



**Exploring Foundation Phase teachers' strategies to
enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners
by
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DECLARATION

I declare that the study entitled “Exploring Foundation Phase teachers’ strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners” is my own work and that this dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any university. All sources consulted and quoted have been indicated, cited and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signature..... Date.....

Balungile Jennifer Gumede

Statement by Supervisor

This dissertation is submitted with/without my approval

Signature..... Date.....

Ms Dimakatso Kortjass

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Almighty God for giving me strength and providing me with family and friends who are loving and supportive.

My Supervisor, Ms Dimakatso Kortjass: Thank you for your guidance throughout this journey. Without you, this research would not have been completed. Thank you and may God bless you.

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Amahle, the race is still on. “Uzibambe ziqine.”

DEDICATION

To my late father, Mr N. H. Gumede, who was passionate about education, thank you for being my first teacher. I also dedicate the study to my mom, Mrs B.T. and my mother-in-law, Mrs D.V. Ngithi nje “Xabhashi nakuwe Gawozi nime njalo nje”.

ABSTRACT

All learners need to receive quality education irrespective of their race, gender and disability status. Any learner who is intellectually challenged ought to be granted access to appropriate and quality education and no learner should be discriminated against because of a disability. Efforts have been made to provide relevant support to learners who encounter barriers to learning. Thus, to grant an opportunity for learners with intellectual impairments to live independently within their societies, they need to acquire reading skills.

It was in this context that this study explored strategies used by Foundation Phase (FP) teachers to enhance reading skills to intellectually challenged learners. Understanding the various strategies the teachers employed, was essential for comprehending how they organised and presented information in order to assist these learners as they function at a level of development that is below that of their peers. It was discernibly clear that teachers who teach these learners in mainstream classrooms encountered problems. The study was conducted in a public school in Jozini, an area in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. Purposive sampling was employed to select the six teachers with first-hand experience of teaching in the Foundation Phase. An interpretivist paradigm was employed for this study, to comprehend participants' experiences of classroom practices in their authentic settings. The qualitative data were generated using focus group interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. To capture the exceptionality of actual situation in the school exploratory case study design was adopted.

The findings of the study revealed that FP teachers struggled to use creative strategies when teaching reading to learners who were intellectually challenged due to overcrowded classrooms. Thus, the learners in the school were marginalised as they were only peripherally included in teaching and learning activities in the overcrowded classrooms. The challenges these learners face and the struggles they experience within themselves need to be taken into consideration in the education process and therefore strategies need to be developed and utilised to create a learning environment in which these learners can reach their full potential. With reference to reading, it is an undeniable fact that learners with special education needs require systematic instruction to enable them to make meaning of the texts that they read. The study findings highlight the importance of utilising creative and innovative strategies in teaching intellectually challenged learners to read. Moreover, these reading strategies should be varied, and they should be adapted to address the special needs of learners so that they will reach their maximum potential. The study also stresses the application of inclusive education policies and practices in FP teacher training programmes and teacher development courses.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	- Annual National Assessment
AYP	- Adequate Yearly Progress
B Ed	- Bachelor of Education
CAPS	- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CK	- Content Knowledge
CPK	- Content Pedagogical Knowledge
DBE	- Department of Basic Education (post 2009)
D-CAPS	- Differentiated Curriculum and Policy Statement
DoE	- Department of Education (prior to 2009)
EFA	- Education for All
EWP 6	- Education White Paper 6
FAL	- First Additional Language
FASD	- Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FP	- Foundation Phase
HEQF	- Higher Education Qualification Framework
HIV	- Human Immuno Virus
IDEA	- Individuals with Disabilities Education
INSET	- In-service Education Training
IQ	- Intelligent Quotient
LoLT	- Language of Learning and Teaching
LSEN	- Learners with Special Education Needs
LTSM	- Learning and Teaching Support Material
MLA	- Monitoring and Learning Achievement
MRTEQ	- Minimum Requirements for Teacher Qualification
NCESS	- National Commission on Education Support Services
NCLB	-No Child Left Behind
NCS	- National Curriculum Statement
NCSNET	- National Commission for Special Needs in Education and Training
NEEDU	- National Education Evaluation and Development Unit
NRS	- National Reading Strategy

PIRLS	- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PK	- Pedagogical Knowledge
SAFCD	- South African Federal Council on Disability
SASA	- South African Schools Act
SGB	- School Governing Body
TB	- Tuberculosis
UKZN	- University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Most learners, especially those who reside in rural areas, lack supervision and support by parents or caregivers for various reasons. This is a common phenomenon because many households are headed by grandparents or even older siblings who have little or no interest in education. Even if some parents and caregivers value the education of their children, they often lack the knowledge and skills to assist young children in their most vulnerable developmental stage Department of Social Development/Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities & United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012). Moreover, the poor socio-economic status of many parents means that they cannot afford to buy books, magazines or even newspapers to expose their children to a reading culture. This means that for many young children exposure to reading occurs only at school. But in many South African schools, when the learners arrive in the classrooms there are few or even no teaching and learning materials to support their educational development.

It was against this background that this study aimed to explore the strategies used by Foundation Phase (FP) teachers to improve the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. The first chapter illuminates the importance of teaching intellectually challenged learners to read and it illuminates the importance of inclusive education in assisting learners who are intellectually challenged. The chapter also presents the focus and purpose of the study, provides background information, presents the rationale and the key research questions, and provides a brief definition of key terms that are used in this study report. The chapter is concluded with a presentation of a summary of all the chapters in the thesis, followed by a brief conclusion.

1.2 Background to and Context of the Study

Despite being a signatory of a universal agreement on inclusive education, South Africa is still facing challenges in the implementation of this educational concept (Makoelle, 2014). Many learners in this country have special needs and many do not attend school – or drop out of school untimely – as the

facilities do not accommodate their various conditions and needs. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2001, cited in Bankote, 2013) argue that many learners who have special education needs have restricted access to schooling. According to Moketsi (2012), in 2012 the number of South African children who were living with disabilities and who did not attend school was in the region of 467 000. Furthermore, a lack of information, combined with discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities at all levels of society, contributes to the continued neglect of such children's right to education. This partly explains the minimal rate of progress that has been made towards the enrolment and participation of children with disabilities in the education process. Lomofsky and Lazarus (2012) contend that it is not only access to schools that is problematic, but that the South African education system is failing even those who are in the system because of its inflexible curriculum. Mveli (2012) further articulates that learners with special education needs may be enrolled in mainstream schools, but that the buildings and environments in which these schools are located remain inaccessible to them. According to Christie (1998) and Haskell (2000, as cited in Jali, 2012), the lack of understanding of the policy of inclusion is due to the lack of involvement of educators in policy formulation, although they are regarded as important role players in the execution of these policies. Ntombela (2009) argues that, for inclusive education to be properly implemented, the Ministry of Education should pay more attention to the continuous development of educators and the upgrading of mainstream schools to accommodate learners with special needs.

One need that should be addressed is mentally challenged learners' ability to read with comprehension as these learners face numerous challenges during reading activities. An investigation conducted by Wawryk-Epp, Harrison and Prentice (2004) revealed that intellectually challenged learners struggled to construct meaning from texts. Also, they had difficulties in recalling previously read information, and their vocabulary skills were insufficient to read age-appropriate texts. Warwyk-Epp et al. (2004) thus argue that intellectually challenged learners lack frequency skills and they therefore find it difficult to express ideas based on their reading. The challenges these learners face and the struggles they experience within themselves need to be taken into consideration in the education process. Thus, strategies need to be developed and utilised to create a learning environment in which these learners can reach their full potential. In short, learners with special education needs require systematic, appropriate instruction to enable them to make meaning of texts when they read.

The inclusion of learners with learning impairments in mainstream schools is a global issue. During a world conference that was held by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on Special Needs Education in Salamanca in Spain in 1994, a call was made

on international communities to endorse the approach of inclusive schools. It was argued that this would be possible if schools could implement practical strategic education planning for delivery that would embrace the principle of inclusion (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix).

In the United States (US), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, which was amended in 2004, is a federal law requiring all students to have access to the general education curriculum. Houston and Torgeson (2004) assert that because reading is part of the general education curriculum, it should also address the needs of students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 of the US requires that all students, including those with impairments, achieve adequate yearly progress standards, which include appropriate reading levels (NCLB, 2001).

In responding to a global call, South Africa has established several policies and Acts to provide for inclusive schools where all learners, regardless of their needs, can access education. One such policy is the Revised Policy on Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (Department of Higher Education, 2015), which stipulates that FP student teachers “need extensive and specialized knowledge of early childhood learning to teach reading, writing and numeracy and to develop key initial concepts and skills which lay the foundation for learning in later phases” (Department of Higher Education, 2015, p. 20). The policy further specifies that educators need proficiency in the identification of learning barriers and they need to be competent in curriculum differentiation for multiple learning levels. Concurrently, the South African Schools Act (SASA) (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) commits to the provision of quality education for all learners regardless of their conditions or mental capacity. Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) contends that attitudes, behaviours, teaching methods, teaching environments and the curriculum should not only meet the needs of all learners but should also empower learners with adequate skills so that they can participate fully in their communities. Thus, for all learners to be able to overcome the various challenges they face when they are taught to read, they need teachers who are skilled in using different methods and a variety of strategies that will enhance their reading skills, regardless of their cognitive capacity.

1.3 Focus and Purpose of the Study

The Department of Education (DoE, 2001) states that all children have the right to quality education and all learners can learn if they receive enough support. It is undeniable that learners in rural areas

face more challenges than their urban counterparts because of several factors such as their lower socio-economic status, deprived cultural background, and overcrowded and poorly equipped schools.

The study was conducted in one school in the Bonjeni Circuit in the Umkhanyakude District. The study site was done a public school in the deep rural area of Jozini which is situated in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. This primary school enrolled learners from Grade R to Grade 7 at the time of the study. Because of the mountainous geographical location of the area where the school is situated, it has been impossible to build new schools regardless of the dense population. The classrooms of the study site were therefore overcrowded. Most learners were from a poor socio-economic background and most families relied on government grants for survival. This mainstream primary school was selected as I was familiar with the area and because I was in possession of anecdotal information that testified to the fact that intellectually challenged learners in the FP were taught at this school. All the FP teachers who participated in the study were chosen because of their first-hand experience of teaching FP learners.

This study was conducted in the Educational Psychology field and it is envisaged that the findings and recommendations will contribute to scholarly knowledge and a deeper insight regarding different strategies that can be employed by teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. The way these strategies may be employed will also be elucidated, and this information will contribute to this particular field of study. The findings of this study will be disseminated in various forms (e.g., workshops and academic publications) to FP teachers and policy makers, and it is thus argued that the teachers who have not yet practised inclusive education in their classrooms will better understand the requirements for the inclusion of learners with intellectual challenges in the reading programmes that they devise. Only by employing various strategies to enhance reading will FP teachers be able to help their intellectually challenged learners to reach their potential.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

I had 19 years of teaching experience when I commenced this study. During these 19 years I observed the devastating phenomenon that learners tend to drop out of school if they have difficulties with reading. Several studies have been conducted on teaching reading in all phases, but I could not trace any study that had explored the teaching of reading to intellectually challenged learners in rural mainstream schools in South Africa, regardless of the presence of many such learners in our schools and communities.

To fill this gap in scholarly knowledge, I therefore decided to employ a case study design in my exploration of the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of the intellectually challenged learners in their classrooms. I was inspired to conduct the study in the knowledge of the Constitutional right of all learners to quality education regardless of their conditions or socio-economic status.

1.5 Problem Statement

My personal interest is to see intellectually challenged learners attain reading skills. It is therefore crucial for teachers to implement different strategies to enhance the attainment of reading skills.

1.6 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to determine whether rural Foundation Phase teachers' strategies for teaching intellectually challenged learners to read achieved their objectives.

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. To explore the teaching strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners.
- ii. To investigate how FP teachers implemented teaching strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners.
- iii. To explore the extent to which these strategies enhanced the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners.

1.7 Research Questions

The study was driven by three key research questions:

1. Which strategies are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?
2. How are these strategies employed to ensure that enhancement of the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners occurs?
3. To what extent do these strategies actually enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?

1.8 Key Concepts

Intellectual challenges

Intellectual challenges are the restrictions that limit cognitive functioning and adaptive conducts (AAIDD, 2010). The term covers many everyday social and practical skills.

Inclusive education

Inclusive education is a system that stresses the importance of adapting demands that attitudes, behaviours, teaching methodologies, teaching environments, and curricula to meet the needs of all learners (DoE, 2001). The application of this educational system should develop *all* learners' strengths so that they can participate effectively in the learning processes in the schooling phase in which they are involved.

Reading

Reading is the process whereby learners engage meaningfully with a written text (DoE, 2011).

Reading skills

Reading skills are the abilities learners acquire to make meaning of a text that they read (Afflerbach, David Pearson, & Paris, 2008). These skills are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary acquisition and comprehension. It is the acquisition of these skills by intellectually challenged learners that underpinned the main aim of the study.

Strategies for teaching reading

Afflerbach, David Pearson, and Paris (2008) define strategies for teaching reading as the approaches that can be used by educators to assist learners to interact with a text. Some of the strategies are shortening the text, text augmentation (e.g., adding a storyline to extend the main idea), adaptations (e.g., text summaries), rewriting the text, and using a prediction structure that can help learners gain meaning from the text.

1.9 Brief Historical Overview of Inclusive Education in South Africa

Opportunities for most young learners to learn to read are in the hands of FP teachers. It is therefore an undeniable fact that reading skills should be attained in the FP years of schooling. Learners with special education needs have historically been separated from mainstream schools, but this situation changed with the advent of international and national revisions of the legislative framework for education.

In the immediate post-apartheid period (i.e., in the mid-1990s), the South African education legislative framework was comprehensively reviewed to accommodate all learners in what was deemed to be a transformed education system that would be inclusive of all learners. It was in this context that the South African Schools Act (1996), the Higher Education Act (1997), the Further Education and Training Act (1998), the Adult Basic Education and Training Act (2000) and complementary White Papers provided the foundation for the creation of an inclusive education and training system. Consequently, the above legislative framework offers guidance on the implementation of their provisions and, inter alia, elucidates strategies for overcoming the origins and outcomes of barriers to learning. The South African Ministry of Education thus gives attention to the challenges that relate to the school and college systems through legislation and policies for these educational institutions. For example, explicit revision of admission policies was affected so that learners with special education needs are now accommodated and supported within designated full-service or other school settings.

Ntombela (2009) proclaims that the inclusion of learners with intellectual challenges into mainstream education has been provided for in legislation in most developed countries in the last twenty years, and that South Africa is no exception. The EWP 6 (DoE, 2001) defines inclusive educational as a system that determines that all learners are capable of learning if they are provided with proper support. The EWP 6 (DoE, 2001) further states that inclusive education acknowledges that each learner is unique, and that learning occurs in different social contexts. Moreover, it is argued that inclusive education is a powerful tool in the construction of an education system where sound and effective teaching and learning methodologies will enable schools to meet the needs of diverse learners. In essence, the system must enable all learners to participate in the curriculum to access learning. Additionally, the EWP 6 (DoE, 2001) seeks to challenge educators' traditional attitudes and behaviours and demands diverse strategies when they teach their learners, particularly those with special education needs. If teachers adapt their teaching strategies to incorporate the principles of inclusive education, learners' reading skills will be enhanced so that they will be empowered to critically participate during reading and comprehension processes (DoE, 2001). Therefore, to authenticate inclusive education in South African schools, the EWP 6 (DoE, 2001) provides a comprehensive framework for addressing barriers to learning and the needs of learners who have special needs. According to this framework, the Minister of Education was tasked with the responsibility to inaugurate an inclusive education and training system that would revise and legislate policies ranging from general education provision to the higher education band. To improve uniformity, all existing policies and legislation for general,

further and higher education and training were reviewed for consistency with the policy proposals put forward in the EWP 6 (DoE, 2001).

However, regardless of the many legislative and policy amendments to the education system in South Africa, the poor performance of this country's learners compared to their international counterparts remains a matter of grave concern. For example, according to the findings of the Progress in the International Reading Literacy Study that were published in 2006, South African learners scored the lowest of the participating countries (PIRLS, 2006). Likewise, a summary of the 2013 ANA results from Grade 1 to 6 revealed the level of performance in Home Languages (HLs) averaging close to 50%. According to DBE (2014), the acceptable level of proficiency is 50%. A disconcertingly low performance level in First Additional Language (FAL) was witnessed for Grades 4, 6 and 9 from 2012 to 2014. Marks for these grades ranged between 30 and 40% (DBE 2014). Given the importance of the First Additional Language in these grades as it is the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), immediate intervention is warranted in FAL teaching in the early phases of schooling. It is in this context that Hugo (2010) argues that ineffective teaching of reading in the FP results in learners in South African schools experiencing reading and therefore developmental problems. It is inarguable that when learners cannot read, this deficit will impact their ability to access the curriculum at every level. The current study thus argues that if essential, effective strategies are employed to enhance the reading skills of all learners, and by implication those of intellectually challenged learners, this situation can be remedied.

1.10 The Importance of Teaching Intellectually Challenged Learners to Read

Meaningfully

Regardless of a child's intellectual development or capacity, learning to read is the most important skill that a person could acquire. However, Allor, Champlin, Gifford and Mathes (2010a) articulate that teaching learners with intellectual challenges to read has been overlooked in many schools, to these children's detriment. Furthermore, Allor et al. (2010a) argue that there is a stereotypical belief that intellectually challenged learners are not capable of acquiring reading skills because of the complex challenges they experience. As a result, intellectually challenged learners are only taught to recognise a limited number of words. Yet research has reinforced the idea that intellectually challenged learners should acquire the same skills as learners with other special learning needs (Allor et al., 2010). On the same note, Houston and Torgeson (2004) regard reading and literacy skills as key

to accessing knowledge, gaining independence, and making choices. In addition, Hallahan and Kauffman (2006) perceive reading to be the most important skill learners need to learn at school, especially in the modern technologically orientated society of the twenty first century. Hallahan and Kauffman (2006) further proclaim that for learners to be successful at school, they should learn to read fluently; that is, they should acquire the skill to read effortlessly and smoothly at a normal reading rate with proper expression and with the necessary comprehension. In an online essay addressing students who questioned the need to learn to read, Mackay (2007) lists important reasons for reading such as getting a driver's license and driving, travelling, ordering food at a restaurant, buying online, getting a job, going to a doctor, and reading instructions on medicine bottles. Furthermore, Mackay (2007) argues that illiterate adults have trouble living independently and successfully. Likewise, Polloway, Patton, Serna and Bailey (2013) substantiate that reading is indeed a vital component for learners with intellectual challenges to accomplish independence throughout their lives. Calkins and Tolan (2010) also argue that there is a high premium on the development of literacy skills as current technologies demand that all learners should be able to search information and directions online, irrespective of the intellectual challenges they might be facing. Finally, Alberto, Bradford, Flores, Houschins and Shippen (2006) affirm that a slow development of reading skills affects more than just academic subjects as it also delays language acquisition, general knowledge, vocabulary building, and even social competence and acceptance. It is therefore of the utmost importance that intellectually challenged learners are taught reading so that they become independent citizens.

1.11 Theoretical Perspective

Scholarly theories provide a framework within which researchers in educational matters formulate questions and understand behaviour. Maree (2007) emphasises that a researcher needs to access a theoretical framework to authenticate the origin of the research. To provide focus on the current exploration of the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners, the study was located within the constructivist theory as advanced by Jerome Bruner (1966). This theory suggests that a learner of a very young age can learn any material if the instruction is properly organised. This implies that learners in the FP who are intellectually challenged are capable of reading if the information is organised properly by their educators and if different reading strategies are employed.

According to Bruner (1966), learning is an active process in which learners create new thoughts or concepts based upon their current and/or past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information and constructs and makes decisions by relying on a cognitive structure to do so. It is in this context that the South African Council of Educators Act (SACE) No. 76 of 1998 affirms that learners with learning and other difficulties cannot reach their full potential without intervention. Bruner's theory was thus used to understand and explore the methods used by FP teachers to teach learners who are intellectually challenged and who thus battle to read.

According to Fosnot (2005), constructivism is the theory that outlines acquisition of knowledge as an active process whereby learners need to construct explanation and meaning through active involvement in learning. Fosnot (2005) further argues that through active involvement, learners probe for meaningful knowledge inquiry which can lead to direct encounters with their cultural and social groups. Fosnot's extension of Bruner's constructivism theory was thus also applied in this investigation.

1.12 Methodological Approach and Design

Interpretivism focuses on the investigation of people's actions, attitudes and behaviour (Punch, 2005). According to Cohen et al. (2011), interpretivism is also characterised by a concern for the individual to understand the subjective world of human experience. In this process efforts are made to get inside the person's mind to understand the phenomenon under study from their perspective. To comply with the requirements of this investigative process, I observed the selected educators during lesson presentations, to explore the strategies they used to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners.

This study was located within a qualitative case study design that was supported by the interpretive paradigm. According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative approach is embedded in naturalistic settings and in generating the data, the researchers are regarded as key instruments. This approach was deemed suitable for this study as it would enable me to interact with the participants in their natural setting, which was the classroom. Employing this approach also assisted me in exploring the strategies used by educators to enhance reading skills, and it allowed me to better understand the challenges and successes they experienced in their endeavours to enhance the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners.

Case studies are orderly and thorough investigations of a single study in its setting (Rule and John, 2011). According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), case studies propose to explain what it is like to be in a specific situation, and they are naturally suggestive. In the same vein, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) claim that the case study researcher aims to capture the exceptionality of actual situations of people and situations through available books. Cohen et al. (2011) differentiate among the following kinds of case studies: exploratory, expository, ethnographic, and multiple. Streb (2010) attests to the fact that exploratory case studies investigate problems that have not had clear definition. The current research study adopted an exploratory case study approach because the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners had not been defined before.

1.13 Outline of the Thesis

This study report is presented in five chapters.

Chapter one provides the background of the study by explaining the importance of teaching reading to intellectually challenged learners because it is their democratic and constitutional right. It further explains the focus and the purpose of the study. The rationale for the study, the research objectives and the key research questions are clarified. A brief historical overview of inclusive education is provided and the theoretical framework that guided the study is briefly outlined.

Chapter two reviews the literature that was interrogated to clarify, inter alia, the reading strategies and the reading skills that need to be acquired by Foundation Phase learners so that they are enabled to interact independently with reading texts. Additionally, literature on inclusive education within the context of the South African education system and educators' need to understand the learning disabilities learners experience are reviewed. Finally, methods of teaching reading are analysed.

Chapter three explicates the research design and the methodology that was employed in the study. This chapter also elucidates the research instrument that was used as well as the data analysis methods. The issues of reliability, validity and ethical considerations are discussed, and it is shown how these issues were addressed in this study.

Chapter four presents a discussion on and analyses of the data that were generated. The findings of the study are subsequently discussed.

Chapter five presents the conclusions that could be drawn from the findings. The implications of the findings are discussed, and recommendations are offered. Suggestions for further research are also offered.

1.14 Conclusion

The challenges faced by the South African education system in terms of the implementation of inclusive education were discussed and the legislative steps that have been taken by South Africa in its endeavours to embrace the principle of inclusive education were illuminated. The main Acts and policies that were put in place immediately after the Salamanca Conference of 1994 as a framework for the implementation of inclusive education were referred to.

The study site was described, with special reference to the deep rural setting of the Jozini area in Northern Zululand in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and the poor socio-economic status of the communities residing in this region was highlighted.

The importance of teaching intellectually challenged learners to read was highlighted. Moreover, the employment of different strategies to teach these learners to read so that they will reach their maximum potential was emphasised, while the application of inclusive education policies and practices was stressed. The importance of incorporating inclusive education principles in FP teacher training programmes and teacher development courses was highlighted, as this will ensure that all graduates entering the teaching profession and all teachers in the field will be equipped with adequate skills and knowledge on how to include learners who are intellectually challenged in their classroom practices. Only when this happens will all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, receive adequate education in the same school.

The next chapter provides a review of the related literature that informed the study. In particular, the importance of employing different strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners is elucidated.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the background to the study and enlightened the focus and the purpose of the study. The research questions and the rationale for the study were presented to highlight the importance of teaching reading to intellectually challenged learners. Chapter two presents a discourse on the literature that was reviewed in the exploration of strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. Bhattacharjee (2012) emphasises that a literature review is aimed at measuring existing knowledge about the subject the researcher is investigating, to give recognition to these authors, and to illuminate articles that have been written on the topic. This process assists the researcher to detect if there are any gaps in existing scholarly knowledge about a given phenomenon. The aim of the review of the literature in this chapter is to highlight the research that has been conducted on strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. The review also facilitates an illumination of the components that should of necessity be studied when this topic is addressed.

Several researchers such as Mwamwenda (2004), Naidoo (2004) and Ntombela (2009) conducted research to understand inclusive education and to explore various experiences regarding this phenomenon. Naidoo (2004) investigated the attitudes of educators towards the inclusion of learners with mild intellectual impairments into mainstream classes. Also, determined the factors that influenced educators in the successful implementation of inclusive education. Correspondingly, Ntombela (2009) explored how the implementation of inclusive education was disseminated to educators. To explore the implementation of inclusive education in schools, Mveli (2009) focused on learners' experiences in the classroom. Mveli (2009) also explored teachers' views about the classroom environment for such learners. In the same vein, Mtambo (2011) initiated an investigation into teachers' understanding of learning disabilities and the challenges they faced in the classrooms where these learners were taught. Finally, Jali (2014) explored teachers' challenges and their understanding of their role in inclusive classrooms.

Most of these studies concluded that South African teachers have a blurred understanding of inclusive education and its implementation, and that the application of this educational practice is therefore still

in its infancy. It has been argued that misconceptions about inclusive education might result in an increasing number of intellectually challenged learners dropping out of school because teachers, who are the main facilitators of inclusive education, are not ready to apply the principles and practices of inclusive education in classroom settings.

The perusal of several studies on the dissertation and implementation of inclusive education, with focus on teaching reading in the Foundation Phase (FP), revealed that only a handful of studies aimed to investigate strategies to enhance reading skills in complex educational contexts. One such context is poor socio-economic communities where teachers do not have access to resources that can help them to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. Considering the above, the purpose of the current study was to explore the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners in a selected school in a rural community. The study was conducted in the Jozini area in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

The literature that was perused as secondary data to investigate the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually impaired learners will be analysed step-by-step. First, the intellectual challenges that manifest in these learners are clarified, followed by an elucidation of the reading skills that ought to be acquired by intellectually challenged FP learners. Thirdly, barriers to teaching learners who are intellectually challenged are analysed, and finally the strategies that can be used by FP teachers to enhance reading skills will be interrogated. To ensure that the research is located within a global educational context, the findings based on the literature review will be grounded on the theoretical framework that underpinned the study.

To address the challenges that are barriers to learning, it is important that educators have a clear understanding of the intellectual challenges that manifest in learners. The nature of the challenges that were exposed in the literature are discussed in the following section.

2.2 Clarification of the Term ‘Intellectual Challenges’

The term ‘intellectual challenges’ to describe the cognitive barriers that some learners experience has evolved over the years. At the beginning of the 19th century, some children’s inability to learn or the difficulties they experienced in learning were regarded as a form of “mental retardation” (Weis, 2013). In 1986, the term “mental handicap” was coined and difficulties in learning were described as an “intellectual disability” later in the 21st century (Fosket, 2017). Weis (2013) affirms that the term

“mental retardation” was substituted by “mental disability” because of the hurtful connotation of the former term. More recently, researchers and educationists have used terms such as “intellectual impairment” and “intellectual challenges” interchangeably when referring to learners who are intellectually disabled. However, the term “disability” is mostly associated with problems of a medical nature (Landsburg, 2016). In this study report, the terms “intellectual challenges” and “intellectual impairment” will be used interchangeably when referring to learners with intellectual disabilities. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) (2010) clarifies that intellectual challenges normally manifest in learners before the age of 18. Cheung (2013) suggests that intellectual challenges can be defined as major barriers to cognitive development and as challenges in social, conceptual and practical adaptive behaviour, and argues that impairment becomes visible before the age of 22.

Donald, Lazarus and Moolla (2014) define intellectual challenges as the challenges confronted by learners in understanding, remembering and reasoning about learning material, whereas Landsberg, Kruger and Swart (2016) accentuate that the most recent and accepted definition of intellectual disability is the one from the AAIDD (2010, p. 29) which defines intellectual disability as “a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour, which includes many everyday social and practical skills”.

Weis (2013) states that, for learners to be diagnosed with intellectual impairment, their limitations should be evident when they are matched with peers of the same gender and from the same socio-cultural background. Cheung (2013), Weis (2013) and the Department of Basic Education (2016) emphasise that for learners to be regarded as intellectually challenged they should be subjected to scrutiny that involves the following:

- Barriers to reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgement, academic learning and learning experiences should be established by clinical assessment and standardised tests.
- The inability to meet sociocultural standards, social responsibilities and individual freedom should be determined through the assessment of cognitive functions.
- The period when the discrepancies in reasoning and adaptive deficits commenced should be determined.

According to Weis (2013, p. 89), learners who are intellectually challenged normally demonstrate low intellectual functioning in one or more of the following: “...perceiving and processing new information, learning quickly and efficiently, applying knowledge and skills to solve novel problems, thinking creatively and flexibly, and responding rapidly and accurately” to stimuli. Furthermore, intellectual disability is identified when the skills that are compromised are the following: lack of conceptual skills, poor language development, the inability or difficulties in solving mathematical problems, and the ability to recall learned information (Weis, 2013). It is important that learners with intellectual challenges are accurately diagnosed at a young age so that they can be exposed to early, appropriate interventions.

Landsburg (2016) argues that intellectual challenges result in detrimental outcomes and that such learners will also show substantial limitations in language acquisition. This scholar also maintains that because intellectual challenges can be disadvantageous to all other aspects of such learners’ lives, educators should work on assisting learners who experience intellectual disabilities so that they can improve their reasoning and metacognition skills. However, much cognitive learning is reading-based, hence educators who teach learners who are intellectually challenged ought to employ appropriate strategies to enhance reading skills. Learners’ ability to overcome reading challenges will ensure that they receive effective support in most, if not all, subjects. Donald, Lazarus and Moolla (2014) therefore emphasise that educators should not only be skilful in identifying learners with intellectual disabilities, but they should also be able to differentiate among impairments such as a mild hearing disability, communication difficulties, specific learning difficulties, and emotional challenges. If educators are skilled in identifying the various barriers that their learners experience to learning, they will be able to devise suitable intervention strategies for learners who are intellectually challenged.

2.2.1 Severity of intellectual challenges

The severity of intellectual challenges is the degree of the seriousness to which learners with intellectual challenges are affected. Learners with intellectual disabilities were formerly classified based on their Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores, but currently the adaptive functioning scales are used (Weis, 2013). According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (2013), adaptive functioning refers to “how an individual can effectively survive life’s burdens, how independent and how well they meet the standards of personal independence when compared to a same-age group, their social-cultural background, and community settings. Adaptive functioning can be assessed using standardised rating scales, clinical interviews, and observations at home and at school. The IQ measures the level of

intelligence whereas the functioning scales measure the person’s level of adaptive functioning. Weis (2013) comments that the IQ classification was abandoned because of its lack of reliability. Moreover, it lacked support and assistance at home, at schools and among communities and the scores lacked validity towards the lower end of the IQ ratings.

To measure the severity of intellectual challenges in learners, psychologists usually administer “norm referenced interview” questions to the caregiver. The learner will then be graded subject to the scores of adaptive behaviours in conceptual, social and practical areas. The table below clarifies the rating of the severity of intellectual challenges.

Table 2.1: Descriptions of the Severity of Intellectual Disability

Severity	Conceptual Domain	Social Domain	Practical Domain
Mild Scores 55-70	Pre-schoolers may show no obvious conceptual differences. School-aged children show difficulties in acquiring academic skills (e.g., reading, writing, arithmetic, telling, using money). Abstract thinking and planning may be impaired; thinking tends to be concrete.	Communication, conversation and language are more concrete or immature than the skills of peers. The child may have difficulty accurately understanding the social cues of others. There may be difficulties in regulating emotion and behaviour compared to peers.	The child may function in an age-expected manner with regard to personal care. In adolescence, assistance may be needed to perform more complex daily living tasks like shopping, cooking, and managing money.
Moderate Scores 40-55	Pre-schoolers’ language and pre-academic skills develop slowly. School-age children show slow progress in academic skills. Academic skills development is usually at the elementary level.	The child shows marked differences in social and communicative skills compared to peers. Spoken language is simplistic and concrete. Social judgment and decision making are limited. Friendship with peers is often affected by social or communicative deficits.	The child needs more time and practice to learn self-care skills such as eating, dressing, toileting and hygiene than peers. Household skills can be acquired by an adolescent through ample practice.
Severe Scores 25-40	The child generally has little understanding of written language or numbers. Caretakers must provide extensive support for problem solving throughout life.	There are limited spoken language skills with simplistic vocabulary and grammar. Speech may be single words/phrases. The child understands simple speech and gestures. Relationships are with family members and other familiar people.	The child needs ongoing support for all activities of daily living: eating, dressing, and bathing. Caregivers must supervise at all times. Some youths show challenging behaviours, such as self-injury.
Profound Less than 25	Conceptual skills generally involve the physical world rather than symbols (e.g., letters, numbers). Some visual-	The child has a limited understanding of symbolic communication. The child may understand some simple	The child is dependent on others for all aspects of physical care, health and safety, although he or she may

	spatial skills such as matching and sorting may be acquired with practice. Co-occurring physical problems may greatly limit functioning.	instructions and gestures. Communication is usually through non-verbal, non-symbolic means. Relationships are usually with family members and other familiar people. Co-occurring physical problems may greatly limit functioning.	participate in some aspects of self-care. Some youths show challenging behaviours such as self-injury. Co-occurring physical problems may occur.
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Source: Weis, R. (2013) pg. 92.

2.2.2 The manifestation of intellectual challenges in South Africa

According to Statistics South Africa, data since 1996 have shown that in a national population of 40 million people, about 2 780 000 live with disabilities. In 2001 there was a decrease in the prevalence of disabilities and, in a population of 45 million, 2 255 982 people lived with disabilities. Of this latter population, 270 718 people were intellectually challenged. In 2007, there was a further decline in the number of people with intellectual disabilities to 128 841 (Statistics South Africa, 2001).

However, Fosket (2014) contests that the statistics on the prevalence of intellectual challenges in South Africa are not accurate. This argument is based on the ever-changing terminology that is used and the questions that have been used during population surveys. Thus, intellectual impairment may easily have been identified in comorbidity with other disabilities. Changing terminology does not only contribute to the inaccuracy of data reporting, but it will of necessity impact the dearth of published literature on intellectual development. Due to the alleged inaccuracies, the government is struggling to develop suitable policies concerning people living with disabilities, with a focus on intellectual disabilities.

Despite numerous policies that are in place to accommodate and include learners with disabilities and challenges, South African children who are intellectually challenged are still not receiving the attention they deserve. Kromberg, Zwane, Manga, Venter, Rosen and Christianson (2008) attest that 4.3% of the subjects who were used in data collection for the prevalence of intellectual impairment was diagnosed with two or more disabilities. According to Fosket (2014), about one million South Africans are diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and this scholar thus argues that intellectual disability mostly originates from this syndrome (Fosket, 2014). Generally, the literature suggests that there is a strong possibility that a number of learners who are intellectually challenged are left unidentified and that they therefore cannot receive the attention that they deserve. Moreover, it

seems that intellectual challenges manifest mostly in rural areas because of the poor socio-economic factors that prevail in these contexts (DSD, DWCPD and UNICEF, 2012).

2.3 Why should Intellectually Challenged learners be taught to Read?

Reading is the ability to distinguish among 26 letters of the alphabet and to derive meaning from them when they are used [in various combinations] in a text (DoE, 2008b). Furthermore, the DoE (2008b) states that numerous skills are involved in the reading process such as presumption, guessing and prediction. To further develop these advanced reading skills, learners need to engage meaningfully with several developmentally appropriate texts (DoE, 2008b). The DBE (2016) further states that speaking, and reading are the two most important language components that learners ought to acquire to be able to interact with the outside and social world. Reading is particularly important because it is aimed at extracting meaning from texts. Hiskes (2005) proclaims that reading is a dialogue between a reader and a writer, hence reading is regarded as a form of “remote control” to access information from distant areas. Reading is also defined as the process whereby learners participate with a script meaningfully to be able to gain information (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit [NEEDU], 2012). Mzila (2016) concurs with this definition and explains that reading is a process which is crucial in deriving meaning from the script that is read. These definitions imply that learners who cannot read with understanding and discernment will experience barriers to learning.

During a conference that was held in Salamanca in 1994, it was determined that the inclusion (or more accurately the *exclusion*) of learners with disabilities from educational settings and development is a global issue (UNESCO, 1994). Soon after this conference, a framework for action for inclusive education was adopted. This framework provides for the educational rights of *all* children, as it states:

“All children have a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning. Therefore, educational systems should be designed, and educational programmes implemented to take account of the wide diversity of characteristics and needs that exist among children, because all children can learn, including those who have special needs” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 4).

The Salamanca Statement concludes that “schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions” (UNESCO, 1994, p. 6).

Both the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and the Bill of Rights that is entrenched in the Constitution endorse all citizens' right to equality (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Section 27 of the South African Constitution provides that all children have a right to access basic, quality education (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). Subsequently, Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) (DoE, 2001) states that all learners need to receive quality education irrespective of their race, gender and disability status and therefore, as South African citizens, any learner who is intellectually challenged ought to be granted access to appropriate and quality education (DoE, 2001). Section 9 further stipulates that no learners of school going age should be discriminated against because of a disability. In adhering to Act 108 of 1996, the DBE (2016) articulates that relevant support should be provided to those learners who experience barriers to learning. Thus, to grant an opportunity for learners with intellectual impairment to live independently within their societies, they need to acquire reading skills. It was against this backdrop that this study explored the strategies used by FP teachers to enhance reading skills in intellectually challenged learners in this phase.

According to the Differentiated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (hereafter referred to as DCAPS), the possibility exists that learners who are intellectually challenged may be enrolled in mainstream schools. It is therefore important that all educators are exposed to the differentiated curriculum (DBE, 2017). DCAPS is the curriculum that has been piloted in special schools to accommodate teaching and learning for learners with special education needs. The conditions of these learners may range from mild to severe intellectual impairment, physical challenges, and any other challenges that can cause barriers to learning if not properly addressed at an early stage. This implies that special educational programs should be accurately and efficiently planned for learners who are intellectually challenged. This is readily attainable if the content, teaching methods, different strategies and a variety of teaching and learning materials are employed by educators, irrespective of the stream they are teaching.

One of the aims of DCAPS is to equip learners who have special education needs with reading skills. These skills should be acquired by learners during the process of their language development so that they are able to relate to written texts in the world around them, are capacitated to express themselves more eloquently, and are able to live independently (DBE, 2017). Randi, Newman and Grigorenko (2010) explain that the permanency in written texts is supportive of learners with intellectual challenges who normally struggle to keep track of information that was given to them orally. Reading skills can therefore be beneficial to intellectually challenged learners. As independent citizens, they

need to be able to know and understand the way around their environment by for example acquiring the ability to identify relevant public toilets and differentiate between gender issues. It is therefore essential that learners who are intellectually challenged should acquire adequate reading skills.

2.3.1 Important reading skills to be acquired by intellectually challenged learners

The terms ‘skills’ and ‘strategies’ are often used interchangeably and are then confused by students, and this confusion often results in less effective instruction and learning. Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris (2008, p. 368) define reading skills as “automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with speed, efficiency and fluency [that] usually occur with awareness of the components or control involved”, whereas reading strategies are “deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode the text, understand words and construct meanings of texts”. This definition clearly suggests that reading skills are acquired whereas reading strategies are various methods that are used to acquire reading skills.

Decoding and comprehension are two elementary components of reading (Mzila, 2016). These skills are regarded as the most important reading skills to be acquired by learners because they form the basis for all learning. Decoding is the ability to identify the relationship between letters and their sounds and comprehension is the ability to synthesise meaning from a text (Mzila, 2016). The DBE (2011) accentuates the point that learning to read should focus on acquiring decoding skills, which is a skill that should already be attained in the FP. Because learners who are intellectually challenged struggle with cognitive development, it is crucial that educators who teach these learners employ intensive strategies to enhance decoding and comprehension skills. By so doing, the learners will be enabled to interact with any age-appropriate texts that they are required to read.

The National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (DBE, 2011) highlights that knowledge, skills and values should be attained by learners in South Africa and it also affirms the necessity for the acquisition of reading skills. More specifically, intellectually challenged learners should be encouraged to interact with society in a meaningful way. However, most learners who are intellectually challenged need to acquire special communication skills; and for these skills to be well developed the learners need guidance from more knowledgeable others.

2.3.2 Components of reading

According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the FP (DBE, 2011), reading should be given 4h30 minutes of the minimum 7 hours per week that are prescribed for a home language in grades 1 to 3. For learners to construct meaning from a text, emphasis should be placed on phonemic awareness, vocabulary, phonics, fluency and comprehension (Williams, 2007). Correspondingly, the DBE (2011) affirms five significant components in the teaching of reading, namely phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. The DBE (2011) emphasises that these components of reading form the foundation for reading and they need to be developed thoroughly in the FP. More specifically, as phonemic awareness, word recognition and comprehension need to be developed in the FP, these three components will be briefly discussed below.

1. Phonemic awareness

The DBE (2008) defines phonemic awareness as “the ability to notice, think about and work with individual sounds in spoken words”. Hugo and Lenyai (2013) confirm that phonemic awareness is the ability to separate (or distinguish among) the different sounds of a language. Wium, Louw and Ellof (2011) also regard phonological awareness as significant, as learners need to be able to read words by identifying the letters of the alphabet. They learn to systematically put the letters together to form words. The DBE (2011) also stresses that phonemic awareness should be established as early as Grade 1, and the specific sequence when teaching phonemic awareness is highlighted in the relevant CAPS document. This should occur by employing the following strategies:

- learning words through rhyme;
- breaking words into syllables;
- working with phonemes by putting together the smallest units that make words;
- doing matching activities by looking at words that have something in common;
- substituting by using different letters to form a new word;
- blending by forming words using different sounds;
- segmentation by calling out the words that can be distinguished in a sentence; and
- deletion by saying words and ignoring some sounds.

2. Word recognition (sight words and phonics)

The DoE (2008a) refers to word recognition as “the skills that should be acquired by the learners in order to be able to read new words”. The DBE (2011) states that word recognition is the ability to identify words that are frequently used in a sentence or in a story. For learners to be familiar with age-appropriate words, teachers should carefully select stories in which these words are used. After the story has been read and listened to, the focus words are put up on the ‘word wall’. By hearing the words in context and seeing them displayed visually, learners make associations and they thus read these words every day. The ‘five finger strategy’ is also recommended by the DBE (2011):

- thumb: leave the word out and read to the end of the sentence;
- first finger: look at the picture;
- second finger: look at the word to see if any parts of the word are known;
- third finger: sound the word out;
- fourth finger: ask for help in reading the word or understanding its meaning.

3. Comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand and make sense of what the person is reading (Maphumulo, 2010). Logically, teachers can assess comprehension skills by preparing questions that will force learners to interact with what they are reading, and the level of comprehension skills can be differentiated by asking questions according to the learners’ level of cognition (DBE, 2011). The following levels should be addressed:

- Literal comprehension: This refers to answering questions that are based on the information that is given in the text;
- Re-organisation: Here the learner is required to compare, divide and contrast the information that is in a story;
- Inferential comprehension: This is the ability to discuss the consequences of or to predict what could or would have happened in a story;
- Evaluative comprehension: This is when the teacher assesses learners’ understanding by asking them to give their opinions about what transpired in a story;
- Appreciative comprehension: This is when learners can give their opinion; for example, why they liked or disliked a certain character in a story.

If all the above components are accurately and adequately dealt with in the FP, learners will develop sufficient skills and vocabulary that will enable them to read fluently throughout their school lives and beyond. Learners who are intellectually impaired also need these skills to be able to read independently.

2.4 Challenges encountered when teaching intellectually challenged learners

Neethling and Smith (2013) define barriers as the complications that hinder learning and development, that prevents learners to obtain progress during learning. They usually occur as factors that lead to the inability of the education system to accommodate diversity, as this will prevent learners from reaching their full potential (Lomofsky and Lazarus, 2001). Barriers can for example arise unexpectedly when the conditions that a child is used to alter suddenly (DoE, 2005). Other factors that can cause barriers to read are the physical and psychosocial conditions of a child, the home environment, the socio-economic status of parents, community issues, and a sudden change in the language of learning and teaching. They can either be temporal or permanent and they may affect an individual or a group of learners. Psychosocial Support Services (DBE, 2014) confirms that in every mainstream classroom there may be one or more learners who experience some challenges to read. The DBE (2011) thus encourages mainstream schools not only to be centres of teaching and learning, but also to be centres of care and support for all learners who attend school.

According to Statistics South Africa's 2002-2010 report on the social profile of vulnerable groups in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal had a population of 10.3 million, of which 3.4 million were under the age of 15 at the time of the survey. Tragically, about 26.9% of these youths were orphans and many lived in child-headed households where the eldest sibling took care of the family comprising of school children (DBE, 2011). To this day, many young children are prone to emotional, social, health and economic challenges and many are regarded as vulnerable. Vulnerable children of various categories will experience barriers to learning and education and such learners are found in every mainstream classroom (DBE, 2014). This fact implies that educators should be well acquainted with the factors that might be causing challenges to their learners' ability to read. Early identification will help teachers to address these challenges before they result in reading impairments or disabilities.

Howell (2007) elucidates that the term 'barrier to learning' was initially used to refer to learners with special needs due to learning problems. In South Africa, 'challenges to read' were initially linked to intrinsic factors; this means they were linked solely to learners' medical conditions and the lack of

their ability to perform some actions (Engelbrecht, 2008). However, in-depth research studies have resulted in a paradigm shift and thus a change in how challenges are perceived has occurred. Challenges are no longer solely associated with intrinsic factors, but they can also occur due to factors beyond a learner's control, such as the curriculum that is used in schools or socio-economic conditions (Engelbrecht, 2008). Lomofsky and Lazarus (2010, p. 311–312) divide barriers into three groups:

Systemic barriers: lack of basic and appropriate learning support materials, lack of assistive devices, inadequate facilities at school, overcrowded classrooms, and a lack of mother tongue teachers.

Societal barriers: severe poverty, late enrolment, gangs/violence in neighbourhoods and at home.

Pedagogical barriers: insufficient support by teachers, inappropriate and unfair assessment procedures, and an inflexible curriculum.

The EWP 6 (in DoE, 2001) lists the following four barriers to learning:

Social barriers: community circumstances such as crime, the school context (i.e., demographic situation);

Institutional barriers: school, curriculum, teachers;

Curriculum barriers: if the curriculum is not properly disseminated to relevant stakeholders such as teachers and district managers;

Disabilities and impairments: hearing, visual, language, intellectual.

Three groups of barriers are briefly discussed below.

2.4.1 Institutional barriers

Despite some improvements that have been made to education in South Africa in the post-apartheid era, there is still a lot that needs to be done to bring equity among learners in South African schools. The government is unable to provide sufficient amenities in schools because there are also other important burdens on state finances such as health services, social welfare, road maintenance, law enforcement, and many others. It is particularly rural schools that are deprived of basic amenities such as electricity, running water and flushable toilets. The schools that are in deprived areas suffer the most because they lack basic amenities such as libraries, laboratories, enough classrooms, proper furniture. These schools also have shortage of qualified teachers. Without these basic resources, it is inevitable that barriers to learning will occur.

Most learners who derive from these contexts are hardly exposed to written forms of language in their environment, and therefore their reading level is below that of their peers who come from print-rich backgrounds (NEEDU, 2012). In a survey that was conducted in 2012, it was found that about 60% of Grade 3 learners were unable to read (NEEDU, 2012). It is argued that these learners encounter reading material only when they get to school, and their schools do not have enough resources to lay the foundation for reading.

i. Teachers

Teachers are regarded as the main role players in the implementation of inclusive education which depends on their expertise (Coles, 1998). Shockingly, most teachers feel overwhelmed when they must teach reading comprehension because the process is time consuming and it requires teachers to change their customary approaches (Klapwijk, 2011). The National Reading Strategy confirms that most South African teachers lack appropriate skills to teach reading and writing; consequently, they resort to rote teaching, which may have been the approach that was used when they were taught (DBE, 2008). The Monitoring Learning Achievement survey endorses the argument that the poor performance of learners in reading is a consequence of the employment of unqualified teachers in the FP and in rural areas (DoE, 2008).

EWP 6 advises that, in inclusive education, the focus should be on the learner (DBE, 2011). Therefore, Landsburg (2016) recommends that teachers should be aware of barriers to learning and be able to identify all the factors that can lead to learners experiencing these barriers. De Boer, Pitj, and Minnaert (2011) urge that teachers should be optimistic about learners who experience barriers to learning, as these barriers can be overcome by a learner-centred approach and an environment that is equipped with all the resources that are beneficial to learners' acquisitions of reading skills. Thus, teachers should be well versed in the inclusive education approach. If teachers are unable to identify and address the challenges that are faced by their learners in the early stages of learning, they may worsen the challenges these learners experience, particularly if the learners are intellectually challenged.

ii. Language

South Africa has the most varied ethnic population in the world. The Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) entrenches the right of all inhabitants to use the language of their choice. In the educational context, each child has the right to be taught in his/her mother tongue in the early years of schooling, while an additional language (usually English) is also introduced (Steyn & Wolhuter,

2008). The Minister of Basic Education at the time, Angie Motshekga, endorsed the importance of the Constitution when she stated: “From the start of democracy, the Department of Education has built a curriculum on the values that inspired the Constitution” (DBE, 2011, p. 1). The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) establishes a National Language Policy which envisages that all learners should be exposed to at least two of South Africa’s 11 official languages. One of the languages that ought to be offered is a Home Language (HL), whilst the other should be a First Additional Language (FAL). However, regardless of the Language in Education Policy of 1997, most South African FP learners are not taught in their mother tongue (DoE, 2008). This is due to parents taking their children to multiracial schools where the medium of instruction is not their home language, but predominantly English. It is of great importance to intensively develop home language skills in learners in the FP so that this language forms a strong base for additional language development, which is endorsed by the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (DoE, 1997).

Learners who are intellectually challenged are no exception to the language acquisition requirement. In the FP, learners are generally taught in their mother tongue while a first additional language (generally English) is introduced. When they reach Grade 4, English (or Afrikaans in a minority of the schools) becomes the language of instruction. For example, a learner of the Zulu ethnic group will be taught in isiZulu up to Grade 3, and will thereafter be schooled in English, with the choice of isiZulu as a Home Language subject. If learners in the FP are not introduced to the FAL that will become the language of instruction after Grade 3, the consequences may be dire as they will not be adequately prepared for tuition in English. This is a problem that particularly affects learners with intellectual challenges, as the acquisition of the language of instruction that will be used after the FP is vital.

iii. Overcrowded classrooms

The DBE (2014) articulates that for public schools in South Africa the teacher to learner ratio should be 1:30.4. If this ratio is exceeded, the classes become overcrowded. UNESCO (2005) articulates that about 60% of schooling takes place in rural areas and that is where overcrowding is most prevalent. Crowded and ruined classrooms obstruct the implementation of the curriculum (DoE, 2008). According to Ijaiya (1999), the quality of teaching and learning can be weakened by overcrowded classrooms and the teachers find it difficult to achieve the objectives set for lessons in these classes. Onwu and Stoffels (2005) confirm the negative effect of overcrowding as it brings limited opportunities for meeting individual learners’ socialization and educational needs. In this context, teachers struggle to offer individual attention and learners who are intellectually challenged and who

are slow to grasp content cannot be easily identified and be assisted by teachers in overcrowded classrooms. If teachers are unable to identify and address the barriers experienced by learners during reading lessons, the barriers become reading disabilities.

In conclusion to this section, it must be stated that overcrowding is not only threatening teaching and learning but is also a threat to the health of teachers and learners. Lee and Chang (1999) claim that if there are consistent high levels of carbon dioxide in classrooms, there will be problems with respiration as too much carbon dioxide may affect the health of both learners and teachers, and thus teaching and learning will be compromised.

iv Learning and teaching support material

Learning and teaching support material (LTSM) refers to the resources that are needed and used by teachers to enhance the achievement of their educational objectives. The term ‘teaching materials’ usually refers to teacher resources that are concrete objects or worksheets that the learners use to practise their skills and capabilities.

The Monitoring and Learning Achievement (MLA) survey that was conducted in 1999 revealed that there is a strong correlation between parents’ educational background and learners’ performance (DoE, 2008b). Generally, uneducated parents find it hard to assist their children with school-related issues as these households generally do not possess any books (DoE, 2008b). Furthermore, very few books are written in African languages which is a regrettable gap that prevents children from reading for enjoyment in their home language (DoE, 2008).

Learners are generally expected to rely on their school libraries or classrooms for reading material, but the MLA survey discovered that many South African learners have limited access to libraries, because only 7% of South African schools had a properly functioning library at the time of the survey. In the absence of school libraries, learners relied on classroom materials, but a shocking finding was that only 25% of the schools under survey had books that were accessible to the learners (DoE, 2008). It was found that in some classes the books that were available were inappropriate in terms of the learners’ development level (DoE, 2008). Thus, if teachers have little or no experience in developing teaching and reading material, teaching reading is just not happening in some schools.

2.4.2 Curriculum Barriers

i. A constantly changing South African school curriculum

The many changes to the South African school curriculum since 1994 have undeniably been detrimental to the education system as it confused and frustrated educators. The curriculum changed from what had been referred to as “Outcomes Based Education” to the “Revised National Curriculum Statement”, and again to the most recent “Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement” (CAPS) system. Frustration has been caused because teachers have been expected to adapt to a new curriculum only to find that they must familiarise themselves with a new curriculum just when they felt comfortable with the ‘old’ one. It is undeniable that if teachers are confused, they can hardly deliver the content, which becomes a barrier to teaching. It is especially learners with intellectual challenges who need teachers who are clear about the subject content that they teach, for it is when they are proficient with the content area that differentiation will be employed with ease.

ii Inflexible curriculum

The inflexibility of the curriculum also causes a problem in terms of its implementation because teachers are expected to cover a certain body of work at a stipulated time. However, the curriculum that is prescribed is geared towards mainstream schools, yet teaching is expected to be inclusive of the diverse needs of all learners, even those with disabilities. The differentiated curriculum (DCAPS) that was issued by the DBE (2016) acknowledges this gap and is aimed at special schools; however, there are learners with special needs in mainstream classrooms where they need to be taught how to read.

The curriculum addresses the skills, knowledge and values that should be acquired by all learners in South Africa. CAPS documents for the various phases and subjects therefore specify the content and provide teaching, learning, and assessment guidelines for all grades from Grade R to Grade 12. However, teachers are bombarded with a full and comprehensive curriculum in all phases with very little time for reflection and re-teaching and many ends up rushing to finish the curriculum. This leaves learners who are intellectually challenged behind.

iii. Curriculum dissemination

Curriculum dissemination means the methods and strategies used by policy makers to cascade information about the curriculum to educators who will be implementing that curriculum. Ntombela (2009) argues that the method used by the DBE to disseminate the curriculum to teachers is flawed,

arguing that the waterfall process of cascading the curriculum has been ineffective and that teachers' understanding of inclusive education is therefore still not vivid. If the curriculum is not properly disseminated, teachers are confused and become unable to deliver the content as per specific curriculum requirements. Also, if teachers are unclear about the principle of inclusion and the essential language skills that are required, the teaching of reading is also affected in the Foundation Phase.

iv. Assessment procedures and methods

Assessment procedures are different strategies that can be used by teachers to identify learners' progress and the barriers that can hinder their learning. Proficient teachers have devised strategies not only to assess their learners, but they have also devised strategies to support those learners who experience barriers to learning (Jali, 2014). However, teachers who are unfamiliar with different assessment methods find it hard to assess learners with barriers to learning (Ibid). The assessment of learners on a continuous basis is vital as it assists teachers in identifying gaps in the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are needed by learners who experience barriers to learning. If learners are properly assessed, the barriers that they experience in learning to read will be identified at an early stage and they can receive the necessary assistance.

2.4.3 Support teams

Most South African teachers support inclusive education but there is uncertainty about whether they will be able to carry the load that accompanies this process (Engelbrecht & Green, 2007). Amongst other things, most teachers feel that for the successful implementation of inclusive education they need to spend more time planning for and re-teaching learners with special needs; however, this requires time which they do not have. Also, they need to teach intensively using different strategies and be supportive during lessons to assist their learners, which requires additional preparation and classroom time.

District-based support teams, institutional-level support teams, parents and special schools as resource centres are regarded as the most important support structures that can assist in the identification of and addressing the barriers that might cause learning problems for learners with special education needs (DBE, 2011). If teachers can work collaboratively with these teams, their uncertainty about including learners with special education needs can be resolved. Kirk, Gallarher, Anastasiow, and Colman (2006) indicate that for teachers to effectively assist and interact with their learners who are intellectually challenged, they need to participate in such a support team. The support that ought to be

received by intellectually challenged learners should begin immediately at their school and continue even when the learner is at home.

i. Institution-based support teams

All mainstream schools are by law mandated to form school-based support teams that will liaise inclusive services and network with education specialists and resource centres (DBE, 2011). A school-based support team (SBST) is a team formed by teachers and learners' parents who are meant to offer internal support to all the personnel in the school (Engelbrecht, Green, Naicker, & Engelbrecht, 1999). All mainstream schools are supposed to form such a team which should be coordinated by a staff member who has competency in life skills education, counselling or learning support (DBE, 2001). The SBST should support teachers who experience problems in assisting learners who experience barriers to learning in mainstream schools (DBE, 2011). If the SBST is not functioning properly, barriers to learning are not addressed at institutional level which will result in exacerbated learning impairments or learning disabilities.

ii. The district-based support teams

A District-based support team (DBST) is a team that comprises members of the District office who manage inclusive education in a district (Landsburg, 2014). One of the basic roles of the District-based support team is to provide school-based support teams with appropriate assistance in “capacity building, identifying, assessing and prioritizing learning needs and barriers to learning experienced by learners in their district” (DoE, 2005, pp. 21-22). If the DBST is dysfunctional, learners who have been identified by the SBST will not receive the required assessment and the intervention process will take too long or will collapse entirely.

2.4.4 Disabilities and illnesses

i. Physical disabilities

Physical disabilities usually result from neurological disorders such as epilepsy, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and muscular dystrophy. Skeletal and muscular weakening occurs in children which can result in amputations, osteogenesis imperfecta and injury wounds (Kruger, 2002). Landsburg (2016) states that physical disabilities usually affect learners' freedom of movement and physical liveliness. In the absence of motivation, learners who are physically challenged will have a poor self-image and physical disability becomes a barrier to learning if it hinders learners' active participation in learning

activities. Learners who are physically challenged need support regarding their psychosocial needs, mobility, the loss of sensation, pressure sores and incontinence (Landsburg, 2016). In most cases, learners with physical challenges often stay away from school when they have a doctor's appointment and thus their learning can be negatively affected.

ii. Reading disabilities

Moats and Tolman (2009) identify three kinds of early reading disabilities and argue that, as much as these disabilities overlap, they are diverse. These disabilities are phonological deficit, processing speed/orthographic processing deficit, and comprehension deficit.

Phonology is “the study or description of the distinctive sound units (phonemes) of a language and their relationship to one another” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 433).

Phonological deficit is the problem learners experience in processing the sounds of the alphabet and it is believed that this emanates from the oral language. Phonological deficit can also be regarded as dyslexia which, according to Moats and Dankin (2004), is a reading impairment which affects accuracy and fluency that are characterised by phonological impairment.

Processing speed is the deficit that affects the fluency of learners' reading.

Comprehension deficit is all comprehension language learning disabilities related to language learning disorders that affect intellectual reasoning and analytical thinking.

According to Moats and Tolman (2009), about 70–80% of learners with reading problems has a form of deficiency that is related to phonology, 10% battles with fluency, and the remaining 10% is related to comprehension deficit. Because a large percentage of reading disabilities emanates from phonological deficit, it is imperative that FP educators intensify learners' understanding of phonemes (i.e., the smallest units of sounds) and their relationship to one another. Intellectually challenged learners need to be taught these phonemes to minimise reading challenges for them. Phonological awareness and correct pronunciation are imperative for good reading skills.

Based on the findings of a study that was concerned with the importance of phonology in the teaching of pronunciation, O'Connor (2006) discusses the relevancy of implementing the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in ensuring that learners pronounce the letters correctly. Even though the teaching of

pronunciation has been neglected by language teachers in the 1970s and 1980s, it has been witnessed that these two skills are inseparable (O'Connor, 2006). In addition, Broughton, Brumfit, D Wilde, and Pincas (2002) regard phonetics as an appropriate instrument that can be employed by educators in the instruction of pronunciation. This is because, during phonetics instruction, learners are educated to identify and classify sounds into vowels and consonants (Broughton et al., 2002). Consonants are distinguished according to the movement of the mouth during vocalization (which can either be bilabial, dental, alveolar, palatal or velar), or the movement of the tongue, or in the use of the voice (voiced, voiceless, plosive, affricate, fricative, nasal, or lateral). On the other hand, vowels are distinguished based on the position of the tongue and lip turning (Haycraft, 1996). Consequently, Haycraft (1996) regards phonological acquisition as a useful tool in teaching reading because many mistakes made by struggling readers relate to sound production.

iii. Illness and absenteeism

There are several illnesses that might have an influence on the burden of disability, such as nutritional deficiencies, infectious diseases, mother-to-child transmitted diseases such as the HIV, and tuberculosis (TB) viruses, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), and injuries sustained through violence (Adnams, 2010).

Quite a few learners in sub-Saharan Africa who never received antiretroviral treatment immediately after birth have been reported to have high levels of cognitive disability and visual, spatial and motor arrears. They also suffer from neurological impairments and seizures (Abubakar, Van Baar, & Van de Vijver, 2008; Smith, Adnams, & Eley, 2013; Wilmshurst, Burgess, Hartley, & Eley, 2006). Moreover, Smith, Adnams, and Eley (2008) state that even if children from HIV/AIDS infected parents receive treatment, their cognitive functioning is in the mild intellectual disability range. Synchronously, they become orphans at a young age. It is therefore very unlikely that these young orphans will receive the necessary attention at home; and if they ever received interventions, these efforts are mostly short-lived. Frequent sickness that is generally associated with HIV infection may be central to chronologically sick learners who are always tired and unable to concentrate during lessons (Landsburg, 2016). Sick learners are normally given regular resting periods which becomes a challenge because they experience gaps in learning due to their absenteeism. Moreover, whatever challenges to learning these children experience, they may not receive the necessary interventions and they may suffer from severe learning disabilities later in life.

TB is a disease that is highly prevalent in South Africa. It mainly affects the lungs but can also affect the heart, skeletal system, kidneys and the brain lining. It mostly affects people in low socio-economic settings because of overcrowding as it can be easily transferred by air (Adnams, 2010).

Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) is a highly dangerous lung disease that leads to the most severe form of extra-pulmonary tuberculosis. It is associated with high sickness and death rates in African children (Adnams, 2010). In severe cases, TBM-affected children may suffer from poor cognitive ability which results in moderate to severe intellectual challenges. Just like HIV infected learners, TB patients suffer from chronic tiredness which means that they miss out on learning opportunities in class, then the illness thus becomes a barrier to their learning.

Adnams (2010) declares that FASD is a consequence of an unborn baby being exposed to alcohol by mothers who consume extreme amounts of alcohol during pregnancy. As a result, most South African children with FASD are operational in the mild intellectually challenged group. This syndrome places unnecessary stress on the health, education, social and justice services because these learners need to be supported in all these spheres. Kirk, Gallagher, Anastasiow, and Coleman (2006) regard alcohol as one of the most dangerous environmental toxins that is detrimental to the development of the foetus if consumed by a pregnant woman.

2.5 Strategies to Improve Reading

Fajardo, Avila, Antonio, Tavares, Gomez, and Hernandez (2014) consider reading and text comprehension as the most difficult skills for intellectually challenged learners to acquire due to the slower level of cognitive development when they are compared to their peers. Affirming, Alnadh (2015) attest that the complexity of reading makes it a very problematical process for intellectually challenged learners to achieve. On the same note, Bransford, Brown, Cocking, Donovan, and Pellegrino (2000) verify that whether reading in general or reading for comprehension, it is closely linked with the intelligent quotient (IQ) of the learner. This is because usually the IQ for intellectually challenged learners is significantly below that of their peers. Maphumulo (2010) agrees and suggests that, to enable learners to crack the code of written tasks, they should be taught different reading strategies. Reading strategies are the engagements that are implemented by experienced teachers in order to assist learners to comprehend what they are reading (Klapwijk, 2015). Blair, Rupley, and Nichols (2007) confirm that it takes a variety of classroom strategies to be an effective teacher of reading and that the quality of the instruction students receive is a major factor in learners' reading success.

Even though teachers encounter problems when teaching intellectually challenged learners to read, there are several strategies that might be useful to improve learners' reading comprehension (Alnadhi, 2015). Furthermore Alnadhi (2015) attests that reading strategies for students with intellectual disabilities have evolved from the slate approach in the early 1900s. The latter strategy required learners to distinguish the letters of the alphabet and to spell the familiar words. In the 1910s, the phonetic system was introduced which involved grouping the onset words. In the 1940s, teaching reading involved the mastering of 150 sight words as the initial step in teaching reading to intellectually challenged learners. In the 1990s, the phonetic approach was highlighted as the most appropriate approach to teach learners with intellectual disabilities to read.

These strategies involve phonics instruction, straddling, text augmentation, 'walking' through the book, and the use of different grouping strategies. The DBE (2011) supports these strategies, and states that there are numerous tactics that can be used by learners if they are unable to read a word. For example, they can look for clues in the pictures, they can sound out the word, or they can break it down into syllables. Therefore, teachers who are teaching these learners should ensure that they systematically employ appropriate strategies to adjust to the level of learners who are intellectually challenged.

2.5.1 Phonics instruction

According to Joseph and McCachran (2003), teachers play a significant role in teaching learners to read, and it has been argued that it is especially students with intellectual disabilities who can benefit from phonics instructions. Phonics instruction is regarded as an essential to develop learners' phonemic awareness (DoE, 2008a). Hugo and Lenyai (2013) explain phonemic awareness as the ability to separate the individual sounds. During phonics instruction learners are taught the letters of the alphabet, starting with the vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and followed by the consonants (b, c, d, f, g, etc.). Consonants and vowels are then blended into sounds such as ba, ma, da, ga, etc. It is inarguable that phonics instruction plays a significant part in teaching learners to read because learners use the knowledge of letters to read, complete words, and thereafter construct sentences. This is line with the constructivists theory which states that material must be presented in a sequence giving the learners the opportunity to acquire and construct knowledge, transform and transfer learning (Bruner, 1966).

However, Blunden-Greeff (2015) advises teachers not dwell too much on this instruction because it can affect reading fluency and comprehension. From the constructivism theory point of view, it is important that teachers who teach learners with intellectual challenges ensure that what they teach makes sense, because these learners struggle to remember concepts (Parker, Zhong, Tracey, Craven, & Morin, 2015). Teachers should therefore make sure that the words they teach are meaningful and age-appropriate.

2.5.2 Comprehensive reading instruction

Most students with intellectual disabilities can read simple, connected text with meaning (Allor, Mathes, Roberts, Jones, & Champlin, 2010b). Affirming the above statement, Allor et al. (2010b) conducted a study on strategies that can be used to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners in primary school. The study employed comprehensive reading interventions. Comprehensive reading instruction is a strategy to teach reading which is modified by oral language exercises. It requires improved teaching techniques to increase phonemic awareness, alphabetic understanding, word recognition, oral language skills and comprehension. The study suggests that learners with intellectual challenges are capable of reading texts meaningfully even though the teaching time frame needs to be doubled compared to the time required by peers who do not have reading disabilities. The conclusion was reached that learners with intellectual challenges need regular, explicit and well organised teacher led instruction.

Based on their multi-year study of primary school students with moderate ID using a comprehensive approach, Allor et al. (2010b) report significant increases in several subskills of literacy, although not in reading comprehension measures. Oral language activities and modified teaching techniques were added. The sample of 28 students received about 40-50 minutes direct instruction daily in trying to target big ideas in reading and key strategies. The strands presented were concepts of print, phonological and phonemic awareness, letter knowledge, sounds, word recognition, fluent reading, reading comprehension, and reading aloud for vocabulary and language development. One of the clearest results was an improvement in phonemic awareness. The researchers also found improved alphabetic decoding, word recognition, oral language skills and comprehension. Generally, the students with intellectual disabilities took twice as long to complete the tasks as the readers who had no impairment (Allor et al., 2010b). These authors thus recommend that students with intellectual disabilities “need consistent, explicit, systematic teacher-led instruction over a long period of time” (Allor et al., 2010b, p. 11).

2.5.3 Scaffolding

Another strategy that can be used to support learners in the construction of new knowledge is referred to as ‘scaffolding’. Scaffolding is when a teacher gives significant support to learners at first, but this support is gradually withdrawn when the learners seem to be able to perform tasks more independently (Killen, 2015). As a concept scaffolding encourages teachers and learners to interact with the text since lessons are implicitly structured. Hence (Chonco, 2015) regards scaffolding as a meaningful approach to assist learning. However, Axford, Harders and Wise (2009) argue that scaffolding is more than support since it facilitates the performance of the required task. The activities are allowing teachers to move backwards in the sequence if they realise that learners are not ready to perform the required activities (Axford et al, 2009). Accordingly, assistance should be decreased to enable learners to complete tasks individually, which will ensure that they eventually master various reading skills. Subsequently, scaffolding is the ideal strategy in supporting emergent literacy it can enhance reading skills of intellectually challenged learners.

2.5.4 Text augmentation

Text augmentation is the strategy of adding some information in the text so that it can be easily understood by the reader. This strategy is used mostly to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. Books used to teach intellectually challenged learners to read can be improved by adding pictures to the text, by repeating the text, and by adding items at the corner of the page (Hudson, Browder, & Wakeman 2013). However, augmentation should be carefully done to avoid drawing learners’ attention away from text to pictures (Hudson, Browder, & Wakeman 2013).

2.5.5 Walking through the book

One of the strategies that can be employed by teachers when introducing a story is to ‘walk through the book’ with the learners (DoE, 2011). When using this strategy, the teacher involves the learners in a discussion of the story by using pictures and headings to arouse learners’ interest and to ensure their active participation.

2.5.6 Straddling

Another suggestion is that learners who are intellectually challenged can straddle (i.e., progress to one level while still being instructed in concepts and skills that had to be acquired at the lower level), which will allow them to take some subjects at a particular level and others at a lower level.

According to the DoE (2011), straddling is when “a learner or group of learners at a specific grade or level work towards attaining assessment standards from more than one grade within learning areas or learning programmes”. To be able to do this, it is imperative that learners’ reading ability is enhanced and that teachers engage them in extensive reading programmes to ensure that they achieve success at both levels.

As the aim of reading is to obtain meaning from a text, another strategy that can be used by educators to enhance the reading comprehension of intellectually challenged learners is to employ easy-to-use texts. In a research study that was conducted by Fajardo, Avila, Ferrer, Tavares, Gomez, and Hernandez (2014), the efficiency of easy-to-read texts in enhancing the reading comprehension of intellectually challenged learners was demonstrated.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

Miller (1991) highlights the fact that educators have not managed to improve learners’ reading ability without reference to structured theories, probably because more attention was paid to practical concerns while neglecting the theoretical concerns of teaching learners with special needs. This omission has proven to be detrimental in special needs education where the root or ecological causes and transactional origins of disability were neglected. Recently it has been established that research studies should be grounded in a theoretical framework which reinforces what will be researched during the study. The theoretical framework that underpins any study narrates the logic on which the study is based and connects theory with the practical aspects of the research (Sinclair, 2007). In consideration of this requirement, this study was informed by Jerome Bruner’s constructivist theory.

Jerome Bruner’s constructivist theory was used in this study as a lens through which I could engage with the data. Bruner (1966) suggests that a learner of a very young age is capable of learning any material as long as the instruction is properly organized. Pretorius (2015) concurs, stating that the formal teaching of reading should begin in the FP, because it is in this phase that young minds are developing and can receive new information with ease. This implies that learners in the FP who are intellectually challenged are capable of reading as long as the information is organized properly by the teachers and different reading strategies are used.

According to Bruner (1966), learning is an active process in which learners create new thoughts or concepts based upon their current or past knowledge. Furthermore, the learner selects and transforms

information and constructs and makes decisions relying on a cognitive structure to do so. The South African Council of Educators Act 76 of 1998 affirms that learners with financial, learning and other difficulties cannot reach their full potential without intervention. This knowledge has been used in understanding and exploring methods used by teachers to teach language to learners who are intellectually challenged.

Bruner (1966) proposes three modes of presentation of information. These modes are: enactive, iconic and symbolic representations. Enactive representation involves converting action-based information and storing it in our memory. In the iconic representation, information is stored visually in the form of images. The symbolic representation develops last. Bruner (1966) maintains that this is where information is stored in the form of a code or symbol such as language. Modes of representation are the way in which information is stored and encoded in the learner's memory.

This theory has the following implications for teaching practice:

1. Teachers must be able to plan and prepare suitable materials for teaching according to the difficulty that matches learners' level.
2. The teacher must revisit the material to enhance teaching reading. This means building on pre-taught ideas to grasp the full concept is very important.
3. According to Bruner, the teacher must re-introduce vocabulary, grammar points and other topics now and then in order to push the learners to a deeper comprehension and longer retention.
4. Material must be presented in a sequence giving the learners the opportunity to acquire and construct knowledge and transform and transfer learning.
5. Learners must be involved in using their prior experiences to learn new knowledge.
6. Teachers must categorize new information.
7. Teachers must help learners to categorize new information in order to be able to see similarities and differences between items.

On assisting learners in building their knowledge, teachers should use scaffolding and their assistance should be withdrawn systematically as it becomes less necessary. Moreover, regular feedback should be given to learners that is directed at intrinsic motivation. It is also important that success and failure are not experienced by learners as reward and information, but as information (Bruner, 1966).

The strength of the constructivist theory is that it enables learners to be able to interpret multiple realities and that they are therefore able to deal with real-life situations.

As was mentioned in Chapter one, Bruner (1966) perceives learning as an active process in which learners create new thoughts or concepts based upon their current and/or past knowledge. In this process the learner selects and transforms information and constructs and makes decisions relying on a cognitive structure to do so.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter interrogated the literature on studies that had been conducted to explore the realities of learners who experience challenges in mainstream schools, with particular reference to the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase. It was noted that a limited number of studies had been conducted on teaching intellectually challenged learners in rural communities to read, even though about 60% of the black learner population resides in rural areas (DSD, DWCPD & UNICEF, 2012).

A brief definition of intellectual impairment was given and relevant literature on the history of intellectual challenges was reviewed. It was noted that the terms for learners with learning disabilities had evolved to discard hurtful terminology. The severity and manifestations of intellectual challenges in South Africa were also briefly discussed.

Literature on the reading skills that ought to be acquired by intellectually challenged learners was probed. Different barriers that hinder reading were illuminated and reference was made to societal, curricular and physical factors that affect the reading process. Strategies for teaching reading were interrogated and it was reflected on how they can be used to enhance reading in the FP. A discussion of Bruner's constructivist theory that underpinned the study concluded the chapter.

In the next chapter the research methods that were used to explore the strategies that were employed by FP teachers to teach intellectually challenged learners in a rural context to read are discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter concentrated on literature that underpinned the research questions and the discourse focused on earlier researchers' findings regarding teaching strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. The current study aimed to explore the strategies used by selected FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. Guided by Bruner's theory of constructivism, the study also investigated how the participating FP teachers implemented teaching strategies to enhance the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners. This chapter provides information on the research design and the methodology that were used to obtain answers to the critical research questions as presented in Chapter One. A brief explanation of the sampling procedure that was adopted and a description of the research site are presented. The data generation and analysis methods are also elucidated. The chapter is concluded with a description of the ethical requirements that were adhered to and the limitations that had to be considered.

3.2 The Interpretivist Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is how a researcher observes the world and what it is that prompts him/her to conduct a research study (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Any research project should be grounded on a specific paradigm that will give direction to the study. In this context, the importance of interacting with and assessing the views of human participants in my study played a vital role when I collected the data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). On the same note, Morgan (2007) explains that a paradigm has a great influence on the questions that are compiled and the methodology that is followed by the researcher, which was why I chose this paradigm.

The current study was located within an interpretivist research paradigm, which means that the analysis and interpretation of the data occurred within the context of the study site and the participants' experiences. As an interpretivist researcher, I thus employed meaning-oriented methodologies such as interviewing and observation because these processes relied on the subjective

experiences of the participants (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). I was thus cognisant of Cohen, Manion, and Morison's (2011) argument that interpretivism is characterised by an individual's willingness to understand human experience. I thus endeavoured to get inside the minds of the participants and to understand their world in the FP classroom from within their experiences. Punch (2005) argues that interpretivism focuses on an investigation of the actions, attitudes and behaviour of people. Moreover, the interpretive paradigm assists the researcher to gaze at different aspects in order to understand the phenomenon under study (Taylor & Medina, 2013). According to Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran (2001), interpretivist researchers assume that reality is socially constructed, and the researcher is therefore responsible for revealing this reality. When researchers are passionate to apprehend the meaning made by people according to their daily experiences, and if they want to make use of these experiences through the data they collect, they use the interpretivist paradigm (Cantrell, 2008). I thus employed the interpretivist paradigm to collect the required data from within the cultural, social, professional and natural settings of the participants. This means that Foundation Phase teachers' perceptions and experiences of classroom practices in a rural setting in northern KwaZulu-Natal were acquired in authentic classroom settings. The choice of the interpretivist paradigm facilitated my exploration of the strategies used by these teachers to enhance the reading skills of the intellectually challenged learners they taught, and the subjective positioning of the participants thus assisted me in understanding how they implemented different strategies to teach these learners.

3.3 Research Approach

Most researchers in the social sciences employ a qualitative approach in their studies so that they can draw rich and detailed data from the participants (Carr, 2008). On the same note, Creswell (2008) argues that the qualitative approach is grounded in a naturalistic setting and that, when employing this approach, the participants are regarded as key instruments because they are the source of data that are generated through data generation tools. In this study the key instruments were Foundation Phase teachers. I chose a qualitative approach because of its exploratory, descriptive and interpretive characteristics.

The qualitative approach was appropriately utilised as it enabled me to interact with the participants in their natural settings, which were their school and classroom environments. During lesson observations, I was able to explore the challenges and successes experienced by these teachers in their endeavours to enhance the reading skills of the intellectually challenged learners in their care. To

address the research questions, I was able to interact with and observe these Foundation Phase teachers in my quest to investigate what strategies they employed in their teaching, how they applied these strategies, and to determine whether the strategies they employed were effective or not.

3.4 A Case Study Design

A case study design was employed. A case study is a systematic and in-depth study of one case in its context (Rule & John, 2011). Because case studies aim to explain the experiences of study participants at first hand, they are evocative in nature (Bertram & Christiansen, 2015). Four types of case studies can be employed, namely an exploratory, an expository, an ethnographic, or a multiple case study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). I implemented an exploratory case study design which, according to Streb (2011), is the design that is used when a problem under investigation has not been clearly defined. I also employed this design as it allowed me to obtain first-hand information from the participating teachers. The case that was explored in this study was the strategies that FP teachers employed to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. I was also able to investigate how these strategies were employed and whether they were effective in enhancing the reading skills of these learners or not.

Scholarly investigations into the barriers learners with intellectual challenges experience is a theme that is very familiar to educational specialists; however, how these children's reading capacity is enhanced has not yet been clearly defined, particularly when they are incorporated in mainstream classrooms (Ntombela, 2009). Some teachers feel that intellectually challenged learners need to be taught in special schools. It was against this backdrop that the case study design allowed me to gain first-hand experience of the strategies that FP teachers employed to teach reading skills to intellectually challenged learners.

Which strategies are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods used in this study were focus group interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. Focus group interviews were conducted to find out which strategies are used by FP teachers to enhance reading skills. To understand how the strategies were employed the researcher

observed teachers during lesson presentation. Documents were then analysed to determine whether the extent the strategies enhanced reading skills. These methods are discussed below.

3.5.1 Focus group interview

To collect the primary data for this study, I conducted a focus group interview with the participants. This is a technique widely used in exploratory studies to formally interview a group of participants to procure data on the phenomenon under study (Streb, 2010). By using an interview schedule and by thoroughly analysing relevant secondary data such as lesson plans, I was able to explore the strategies used by the participants to enhance the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners. By listening closely, taking notes and recording the interview, I was able to identify the strategies used by the teachers to enhance the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners.

3.5.2 Classroom observations

Classroom observations were also employed to allow me to attend classes and observe the classroom practices of teachers who were responsible for teaching reading to learners with different abilities. Moreover, I could witness how these teachers implemented different teaching strategies to enhance the reading of intellectually challenged learners, and I was also able to capture the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible records.

3.5.3 Document analysis

The documents that were analysed were firstly lesson plans. They were observed during lesson presentation to ascertain whether teachers presented the lessons the way they have planned. Only lesson plans for observed teachers were analysed. Secondly the CAPS document and the White Paper 6 were perused to check the minimum requirements for reading instructions. Lastly the mark lists were scrutinised in order to find out whether there was any progress made by learners since the beginning of the year.

3.4.4 Field notes

During my visit to the school under study, I consistently made notes in a diary to record my observations, experiences and emotional responses to what I observed. These notes were used to augment and enhance my perceptions during the field work phase of the study, as recommended in Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017).

3.6 Research Context

The study was conducted in one of nineteen mainstream primary schools in the Bonjeni Circuit in the Umkhanyakude District. This mainstream school was selected in the knowledge (through personal experience) that learners with intellectual challenges were enrolled in the FP there. I had visited the school several times from 2013 to 2017 during my term of appointment as an assessor by a certain private higher institution to assess student teachers during teaching practice.

This public school is situated in the deep rural area of Jozini in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. The school accommodates learners from Grade R to Grade 7 and is also a centre for Adult Basic Education and Training. All the grades in the school comprise two sections, meaning each grade is divided into A and B classes. My research focused on Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3 teachers in the Foundation Phase.

My observations clearly revealed that the population around the school was dense, poor, and that the classrooms were overcrowded. The school is a quantile 1 school, which implies that it has limited facilities and amenities. According to the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), quantile 1 schools do not charge any school fees as parents hail from deprived socio-economic backgrounds and most families rely on a government grant for survival.

3.7 Sampling

Sampling is a method of choosing a smaller group from the general population (Silverman, 2000). According to Maree (2014), sampling is the procedure that is used by academics to choose the participants who will take part in a study. Stratified sampling, snowball sampling and criterion sampling are the three sampling strategies that can be used by researchers when choosing their participants (Maree, 2014). To obtain in-depth information of the strategies employed by FP teachers to enhance the reading of intellectually challenged learners, I employed purposive sampling.

Purposive sampling is mostly used by researchers when they want to make specific choices about which group to include in the research. It is therefore regarded as criterion sampling (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). Maree (2014) clarifies that criterion sampling is when the researcher decides on the characteristics of the participants to be included in the research; they must therefore meet certain criteria (which could include gender, location, or profession) to select the participants who will have the desired insight into the research topic. Maxwell (2008) ascertains that a sample of systematically

selected participants brings more confidence to the conclusions of the study, as such a sample represents a more adequate number of knowledgeable members than a sample of randomly selected participants. The participants chosen for this study had to meet one primary criterion, which was that they should have had first-hand experience of teaching reading in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3).

Six FP teachers from the selected study site were involved in the study. All the teachers had more than five years' experience of teaching in the FP and all had had first-hand experience of teaching learners who were intellectually challenged. As the Foundation Phase is the schooling phase in which intellectual challenges first manifest, almost every FP classroom will have learners who are challenged in some way or another.

All six teachers were involved in a focus group interview which lasted for about two and half hours in one of the FP classrooms after school. The time was decided upon by the teachers to ensure that there was no unnecessary disturbance of teaching and learning processes in the school at the time of the interview. Of the six educators who were interviewed, only three were randomly chosen for classroom observations as it had been agreed that one teacher per grade, and not all six teachers, would be observed during a lesson presentation.

3.8 Participants' Profiles

All the participants were FP teachers, and all were of the female gender. They were all qualified holding relevant diplomas or degrees in teaching. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms are used in this report instead of their real names. In the interest of authenticity, the comments of the participants are presented verbatim.

Table 3.1: Demographic data of the participants

Teacher's name (pseudonym)	Training Institution/ s	Qualifications	Age in years	Experience in the FP in years	No. of learners in the class
Zevile	Intuzuma College; UNISA	PTC, FDE, ABET	50+	16 +	65

Nonhlelelo	UNIZULU	B Ed. (Honours)	21-30	1-5	60
Andile	Esikhawini College; UNISA	PTD (J), ACE	41-50	16 +	63
Ayah	Esikhawini College; UNIZULU	PTD (S), HDE	31-40	16 +	60
Okuhle	UNIZULU	B Ed. (Honours)	21-30	6-10	58
Akhona	Esikhawini College	PTC, FDE and ABET	50+	16+	60

3.8.1 Foundation Phase Teacher 1 (Zevile)

Zevile was a Grade 1 teacher who had been teaching for more than 25 years. Zevile held a Primary Teacher's Certificate from Intuzuma College of Education, a Further Diploma in Education, and an ABET certificate from UNISA. She had 65 learners in her class. After many years of teaching experience in the primary school in both the FP and the Senior Primary Phase, she was ready to retire. She also seemed overwhelmed by the work overload that she felt teachers were burdened with. She complained about a heavy administrative workload and ever-changing policies issued by the Department of Basic Education. She stated:

"I can't wait to turn 55 and take early retirement. I have been in the teaching profession for more than two decades. I feel now it is the time I leave the profession and let the young teachers explore all the theories they are having about teaching and learning."

3.8.2 Foundation Phase Teacher 2 (Nonhlelelo)

Nonhlelelo was a Grade 1 teacher who had five years' teaching experience. Nonhlelelo held a Bachelor of Education Degree in the Foundation Phase from the University of Zululand. She had 60 learners in her class. She seemed a very enthusiastic teacher who had a passion for teaching, hence she had requested gaining experience as a Grade 1 teacher. She wanted to get experience teaching learners who came to school for the first time. She was also aware that some Grade 1 learners in her class had

never attended Grade R, because there is only one pre-primary school in the neighbourhood and the school can only accommodate a limited number of learners. She commented:

“I would like to witness my learners growing and getting familiar with the school environment. Progressing from ‘I am unable to’ to ‘I am able’ stage of their school life.”

3.8.3 Foundation Phase Teacher 3 (Andile)

Andile was a Grade 2 teacher who held a Senior Primary Teacher’s Diploma and an Advanced Certificate in Education from Esikhawini College of Education. There were 65 learners in Andile’s class. Andile had seventeen years’ teaching experience and she had taught in both the Senior Phase and the Foundation Phase. It was very easy for Andile to recount the experiences and differences between teaching in the FP and Senior Phases. She said:

“It is always a pleasure to teach learners when they have just joined the school environment. They are so innocent, and they are always eager to learn, and they pay attention to all the activities in class. And lastly, they are not shy to ask whenever they feel confused.”

3.8.4 Foundation Phase Teacher 4 (Ayabonga)

Ayabonga was a female Grade 2 teacher. She had 60 learners in her class. Ayabonga held a Senior Primary Teacher’s Diploma and a Higher Diploma in Education from Esikhawini College and the University of Zululand respectively. She had been a teacher for more than nineteen years. She started her teaching career as a high school teacher because there was a shortage of teachers who were qualified to teach Mathematics and Physical Sciences. When she got married, she relocated to Jozini and she found a teaching post in the primary school under study. Andile felt that it was important for schools to place skilful teachers in the FP so that they can lay a good foundation for the learners.

“Learners can grasp information from the early school years and they usually do not forget what has been taught during these years for their entire school life.”

3.8.5 Foundation Phase Teacher 5 (Okuhle)

Okuhle was a Grade 3 teacher who had 58 learners in her class. Okuhle held a Bachelor of Education Degree from the University of Zululand. She had been teaching for six years in the Foundation Phase. Okuhle entered the teaching profession because she had not qualified for the course that she wanted to study, and teaching was her only option. She developed a love of teaching from the time she started her teaching practice and she did not regret taking the teaching route. She stated:

“I just love teaching. I am also glad that I am able to make a difference in the lives of my learners.”

3.8.6 Foundation Phase Teacher 6 (Akhona)

Akhona was a Grade 3 teacher who held a Primary Teacher’s Certificate and a Higher Education Diploma from Esikhawini College and UNISA respectively. Akhona had been in the teaching profession for more than three decades. All her teaching life had been spent in the primary school where she taught from Grade 1 to Grade 6. There were 60 learners in Akhona’s class. She seemed exhausted; this was evident because whenever she addressed her learners in class, she perched on the table.

3.9 Data Generation Methods

Immediately after permission to conduct the study had been granted by the Department of Basic Education and the College Research Ethics Committee, the Principal of the school was called to obtain his permission and to schedule the dates for the data collection process. I then E-mailed the consent forms (Appendices A and B) to the relevant participants. Arrangements were then made with the principal and the participants to meet them to set the dates for data collection. As was previously alluded to, permission was granted to collect data by means of lesson observations, a focus group interview and document analysis.

3.9.1 Lesson observations

Creswell (2009) articulates that observation provides trustworthy data because a researcher is then able to report and write about what he/she has observed. To answer the research questions that gave impetus to the study, I employed a structured lesson observation schedule which was used when I

observed the educators while they were teaching reading. One FP teacher in each grade (Grades 1-3) was observed during the presentation of a reading lesson. I was keen to determine the different strategies that the teachers implemented to enhance the reading skills of the intellectually challenged learners in their respective classes (i.e., one grade in each of the three FP grades was observed). This method also allowed me to explore how the teachers implemented teaching strategies and whether these strategies were successful.

It must be acknowledged at this point that the acquisition of reading skills occurs over a prolonged period and that learners acquire reading skills at various stages and at their own unique pace. The observations that occurred over a limited period during one lesson are therefore by no means definitive and exhaustive of the strategies employed by the teachers. However, this was an explorative study and the data may serve as a point of departure for future studies in this field.

3.9.2 Focus group interview

A focus group discussion was conducted with the participating teachers. According to McMillan (2014), a focus group discussion is a technique to formally interview a group of people who possess knowledge of the same topic. All the participating FP educators were interviewed in one classroom after school. The venue was decided upon by the educators and the interview was conducted at a time that was suitable for them all. The interview lasted about 2 hours and 30 minutes.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) articulate that focus group interviews should pose questions that are based on one theme. This interview method assisted me in collecting appropriate and rich data about the challenges and successes that the educators experienced in their attempts to enhance the reading skills of the intellectually impaired learners in their respective classes. The focus group interview was particularly helpful in that the comments of one teacher often stimulated additional responses from the others, which ensured that the primary data that were required for this study were rich and exhaustive.

3.9.3 Document analysis

Creswell (2014) maintains that document analysis enables the researcher to obtain the written words of participants and to present them as the participants intended them for the compilation of the data. For

this purpose, the CAPS document for the FP, EWP 6, the teachers' lesson plans, and assessment records were perused.

The lesson plans were assessed during the observation of the lesson presentations. A lesson plan is a step-by-step explanation of how a lesson will be presented and contains information about the lesson objectives and methodology. I first perused the lesson plans of the teachers whose lessons I would observe to later ascertain whether the teachers presented the lessons as planned. The strategies for including learners with intellectual challenges (i.e., special needs learners) in the lessons were carefully scrutinised. It was particularly important to determine what support material the teachers would use, as the achievement of teaching and learning objectives depends on suitable learner support material, or LTSM as it is generally referred to. I was therefore curious to determine whether the LTSM that the teachers had chosen would enhance the objectives they had established and whether these objectives were in line with curricular guidelines. I attempted to determine if the various learning styles were addressed in the lesson plans and whether the planned activities included the senses (visual, kinaesthetic, auditory, tactile, or analytic) (DBE, 2011b). Management of classroom and time was also analysed during the observations of the lesson presentations.

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for the FP was the second document that I analysed. Information about the knowledge, concepts and skills that is contained in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) document is systematically arranged in the CAPS document per term. Amongst other things, the CAPS document offers guidelines about "the content, concepts and skills to be taught per term" (DoE, 2011). When I analysed the CAPS document, the minimum requirements for reading instruction were closely perused. This assisted me in observing whether the teachers were familiar with the requirements of the National Policy Statement for the FP or not.

The third document that I analysed was the Education White Paper 6 (EWP 6) of 2001. This document promotes inclusive education and guides educators towards the inclusion of learners with special education needs. The EWP 6 was surveyed in order to identify the particular skills and the levels of competency required for intellectually challenged learners.

I also analysed the teachers' assessment record sheets. These record sheets should reflect the minimum competency of learners as stated in the CAPS document. It was therefore important to analyse these records to ascertain whether the teachers had managed to keep up with the minimum requirements for reading as required by the CAPS document. This phase of the study was conducted in March of 2018,

as it was also important to find out whether individual learners had made any progress since the beginning of the year.

3.10 Data Analysis

Bertram and Christiansen (2014, p. 115) define data analysis as “the separation of a whole into parts for the purpose of the study”. Data can be analysed through inductive and deductive methods (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The study adopted an inductive analysis process which is explained by McMillan and Schumacher (2014, p. 395) as “the process through which qualitative researchers synthesize and make meaning from the data, starting with specific data and ending with categories and patterns”. Maree (2014) regards inductive analysis as the process whereby the researcher uses the information in the transcript that will authenticate or disconfirm the theory”. This method of data analysis enabled me to answer the research questions.

- Which strategies are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?
- How are these strategies employed to ensure that enhancement of the reading strategies of intellectually challenged learners occurs?
- To what extent do these strategies enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?

After the group interview, the recorded data were first transcribed from the audio recording into written text. The text was read several times and similar themes were identified and were coded under headings. Maree (2009) refers to coding as “the process of reading carefully through your transcribed data, line by line, and dividing it into meaningful analytical units” (p. 105). After I had transcribed the data, the participants were forwarded a draft report to establish whether my interpretations accurately reflected what the participants had expressed during the interview. To make meaning from the data, I started with the transcribed data and then similar categories and patterns were identified and used to analyse the data that had been obtained from the participants.

To analyse the data that had been collected during the lesson observations, I first organised the data under different headings. I then followed the same procedure as for the interviews by organising the text into codes and themes using a content analysis process.

In analysing the documents, I first established whether the lesson objectives stated in the lesson plans had been achieved. Secondly, I categorised the minimum requirements as stated in the CAPS

document to determine whether the lesson objectives were in line with policy. Finally, the information from the record sheets was organised into distinct categories as directed by the observation schedule and these findings were compared to the minimum competency requirements as stated in the CAPS document.

3.11 Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness refers to the researcher's ability to convince the readers of the study report that they can rely on the data that were collected (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Maree, 2009). For a study to be trustworthy the researcher also needs to ensure validity and reliability.

3.11.1 Validity

Vithal and Jansen (2006) define validity as a researcher's effort that is used to authenticate the information and verify its accuracy. Research findings are valid when the results are trustworthy, authentic or credible (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) also identifies five strategies to ensure validity: triangulation, member checking, rich and thick descriptions, clarifying the bias of the researcher, and peer debriefing. To ensure the validity of the study, the triangulation and member checking strategies were adopted. Triangulation is a technique of employing two or more sources to validate data (Creswell, 2014). For triangulation I compared and confirmed the findings from the observations, interviews and document analyses. These findings were then transcribed.

The second strategy that I employed was member checking. Creswell and Miller (2000) argue that it is important to engage the participants in assessing the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of the data. To engage the participants, the data from the interviews were transcribed and a draft was forwarded to all six participants to establish whether my transcriptions were accurate and reflected what the participants wanted to express during the interviews.

3.11.2 Reliability

Leung (2015) regards reliability in qualitative research as consistency. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011, p. 199), for research to be reliable "it must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context, then similar results will be found". Cohen et al. (2011) identify three ways to address reliability in qualitative research: the stability of

observations, parallel forms, and inter-rater reliability. This study utilised stability of observation and parallel forms because inter-rater reliability requires the involvement of a different researcher.

I conducted classroom observations in all three Foundation Phase grades (Grades 1, 2 and 3) at separate times of the day. The different grades were observed to give recognition to the developmental reading level of the learners in the different grades. This also enhanced my awareness of whether intellectually challenged learners were present in all the grades and whether different strategies to enhance reading were used by the educators in the FP.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

According to Cohen et al. (2011), ethical issues involve informed consent, confidentiality, and containing the possible negative consequences of interviews. Before embarking on the research, I received an ethical clearance certificate from the UKZN Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the Department of Basic Education and the school principal. The six FP teachers agreed to participate voluntarily in the study and each signed an informed consent form.

Neuman (2006) asserts that participants need to know whether their privacy and sensitivity will be protected and what will happen with their information after recording it. Before the study was conducted, the participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality and they were also informed that the findings would not be used against them in any way. The participants were then assured that the data would not be used for any purpose other than the proposed research. Also, the information would not be used without prior permission by the participants. They were also informed that the data would be safely stored at UKZN for five years, after which the records would be discarded.

Ethics can be regarded as a matter of being principled by being sensitive to the rights of other people (Cohen et al., 2011). Just before the study commenced, the participants were informed of the background and objectives of the study. They were also informed that the study might be useful to the Department of Basic Education and that the data could be appropriately disseminated to interested role players. The participants were ensured that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons for their withdrawal.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter presented a brief discussion of the methodology that was employed in this study. As this research was qualitative in nature, a case study was the most suitable approach because a small sample was used as the intention had been to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. The data generation methods comprised observations, a focus group interview and document analysis. The interviews and observations were audio-taped and then transcribed. The final part of this chapter dealt with the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study. The next chapter will present the analyses of the data that were obtained from lesson observations, the focus group interview, and the perusal of related documents.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysed data and the findings in terms of FP teachers' strategies to enhance intellectually challenged learners' reading skills. It is reiterated that the data were generated by means of focus group interviews, lesson observations and document analysis. First, the collected data were transcribed verbatim from the audio tapes. The interview and classroom activities occurred in isiZulu and the transcriptions were translated into English. Secondly, key words were highlighted and themes that emerged from the data were identified. The headings were coded as a final step in the process.

Three lesson observations were conducted in each of the grades (Grades 1, 2 and 3) in the FP (see Appendix A). Each lesson lasted 45 minutes. Focus group interviews were conducted with six participating FP teachers after school in one of the classrooms.

As part of the document analysis process, the assessment record sheets were examined to determine if progression in reading had occurred for those learners who had scored low marks at the beginning of the year. I also studied the minimum requirements for reading in the FP as stated in the Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement (CAPS) document for the FP.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the participants in this study were all female teachers who were employed in the rural school that was the study site. In the current chapter I focus on the interpretation and analysis of the data and critically discuss the key themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data with the intention of answering the following research questions:

- Which strategies are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?
- How are these strategies employed to ensure that enhancement of the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners occurs?
- To what extent do these strategies enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?

The data that were collected during the focus group interviews assisted me in exploring what strategies the FP teachers used to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. During the classroom observations, I was able to confirm the manner in which these strategies were implemented, and by perusing the assessment records, I was able to determine whether these strategies had impacted these low performing learners' reading skills at all.

The themes emerged from the data are discussed in depth. The comments of the participants were recorded in IsiZulu, and they were translated into English by myself as I am proficient in both IsiZulu and English. The translated comments are presented verbatim in the interest of the validity of the data.

Six key themes emerged in the data analysis process. These themes are discussed in this chapter:

- Knowledge and skills;
- Utilising a variety of teaching strategies;
- Phonics instruction;
- The importance of practical activities;
- Collaboration; and
- Barriers to teaching reading.

The themes highlight the importance that FP teachers should understand the methods of teaching reading that are appropriate for intellectually challenged learners, and that they should implement these methodologies to enhance the reading skills of these learners.

4.2 Theme 1: Knowledge and Skills to be Acquired by FP teachers

The Foundation Phase is the reception phase of a child's schooling career. It is during this phase that a love for school and a sound foundation for learning are established in the minds and hearts of learners. "If the rudiments of reading, writing and calculating are not firmly entrenched by the end of Grade 3, then both learning opportunities and the larger life chances of young citizens will be curtailed" (NEEDU, 2013). Studies conducted nationwide have revealed that South African learners are struggling with mathematical skills and reading even after the FP (Kruizinga & Nathanson, 2010). The NRS (National Reading Strategy) (DoE, 2008b) indicates that the struggle to read commences in the early schooling grades and that it is in this phase that interventions must be implemented to remedy the situation for numerous young learners. A report based on an analysis of the ANA (Annual National Assessment) results also suggested that the deficient performance in the Home Language of Grade 3 and Grade 6 learners was the result of the poor teaching of literacy in the FP (Howie et al., 2006;

Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse, & Zimmerman, 2011). This suggests that teachers who are teaching in this phase must be skilled in identifying learners who struggle, and they should establish the causes of these challenges as early as possible. Moreover, FP teachers must possess the skills to inculcate a love for school in *all* their learners by ensuring that school life is meaningful and enjoyable. This is in line with Bruner who emphasises that Teachers must be able to plan and prepare suitable materials for teaching according to the difficulty that matches learners' level (Bruner 1966).

4.2.1 Knowledge

Even though intellectually challenged learners tend to function below the cognitive level of most of their peers, some teachers manage to teach them well as these learners are capable of learning and acquiring various skills. The knowledge that teachers should possess to facilitate this process can be classified into three categories: pedagogical knowledge (PK), content knowledge (CK), and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (Ewijk & Van der Werf, 2012). CK is a teacher's knowledge about the specific subject matter, PK is regarded as a teacher's knowledge on how to teach, and PCK is the ability of a teacher to simplify the content for learning using different strategies. Then again, NEEDU (2012) regards school subjects, knowledge of the official curriculum (i.e., CAPS), and knowledge of how to teach the subject as important. In terms of CK, familiarity with CAPS is essential in shaping teaching strategies, as this document has been designed to shape and control all curricular activities in a learning area or subject per phase and to give guidance to teachers in achieving the learning objectives (NEEDU, 2012).

Three teachers agreed that sound content knowledge is vital in ensuring that learners learn to their optimum. Similarly, Kanyongo and Brown (2013) regard appropriate content knowledge as key to teaching as it impacts how teachers prepare and present their lessons and how they interact with their learners.

Teacher Akhona mentioned the importance of a sound knowledge of the educational context of all the learners in the FP:

“This can be achieved if teachers build sound relationships with their learners.”

Consequently, to possess “knowledge of the educational context”, teachers should have knowledge of their learners such as knowing from which societies they come, what makes them feel comfortable,

and what scares them (Grossman, 1990). If teachers have this knowledge, they will understand their learners better and will prepare their lessons in such a way that all learners in the class are accommodated. In this regard, teacher Nonhlelelo commented as follows:

“Based on my previous experiences I can say that FP teaching requires a sound content knowledge as well as appropriate delivery. FP learners require a teacher who can use concrete objects since learners in this phase do not have enough vocabulary and exposure to learning material since they are new at school. It is unlike the Intermediate Phase; learners in this phase know a lot of things concerning school life and have enough vocabulary that was acquired in the previous school years.”

Teacher Andile also regarded pedagogical knowledge (PK) as an imperative for FP teachers:

“Learners need a teacher who knows how to teach, because FP learners are so fragile they need a teacher who is flexible, who can persevere and accept them as they are.”

Knowledge of the learners is also very important when teaching FP classes, especially when intellectually challenged learners are in the same class with more proficient learners. It is noteworthy that intellectually challenged learners are as adept at pulling tricks and trying to escape from doing work in class as any other learner. Two teachers shared their experiences in this regard. Teacher Okuhle said:

“During class discussions they will just keep quiet. If you try and force them to participate in activities, some of them will just cry. If they happen to answer a question, they will just say something out of context.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo said:

“When you teach they will appear to or pretend and say that they understand what you are teaching. But when you ask them questions, they will give you answers that do not relate to what you have asked.”

4.2.2 Skills

Teachers should be able to perform their task efficiently to enable learners to reach their potential. The *Norms and Standards for Educators* (DoE, 2000a, pp. 13-14) document describes the various roles of

a teacher as a “learning mediator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials; researcher and lifelong learner; community, citizenship and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject/discipline/phase specialist”.

Nel, Engelbrecht, Swanepoel, and Hugo (2013) argue that three other important roles should also be played by educators, namely the ability to create a learning environment; stimulating parental involvement in identifying challenges in learners’ development; and getting help for learners with special education needs. It is undeniable that the implementation of inclusive education relies strongly on the role of educators. Therefore, the skills and expertise teachers possess become useful as intervention tools during lesson presentations. For example, Calkins (2000) suggests that teachers who love reading can enthusiastically transfer their passion for reading to their students.

In the current study, three teachers stated the importance of early identification of learners who experience challenges as a very important requirement. Teacher Andile said:

“A teacher should know and understand that learners are coming from diverse backgrounds so that she can be able to treat her learners well.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo said:

“Understanding and the ability to implement the differentiated curriculum are the first steps. Also having enough knowledge about different disabilities helps the teacher to be aware of how to treat learners as individuals.”

Conversely, Teacher Ayah stated:

“It is not always easy to identify learners who are intellectually challenged because they do not have any physical impairment like visual or other impairments that might be visible to you as a teacher. In most cases, it is their comprehension skill which is very low. Having said that, early identification is the key to success because it is during this period that, as a teacher, you are able to design strategies so that the learner can be assisted.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo showed her dissatisfaction with the manner in which the SIAAS representatives conducted their assessments. She said:

“Identification is a challenge to us teachers because you can identify the learner and keep observation records, but when those SIAAS guys come they will just spend a few minutes with the learner and tell you that the learner is not intellectually challenged. I am frustrated because

I spend the entire day with these learners; I know all the challenges that they are facing but they are not properly diagnosed. Their screening method is not right.”

The importance of early identification was discussed by the teachers as vital in assisting intellectually challenged learners to reach their potential. In this study it was evident that the teachers endeavoured to apply the skills that they had acquired during teacher training and through their experiences to assist them in including intellectually challenged learners in their classroom activities but, sadly, this was not always possible.

Another important skill that should be possessed by the FP teacher is the skill of differentiation. The CAPS document stipulates that teachers should be flexible in the implementation of the curriculum. Flexibility in curriculum implementation means that teachers should respond to learners' diversity, and that they should differentiate the content of the curriculum, the learning environment, their teaching methods, and assessment tasks (DBE, 2011). In brief, this implies that teachers should:

- Respond to learners' diversity: To effectively respond to learners' diversity means that teachers should understand their own biases. They should have proper knowledge of their learners and should be aware of their different learning styles, interests and backgrounds so that they are able to differentiate their teaching to suit all learners.
- Differentiate the content of the curriculum: To allow learners to experience success in the classroom, teachers should consider teaching from the concrete to the abstract; they should break down their teaching material into smaller, simpler tasks; and they should develop a variety of materials to support teaching and learning. Additionally, learners can benefit from multilevel teaching. Hugo and Nel (2013) differentiate among three steps in multilevel teaching: whole class teaching when introducing a concept; dividing learners heterogeneously; and engaging the whole class in the conclusion of the lesson so that they all participate.
- Differentiating the learning environment: Physical space and psychosocial space where learning takes place should be differentiated so that the needs of all learners are met.

- Differentiating teaching methods: Using different strategies such as scaffolding, grouping strategies, and presenting lessons differently should be employed to accommodate and engage all learners.
- Differentiating assessments: Using assorted assessment strategies that will cater for all learners' needs is important. For example, for visually challenged learners the font of letters should be big and bold, and texts should be read aloud to accommodate learners who are visually impaired.

During the lessons that I observed, I did not witness any application of differentiation. For example, teacher Aya was well prepared and presented her lesson enthusiastically, and the LTSM that was used supported the achievement of her lesson objectives. However, there was no evidence of deliberate or focused inclusion of learners with intellectual challenges, even though teacher Ayah admitted that she had intellectually challenged learners in her class during the interview.

This issue was broached during the interview as all the teachers were asked about the practice of differentiation.

Ayah addressed this question as follows:

“Yes, I have intellectually challenged learners in my class. Their comprehension skill is very low, and they need or want to use straight answers when they are answering questions.”

Also, during the lesson I observed I noticed that when teacher Ayah asked a question, the answers were given in chorus by the entire class. Even though the whole class seemed to be paying attention, there was no evidence that they were all reading what they were supposed to be reading or that every learner comprehended the text.

4.3 Theme 2: A Variety of Teaching Strategies

Learners who are intellectually challenged function at a level of development that is below that of their peers. It is therefore more than likely that teachers who teach these learners will encounter problems in the classroom. It is imperative that teachers who teach intellectually challenged learners employ different strategies to ensure that all learners have mastered the skill of reading. Concurring, Bruner (1996) asserts that every learner can master reading if the material is systematically arranged. Some of

these strategies were mentioned by educators during the data collection process but, unfortunately, because of time constraints, the researcher could not stay to witness the use of these strategies over a prolonged period.

Even though teachers encounter problems when teaching intellectually challenged learners to read, there is several strategies that might be useful to improve learners' reading comprehension (Alnadhi, 2015). These strategies involve phonics instruction, sight word instruction, text augmentation, 'walking' through the book, and the use of different grouping strategies. The DBE (2011) supports these strategies, and also state that there are numerous tactics that can be used by learners if they are unable to read a word. For example, they can look for clues in the pictures, they can sound out the word, or they can break it down into syllables. Bruner (1966) concurs that the teacher must revisit the material to enhance teaching reading. This means building on pre-taught ideas to grasp the full concept is very important.

4.3.1 Repetition

When teaching intellectually challenged learners to read, sufficient time should be devoted to all reading skills (Alnadhi, 2015). Allor et al. (2010) highlight the point that intellectually challenged learners should receive extended, constant, clear, orderly and teacher-led coaching over an extended period of time. In this context, Bruner (1966) argued as far back as 1966 that re-introducing and the repetition of concepts contribute greatly to learners' clear understanding and retaining of information. Another suggestion is that learners who are intellectually challenged can straddle (i.e., progress to one level while still being instructed in concepts and skills that had to be acquired at the lower level), which will allow them to take some subjects at a particular level and others at a lower level. According to the DoE (2011), straddling is when "a learner or group of learners at a specific grade or level work towards attaining assessment standards from more than one grade within learning areas or learning programmes". To be able to do this, it is imperative that learners' reading ability is enhanced and that teachers engage them in extensive reading programmes to ensure that they achieve success at both levels.

In the current study, four teachers agreed that intellectually challenged learners should be given more time to finish their work than their peers. However, Zevile appeared to have lost hope in assisting intellectually challenged learners, as she stated:

“The challenges? Oh, intellectually challenged learners do not finish in time like other learners. You need to get closer to them because they can pretend to understand when they do not.”

In support of this view, teacher Andile added:

“Yaah, what can I say? Teaching intellectually challenged learners is time consuming and power draining. Sometimes as a teacher you feel like you are failing them if you cannot get through to them.”

Teacher Zevile noted:

They need extra time, repetition of work and perseverance. In this way, they can slowly try and do what is expected of them.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo felt that additional time was not only relevant to teaching and learning, but also important for lesson preparation:

“More time is needed when preparing the lessons and you need to prepare a lot of LTSM (Nawo lawo angekho) which we do not have, because they have different learning styles. First, intellectually challenged learners are normally older than the rest of their classmates and most of the time they bully the younger learners if they feel they cannot keep up with the work or if other learners are refusing to help them. Some can be very good at copying from the board correctly. If you write the words on the board, they can copy as it is, but if you erase the work and ask them to repeat it, they will write something that you have never ever seen.”

The low cognitive levels of intellectually challenged learners presented a major challenge to the teachers. Teacher Ayah noted:

“Their comprehension skills are very low. They want you to repeat one thing several times and they always give one-word answers when they are answering questions.”

Teacher Andile agreed and sounded hopeless when she said:

“Not all of them can read successfully, no matter how hard you try. (Abanye badinga ukukhulekelwa nje du.) Some learners need intervention from the Almighty.”

The use of repetition was observed during teacher Ayah’s grade 2 lesson when a particular phrase was repeated to facilitate meaning: “Ucabanga ukuthi muhle kuzo”, which means he/she thinks it looks good on them.

The above comments revealed that teaching intellectually challenged learners can be a very demanding and often a frustrating task for teachers who also teach mainstream learners. This calls for teachers to be vigilant so that they can intervene during teaching and learning activities to ensure that all their learners in the FP are capacitated with relevant knowledge and skills.

4.3.2 Text augmentation

As explained in chapter 2, text augmentation is the strategy of adding some information in the text so that it can be easily understood by the reader.

During the focus group interview teacher Akhona said:

“Another strategy that is useful when teaching intellectually challenged learners to read is to create booklets with simple pictures that the learners will be able to read. The teacher can just put up pictures and ask the learners to tell what they think the pictures are about.”

4.3.3 ‘Walking through the book’

Another strategy that was observed was walking the learners through the book. Teacher Okuhle and teacher Ayah used books with big letter to present their reading lessons. They both ‘walked’ their learners through the book when they asked questions based on the pictures on the cover page. Also, during the reading process, they stopped and asked the learners to predict what was going to appear on the next page.

4.3.4 Scaffolding

As explained above scaffolding is another useful strategy that can be used to support learners in the construction of new knowledge. This approach was witnessed during the lesson by teacher Zevile, who modelled how a sentence should be constructed. After she had modelled proper reading skills, and when she considered that the learners were ready, she encouraged them to read on their own. Teacher Zevile thus facilitated reading by gradually withdrawing her assistance during the reading process. However, teacher Zevile did not pay extra attention to intellectually challenged learners, instead she expected the same ability from them.

4.3.5 Grouping strategies

The teachers were asked if the strategies they discussed were successful in enhancing intellectually challenged learners' ability to read. Various explanations were offered depending on the strategies that they mentioned. They also discussed how they employed grouping strategies to enhance reading.

Teacher Zevile said:

“If the story I’m going to use is in the book, I begin my lesson by showing my learners the picture on the cover page and asking them what they see. This is an effortless process because most Grade 1 books are colourful and full of pictures. I will read sentence by sentence from my big book whilst the learners are following.”

Teacher Aya said:

“I then use a chart with the story or big book to do shared reading. I demonstrate the proper way of reading and learners join in when they are ready.”

The strategy that was employed by teacher Zevile and teacher Aya is commonly referred to as shared reading. This strategy is used mostly used by FP teachers when they introduce a reading text to the whole class. This strategy allows teachers to demonstrate important basic reading skills such as reading from left to right, reading unfamiliar words, and reading meaningfully.

Teacher Okuhle stated:

“During shared reading, I use big books or charts and after dramatising the story they do not take long to join in during the reading.”

Teacher Andile said:

I use different grouping strategies when I teach my Grade 2 class to read. First, when I am introducing the reading lesson, I teach the whole class so that they all get the gist of what I want them to know. I then follow by dividing them into their ability groups where I will give attention to each specific group. Then learners will read in pairs so that they are able to assist one another. Then learners will be given a reading activity to do individually, as this will help me to assess whether they are able to read on their own. At times, after I have completed my reading lesson, individual learners will be chosen to read for the whole class. This I do so that they can pay attention when we are reading because they will know that they might be chosen to read to the whole class.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo shared her strategy as follows:

“It also depends on the strategy I have decided to use. It can either be shared reading where I read the story aloud from the chart and ask them to read when they feel they are ready to read, or I will read the story from the storybook whilst learners are listening. Then I will read the story to that group.”

The above discussion demonstrated that the FP teachers were knowledgeable of various strategies that can be employed to enhance reading skills. However, very few of these strategies were witnessed during the time that I observed their lessons.

4.4 Theme 3: Phonics Instruction

According to Joseph and McCachran (2003), teachers play a significant role in teaching learners to read, and it has been argued that it is especially students with intellectual disabilities who can benefit from phonics instructions. Phonics instruction is regarded as an essential to develop learners' phonemic awareness (DoE, 2008a). Hugo and Lenyai (2013) explain phonemic awareness as the ability to separate the individual sounds. During phonics instruction learners are taught the letters of the alphabet, starting with the vowels (a, e, i, o, u) and followed by the consonants (b, c, d, f, g, etc.). Consonants and vowels are then blended into sounds such as ba, ma, da, ga, etc. It is inarguable that phonics instruction plays a significant part in teaching learners to read because learners use the knowledge of letters to read, complete words, and thereafter construct sentences. Like-minded material must be presented in a sequence giving the learners the opportunity to acquire and construct knowledge, transform and transfer learning (Bruner, 1966).

However, Blunden-Greeff (2015) advises teachers not dwell too much on this instruction because it can affect reading fluency and comprehension. From the constructivism theory point of view, it is important that teachers who teach learners with intellectual challenges ensure that what they teach makes sense, because these learners struggle to remember concepts (Parker, Zhong, Tracey, Craven, & Morin, 2015). Teachers should therefore make sure that the words they teach are meaningful and age-appropriate.

Teacher Ayah shared her strategies as follows:

“Most of my reading starts in the reading corner, which is where I start my reading lessons. We first discuss the theme for the week. After that, I explain unfamiliar words and then will sound

out the words and break them down into syllables. Then the learners will write all the words with the letter I introduced on that particular day.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo said:

“In most cases, I begin my reading lesson at the beginning of the week by introducing one letter from the letters of the alphabet. For my reading lessons I always choose a story that has letter/s that I have just introduced in that week. This is to make sure that they experience these letters in real reading and writing [activities].

In a Grade 3 class, it is heart-breaking to have a learner who cannot recognise vowels because that is Grade 1 work. For instance, I am working with one learner in my class to help him to differentiate between ‘a’ and ‘e’.”

Teacher Nonhlelelo`s comment supports the argument that it is imperative that FP teachers focus on phonics so that learners can master reading later in their school career. This also suggests that intellectually challenged learners should be taught to read by familiarising them with words through the use of phonics.

4.5 Theme 4: The Importance of Integration and Practical Activities

Learners go through six stages of development when they learn to read. These experiences range from their ability to hold a book to the ability to infer meaning from text and to associate pictures with a text. These phases are pre-reader, emergent reader, early reader, developing reader, fluent reader, and independent reader (DoE, 2008a). Furthermore Bruner (1966) attests that material must be presented in a sequence giving the learners the opportunity to acquire and construct knowledge and transform and transfer learning.

Teachers` understanding of these stages in their learners` development plays an important role in planning their lessons, as effective planning ensures that teachers get through to their learners regardless of the stages of development they have achieved. Also, teachers need to decide which approach/es to employ during lesson delivery. Some of the approaches that I observed during the lesson presentations were the bottom up, the top down, the play-based, and the integrated approaches of teaching.

4.5.1 The bottom up approach

When utilising the bottom up approach, the teacher focuses on the look and say method (Joubert, Bester, & Meyer, 2008). This method relies on the reinforcement of sight words or high frequency words. The learners thus get to recognise the shape and length of a word as well as associated word structures (DoE, 2008).

Teachers employing this approach begin their lessons by ensuring that learners are able to identify and recognise letters of the alphabet, then words. They then begin to construct sentences and finally can read passages. This method is based on the belief that meaning is progressively obtained by learners in a line method.

Teacher Zevile said:

“If I’m introducing a sound – because that is what we do mostly in Grade 1 – I show them the specific letter and ask them to sound out the letter. After that they will give or form words using that specific letter. I will then write down the words and ask learners to read them. I sometimes give them those words for homework so that they can practise reading at home.”

4.5.2 The top down approach

Teachers choosing this approach believe that when learners come to school, they already have some knowledge that they have acquired from home and social contexts. Joubert et al. (2008) attest that reading is derived from readers’ minds or experiences and the then make assumptions about the text they are about to read. Learners must be involved in using their prior experiences to learn new knowledge (Bruner (1966).

Teacher Zevile explained that she used pictures to stimulate her learners’ interest and attention. For example, she explained that the pictures that were handed out to separate groups might contain the letter ‘G’ or ‘g’, as she wanted the learners to construct words and later sentences using the letter G. She thus based the learning of reading on words that had previously been learned – i.e., she used the principle of building on prior knowledge in a lesson.

4.5.3 The play-based approach

When teachers understand that play is innate to learners and is important for holistic development, they employ a play-based approach in their teaching. A play-based approach is when the teacher teaches learners the relevant concepts and skills through play (Bruce, 2011). Gordon and Browne (2008) argue that teachers should create environments that will permit learners to explore and develop holistically. This can be achievable if teachers know how to prepare lessons that utilise different activities.

Teacher Ayah pointed out another strategy that FP teachers can use to enhance the acquisition of reading skills when she referred to the following:

“Unlike IP, when teaching FP learners, the teacher needs to move from concrete to semi-concrete and then to abstract concepts, even though some of the learners don't succeed in the abstract stage. Learners benefit more from practical activities. There is a lot of work when teaching FP. As a teacher, you need to come up with different strategies so that all your learners can understand what you are explaining and grasp the concept you need to teach.”

Zevile mentioned the importance of play-based learning when teaching Grade 1 learners:

“Foundation Phase teaching is different from other phases. Even if I don't have experience with other phases, I can see that the way we are teaching is different from the other phases. As a Grade 1 teacher, I have noticed that if you want your learners to understand and grasp the concept, you need to make sure that the activities are play based. Grade 1 learners learn best when they are playing. I apply this strategy in all the learning areas – in Maths, Language and Lifeskills. I make sure that 'bayadlala' (they play) and I always get satisfactory results. They like practical work so much and I just give them that most of the time so that they can have more practice of the skill that is being taught.”

In the Grade 2 class that I observed, the learners seemed keen to engage and participate in class activities. Teacher Aya introduced the lesson by displaying different clothing items on the theme table. She also asked her learners to recite a poem in their mother tongue:

*Akekho umuntu ofana nomama,
Ubaba ngiyamthanda
Naye udadewethu
Naye umfowethu*

Kodwa hhayi njengomama.

Teacher Akhona shared the strategies she employed to enhance reading as follows:

“For reading lessons, I always involve learners in pre-reading activities by asking them what they expect from the story to be read. I thus use learners’ existing knowledge about a specific topic and I do not just shove new information into their minds. Teachers should employ a child-centred style of teaching – ‘hhayi indaba yokuthi izingane zilalele wena thisha nawe kumele uzwe ukuthi zinaluphi ulwazi’ – and learners should not listen to the teacher all the time. Teachers should find out what learners’ prior knowledge is on the topic. Even after reading and before giving your learners homework, you should determine whether they understood what the lesson was about by asking them questions.”

Teacher Okuhle presented a lesson on shared reading in Grade 3. The three stages (pre-reading, reading and post-reading) were functional during the lesson and dramatisation was incorporated in this lesson. The strategy that was used by teacher Okuhle after shared reading was allowing the whole class to dramatise the story by looking for something in various places. In this process prepositions were used. This lesson differed from what other teachers did to integrate reading and writing in their reading lessons, as it also involved the use of a grammatical concept. According to Bruner (1966) the teacher must re-introduce vocabulary, grammar points and other topics now and then in order to push the learners to a deeper comprehension and longer retention.

During the focused interview, teacher Okuhle stated the following:

“When they have mastered reading the text, they can dramatise the story. I recall the one about ‘Umpungushe no Chakijana’. Chakijana conspired against Mpungushe, and the story was dramatised in class. Till today learners always remember what happened in that story.”

This statement corroborated to the teachers’ claim that learners learn best when they are actively involved in activities.

4.5.4 The integrated approach

According to Nation Reading Panel (2000), a balanced approach to teaching should comprise various teaching strategies such as reading aloud, guided reading, shared reading, independent reading and the

phonic method. If these strategies are used collaboratively, learners acquire all the skills that they need to become fluent readers.

Nonhlelelo shared information about the strategies she used as follows:

“I always choose a story that has letters that I have just introduced. This is to make sure that they experience these letters in real reading and writing.” **(phonics instruction)**

“I will then ask my learners if there are words that they did not understand to identify familiar words from the story, and then I explain those words.” **(vocabulary building)**

“Then my learners will read the story on their own and I give them the same story for homework to read at home.” **(improving fluency)**

“Whilst other groups are reading independently, I visit the struggling learners and will assist them to use different strategies like asking them questions about the picture to help them understand the reading passage.” **(reading comprehension)**

Most of the participating teachers utilised an integrated approach in their lesson presentations. They did not teach only one skill at a time, and reading was integrated with writing as is required by the CAPS guidelines (DBE, 2011). For example, after modelling shared writing and reading, teacher Zevile encouraged the learners to compose their sentences and those sentences were used to teach reading. This strategy was effective because the learners showcased their phonemic awareness, as the repetition of the letter ‘b’, ‘l’ and ‘m’ and their sounds in the word selection was evident. This ability relied on the mastery of previously learned letters. The learners were thus able to construct sentences using words in which those letters and sounds appeared. Language structures were also integrated into these activities as the sentences had to be clearly formulated to create meaning. This is in line with Bruner’s appeal for teachers to help learners categorise new information to see similarities and differences (Bruner 1966).

There was evidence that the teachers understood and utilised the CAPS document. During the lesson observations I noted that the teachers had a sound knowledge of the language skills that need to be taught in the FP, with the lesson on prepositions being a case in point. In all the reading lessons that I observed, the teachers integrated reading and writing, and they clearly understood that reading, speaking, writing and language skills should never be taught in isolation.

4.6 Theme 5: Collaboration

Teachers do not have to stand alone in their efforts to supporting learners who are intellectually challenged. An erstwhile Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, stated in his introduction to the EWP 6: “I acknowledge that building an inclusive education and training system will not be easy. What will be required of us all is persistence, commitment, coordination, support, monitoring, evaluation, follow-up and leadership.” This statement is supported by the principle of collaboration in all phases in the education system.

Every school should have support teams in place. NEEDU (2012) recommends the employment of intra-school professional development structures, where teachers can assist one another through observation and demonstration. On the same note, EWP 6 (DoE, 2001) mandates school and departmental support teams to offer support to teachers, parents and the community who must educate learners who are intellectually challenged. Support teams outside the school are designated to work in collaboration with teachers to ensure that all learners receive quality education regardless of their disabilities. External support teams should include staff from provincial, district and regional levels and from special schools. Thus, School Based Support Teams (SBST), District Based Support Teams (DBST) and the community at large should collaborate to assist and support learners with disabilities (DoE, 2001). In addition, the Provincial Department of Education created a Psycho-Social Sub-Directorate within the Special Needs Education Service (SNES), which outlines the importance of continued support across the Department of Basic Education, governmental and non-governmental partners, and concerned stakeholders in education (DBE, 2014).

Two teachers shared their encounters with these support teams.

Teacher Andile shared the joy she always experienced when she had had an encounter with the SBST:

“I have consulted with the SBST a number of times to discuss and get ideas on how best learners can be assisted. Whenever I consult the SBST, I get assisted on how to handle a learner with a learning problem. Teachers should capitalise on working hand in hand with parents so that they can relate their own expectations and share their experiences with their children at home. This is how best they learn and how parents treat their children at home. Working closely with other teachers is also very helpful. Just like us in the Foundation Phase, if we share ideas, it is easy to tackle challenges.”

Andile shared an anecdote of a recent incident:

“I recall my recent consultation with the SBST. I needed assistance with a learner who was tearing pages from books. The team suggested that I give him clear pages and ask him to paint, as this might bring sense to him that these pages are just painted with colours, which makes them different from others.”

Conversely, teacher Zevile expressed her disappointment with how the DBST took time to intervene when there was a crisis.

“At school level we had tried everything we could possibly do; the SBST sent reports to the District office last year about one of my learners who was having a learning problem, but I feel it is all in the hands of the DBST to intervene.”

It can be concluded that the teachers in this school were aware of and understood the role of support teams that should be available for assistance. There was ample evidence that they had consulted the members of these teams during times of need. However, it appeared that the response from the DBST was slow and it is suggested that this might have a detrimental effect on teachers’ efforts to support intellectually challenged learners at a higher level.

4.7 Theme 6: Challenges in Teaching Reading

4.7.1 LTSM

A useful strategy that can encourage intellectually challenged learners to read is text augmentation. However, a shortage of reading material can be a barrier in the process of teaching intellectually challenged learners to read. The participants mentioned that lack of resources is one of the barriers that teachers face when they endeavour to teach intellectually challenged learners to read. In the FP, learners are expected to read at least one book a week if they are to acquire appropriate reading skills (NEEDU, 2012). However, the current state of shortages of LTSM in FP schools, particularly in rural schools, means that this goal will never be reached.

Teacher Zevile mentioned the need for appropriate reading materials:

“When teaching intellectually challenged learners to read, you need to make sure that the books you are using have clear pictures. In our school we have limited readers in our classrooms and therefore you must improvise. Learners cannot be given books to take home.”

Teacher Okuhle concurred, and also stressed the importance of having relevant reading material in class. She said:

“Teachers should ensure that there is always reading material for learners in the classroom. Even if the school cannot afford to buy books, the teacher can improvise and design reading materials for learners which is at their level of development so that they can be exposed to reading materials.”

Teacher Akhona also referred to the importance of LTSM in helping intellectually challenged learners to read:

“Make sure you have enough reading material and if you send a learner to the library, make sure that you send a note with the learner so that the librarian can help the learner to select reading material that is within the learner’s ability.”

4.7.2 Overcrowded classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms were indicated as a barrier that hindered the participants in their efforts to employ a variety of strategies in their classrooms. Van Reusen, Shoho and Barker (2001) assert that is impossible to implement inclusive education in an overcrowded classroom.

Zevile expressed her concern in this regard:

“In most cases it is extremely hard to pay attention to the learners with special needs because our classrooms are overcrowded. How do you give individual attention to learners if you are having more than 50 learners in one class?”

Concurring with this statement, Okuhle said:

“While we are expected to teach in overcrowded classroom, the Department also forces us to accommodate learners with special needs. Teachers in special schools are handling very few students. This is very unfair. I just do not understand why these learners are not sent to special schools. No matter how much we like them, we cannot assist them sufficiently in our overcrowded environments.”

4.7.3 Language policy

The issue of the language policy for the FP was raised by teacher Okuhle, who argued that mother tongue instruction was beneficial for both teachers and learners in the FP:

“In the FP all subjects are taught in IsiZulu which is the mother tongue [of the teacher and learners]. This makes it easier for teachers to explain the content as they use the learners’ home language.”

It is stipulated by the DBE (2011) that learners should be taught in their mother tongue (or home language) up to Grade 3. The National Reading Strategy stipulates that each school should have a language policy that addresses the learning needs of all its learners, which include learners who experience barriers to learning (DoE, 2008). Teachers should take advantage of this provision and employ different strategies and methods for teaching and learning whilst utilising their learners’ home language.

However, a comprehensive curriculum that does not allow sufficient time for reflection, repetition and re-teaching can also be regarded as a major barrier to teaching intellectually challenged learners to read. Teachers are expected to complete the curriculum for each grade in the FP within a specific time frame, which is often impossible in the face of the many challenges that some learners experience. Therefore, teachers should also be knowledgeable of strategies to adapt the curriculum so that they can reach out even to those learners who are intellectually challenged.

4.8 Successful Intervention Strategies

During the focus group discussion, the teachers were asked if the strategies they employed were successful in enhancing the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners.

Four of the teachers shared their success stories and one teacher was uncertain about the success of the achievement of her objectives to teach intellectually challenged learners to read.

Teacher Zevile stated:

“From my point of view, I think I have been able to help them to succeed in developing reading skills. The reason I say this is because they still remember the letters that they have learned at the beginning of the year. My learners can read words with previously learned sounds. Even if they come across those sounds in a reading passage, they can recognise the letters if those letters were intensively drilled. Giving a reading passage after dealing with a specific sound

also has a positive outcome, because intellectually challenged learners rarely forget the sounds and letters that are meaningful to them.”

Teacher Andile said:

“Yooo (‘kusiza kakhulu!’). It helps a lot! The more these learners practise reading aloud to the teacher and to their friends, the more knowledgeable they become. They gain confidence and they will become eager to try and read on their own.”

Teacher Ayah commented as follows:

‘Kakhulu phela!’ – A lot! If you differentiate, use the strategies carefully and take time when working with learners who are intellectually challenged, you will never go wrong.

Using different grouping strategies enables the teacher to work closely with the learners. When you are closer to the learners you can easily identify barriers that they might be experiencing when it comes to reading. During group guided reading, I was able to identify a learner in my class who was having a problem with the tongue. The tongue could not be lifted and as a result the learner was unable to pronounce some sounds. But working closely with this one learner who took time to master reading was remarkably successful. I realised that he needed to be given more time because sometimes he would just switch off in the middle of the lesson. I therefore granted him more time so that he could finish the work like the other learners. The good thing is that when I gave him time, I got the right answers.”

However, I did not observe any such groupings during teacher Ayah’s lesson presentation. Admittedly, I observed her strategies for only a brief period of time and was confident that her knowledge of the value of grouping strategies would be applied and that her intellectually challenged learners would be included and generally incorporated in the active learning strategies that she would devise.

Teacher Okuhle stated:

“The good thing is that when you give intellectually challenged learners more time, you will get the right answers. I would like to say as much as the learners who are intellectually challenged carry a stigma of not being successful in learning activities, well-trained and passionate teachers can assist these learners in whatever skills they can achieve. Once intellectually challenged learners are confident enough, they become free when they are around their peers and that stigma will be removed.”

On the other hand, teacher Nonhlelelo expressed uncertainty about her successes, as she argued that only assessment can prove whether lessons were successful or not:

“Yes, I guess I have been successful. With intellectually challenged learners you are never sure whether they have mastered the skill because they can pretend that they understood and when you assess them, you will realise that they are still not clear. Intellectually challenged learners also forget things easily.”

The above comments were clear evidence that the teachers were aware that if different strategies are used to enhance the reading of intellectually challenged learners, they can achieve reading at grade-appropriate level. Additionally, if teachers are patient enough to give them more time to practise, the results can be positive and visible.

4.9 Assessment

The DBE (2011) describes assessment as the method that is used to collect, analyse and interpret data regarding the learner performance. [It] can also be for learning to enhance learners’ learning progress or to evaluate the progress of learning. Either way, assessment plays a significant role in teaching and learning. It can be used by teachers as a yardstick to awaken them if intervention has become necessary. Therefore, accurate records should be kept safely to validate the progress made by both teachers and learners during the teaching and learning processes.

Teachers are mandated by policy as provided for in the various CAPS documents to keep efficient record of marks as evidence of learners’ progress (DBE, 2011). Again, regular feedback should be given to learners that are directed to intrinsic motivation. According to Bruner (1966), success and failure should not be experienced by learners as a reward and information, but as information. Therefore, mark sheets are used by teachers to compile schedules and schedules are used to formulate progress reports per term for each learner. I analysed three teachers’ records of reading and writing for the first term in 2018. These assessment records revealed that in every one of the three classes five or more learners had not yet achieved reading and writing skills at an expected level. Recording was according to the national rating codes and their descriptions as prescribed in (DBE, 2011). Rating codes comprise of seven-point scale with achievement descriptions, where 7 indicates outstanding achievement and 1 indicates skill not achieved.

Table 4.1 shows the percentage of learners who were reading below the expected level. Only the learners in the classes that were observed were included in this survey.

Table 4.1: Frequency of learners reading below standards

Grade	No. of learners	Learners reading below level 2	% Per class
Grade 1	65	8	12.3%
Grade 2	60	5	8.3%
Grade 3	58	5	8.6%
TOTAL	183	18	9.83%

The number of learners who were struggling in Grade 1 appeared to be the highest at 12.3%. This might be due to the fact that these learners were still new in the formal teaching and learning environment and they might still have been adapting to this unfamiliar world. It was envisaged that the second term results would show an improvement because the learners might feel more at home in the environment and with their teacher.

The teachers were asked what type of assessment records they kept and how the records were stored. All six the teachers agreed that the safekeeping of records of assessments was important as such records are evidence of teaching and learning and they should be presented to relevant stakeholders (officials and parents) should the need arise.

Teacher Zevile said:

“Records of informal assessment are kept in the assessment files. This will help the teacher to figure out whether progress has been made by the learners. Evidence of formal assessment tasks should also be kept so that teachers can use it as evidence of learners’ progress.”

Teacher Andile said:

“Teaching is incomplete without assessment. All formal assessment tasks as prescribed by the policy document should be recorded and records should be kept in the assessment file. Informal assessment and classroom observations should also be recorded, and these records should be

kept in the same file, but under informal assessment. These assessments are useful when the teacher must decide whether the child can progress to the next grade even if the child has missed the final exams. Records will give you an idea of whether the child is ready to progress or not.

Records that are kept in the assessment file should be kept safely because the HOD might need them as evidence of the work that has been completed.

Assessment helps to track learners' progress. If you see the graph going down, you get worried and you start coming up with ideas on how to assist the learner. If the graph is going up, you know that as a teacher the objectives of the lessons were achieved."

Teacher Ayah added:

"Ehh, as for me, I keep all the records even if it is not needed by the office. I bought myself a file from Pep. This file is used to record all the learner information that I observe – from behaviour to absenteeism and sicknesses. Even when the learners have received immunization I record it and keep record in this file. Correspondences from the school – date sent and date returned – is also recorded. This assists me in figuring out how seriously parents view their child's work.

Records of informal and formal assessments are kept in the assessment file. This helps to inform the teacher of the progress of each learner and the teacher can quickly intervene when and if it is necessary. The assessment programme, record sheets and lesson plans are kept in the file so that the teacher is able to track her planning and intervene when required."

The above comments were supported by teacher Ayah who mentioned the importance of assessment records to plan any required interventions, even by the Department.

Teacher Ayah noted:

"Officials from the Department who come to the school sometimes at the beginning of the year want statistics of intellectually challenged learners. They further ask that we record all the assessment tasks formally and informally so that they can be used during the intervention stage."

It was evident that all the participants regarded assessment as crucial and supported the importance of keeping records securely for various purposes.

4.10 Additional Issues that Emerged from the Data

4.10.1 Attributes

The six teachers indicated that teaching in the FP was vastly different from teaching in other phases. Love, perseverance and creativity were listed as prime attributes that FP teachers should exhibit. Confidence, patience, empathy and love were also identified by Kortjass (2012) as the most important attributes that FP teachers should possess.

Teacher Andile stated:

“FP learners need a teacher who has love, who is dedicated, who knows and understands the roles of the teacher. Moreover, a teacher who has a sound content knowledge and who can impart the appropriate skills to the learners whilst learners are having fun is important.”

Teacher Okuhle also mentioned the importance of perseverance in FP teachers to ensure success in teaching and learning:

“As a teacher, you need to persevere when working with intellectually challenged learners. When dealing with the very slow learner, a teacher should be patient because sometimes it is hard for them to finish the work.”

During the interview, teacher Okuhle distinguished a very important characteristic that should be possessed by a teacher who teaches intellectually challenged learners to read. She said:

“Teaching intellectually challenged learners to read requires teachers who have strong and firm voices, not ones who shout. Teachers should speak loudly enough so that they are heard by all the learners in the class. The teacher should also be able to use gestures because when working with the learners you might think they are following, whereas they are left behind just pretending to be following. This helps a lot, especially during shared reading.”

4.10.2 Learners’ attachment to their teachers

Teacher Ayah mentioned that one of the challenges that FP teachers experience is when learners progress from one grade to the next and that they then have to go to a different teacher.

Teacher Ayah stated:

“Transition from one grade to the next is not easy because FP learners become too attached to their teachers.”

This process is even worse for intellectually challenged learners because they are always unsure of what to do or whether the new teacher will approve of what they are doing. They get very attached to their teachers and a change is often traumatic for them.

It is therefore vital that FP teachers prepare their learners for the following year during the fourth term by informing them that they will be moving to the next class because they have done excellent work and they have been at their best behaviour. They should also be aware that in the next class they will meet a teacher who will be loving and caring. This can be facilitated by the next teacher who could do a fun lesson or two when introducing herself to the learners.

However, it was observed that the teachers whom I interviewed tended not give extra attention to the struggling learners as they might have been concerned that these learners might get too attached to them. This attitude presented a strange dichotomy, as on the one hand the teachers might have protected the children from emotional harm, but on the other hand they might have inadvertently prevented them from developing optimally while they were in their care.

4.10.3 Grouping learners

Learners can be grouped according to their level of development (i.e., by placing same ability learners in a homogeneous group) or according to their different abilities (i.e., heterogeneous groups).

The teachers were concerned that, regardless of the directive from Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001) which guides educational institutions not to discriminate against *any* child, some teachers were still discriminating against learners who were intellectually challenged. Teacher Zevile expressed her concern regarding this matter:

“Another challenge we are facing is that in some classes learners with intellectual challenges are grouped together. How on earth can you put together learners who are struggling and let them be on their own?”

In this context, Hugo and Nel (2013) emphasise the benefit of cooperative learning where learners work in heterogeneous groups to assist one another with instructional activities. The theory of constructivism encourages this situation in that it is argued that classroom situations should be formed to develop communication and social skills that will promote collaboration and exchange of ideas amongst students (Vygotsky, 1978).

When teacher Zevile was asked what teachers, who teach learners with intellectual challenges should know, she repeatedly demonstrated her rejection of the idea of separating learners according to their abilities. She argued that learners should be taught to work collaboratively. This seemed to be a sensitive issue for her, as she mentioned it several times:

“I will advise teachers not to group learners with the same abilities together in class.”

Conversely, teacher Nonhlelelo felt that she sometimes saw the need to teach intellectually challenged learners in a group separate from the others:

“I sometimes feel they need to be taught in a separate class so that I can plan different activities and give them extra time to repeat a concept several times before I can move on to the next. I’m saying this because intellectually challenged learners in my class do not get enough attention from the teachers. They feel that they are being ignored and I am scared that might cause more problems. They work at a slower pace and are disruptive during the lessons. But I know the Department does not allow us to separate learners according to their disabilities.”

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter presented the analyses of the data that had been collected during a focus group interview, classroom observations and document analysis. The data were triangulated where appropriate and the findings were discussed.

Based on my observations of the lessons that I attended, it was evident that the teachers came to class well prepared. The lesson plans had all the required components and lessons started with an exploration of prior knowledge and progressed from suitable introductions to post-reading activities. Furthermore, the teachers made sure that the skill they wanted to teach was demonstrated first before they expected the learners to practise and internalise it. The interaction that I observed between teachers and learners verified that the teachers were no longer stuck in the teacher-centred method of teaching.

It was also evident that the teachers had a clear understanding of the strategies that should be used to teach reading. Awareness of the importance of appropriate LTSM to enhance lessons was also evident. The materials that had been devised and were used by the teachers were relevant and served to ensure the achievement of the lesson objectives. However, in the first lesson that was presented by teacher Zevile, the pictures that she used were not big enough to be visible to the entire class; but

when the learners sat in their groups the pictures could be clearly seen. Teacher Ayah and teacher Okuhle used big books with big, bright pictures.

However, as the focus of this study was on teachers' methods of teaching intellectually challenged learners in mainstream classrooms, various gaps were observed which suggested that the challenges these learners faced when they were taught to read had not been overcome. For example, two contextual drawbacks were overcrowded classrooms and a curriculum that was found to be too demanding for intellectually challenged learners.

The following chapter will emphasise the main findings. My conclusions are presented, and recommendations will be offered for strategies that can be used successfully by FP teachers to enhance the reading of their intellectually challenged learners.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies that FP teachers employed to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners. I also intended to discover the extent to which these strategies were developed. The previous chapter presented the data that had been generated by means of a focus group interview comprising six participants, three classroom observations, field notes and the analysis of policy documents (i.e., the CAPS document for the FP and Education White Paper 6). Assessment mark sheets were also examined.

This was an exploratory case study in a rural context where overcrowded classrooms and the enrolment of intellectually challenged learners were noteworthy features. This chapter presents a summary of the main research findings and the report is concluded with final pertinent remarks.

The three research questions that gave direction and impetus to the study were addressed:

- Which strategies are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?
- How are these strategies employed to ensure that enhancement of the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners occurs?
- To what extent do these strategies actually enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners?

It must be noted that my purpose was to observe teaching strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners and not to evaluate the learners' behaviour. To avoid bias during the classroom observations, I was thus unaware of which children were challenged and which were not, as my purpose was to determine if the teachers would employ teaching strategies for special needs learners. I envisaged that these strategies, if employed, would be visible and thus I did not require identification of the learners prior to the commencement of the lessons.

5.2 Discussion of the Findings

The literature that was reviewed emphasised the importance of teaching intellectually challenged learners to read. The researchers that were cited all agreed that the ability to read can enable intellectually challenged learners to live independently. Moreover, as citizens of South Africa, *all* learners have the right to quality education, and reading is one of the most important skills that they ought to acquire. It is also indisputable that most mainstream schools in South Africa accommodate a number of intellectually challenged learners who require special attention.

In the main, the principle of the inclusion of intellectually challenged learners in mainstream classrooms was regarded as important by the participants; however, the effectiveness of the practice was evidently affected by some challenges. Teaching children to read is a complex process which is often hampered by the low cognitive abilities of some learners. It is therefore imperative that teachers who work with such learners employ a variety of appropriate strategies to enhance their reading skills. Based on the findings, I concluded that the teachers showed an understanding of the curriculum as most of the lessons had been systematically planned and enthusiastically presented. Also, a variety of resources was used to enhance learners' reading skills. Bruner (1996) argues that a child of any age is capable of learning if the information is systematically arranged, and there was evidence that the teachers who were observed had made concerted efforts to teach their FP learners to read using appropriate strategies.

5.2.1 Foundation Phase teachers' pedagogic skills

The FP is the reception phase in a child's schooling career and the foundations for learning should be firmly established in this phase, regardless of learners' conditions or challenges. Good foundations for learning can be laid by teachers who have sound content and pedagogical knowledge (PCK). PCK is regarded as distinct and qualitative, unlike technical and content knowledge (Morrow, 2007). This argument is supported by Kennedy (2002) who regards this knowledge as the expertise teachers should possess that can only be established through experience.

By acknowledging that intellectually challenged learners should be accommodated among mainstream learners, the FP teachers accepted the challenge to acquire relevant skills and knowledge that can be useful in assisting these special needs learners to read adequately at an age-appropriate level. Because the educators had acquired these vital forms of knowledge, they showed creativity in lesson planning and presentation.

The choice of the materials that enhance reading depends on teachers' knowledge of their learners' level of development. The LTSM used in the Foundation Phase should have clear pictures and the writing should be bold. Moreover, the sentences used in texts should be short. However, although all the above criteria seemed to be met, it was noted that the big book that was used in the Grade 2 lesson was too easy for the learners and thus no new vocabulary was acquired. During a shared reading activity, the learners were reading fluently even before the teacher demonstrated how they should read. This made me suspect that this was not the first time these learners had encountered the book. However, I observed that no special attention was afforded the learners who clearly lacked the reading skills of most other learners in the classes that I observed.

5.2.2 Challenges encountered when teaching intellectually challenged learners

All the participants affirmed that teaching intellectually slow learners is fraught with challenges. One challenge that they all mentioned was the time factor. Teachers need to be patient with intellectually challenged learners and give them more time to finish their tasks; however, there is limited time for the Language Learning Area and reading is allocated only a portion of that time. What emerged from the study was that teachers tended to be impatient and did not give intellectually challenged learners more time to read as they seemed to run out of time. The DBE (2011b) states that one hour of the school day should be allocated to reading in any language. During the lessons that were observed, this amount of reading time was ignored, because the lessons lasted for about 40 to 45 minutes and different language skills were integrated in one lesson. Apparently, teachers used their discretion as they were familiar with their learners' developmental stages and the pace at which they should teach them. An integrated approach was therefore used which is appropriate for this phase as suggested by Bruner (1996), who affirms that teachers can employ an integrated learning approach when teaching reading.

The curriculum stipulates what needs to be covered in a specific term, but the teachers agreed that very little time was available for re-teaching and the reinforcement of concepts, particularly for the intellectually challenged learners in their classes. Also, most learners could not stay behind after school for extra tuition because it was unsafe. It is a known fact that lack of transport in rural areas is often a severe stumbling block for learners who need to attend additional classes after hours. Nevertheless, most of the teachers did their best to revisit the texts that they had used earlier in order to enhance the reading skills of their learners.

In overcrowded classrooms, mainstream learners become frustrated when teachers focus on challenged learners, because all children need teachers' nurturing attention and they feel neglected when they pay more individual attention to learners with special needs than to the rest of the class. During my visits to the classrooms, I noticed that all the classrooms were overcrowded and few of the strategies to teach reading that had been mentioned during the group discussion were observed. What was evident in all the classrooms was that the teachers could hardly walk among the learners because there was no space. The overcrowded classrooms also prevented the use of grouping strategies for interactive learning as was mentioned during the interviews. In teacher Ayah's Grade 2 class, when the learners were summoned to sit on the carpet most of the children rushed to sit in front and as close to the teacher as possible. I could deduce that the ones who were not bothered to do so were the ones who did not want to be noticed by the teacher, possibly because they were shy or reluctant to participate and respond to the inevitable questions that she would ask. One of the teachers referred to this behaviour during the discussions as "*bayacasha*" ("they hide behind others").

Another challenge that was observed was the shortage of reading resources such as readers and textbooks. A poor infrastructure was also evident as there was no space for reading corners in the classrooms and no school library. Thus, the absence of a support system for the acquisition of reading skills was evident (NEEDU, 2012).

5.2.3 Strategies to enhance reading skills

All three the teachers who were observed employed shared reading strategies (or choral reading) as a strategy to teach reading. However, this seemed to be the only reading strategy that was used in these FP classes as the teachers explained that grouping learners for more individual attention was a challenge in such overcrowded classrooms. Moreover, even though teacher Zevile and teacher Okuhle managed to group their learners, no individual attention was given to the intellectually challenged ones although they had all acknowledged during the discussion session that such students were present in their classrooms.

Other strategies that were observed were repetition, text augmentation and phonics instruction, yet these strategies were not focused on enhancing intellectually challenged learners' ability to read. It was noticed that some learners plodded on and were more or less left to their own devices during the choral reading sessions.

Based on this observation, it was deduced that the participating teachers found it impossible to employ strategies to enhance the reading skills of their intellectually challenged learners. Moreover, this observation is strengthened by the fact that the teachers confirmed that intellectually challenged learners would “hide behind other children” and that they had the habit of pretending that they understood what was being taught. It appeared as if the teachers did not consider the option to seat these learners in front in the classroom so that they could pay more attention to them when appropriate. It was also observed that learners were chorusing during reading lessons and that the teachers paid attention to word recognition and phonics but neglected other components of reading such as comprehension, vocabulary building and fluency. According to NEEDU (2013, p. 38), reading should be shared as it “informs shared writing where the teacher models writing, and the reading text is used to provide examples of vocabulary, grammatical structures, spelling, tone and other features”. It is acknowledged that an observer does not get the full picture of what transpires in a classroom by observing only one lesson, yet it was evident that certain strategies could hardly be employed in reading instruction due to the contextual barriers that these teachers experienced.

However, the teachers’ ability to improvise was astounding. For example, in the first lesson that I observed the teacher used pictures (visual stimuli) and integrated reading and writing strategies. This was a brilliant idea because the learners could make meaning of the sentences that they were reading. The lesson in which the use of prepositions was encouraged interactively and through a fun play activity was also commendable.

Conversely, the use of the big book in the Grade 3 classroom assumed that all the learners were on the same level of development. However, they all *appeared* to read, when in truth not all the learners were reading. The teacher spent the entire lesson in the front of the classroom and never moved to the middle or the back to get closer to the learners.

5.2.4 Importance of assessment

All the teachers acknowledged the importance of assessment as a yardstick to determine their lesson planning and learner progress (or lack thereof). Some even noted that assessment helped them to identify learners with special education needs. The teachers confirmed the importance of the safe keeping of assessment records in an assessment file. I checked these assessment files with their permission and observed that the assessment tasks had been duly planned and that the records had been updated and filed by all three the observed educators.

An analysis of the assessment results revealed that about 10% (18 of 183 learners) of the surveyed Grade 1–3 learners achieved below the required standards for reading at an age-appropriate level, with the highest percentage of this group being Grade 1 learners. This finding may not seem significant on face value, but when the consequences for each of these poor reading achievers are considered, a dire picture emerges. Unless concerted efforts are made by all role players to address the contextual factors that create a barrier to the acquisition of reading skills by these learners, they may become part of the devastating drop-out rate that characterises learners' future in many deprived areas, regardless of their constitutional right to a high standard of education.

5.3 Reflection on the Theoretical Framework

This study utilised the constructivist theory to underpin the findings. Alghatani (2017) regards constructivism as a teaching technique rather than a teaching theory because it illuminates how learners construct knowledge. Bruner (1966) regards learning as an active process whereby learners create new thoughts or concepts based on their current or prior knowledge. The learner then selects and transforms information and constructs and makes decisions relying on a cognitive structure to do so. The theory highlights the importance of directed activities for learners which ensure active participation and collaboration amongst them. For active participation and collaborative learning to occur, teachers need to arrange their lessons in a systematic manner so that the lessons can be meaningful.

When they build their teaching practice on the constructivist theory, teachers are inspired to let their learners learn by progressing from the known to the unknown (Algahtani, 2017). They thus introduce concepts by discussing interrelated ideas so that learners acquire new information which they construct based on their previous knowledge. Teachers' understanding of utilising the prior knowledge that learners possess is regarded as imperative by this theory.

It is within this theoretical context that the Department of Education (DoE, 2007) states that, to read meaningfully, children need to harness their knowledge about decoding a text, their knowledge of the language in which they are reading, their general knowledge of the world around them, their recognition of phonics, and their familiarity with sight words and knowledge of vocabulary. Furthermore, the theory encourages teachers to systematically arrange information to accommodate all their learners' levels of development (Bruner, 1966). This means that educators should know what prior knowledge their learners possess so that they can structure their lessons to ensure that all

learners, irrespective of their level of development, can attain the required age-appropriate reading ability.

By utilising this framework, the teacher is assisted in clarifying how information is stored in a learner's mind. Bruner (1966) proposes three modes of presentation of information, referring to them as enactive, iconic and symbolic representations. Enactive representation involves the conversion of action-based information and storing it in our memory. In the iconic representation, information is stored visually in the form of images. The symbolic representation develops last and this occurs when information is stored in the form of a code or symbol such as language (Bruner, 1966). Teachers who are well versed in this theory will ensure that learners acquire phonics as this is an important code in the acquisition of word formation, sentence construction and finally in paragraph writing.

Pretorius (2015) maintains that whenever a person decides to read, it is for a specific purpose; thus, for whatever reason a text, an article or an instruction is read, it must be understood. This is in line with Bruner's (1985) constructivist theory, as it stresses the importance of comprehending printed stories that represent real life situations because they will be helpful in dealing with events that the learners might encounter in real life. If learners have mastered phonics, they can read fluently which will lead to improved comprehension. Also, if the reading material is meaningful to the learners, they will not struggle to retain and understand it. In the same vein Parker, Zhong, Tracey, Craven, & Morin (2015) attest that learners should be exposed to real life situations when reading. When teaching learners to read, teachers should thus always use contextual situations that refer to experiences in learners' lives. After teaching particular phonics, teachers should then ensure that new information is relevant by using real names, sight words and words learners see in their everyday lives.

Furthermore, Bruner (1966) argues that a child of any age can learn as long as the information is systematically arranged. Pretorius (2015) concurs, stating that the formal teaching of reading should begin in the Foundation Phase because it is in this phase that young minds are developing and can receive new information with ease. DBE (2011b) emphasises that the letters of the alphabet should be introduced in Grade R and be revised during the first term of Grade 1. This ensures that learners' phonemic awareness is well developed and, when they engage in reading activities, they will be able to comprehend any age-appropriate reading material given to them. Therefore, as early as grade 1, learners should be taught how to read, and teachers should arrange the information systematically using appropriate LTSM to ensure the achievement of the objectives for teaching reading.

5.4 Implications of the Study

The findings of the study revealed that the intellectually challenged learners in the school under study were marginalised as they were only peripherally included in teaching and learning activities in overcrowded classrooms. The relatively low number of identified poor performers (18 out of a total of 183 learners), regardless of the poverty-stricken and deprived circumstances from which many of these learners came, also raised serious questions as to their actual reading abilities. There is thus a strong suggestion that learners will be transferred to the following grade without having acquired the necessary skills that will enable them to interact with written texts at ever increasing difficulty levels, and it is a tragic reality that many may drop out of school untimely.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

The interview was planned to last for 1½ hours, but due to the interactive involvement of the participants it lasted for 2½ hours. However, the thick data that were generated by this session may be regarded as a bonus rather than a limitation.

It is acknowledged that the findings of this study may not be generalised to all FP classes because the study involved only six teachers in only one school within one of the nine provinces of South Africa. To limit this gap, the findings will be compared with those of other research studies to determine similarities and contradictions.

Another limitation was that the study utilised a focus group discussion only. Although the participation was lively and informative, it is acknowledged that additional one-on-one interviews could have augmented and enriched the data pertaining to each particular grade.

5.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The recommendations are two-fold and impact teachers on the one hand and the Department of Basic Education on the other hand.

- Strategies to interact with intellectually challenged learners in overcrowded classrooms should be further explored in studies of a larger scope and the findings should be effectively disseminated to teachers in rural schools.

- Investigations should focus on an accelerated review of the teacher to learner ratio in mainstream schools. The Department of Basic Education needs to address this issue urgently if the Ministry of Education, and by implication the government, is committed to redressing the inequalities of the past.

5.6 Conclusion

The aim of the study was to explore the strategies employed by FP teachers to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners and to determine if these strategies impacted the ability of these learners to enhance their reading skills in a positive manner.

This chapter presented the interpretation of the findings from the data that had been collected by means of a focus group interview, classroom observations and document analysis. The data procured from these sources were triangulated and analysed to address the research questions.

During the focus group interview, the teachers confirmed that they had intellectually challenged learners in their classrooms and they discussed various effective strategies that they believed could be employed to enhance the reading skills of these learners. However, a deeper analysis based on classroom observations revealed that these strategies were limited in practice as not all the reading objectives could be reached and learners with reading challenges were generally excluded from reading skills enhancement opportunities. It was thus noteworthy that the principle of inclusive education was marginalised as none of the three teachers that were observed purposively included learners with intellectual challenges in active learning strategies during the lessons that I observed, regardless of their awareness of the special needs of these children.

It was also mentioned in a discussion on the demographics of the study area that the district in which this school is located is populated by poor and deprived communities. Therefore, although the scope of the study was limited, and the findings may not be generalised, it may be assumed that many of the nineteen primary schools in this district – if not all – may experience the same challenges as the school under study, as they are fed by virtually the same community. Overcrowded classrooms paint a dark picture for the future of many intellectually challenged learners in this region and places the onus on the government and the Department of Basic Education to address overcrowding in rural schools as a matter of urgency.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Lesson Plans

Lesson 1 by Teacher Zevile

Grade: 01

Topic: Ukufunda (Reading)

Objectives: Learners should be able to form words using letter “g”.

Learners should be able to construct sentences using pictures.

Learners should be able to read sentences that they constructed.

LTSM: flash cards with words, picture cards, charts and koki pens, song “baleka mfana.”

Previous knowledge:

Learners were asked if they still remember the sound they learnt to write the previous day.

Answer: (g)

They were asked to write the letter “g”, on air using their fingers and on their desks.

Introduction:

The teacher asked learners to sing alphabets in isiZulu; aphula a, baba b, Cele c, dada,.....

New Content:

The teacher showed learners pictures of the following, ugesi, geza, gijima, ugoro, igula and asked them what they see in the pictures.

The teacher then explained to the learners that they are going to make sentences using the pictures. She demonstrated using the picture of the granny who is kneeling. The picture was pasted on the chart.

She then asked the learners to help her to write a sentence about what the granny they see in the picture. Underneath the picture the teacher wrote the sentence based on what they said the granny was doing. The sentence read thus. **“Ugogo ugobile ebaleni.”**

The teacher read the sentence whilst pointing on the syllables from each word. She instructed the learners to listen whilst she was reading. She informed them that they will get an opportunity to build and read the sentences in their reading groups.

In groups learners were given different pictures and were asked to discuss what they see in the picture so that the sentence can construct their own sentences. They were also informed that the sentences they have formed will be read for the whole class.

The teacher assisted the groups that were struggling to formulate and wrote the sentences.

The following sentences were constructed by different groups:

ugesi, geza, gijima, ugogo, igula

- i. Izingane zikhanyisa ugesi.
- ii. Umama ugeza ingane.
- iii. Abafana bagijima ebaleni.
- iv. Ugogo ufaka amasi eguleni.

After the groups finished, the sentences were displayed for the whole class. Each group appointed a member to come and read their sentence for the whole class like how the teacher demonstrated.

The teacher used the sentences constructed by her learners to do shared reading with the whole class.

Funwork: Learners were taught to sing the song “gijima mfana”

“Gijima, gijima , gijima, gijima,

Gijima iwe mfana gijima mfana.

Baleka, baleka, baleka, baleka,

Baleka iwe mfana baleka mfana.

Lesson 2 by teacher Ayah

Grade: 02

Topic: Isifundo sokufunda (Reading lesson)

Objectives: Learners should be able to read the story.

Learners should be able to match the clothes with the family members.

LTSM: Big book, pictures of different clothes found on the reader, chart with sentences.

Previous knowledge: The teacher asked the learners the names of different clothes that they wear when coming to school.

(socks, shoes, jersey, shirt, t shirt, pants, jacket, hat, and tie)

Introduction:

The teacher asked the learners to recite the poem “Umama wami lo”

New Content:

Pre-reading

The requested the learners to sit on the carpet. She then showed the learners a big book and ask them what they see in the cover page. Different answers are expected like, the family members, sunglasses, the baby etc.

The teacher informed learners that they are going to read the story with the teacher. Learners will be asked to predict what they think the story will be about. The teacher will ask if any learner can read the title of the book. The teacher then reads the title and ask leaners to follow her.

After turning the first page learners will be asked what they think is on the second page.

Expected answers: identification of different clothes,

During reading:

The teacher turned the first page and ask the learners what is happening, the answer, they see a girl with shirt dress. The teacher then reads the sentences on the page. The learners read after the teacher has demonstrated reading.

During the reading process the teacher stopped and asked learners to predict what is happening and what they think is going to happen on the next page.

Questions like the colour of the clothes were asked. To check the knowledge of colours.

After reading:

- 1. How many people are there in the main picture?**
- 2. What was the colour of mommy`s shoes?**
- 3. Is Ayoyo a boy or a girl, why do you say so?**
- 4. Who purchased more than one items? Can you count all the items that were purchased?**

The teacher pasted the chart on the board and asked the learners to match what each item was chosen by family members.

Homework

The teacher wrote the following words on the board; **umndeni, uyathanda, kuthenga, ukuthi, thatha.**

She asked the learners to copy on their homework books. She further explained that the words are for the spelling test that will be written for Friday.

Lesson 3 by teacher Okuhle

Grade: 03

Topic: Reading: Grandpa`s sunglasses

Objectives: Learners should be able to read the story with understanding.

Learners should be able to identify Pre-positions used in the sentences.

Learners should be able to answer questions related to the story.

Resources: Big book, group reading cards, learners

Previous knowledge: The teacher gave a sentence and ask the learners to identify the underlined words.

1. They are seated in the couch. (verb)
2. Zizile is playing with her doll. (noun)

Introduction: Learners sang the alphabet song.

After the song the teacher asked the learners, to come and sit on the carpet.

Pre- reading

The teacher showed the learners the cover page and asked the learners what they think the story on the big book will be about.

To consolidate teacher opened the book and started reading. Learners were informed that they should listen carefully whilst the teacher was reading and then they can join when she reads for the second time.

During reading

During reading the teacher asked some questions to ensure that learners were reading with her.

- Were the children aware of the whereabouts of grandpa`s glasses? Why do you say so? **No, they did not know they were helping grandpa because they wanted him to read the story for them.**
- Which room are they going to look for the sunglasses? **bedroom, kitchen, bathroom etc.**

After reading

After the teacher finished reading she asked the learners the following questions:

- What made grandpa start looking for the glasses?
- How many rooms are there in the house?
- Who found grandpas sunglasses?

The teacher then asked the whole class to read the book with her whilst she was pointing at the words.

Assessment:

The teacher pasted the chart with sentences on the board. Learners were asked to identify the words that tell the position.

- Are my glasses on the table?
- Are my glasses in the drawer?
- Are my glasses under the sink?
- Are my glasses in the bath?
- Are my glasses under the bed?

The teacher explained that all the underlined words are called pre-positions. She pasted cards with the prepositions on the board and asked the learners to read.

Fun work

Learners were divided into different groups and they were asked to prepare a short play where they will play hiding something and the rest of the class will assist in searching for the lost item. The plays will be performed the following day.

Learners were encouraged to use prepositions during their play.

Appendix B: Ethical Clearance from UKZN



12 June 2017

Mrs Balungile Jennifer Gumede (214082430)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Gumede,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0465/017M

Project title: Exploring strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers' to enhance reading skills in intellectually challenged learners

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 04 May 2017, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shefuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Makie Kortjess
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tzyer Khumalo

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

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Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

Appendix C: Permission from KZN DoE



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Dume

Tel: 033 302 1041

Ref:24/3/1181

Mrs SJ Qamede
J1358 Mdoni Road
PO KwaMashu
4359

Dear Mrs Qamede

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "EXPLORING STRATEGIES USED BY FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS TO ENHANCE READING TO INTELLECTUALLY CHALLENGED LEARNERS", in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 27 March 2017 to 07 June 2019.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Connie Kehlogile at the contact numbers below
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag 00137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Embuyelo Primary School

Dr. EV Mzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 28 March 2017

..Championing Quality Education - Creating and Securing a Brighter Future

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Postal Address: Private Bag 00137 - Pietermaritzburg - 3200 - Republic of South Africa
Physical Address: 217 Burger Street - Green Lamada Building - Pietermaritzburg - 3201
TEL: +27 33 302 1041/11 - FAX: +27 333 302 1203 - Email: Kehlogile.Connice@kzndoe.gov.za / Phindile.Dume@kzndoe.gov.za - Web: www.kzndoe.gov.za
Facebook: KZNDOE - Twitter: @KDE_KZN - Instagram: kzn_education - YouTube: kzn_doe

Appendix D: Request for Permission

School's address:

Tell/Cell: _____

Date: ___/___/2017

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Administration

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

RE: Letter to grant permission to conduct research in the school

Declaration

I..... Principal of..... (School name) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project and I grant permission for..... (Researcher's name) to conduct his Master of education research in my school, by observing one lesson of the male teacher and one interview.

I understand that all the information will be kept confidential and will only be used for the educational purpose Master of education degree.

Signature of the Principal

Date

STAMP

Appendix E: Informed Consent Letters

CONSENT LETTER TO THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

J1388 Mdoni Road

P.O. KwaMashu

4359

24th July, 2016

MKHUZE DISTRICT MANAGER;

PO Box

JOZINI, 3969

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Application for permission to conduct a study at [REDACTED] Primary School

I am currently enrolled with the University of KwaZulu Natal pursuing my Master of Education in Education Psychology degree. One of the requirements is to conduct a study. I therefore apply for a permission to conduct my study at the above-mentioned school.

My study topic is: **Exploring strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance reading to intellectually challenged learners.**

The purpose of the study is to explore the strategies that are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance reading skills amongst intellectually challenged learners. Teachers will be interviewed, observed and their lesson plans and mark lists will be analyzed. Teachers are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. Rights of the teachers will be safeguarded in relation to confidentiality of information they provide. The information they will offer will only be used for my study purposes. Teachers' names and school name will not be disclosed in any way instead the pseudonyms will be used. I hope my study results will benefit teachers in their daily teaching and teaching of reading to intellectually challenged learners.

My contact details and those of my supervisor are provided below in case you may need clarification of my study.

Yours Faithfully

Balungile Jennifer Gumede

Mobile numbers : +27 72 344 1443

: +27 74 770 4241

Email address : balungilegumede@yahoo.com

Supervisor : Dimakatso Kortjass

Mobile number : +27 82 934 2621

Email address : KortjassM@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT LETTER TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

J1388 Mdoni Road

P.O. KwaMashu

4359

24th July 2016

The Principal

██████████ Primary School

Private Bag x 69

Jozini, 3969

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Application for permission to conduct a study

I am currently enrolled with the University of KwaZulu Natal pursuing my Master of Education in Education Psychology degree. One of the requirements is to conduct a study. I therefore apply for a permission to conduct my study at your school.

My study topic is: **Exploring strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance reading to intellectually challenged learners.**

The purpose of the study is to explore the strategies that are used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance reading skills amongst intellectually challenged learners. Teachers will be interviewed, observed and their lesson plans and mark lists will be analyzed. Teachers are free to withdraw from the study at any stage. Rights of the teachers will be safeguarded in relation to confidentiality of information they provide. The information they will offer will only be used for my study purposes. Teachers' names and school name will not be disclosed in any way instead the pseudonyms will be used. I hope my study results will benefit teachers in their daily teaching and teaching of reading to intellectually challenged learners.

My contact details and those of my supervisor are provided below in case you may need clarification of my study.

Yours Faithfully

Balungile Jennifer Gumede

Mobile numbers : +27 72 344 1443

: +27 74 770 4241

Email address : balungilegumede@yahoo.com

Supervisor : Dimakatso Kortjass

Mobile number : +27 82 934 2621

Email address : KortjassM@ukzn.ac.za

CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPANT

J1388 Mdoni Road

P.O. KwaMashu

4359

24th July 2016

Dear Participant

I am currently enrolled with the University of KwaZulu Natal pursuing my Master of Education in Education Psychology degree. One of the requirements is to conduct a study. I therefore apply for a permission to conduct my study at the above-mentioned school.

My study topic is: **Exploring strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance reading to intellectually challenged learners.**

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person but reported only as a population member opinion.
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference.
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only.
- Data will be stored in secure storage and destroyed after 5 years.
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
- The research aims at knowing the challenges of your community relating to resource scarcity, peoples' movement, and effects on peace.
- Your involvement is purely for research purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved.
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded by the following equipment:

	Willing	Not Willing
Audio equipment		
Photographic equipment		
Video equipment		

My contact details are provided below in case you may need clarification of my study.

Mobile numbers : +27 72 344 1443

: +27 74 770 4241

Email address : balungilegumede@yahoo.com

My supervisor is Ms Dimakatso Kortjass who is located in the School of Education, Edgewood campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her contact details are as follows:

Supervisor : Dimakatso Kortjass

Telephone number : +27 33 2603669

Email address : KortjassM@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

P. Mohun

HSSREC Research Office,

Tel: 031 260 4557 E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours Faithfully

Balungile Jennifer Gumede

DECLARATION

I..... (full names of participant)
hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project,
and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

.....

Appendix F: Interview Schedule/ Biographical Data / Personal Particulars

1. Title _____ Initials _____ Surname _____
2. Qualifications: _____
3. Institution/s: _____
4. Age in years: _____

21 - 30	31 - 40	41 – 50	50+
---------	---------	---------	-----

5. Work experience in years:

1 - 5	6 - 10	11 – 15	16+
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In depth interviews with teachers

1. What is it that makes teaching in the Foundation Phase different from other phases?
2. Language is one of the key learning areas in the FP. Tell me how you teach your learners to read?
3. Do you have intellectually impaired learners in your class? How were these learners identified?
4. What do you think is important for teachers teaching learners who are intellectually challenged to know?
5. Do you think there is a difference between teaching learners who are intellectually challenged and those that are not? Please explain.
6. Did you have training in teaching reading to learners who are intellectually challenged?
7. Which strategies do you use to teach reading to intellectually challenged learners?
8. How do use these strategies?
9. Do you think you have been successful in helping learners to improve reading skills? Explain.
10. What challenges do you face when teaching reading to intellectually challenged learners?
11. What do you think can help you to face these challenges?
12. If you can be selected as a trainer of what will be your main focus?
13. What type of record do you keep of your learners' assessments? How do you store your records?
14. Is there anything you would like to share or something that can be beneficial to this study?

Appendix G: Observation Schedule

Teacher : _____ Subject : _____

Grade : _____ Topic : _____

Number of Learners : _____ Date : _____

Criteria	Comments
Introduction of the Lesson	
Learners activities (do the activities include five senses (visual, kinesthetic, auditory, tactual, analytic)	
Lesson`s main objective	
Inclusion of all learners in the activities	
Classroom arrangement and management	
Teaching methods used by the teacher Learning teacher support material	
Questions asked by the teacher (application, knowledge, synthesis etc.)	
Time management on each activity	

Appendix H: LANGUAGE EDITORS CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES CC

DECLARATION OF PROOFREADING

SARS Tax Clearance Certificate: no. 1994/016841/23 Name: N.D. Coertze Contact details: Cell: 0833440706 Email: lindac@skytec.co.za	Postal Address: P.O. Box 5432 Winklespruit 4145	Residential Address: 31 Fynn Road 12 Chardonnay Amanzimtoti 4125
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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Nicolina D. Coertze, declare that I meticulously perused the manuscript referred to below for language editing purposes. I endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge and ability, to identify any linguistic and stylistic inaccuracies that may have been omitted during the initial editing stages by the author and her supervisor. Using the Word Tracking system, I kept track of any changes that I made and also made annotations as guidelines and recommendations to the author for additional review of the language presentation of the work. I declare that I adhered to the general principles that guide the work of a language editor and that I remained within my brief as had been agreed with the author of the manuscript.

Details:

TITLE	<i>Exploring Foundation Phase teachers' strategies to enhance the reading skills of intellectually challenged learners</i>
-------	--

NAME & SURNAME	BALUNGILE JENNIFER GUMEDE
STUDENT NUMBER	215082430
PROPOSED QUALIFICATION	MASTER IN EDUCATION STUDIES (EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)
FACULTY	EDUCATION
TERTIARY INSTITUTION	THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
NAME OF SUPERVISOR	MS DIMAKATSO KORTJASS
REFERENCING STYLE	HARVARD

Respectfully submitted on **09 November 2018**



N.D. COERTZE

SACE registration number: 1082433
Date of Certification: 17/12/2003