditory problem may lose interest in classroom activities because they cannot sustain the effort needed to listen (Guszak, 1985:137).

2.9.4.2 Auditory discrimination

According to Ekwall & Shanker (2000:125), auditory discrimination is dependent on good auditory acuity, which is the ability to hear the subtle and gross differences between sounds. Ekwall & Shanker (1989:323) affirmed the importance of being able to discriminate between similar sounding phonemes as of vital importance in learning to read. To reproduce sounds, a learner should also be able to hear differences in them in the presence of other sounds, especially when using phonic skills while decoding words. If a learner has difficulty hearing differences in sound frequency, that learner needs support because that learner will have difficulty in discriminating between tone and pitch in speech, which will then result in reading difficulties.

Children use auditory discrimination to hear differences between sounds around them. Without discrimination skills, children are not able to match information or notice differences between sounds, and they will not be able to follow instructions or to understand what people are saying. This will affect the learner's interpretation of what he or she hears. The learner must be able to distinguish which differences between sounds make a difference in meaning. The inability to detect sounds indicates a problem in reading related to the auditory functions, which plays a prominent role in reading difficulties.

The inability to detect and discriminate sounds presented in rapid succession as well as to discriminate sounds presented in rapid succession are commonly found in learners with reading problems (Wright, Brown & Zecker, 2000:532). This means that the learner will find it difficult to discriminate between letters and sounds which sound similar, e.g. rat and red.

Bald (2007:6), as well as Bursuck & Damer (2007:33-49), identified sound activities to be used in reading difficulty programmes which match the developmental stages of phonemic awareness:

- Sound matching: Learners are asked to match a word in a word family, e.g. lunch, branch, bunch, and bench.
- Sound isolation: Learners are asked to determine the beginning, middle or ending sounds in a word.
- Sound blending: Learners are asked to combine individual sounds to form a word.
- Sound segmentation: Learners are asked to segment each individual sounds, e.g. c/a/t/, of which the response will be cat.
- Sound substitution: This is where a learner must add, subtract or substitute a sound from an existing word according to what the educator asks.

Learners with auditory perceptual problems are not able to remember what they have heard or seen (Ramaano, Kutame', Mudzielwana, Maluleke & Ravhuhali 2015:11). They also struggle to pronounce words correctly or say a phrase in the correct order.

2.9.4.3 Auditory analysis and synthesis

Ekwall & Shanker (1989:480) defined segmentation as a learner's ability to recognise that when oral language is translated into print, the language is divided into phonemes, words, and sentences. Segmentation enables the learner to recognise similarities in sounds in different spoken words, which is important for learning to read.

Mann, Suiter & McClung (1992:127) referred to synthesis as the act of blending sounds into syllables and syllables into whole words. Learners should be able to segment speech into syllables because it is easier to decide how many syllables there are than phonemes. Learners with reading problems do not understand that syllables can also be analysed into shorter phonic segments. Thus the ability to break words into syllables or to blend the syllables and sounds into words would affect reading.

2.9.4.4 Auditory memory

Auditory memory is the ability to listen to, remember and repeat a series of words. Learners should be able to hold the sounds and put them together, especially in word analysis. Auditory memory involves being able to take in information that is presented orally, to process that information, store it in one's mind and then recall what one has heard. Basically, it involves the skills of attending, listening, processing, storing, and recalling. This is because students with auditory memory weaknesses pick up only bits and pieces of what is being said during classroom teaching.

Memory includes both short-term and long-term processes. Short-term memory stores and processes linguistic information through phonological structures and is also referred to as working memory. New information is stored in the short-term memory and then the information in long-term memory is utilised (Mann *et al*, 1992:45). To be able to recognise words and to read, learners should also remember which grapheme is associated with which phoneme. Short-term memory assists learners to remember sequences. These words and sequences are processed ultimately to comprehend the text and to store it in the long-term memory (Stanovich, 1992:45-46).

The quality of a learner's memory depends on memorisation strategies such as elaboration and image, verbal rehearsal strategies, and attentiveness. The problem in any of these aspects may

affect cognitive planning, study strategies, and understanding of complex information. When short-term memory becomes overloaded, it will lead to failure in reading.

Students with auditory memory deficiencies will often experience difficulty developing a good understanding of words, remembering terms and information that have been presented orally. These types of students will experience difficulty processing and recalling information that they have read. A poor auditory short-term memory is often the cause of a child's inability to learn to read using the phonics method. Phonics is an auditory learning system, and it is imperative to have a sufficient auditory short-term memory in order to learn, utilise and understand reading using the phonics method.

2.9.4.5 Vision impairments

Reading is obviously a visual perceptual task that requires processing of multi-letter strings (Kennedy, Radach, Heller & Punte, 2000). According to Guszak (1985:8-9), reading cannot take place if the learner's vision is impaired, as he or she must be able to see the word with sufficient clarity and detail. Reading takes place in front of the eye as the eye moves and jumps and fixates. Guszak (1985:137) stated that when reading, the eyes must accommodate both images and fuse them into one image and fixate frequently from left to right to receive visual stimuli.

The eyes, however, limit the act of reading, as they can move at a certain speed and perceive limited information; therefore, one cannot speed up the eyes but rather what is happening behind the eyes. Many children who cannot control their eyes well enough to follow a line of printed words do not have enough two-eyed coordination (binocular control) to look sequentially along a line of images. Reading requires binocular stability, which means that both eyes work together in such a way that children are able to fixate on small targets and maintain a single, clear fixation as the reader moves his eyes frequently from left to right to receive the visual stimuli across and down the page.

If the visual stimuli become distorted because the eyes are not functioning properly, it may become difficult to recognise a word. The eyes, however, limit the act of reading as they can only move at a certain speed and perceive limited information. Readers' eye movement while reading indicates whether or not readers are skilled readers because eye movement reflects differences in cognitive progressing during reading. The eye movements of less-skilled readers reflect difficulty in recognising words in the text.

Ekwall & Shanker (1989:12) had identified another factor which influences reading, namely, "directionality", referring to the knowledge of right and right side. In global reading mode, the visual attention window extends over the whole sequence of the word to be read. In analytic

mode, it narrows down to focus attention on the different sub-lexical orthographic units of the input string successively (Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). This ability enables the learner to identify the direction of letters and the sequences of letters in words, as well as reading direction from left to right. This directionality may be caused by physiological or psychological factors. Directional confusion influences reading because learners tend to rotate letters and words.

Although poor vision is usually not a cause of reading problems, it can make reading and related learning activities more difficult. Struggling readers sometimes complain that the letters seem to be moving or hold the book too close or too far, or squint when copying from the board (Gunning, 2010:50). According to Ekwall & Shanker (1989:318), a learner with a visual discrimination problem is unable to perceive the similarities and differences between visual shapes such as letters and words. Poor readers further exhibited a deviant pattern of viewing position effect that could reflect a specific visual attention (VA) deficit associated with reading disability (Dubios, Lafaye de Micheaux, Noel & Valdois, 2007). This is applicable when the learner has to recognise words immediately or needs to remember spelling patterns. The learner must be able to recognise the letter or word in any position regardless of shape, size or position.

According to Mann *et al* (1992:41), the ability to distinguish an object from the background stimuli and to hold on to it while the total pattern is being scanned is called visual figure-ground perception. For reading purposes, the learner must be able to single out a letter, word or sentence from the text, ignoring the rest of the text while identifying it. A learner with a visual figure-ground problem will have a problem reading text on a fully written paper because he or she tends to lose place or skip lines.

2.9.4.6 Visual perception

Visual perception skills that play a role in learning to read are visual discrimination, memory, sequencing, form constancy, figure-ground, directionality, and analysis and synthesis (Spache, 1983).

2.9.4.7 Visual discrimination

The progress in the continuum of learning means moving towards the fine discriminations demanded by letters and words. Shapes and forms are closely related to the hand-eye movements of writing and the visual movements of reading (Spache, 1983).

According to Ekwall & Shanker (1989:318), visual discrimination is referred to as the similarities and difference between visual shapes such as letters and words. Children must be able to pay attention to detail and to compare different sizes, shapes, or colours. This is applicable where

the learner has to recognise words immediately, where he or she needs to remember spelling patterns or irregular words. Learners with visual discrimination problems will have difficulty reading letters, for example, nut and hut, and will probably not see the difference (Mann *et al*, 1992:41). These learners jump words, read the same line twice, or skip a line.

2.9.4.8 Visual memory

According to Mohammed (2015:11) visual memory is the ability to remember what one sees. Visual memory involves the ability to store and retrieve previously experienced visual sensations and perceptions when the stimulus that originally evoked them is no longer present. That is, the person must be capable of making a visual image in his mind of the stimulus, such as a word, and once that stimulus is removed, to be able to visualise or recall this image without help.

Most learning-disabled students have serious deficiencies in the area of visual memory. Children who have not developed their visual memory skills cannot readily reproduce a sequence of visual stimuli. They frequently experience difficulty in remembering the spelling. They may remember the letters of a word but often cannot remember their order, or they may know the initial letter and configuration of the word without having absorbed the details, that is, the subsequent letters of the word. As a result, these students fail to develop a good sight vocabulary and frequently experience serious writing and spelling difficulties. Students with auditory memory deficiencies will often experience difficulty developing a good understanding of words, remembering terms and information that they have been presented orally (Mohammed, 2015:12).

A poor auditory short-term memory is often the cause of a child's inability to learn to read using the phonics method. These students will also experience difficulty processing and recalling information that they have read to themselves. Phonics is an auditory learning system, and it is imperative to have a sufficient auditory short-term memory in order to learn, utilise and understand reading using the phonics method.

Written text consists of graphemes in words which learners must memorise and remember to be able to recall them at a later stage. If a learner experiences problems remembering letters which are in words and words on sight, he or she will have difficulty reading written text.

2.9.4.9 Visual closure

According to Lerner, *et al* (2010:283), visual closure is the ability to recognise an incomplete object. Words provide clues for visual closure to enable learners to identify them. The ability to see clearly is critical to the reading process. Vision problems may be quite complex, involving

difficulties in seeing close up or far away or in focusing both eyes together (Lerner *et al*, 2010:61).

A learner with a closure problem has difficulty in identifying a word on sight because he or she has to look at every letter in order to see and read the word; he or she is inclined to read slowly. When children have the skill of auditory closure, they can predict the ending of a word or a sentence. Their mind must remember and complete the information on its own. When children struggle with fitting information together in order to complete pictures or words, they usually struggle to read. They also forget what their spelling words look like and find rhymes difficult to remember.

2.10 Sequential memory

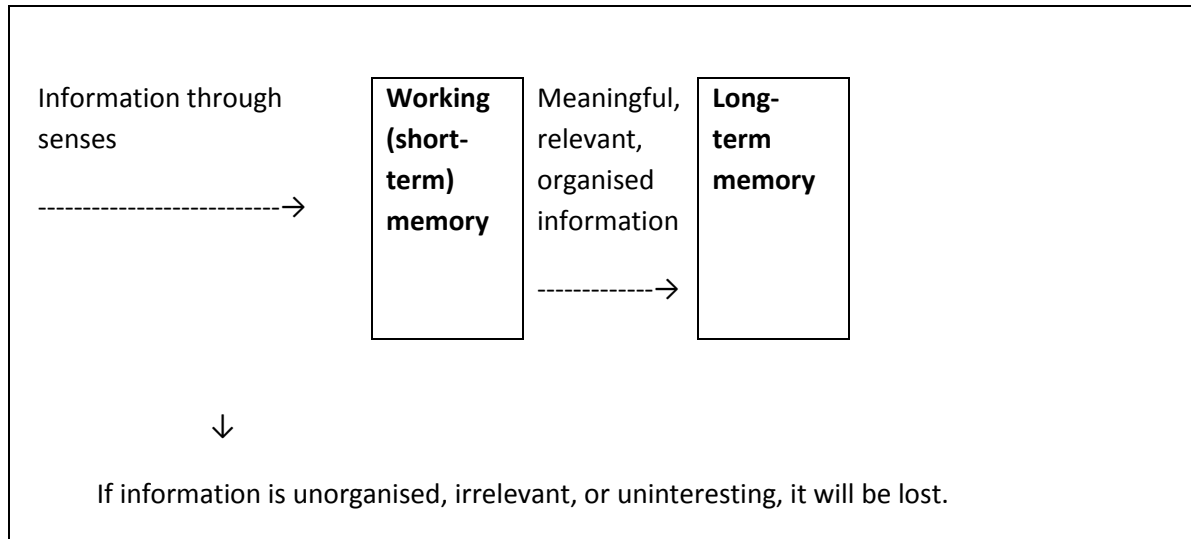
Sequential memory requires items to be recalled in a specific order. This means they must remember the order in which they have heard or seen things. Many learners with reading difficulties have poor visual sequential memory, i.e. a poor ability to perceive things in sequence and then remember the sequence. Without sequential memory, children cannot follow instructions. They will also mix up the letters in their spelling words; putting pictures into sequence teaches them to arrange objects from big to small and to look for logical connections between events. Naturally, this will affect their ability to read and spell correctly (Hill,2008:79). After all, any word consists of letters in a specific sequence. To read, one has to perceive the letters in sequence and also remember what word is represented by that sequence of letters.

2.10.1 Working memory

Working memory is the ability to hold on to a piece of information until the piece blends into a full thought or concept (Mohammed, 2015:11). Academic success needs learners to have long-term memory where they should store information over a long period of time. Learners with short-term memory cannot store or retain information for a long time. Working memory capacity increases with age. A learner at preschool age can deal with two items of information at the same time and thereafter the learner can deal with three to seven items. Later on at the adolescent stage, they can deal with five to nine items. This limited capacity of the learner explains the ability to memorise songs and poems through repetition.

In reading, phonology relies on memory to retain and recall bits of verbal information. When the learner reads a word, the decoding process breaks the word into phonemes, and these are blended using stored criteria to form words that the reader can recognise. To be a skilled reader, the learner must retain phonemes in the working memory. Poor readers lack the ability to retain a string of phonemes to make a word or to hold a sequence of words so as to make a sentence.

Figure 2.3: Illustration of working memory



2.10.2 Speech and pronunciation

Reading is an integral part of the language system. Underlying problems with language can affect the ability to read (Lerner *et al*, 2010:39). According to Ekwall and Shanker (1989:327), speech is closely related to auditory discrimination. Guszak (1985:137) stated that speech plays an important role especially in the phonic-centred reading approach, where the pupil has to encode symbols into sounds, as there is a link between sound production and the symbols representing sounds. Ekwall & Shanker (1989:11) postulated that there may be a connection between neurological dysfunctions, speech inadequacy, and reading problems. They submitted that the latter is a result of speech problems when in fact they both result from the neurological dysfunction. Speech problems may lead to poor pronunciation, but the learner may pronounce words properly without having a speech problem, which, in turn, may have an effect on reading. According to Lerner *et al* (2010:40), children display three kinds of speech problems:

1. Articulation problems: inaccurate production of sounds
2. Voice disorders: improper pitch or intonation
3. Stuttering: breath or rhythm problems

Although low-achieving readers have a higher incidence of speech problems, these problems do not necessarily lead to reading problems.

2.10.3 Gender differences

Another discovery is that there are differences in the male and female development of the myelin sheath in the brain, which develops slowly in boys than in girls (Kapp, 1996:202). This affects boys' physical development; as a result, boys are less interested in schoolwork than girls in the Elementary Phase. According to Sousa (2005:30), girls' brain development may be advanced by one or two years compared to boys of the same age, and therefore, early reading instruction may cause reading problems in boys.

2.10.4 Language factor

Learners' level of language development is an important factor in reading ability. It also offers a sense of security and belonging. The home language policy stipulates that learners should start learning at school in their home language until grade 3. Learning of abstract knowledge is essential in order to gain new knowledge and understanding language. This implies an interaction between cognition, behaviour and environmental stimuli.

The cognitive function involved in this process is grouping of information with similar characteristics. This includes differentiating between stimuli and objects, classification and generalisation of information, and the association of stimuli and objects. Kamhi & Catts (1989:76) maintained that words and sentences gain meaning when the learner knows the specific language. By perceiving sounds and reconstructing them into words, the learner is able to understand, store and remember.

Learners' level of language development is an important factor in the ability to read. Vocabulary correlates with good reading performance. In the Intermediate Phase, reading becomes the main determinant of vocabulary. Limited vocabulary has a reciprocal cause relationship with reading problems, as limited vocabulary may lead to poor word recognition. Several studies have proved that poor readers rely on higher language processes on word recognition, whereas good readers have a larger vocabulary and verbal fluency, and they use more complex, complete sentences and more transformations. Poor readers have deviant listening comprehension skills that affect reading ability. Poor readers also have deficient knowledge of morphology and grammatical rules (Kamhi & Catts, 1989:76).

2.10.4.1 Dimensions of language

When a child learns to combine sounds in a way that another person understands, they must develop the understanding of phonology, morphology, and syntax. Language consists of three dimensions: form, content, and function. A person uses all three dimensions when speaking (Mann *et al*, 1992:382-384).

- **Phonology**

Phonology refers to the sound system of a language. Oral language consists of a stream of sounds, one after another (Lerner *et al*, 2010:38). Phonology is the essential foundation upon which language is built. Children may have difficulty producing certain speech sounds, and children who have not mastered sounds in speech may have difficulty distinguishing them in reading (Lerner *et al*, 2010:38).

- **Morphology**

According to Landsberg, Kruger & Nel (2008:121), morphology refers to the knowledge a speaker possesses regarding the manner in which new words can be created from existing words. Morphology helps learners to learn to create new words and can help them spell and pronounce words correctly. Morphological awareness could help a number of reading tasks and refer to morphemic boundaries, e.g. “oo” in the word “spoon” and “co-opt”. A morpheme can stand on its own and be a root of a word, e.g. “cat”. Adding a morpheme to a root may change the meaning of a word. Morphemes include a prefix such as be- in beloved or suffix such as -ing in loving. Free morphemes are single-root words, and when combined, they form a new word, e.g. wind and pipe may be combined to form the new word windpipe. Inbound morphemes are meaningful when a prefix or suffix is combined with a free morpheme, e.g. “un- and “do”. Learners learn that prefixes and suffixes alter the meaning of words in certain ways and that common roots often have a common meaning.

Learners who have inadequate morpheme awareness will probably have difficulty reading unknown words with more than one syllable and which are not part of their vocabulary because they do not have the skill to segment words and have to resort to sounding words. This will result in loss of understanding.

- **Syntax**

Syntax is the study of the structure of language. It has to do with the order of words, where it carries meaning on a deep-structured level. Oats and Grayson (2004:170) posited that each language has its own rules of syntax. The rules of syntax do not allow the random arrangement of words in sentences. Words follow a typical sequence such as subject-verb-object format, e.g. “the boy kicks the ball”. Syntax awareness influences reading development by expanding a learner’s phonological decoding skills. A learner who has reading problems very often has a language problem and is unable to rely on his or her syntactic awareness. He or she then needs to rely on his or her knowledge of morphemic or phonemic structures when reading.

Morphemes are linked to form words which, in turn, are strung together in a correct order (syntax) to form phrases and sentences with meaning. The difference in meaning (semantics)

between the sentences must follow a sequence common to many languages. Oats & Grayson (2004:170) highlighted that words must be arranged in a sequence that makes sense. According to the rules to which the listener may become accustomed, the arrangement of words is important to convey the correct meaning of a sentence completely, e.g. “the cat is on the chair” and “the chair is on the cat”. Words may be rearranged accordingly to certain rules to convey meaning.

- **Semantics**

According to Lerner *et al* (2010:38) semantics refer to the meaning of words and sentences which enable one to form concepts. Semantics include:

- Lexical semantics, which is the literal meaning of a word in a sentence, e.g. “The tree is tall” referring to the length, literally meaning it is a tall tree.
- Sentence semantics, where not only the words have meaning but the sentence as a whole, e.g. “The girl is pretty”, meaning the girl is beautiful.
- Interpretive semantics, where the same ideas can be communicated differently, e.g. “The mouse fled from the cat”, meaning the cat chased the mouse.
- Semantic relationships, where each word has a specific function in the sentence, e.g. “the sheep flocked”, meaning the sheep came together.

Words and sentences have meaning if the learner knows a specific language. By perceiving sounds and reconstructing them into words, the learner is able to understand, store and remember the message. Knowledge of word meanings (vocabulary) and semantic representations correlate with good reading performance. At approximately the age of eight, reading becomes the main determinant of vocabulary. Limited vocabulary has a reciprocal causal relationship with reading failure, as limited vocabulary may lead to poor word recognition, which leads to slower vocabulary growth.

- **Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is described as the study of the contextual variables surrounding the use of language and their influence on the meaning of language. The context in which an expression is uttered determines the meaning being conveyed. Depending on the social situation, an expression such as “good Friday” to ordinary people would mean the day is fine, but the very expression to Christians means a Christian holiday.

Learners with a language difficulty will in all probability have pragmatic problems. They will have problems in asking and answering questions, making use of or interpreting non-verbal

language, communicating information accurately, and negotiating with other people. This may lead to misunderstandings (Mann *et al*, 1992:10).

With regard to reading, pragmatics plays an important role because it enables a learner to understand interpretive semantics relations. If a learner is unable to interpret pragmatics into spoken language and to use it, he or she will be unable to understand it in written language.

2.11 Reading readiness

According to Gillet & Temple (2000:217), reading readiness is a factor and there are stages during which literacy develops, but the stages vary by age from learner to learner. There is no clear indication when learners are ready to read. Before a learner begins to read, it is necessary to prepare a learner for meaningful interpretation of printed or written verbal symbols and to subsequently lay a foundation for successful reading. A learner goes through a pre-reading phase, which stretches from birth to a stage where he or she is taught to recognise words and to read them.

Stahl & McKenna (2006:50) interpreted reading readiness as having various stages, whereas word recognition progresses through three stages which start from learners at the end of first grade in school up to the end of third grade. The first stage of word recognition is the development of phonological awareness, the knowledge of the relationship between written and spoken language. The understanding of a word in both written and spoken language is the relationship between letters and sounds and the understanding of phonemes. The second stage is the accuracy when learners learn to decode words. This stage is characterised by phonetic cue reading where a learner will concentrate on the initial sound and last sounds of words while decoding. The third stage is called the accurate word reading stage. A learner learns to understand words and their meaning by hearing them. In other words, they begin by phonological contents followed by the semantic value.

2.11.1 Experiential background

The experience which a learner gains at home and school form an integral part of the reading readiness programme. Experience gives meaning to reading because it is the background to vocabulary and concepts. It enables the learner to relate experiences to symbols. Experiences are the foundation for building concepts and for building vocabulary (Burns *et al*, 1982). Experience enables the learner to change and refine perceptions in order to understand a concept clearly.

2.11.2 Cognitive development and language learning

Burns *et al* (1982) explained that the way the learner learns to use language and how he or she develops the ability to know and understand concepts and ideas are closely related. Language is used to understand and communicate thoughts accurately, which is the foundation for reading. Both language and cognitive factors are vital for learning to read. This includes intelligence.

Piaget (1972:14) is of the opinion that when there are changes in the learner's language behaviour, it is symptomatic of his or her mental development. Piaget's main interest is therefore growth of cognition and language development. During the preoperational stage, the child's language is egocentric and the child seldom communicates by means of speech with others. As cognition develops, his or her thoughts become inner speech which, in turn, becomes audible speech. At the end of the preoperational stage, the child has gained socialised speech (communication with others). This is because the child's cognition is maturing and he or she is interacting with others, his or her mental organisation and language usage changes as he or she becomes older.

According to Ekwall & Shanker (1989:147), when a learner enters school, he or she needs to consciously analyse language and make use of meta-linguistic skills. Learners who use good oral language, vocabulary, sentence structure, and syntax have an advantage over those who do not use good oral language while learning to read.

2.11.3 Interest in reading

Interest in learning to read develops by exposing the pupil to language and literature in his or her early preschool years (Burns *et al*, 1992). This is because stories are at the heart of many beginning reading programmes, learners should be able to understand a story as a whole, characteristics and elements, and develop a story sense.

2.11.3.1 *Social and emotional development*

Burns *et al* (1992:19) claimed that individual as well as group communication is important for a pupil to develop emotionally and socially. As language is the most important basis of cooperation (Burns *et al*, 1992:19), the learner learns to work independently as well as in a group where he or she is expected to cooperate, share and socialise with others. Love, attention and acceptance, and a positive attitude towards himself or herself and his or her peers are developed during preschool years through structured communication experiences.

According to Pan, Rowe, Singer & Snow (2005:765), social disadvantage factors in learners from poor family backgrounds may affect skills and knowledge of learners upon entering schools. Some of the learners may come from single-parent households, be living in poverty, have parents with little or no education and low literacy levels, and may have poor nutrition. These social disadvantages may delay learners' development of both spoken language and literacy skills.

Learners with reading difficulties are particularly prone to experience emotional distress and may experience negative psychological and emotional reaction to reading. These learners may try their level best to avoid reading such as pretending to be busy while doing nothing or go to the bathroom just to avoid reading out in class.

Learners who are emotionally unstable often develop psychosomatic manifestations in order to avoid the conflict situation, and this can be categorised as personality maladjustments (Schubert & Torgerson, 1981). These maladjustments may have an adverse effect on learners' emotional health, and learners often display the following symptoms as catalogued by Schubert & Torgerson (1981):

- They are nervous and develop habits such as stuttering and nail-biting.
- They make use of defence mechanisms, such as loud talk and deviant behaviour.
- They withdraw by daydreaming.
- They make use of count attack strategies such as bullying and destructive behaviour.
- They become self-conscious and develop a defeatist attitude.

Attitude maladjustments may be caused by:

- repeated failures
- physical factors, such as physical abnormalities

- poor home circumstances or broken homes where the parents reject the child; over-solicitousness; or inconsistent discipline such that the child requires security or attention

2.11.4 Family factors

Children of parents who had reading difficulties are likely to experience reading difficulties themselves. Genetic studies suggest a complex interaction between several genes and environmental factors (Gilger & Wise, 2004). The home literacy environment is a critical factor in children's literacy development. Key factors include the following:

- **Parental reading habits:** What parents do, or not do, has an impact on children's attitude towards reading and reading success. Parents have long been considered critical to the development of their children's reading skills, and parents play an important role in supporting their children's reading development (Morris, Taylor, Knight & Wasson, 1995). The closeness that exists between parent and child might allow the child to express more openly the areas that he or she does not understand. The closeness might enable children to listen to a parent more attentively than they might listen to their teacher, and increased opportunities for teaching learning interactions may arise between the child and the parent due to one-on-one instruction.

Children are more likely to value reading if they see parents reading. Parents who are not interested in their children do not attend to them and support them cognitively may be responsible for children's reading problems (Gunning, 2010:55). All parents want their children to be successful in school; however, they may lack the skills necessary to instruct them in phonemic awareness. These skills are vital for positive gains towards reading independence. It has been reported that there is a paucity of information on the effects of parental training in teaching phonemic awareness on children's progress as readers (NICHD, 2000).

Reading to children by an adult: Reading to children is one of the most valuable things that parents can do and is a requisite for building early reading skills and should be used as a scaffold to build instruction once children start school. Reading to children develops language and literacy skills (Gunning, 2010:55). Parental reading patterns provide a positive reading environment, and when parents read in different contexts, children learn about literacy in an incidental manner and acquire a positive attitude towards reading. Seeing parents reading magazines, books or newspapers provides a positive stimulus for children's reading.

- **Availability of reading and writing materials:** Just having literacy materials fosters their use (Gunning, 2010:55). The availability of reading material at home provides a positive reading environment. Research has also shown that parents who expect their children to do well at school are more likely to provide books and academic games for their children and take them to the library.
- **Stimulating verbal interactions:** Discussions, explanations, conversations, and reading to children and discussing what has been read contribute to children's language and conceptual development (Gunning, 2010:55). With the discussions that spontaneously take place during storybook reading, often including interactive language and references to shared real-life experiences, parents help their children to understand the meaning of what is being read. These opportunities to observe and participate in home reading activities thus acquaint children with the nature and functions of written language.
- An oral teacher read-aloud component with some direct vocabulary and comprehension instruction should provide a significant opportunity to improve vocabulary (Baumann & Kame'enui, 2012:44).

2.11.5 Economic factors

Children raised in poverty usually come to school hungry and unable to concentrate. These learners know fewer words than children from affluent families. Ramphela (2009:51) suggested that the reason for the large number of struggling readers in the Intermediate Phase is that at least half of the learners in the country live below or near the poverty level; some learners live in shelters, in cars, with relatives or on the street, while others have to miss school to take care of young siblings or to carry out certain domestic tasks which clash with the routines and timetables of the school. Taylor, *et al* (1995) supported the view that challenges of poverty can prevent many learners from learning to their full capacity.

According to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data, children raised in poverty lag behind in reading. Schools in poverty areas emphasised more rote learning with less learners' involvement.

Learners in poverty areas are also not likely to be taught comprehension strategies and may not be asked to do out-of-class reading. Poverty might interact with other factors such as eyesight problem; as a consequence, they might not see what is written on the chalkboard (Gunning, 2010:56).

2.11.6 A culture of neglect

Currie (2004:2) indicated that people live in a culture that makes it all too easy for learners in the Intermediate Phase to define themselves as failures and losers who do not fit in well with their families and schools. He is supported by Lenski (2008), who maintained that the current structure of schooling does little in nurturing struggling readers once they are in the Intermediate Phase.

Learners' reading problems manifest in different ways. Struggling readers experience certain inconsistencies in their behaviour that they cannot explain. They feel intelligent in some areas but are completely in the dark in others. They often display behaviour-related reading problems such as poor spelling, poor verbal skills, poor reading comprehension, poor reading speed, listening problems, poor handwriting, and an inability to make notes.

2.12 Reading materials

Reading materials are the most supportive factors in reading. Intermediate Phase learners need to be able to read in order to learn. Access to reading materials is considered to be one of the most important predictors of intellectual development. Teachers cannot supply all the information needed for a thorough knowledge of the subject, and extra information has to be sought in textbooks. Textbooks provide the basis for what has to be learned. Learners cannot recall all the information heard during a lesson and textbooks provide the means to consolidate what has been taught to fill the gaps, as they can constantly be referred to and consulted. Learners also have to learn to study independently and to produce assignments, and for this, they need to consult prescribed books.

Reading materials for beginners should support and encourage them in their search for meaning. There should be a number of words not known by at least half of the class. It is not advisable to concentrate on words known by only a few of the children in class, nor to select books that contain many little-known words (Baumann & Kame'enui, 2012:44). There is a belief that learners will do better if given materials on their grade level, even if they are reading below grade level. The findings of studies by Pretorius & Mampuru (2007:41) and Makoe (2007:60) revealed that South African schools are not well-resourced with school libraries, and when they do exist, most of them have few books or are without books.

Poor readers spend more time on reading tasks; when poor readers know most of the words, they are better able to use context clues and so do not have to rely on sounding out the words. The text must make learners experience success than frustration and failure. Carr & Bertrando (2012) offered four options which described steps for planning instruction for different types of reading materials:

Option 1: Using unaltered text

Learners with challenges in reading in the primary grades may need to focus on decoding skills. These learners may be able to comprehend some short reading excerpts but will have difficulty with complete texts; some may need accommodations, such as text in digital format and assistive technology such as large print, chunking, enhanced spacing between the lines, and hyperlinks to vocabulary definitions. Struggling readers in the Intermediate Phase level need to focus on comprehension skills (Carr & Bertrando, 2012:88).

Option 2: Using annotated text excerpts

Learners may be able to comprehend annotated excerpts, reading independently. Moreover, those with reading problems will likely have difficulty independently reading and comprehending annotated text excerpts. Learners should be assisted to identify excerpts in a conceptual unit that addresses the essential information needed to understand (Carr & Bertrando, 2012:89).

Option 3: Using reading material at various levels

Although some learners can independently read and comprehend texts at their level, learners with reading difficulty cannot independently read and comprehend texts at the lowest reading level, except when using shared reading (Carr & Bertrando, 2012:90).

2.12.1 Narrow reading

Narrow reading is reading numerous authentic texts on the same topic where vocabulary will be repeated throughout the course of reading, which both makes the reading easier and gives the reader a better chance of learning vocabulary. The context must be rich enough to offer adequate clues to guess a word's meaning (Richards & Bamford, 2010:152).

The findings from the literature review demonstrated that learners with reading problems present challenges with strategic processing components of reading, namely, decoding, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The significance of reading problems has been studied extensively using reading strategies to promote reading. Further attention was given to the importance of developing a strong sight vocabulary, using word recognition skills to promote effective reading (Polloway *et al*, 2013:138).

This chapter focused on challenges of learners in reading typically present in classroom situations. It is important to point out that social and cultural context has an effect on learners' reading.

2.13 Challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners

Intermediate Phase learners are learners who completed formal education in the Foundation Phase. In the Intermediate Phase, they should be able to read expository texts and critically analyse a variety of texts. They are now expected to read, write and comprehend what they have read in order to cope with academic demands, which means that they are expected to understand English well in order to understand all learning areas.

In the Intermediate Phase, the learners start to experience profound changes at school, as they are expected to adjust to a new environment such as moving from one class to another in order to attend different learning areas which are being taught by different teachers and a new curriculum. According to National Curriculum Statements (NCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), learners in the Intermediate Phase are expected to learn six learning areas in which among five of them, Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is English. For some learners, English is their Home Language, whereas for others, English is their First Additional Language (FAL) or Second Additional Language (SAL).

2.13.1 Gender differences

The findings from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Strategy (PIRLS, 2011) indicated that girls outperformed boys in nearly all of the participating countries, particularly in the area of literary reading. More boys than girls are identified as having reading disabilities. Bender (1993:1) pointed out that the ratio of boys among girls with reading difficulties is 3:1 or 4:1. Lerner, Caldwell & Jennings (2010:41) have identified several reasons for more boys than girls being identified with reading difficulties:

- Boys mature later physically than girls. At the age of beginning reading instruction, boys may not have developed certain skills that aid in reading, such as the ability to manage pencils and books.
- School environment may affect boys and girls differently. Educators in the primary grade are mainly females, and boys may have a problem in associating themselves with them. The rewards tend to be given for being neat and quiet in the primary grades, which are the characteristics of girls than boys.

The NICHD shows that as many girls as boys may have reading disabilities, but the girls are not being identified.

2.13.2 Instruction

Learners who are able to read can also follow instruction easily, but low achievers and underachievers are left behind (Wilson & Cleland, 1985:3). The gap becomes wider; consequently, catching up becomes difficult even if the learner is willing to catch up. Lerner (1993:430) emphasised the use of whole language instruction as a philosophy of teaching reading that emphasises reading and writing, meaning and comprehension, the use of authentic literature, and the avoidance of exercises and drills such as decoding instruction.

2.13.3 Reading readiness

Reading readiness refers in totality to the child who has achieved a level of independence in his or her relationships that enable him or her to meet the requirements of school with a minimum of tension. Readiness for learning to read is not directly linked to school readiness but may appear in the initial stage in elementary school, and yet readiness to read may appear much later in the child. In general reading, a readiness period is viewed as an attempt to synthesise new experiences with previous experiences that the learner has had. This conception of reading readiness implies that reading is a process of getting the message from visual language symbols, which entails both decoding and comprehension.

2.14 Factors affecting reading readiness

Johnson (1978:368) identified two types of factors which affect the degree of reading readiness:

- a) "Prerequisites" – factors that will make a learner not to be able to read at all. These include visual acuity and discrimination to deal with written text.
- b) "Facilitators" – factors that will increase ease and effectiveness of learning, for example, vocabulary and reading speed.

Reading readiness must involve the above-mentioned factors for completing cognitive tasks as well as recording a message from visual to oral symbols (Johnson, 1978:369). Therefore, it must be ascertained whether the reading ability of the learner is developed to such an extent that he can begin to read.

2.14.1 Reading material

Heimburge (2006:79) stated that when materials used are difficult, reading can be frustrating. The attitude that develops as a result is that reading is difficult. Reading problems are compounded when the primary school learner is presented with dry, uninteresting or difficult material (Hermbuge, 2006:79). Spanche and Spanche (1977:55) stated that reading material should be carefully scaled according to the difficulty and presented in a sequence that is consistent with available knowledge of learning and semi-controlled vocabulary in order to arouse reading interest in learners with reading problems. The selection of reading experiences should include poetry, prose and factual, fictional, informational and entertaining material (Spanche & Spanche, 1977:55). He distinguished the following variables concerning reading material:

- **Perceptibility**

If the message is partially obscured or obliterated, it becomes more difficult or impossible to comprehend.

- **Adequacy and completeness of coding systems**

Reading material consists of lexical symbols, that is, vocabulary terms that carry meaning directly (for example, sun, school, church) and grammatical devices, that is, those symbols that signal a relationship (for example, of, on, but). For the reader to comprehend what he or she is reading, the learner should have mastered both lexical and grammatical terminology and punctuation marks because they all determine meaning.

- **Readability**

Comprehension is also determined by the ease or difficulty with which a passage can be read. This entails vocabulary difficulty, length, and complexity of sentences.

- **Unstated meaning**

Meaning is either explicitly stated or suggested. The suggested meaning may be more a significant part of the author's message and may be difficult to comprehend. To comprehend successfully, the reader must understand the main idea being presented, whether stated or implied. This involves aspects about the message, enough background about the message read, and enough vocabulary on the topic being read.

2.14.2 Stigmatisation

In the researcher's experience as an educator, learners in primary schools usually ridicule a learner with reading problems. The onus rests on educators to instil positive values in learners so that they can feel at ease to explore the reading world without stigmatisation. Wilson & Cleland (1985:4) highlighted that when a learner with reading problems is stigmatised, it is difficult to maintain a positive self-concept. Individual educational programmes should be used regularly and reading problems must not be viewed as a failure but as an opportunity for further instruction to support reading problems.

2.14.3 The impact of reading problems on learners

Having a reading problem is the primary reason learners drop out of school. In rural areas, most of them tend to have early marriages or practise cohabitation. These learners are often inattentive, often absent from school, play truant, playfully distractive and/or show frustration in the classroom. According to McEwan (2002:1), failure has the power to paralyse with fear, enrage with frustration, and demoralise with despair. McEwan (2002:1) also further stated that learners with reading problems tend to be hostile and aggressive, have low self-esteem, and are at times shy because of their inability to cope with others. They tend to distance themselves from the learning situation.

2.14.4 Parents

Parents of a learner with reading problems frequently discover that their methods to manage the child's reading problem and reduce failure experiences are not effective. They soon begin to perceive the learner's reading problem as they would those of a chronic disease, as something unpleasant which must be endured because it cannot be changed. The entire situation may seem impossible to change and equally impossible to cope with (Bender, 1993:180). Parents may respond to this dilemma with feelings of guilt and anger. They may harbour their anger on the learner or blame themselves as the cause of the problem. Some parents may overprotect a learner with reading problems. Some parents dump the learner to be the educators' responsibility.

2.14.5 Lack of rich language environment

Some learners are not exposed to rich language in the home and in other everyday environments. Activities done in a nurturing home, such as reading books, listening to stories, and engaging in the free exchange of ideas, form an important basis for reading skills. Some parents lack the reading skills to foster literacy, others lack time, and others are not aware of the value of such experiences (Lerner *et al*, 2010).

2.14.6 Distractions

Children spending too much time on computers, playing video games, and watching television may develop reading problems because they may not be actively engaged in reading. Learning on the computer is far less brain-building. When children are interacting with computer games, they are working with external symbols (pictures on a screen) rather than with internal symbols (language and mental images). Children need to interact with others to develop oral language. The computer requires no physical interaction. The use of computers affects thinking processes and degrades learners' thinking power and creativity skills (Goldsworthy, 2002:108).

2.14.7 School attendance

Absence from school and frequent transfers can be harmful to learners' progress. Some learners absent themselves for a number of days, missing critical instructions. The missed instructions have a particularly damaging effect on reading progress. Others change schools several times during the year, resulting in abrupt changes in instructional approaches and materials (Lerner, *et al*; 2010:54).

2.15 Characteristics of learners with reading problems in the Intermediate Phase

Intermediate Phase learners with reading problems not only have a challenge in reading but must also cope with normal challenges and adjustments by peers. Lerner, *et al* (2010:378) stated that trying to deal with this creates special burdens for learners with reading problems in the Intermediate Phase such as:

- *Passive learning:* Intermediate Phase learners with reading problems have often developed an attitude of learned helplessness and dependence.
- *Poor self-concept:* Low self-esteem and other emotional problems result from years of failure and frustration.
- *Inept social skills:* Intermediate Phase learners with academic problems often have difficulty making and keeping friends during a period when friendships and peer approval are important.
- *Attention deficits:* Poor attention and concentration are common in teenagers who read poorly because long periods of concentration are required for high school work; thus, attention problems are quite serious.
- *Lack of motivation:* After years of failure, many teenagers feel that they are dumb and that their efforts to learn are futile.

2.16 Symptoms of reading disability

The term reading disability is reserved for reading problems that are attributable to some factor intrinsic to the reader such as deviant phonological processing skill, comprehension deficit, and peculiar cognitive learning style (Joshi & Aaron, 1992:87). The most fundamental deficit of reading disability is word recognition skills, which are strongly correlated with the speed of initial reading acquisition (Stanovich, 1991). A major source of deficient word recognition skills is weak phonological processing skills. The symptoms of reading disability include a slow rate of reading, erratic oral reading, spelling errors, incorrect use of suffixes and function words in reading and writing, and below average comprehension on timed reading tests.

2.16.1 Slow reading speed

The speed with which words are recognised is a major factor contributing to individual differences in reading skills. Even though skilled readers may be able to recognise many written words without resorting to phonological recording, poor readers are held back when they encounter unfamiliar words. Learners with reading disability tend to remain slow readers relative to others their age despite many years of schooling because they are slow in processing verbal information, as their phonological lexicon is either poorly organised or that the entries in the lexicon are incomplete.

2.16.2 Errors in oral reading

Poor decoding skills lead to an over dependence on sight word reading strategy. As a result poor decoders tend to identify words on the basis of minimal cues, usually the first few letters of the word, they tend to misread a large number of words and commit oral reading errors. Omission and substitution of suffixes are also frequently seen in the oral reading in learners with reading disability because of their phonological problem.

2.17 Addressing reading in South Africa

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP, 2007) that monitors learners' reading has reported that more than 69% of fourth-grade learners performed below proficient reading levels, and these problems persisted even in upper grades. These children need help in reading. Most of the learners with reading problems are in the mainstream education classes, with no special assistance in reading. Some learners receive help through school- or state-sponsored reading programmes. About 5 million children have disabilities and are served through special education programmes under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 [IDEA, 2004]. Despite all sources of help, a substantial number of students with reading problems receive no help other than general classroom instruction (Lerner *et al*, 2010:3).

The Department of Education has called for learners' reading competencies at different levels to be continually monitored and evaluated through the projects that follow.

2.17.1 Progress in International Reading Literacy Strategy

This project is conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The PIRLS is designed in a five-year cycle to measure children's reading literacy achievement, to provide a baseline for future studies of trends in achievement, and to gather information about children's home and school experience in learning to read. In 2011, the PIRLS was offered to assess basic reading skills where most children are still developing reading skills at the end of the primary school cycle. The findings indicated that there were fewer achievement differences in informational reading across countries.

2.17.2 Systematic evaluation

This is an external way to monitor the education system by comparing learners' performance to national indicators of achievement. This form of evaluation compares and aggregates information about learners' achievement so that it can be used to assist in curriculum development and evaluation of teaching and learning (Department of Education (DoE), 2004:2).

2.17.3 Annual National Assessment

The Annual National Assessments (ANA) (2014) are standardised national assessments for languages and mathematics in the Intermediate Phase (grade 4-6) and literacy and numeracy for the Foundation Phase (grade 1-3). ANA was put in place by the DoE as a strategy to annually measure progress in learner achievement towards the 2014 target of ensuring that at least 60% of learners achieve an acceptable level of literacy. ANA is one of the initiatives that formed the backbone of DoE Action Plan to 2014. The DoE is determined to improve the language and mathematics skills of learners.

All these evaluations have revealed that South African learners still read below their expected standard. Taking this factor into consideration, DoE has launched the following campaigns in order to improve reading.

Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP)

This campaign was launched in 2007 as an affirmative action programme targeting schools which are operating in high poverty communities where the quality of education is seriously

compromised due to lack of resources, shortage of skilled personnel, lack of basic infrastructure, and overcrowding in classrooms.

Foundation for Learning (FFL)

This was launched in 2008 as a four-year campaign to improve reading, writing and numeracy skills of all learners. It was intended to provide clearer and more specific guidelines for teachers as directives to support schools and education officials across the system (DoE, 2008).

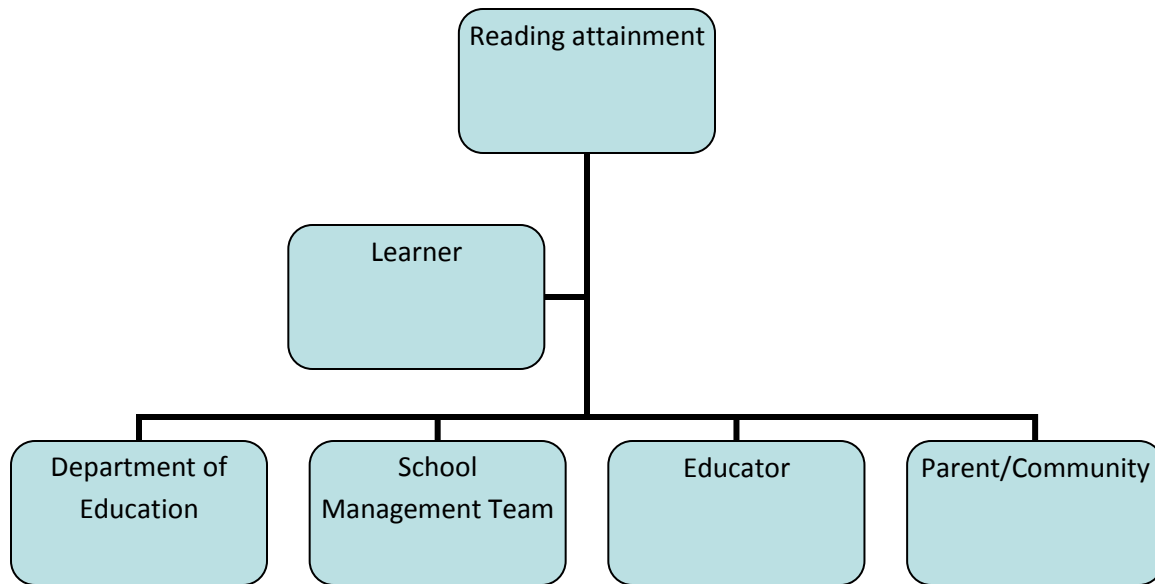
National Reading Strategy (NRS)

This campaign was also launched in 2008 to address the growing concern over literacy and to promote lifelong readers and lifelong learners. This campaign was aimed at improving reading competencies by engaging teachers and learners to a “Drop Everything and Read” (DoE, 2008). It was closely followed by the Integrated National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (INLNS) aimed at addressing the low achievement levels of learners in literacy and numeracy as confirmed by national ANA, regional (Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMEQ) DoE (2010) and international (PIRLS) assessment (DoE, 2011).

The NRS requires the involvement and commitment of the following range of role players:

- First, the learner is at the focal point because it is the learner who should read fluently and with understanding.
- Second, the educator has to actively teach reading skills to all learners and must create an environment that promotes reading.
- Third, parents need to value reading. Wherever possible, they need to read to their children and encourage them to practise reading.
- Finally, DoE must provide the necessary resources and support to schools.

Figure 2.4: Important role players in teaching reading among learners



English as a home language

The home language assessment standards assume that learners come to school able to understand and speak the language (DoE, 2005). These learners are expected to meet the following assessment standards. The learner should

- read a variety of South African and international fiction and non-fiction texts;
- view and comment on various visual and multimedia texts for different purposes;
- describe feelings about the text and give reasons;
- discuss choice of language and how graphical features influence the reader;
- understand the vocabulary and discuss the choice of words, imagery and sound effects in poems, stories, and multimedia texts;
- recognise the different structures, language use, purposes, and audiences of different texts;
- identify and discuss values in texts in relation to cultural, social, environmental and moral issues;
- understand and respond appropriately to information texts;
- interpret simple visual texts and be able to change text from one form to another, e.g. poster to explanatory paragraph; and

- select relevant texts for own information need

The learner whose home language is English is expected to extend their literacy skills, build confidence and fluency in order to cope.

English as a first additional language

The FAL assumes that learners do not necessarily have any knowledge of language when they arrive at school. According to DoE (2005:59-61), the curriculum is designed in a way that learners are being taught to understand and speak the language. English FAL learners are expected to meet the following assessment standards. The learner should

- understand in a simple way some elements of the stories;
- understand in a very simple way some elements of poetry;
- read for information;
- read media texts;
- read for pleasure and information; and
- use reference books and develop vocabulary

The focus in English FAL is to make learners understand many words and structures, and use this knowledge to check their use of language, especially when writing. They are expected to develop confidence and also read for enjoyment and therefore be able to read fiction and non-fiction texts at the appropriate level (DoE 2005:59-61).

English as a second additional language

The SAL is intended for learners who wish to learn three languages, and the assessment standards ensure that they are able to use it for general communication purposes. According to DoE (2005:17), a learner is expected to meet the following assessment standards:

- Read short texts with visual support.
- Use reference books for language learning.
- Read and understand up to 500 words in context by the end of grade 4.

The purpose at this stage is to equip learners with the skill to interact with other South Africans and to use what they know to construct new knowledge and put their skills into practice (DoE, 2006:71).

2.18 Stages of reading development

Reading is a developmental process. The skills and abilities associated with decoding written symbols are developed logically and sequentially. The learner with reading problems cannot master reading skills (Taberski 2000:104).

2.18.1 Pre-reading stage

The initial stage, from birth to the age of six years, is a preparation for the complex, formal act of reading texts. In the pre-reading stage, the child listens and reacts to spoken words, imitates sounds, learns some words, and uses short sentences. Most reading problems are detected at this stage because the child will not respond to spoken words.

2.18.2 Reading readiness stage

Although reading readiness occurs at all levels, this stage is most commonly associated with a young child who is just beginning to learn to read during the first year at school. Reading readiness primarily involves the child's ability to:

- distinguish sounds
- make discriminations in visual symbols
- express simple ideas
- follow simple oral directions

Most reading readiness programmes are instituted in the Elementary Phase of the learner. In learners with reading problems, the reading readiness stage may be extended for a longer period prior to instituting the formal reading programme.

2.18.3 Beginning reading stage

This stage usually spans up to grade 1 and grade 2. It is a period for expanding basic vocabulary, building word recognition and comprehension skills, and for developing favourable attitudes towards reading.

The child is ready for reading if the child has built a meaningful listening and speaking vocabulary, has learned to carry on a conversation and tell a story in a sequence, can identify and discriminate between sounds in oral expression, and can see similarities and differences in printed letters and words. In addition to these linguistic indications of readiness, the learner should also have a desire to learn to read, the physical ability to hear and see properly, the

mental ability to associate, relate and remember, and be free from social problems and emotional conflicts that might distract learner's attention.

The phonic approach is most frequently used and comprises the systematic learning of sound-letter associations in keywords while the child is learning to read some words at sight and to use phonics, structural analysis and context clues to recognise words that are unfamiliar to the child. The child also learns to understand (comprehend) sentences. The learner with reading problems struggles with word recognition and correct pronunciation of words in a sentence and has no idea of what the sentence said. This disregard for meaning is due to neglecting to develop comprehension skills in beginning reading.

If learning to read were to be made more natural, fewer reading difficulties would appear in the later stage of reading of a learner. The child needs a carefully graded sequence of material that provides for continual growth in reading skills and attitudes.

2.18.4 An early reader

According to DoE (2007:10-11), an early reader displays the following characteristics:

- uses different "cueing" systems such as phonics (sounding out), language knowledge (familiar sentence structures), and general knowledge in order to make meaning
- recognises most familiar words on sight (approximately 200 words)
- reads fluently – at least 60 words per minute
- uses punctuation to enhance comprehension
- begins to understand implied meaning
- reads texts with longer and more complex sentence structures
- demonstrates a developing knowledge of story elements, such as the plot, the characters, and the resolution of a problem
- reads silently for extended periods
- uses reference materials, with guidance
- reads books with chapters that have smaller print

2.18.5 An independent reader

Learners in the Intermediate Phase should be fluent and independent readers (Rault-Smith, 2009:35). An independent reader displays the following characteristics:

- uses “cueing” systems (phonics, language and general knowledge)
- unconsciously having integrated cueing systems into general approach to new texts
- reads fluently and at least 60 or more words per minute
- understands books with unfamiliar settings
- reads and understands implied meanings
- reads longer and more advanced books, books with chapters, fiction, and non-fiction
- uses reference books independently

The independent learner can now master more advanced word recognition skills that enable him to decode unfamiliar words instead of learning them merely as sight words. The learner should now be developing more sophisticated comprehension skills, is able to read longer thought units, has a wider background that enables him to make better comparisons between solutions read, and is able to relate more directly to the material read. The learner should be capable of more independent reading and should be able to make better use of library books. Intermediate Phase learners are supposed to access information, become critical readers, analyse information from texts, generalise information, construct new knowledge, and understand abstract concepts (DoE, 2007:10). In terms of their reading level, they are expected to read 158 words per minute. From research which was conducted by Nchindila (2012:312) most learners in the Intermediate Phase have been found to read far below the expected criteria, and they seem to lack the necessary reading skills.

2.19 Identification of reading difficulties

To identify reading problems in children is important so as to understand what a reading error really is. Children make different kinds of errors when they are reading that can be attributed to varied factors. Gillet, Temple & Crawford (2006:35) stated that the challenge that learners experience in learning to read is based on decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. Also, insufficient phonological awareness usually results in reading difficulties (Gillet & Temple, 2005). The critical observation of a learner while learning to speak and read is the most effective tool for identifying reading difficulties (Sousa, 2005:13).

2.19.1 Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a type of learning disability in which the person exhibits severe difficulty in learning to read (Lerner *et al*, 2010:390). The core problem in learning to read when one suffers from dyslexia is in the brain's ability to form stable phonological representations to pair with the visual printed word (Goldsworthy, 2002:73). Learners who suffer from it typically read at a level that is significantly lower or expected reading comprehension is negatively affected, and they experience problems in word recognition with underlying phonological processing difficulties. Dyslectic children tend to have difficulty with short-term memory problems involving verbal material such as difficulty in naming days of the week, difficulty repeating non-words, and they have word retrieval problems (Goldsworthy, 2002:74).

Learners with dyslexia may experience difficulty comprehending complex syntax, particularly those with relative clauses, passive voice, or negation. In contrast, normally developing children move to a full comprehension of complex syntax. Learners with dyslexia continue to rely on comprehension strategies for passive sentences and those with relative and adverbial clauses and rely on word order or on when events usually happen rather than on how the word order is presented by the speaker. Dyslexia is a learning disability that is difficult to identify in learners (Goldsworthy, 2002:75). Individuals with dyslexia are often intelligent in other ways and even excel in areas such as mathematics and art (Lerner *et al*, 2010:391).

2.19.2 Hyperlexia

Hyperlexia is a reading problem disability found primarily in children with adequate decoding skills but poor reading comprehension (Goldsworthy, 2002:76). Children with hyperlexia read words spontaneously but have impaired comprehension. The American Hyperlexia Association (AHA) (2007) described hyperlexia as a syndrome observed in children who have the following characteristics:

- They typically have a precocious ability to read words, far above what would be expected at their chronological age, or an intense fascination with letters or numbers.
- They have significant difficulty in understanding verbal language and abnormal social skills, difficulty in socialising and interacting appropriately with people.
- They read expressive language in a peculiar way; they echo or memorise the sentence structure without understanding the meaning.

Parents of children with hyperlexia report that these children have normal development until 18 to 24 months. They have a strong auditory and visual memory (Goldsworthy, 2002:76).

2.20 Early indications of reading difficulties

Various researchers (Mercer and Mercer, 2001:239; Spear-Swerling, 2007:301; Flanigen, 2006:37) identified spoken language difficulties that can be observed in learners which may be early indicators of reading problems:

- Delay in speaking: A delay in speaking may be an indication of reading difficulties because learning to read is closely linked to phonological skills in spoken language.
- Delay in consonant acquisition: A problem in phonology appears as articulation disorders which may be a delay in consonant acquisition, e.g. “dreen” for “green”.
- Recalling incorrect phonemes: Learners with reading problems will not be able to express themselves through language, and they will have a problem recalling a word on command.
- Blending sounds: Learners with reading difficulties will have a problem in blending orally presented sounds into spoken words, e.g. p/u/n/i/sh.
- Word construction difficulties: These learners use incorrect words, tense, suffix, prefix or affix in a sentence, e.g. “When did Nelson Mandela born?” or “I was inqualified in sports”.
- Insensitivity to rhyme: If a learner shows no sensitivity to rhyming, that may be an indication of reading difficulties because of the inability to detect consonant sounds that change the meaning of rhyming words, since by using rhyming sounds, the learner recognises the separate segments in words and that different words may share the same sound and the learner may become familiar with rhymes by hearing and repeating rhyming words.
- Genetics: Studies show that if there is a reading problem in the family, it may be an indication that the reading problem could be genetic.

Learners identified as having reading problems struggle to understand the manipulation of sounds. Phonemic awareness is needed to rhyme, segment and blend the sounds in spoken words. Struggling learners have difficulty recognising rhyming words and in segmenting sounds. Gillet & Temple (2006:296) noted that learners have to master a complex sound-to-symbol coding system to be able to decode unknown words. Due the fact that complexity of the sound-to-symbol relationship, it may cause difficulties for a learner with reading difficulties. Learners with reading problems may lack the understanding of multiple-sound consonants.

Learners with reading problems have poor phonological awareness or an oral language difficulty characterised by a difficulty with listening comprehension. Reading difficulties in this context refer to a specific difficulty in understanding the sound structure of language.

A great deal of researchers Bender (2004:90) has demonstrated that learners with reading difficulties have problems detecting and manipulating phonemes. If a learner with a reading difficulty had to detect differences in speech sounds and manipulate these differences in sounds, that learner may experience a problem in detecting sounds that are different. According to Sousa (2005:1460) the development of phonemic awareness is a continuum that begins with simple rhyming and ends with manipulation of individual phonemes.

2.20.1 Problems with emergent literacy

Emergent literacy refers to the understanding and skills that underlie reading. These skills include the knowledge that prints stand for meanings, the recognition of alphabet letters, and the ability to recognise letter sounds. Although most learners have acquired emergent literacy skills by the time they enter first grade, some learners with reading problems continue to lack such skills long after formal instruction has begun (Lerner *et al*, 2010:103).

2.20.2 Problems with decoding

Learners who acquire reading skills in an alphabetic orthography must learn to decode, which means establish the link between the letters of printed words and the phonemes of spoken words (Catts & Kamhi, 2005:42). The learner should master the following fundamental principles in early reading:

- the development of phonological awareness and manipulation;
- understand alphabetic principles, namely, that phoneme sounds are represented by letters and how to form the sound; and
- be able to quickly produce the sounds represented by letters

The learner should master these fundamental principles, as failure will result in reading difficulty.

2.20.3 Problem with word recognition accuracy

Many learners with reading problems cannot recognise words accurately. They lack strategies for identifying unfamiliar words. For example, trying to read a passage about *farm* as *from* or *from* as *for* without accurate word identification, a learner cannot comprehend a passage (Lerner *et al*, 2010:103).

2.20.4 Perceptual skill difficulties

Sousa (2005:126) revealed that listening is one of the most important skills for reading. Some learners with reading difficulties experience deficits in auditory and visual perception. For a learner to be able to read accordingly, the visual and auditory processing systems have to work together. It is essential for a learner to correlate the grapheme with the phoneme; hence, the visual and auditory systems must synchronise.

The beginner reader has to be in control over the finger-pointing stage of reading and when the learner needs their eyes to do the reading from thereon. The reader has to begin to combine words into meaningful phrases as their eyes move across the page; otherwise, it may interfere with reading fluency.

If the learner has difficulty synchronising the auditory processing system with the visual processing system, the learner will be in a situation where learner's eyes are already scanning the letter "g" while the phoneme /d/ is still being processed in the auditory system. Therefore, the learner's brain incorrectly associates the letter "g" with the phoneme sound /d/. Later when the learner has to recall the letter "g" and eventually produce the word, they will read a word as "god" instead of "dog".

2.20.5 Auditory discrimination

The ability to hear and discriminate between sounds is of vital importance in learning to read. If a learner has difficulty in hearing differences in sound frequency, that learner needs support because if the learner is not supported, he or she will have difficulty in discriminating between tone and pitch in speech. To say reading involves sounding out words in the auditory processing system, it means that the learner will experience reading problems. The inability to detect tones because of interfering background noises indicates problems with reading related to the auditory functions, which plays a significant role in reading difficulties (Wright *et al*, 2000:533).

The inability to detect and discriminate sounds presented in rapid succession as well as to indicate the order of two sounds are commonly found in learners with reading problems. This problem is directly linked to distinguishing phonemes as part of phonological processing

(Wright *et al*, 2000:532). A learner with this inability will find it difficult to read the word, for example, mouth/month or bead/beat.

2.21 Manifestation of reading difficulties

Gillet & Temple (2000:286) pointed out that poor word recognition and slow word-by-word reading cause difficulty in comprehension. Learners may read in monotone and pause at inappropriate places. The cause may be that some learners do not have mentor readers to observe or to recite memorised books, which is a pre-reading experience. Another cause may be that poor readers are not given enough opportunities to practise reading. According to Spear-Swerling (2007:302), the more skilled the reader becomes, the better the word recognition, comprehension and the ability to read with a change of tone and emphasis.

2.21.1 Comprehension difficulties

Gillet, Temple & Crawford (2006:242) described comprehension as the understanding of new information in relation to old information. Poor reading comprehension may be prevalent in learners who do not derive meaning from what they read. Answering the questions about the text is an intrinsic part of the reading process, and unsuccessful readers may not have the ability to deal with explicit as well as implicit information. The ability to pronounce a word does not necessarily indicate an ability to understand the meaning of a word. Therefore, understanding comprehension of words may involve more than recognition skills. According to Cain & Oakhill (2007:41), for learners to become successful and independent readers, they need to develop two broad skills:

- be able to recognise and decode individual words on the page
- to be able to comprehend the text

By failing to develop these two skills, they may become struggling readers who need support. According to Gillet & Temple (2000:242), the psychologist Piaget described comprehension as the understanding of new information in relation to information, in other words, the use of concrete to relate abstract.

Poor understanding of a text may be rooted in causes other than comprehension. For example, a learner who lacks adequate word recognition may not be able to comprehend material. Another problem in reading comprehension may be caused by underlying problems in understanding language and word meanings.

Cain & Oakhill (2007:46) support the notion that learners with poor discourse and text comprehension are struggling in their ability to correct a sentence with incorrect word order or

grammatical errors. They also reveal that learners with poor comprehension have poor declarative knowledge about the information provided by particular story features.

2.21.2 Problems at the level of single words

According to Oakhill & Yull (1991:23), there are three ways in which problems could influence comprehension: children may not know the meaning of words that they can decode, they may decode words or access their meanings so slowly that comprehension is hampered, or they may fail to make appropriate use of context in word recognition. Learners with comprehension difficulties, although they are skilled at pronouncing words, do not understand the meanings of the words that they read. Although a learner's vocabulary can affect text comprehension, it cannot be a complete explanation of comprehension problems because children can fail to understand texts that comprise only very familiar words (Perfetti, 1985:97).

2.21.3 Memory in reading comprehension

The working memory capacity (discussed in Chapter 2) is correlated with learners' reading and listening comprehension and impaired learners with comprehension difficulty. Many skills involved in successful comprehension and structuring of inference, use of context, and monitoring of comprehension of stories are all dependent on the storage of the information in memory. The relatively automatic decoding and semantic access processes of skilled readers are more efficient in their use of available memory space and leave more capacity available, very slow decoding may mean that the early part of a sentence is no longer available in memory before the final part has been decoded and can be integrated with what is gone before.

Learners with reading problems sometimes use a strategy to cope with a problem; they concentrate on decoding the words as they read through a sentence for the first time and then reread the whole more rapidly, to get the meaning of the sentence (Oakhill & Yull, 1991:24). Long-term memory serves as a source of relevant background knowledge which will be important in understanding text and making inferences, and problems will arise if learners do not or cannot use information from long-term memory to help them make sense of the text. Cain, Oakhill & Bryant (2004:35) posited that there is a direct relationship between reading comprehension and word reading ability as well as vocabulary knowledge. Learning of poems is one of the most crucial exercises to develop the learners' memory skills. In most South African schools, the learning of poems is neglected.

2.21.4 Sentence recall in reading difficulty

Sentence recall involves the integration of semantic information with structural aspects of a sentence such as the word order which involves both short-term and long-term memory. The link between performance on sentence recall tasks and learners' abilities in learning to read, and the contribution of long-term memory to sentence recall plays a major role in differentiating learners with comprehension problems from those without such a problem. The researcher concurs with the view of Conti-Ramsden *et al* (2001:743) that the contribution of sentence recall to learning and the storage component of sentence recall is associated with short-term memory and may be linked to difficulties in literacy and comprehension. The learner who struggles to read may also struggle with memorising poems.

Learners who struggle with reading may rely on sentence context to read words. That being the case, they have to guess unknown words based on the first letter of the word and then the meaning of the surrounding sentence.

2.22 The relationship between reading ability and academic performance

In education systems, much emphasis is placed on skills of reading. Children who experience difficulty with reading are likely to find it harder to reach their academic potential at school. Research has shown that learners with low reading ability are general low academic achievers (Stanovich, 2000; Gardner, 2006). Children who read effectively have access to numerous sources of written material which, in turn, enables them to increase their general knowledge, their vocabulary and language skills.

2.22.1 Reading comprehension and academic performance

As described earlier, comprehension has to do with the meaning that is gained from reading. It is through this process that the reader learns. Machet & Pretorius (2003) described the different skills and knowledge that a reader needs in order to develop reading comprehension. These include:

- the ability to link the information in a text
- the ability to use background knowledge about the world and people in order to understand and contextualise the text
- the ability to distinguish between main ideas and those which are of secondary importance
- the ability to draw conclusions about what has been read

- the ability to make predictions about what is being read

A good reader will be able to master this process with ease, which is not the case for learners with a reading difficulty. For them, comprehension will be problematic, and this will have a negative impact on their ability to learn from what they are reading.

Pretorius (2000:35) asserted that learners need to be good readers in order to be able to read so as to learn. The author stated that reading is important for learning because it gives readers independent access to information in an information-driven society and that it is also a means of constructing meaning and acquiring new knowledge.

2.22.2 Language skills, reading, and academic performance

Washington (2001:3) noted that strong oral vocabulary skills, both expressive and receptive, are critical for both reading and general academic success. Vocabulary supports reading development, and both vocabulary breadth and vocabulary depth are significant. Vocabulary breadth has to do with the number of words which a child knows and the vocabulary depth knowledge. Children who experience difficulty with the structural aspect of vocabulary or from language often have delayed language milestones. These children have difficulty understanding the grammar of language, and when they reach school level, they will generally struggle with the mechanics of reading. Learners with reading problems find it difficult to retain in their short-term memory what they have read, which has negative implications on their ability to learn and achieve academically.

2.23 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with literature on reading problems. The two theories of bottom-up theory and top-down theory were defined and described because they are more likely to provide an appropriate framework for reading problems.

The bottom-up approach teaches learners the letter-sound relations and then to sound and say the word. Comprehension should then develop automatically. On the other hand, the top-down approach is in contrast to the bottom-up approach, where learners had to identify words. This approach enables learners to become aware of phonemes and letter-sound relations while the learner is reading, but the interactive approach is more popular because it accommodates both word identification and comprehension while a learner is reading. According to Landsberg *et al* (2008:140), this approach includes word identification as well as decoding.

As was brought out, the theoretical framework for reading presents a number of different perspectives. For instance, Brown (2000:120) argued that reading problems reveal the development of inter-language. Reading acquisition process is more critical than learning

process and that reading acquisition should be encouraged through activities that involve reading rather than grammar exercises. The chapter that follows discusses the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter was a review of literature pertinent to this study. This chapter describes the methodological procedures to acquire the data required to describe the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading in selected schools in Mondlo Ward in Vryheid District. The main research question for this study is “What are the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading?” The chapter deals with the following areas: research method, qualitative research, phenomenological approach, research design, data collection, and data analysis and presentation.

3.2 Research method

Qualitative research was used for this study because this research method investigates phenomena in their natural setting so that one can learn what participants are thinking, and more importantly, why they think and act the way they do (Minichiello & Kottler, 2010:12). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research begins with assumptions, worldviews that provide the basis of the design. The aim of this investigation is to describe and interpret challenges faced by learners in reading in the Intermediate Phase. The qualitative research method requires the researcher to be the research instrument (Maritz & Visagie, 2010:9). McMillan and Schumacher (2001:396) explained the role of the qualitative researcher as being “immersed in the situation and the phenomenon studied”. The qualitative methodology seems to be an appropriate option because of its features as indicated by Eisner (1991:32-40). These features are as follows:

- Qualitative research tends to be field-focused.
- Qualitative research is interpretive in nature. Inquires endeavour to account for what they have given an account of.
- Qualitative inquiries display the use of expressive language and the presence of voice in the text.
- Qualitative research focuses on participants.

Thus qualitative investigations lend themselves to a variety of methods to interpret, analyse and understand. Their research design and process is steeped in natural interactions and social context, making it imperative for the researcher to acknowledge his or her participation in the research context and to interrogate reflexively his or her effects on the data gathered.

Le Compte & Preissle (1993:92-93) argued that the qualitative inquirer is perceived as subjective and that this stand ignores the fact that qualitative research is distinguished by its admission of the subjective perception and biases of both participants and researcher into the research frame. The subjectivities of participants are usually a major part of what inquirers seek to capture in their records.

Qualitative research is based on the interpretation of data collected from individuals. The meaning ascribed to the setting is therefore personal experiences as constructed by those researching and being researched in a particular site. The acknowledgement of the location of reason and hence of science in “tradition” immediately introduces an unacceptable subjectivity, thus destroying the objectivity of science. This investigation acknowledges the ‘positive intentions’ of all the participants involved in the research process. Verification processes guiding the drawing of conclusions endeavours to ensure that the subjectivities purported in the investigation are useful.

Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2006:83) opined that constructivism does not see knowledge as given but as actively and continually constructed by individuals. Knowledge gained is not passive but is actively constructed. Neuman (2011:72) emphasised that the interpretive approach in a qualitative research analyses social actions in their natural setting, through direct and detailed observation, in order to understand and interpret meaning in their social world.

Another form of qualitative study is observation. Nunan (2008) stated that classroom observation may involve stimulated recall in which the researcher transcribes or records sections of a lesson and thereafter gets a teacher or a learner to comment on what was happening at the time the lesson was taking place. For the purpose of this study, the researcher audio recorded a learner while reading to her and played back the audio recorded to the learner to comment on his or her reading problems.

3.2.1 *Characteristics of qualitative research*

Creswell (2007:37-39) identified the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- Researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the problem under study.
- Researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour and interviewing participants.
- The researchers gather multiple forms of data rather than rely on a single data source.

- In the entire qualitative research process, researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research.
- Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex and holistic view of social phenomena.
- Qualitative research is a form of inquiry in which researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand. The researchers' interpretation cannot be separated from their own background, history and context.

These qualities reinforce the view that qualitative research is a naturalistic inquiry that seeks to discover the meanings that people have, which will be evident in this study.

3.3 Research design

Research design may be viewed as a plan, structure, and strategy for conducting research (Punch, 2004:149; Kumar, 2005:84). Creswell (2003) highlighted that a qualitative research approach has multiple meanings of individual experiences, socially and historically constructed for the purpose of developing a theory or pattern. Research design is a plan of action focused on such issues as subject selection, data collection, and data analysis and interpretation in a manner which is unique to the type of research being conducted.

Research design for this study is specific to qualitative research and therefore determines how subjects are to be selected, how data will be collected and analysed, and also how results will be interpreted. Another feature of qualitative research is that data is presented in a narrative description. Lewis (2008:47) is of the idea that a good qualitative research design is one which has a clearly defined purpose in which there is coherence between the research question and the methods or approaches proposed and which generates data that is valid and reliable. Bogdan & Taylor (1975) revealed that qualitative research should be understood against the background of two theoretical viewpoints, namely, positivism and phenomenology.

3.3.1 Phenomenology

The researcher used phenomenology as a research design for this study because phenomenology is a way to access the world as people experience it; pre-reflectively it is also an approach that focuses on people's lived experiences regarding a phenomenon under study. Johnson & Christensen (2008:337) brought out that the aim of phenomenological research is to understand the meaning that people attach to their experiences. They further explained that phenomenologist generally assume that there is some commonality in human experience and they seek to understand this commonality. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe and interpret the experiences of participants regarding a particular event in order to

understand the participants' meanings ascribed to that event. The basis of phenomenology is that there are multiple ways of interpreting the same experience and that the meaning of the experience for each participant is what constitutes reality.

Creswell (2007:58) identified two types of phenomenology. These are hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology:

- Hermeneutical phenomenology described research as orientated towards lived experiences and interpreting them.
- Transcendental phenomenology is focused less on interpretations of the research and more on the descriptions of the experiences of participants.

This study will adopt both these types of phenomenology, as this will enable the researcher to collect information pertaining to the lived experiences of the participants. In phenomenological research, the concept *epoche*, which is the suspension of belief, has an important significance because the *epoche* describes the ways that the researcher needs to open the reader's mind to the world as it is experienced and free from presuppositions.

Epoche involves bracketing or suspending one's experiences and prejudices regarding the phenomenon under study. According to Vagle (2014:67), the researcher brackets "past knowledge about the phenomenon encountered, in order to be fully present to it as it is in the concrete situation in which one is encountering it". The essence of bracketing is that pre-understandings are restrained so that people do not attempt to make a definite of what is indefinite as the researcher actively waits for the phenomenon – and its meaning(s) – to show itself. This enables researchers to set aside their experiences in order to take a fresh perspective of the phenomenon under examination (Creswell, 2007:485).

Morgan & Embree (2004:2) postulated that phenomenology may be initially characterised in a broad sense as seeking an unprejudiced, descriptive account of consciousness, as it appears. This enables the researcher to set aside their experiences in order to observe a phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007:485). This is in line with transcendental phenomenology where transcendental phenomena are the experiential entities that may become the objects of people's reflection regarding the meaning of objects they encounter in the world (Van Manen 2013:90). In this study, the researcher will try her best to suspend her experiences gained during her teaching experience.

The method of investigation from the phenomenological perspective is the qualitative method, which seeks an understanding of how people interpret their environment, through procedures such as participant observation, interviews, and personal documents. Information obtained through this method enables the researcher to see the world as it is perceived by his subjects.

According to Patton (2002:96), in phenomenological research, the following concepts deserve special attention: constructivism and constructionism. Constructivism focuses on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind, whereas constructionism focuses on the collective generation and transmission of meaning.

Constructivism suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is valid and worthy of respect as any other, thereby tending to scotch any hint of a critical spirit. Creswell (2007:21) used the concept social constructivism. According to Creswell (2007:21), individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences directed towards certain objects or things; these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. A common theme that emerges in these definitions is that reality is socially constructed. Most qualitative researchers (Saria & Kutsuse, 1994, cited in Minichillo & Kottler, 2010:23) and constructivists draw their views by looking at the ways people give meaning to their experiences and their interaction with others.

This study will adopt the two concepts of constructivism and constructionism in the research design methodology. The data gathering will be unstructured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

The researcher will take into account the above characteristics when conducting the study, which will take place in a natural setting at the identified schools. The researcher will have face-to-face interaction with the participants in order to understand the problem under study. The researcher will have face-to-face interaction in the classroom context to observe and collect data on learners with reading problems.

3.4 Sampling

A qualitative study focuses on phenomena that occur in a natural setting and involves studying those phenomena in all their complexity through an in-depth study (De Vos, 1998) Purposive sampling will be used for this qualitative study. Le Compte (2003:43) indicated that purposive sampling is a sampling procedure whereby the population may or may not be accurately represented. According to Nunan (2008:142), purposive sample is a type of sampling where subjects are handpicked by the researcher from a population. Creswell (2008:215) stated that in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select participants to understand the phenomenon. Every researcher must also acknowledge that the intended sample might differ from the obtained sample because some people might choose not to participate. Regarding the selection of participants, a purposive sample is based on the characteristics that the participants hold and which are deemed by the researcher to be crucial to understanding the phenomenon being investigated (Singleton & Straits, 2010:173). Selecting appropriate proportions of subgroup populations using the variables was considered to be important in the qualitative component.

Purposive sampling will be used to select three primary schools among 25 primary schools in Mondlo ward under the Vryheid District. Intermediate Phase learners (grade 4 to 6) from these schools will be purposefully selected to participate in the research. The three schools (schools with Intermediate Phase) with more reading problems in the district were selected according to the availability of information-rich participants who are likely to be knowledgeable about the phenomena that the researcher was investigating (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:319). Three Intermediate Phase classes will be selected per school; in total, nine classrooms will be observed. The subgroup populations will be Intermediate Phase English language educators, principals, principals of selected schools and an English subject advisor. A purposive sample will be used to select schools for classroom observation and interviews.

3.4.1 Sampling methods

In this study, purposeful sampling strategies will be used. Purposeful sampling refers to the selection of information-rich cases for an in-depth study when the researcher wants to understand phenomena (Leedy, 1993:201). The criterion for site selection will be the school's geographical context, and isiZulu is their first language and English is the medium of instruction. The assumption is that learners with a good foundation in first language (L1) reading would be able to transfer their reading skills to second language (L2). It was decided by the researcher to observe English reading lessons presented by the educator in the Intermediate Phase learners in the selected schools.

3.4.2 Criteria for sample selection

The sample selection took into consideration knowledge of the subject on the issues to be investigated. Bogdan & Taylor (1975:102) pointed out that subjects should be able to express their feelings freely on the subject so that the implication of the matter on their lives can become clear to the researcher.

The sample to be used in this investigation will be Intermediate Phase learners from schools in Mondlo ward Vryheid District. The Intermediate Phase learners form the sample because it is expected that they have mastered the basic mechanics of reading (word recognition and comprehension) and will be in a position to read across the curriculum. In the Intermediate Phase, the medium of instruction is English, which is the second language, and learners have to undertake more formal reading. The highest failure rate is experienced in this phase (National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) (2007). The investigation will indicate the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading.

The criterion for identifying learner participant will be that the researcher wished to include learners having one or more of the following reading problems:

- lack of vocabulary
- lack of phonological awareness skills
- lack of decoding skills
- lack of comprehension skills

Information about the learners' general performance was obtained from the educators' assessment records. It was then confirmed with the learners who were selected for the study.

For each grade, children will be sampled from different grades belonging to different schools so that the probability of teaching method effects would be greatly reduced. This sample will consist of four learners per grade and per selected school in the Intermediate Phase. The sample will include learners with reading problems. The researcher will select these learners using educators' reading assessment record.

3.4.3 The sample size in selected schools

The question of sample size is still debatable in qualitative research. It appears that there is no formula for sample size, as the most important issue is the in-depth study of the phenomenon under investigation. Kumar (2005:165) opined that in qualitative research, a sample size has little significance because the main aim of most qualitative research is either to explore or describe the diversity in a situation, phenomenon or issue. In qualitative research, the sample size is typically small. The sample size for this study will consist of 36 Intermediate Phase learners, nine English educators, three principals, and one Intermediate Phase English subject advisor.

3.5 Data collection

The researcher opted to use observations and unstructured interviews. The observations have the innate advantage of drawing the observer into the phenomenological study.

The primary strategy of in-depth unstructured interviews is to capture the deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:101). The in-depth interview is a repeated face-to-face encounter between the researcher and informants, directed towards understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words. The aim is to obtain an account of the research participants' lived experiences regarding a phenomenon under investigation to help the researcher to develop an insight on how their subjects interpret the world.

3.5.1 Unstructured in-depth interviews

In-depth unstructured interviews play a crucial role in qualitative research, as they enable the perception and experiences of research participants. In-depth qualitative interviews provide an opportunity for a detailed investigation of each person's perspective for an in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomenology is located (Marshall & Rossman, 2006:101).

Qualitative interviewing begins with an assumption that the perspective of the other is meaningful, knowledgeable and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002:341). Mason (2002:62) argued that most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual; therefore, the interview ensures that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced.

Marshall & Rossman (2006:101) described the unstructured interview or informal conversational interview as an open situation. Its main purpose is to capture deep meaning of experience in the participant's own words. He further stated that an unstructured interview is characterised by having greater flexibility and freedom to respond according to one's feelings. In an unstructured interview, therefore, no questions are prepared in advance. Obviously, data collected by an unstructured interview will differ from one respondent to another.

An advantage of the informal conversational interview is that it allows respondents to reveal in a relatively unrestricted manner their perceptions of their world or themselves (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975:6). On the other hand, the unstructured interview is associated with a phenomenological approach (Patton, 1980:198). It was therefore adopted as an instrument for data collection in this study because of its ability to allow subjects to state their perceptions in an unrestricted manner.

In this study, in-depth unstructured interviews will be conducted in three selected schools. An audio recorder will be used to record selected learners while reading, and the recorder will be played back to each learner so that the learner will listen to himself or herself, and the researcher will then ask the learner about his or her reading problem(s) as identified in the learner's reading. The interviews will also be recorded, and all collected data will be transcribed.

3.5.1.1 Advantages of interviews

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011:277), the following are the advantages of the interview as a research instrument:

- Interviews are flexible, and an idea can be explored. This makes it possible to check how people are interpreting the questionnaire.
- People are generally better at expressing their views verbally than in writing.
- All items can be explained or rephrased by the interview so as to obtain a clearer response from the respondent. This avoids misunderstanding of the questionnaire.
- Interviewees can explain their answers.
- The interviewer can reassure and encourage the interviewee.
- It makes rechecking of responses possible.
- Questions are treated independently.

3.5.1.2 Disadvantages of interviews

According to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2011:277), interviews also have disadvantages, namely:

- Interviewers have to be carefully trained. The responses of the interviewee can be compromised if the interviewer is not constant.
- No anonymity due to the presence of interviewer.
- It is difficult to analyse responses to open-ended questions.
- There is less uniformity in questions and responses. The manner and tone with which the question is asked may influence the respondent's answer.

- The respondents may be less frank when answering questions of a personal nature.
- Interviews can be subjective and bias on the part of “leading on” or influence the interviewee’s responses. If interviewee and the interviewer know each other, there may be a tendency for the interviewee to give information that the interviewer would like to hear.

In the preparation and conducting of the interviews, the researcher took into account the advantages and disadvantages of interviews.

3.5.2 Data collection method

Although qualitative researchers specify the research instruments used in the collection of their research data when they begin synthesising and analysing their data, it is critical for the researcher to know exactly how data will be collected before entering the study situation. This does not mean that the researcher will not continuously check whether the data meant to be gathered is satisfactorily gathered by the methods used and that the research question(s) are adequately answered.

The methods of data collection used in qualitative research are observations, interviews and documentary data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:248). This study used mostly observation as a tool which made it possible for the researcher to understand challenges that learners face in reading.

3.5.3 Observations

3.5.3.1 Observing by being there

Field observation is fundamental to qualitative research (Mouton, 2003:133). This technique is useful in the exploratory stages, getting a feel for situations. This is the case because it would be difficult to compare observations made without a common agenda and there would be a high risk of missing out significant things. An observation schedule is essential when visiting the school for the first time. The researcher will be responsible for the school and classroom observation.

3.5.3.2 Participant observations

Participant observation is a way of collecting primary data. It is a purposeful systematic and selective way of watching and listening to the phenomenon as it takes place. In the observation, both the researcher and participants are strategically positioned throughout the research process to gather data grounded in context. Their role in this process cannot be taken

for granted. Before embarking on the discussion of their role in the qualitative research, it is appropriate to explicate briefly observation as an instrument of qualitative research that endeavours to establish what challenges learners encounter in reading (Drew, *et al*; 2008:195). According to Sousa (2005:136), educators may use checklists as an indication of whether the learner displays difficulties in reading.

Kumar (2005:118) highlighted that there are two types of participant observations, that is, participation observation and non-participation observation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected non-participant observation because the researcher will be a passive observer observing how educators engage learners in teaching reading. The researcher will watch and listen to the activities in order to draw a conclusion from the observation.

3.5.3.3 The observation schedule

The observation schedule outlines the inquiry for the school and classroom observation in terms of physical setting and the resources for reading. The observation will include the interactional setting, describing the lessons and teaching resources (Nunan, 2008). The researcher will observe reading lessons.

3.5.3.4 Personal document study

Personal documents such as timetable will be analysed to verify whether there is any period assigned for reading. The researcher used the educators' mark sheet to check the reading performance of learners. The National Protocol for Assessment Grade R-12 (Department of Education (DoE), 2010:5) indicated that promotion requirements from grade to grade should be within the appropriate age cohort. The year-end schedule will be analysed to check the manner in which learners with reading problems progressed from grade to grade.

3.5.3.5 Official documents

Official documents such as the time book will be checked to determine educator's punctuality and regular reporting for duty, which will have an effect on learners' reading performance and the class attendance registers to obtain the regular attendance of learners. Educators' regular reporting for duty and learners' irregular attendance will have an effect on reading performance.

3.5.4 Focus group discussion

According to Knight (2002:63), a flexible sequence allows for the researcher and participants to address issues that are not perhaps adequately given attention or answered in a questionnaire. The focus group discussions will be conducted after the unstructured in-depth interviews.

Knight (2002:117) brought out that a focus group discussion is very useful for identifying the range of challenges that people have. This is a useful technique in this study in order to understand the challenges learners face in reading in different grades in the Intermediate Phase. According to Lewis (2008:58), focus group discussions provide the social context within which a phenomenon is experienced, and they can display the way in which the context can shape peoples' views, showing how data is generated through conversation.

Focus group interviewing intends to interview a selected sample of the research population or the whole research group if it is a small group. The focus group discussion uses participants who are chosen with a certain intention in mind to clear up a given topic. The participants can give the researcher deep insight into a topic. The aim of a focus group is to explore the perceptions, experiences and understandings of a group of people who have more or less the same problem (Kumar, 2005:130). In this study, focus group discussions will be conducted in participants' schools.

3.5.5 The researcher as the primary source of data collection

In qualitative research, researchers are viewed as the primary data collectors in that the researcher is part of the data development and collection source. The researcher is a participant and he or she is part of the world that consists of the individuals, and he or she is expected to interact with the subjects in the course of their daily activity (Knight, 2002:54). Data for this study will be collected using an audio recorder, taking field notes and writing up summaries of the exchange after the interview. The responses of the participants will be transcribed manually in preparation for data analysis. Each data recording method has its merits and demerits. Some of these are as follows:

- Taking field notes after the interview may disrupt the flow of the interview and remove attention from the interviewee.
- Writing up notes after the interview has a disadvantage in that while every word matters in qualitative interviewing, not all the words can be remembered when a summary is written after the interview. Most of the data invariably gets lost.
- The audio recording allows the interviewer to pay more attention to the interviewee. The interaction between the interviewer and respondents will not be easily disrupted by the audio recording.

After careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of each data recording method, the researcher decided that the audio recorder will be the most appropriate for interviews because it collects accurate information.

Each interview will last for 20 minutes. One or two interviews will be conducted per day depending on the schools' proximity to one another. For this study, unstructured in-depth informal interviews with participants will be used. The interview will be based on factors which may have an influence on a learner's reading success, which are as follows:

- Physical factors: Physical factors such as the learner's general health, vision, hearing, motor skills and speech should be considered and investigated before initiating support. Any problem in one or more of these areas should be referred to a medical practitioner.
- Emotional state: The background information regarding the emotional state of the learner is gained from the educator's observations in the classroom and playground. This indicates the way in which the learner should be approached. Praise and success experiences can restore self-confidence. Once reading difficulties are overcome, emotional problems also disappear.
- Home background: From the information gained regarding the home circumstances, it is possible to determine whether the learner is emotionally stable or fluctuating. The quality of exposure, motivation, and intellectual stimulation at home also gives an indication of the learner's general knowledge. This information determines the methods that can be used and the content of the text to be selected for the learner.
- Reading material: The appropriate reading material gives an indication of whether a reading problem does exist or not, as well as the cognitive level at which a learner needs support.

The interview audio recordings will be listened to in a quiet place with a learner so that the learner can be interviewed on his or her reading problems based on his or her reading. The audio recordings will be saved on a password-protected computer. After the transcription has been completed, a copy of the transcript was given to the interviewees to confirm accuracy.

3.5.5.1 Interviews with principals

The researcher interviewed the principal per selected school to establish what support teachers are given to teach reading. A copy of interview questions was given to the participants prior to the interview session so that they know beforehand what would be expected in order to respond freely and confidently from what they know.

3.5.5.2 Interviews with learners

The learners were interviewed individually. Before the interview took place, the researcher informed the learner about the aim of the interview, that it was to find out about their reading experiences, and all the learners granted the researcher verbal permission to conduct the interviews. The interviews were conducted during learners' break time so that learners' teaching time would not be interrupted. The interviews were conducted in a private place where only the researcher and the learner were present in order to reduce tension. The responses were recorded both in the researcher's notebook and on a tape recorder.

3.5.5.3 Interviews with educators

With regard to educators, English language educators per grade in the Intermediate Phase were interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to obtain an in-depth description of the interviewee's interpretation on learners' reading problems. The interview questions were open-ended. The interviewee was informed that notes would be taken during the interview, and the purpose of the interview was explained.

3.5.5.4 Interview with subject advisor

For the purpose of this study, one Intermediate Phase English language subject advisor will be interviewed using an informal conversation interview. In this interview, the interview questions emerge from the immediate context. The responses were recorded in the researcher's notebook.

3.6 Data analysis

Qualitative research produces a large amount of raw data that does not have meaning on its own. De Vos (2005:333) explained that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:364), qualitative data analysis is a primary inductive process of organising data into categories. Data analysis in this study places the emphasis on inductive analysis, which involves uncovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data (Patton, 2002:453). Punch (2004:201) stated that in analytic induction, concepts are developed inductively from data and raised to a higher level of abstraction, and their interrelationships are then traced out.

Patton (2002:432) revealed that qualitative research analyses data into findings. The challenges of qualitative analysis lie in making sense of the huge amounts of data. It is important to note that data analysis is a continuing cyclical process that is integrated into all phases of qualitative research. De Vos, *et al* (2005:340) indicated that the process of data analysis can be

represented in a spiral image whereby the researcher moves in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach.

3.6.1 Data management

According to Creswell (2007:150), data management is the first step. In this regard, the researcher will revisit a large amount of data gathered. The researcher will organise data into file folders and develop a table of sources. The researcher will record data in a systematic manner through labelling audiotapes, find quiet places for note-taking and planning ahead for coding notes. The researcher will transcribe data obtained through observations, from audio-tape recordings and field notes into text data.

3.6.2 Immersion in the data

In this phase, the researcher will familiarise herself with the collected data. The researcher will try to gain a sense of the whole by thoroughly reading all transcripts and field notes (Creswell, 2007:150). The researcher will try to perceive data from the point of view of the participants.

The researcher will go through one document at a time, asking questions and considering the underlying meaning. This will help the researcher to identify challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading. The researcher will divide the text into segments of information and label them with codes. Codes can address many different topics such as the setting and the context, perspectives held by participants. Immersion in the data is an important step of coding data.

3.6.3 Writing memos

The researcher will jot down notes throughout the research process of data analysis in the margins based on the ideas as they come to her mind. These notes are helpful, as they illuminate the process of data analysis. Johnson & Christensen (2008:532) highlighted that memos are reflective notes that researchers write to themselves about what they are learning from their data. In this study, the researcher will write analytic notes in the margins regarding the observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as part of the process of coding.

3.6.4 Data coding

De Vos, *et al* (2005:243) stated that in the coding process, the researcher divides text data into text or image segments, labels the segments with codes, examine the codes for redundancy and overlap. Saldana (2009:3) brought out that in qualitative research, a code is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative essence. A coding system was devised in which the names of the subjects will be represented by a sequence of alphabets and numbers that will make it impossible for anyone else to identify.

3.6.5 Trustworthiness of the research findings

Trustworthiness deals with the degree to which one can depend on and trust given research findings (Shank, 2006:114). To ensure trustworthiness of the data, the researcher compared data collected from class observations and participants' interviews and conducted the study in an ethical manner to collect data on challenges faced by learners in the Intermediate Phase. According to Lincoln and Guba (2008:300), trustworthiness is concerned with the following issues: credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

3.6.5.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to whether the participants' perceptions of the setting or events match with the researcher's portrayal of the research report (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtler, 2010:196). According to De Vos, *et al* (2005:346), the alternative to internal validity is to demonstrate that the inquiry is conducted in such a manner that the subjects are accurately identified and described. In order to make sure that the findings and interpretations throughout the data collected and analysed are accurate and trustworthy, the researcher will employ the following strategies: the researcher used different data sources to enhance the accuracy of the study and used different methods to obtain corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2008:258), and the researcher will return the findings to the participants and ask them about the correctness of the report in order to determine its accuracy.

For Creswell (2003:196), credibility in qualitative research is the extent to which data analysis takes into account the social and cultural contexts in which it is gathered. It will ascertain that the inquiry be conducted in such a manner that the subject has been accurately identified and described. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will allow the participants to verbalise their views and feelings. The researcher will triangulate the study by gathering data from multiple sources.

3.6.5.2 Dependability

Shank (2006:114) submitted that dependability is the ability to know where the data in a given study comes from, how it was collected and how it was used. According to De Vos, *et al* (205:420), dependability requires a check on whether the process is logical, well-documented and audited. It can also be seen as a way in which the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena. To ensure dependability, the researcher will use an audio recorder to understand learners' problems in reading.

3.6.5.3 Confirmability

In qualitative research, the concept of confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of the research can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim, 2006:2). Confirmability deals with the details of the methodology used (Shank, 2006:114). Shenton (2004:72) emphasised that in enhancing confirmability, steps should be taken to ensure that as far as possible, the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. A number of activities can be used to enhance confirmability.

3.7 Ethical considerations

The researcher will apply for an Ethical Clearance Certificate from the University of South Africa through the supervisor before the commencement of data collection. Generally, ethics are considered to deal with beliefs about what is right or wrong, proper or improper, good or bad (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:142). According to De Vos, *et al* (2002:63), ethical guidelines are a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group and widely accepted.

Ethical issues are invariably an integral part of research, especially when the research is conducted within the reading context where learners and teachers have to sacrifice part of the valuable teaching time for attending to the researcher. The subject's participation in this study depends on their willingness, as they have a choice not to participate.

Working on the assumption that research has value in contributing to knowledge and ultimately to reading improvement, the qualitative research is more likely to be personally intrusive than quantitative research. This is because in qualitative research, the researcher uses face-to-face techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings. McMillan & Schumacher (2014:243) identified four considerations that need to be taken into account when dealing with educational research:

- the right of subjects to privacy

- the right of subjects to remain anonymous
- the right of subjects to confidentiality
- the right of subjects and the community to expect the researcher to be responsible

In this study, the obligation rests on the researcher to protect the learners from physical discomfort and emotional harm, which is often more difficult to predict. The researcher was ethically obliged not to expose the learners to physical or emotional harm which she may be aware of. Informed consent ensures the full knowledge and cooperation of subjects while also resolving or relieving any possible tensions, aggression, resistance or insecurity of the subjects.

The aforementioned rights were respected by the researcher throughout the research process by providing participants with the rationale for the study and an outline of the reasons for each of the tests that would be conducted. Participation was voluntary. Learners were not forced to participate in the study and were informed that they could take part in the reading assessment and could discontinue it if they want to. Different authors have identified broad ethical issues. The researcher opted to use ethical considerations as espoused by De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport (2007:58-66). Written permission to conduct research in schools in Mondlo ward was obtained from the Department of Education of Vryheid District. The researcher made a telephonic appointment with the subject advisor. Prior permission to conduct observations and interviews in the schools was obtained from the principals of all selected schools.

Informed consent is achieved by providing subjects with an explanation of the research as well as their role. According to various authors informed consent means “voluntary participation” (Babbie, 2001; De Vos, 2005:59). The principle of informed consent brings up the subject’s right to freedom and self-determination (Cohen, *et al* (2011:77).

Obtaining informed consent implies that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation; the procedures which will be followed during the investigation; the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which respondents may be exposed; and the credibility of the researcher be rendered to potential subjects or legal representatives. Strydom (2005:59) stressed the voluntary nature of participation in research. He also emphasised that participants must be made aware that they would be at liberty to withdraw from the investigation at any time.

The content of research ethics, autonomy, refers specifically to a prospective subject’s right as well as ability to choose whether to participate in the study or not to continue in the study or to opt out of the research process at any time when the he needs to.

For this study, the researcher obtained permission from the director of education in Vryheid District, the principals, the participating educators, and all learner participants. (In order to maintain anonymity, the letters received from the school principals are not attached.)

Since the study involved learners below the age of 18 years to write a test, the researcher obtained parental consent before proceeding. The majority of the consent letters were signed, granting permission to conduct the study. Durrheim & Wassenaar (1999:66) maintained that obtaining consent from participants is not merely the signing of a consent form.

3.7.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that subjects' disclosures are protected against unwarranted access; it is a way of ensuring subjects' privacy and may also be a way of improving the data they provide. According to Glesne (2006:138) and De Vos, *et al* (2005:61), participants have a right to expect that when they give the researcher permission to observe and interview them, the researcher will, in turn, protect their confidence, respect their privacy and preserve their anonymity. Punch (2004:25) asserted that the researcher has an obligation not to disclose the information to others. Sieber (2009:117) indicated that confidentiality is an agreement as to how the data is to be handled in keeping with the subjects' interests in controlling the access of others to information about themselves. The researcher will ensure that the data will be stored in a passworded file. The findings of the research will be used for the purpose of the study only.

3.7.2 Anonymity

In this study, the researcher will use pseudonyms, and selected schools will be given numbers to ensure the protection of the identity of the research participants. Lewis (2008:67) stated that anonymity means the identity of those taking part is not known outside the research. The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity (Cohen, *et al*; 2011:91). Great care was taken in this study to safeguard the privacy and identity of the research sites and respondents. The authorities of the research settings and the participants assured that they would not be identifiable in print. The names will be removed to protect the identity of the participants. McMillan & Schumacher (2006:334) asserted that researchers have a dual responsibility:

- to protect the individual's confidences from other persons in the setting
- to protect the informants from the general reading public

Respondents were assured of anonymity in the covering letters and also by verbal communication.

3.8 Protection from harm

De Vos, *et al* (2005:58) highlighted that subjects can be harmed in a physical, psychological or emotional way. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119), harm includes revealing of information that may result in embarrassment or danger to home life, school performance, friendships, as well as direct negative consequences.

To avoid harm in this study, the researcher will inform the participants beforehand about the impact of the investigation and by upholding participants' dignity during interaction.

3.9 Exposure to the programme

The researcher requested permission from the principal in each and every selected school to have a meeting with English language educators. The purpose of the meeting was to present to the educators the designed reading programme, stating its aim, the instructional objectives and the various activities offered in the programme. The rationale of the programme was explained to the educators before the programme itself was presented.

3.10 The right to withdrawal

The right of participants to withdrawal means that research participants are free to withdraw from the research process at any time. Creswell (2007:12) brought out that participants have the right to refuse to participate in a study. When the informed consent of the participants was sought, it was also stressed that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

3.10.1 Research materials

The research materials were an administration questionnaire to the principal, observation schedule, audio recorder and interview questions. All the research materials provided were used and adjustments were made in the observation schedule.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter will give a comprehensive description of the research methodology that will be used to describe the ways in which the study will be designed to explore the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading. The research design, which is qualitative research, and the phenomenological approach, as the research paradigm, were discussed. Sampling, data collection method, and ethical considerations were highlighted. The next chapter will analyse data collected in the selected

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The foregoing chapter discussed the research methodology that was used to conduct the study. This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study as was discussed in Chapter 2. The study sought to answer the following main research question: *What are the challenges faced by learners in reading the English language in the Intermediate Phase?* In presenting the findings, in-depth interviews and classroom observation were involved as outlined by Marshall & Rossman (2006:163). This approach involves the presentation of data gathered through in-depth interviews where participants' perspectives structure the report. Findings from unstructured interviews will be discussed prior to classroom observation findings.

4.2 Findings from the interviews

First, learners' demographic data will be discussed followed by the main themes that emerged from the analysis of data.

4.2.1 Demographic details of the learner participants

The participants were 36 learners with reading problems from three selected schools (23 boys and 13 girls). Four learners per grade in the Intermediate Phase were identified by the researcher from the educators' reading assessment record sheet. All participants were allocated numbers to enhance anonymity and confidentiality of participants. Symbols were also assigned to the participating schools for anonymity.

Table 4.1: Learner participants

CLASS	NAME OF SCHOOL	GENDER	GRADE	AGE
Learner 1	School A	Boy	4	12
Learner 2	School A	Girl	4	11
Learner 3	School A	Boy	4	13
Learner 4	School A	Boy	4	13
Learner 5	School A	Boy	5	12
Learner 6	School A	Girl	5	12
Learner 7	School A	Boy	5	14
Learner 8	School A	Girl	5	10
Learner 9	School A	Boy	6	13
Learner 10	School A	Boy	6	15
Learner 11	School A	Girl	6	15
Learner 12	School A	Boy	6	13
Learner 13	School B	Girl	4	12
Learner 14	School B	Boy	4	14
Learner 15	School B	Boy	4	12
Learner 16	School B	Girl	4	11
Learner 17	School B	Boy	5	13
Learner 18	School B	Boy	5	13
Learner 19	School B	Boy	5	14
Learner 20	School B	Girl	5	12
Learner 21	School B	Boy	6	14
Learner 22	School B	Girl	6	13

CLASS	NAME OF SCHOOL	GENDER	GRADE	AGE
Learner 23	School B	Boy	6	14
Learner 24	School B	Boy	6	13
Learner 25	School C	Girl	4	12
Learner 26	School C	Boy	4	11
Learner 27	School C	Girl	4	11
Learner 28	School C	Boy	4	12
Learner 29	School C	Boy	5	14
Learner 30	School C	Girl	5	10
Learner 31	School C	Boy	5	11
Learner 32	School C	Girl	5	12
Learner 33	School C	Girl	6	12
Learner 34	School C	Boy	6	13
Learner 35	School C	Boy	6	15
Learner 36	School C	Boy	6	15

As shown in the classroom data in Table 4.1, learners with reading challenges are older than their grade level. According to the year-end schedule, learners with reading problems had to repeat a grade and be conditionally promoted to the next grade the following year, which does not help the learners if the underperformance of the learner from the previous grade will not be addressed in the next grade which the learner has been promoted to.

4.3 Findings analysis of data and discussion: Individual unstructured interviews with learners

The purpose of the interview was to obtain an in-depth understanding of learners' challenges in reading in order to interpret what was observed. A tape recorder was used to record the responses of the participants. Data obtained was analysed in order to identify the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants.

The main themes that emerged from learners' analysed data are as follows:

- cognitive factors
- physical factors
- academic difficulties
- home background

4.3.1 Cognitive factors

All learners with reading problems stated that they do not understand English clearly, which is the medium of instruction in the Intermediate Phase. On that account, they lack confidence in participating in class activities which involve reading. Learners who experience a barrier in English, which is the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) in the Intermediate Phase, are in danger of being totally excluded from the learning process, since all curricula content is presented in English. Learners experience frustration when they cannot participate in learning activities. Twenty-three learners who, according to educators' assessment record, lack phonemic awareness stated a general response and could not elaborate; they would simply say *"I don't know."* Eight learners did not give any answer. The following are some of the learners' responses:

Learner 3 of school A:

"I don't understand if the educator is teaching us in English."

Five learners lack the confidence to give the answer. These learners lack reading comprehension, and they may know the answer in their home language, but it becomes difficult to convert the answer into English. This could be one of the reasons why learners with reading problems are silent in the classroom. The following are the responses of learners concerning the confidence of speaking English:

Learner 25 of school C:

"Sometimes I know the answer, but I fail to express myself in English. It's better if I write the answer because I have enough time to think."

Learners 13 of school B who lack vocabulary had this to say:

"I do not know how to read English words because they are not the same as Zulu."

4.3.2 Physical factors

It was also noted that some learners have physical problems such as with their eyesight. This was evident because nine learners were holding the book closer to their eyes when trying to read. It was obvious that word recognition was a problem. Reading cannot take place if the learner's vision is impaired, as the learner must be able to see the word with sufficient clarity and detail. According to the researcher's experience, visual problems are closely related to the academic progress of a learner because if a learner cannot read due to eyesight problems, this may cause an inability to understand the written word.

Learner 7 of school A, with vision problems, had this to say concerning his problem:

"I have a problem of low vision, reading is difficult for me, and I fail to read on the chalkboard because it's too far."

It was picked up from learners' responses that learners with reading problems avoided eye contact with the educator when the educator was asking a question because they do not have an adequate vocabulary to express themselves; therefore, they decide to be silent in class because they have difficulty in grasping English.

Learner 15 of school B revealed:

"I don't like reading because other learners used to pass derogative remarks and laugh at me."

4.3.3 Academic difficulties

Reading problems automatically lead to academic difficulties. This is because learners cannot understand the written content of all subjects. In the Intermediate Phase level, learners are supposed to read in order to learn; accordingly, learners with poorly developed reading skills will have academic difficulties. Intermediate Phase learners who experience problems in reading are in danger of being totally excluded from the reading process, since all curricula content and assessment is in English. The following are comments from learners with reading problems:

Learner 12 of school A:

"I fail to read with understanding. It's better for me when the educator asks me the question orally."

Learners fail to understand even the simplest instruction because it is written in a language they do not fully understand. They would therefore be disadvantaged because of their limited reading comprehension skill.

4.3.4 Home background

All learners with reading problems believed that if they can have people such as parents or guardians to help them in reading, their reading performance can improve. This was an input from learner 27 of school C:

“I think I can improve if I can get someone at home to help me in reading.”

Learner 11 of school A was of a similar opinion. She stated:

“If I can know English well, my reading can improve.”

Further, learner 31 of school C had this to say:

“My reading can improve if I can be taught in my home language even in the Intermediate Phase.”

From the learners’ interviews, it became evident that learners have reading problems, especially in comprehending text. Learners probably think that once they are finished reading a passage, they have understood it. Learners confused reading speed with reading with comprehension. This is because learners do not derive meaning from what they read. According to Bursuck & Damer (2007:254), reading comprehension should be the goal of all teaching instruction at any level. In schools A and C, it was observed that most learners were from a low socio-economic background and received their first and main meal of the day from the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which serves them daily with healthy and nutritious food. From the researcher’s experience as an educator, an undernourished child struggles to concentrate and cannot be effectively involved in the learning process. In school B, almost all learners were in their school uniform. There were few learners who did not conform to the code of conduct for learners based on school uniform; these learners did not have proper school shoes – instead, they wore black running shoes. This was attributed to the low socio-economic status of such learners.

It was evident from the researcher that most of the learners in school A were from broken families; some of them were “child to parents”, that is, older siblings who are heading families and some are neglected by their families. This was evident because most of them wore dirty school uniform and some had torn uniform. According to the informal interview with the educator, the cause of child neglect was because some parents are substance abusers, and they can hardly assist their learners in reading at home.

4.4 The profile of educator participants

Before the observation of the lesson, the researcher requested the educator participant to

introduce themselves and reveal their qualifications and teaching experiences. The information in Table 4.2 was obtained.

Table 4.2: Profile of educator participants

Educator participants	Gender	Name of school	Grade	Professional qualification	Year of teaching	Age	Capacity
Educator 1	Female	School A	4	Two-year Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC)	32	59	English language educator
Educator 2	Female	School A	5	Junior Primary Teachers Diploma (JPTD)	19	43	Class teacher
Educator 3	Female	School A	6	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma (SPTD)	14	41	English language educator
Educator 4	Female	School B	4	JPTD Adult Basic Education (ABET)	18	39	English language educator
Educator 5	Female	School B	5	Bachelor of Education (B.Ed)	05	35	Class educator
Educator 6	Female	School B	6	Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) in Management	12	48	English language educator
Educator 7	Female	School C	4	SPTD Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	13	37	English language educator
Educator 8	Female	School C	5	JPTD	06	32	Class educator
Educator 9	Female	School C	6	B.A. degree Higher Education Diploma (HED)	15	43	Language educator

Table 4.2 indicates that all educators observed and later interviewed were females. Three educators teaching the English language in the Intermediate Phase were interviewed. Of the nine educators interviewed, three were teaching English in school A, three were teaching English in school B, and another three were teaching English in school C. All educators interviewed had teaching experience of five to thirty-nine years, and they were qualified teachers. The educators' qualifications and experience in teaching English in the Intermediate Phase highlighted that they have sufficient knowledge of challenges face by learners in reading. These educators would provide the researcher with rich information. Although some of the educators had Junior Primary Teachers Diplomas (JPTD), they have accumulated enough experience in teaching English in the Intermediate Phase.

Educators in schools A and B were willing to be observed and interviewed. They even invited the researcher to come and observe them while teaching. Educators in school B were not too keen to be interviewed, even prolonged break time trying to avoid the interview. Educators in school C were not interested in being interviewed. They stated that according to their programme of assessment, they are doing language structure and use, which is Learning Outcome 6 in National Curriculum Statement.

4.4.1 Interview with educators

The researcher used individuals and the focus group to interview educators, principals and subject advisor through unstructured questions. The outcome of the interviews was corroborated with the available evidence from the observations. The following themes were identified from the interview results of educators, principals and subject advisor:

- Lack of transition from learning to read to reading to learn
- Impact of reading difficulties on academic performance
- Different reading approach
- Lack of support for learners with reading problems by educators
- Lack of support from the parent
- Strategies to improve reading in the Intermediate Phase

4.4.4.1 Lack of transition from learning to read and reading to learn

The teaching of reading in the Intermediate Phase poses the greatest challenge for educators because a learner's vocabulary is limited, since the medium of instruction is English, which they use only at school. Also, the learner is not getting enough practice at home. Learners read very little and lack effective word attack skills, and they have limited language abilities and

vocabulary. This could lead to learners being incorrectly labelled as learners with reading problems simply because they struggle to read in English. The following are the responses from educators pertaining to the cause of reading problems:

The participant brought out:

“They are not used to the medium of teaching and learning, which is English, since they are from the Foundation Phase where they were taught in isiZulu, which is their mother tongue, and the number of learning areas in the Intermediate Phase has increased from 4 to 6 and all of them are taught and learn in English. They are now taught by different educators, yet in the Foundation Phase, they were taught by one educator, and they are expected to adapt to more than one educator with different teaching styles.” (Educator 3 of school A)

Another participant had this to say:

“Learners are not getting enough practice of reading; especially at home, parents are not helping them.” (Educator 1 of school A)

The new policy that was introduced by the Department of Education (DoE) in 2012 stated that English should be taught as a First Additional Language (FAL) from grade 1 to 3. According to the research, learners being taught English too early may result in them ending up with lack of reading proficiency in both first and second languages.

Participant pointed out:

“I have tried to assess them in home language reading; they got level 1 performance. Their former educator told me that they progressed because of age.” (Educator 7 of school C)

Educators commented that reading problems are caused by the time allocation from DoE because it does not specify reading time, and the curriculum does not state what to teach on reading. It was noted by the researcher that class timetable and homework timetable only indicated the learning areas. Reading time was not specifically indicated; as a result, there was no clear indication as to whether reading was being taught in the classroom or just being incorporated with teaching of language.

A participant remarked:

“I am expected to teach 72 learners and I don’t have enough time to do individual reading because if I spend most of the time in reading, I won’t be able to finish my work.” (Educator 2 of school B)

Eight educators stated that learners in the Intermediate Phase are exposed to a language they do not fully understand. As a consequence, for these learners, an entire lesson would be lost

because they do not understand what is being taught in the classroom.

Grade 4 educators, in particular, had this to say:

“I think changing from isiZulu, which was LoLT in the Foundation Phase, to English has a negative effect on learners because words are not pronounced the same way in English because in the Foundation Phase they were taught only the basics of how to read, now in the Intermediate Phase they are expected to read with comprehension in order to learn.” (Educator 4 in school B)

“They are being affected by maladjustment because in the Foundation Phase they were taught by one educator and the workload in learning areas has increased.” (Educator 1 in school A)

“It is difficult for them to understand what they are reading because their English vocabulary is so shallow when they enter the Intermediate Phase.” (Educator 7 of school C)

Educators in schools A and B stated that it is extremely difficult for learners who were promoted because of age cohort due to the fact that such learners cannot read even their home language; thus, the Intermediate Phase aggravates their reading problem. According to Allington and Pressley (2015:383), not intervening when learners are experiencing reading problems is setting learners up for additional failure and diminishing self-esteem in learners.

Some of the participants expressed themselves as follows:

“You know it’s very painful to promote a learner to the next grade because of age cohort because some of them need more time to develop. They are not yet ready to go to the next grade. The department is not addressing the readiness of a learner.” (Educator 5 of school B)

“I think this is one of the biggest points of high dropout rate in the Intermediate Phase because these learners become so frustrated when they do not cope; as a result, they become violent or simply drop out of the school.” (Educator 2 of school A)

Educators added that new learners from other schools do not come with their profiles so that it would be easy for the educator in the next grade to see the learner’s reading performance. The participants showed that there were different factors that might affect learners’ reading ability, and they mentioned the following factors: lack of concentration, limited vocabulary, and lack of family involvement. Some of the learners experience reading problems as a result of their impairment such as auditory, visual and speech problems, which are discovered at a later stage.

4.4.4.2 The impact of reading difficulties on academic performance

Many learners with reading difficulties experience academic failure. According to the researcher's teaching experience, repeated failure makes learners to become more conscious of their poor performance, which results in emotional, social and self-concept problems. Many of these learners end up being drawn to juvenile delinquency. Most learners underperform in all learning areas because they find it difficult to understand English, which is the medium of instruction.

The feeling of defeat has turned off their desire to read, and they exhibit inappropriate behaviours to hide their inability to read. Selected educators from all three selected schools unanimously agreed that such learners are withdrawn in the classroom and do not participate in reading activities. They are afraid to attempt to read anything and often engage in rote learning, lip reading or mimicking while other learners are reading.

The following substantiated the above statements:

"Learners use to fail dismal in grade 4. In my class, I've learners who were very good in grade 3. In grade 3, they learned English only as a language which makes them to have limited vocabulary in English, which has turn to be the medium of instruction from grade 4 onwards; so these learners experience Intermediate Phase in a negative way because they don't meet promotion requirement; as a result, they fail in grade 4. Actually in grade 4, learners are just bridging from home language to First Additional Language (FAL)." (Educator 5 of school B)

Another participant commented this way:

"Eih! They lack confidence in reading and develop an avoidance attitude by not participating in classroom activities. Instead, they display disruptive behaviour in class like doodling, drawing unnecessary pictures, talking to peers, going to toilet and attending to numerous distractions in class; as a result, they are being sent to the principal's office for disciplinary reasons. All this is because they experience the school norm as meaningless they simply drop out of the school."
(Educator 8 of school C)

Dropping out of school is common in learners with reading problems. According to educators interviewed, poor performance prompted learners to be absent from school and ultimately drop out of school. Some educators have stated the following:

"More than 70% of learners who dropped out of the school performed far below average in reading. I'm fully convinced that their poor level of performance has to do with their low level of reading." (Educator 9 of school C)

In school A, educators stated that learners' attendance is good because they tend to be good in

sports activities and extra-mural activities. In the classroom, they do not concentrate; instead, they disturb other learners, and they turn to be bullies. A participant had this to say:

“Oh! They become bored when it is a reading lesson, and they become so happy when the bell is ringing for break time because it’s where they bully other children to gain their lost ego.”

(Educator 4 of school B)

Another participant supported the statement by adding:

“They don’t absent themselves, but they end up dropping out of the school because it becomes difficult for them to acquire reading skills needed to meet academic expectations.” (Educator 6

of school B)

4.4.4.3 Different reading approach

Regarding the reading approach, the participants indicated that they did not have a prescribed approach for teaching reading. The most common approach used by educators in teaching reading was reading aloud. One of the participants frankly said:

“I read aloud to them three times before I request learners who are able to read to read the text, and while able readers read, I motivate learners with reading problems to point at each and every word read to make sure that they follow the reading lesson.” (Educator 8 of school C)

The practice of pointing at words helps learners with reading problems to emulate the words read by able readers. The struggling learners also hear how words are pronounced, and it also promotes the concentration of learners who do not read aloud.

Most of the educators used a whole language approach and have used this approach to teach reading for many years and were comfortable with it. This method is geared towards accommodating normal learners who are able to read. Nonetheless, it is difficult for learners with reading problems to catch up with this approach. Although many learners have reading problems, educators do not question the effectiveness of the whole language approach in teaching reading.

4.4.4.4 Lack of support for learners with reading problems by educators

The educators in school A stated that they use the sixth period of the day to assist learners with reading problems, not in front of other learners but in an empty classroom.

“Our normal teaching time is five hours per day, but we have decided to make every day six hours so that we assist learners in their reading problems.” (Educator 3 of school A)

The educators in school B stated that they give learners with reading problems supplementary work, which include mostly phonics and easy storybooks.

“We give them easy work to read, and we allow them to choose books suitable for them to read.” (Educator 1 of school B)

The educators in school C stated that learners with severe reading problems are referred to the Institution Level Support Team (ILST) committee, and it seems that learners with reading problems are not benefiting in the education system because the focus is only on the high performance of learners.

“Aih! It’s difficult for some of the learners to catch up even if I put more effort to them. They cannot even speak their home language. I used to refer such learners to ILST committee for intervention.” (Educator 6 of school C)

Other participants indicated:

“Because their problems are not the same, there are those who are developing readers; I pair them with good readers. For the emergent readers, I give them additional reading material with pictures, and for the learners with severe read problems, I re-teach them reading skills during break time.” (Educator 3 of school A)

“Every time I do planning, I bear in mind that the reading levels of my learners are not the same; there are learners with reading problems. Therefore, in my planning, I plan according to their levels, and when I teach, I start my lesson by paying particular attention to learners with reading problems; when they know what is expected of them, I then teach the whole class.”
(Educator 8 of school C)

4.4.4.5 Lack of parental support to learners’ reading problem

Parental involvement has a great effect on children’s acquisition of reading. In all identified schools, most learners are living with grandparents who are illiterate and tired of raising children; for some of these grandparents, it is difficult to come to school and therefore cannot assist learners. Some parents are working, so they do not spend enough time with their children. The following comments highlighting this were made:

“Very few parents are supportive to their children’s reading performance. Most of them don’t even come to school on open days to check their children’s work. Those who come they just say they are illiterate.” (Educator 7 of school C)

Another participant repeated the foregoing statement and added:

“When you give homework to these children, you will find that they don’t even complete it and when you call the parent to investigate the matter, he or she won’t turn up.” (Educator 3 of school A)

Many learners with reading problems are from families that have experienced life changes such as the death of a parent, divorce, family mobility, drugs and violence. Learners from these backgrounds do not get enough support and guidance from parents. One participant mentioned:

“Some parents left their children with their grandparents or great grandparents who are illiterate. Although the grandparents might be willing to care for these children, but their age often prevents them from playing the more effective role of a parent.” (Educator 9 of school C)

Another participant affirmed the point of home background and had this to say:

“Many learners are orphans and stay with relatives, and some are from child-headed families. These children were affected psychologically because of loss of their parents. Their foster parents, which can be either relative or sibling, tend to focus only on basic needs such as food than reading material, so these kids only meet the book in the classroom, so that is why they are reading far below their level.” (Educator 6 of school B)

Unstable family backgrounds played a negative role in learners’ reading performance. This poor reading performance is attributed to the fact that children from unstable families are too psychologically unstable to concentrate on reading lessons. An educator had the following comment:

“It is very difficult to teach a child from unstable family units. These learners are always withdrawn and distance themselves from reading lessons. They barely concentrate on what you teach.” (Educator 3 of school A)

One participant responded like this:

“In my class, I’ve got a learner who used to get 90% in reading assessment, but now after her parents divorced she is performing below 40%.” (Educator 6 of school B)

Another participant emphasised the point by adding:

“Learners with reading problems are shy because most of them do not have even proper uniform; they do not concentrate during the lesson. They are withdrawn because even if they try to read, other learners laugh at them, do not interact with reading lesson. Those who are from violent families turned to be bully, stubborn, aggressive and do not listen to instructions.”

(Educator 2 of school B)

4.4.4.6 Strategies to improve reading in the Intermediate Phase

A very large number of participants stated that learners must be encouraged to communicate mostly in English even outside the classroom because it is difficult for learners to read a language they cannot speak. Swanepoel & Engelbreit (2013:212) stated that basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) are a prerequisite in learners because they comprise surface skills such as pronunciation, basic vocabulary, and grammar.

Another participant pointed out:

“In this school, we encourage learners to speak English because English is the medium of instruction, and they are not exposed to it because it’s not their home language. So it is like we want to improve their speaking skill; maybe that can help them in reading as well.”

(Educator 1 of school A)

In agreement, another educator had this to say:

“Because English is the medium of instruction in the Intermediate Phase, learners are encouraged to speak English and to read newspapers so that they acquire more vocabulary.”

(Educator 1 of school A)

Similar views were expressed during the focus group discussion, where the need to speak English was emphasised.

“Reading must not only be done in English lesson, but reading must be done across the curriculum.”

(Educator 5 of school B)

Other participants stated that reading can be improved if learners can start using English as the LoLT perhaps in the third term and fourth term in grade 3 so that they can gain more vocabulary and reading comprehension. Also, the schools must have free reading time so that learners can practise reading on their own. Reading activities must be done in all learning areas.

A participant opined:

“The curriculum must be adapted to suit the needs of learners with reading problems so that

they experience success, and principal should organise compulsory informal In-Service Training (INSET); for example, one afternoon should be set aside to discuss reading improvement.”
(Educator 6 of school B)

It is critical to identify learners with reading difficulties early in the elementary years so as to provide learners with appropriate instruction and intervention programmes on reading so that reading difficulties are resolved in early years of schooling. A participant remarked:

“Because reading problems are not the same in learners who have been identified as having reading problem, all schools must have design curriculum differentiation to suit learners’ levels, and schools must have individual support plan.” (Educator 8 of school C)

Another participant suggested:

“All schools should have a library to help learners to get more reading material because reading several books could help children to develop reading skills. Reading competitions should be introduced to motivate learners to read.” (Educator 2 of school A)

4.5 Demographic details of school principals

Table 4.3: Demographic details of school principals

Principal participants	Gender	Name of school	Professional qualification	Age	Experience
Principal 1	Female	A	Senior Primary Teachers Diploma (SPTD) B.Ed with Education in Geography and History Masters in Education Management	46	9
Principal 2	Male	B	Two-year Primary Teaching Certificate (PTC) B.A. degree in Management	59	32
Deputy principal 3	Female	C	STD Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in Mathematics B.Ed honours in Mathematics	43	7

In school C, the principal left the school early to attend the principals' meeting and delegated the deputy principal to attend to the researcher. The principals' qualifications and management experiences indicated that they can support educators when they encounter any challenges in teaching English reading.

4.5.1 Interview with principals

The aim of interviewing the principal was to establish how reading is conducted in different schools and the issues of challenges in the school encountered in teaching reading. The principals remarked that learners should be taught reading skills as early as preschool, and they also remarked that as Intermediate Phase educators, it is difficult to teach reading to learners who are from different schools with different reading backgrounds. The following themes emerged from the interview with principals:

- Lack of language across the curriculum
- Lack of monitoring reading in schools
- Effects of curriculum change
- Lack of motivation for learners to read

4.5.1.1 Lack of language across the curriculum

- **Teaching of English reading in the intermediate phase**

Generally, the response to the question of teaching of English revealed that principals only pay particular attention to extra reading activities than real teaching of reading. The principal of school A stated that they promote reading across the curriculum. Learners are exposed to English reading practice only in English lessons, and in other learning areas, educators do not reinforce reading. The educators used to code-switch to learners' home language when teaching instead of communicating consistently in English throughout the lesson. A common feature in all observed classrooms was that learners uttered answers in single words in English in class. With regard to teacher's English communicative competence, it was observed that English and home language, which is isiZulu, were used interchangeably when teaching, and they hardly completed sentences in one language consistently. The implication for code-switching was that learners will not be able to read text which is written in English.

Principals also make use of subject committees, and they also have English language educators meet every week for development and to discuss the challenges they encounter in teaching English. One principal made this comment:

"I do not go to classes on a regular basis except when I conduct class visit and IQMS. I rely mostly on learners' performance to determine whether teacher so and so is coping or not. But we do have Subject head whose responsibility is to monitor the daily bread of the school."

(Principal 2 of school B)

The deputy principal in school C remarked that they make sure that reading material is enough. Each and every class has a reading corner with interesting books which are age-appropriate for learners to motivate them to read. She further stated that debates and reading competitions are planned and conducted every month. In schools A and B, principals stated that every Friday, classes take turns in reading at the school assembly.

4.5.1.2 Lack of monitoring of reading in schools

- **Monitoring of reading periods**

The principal in school A highlighted that they use a periodic timetable to monitor that educators adhere to the timetable where reading period is also reflected. The educators are expected to write the starting time and ending time of the period and write the theme of the lesson and sign next to their name. In both schools B and C, the school management team (SMT) members indicated that they do not monitor reading periods. The principal from school A had this to say on monitoring of reading periods:

“I effectively monitor read periods that are being honoured by all English language educators. Educators are expected to mark a periodic register. The purpose of periodic register is to ensure that educators attend all the periods, and we analyse period register every week when in the school management team (SMT) meeting” (Principal 1 of school A)

4.5.1.3 Effects of curriculum change

- **Problems that are experienced by educators in teaching reading**

In all the schools, the principals remarked that educators experience problems in teaching reading because of curriculum changes that are often not well understood by educators. They alleged that reading difficulties are increased by a curriculum that does not say much about how and when reading must be taught or what to teach.

“It would be much better if the Department can invite our inputs before the curriculum changes. I am expected to monitor educators’ work knowing very well that they are still struggling in teaching the new curriculum because they only have to attend one-day workshop.” (Principal 2 of school B)

The principals remarked that educators’ greatest problem is that learners generally have a limited vocabulary that they actually understand and are able to use constructively. This can be attributed to lack of exposure in gaining proficiency in English because learners are taught in their home language in the Foundation Phase and then abruptly need to start learning in English in grade 4. When formal learning is suddenly cut off from learners’ home language, it

can negatively affect learners' vocabulary. In the Intermediate Phase, learners need a sound knowledge of English, as they need to learn in English. All textbooks used are written in English.

The school principals also commented that in some learners, discipline and motivation are lacking, which is the major effect of reading difficulties, as most learners do as they wish in the classrooms, taking for granted that they will not be punished. The researcher observed that all the observed educators were females, and most of the learners with reading problems were boys. From the interview, it was noted that most of the learners are from broken families and they lack a male identification figure both at home and at school. It is possible that the cause of ill-discipline is caused by lack of role models in boys.

4.5.1.4 Lack of motivation for learners to read

- **Motivation of learners to read**

The principals in school A and B indicated that learners take turns in reading news every day in morning assembly. The deputy principal in school A stated that they are doing grades reading competitions, and he maintained that reading competitions motivate learners to do well in reading because even learners with reading problems are involved in class competitions for selected best readers to represent the grade. According to Allington & Pressley (2015:390), a reading competition has a negative effect on learners with reading problems because these learners know that they cannot read and they do not form part of the competition. It could be better if learners with reading problems can be awarded for their reading improvement.

The principal in school B stated that every day educators are compelled to supervise reading for the first 30 minutes of the day. During this time, all learners are engaged in either group reading or individual reading. In the Intermediate Phase, learners are motivated to do silent reading.

The deputy principal in school C indicated that nothing new and exciting is being done to motivate learners to read. This perhaps reflects a lack of innovation in educators because innovative educators try new ideas to motivate their learners to read and learners should be taught to be responsible for their own reading.

- **Reading support from the district to learners with reading problems**

The principals acknowledged that the district does organise workshops for educators but the workshops are more on English as a learning area and discuss mainly Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards without addressing how to teach reading and its components and on how to assist learners with reading problems.

“I encourage educators to give feedback from a workshop they have attended. What I have noticed is that in these workshops, one and the same issues are being addressed. It would be better if the Department can read the reports from school improvement plans before organising the workshops.” (Principal 1 of school A)

The principals were of the opinion that the subject advisors often left educators to their own devices in solving reading problem issues at schools. Educators are obliged to do reading support in their classes without the necessary skills and knowledge to support learners with reading problems.

Another point that was raised by the principals was that the district does not do regular support in the Intermediate Phase educators as compared to in the Junior Phase. Most of the time, educators in the Intermediate Phase teach reading using their own teaching experience.

- **School language policy**

The policy of English FAL clearly states that learners should reach a high level of proficiency in English in order to communicate and understand other learning areas. Only school A had a language policy that caters for learners with reading problems. In this school, learners read a book from the community library and every Friday learners are expected to report to the class. According to the school policy, learners with reading problems are expected to read a book in their home language, and they are also given a chance to report in class.

“Our policy states that learners with reading problems should read a book from the library in their language, and they have to come back and report to class what they have read.” (Principal 1 of school A)

All school principals concurred that reading must be promoted as early as in preschool because learners who are exposed to reading in the preschool years tend to have a larger vocabulary than their peers who have not been exposed to reading. The principal of school A also added that the government should introduce programmes for teacher development to equip educators with more reading skills to help learners with reading problems.

4.6 Interview with the subject advisor

The role of the subject advisor is to support the educators regarding classroom practice, which includes teaching of reading in all levels of learners. They are expected to be experts in the field in which they render support to educators, and they need to be conversant with educational methods of teaching reading, since they were trained as educators.

The Intermediate Phase English subject advisor was interviewed to establish whether she was aware of any challenges faced by learners in reading in the Intermediate Phase.

4.6.1 Stimulate reading in the Intermediate Phase

The subject advisor stated that their role is to support educators with the teaching of different learning areas. They ought to support the educators with learning programme development and the implementation thereof. They are not dealing with learners; the issue of stimulating learners in reading is the responsibility of the educators who are the curriculum implementers. The subject advisor answered:

“It’s not our duty to stimulate learners in reading; that is the responsibility of educators. As the subject advisors, we support educators. We are not dealing directly with learners.”

4.6.2 Reading problems schools encounter

The subject advisor said that educators experience difficulty in teaching reading due to their poor background in English proficiency; as such, it becomes difficult for such educators to teach a language they are not confident with. In addition, she stated that schools have insufficient books because of curriculum changes. The subject advisor had this to say:

“Schools do not have enough books because if the curriculum changes, the schools are expected to buy new books and the funds from the Department is not enough, so the schools top up books yearly, which has a negative effect on learners when the books are insufficient.”

4.6.3 Academic performance

The subject advisor pointed out that although academic performance is not directly linked to the reading ability, in the current education systems, good reading skills are the prerequisite for academic performance because in the assessment tasks, learners will be expected to read with understanding. Learners will only be able to answer literal questions and find it difficult to answer high-order questions that demand meaning.

“Learners perform well in questions requiring short answers but perform very poor in high-order questions. This may be due to lack of vocabulary to express their subject knowledge.”

Learners with reading difficulties will tend to find it difficult to retain in their short-term memory what they have read. All this will have a negative effect on learners' academic performance.

4.6.4 Causes of reading problems in the Intermediate Phase

Responding to the question on the cause of reading problems, the subject advisor stated that educator's training is an integral part of an effective education system. She brought out:

"The possible weakness in literacy instruction may have to do with teacher training in South Africa, which does not pay much particular attention to teaching methods, and I think that teacher trainings need to improve so that teachers can be effective in teaching reading."

The subject advisor added that on paper, the role of the subject advisor was to support the educators, but the reality on the ground dictates otherwise. Actually, it is not the duty of the subject advisor to conduct the workshops; they are assisting those in the Curriculum Development Unit who are the curriculum developers. She also pointed out that there are several colleges and universities in South Africa that offer teacher training courses through correspondence. This implies that these university student teachers do not attend lectures on a regular basis and are not provided with sufficient guidance and support as compared to students who are registered for full-time teacher training courses. The students that are not fully exposed to comprehensive training will not be equipped to teach reading skills effectively because educators lack the teaching methods, so as subject advisors, they spend much of their time teaching educators how to conduct reading lessons. She commented:

"When we try to organise workshops on school holidays so that we can get enough time for assistance, educators don't come."

4.6.5 Reading improvement

The subject advisor pointed out that learners with reading problems must be assisted in the development of reading skills, and they must read more books to extend their reading comprehension. She highlighted:

"Reading comprehension is an integral facet of literacy and thus important for struggling readers who often do not comprehend the material they are expected to read at school. Some readers read so fast, without comprehension of what they have read."

4.6.6 Workshops for educators

The subject advisor stated that she monitors a school's functionality, and she compiles reports based on the findings and forward the report to district management.

"We don't plan the workshops on our own. The Curriculum Development Unit, after developing the curriculum, they train us as the subject advisors in the implementation of the curriculum so that we can assist educators. The department used to appoint the task team which is responsible for conducting the research on the curriculum. All the information we cascade in the workshop is from either national or provincial level, but to our greatest surprise, very few schools implement the information from the workshops; as a result, we repeat one and the same information."

4.6.7 Intervention programmes for learners with reading problems

Responding to the question of intervention programmes, the participant pointed out that as the Department, they do not have specific reading intervention programmes because learners' problems differ. As the subject advisor, they review the reading approach used by the educator. The educator's approach will spell out the corrective reading intervention programme for the individual learner.

4.6.8 Resources in schools

The problem of delivery of textbooks to schools is common. In all three schools visited, there was no existing policy on how often schools are to be supplied with textbooks. In school C, the workbook from the Department was obsolete because in school, English was taught as FAL, but the workbooks were meant for schools which were teaching English as a Home Language (HL). In addition, no measures were taken to change the workbooks. Some of the textbooks in the observed schools were still new and neatly packed on the shelves. Responding to the question of school monitoring, the subject advisor stated that they do monitor the curriculum coverage when they visit schools for support.

She disclosed:

"We do monitor the curriculum coverage and reading is part of that, but really, learner improvement depends on the educator who is able to assess the reading level of each and every learner."

4.6.9 Curriculum differentiation

The participant stated that reading problems require a network of support because they are not the same; some are because of external factors such as socio-economic factors, while others are because of internal factors such as visual problem. The subject advisor indicated:

“If the learner is having physical problems such as visual or hearing problem, he or she is referred to concessions which will suit the learner’s barrier. If the learner’s reading problems is from external factors, reading matter will be adapted to suit the level at which the learner is able to read to ensure the positive attitude towards reading.”

4.6.10 The support for learners who were promoted based on age cohort

According to national promotion requirements (Department of Basic Education, 2011), age cohort learners must be offered adequate additional support. The response from the participant spelled out that learners with reading problems should be monitored on a daily basis and that such monitoring is the responsibility of the educator who is directly involved with the learner. She revealed:

“You know in all our workshops we used to emphasise that lesson plan and assessment tasks must accommodate all levels of learners. No learner must be left behind because they all have the right to education. Therefore, all admitted learners must benefit.”

4.6.11 Promotion requirements

Responding to the question of promotion requirements, the subject advisor mentioned that all the promotion requirements are based on National Policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12, which stated that a learner who is not ready at the expected level and who has been retained in the phase for four years or more and is likely to be retained again should receive the necessary support. The subject advisor highlighted:

“Learners who because of learning barriers cannot attain the necessary promotion requirement should apply for concessions suitable for learners’ problems as a support mechanism.”

The subject advisor stated that schools should make every endeavour to promote reading. Reading must not be the task of English educators only. English is the key to all learning areas in the Intermediate Phase because it is the LoLT. If learners have challenges in reading, that will have an impact on all learning areas, resulting in dismal results. Reading can improve easily if reading is done across the curriculum, not in the English language only. Therefore, all learning area educators in the school must promote reading as a means of strengthening the LoLT.

4.7 Characteristics of the schools

The characteristics of the schools that participated in the study are tabled. This is followed by the observation of schools based on their physical settings, accessibility of infrastructure, conditions and availability of resources, the culture of teaching and learning in the schools, and observation of reading lessons.

All the schools selected for this study were primary schools starting from grade R to 7 and located in the vicinity of the Mondlo area, and they are all in the rural area of Mondlo. In all selected schools, isiZulu was the medium of instruction from grade R to 3, and English was taught as a subject in this phase. English became the medium of instruction from the Intermediate Phase, which comprises grade 4 to 6. According to Govender (2015:43), it is difficult for learners to learn enough of the English language in three years to switch to English language medium of instruction by grade 4. Learners require six to eight years to learn a second language before they use it as a medium of instruction. This implies that under optimal conditions, they should not switch to English as a medium of instruction before grade 7. It is challenging for learners with reading difficulty and for learners who come from low socio-economic backgrounds. According to Mancusi (2013:10), learners from low socio-economic backgrounds experience less home support, as parents often do not have sufficient education or understanding of certain aspects of reading development. These learners show a particular risk for reading deficiencies because they have less exposure to literacy awareness. Accordingly, ongoing support and early intervention strategies are particularly important.

Table 4.4: Characteristics of the three schools involved in the study

SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS AND GOVERNANCE	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Number of learners	528	632	457
School management team	Principal, deputy principal, four departmental heads, and four extended departmental heads	Principal, deputy principal, and four departmental heads	Principal and two departmental heads
Number of phases per school	3	3	3
Type of level of the school	Quintile 2	Quintile 2	Quintile 2
Student representative body/council	Prefect system	None	None
SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
Number of classrooms	14	14	12
Administrative block	Principal's office, administrative clerk office, SMT offices and staff room	Principal's office and administrative clerk office	Principal's office, administrative clerk office, and store room
Security fencing	Well secured with electric wire	Surrounded by high fence and gate	Well secured with a strong galvanised fence and gate
Location site	Rural	Rural	Rural
Environment	Clean, tidy, has flower garden and conducive to teaching and learning	Tidy, the school falls under health promoting school (HPS), and conducive to teaching and learning	Clean but the fence was full of dirty papers and walls have cracks

SCHOOL RESOURCES	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
School library	No school library	Well-resourced library	No library
Toilets	Waterborne toilets	Waterborne toilet	Pit toilet
Staff room	Staff room was available	No staff room	No staff room
Sports area	Well-resourced sports area	No sports area	No sports area
Playground	Learners use sports area as playground	Playground was available	Playground does not have enough space
School garden	The school has a beautiful garden with different vegetables	The school garden was there, but it was full of weeds with no food	No school garden
Electricity	Available in the whole school	Available in the whole school	Available in the whole school
School furniture	Sufficient for all learners	Insufficient furniture	Surplus furniture available
First-aid kit	Available, and it was evident that it is normally used	Available but was locked in the strong room	Available, and it was evident that it is normally used
LTSM	Textbooks were highly insufficient compared to the school enrolment	Learner support material was insufficient, even workbooks from the Department were insufficient	All learners had access to the learner support material supplied by the Department
Teaching and learning aids	Well-resourced with teaching and learning aids	Under-resourced with teaching and learning aids	Under-resourced with teaching and learning aids

As shown in Table 4.4, the selected schools were all classified as quintile two (no-fee schools) because the community in the area is mostly unemployed and impoverished. For ethical

reasons, the schools were allocated numbers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. The numbers were also given to learners identified for purposes of this study.

4.8 Observation of reading lesson

According to Marshall & Rossman (2011:139), observation is the systematic noting and recording of events in a social setting. The researcher observed carefully how educators conducted reading lessons and how learners read a passage and responded while reading. The researcher sat in front of the class so that it would be easy to observe the educator teaching reading and to observe how educators interact with learners with reading problems and could also observe the responses of learners to reading lessons. Sitting in front also gave the researcher an opportunity to capture features of the classroom teaching instruction such as reading charts, class timetable and learners' books. Notes of the main aspects regarding reading problems were taken as the researcher observed the lesson.

The researcher focused on the following during classroom observation sessions:

- to see the number of learners in each class;
- to look at the classroom environment to see whether the reading corners are available;
- to check the availability and frequent usage of reading material;
- to monitor what reading approaches are used by educators in developing learners' reading skills;
- to observe whether learners interact during reading lessons; and
- to observe how learners with reading problems are supported during teaching time

According to Henk, Moore, Marinak & Tomasetti (2000:5), the presentation of reading lesson should follow the seven components, such as classroom climate, pre-reading, guided reading, post-reading, skill and strategy instruction, materials and task of the lesson, and teacher practices. The researcher kept these components as the framework of the observed reading lesson. These components were used to organise the framework for observation.

The researcher requested permission to use an audio recorder to record the reading lesson. This audio recorder was played back to the learner after reading so that the learner would be able to identify his or her reading problems.

Table 4.5: Observed classroom data

	School A	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	School B	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	School C	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
Class enrolment		39	45	72		68	28	36		45	43	38
Boys in class		17	21	36		31	12	14		20	18	22
Girls in class		22	24	36		37	16	22		25	25	16
Good readers		6	2	7		8	3	6		4	5	5
Good readers in boys		1	0	3		3	1	2		0	1	2
Good readers in girls		5	2	4		5	2	4		4	5	3
Poor readers		33	43	65		60	25	30		41	38	33
Poor readers in boys		21	28	42		37	18	18		30	22	20
Poor readers in girls		12	15	23		23	7	12		11	16	13

The classroom-based data in Table 4.5 reveals that five of the classes had very large classroom enrolment. Most learners (72) were found in grade 6 in school A. It was observed that it was not possible for educators to give individual attention to learners and that the educators spend more time in marking learners' work instead of teaching. The results from the observation show that out of 414 observed Intermediate Phase learners, only 46 learners were categorised by their educators as good readers. This is an indication that learners in the Intermediate Phase have challenges in reading English.

The result also indicated that there are more boys with reading problems than girls in the Intermediate Phase. According to Sousa (2005:30), boys' cognitive development is often slower than girls, and girls' brain development may be advanced by one or two years compared to that of boys of the same age.

The research report of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) shows that as many girls as boys may have reading problems, but the girls are not identified. Lerner, *et al* (2010:44) opined that at the age of beginning reading instruction, boys may not have developed certain skills that aid in reading, such as the ability to pay attention and that in primary schools, learners are being rewarded for being neat and quiet, which are the characteristics of girls than boys. Educators need to take note of these findings and provide appropriate and sufficient reading support to boys in order to catch up with their female counterparts.

All the educators selected for the study were qualified with teaching diplomas or university degrees, and their teaching experience was more than five years. The data reflected that educators had sufficient knowledge and skills and were well experienced in teaching reading in the Intermediate Phase. However, qualification and experience do not guarantee effective reading instruction.

The themes that emerge from the observations are as follows:

- Lack of print-rich environment
- Lack of reading material per learner
- Insufficient time to teach reading skills
- Reading approach
- Lack of school libraries

4.8.1 *Lack of print-rich environments*

Only one school out of three selected schools had some English print-based materials on the wall in front of the classroom. According to the researcher, the fact that in all selected schools there was no reading corner means reading is not valued and promoted in the classrooms. The other common problem with all the selected schools was the large number of learners in each classroom, which has a negative impact on the individual reading assessment. In school C, there was no class timetable in all observed classrooms where the researcher can check reading periods, and the grade 5 classroom in school C had one reading chart on the wall. In schools A and C, desks were arranged in traditional rows, with learners facing the chalkboard and the teacher. In school A, the class timetable was available, but it did not reflect reading periods. The classroom in school B was rich in print and charts, but most of the charts were related to other learning areas such as natural sciences, technology, and social sciences.

4.8.2 *Lack of reading material per learner*

Reading materials such as textbooks, workbooks from the Department of Education, charts and posters are important in fostering reading in learners' classrooms. Therefore, lack of reading material serves to illuminate the socio-economic constraints under which these learners acquire reading skills. Even if the learners are motivated to use the community library, that is not enough, as schools should play a compensatory role by providing a print-rich environment. Research on best practice in reading (Elley, 2000; Pressley, 2006) indicated that learners need to be exposed to a variety of print-based resources on a regular basis. This is very important especially when a learner comes from a poor home where he or she is unlikely to encounter many books or reading practice. The books in a classroom were distributed by a learner and they were very few in such a way that three to four learners were expected to share one book, which made it difficult for learners to read. According to Scanlon, Anderson & Sweeney (2010:43), reading materials should be readily available and accessible to the learners.

In school A, the classrooms had a whiteboard and overhead projector mounted on the wall, but educators did not use them because they were not well versed in operating them. The school also had a computer room where learners could do computer studies, and the schools had access to the Internet but most educators were computer illiterate and not well versed in the use of the Internet so as to get the latest information. Neither were they able to introduce learners to the use of the Internet. In school B, although the school was relatively well-resourced, it did not have a library for extra reading. The principal in the informal interview stated that they motivate learners to use the community library. In school C, it was observed that the computers were new and never used by both learners and educators.

4.8.3 Insufficient time to teach reading skills

Insufficient reading time was evident in all observed schools. Reading time is important more especially where reading is conducted in a second language. In the Intermediate Phase, educators teach selected learning areas and learners are expected to change classes in order to attend different learning areas or educators rotate between the classes. In school C, time allocated per period was interrupted on a daily basis. The first period was unusable, as learners kept trickling into the class. Learners break at 10h00 to 10h30 for a nutrition programme. The teaching period which comes after break was not effective in school C because learners came late for the lesson.

According to the researcher, learners do not have enough time to play during break time because break is included with nutrition time. They are expected to come back for learning while their body is still full of un-exhausted energy from food, and some were still busy washing their plates. It was noted that learners become uncontrollable, hampering effective teaching and learning, which influences low reading levels. In school B, learners moved from class to class for different learning areas. According to an informal interview with the educator, the moving from class to class of learners is good for resource management. It was noted by the researcher that teaching time is being wasted by moving learners from class to class.

4.8.4 Reading approach

In all observed classes, educators only applied the whole language approach which assumed that reading is acquired naturally. This approach may work well with learners who have been exposed consistently to the basics of reading, but it does not work well with learners with reading problems. The educator only applied the learner engagement component slightly when she asked learners for answers to the questions and did not develop learners' critical reading skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. The educator was pointing at the learners who could read to answer questions and to read a passage. Learners with reading problems were not given the chance to attempt reading.

Measures need to be taken to ensure that all learners are accommodated in a lesson. It would be irresponsible to continue with a lesson where only the lucky few are able to cope while others are experiencing difficulties (Nchindila, 2012). It was noted that in all observed classes, girls were more interested in reading lessons than boys. Learners with reading problems were not interested in following along in their books and reading, and they lack concentration and lip reading when the whole class is reading.

4.8.5 Lack of school libraries

The absence of libraries and lack of easy access to books in the classroom have serious implications for reading practices. Research on best reading instruction practice (Cunningham & Hall, 1998) indicated that learners need many opportunities to practise their reading skills, and they need motivated teachers to assist them to become fluent readers who will read voluntarily. This is apart from the fact that the library provides opportunities for learners to be exposed to reading by way of different genres such as stories and reading materials.

School A was a well-resourced school with a library, although it was not adequately resourced. There were very few books in the library to such an extent that most of the shelves were empty, and the library appeared to be infrequently used. This was evidence because all books looked new and the library did not have a library timetable where the researcher could see how often classes take turns in using the library. The school had a programme provided by Sector Education Training Authorities (SETA), which aimed at improving reading skills in learners. This programme (SETA) had provided the school with people who could assist the educators in monitoring and supporting learners in reading by listening to individual learners reread and discuss books that were previously read with the educator and also assist learners on how to use the library.

4.9 Conclusion

The aim of this research was to identify challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in English reading in Vryheid District. This chapter presented the observation of the three selected schools. The observations bring about themes of reading difficulties, namely, lack of print-rich environment and lack of reading material per learner. Learners lack access to reading books and lack school libraries. Learners have little exposure to the English language, which is a language of learning and teaching in the Intermediate Phase.

The findings from observations and interviews pointed out a number of challenges. These challenges include poor classroom environment such as lack of reading corners, insufficient reading books in the classrooms, ineffective teaching approach to English reading, and overcrowded classrooms.

From the interviews, it was noted that reading challenges were attributed to the change of the medium of instruction from grade 4 and lack of parental involvement in learners. Based on the findings of the researcher in the classroom observation and interviews, it was evident that there is a compelling need to improve reading.

The next chapter will provide a discussion on the findings and recommendations of the research study conducted in the selected schools.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The penultimate chapter presented the findings of the study. These findings were analysed and discussed in the context of the literature review carried out in Chapter 2. The aim of the study was to investigate challenges faced by learners in reading in the Intermediate Phase. This chapter presents a summary of major findings, conclusions, and recommendations that are derived from three schools researched.

5.2 Summary of findings

This study sought to answer the following main research question: “What are the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading the English language?” (see Section 1.4.2)

The following research questions were the sub-questions:

- To what extent does reading affect academic performance?
- What are the teaching conditions in which learners find themselves?
- How can guidelines be developed on improving reading in the Intermediate Phase?

The first chapter presented a background of the study indicating the concern from educationalists in South Africa about the poor performance literacy level of learners, more especially in the Intermediate Phase. The literature study indicated that the government has an interest in improving English language reading in the Intermediate Phase. Five components of good reading which are essential were discussed. The chapter provided the justification for conducting the study, stating the analysis of the problem and the significance of the study, aim of the study and research questions, the research methodology, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2 presented the literature review. Approaches to reading such as bottom-up, top-down and interactive theories for teaching of reading (Gunning, 2010:8-12; Harris, 2005:26; Vacca, *et al*; 2000:28-29; Caldwell, 2007:135; Richards, *et al*; 2010:12) were discussed in order to determine the effect of each approach on reading acquisition.

The overview of five reading components such as phoneme awareness, phonology, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension was discussed in length. The challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners were investigated in this study with respect to the factors that influence reading acquisition as set out were looked into.

The literature revealed that there is a great controversy on what causes reading difficulty. These included physical factors such as health, hearing, vision, speech, and motor skills (see

Section 2.9). The auditory and visual perceptions are considered for their role in reading acquisition. Comprehension factors such as concepts and processes are elucidated as are language, cognition, and meta-cognition as part of the understanding factor.

Emotional factors and adjustment are discussed as strongly influencing reading in an indirect way. Family factors such as home environment and the socio-economic level of parents are regarded as having a considerable influence on the learners' reading performance because they cannot provide literacy resources for their children. Reading readiness with all its involvements such as experiential background, cognitive development and language learning, interest in reading, social and emotional development, and physical development is seen as having a profound influence on a learner's ability to acquire reading skills.

Chapter 3 presented the research methodology and research design. The research method chosen was qualitative research with phenomenological research design. Data collection methods were discussed as well as procedures used to analyse data. Trustworthiness and ethical issues were presented.

Chapter 4 presented and discussed the findings that emerged from data gathered through classroom observation. Classroom observation allowed the researcher to observe the school teaching and learning culture, learners' attitude towards school as well as availability and use of educational resources, participants' interviews, and to document the study. The data gathered from observations and interviews was transcribed for conducting analyses more easily and quickly through the use of coding. Data was analysed, interpreted and discussed in a fair and unbiased manner.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings of the study, the researcher's recommendations on improving reading in the Intermediate Phase in Mondlo ward Vryheid District, and the strategies that can be used to improve reading difficulties in learners. The limitations of the study are highlighted, and recommendations that have educational implications are made for improving reading in Intermediate Phase learners.

5.2.1 Summary of findings from literature review related to reading theories

Literature acknowledged the importance of the bottom-up approach for teaching reading, which is a text-based approach, because it focuses on information provided by the text rather than the input from the reader's precious knowledge (Polloway, *et al*; 2013; Gunning, 2010; Ekwall & Shanker, 1989). This form of reading is very abstract because the letter-symbol connections are abstract, and readers are therefore unable to attach meaning to what they are reading.

Literature also acknowledged the top-down approach as a critical element in effective reading (Polloway, *et al*; 2013:118). This approach focuses mainly on meaning. Readers read complete sentences and attach meaning to what they have read. A reader's pre-knowledge therefore influences understanding of text.

Initially, the bottom-up approach was the point of departure, but eventually, the emphasis shifted to the top-down approach due to shortcomings in both approaches. An interactive approach was subsequently adopted. According to the interactive approach, the reader uses the top-down approach when reading material is known and the bottom-up approach when reading material is not known. Also, as the reading skills increase, more attention is given to reading comprehension. These approaches play a differing role at various stages of reading development. The study aligned itself with the interactive approach to reading, which includes bottom-up and top-down approaches to reading because efficient and effective reading entails both bottom-up and top-down approaches which are evident simultaneously for teaching reading and for reading comprehension (Gunning, 2010:12; Richards and Bamford 2010:12).

5.2.2 Summary of findings from literature review related to components of reading

Literature in this study investigated possible challenges faced by learners in reading English. To investigate the challenges faced by learners in reading the English language, it became important to understand the components and skills that enable a learner to read. According to the National Institution of Child Health Development (NICHD), five essential components of good reading must be taught in order to teach reading. These consist of phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. To ensure reading success, all reading components should be manifested to a more or lesser degree during reading instruction and acquisition of reading.

5.2.3 Summary of findings from the literature review related to reading acquisition

It was found from literature that children follow a similar pattern when acquiring reading (Vacca, *et al*; 2000:70). Reading is a continuous development that emerges from a child's experience with oral language and expands as the child progresses through grades. According to Gunning (2010:10), reading is divided into four stages: emergent literacy, early reading, growing independence, and reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase (see Section 2.8).

5.2.4 Summary of findings from the literature review related to factors that impact reading

It was evident from literature that there are factors that enable the learner to read, namely, cognitive, educational, physical development, neurological and language factors (see Section 2.9). It is not easy to single out one factor as a leading cause of reading problems because they

are intertwined. The findings from literature corroborate with this study which stated that reading difficulties are not determined by a learner's ability alone but also by factors within a learner's environment (see Section 2.9). However, it is important to note that some factors play a major role than others. According to educators interviewed, the leading cause of reading problems are language factors because learners learn in English, which is a language they are not familiar with. The Education Policy requires that in the first three years of formal learning, they use home language as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). In the Intermediate Phase, they switch to English as the LoLT, which is the language they are not familiar with. Learners at this level lack the vocabulary to read with understanding, and they show low performance in all aspects of language reading.

5.2.4.1 Educational factors, physical development and economic factor

Lack of reading instruction is a major factor in reading difficulty. The research has shown that most educators are uncertain about the methods and approach that need to be used in order to teach reading in the Intermediate Phase. This implies that educators do not have the capacity to teach reading (see Section 2.9.3). In educational factors, literature revealed that exposure to print, quality of early reading instructions and opportunities for appropriate instruction were identified as some of the factors that influence reading. It also revealed that reading problems can be associated with poor instructional planning and instructional pace and by choosing reading material that is too difficult or too easy for learners' grade level. If the reading material is interesting and age-appropriate, it is more likely that the reader will engage with it and be encouraged for further reading (Vellutino, *et al*; 1996; Gunning, 2010).

Literature reviewed revealed that physical development areas such as perceptual, language and emotion affect the learning process and are important for formal reading (Sousa, 2005). Early language development occurs in context with other skills such as cognition, gross and fine motor coordination, and social interaction. These skills are learned in the early years of a learner. This will enable a learner to be school ready. A learner who is pushed to reading without having developed a specific degree of readiness may become negative about reading experience (see Section 2.9.4).

There is sufficient research evidence which suggests that socio-economic factors have a negative impact on learners' reading performance (Ramphela, 2009; Kids Court, 2008; Gunning, 2010). These learners usually come to school knowing very few English words because they are not being exposed to extra leisure reading because parents cannot afford to buy books. Learners from poor families often come to school without basic needs being met such as shelter and a balanced diet.

The findings from the literature indicated that gender differences play a role in learners' reading achievement. Many research studies have indicated that girls significantly outperform boys in reading (see Section 2.10.1). The reason could be that the English language is considered to be a feminine subject.

5.3 Summary of findings from the qualitative study

The reading condition of Intermediate Phase learners was collected from three selected schools through classroom observation. The schools were selected using purposive sampling. The classroom observation and interviews were enriched through the use of an audio recorder in all the selected schools. The data was later analysed according to class enrolment, learners' reading performance according to gender and teacher-learner ratio, as well as how these may be related to the challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading.

5.4 Summary of findings from interview with learners

A total of 36 learners from different schools with reading problems were interviewed to obtain an in-depth understanding of their challenges in reading in order to interpret what was observed in class observations and from educators' record sheets. The findings indicated that in 23 learners, reading skills were far below the grade level of Intermediate Phase learners. Five learners did not answer at all, and four learners gave five-word answers which were not expected from Intermediate Phase learners.

With respect to responses on *reading problems*, the findings of this study indicate that learners do not understand the language of learning and teaching, which is English. Learners' level of language development is an important factor in their ability to read. Hinkel (2005:566) stated that for second language reading to take place, the reader must have developed proficiency in that language. Learners have insufficient exposure to English, as it was taught as a subject only in the Foundation Phase, so learners in the Intermediate Phase lack adequate proficiency to understand the curriculum.

The above-mentioned response also indicates that in most learners, reading problems are extrinsic, which means they can be avoided. It is important that valid assessment tools be used to identify learners with reading problems. Bursuck & Damer (2007:4) revealed that once learners with reading difficulties are behind in the fourth grade, it is very difficult to catch up later, and if learners come into the Intermediate Phase with poorly developed reading skills, the challenges are all the greater.

With respect to *learners' academic performance*, the responses to the interview question indicated that there is a strong correlation between reading problem and poor academic

performance. This is because readers' vocabulary needs to have been developed to the point where they will be able to understand what is being read.

The response to the issue of *support from the family in reading* highlighted that lack of parental involvement was attributed to the fact that most learners stay with their grandparents who are illiterate and who do not recognise the value of reading. Parents' involvement has a great impact on children's acquisition of reading. Parents need to encourage their children to read and to assist these learners.

With respect to *learners' reading improvement*, the responses indicated that learners need outside help in order to improve their reading proficiency. Reading improvement should always be based on learners' present strengths – no matter how limited they may seem to be. The learner with reading problems must be made aware of his or her reading strengths so that he or she can be positive about reading.

The reading improvement programme should begin in learners' areas of difficulty; for example, most learners have a problem in word recognition and comprehension. These learners must be given many reading opportunities to read in and outside the classroom and to apply what they have read in their real life. Educators must choose reading material which is appropriate to a learner's reading level and assist the learner while reading. The learner must be able to comprehend the reading material. The educator should assist the learner while reading so that the learner will be able to understand what is being read.

5.5 Summary of findings from interview with educators, principals and subject advisor

The outcome of the interviews corroborated with the available evidence from the observations. The following themes were identified from the interview results of educators, school managers, and subject advisors.

Two schools had inadequate resources, and even the available resources were often not utilised. In all three schools observed, there were no reading corners, which are vital to expose learners to free reading, more especially in areas where many households do not have books.

The responses on *curriculum changes* revealed that these have a negative impact on educators because they are expected to teach the curriculum while they do not clearly understand it, and it is difficult for learners to master the lesson contents because it is fast-paced. Learners are expected to grasp too much information in one lesson. Most of the learners, if not all learners, grasped absolutely nothing at the end of a lesson because of the workload.

With respect to the responses on *insufficient teaching time*, the findings of this study indicate that reading periods are not specified in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). It only

stipulates instructional time for grades per week, which is divided into different learning areas. Educators are expected to design daily timetables on their own. None of the three observed schools had a reading period on their class timetable. The class timetable only reflected the learning areas.

Time available for a particular lesson helps to determine the pace and flow of a lesson. Teaching time is an important element in learning more, especially when reading is conducted. Because reading time is not reflected, the majority of respondents felt overwhelmed and attributed time pressure and overload as causes of insufficient time to consolidate concepts with learners, supporting those experiencing barriers to reading and enriching those who mastered reading easily.

With reference to responses to the question on *the impact of reading difficulties on learners*, educators pointed out that learners with reading problems fail because they tend not to understand instructions and questions. When learners learn in a language in which they are not proficient, they often experience difficulty with academic concepts and terminology which is not easily understood. Learners often translate these terminologies back into their home language trying to understand them better. This may not always be successful because some of the words are not available in a learner's home language.

Many of the struggling learners are tempted to drop out of school or to become drug dealers or end up being drawn to juvenile delinquency. In South Africa, two out of ten learners drop out after grade 3. The outcomes of the interviews indicated that *learners' home background* has a great impact on the child's acquisition of language. Many struggling learners grew up in poor socio-economic circumstances. Some learners are from child-headed families, and their mother-tongue ability is not developed to an optimal proficiency level because they do not have adults to stimulate their language ability, which will impact negatively on their learning of a second language. Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds are generally not exposed to reading, and they struggle to do homework because there are no resources such as newspapers or internet to assist them.

The reason given by the subject advisor was that *educators are not coping with teaching of reading* because most teacher training institutions do not equip educators in learners' acquisition of reading. Some of the educators who are teaching English are not fluent in English and are unable to express themselves correctly, which restricts them from supporting learners who experience challenges to learn as a result of limited language proficiency.

With respect to the responses from the principals on the monitoring of reading in their schools, it was noted that in most schools, reading is not being monitored. The National Education Evaluation and Development Unit (NEEDU) report on the lack of knowledge and educator

competence appealed to principals to set norms for reading in the subject policy and the SMT to monitor learner reading systematically against the norms.

Educators and principals reported that *the support from the district is lacking*. All participants did not feel supported by the district. Although educators attend workshops, the workshops do not equip educators on teaching reading in order to be able to support learners with reading difficulties.

Regarding *motivation of learners*, the responses to the interview questions indicate that nothing new is being done to motivate learners in reading. Most of the schools have time for extra reading such as reading competitions or reading the news during the school assembly. All that is done by learners who are able to read, but learners with reading problems are neglected.

As regards responses on *the effect of learners' progression based on age cohort*, all the respondents stated that this has a negative effect on learners' performance. The government legislation and policy that regulate and direct the education system pays more particular attention to school maturity, which is being measured by the age of the learner. Learners are not allowed to repeat a grade more than once.

According to the researcher, learners' development in school should be considered more than the learner's age, as some learners enter school because of age but they are delayed cognitively. It is meaningless to progress these learners based on age cohort because they have not yet reached the required developmental level.

5.6 Summary of findings from focus group discussion with educators

The researcher brought together all nine Intermediate Phase English language educators from the selected schools for a focus group discussion after the individual interview. Based on the group discussion, educators had attested that some learners experience reading difficulties in the Intermediate Phase. The educators showed that there were different factors that might affect learners' reading ability. Among them, the following factors were highlighted: lack of concentration, poor word concept, lack of basics and perceptual skills were not developed, and physical factors such as eye problems and hearing problems. They also indicated a lack of family involvement as another contributing factor.

The following are the comments made by educators in the focus group discussion:

- Learners with reading problems read below their grade level.
- They do not progress to the next grade within the normal year.
- They are unable to do their homework.
- Their parents do not adequately assist them in schoolwork.
- They often drop out of school.
- They do not have confidence in their performance.

To keep learners with reading problems feel part of the lesson in class, the educators brought out that they use shared reading, where an educator pairs learners to read together; hence, the one with reading problems is assisted by an able reader. The disadvantage of that is that the able reader may know the incapability of a learner and make fun of him or her; consequently, a learner with reading problems will be discouraged.

When educators were asked about parental support, they stated that some parents want to be involved in their child's learning, but they feel uncomfortable especially if they speak little or no English. Educators have suggested that each day learners must write a message to parents, and the parents must write back. They also suggest that at least once a week learners take home a backpack of books in English for reading easy activities, which will make it easy for parents to assist them.

Because access to books is a key factor to promoting reading, educators stated that they collect newspapers, and they also donate multiple copies of books to make a school library. Books can be solicited from parents and learners.

Another finding was the use of a child-centred approach. The educators stated that this approach helps learners to have the opportunity to express their ideas freely and to help all learners feel equal. Isaacs (2012:14) argued that learning and development are highly intertwined. All educators stated that learners with reading problems do not get the necessary support. They further highlighted that they wish to give learners individual attention by withdrawing learners with reading problems out of the classroom for special reading lesson, but there is no floor space to do that. When learners are given homework to do, they do not do it. Kirk, Gallergher, Anastasiow & Coleman (2008:11) posited that learners with reading problems should be supported within the classroom in order to enhance inclusion, and this helps the educator to ensure that all learners are working together and that learners with reading problems are not treated as if they are special. The findings also revealed that educators are trying to teach reading in the Intermediate Phase; however, there was no time assigned for reading. Most observed educators used the whole language approach. The whole language approach focuses on critical skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary,

reading fluency, and comprehension strategies can be learned through exposure to reading not through systematic instruction. This means that educators expect learners to learn basic reading skills on their own with minimal guidance from the educators. Although the whole language approach can work well for learners who have been exposed consistently to the basics of reading in the Foundation Phase, it does not work well for learners who do not read on grade level in the Intermediate Phase.

The study provides the need for a systemic reading approach. Knowledge of the causes of reading problems can assist the educator to determine a reading approach that will be effective for a learner. The observations carried out in this study highlighted the fact that schools lack print-based materials in classrooms and opportunities for reading practice. The weaknesses identified in this study in the lesson presentation, arrangement of the classroom environment, teaching materials, and reading indicated the need for quality teaching, libraries, and good reading approaches.

5.7 Summary of findings from class observations

One of the research aims was to give an overview of teaching conditions in which learners find themselves. The researcher assessed the physical settings of the classroom (see Chapter 4) in the matter of physical setting; it was observed that in school A, desks were arranged in groups, allowing learners to read and write independently. The findings revealed that the seating arrangement is determined by the floor space. In school B, desks were arranged in traditional rows with learners facing the chalkboard and the educator. In school C, learners were seating in two rows against the wall; it was noted that learners seating behind others were unattended.

Reading observations were conducted in nine different classes in three schools. Five of these classes were overcrowded with more than 40 learners. The class size norm in a primary school is 40 learners (Department of Education (DoE), 2010:39). During reading observations, it was noticed that schools B and C had more class enrolment in grade 4 and grade 5, while school A had more class enrolment in grade 5 and grade 6. The results of the observed schools indicated that schools A and C were overcrowded; the number of learner-teacher ratio was high. The high student population is not an issue when the school has enough classrooms and educators to teach learners in small numbers. According to the researcher's teaching experience overcrowding in a classroom results in disciplinary problems, poor classroom control, and management, individual attention to learners was impossible. In school B, the educator-learner ratio was relatively low, which enabled the educators to give individual reading attention.

The main findings from the selected schools indicated that in South Africa, foundational reading skills are developed in the Foundation Phase. In this phase, learners are taught in their mother tongue with more emphasis on bottom-up technical reading ability. In the Intermediate Phase,

learners are expected to learn to read. This transition is challenging especially when a learner has reading difficulties. According to Bursuck & Damer (2007:4), once a learner with reading problems is behind in grade 4, it may take an immense amount of effort and resources for that learner to catch up.

The findings also indicated that most learners in the Intermediate Phase were still lagging behind about one to two years with regard to reading skills. The study indicated that there is a correlation between learners' socio-economic background and learners' reading proficiency. Worldwide research shows that it is not easy to educate learners from poor homes, especially if the language of schooling is not aligned with the home language. The reasons lie not with the intellectual potential of learners themselves but with the barriers to learning that poverty conditions impose. Learners from poor home backgrounds and unstable environments experience more reading difficulties than those from good stable backgrounds. Ghanaguru, Liang & Kit (2010:22) identified lack of motivation, unstable home environment, and prior knowledge as factors that constitute barriers to effective reading. Most learners from poor families attend poorly resourced schools where classrooms are poor print-rich environments and where reading plays a peripheral role (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007; Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009). These learners have very little help to practise their acquired reading skills. Another finding was that schools have no school libraries or reading corners in the classrooms. Although school A does have a library, it is not well-resourced. Learners need opportunities for extended reading for their emotional engagement. If learners are not taught how to read and to enjoy reading, they will not value reading, and this will have a negative effect on learners' academic performance.

As per observation, educators in all the observed schools were using the whole language approach when teaching reading lessons, which claims that learning to read should be as natural as learning to talk (Lyon & Blaunstein, 2006:5), and they paid less attention to basic reading skills to support learners with reading problems. A teaching approach had an immense significance on reading. The whole language approach can assist learners to identify and recognise regular and irregular words for reading without comprehension.

Reading lessons appeared to be much more on questioning the texts read than on critical reading skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading fluency, and comprehension. The study supports the notion of Sousa (2005:87), who recommended a balanced approach for learners because it takes into account the diversity of learners in reading, especially learners with reading problems. Reading difficulties experienced by Intermediate Phase learners include a slow reading rate, guessing words, repetitions, ignoring punctuation, reversal of letters, and omissions and insertion of letters.

Learners could not read with understanding, and they were unable to process information. The

researcher expected the learners to be able to give meaning of the text because reading comprehension itself can distinguish between good readers and poor readers. It was noted that the majority of learners had reading comprehension skills which were far below the level expected for Intermediate Phase learners. Most of the learners did not answer at all, and some of them were answering in one word, which is not expected in Intermediate Phase learners.

Learners were less able to comprehend English at grade level, and they may be at risk of being diagnosed with learning with reading problems when in fact their limitation is due to poor comprehension. Therefore, the focus on strengthening comprehension is deemed necessary (Swanson, Branchini & Lee 2012:19). According to John (2006:75), when learners with comprehension difficulties read a passage and they encounter words that they either cannot read or do not understand the meaning of, the whole message of the text will be lost because of one word standing in their way of comprehension.

According to Pressley & Allington (2015:84), learners with reading problems often rely much more on semantic-contextual cues to identify words and read words by looking at pictures or guess the words. This results in inaccurate decoding of words. The educators reported that according to Foundation Phase reading assessment records, most of these learners did not have reading problems in the Foundation Phase. This is because in the Foundation Phase, much of the teaching and learning was oral-based with far less reading because books hardly feature as learning tools or resources. When learners change to English as an LoLT, they are expected to move from a relatively sparse home language narrative text base to an extensive English expository text base in order for them to read to learn.

The study also indicated that there are more boys with reading problems than girls. It was noticed that boys had a negative attitude towards reading, and they do not receive much attention from the educators, as most of them were seating at the back of the class. Most of the educators that were observed were females. Boys may have difficulty relating with female educators; this was evident because more girls were pointed to answer the questions than boys and most girls were able to read.

The findings corroborated with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000), which suggested that generally, girls tend to do better than boys in reading, and this trend seems to be global. The reason for girls doing better in reading could be that parents tend to spend more time talking to girls from an early age; as a result, they acquire language faster and develop more vocabulary than boys, whereas boys are engaged in rough games where there is not much talking done except action. Landsberg, *et al* (2008:130) stated that boys' physical and cognitive development is often slower than that of girls and that boys are often less interested in schoolwork and their school careers. When educators are not aware of that, they may misdiagnose normal boys as having reading problems.

All observed classes had fundamental resources such as prescribed textbooks and charts available, but not even a single class observed had a reading corner to promote incidental reading. It was noted that schools A and B were seriously challenged in terms of reading material. The findings also indicated lack of reading material, and classroom practices tended to be oral-based without much writing or use of extended texts to read. Books are often poorly managed or locked away in storerooms (NEEDU National Report, 2012). Less reading opportunity creates a negative attitude for reading, which obviously results in poor reading achievement. The under-resourced school finds it very difficult to operate because it is unable to create a conducive environment for effective reading. The researcher also observed that schools B and C had no school library, and homework timetable does not reflect reading homework. Learners who are exposed to a print-rich environment are motivated to read. Findings indicated that learners lack phonemic awareness and word recognition, and lack explicit reading comprehension instruction that could extend their reading abilities. To adequately help learners with reading problems, it is important to have knowledge of reading and its components.

It was observed that eight of the learners had physical problems such as eyesight. These learners were seen holding books closer to their eyes when trying to read. If a learner cannot read due to vision problems, that may cause an inability to read the written word with understanding.

Reading difficulties experienced by learners which may be an early indicator of reading problems include:

- a) Ignoring punctuations
- b) Low self-esteem
- c) Making mistakes when reading aloud by repeating and pausing often
- d) Unable to understand what he or she was reading
- e) Word construction difficulty
- f) Recalling incorrect phonemes
- g) Recognising words with similar sounds
- h) Poor phonological awareness
- i) Lack strategy to identify unfamiliar words
- j) Guesses at reading words
- k) Deficit in auditory and visual perception
- l) Very slow progress in acquiring reading skills
- m) Omitting parts of words when reading
- n) A fear of reading out loud
- o) A reliance on context to discern the meaning of what is read

A learner with the above-mentioned reading difficulties will not be able to process information accordingly. Therefore, there is a need to identify reading problems in learners as early as possible so as to provide necessary support for learners in order to address and support learners with reading problems.

5.8 Conclusions from empirical study

The conclusions that follow are drawn from the analysis conducted. These conclusions are given as answers to the research questions outlined at the beginning of the study. The findings of this study indicate that Intermediate Phase learners have reading problems; these include omitting, substituting and adding words as well as mispronouncing words. The findings of the study are discussed under the themes that arose from data.

5.8.1 Home background

Educators' perceptions revealed that home background has a great impact on learners' acquisition of language. Educators raised their concerns regarding learners from poor home background and unstable environments. The educators felt that these learners experience more reading problems. They stated that learners from poor families often come to school without their basic needs, such as food and clothing, being met. A learner who is hungry or cold will not learn effectively in school. They felt that parents were not giving themselves time to assist their children in reading. Learners from unstable family backgrounds experience many hazardous changes which affect learners emotionally and physically; such learners often move from school to school. Educators also revealed that parents who have low literacy levels will not be able to facilitate their children's reading practice in the home and to support children when doing homework activities.

5.8.2 Physical factors

All interviewed educators pointed out that learners come to school with various physical developments such as poor health conditions, visual acuity, eye coordination, and auditory acuity. These physical developments are sometimes discovered at a very late stage when the gap is already wide for the learner to catch up in reading ability.

5.8.3 Gender differences in reading ability

It was found from educators' record sheets, reading observations and educators' interviews that girls were doing fairly well compared to boys in reading. All educators highlighted that there is a huge difference between boys and girls in reading abilities. Girls are more motivated to read; they even practise reading at home.

5.8.4 Educational factors

A common recurring factor in all educator interviews is that learners do not understand English, which is the language of learning and teaching in the Intermediate Phase. This is because reading skills are not adequately developed, in some instances, not developed at all. In South Africa, foundationally reading skills are developed in the first four years of schooling, which is grade R to grade 3 where learners are taught in their home language. Learners experienced difficulty in processing information in English. Lack of exposure to the English language has contributed to reading problems. On that account, it becomes difficult for a learner to understand the message of a text because they are not familiar with the vocabulary used.

5.8.4.1 Curriculum changes

All principals and educators interviewed appeared to be exasperated by frequent curriculum changes. They perceived curriculum changes as the cause of reading problems because the curriculum does not state clearly how and when reading must be taught. Reading problems are related to curriculum changes within a short period of time without ensuring proper and thorough training of educators. According to interviewed principals and educators, they are absolutely dissatisfied with curriculum changes because these have a negative effect on reading performances. They brought out that education in South Africa had undergone many critical changes in education in a short period of time without ensuring proper training of educators.

The curriculum does not state specifically how or when reading must be taught and what to teach learners in reading lessons. Educators concentrate more on learning the new curriculum instead of actual teaching, which will guide educators on what to teach. Schools are expected to buy new textbooks which are curriculum-based. Educators argue that Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is too challenging for both educators and learners because it consists of too many assessment tasks and does not cater for individual learners' reading needs.

5.8.5 School factors

The findings from the school observations revealed that schools neither have libraries nor print-rich environments, and if the school does have a library, it is without books. The findings from class observations revealed that reading materials used are above the level of learners with reading problems, which often frustrates such learners; as a result, they drop out of school without mastering reading skills.

5.8.5.1 Reading approach

With regard to the reading approach educators used in teaching reading, it was evident from classroom observation that the reading approach used by educators also contributes to learners' reading problems because learners were exposed to whatever reading approach that an educator chose to use in her class. Most educators used the whole language approach, which may not suit reading levels of learners with reading problems, and learners with reading problems are rarely supported during reading lessons to improve their reading skills. Coordination in teaching reading was rare among the educators in the Intermediate Phase. Most educators used the whole language approach, which is context-based.

5.8.5.2 Insufficient time

In all classes observed, a reading period was not reflected on the class timetable. Moreover, in most observed schools, educators teach different learning areas but they do not move out of the class. Instead, learners are expected to change classes to attend different learning areas. A great deal of instructional time was lost in changing classes. Learners did not move quietly from one class to another; as such, other classes were also disturbed. This may have affected the quality of learning in the school, and learners will not get enough exposure to reading.

5.9 Limitations of the study

The first limitation is that the study was limited to three primary schools with Intermediate Phase in Mondlo ward. The researcher selected the schools located in the same geographic area. All schools selected are classified as quintile two, which implies that the schools are in a poor socio-economic community. This was evident because most learners were beneficiaries of the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP). In light of the foregoing, this may not be representative of the whole population. A bigger sample could be obtained from several districts in various provinces so that findings could be generalised for Intermediate Phase learners in South Africa.

The second limitation was that during classroom observation, the presence of the researcher could have affected the participation of learners and educators in their normal reading lessons.

During the interviews, learners may not have felt free to express themselves, as the researcher was a stranger to them. This is shown by some of the irrelevant and short answers from learners.

The third limitation was that it was difficult to get information from learners because the interview was conducted in English, which learners lack competence in and were not fluent in. It was observed that it was difficult for learners with reading problems to express themselves in English. The researcher ended up asking learners in their home language, which is Zulu. According to the researcher, learners' problems might be in speaking English.

5.10 Recommendations

The focus of this study was on challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in English reading. An important finding and implication from this study is that reading ability in the Intermediate Phase is poor. In the three schools observed, there was no evidence of teaching reading because it was reflected on class timetables, and learners were not given the opportunity to interact with extended texts. Educators did not teach reading through pre-reading, during reading and post-reading phases, and they did not engage learners in discussions of the reading passages. According to the researcher, this may require rethinking of the methods in which reading can be taught, not only in the language but across the curriculum. Another finding was that reading is affected by learning conditions in which learners find themselves, such as lack of resources, e.g. textbooks, libraries, and newspapers.

5.10.1 Recommendations to schools

A report from UNNESCO (2000) recommended that schools should pay particular attention to reading lessons. This involves learners undertaking independent reading every day. Reading should not be confined to language classes, but should occur across the curriculum.

The following further recommendations to schools are worth keeping in mind:

- It was observed in school A that six learners were sharing one book. It is the priority of the Department that every learner be provided with a textbook for every subject. Schools should make sure that all learners receive prescribed books on time, and an effective retrieval system and guidelines for the maintenance of textbooks must be in place in every school.
- Schools should be well-resourced and be equipped with libraries because libraries are important reading resource centres and every class should have a reading corner that contains reading material adapted for all learners' reading levels. Also, learners should be given reading homework daily. This will provide an environment in which learners can immediately feel enchanted to the reading world.
- A culture of reading needs to be cultivated in the classroom, and teachers must show enthusiasm for reading on a daily basis. Overcrowded classrooms are detrimental to the process of identifying and supporting learners with reading problems. Some learners are shy and inhibitive; therefore, their reading problems may not be identified until very late, i.e. when reading problems have become a permanent part of the learner's life.
- School must have compulsory English reading support for learners with reading difficulties within the instructional time.
- Since in all researched school girls outperformed boys in reading, schools should provide reading activities that will challenge boys to read.
- Schools must make sure that the underperformance of learners in reading is addressed in the following grade that the learner has been promoted to.
- Schools should have a reading policy, and the school management team (SMT) should monitor the implementation of reading policy.

5.10.2 Recommendations to learners

Many contributing factors have an impact on learners' low reading ability. A large number of learners come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, and many adults have low literacy levels. Children are seldom exposed to books or regular literacy practices in the home. Schools need to assist these children by giving them books to take home to read.

When learners fail to read correctly, they will not be able to complete their schoolwork adequately, which will lead to frustration because the reading material is beyond their reading ability (Help teach a child to read, 2013:A4). It is recommended that reading materials be designed to be of high interest to learners with reading difficulties, and they must be given plenty of opportunities to read in and outside the classroom.

The following further recommendations are made for learners:

- Learners must have a positive attitude towards reading activities.
- Intermediate Phase learners should be motivated to acquaint themselves with books so as to improve their reading skills.
- Group work and peer work should be encouraged so that learners can support one another.
- Learners must give themselves time to read regularly at home.

Learners with reading problems should be identified early, and intervention strategies and support should be designed. Learners who are at risk of reading failure can learn to read at average levels if they are identified early and taught. Usually, systematic and intensive instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension strategies can be helpful to such learners (Lyon & Blaunstein, 2006:7).

5.10.3 Recommendations to educators

The findings from this study have shown that the quality of teaching reading is poor, and the classroom practice tended to be oral-based without extended text to read. It would be worthwhile for educators to heed the recommendations below.

- Educators need to develop their reading instruction further in order for learners with reading problems to improve all components of reading, not teaching English language only, which means that universities need to train educators in reading.

- Educators need to understand different components of reading and how to develop and assess reading and its components so that they can identify where the problem lies and take appropriate action.
- Educators should monitor learner reading systematically, and the progress of learners with reading problems should be tracked at least monthly. Educators should ensure that learners read grade-appropriate text, and components of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonic, vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension should be integrated into all reading lessons.
- Educators have to sort out material from other sources such as the Internet and newspapers because textbooks are either too difficult or too easy and do not match with the abilities of different learners (Naidoo, Reddy, & Dorasamy, 2015:140).
- Educators should take into consideration learners with reading problems when planning lessons. Schools must be encouraged to compile learners' profiles for learners with reading problems.
- Educators from each grade should get together and form their own internal support teams that could cooperate and collaborate in developing simple reading tasks that could be done (Naidoo, Reddy, & Dorasamy, 2015:140).

5.10.4 Recommendations to the Department of Education

Research has shown that most educators are uncertain about the methods and approaches that they need to use in order to teach reading. Most of them use only the whole language approach, which emphasises on comprehension of the whole passage, neglecting other components of reading (Erlina 2016:54).

The following recommendations are made to the DoE:

- To avoid implementing invalid and ineffective reading approaches, educators must be properly trained on how to teach reading and to support learners with reading problems. The Department must provide continuous monitoring and support to educators.
- Based on the findings of this study, it was observed that schools A and B have a high class enrolment. The Department must ensure that the desirable learner-teacher ratio is maintained so that it can be easy for educators to identify and support learners with reading problems.

- The Department of Education should design clearly structured material for analysing learners' reading levels, and reading problems could form an integral part of the programme. A more intensive assessment is necessary to establish learners' reading problems in the Intermediate Phase.
- An assessment component where learners' progress in reading can be monitored should be built into the programme, such as a running record of learners' progress.
- The Department of Education should ensure that all educators are competent to teach English, so that they can be able to teach with confidence and be able to identify and support learners with reading problems. It was discovered during classroom observation that there were English language educators who did not qualify to teach the English language.
- Policymakers need to come up with ways on how to structure a school timetable in order to make sure that all components of reading and learners' problems are addressed in order for reading to improve.
- It is recommended that when the Department of Education intends to compile or amend the curriculum in the Intermediate Phase, educators should always be included in the panel because of their vast experience and knowledge.
- The Department of Education must build more technical schools to accommodate learners who do not benefit from mainstream education because of reading problems.

5.10.5 Recommendations to parents

It was noted from the findings that some educators expressed their concern regarding lack of parental involvement. They felt that parents do not support their children in reading activities. Gunning (2010:533) pointed out that the parents may not be equipped to help their children with their reading problems; thus, they should gradually be provided with information to build and develop their reading skills.

The following recommendations are made to parents:

- It is recommended that parents motivate learners to read to them, by creating a suitable reading atmosphere at home. Additionally, group reading should be encouraged with siblings reading together so as to assist one another to improve reading skills.

- Parents should visit the school so as to communicate with a learner’s educator in order to discuss the learner’s progress in reading.
- Parents should reduce learners’ anxiety to read and give consistent support to a child with reading problems.

It is anticipated that this study will enhance the understanding of challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in English reading. The findings of this study are expected to provide educational authorities with valuable information to contemplate when preparing educational programmes for learners with reading problems. The guidelines to improve reading in the Intermediate Phase that follow are proposed as an original contribution to this study.

5.11 Proposed guidelines to improve reading in the Intermediate Phase

1. Introduction

These proposed guidelines to improve reading are based on the research findings arising from the thesis. They should be seen as the researcher’s contribution to addressing the challenges faced by learners in English reading as discussed in Chapter 1. The findings of the research showed that there is a low level of reading ability in Intermediate Phase learners in Mondlo ward. This is not surprising considering the PIRLS 2011 report which reflected that South Africa scored relatively low in the reading ability of the learners that were tested, and there was a persistent gap in reading achievement between boys and girls.

Effective reading requires that teaching of reading skills be strengthened and learners be given more practice in reading from grade R in order to improve reading ability. In this regard, continuous monitoring and support of learners with reading performance is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of reading ability in learners. It becomes imperative that a framework for improving reading be generated to guide educators on how to address the challenges that Intermediate Phase learners face in reading as a way of regulating its practice. This framework should be comprehensive so as to accommodate learners at all reading levels. This proposed framework for improving reading contains all different issues that need to be considered. In the Intermediate Phase, there is a great need to strengthen learners’ capacity in English, since English is the LoLT in this phase. Every effort should be made to expose learners to English. Educators are expected to teach reading across the curriculum by including reading activities in their lessons – in all learning areas – and the strategy for the sustainability of the programme should be developed. This will assist in addressing the gap between theory and practice in reading abilities of Intermediate Phase learners.

2. Preamble

Education in South Africa has undergone significant changes in the last two decades following democratic elections in 1994. Many policies were put in place, ranging from new curricula to meet the needs of a post-apartheid society. The policies focused on developing a framework to address the historical inequalities of apartheid, at the same time creating a broad-based vision for a new South African education system. South Africa has 11 official languages and the first year of schooling is taught in learners' home language, with English as a subject. From grade 4 onwards, all learners will have to use English as the LoLT and at least one other approved language as a subject. One of the principal challenges learners face in the Intermediate Phase is the difference between the language structure of home language and English. Learners have a tendency to apply home language structure to English.

There are many achievements and breakthroughs that South Africa has made in ensuring quality education, and the provision of education opportunities for learners with reading difficulties became a focus of increasing attention. However, because there is no policy framework for improving reading, this has presented challenges in terms of implementation. In 2001-2004, the Department of Education conducted a national systemic evaluation to establish literacy and numeracy levels in primary schools. The surveys conducted showed shockingly low levels of reading ability across the country. The Department had launched a number of campaigns to improve reading proficiency in South Africa, which included:

- Quality Improvement, Development, Support and Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP), which targeted to improve education in high-poverty schools where the quality of education is seriously compromised due to lack of resources and overcrowding in classrooms.
- National Reading Strategy (NRS), launched in 2008, intended to promote reading across the curriculum.
- Foundations for Learning (FFL), also launched in 2008, intended to improve reading, writing and numeracy of all learners. The Foundation for Learning Campaign (2008-2011) showed strong government commitment to a back-to-basics approach (Government Gazette 2008).
- The Quality Learning and Teaching Campaign (QLTC), also launched in 2008, to ensure quality learning and teaching for all the learners in the school community.

To further improve the implementation of these campaigns, the Department of Education's Minister of Education declared the Action Plan for 2014 as part of Schooling 2025 vision. This

includes Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement, Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development in South Africa and National School Nutrition Programme.

3. Objectives for reading improvement framework

The broad objectives of reading improvement are to:

- 3.1 ensure that all learners irrespective of their reading difficulties or gender receive equal opportunity to practice reading.
- 3.2 raise the level of support for learners who are at risk in falling behind in reading.
- 3.3 establish appropriate teaching approaches that would improve reading in the Intermediate Phase.
- 3.4 ensure that reading material used to assist learners with reading problems are at the level of such learners.
- 3.5 ensure that reading is promoted across the curriculum.

4. The role of educators in reading improvement

The relationship between the educator and the learner with reading problems is of vital importance to learners' reading achievement. Unless a culture of reading is inculcated in learners by adults, it will be very difficult to develop positive attitudes to reading in learners. Therefore, the educator's genuine feeling of concern for and acceptance of a learner with reading problems is crucial for reading improvement and able to help a learner with reading problems to develop a positive self-concept.

Learners with reading problems are often rejected by their parents even before school entrance because they fail to meet their expectations. Some are neglected from home, and they always come to school full of anger and frustration. Others are from child-headed families, and their basic needs are not properly met. These learners usually have met defeat in all learning experiences in school in such a way that they become emotionally involved with all reading situations.

The educator must try his or her best to gain the confidence of a learner with reading problems by giving the learner reading tasks appropriate for his or her level, which will make a learner experience success in a concrete way, such as by using charts or gold stars showing progress in the areas in which the learner is receiving help. Learners in the Intermediate Phase can assist the educator to understand their reading problems and their causes and in planning a reading programme for reading improvement.

5.12 Recommendations for further research

The following recommendations are in order for future research:

- The findings in this study showed generally low reading levels in the Intermediate Phase. It is necessary to carry out the study on challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in reading of isiZulu as their primary language.
- Research needs to be conducted on methods of support being provided to learners with reading problems in the Intermediate Phase in their regular classes.
- More studies could examine the methods of supporting reading ability in English and how reading can be effectively taught in the Intermediate Phase.
- More research is needed to investigate the effect of reading problems on general academic performance and achievement across the curriculum.
- This study focused on challenges faced by learners in English reading in the Intermediate Phase. What is now needed is a more fine-grained analysis of reading problems in learners who were promoted because of age cohort or because of a number of years in a phase.
- Education that can help educators' development into effective reading instructions in the Intermediate Phase: Educators must learn how to mix explanations with learners' scaffolding participation in reading. Such teaching requires consistent monitoring of learners as they read as well as understanding of the reading text.
- Longitudinal studies could perhaps be conducted with two groups of learners – challenges of English reading in English-speaking learners and challenges of English reading in isiZulu-speaking learners.

5.13 Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to investigate challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners in English reading. An in-depth literature study on reading problems was initiated, which provided an appropriate framework for reading problems. The findings from the literature demonstrated that learners with reading problems present challenges with strategic processing components of reading.

The challenges faced by Intermediate Phase learners were investigated using the qualitative approach. Unstructured interview schedules were used. Several dominant themes emerged throughout the data analysis. The major findings of this study were that there are several causes of learners' challenges in English reading such as physical factors and neurological factors, which all contribute to a certain extent to reading problems. According to the findings from interviews, all participants had their own perceptions about the causes of reading problems. From the learners' side, it emerged that the problems were lack of comprehension of the English language and the inability to express themselves in English. The major finding from educators' interviews was the negative effect of curriculum changes, and the learners' home background has a negative effect on learners' reading ability. In the interview with principals, it was found that there are inadequate teacher training workshops based on reading skills.

The researcher undertook a field observation in the researched schools. It was found that boys are more susceptible to reading problems as compared to girls. The problems noted from the school and classroom observation are the following: inadequately resourced to equip learners with the necessary support material for reading; overcrowded classrooms; unclear time to teach reading; lack of school libraries and reading corners; ineffective teaching approach to English reading; and lack of strategies to support learners with reading problems.

The main finding of the study was that many of the challenges learners encounter in reading English are related to five components of reading (phonological, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension). This study provides evidence that all reading components must be taken into consideration. It is clear that reading cannot be approached superficially but there must be a systematic and integrated manner during reading. It was evident that reading ability requires time and opportunities for learners to practise reading skills and every effort must be made by all stakeholders to improve reading in learners. Although the study was conducted in only three schools, the findings show that the reading levels in all selected schools were below the grade level of learners. The findings revealed that socio-economic conditions of the schools and learners' homes appear to be a major contribution in low reading levels. Also, greater access to information and resources in schools was found to have a high correlation with reading problems.

The outcome of this study will provide new insight into reading problems and to improve learners' reading levels. Although the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the wider population, they can be used to understand the challenges faced by learners in reading English.

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APPENDIX A: RESEARCH ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

P.O. Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

The Department of Education
Private bag X9330
Vryheid
3100

Re-Permission for research study in Primary Schools in Mondlo ward

Dear Sir

I am here by applying for permission to contact the Intermediate Phase Subject Advisor for English Language principals of primary schools in your jurisdiction in Mondlo area for research purposes.

I am a doctoral student at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Prof. P.J. Heeralal contact details 0214292318 and email address heeralalpj@unisa.ac.za . My topic of research is "CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS IN READING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO WARD VRYHEID DISTRCT. "

The aims of the study are:

- To identify challenges faced by learners in reading.
- To provide information about issues and challenges experienced by learners with reading problems.
- To make a meaningful contribution and guidelines on how to improve teaching of reading.
- To give an overview on teaching conditions in which learners find themselves in.

The researcher will request the permission to check the time book, assessment record sheets, the year end progression schedule, to observe the schools, to observe English reading lessons in the Intermediate Phase and conduct interviews with the identified learners with reading problems, English language educators, principals and Subject Advisor. Educators and learners

will also be requested to join focus group discussion after interview. Observation schedule and interview questions are appended for your information.

I believe that the results from this study may assist the Department of Education in providing the appropriate answers to the challenges faced by learners in English reading and to design strategies that can be used to improve reading problems in the Intermediate Phase. All the participants will not be exposed to any form of risks by participating in this study. The copy of the theses will be provided upon completion.

Yours truly

T.P. Nkosi (0828353070)

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO DO A RESEARCH STUDY WITHIN MONDLO CIRCUIT

EDUCATOR : NKOSI T.P
PERSAL NUMBER : 61107522
SCHOOL : GOQO PRIMARY

We acknowledge receipt of your application for permission to do a research study within Emondlo Circuit. We are a Department that supports all efforts aimed at equipping our employees with information and skills that will sharpen their understanding of educational matters and contribute towards making them competitive and productive in the work environment.

The need for you to undertake this research study for your doctoral theses is acknowledged with much appreciation. You are hereby granted permission to undertake your research study within the specified circuit and with due regard for the protection of uninterrupted daily activities and academic programmes of the school you will interact with in the course of your research study.

[Signature]
CES: BHEKUZULU CMC

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Department van Onderwys Umnyango Umfundo
BHEKUZULU CIRCUIT
2014 -09- 18
ISILWYAMA SEPOST PRIVATE BAG X3318, VRYHEID, 3100
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Postal Address: Private Bag X9318 • Vryheid • 3100 • Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 116 Landdrost Street • Vryheid • 3100
Tel.: +27 34 980 9491 • Fax: +27 034 980 8715 • Web: www.kzeducation.gov.za

...dedicated to service and performance
beyond the call of duty

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPALS

P.O. Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

The Principal

Permission to conduct a research study I your school

I humble request the permission to conduct the research in your school. The research is about reading problems in the Intermediate Phase. I am a doctoral student at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Prof. P.J. Heeralal. I am undertaking a research on CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS IN READING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO VRYHEID DISTRICT as part of my doctoral theses.

The aims of the study are:

- To identify challenges faced by learners in reading.
- To provide information about issues and challenges experienced by learners.
- To make a meaningful contribution and guide lines on how to improve reading.
- To give an overview on teaching conditions in which learners find themselves in.

Your school was selected because it is assumed that it has more reading problems in the district based on the intermediate phase year end progression schedule. The researcher will check the time book to check the regular attendance of educators, observe the school, observe the classroom and reading lessons during English reading period and shall request English reading assessment record sheet in order to confirm what was observed and to identify learners with reading problems and thereafter conduct unstructured interviews with the principal, identified learners with reading problems and one English educator per grade in the Intermediate Phase (at least with five years teaching experience) as well as conducting focus group discussion with the same learners and educators. The interviews shall take twenty minutes each and focus group discussion shall take about an hour. Every effort will be made to ensure that minimum disruption of learning occurs during the research process.

All participants will be on a voluntary and anonymous basis and participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time. This study will assist the Department of Education in developing strategies to improve reading in the intermediate phase. No participants will be exposed to any form of risks by participating in the interview or attending focus group discussion. During and after the research the name of your school and participants shall remain confidential. Hard copies of all the answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard in my office and electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. After five years hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

I have already obtained the permission from the Department of Education and Research Ethics Committee granted the permission. The copies of the permission letters from are attached. The school will receive a copy of the findings.

Should you require any further information about any aspect of this study feel free to contact me on 0828353070 or email me on nkosiphu5@gmail.com. Should you have concern about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor Prof. P.J. Heeralal his phone number 012429318 fax number 0866579494 or use his email address heerapi@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson Madaleen Claassens on 0123460701 fax number 0123460701 or mcdt@netactive.co.za.

Thanking in advance.

Yours truly

T.P. Nkosi

Consent form for principal

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a theses and that my participation will be kept confidential.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name and Surname: _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____ -

Researcher's Name and Surname: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM FOR EDUCATORS

P.O.Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is **Temperance Phumzile Nkosi**. I am a registered doctoral student with University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Prof. P.J. Heeralal. I am undertaking a research on CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS IN READING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO WARD VRYHEID DISTRICT as part of my doctoral theses and kindly requested you to be part of the sample in the study. The researcher will need only three participants per school.

The purpose of the study is:

- To identify challenges faced by learners in reading.
- To provide information about issues and challenges experienced by learners with reading problems.
- To make a meaningful contribution and guide lines on how to improve reading.
- To give an overview on teaching conditions in which learners find themselves in.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

You have been selected by purposive sampling strategy. I invite you to take part in this survey.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written concern form. You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time and without giving a reason.

PROCEDURE

The researcher will request the permission to observe your classroom environment, to observe your reading lesson and to check your reading assessment record sheet and thereafter will request you to take part in the unstructured interview as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience. The interview will take twenty minutes and to join focus group discussion thereafter. The researcher will use audio recorder in order to be able to take as much information as possible.

DURATION

The research exercise requires about one hour of your time.

RISKS

You will not be exposed to any form of risks by participating in the interview session and in attending the focus group discussion.

BENEFITS

Your participation in this study will go a long way in assisting the department in designing strategies to improve reading difficulties and in designing new methods and approaches to teach reading in the Intermediate Phase.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your answers will be given a code number and you will be referred to in this way in the data. While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.

STORAGE OF DATA

Collected data will be saved on a password protected file for a period of five years and raw data will be stored in a secure place which will not be accessible by any person other than the researcher.

ETHICS APPROVAL

I have already received written approval from the Department of Education and College of Education Research Ethics Review Committee, UNISA. A copy of the approval letters can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact me, my contact number is 0828353070 or use this email address nkosiphu5@gmail.com. The findings will be accessible in June 2016. Should you wish to have concern about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor Prof. P.J. Heeralal phone number: 0124292318 or in this email address: heerapj@unisa.ac.za fax number: 0866579494 alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the College of Education research Ethics Review Committee Madeleen Claassens mcdtc@netactive.co.za phone number: 0123460701 fax number: 0123460701

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours truly
T.P. Nkosi

PART II
CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

I confirm that I have read the foregoing information with understanding as explained in the information sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions if any and I am prepared to participate in the study.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report. I have received a copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name and Surname : _____

Participant Signature: _____

Researcher's name and Surname: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS

P.O Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

Dear parent/ guardian

Your child is invited to participate in the study entitle CHALLENGES OF RAEDING IN THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE IN READING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO AREA VRYHEID DISTRICT. I am undertaking this study as part of my doctoral research at the University of South Africa (UNISA).

The purpose of this study is:

- To identify challenges faced by learners in reading.
- To provide information about issues and challenges experienced by learners with reading problems.
- To make a meaningful contribution and guidelines on how to improve reading.
- To give an overview on teaching conditions in which learners find themselves in.

I kindly request the permission to include your child in this study because he or she is in the intermediate phase therefore he or she can have valuable contribution to the research problem. I expect to have thirty five other children participating in the study.

If you allow your child to participate, I shall request him or her to:

- Observe your child in his or her respective classroom while being taught an English lesson by their educator
- Look at your child's English reading assessment sheet
- Take part in an interview
- Record the interview

It will be a confidential interview and your child's name will remain anonymous. The interview and focus group discussion will be conducted in your child's school.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child by participating in this study and your child will receive no direct benefit from participating in the study; however possible benefits to the education will assist the Department of Education in designing new methods and approach to the improve in reading in the Intermediate Phase. Neither your child nor you shall receive any type of payment for participating in the study.

Your child's participation is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time.

The study will take place during regular classroom activities with prior approval of the school. However, if you do not want your child to participate, an alternative activity will be available.

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study and your child will also be asked to sign the assent form which accompanies this letter.

The information gathered from this study and your child's participation in the study will be stored securely on a password locked computer in my office for a period of five years after the study.

If you have questions about this study please ask me or my study supervisor Prof. P.J. Heeralal Department of Science and Technology Education at University of South Africa (UNISA). My contact number is 0828353070 and my email is nkosiphu5@gmail.com. The email of my supervisor is heerap@unisa.ac.za. Permission for this study has already been given by the Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to allow your child to participate in the study. You may keep a copy of this letter.

Name of child _____ Parent/guardian's signature _____
Date _____
Researcher's name _____ Researcher's signature _____
Date _____

APPENDIX G: ASSENT FORM FOR INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS

P.O. Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

Dear learner

My name is teacher **Temperance Phumzile Nkosi** and would like to ask you if I can come and listen how you read English with your educator. I am trying to learn how Intermediate Phase learners read with their educator.

If you agree to do this, I will come and observe you when you are with you educator in reading lesson. I will also ask you to answer some few questions. I promise that I will not hurt you.

I will also ask your parents if you can take part. You can say yes if you want to take part or you can say no if you don't want to take part. If you have a question you can ask now or later if I visit your school.

Please ask your mommy or daddy about taking part before you sign this letter. Signing your name at the bottom means you agree to be in this study. a copy of this letter will be given to your parents.

Regards

Teacher T.P.Nkosi

Your name	Yes I will take part X	No I don't want to take part X
Name of the researcher		
Date		
Witness		

APPENDIX H: CONSENT FORM FOR SUBJECT ADVISOR

P.O. Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

The Subject Advisor

Permission to conduct interview

I Temperance Phumzile Nkosi, am conducting a research as part of my research as a doctoral student entitled CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS IN READING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO WARD VRYHEID DISTRICT at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Permission for this study has been given by department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience related to my research topic.

The focus of this study is on reading problems based on the assumption that reading is the engine that powers success in the academic context. Your involvement would assist in understanding the current state of reading in the whole district. I will request you to take part in the unstructured Interview as honestly and frankly as possible and according to your personal views and experience on this topic. This information can be used to improve reading. Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately twenty to forty minutes in your office at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions. You may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. I will send you a copy of transcript afterwards to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for five years in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participated in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0828353070 or by email at nkosiphu5@gmail.com.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this study. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form.

Yours sincerely

T. P. Nkosi

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter and have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to the study. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications, with the understanding that quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I agree on my free will to participate in this study.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX I: LETTER REQUESTING THE SCHOOL COUNCILLOR TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

P.O. Box 1971
EMONDLO
3105

Dear Sir/ Madam

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I **Temperance Phumzile Nkosi** am conducting as part of my research as a doctoral student entitled CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS IN READING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AT MONDLO WARD VRYHEID DISTRICT at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has been given by the Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you agree to take part.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences.

All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collection during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for twelve months in a locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participating, please contact me 0828353070 or by e-mail at nkosiphu5@gmail.com I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely
T.P. Nkosi

Consent form

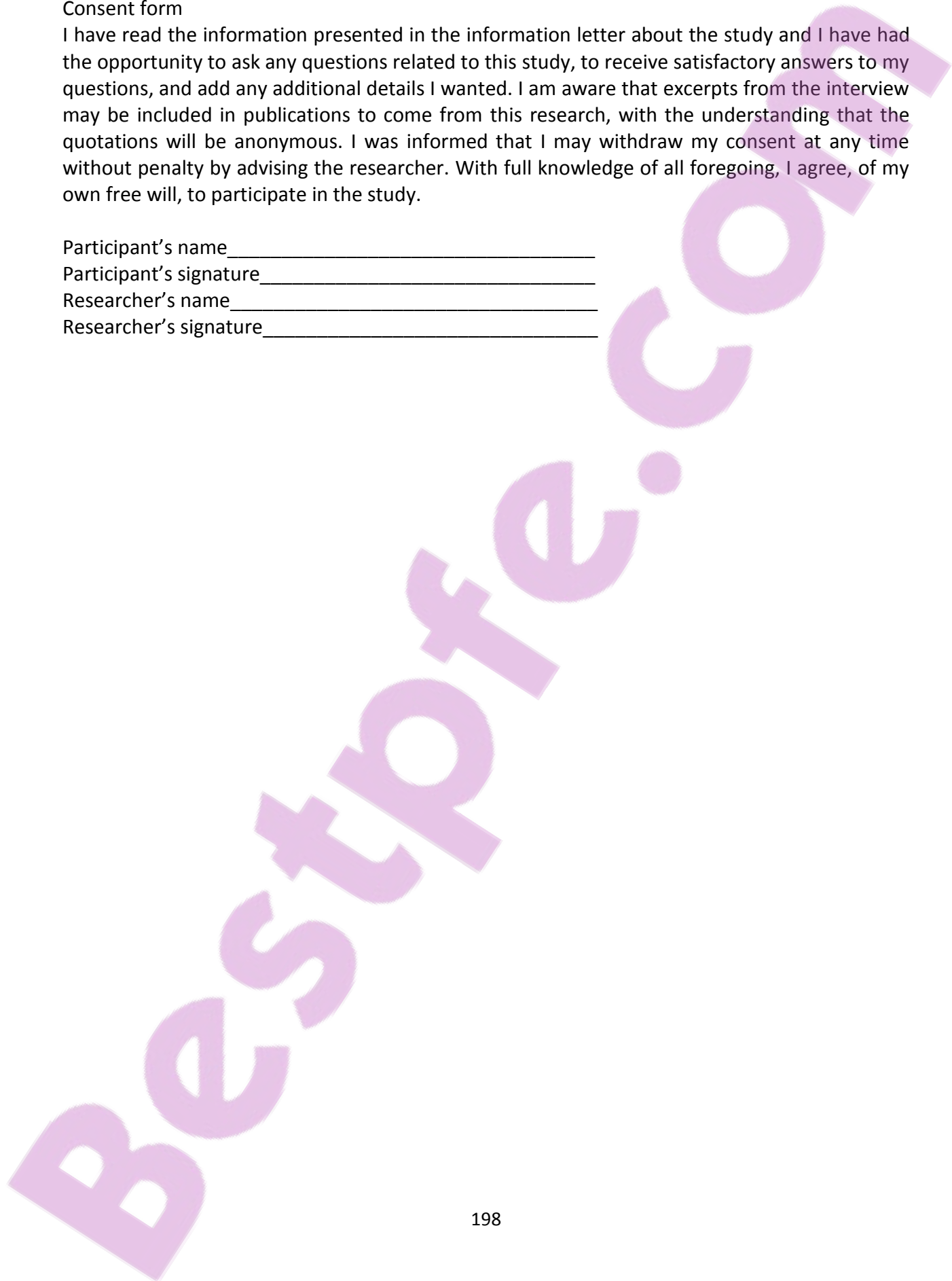
I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study and I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in the study.

Participant's name _____

Participant's signature _____

Researcher's name _____

Researcher's signature _____



APPENDIX J: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Name of school _____

Date of visit _____

Class visited _____

Time spent for observation _____

Classroom size

Average age of learners

Learning environment

Teacher learner interaction

Learner attitude

Availability and use of educational resources

Reading material per learner

Library use /Reading corner

Class time-table

Assessment tool

Mode of interaction of school with parents (open day/reports forms)

APPENDIX K: QUESTIONS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH THE PRINCIPALS

1. How do your teachers cope with the teaching of English reading in the intermediate phase?
2. How do you monitor that the reading periods are being honoured by educators and learners?
3. What kinds of problems are experienced in the teaching of reading?
4. How does the school motivate learners to read?
5. What support did the district give to learners with reading problems?
6. What do you think it can be done to improve reading?
7. How does the school language policy cater for learners with reading problems?

Do you have anything to add based on reading problems in the intermediate phase?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX L: QUESTIONS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH EDUCATORS

1. According to your view what makes your learners not be able to read up to the expected level or grade level?
2. What is the impact of reading difficulties in learners?
3. What reading approach do you normally use when teaching reading?
4. What do you think are the factors that affect reading in the intermediate phase?
5. What is your individual support plan for learners with reading problems?
6. How do the parents of these learners provide to reduce learners' reading problems?
7. How is their home background and behavior?
8. What do you think is the impact of reading difficulties on learners?
9. According to your view how can reading be improved in the intermediate phase?
10. Please make any comment regarding problems experienced by learners in reading?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX M: THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

1. In your view as English language educators, why do most learners in the intermediate phase struggle with English reading?
2. How do you keep learners with reading problems feel part of reading lesson in class?
3. How can you gain parental support for reading practice?
4. Apart from the prescribed English reader for your class, what other reading material do you use in the reading lessons?
5. What kind of support do you receive from the department to improve your teaching of reading?
6. In your experience, what kind of activities can help to develop reading skills in learners?
7. In your view, do you think learners with reading problems in the Intermediate Phase receive the necessary support to improve their reading difficulties?

APPENDIX N: QUESTIONS FOR THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW WITH LEARNERS

1. What causes you not to read well?
2. Why is it important to know how to read?
3. How can I help you to do better in reading?

APPENDIX O: QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERMEDIATE PHASE ENGLISH SUBJECT ADVISOR

1. As the Department of Education how do you stimulate reading in the intermediate phase?
2. Which reading problems do the schools encounter?
3. To what extent does reading affect learners' academic performance?
4. According to your view what are the causes of reading problems?
5. What can be done to improve reading in the intermediate phase?
6. How do you conduct needs analyses for schools before planning any workshop?
7. Which corrective reading intervention programmes do you have to equip educators to assist learners with reading problems?
8. How do you monitor that schools have enough and relevant resources like text books and department workbooks and they are frequently used?
9. How is the curriculum adapted to suit learners with reading problems?
10. How do you monitor that learners who were progressed based on age cohort receive adequate support from educators?
11. How do the promotion requirements from grade to grade cater for learners with reading problems?
12. Do you have anything to add based on reading improvement?

THANK YOU

APPENDIX P: EDITOR'S DECLARATION

DECLARATION BY LANGUAGE EDITOR



19 July 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

DECLARATION: LANGUAGE EDITING of DEd Thesis

I hereby declare that I have edited the Doctor of Education (in Inclusive Education) thesis of TEMPERANCE PHUMZILE NKOSI entitled "**CHALLENGES FACED BY INTERMEDIATE PHASE LEARNERS IN READING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MONDLO VRYHEID DISTRICT**" and found the written work to be free of ambiguity and obvious errors. The scope of the edit was from the cover page to the end of the reference list. It is the responsibility of the student to address any comments from the editor or supervisor. Additionally, it is the final responsibility of the student to make sure of the correctness of the thesis.

Khomotso Bopape

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