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Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work

By

Chief Ntshangase

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of a requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

African Languages and Lingusitics

Supervised by: Dr Lindiwe Tshuma

March 2024

DECLARATION

I, Chief Ntshangase hereby solemnly declare that the thesis submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has not been previously submitted to any other university for assessment purpose, and that all sources contained therein has been duly acknowledged and indicated by means of complete references.

Signed by _____ Day _____in the month of_____2024.

DEDICATION

I humbly dedicate this thesis to my late grandmother Lucy Rose Mthembu. Thank you for your prayers, blessings, endless love, and unwavering support you showed. Although you are late, but your teachings about life, God, and respect will forever run through my veins, you remain the greatest influence in my life.

I also dedicate this work to my mother Mary Mthembu. Thank you for your prayers, your presence in my life as well as the support you demonstrated throughout my studies, I will continue making you proud.

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My gracious thanks extend to the National Research Foundation for providing the financial support to carry out this research project.

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LANGUAGE CERTIFICATE

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jou kennisvennoot · your knowledge partner

3 March 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I assisted **Chief Langelihle Ntshangase** (Student number: 2398295) with the language editing of his thesis submitted to the Department: African Languages and Linguistics, School of Literature, Language and Media (Wits). The title of the thesis is **Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work**.

I went through the thesis making corrections and suggestions with respect to language usage to the best of my ability in the document, which needed detailed attention, and restricted my editing to addressing such issues. Given the nature of the process, it is not necessary for me to see the final version, but I always remained available for consultation as long as necessary.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ANA	Annual Assessment Report
CAPS	National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CBM	Curriculum Based Measurements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBST	District- Based Support Team
DeE	Department of Education
EGR	Early Grade Reading
ESL	English Second Language
FAL	First Additional Language
FFW-L	Fast-For-Word Language
FP	Foundation Phase
HEQE	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HL	Home Language
IHE	Institution of Higher learning Education
IP	Intermediate Phase
IRA	International Reading Association
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Source Materials
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
NRP	National Reading Panel
NRS	National Reading Strategy
ORF	Oral Reading Fluency
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
RTI	Response to Intervention
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SIAS	Strategy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WCPM	Words Read Correctly Per Minutes
WPM	Words Per Minutes

ABSTRACT

Despite several interventions put in place to alleviate the reading crisis in South African primary schools, many teachers still experience challenges in teaching reading comprehension. The situation is even more dire with regards to teaching inclusive reading to at-risk readers in mainstream schools in under-resourced settings. The term at-risk readers refer to learners with reading difficulties. Curriculum guidelines on reading do not outline pedagogical strategies that are effective in reading classrooms that include both at-risk and healthy progress readers. It is against this background that this study investigates the pedagogical strategies used to teach isiZulu inclusive reading comprehension at the Intermediate Phase level. Since the majority of studies conducted around literacy challenges focus on teachers' capabilities to teach reading, this study extends this debate by interrogating teacher educators' facilitation of inclusive reading.

This qualitative study is guided by the interpretivist paradigm and framed by the Lexical quality hypothesis, Word Learning Theory and the Simple view of reading approach. Non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 10 intermediate phase isiZulu teachers based in mainstream schools, in uMkhanyakude district. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with seven isiZulu methodology lecturers purposively selected from five South African universities. The qualitative data were analysed by the researcher through thematic analysis. The unit of analysis in this research are the pedagogical strategies for developing intermediate phase isiZulu inclusive reading among At-Risk readers.

Findings indicate that intermediate phase isiZulu teachers struggle to organize meaningful and cohesive reading strategies. Strategies employed are not structured to address specific reading challenges and consequently at-risk readers in mainstream schools remain inadequately catered for. Furthermore, university teacher education departments do not adequately equip pre-service intermediate phase teachers with the necessary pedagogical skills to teach inclusive reading to at-risk readers in mainstream schools. This study, thus contributes to the body of knowledge related to the pedagogical strategies best suited for developing inclusive reading.

CHAPTER ONE:
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The transformation of South African education after 1994 produced several positive outcomes in enforcing learning equality and ensuring that education must be accessible to everyone. However, many learners with learning challenges in mainstream schools are still left behind (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016). As much as these learners are physically included in the mainstream schools, the majority of them are academically excluded as a result of insufficient academic support and interventions assisting them to meet their needs (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). It is necessary to address various learning challenges, including communication challenges, behavioural problems, reading and writing difficulties, second-language learning challenges and listening difficulties, to name a few. The present study focuses on the isiZulu reading comprehension skills for at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase (IP) level in mainstream schools of the uMkhanyakude District in KwaZulu-Natal province.

Reading comprehension is primarily important for developing learners reading proficiency, so this study investigates three reading stages (pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading) taken into account to teach reading comprehension. The study focuses on these three reading phases to understand the reading strategies used to teach inclusive reading and how at-risk readers are supported while they are reading.

The notion of inclusive reading is derived from the concept of inclusive education, which refers to teaching learners with learning challenges in the same classroom as learners who do not have learning problems as stipulated in the Education White Paper six (DoE, 2001). In the context of this study, inclusive reading then means teaching reading comprehension in the same classroom to both learners with reading difficulties and readers who are making healthy progress.

This study posits that among the factors perpetuating the academic exclusion of at-risk readers are pedagogical strategies currently stipulated in the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, 2011), which do not accommodate inclusive reading. The policy statements recommend a text-based approach to be used to develop reading amongst all learners in the mainstream IP classes (DBE, 2011: 18). The assumption of this study is that the pedagogical strategies employed by reading teachers hardly contribute to inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase in mainstream schools. In other words, many learners with academic

challenges in the mainstream classroom are still left behind as the consequence of pedagogical strategies which have the effect of excluding them in the academic context of learning.

The recent findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy study (PIRLS) indicate that reading is in a crisis in South African primary schools, since 81% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning and understanding (Mullis et al., 2023). Inadequate reading pedagogical practices contribute significantly toward the reading difficulties experienced in classrooms. This is because many teachers in mainstream schools are insufficiently skilled to adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate at-risk readers (Donohue & Bornman, 2015: 4). As a result, this may place constraints upon teachers who are expected to deliver the content to at-risk readers in Intermediate Phase classes.

This study examined pedagogical strategies for supporting at-risk readers in reading comprehension, specifically at the selected Intermediate Phase mainstream schools in the uMkhanyakude District. This study considered the vital nature of pre-service teacher preparation in terms of inclusive reading pedagogy in university teacher education programmes. Therefore, to understand the deeply-rooted challenges faced by teachers in undertaking inclusive reading specifically for at-risk readers in mainstream classroom, this study investigated pre-service teacher preparation in methodology courses in teaching inclusive reading in isiZulu home language to at-risk readers.

1.2 Background

A mainstream school in the South African educational context refers to an ordinary neighbourhood schools that all children attend (DoE White Paper Six, 2001). Mainstream schools have an obligation to accommodate learners with learning challenges or disabilities. The Screening Identification Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy indicates that it is mandatory for all learners to attend their local neighbourhood school first, despite of their disability condition.

The SIAS policy plays a crucial role in identifying whether learners require a low, moderate or high level of support to meet their needs. The level of support needed will then determine their placement in schools. Different countries adopt their own policies and protocols to classify and determine the level of support required by a learner, which later guides their placements. The following section discusses the classification of learners who may require extra support in the United States, Zambia and South Africa.

Whilst, this study's focus is within the education context of South Africa, however, it was essential to further understand how reading challenges are dealt with from the international perspective as well as in the African context. While many other countries could have been selected, both Zambia and USA were randomly opted due to their comprehensive reading intervention plans which are detailed below. Through their reading intervention plan, the researcher believes that the South African DBE could learn and improve their reading intervention approach to cognitively assist at-risk readers.

1.2.1 Classification of learners with learning challenges in the United States

The United States has implemented a Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to provide early systematic and effective assistance to learners with different learning challenges (Blumenthal & Vob, 2019). This approach screens learners with distinctive learning challenges and implements intensive interventions to respond to their challenges (Blumenthal & Vob, 2019). The RTI process is divided into three tiers of support to facilitate screening and providing extra support to learners with severe and moderate learning challenges. Tier 1 focuses on the core curriculum for all learners. Learners who do meet the standards in Tier 1 are provided with additional supplementary interventions in Tier2. These learners who are referred to Tier 2 could be experiencing moderate learning challenges, which include emotional/behavioural problems, hearing difficulties, visual problems, difficulties with memory, reading and written language. Tier 3 determines that a learner will require special education as a result of severe learning challenges such as mentally disability, deafness, blindness, Down Syndrome and any other type of diagnosed impairment. When all learners have been screened, then the group of learners who are found to be experiencing severe learning challenges under Tier 3 are referred to special schools for intensive support and medical interventions.

The RTI approach of the United States is important and mostly reliable in the intervention support of learners in need. It also entails focusing on the effectiveness of the core curriculum and pedagogical practices required for learners who need extra support. When the curriculum is flexible, it is easier for learners with learning challenges to achieve their academic goals. The

South African education system could learn from the importance of addressing the flexibility of the core curriculum initially, before the screening process takes place.

1.2.2 Identification and screening of learners with learning challenges in Zambia

The Department of Education in Zambia states that the process of identification and screening starts at birth using the Apgar scale (Lufumbo, 2016). The Apgar scale identifies and measures five dimensions, namely skin colour, heart rate, reflex irritability, muscle tone and breathing on a scale of 0-10. A score of 0-3 is regarded as critically low and a score of 4-6 is regarded as low. A learner with a score of 7-10 falls within the normal range. A low Apgar score indicates that the learner requires immediate medical intervention. As a result, many assessments are carried out to identify any potential learning challenges. Despite medical interventions, parents have a responsibility to identify a child's developmental delays (Lufumbo, 2016). A team for assessment includes an audiologist, psychologist, ophthalmologist, counsellors, teachers and social workers working together to provide support and counselling to the parent (Mitiku, Alemu & Mengsitu, 2014). Sometimes the assessment team may recommend additional testing to be conducted, the process ends with the assessment report that indicates whether the learners require special or ordinary education (Lufumbo, 2016: 8). The Apgar scale method may be useful in the South African education context in identifying learners' inabilities at birth. This may assist the later placement of learners in most appropriate type of school they belong.

1.2.3 Classification of learners with learning challenges in South Africa

Enormous effort has been put in place in the South African educational context to respond to the learning challenges. In 2014, the Department of Basic Education gazetted a document, the Screening, Identification Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) (DBE, 2014). The purpose of this policy is to provide a "framework for standardisation of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support". In addition, the policy seeks to promote not only quality and equal education to vulnerable learners in terms of their economic background, but also support for those with learning challenges. The SIAS policy provides guidelines in terms of screening and identification of learners who require additional support because of their learning challenges (DBE, 2014). The policy also classifies different learning challenges and indicates whether a learner requires intensive support at a special school or moderate support from a mainstream school.

The SIAS policy consists of three stages of a protocol that need to be implemented in identifying

and screening learners with certain learning challenges. Stage One requires a teacher in the mainstream school to perform the screening process for all learners upon admission, as well as at the beginning of each school phase (DBE, 2014). The findings must be captured in the Learner Profile (LP). Stage Two becomes relevant when a learner is found to have learning challenges during screening in Stage One. In Stage Two a teacher is responsible for organising the necessary support such as a School-Based Support Team (SBST), based on information captured in the LP in stage one. Stage Two is crucial, because referral decisions are permissible according to the standard procedure of the SIAS policy.

Stage Two encompasses three classifications of learning challenges that guide decisions for a learner to be referred to a special school or not. Learning challenges in the SIAS document are categorised as follows: (a) social mode challenges, (b) moderate/mild learning challenges, and (c) severe learning challenges (DBE, 2014). In the social mode challenge, learners may be labelled by society as being disabled, not because of their disability such as a visual or hearing impairment, but because of the negative attitudes and rejection experienced by these learners in society. Social mode challenges are deemed to be dangerous because they can lead to social exclusion and a learner developing debilitating psychological conditions such as stress, depression and low self-esteem (Cortez, 2016). Stage Two of the SIAS policy asserts that learners with moderate learning challenges such as emotional/behavioural problems, hearing difficulties, visual problems, difficulties with memory, and reading and writing problems must be included in the mainstream schools. However, additional supplementary support is required to ensure their inclusion.

On the other hand, severe learning challenges refer to learners with intensive learning problems such as mentally disability, deafness, blindness, Down Syndrome and any other diagnosed impairment illness. Learners with severe learning challenges cannot function adequately within a normal school curriculum (Mitiku & Mengisitu, 2014; Tungaraza, 2014). For example, a totally deaf learner cannot hear any sound. These learners may require Sign Language to communicate. In other words, they are referred to special education contexts as they require extra support, as stipulated in the White Paper 6. Stage Three of the SIAS policy is known as the action stage. The District-Based Support Team (DBST) is responsible for putting the plan into action. The plan from DBST will spell out a support package that includes a budget for additional support, resources to accommodate the needs of learners with severe learning challenges, teacher training and monitoring support.

The classification of learners with severe or moderate learning challenges, specifically in the

South African education context as per SIAS policy, categorises reading difficulties as among the moderate learning challenges, which must be addressed in mainstream schools. Since the present study focuses on at-risk readers in Intermediate Phase mainstream schools, it is consistent with the guidelines stipulated in the SIAS policy in terms of moderate learning challenges.

1.2.4 Learners with learning challenges in the uMkhanyakude District

This research was conducted in ten selected Intermediate Phase mainstream schools in the uMkhanyakude District that include at-risk readers. The uMkhanyakude District is situated in the northern region of KwaZulu-Natal province. This district is the second largest district in KwaZulu-Natal with a population of approximately 625, 846 (Statistics South Africa (STATS SA), 2022: 23). Figure 1.1 indicates the map of KwaZulu Natal Province (A) and the boundaries of municipalities in uMkhanyakude District (B):

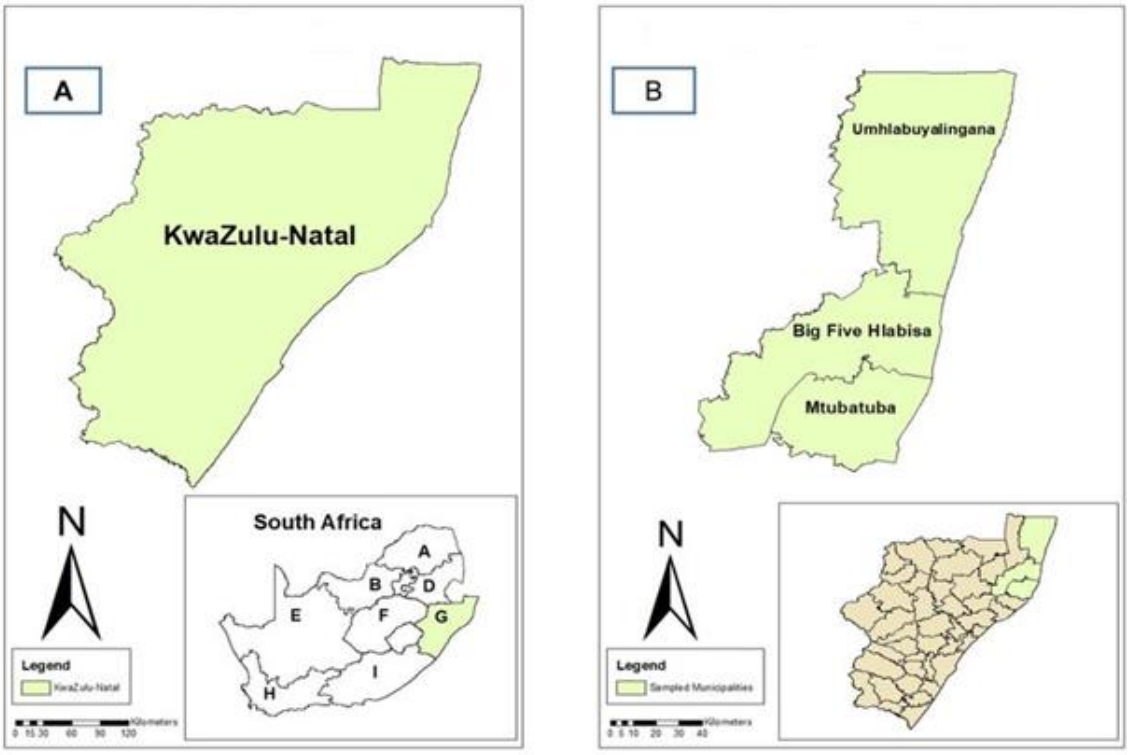


Figure 1.1: Map of uMkhanyakude District

Source: (Google Maps: 2023)

(https://municipalities.co.za/map/121/umkhanyakude-district-municipality)

UMkhanyakude district is regarded as amongst the poorest rural districts in South Africa. The uMkhanyakude district municipality's Integrated Development Plan review (2021/22) estimates

that 71% of its population lives under the poverty. The majority of schools in the district are under resourced, no-fee paying schools, classified as quantile 1 to 3. The report further asserts that there is a high unemployment rate in the district at 58.6%, and poor service delivery, with only 41,3% of people receiving electricity, 38.2% without water and 18.2% without access to toilets at all.

According to Majoko and Phasha (2018: 26), a report by the KZN Department of Education states that 53% of children with severe learning challenges do not attend schools and, of those with moderate learning challenges such as reading comprehension difficulties, 53% underperform in their academic activities. The report shows that these learners are between the ages of 6 to 11, from Grade 3 to Grade 7. At least 76% of children with learning challenges in KZN may not be receiving proper schooling (Majoko & Phasha, 2018:11). A variety of problems affecting the province include poor capacity development for teachers and principals, insufficient support in terms of infrastructure, shortage of school transport, an inflexible curriculum, poor monitoring, lack of motivation and insufficient assessment support (Mbokazi & Mkhasibe, 2021).

1.2.5 At-risk readers

In the education context at-risk readers are regarded as learners who struggle to develop reading skills and as a result achieve poor results (De Witt & Lessing, 2018; Rule & Land, 2017). These learners are included in the mainstream classrooms and receive no special assistance (Richard, Pretice & Keith, 2013).

This study identified the pedagogical strategies that work for at-risk readers when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension skills. According to the South African CAPS, the Intermediate Phase refers to the education phase ranging from Grade 4 to Grade 6. This phase requires a learner to be fully engaged in all academic skills to advance their education.

Developing reading comprehension in at-risk readers in the 21st century has changed as compared to the 20th century due to the Inclusive Education Policy implemented in the education system. Teachers are required to utilise extensive comprehension pedagogical strategies, with all learners included in one setting, not only for at-risk readers (Murphy, 2016). At-risk readers may differ from skilled readers in terms of monitoring comprehension and comprehending a text, as well as dealing with their inadequacy in reading comprehension. At-risk readers may have an insufficient understanding of the keywords and the ways in which sentences correlate with one another. On the other hand, skilled readers have enough knowledge to read for meaning and understanding.

Should the reading make no sense, they are eventually able to draw on their prior knowledge of a text to comprehend words in the text.

In the process of developing reading comprehension, teachers need to avoid low-quality reading material, including learning materials that do not relate to learners' daily life-experiences (Foorman et al., 2015). It is evident that at-risk readers tend to acquire knowledge of reading when using learning materials that reflect their daily experiences. Reading may also improve through frequent practice. It is therefore necessary that teachers provide motivation and help at-risk readers to improve their reading comprehension skills.

In 2018, research was conducted by the Department of Education to determine the literacy level of learners in the Intermediate Phase (Majoko & Phasha, 2018). The results revealed that approximately 61% of learners in the mainstream classes have reading comprehension problems. However, it is important to note that there are various factors that may contribute to reading comprehension challenges, including learning difficulties. The study further showed that at least 18,5% of learners across all the provinces continuously fail reading assessments. These figures support the assumption of this study that the pedagogical strategies currently in use for developing reading comprehension in mainstream classes are inflexible and hardly benefit at-risk readers. Therefore, there is a need to identify the appropriate pedagogical strategies that can work when teaching isiZulu comprehension skills to at-risk readers.

1.2.6 Educational policy governing the teaching of learners with learning challenges in South Africa

The post-1994 South African education system initially adopted apartheid laws stemming from the Bantu education system. Before 1994 South Africa laboured under a bimodal education system, which established two different education systems aimed to sustain apartheid in which one system represented opportunity and privilege for Whites and the other lack and disadvantage for Blacks.

The bimodal education system made it mandatory that only 20% Black learners with special needs maybe included in well-resourced schools (DoE White Paper Six, 2001). This means that between 2.2% and 26% of black learners could not be identified as having learning challenges (DoE, White Paper Six, 2001). In the DoE White Paper Six (2001), the statistics indicated that 64 200 learners with special needs were accommodated at 380 special schools. Significant progress has been made recently throughout the nine South African provinces, where statistics indicate that approximately 119 403 learners with special needs are accommodated in special schools (DBE, 2018: 30).

1.3 Context of the study

Various studies have been conducted on the physical learning challenges affecting learners at mainstream schools, some even questioning the practicality of inclusion, interventions and the provision of learning support in mainstream schools. However, there is still the potential to address learning challenges – specifically isiZulu-language reading comprehension for at-risk readers – as well as providing pedagogical strategies that can work effectively to reinforce academic inclusion in mainstream classes. The academic learning challenges in the teaching of African languages, such as reading comprehension, have been overlooked, but there has been greater input in addressing other academic challenges, which include English Second Language reading challenges as well as physical learning challenges such as visual problems and others. Developing isiZulu reading comprehension is crucial, not only for the purpose of learning isiZulu, but also for second-language learning (English), which is used as the medium of instruction at the selected schools. It has been shown that second-language learners develop competence in the second language by mastering their first language (Mezrigui, 2011: 43).

While the CAPS document sets the expectation that all learners must meet the standard guidelines, little is said about the standards when teaching at-risk readers in mainstream classes. Simply including at-risk readers in mainstream classes without a proper plan of instruction raises serious issues of equity. Mere inclusion, (physically including children with learning challenges in regular classrooms) but otherwise excluding them from meaningful participation, can do little to promote equity of educational opportunities (Cortez, 2017).

It is vital that pedagogical strategies that work effectively are used in classes to ensure academic inclusion in reading with comprehension for at-risk readers. A study conducted by Haager and Vaughn (2013) found that to set common academic demands for all learners may have a negative impact on learners with academic learning challenges, as they may struggle to cope with the required academic skills to complete tasks. In that sense, teachers will be forced to modify their pedagogical strategies to include learners with learning challenges during instruction (Haager & Vaughn, 2013).

A study conducted by Cortez (2017) focusing on reading problems for learners in the lower grades found that the pedagogical strategies which teachers personally adopt do not always align completely with effective strategies that are supposed to ensure the inclusion of at-risk readers. This shows that teachers need to be assisted with specific pedagogical strategies that could be used for developing reading comprehension amongst at-risk readers.

1.3.1 Pre-service teacher training on inclusive reading for mainstream classrooms

The task of teaching reading to at-risk readers has proven to be more challenging than once believed. In the past, pre-service teachers were taught that reading was a natural process (Narkon & Black, 2008); however, this view has been disputed (Pittman & Dorel, 2014). Reading instruction is a linguistic task which demands complex knowledge, effective pedagogical instruction and expertise to be properly taught in the inclusive classroom (Pitman & Dorel, 2014). The serious demand for an effective pedagogical reading strategy, including training, has been underestimated by universities. One consequence has been that teachers exhibit low self-confidence and even failure to adequately improve reading skills for at-risk readers. It is therefore important that methodology courses for all language teachers must include strategies suitable for at risk-readers. To achieve this objective this study explored how selected universities prepare pre-service teachers on the methodology of teaching inclusive reading in isiZulu home language to at-risk readers. The Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ 2015: 24) stipulates that all IP teachers must be adequately trained to teach both Home Language and First Additional English language. The guidelines of the MRTEQ policy are essential, provided that most IP teachers use irrelevant pedagogical strategies to teach isiZulu reading comprehension because of the lack of African-language pedagogical guides (Ntshangase & Tshuma, 2023).

1.3.2 Reading comprehension among at-risk readers

Reading comprehension is a process in which a reader interacts and creates meaning from a text using information found in the text as well as prior knowledge (Murphy, 2016: 9). At-risk readers may come from less privileged environments with inadequate language literacy skills which may include prior knowledge in word recognition (Deacon, 2012). Comprehension difficulties for at-risk readers may be the result of difficulties in spelling, decoding words and fluency (Deacon, 2012). Learners need to have acquired prior knowledge of a word and have sufficient understanding of decoding to develop reading comprehension. To ensure adequate reading development, a teacher may require a comprehensive pedagogical strategy that will assist at-risk readers to enhance their competence in reading comprehension. Therefore, this study identified pedagogical strategies that can be used by teachers when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase.

1.3.3 The importance of developing reading skills in a home language at the Intermediate Phase level

The ability to acquire reading proficiency in one's native language can be transferred to other languages (Dolean, 2022). Pretorius and Stoffelsma (2021: 28) point out the degree to which vocabulary growth in one's native language positively influences vocabulary development in a second language. This builds on Cummins's Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, which suggests that there are benefits to transferring some first-language abilities to the process of acquiring a second language. An adequate comprehension of isiZulu reading can be correlated with a knowledge of English reading, based on the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) transition from mother tongue instruction in the Foundation Phase (FP) to the use of English or Afrikaans as LoLT at the IP level.

The threshold hypothesis states that a learner's level of home language proficiency already acquired determines whether or not they will experience cognitive deficit or benefit from learning a second language (Cummins, 1979). This implies that there may be a "threshold" that an individual must pass in their mother-tongue language, which is isiZulu in this case. Those who begin learning a second language before they reach this level will face considerable learning challenges (Cummins, 1976). Therefore, learners who have not yet reached a high enough level of isiZulu reading proficiency will experience difficulties when they switch to an English-language instructional setting. Additionally, Tshuma (2021) demonstrates the cognitive advantages for learners who have studied in both their first and second language for academic purposes. This is a justification for strengthening learners' isiZulu reading abilities, which will inevitably equip them for a seamless transition and cognitive advantages when learning English as a second language in addition to improving their English reading abilities.

1.4 Problem statement

The implementation of an inclusion policy for learners with diverse needs in the South African education context has been a matter of intense debate since 1994. The Salamanca statement (1994) asserts that every learner has a constitutional right to receive quality education. The Education White Paper Six (DoE, 2001) stipulates that learners with learning challenges should be included in the same classrooms as learners who do not have learning challenges. The idea of inclusive reading is therefore included under the umbrella of inclusive education stipulated in the Education White Paper Six (DoE, 2001). Inclusive reading refers to the teacher's ability to teach both at-risk readers and healthy progress readers in one classroom using effective reading strategies (Berkeley

& Larsen, 2018). Reading challenges among learners appear to be perpetuated by the challenges facing teachers in the inclusive reading classrooms such as inadequate pedagogical strategies. These strategies are often perceived to be inflexible and resistant to acknowledging and accommodating at-risk readers (Land, 2015). It is a problem that many teachers it mainstream schools are insufficiently skilled to adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate at-risk readers (Donohue & Bornman, 2015: 4). This may place constraints upon teachers who are expected to deliver the content to at-risk readers in Intermediate Phase (IP) classes. This study identified the pedagogical challenges faced by IP isiZulu teachers when teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in the mainstream schools of uMkhanyakude district, in the Northern part of KwaZulu-Natal province.

There is a significant need to understand the role of methodology courses offered by university teacher education programmes in the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading to at-risk IP readers in mainstream schools. Changes in the education sector regarding the inclusion of diverse learners in one setting have been underway for at least two decades; this has placed pressure on pre-service teacher preparation programmes to incorporate inclusive pedagogies. As pre-service teacher preparation for inclusive teaching and learning in mainstream schools gains momentum, teacher education programmes are increasingly presenting introductory courses on inclusion and the factors to take into account when teaching learners with learning challenges (Allday, Neilsen-Gatti & Hudson, 2013; Harvey et al., 2010; Pugach & Blanton, 2012). Farr (2020) points out that in-service teachers do not view teaching learners with reading challenges as their responsibility. A lack of teaching strategies focusing specifically on learners with reading challenges makes pre-service teachers feel underprepared to teach reading effectively (Kennedy, Hart & Kellems, 2011). Such teacher deficiencies regarding learners with reading challenges negatively affect learner performance and deprive learners of the necessary teacher support as well as their right to quality education. One of the ways of upskilling teachers to address the teaching of learners with reading challenges involves embedding elements of inclusive reading in pre-service teacher methodology courses.

1.5 Conceptual framework

This study uses the theoretical lenses of the lexical quality hypothesis, word learning theory and the simple view of reading theory to identify and explore effective reading strategies including how to understand and support at-risk readers in mainstream schools who are experiencing reading comprehension difficulties.

1.5.1 Lexical quality hypothesis (Perfetti, 2007)

The lexical quality hypothesis describes word recognition and its significant role in reading comprehension (Perfetti, 2007; Perfetti & Hart, 2002). The lexical quality hypothesis advocates that efficiency in word recognition depends on high-quality lexical representations, namely orthography, phonology, morphosyntax and semantics. The high-quality lexical representations play an important role in word integration, including how accurately and quickly the word is read (Murphy, 2016: 9). High-quality representations are connected and well specified, leading to reliability and easy word recognition to develop better comprehension.

1.5.2 Phases of word learning theory (Ehri & McCormick, 2008)

Ehri and McCormick (2008) developed five phases of word learning for improving comprehension skills among beginners and at-risk readers. The five stages help the learner to become fluent and promote the development of reading abilities. These stages are known as pre-alphabetic (preschool), partial alphabetic (kindergarten), full alphabetic (First Grade), consolidated alphabetic (Second Grade) and automatic alphabetic phase (beyond Second Grade). The word learning theory is relevant to this study as it addresses the critical phases a learner has to go through to develop reading fluency. Teachers' understanding of these critical phases could effectively address the needs of at-risk readers in inclusive classrooms.

1.5.3 The simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

The simple view of reading approach was propounded by Gough and Tunmer (1986) and it focuses on language comprehension and word recognition as the only two processes that are necessary for success in the difficult task of reading comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990). According to the simple view of reading, both elements are crucial, and each provides the necessary skills for at-risk readers. The distinct components of the simple view of reading contribute in different ways to the development of reading comprehension across different learners with reading problems. Therefore, employing the simple view of reading approach in this study was important to understand different types of at-risk readers and their areas of reading deficiencies.

1.6 Literature review

The literature reviewed in this section discusses reading phases, foundational reading skills in reading, preparation for teaching at-risk readers, curriculum stipulations regarding the

development of home language in the IP, and pedagogical strategies to foster reading comprehension. These concepts are the fundamental building blocks towards comprehensive reading comprehension skills and the implementation of effective pedagogies that accommodate inclusive reading in the IP.

1.6.1 Reading Phases

Pre-reading

The pre-reading stage refers to the reading activities that introduce the reading text, to enable learners to have sufficient background knowledge, grammar and vocabulary in order to read the text (Wahjudi, 2010). Teachers often work on a general aspect of the text to convey the background knowledge and get learners prepared to acquire new information in the pre-reading stage (Zarfsaz & Yeganehpour, 2021). It is imperative that teachers set the reading objectives they aim to achieve during pre-reading. This could be done through stating the reasons for reading, unpacking unfamiliar words or asking leading questions. Given that at-risk readers have low working memory, the pre-reading stage serves as the most important aspect in helping them recall what had been read previously and what is being read currently.

While-reading

The while-reading stage is an important phase which provides comprehensive demonstrations of reading pedagogical strategies (Güzel, 2022). In this stage a teacher improves at-risk readers' reading skills by identifying the main ideas of the text, making inferences about what comes next, providing ideas that relate to one another and predicting meaning of the unknown words in the text (Wahjudi, 2010). This stage is usually dominated by discussions that relate to learners' interests. It is a crucial stage where a teacher has to be cautious not to select a reading strategy that will exclude at-risk readers from meaningful classroom participation. In other words, reading strategies selected should serve the common interest of improving not only healthy progress readers' reading skills, but also at-risk readers included in the mainstream classrooms.

Post-reading

While intensive work is done in the while-reading stage, general comprehension is intended to evaluate learners' reading skills. In the post-reading phase, learners are given opportunities to respond to what they have comprehended in the text (Güzel, 2022). Learners may be asked to provide their narrative view of the characters and authors in the text, then relate this to their personal lives, discussing ideas, incidents, turning points, feelings, and predict what would happen

afterwards (Güzel, 2022). Wahjudi (2010) maintains that many reading lesson plans do not reach a post-reading stage because of factors such as the teacher's reluctance, time constraints and lack of awareness of the importance of the post-reading stage in learners' reading development. Something must be done to assist learners to use the new information they have attained, so that the new information becomes more than just some knowledge acquired. Teachers must understand that in the post-reading stage, learners are not comprehending the text nor learning about the language of the text; instead they are applying what they have learned. Teachers could use this opportunity to examine whether at-risk readers have made significant progress, and whether they were able to read for meaning and understanding.

1.6.2 Foundational skills in reading

At-risk readers reveal an early inability to manipulate phonemes and this inability is among the primary causes of subsequent reading comprehension problems (Cortez, 2017). Ehri, Stahl and Williams (2001) compared systematic phonics instruction and unsystematic instruction for learners with reading comprehension difficulties. The results showed that systematic phonics instruction assists learners to be able to read more effectively compared to non-systematic instruction. These findings are also supported by Swanson (1999), who revealed that the combination of both strategy instruction and direct instruction have a positive result amongst at-risk readers in acquiring foundational reading skills. Computer-based instruction is another approach teachers could use to support at-risk readers. It is worth noting that the computer-based approaches have not received sufficient support on the basis that many at-risk readers may lack basic knowledge about using technological systems during their learning.

1.6.3 Preparation for teaching at-risk readers

There is ample evidence championing programmes that promote teachers' ability to support the academic inclusion of learners with learning challenges (Gottfried, Ethan & Kirksey, 2019; Naidoo, 2012). Collaboration among general education and special education teachers to teach learners with learning challenges in one class was crucial in developing collaborative skills and building relationships (Wang & Fitch, 2020). Brownwell et al. (2005) reveal that the collaboration strategy fosters the academic inclusion of learners with learning challenges. In addition to the collaboration of teachers, there is also a need to promote work collaboration among school stakeholders for the purposes of educating at-risk readers attending mainstream schools.

Courses in teacher education that are entirely removed from authentic field-based experiences are

weak in preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive teaching (Gottfried et al., 2019). Boe, Shin and Cook (2007) posits that that teachers who are novices in the profession believe that content-based preparation in relation to pedagogy is better than content knowledge alone. In other words, field-based experiences for teachers in mainstream schools may assist in developing isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers. In addition, it is important to align the coursework with classroom practice to effectively prepare pre-service teachers to be able to provide support for learners with academic learning challenges. Due to the various policy and curriculum changes at higher education institutions, there are incoherent strategies of how to prepare teachers to manage inclusion in mainstream schools (Gottfried et al., 2019). Thus, universities may experience challenges in enforcing collaboration between theory and classroom practice.

Sharma and Sharma (2010) recommend that education programmes must encourage pre-service teachers to reflect on their lessons so that they can identify learning issues and then rectify them to ensure academic inclusion for all. The ability to reflect on teaching practice and modify one's practice has positive outcomes in developing reading skills among at-risk readers. Through reflection, teachers are able to identify areas that cause difficulties in reading comprehension, such as poor language comprehension, low-quality lexical representations or lack of fluency. Preparing pre-service teacher to teach effectively plays a crucial role in upskilling teachers to teach inclusive reading.

1.6.4 Curriculum stipulations for the development of home-language reading in the Intermediate Phase

The Curriculum Assessments Policy Statement (CAPS) could be a contributing factor to reading difficulties in indigenous South African languages in particular (Land, 2015; De Vos et al., 2014). Many African learners struggle to remember the five vowel letters' distinct sounds and have difficulties in understanding the letters in a constructed word, yet they can chant the letters *a*, *i* and *u* more easily (Cronje, 2021). According to De Vos et al. (2014: 3), there is a lack of indigenous language knowledge among the curriculum developers of the CAPS document. For instance, irregularities in isiZulu structures are among the CAPS' limitations for IP isiZulu Home Language (Cronje, 2021). The CAPS specifies various methods to spell words, however isiZulu does not use different ways to form sounds. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the difficulties and viewpoints that teachers have when it comes to teaching inclusive reading.

1.6.5 Pedagogical strategies to foster reading comprehension

Differentiating between written and spoken language development calls for specific skills. According to Bharuthram (2012:208), reading comprehension does not automatically improve with increased language proficiency. Instead, attention devoted to reading improves reading comprehension skills, which automatically enhances language proficiency. Watson et al. (2012) suggest a variety of tactics and elements that can be considered, including graphic organizers, text structures, summarization, text coherence and prior knowledge.

1. Concept maps, semantic feature analyses, or diagrams are examples of graphic organizers that are used to bolster knowledge in a variety of text structures, including expository and narrative texts (Ciullo, Falcomata & Vaughn, 2015).
2. Text structure: Understanding text structure aids in comprehension and helps readers retain what they have read. It is implied that students would not know how ideas should be organized if they were unable to comprehend various text structures (Watson et al., 2012).
3. Summarization: the capacity to succinctly and clearly state the main ideas of the text (Stevens & Vaughn, 2019). In order to understand and remember what they have read, this aids learners by concentrating on the main ideas of the narrative and emphasizing the text's main points.
4. Text coherence is the extent to which a reader can understand the connections between the different concepts and ideas that are conveyed in the text. Lack of knowledge would prevent a learner from identifying coherence in a text (Nahatame, 2017).
5. Past knowledge activates readers' prior knowledge on the subject and increases the likelihood that they will interact with the text, which improves readers' cumulative reading comprehension skills (Smith et al., 2021).

The National Reading Strategy (DBE, 2008) aims to improve the reading level of all learners in the country, including those who experience barriers to learning and those learners who are at special schools. In order to address the reading crisis, the National Reading Panel (2000) suggests teaching the five components of reading: phonemics, vocabulary, fluency, phonics and comprehension. These instructional techniques might be adequate to encourage an optimal progression in reading abilities, but they might not go far enough in addressing the comprehension

difficulties that an at-risk reader faces. In primary schools, teachers must inculcate in learners the persistence required to read and comprehend challenging texts (Graves et al., 2010).

1.6.5.1 Text-based approach to language teaching

The CAPS prescribes the use of a text-based language approach as an effective pedagogical method to develop reading skills amongst all learners (DBE, 2011: 18). The prescription of the text-based approach includes the development of competence, confidence, critical reading and comprehension. In other words, the text-based approach provides an understanding of how reading skills must be acquired.

There are gaps between curriculum stipulations and actual classroom practice in terms of adhering to the inclusive policy regulations in place (Donahue & Bornman, 2015; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Phahlamohlaka, 2017). This study contends that the text-based approach does not address the inclusion of at-risk readers during the learning and teaching process. In addition, policy does not provide clear guidelines in terms of how teachers must present their content in a way that will accommodate both skilled readers and at-risk readers in one setting. The prescribed time for conducting reading lessons in the curriculum expects of every learner to be competent in the reading area within the prescribed period, despite the inclusion of at-risk readers in the mainstream classes. Consequently, this study set out to understand how teachers in the Intermediate Phase use the prescribed pedagogical strategies to ensure inclusive reading when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers included in the mainstream classes.

1.7 Rationale of the study

Conceptual: The rationale of this study is to identify pedagogical strategies for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in Intermediate Phase mainstream schools. Developing these skills will allow at-risk readers to rely on their mother tongue to master the second language used as the medium of instruction.

Professional: The Progress in Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2022/23) reveals that many learners cannot read for meaning and understanding in any language, the statistics indicate that the reading challenges are predominant in African language classrooms, including isiZulu. These results raise the question of the effectiveness of the prevailing pedagogical approaches for teaching reading in African languages. This research focuses on isiZulu to champion reading comprehension knowledge. Moreover, it is crucial that the current teacher preparation departments not only promote effective pedagogical strategies for inclusive reading in the

mainstream classroom to deal with at-risk readers, but also equip teachers with sufficient skills to identify at-risk readers in their classrooms.

Personal: At a personal level, this study will be useful to the researcher as uMkhanyakude is the area in which the researcher grew up and is familiar with the context and has a vested interest in better understanding social issues affecting the community, including the literacy levels of learners in the district.

1.8 Aim and objectives of the study

1.8.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools.

1.8.2 Objectives

1. To identify the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools.
2. To identify the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools.
3. To determine how universities prepare pre-services teachers on inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk reader in mainstream schools.
4. To identify pedagogical strategies that can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools.
5. To identify progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

1.9 Key research question and research sub-questions

1.9.1 Key research question

What pedagogical methods can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude district mainstream

schools?

1.9.2 Research sub-questions

This study addressed the following research sub-questions:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools?
2. What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools?
3. How do isiZulu methodology lecturers prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
4. What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
5. What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

1.10 Research design and research methodology

Research paradigm

Paradigms are the worldviews that researchers bring to their studies, and which influence the ways they use the research design and conduct successful research (Creswell, 2013: 68). Bertram and Christen (2014) point out that a paradigm refers to the framework that indicates to the researcher what must be done and how to do it. This research is located within the interpretive paradigm. This is because the interpretive paradigm creates meaning that focuses on understanding people's experiences (Husam & Pius, 2020; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Through the interpretive paradigm, the study captured the experiences of teachers who educate at-risk readers in isiZulu reading comprehension at the selected Intermediate Phase mainstream schools in uMkhanyakude district, and the experiences of lecturers in the teacher education programmes.

Four philosophical orientations that describe how individuals perceive the world and how relationships are developed are epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology. Epistemology refers to how the creation of knowledge is theorised. The creation of knowledge in this study comprises suggestions of effective pedagogical practice that could be used to teach isiZulu

reading comprehension to at-risk readers. Ontology entails specifying the form and nature of reality. The reality in this research is that there are at-risk readers in the mainstream schools, however the teachers who are teaching them are not academically reaching out sufficiently to them. Axiology refers to the values of the researcher which indicate the choice of methods chosen in the research process. By observing isiZulu Intermediate Phase teachers while they teach reading comprehension lessons, the researcher interpreted how well (if at all) the teachers used inclusive reading to accommodate at risk readers. The teachers' experiences recorded through teacher semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to interpret the effectiveness of the pedagogical strategies used by the teachers.

Research design

Flick (2018: 128) defines a research design as "a plan of collecting and analysing evidence that make it possible for the investigator to answer whatever questions he or she posed". The research design explains the sampling strategies, research statement, specification of the research strategies and different methods of data analysis employed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013: 4). This research undertook the qualitative approach, with elements of a case study.

Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach was suitable for this study in order to better understand whether sufficient support is provided for at-risk readers to achieve their academic potential, as stipulated in the Inclusive Education policy and supported by the SIAS policy. King, Horrocks and Brooks (2019) and Johnson (2017) posit that a qualitative approach helps the researcher to understand the social experience of a group of people. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 105) also note that qualitative research includes a strategy for choosing subjects, research field and the procedure of collecting data to answer research questions. The qualitative research method accumulates data through field experience where the researcher plays a central role. The methodology employed by this research is detailed below.

Case study

A case study serves to "explore the phenomena under investigation from a variety of perspectives to gain an in-depth balanced picture of the phenomenon" and is widely associated with qualitative research (Taylor & Martindale, 2014; Taylor & Gregory 2015: 37). A case study is generalisable but primarily devotes attention to the situation to gain an in-depth understanding of the given phenomenon. Table 1.1 presents a summary of the research methods that were adopted for this

study.

Table 1.1: Summary of the research methods

Research paradigm	Interpretive
Research design	Case study
Research methodology	Qualitative
Sampling method	Non-probability purposive sampling
Data-collection tools	- Non-participant classroom observations - Teacher semi-structured interviews - Lecturers semi-structured interviews
Data analysis	Qualitative analysis of themes emanating from the data

The section below details the data-collection tools employed in this study.

1.10.1 Data-collection tools

Non-participant classroom observations

Non-participant classroom observation is referred to as a qualitative research tool used to collect specific primary data in a classroom through observing and noting down important information without interacting directly with the participants (Shanjida & Rizwana, 2015: 163). This study used non-participant classroom observations, which involve observing without interacting with the participants in the research setting. Non-participant observations were chosen to observe teachers' pedagogical strategies during the class when developing Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers at mainstream primary schools. Ten non-participant classroom observations took place across ten mainstream Intermediate Phase grades (Grades 4, 5 and 6).

Semi-structured interviews: Teachers

Semi-structured interviews are a qualitative research tool consisting of a set of open-ended questions and structured questions that enable the interviewer to explore a particular theme (Green et al., 2015: 50). One teacher from each of the ten selected primary schools was interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers immediately after the non-participant classroom observation, with the aim of allowing participants to share their experiences concerning the pedagogical challenges they encounter when teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers. In addition, the purpose was to elicit their thoughts on the education policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical strategies for supporting at-risk readers.

Semi-structured interviews: University lecturers

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with lecturers at five South African universities that offer teacher education qualifications. The researcher established whether the methodology courses offer inclusive reading strategies to at-risk readers. Semi- structured interviews with lecturers were used to collect data in terms of university education departments' preparation of candidate teachers with adequate skills to facilitate inclusive reading comprehension skills amongst at-risk readers in mainstream classes. Table 1.2 describes the specific instrument used to collect data to provide answers to particular research questions.

Table 1.2: Summary of data collection tools used to collect data for specific research sub-questions

Data Collection Instrument		Research Sub-question
Classroom Observations		**Q1**: What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools?
Semi-Structured Interviews	**Teachers**	**Q2:** What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools? **Q4:** What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools? **Q5:** What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
	Lecturers	**Q3:** How do universities prepare pre-services teachers on inclusive reading to accommodate At-Risk reader in mainstream schools? **Q4:** What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools? **Q5:** What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

Data collected through non-participant classroom observations provided answers to Question 1. Data gathered from the teachers' semi-structured interviews provided answers to research Questions 2, 4 and 5. Research questions 3, 4 and 5 were answered by the data collected through the lecturers' semi-structured interviews.

The researcher first identified the ten primary schools within one district, uMkhanyakude, as the 'case' followed by reviewing existing literature on at-risk readers and inclusive reading. Then non-participant classroom observations were followed by semi-structured interviews with the teachers who had presented the observed reading comprehension lessons. Semi-structured interviews with lecturers were conducted separately and the data emerging from the different qualitative instruments were merged for analysis purposes. Interpreting qualitative data involves analysing the collected data and identifying themes and patterns by grouping them into categories. Thematic analysis was used in this research. The unit of analysis in this research are the pedagogical strategies for developing isiZulu reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers at Intermediate Phase level.

1.10.2 Sampling method

A sampling method is the process or technique of selecting a representative part of the population to determine parameters or characteristics of the whole population (Stratton, 2021). This research employed non-probability sampling to select the subjects of the study from whom data were collected. The uMkhanyakude district was the selected research site because of its rurality. The ten schools were selected because they are mainstream schools enrolling at-risk readers. The schools are situated in Zulu-dominant language communities in the uMkhanyakude district. The universities selected by the study were chosen because they offer teacher education qualifications and are therefore expected to have a methodology course on teaching inclusive reading for at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

Non-participant classroom observations were carried at ten selected Intermediate Phase uMkhanyakude mainstream schools; one observation was conducted per school in an Intermediate Phase isiZulu class. A sample size of ten teachers with at least two years' experience teaching at-risk readers was purposively selected to participate in the semi-structured interviews. At each school one teacher in the Intermediate Phase participated in the semi-structured interviews. The same teacher who was observed in the non-participant classroom observation was interviewed further in the semi-structured interviews. At university 1 and 2 there were two lecturers who participated, whereas the rest of the universities had 1 lecturer to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

Table 1.3 indicates the number of respondents who participated in the non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Participants, schools and universities were assigned different codes to ensure anonymity.

Table 1.3: Sample size

Research participants			Research instruments	
			Non-participant classroom observations	Semi-structured interviews
IP isiZulu teachers	T1	S1- Grade 4	10	10
	T2	S2 -Grade 5		
	T3	S3 -Grade 6		
	T4	S4 -Grade 4		
	T5	S5 -Grade 5		
	T6	S6 -Grade 6		
	T7	S7 -Grade 4		
	T8	S8 -Grade 5		
	T9	S9 -Grade 6		
	T10	S10- Grade 4		
isiZulu Methodology lecturers	L1 and L2	U1	-	7
	L3 and L4	U2		
	L5	U3		
	L6	U4		
	L7	U5		

Key: ***L1: Lecturer 1***
S1: School 1
T1: Teacher 1
U1: University 1

In summary, this study presented 17 participants, spread across ten schools in the uMkhanyakude district and five selected South African universities. Participants, schools and universities were assigned different codes to ensure anonymity.

1.10.3 Target population

The target population for this study were Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers teaching at-risk readers at the selected mainstream schools. The same population chosen for non-participant observations was also used as the target population for the semi-structured interviews. The teachers selected were expected to be qualified, with at least two years' experience teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu. Furthermore, the target population for the semi-structured interviews were university teacher education lecturers who teach methodology courses for teaching reading in isiZulu home language / first additional language.

1.10.4 Trustworthiness, credibility and dependability

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1994) are of the view that trustworthiness of qualitative studies must ensure their credibility and dependability. These terms justify that the study was worth undertaking. McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 102) define credibility as "the extent to which the results approximate reality and are judged to be accurate, trustworthy and reasonable". To ensure credibility, this study took the responsibility to produce reliable, consistent and credible data using non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers and lecturers (Cmar, 2015: 2).

Dependability

McMillan and Schumacher (2010: 105) stress that dependability is a quality that shows the relevance of data collected and analysed in the real situation. A study must be sufficiently detailed to enable future researchers to repeat the investigation and possibly reach the same findings. To achieve dependability in this research, all the processes and methods that were undertaken to reach the findings were explained in depth.

1.10.5 Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the University of the Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee's (HREC, H22/01/20) ethical standards. A request for permission to undertake research in the selected schools was obtained from the KwaZulu-Natal provincial Department of Education, the principals of the ten schools, and the five universities selected for this study. All participants in this study were requested to complete a participant information sheet as well as a consent form before participating. To protect the respondents of this study and for the study to remain confidential, pseudonyms were used. The participants were assured of their anonymity. Collected data were stored on a password- protected computer, accessible only to the researcher and supervisor, to protect the participants' right to confidentiality and their details were not disclosed. Respondents were informed that participation is voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any stage of the research.

1.11 Significance of the study

Practice: This study will benefit Intermediate phase learners, teachers and isiZulu methodology lecturers. The findings of the study will be used to inform teachers about the recommended reading pedagogies for developing Intermediate Phase isiZulu inclusive reading skills among at-risk readers. The study will also identify the reading challenges teachers are confronted with while

teaching inclusive reading. This study could foster a culture of reading among isiZulu reading teachers and at-risk readers. While there is a growing body of knowledge outlining the impact of poor training for teachers who teach reading, this study challenges teacher education programmes to examine their curriculum and to infuse pedagogical knowledge for teaching inclusive reading in the methodological courses preparing pre-service teachers to teach reading.

Policy: This study will benefit policy designers and curriculum developers by suggesting improvements in policies such as SAIS and the Inclusive Education policy regarding the necessary support required by at-risk readers in inclusive mainstream classrooms. The findings of this study may help to redress the inadequacies in the education policy frameworks that seek to provide extra support to at-risk readers in the inclusive classroom.

Further research: This study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding at-risk readers. This study will also make a contribution towards the debate on pre-service teacher preparation regarding inclusive reading. Future research might focus on learning challenges other than the reading comprehension difficulties focused on in this study.

1.12 Study limitations and delimitations

A limitation is defined as a potential weakness that is usually out of the researcher's control, and is closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018: 156). The limitation in this study is that all the lecturers' semi-structured interviews were conducted on MS Teams because of the distances between the universities. However, the rest of the data collection (classroom observations and teacher interviews) was conducted in person in the selected schools. Delimitations are defined as the researchers' decision to create boundaries for the study's aims and objectives to ensure that it does not become impossible to achieve the goals of the study (Dimitrios & Fountouki, 2018: 156). The delimitations of this study is its focus on one province only, KwaZulu-Natal, specifically one district, uMkhanyakude, situated in the northern part of KwaZulu-Natal. Limiting the study to one district allowed the opportunity and enough time to undertake non-participant classroom observations and interviews, which can provide an in-depth understanding of the research topic. A further delimitation of this study is the decision to focus only on reading comprehension skills, while there are many other reading skills.

1.13 Structure of the thesis

In reporting on the research, it was necessary to organize the study in the following chapters. Each chapter makes a significance contribution towards a holistic understanding of the identified problem. The chapters were organized as outlined below.

Chapter One: General orientation

This chapter provides a general introductory background of the problem in the study. The problem statement is also outlined in detail, and the research objectives and questions are stated. The significance of the study, research aim, research objectives and questions are highlighted. The research design and methods, definition of key concepts as well as the structure of the thesis are also presented.

Chapter Two: Conceptual framework

In reporting on the research, it was necessary to organize the study in ten chapters. Each chapter makes a significance contribution towards a holistic understanding of the identified problem. The chapters were organized as outlined below.

Chapter Three: Outline of the concept of the at-risk reader

The chapter unpacks the notion of an at-risk reader through discussing various factors and characteristics that influence the creation of reading problems not only in the South African context but also in a few international, including African, countries. This chapter further explains different interventions undertaken by different countries including South African in addressing reading problems.

Chapter Four: Literature review

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on understanding what is paramount about teaching reading comprehension to at-risk readers and preparing pre-service teachers to teach reading at the intermediate phase level. The chapter is divided into five sections namely: reading development in the home language, reading pedagogies, reading comprehension, education policies that inform inclusive learning the teacher education programmes preparing pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading.

Chapter Five: Research methodology

The chapter provides an account of the empirical research methodology employed, including a detailed discussion of the paradigm and research design of the study. The sampling method and population, participants' demographic information are presented in this chapter. This chapter also discusses the research methods, data collection tools, and addresses the issues of credibility and trustworthiness, data triangulation in detail.

Chapter Six: Presentation and analysis of data on classroom observations

In this chapter data collected through non-participant classroom observations were presented and analysed.

Chapter Seven: Presentation and analysis of data teacher semi structured interviews

This chapter presents and analyses data collected through semi-structured interviews from teachers teaching isiZulu reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase.

Chapter Eight: Presentation and analysis of data: lecturer interviews

This chapter presents and analyses data collected through semi-structured interviews from teachers teaching isiZulu reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase.

Chapter Nine: Discussion of findings

Following the presentation and analysis of data in the three previous chapters, this chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the findings of this study. This chapter is divided into two sections (i) discussion of findings emerging from IP isiZulu teachers in mainstream schools, and (ii) discussion of findings emerging from isiZulu Methodology lecturers responsible for preparing pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading.

Chapter Ten: Conclusions and recommendations

The final chapter draw3s some conclusions based on the key findings of this study. This chapter seeks to provide answers to the research questions that drove this study. Furthermore, recommendations for improvement for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension and preparation of pre-service teachers to teach reading comprehension are suggested.

1.14 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the general orientation to the study. The aim of this study was to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be recommended as effective for teaching

Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools. This study is framed in terms of three theories, namely, the lexical quality hypothesis (Perffetti, 2007); word learning theory (Ehri & McCormick, 2008) and the simple view of reading approach (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers and lecturers.

Inadequate reading comprehension in African languages has been declared as a crisis that requires immediate intervention. Hence, this study investigates the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies to address reading skills, which are the cardinal pillar in promoting reading development. If teachers lack reading skills and pedagogical content knowledge to teach reading, South African education will continue to exhibit poor reading performance as evident in the 2022/2023 PIRLS findings, and this study intends to address that deficit. While teachers remain the first and foremost stakeholders for reading development, this study further widens the scope by understanding the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. This will contribute immensely to the improvement of reading pedagogies and encourage teacher education programmes to look more rigorously into their course content to train teachers to teach reading in schools. This next chapter will provide a discussion on the conceptual framework framing this study.

1.15 Definition of key concepts

At-risk reader: At-risk readers are defined as learners with minimal reading abilities; hence their reading ability is far below their grade level (Martins & Capellini, 2021).

Inclusive reading: Inclusive reading is defined as the ability to teach reading skills in a classroom that includes both healthy-progress readers and at-risk readers through implementing inclusive pedagogical instruction that caters for all (Berkeley & Larsen, 2018).

Mainstream schools: A mainstream school within the South African educational context refers to an ordinary neighbourhood school that all learners attend (DoE, 2014).

Pre-service teacher preparation: In the context of this study, pre-service teacher preparation refers to the university teacher education programmes that train teacher candidates to teach reading comprehension in mainstream schools (Gottfried et al., 2019).

Pre-reading: Refers to the reading activities conducted with the purpose of introducing the reading text to enable learners to have sufficient reading background knowledge, grammar and

vocabulary in order to read the text (Wahjudi, 2010).

Post-reading: Defined as an evaluation stage where learners are given an opportunity to respond to what they have comprehended in the text (Güzel, 2022).

Reading comprehension: This study defines reading comprehension as the process in which a reader interacts with and creates meaning from a text drawing on information found in the text as well as prior knowledge (Murphy, 2016: 9).

Reading strategies: Refers to the cognitive methods of teaching reading which involve interactions between the reader and the reading text, using multiple skills (Teng, 2020).

While-reading: Refers to the reading stage which requires intensive work from a teacher to comprehensively model effective reading pedagogical strategies and while encouraging learners to read independently with understanding (Güzel, 2022).

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided a general orientation to this study. This chapter describes three theoretical lenses that guide the study. The aim of this study is to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools. It was important for this study to employ these three theoretical perspectives that cover the linguistic aspects of reading, reading pedagogy and the different stages at-risk readers go through before they become healthy-progress readers. Each theory discussed played a crucial role in understanding the development of reading comprehension in general and among at-risk readers specifically. The theories also provide a background for interpreting the findings of this study and in framing the recommendations emanating from this study. These theories are the lexical quality hypothesis, word learning and the simple view of reading. The following section discusses the simple view of reading and its relevance to the present study.

2.2 Simple View of Reading

The simple view of reading (SVR) was propounded by Gough and Tunmer (1986) as a product of decoding and comprehension: ***Decoding (D) x Language Comprehension (LC) = Reading Comprehension (RC).*** This model formed the basis of the literacy component model, which emphasizes how reading comprehension, word reading and language skills all relate to produce a good level of literacy. Assessing learner achievement on word reading and language skills using the model is done on the basis of four quadrants (categories) of readers, with different strengths and weaknesses, as illustrated in Figure 2.1. The different learner reading levels also imply differing levels of support required from the teacher. The simple view of reading addresses the reading competencies of at-risk readers.

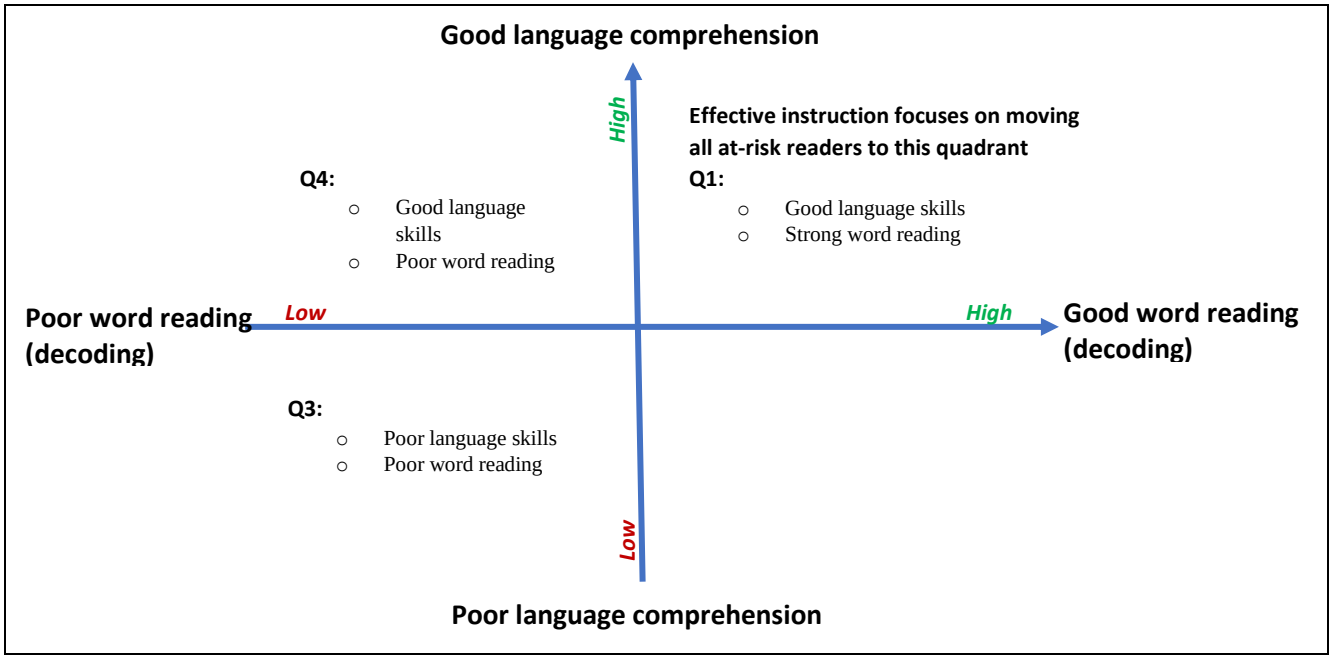


Figure 2.1: Simple view of reading

(Adapted from Gough and Tunmer, 1986)

Each quadrant represents a different combination of word-reading and language skills. The quadrants categorize learners according to their reading profiles and reveal their instructional needs. Learners with healthy skills in both areas are placed in the top-right quadrant, Quadrant 1 (Q1), which represents the goal of effective reading instruction for at-risk readers (Knight, Galletly & Gargett, 2017). Learners with weak language skills are placed in the bottom two quadrants, Q2 and Q3. Learners with weak word-reading skills are placed in the two left-side quadrants, Q3 and Q4. Learners with combined weaknesses are placed in the bottom-left quadrant, Q3. Without focusing on just one aspect of literacy development, the simple view of reading pulls together word-reading and comprehension skills to indicate holistic literacy. The mapping of reader positions using the simple view of reading also enables both pre- and in-service teachers to identify at-risk readers and develop the necessary reading skills and provide support.

The simple view of reading maintains that the essential reason for reading comprehension difficulties is poor language comprehension skills and word decoding skills (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Reading comprehension deficiencies are often rooted in poor listening skills and word decoding (Vaughn, 2018). Hoover and Gough (2000) assert that there are three different types of at-risk readers-ranging from mild versions to exceptionally high-level health conditions related to at-risk reading and these are defined as follows:

- Hyperlexia refers to the type of at-risk readers with the ability to decode text without developing a proper understanding of what is read.
- True dyslexia refers to the type of at-risk readers with the ability to understand spoken language but poor ability to decode text.
- Garden-variety reading disorder refer to the type of at-risk reader without the ability to either decode a text or understand spoken language.

SVR is a widely accepted reading comprehension model that has been tested and supported by a number of experiments in the literature of language literacy. However, it does not imply that reading comprehension is simple; rather, it explains the complexity of reading in two reading predicators, namely language comprehension skills and word decoding skills. The context of SVR explains that when the ability to identify words or comprehend language is impaired, then a reader will experience reading difficulties. Research has found that the combination of language comprehension and word identification measured through vocabulary and listening comprehension accounts for the majority of variations in reading comprehension (Lonigan, Burgess & Schatschneider, 2018). While the simple view of reading is widely recognized in the teaching of reading comprehension, Israel and Duffy (2009) point out its limitations, which include, for example, insufficient explanations on how decoding and linguistic comprehension function in the development of reading comprehension.

2.2.1 Empirical evidence of the simple view of reading

According to studies on struggling readers, variance in reading comprehension performance is explained by the SVR components. However, a number of the components of SVR (such as the dimensionality of language comprehension, how the components interact, and how stable their explanatory effects are over a range of reading skill levels) have not been examined thoroughly (Lonigan et al., 2018). Garcia and Cain's (2014) meta-analysis findings suggest that age plays a role in the extent to which decoding affects reading comprehension. Using three widely used tests for decoding and three commonly used tests for reading comprehension, Lonigan and Burgess (2017) report a developmental pattern for the emergence of distinct decoding and comprehension components of reading in a sample of 1 500 children in kindergarten through to Fifth Grade. These examinations of decoding and reading comprehension are performed best when expressed as a single reading factor for children in kindergarten through secondary school, and as separate reading comprehension and decoding factors for children in the Third through Fifth Grades. In

line with the simple view of reading, it appears that children's weak decoding abilities significantly limit the extent to which reading comprehension assessments can gauge comprehension-specific processes while they are still learning how to decode (Lonigan et al., 2018).

SVR has been widely used to demonstrate that learners with reading difficulties are not identical and instead display a variety of reading challenges. These could further be labelled as disorders, which are based on deficiencies in word recognition, language comprehension, or both, commonly referred to as dyslexia, hyperlexia (or specific comprehension difficulty), and mixed disability (or language learning disabilities). SVR has been used by several studies to study and understand reading comprehension difficulties (e.g. Ebert & Scott, 2016; Morris et al., 2017; Sleeman et al., 2022).

Sleeman et al. (2022) predicted group membership using information from 10 more tests they had performed. Their model correctly predicted 66% of the group assignments, indicating that four of the 10 measures – one each for language comprehension, decoding, reading comprehension and phonological awareness – made significant contributions (two quick name tests, three additional phonological awareness tests, and one additional decoding test did not significantly add to the model.) After defining the initial four groups using word recognition and language comprehension composite scores, they conducted a two-step cluster analysis with the aim of maximizing both within-group homogeneity and between-group heterogeneity. The number of children assigned to the mixed disability group was decreased; the number of children inside the dyslexia and particular comprehension difficulties groups was increased; and the group of unexplained poor readers were eliminated. This study supported three group clusters instead of the original four. The same four assessments significantly contributed to the three-group model, which correctly predicted 74% of the three-group assignments, using data from the ten additional assessments. In the end, the cluster analysis had to be repeated with the requirement that four groups be found; an evaluation of its predictive ability using the ten extra tests revealed that it was able to correctly predict 69% of the assignments. Compared to the conventional classification method (66%) this was a significant improvement, but it was identical to the three-group accuracy level (74%). In conclusion, Sleeman et al. (2022) demonstrate that using a clustering algorithm instead of the conventional method could increase the accuracy of classifying at-risk readers. The authors conclude that their results are consistent with the SVR definition of three different categories of reading difficulties.

A group of 65 Fifth and Sixth Graders who had scored below the 50th percentile on a standardized end-of-grade (EOG) reading test the previous spring were examined by Morris et al. (2017). Every child was given tests of their current grade level for language comprehension (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test) and word recognition (speed and accuracy in reading brief passages) in March. Their results were classed as either high or low. High performance was defined as reading at least 105 words per minute, with at least a 94% accuracy for word recognition, and a cut-off score of 40 percentile for vocabulary. Four groups were formed out of these: low on both, high on one and low on the other, or low on both points. With a vocabulary that was average or better, the majority of students (48%) fell into the low-low category, while a small percentage (14%) fell into the high-high category. These students' EOG scores for that grade level, which were obtained three months later, were below, but close to, the 50th percentile. Thus, this study identified a group of late primary school learners who demonstrated below average reading comprehension capabilities, but average or better word identification and language comprehension abilities.

These studies have provided compelling evidence that proves that the two predicators of SVR play a paramount role in reading comprehension within the context of learners experiencing reading difficulties. Furthermore, SVR has evidently been proven to be integrating appropriately with other important reading comprehension skills such as vocabulary and reading fluency.

2.3 Lexical quality hypothesis

The lexical quality hypothesis was developed by Perfetti (2007). Perfetti stresses that variations in the quality of the word representations have consequences in the development of reading comprehension. High quality lexical representations are a paramount feature of this study, since they emphasizes the importance of word knowledge in reading.

According to the lexical quality hypothesis, the ability to acquire reading comprehension skills depends on the quality of lexical representations of the word (Perfetti, 2007; Perfetti & Hart, 2001). The lexical quality hypothesis consists of four representations namely phonology, orthography, semantics and morphosyntax (Rossi, Martin-Chang & Ouellette, 2019). These lexical representations play an essential role in word integration and how quickly the word is read. High-quality representations are strongly connected and well specified to develop better comprehension skills (Perfetti, 2017).

2.3.1 Components of high quality lexical representations and reading comprehension

Lexical quality relates to how well the reader understands a word's form, meaning, and constituents, as well as how the teacher employs a term in a way that integrates pragmatics and meaning (Perfetti, 2017). The word quality refers to the way in which the mental representation of a word specifies its form and meaning components in a manner that is both precise and flexible (Perfetti, 2017). The lexical quality hypothesis posits that high-quality lexical representations of words should be used by teachers in developing reading comprehension skills (Andrews, Veldre & Clarke, 2020). At-risk readers who have not been taught lexical representation have challenges in developing reading comprehension. Their difficulties in reading comprehension are the result of low lexical quality representations by the teachers who disconnect the components of lexical quality. However, it is important to note that these dimensions of lexical quality cannot be taught to learners in the primary schools, rather reading teachers may filter some aspects of lexical quality to ensure effectiveness of their reading pedagogical strategies. This shows that the teachers should uphold lexical quality in developing reading comprehension skills. According to the lexical quality hypothesis as explained by Swart et al. (2017), reading comprehension is regarded as a process whereby meaning is extracted from the written text, which is linked to the quality of meaning representation.

2.3.2 High-quality lexical representations and word identity

Readers identify words rather than merely recognize them. Basically, identifying a word means retrieving data in terms of form and meaning from memory. The identity of a word is given by simple triplet formulation expressing values on identity as illustrated in Figure 2.1.

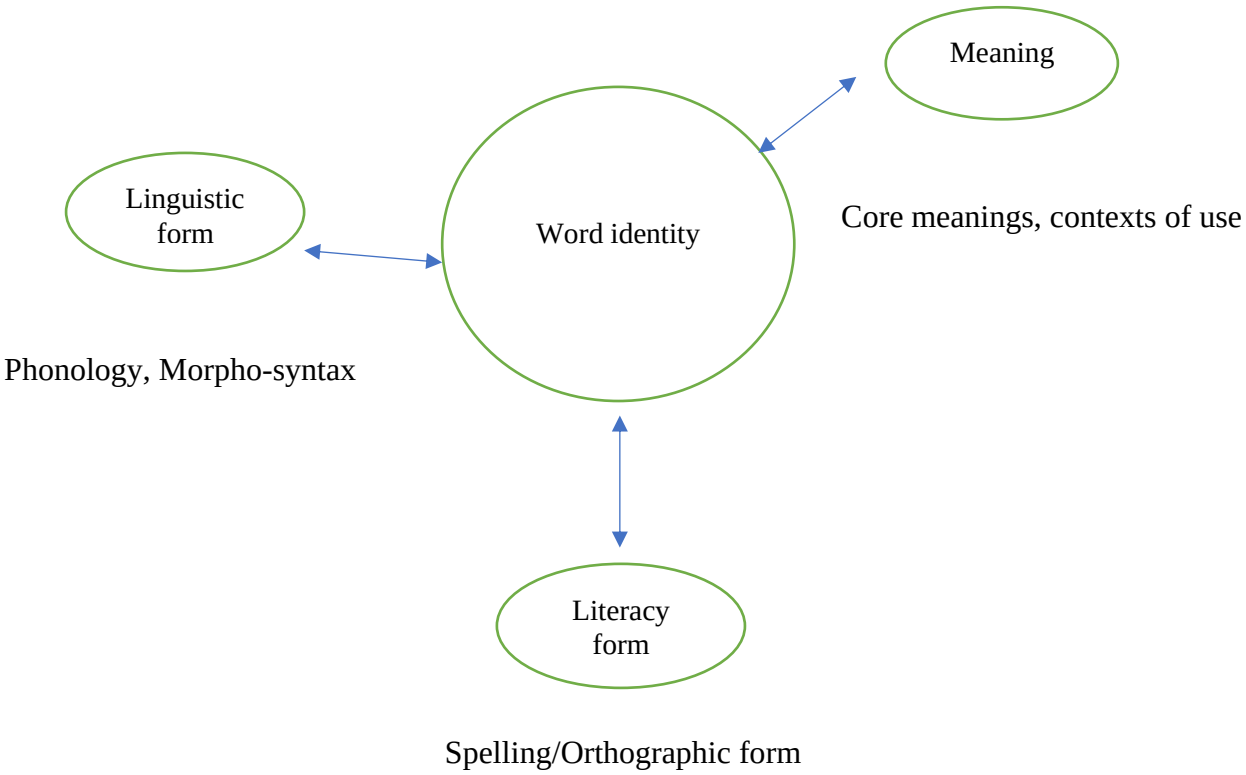


Figure 2.2: Word identification and lexical quality

Figure 2.1 illustrates three word identity forms, namely: the linguistic form, literacy form which led to interpreting the meaning of the word, (Perfetti, 2001). The lexical quality representations are believed to be adequate factors required to develop reading skills; however, it is worth arguing that in order for a reader to develop reading with understanding they should be able to generate inferences to discover implicit meanings (Hall & Vaughn, 2019: 1).

2.3.3 High-quality lexical representations and reading inferences

Inferences refer to the "process by which a reader integrates information within or across text to create new understandings" (Hall & Vaughn, 2019). To develop adequate knowledge of the text, a reader must make inferences (Verhoeven & Segers, 2016:578). Knowledge to make inferences in reading comprehension indicates a high skills level (Oakhill & Cain, 2012). Tighe and Schatschneider (2014) discovered that the ability to make inferences during the reading process represents a great contribution towards the development of reading comprehension skills in at-risk readers in primary schools. The reader should be able to create logical steps in deducing a conclusion based on what is indicated in the text (Verhoeven & Van Leeuwe, 2016). Doing so helps in explaining implicit information in the text. Oakhill and Cain (2012) maintain that to create and understand inferences may predict adequate comprehension. This automatically

indicates that at-risk readers are unable to make inferences during the reading process.

2.3.4 Empirical evidence of the lexical quality hypothesis

Various studies have investigated and examined different aspects of lexical quality in relation to reading comprehension skills development (Murphy, 2016; National Early Literacy Panel (NELP), 2008). Richter et al. (2013) conducted a study in lexical quality as a predicator for developing reading comprehension skills in primary school children in Germany. The author investigated the relations between lexical quality and reading comprehension in a cross-sectional sample of 274 Grade 1 to Grade 4 children in Germany. They concluded that lexical quality representations are pivotal in developing reading comprehension skills in primary school children.

Verhoeven et al. (2016) conducted research on the contribution of lexical quality to early word decoding. The study investigated the lexical quality abilities of Dutch kindergarteners. The outcomes of the study revealed that the two lexical quality aspects, phonological awareness and lexical retrieval, in particular rapid naming, are significant variance in grapheme-phoneme correspondence at the starting point of kindergarten and word decoding towards the end of kindergarten.

High quality lexical representations significantly contribute to the early development of reading skills and can be useful to at-risk readers. It is a powerful tool that can be used by the teacher in identifying at-risk readers during reading comprehension lessons. However, one could still argue that teachers are required to be extra cautious, since learners at the Intermediate Phase level are not yet ready in terms of their competence and skill to grasp the knowledge of lexical quality representations in the reading process. Therefore, reading teachers should use certain aspects of lexical representations such as word decoding and vocabulary to meet the IP learners' level of competence.

One purpose of this study was to develop the reading comprehension skills of at-risk readers who are in the Intermediate Phase classes. The lexical quality hypothesis implies that the ability to develop reading comprehension skills depends on the lexical representations, phonology, orthography, semantics and morphosyntax. This framework is relevant to this study since it contains the lexical representatives that comprise the primary aspect of reading such as spelling, phenomics, inferences and phonemes. The four lexical representatives benefit this study in terms of exploring the most effective reading skills that can be used by teachers in the Intermediate Phase to improve at-risk readers' word knowledge competence. The following section provides a

detailed discussion of Erhri and McCormick (2008)'s word learning theory.

2.4 Ehri and McCormick's word learning theory

While it is a fact that developing reading comprehension skill plays a crucial role in high quality lexical representations, the importance of reading pedagogical strategies should not be forgotten in the event of developing reading comprehension skill. This is because reading pedagogical strategies should provide practical demonstrations of the lexical representations, phonology, orthography, semantic and morphosyntax to develop a comprehensive reading comprehension skill. Therefore, navigating a theory that alludes to the reading instruction practice in the present study is paramount for contributing to the reading pedagogical practices that aid teachers to develop reading skills among at-risk readers. This section contributes theoretically to the reading comprehension strategies. Figure 2.2 presents Ehri and McCormick (2008)'s five phases of word learning theory.

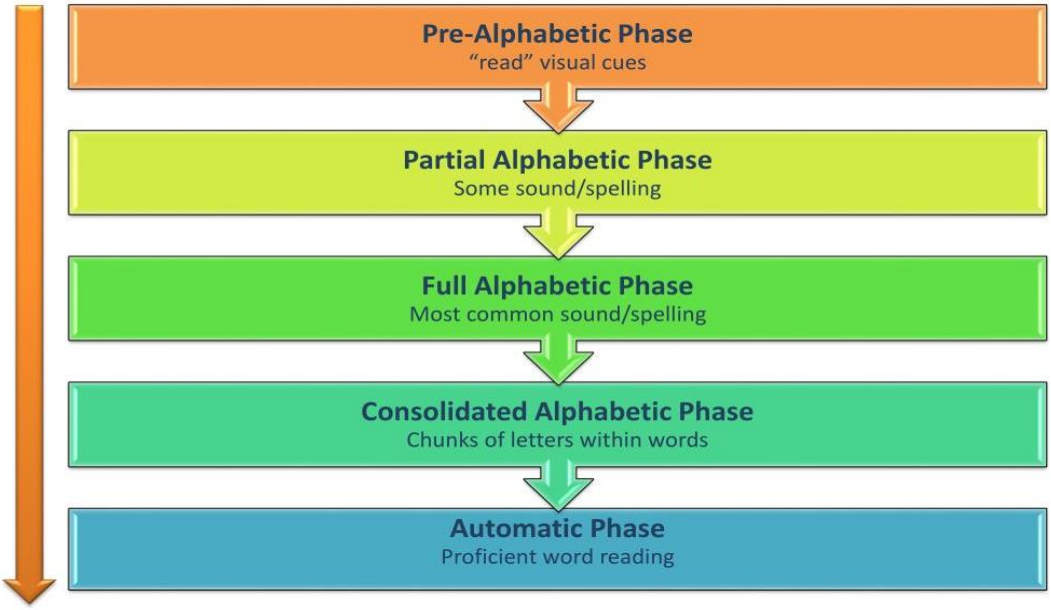


Figure 2.3: Ehri and McCormick's Word Learning theory

(Adapted from Ehri and McCormick, 2008)

The phrase 'learning theory' describes five phases a learner has to go through to achieve fluency, including other aspects that contribute to the development of reading skills. These phases are pre-alphabetic (Preschool), partial-alphabetic (Kindergarten), full-alphabetic (First Grade) and consolidated-alphabetic (Second Grade), and the automatic-alphabetic phase (beyond the Second Grade). Each of these phases consists of its own characteristics which are used to develop comprehensive reading provides an effective guide to reading. For example, during the pre-

alphabetic phase the reading pedagogical strategy of a teacher ought to focus on letter recognition and phonics awareness. In the partial-alphabetic phase, teacher's reading pedagogical strategy should model to learners how to manipulate sounds and words. The third phase emphasises that teachers reading instruction strategies should allow learners to re-read the text many times while practising pronunciation, including various sounds to encode them.

It is worth noting that the first three phases aim to develop knowledge of letter recognition, sounds grapheme, phonemes and phonics. This research underscores the significance of a systematic phonics strategy that teaches learners effective knowledge and skills that are paramount in acquiring reading comprehension skills.

The reading-aloud strategy is often used in consolidating the alphabetic phase to move learners to the advanced stage (Ehri & McCormick, 2008). The purpose of the automatic alphabetic phase is to develop automaticity in speed when reading unfamiliar words in the text. Ehri and McCormick (2008) use different methods of reading instruction which are suitable for each learner's level of reading such as modelled reading, assisted reading and the repeated-reading strategy (Pikulski & Chad, 2005). The word learning theory maintains that reading instruction should encourage learners to practise reading on a daily basis to enhance their knowledge of the alphabet and sight/high-frequency words.

Oral reading fluency assessments should be conducted regularly through observing learners and providing the necessary support that will help them to move from one step to another (Erhi & McCormick, 2008; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). Having knowledgeable teachers who will employ the prerequisite reading pedagogical strategy remains key in building a strong foundation of literacy skills. Therefore, it is worth stating that at-risk readers need knowledgeable teachers who will provide the support that will help them succeed in reading. In addition, Ehri claims that a classroom environment with printed word materials is important in enhancing learners' vocabulary skills (Aldhanhani & Abu-Ayyash, 2020).

Erhi and McCormick (2008) further suggest the decoding strategy (also known as the word-attack strategy), which enables at-risk readers to be exposed to unfamiliar words. The decoding strategy identifies sounds of individual letters by means of holding them in memory and then blending them into pronunciations which are recognized as real words. The analogy reading strategy entails recognizing how the spelling of a particular word is similar to a word that is already familiar. Analogizing enables at-risk readers to access the familiar word in memory and thereafter adjust their pronunciation in order to accommodate the new word. A sight-reading strategy uses memory

to read words that have been attended to or read before. Ehri and McCormick (2008) explain that the sight of the word automatically activates its pronunciation, spelling and meaning in memory. In other words, when readers have mastered sight words, it becomes less complex for them to recognize pronunciation without having to try figuring out the word.

The word learning theory is relevant to this study, since it deals with comprehensive reading strategies and further discusses critical phases a learner has to go through to develop reading fluency. This theory also provides insights into reading instruction that is suitable for each learner's level of reading, such as modelled reading strategy and the repeated-reading strategy, etc. This benefits this study in exploring various reading pedagogical strategies that can work effectively for at-risk readers and for teachers teaching isiZulu reading comprehension. The present study is based on the premise that printed word material in the classroom is pivotal in improving learners' vocabulary knowledge, which is further detailed under word learning theory. Therefore, framing this study in the word reading theory can help the researcher to explain the data from this study.

2.4.1 Empirical evidence of using the word learning theory

Various studies have been conducted and tested based on the validity and coherence of Ehri and McCormick's word learning theory. Miles (2018) uses world learning theory to support his argument that knowledge of an alphabetical system allows readers who are beginners to remember spelling and pronunciation in their mind during the reading process. The evidence from the study shows that high quality lexical representations positively influence learners' ability to recall words and spelling during their reading. It was also found that words learned with orthography are recalled better than those learned without orthography. A study investigating the move from the pre-alphabetic to the partial-alphabetic phase was performed among Israeli pre-school learners (Levin & Ehri, 2009). Many learners were able to read multiple words printed on cubbies in their classroom, but when the words were displayed in isolation, only few could identify letters and recognize words. The findings emerging from these studies emphasise the importance of alphabetic knowledge as a way of enabling novice readers in the pre-alphabetic phase to move to partial-alphabetic-phase reading.

2.5 Relevance of key conceptual frameworks to the present study

While this chapter has provided in-depth discussion on the theories framing this study, it was imperative to further illustrate the relevance of the key conceptual frameworks to the present

study. Table 2.1 provides an illustration of research sub-questions, a conceptual framework, the influence of a conceptual framework on research design, the influence of a conceptual framework on analysis and significant tools used to collect data.

Table 2.1: Relevance of key conceptual frameworks to the study

Research Question	Key Conceptual Framework (CF)	Influence of CF on Research Design	Influence of CF on Analysis	Significant Tool Employed
Question 1. **What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?**	Ehri and McCormick's Phases of Word Learning theory (2008)	Information to answer research sub-question 1 was collected from both primary data through qualitative research approach as well as existing secondary data.	The reading strategies recommended by the Phases of Word Learning theory such as the re-reading strategy, reading aloud and others were used to analyse the primary data on the reading strategies suggested by respondents of this study.	Non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data regarding the strategies currently in use for teaching IP isiZulu reading comprehension.
Question 2. **What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?**	Lexical Quality hypothesis (Perfetti, 2001). Word Learning theory (Ehri & McCormick, 2008)	Information answering this research question was gathered from primary data collected through qualitative research approach and partly secondary data. Information responding to this sub-research question was collected from the primary data of this study as well as secondary data from the literature.	Reading spelling comprehension which forms part of the representations of the Lexical hypothesis framing this study was used to further understand teachers' challenges in teaching and improving reading spelling among at-risk readers. The lenses of word learning theory which comprises four alphabetic phases: pre-alphabetic (Preschool), partial-alphabetic (Kindergarten), full-alphabetic (First Grade) and consolidated-alphabetic (Second Grade) were used to analyse the challenges encountered by teachers while teaching comprehension to at-risk readers.	No participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data about how reading teachers teach reading components to improve at-risk readers' reading skills. No participant classroom observations and teacher semi-structured interviews were used to note and understand teachers' challenges in using pedagogy strategies during reading instruction.

Question 3. How do isiZulu methodology lecturers prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools?	The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)	Information answering this research-sub question was obtained from primary data collected through qualitative research.	Simple view of reading influenced analysis of the data collected by providing an effective way in which both in-service teachers and pre-service teachers can identify at-risk readers and healthy-progress readers in the inclusive reading classroom based on the two key areas, language comprehension skills and word recognition skills.	In the case of simple view of reading, lecturers' semi-structured interviews were used to ascertain how pre-service teachers are prepared in their training to identify at-risk readers in the inclusive reading classroom.
Question 4. What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?	Ehri and McCormick's Phases of Word Learning theory (2008)	Information answering this research-sub-question was obtained from primary data collected through qualitative research.	The word learning theory, including some existing literature cited in this study alluding tothe effective reading pedagogical strategies, was used to compare and understand comprehensiveness, also identifying gaps on the reading strategies suggested by teachers.	Teacher semi-structured interviews are used to gather data from reading teachers on the suggested effective reading strategies for teaching reading comprehension skills.
Question 5. What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?	Ehri and McCormick's Phases of Word Learning theory (2008)	Information to answer this research-sub question were collected from both primary data through qualitative research approach and secondary data in the literature.	In this context, Ehri and McCormick's world learning theory were very helpful in the provision of effective pedagogical strategies that can be used by curriculum designers and policy makers. Thus, collected data will consist of teachers' views and their suggestions on what they think should be improved concerning to curriculum and policies currently in used.	Semi-structured interviews with lecturers and teachers were used to understand their perceptions and understanding progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practice in teaching reading.

Table 2.1 provides information on how the conceptual framework was used as a guide towards determining and analysing the findings of this study, including building a comprehensive research methodology. The research sub-questions are primarily linked to the conceptual framework with the purpose of ensuring that findings address the main challenges discussed by this study.

2.6 Conclusion

The theories discussed in this chapter (lexical quality hypothesis, phases of word learning theory and simple view of reading) moved from a broad scope to specific targeted reading comprehension components and comprehensive reading pedagogical instruction. This has allowed this study to navigate key aspects of reading comprehension, which include the role of high quality lexical representations, inferences, knowledge sources in reading and word identification.

This research maintains that to ensure that at-risk readers benefit effectively from the knowledge of the high-quality lexical representations in enhancing their reading skills, a comprehensive reading pedagogical strategy is fundamentally important in ensuring the practicality of acquiring reading skills. The phases of word learning theory sheds light on reading instruction practice and the role of a teacher during the process of developing reading skills. The four alphabetic phases established by Erhi and McCormick in the phases of word learning theory are essential for reading practice and developing fluency; hence they reflect each learner's level of reading, from the pre-alphabetic phase to the partial alphabetic phase. The word learning theory benefits this study, since it deals with learners who are still in their primary stage of reading and face reading problems. The simple view of reading highlights two reading elements: language comprehension and word recognition. Both these reading predicators are fundamentally important in the identification of at-risk readers so that teachers will be able to employ the correct pedagogical strategies to assist at-risk readers in their areas of reading deficiency.

The present study views these three theories (lexical quality hypothesis, word learning theory and the simple view of reading) as essential in developing comprehension skills for at-risk readers. In addition, these theories are relevant to achieving the objectives of this study, and they are used to interpret the findings of this study.

The following chapter discusses the context of at-risk readers in a broader perspective.

CHAPTER THREE: AT-RISK READERS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed three theories addressing reading comprehension: the lexical quality hypothesis, the word learning theory, and the simple view of reading approach. This chapter aims to unpack the concept of at-risk readers and discusses various factors that influence reading problems and constitute the conception of the at-risk reading. Several scholars have studied reading comprehension problems encountered by learners, particularly in under-resourced primary schools (Pretorius & Klapwijk 2016; Land 2015; Spaull 2016; Majoko & Phasha, 2018). According to Williams et al. (2023), reading difficulties experienced by learners can impact negatively on their schooling, even leading to them dropping out. This chapter begins by addressing issues of literacy in South Africa; followed by international assessments on reading literacy; an overview of studies focusing on at-risk readers at international, regional, local and provincial levels; factors to be taken into account when teaching at-risk readers; planning reading interventions that target at-risk readers and the challenges faced by at-risk readers in language learning.

3.2 Literacy in South Africa

Teaching literacy has been focusing on the cognitive consequences of literacy acquisition, where literacy was viewed to be a natural skill that do not require intensive attention in teaching (Chetty, 2019). The socio-cultural practice in literacy conceptualize literacy as an ideological practice, complicated in power relations and embedded in specific cultural meanings and practice (Chetty, 2019). Children begin learning about literacy in their homes, and this could be viewed as a socio- cultural practice. Learning literacy and socio-cultural knowledge should remain inseparable in order to develop a concrete literacy foundations. Moreover, parents have a prominent role in developing their children's literacy skills. This study deems the parents' role as important in developing a concrete literacy foundation preparing learners for their schooling.

Literacy is defined as having competence in reading and writing skills and being able to engage with the basic structures of language that form part of the learning process (Combrinck, Van Staden & Roux, 2014). Literacy encompasses four basic learning skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. This study focuses on one specific language skill, namely reading.

Reading remains a skill that is essential for the development of academic capabilities from primary to tertiary education. Basic literacy skills are prerequisite not only for academic development, but also for meaningful participation in society, economic development and lifelong learning (De Vos, Van der Merwe & Van der Mescht, 2014; Govender & Hugu, 2020).

South African studies have confirmed that education is currently facing severe challenges particularly in the development of literacy (Govender *et al*. 2014; Wilsenach, 2013; Naidoo, Reddy & Dorasamy, 2014; De Vos, Van der Merwe & Van der Mescht, 2014; Land 2015). South African learners in the primary grades demonstrate poor results and low literacy levels. The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2017) also maintains that poor literacy levels in primary schools pose a serious threat in the education context as a whole.

Various factors contribute to poor literacy levels in under-resourced schools. These factors include lack of parental involvement in children's literacy development, illiterate guardians and shortages of learning material (Chetty, 2019). Such factors prove that there is inadequate implementation of the Language in Education policy, which aims at sustaining learners' basic academic language development. Many under-resourced primary schools lack support structures for both teachers and learners, consequently impacting on learners' performance in literacy (Land, 2015).

The majority of literacy studies focus on literacy problems in English as a medium of instruction in most schools, but very few studies have been undertaken to understand literacy challenges in African languages and ascertain how South African learners are impacted by this crisis. The present study is conducted not only to unpack at-risk readers' challenges in comprehending isiZulu, but also to address the lack of literacy in African languages, specifically isiZulu.

3.2.1 Literacy in the Intermediate Phase

Pedagogical practices change when learners move from the Foundation Phase (FP) to the IP. At this level, different content subjects are taught using a variety of learning materials. The instruction in the IP is based solely on the whole class focusing on a different range of themes in the subject; hence learning resource materials such as textbooks play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

In the context of reading comprehension in the IP, it is essential for learners to have reading accuracy skills, oral reading fluency and the ability to read for meaning and enjoyment (Van

der Walt, 2021. Learners must have the ability to read the text for meaning using different reading strategies, describing their feelings based on the text, discussing the text, interpreting visual texts, comprehending and responding suitably to the text (Naidoo et al., 2014).

Pretorius and Stoffelsma (2017) argue that the shift to IP extends beyond the perimeters of a language switch, as learners transition from having only one teacher in the classroom to having multiple teachers teaching different subjects. Learners are exposed to a range of academic texts as they are expected to begin reading to learn rather than learning to read (Pretorius & Stoffelsma, 2017). This transition justifies the need to also ensure the credibility and quality of reading pedagogy strategies in the IP classroom and that teachers are equipped with effective pedagogical content knowledge to prepare learners for a smooth transition.

3.3 International assessments on reading

The weak academic performance demonstrated by South African learners in literacy assessments is well documented in the systematic reports such as the Annual National Assessment (ANA) report, international reports based on the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) and the South African Results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Figure 3.1 presents PIRLS 2021 results for Grades 4 and 6 achievements by language of test.

Grades 4 and 6 PIRLS achievement by language of test (PIRLS 2023)

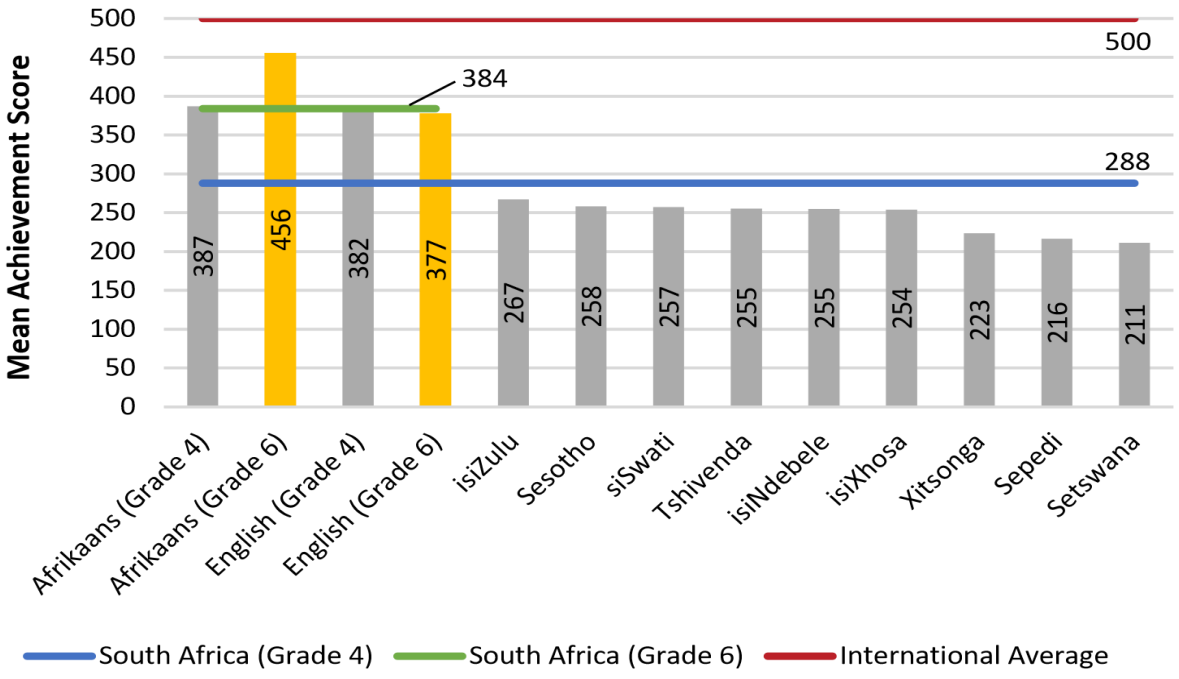


Figure 3.1: Grade 4 and 6 PIRLS achievement by language of test (PIRLS 2023)

(Adapted from PIRLS, 2023)

Figure 3 shows that Afrikaans received a score of 387 at the Grade 4 level, while English received a score of 382. Only these languages have test scores higher than the 288 average for South Africa. IsiZulu (267) and the other African languages are scored lower than average. Afrikaans (456) is the only language in Grade 6 that scores higher than the 384-point national average. The national averages for Grades 4 and 6 are both below the international mean achievement score of 500, which is a serious cause for concern, even though the national mean scores for Afrikaans and English are higher than those for African languages.

According to Spaull (2016), one of the primary causes of the low proficiency in African languages is the early pushing of learners to acquiring a new language, such as Afrikaans or English, even when they have not developed enough literacy skills in their native language. This exacerbates the low literacy rates in African languages. The data in Figure 3.1 demonstrate the need for providing reading materials in all languages and providing educators with thorough pedagogical training in order to teach reading at the primary school level. By doing this, learners might be in a better position to advance their mother-tongue proficiency as well as their language skills in Afrikaans or English (Ntshangase, 2023).

3.4 Perspectives on at-risk readers

Various studies across the world have been conducted to examine the reading process and identify potential risks that lead to reading comprehension difficulties (Martins & Capellini, 2021; Ngwaru & Oluga, 2015; Land, 2015). Reading problems have been declared a national crisis in South Africa that needs to be dealt with urgently to secure the future of children. Therefore, this section reviews studies on at-risk readers at the international, regional, local and provincial level.

3.4.1 At-risk readers: International context

In the United States text word comprehension, reading fluency, word decoding, phonics, phonemic awareness have been cited as important elements needed for learners to build their reading comprehension skills (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000). While the NRP also encourages reading motivation, reading components remain the major elements needed by learners to develop reading comprehension. The Common Core State Standard (2016) states

that reading fluency and word identification are foundational competencies for learners in their early grades that are important in reading development. These two competencies must be taught in the early reading grades to avoid persistent reading challenges in the upper grades.

Rasinski (2018) examined the reading performance of primary grade learners who were identified as being at-risk readers and were further recommended for traditional pedagogical instruction. The results of that study revealed that reading fluency was the major problem hindering learners' reading progress. Valencia and Riddle-Buly (2004) examined 100 learners who performed below the acceptable level in reading. These learners had difficulties in comprehending grade-appropriate texts. Learners were assessed in a variety of literacy tasks in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses in reading and language processing. It was reported that only 18% of learners were identified as proficient readers and possessed the ability to demonstrate sufficient word-recognition skills and fluency. The remaining 82% were identified as being underachievers in reading proficiency and were considered as having difficulties in word identification. If learners in the primary grades do not master foundational reading such as fluency and word identification, they are most likely going to continue being disengaged when it comes to reading in the upper grades.

Leach, Scarborough and Rescorla (2003) examined the profile of Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners labelled as 'late emerging' in one primary school. Approximately 67% of the late emerging learners were found to be deficient in word-level processing. In another study conducted by Dennis (2012) examining the reading development of 94 learners from Grade 6, 7 and 8 who were assessed as below proficient on a state standardized reading proficiency examination, 67% of learners were found to be illiterate in word identification and reading fluency. Hock et al. (2009) examined 200 learners who were identified as struggling and 96% encountered problems in word identification, word meaning vocabulary and reading fluency.

Hernandez (2011) found that learners from a deprived economic background often perform extremely poorly not only in reading but for entire academic subjects. Although this study was done in the US context, the findings resonate with the South African context. Many learners from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds receive very little or no support in dealing with their schooling challenges. Very few interventions have been implemented to minimise the impact of poor academic achievements.

The studies conducted in the USA confirm that word identification and reading fluency are the pillars of reading development. The position of this study is that the reading elements

(vocabulary, decoding, word recognition, phonological awareness, morpheme, phonics, semantic act) are fundamental in development of reading skills. These elements of reading correlate and depend on one another to form a comprehensive reading skill. In addition, teachers need to take these skills into account to ensure quality teaching, taking into account that social factors such as poor economic background affect learners' success in learning to read.

3.4.2 At-risk readers: Sub-Saharan context

Global data from United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) indicate that 85% of children in the Sub-Saharan region are illiterate. Ghana, a former British colony, has an adult literacy rate of 71,6%, which is far below the UNESCO global literacy rate of 86.6% (UNESCO, 2017). These statistics are of great concern and need to be addressed. To address this crisis, Ghana has undertaken an initiative to improve reading performance and the quality of reading pedagogical instructions in rural primary schools, working together with Ghana's Ministry of Education and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

A study that was conducted by the Southern Africa Consortium for Measuring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) in about 15 African countries, including Ghana, Zambia, Botswana, Lesotho, Uganda, showed that many children lack adequate grade-level reading skills, while others cannot read at all. It remains unclear as to what exactly the problem is. Is it that he children in Africa are not amenable to literacy training, for various reasons? Are our curricula too inflexible? Could it be that most African teachers did not receive adequate training to address this deficiency?

Lack of reading material in most schools in Africa contributes fundamentally to the development of reading problems. Availability of reading material in schools increases learners' interest in reading, not only for academic purposes but also for enjoyment and pleasure (Makuwa, 2005; Nengomasha, Uutoni & Yule, 2012; Siririka, 2007; Smith et al., 2008. Therefore, it is worth emphasising that with poor access to resources and lack of reading material in schools, it is most unlikely that children will ever develop reading competence.

A study conducted by Ngwaru and Oluga (2015) in under-resourced communities in Tanzania noted the extent to which school infrastructure, buildings, ecology, teaching and learning materials as well as teachers' competence to implement effective teaching practices impact on

literacy learning. A study in Kenya (Piper, Zuilkowski & Ong'ele, 2015) found that poverty, poor literacy skills and inadequate pedagogical instruction drastically reduces opportunities for poor children to be successful in education. In other words, poor resources and materials in schools influence reading achievements significantly.

3.4.3 At-risk readers: South African context

It is often said that most black South African teachers are the product of the notorious apartheid Bantu Education system. These teachers could be well trained to teach reading in English and Afrikaans but demonstrate low levels of competence in teaching reading in African languages.

A study conducted by Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) reviewed local studies on reading comprehension teaching and gathered data from teachers about how they perceive themselves as skilled readers. The responses were then matched with Annual National Assessments (ANA) results in their schools. The results revealed that many teachers documented poor ANA results. Furthermore, teachers did not demonstrate a deep understanding of reading concepts, reading methodology or reading development. Thus, teachers who teach literacy have not themselves developed the necessary reading skills, resulting in a vicious cycle of under-performance of teaching and learning reading in schools.

Pretorius and Mokhwesana (2009) and the National Education Development Unit (NEEDU) (2013) note that South African teachers are not adequately trained to teach reading in African languages. One of the reasons behind is that there is a paucity of research conducted on reading in African languages (Land, 2015), but there is more research on reading English. Hence, pre-service teaching training is manifested by methods that favour teaching reading in English, whose linguistic structure is different from that of South African indigenous languages. The body of research on learners' acquisition of reading skills in South African indigenous languages has yet to grow significantly (Pretorius & Mampuru, 2007; Verbeek, 2010, Van Rooy & Pretorius, 2013).

Govender (2010) analysed three Grade 1 literacy classrooms to identify pedagogical reasons for the poor reading performance that seem to be dominating South African primary education. The findings of the study showed that teachers do not often assist learners to acquire reading skills. They do not teach reading for meaning and understanding. The lack of focus on the development of reading for meaning and understanding partly explains the existence of at-risk readers.

3.4.4 At-risk readers: KwaZulu-Natal context

The KwaZulu-Natal province is among the South African provinces facing numerous education challenges which continues to impede learners' academic performance. The DOE Annual Report 2022/23 states that 53% of children with severe learning challenges do not attend schools and of those with moderate learning challenges such as reading comprehension difficulties, 53% do not perform well in their schooling (Majoko & Phasha, 2018: 26). At least 76% of children with learning challenges in KZN may not be receiving proper schooling (Majoko & Phasha, 2018: 11). The report found that among the many problems affecting education in KZN one could include the lack of training for teachers and principals, insufficient support for district departments, poor infrastructure, unavailability of school transport, inflexible pedagogical strategies, poor monitoring, lack of motivation and insufficient assessment support. All these challenges have a great impact on academic literacy.

The Reading Policy Guidelines for the KZNDoE (2005, cited in Mhlongo (2019) found that learners in Grade 6 (Intermediate Phase) obtained poor reading scores not only in languages but also in other academic subjects. These findings are associated with the unfavourable learning conditions and poor access to quality education. The Audit of South African school libraries revealed that there is a shortage of isiZulu reading books stocked by libraries (Mhlongo, 2019).

Pretorius and Machet (2004), stress that learners in well-resourced schools have the advantage of attaining a high level of reading skills as opposed to learners from rural underprivileged schools. The scarcity of fundamental learning resources has a devastating outcome in learners' academic performance. A study carried out by Ramdan (2015) on factors jeopardizing teachers' ability to teach reading in primary schools discovered that the main challenges encountered by teachers are associated with the unavailability of learning resources in schools. However, it is worth noting that the problem of the unavailability of learning resources may not be limited only to KZN province but to the entire country.

When less privileged schools are provided with sufficient learning equipment such as storybooks, and teachers and learners are motivated, they produce good results. Many rural schools are too poor to buy print resources such as storybooks on their own but require financial assistance. It is essential that rural schools must be provided with functioning libraries to improve the quality of education, in turn affording learners the opportunity to produce sound grade-level academic results.

3.5 At-risk readers in mainstream schools

In South African education, a mainstream school is a regular neighbourhood school that all learners attend (DoE, 2014). At the IP level, learners read for educational purposes; hence it is critical that they understand the material and draw conclusions from it (Reed & Lynn, 2016). Learners who do not acquire reading skills at an age-appropriate level may grow to detest reading. Academic development is significantly impacted as learners advance through higher grades, if they are unable to develop the requisite reading abilities at the IP level. These learners are also more likely to experience reading difficulties in later grades. Teachers who fail to implement the required reading methods at the IP level presume that language classes will address this at a later stage (Akhondi, Malayeri & Samad, 2011). Consequently, many learners tend to encounter difficulties deriving meaning from the content of the text provided as the content becomes more complex (Reed & Lynn, 2016).

According to Martins and Capellini (2021), at-risk readers are learners who have very low reading proficiency, which means that they read far below grade level. Knight et al. (2017) define at-risk readers are learners who will have difficulties developing their reading comprehension, fluency, word reading and/or language reasoning skills later in life. These learners lack proficiency in a variety of reading domains, such as phonemics, vocabulary, word identification, phonological awareness, syllable awareness and fluency. A teacher can designate a learner as an at-risk reader based on ongoing observations of the learner while they read, tracking the student's growth in comprehension, fluency and confidence, as well as their effective and reading accuracy (Knight et al., 2017).

According to Bharuthram (2012), many students struggle to keep up with the academic reading requirements even by the time they attend university. This could be because students' reading difficulties from primary school frequently persist into secondary and post-secondary education. Higher education institutions in South Africa report similar findings. Pretorius (2000) found that a large number of University of South Africa (UNISA) Sociology and Psychology students had poor reading comprehension, scoring below 60% for comprehension and below 90% for decoding accuracy. Reading difficulties were only detected at university level (Ngwenya, 2010; Nel, Dreyer & Klopper, 2004). These results confirm the necessity of reading development at the primary school level and highlight the need for highly qualified primary school teachers who can help at-risk readers in mainstream classrooms by helping them acquire the essential reading abilities.

3.5.1 Identifying at-risk readers in the mainstream classrooms

The ability to identify at-risk readers in the classroom has been a challenge for many teachers teaching reading comprehension. This is because of the limited measures that can be used by teachers to assess learners' reading skills effectively. The unavailability of reading measures may lead to a further drastic decline in reading performance. Nonetheless, different methods to identify at-risk readers in classroom have been used in various countries and these can be reviewed for adaptation in the South African education context.

Brazil's Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) "measures growth in specific areas of basic knowledge and skills and assesses the effects of instruction programs" (Martins & Capellini, 2021: 2). The CMB emphasizes that assessment should be based on what has been taught; this notion has been used frequently in the field of special education (Martins & Cappelini, 2021: 2). The CBM seeks to suggest simple measures for academic competence that can be used by teachers quickly and effectively (Martins & Capelini, 2021: 2). Furthermore, it aims to provide an overview of each learner's academic development as well as their potential academic difficulties.

To identify at-risk readers, the Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) is applied and it provides analyses regarding the number of words read correctly per minute [WCPM] (Martine & Capellini, 2021). ORF focuses on two of the three aspects of fluency, namely rate and accuracy which enable the learner to read a particular grade-level passage that they have not read before. To calculate the WCPM, mistakes made in one minute are subtracted to determine the number of words read (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). This method measures reading development and enables teachers to measure learners' literacy progress in basic reading, writing, speaking and expression skills (Rasinski, 2004). The outcomes of WCPM measures can assist in screening not only for at-risk readers but also for healthy progress readers (Hasbrouck & Tindal 2006).

Alves et al. (2019) recommend the use of semi-automatic and instantaneous reading fluency analysis to assess and monitor learners' reading comprehension skills. The purpose of this analysis is to identify reading difficulties such as dyslexia. Brazil developed an assessment called the Reading Fluency Performance which assesses reading difficulty levels from the first to the fourth grades (Martins & Capellini, 2018).

Many studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of some of the methods discussed above. Reading assessments should be reliable in reflecting learners' performance in reading particularly for primary grades (Valencia & Riddle-Buly, 2010). These methods are

regarded as the most effective in identifying learners' reading difficulties. Given their effectiveness in identifying reading difficulties, it is worth suggesting the adaptation of these approaches to the South African inclusive reading context. Teachers will be able to further identify learners' strengths and weaknesses in isiZulu reading comprehension, and then apply the appropriate pedagogies that will aid in improving reading skills.

3.6 Factors to be considered when teaching at-risk readers

Studies on reading comprehension have not made a distinction between a reading pedagogy for healthy-progress learners and a pedagogy tailored to meet the needs of at-risk readers (Knight et al., 2017). The majority of reading instruction targets readers who are making good progress. This suggests that there is a need for more appropriate pedagogical approaches to address the reading difficulties that at-risk readers encounter in mainstream schools.

The Matthew effect in poor reading (Stanovich, 1986) describes learners who detest reading precisely because they are illiterate. Figure 3.2 illustrates the negative cycle that at-risk readers go through.



Figure 3.2: The Matthew effect in poor reading

(Adapted from Pretorius and Murray, 2018)

When at-risk readers do not receive proper remediation, they read less and gain less knowledge and enjoyment from reading than the healthy progress readers gain. They consequently do not

acquire vocabulary, background knowledge, or understanding of the structure of reading material. When the necessary support is not given, at-risk readers may fall into a vicious cycle as illustrated in Figure 3.2. Furthermore, the at-risk readers experience increasing resistance to reading and reading failure.

Teaching reading should incorporate strategies that focus on at-risk readers and provide guidance on how a teacher should provide extra support most effectively. Four key challenges faced by at-risk readers because of unsuccessful teaching are:

a) Mastery: difficulties in initially mastering skills;
b) Automaticity: difficulties in becoming automatic readers;
c) Generalisation: failing to generalise skills for effective use in diverse contexts; and
d) Maintenance: forgetting skills that have been learned. (Adapted from Galletly, 2017)

While it is critical that teachers identify at-risk readers, doing so should be accompanied with a successful intervention that makes use of timely repair techniques to promote successful, engaged learning. In order to ensure that instruction is always expertly differentiated to maximize the learning gains of at-risk readers, a teacher must possess the ability to quickly and easily adapt learner activities both during the planning phase and during instruction.

Compared to healthy progress readers, at-risk readers have low working memory and cognitive capacities (Gathercole & Alloway, 2007). Therefore, in order to prevent overloading at-risk readers with limited processing ability, teachers should appropriately control content and task loads. In order for at-risk readers to make strong reading progress, they must spend a lot of time learning and practising, thus teachers need to make sure that the learning experience is enjoyable, motivating and engaging. Teachers in the IP must support at-risk readers. For learners to comprehend their unique reading difficulties and feel firmly supported, it is imperative that teachers also offer strong emotional support as part of the reading instruction process.

In the IP, learners read to advance their cognitive learning even as they acquire reading skills (Le Cordeur, 2010). Extrapolating from this, at-risk readers may need support from their teachers as they tackle more difficult texts that call for a higher level of reading proficiency. Knowing that their teachers are aware of how challenging it is for them to learn and that they should be rewarded for their efforts gives at-risk readers confidence (Galletly, 2017).

These elements suggest that teaching at-risk readers to read should be seen as a long-term objective. Teachers must be well informed about the curriculum requirements and be able to recognize the difficulties faced by at risk-readers. Understanding the curriculum enables the teacher to develop literacy skills that support learning across different learning areas, while an awareness of individual learner challenges enables the teacher to provide effective interventions. Teachers are able to concentrate on developing reading subskills when they acknowledge that the development of literacy among at-risk readers is a long-term process. Pre-service teacher education must provide particular direction in order for teachers to understand the different aspects influencing teaching reading to at-risk readers.

3.7 Planning a reading intervention targeting at-risk readers

An intervention in this context can be defined as a plan adopted to tackle the reading problems identified in the at-risk reader. The reading intervention plan often lasts for specific period of time. Planning the reading intervention requires a specific sitting arrangement where learners are typically put in small reading groups, peer reading or pair reading, depending on their needs. A teacher who understands the learners' reading difficulties should plan for extra time to work with the learners outside of classroom time while other learners continue with their normal academic activities. It is of great importance that a teacher creates opportunities for learners to read for enjoyment. At-risk readers struggle to move at the same pace as healthy progress readers. They require additional reading instruction which can be arranged before, after school or during holidays.

The DBE (2020) provides four key lesson intervention plans, which are outlined below.

- The lesson intervention plan must re-introduce the learning in a progressive and developmental manner. In other words, random reading activities should not be introduced, but the activities should be in line with what has already been taught in a classroom, but which has not yet been assimilated by the learner.
- The teacher should understand what the learner knows, correct the problem and build up comprehensive reading skills, bridging the identified gaps and creating understanding.
- In a case a where learner repeats a grade, change the pedagogical practice so it is not just a repetition of what was not understood.
- Before moving to another step, the teacher should ensure that learners have acquired important reading skills. For example, a learner may struggle to acquire letter-sound

knowledge; at this juncture a teacher must focus on phonics and all the letters in a systematic manner while ensuring that the learners fully understand and remember letters already taught before revising new ones.

3.8 Challenges faced by at-risk readers in language learning

In the majority of South African schools, learners use their home language in the FP, and the language of instruction changes on transitioning from FP to IP. Despite the constitutional obligation mandating everyone to learn and access quality education in their language of choice, many learners still learn in a language which is not their home language and reading problems tend to be masked as language proficiency issues (Land, 2015). An associated assumption is that when learners have difficulty using reading as a tool for learning, then their comprehension problems are understood to be a product of limited language proficiency rather than inadequate reading skills. Such reading difficulties are often misdiagnosed as language proficiency difficulties.

While there is a connection between language proficiency and ability to read, it should be noted that they are not synonymous. As Pretorius and Machet (2004: 47) stress, poor literacy achievement cannot only be associated with second-language instruction, because teachers and learners also experience challenges with African languages literacy. This has been confirmed with the PIRLS (2022/23) findings regarding poor achievement in African languages reading. Many IP learners possess the ability to speak fluently in their home language but often struggle to read adequately.

This study advocates that more literacy development opportunities must be made available in African languages. Learners develop competence in the second language by mastering their home language (Mezrigui, 2011: 243; Ntshangase, 2023).

3.9 Teaching inclusive reading in mainstream schools

According to Berkeley and Larsen (2018), inclusive reading is the capacity to teach reading skills in a classroom with both at-risk and healthy-progress readers by utilizing inclusive pedagogical instruction that meets the needs of all learners. According to the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), the idea of an inclusive education involves teaching learners who have been diagnosed with learning difficulties in the same classroom as students who do not have such issues.

Diversity and inclusion are promoted in university teacher education programmes. Recently graduated teachers have found it difficult to support varied learning in the classroom without proper training for inclusive learning (including inclusive reading) (Mengual-Andrés, Lopez-Torrijo & Viana-Orta, 2015; Subban & Mahlo, 2017). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) offers a "framework for standardization of the procedures to identify, assess, and provide programs for all learners who require additional support" in the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Help Policy (SIAS) (DBE, 2014:37).

Guidelines for identifying and screening students who need extra help because of learning disabilities are provided under the SIAS policy (DBE, 2014). The South African education system has made an effort to create a policy that encourages the inclusion of these learners in the classroom, but it is still unclear how teachers should really put inclusive policies into effect. Moreover, the policy does not include precise instructions on how inclusive reading should be taught in regular schools, and neither do reading initiatives like the Early Grade Reading Assignment and the National Ready Strategy.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has unpacked the notion of at-risk readers and discussed various factors which lead to reading difficulties in learners. The chapter also discussed ways to address reading difficulties and suggests necessary interventions to develop reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers. From the literature discussed in this chapter it has emerged that many studies on reading problems so far have focused on English reading problems but hardly on African languages. The following chapter presents various components that learners need to acquire to develop reading skills and also sheds light on pre-service teacher preparation for teaching inclusive reading in isiZulu home language to at-risk readers.

CHAPTER FOUR: STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING ISIZULU READING COMPREHENSION

4.1 Introduction

The characteristics of at-risk readers were discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter provides a broad overview of the literature related to reading comprehension. This is intended to clarify the pedagogical approaches that can be recommended as effective for teaching comprehension skills to at-risk readers at the Intermediate Phase level in mainstream schools. The first section of the literature review addresses components of reading comprehension; the second section discusses factors that impede reading development; the third discusses reading strategies suitable for teaching African languages; the fourth section outlines current policies governing the inclusion of reading skills; the last section discusses the role of teacher education programmes in preparing pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading in mainstream schools.

4.2 Components of reading comprehension

The components of reading comprehension are covered extensively in this section. For the benefit of reading teachers as well as at-risk readers, the reading components covered in this section help to explain how to develop comprehensive comprehension skills (see Figure 4.1).

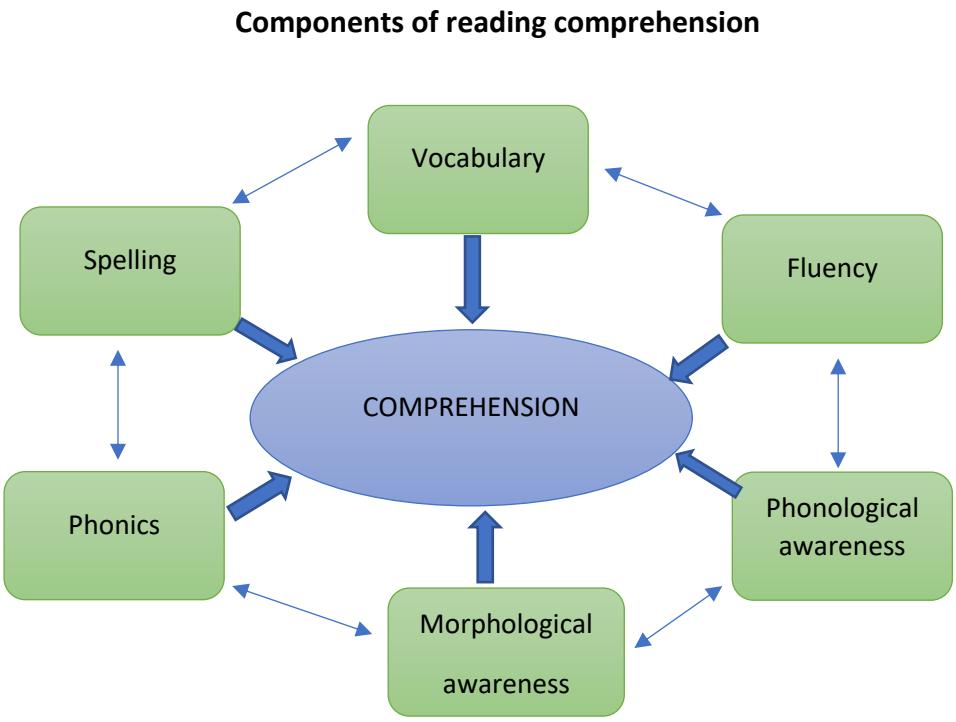


Figure 4.1: Components of reading comprehension

The various integrated reading components shown in Figure 4.1 are essential to the development of reading comprehension skills. Each of these reading components helps with overall comprehension, and they function collaboratively to contribute to reading comprehension. For the teacher, they offer useful guidelines that can be used to teach these skills in the classroom. These reading components are very important to reading teachers, because understanding them helps teachers to identify at-risk readers and evaluate the reading curriculum.

The National Reading Strategy (2008) highlights phonemics, vocabulary, fluency, phonics and comprehension as some of the reading components that can address the reading crisis. These instructional techniques may be adequate to encourage a healthy progression in reading abilities, but they might not go far enough in addressing the difficulties that at-risk reader face. The discussion that follows goes into more detail about the scope of each component and offers instructional strategies.

4.2.1 Vocabulary and background knowledge

The words we use in a language are referred to as our vocabulary (Liu & Zhang, 2018).

Vocabulary entails the capacity of a person to identify, comprehend and use specific words with the greatest precision in reading comprehension. Skilled readers frequently have extensive vocabularies, which help them read words fluently and comprehend their meaning with ease. This suggests that having a large vocabulary is crucial for learners' reading development, because it helps them interpret words that are unfamiliar. Furthermore, a wide vocabulary is essential for learners because they interpret the words they encounter in print using their oral language (Sidik & Masek, 2021). Before attempting to understand what they are reading, learners must first understand the definition of the word.

Phonological knowledge is necessary for vocabulary instruction as it ensures that words are pronounced correctly and that their morphemes are broken up correctly into their constituent parts. According to Van der Merwe (2011), reading teachers must be conversant with semantic organization as well as the relationships between word structure (morphology), grammatical rules and spelling (orthography). Word knowledge encompasses more than just knowing what a word means and how to use it effectively in conversation (Liu & Zhang. 2018). Teachers must provide thorough examples when helping learners develop their vocabulary for reading comprehension (Sidik & Masek, 2018). In the classroom, using both direct and indirect vocabulary instruction, assists learners in developing their reading comprehension skills. While indirect vocabulary instruction is based on frequent oral language engagement, such as hearing parents read aloud to their children and from extensive independent reading, direct vocabulary instruction helps learners to decode challenging words and develop an understanding of their meaning (Sidik & Masek, 2018).

For words to be effectively learned, they must be carefully selected, correctly connected to the curriculum content, and encountered over an extended period of time in a variety of contexts (Van der Merwe, 2011; Verbeek, 2011; Moats et al., 2010; Liu & Zhang, 2018) Children's language experiences may be adversely affected by the socioeconomic status of their families (Verbeek, 2011; Land, 2015; Abadzi, 2006). Compared to their affluent peers, children from impoverished homes frequently receive less word exposure. When learners use a language other than their mother tongue as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), these problems are typically made worse. Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) found that there is a 15 000-word difference between privileged and underprivileged learners in the United States. Similarly, it is clear that learners' academic performance is impacted by the range of their vocabulary.

4.2.2 Fluency instruction

According to Moats et al. (2010:24), fluency is the capacity to read a text accurately, smoothly, and with attention to proper pronunciation and intonation. When readers have fully developed language and cognitive skills to read accurately and respond to the prosody of the text, they are said to be reading fluently. As fluent readers learn to determine and identify words accurately and automatically, while focusing on comprehension, fluency is seen as a bridge between reading comprehension and word recognition (Young et al., 2015). Cultivating a fluent reader requires taking into account three fluency components: (i) prosody (ii) speed (iii) and accuracy (Moats et al., 2010). Figure 4.2 shows the bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension.

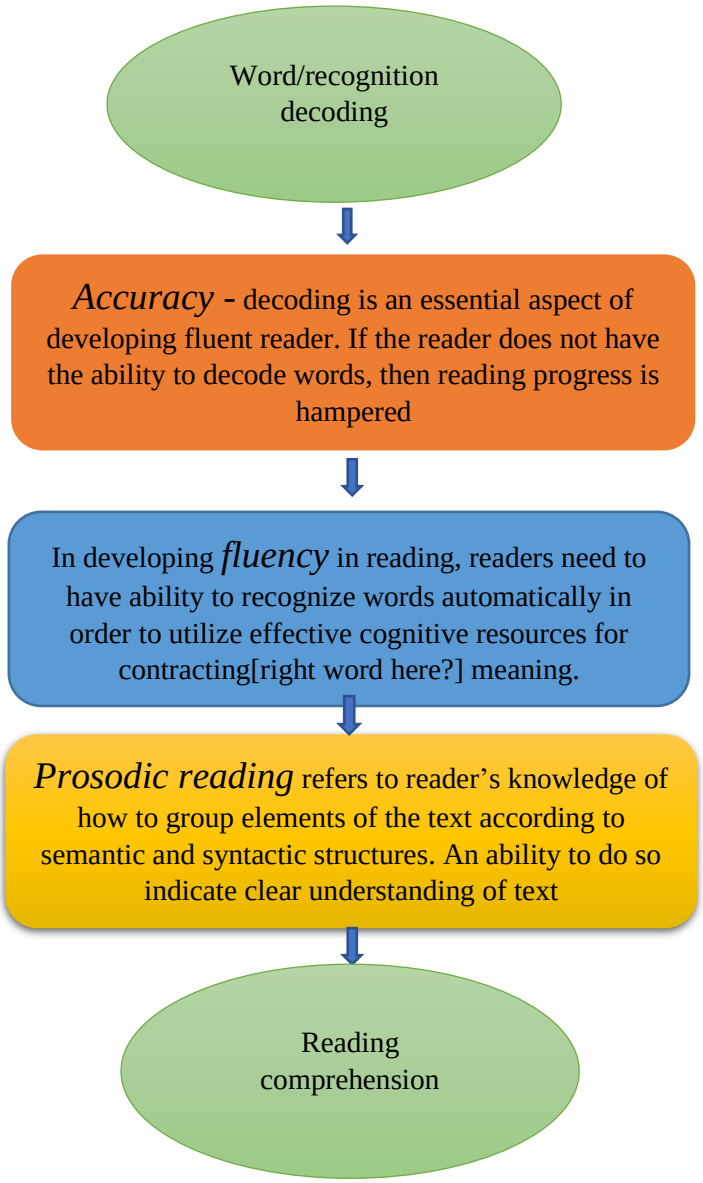


Figure 4.2: The bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension

(Adapted from Rasinski and Mraz, 2008: 115)

It is essential for learners to develop accuracy in isiZulu reading in order to correctly recognize and decode words. In isiZulu, for instance, if one reads the word *Ngiyanithanda* ('I love you' in plural form) instead of *Ngiyayithanda* ('I love it' (the cat)), someone listening will likely misunderstand the text. Failure to ensure accuracy may distort the intended meaning. The rate at which learners read a text determines their level of decoding knowledge (DBE, 2020). The Nguni languages are agglutinative, which means that they have a conjunctive writing system. Learners learning isiZulu are expected to create longer words than those learning English. There are various ways to confirm the fluency of reading in different language groups such as Nguni languages, the Sesotho language grouping, and Xitsonga and Tshivenda.

Prosody, on the other hand, entails reading at a normal pace and following the required grammatical rules, including pausing when appropriate (DBE, 2020). When reading with prosody in mind, learners are more likely to grasp the main idea of the sentence and then pronounce it correctly (Van der Merwe, 2011). Because of the tonal qualities of African languages, prosody is crucial when reading them (DBE, 2020). For instance, in isiZulu, the word *Ithanga* can refer to a pumpkin, thigh or grazing land, depending on the tone used. Additional examples could be the word *Ubonile* (in low tone), where the prefix vowel "U" indicates that you have seen, and *Ubonile* (in high tone), where the prefix vowel "U" indicates that she or he has seen.

Automatic recognition of words is paramount for enhancing reading comprehension (Verbeek, 2010, Moats et al., 2010). According to Abadzi (2006), a proficient reader must be able to comprehend the meaning of the text by reading at least seven words in approximately six seconds because of the short-term memory required for word and meaning comprehension. If the speed of reading is below 60 words per minute, the reader automatically fails to recall what was said initially and this hampers reading comprehension. In order for learners to reach this level in preparation for Intermediate Phase classes, they must receive the maximum amount of support.

However, this study may adopt a different perspective on the reading rate from that of Abadzi (2006), in the sense that it is common that readers often read at different paces for various reasons, even when reading the same text. For example, a study conducted by Weaver (2002) investigated the relationship between the types of miscues that happen during reading and the

rate of reading. Their findings revealed that pauses and regressions in reading are connected to the ability to effectively construct meaning. In other words, by the time a reader pays more attention to the construction of meaning, the longer the time is expected to be spent on the text. Even those who are proficient readers may be unable to read fluently when reading to comprehend.

Some readers are not classified as fluent even though they read with a high degree of accuracy. This could be caused by various factors, including a lack of fluency in reading prior to starting school or a lack of practice in reading and the application of suitable reading strategies to teach fluency. To address this, phonology, morphology, orthography and semantics are the four lexical representatives that teachers need to be aware of. These components are a part of the lexical quality hypothesis, one of the frameworks guiding this study. Lexical representatives are the linguistic components that are linked to fluency. They also effectively help in the development of word recognition skills during reading comprehension. Figure 4.3 illustrates key components of phonological awareness.

Representation of phonological awareness

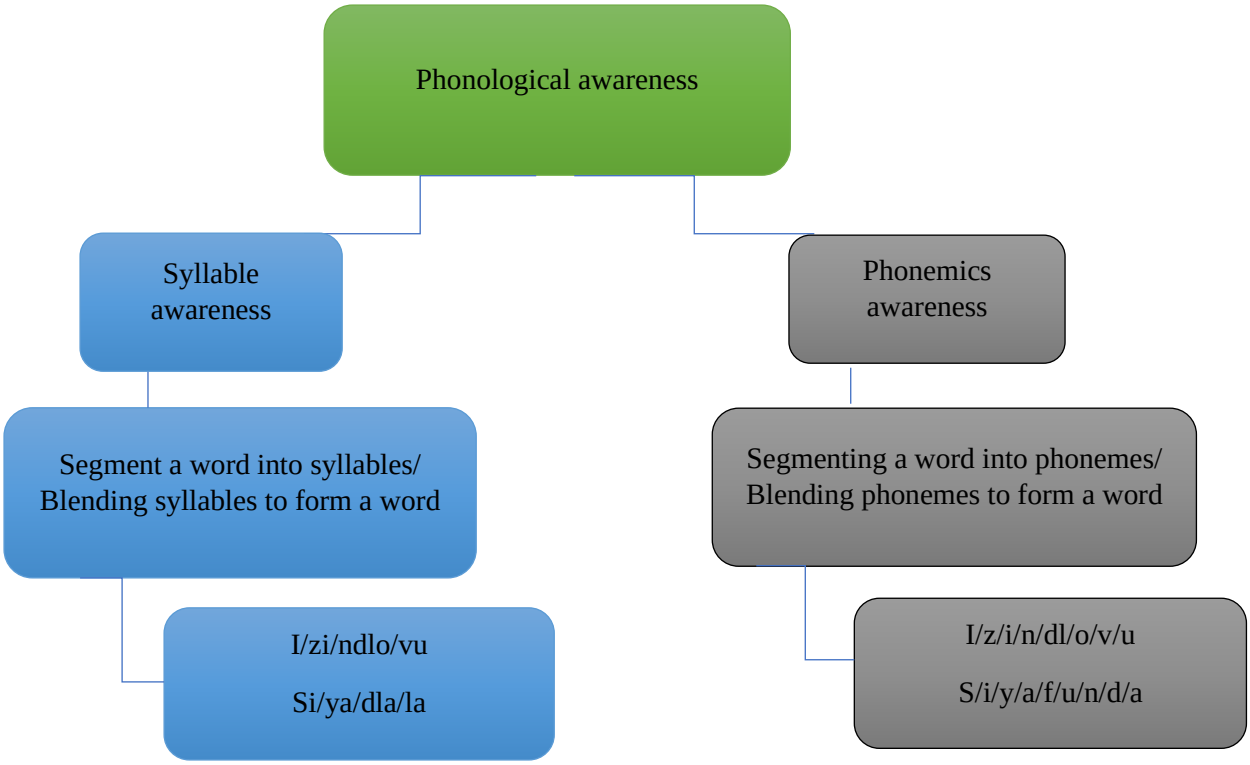


Figure 4.3: Representation of phonological awareness

According to Milankov et al. (2021: 3), phonological awareness is the ability to identify,

process, and manipulate phonological units that compose spoken words of different complexity and size. Liberman (1973) found a correlation between first-grade reading proficiency and an individual's ability to segment phonemes, or the individual sounds in a word. While those who struggled to segment the word during the test were classified as at-risk readers, the majority of learners who were able to tap out each individual sound were considered skilled readers. According to Murphy (2016), speakers constantly develop a heightened sensitivity to smaller phonological structures in words, which is how the hierarchy of word phonological structure is conceptualized. As seen in Figure 4.3, phonological structure is a component of phonemic awareness and syllable awareness.

4.2.3 Phonemics awareness

Phonemic awareness—which concentrates on identifying the sound in the word—is sometimes used interchangeably with phonological awareness. Phonemes are crucial for understanding alphabetical principles, spelling and phonemics, as they are recognized as units of sound that correspond to the letters of an alphabet (Schaefer, Probert & Rees, 2020). When learners develop a solid foundation in phonemic awareness, it becomes easier for them to understand that particular letters correspond to particular sounds. Learners can decode written text into letter sounds by storing them in their memory and then blending them into words. Explicit instruction in phonemic awareness is necessary (Lacabex & Gallardo-del-Puerto, 2020; Schaefer et al., 2020; Wilsenach, 2019). The activities used to teach phonological awareness should support segmentation, addition, deleting, substituting and blending. DBE (2020) provides examples of the various phoneme types and their illustrations.

- Phoneme blending referred blending individual sounds into a word, for example in isiZulu, *i/s/i/s/u* into *isisu* meaning stomach.
- Phoneme segmentation is defined as the ability to break apart the individual sounds which form part of a word or syllable. For example, *isisu* into *i/s/i/s/u*. Being able to do this indicates a decoding skill.
- Phoneme addition, referred to a process of adding new phoneme to the prefix or suffix of a word to create a new different word with different meaning. Example, saying the word ***bo****nke*, then repeating it using /*Z*/ instead of /*b*/ will mean ***Zo****nke.*
- Phoneme deletion referred to a process of removing a phoneme from a word to create a new different word. Example, *Uhleka* without */U/* will be -*Hleka*.

4.2.4 Syllable awareness

Syllables are defined as units of uninterrupted sound (Müller, Richter & Karageorgos, 2020; Land, 2015). These vowel sounds often come together to form words; thus, every word is made up of syllables. After every syllable identified in a word, there is a natural break where the reader will insert a short pause during the pronunciation of words. There are two kinds of syllables: closed syllables and open syllables. Closed syllables are typical of the English language whilst open syllables characterise African languages (Land, 2015).

This study focuses on open syllables to provide comprehensive examples for isiZulu reading teachers. Usually, the open syllables conclude with a single, long-sounding vowel. They should contain only one consonant, such as "**ba**-ba," in between an open syllable and the subsequent vowel. Since African languages have open word structures, syllables frequently end in a vowel. For example the word *siyasebenza* meaning we are working, *S/i/ya/se/be/nza/* and *Imoto*, meaning car, *I/mo/to/* and *uyafunda* meaning she/he is studying, *U/ya/fu/nda*. According to Anthony et al. (2003), phonological awareness grows over time. The most crucial linguistic component of reading, as previously mentioned, is phoneme awareness (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012). A reader can take advantage of letter sound-mapping during the decoding process, because words are composed of individual sounds, or phonemes (Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012).

Agglutinative terms found in isiZulu may be difficult to understand for learners in lower grades, including those in the Intermediate Phase. The use of successful reading techniques in the classroom is essential to achieving reading fluency. By addressing African linguistic repertoires, strategies can be used to determine the efficacy of reading. The study suggests that the adoption of European pedagogies to develop reading skills in African languages is one of the main causes of low reading literacy in African languages. Treating European pedagogies as universally valid pedagogical strategies – as if what is true of these pedagogies is also applicable to the acquisition of African languages – is a persistently ignorant tendency. Therefore, it is essential that this study be undertaken in order to assess and recommend effective reading pedagogies that take into account the realities and core values of isiZulu reading instruction.

4.2.5 Phonics

Phonics is a system of sound-letter relations used for reading and writing. In order to decode and encode words, learners must be proficient in matching letters to word sounds, learning

spelling rules and applying this knowledge (Castle, Rastle & Notion, 2018: 12). In reading, phonics is the ability to translate textual letters into spoken sounds and then combine these sounds to form words and meaning. Beginning with frequent practice in word recognition, the learner sounds out words slowly and carefully. However, proficient readers may read without exercising such caution (Castle et al., 2018). The relationship between sounds and letters is crucial and undeniable in reading instruction, especially for alphabetic writing systems, and phonics instruction can help achieve this (Castle et al., 2018).

Phonics is a component of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, roots and base words (Castle et al., 2018). By teaching learners that written words are composed of letter groups, such as syllables and clusters of consonants, phonics helps them develop their letter knowledge (Buckingham, 2020). In addition to being able to connect phonemes and graphemes, learners are expected to be familiar with spelling patterns for the syllables that make up longer words (Buckingham, 2020). Decoding graphs, vowel teams, word families, blends, roots, affixes and inflections are skills that learners must master as they advance to the next level (Ehri, 2020, Buckingham, 2020). After some time, "based on orthographic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic information relating to smaller and longer segments of words, learners recognize recurring letter patterns in their language" (Castle et al., 2018). Learners get accustomed to words and learn to recognize them in chunks the more often they occur. For example, in the isiZulu word, '*asifundi, bafundile and zisafunda*' learners will eventually understand the common root which is *-fund-* which means 'learn'.

It is crucial that teachers know about the strategies used to teach phonics in the classroom (Ehri, 2020; Flynn et al., 2021; Campbell, 2020). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has a National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase, which is based on a variety of phonics teaching approaches found in the Department's learner workbook (DBE, 2020). These sources are important because they offer a foundational understanding of basic concepts that are necessary for handling sound-letter combinations and differentiating between similarities, as in the case of agglutinative languages.

The two methods used to teach phonics are analytical and synthetic. Programmes for synthetic phonics focus on teaching learners the individual and specific sequence of grapheme-phoneme correspondences. Learners also participate in early blending or "synthesis", where they combine infrequent phonemes to form words (Castle et al. 2018: 13). In contrast, analytical phonics begins with the word; therefore, learning phoneme correspondence in this context

primarily depends on dissecting words into their constituent parts (Erhi, 2020).

Synthetic phonics appears to have some distinct benefits, one of which is the individual grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Teachers can manage the classroom during synthetic instruction to support learners' explicit acquisition of correspondence. (Castle et al., 2018: 13). Synthetic phonics is supported by longitudinal empirical studies carried out in Scotland (Castle et al., 2018: 13). Regarding the learning of reading accuracy and spelling over a 16-week period, Johnston and Watson (2005) found that using synthetic phonics yielded more long-lasting results than two analytic phonics interventions. However, some would argue that the evidence is insufficient to conclude that synthetic phonics is superior to analytical phonics. Differences in effect sizes were found between the two kinds of phonetic instruction by Torgerson, Brooks and Hall (2006). The results of these two studies showed that the synthetic component is the main component of successful phonics instruction. To ascertain which form of implementation is the most successful, more research is necessary. The distinction between phonological awareness and phonics is summarized in Figure 4.4.

Differences between phonological awareness and phonics

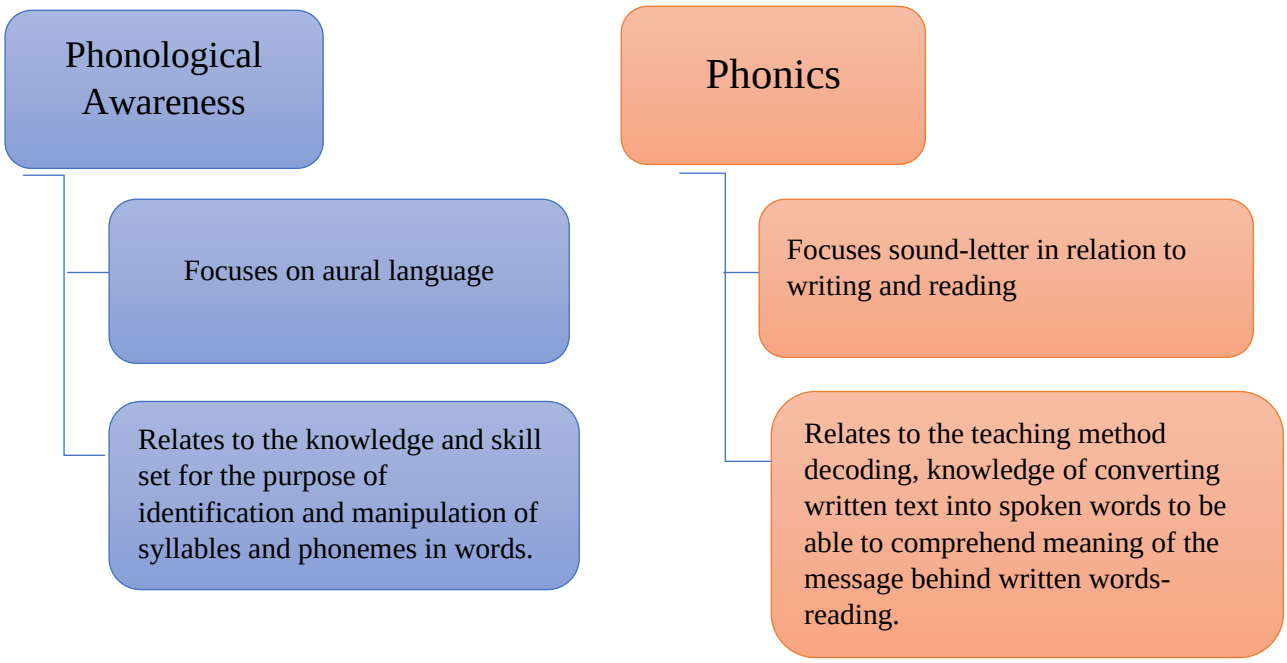


Figure 4.4: differences between phonological awareness and phonics

4.2.6 Morphological awareness

Morphology is a binding agent that is associated with phonology and semantic awareness as a form of lexical quality representations (Kirby & Bowers, 2017). According to Duncan (2018),

morphological awareness refers to the knowledge and skills connected to the capacity to break down words into smaller units of meaning, such as roots, stems and morphemes. Given its considerable impact on the development of word reading fluency, morphology plays a crucial role in comprehension (Castle et al., 2018). The smallest units of words with meaning, as opposed to a word with a stand-alone meaning, are what determine morphemes (Kirby & Bowers, 2017). Therefore, developing morphological structure provides word simplicity and enhances learners' vocabulary (Duncan, 2018).

In all languages, the word, not the root, is the most striking feature of the language morphemes. The most striking aspect of the full word morphological analysis involves word affixing, which generally refers to morphological substitution, reduplication, deletion, and prefixing and infixing (DBE, 2021: 45). In other words, by applying such morphological processes to the word, the meaning of the word can be fully explained. The agglutinative morphology of African languages makes it more difficult to comprehend the morphological structure of long words (DBE, 2021: 45). Through language and reading experiences, learners can be implicitly introduced to morphological knowledge (DBE, 2021).

While morphological instruction was first used in the 18th century, it is still applicable and included in a number of modern curricula. The National Curriculum in England describes the various roles that prefixes and suffixes play in the formation of a word, including changing the spelling patterns of stems that must be taught during the primary education level (UK Department of Education, 2014). Even though the concept of morphological instruction is well established and has a long history, there is still a dearth of research on the nature and efficacy of such instruction. Research further shows that a large number of teachers are unaware of the precise ways in which morphemes can support understanding of spelling construction (Le, 2023; Newton, 2018). This is a critical knowledge gap for teachers. The impact of morphological intervention on academic literacy have been the subject of several studies (Bowers, Kirby & Deacon, 2010; Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). Morphological instruction had a significant impact on spelling, vocabulary and fluency (Goodwin & Ahn, 2013). In contrast to traditional phonics instruction, morphological instruction consistently raises learners' literacy levels, particularly in reading (Devonshire, Morris, & Fluck, 2013).

In summary, learning to read involves a number of intricate reading components, necessitating the expertise of a reading teacher who is well versed in reading literacy. Understanding the connection between spelling and reading has received very little attention. The next section

focuses on the importance of spelling in reading and how it helps learners read successfully in the classroom.

4.2.7 Spelling and reading comprehension

Spelling is a part of reading that is strongly correlated with word recognition, lexical representations and autography acquisition; all of which play a significant role in improving reading comprehension skills. The significance of spelling for reading comprehension has been indicated by numerous studies (Pan, Rickard, & Bjork, 2021; Rack, 2021; Zhao, Wu & Li, 2023; Murphy, 2016; Daries & Probert, 2020). The same mental images of a word serve as the foundation for both reading comprehension and spelling (Ehri & Snowling, 2004). The accurate spelling of each word gives readers a fluid and strong representation of it. In fact, learners can automatically map letters and letter combinations to sound when they are able to read words by sight, (Ehri & Snowling, 2004). In order to support memory, spelling acquisition requires instruction and learning integration (Diemer, 2015).

De Sousa and Broom (2011) studied spelling performance at Grade 2 level in South Africa. Thirty respondents who were monolingual English speakers, and another thirty who were bilingual in isiZulu and English were included in the study. The results of the investigation show that phonological awareness is essential for the development of spelling; furthermore, phonological awareness facilitated the easy development of learners' first language, isiZulu. They emphasized that learning about phonemes and how to segment, decode and manipulate them enhances learners' decoding comprehension, which in turn affects successful spelling.

In addition to phonological awareness, orthography plays a significant role in spelling acquisition (Land, 2015), as learners who are working on their spelling are expected to gain a broad understanding of the letter names and sounds (Fleisch, Pather & Motilal, 2017). Mpiti (2012) contends that orthographic rules and conventions, as well as visual memory, are factors that are incorporated into spelling. This is demonstrated by Templeton and Morris (2000) who posit that learners' ability to spell a word will reflect the orthographic knowledge they were able to utilize in processing the word for spelling, according to Zaric, Hasselhorn and Nagler (2020). Their results showed that spelling performance is significantly influenced by general orthographic knowledge rather than intelligence, including phonological awareness.

Learners (assisted by their reading teachers) should be able to concurrently integrate all lexical representations – orthography, phonology, morphology and grammatical knowledge – in order

to become proficient spellers in reading comprehension. Naturally, teachers play a crucial role in helping learners practise reading by implementing successful reading techniques that will help them succeed in spelling and reading comprehension. The researcher further notes that the development of English spelling has received a great deal of attention, with little knowledge being generated about spelling in African languages.

4.2.8 Motivating learners to read

To encourage children to read, print experiences are necessary where learners are exposed to as many unfamiliar words as possible (Daries & Probert, 2020). Teachers should encourage their learners to read independently and with enthusiasm (Dakhi & Damanik, 2018; Nevo & Vaknin-Nusbaum, 2020; Zulu & Ndebele, 2020). However, the key question remains: How can this be accomplished? Daniel Willingham (2017) discusses a strategy known as rewarding children for reading. Although rewarding a learner will create the desired behaviour in the short term, the long-term effect is to instil in them that their academic participation will always be rewarded. This means that if they were never rewarded in the first place, they would be less likely to participate well in the absence of a reward (Willingham, 2017).

Willingham (2017) offers two main reading motivational strategies: maximizing the value of reading and making the choice to do so easily. If there are enough engaging reading materials available to them, such as texts that relate to their everyday life or foster friendships, children will frequently take reading seriously (Rideout, 2015). Comic books, books with specific song lyrics or about their favourite sports are a few examples of possible texts. These resources might be innately inspiring to a child even though they are not great literature. The amount of time learners spend reading depends greatly on their willingness to read as well as whether they are willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them (Willingham, 2017). According to Rideout (2015), while 30% of teenagers said they enjoyed reading, they also said they were more interested in other activities such as watching videos and playing games. To make the most of reading opportunities, it is always crucial to have print material in the classroom. To boost learners' chances of selecting a text of interest to them to read, parents can, for instance, stock their homes and other areas with a variety of reading materials (Brown, 2017).

Introducing learners to a wide range of words and texts is essential in encouraging them to read. Learners must be exposed to texts by their teachers both in class and through homework. What learners accomplish from teacher-motivated reading is very little compared to what they can accomplish when reading independently (Daries & Probert, 2020). To ensure that at-risk

readers maximize the benefits of reading and voluntarily choose to read, teachers must cultivate a love of reading, particularly independent reading. The ability to read and the desire to read are closely related; learners are more likely to enjoy reading when they are proficient in the material than when they are having difficulty with it (Willingham, 2017). This implies that reading development and motivation cannot be discussed in isolation. To encourage reading, pedagogical strategies for at-risk readers should also focus on motivational factors.

4.2.9 Factors affecting reading development outside the classroom

Chapter 3 addressed a number of factors that contribute to reading difficulties, including their negative effects on learners' academic performance. Although some factors mentioned hinder learners' rapid reading development, teachers might not have much control over them. One of the main factors that consistently contributes to reading comprehension issues is poverty (Young & Rasinski, 2018; Martins & Capellini, 2021; Land, 2015; Spaull 2016). Children who grow up in low-income neighbourhoods are more likely to have low reading engagement (Rasinski, 2018).

Additional factors that may not be under the control of educators include family dynamics, the community and learners' access to high-quality non educational reading materials that will improve their reading skills. According to the National Reading Strategy (2008), literacy difficulties are caused by a lack of reading materials that allow learners to read in their mother tongue. The majority of rural South African schools lack adequate reading areas, school libraries and even books. Even the minority classes that do have readers typically have them assigned to the incorrect grade level (National Reading Strategy, 2008). Despite these challenging circumstances, parents and other school stakeholders must be deeply involved in helping teachers support the development of proficient readers.

4.2.10 Assessing reading comprehension

Assessments play a significant part in giving teachers a chance to identify at-risk readers. Investigating the reading pedagogy employed by teachers also includes addressing the way the teachers treat the assessment of reading. According to Castle et al. (2018), the best strategy for assessments is to administer a test to see how much the learners' reading has improved in comparison to a group control. Reading comprehension assessments are difficult to measure because there is not a single, easily measurable entity that can be captured by a "gold-standard" (Castle et al., 2018: 35). Some assessments might have strict word-level requirements rather

than focusing on understanding reading (Daries et al., 2020). On the other hand, some tests have questions that demand answers to be given directly, without even requiring the candidate to read the passage (Keenan & Meanan, 2014). Even thorough and verified tests vary in the reading comprehension context they cover (Castle et al., 2018: 36). A few of the assessment criteria are based on the reader's age as well as the length and format of the text. This implies that reading comprehension varies depending on one's level of knowledge; even proficient readers may find a text challenging if it contains material they are unfamiliar with.

Snow (2002) defines reading as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written languages. This calls for an understanding of the reader (e.g. the child's unique capacities), the text (e.g. its complexity, genre), and the context (e.g. skimming studying, reading for pleasure). Therefore, teachers must understand the goals of every reading assessment and the metrics used to measure it. Teachers must possess in-depth knowledge of reading comprehension and the reasons why it varies over time.

It can be a difficult task to teach reading comprehension to at-risk readers. This duty necessitates teacher proficiency in effective reading strategies. Teachers are deemed competent to teach reading comprehension if they use the appropriate strategies. Reading components are essentially those elements that are necessary to teach learners how to read accurately. Skilled reading teachers are aware of the importance of vocabulary, phonics, phonemic awareness, and oral reading fluency in the development of reading. Teachers can assess a learner’s reading proficiency and decide whether or not further support is necessary, as well as how best to provide it. To find ways to assist learners to improve their reading performance in the classroom, teachers must be committed and creative.

4.3 Reading strategies

Teachers play a crucial part in making sure learners become fluent readers in both their home language and another language. This section's main goal is to discuss reading instruction in African languages, in this case isiZulu. All learners can become fluent readers if appropriate reading strategies that reflect the realities, values, and vocabulary of that language are applied in the classroom.

According to Trudell and Schroeder (2007), teaching reading in African languages does not impart knowledge embedded in African linguistic repertoires. Moreover, this is even likely to

worsen with the shortage of reading materials in African languages. Not much research has been done to assess reading approaches that take African linguistics into account. Therefore, it is worthwhile to carry out this study in order to identify isiZulu reading strategies that direct the way in which reading should be taught in the isiZulu language, including elements that serve as the foundation for reading.

Learning to read in one's mother tongue is an advantage for learning other languages. For those who are already linguistically marginalized, adopting European reading approaches that do not reflect African linguistic repertoires is a disadvantage. In order to challenge the marginalization of African languages in the educational context, there is a critical need for African language reading approaches that can impart African knowledge to African learners.

4.3.1 Understanding reading in isiZulu language

Readers of languages with transparent orthographies, like Greek, Italian and Spanish, decode text by matching graphemes, or combinations of letters (Land, 2015; Pretorius, 2013; Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). Letters in opaque and inconsistent orthographies – like English – do not always represent the same sound or phonics, hence readers of these orthographies will inevitably adopt different strategies (Land, 2015; Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). According to this theory, readers of opaque languages with inconsistent orthographies tend to rely on larger letter groupings than readers of transparent languages with consistent orthographies (Land, 2015).

Orthographies can be transparent and consistent (where spelling can make predictions on pronunciation). This means that the orthographies of isiZulu and English fall at the opposite ends of the continuum. This has an extensive impact on the process of developing reading skills, especially for at-risk readers. Teachers need to ensure that learners are able to recognize the differences in the way that letters of the alphabet are utilized in each language. For example, the letter ‘c’ can be used across various speech sounds in English, none of which resembles the click consonant it often represents in isiZulu (Land, 2015).

When learners develop reading skills in their home language, their existing vocabulary knowledge and phonemic knowledge must help them predict and recognize words (Land, 2015). Their confidence in using mother-tongue language should facilitate their conceptual representation of a text’s meaning (Land, 2015).

There is a perception in many Sub-Saharan African countries that teaching reading it is all about instructing learners to simply read aloud without the cognitive benefit of reading for

meaning and understanding. (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). This perception is likely to hamper teachers from developing and emphasising the ability to read for meaning and utilizing silent reading exercises in class. Mather (2013) and Sivnarain (2014) observed reading lessons in various schools and noted that the only activity used to teach was reading aloud. The researchers concluded that teachers need to understand that short exercises conducted in silent reading, where learners practise deducing, predicting and concluding skills, and then provide immediate feedback, would work effectively to encourage readers to read for meaning.

IsiZulu language consists of agglutinative structure and conjoined writing system which makes it contain long, complex words. The complexity of isiZulu words is constituted by a word stems and affixes therefore, readers need to register the meaning of the stem and consider its modification for every single affix. The psycholinguistic grain means that isiZulu readers have the ability to process small grain size units as a way to reconstruct language. Thus isiZulu reading teachers should develop exercises that stimulate non-agglutinated short words with not more than three morphemes to prevent reading difficulties from occurring.

In spoken isiZulu, the tone tends to modify the meaning but there are no tone makers in written isiZulu. For example, -*nga*- can convey a negation form if the tone is low, but if the tone is higher the meaning can be positive. For example, *Lenkomo ingahlatshwa*- meaning this cow must not be slaughtered but if the tone of -*nga*- is high means the cow must be slaughtered. This indicates that readers of isiZulu need to have alternative meanings in mind where ambiguity occurs until meaning is confirmed from contextual cues, or readers may opt to reread the phrases to be certain of the meaning. Readers should recognize contextual cues in order to be certain of the appropriate tone in the absence of tone makers.

Finally, when comparison is made between English and isiZulu structure, isiZulu forms a low number of permissible letter combinations due to syllable structure and because there are no contiguous vowels nor double consonants (Land, 2015). Short letters of isiZulu such as-*la, ku, hla* or *nga*- may occur frequently as stand-alone morphemes, distinct morphemes or form parts of larger morphemes with various meanings in different context. It is expected that IP learners may take longer to differentiate between similar and dissimilar words (Abadzi, 2011).

4.3.2 Overview of strategies promoting reading development

A variety of reading strategies can be implemented in the classroom to advance reading knowledge to at-risk readers. The basal reading approach was common in the mid-20th century

but is still active even to date (Gonzalez-Diaz & Yanez-Bouza, 2023). This strategy limits sentence length and difficulty, and controls vocabulary by letter-sound correlation and frequency of use (Verbeek, 2010). The Mastery Learning Movement focuses on breaking difficult processes of reading into their subcomponents and having them taught separately (Pearson, 2000). The Mastery Learning Movement seeks to produce a flexible curriculum which allows teachers to use very easy reading materials and skills-based worksheets in order to assess phonics skill, comprehension and vocabulary skills (Knight et al., 2017). The top-down reading strategy promotes a connection between reading and meaning. The top-down strategy stresses that throughout the reading instruction in class, a learner must be initially introduced to the entire sentence and paragraph, and afterwards a learner should learn about smaller units of language such as words, letters and sounds (Ahmadi et al., 2013). A leaner may not necessarily be required to process every word or letter (Suraprajit, 2019). The development of a whole-language methodology is viewed as child-centred, constructivist, authentic and integrated (Ahmadi et al., 2013). In the whole-language methodology for reading instruction, the teacher is perceived as a facilitator of learning and connector of appropriate materials to provide adequate support to learners particularly including at-risk readers. In this instance, a learner has pre-existing knowledge which can be built on. A text using natural language patterns will adequately allow learners to predict words and meanings (De Vos et al., 2014). Learners' own experience or daily experiences are key in forming an effective reading pedagogy as they develop interest easily in reading storybooks which relate to their real-life experience.

The balanced instruction improves literacy by paying attention to both reading and writing (Center, 2020; Franklin et al., 2020; Pressley, Allington & Pressley, 2023; Willson & Falcon, 2018). Balanced instruction entails the following:

- Balance consists of teaching language-rich literature instruction and direct, explicit skills using two separate, parallel strands. Successful reading involves prerequisite instruction of phonics and word knowledge.
- Balance ensures that both reading and writing receive equal status through recognizing cognitive dimensions of literacy, effectiveness instruction and providing learners with equal opportunities to become competent readers.
- Balance reinforces planning of instruction by acknowledging learners' daily experience, strengths, interest and needs. (Adapted from Verbeek, 2010)

The Report of National Reading Panel (NRP) and the South African school curriculum support the balanced approach and focus on the following five reading components that are essential for reading instruction: (i) phonemic awareness, (ii) phonic, (iii) fluency, (iv) vocabulary, (v) comprehension. These were discussed in detail in section 4.2. The balanced instruction approach promotes authentic reading which emphasizes that sound reading ability entails comprehending meaning.

A reciprocal reading strategy involves dialogue between learners and teachers regarding the text. It focuses on creating meaning, summarizing and predicting (Okkinga et al. 2018). In reciprocal reading, teachers begin by demonstrating each of the three skills before learners gradually use the strategies independently (Azizzadeh & Bazargani, 2023). In transactional reading strategies, teachers help learners be able to derive meaning from a text (Brown & Pressley, 2023). This strategy involves activating prior knowledge, predictions, raising questions, clarification, summarization, visualization, and story grammar, making connections, text structure and thinking out loud (Brown & Pressley, 2023). Transactional strategies further use direct explanation and teacher modelling. Concept-oriented reading (Guthrie, McRae & Klauda, 2007) enhances learners' motivation and the restores ground knowledge, summarizing, questioning, organizing information, searching for information and structuring stories.

Hedgcock and Ferris (2009) categorized reading strategies into three phases, pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. During the pre-reading phase, class activities should involve surveying the text, asking questions and identifying key vocabulary. The while reading phase forms involves a quick read-through of the entire text to develop a sense of its main point(s) and confirm initial predictions made during pre-reading phase (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). Re-reading a text explicitly means paying close attention in a language and structure of the text. Post-reading involves activities that focus on summarizing, responding and applying critical thinking and writing connections.

There is a gap in comprehension instruction in South African classrooms (Ntshangase & Tshuma, 2023). When teachers do not teach reading effectively, they deprive learners of the opportunity to develop comprehension skills. Sometimes teachers claim that they have inadequate knowledge of how to teach comprehension and are unable to cater for at-risk readers in the inclusive classrooms. The discussed strategies provide guidance on how comprehension knowledge can be improved. They use explicit instruction to assist in bridging the gap for at-risk readers particularly between decoding skills and comprehension skills. However, it

remains a key question that if such a variety of reading strategies are available, why are reading and comprehension skills still a challenge in South African classrooms?

4.3.3 Teacher challenges in engaging with comprehension instruction

Teachers face several challenges in reading comprehension instruction, which is both demanding and time consuming (Block & Duffy, 2008). This is why it is essential that professional teacher development should include guidelines to promote learners' reading skills. Teachers who are not confident in applying reading strategies are partly the cause of poor reading performance (Klapwijk, 2011).

4.3.3.1 Teacher beliefs about reading pedagogical strategies

Teachers' beliefs and values can influence their behaviour and judgement in the class (Land, 2015; Daniel & Tlale, 2020; Chetty, 2019; Klapwijk, 2011; Ramdan, 2015) and have a way of shaping their practice and pedagogical strategies. Teachers' theoretical beliefs accordingly have an influence on learners' reading acquisition (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Bamanger & Gashan, 2014; Pusparini, Widiati & Susanti 2021); however, some studies have shown that belief and practice can be inconsistent (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Lopez, 2016; Farrell & Yang, 2019; Algozzine, Kissau & Yon, 2012). Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) found that teachers who are knowledgeable about literacy acquisition display greater consistency between choice of pedagogical strategies and theoretical beliefs compared to less knowledgeable teachers. Teachers' owns experience of learning to read has the potential to influence their beliefs about teaching and learning to read. A study conducted by Abadzi (2006) on teachers' behaviour found that teachers often copy the pedagogical practices and behaviour of their past teachers and use them in their own classrooms as teachers. In this case, coping may involve different factors such as mistreatment of learners, memorization, absenteeism, frequent use of textbooks and inefficient use of time (Abadzi, 2006).

4.3.3.2 Teacher knowledge relevant to reading pedagogy

Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but new phenomena are interpreted through beliefs, thus, beliefs have a filtering effect on thought processes (Verbeek, 2010). Teachers' knowledge has been measured through qualifications such as diplomas, degrees or any kind of academic certificate completed in the education sphere; however, training in higher institutions of learning does not translate into improved instruction. Verbeek (2010) highlights that little research has been done on the teachers' knowledge of literacy teaching. Shulman

(1987) discusses seven types of teachers' knowledge: curriculum knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational ends, purpose and values, general pedagogical knowledge, and content knowledge.

Shulman promotes pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as it focuses on the transformation of content directly into forms that are pedagogically strong (Basson, 2016). PCK involves reading teachers asking questions such as: What makes reading acquisition complex? And how does the teacher develop the understanding of learners in class?

In summary this section has discussed teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their impact on reading instruction. For teachers to be able to facilitate successful reading lessons, they need strong PCK to tackle reading difficulties facing at-risk readers. Teachers need to evaluate their instruction through reflecting on their pedagogy after each lesson to identify deficiencies and rectify them.

4.4 Education policies governing learners with learning challenges

While this study has provided a discussion on the classification of learners with learning challenges in chapter 3, it is essential to widen the scope to address inclusive education in the South African context, specifically in the KwaZulu-Natal province, where uMkhanyakude district is located. This section discusses various factors impacting on the policies that inform inclusive learning (and reading) in mainstream schools.

4.4.1 Inclusion in the South African education system

Inclusive education is considered a priority issue by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). UNESCO asserts that every learner has a constitutional right to receive quality education. The DBE implemented the Inclusive Education Policy which accepts and respects that all learners are different in some way and have different learning needs which are equally valued and an ordinary part of our human experience (DoE White Paper Six, 2001: 16). The development of the Inclusive Education Policy is aligned with the South African Constitution, Act No. 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996), section 29 which stipulates that every citizen has the right to receive quality basic education, as well as adult basic education, irrespective of gender, race, social background and economic status. However, the academic exclusion of learners with learning challenges (such as at-risk readers) as a result of inflexible pedagogical strategies appears to be misaligned with

the Constitution.

Sub-Saharan African countries have sought to develop policies that support the objectives of inclusive education (Geldenhuys & Wevers, 2013). Some Sub-Saharan African developing countries such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Namibia continue to experience challenges in implementing inclusive education (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019: 2). The challenges include inadequate resources such as infrastructure, weak economies , a rigid curriculum, poor support facilities and inadequate training of teachers, who are expected to reinforce academic inclusion in classes. Several concerns have been raised by teachers regarding the inclusion of learners with learning challenges in mainstream schools (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019: 3). The concerns include their lack of training, inadequate pedagogical strategies in the curriculum, and lack of support for intervention (Singh, 2010).

The Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support Policy (SIAS) (DBE, 2014) provides a framework for standardisation of the procedures to identify, assess and provide programmes for all learners who require additional support. The policy seeks to promote quality and equal education for vulnerable learners in terms of their economic background as well as giving support in addressing learning challenges. The SIAS policy provides guidelines on screening and identification of learners who require additional support because of their learning challenges (DBE, 2014). Despite attempts by the South African education system to develop a policy that supports the inclusion of such learners in schools, it is still not clear how teachers should implement inclusive practices practically. Furthermore, the policy does not provide clear guidelines on how inclusive reading should be taught in mainstream schools; neither do reading campaigns such as the National Ready Strategy and the Early Grade Reading Assignment specifically provide guidance on inclusive reading in the schools.

4.4.2 Reading Policy Guidelines of the KZN Department of Education

The reading policy guidelines of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KZN DoE) were meant to be implemented within a period of five years. The mission of the Department was to sustain a culture of reading and the availability of reading resources. This policy was established on the view that writing and reading share many similarities that assist learners develop basic knowledge of literacy. The ability to read and write in one's fist language stimulate learners' competence to easily acquire any additional languages (Mhlongo, 2019; Land, 2015; Tshuma 2021; Pretorius & Stoffelsma, 2021).

The reading policy guidelines outline the importance of developing reading materials which are related to learners' daily experiences. This guideline helps to stimulate reading interest among learners. The policy further promotes sustainable reading programmes by appointing reading champions among staff members (KZN DoE, 2006). The reading champions spearhead the reading programmes in schools then connect the school with other organizations which promote reading. Promoting the culture of reading in KZN has five dimensions:

1. establishing reading committees that design reading programmes;
2. developing reading programmes that are specific to learning phases;
3. timely distribution of reading materials in schools;
4. ongoing professional teacher development in reading; and
5. developing partnership with a variety of stakeholders such as universities and publishers.

While interventions are necessary to promote learners' reading proficiency in South Africa, issues hindering inclusive policies and its implementation in mainstream schools must still be addressed. Many teachers still lack an understanding of the role of inclusive education and how it should be implemented. It is essential for inclusive education policies to set clear guide in terms of how inclusive reading should be implemented in the mainstream classrooms. The next section unpacks how pre-service teachers are prepared to teach inclusive reading and also the compliance of teacher education programmes with inclusive education policies.

4.5 Teacher education preparation programmes

The previous section addressed education policies in terms of guidelines on inclusive reading. This section discusses teacher education programmes on methodologies used to prepare pre-service teachers. There is a lack of research on the professional development of teachers regarding reading comprehension instruction (Sailors, 2008). Research in USA and UK on the preparation of teachers to teach reading reveals that most of the higher education institutions in England allow insufficient time to prepare teachers to teach reading. They report that there is inadequate correlation between practice and theory in most teacher education programmes that focus on reading. They found that only 10% of pre-service reading teachers were excited and satisfied with their training courses on methodology (Hoffman; Roller; Maloch; Sailors; Duffy & Beretvas, 2005)

In South African schools, teachers seem to be inadequately prepared to teach comprehension (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Ntshangase, 2023; Dagada, 2022; Phala & Hugo, 2022). According to Klapwijk (2011), teachers fail to engage with comprehension strategies because the traditional teaching practice of any skill that relates to language (such as listening, reading, writing and speaking) is allocated to the so-called language teacher. Moreover, the practice is restricted to the language classroom, which compounds comprehension difficulties. Similarly, language teachers tend to think that all problems related to literacy (reading, speaking, writing and listening) are their responsibility or, even worse, they are the learners' problems.

Teacher preparation programmes appear to lack comprehensive comprehension instruction. Comprehension courses are limited to future language teachers only, instead of enabling all pre-service teachers to acquire the pedagogical strategies to teach comprehension. Klapwijk, (2011) firmly believes that teaching reading comprehension in teacher education programmes should not be only offered to future language teachers to teach comprehension and identify reading problems faced by learners. Every pre-service teacher, regardless of subject field, should be able to teach comprehension skills adequately. This would be a crucial contributor to literacy development. In addition, teachers have the advantage of working collaboratively to bridge the gap between literacy and instruction practice in classrooms.

4.5.1 Teaching reading teachers

Despite the quality and innovations of a teacher education programme, many teachers adopt practices that reflect those of their previous teachers, rather than those advocated by their teacher education courses (Hartse et al., 2004). Teaching in the classroom is commonly of the teacher-talk and rote and drill type, despite pre-service preparation. Hartse et al. (2004) note that many teachers do not undergo teacher education programmes at all, but rather go through hodgepodge coursework programmes from a hodgepodge of lecturers who are applying hodgepodge theoretical lenses – hence for practicum reasons they are placed in an environment made up of a hodgepodge of components.

Teachers who can utilize their theoretical knowledge to justify their practice have a greater chance to accomplish change, whilst teachers who possess a poor understanding of the relation between theory and practice often experience problems in their teaching practice (Hartse et al., 2004). Addressing this is vitally important for the South African education system, considering the legacy of the Bantu Education system. More opportunities are needed to allow pre-service teachers to observe these theories in practice during their classroom.

Hoffman and Pearson (2000) make a distinction between teacher training and teaching of reading teachers. They stress that training involves direct action from a teacher in order to maximize automatic behaviour (e.g. skills), whereas teaching refers to the intentional action of a teacher to sustain personal control over and responsibility for learning. They posit that training is useful in the sense that the outcomes are efficient, achieved ore quickly and can be easily communicated in practice. However, training may not be so useful in assisting teachers to enhance their professional and personal commitments "to lifelong learning required by those who want to confront the complexities and contradictions of teaching" (Hoffman & Pearson, 2000: 37). These findings indicate that training must be placed within in a broader vision of teaching and learning.

The Reading Teacher Education commissioned by the International Reading Association (IRA) stipulates that competency-based education programmes promote little engagement with learning and preparing pre-service teachers with effective knowledge to adapt and transform professional knowledge efficiently. The IRA believes that pre-service teachers should be assisted by letting them acquire field experience under the supervision of their role models, who share similar traits and the philosophy of the teacher training programme. The IRA investigation identifies eight features of reading excellence in teacher preparation programmes:

- Content: Effective curriculum is required for the development of teacher comprehensive knowledge base and ability to stimulate innovative discussions during learning progress in the classroom.
- Apprenticeship: Many courses involving field experience must be offered and allow pre-service teachers an opportunity to engage with their mentors.
- Vision: Lecturers teaching pre-service teachers should plan and organize their preparation programmes in terms of a vision of reinforcing quality literacy and teacher education.
- Resources and Mission: Teacher education programmes should have sufficient financial, intellectual and professional resources to provide quality teacher education.
- Personalized: Teacher educators need to be able to tolerate and respond positively to diversity in the programme.
- Autonomy: Teacher educators should have the capability to adapt and to provide students with an active learning community.

- Community Effectiveness: Teacher educators should promote collaborative working environments to create an innovative and active learning community. (Adapted from International Reading Association, 2003)

The IRA commission stated that education programmes for reading teachers should be able to cover the followings at a minimum level: Literacy in the early grades, including different reading components such as fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics and word recognition; oral language, vocabulary and comprehension; assessing all features that develop literacy learning; and organizing and mapping pedagogy instruction for literacy through all grades.

This study argues that teacher education programmes need to include comprehensive reading methods to convert theoretical knowledge into practice. Undergraduate students should be knowledgeable about literacy and effective reading pedagogies. The content should equip pre-service teachers with the ability to teach about the manipulation of words, blending words and decoding. Since pre-service teachers are being prepared for a general education that forms part of inclusive learning, teachers need to be thoroughly trained to meet the needs of learners who may require extra support, such as at-risk readers (Ntshangase, 2023). Risko et al. (2008) note that the teacher education programmes have a positive influence when theory and practice are strongly connected through guided pedagogical strategies and that provision for demonstration (modelling) is the key for comprehensive teaching practice. However, teacher educators are still required to monitor and assess the ongoing process of explicit instruction and the determine whether it is leading as expected to the ability to construct knowledge and solve problems compared to merely acquiring technical knowledge (Risko et al., 2008).

4.5.2 Effectiveness of methodology courses preparing pre-service teachers

According to Duffy and Atkinson (2001), pre-service teachers feel unprepared to teach learners with reading difficulties in an inclusive classroom, even though they have completed methodology courses at university. Gottfried et al. (2019) claim that pre-service teachers are not well-prepared for inclusive reading in teacher education courses. Instead of emphasizing the individual, university teacher education programmes should plan globally (Farr, 2020). Teaching reading skills is most likely done with a view to teaching the skilled reader rather than the at-risk reader.

A teacher's pedagogical knowledge also entails a sense of efficacy, and if pre-service teachers are equipped to engage at-risk readers, they are more likely to do so successfully. Coursework

and self-reflection, in addition to pedagogical content knowledge, will support pre-service teachers' advocacy of learners with learning challenges.

4.5.3 Preparation of pre-service teachers to cater for learners with extensive support needs

A class which is facilitated by a teacher with less effective teaching skills can have a devastating effect on learners' academic achievement (Ntshangase, 2023). If pre-service and in-service teachers of learners with extensive support needs are provided with the most recent research-based literacy instruction strategies, it is most likely that their learners will achieve good literacy results. Even though the criteria for general and special education are changing the way in which these individuals are trained to teach reading (such as adding additional coursework to general reading instruction), it is still not clear if these changes can adequately ensure academic inclusion of learners who require additional support.

A number of studies have been undertaken to examine the factors that affect teachers' abilities to support individual learners with extensive support needs (Bishop et al., 2010). The web-based survey examined teacher preparation to teach literacy to learners who require extensive support needs. The survey focused on the time dedicated to literacy topics. The survey revealed that of 28 institutions only 3 offered courses which specifically focused on reading instruction for learners with extensive support needs. It is therefore most likely that these pre-service teachers would not be in a position to adequately provide learners with the necessary skills for literacy development.

Copeland et al. (2011) examined two textbooks used in university courses for special and general education teachers. Their study intended to determine whether literacy information was included in these two textbooks for developing literacy among learners with an intellectual disability, and if literacy issues were included, how did this benefit learners. Findings revealed that the focus of these two books was solely on learners with an intellectual disability without much on developing these learners literacy. Since then, there have been several studies focusing on literacy instruction for learners with extensive support needs (Copeland et al., 2011; Mapepa & Magano, 2018; Van der Merwe, Fourie & Yoro, 2020).

Despite the qualifications obtained, teachers may fail to create an effective learning environment supporting every learner in the class. If there is no evaluation undertaken to review the effectiveness and the value of methodology courses in teacher education programmes, there is danger that at-risk readers and learners with extensive support needs will be negatively

affected.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the variety of factors that need attention when developing reading skills. DBE is keen to strengthen the use of African languages at home-language level and has promoted the incremental introduction of African languages (DBE, 2013).

The DBE relies on the competence of teachers on the ground to deliver comprehensive literacy development. Teachers are transmitters of knowledge and should be competent in reading instruction and the structure of isiZulu language that consists of agglutinative words. However, the key question is what happens when teachers are unfit to pass such knowledge to learners as expected? Perhaps, this situation arises because there is little research in reading African languages and an abundance on reading English. The reading methods used do not represent the realities and values of reading African languages.

There is a need to understand the implications of inclusion policies that cater for learners with mild learning challenges included in the inclusive classrooms, such as at-risk readers. Many teachers in South Africa are not familiar with inclusive reading. One cannot dispute the fact that the exclusion of these learners is mainly perpetuated by pedagogical strategies that do not take learning challenges into account, but rather treat all learners in the classroom the same way. Policy makers and curriculum designers need to pay attention to the pedagogical content design to accommodate at-risk readers. Finally, teacher education programmes should design their methodological courses in a manner that is not only sound theoretically, but also practically implementable. In other words, pre-service teachers should be trained to become skilled in advancing inclusive reading.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Four reviewed various studies regarding reading pedagogy and preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading in mainstream schools. This study aimed to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude district mainstream schools. Chapter Five presents the research design and methods used to collect data. The rationale and objectives of this study guided the researcher on the choice of methodology. This study adopted an interpretive paradigm within a qualitative research approach design. It was also designed as a case study. The demographic data, data-collection process, sampling techniques, reliability, validity and trustworthiness of data including ethical considerations are discussed in this chapter.

5.2 Paradigm

The research paradigm is defined by Khatri (2020) as a framework of thinking used by the investigator when conducting research. A research paradigm provides a comprehensive guiding philosophy for carrying out the research (Khatri, 2020). Moswane (2019:79) defines a paradigm as a "set of interrelated assumptions about the social world that provide a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of the world". Mertens (2005:7) stresses that a paradigm is concerned with underlying and developing an understanding of the world. Hence it is guided by philosophical assumptions that provide thinking and action. In this study, the paradigm provided guidance on capturing teachers' experience of using reading pedagogical strategies to teach at-risk readers as well as clarify their perspectives on inclusive reading in mainstream schools. It is essential to understand how university teacher education programmes prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading among at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

5.2.1 Interpretivist paradigm

This research is based on the interpretivist paradigm which, according to Alharahsheh and Pius (2020: 41), is concerned with defining people's experiences and how they interrelate. It seeks to develop an understanding of phenomena through the meanings that people often assign to them. The researcher opted to use interpretivism as the paradigm framing this study as it

enabled immersion in the research field, interacting with the respondents, observing their working environment, and noting down their feelings, ideas, and thoughts. In the light of this, the researcher had to provide topics and interview questions that were appropriate to teachers and make sure that there were no forms of bias the way that the respondents understood what the researcher required. Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that interpretivism or constructivism research often depends on the perspectives of the respondents on the situation addressed and the impact of the research process on their experiences. This is to argue that the idea of meaning is socially constructed within a particular context. A paradigm is composed of several components that include the following: ontology, axiology, epistemology and methodology detailed below and connected with the scope of this study.

5.2.3 Ontology

Ontology is regarded as the reality of social constructs. It should be constructed by the researcher through engagement in practical research, allowing everyone to express their thought and ideas in the form of learning (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Beyond that, ontology requires the construction of knowledge that is based on historical, cultural, social and contextual perspectives. Ontology can briefly be defined as the nature of existence or simply a reality about how learners are taught (Ferraris, 2020). Ontology in the context of education is concerned with the nature of knowledge that learners need to acquire and transform (Stoddard, 2013: 459). From a pedagogical perspective, ontology helps teachers and learners to be able to construct new knowledge adequately and collaboratively. In their newly constructed knowledge, teachers and learners have the opportunity to include new ideas and understanding of the factors that impede the learning process, such as reading difficulties in this study.

Ontology is interested in the reality and existence. The reality in this research is that there are at-risk readers in the mainstream schools. However, the teachers who teach them seem to be academically not reaching out sufficiently to them due to ineffective reading pedagogies. Ontology requires reality and existence, what people acquire utilizing various sources of knowledge (Raadschelders, 2011: 919). Kohn (2015: 319) argues that ontology is socially related, which motivates learners and teachers to reflect on learning and new knowledge to think differently. Most importantly, ontology provides directions for the research design to be able to learn new knowledge in order to find solutions to the existing problems.

5.2.4 Axiology

Axiology refers to the values of the researcher which indicate the choice of methods chosen in the research process (Goodman, Martens & Flurkey, 2016: 217). Yet axiology in the form of learning education is viewed as ethical and moral behaviour that teachers need to show towards learners in the learning environment (Goodman et al., 2016). The better way to reveal this is through cultural norms of communication regarding human rights, including social justice.

Axiology in education research requires of learners in education to become researchers and expand their knowledge through effective information provided by teachers (Martin, Moton & Matruglio, 2010:436). Vice versa, teachers also get an opportunity to learn from learners through comprehensive knowledge researched by them. In the context of this study, values can be determined by installing passion and love for reading in learners. It is imperative to note that ethical values are often more concerned with ethical evaluation as opposed to ethical and moral knowledge (Moswane, 2019). The researcher met the ethical values comprised within axiology by observing how reading teachers of isiZulu reading comprehension applied their pedagogy while they conducted reading comprehension lessons; this also enabled me to interpret their understanding of inclusive reading.

5.2.5 Epistemology

Epistemology is described as the theory of knowledge that determines how knowledge and reality should be constructed. In the education context, it focuses on determining the relationship between the teacher, learner and social community (Fekede, 2010: 100). The term ‘epistemology’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*episteme’* which means how knowledge is shaped in the mind, but also recognizing the social community as justification of reality (Edelheim, 2014: 32). The importance of epistemology in learning education implies that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) should promote quality education. The construction of knowledge in this study consists of suggestions for effective reading pedagogy that could be used to teach isiZulu reading comprehension at the Intermediate Phase to at-risk readers in the rural schools.

5.3 Research design

The research design can be described as a framework used to conduct research. A research design can also be referred to as a blueprint that aims to aid the researcher answer the research

question of the study, support or refute the hypothesis, and analyse and interpret data. Denzin and Lincoln (2013) stress that a research design attempts to provide in-depth explanations about sampling strategies, research statements, different varieties of research strategies, and methods of analysing data. Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) define a research design as a plan for conducting a research study with maximum control over factors that may significantly impact on the validity of the findings. This study employed a qualitative design.

5.3.1 Qualitative research

Crabtree and Miller (2022) define qualitative research as the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest. They further maintain that the purpose of qualitative research is to provide comprehensive knowledge about a social setting based on the research subjects' perspectives. It is against this background that the researcher chose to frame this study within a qualitative research approach to understand the pedagogical challenges and experiences encountered by teachers when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers in the inclusive classroom. In addition, the motive behind framing this study within a qualitative approach is to ascertain whether sufficient support was provided for at-risk readers to reach their academic potential as stipulated in the inclusive education policy, also supported by the SIAS policy. The qualitative approach was suitable for this study for understanding and gaining lecturers' insights into the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading at the Intermediate Phase level in mainstream schools.

Most appropriately, this study adopted a qualitative approach in order to gain insight into the context within which teachers of isiZulu reading comprehension find themselves. King et al. (2019) stress that through employing qualitative research, the researcher has the opportunity to be close to the participants and their circumstances to collect evidence of what is happening.

What marks a qualitative approach as more effective and convenient as opposed to its counterpart, a quantitative approach, is the nature of the collection of data and analysis. A quantitative approach tends to rely on figures and statistics, which cannot precisely present the circumstances and lived experiences of people. Contrary to that, a qualitative approach consists of theoretically grounded methods which provide a comprehensive knowledge of what is taking place in reality in a manner in which figures and statistics cannot achieve. The researcher employed a qualitative approach based on the following advantages as also noted by Johnson (2020), Crabtree and Miller (2022), and King et al. (2019):

- It attempts to study people's experiences in their natural settings and so make and provide an interpretation of the meaning assigned to their daily lives.
- It is a grounded theory providing flexible tools such as in-depth interviews and observations, which give the researcher the opportunity to connect directly with the participants to understand their circumstances.
- It strengthens the researcher's insight into the behaviour and experiences encountered by people, which in turn shapes the context of culture, society and the economy.

Despite the advantages of a qualitative research approach, there are also several limitations. Some of the disadvantages of qualitative approach are concerns about the subjectivity of the inquiry, which contributes to the difficulties in ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings (Rahman, 2020). This study used validity and reliability to avoid complete subjectivity.

5.3.2 Methodology

Research methodology is defined as a set of systematic techniques and principles applied in the field of study (Igwenugu, 2016). Methodology is a guide to research in terms of how fieldwork will be conducted. It provides a detailed description including an analysis of methods, limitations and resources, and clarifies the consequences that can be expected, as well as the role of assumptions and pre-conceptions in employing methods. By focusing on uMkhanyakude District, this study has elements of a case study.

5.3.2.1 Case study

A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry that serves to study a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life situation, specifically when there is an indication of unclear evidence between phenomenon and context (Palić & Vignali, 2015). A case study serves explores the phenomena under investigator from a variety of perspectives to gain a balanced picture of the phenomenon. A case study is viewed by Schoch (2020) as a strong description of individual cases, including its analysis, such as how the cases and events are characterized and the description of the discovery process of these aspects that is the process of the investigation itself. Taylor and Martindale (2014) assert that a "case study is used when we analyse and describe, for example, each person individually (his or her activity, special needs, life situation, life history, etc.), a group of people (learners with extra needs), or event in a particular

situation". This is to argue that case studies are concerned with highlighting a developmental factor.

Despite the variety of definitions provided above by different scholars, they all share a similar commitment to examining the complexity of different real-life situations. This approach was fundamentally important to this study as it investigated experiences of teachers teaching isiZulu inclusive reading comprehension using reading pedagogical strategies.

5.4.2 Research site

The primary research for this study took place at ten schools situated in the uMkhanyakude District. The uMkhanyakude District was selected as the research site because of its rurality. In other words, the schools chosen for in this study are referred to as rural schools. The universities were selected because they offer teacher education programmes that are supposed to prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading among at-risk readers in mainstream schools. The difference between rural schools and their counterpart urban schools is that urban schools are well-resourced with quality education assured, whereas rural schools have fewer resources and poor economic status, which jeopardize the quality of education that should be rendered (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019).

The rural schools in the South African education context range from quintile one to three, whilst urban schools range from quintile four to five. The National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) policy offers a quintile ranking system for addressing equity in schools. Quintile 1 is the group of schools in each province that serve the 20% of learners from the lowest income bracket. Quintile 2 schools cater to the next 20% of schools that are the poorest. The quintile 5 schools are those which cater to the 20% of least impoverished learners. Quintile 1, 2 and 3 poor schools are designated as no-fee schools and receive a greater government subsidy than Quintile 4 and 5 affluent schools.

The rational for selecting rural schools in uMkhanyakude District is because the researcher grew up in that area and was enrolled in one of these schools, hence has first-hand knowledge of the situation regarding at-risk readers in such settings.

5.5 Sampling method and population

Sampling refers to taking a particular section of units of a population as representative of the entire population (Van Haute, 2021; Buntin, 2020; Idarrou & Douzi, 2020). Scientific sampling

enables a researcher to describe the population or test the hypothesis in respect of research respondents and then generalizes findings to the whole population. Leedy, Ormrod and Johnson (2019) assert that sampling is the process that requires of the researcher to select the representatives of the particular population. In this study, the researcher used the non-probability purposive sampling.

5.5.1 Purposive sampling

The purpose of sampling is to save time and effort while remaining consistent and unbiased towards the population status regarding whatever is being investigated (Obilor, 2023). Purposive sampling is defined by Cohen et al. (2011) as a comprehensive method of selecting research subjects that are representative of the population under investigation. Creswell and Creswell (2018) contend that the purposive sampling method enables the researcher to purposively select entities or cases to be included in the sample based on the characteristics displayed by subjects. In contrast, Datallo (2010) suggests that purposive sampling can be employed effectively to achieve any of the following goals:

- To acquire knowledge based on the separate population;
- To gather primary information that is important and suitable for the study;
- To collect primary data which includes choosing a sample from existing data; and
- To select "small and closely observe typical and unusual or extreme elements".

5.5.1.1 Purposive sampling IP isiZulu teachers

The researcher purposively selected a sample of ten Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers to participate in this research. The teachers were selected because they are responsible for teaching reading to Grade 4, 5 and 6 learners in classes incorporating both healthy – progress and at-risk readers.

5.5.1.2 Purposive sampling isiZulu Methodology lecturers

While there are numerous studies investigating learner literacy development at IP level, there is a paucity of studies investigating lecturer practices in preparing pre-service teachers to teach reading at IP level. Lecturers providing Methodology courses for IP isiZulu teachers were purposively selected because:

- The IP level serves as the 'gear-shifting' phase for reading development.

- The mastery of reading skills in isiZulu would provide a firm foundation for developing reading in additional languages.
- The pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading are expected to be taught by lecturers providing IP isiZulu methodology courses.

The universities were selected by the researcher since they offer teacher education qualifications; thus, they are expected to have a methodology course on teaching inclusive reading to pre-service teachers.

5.5.2 Sample size

Table 5.1 below represents the number of participants who took part in the non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

Table 5.1: Sample size

Research participants			Research instruments	
			Non-participant classroom observation	Semi-structured interviews
Teachers	School 1	Grade 4	10	10
	School 2	Grade 5		
	School 3	Grade 6		
	School 4	Grade 4		
	School 5	Grade 5		
	School 6	Grade 6		
	School 7	Grade 4		
	School 8	Grade 5		
	School 9	Grade 6		
	School 10	Grade 4		
Lecturers	2 lecturers - University 1	Methodology lecturers	–	7
	2 lecturers - University 2			
	1 lecturer - University 3			
	1 lecturer - University 4			
	1 lecturer - University 5			

In summary, this study had a total of 17 participants spread across 10 schools situated in the uMkhanyakude District and five South African university teacher education programmes.

5.6 Demographic participant information

Table 5.2 presents the teachers' gender, age, experience in isiZulu reading comprehension teaching, and their highest qualifications.

5.6.1 Teacher demographic information of participants

Table 5.2: Teacher demographic information

Participants	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years) teaching IP isiZulu	Highest Qualifications
T1	**F**	> 60	13-14	PGCE
T2	**M**	> 60	12-13	PGCE
T3	**F**	51-60	8-10	BEd
T4	**M**	51-60	8-10	BEd
T5	**F**	41-50	7-8	PGCE
T6	**F**	41-50	8-10	BEd
T7	**M**	41-50	2-4	Honours
T8	**F**	31-40	8-10	BEd
T9	**F**	31-40	5-7	BEd
T10	**M**	31-40	2-4	Honours

Understanding teachers' gender, age and experience in teaching isiZulu reading comprehension skills was necessary to determine whether these factors have any influence on teaching inclusive reading. The highest qualification for 20% (*n=2*) of the respondents is an Honours in Education, while for 50% (*n=5)* it is a Bachelor of Education; 30% (*n=3*) of the respondents have PGCE qualifications; 20% (*n=2*) of the respondents have between 12 and 14 years' experience of teaching isiZulu reading comprehension; 40% (*n=4*) of the respondents have between 8 and 10 years' experience; 20% (n=2) have 5 to 7 years' experience and another 20% (*n=2*) have between 2 and 4 years' experience. All the participants are based in mainstream primary schools in uMkhanyakude District. Table 5.3 presents the lecturers' gender, age, experience in lecturing isiZulu methodology courses and their highest qualifications.

5.6.2 Lecturers' demographic information

Table 5.3: Lecturers' demographic information

Participants	Gender	Age (years)	Experience (years) lecturing isiZulu Methodology courses	Highest qualifications
L1	**F**	> 50	5-7	Master of Education
L2	**M**	>50	8-10	PhD
L3	**F**	>50	8-10	PhD
L4	**M**	41-50	5-7	PhD
L5	**F**	41-50	2-4	Master of Education
L6	**F**	41-50	8-10	PhD
L7	**M**	31-40	2-4	PhD

Understanding lecturers' gender, age and experience in teaching isiZulu methodology courses

was necessary to determine whether they have any influence on teaching inclusive reading. The highest qualification for 71% (*n=5*) of the respondents is a PhD, while 29% (*n=2*) of the respondents' highest qualification is a Master of Education; 43% (*n=3*) of the respondents have between 8 and 10 years' experience of teaching isiZulu methodology courses; 29% (*n=2*) of the respondents have between 5 to 7 years' experience, and another 29% (*n=2*) have between 2 and 4 years' experience. Participants L1 and L2 are based at one university in the Gauteng province, while L3 is based at a different university also in Gauteng. Participants L4 and L5 are based at one university in KwaZulu-Natal province, while L6 and L7 are from different universities in KwaZulu-Natal.

5.7 Data-collection instruments

In this study, the researcher used various data-collection methods to provide comprehensive and verifiable responses to the research questions. Each of the research methods employed in this study is presented and discussed in the following section to give an insight into how data were derived.

5.7.1 Non-participant classroom observations

Non-participant classroom observation is a major qualitative research tool used to collect data through observing certain behaviours of participants without engaging or interacting with them and noting down essential information. The non-participation observation is an unobtrusive qualitative research method for collecting primary data about a specific social phenomenon without having direct interaction with the study subjects (Boso, Van der Merwe & Gross, 2020). Non-participant observers may be physically present with the respondents in the naturalistic environment; however, in some instances, they might not be present in the setting (Boso et al., 2020).

5.7.1.1 Non-participant classroom observations: Teachers

The researcher used a classroom observation schedule (Appendix 2) to observe reading teachers' pedagogical strategies they use when teaching reading comprehension to at-risk readers. The researcher also observed other factors such as the availability of reading materials used to promote reading and whether the teacher took into account some of the reading components that were discussed earlier in this study during reading instruction, such as vocabulary, phonemic awareness, fluency, and phonics. The researcher further noted the type

of reading textbooks and text that reading teachers used when teaching reading. Teachers' ability to introduce the reading lesson and connect it with the aim and the content of the lesson was observed during the course of data collection. To ensure accuracy of the data collected, the researcher noted down some field notes while observing the teachers.

5.7.2 Interviews

An interview is defined as an encounter taking place between the interviewer and the respondent or a selected group of participants (Espedal et al., 2022). As a research tool within the qualitative research approach, an interview involves a way of gathering data through verbal interaction between individuals (Knott, Rao, Summers & Teeger, 2022). There is flexibility in terms of the way interviews are conducted, for example, through the use of digital platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom. This is a reason interviews can cover a wide spectrum and become the preferred and most popular tool used to collect qualitative data.

In this study, interviews were conducted with Intermediate Phase reading teachers and lecturers teaching inclusive reading to pre-service teachers in the teacher education programmes. This enabled the researcher to collect sufficient data based on the participants' experiences. Mann and Mann (2016) state that there are four categories of interviews, namely structured, semi-structured, focus-group and unstructured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews

This study employed semi-structured interviews as this provided an opportunity for participants to express themselves in depth. Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) suggest that semi-structured interviews should have specific questions prepared beforehand; and they should allow for opportunities for probing the answers in more detail. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to gain deep insight into the participants about their feelings and perceptions of the phenomenon investigated (Mclntosh & Morse, 2015). The researcher used semi-structured interviews because of their flexibility, and allowing the interviewer to probe the participants so that they could elaborate on their responses. Participants' responses were recorded with permission from the interviewees.

5.7.2.1 Face-to-face semi-structured interviews: IP isiZulu teachers

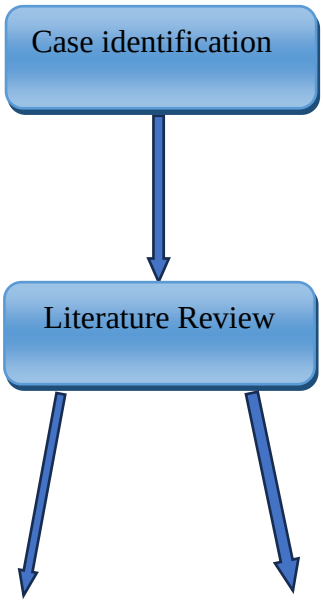
Semi-structured interviews with teachers were conducted following non-participant classroom observations. The same teachers observed were interviewed later. Teachers teaching isiZulu

reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase across ten schools were randomly selected to participate in the interview. Each interview with a teacher lasted approximately 60 minutes. Appointments to conduct interviews with teachers were made in advance with the school principals. The researcher, together with the participants, worked collaboratively to identify a suitable and quiet setting in the school where teachers would feel comfortable to share their experiences with reading pedagogical strategies and at-risk readers. Interviewees were provided with copies of the interview guide (Appendix 3) prior the interview so that they could have an idea of what was expected beforehand. This lessened participants' tension and enabled them to respond with confidence on what they know. If there was a need clarity, the researcher could explain further.

5.7.2.2 Online semi-structured interviews: IP Methodology Lecturers

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted online with the lecturers from five university teacher education programmes (Appendix 4). Two university teacher education programs had two participants each, whereas the other three university teacher education programmes had one respondent each who participated in online, semi-structured interviews. The purpose of online interviews with the lecturers was to collect data about teacher education programme preparation of pre-service teachers to use isiZulu inclusive reading pedagogical strategies to teach reading comprehension to at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase mainstream classes. The researcher established whether the methodology course offered inclusive reading and reading pedagogical strategies to pre-service teachers. Figure 5.1 represents strategies that were used to collect data in this study.

Data Collection Strategies



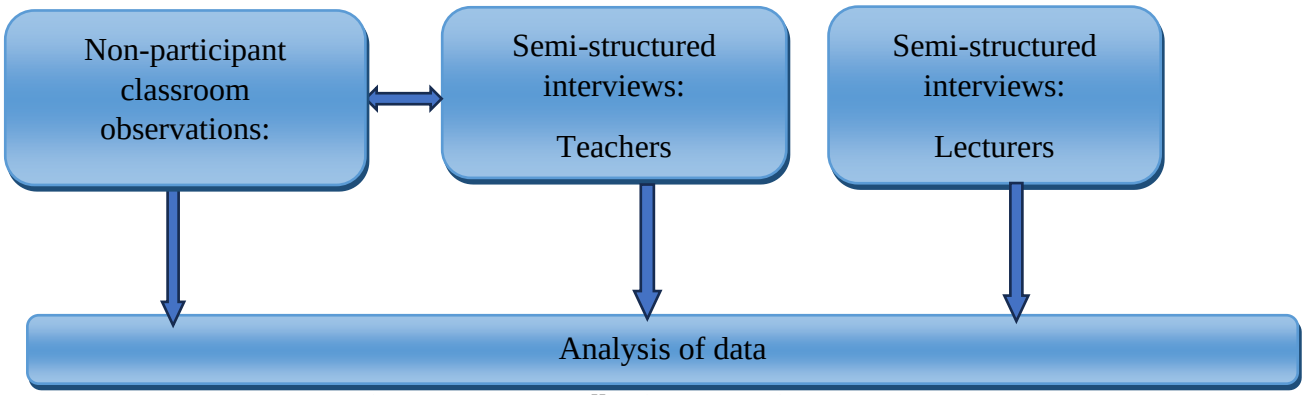


Figure 5.1: Data collection strategies

5.8 Data analysis procedure

Data analysis refers to the process of changing collected data into meaningful facts and ideas in order to be clearly understood in a qualitative approach (Alem, 2020). It entails disassembling already complex factors into simpler components and rearranging the components for the sake of interpretation. The unit of analysis in this study comprises IP isiZulu teachers' pedagogical strategies for developing isiZulu reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers. The following process of thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse the data gathered.

5.8.1 Thematic data analysis

The present study considered the following six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Clarke and Braun (2013).

Phase one: Familiarization

Familiarization is defined as a method of gaining insight into data and developing an extensive understanding about data collected. Further, the researcher has opportunity for immersion in the dataset (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Familiarization may require reading repeatedly of data and creating casual observation notes (Creswell, 2018). In this study the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and lecturers participating were recorded using a tape recorder and laptop. The interviews were listened to repeatedly and then transcribed manually. The classroom observation notes that were captured roughly in the observation schedules were read repeatedly and cleaned. The purpose of transcribing data was to transform the audio recording into a written form (Creswell, 2018).

Phase Two: Generating initial codes

The purpose of coding is to make organised sense of the transcribed data (Creswell, 2018). Gray (2014: 610) defines the coding process as a way of identifying a segment of a specific concept from the dataset and reading through the text, labelling the segment of information extracted using a code. In this study, each code that was generated contained essential information about data, which allowed the researcher to make meaningful analytical interpretations without needing to refer to the data (Braun, Clarke & Snowling, 2016). Codes that were identified by the researcher as meaningful and relating to the research questions were categorized to form one idea.

Phase Three: Searching for themes

In this phase the researcher may begin examining cautiously what can and what cannot be generated as a theme. By re-reading the collected data, extracts and codes emerged, and the researcher could begin to construct themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2016). In this phase of searching for themes, the researcher organised codes into potential themes captured through assigning a relevant dataset to each theme (Gray, 2014: 610). The researcher ensured consistency and transparency in the choices made on the themes selected. Five themes emerged from the teacher interviews; another four themes emerged from the lecturers' interviews; and eight themes emerged from the teacher observations. Each theme that emerged was relevant to the research questions.

Phase Four: Reviewing themes

This phase refers to a recursive process in which themes developed are reviewed in relation to the dataset and codes (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Braun and Clarke (2016) maintain that data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. This phase may involve renaming of themes, discarding some, and grouping two potential provisional themes together. In this phase, the researcher firstly checked the themes against the collated extracted data to gain an understanding of whether the themes that emerged corresponded with the data. The researcher reviewed the data by rereading everything to ensure that the themes developed were meaningful and captured the entire dataset.

Phase Five: Defining and naming themes

Defining and naming themes refers to the generating of clear definitions for each theme captured and identifies the concept it represents (Gray, 2014: 610). This phase involves the specification of the essence of each theme; and themes need to be clearly relevant to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2013: 258) stress that theme names need to be catchy, evocative and informative, in the sense that they give a reader a clear and direct view of what a theme is about.

Phase Six: Producing the report

The purpose of the data analysis in a qualitative research approach is to determine how research subjects intend to make meaning within the context of a given social phenomenon. The present research aimed to answer the following key research question: ***What pedagogical methods can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?*** A summary on themes emanating from the data collected in this study is provided in Chapter 9.

5.9 Validity and reliability of data

Designing the research requires of the investigator to implement measures that will ensure that the data collected are both valid and reliable (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Reliability can be defined as the stability of findings, whereas validity refers to the truthfulness of the findings collected by the researcher (Coleman, 2022). These are essential concepts in research, since they ensure transparency and minimize chances of bias in qualitative research. Vu (2021) also adds that validity and reliability increase the level of accuracy. The researcher ensured validity through the triangulation method employed in this study.

5.9.1 Triangulation

This study has employed triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected. The researcher used triangulation by employing different research methods, which include classroom observations, teacher face-to-face interviews, and online interviews with lecturers to minimize chances of bias in the data collected. The researcher found it crucial to use triangulation to enhance the trustworthiness and comprehensiveness of data further and to counterbalance the limitation of each individual research method employed by the study.

Moon (2019: 103) defines triangulation as a research method strategy that consists of the use of different data instruments or research methods that purposefully strive to ensure accuracy

and comprehensive analysis of data and conclusions. Triangulation has been viewed as a research method suitable for qualitative research strategy in ensuring consistency and validity through the convergence of data from various sources (Moon, 2019). Triangulation was also used in this study to minimize the potential effects of the drawbacks of the qualitative approach.

5.9.2 Credibility

Credibility refers "to the truth of the data or the participant views, interpretation and representation of them by the researcher" (Polit & Beck, 2013). Ensuring credibility requires of the researchers to describe in detail their experience of collecting data and verify the outcomes with the participants. To achieve credibility in qualitative research, Shufutinsky (2020) points out that the researcher should be able to demonstrate engagement with methods of observation.

This produced credible data using non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with the selected participants (Cmar, 2015: 2). Hence, the researcher was able to measure the findings comparatively and interpreted them. Coleman (2022) states that the reliability is related to the research questions, findings and the setting in which the research was undertaken. The researcher ensured that the data collected were verified repeatedly to ensure credibility of information collected from the participants. Moreover, verbatim quotes were used during the collection of data to maintain the accuracy of data and evidence (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 326).

5.10 Confidentiality and anonymity

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity can be described as an ethical practice that seeks to protect the privacy of human participants during the stage of collecting, analysing and reporting data (Coffelt, 2018). Confidentiality is typically referred to as modifying or separating any personal information that is provided by human subjects from data (Coffelt, 2018). Confidentiality requires the researcher to keep the identities of the participants secret and shield them from any kind of exposure, whereas anonymity is defined as the procedure of gathering data without revealing any personal, identifying information.

In this study, the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents were preserved by not disclosing their identities during the collection of data, analysis and reporting of the findings. This was achieved by using pseudonyms and codes to ensure effective relationships and to

keep participants' identities undisclosed. The collected data were stored on a password-locked computer accessible only by the researcher and supervisor to protect the participants' right to confidentiality.

5.11 Ethical approval and access to participants

It is unethical to collect data from participants without their knowledge, willingness and informed consent (Moriña, 2021). The researcher respected participants' rights by first seeking their permission before they participated in the research and providing them with the option to withdraw from participating at any stage of the research. Before data were collected, the researcher requested the participants to complete the information and consent letters.

This research was conducted following the University of Witwatersrand ethical standards procedure The ethical clearance certificate was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Wits University (Appendix 1). Permission to conduct research across ten primary schools was granted by the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education [KZNDoE] (Appendix 5).

5.12 Limitations and delimitation of the study

A limitation is defined as a potential weakness that is usually out of the researcher's control, and is closely associated with the chosen research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018: 156). The limitation in this study is that all the lecturers' semi-structured interviews were conducted on MS Teams because of the distances between the universities. However, the rest of the data collection (classroom observations and teacher interviews) were conducted in person in the selected schools. Delimitation is defined as the researcher setting parameters for the study's aims and objectives to ensure that it does not become impossible to achieve its goals (Dimitrios & Fountouki, 2018: 156). The delimitation applicable to this study is its focus on one province only, KwaZulu-Natal, specifically one district, uMkhanyakude. Limiting the study to one district allowed the opportunity and time to provide an in-depth understanding of the research topic. A further delimitation of this study is the decision to focus only on reading comprehension skills, while there are many other reading skills.

5.13 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the different research methods employed in this study to collect data, including a description of the research design, i.e. the interpretivist paradigm. A qualitative research approach was employed to understand teachers' experience in using reading pedagogical strategies to teach isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers, as well as to determine how universities prepare pre-service teachers on inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools. The primary data of this study were collected using non-participant classroom observations, face-to-face and online semi-structured interviews, which allowed the researcher to apply triangulation to test the findings. The following chapter presents the data interpretation and analysis of the data gathered from non-participants' classroom observations.

CHAPTER SIX: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA: NON-PARTICIPANT CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the methodology used to collect data from respondents. This chapter presents data from observed IP isiZulu reading lessons. The aim of this study is to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools. Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to observe pedagogical strategies used by teachers when teaching inclusive reading to at-risk readers in the IP classrooms. IP isiZulu reading teachers were observed partly to answer the following research sub-questions:

1. What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?
2. What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?

6.2 Non-participant classroom observations

Ten classroom observations were conducted with ten teachers across ten IP primary schools. Classroom observations were based on classroom organization in the reading lesson, teacher activities before reading, learner activities while reading, code-focused reading strategies, and teaching and learning resources available in the classroom. The following section presents and analyses data observed under the category of classroom organization in the reading lesson.

6.2.1 Classroom organization in the reading lesson

Classroom organization is a process whereby the teacher seeks to create an environment conducive to learning that caters for all learners according to their learning performance (Chepkwony et al., 2018). The key element in ensuring a successful class organization as suggested by Chiarelli, Szabo and Williams (2015), is to organize learners according to their reading cognitive abilities. Organizing learners for reading lessons can be in the form of groups,

small groups and peer reading. Table 6.1 presents classroom organization in the observed classrooms.

Table 6.1: Classroom organization in the observed classrooms

Variable: **Classroom organization in the reading lesson**	
T1	*T1 grouped at-risk readers together with those who read better in class. 32 learners were present in the class*
T2	*T2 allowed learners to group themselves in groups of five to six before reading commenced.*
T3	*T3 grouped learners based on their reading cognitive ability; however, this resulted in a chaotic and disorganized class as there were 78 learners in the class.*
T4	*T4 noted that the classroom is overcrowded; therefore, organizing learners to sit in groups was not feasible. 82 learners were present in the class.*
T5	*The classroom sitting arrangement was organized into six rows. The first three rows were set up for learners with learning challenges, including at-risk readers. 85 learners were present in the class.*
T6	*There was no classroom organization for reading because of the overcrowded classes. Learners were reading all together. There were 82 learners in the class.*
T7	*T7 shared a similar view to that of T4 that organizing learners to sit in pairs or groups was not possible because their classrooms are too small, since they used containers. The class had 65 learners.*
T8	*T8 organized learners to sit in groups of five. The classroom consisted of 25 learners.*
T9	*The classroom was organized according to the sitting plan from row A to row B. The class had 35 learners.*
T10	*The classroom was overcrowded with no sitting arrangement for reading. The class consisted of 74 learners.*

The major issue emerging from the above observation was the overcrowded classrooms, which affects the organization of the class during a reading lesson. The researcher noted that most of the classes observed ranged between 65 to 85 learners in one class. An overcrowded inclusive learning environment can compromise the development of learners to read fluently. Also, it becomes difficult for the teacher to provide extra support to at-risk readers in an overcrowded classroom. Nevertheless, it was noted that reading in small groups seemed effective, especially when at-risk readers are grouped with healthy-progress readers. 40% *(n=4)* of teachers of reading lessons implemented reading groups apart from 60% (*n=6*) of classes that could not implement reading groups as a result of an overcrowded class.

The following section presents data observed under teacher activities before reading.

6.2.2 Teacher activities before reading

6.2.2.1 Grouping learners for reading tasks

Chiarelli et al. (2015) stress that reading teachers are required to group learners based on their

reading competencies and reading interest. The grouping of learners based on their reading competencies provides teachers with the opportunity to notice at-risk readers and do the necessary interventions to help them read accurately. Table 6.2 presents observations on how reading teachers group learners during a reading lesson.

Table 6.2: Learner selection according to reading ability

Variable**: Teacher selection of learners for reading tasks**	
T1	*T1 used a one size-fit-all kind of intervention to teach reading without making the necessary selections.*
T2	*T2 grouped learners according to their reading performance; however, some of the learners were not pleased to be grouped by the teacher. The selection enabled T2 to assist the at-risk readers and monitor them in a closer space.*
T3	*No reading selection occurred before the reading lesson began.*
T4	*T4 provided learners with the opportunity to select the topic they wanted to read. Also, the teacher knew all the learners by name, especially the at-risk readers in the class which made the learner grouping process easier.*
T5	*T5's classroom was already organized according to learners' reading cognitive ability.*
T6	*There was no grouping of learners according to their reading interest.*
T7	*T7 grouped learners who could read well together with at-risk readers.*
T8	*No selection took place in the classroom, but the teacher instead allowed learners to group themselves in groups of five and select their topic of interest.*
T9	*In groups of five, learners were allowed to select the topic in the textbook they wanted to read.*
T10	*T10 did not attempt to make any selection in the class during the reading stage.*

60% *(n=6)* of the participants observed did not attempt to group learners based on their reading cognitive abilities and reading interest, whereas 40% *(n=4*) of the participants were able to group learners or have their classes already organized based on learners' cognitive reading cognitive abilities. These figures indicate that the majority of teachers do not attempt to group learners according to their cognitive reading abilities. This study maintains that learner grouping in the inclusive classroom is extremely important, given that, in most cases, learners with reading problems could be neglected if not grouped with healthy progress readers before the reading occurs. It is important to note that in most cases grouping was not possible because of limited space, not that the teachers did not want to.

6.2.2.2 Reading scaffolding

Scaffolding is often temporary, and it is gradually removed during instruction to allow learners to feel free and gain independence from the educator's surveillance and control (Haghparast & Mall-Amiri, 2015). This means that scaffolding is expected to stop once learners have acquired sufficient knowledge to participate in academic activities that are beyond their capabilities. A

teacher is required to provide guidance and feedback from each learning activity given to learners. Table 6.3 presents observations on reading scaffolding.

Table 6.3: Reading scaffolding

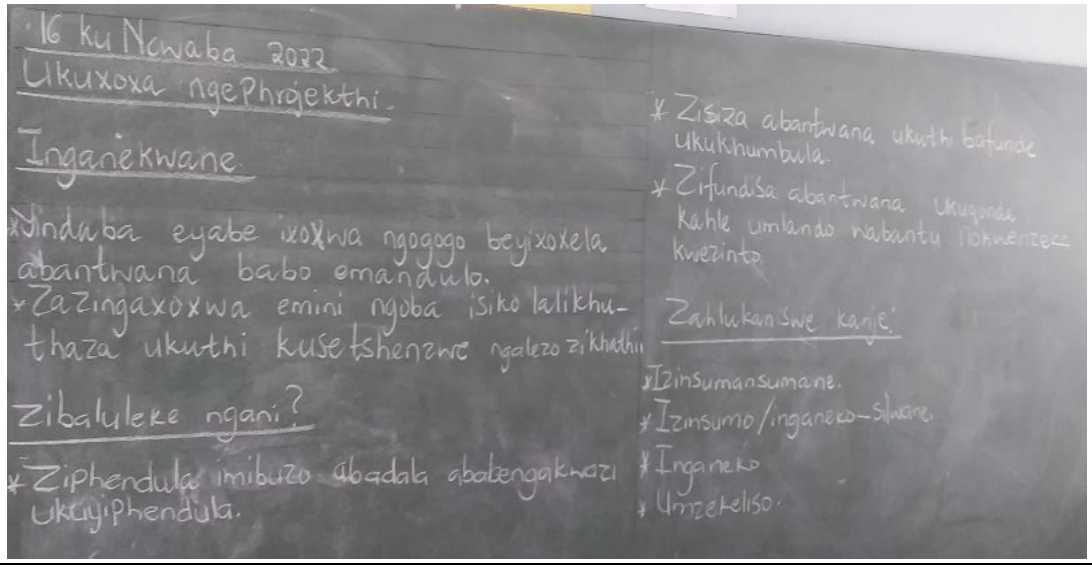
Variable: **Reading scaffolding**	
T1	*T1 read the story to all the learners in the class and defined difficult words that could be problematic to learners when they began reading.*
T2	*T2 provided a brief introduction which provided background knowledge about the text to learners. T2 further introduced the key concepts in the text and defined them by providing examples.*
T3	*T3 began by checking learners' prior knowledge and asking them about comprehension topics that were covered previously. Learners responded well. T3 then introduced the topic of the text and asked questions to learners about what they see in the form of visuals.*
T4	*T4 did not scaffold the text. Learners were instructed to read the text without receiving any background knowledge.*
T5	*Similar to T4, no reading scaffolding occurred before reading commenced in class. Learners were told to open their textbook and begin reading.*
T6	*T6 guided learners through key concepts of the text. Learners were asked to define the key concepts with the assistance of the teacher.*
T7	*T7 asked learners to answer quiz questions related to the text. The quiz questions provided insight into learners understanding of the text.*
T8	*T8 used images in the text to scaffold the text. Learners were asked to pay attention to the images and provide their thoughts.*
T9	*T9 provided a video clip to provide background knowledge about the text. Learners were further provided with pictures that align with the text to enhance their understanding, including the background knowledge.*
T10	*T10 did not attempt to scaffold a text before reading commenced.*

The observations from the above table indicate that 30% (*n=3*) of the teachers did not engage learners in reading scaffolding. Failure to engage learners in reading scaffolding as observed in the classes contributed heavily to learners' reading difficulties during the reading stage. Some of the key words that were not scaffolded had a detrimental impact in learners' reading. On the other hand, 60% (*n=6*) of the teachers used various innovative methods to scaffold reading, such as providing a brief introduction of the text, defining key concepts or phrases of the text, and using visual aids to provide background knowledge about the text. Through scaffolding the reading, learners seemed to be eager to read the text. Also, scaffolding shifted the learners' position of not knowing about the text before reading stage into a more receptive mindset through creative and exciting ways to prepare learners to read. The researcher further noted that scaffolding afforded teachers an opportunity to unpack reading difficulties so that reading can be more flexible, especially for at-risk readers.

6.2.2.3 Learner preparation to read

Using visuals to introduce the text is highly effective in the inclusive reading classroom. Some of the learners may not have reading competency but they can connect to illustrations displayed and make predictions about the text. The teacher can use various forms of visuals to help learners get background to the story through images in the text or videos (Vernet et al., 2022). Table 6.4 below presents observations on learner preparation to read.

Table 6.4: Learner preparation to read

Variable: **Learner preparation to read**	
T1	*T1 made a list of key vocabulary concepts which the teacher presumed would will be unfamiliar to learners.*
T2	*Learners were engaged to define complex key terms in the text before reading happened. T2 wrote list of key words in the chalkboard and asked learners to define those words while assisting them.*
T3	*Before reading takes place, T3 explains the importance of telling a story and its significance to children. T3 further unpacks different kinds of isiZulu stories as shown in the picture below.* 
T4	*No form of engagement was done by T4 to prepare learners to read the text.*
T5	*Learners were instructed to read the text without any form of preparation prior to preparing learners to read the text.*
T6	*T6 instructed learners to look at the visual images displayed in the text to gain a deeper understanding of the text.*
T7	*T7 read the text for learners in class and requested them to underline complex concepts while reading was underway. Once the teacher was done reading, learners raised their hands to state which words they had underlined with the aim of defining them.*
T8	*T8 asked learners to focus on ways in which the author had structured the text to guide the reader's understanding and the meaning.*
T9	*T9 used a short video clip to provide background knowledge of the text which talk about the battle of Isandlwana between the Zulu Kingdom and the British Empire that took place on 22 January 1879. The video captured learners' attention and stimulated their interest to read the text. Also, it enabled learners to get a sense of the characters in the text; hence, it was easier to recall names and roles of the characters when they read. While learners were still watching, the teacher paused the clip and*

	asked learners to define certain words which she thought could be difficult. This was done to develop learners' vocabulary knowledge. At the end of the video the teacher asked learners to state their thoughts and feelings about the story and the roles of characters, including the lesson they have learned.
T10	*No form of preparation done by T10 prior to reading.*

Following the above observations on the reading preparations, it is worth noting that reading preparations and reading scaffolding are similar in that they both strive to unpack reading difficulties that might appear the text. This suggests that teaching reading does not always need to be centred on reading textbooks. Teachers may use modern technology such as watching a video clip of the story to prepare learners to read the text, as observed in the T9 reading lesson. The researcher saw this as a highly innovative way of preparing learners to read, specifically at-risk readers, since in most cases they struggled to read a text for the first time. Nonetheless, teachers used text analysis, which provided an opportunity for at-risk readers to develop not only their vocabulary, but also to reflect further on their analysis when reading was underway. The observation table above indicates that 60% (*n=6*) of the participants had innovative ways of preparing learners to read text.

On the contrary, 40% (*n=4*) of the teachers did not engage leaners in any reading preparation before the actual reading. Learners were provided with a textbook and instructed to begin reading, and then to respond to the written questions when they finished reading. This appeared to be a daily routine of teaching reading comprehension. This study shares the view that a change of reading pedagogy in the inclusive classroom is necessary to stimulate learners' reading interest and enhance their learning cognitive abilities.

6.2.2.4 Emphasizing targeted reading skills before reading

The purpose of reading practice is to cultivate learners' reading skills and equip them with various ways in which they can improve their reading proficiency, such as decoding skills, word recognition skills, pronunciation skills and vocabulary skills (Hazaea & Alzubi, 2016). This should be a first priority in a teacher's preparations to teach reading comprehension, particularly in the inclusive classroom with at-risk readers. As noted during the observations with the teachers, many reading lessons that are conducted without targeting any reading skill are more likely to remain directionless. A teacher would divert from one reading skill to another, consequently creating confusion for the learners in the classroom. It is also a fact that given the learners' capacity, particularly in the Intermediate Phase, they may not be able to

grasp various skills taught simultaneously; therefore, targeting one reading skill in each lesson is paramount in enabling learners to achieve reading competency. This is borne out by the lexical quality hypothesis Perfetti et al. (2007) applied in this study. Also, it highlights the need for the planning of a reading lesson, and important reading aspects that need to be indicated before reading commences.

Reading teachers conduct reading lessons because they must fulfil the expectations of the curriculum, not invest in building competent readers who read with meaning and understanding (Pretorius & Stoffelsma, 2021). All of the teachers observed did not have any awareness of the need for targeted reading skills. They presented reading lessons not knowing exactly what they want their learners to achieve at the end of the lesson. It is essential that teachers should be trained to apply targeted reading skills when conducting reading comprehension lessons in inclusive classrooms. The following section presents data observed among learner activities while reading.

6.2.3 Learner reading activities

Erekson, Opitz & Rubin (2011: 49) point out that reading problems occur as a result of weak oral instructions provided in the class. Poor oral instruction may create uncertainty in learners, consequently resulting in poor fluency, poor vocabulary and an inability to recognize words in the text comprehension. Apart from oral reading instruction, problems with sounding out words may likely create difficulties in reading and decoding longer multisyllabic words, considering that the isiZulu language consists of agglutinative words. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance that reading teachers monitor reading and have the necessary skills to rectify learners' mistakes during reading. Inadequate monitoring of reading creates room for poor concentration during learner reading, especially in at-risk readers. Above all, the reading problems pointed out contribute immensely to the learner challenges to reading for meaning and understanding.

6.2.3.1 Reading instruction provided to learners

Undoubtedly, unclear instructions given in the classroom can affect learners' success in reading (Spear-Swerling, 2016). Without clear instruction, learners may create a perception that a task is quite challenging as they have no clue about what is expected from them. The extent to which clear instructions are provided partly determines the level of success in performing the task and draws learners' attention to being mindful of difficulties that can be expected in the task. This

study maintains that proper reading instructions can be achieved through using clear and precise instructional language that helps to ensure learners understand a text, explaining the requirements of a task and using an appropriate tone. In helping learners to remember the instructions, a teacher may provide a detailed rubric, which will guide learners regarding what and how much is expected from them (Spear-Swerling, 2016). The teacher may also help learners to remember instructions by asking them to repeat or rephrase what is expected of them. One may conclude to say that, in many cases, learners' problems with remembering instructions are the result of unclear instructions. Table 6.5 below presents observations on reading instructions provided to learners.

Table 6.5: Reading instructions provided to learners

Variable: **Reading instructions provided to learners**	
T1	*T1 instructed learners to identify specific sounds letters in the prefix and suffix of the word.*
T2	*T2 did not engage learners in any form of reading instruction except asking learners to read the text until the end without monitoring them and assisting where learners struggle.*
T3	*T3 did not provide any reading instructions.*
T4	*After reading the text, T4 wrote words in the chalkboard and instructed learners individually to break a word into its single sound syllables.*
T5	*T5 provided explicit instructions by indicating to learners that they need to have skills to blend sounds together. Learners with reading difficulties were instructed to say each sound letter that make up a word and then say the whole word.*
T6	*T6 picked two letter sounds, "K" and "C", and then provided words that begin with these letter-sounds. T5 then pronounced these words slowly while emphasizing the "K" and "C" sounds. Learners were instructed to blend each word accordingly.*
T7	*Reading instructions were not quite clear; hence, no explicit guideline was provided in terms of how difficult words should be read.*
T8	*The only reading strategy used by T8 was asking learners to define unfamiliar words. No attempt to engage learners in reading instructions.*
T9	*T8 unpacked the background knowledge of the story, but no intensive engagement with reading instructions.*
T10	*In developing fluency, T10 instructed learners to select any paragraph in the textbook and read it rapidly until a learner could read correctly without any mistakes.*

The observations in the above table reveal that 60% (*n=6*), which is the majority of the participants, did not provide reading instructions to their learners. It is arguable that other teachers are simply reluctant to teach reading because of their lack of cognitive reading instruction competence. Some of the teachers do not have the professional reading skills required to teach reading comprehension (Ntshangase & Tshuma, 2023). The lexical quality hypothesis (Perfetti et al., 2007) maintains that word reading is constituted by high quality lexical representations that integrate to form reading accuracy and fluency. It was noted that in

the classroom there are no intensive engagements such as teaching learners how to segment words into morphemes or how to blend sound letters of the word. On the contrary, 40% (*n=4*) of the teachers observed were partly able to provide effective reading instructions such as segmenting words into phonemes, which assisted learners to read better.

6.2.4 Code-focused reading strategies

Reading comprehension components are intertwined provide positive guidance on the pedagogical strategies used to teach reading comprehension in the classroom (Castle et al., 2018).

Even though the components are integrated, it should be highlighted that they cannot be taught in the same way; also, their methods of instruction differ, depending on the language (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007). This requires of a teacher to be linguistically competent in differentiating language structures, including all the elements that form literacy development. Failure to teach comprehension components appropriately may consequently affect learners' reading development (Trudell & Schroeder, 2007).

6.2.4.1 Learner and teacher spelling development activities

Spelling is a primary mechanism when developing reading comprehension among at-risk readers. This is because spelling comprises fundamental linguistics elements, which include phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge and morphological knowledge. It was important for this study to observe how teachers engaged learners pronunciation, word recognition and phonics. Table 6.6 presents observation data on learner and teacher spelling activities.

Table 6.6: Learner and teacher spelling development activities

Variable: **Learner and teacher spelling development activities**		
Learner Activities		***Teacher Activities***
T1	*In the reading lesson from T1, learners struggled to spell words correctly, which automatically jeopardized their ability to sound out words.*	*As learners were reading the text, T1 paid attention to how learners spelled words, including unfamiliar words.*
T2	*Learners paid attention to the instruction of the teacher.*	*T2 used phoneme knowledge and manipulation of letters, which automatically led to better spelling by learners.*
T3	*Learners focused on reading the comprehension text.*	*No reading spelling instruction took place during the reading lesson. However, the researcher noted that print work consisting of words were displayed on the wall.*
T4	*This was an isiZulu reading comprehension lesson.*	*T9 did not engage learners in letter sounds and spelling during reading lesson. However, the researcher observed that the printed reading materials were displayed on the wall.*
T5	*Some of the learners could spell and pronounce words accurately; however, they did not know the meaning of those words when the teacher asked them.*	*T5 asked learners to define some key concepts in the comprehension as they read.*
T6	*Learners had problems adapting to a natural reading pace as the result of inability to spell certain words correctly.*	*As reading was underway, T6 asked learners read in a natural pace and spell words correctly.*
T7	*Learners read the comprehension text.*	*Reading spelling did not happen in the entire lesson.*
T8	*Learners read the comprehension text.*	*No reading spelling happened in the lesson.*
T9	*Learners struggled to spell out words that contain click sounds.*	*T9 noted that learners struggled to spell out letters with clicks sounds such as "Q" in isiZulu. T9 engaged learners to practise letter sounds that have click sounds.*
T10	*Learners were reading the comprehension text.*	*Even though T10 was not emphatic regarding the spellings, the class had reading charts displayed on the wall.*

The above observations on spelling show that 50% (*n=5*) of the teachers observed were able to assist learners to improve their spelling skills. These teachers engaged learners in defining unfamiliar texts to improve reading. The connectivity of spelling and word recognition facilitates reading comprehension (Perfetti, 2016). Spelling skills are imperative when developing reading comprehension among at-risk readers. The other 50% (*n=5*) of the teachers did not attempt to assist learners in improving their spellings throughout the lessons. This has a largely negative impact not only on spelling skills, but also on word-recognition skills. Nevertheless, the researcher observed that some of these teachers had spelling print work displayed on the wall for learners to practice.

6.2.4.2 Learner and teacher vocabulary development activities

It was necessary to observe how teachers in IP engage learners to develop learner vocabulary in the classroom. Vocabulary is the ability to understand multiple meanings, define words as well as to recognize words that need to be used in the appropriate situation (Cheng & Matthews, 2018). Table 6.7 presents observations on learner and teacher activities developing vocabulary in the classroom.

Table 6.7: Learner and teacher vocabulary development activities

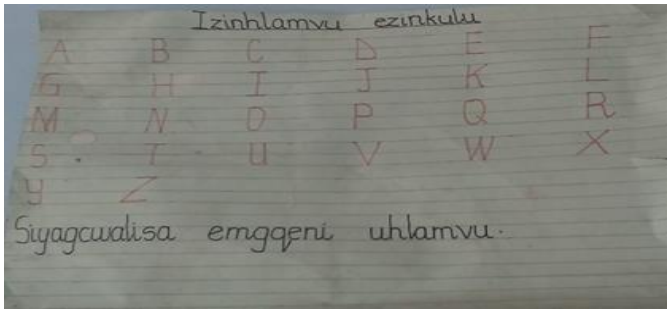
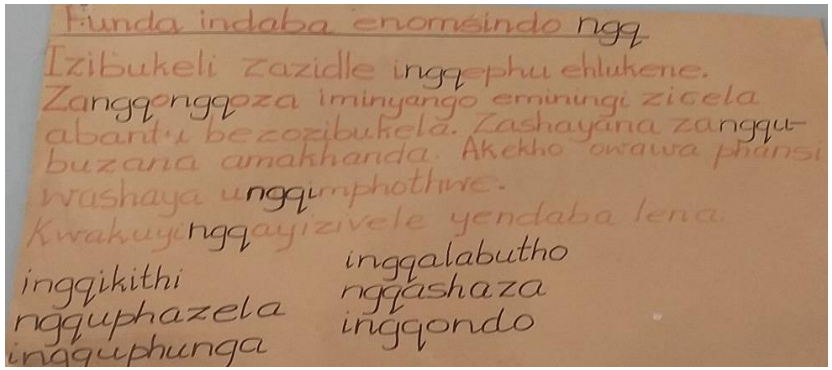
Variable: **Learner and teacher vocabulary development activities**		
Learner Activities		***Teacher Activities***
T1	*The majority of the learners could not create sentences using new words as per teacher's instruction.*	*Before reading happened, T1 wrote new words in the chalkboard and asked learners to use those words to create sentences.*
T2	*Learners read the comprehension text.*	*No vocabulary instruction took place in the class. T2 instructed learners only to read the comprehension text.*
T3	*Learners' problems with vocabulary were quite intense during reading. Approximately half of the class struggled to define common isiZulu words found in the text.*	*T8 had to provide practical demonstrations to allow learners to guess the meaning of each word in the vocabulary list.*
T4	*Learners did not participate actively in defining the words.*	*T4 uses the comprehension text to choose the list of vocabulary words that are unfamiliar to learners and then define them.*
T5	*Learners read the comprehension text, but struggled with a few new words in the text.*	*There was no formal exposure to the new words found in the comprehension text.*
T6	*As the teacher established multiple ways to expose learners to new vocabulary, learners were quiet and listened attentively to the instructions of the teacher.*	*T6 provided learners with multiple exposure to new words. For example, T6 helped learners to understand the key concepts of the text by creating a short story that illustrated the functionality of the words, including their examples.*
T7	*Learners were reading the comprehension text. Many of them could not articulate certain words correctly, which indicated poor vocabulary.*	*There was no attempt to develop learners' vocabulary. T7 focused on reading practice.*
T8	*As learners were reading the comprehension, many of them struggled with new words.*	*In the comprehension text, there were couple of words that were new to learners; hence, they could not pronounce them correctly, but T8 did not help learners to explain those words.*
T9	*Learners read new vocabulary lists written by the teacher on the chalkboard.*	*T9 wrote a list of vocabulary words on the chalkboard in an alphabetical manner. The teacher asked learners to read words repeatedly and they were assisted in defining them further. T9 then decided to mix words and requested learners to read the same words again and provide meaning.*
T10	*Learners worked collaboratively with the teacher to define new words before reading occurred.*	*T10 indicated that there could be couple of words in the story that could be new to most learners; therefore, there was a need to know the meaning of those words before reading took place. They worked together with learners to define those new words.*

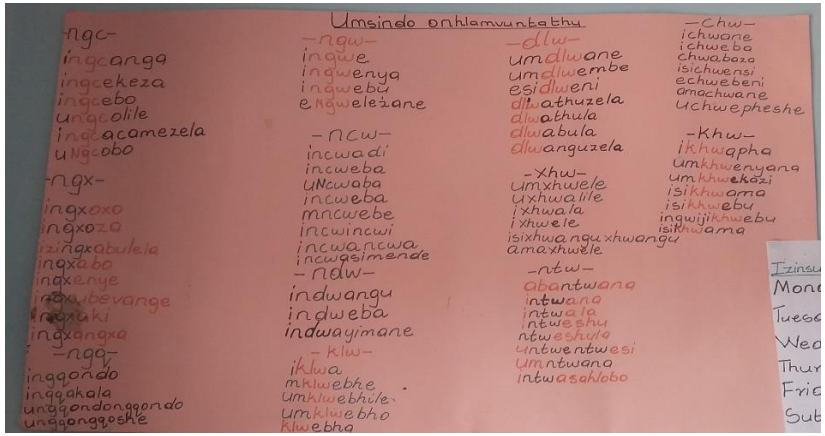
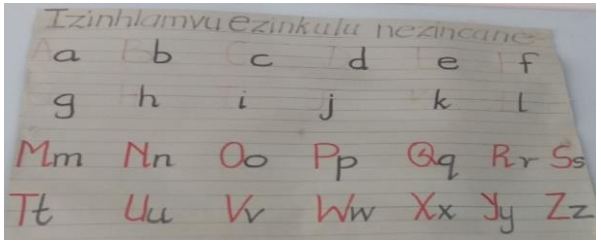
The above observation shows that the majority of the teachers make an effort to help learners develop isiZulu vocabulary, as 60% (*n=6*) of the teachers appear to be using innovative methods to improve learners' vocabulary such as allowing learners to construct sentences using new words before reading occurs. On the other hand, 40% (*n=4*) of teachers did not attempt to provide vocabulary instruction to learners. Failure to provide vocabulary instruction may affect learners' cognitive ability to read text with understanding. Reading proficiency depends on high-quality lexical representation; thus, vocabulary is the strongest predictor of reading comprehension.

6.2.4.3 Learner and teacher letter sound development activities

Letter sounds, commonly known as graphemic knowledge, is paramount in reading, since it helps learners to decode written terms and improve their vocabulary knowledge by getting to know new terms. Through letter sound knowledge, learners can use letter sound patterns to read the word and spell it correctly, even if it is not familiar to them. Phonics instruction is the most effective approach teachers can use to teach letter sound knowledge (Castle et al., 2018). Table 6.8 presents data observed for learner and teacher activities when teaching letter sounds.

Table 6.8: Learner and teacher letter sound development activities

Variable: **Learner and teacher letter sound development activities**		
	Learner Activities	***Teacher Activities***
T 1	*Learners could not clearly pronounce certain isiZulu sound clicks such as the letter sounds "Q" and "X".*	*T1 asked learners to read the sound letters displayed on the wall.* 
T2	*Learners could read well and comply with the reading grammatical rules; however, they struggled to sound complex isiZulu words, most of which consisted of three- or four-consonant letter sounds.*	*T2 assisted learners with pronouncing complex words in the comprehension text.*
T3	*Learners struggled to pronounce long and complex isiZulu terms. They had problems in recognizing terms that consist of three-letter sounds.*	*T3 asked learners to read a short story that was displayed on the wall. The short story aimed to teach learners to be able to sound out words that consisted of three-sound letters.* 
T4	*Learners were instructed to read the sound letters.*	*T4 used learners' names for blending practice and identification of letters; then compared the pronunciation of learners' names that shared the same letters.*

T5	*T3 instructed learners to cut out their preferred letters included in the names of their hobbies such as sport and game.*	*While learners were cutting their preferred letter sounds T5 monitored learners and helped them to match the letters with their hobbies.*
T6	*Learners were instructed to read letter sounds and create sentences that include those letter sounds.*	*Sound letter charts that educate learners about three-consonant sounds were displayed on the wall.* 
T7	*After reading comprehension, learners were instructed to read the chart of letter sounds.*	*T7 guided learners on how they should sound out double-consonant sounds.*
T8	*Learners learned about letter sounds.*	*Letter sounds starting from A to Z were displayed on the wall. The teacher asked learners to provide the word from the reading text that started with the letter sound she pointed to.* 
T9	*Learners gave words that begin with the letter sound pointed by the teacher.*	*T9 drew a table on the chalkboard with different letter sounds, pointed to each letter and requested learners to nominate any word that began with it.*
T10	*Learners read the comprehension text.*	*Sound letter charts were displayed on the wall. However, they were not used during the reading lesson.*

The observations highlight the significant role played by printed reading material to help learners recognize letter sounds, which may lead to reading difficulties if ignored. All of the teachers were able to engage learners with letter sound development activities. Most importantly, teachers got learners to practise the letter sounds through various methods. One of the important alphabetic phases in Ehri and McCormick's (2008) theory of word learning during the pre-alphabetic phase suggests that the reading strategies ought to focus on letter recognition and phonics awareness (Ehri, 2002). Therefore, this theory is of great importance to assist at-risk readers in developing letter-sound knowledge. On the contrary, the researcher observed that some of the reading charts that were displayed in classes were not updated. Outdated reading material leads to a sense of disengagement, including a lack of reading motivation in learners.

6.2.4.4 Multisensory (audio-visual) activity

In most cases the curriculum used in mainstream schools caters only for auditory-visual learners (Warnick & Caldarella, 2016). However, for some of the learners included in mainstream schools this may not be a natural way to learn. These learners may need to learn using certain objects that can assist them to remember new information. In most cases they may struggle to read or write like other learners; (Warnick & Caldarella, 2016). It is for this reason that the introduction to multisensory teaching is fundamentally important to acknowledge and cater for the uniqueness of these learners who may be included in mainstream schools. Multisensory teaching gives at-risk readers the opportunity to use their senses to activate their memory to retrieve new information (Warnick & Caldarella, 2016). A competent educator would be able to facilitate this approach successfully. Based on the observations, specifically on the multisensory approach, some of the teachers implemented such a learning approach and it yielded positive outcomes. Table 6.9 presents teachers engaging learners in multisensory (audio-visual) activity.

Table 6.9: Teacher engaging learners in multisensory (audio-visual) activity

Variable: **Teacher engaging learners in multisensory (audio visual) activity**	
T1	*T1 allowed learners to pay attention to the images displayed in the text before reading and learners were provided an opportunity to share their thoughts about the text.*
T2	*T2 asked learners to share their thoughts on the important message communicated by the author to the reader through the images displayed in the text.*
T3	*Learners were asked to use the visual images displayed in the text to express their thoughts about the story before reading it.*
T4	*There was no sense of a multisensory learning approach in the class. T4's class was devoted to reading practice.*
T5	*T5 did not engage learners in any form of multisensory form. Learners were just instructed to read the comprehension.*
T6	*T6 allowed few learners in class whom he knows are struggling to read to use visual images displayed in the text to tell what the story is all about. As the researcher observes and listens attentively, a learner was able to connect the images he sees in the text to and tell exactly what is happening without having to read the entire story.*
T7	*T7 allowed learners to read the text twice. After reading they were instructed to form groups of six to create a play based on the story they read. Learners chose names of the characters that they would represent during acting. Each group was given ten minutes to act out the story. This is a funny and innovative method of learning which not only cultivates reading skills, but also explores other social skills and accommodates at-risk readers to become part of the teaching and learning process.*
T8	*T8 used reading materials such as books and flashcards to allow physical interaction with the material.*
T9	*T9 was holding a book showing learners pictures of the story and asking them questions related to pictures displayed in the textbook.*
T10	*T10 used flashcards that were associated with the pictures that begin with a particular letter such as "H" or "D". A teacher would pick any random flashcard with a letter, then learners would provide a picture that matches the letter. For example, when a flashcard with the letter 'H' meaning "**Hamba**" (to walk), was shown, a learner picked up the picture of a boy walking. This did not only help learners with word identification, but it further improved their vocabulary as they got to know new words.*

Teachers appear to consider multisensory reading useful and beneficial, not only to at-risk readers, but to all learners in the reading lesson. In this case, multisensory learning seems to be an impactful strategies and uncovers new ways in which those who struggle to read feel accommodated and are given a chance to participate in class. The observations above show that 80% (*n=8*) of teachers were able to expose learners to multisensory learning activities. 20% (*n*=2) of the teachers did not engage learners in any multisensory activities, which consequently narrowed the space of learning as it does not explore alternative approaches to accommodate learners with reading difficulties.

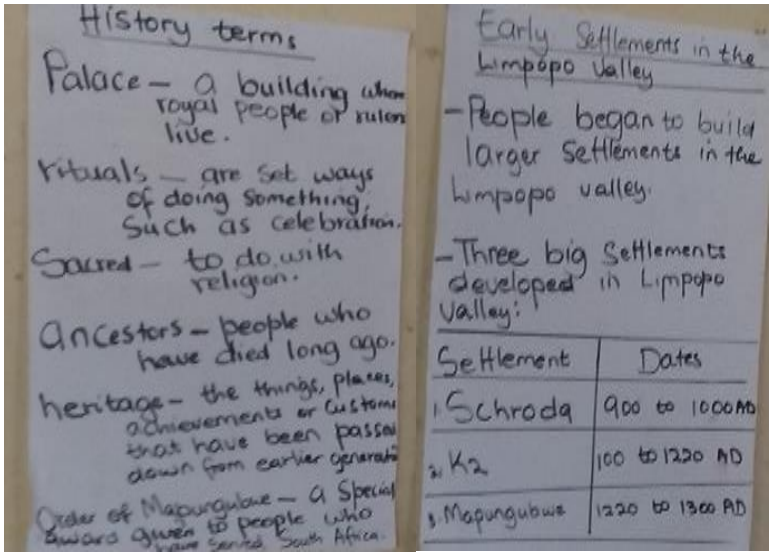
Teachers who were able to implement a multisensory learning approach explained to the researcher that some of the reading activities are not for the Intermediate Phase level; rather,

they belong to the Foundation Phase. They mentioned that it was paramount that they reverted to the FP work and instructions to allow at-risk readers to move a step closer to the IP work. This indicated that learners in the FP progress to the IP without being academically ready. In addition, it raises significant questions about training of FP teachers, as well as their competence in teaching reading comprehension in the mainstream classrooms.

6.2.4.5 Availability of reading materials in a reading classroom

The researcher holds a firm view that innovative teachers who make an effort to create meaningful reading materials and strive to establish a smooth reading environment where learners have a preference for a specific reading strategy are more likely to see an improvement in reading. Table 6.10 presents observations of reading material on display in the observed classrooms.

Table 6.10: Availability of reading materials

Variable: **Availability of reading materials**	
T1	*T1 had various printed reading materials displayed on the class walls for learners to read, such as charts consisting of isiZulu letter sounds. However, the researcher did not see learners practising letters in printed materials.*
T2	*The researcher noted that the classroom did not have isiZulu materials, but English materials were available.* 
T3	*Alphabet's sounds were displayed on the wall.*
T4	*The classroom had a chart with isiZulu consonant sounds, with a picture and the word describing the picture.*
T5	*The classroom had sound letters displayed on the wall for learners to practise phonics.*
T6	*The classroom did not have any materials displayed in the class. Hence there was no engagement with displayed materials.*
T7	*Displays of letter sound charts were available in the class, but the teacher focused on developing learners' reading fluency.*

T8	*Some of the materials looked quite old and disorganized so that one could tell that they were no longer used; a few sound letters were cut off and did not appear on the chart.*
T9	*T9 did not have displayed materials displayed on the walls. The reasons were explained that charts displayed on the walls are not for the IP level, but for the FP level, which came as a surprise as to why there were no printed charts on the walls while many learners still struggled to pronounce and blend sound letters. English reading charts were available but not for isiZulu reading.*
T10	*T10 explained that the reason there are no printed materials on the walls is because learners always remove reading charts intentionally because they do not want to read. This speaks strongly of the attitude that learners had towards reading comprehension and their lack of motivation to read. Seemingly learners only practise reading when they are at school, not at home. Thus, questions arise about the role of parents in improving their children's reading skills.*

From the observations above it emerged that 80% (*n=8*) of the learner classrooms had reading charts displayed on the wall. Learners in these classrooms receive more exposure to reading, and they have the opportunity to grow their reading skills, especially the at-risk readers. However, the researcher observed that these teachers did not have any other type of reading material in their classes such as reading corners or reading boxes, except for reading charts. This indicates that teachers hardly use their knowledge to explore and be creative enough to design other forms of reading that can help learners develop reading skills. The other 20% (n=2) of teachers did not engage learners with displayed reading materials during the lessons; there was no printed material on the classroom walls. This conveys a sense of a learning environment that is less productive with an atmosphere not conducive to learning and not vested in cultivating learners' reading knowledge and enabling them to grow.

6.2.5 Teacher activities after reading

Meaning-focused reading strategies

Reading comprises various factors working together to influence reading proficiency which includes, among other things, background knowledge and cognitive strategies that help to construct meaning from the text. Research suggests that teachers need to use a variety of reading strategies to help learners comprehend the text and understand the essential components of reading (Yapp, De Graaff & Van den Bergh, 2021; Bilonozhko & Syzenko, 2020).

6.2.5.1 Text summary

Reading summary is an excellent way of checking whether learners were able to read the text with understanding and for meaning (Mokeddem & Houcine, 2016: 199). A reading summary

requires learners to provide the representation of the main points that stood out from the text accurately and in their own words without referring to the original text (Mokeddem & Houcine, 2016: 199). Apart from that, learners may further state their own opinion about the text or compare with another text they have read. It is a creative and innovative method of giving learners the opportunity to express their views about the roles of the characters in the story. Table 6.11 presents the use of text summary in the observed classrooms.

Table 6.11: Text summary

Variable: **text summary**	
T1	*No reading summary was initiated in the class throughout reading.*
T2	*Learners were asked to summarize the climax and the turning point of the story in their own words without referring back to the original text.*
T3	*T3 did not engage learners with a reading summary throughout the reading lesson.*
T4	*No reading summary was initiated in the class throughout the reading lesson.*
T5	*No reading summary was initiated in the class throughout the reading lesson.*
T7	*T3 advised learners to focus on the turning point of the story and then use their own words to provide a written summary.*
T8	*T8 tasked learners to summarize the text in five points by finding the main ideas that convey the gist of the story.*
T9	*T9 did not ask learners to summarize the text. The focus was heavily on the reading practice and identifying unfamiliar words in the text.*
T10	*No reading summary was initiated in the class throughout the reading lesson.*

The observation indicated that 60% (*n=6*) of the participants did not provide any opportunity for learners to summarize the text, whether orally or in writing. The ignorance about the value of a reading summary in the reading lessons may limit teachers in evaluating learners' ability to read for meaning and understanding. Forty percent (*n=4*) of the teachers demonstrated various strategies on text summary to evaluate learners' understanding of the story. These strategies were useful not only to verify learners' reading for meaning, but also to identify specific problems that at-risk readers have when it comes to reading for meaning and understanding. Teachers also did tremendous work by exposing learners to both verbal summary and writing summary. By doing so, teachers afforded learners the opportunity to integrate various skills such as communicative skills and writing skills, including enhancing their reading memory capacity.

6.2.5.2 Questions about the text

Asking questions during reading instruction is one of the most influential factors in promoting reading comprehension as it does not only enhance reading cognitive ability but also provides

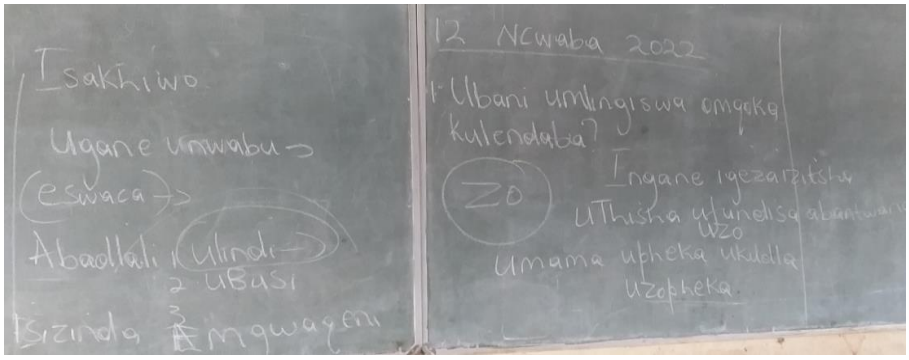
an opportunity to evaluate understanding of a reading text. Asking learners questions improves comprehension knowledge, irrespective of whether it's a learner self-generated question or teacher questions (Blything, Hardie & Cain, 2020).

Jones (2012) elaborates on the different intentions of asking questions in the reading lesson. Questions in reading can be asked to enhance learners' participation. A teacher may feel that learners are not participating as expected, so there is a need to encourage class participation in order to hold them accountable (Jones, 2012). This includes checking whether a learner can answer a question when they are called upon. Answering comprehension questions in a reading lesson makes the lesson more learner-centred. A teacher may ask a question to shift from the domination of teacher's talk towards encouraging learners' talk (Blything et al., 2020), whereas another teacher may stimulate learners' thinking by asking them whether they remember important information about the previous reading activity. Then, in an open and unstructured engagement, the teacher asks questions to learners and discusses the answers (Jones, 2012).

The researcher observed that teachers were active in asking questions about the text before, during and after reading. However, some of the questions from teachers did not seem to serve any purpose in reading development. At some point questions were not designed to engage learners to think deeply about the text they read. Table 6.12 presents observations on teachers asking questions about the text during a reading lesson.

Table 6.12: Questions about the text

Variable**: Questions about the text**	
T1	*T1 only asked close-ended questions which in the researcher's view was limiting learners from probing further in detail to show their intensive understanding by connecting different aspects of the text to support their responses.*
T2	*T2 similar to T1, engaged learners by asking close-ended questions, by asking them true or false questions.*
T4	*The researcher noted that T4 was quite pleased with the skilled readers who provided correct responses from the questions. However, no attention was given to at-risk readers. Learners who were struggling with reading could not answer any of the questions that were asked; yet no assistance was provided.*
T5	*T5 asked many questions which contributed immensely to reading development. However, some inadequacies were noted. For example, T5, spent too much time asking learners questions before reading commenced, which resulted in limiting oral reading practice. Only approximately ten minutes were allocated for learners to read.*
T6	*Most of the questions generated by T6 were based on the definitions of concepts, but hardly any on the learners' understanding of the text.*
T7	*Each group in the classroom generated five questions about the story which had to be answered by another group. T7 noted that the aim was to promote a learner-centred approach whereby learners were in charge of their learning.*

T8	*T8 asked learners to name the characters found in the story and further describe their roles and how they influenced the turning point of the story.* 
T9	*Learners were asked to describe the incidents that took place in the story and describe the lessons they learned from those incidents.*
T10	*Questions asked by T10 were worth asking. However, they served less purpose in evaluating learner's understanding about the text. In other words, the questions were too general and obvious in a manner that there was no question which sought to understand learners' thoughts and ideas about the text.*

The observations above indicate that posing questions is the most common factor in cultivating reading skills. All of the teachers observed posed questions. However, 60% (*n=6*) lacked a comprehensive strategy for which questions had to be asked and what objectives the questions sought to achieve. Teachers need to be educated about various means of posing questions and how best they can improve their questioning methods to accommodate the at-risk readers in class, since it emerged that often they do not participate. The present study maintains that teachers may use other methods of asking questions such as brainstorming or writing prompt note cards whereby learners write questions about what they have noted in the passage during reading.

6.2.5.3 Word definition

Defining words in reading comprehension is paramount to enhancing learners' vocabulary and improving their understanding of the text (Castle et al., 2018). A reading teacher may define a few words that are unfamiliar in the text before, during and after reading. It has been established that some of the learners can read words fluently, also with correct pronunciation, but without knowing the actual meaning of a word (Castle et al., 2018). Before reading lessons commence, teachers must identify and underline words they presume may be complex and confusing for learners. While defining words, a teacher may provide examples, illustrations and demonstrations to ensure that even at-risk readers get an idea of what is being referred to. Practical examples and demonstrations in particular may be useful in helping learners to

remember the meaning of a word. Table 6.13 presents observations on how word definition was dealt with in class.

Table 6.13: Word definition

Variable: **Word definition**	
T1	*The teacher did not define the few words that were confusing to learners. The text that was read in class contained proverbs and fixed expressions which had to be explained to make sense to learners.*
T2	*T2 provided examples and contextualized them to help learners understand the meaning of words. The example provided by T2 created a flexible and relaxed learning atmosphere, as they were related to learners' personal lives.*
T3	*T3 instructed learners to write down words which they do not understand and use their isiZulu dictionaries to explain them and give examples by creating sentences.*
T4	*While learners' reading was underway, the teacher paused learners to ask them to define concepts which she thought were not familiar to them. Assistance was provided in cases where learners failed to define a particular word.*
T5	*T5 had a list of vocabulary words on a separate piece of paper. Learners were asked to use their Zulu dictionaries to define them and a create sentence.*
T6	*T6 showed a lack of preparedness as some of the learners could not sound out certain words in the text; yet no definition of the concepts was provided.*
T7	*T7 asked learners to underline words they did not understand in the text by using their Zulu dictionaries and working with their peers.*
T8	*T8 did not attempt to ask learners any questions before, during and after reading the text. Instead, T8 gave learners some homework to underline unfamiliar words and inform learners to ask their parents to assist in defining those concepts.*
T9	*T9 wrote a list of vocabulary words in the chalkboard and worked collaboratively with learners to define them and provide examples which included exciting demonstrations.*
T10	*T10 did not define concepts or words in the text. Some of the words sounded unfamiliar to learners but there was no attempt to define them.*

From the observations above, 60% (*n=6*) of the teachers seemed to understand the importance of defining words in the reading lessons, even though this is not the case for the other 40% (*n=4*) of the teachers, who appeared unprepared and to lack skills on how they could assist learners to define words in class. Teachers need to be careful about the reading text they choose in class; some of the texts may not resonate with learners' interests and contain complex terminology that is beyond learners' intellectual capacity. Therefore, teachers' prior reading preparation is fundamentally important in ensuring that learners read the text that will develop the vocabulary at their level and align with their personal real-life interests as far as possible.

However, the researcher noted that the teachers did not really focus on the teaching of expressions and reading them with understanding. They would inform learners to just go home and familiarize themselves with certain expressions on their own, which may not be an

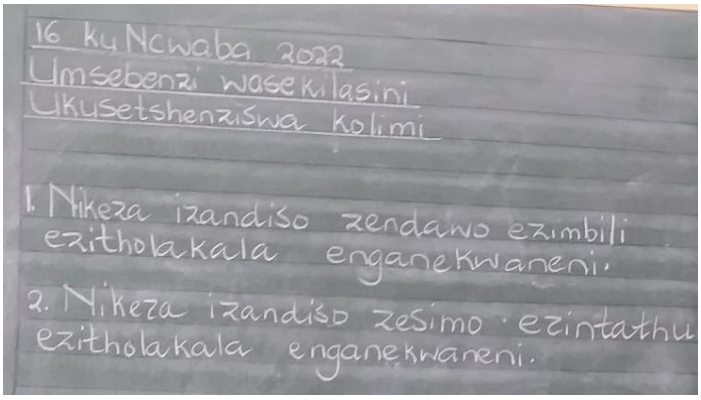
effective way of developing reading skills. Teachers need to assist learners systematically to develop an understanding in their reading of these expressions.

6.2.5.4 Writing about the text read

Writing about the text that has been read is often regarded as among the crucial aspects that influence reading for meaning and with understanding positively. Writing about the text falls under the post-reading stage. At this stage, learners are expected to have attained new information from the text which enables them to respond to the written questions about the text. Learners are expected to have familiarized themselves with the topic, text structure, new vocabulary, new idiomatic expressions, new sentences, characters and main character of the story (Wahjudi, 2010).

In other words, reading comprehension does not only end in the oral reading development, but learners' knowledge and understanding of the text also need to be tested. When learners are instructed to write about the text after reading it, the aim is not to comprehend the text or to understand the language of the text, but to apply what they have learned (Wahjudi, 2010). This means that learners need to reflect on what they have read in the text and apply their understanding. Writing about text further stimulates learners' self-confidence, because they are able to demonstrate how well prepared they are to have reached the post-reading stage. Table 6.14 presents observations on writing about the read text:

Table 6.14: Writing about the text read

Variable: **writing about the text read**	
T1	*Provided individual writing activity after reading. Some learners were not finished with their writing activities, and others who had finished were instructed to read a second text. This destabilized the class and caused the lesson to be disorganized.*
T2	*Learners were never provided with any writing activity after reading comprehension.*
T3	*Learners were given the activity shown below after reading compression.* 
T4	*After reading, T4 asked learners to respond to the questions in the textbook.*
T5	*T5 did not provide any writing activity to learners.*
T6	*No writing activity given to learners after reading.*
T7	*No writing activity given to learners after reading except oral questions asked by T7.*
T8	*T8 analysed the structure of the story orally, but no written activity was given to learners after reading.*
T9	*T9 did not provide a writing activity after reading comprehension.*
T10	*Learners were given homework in their textbook to write about the story they had read in class.*

The outcome of the observations based on writing about the text read shows that 40% (*n=4*) of the teachers observed were able to provide writing activities after reading, which demonstrates teachers' understanding that learners need to be given the opportunity to apply what they have read in the text to demonstrate their understanding. On the contrary, 60% (n=6) of the teachers did not provide any writing activity after reading. The most definite problem about this is that the at-risk readers did not get the opportunity to be assessed and checked on whether they were able to read the text with understanding. This indicates that teachers ended the reading acquisition process in the reading stage.

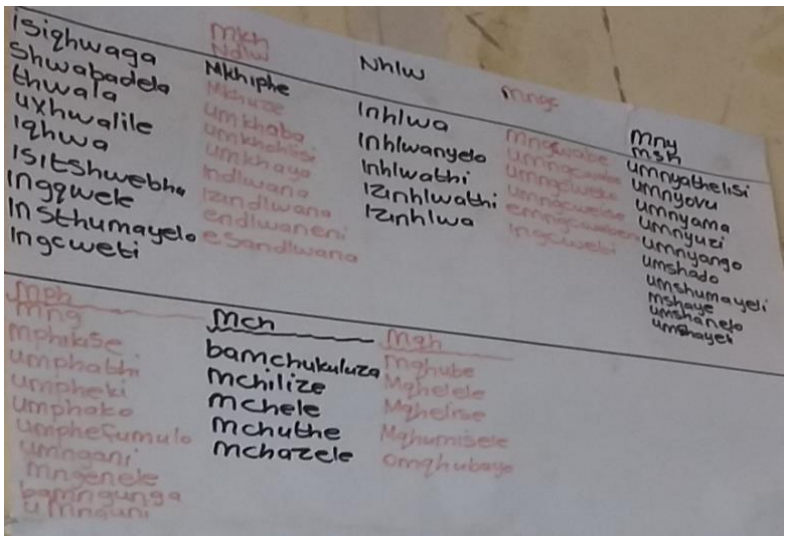
6.2.6 Teaching and learning resources

Learning resources in schools are the driving force towards successful learning and teaching processes. This indicates that the shortage of learning resources may have a greater impact in sustaining poor-quality education, particularly in the rural school context. Many rural schools face a serious shortage of learning resources compared to their wealthier urban counterparts.

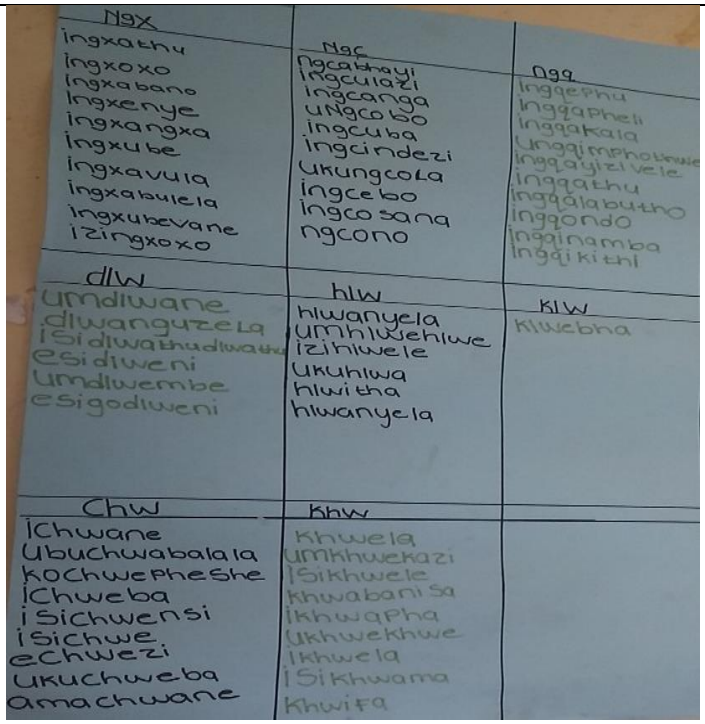
The consequence of having poor learning resources is a high rate of learner drop-out. This is a clear indication that the South African education system is still unequal, despite the provisions of the South African Constitution (1996) that stipulates that everyone must have access to a good quality of education. However, rural schools remain the most marginalized and neglected institutions of learning when it comes to access to quality education.

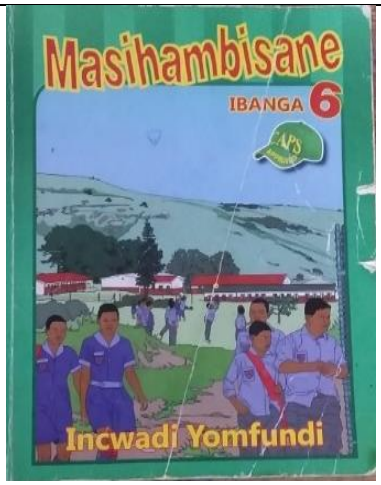
The availability of reading materials is a profound aspect of inclusive education to stimulate learners' desire to read and ensure the provision of reading assistance to at-risk readers. Molin & Lantz-Andersson (2016) argue that reading teachers also have a role and responsibility to create reading materials in their classes. Learners in the classroom can also work collaboratively with the teacher to design materials such as reading charts. Reading material should stimulate learners' reading interest and instil reading confidence inside and outside of the classroom environment. Reading materials may include DBE workbooks, dictionaries, learners' work displayed on classroom walls, and the class library, as well as magazines, catalogues, brochures, newspapers and computer-based reading material. Table 6.15 presents observations on teaching and learning resources.

Table 6.15: Teaching and learning resources

Variable: **Evidence of text-based teaching and learning resources in the classroom**	
T1	*A sound chart was displayed on the wall in the classroom.*
T2	*The researcher observed that the classroom did not have any of isiZulu reading charts on the wall, but many English reading charts were displayed on the wall.*
T3	*The classroom had an old chart of isiZulu consonant sounds which was not updated.*
T4	*The classroom had a chart with isiZulu consonant sounds.* 
T5	*The classroom had a book corner where learning material is stored.*

	
T6	*Sound-letter charts were displayed on the wall consisting of double-consonant sounds.* 
T7	*In the classroom there was a chart for a short story which aimed to teach learners about complex letter sounds.*
T8	*The classroom had reading charts which aimed to educate learners about three-sound alphabet letters.*

	
T9	*The class had a list of isiZulu vocabulary words on the chart consisting of different sound alphabet letters.*
T10	*The classroom had charts displayed on the wall for isiZulu numbers.* 



All of the teachers observed were using the Department of Education isiZulu textbook titled *Masihambisane.* Learners had to sit in groups to share one textbook, because copies were not available for every individual learner. T1 shared that they did not have reading material on the walls because the learners destroyed them every time. Such conduct indicates a lack of

discipline amongst learners. None of the schools had libraries or any technological reading equipment to help learners read, such as computer-based reading materials and reading-voice recorders. It is worth mentioning that the evidence from this study in terms of school reading material is also supported by the National Reading Panel (2008), which alludes to insufficient reading materials as a barrier towards reading development.

Data accrued from the teacher observations indicate that rural schools have an extreme shortage of reading materials that perpetuates reading problems. The present study suggests that rural schools are neglected when it comes to the distribution of learning materials. Nevertheless, the role of the KZNDoE to deliver adequate learning resources to schools and alleviate poor reading in African languages remains a matter of concern. 90% (n=9) of the classes had reading charts displayed on the wall for reading practice, whereas 10% (n=1) did not have any form of printed work in the classroom.

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter provided classroom observation findings from the respondents focusing on various aspects such as classroom organization during the reading lesson, teacher activities before reading, learner activities while reading, code-focused reading strategies, and teaching and learning resources. Given what has been observed from the respondents, it is worth noting that some of the teachers have proven to have basic reading knowledge. For example, they are knowledgeable about activities conducted to prepare learners to read during the pre-reading stage, ensuring reading fluency during the reading stage and evaluating learners' understanding of the text in the post-reading stage. However, deep discrepancies were still noted between teachers in the reading lessons, such as teachers' inability to identify at-risk readers and organizing a sitting arrangement that will accommodate at-risk readers. The major issue observed is that teachers do not create a learning environment that is accommodates learners with reading problems; in other words, inclusive reading is still a challenge and at-risk readers are not well catered for. Lastly, overcrowded classrooms seriously hamper the process of learning and teaching and prevent teachers from implementing effective reading pedagogy strategies.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented data from teacher classroom observations. This chapter presents data from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the teachers. The aim of this study was to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools.

The semi-structured interviews with the teachers were conducted to understand reading teachers' experiences and issues involving pedagogical challenges when teaching inclusive reading comprehension in the classroom. Data collected from IP isiZulu reading teachers partly answer the following research sub-questions:

- What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?
- What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers at uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?
- What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
- What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

7.2 Semi-structured interviews with teachers

Teachers' responses are presented according to the semi-structured interview schedule, which mainly focuses on five aspects, namely teacher preparation for inclusive reading; classroom organization for at-risk readers; pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension; availability of learning and teaching source materials (LTSM) for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers; and policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools. The simple-view of reading approach (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) could be

used in this context to unpack the relationship between word reading and language skills and show how this relationship influences reading comprehension. The simple view of reading approach should further guide teachers on how to move an at-risk reader from Q3 to Q1. Identifying the challenges encountered in this transition (Question 3) should pave the way for improving the strategies used to guide at-risk readers. The lexical quality hypothesis (Perfetti, 2007) also posits that reading comprehension difficulties are the result of low-quality lexical representations, which show a disconnect between the dimensions of lexical quality, phonology, orthography, semantics and morphosyntax.

The same ten teachers who were observed under teacher classroom observation were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The first two close-ended questions sought to gather information from teachers on their preparation to teach inclusive reading in mainstream schools, whereas the majority of open-ended questions aimed to understand teachers' insights into pedagogical practices in teaching at-risk readers, including education policies governing inclusive reading in mainstream schools.

7.2.1 Teacher preparation for inclusive reading

According to MRTEQ (RSA 2011, revised 2015), which is briefly alluded to in Chapter One of this study, there are minimum standards for different types of qualifications offered at South African universities; these standards help to develop learning programmes and curricula. According to the policy, IP teachers are required to specialize in teaching two languages, namely First Additional English Language teaching and Home Language teaching in one of the official languages (MRTEQ, 2015: 24). The general guidelines and procedures for inclusive education are also provided by the policy (Rusznyaki & Walton, 2019). Despite the fact that poor reading skills are seen as a crisis that hinders learners' academic performance in the classroom, training in inclusive reading is not required for general teacher education certifications under the MRTEQ. Additionally, the MRTEQ policy lists an inclusive education course that is available as a postgraduate option. It is outside the purview of this study to find out how many in-service teachers working in mainstream schools have completed this postgraduate course and whether it inherently supports inclusive reading. It is understandable, nevertheless, that teachers would use standard reading techniques without giving at-risk readers extra consideration. The following section presents data on pre-service teachers' education courses on inclusive reading.

7.2.1.1 Pre-service teacher education courses on inclusive reading

Inclusive reading is defined as the ability to teach reading comprehension skills in the classroom in a way that accommodates both healthy-progress readers and at-risk readers by means of implementing inclusive pedagogical instruction that caters for all (Berkeley & Larsen, 2018). Inclusive reading stems from the concept of inclusive education, which in turn refers to teaching learners who have been diagnosed with learning challenges in the same classroom as learners who do not have such problems, as stipulated in the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001). The worldwide recognition of the need for diversity learning in mainstream university teacher education departments represents an attempt to combat exclusion and marginalization in the learning and teaching process and to promote diversity and inclusion. Without adequate teacher preparation for inclusive learning (and inclusive reading), recently graduated teachers encounter challenges in their attempt to facilitate learning in diverse classrooms (Mengual-Andrés et al., 2015). Table 7.1 presents teachers' insights to question 1: ***In your methodology lectures, did you have a course/module focusing on inclusive reading for at risk readers in mainstream schools?***

Table 7.1: Pre-service teacher education courses on inclusive reading

Variable: **inclusive reading courses**	
T1	*No, I was never taught anything of that nature.*
T2	*I do not remember anything related to inclusive reading.*
T3	*It is my first time hearing about the concept of inclusive reading.*
T4	*I only remember the module that has some elements of inclusive education not the inclusive reading.*
T5	*Our language course did not have a specific content for inclusive reading for at-risk readers.*
T6	*No, we did not have any module focusing on inclusive reading.*
T7	*We only had a module focusing on inclusive education in education psychology not inclusive reading.*
T8	*I do not remember being taught anything related to inclusive reading.*
T9	*I was only taught isiZulu structure and introduction to isiZulu education.*
T10	*I was only taught about inclusive education not inclusive reading.*

All of the participants interviewed shared that in their training they did not have a module focusing specifically on inclusive reading for at-risk readers. T5 reported that their language course outline did not cover inclusive reading for at-risk readers. T9 also mentioned that the module focused on the isiZulu language structure and introduction to isiZulu education. T4 and T10 state that they were taught about inclusive education with no specification regarding

inclusive reading. It seems that literacy courses do not consider teaching inclusive reading to at-risk readers as their responsibility; however, the responsibility has been shifted to the Higher Education Institution's psychology department as noted in T7's response. This is a problem, in that the psychology department does not addresses factors related to isiZulu literacy pedagogical practices for at-risk readers. As a result, teachers who are expected to deal with at-risk readers in the mainstream schools remain unprepared.

7.2.1.2 Attending short courses on inclusive reading

Duffy and Atkinson's (2001) study in the context of teacher education programmes reveals that although pre-service teachers completed methodology courses at university, they felt underprepared for teaching learners with reading problems in the inclusive classroom. According to Gottfried et al. (2019), courses in teacher education that do not include authentic, field-based experiences are weak in preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive teaching. Thus, field-based experiences for teachers teaching in mainstream schools may assist in developing isiZulu inclusive reading strategies. Table 7.2 presents teachers' responses to question 2: ***After graduation, did you attend any short courses or workshops focusing on inclusive reading for at-risk readers?***

Table 7.2: Attending short courses on inclusive reading

Variable: **Courses or workshops focusing on inclusive reading**	
T1	*No, I have not attended any course or workshop in inclusive reading.*
T2	*I have only attended two workshops on isiZulu language literacy; however, the workshop was not focusing on inclusive reading.*
T3	*I have not been able to attend any workshop due to the tight schedule for teaching.*
T4	*I do not personally attend these workshops because there is a continuous repetition of content.*
T5	*I am swamped with teaching activities. I cannot find time to attend language workshops.*
T6	*I have only attended one workshop in language literacy not specifically in inclusive reading.*
T7	*I have stopped attending language literacy workshops because they always teach us something we already know.*
T8	*I have not attended any short course or a workshop on inclusive reading*
T9	*I attended two workshops in isiZulu language teaching.*
T10	*I cannot manage to attend a two-week workshop while I am expected to complete a syllabus on time.*

Only 30% (n=3) of the participants reported that they had attended workshops on isiZulu teaching literacy generally, but not specifically on the inclusive reading for at-risk readers. The

rest of the participants stated that they had not attended isiZulu workshops. They reported that the reason they did not attend was because of the work overload; they felt that attending workshops was time consuming, while they have a lot on their plate to deliver, including covering the syllabus. In addition, they stated that they did not attend these workshops because they felt that the content was often repeated and not updated frequently. These sentiments speak volumes about the lack of quality of the DBE teacher capacity development workshops; as is evidenced by teachers, there is a repetition of content from time to time. The DBE needs to ensure the quality of experts who are tasked to train teachers in these workshops.

The following section presents data on the classroom organization.

7.2.2 Classroom organization for at-risk readers

7.2.2.1 Identifying at-risk readers in a class

The simple view of reading approach (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) provides a simplified framework for identifying three categories of at-risk readers as well as the healthy progress of readers in a classroom. The identification would then serve as the basis for the teacher to select the appropriate strategies for use with at-risk readers at different levels of their journey to becoming healthy progress readers. Table 7.3 presents teachers' responses to question 3: ***How do you identify at-risk readers in your Intermediate Phase isiZulu class?***

Table 7.3: Identifying at-risk readers in a class

Variable: **identifying at-risk readers in a class**	
T1	*T1 indicated that the classroom has a specific sitting plan which organise learners' according to their reading competences. For example, at-risk readers are seated in the fourth row. "This makes my instruction seem organized because I do not have to identify them in a class, but the sitting plan directs me exactly where they are seated, thereafter I monitor them and provide extra support they need".*
T2	*T2 reported that she uses a one on one reading strategy and reading group strategy to identify at-risk readers. T2 further mentioned that at-risk readers reading in front of the class they tend to hide their faces by holding the textbooks closer. However, asking learners to read in front of the class becomes impossible in most cases due to overcrowded classes.*
T3	*The at-risk readers have low self-esteem, poor confidence, reading laziness; hence, they become nervous during reading. Whenever I move closer to them during reading, they become uncomfortable and very shy to read. Apart from that, I identify them through reading accuracy and fluently.*
T4	*I usually identify these learners through their procrastination of reading activity in order to avoid studying and doing their work.*
T5	*I identify learners with reading problems through pronunciation and reading fluently.*
T6	*I identify at-risk readers by asking everyone to read individually in front of the class.*

T7	*My class has a sitting plan which makes it easier for me to identify learners with reading problems. Learners with learning challenges are sit in the two front rows: rows A and B.*
T8	*Peer reading helps in identifying learners with reading problems.*
T9	*In most cases at-risk readers would move their mouths to pretend that they are reading, but when you come closer to them you realize that they are not reading and that is how I get to identify them.*
T10	*I identify at-risk readers through poor confidence when they read. They become shy to read alone in class.*

All of the participants interviewed indicated that they used various methods to identify at-risk readers such as reading groups, sitting plan, psychological factors and poor pronunciation, among others. For example, T3 and T10 mentioned similar insights concerning at-risk readers' physiological issues, such as poor confidence and low self-esteem. Willingham (2017) characterizes at-risk readers as being extrinsically motivated rather than intrinsically motivated.

T1 and T7 have a similar strategy of identifying at-risk readers through setting up a sitting plan that will distinguish at-risk readers from the skilled readers. In this case, proper classroom management plays a critical role in helping teachers to identify at-risk readers. For example, a reading classroom that is organized based on the learners' reading competence may have less risk of learner isolation. In that sense, classroom management skills are important to develop a stress-free learning environment, specifically for the benefit of at-risk readers. In addition, the simple view of reading approach (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) provides four quadrants, which include good language comprehension, good word reading, poor language comprehension, and poor word reading. Teachers could test learners' reading ability with reference to these quadrants in order to be able to identify at-risk readers and readers who progress well.

7.2.2.2 Teacher suggestions for sitting arrangements that work best for at-risk readers

Learners may be arranged according to their reading competence in order to select appropriate pedagogical reading approaches to be used. Three different sitting arrangements that have the potential to influence learners' learning in the classroom are cluster, row and horseshoe (Haghighi, & Jusan, 2012, Nayeem, 2015). Table 7.4 presents teachers' responses to question 4: ***What sitting arrangement do you think works better for at-risk readers within a mainstream classroom?***

Table 7.4: Sitting arrangement working better for at-risk readers

Variable: **sitting arrangement works better for at-risk readers**	
T1	*In most cases I arrange learners in groups.*
T2	*Having a special sitting arrangement in this class is not possible due to overcrowding*
T3	*Considering the number of learners and the class capacity, I do not often sit learners in a particular sitting arrangement. My class consists of 74 learners which makes it impossible for me to have a special sitting arrangement for at-risk readers. Even as a teacher I cannot move around the class because there is no sufficient space, but if I am conducting a lesson in a different venue such as this one (the classroom has a sufficient size capacity to accommodate all the learners), I group learners according to their reading cognitive ability.*
T4	*Grouping learners works but due to classes being overcrowded it is difficult to set a special sitting arrangement.*
T5	*The class is arranged per rows, the first three rows are arranged for learners with learning challenges.*
T6	*Sitting arrangement is not feasible because we have many learners.*
T7	*The class has a sitting plan from row A to row E. Therefore, I do not have to create a sitting arrangement but at some point, I allow learners to group themselves just like I did today.*
T8	*Arranging learners to sit according to their reading performance may be time consuming for me seeing that we have many learners in class.*
T9	*Sitting learners according to the class sitting plan works better in classifying learners with learning problems including at-risk readers.*
T10	*Our classes are overcrowded in most cases which makes it difficult to arrange a sitting plan.*

The views of the participants above reveal that 60% (*n=6*) of the participants cannot plan any sitting arrangement for at-risk readers in the class because of overcrowded classrooms. Overcrowding has an immense impact on the challenges of reading acquisition, especially in the inclusive classrooms. On the other hand, 40% (*n*=4) of the participants are able to arrange learners to sit according to their reading performance, which allows teachers to provide extra support to at-risk readers.

7.2.2.3 Benefits of organizing the at-risk readers

Reading sitting arrangements in the classroom may be helpful in creating a relaxed and an environment more conducive to learning, especially for at-risk readers, who may be affected by psychological factors such as stress, lack of confidence or anxiety (Falout, 2014). It is also important to note that proper seating arrangements allow for positive interaction among learners and create a friendly learning environment where learners are able to help one another academically. Table 7.5 presents teachers' insights into question 5: ***What are the benefits of organizing at-risk readers in that way?***

Table 7.5: Benefits of organizing at-risk readers

Variable**: benefits of organizing the at-risk readers**	
T1	*Sitting learners in groups usually benefits the at-risk readers. For example, skilled readers are able to assist the at-risk readers during reading. Reading groups also give them a reading motivation to improve their reading skill. To make reading even more fun, they have created group names such as "Lion Group" or "Zebra Group" and they will compete to become an excellent reading group.*
T5	*There is a sitting plan in the class that helps me as a teacher to deal with learners with learning problems and provide extra support.*
T7	*Having learners seated in rows based on their performance helps me as a teacher plan my teaching strategies in a way that will accommodate at-risk readers seated in a different row.*
T9	*T9 outlined that a seating plan in the classroom is a most effective solution to various problems that come with inclusion in mainstream schools. All that is needed is a proper lesson plan that will cater for a row that seems to have learning problems. T9 said "the reason for having a sitting plan in class, is to identify at-risk readers. For example, I would know that row C comprises of at-risk readers therefore I must provide thorough information and be more explicit in my instructions".*

The views of the participants above show the effectiveness of reading groups in the inclusive classroom as well as other forms of sitting arrangements such as seating learners in rows, as noted in the views of T9. Reading groups allow learners to work together to fulfil a certain task. This seems to be strengthening learners' confidence in their academic work and promotes learning integration and peer support. It is also evident that peer support and cooperative learning are effective approaches to reading instruction (Kos, 2023). There should also be an awareness of stigmatization and discrimination that may arise among learners, particularly between healthy-progress readers and at-risk readers. In addition, learners can learn better around their peers; this speaks volumes about the advantages of a learner-centred approach (Payaprom & Payaprom, 2020) Learners need to be provided with the opportunity to facilitate their own learning, by allowing a shift of focus from the teacher to the learner (Dole, Bloom & Kowalske, 2016).

7.2.3 Specific lesson components targeting at-risk readers

Van der Walt (2021) asserts that there are various types of reading activities that can be used to engage learners to develop reading proficiency. For example, a teacher may focus on oral language, which includes vocabulary, teaching of phonemics and phonics and learning of sight words. It is important to implement comprehensive teaching activities in order to develop suitable reading assessments of at-risk readers. However, there is strong evidence that points to the fact that the majority of teachers use a relatively narrow approach, which does not sufficiently benefit at-risk readers (Clancy, 2015). The reading lessons targeting at-risk readers may include word reading, close exercises and sentence completion (Steinle, Stevens &

Vaughn, 2022). Table 7.6 provides teachers' responses to question 6: ***What aspect of this lesson was specifically targeting at-risk readers?***

Table 7.6: Specifics of the lesson targeting at-risk readers

Variable: **specifics of the lesson targeting at-risk readers**	
T1	*The lesson was aiming to enhance learners' vocabulary knowledge, ability to sound out certain isiZulu letters that consist of double or triple consonant sounds and to read the text accurately without any challenges. The teacher further stated that she did not use Grade 6 reading textbooks because learners have a greater difficulty with reading, rather she utilized Grade 5 material.*
T2	*Learners read for the purpose of understanding the content of the story and enhancing their ability to read for meaning. Furthermore, the text was targeting at improving their vocab, for example, finding meaning for figurative terms used in the story such a '**Kwamachanca/ Kwampunzi endla emini**'. Learners must understand the meaning of expressions like these so that they are able to improve reading competencies.*
T3	*T3 emphasized the importance of complying with grammar rules when reading. Furthermore, she alluded to the importance of dramatizing the story as part of improving understanding. T3 maintained that "the aspect of this lesson focused on educating learners about complying with the grammar rules such as full-stop, comma or pauses to develop reading accuracy".*
T4	*There was no specific aspect of the lesson that focused specifically on at-risk readers. The lesson was conducted for all learners in the class not for specific group of learners.*
T5	*It is quite difficult to set a reading lesson that focus on certain group of learners in the overcrowded classes such as these which have 68 learners.*
T6	*T6 isiZulu consist of various forms of developing reading comprehension, for example, we read poem, drama and novels. At some point, when learners struggle to read, we perform story characters. By so doing, it helps learners develop understanding of the story or novel when they read since they have played roles of some of the characters found in the story. The lesson I conducted was purposefully aiming to improve at-risk readers' isiZulu vocabulary.*
T7	*The reading lesson aimed to enhance learners' reading fluency and improve their pronunciation.*
T8	*T8 mentioned that the lesson did not have a specific aspect that focuses on at-risk readers.*
T9	*T9 draws from the same remarks made by T5 that the classroom is overcrowded, therefore it may not be possible to set a lesson that specifically targets the at-risk readers. In addition, learners with reading problems are assisted.*
T10	*The lesson conducted was aiming to get the at-risk readers to collaborate with skilled readers to promote integration and encourage healthy competition in reading.*

40% (*n=4*) of the participants' views above show that reading lessons do not consist of any aspect that focuses specifically on at-risk readers in the classroom. They hold a strong view that inclusive reading is not feasible in overcrowded classes, as they find it difficult to design a lesson that includes aspects focused on at-risk readers, as articulated by T5 and T9. However, one could argue that there are distinctive ways which teachers can cater for at-risk readers, which were never mentioned by the respondents, such as arranging extra classes. While this study recognises that overcrowding hinders the success of teaching reading in classrooms,

however, teachers be encouraged to be utilizing other approaches such as establishing reading clubs or book loans to deal with some of the reading challenges.

T1's remarks indicate that they use reading materials of a previous grade to teach reading to at-risk readers. This approach may not be ideal and effective in developing learners' grade level reading abilities. Teachers need to be mindful of the different reading skills levels that a learner is supposed to acquire in a particular grade level, which in this case may have been compromised by the idea of using reading material of a previous grade. In addition, this approach may stigmatize at-risk readers, as their peers who are skilled readers may begin to look down on them, as they are taught using a reading textbook below their grade level. Viewed differently, the approach can be very useful in assisting at-risk readers to address reading gaps they may have.

Sixty percent (n=6) of the participants were able to infuse aspects that targeted at-risk readers in the inclusive classrooms. The reading approach through which learners create a play and represent characters in the story is quite exciting, as noted in the views of T3 and T6. Through this approach, learners have the opportunity to engage with their favourite part of the story, which can further assist them in understanding the gist of the story and recalling different incidents that build up comprehension.

7.2.3.1 Grouping learners to read

Grouping learners to read the text is fundamentally important to examine their reading proficiency and provide immediate intervention. Through the careful observation of learners as they read in groups, a teacher has the opportunity to examine aspects of reading that are problematics to at-risk readers. (Pretorius & Stoffelsma 2021). Table 7.7 presents teachers' responses to question 7: ***How does the grouping of learners to read assist in improving their reading skills?***

Table 7.7: Selection of learners to read

Variable: **selection of learners to read**	
T1	*I do not group learners to read because of time restrictions. I use a whole-class reading strategy.*
T2	*Mentioned that once she groups learners based on their reading cognitive abilities, she can concentrate on at-risk readers and provide more exercises to improve their reading skills. She noted that grouping learners in the overcrowded inclusive classroom can be quite draining and stressful; however, it is the best approach one can use to deal swiftly with reading comprehension challenges in isiZulu.*
T3	*T3 stated that grouping learners is helpful because learners who are struggling to read are motivated to work harder to improve their reading after seeing their peers applauded or rewarded for reading exceptionally well. If it is not individual reading, I group them into small reading groups then instruct each group to read perhaps two or three paragraphs in the novel".*
T4	*I do not group learners to read because classes are overcrowded, but I identify individual learners who encounter reading problems to read the text individually.*
T5	*T5 said he usually instructs learners to read in pairs or individually. T5 further mentioned that grouping learners affords him an opportunity to reflect on his reading pedagogical strategies and make necessary improvements that will enable learners improve their reading comprehension skills. However, the researcher noted that no learners were grouped in the lesson.*
T6	*Indicated that they do not group learners, rather they separate the at-risk readers to read the text alone.*
T7	*I use a collaborative strategy whereby learners with reading problems are grouped with skilled readers.*
T8	*I do not select learners in the class to read; instead I allow them to group themselves in small groups of five.*
T9	*Stated that grouping at-risk readers with those who read well in the class works effectively to get learners motivated and eager to read.*
T10	*T10 reported that overcrowding in the inclusive classrooms prohibits her from implementing extra reading measures that might improve learners' reading skills. She said "I acknowledge the importance of grouping learners during a reading lesson; however, this is impossible in my class considering that I have 86 learners in one class. If I were to instruct learners to read individually or in peer groups, I would not be able to finish them all in one period, hence it will deeply affect the syllabus that I have to cover. As the result, I use a whole reading approach without grouping learners."*

50% (n=5) of teachers do not group learners to read. T3, T4, T7, T8 and T9 maintained that they often rely on a group-reading strategy through which at-risk readers are seated together with healthy-progress readers. Reading groups are efficient, as they create a sense of a friendly reading environment where learners work collaboratively to enhance their reading skills. Teachers also get the opportunity to provide extra support to at-risk readers. T1, T4 and T10 mentioned that grouping learners to read within a single period can be time consuming, which

then compels teachers to employ less effective pedagogical strategies such as a one-size-fits-all approach. Maharajh, Nkosi and Mkhize (2016) indicate that the current curriculum is too packed, which is among the leading factors contributing to ineffective pedagogical strategies. In other words, curriculum designers need to redesign the fundamental activities that play a crucial role in learning and teaching and remove other activities to allow reflexive teaching. Even though this is the case, the researcher observed that teachers lack the ability to manage the time allocated to teach reading, which consequently compromises other tasks that needed to be carried out in the reading lesson.

Forty percent (*n=4*) of teachers revealed that grouping learners to read is useful not only for improving their reading skills, but also for instilling intrinsic motivation. Motivation plays a critical role in reading comprehension development.

The following section presents data on pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers.

7.2.4 Pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading comprehension to at-risk readers

7.2.4.1 Pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension

Reading pedagogical strategies are the key and the vehicle towards developing reading skills for learners in the primary grades. Effective reading instruction in the lower grades is significantly important in establishing the basic literacy skills required in learners. Failure to develop reading skills at a lower grade may consequently affect a learner as they proceed to the upper grades (Agbofa, 2023). Table 7.8 presents the teachers' responses to question 8***: What are the pedagogical strategies used when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers?***

Table 7.8: Pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension

Variable: **pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension**	
T1	*I use a read-aloud strategy which helps in ensuring that learners project their voices accurately and they have good pronunciation. Apart from that, reading-aloud strategy reinforces confidence in the learner pronunciation and gives me opportunity as a teacher to pay attention to the at-risk readers and provide extra support.*
T2	*I use a whole class reading strategy then if there is still sufficient time, I choose few learners to read in front of the whole class.*
T3	*I use a reading group and a whole class reading strategy incorporating a multisensory learning approach.*
T4	*My classroom is decorated with a variety of printed reading materials with the purpose of instilling love for reading and reading for pleasure. Alternatively, I use the reading spelling*

	award strategy to motivate them to read. The reading spelling award strategy brings tremendous results and it further conscientizes them to read well so that they can win themselves those small prizes. To check their reading understanding, I list different words alphabetically on the chalkboard, then I would twist them up and ask learners to point to the word I am pronouncing.
T5	*I use every strategy that comes to my mind, because there is no fixed way to teach isiZulu. At some point you need to identify words that they cannot understand and do verbal spelling tasks. What I have noted is that they are not good at spelling; as a result, I always integrate my lesson using spelling and grammar. However, the time is not sufficient to cover everything bearing in mind that we have many aspects to cover in isiZulu such as reading and reviewing.*
T6	*Before reading a text commences, I instruct learners to pay attention to the visuals and make predictions about the text. The topic of the text and the visuals build interest in knowing what the text could be about. Learners cannot read fluently but they are able to connect visual images displayed in the text to tell the whole story.*
T7	*I use a whole class reading strategy because it is not time consuming. This intervention helps because I can cover all the aspects of reading in one lesson.*
T8	*I use reading groups, peer reading and individual reading. I think it is important to expose learners to a varying reading pedagogy to deal swiftly with reading problems they encounter. Also, using different pedagogy gives me opportunity to reflect in each lesson and make improvement.*
T9	*I use reading groups to promote learning integration among learners.*
T10	*I rely on using peer reading strategy incorporating visual aids materials.*

The opinions expressed by the respondents seem important and thorough when it comes to improving reading abilities. Each teacher that was interviewed used a variety of reading strategies in an effort to pique the learners' interest in reading. It was observed, nevertheless, that their pedagogical approaches do not heavily emphasize the linguistic understanding that will enhance the reading skills of learners. These include the ability to decode words, identify words or recognize syllables. This discrepancy suggests that teachers might not be providing at-risk readers in inclusive classrooms with adequate reinforcement of reading comprehension skills. Put in a different context, teachers merely assist learners with reading, rather than providing in-depth instruction in reading. Most South African teachers do not teach reading comprehension effectively; rather, they merely support reading lessons by giving learners reading exercises, failing to develop the necessary reading skills to advance their reading proficiency. Additionally, the majority of teachers are codeswitching from isiZulu to English , which marginalizes the improvement of sound reading comprehension abilities in African languages. According to Land (2015), reading methods that are frequently used in Sub-Saharan Africa to help learners learn to read are usually taken from European socio-educational contexts and do not accurately reflect the linguistic structures of reading in African languages.

The difficulties faced by IP isiZulu teachers when instructing at-risk readers in reading comprehension are discussed in the following section.

7.2.4.2 Challenges encountered while teaching reading

According to Cortez (2017), the pedagogical strategies which teachers use do not align completely with effective strategies that are supposed to ensure the inclusion of at-risk readers. This shows that teachers need to be assisted with specific pedagogical strategies that could be used for developing reading comprehension amongst at-risk readers. Table 7.9 presents teachers' insights into question 9: ***What are the pedagogical challenges faced by IP isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers?***

Table 7.9: Challenges encountered while teaching reading

Variable: **Challenges encountered while teaching reading**	
T1	*In my experience as a teacher, I have not encountered any problems with reading pedagogy. Teachers just need to attend training workshops offered by the KZNDoE.*
T2 *T3*	*The main problem is that we are teaching in inclusive classrooms, but **we do not have inclusive pedagogical strategies presented in our curriculum or reading policies to balance between teaching at-risk readers and skilled readers.** We are not provided enough time to deal with learners with learning challenges. The curriculum expects us to deal with admin activities, teaching overcrowded classes, covering a syllabus in the learning environment that lacks adequate resources.*
T3	*We do not have any challenges with the current pedagogical strategies. However, the time given to teach learners is restrictive. In isiZulu there are many tasks one must cover such as introducing the text, recording the words in their personal dictionaries, a writing activity and providing feedback then make corrections. Also grammar must be taught in just one hour. On the other hand, we need to make time for learners with learning challenges such as at-risk readers.*
T4	*The main challenge with the current pedagogy is that they are theorized but they do not address what transpires in the real teaching profession. In other words, they are rigid.*
T5	*The teaching strategies which are currently in place are rigid and inflexible to be used in the inclusive learning setting. My biggest concern is about teaching workload as they are expected to teach at least six classes in eight hours a day; above that the KZNDoE sets high expectations from them. The KZNDoE uses track record to check teaching progress, which creates problems and an overwhelming atmosphere because there are learners such as at-risk readers that require extra support whilst one must ensure to keep good progress for track record review.*
T6	*As teachers we are not trained about inclusive reading pedagogy strategies including inclusive education. We find it difficult to teach in inclusive classrooms at some point; apart from that the DoE have so many expectations from us within an unreasonable time frame.*
T7	*I think that reading strategies are derived from English language; for example, isiZulu language does not have original reading instructions. Perhaps the rooted problems are with our CAPS which seem to have just been translated from English to our local languages.*

T8	*The current pedagogical strategies stipulated in our curriculum do not address the real challenges that we are facing in schools.* ***Also, the Education policies do not provide comprehensive guidelines on how we should deal with learners with reading problems.***
T9	*It is difficult to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies in the learning environment that involves different learners with unique problems.* ***As the teacher, you must deal with at-risk readers whilst you must also cater for those that can read better.*** *I am of the view that it would be better if learners are grouped based on their leaning cognitive ability. In that way, it would be easier to use one strategy that caters for all learners in class.*
T10	*There is nothing wrong with the current pedagogy. I think the problem is with the teachers who lack critical teaching skills.*

70% (*n=7*) of the teachers' views indicate that there is a gap between the prescribed pedagogical practice in the curriculum and actual classroom practice in terms of adhering to the inclusive education regulations. The insights of T2, T8 and T9 seem to suggest that the current policies and curriculum design do not present clear guidelines in terms of how they should accommodate both at-risk readers and skilled readers in one classroom. Clearly, the expectations of the curriculum and inclusive policy do not align with what currently transpires in the classrooms. Nevertheless, teachers appeared to be extremely occupied with other activities and it became difficult for them to concentrate on effective teaching. This suggests that the curriculum places a huge workload on the teachers, which undermines their primary task of teaching. Teachers' concerns are also central to CAPS, which appears to have been translated from English to local languages, as also alluded to in this study. However, 30% (*n=3*) of teachers are of the view that the current pedagogical strategies are effective, but teachers require extra training; this points to the importance of understanding the role of teacher education programmes in preparing pre-service teachers with effective teaching skills to teach inclusive reading in mainstream schools.

The next section presents the pedagogical strategies suggested by IP isiZulu teachers as being effective for teaching inclusive reading comprehension to at-risk readers.

7.2.4.3 Challenges encountered while practising fluency

Reading fluency is defined as one's ability to read orally with appropriate speed, accuracy and proper expression. The National Reading Panel (2000) discovered that in most cases fluency is ignored in the reading classroom; nevertheless, strategies enhancing fluency are paramount in reading comprehension development. Reading and rereading of familiar text are the most common strategies used to increase reading fluency. While rereading of a familiar text is essential, the ability to read aloud with teachers' guidance, parents and peers also have a

positive impact in reading fluency development. The importance of reading aloud daily is also supported by Foorman et al. (2016). Table 7.10 presents teachers' responses to question 10: ***What challenges do you face when teaching fluency practice to at-risk readers?***

Table 7.10: Challenges encountered while practising fluency

Variable**: Challenges encountered while practising fluency**	
T1	*The challenge is that learners cannot keep the natural reading pace, they are either too slow or too fast, and thus they do not adhere to the grammatical rules such as full-stop.*
T2	*Learners struggle with reading pronunciation, reading spelling and the ability to sound out words with accuracy.*
T3	*Stated that there are sound clicks in isiZulu which influence learners' difficulties to pronounce words confidently such as "Qha, Gqa, Xga, Gqha". When they come across words consisting of these sounds, they will either swallow words or lower their voices.*
T4	*Learners have problems in sounding out words, especially long words which comprises of two or three vowels*
T5	*My learners in class are quite too slow when they read which indicates fluency problems.*
T6	*I think the major issues compromising learners' fluency is the inability to ensure reading accuracy including prosodic reading.*
T7	*The problem I often face is that learners read very slowly hence they cannot sound out certain words accurately.*
T8	*Learners have problems with comprehending the text and remembering unfamiliar words. Some of them need to be monitored in a closer space before they can read fluently.*
T9	*The challenges I encounter is that learners do not want to read; even if they read, they would not pay attention to what they are reading.*
T10	*The main problem is the pronunciation of long terms mostly consisting of triple sound letters.*

Among the challenges emerging from the interviews above are teachers' difficulties teaching fluency and learners' inability to read accurately, lack of reading prosodic knowledge, problems with pronouncing double or triple consonant sound letters. These are the crucial reading aspects in developing reading fluency; therefore, such challenges signify that learners struggle with reading fluency which compromises their academic performance. While the literature supports a re-reading approach to develop fluency, the word learning theory (Ehri & McCormick, 2008) also maintains that reading instruction is fundamentally important in encouraging learners to practise reading on a daily basis to enhance their knowledge of alphabetical sounds.

7.2.4.4 Challenges encountered while identifying words

The reader's ability to identify a word is influenced by prior knowledge, during reading as well as meaning construction from text (Land, 2015). Difficult words are easily recognised if

preceded by semantically related words (Xie et al., 2019). It is also noted that word identification is influenced by three factors: decoding, analogizing and predicting (Paterson, Alcock & Liversedge, 2011). These factors play an essential role also in the activation of word automaticity during reading. Table 7.11 presents teachers' response to question 10: ***What challenges do you face when teaching word identification to at-risk readers?***

Table 7.11: Challenges encountered while identifying words

Variable: **Challenges encountered while identifying words**	
T1	*Learners often struggle to identify sound letters with double or triple consonant sounds jeopardizing their ability for pronunciation and reading accuracy.*
T2	*I have never attempted to use word identification strategy in my reading lessons.*
T3	*T3 was also not knowledgeable about word identification.*
T4	*T14 could not explain how learners experience challenges in the acquisition of word identification.*
T5	*Learners have challenges in identifying new words that we learned in the comprehension text. However, I always encourage them to read Zulu newspapers to develop their reading proficiency.*
T6	*T6 could not provide response to question on challenges with word identification, rather T6 diverted discussion to talk about learners' problems with pronunciation.*
T7	*I have never engaged learners with word identification; however, I make sure that I expose them to reading practice.*
T8	*The challenge is that learners fail to identify sound letters, particularly the consonants sound.*
T9	*T9 did not know about word identification including its acquisition and challenges faced by learners.*
T10	*T10's response showed lack of knowledge about word identification. T10 diverted to talk about reading practice.*

The views by the participants in the above table indicate that 70% (*n=7*) of the teachers were not knowledgeable about word identification. These teachers do not provide any instruction pertaining to word identification as a result of inadequate training and lack of reading teaching skills. Only 30% (n=3) of the teachers were able to respond to the challenges raised by word identification. They seemed to point out the learners' challenges to identify sound letters and identified new words as a major problem that hampers word identification process. Exposing learners to reading practice and discovering other formal and informal ways that stimulate learners' interest in reading could be ideal in helping learners be able to identify new words. Teachers may further use new words to create sentences related to learners' personal lives. The word learning theory (Erhi & McCormick, 2008) utilized in this study can offer a great solution for word-identification challenges, as it posits that the ability to recognize words requires a

working knowledge of the alphabetic phases of the Word Learning Theory. For example, the pre-alphabetic stage of the Word Learning theory focuses on letter recognition and phonics awareness (Ehri, 2002).

7.2.4.5 Challenges encountered while teaching phonemics

Kilpatrick (2015) asserts that phonemic awareness is crucial for the retention of written words and has not received enough attention in reading instruction. Before children can understand words, they must have a basic understanding of phonemes Ehri (2022). In light of this, the current phonemics section aims to indicate how educators could instruct at-risk readers in phonemics within inclusive reading classrooms. Table 7.12 presents teachers' responses to question 11: ***What challenges do you face when teaching phonemes to at-risk readers?***

Table 7.12: Challenges encountered while teaching phonemes

Variable: **Challenges encountered while teaching phonemes**	
T1	*There has never been phonemics instruction in my reading lessons.*
T2	*T2 also states that no phonemics reading instruction ever took place in the reading class.*
T3	*Learners often struggle with understanding some letter sound in the words, I then engage them through segmenting words into phonemics, but they still find it difficult to break up a word.*
T4	*I am not aware of phonemics, but the challenges I face are with learners who cannot adapt to a natural reading pace.*
T5	*I use reading spelling to engage learners with phonemics; however, they struggle to blend sound letters.*
T6	*T6 could not give a proper response to the question about challenges with phonemics acquisition.*
T7	*T7 expressed lack of knowledge about phonemics.*
T8	*T8 stated that they have never incorporated phonemics into a reading lesson because they do not have much knowledge about it.*
T9	*I have no idea what phonemics is.*
T10	*T10 also shared the same sentiments with other participants that they have never incorporated phonemics in the reading.*

The responses by the participants above prove that many teachers lack reading pedagogical knowledge to facilitate reading lessons in the mainstream classes. This is supported by the views of the participants, which point to 80% (*n=8*) of the teachers who are not knowledgeable about phonemics. It can therefore be expected that many learners are struggling to read as the result of teachers' incompetence of reading linguistic components. Only 20% (*n=2*) of the teachers were able to outline the challenges in phonemics acquisition, when they indicated that learners have problems with segmenting words into phonemes. This may require in-depth exposure to decoding of words, including familiarizing learners with complex sound letters.

7.2.4.6 Pedagogical strategies suggested as being effective

Teachers' knowledge of reading pedagogical practice is vitally important in developing reading skills among struggling readers in the classroom (Cortez, 2017). Teachers are regarded as key in developing the basic literacy skills required to improve learners' reading competency. It was necessary for this study to understand teachers' preferred reading pedagogical strategies so that a comparison could be drawn between what teachers in practice perceive to be effective reading pedagogical strategies and what lecturers and the literature have to say about reading pedagogical strategies. Table 7.13 presents teachers' responses to question 11: ***What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as being effective for teaching inclusive reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?***

Table 7.13: Pedagogical strategies suggested as being effective

Variable: **pedagogical strategies suggested as being effective**	
T1	*There are various pedagogical strategies one can use to teach reading comprehension, such as the one I used in the class – reading aloud strategies, whereby all the learners read the text together. Another strategy could be a reading group strategy whereby a teacher create small reading groups and each group should read a particular section in the text.*
T2	*I think the most important aspect of reading pedagogical strategy is that it should be flexible, transparent and accommodating; in that way a teacher can use reading visual strategy, reading aloud, reading motivation including repeating strategy and whole class reading strategy.*
T3	*I would say that it would depend on what you want your learners to achieve at the end of the lesson; for example, if the aim is to improve their vocabulary, you will have to employ the vocabulary reading strategy. If you want to improve their pronunciation, you will have to engage learners in using the reading pronunciation strategies.*
T4	*One strategy that can be used is that you group learners in the class according to their performance; for example, when teaching pronouns or vocabulary you are teaching them at different levels based on their performance; it is easy to move from one level to another. Hence, you can easily apply different strategies in each group provided that you know their level of reading. But this may not be possible if there is large number of learners in one class.*
T5	*Apart from a reading aloud strategy which is used regularly, one of the most effective reading strategies is the visual aid reading strategy. In this strategy teachers can use pictures that are common and ask learners to name the items in those pictures. Learners can also play a memory game by using certain words that rhyme. Teachers may have these words printed on the pasteboard/card stock. Lastly, teachers may give learners the task of coming up with their own new words using syllables that are furnished on the flash cards.*
T6	*Since many learners struggle with reading, I would suggest that they use direct vocabulary instruction for learners who struggle with oral reading fluency. This will help to lay out a proper foundational knowledge to acquire a new word. Whole class reading strategy can also be used to save time.*
T7	*Organising learners to read in groups is the most efficient reading strategy that teachers can use to teach reading comprehension in classrooms.*
T8	*I think as the teacher you must be aware of the reading area which seems to be problematic for your learners then apply an appropriate reading strategy. For example, if the problem is*

	about pronunciation, then you should use repetition strategy until learners are able to pronounce words precisely.
T9	*Reading aloud strategy is the key in exposing learners into reading including reading motivation strategy. On the other hand, the teacher can use small reading groups strategy to ensure that reading become flexible and enjoyable.*
T10	*I would recommend the use of peer reading strategy and visual reading material strategy when teaching reading comprehension.*

Teacher responses indicate that the different pedagogical strategies suggested can have an impact on reading development in different ways. T3, T4 and T8 suggest that before teachers attempt to use a particular reading strategy, they must firstly examine and understand the reading skills that appear to be problematic to learners. This suggests that teachers should engage in action research before implementing interventions to assist at-risk readers. Using a researched reading strategy may assist learners to move easily from one reading level into another. T5 and T10 promote the use of audio-visual reading materials as one of the most effective strategies. Audio-visual materials play a significant role in developing reading skills in both healthy-progress and at-risk readers. While T5 and T10 suggested these useful strategies, they did not use them in the lessons observed.

Although the teachers recommended very useful pedagogical strategies, some of the suggested reading strategies may not cater adequately for inclusive reading. These include the whole-class reading strategy suggested by T2 and T6, which could exclude at-risk readers from meaningfully participating in reading comprehension. As also became evident from observations and interviews responses on the pedagogical strategies; teachers pay less attention to at-risk readers in reading comprehension lessons. The pedagogical strategies they implement do not accommodate at-risk readers, but they often focus on healthy-progress readers.

The following section presents data on the availability of learning and teaching source materials (LTSM) for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers.

7.2.5 Availability of learning and teaching source materials (LTSM) for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers

Developing reading materials for teaching reading comprehension serves as the basis of the language practice and language input for readers. Adequate reading materials contribute immensely to the achievement of teachers' and learners' objectives. While there is a lack of reading materials available in African languages, the current available materials contain

content that is not updated (Mercado, 2015). Yet it is the responsibility of the curriculum designers to develop comprehensive reading materials and pedagogical strategies that aligns with a particular language. It is noted that the design principles of reading materials does not distinguish reading activities for both at-risk readers and healthy progress readers. In this case, it is arguable that at-risk readers and healthy-progress readers should not be treated the same. Table 7.14 presents teachers' responses to question 12: ***What reading material do you have available for your at-risk readers? (Probe on how the available material improves at-risk readers' reading skills)***

Table 7.14: Reading material available for at-risk readers

Variable: **Reading material available for at-risk readers**	
T1	*We are relying on the old reading story books to teach isiZulu reading comprehension. Numerous concerns have been raised with the KZNDoE District office; however, to date nothing has been done, hence this places constraints on the reading teachers who must keep up with the expectations of CAPS.*
T2	*T2 outlined that their school does not have adequate resources available to cater specifically for at-risk readers but also generally there is a shortage of reading materials. "For isiZulu reading comprehension we solely rely on "Masibambisane textbook' or else we take it upon ourselves to create reading materials that will develop learners reading competencies such as reading charts".*
T3	*We are not pleased with the service we receive from our District office when it comes to delivery of learning resources, specifically here in the rural schools. Most of the primary schools in the uMkhanyakude District are under-resourced. When comparing the level of resources in urban schools, one can notice that urban schools are far better off than rural schools. This is a challenge to rural teachers because the curriculum set the same standards regardless of the availability learning resources.*
T4	*T4 was of the view that, there has never been reading resources specifically for at-risk readers in this school. "Resources that we have been using are for general learners not accommodating learners such as at-risk readers in our classes. At some point, we use Foundation Phase textbooks for at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase".*
T5	*We do not have reading material only targeted at the at-risk readers, but we rely on DBE textbooks such as 'Masibambisane'. We also use different reading charts which I believe assist at-risk readers in terms of fluency practice.*
T6	*T6 mentioned that their school does not have sufficient reading materials specifically for isiZulu Home Language. Most of the reading books available are for English. "In isiZulu we usually use DBE textbook which is "Masibambisane" unless I design the material myself as a teacher".*
T7	*In the inclusive classroom such as this one, I prefer using reading material that has visual images to help the at-risk readers use the illustrations displayed to comprehend the text.*
T8	*Even though our school does not have adequate reading materials especially for isiZulu, I try to design different reading charts that will help the at-risk readers to read. These reading charts are composed of different sound letters and short stories pasted against the wall.*
T9	*Our school does not have reading materials for isiZulu. The only material available is that of English. We have been reporting this problem in the DBE district office for more than three years, but nothing has been done to date.*

T10	*Since our school is located in the underprivileged rural community, the state of learning resources has been a major problem distorting the process of learning and teaching. The current available materials are very old and not updated. Learners get bored easily to read stories that happened over 50 or 100 years ago such as reading about King Shaka Zulu. We need updated reading materials in isiZulu that will relate into learners' real life.*

Learning and teaching source materials play a critical role in developing learners' cognitive reading skills. The shortage of adequate reading materials in classrooms adds to the inclusive reading challenges facing teachers. The views of the participants above indicate that KZN DoE does not deliver services as expected. As is evident from the interviews above, it becomes difficult for teachers to implement the CAPS curriculum in a learning setting that has a shortage of adequate materials. Nevertheless, 90% (*n=9*) of the teachers interviewed based their concerns on the shortage of learning materials at their schools, which deeply distorts the process of learning and teaching. While it is undeniable that educators are essential to the success of any educational system, many African language teachers lack adequate training, which makes them heavily dependent on the resources supplied by the school. For mother-language education initiatives to be implemented successfully, books that are specifically designed for educational purposes must be created. Data collected show that only 10% (*n=1*) teachers did not raise a concern about the lack of materials.

The following section presents data on policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

7.2.6 Policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools

The National Reading Strategy (2008) addresses fundamental aspects of reading development for all learners in the country, including those who experience extensive learning challenges. The reading aspects addressed involve pillars of reading comprehension which are fluency, phonics, phonemics, vocabulary and comprehension including pedagogical practice for teaching reading. The present study was undertaken to partly understand the gaps within the South African policy documents, particularly regarding teaching reading to at-risk readers in the mainstream classroom. Table 7.15 present teachers' responses to question 13: ***Are you aware of any policy documents that provide guidelines for teaching at-risk readers in the mainstream classroom?***

Table 7.15: Policy for teaching at-risk readers

Variable: **policy for teaching at-risk readers**	
T1	*I am not aware of any policy that speaks about at-risk readers in the mainstream schools.*

T2	*I have not come across any policy document that provide guidelines for teaching at-risk readers.*
T3	*I only know about inclusive education policy stipulated in the White Paper 6.*
T4	*I do not remember any policy document for teaching at-risk readers.*
T5	*I know that there is Early Grade Reading document that justifies teaching of at-risk readers in the mainstream schools.*
T6	*There are various policies that exist; however, we are not educated about these policies as teachers, hence it is difficult to implement them.*
T7	*I do not know any policy guidelines for teaching at-risk readers in the mainstream schools.*
T8	*So far, I do not remember any policy document that informs teaching at-risk readers in the mainstream school.*
T9	*I am not aware of such policy document since the last past 3 years as a teacher.*
T10	*I do not know any policy document for teaching at-risk readers. I only know about inclusive education policy.*

None of the teacher participants interviewed in this study could identify a single policy document that seeks to cater for at-risk readers in the inclusive reading classroom. While various interventions, such as reading campaigns, reading research projects, and policies such as SIAS, Inclusive education and Early Grade Reading are put in place, not only is there a lack of implementation, but teachers also know less about these policies, as confirmed by T6. Teachers' insights show that there is a policy void on inclusive reading focusing on teaching reading to at-risk readers in inclusive reading classrooms. While the literature review of this study addressed the reading policy guidelines of the KZN DoE, clearly teachers know very little about this policy, which speaks volumes about a lack of policy implementation in schools.

The following section presents data on improvement in the curriculum and policies for pedagogy strategies.

7.2.6.1 Improvement in the curriculum and policies for pedagogy strategies

A number of effective reading strategies are recommended for use in developing reading comprehension skills. Ahmadi (2017) suggests the top-down reading strategy, which promotes a connection between reading and meaning by stressing that a learner must initially be introduced to the entire sentence and paragraph, and only after that should they learn about smaller units of language such as words. Verbeek (2010) suggests the Mastery Learning Movement approach, which focuses on breaking difficult processes of reading into their subcomponents and having them taught separately. The approach provides teachers with an opportunity to use skills-based worksheets to assess phonics, comprehension and vocabulary skills. In the learner-centred whole language methodology for reading instruction (Ahmadi,

2017), the teacher is perceived as a facilitator of learning and connector of rightful materials and methods to provide adequate support to learners, particularly at-risk readers. Direct instruction focuses on reading comprehension skills such as decoding, phonics and segmentation, while strategy instruction focuses on the "global skills for general approach to reading". Table 7.16 provides teachers' responses to question 14*:* ***Suggest improvement for curriculum developers and policy designers in terms of pedagogical strategies for at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase mainstream classroom?***

Table 7.16: Improvement in the curriculum and policies for pedagogy strategies

Variable: **improvement in the curriculum and policies for pedagogy strategies**	
T1	*The improvement I would suggest is that the KZN DoE should invest more on the practical implementation of the policies rather than creating numerous policies which have less impact in learning and teaching.*
T2	*Suggested that the curriculum must not focus on many aspects of learning and teaching simultaneously. For example, the teacher was of the view that reading must be done for the entire day since there are many activities required to carry a reading lesson and they have to cater for learners who need extra support. T2 mentioned that the curriculum needs to prescribe more reading texts which will help learners to improve their reading skills.*
T3	*Maintains that education policies and curriculum need to explain what resources and equipment need to be used for learners with learning problems such as at-risk readers. Thus, they need to make those resources available in schools.*
T4	*We wish there could be more pedagogical strategies that align with isiZulu languages, but I think that the pedagogical strategies in the curriculum were not meant to teach isiZulu but English.*
T5	*I think our curriculum is too packed, which is the reason pedagogical strategies do not work adequately. So, if there could be a redesign of fundamental activities that need to be in CAPS and have other activities removed.*
T6	*Was of the view that the provincial KZN DoE officials need to review the work of the district KZN DoE officials because they are not doing enough to deal with the problems that rural schools are facing. T6 also stressed that there should be a follow up whether these polices established work adequately in our schools.*
T7	*I would suggest that there should be a minimum number of activities in the curriculum also the DBE should reduce the administrative work expected from teachers so that the primary focus would be on teaching and helping at-risk readers.*
T8	*The DBE is not supporting the educators when it comes to the implementation of these policies and guidelines. They would just give us these policy documents and never bother to follow up on the implementation part. The SIAS policy advises teachers to refer learners with severe learning barriers to the special schools; however, the process behind that is quite tricky and it may take several years to be successful. For example, in my class which is Grade 6, I have a learner who had to be referred to special school since Grade R, but this has never been done due to several complications and the process being too slow. All these years the learner had to progress to the next level because of the age cohort. I feel that the Department of Education is not working corroboratively with the Department of Health when it comes to the referral of learners to special schools; the system is a disaster.*

T9	*They should not just write these policies then shove them to us, but there must be experts who visit schools regularly to monitor the implementation of these policies. For example, the SIAS policy advises us that we must identify these learners with learning challenges. However, this results in conflicts between parents and the teacher. Parents would not take it kindly that their child has to be referred to special schools. These polices need to educate parents to be accepting when the child is identified for special learning support.*
T10	*Stressed that Education officials seem to be paying much attention to the lesson plan but hardly on the provision for extra support to learners experiencing learning difficulties in the inclusive classrooms. "I would encourage them to visit classrooms during teaching periods so that they will see the extent of challenges we experience in classrooms during teaching. Learners require extra support and I feel that it is not sufficiently provided, rather the focus has been on the administrative side".*

The above views by the teachers reveal a gap between education policies and their implementation. The views reveal that teachers do not receive sufficient support in schools to provide support for learners in inclusive classrooms. The DBE has been heavily active in the creation of policies, but hardly focuses at all on the realities of implementation. Teachers' concerns are paramount; hence the DBE has a duty to take such views into consideration for the purpose of providing quality education and reinforcing academic success among all learners.

7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has presented data collected from the teacher semi-structured interviews on the five main aspects, namely teacher preparation for inclusive reading; classroom organization for at-risk readers; pedagogical strategies for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension; the availability of learning and teaching source materials (LTSM) for teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers; and policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools. Data collected from teacher semi-structured interviews show that reading teachers are not adequately trained to teach inclusive reading. In addition, they are not adequately equipped to deal with policies governing inclusive learning in mainstream schools. The gaps revealed in this chapter suggest the need for immediate interventions to equip reading teachers with the appropriate knowledge to teach reading comprehension effectively. Teachers serve as the primary vehicles of knowledge transfer to learners; hence, it is paramount that they have at their disposal comprehensive and quality information that will sustain learners' academic achievements. Among the factors highlighted in this section was a shortage of updated isiZulu reading materials. Since there is an awareness of outdated reading materials, teachers need to

be innovative and utilize their creativity to develop efficient and effective reading materials for at-risk readers.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH LECTURERS

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the Intermediate Phase (IP) isiZulu teachers. This chapter presents data collected from the semi-structured interviews with IP methodology lecturers. This study aimed to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools. Data was collected from IP isiZulu methodology lecturers to understand teacher education preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading to at-risk readers in mainstream schools. Data from interviews with lecturers will partly provide answers to the following research questions:

- How do isiZulu methodology lecturers prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
- What pedagogical strategies can be suggested as effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?
- What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills among at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

8.2 Semi-structured interviews with lecturers

Lecturers' responses during the semi-structured interviews have been presented according to the interview schedule, which included four sections: lecturer guidance on inclusive reading for at-risk readers; pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading comprehension to at-risk readers; teaching and learning resources suited for teaching inclusive reading; and policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools. The simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) provides a simplified framework for identifying three categories of at-risk readers as well as the healthy-progress readers in a classroom. Teacher education programmes can benefit from the simple-view training of pre-service teachers to understand different types of readers in the inclusive reading classroom so that they can provide the necessary support according to the learners' reading levels. The following section presents data on lecturer guidance on inclusive reading for at-risk readers.

8.2.1 Lecturer guidance on inclusive reading for at-risk readers

8.2.1.1 Lecturers' understanding of inclusive reading

As noted earlier in this study, the concept of inclusive reading can be defined as the ability to teach reading skills in a classroom that includes both skilled readers and at-risk readers by implementing inclusive pedagogical instructions that cater for all (Berkeley & Larsen, 2018). This concept is derived from the notion of an inclusive education, which refers to the approach to schooling in which learners with learning challenges are educated in one classroom along with learners who have no learning problems, as stipulated in White Paper Six (DoE, 2001). It was important for this study to understand the role of teacher education programmes, particularly the methodology courses in preparing pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading in the in mainstream schools. Table 8.1 presents lecturers' responses to Question 1: ***What is your understanding of inclusive reading?***

Table 8.1: Lecturers' understanding of inclusive reading

Variable: **Lecturers' understanding of inclusive reading**	
L1	*I have never been exposed to inclusive reading; I think inclusive reading has merged with the inclusive education policy which aims to have learners with different learning barriers all included in one classroom. In that case, this could be that learners who are slow readers are included in the mainstream classroom together with learners who are skilled readers.*
L2	*L2 reported that inclusive reading is when you include all kinds of learners in your methodology. A teacher may include learners who might have reading problems in one classroom. Inclusive reading merges with inclusive education, which aims to ensure inclusive learning and no discrimination or isolation of learners with learning barriers.*
L3	*Inclusive reading acknowledges that learners have different reading abilities and learning styles. Once a teacher has accepted that learners are different, he/she will be able to design lessons that accommodate or cater for the needs of all learners. It also means selecting the teaching resources or reading material that will appeal to the needs of all learners, including those who are at risk or who have reading challenges. Inclusive reading means learners with reading problems should not be excluded from the mainstream education system and teachers should modify the curriculum to accommodate the learning needs and styles of all the learners under their care*.
L4	*L4 pointed out that inclusive learning is when we identify all types of learners based on their cognitive abilities for learning purposes. This means that, from a higher performer to a poor performer they must all be included together in one classroom. Inclusive education stipulates that one does not teach a one-size-fits all, but one looks at their need and one caters for their individuality based on their learning performance. L4 also stated that the teacher needs to be mindful of learners who are struggling and have a proper plan for them. Also, as they teach, they need to have a plan for those who are inquisitive and cater for them as well.*
L5	*Inclusive reading is when we use different resources to allow students greater access to the curriculum and more successful learning outcomes. For example, if one learner cannot read, then one should attempt to provide another reading strategy to ensure that everyone is accommodated.*
L6	*These are learners who have problems with reading but are included in mainstream education.*

L7	*Inclusive reading is in line with inclusive education. The teacher teaching in the inclusive classroom needs to acknowledge that there are learners who might be poor readers. Once they have acknowledged that, they need to provide extra support to help learners read well.*

The views of the lecturers above provide a constructive account of the importance of inclusive reading and what the necessary expectations are from teachers in ensuring that at-risk readers are catered for. The researcher believes that the lecturers had a general understanding of inclusive reading.

8.2.1.2 Methodology module focusing on inclusive reading

The UN's 1994 Salamanca statement on teaching differently abled learners seeks to create a friendly community and reinforce cohesion in mainstream schools with inclusion as point of reference (Adewumi & Mosito, 2019). Table 8.2 presents the lecturers' responses to Question 2**: *In your methodology course, do you have a section focusing on inclusive reading?***

Table 8.2: Methodology module focusing on inclusive reading

Variable: Methodology module focusing on inclusive reading	
L1	*No, our methodology content does not have specific focus [on] at-risk readers and inclusive reading. There is a module focusing on the inclusive part which is done by people from Psychology because our programme has merged with the Department of Psychology. So, what I do is that I prepare students for inclusive learning inasmuch as that when they enter the profession, they will find a class in a setup where learners would have different learning abilities and they will know what is it that they need to do.*
L2	*We do not have aspects in the course focusing on at-risk readers and inclusive reading. I know that there is something called inclusive reading, but when we lecture methodology we hardly focus on inclusive reading. We might touch on it, but we do not consciously plan for it.*
L3	*We do not focus on at-risk readers and inclusive reading in the isiZulu Methodology. However, there is a module focusing on the inclusive part, but it is done by students from Psychology.*
L4	*There is a section specifically focusing on* ***Amasu nezindlela zokufundisa ikhono lokufunda nokubukela olimini lwesiZulu kugxilwe nakubafundi abanezinkinga zokufunda*** *(Teaching reading and visual literacy skills in isiZulu language – with a focus [on] inclusive reading and at-risk readers).*
L5	*The Methodology content course that I teach does not strictly focus on inclusive reading. However, I specify to my students that we have three types of learners, such as one who is a fast leaner and can do everything within a time period allocated, and there is one who is confident, struggle and who needs the teacher's support. The last is a slow learner that cannot cope at all with all the academic demands. We emphasize to the pre-service teachers*

	that when they teach these learners, they need to design activities that will suit or accommodate all learners in the class.
L6	*The course that I teach does not focus on inclusive reading, but I always emphasise to my students that activities they design need to embrace all types of learners in one class regardless of their cognitive abilities. However, students struggle with that, because they do not know how the content needs to be taught and how they should cater for different learners in one class, such that even the teachers who are already in the profession in the mainstream struggle with differentiating between these learners and catering for them all.*
L7	*Our Methodology course focuses on the general literacy teaching in the Intermediate Phase. We do not have aspects that educate our students about inclusive reading in the mainstream schools. However, we teach our students always to be mindful that in the classroom they will come across slow learners and they need to design activities that will accommodate them.*

The responses indicate that the majority (86%, *n=6*) of lecturers stipulated that their methodology courses do not have aspects that focus on training pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. It appears that the majority of lecturers teach inclusive reading haphazardly and do not specifically focus on it as part of their methodology content. L5, L6 and L7 indicated that pre-service teachers should differentiate their teaching and design activities to accommodate all learners. While an awareness of different types of readers in the classroom is to be applauded, there is clearly not enough guidance on how to support at-risk readers. The responses from the lecturers justify why teachers in practice have challenges to manage inclusive reading and applying inclusive pedagogies that accommodate both at-risk readers and healthy-progress readers. This is because teacher education programmes do not prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading.

Pre-service teachers should be involved in demonstrations and simulations of the inclusive reading pedagogical strategies required to teach in mainstream schools. While L1 and L3 indicated the involvement of their respective Psychology departments in presenting aspects of inclusive education, further investigation is needed to determine the extent to which these departments focus on inclusivity, or whether they also include the pedagogical strategies for inclusive reading which should be done by the methodology lecturers. It is worth noting that the respondents assume that the treatment of inclusive reading by their Psychology department would translate into pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading. Only one of the respondents (L4) indicated an explicit focus on the use of visual strategies for teaching at-risk readers. The use of visuals is in line with the views of Vernet et al. (2022), who claim that a teacher may use various forms of visuals such as images in the text, videos or movies to help learners get to know the background to the story.

8.2.1.3 Guiding pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers

In the early 1980s, Karen Harris and Steven Graham developed a Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model, which seeks to help young, struggling learners to develop competence in language literacy. The SRSD provides different comprehensive reading strategies that can be used by learners who struggle with language skills. SRSD can be of great assistance in preparing pre-service literacy teachers to teach comprehension in schools. SRSD is regarded as an evidence-based practice that serves as the road map on how at-risk readers can be supported by implementing effective strategies while also addressing the primary areas of comprehension deficit in many learners (Chandler & Hagaman, 2020). SRSD consists of the following six phases of instruction as suggested by Chandle & Hagaman (2020): (a) develop background knowledge, (b) discuss it, (c) model it, (d) memorize it, (e) support it, and (f) independent performance. Table 8.3 presents lecturers' responses to Question 2: ***How do you guide pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers?***

Table 8.3: Guiding pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers

Variable: **Guiding pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers**	
L1	*L1 illustrated that they normally tell their students that if learners cannot read on their own, that means there is a problem; hence they need to assist that learner. They further encourage their students to use the reading-aloud strategy and use a finger or a pointer to follow through the text.*
L2	*I always stress to my students that in the class there will be learners with reading problems. As a teacher you must develop extra activities for those learners because it is difficult for them to be part of the normal class; they need their own exclusive learning that will focus in depth on their reading problems. Perhaps in a semester you can devote two days in a quarter to have these learners in a catch-up session.*
L3	*L3 indicated that pre-service teachers are made aware that some schools do hire the services of professional language therapists who assess learners in different languages skills, including reading proficiency. However, some schools do not have the money to do so due to a number of reasons, including a lack of resources. In such cases, teachers will therefore step in and do the assessments.*
L4	*L4 mentioned that they informed their students to use the oral reading fluency (ORF) to test the number of words learners read correctly per minute (WCPM) and the number of words learners read incorrectly per minute (WPM). Teachers can calculate the scores after using the same passage three times to see if there are any changes in the speed of reading.*
L5	*We tell our students that they can identify at-risk readers through the assessments that are given to learners. That assessment can be in a written form, oral form, through observation, or taking notes. As the teacher you set your own objectives that, at the end of this lesson, you want your learners to reach. I tell my students always to be mindful of the objectives that they set for themselves and the type of lesson that they design should articulate to the set objectives so that they can identify who is achieving and who is not. For those that are not achieving they can then begin to write down some sort of intervention stating that those are at-risk readers*

	and require extra support, as well as come up with a strategy as a teacher to help them. If they still fail, they need to prepare some documents to begin the process of transferring them to special schools, following all the protocols as stipulated in the SIAS policy, using the SANA form.
L6	*L6 illustrated that they should give those learners time to adapt and be lenient with them when doing the reading section. They should not treat them same as learners who perform exceptionally well in class.*
L7	*To identify these learners who are struggling we tell our students that a learner would repeat certain phrases or words and that is automatically a sign that a learner is reading with no understanding. This is when one as a teacher must step in to assist and use strategies such as decoding or word recognition to help that learner. Teachers can further identify them by how they are handling their books when they read, e.g. those who are at-risk readers would hold their books closer to their faces because they are shy about the fact that there are words that they cannot pronounce. Hence the teacher would need to look at their mouths when they read, and not focus much on their book. The focus should be on the learners and how they read. When you ask them questions, they must be able to answer without hesitation.*

According to the responses from the participants, all of the lecturers teach pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers in class. However, one may be of the view that reading comprehension experts could do excellent work in assisting teachers to identify learners with reading challenges in the mainstream classes and then recommend remedial interventions. L4 mentioned that they used the ORF to test the number of words learners read correctly per minute. Chapter 1 of this study describes how various countries use assessments such as the ORF to identify at-risk readers and provide the necessary support.

8.2.1.4 Preparing pre-service teachers to accommodate at-risk readers

Teacher education programmes prepare pre-service teachers to support the academic inclusion of learners with learning challenges (Gottfried et al., 2019; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). This question sought to determine how isiZulu methodology lecturers prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading. Table 8.4 presents lecturers' responses to Question 3: ***How do you prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools?***

Table 8.4: Preparing pre-service teachers to accommodate at-risk readers

Variable: **Preparing pre-service teachers to accommodate at-risk readers**	
L1	*Some learners will have poor sight-word reading or poor visual word recognition. A teacher can identify some sight words and write them on the flash cards so they can read them repeatedly until until they are able to read them fluently. Some learners may not suffer from phonological recoding, visual word recognition and reading fluency, but may fail to read with comprehension. Teachers may accommodate these learners by asking them to read a paragraph and then pose a few questions, or*

	ask them to summarize what they have read, using their own words. Then, teachers would be able to intervene by explaining in simple sentences what the passage was all about.
L2	*Pre-service teachers are taught that at-risk readers are highly heterogeneous, meaning that they are different in the way they display their reading shortcomings … a one-size-fits-all kind of intervention cannot work effectively. For example, when accommodating learners who cannot read new words accurately, commonly known as learners suffering from poor phonological recoding or decoding, one would need to use the novel non-words strategy.*
L3	*Pre-service teachers must know that at-risk readers have different reading challenges and that their intervention strategies and techniques should cater for the diverse learning styles of the learners.*
L4	*I would cite such scenarios that they will find among these learners. Then the teacher will have to expose them to different reading strategies. They must give instructions that will cater to all those learners, meaning that in their instructions they must be cautious not to exclude them. Hence, they must understand that all learners are different, and they are required to implement different reading strategies. We are fortunate that in the lower grades there are various strategies that can be used, so I would take some and explain them to my student teachers.*
L5	*We usually tell the pre-service teachers to create a stress-free learning environment and they must not shout at learners who cannot read. We also emphasize that they should tell learners to practise reading at home. However, there is a lack of parental involvement. Parents tend to rely on teachers to teach learners while sitting back and doing nothing to help their children improve their reading.*
L6	*Some of the strategies that can be used to accommodate at-risk readers are the use of sight-words, which are words that are used to discover if a learner knows certain sounds and how those sounds merge to form a complete word. Some learners will have poor sight-word reading or poor visual word recognition. A teacher can identify and accommodate them by using a few sight words and write them on flash cards so that learners can read them for almost a week until they are able to read them fluently. Some learners may not suffer from phonological recoding, visual word recognition and reading fluency, but may fail to read with comprehension.*
L7	*We make our pre-service teachers aware that they can identify and accommodate these learners by asking them to read a paragraph, then pose a few questions or ask them to summarize what they have read, using their own words. The teachers must then intervene by explaining the gist of the paragraph in simple terms.*

The responses of the respondents show that they are aware that there are at-risk readers in mainstream classes. Poor sight-word reading, visual word recognition, phonological decoding, or inability to read with comprehension are the traits of at-risk readers, as determined by L1 and L6, and they all fall into Quadrant 3 of the simple view of reading. Teachers should accommodate at-risk readers, as agreed upon by all respondents. L2 states that "a one-size-fits-all kind of intervention cannot work effectively". Respondent recommendations include reading aloud several times (L6, L7), using non-word strategies (L2), increasing parental involvement (L5), and summarizing (L1, L7).

The suggested strategies are mostly appropriate for those addressing healthy-progress readers. Even though there is evidence that respondents can identify at-risk readers, they recommended general strategies that are thought to be effective in teaching reading comprehension skills at

primary school level (Liu & Zhang, 2018; Jonas & Director, 2019; Vernet et al., 2022). The majority of respondents failed to clarify how the recommended strategies are actually put into practice. L5's advice on establishing a stress-free learning environment is consistent with Galletly's (2017) argument that teachers should make at-risk readers feel supported. L5 notes the lack of parental involvement in teaching learners to read, and this research suggests that parental support should be added to the teacher's explicit repair strategies in order to systematically improve an at-risk reader to the level of a healthy-progress reader.

The following section presents data on pedagogical strategies for at-risk readers.

8.2.2 Pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading comprehension to at-risk readers

8.2.2.1 Recommended reading strategies to use

For learners in the primary grades, reading pedagogical strategies are the means by which teachers will develop reading skills (Suraprajit, 2019). The strategies recommended by lecturers who are preparing pre-service teachers would provide a solid basis for the acquisition of the fundamental literacy abilities needed by at-risk readers. Table 8.5 presents lecturers' responses to Question 4: ***What pedagogical strategies can be recommended as effective for teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in mainstream schools?***

Table 8.5: Recommended reading strategies to use

Variable: **Recommended reading strategies to use**	
L1	*I would suggest that it is important that one becomes knowledgeable about evidence-based teaching strategies when teaching reading comprehension skills. They can use text structure to teach learners about how the text is structured, including text coherence strategies, which educate learners to align the content of the text in order to avoid unnecessary gaps. Also, they may apply three stages of reading, which include before reading, during reading and after reading.*
L2	*I must say that I am lacking when it comes to reading strategies. However, I would recommend a paired reading or reading in groups. In mainstream schools there are learners with psychological factors such as being shy or having a lower self-esteem or lack of confidence. So, the moment you pair them or let them read in groups, they are likely to read better. However, grouping them or paired reading has its own side effects, because at-risk readers may easily hide behind those who read well, and one would not be able to identify them easily. Teachers just need to use strategies such as phonics strategy, vocabulary strategy, phonemics strategy and all other components that form part of teaching reading*.
L3	*I recommend the use of strategies such as checking learners' prior knowledge before reading commences and explaining the reading strategies, which will help learners to get a clear understanding about the text and what it entails. In addition, direct instruction can be recommended as the most efficient strategy to teach reading comprehension.*
L4	*There are strategies that are recommended for teaching reading comprehension to at-risk readers. These strategies are engagement and motivation to read; activation of prior knowledge; teacher read-aloud; vocabulary instruction; comprehension checklist; silent reading of learners' own selected texts; and scaffolding.*
L5	*Teachers may introduce one strategy first, then move to another until the learners are used to all of them, and then they may decide to use some of these methods and strategies simultaneously. Also, in carrying out some reading tasks, teachers may use the following intervention strategies: Reading recovery; Small groups; Teaming up with a better reader; and Using reading aids.*
L6	*Teachers just need to use strategies such as phonics strategy, vocabulary strategy, phonemics strategy and all other components that form part of teaching reading.*
L7	*Teachers cannot just use any random reading pedagogy, but most importantly, they need to teach isiZulu reading using pedagogy that addresses all the linguistic aspects of isiZulu reading. They can use phonics strategies, decoding strategies, or phonemes strategies, but aligning them with isiZulu linguistic structures.*

The pedagogical strategies and features suggested by the respondents include text structure; text coherence; structuring the reading process into three stages (before, while and after reading); paired/group reading; direct instruction using graphic organisers; learner engagement; motivation to read; activation of prior knowledge; teacher read-aloud; vocabulary instruction; using a comprehension checklist and silent reading of learners' own selected texts. Only two of the strategies indicated by the respondents matched Galletly's (2017) concept of teaching for the reading heart to maximize the ownership, engagement and reading motivation

of at-risk readers. The individual focus that motivation and learner engagement strategies promote is crucial for the development of reading skills. The remaining reading comprehension techniques presented by the respondents are consistent with those recommended by Ciullo et al. (2015), Stevens and Vaughn (2019), and Smith et al. (2021). These strategies are primarily useful for teaching reading to readers who are making healthy progress. The gap between at-risk and healthy-progress readers needs to be closed. L7 rightly suggests that teachers cannot use any random reading pedagogy; instead, they should use strategies aligned with isiZulu language structures. In the same manner, random reading strategies would be inadequate for at-risk readers.

8.2.2.2 Preparing pre-service teachers to teach oral reading fluency

Fluency is the ability to read accurately, quickly and expressively. When one reads fluently, it comes naturally and becomes enjoyable and meaningful. Reading fluency is essential for reading proficiency and is required to comprehend a text, (Moats et al, 2010). Fluency is a key component of reading proficiency, because it connects decoding and meaning-making (National Reading Panel, 2000). Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) assert that fluency is commonly misunderstood, mistaught and misappreciated. Fluency is more than just rapid reading; it also includes comprehending what learners are reading. Table 8.6 presents lecturers' responses to Question 9: ***How do you guide pre-service teachers to teach oral reading fluency to at-risk readers?***

Table 8.6: Teaching oral reading fluency

Variable: **Teaching oral reading fluency**	
L1	*I teach my students that when teaching oral reading fluency, they need to instruct their learners not to use finger tracking as they read. Rather, they must move their eyes in the text so that they can learn to read independently. Teachers and learners can also carry dictionaries during reading poetry lessons because there are words that may not be familiar to them.*
L2	*When I teach reading fluency, I often focus on the three components: (i) accuracy, (ii) prosody, and (iii) automaticity.*
L3	*We teach our pre-service teachers to use a modelling strategy when teaching components such as fluency in our methodology content. They must have exercises for learners who are not fluent and create case studies so that they will see how the problem could be addressed.*
L4	*I teach pre-service teachers several techniques they can use to teach reading fluency, using digital audio recording devices to record learners when they are reading aloud on their own; ask learners to use a ruler or finger so that they follow along the words or the sentences when they are reading; give learners an opportunity to read the same passage several times until they master the reading fluency; teaching them some vocabulary or drill sight words that appear in the extract before engaging with the reading exercise; make learners select*

	their own reading materials or use a variety of books and materials; create a warm and welcoming atmosphere where learners feel less intimidated to read with confidence; and lastly, they may encourage their learners to choose reading materials that are user friendly in terms of the font or font sizes.
L5	*We educate our students that the focus in the early grades should be on reading aloud rather than silent reading, including expanding opportunities for learners to practise reading. They also have to monitor the reading process, which is something teachers in the profession do not do.*
L6	*We teach our students to instruct their learners to start by reading one word at a time; thereafter, they should follow up with a sentence, and that will be a way of developing fluency.*
L7	*When I teach pre-service teachers about oral reading fluency the focus is always on the three aspects of accuracy, speed and prosody. I also encourage my students always to provide opportunities for learners to practise reading. By so doing they will enhance their oral reading fluency.*

The views of the participants on oral reading fluency suggest that they teach pre-service teachers to expose learners to daily reading practice in order to develop oral reading proficiency. While educating pre-service teachers about oral reading is essential in the inclusive reading classroom, lecturers use fluency components such as accuracy, speed and prosody as mentioned by L2 to prepare pre-service teachers for developing fluency. Dlamini (2022) maintains that in most cases prosody or reading with expression is often neglected when teaching reading. Learners with the ability to read with an appropriate expression that aligns with the meaning of the text tend to comprehend the text appropriately.

8.2.2.3 Preparing pre-service teachers to teach vocabulary

According to Ehri (2022), vocabulary is important because it helps learners to understand words they have never read before; it helps them to sort through potential pronunciations to find the right word and helps them to become more aware of words. To enhance reading for meaning, Solari et al. (2021) recommend systematic, evidence-based and explicit vocabulary instruction. Reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge are closely related, therefore pre-service IP isiZulu teachers should possess the necessary knowledge and abilities to teach vocabulary. Table 8.7 presents lecturers' responses to Question 10: ***How do you guide pre-service teachers to teach vocabulary to at-risk readers?***

Table 8.7: Teaching vocabulary

Variable: **Teaching Vocabulary**	
T1	*We teach pre-service teachers to use explicit instruction when teaching vocabulary to at-risk readers; illustrating the words with vivid colours so that they stand out; make the learners play 'Quick Draw' or 'vocabulary charades'; and compensate them when they are able to find the words that are commonly used in the real-life environment.*
T2	*We teach our pre- service teachers to create vast opportunities for learners to learn new words in a written text or oral language that may be outside of the learner' current vocabulary. Through activities they give to learners there should be some element of vocabulary development, could it be reading comprehension text or writing activity. We also make it a primary aspect that they ought to define the complex terms during reading to develop learners' vocabulary.*
T3	*We encourage our pre-service teachers to make an analysis of a word meaning and modelling the context of the word. In that way, learners will not forget a word easily. We further encourage our students to ensure that vocabulary is assessed daily in oral and written language.*
T4	*We coach our pre-service teachers that it is advisable to use the words themselves constantly as teachers so that learners inductively learn how they are used in an authentic communicative episode. Teachers may also ask learners questions that will prompt them to use the words in different contexts thus unconsciously learning the vocabulary.*
T5	*T5 reported that they teach their students always to use direct vocabulary instruction for learners who struggle with oral reading fluency. This will help to lay a proper foundational knowledge on how to acquire a new word.*
T6	*When teaching vocabulary in the Intermediate Phase teachers must let learners have exercise groups where they write new vocabulary words. When training pre-service teachers, teachers must consider using idioms and proverbs in every lesson at Honours level because these expressions are not easy to teach. Most of the teachers do not focus deeply on the teaching of expressions and reading them with understanding. They would inform learners just to go home and familiarize themselves with certain expressions on their own, which is meaningless, because teachers need to assist learners step by step to develop an understanding and reading of these expressions, such as explaining or simplifying widely on the background of that expression.*
T7	*T7 indicated that they teach their students to use explicit vocabulary instruction to enable learners to learn new words. They should also use more comprehension activities and then define the new terms that are not in learners' current vocabulary.*

Lecturers provided thoughtful vocabulary knowledge which sought to improve learners' reading proficiency. Various strategies were discussed by the participants, which include, among others, using a comprehension text to introduce learners to new words and using idioms and proverbs in the reading lesson to enhance vocabulary knowledge of readers. It is worth noting that some learners such as at-risk readers may have poor vocabulary knowledge or skills. A fundamental solution to this problem would be to provide adequate training to pre-service teachers a variety of vocabulary development strategies in order to provide the necessary

support to at-risk readers.

8.2.2.4 Preparing pre-service teachers to teach inferences

A reader must create inferences by identifying appropriate, meaningful links between the different data in the reading text. Pre-service teachers must be equipped with knowledge to teaching inferences in order to develop learners' ability to read with meaning and understanding. Learners frequently concentrate on predictive or forward inferences when asked by teachers to generate them (Stafura & Perfetti, 2015). Based on hints provided in the text, they will ask students to predict what will happen next. Nonetheless, learners who comprehend the text well often do not make inferences and when they do, it is only in response to ample context clues pointing towards a specific prediction. Table 8.8 presents lecturers' responses to Question 11: ***How do you guide pre-service teachers to teach inferences to at-risk readers?***

Table 8.8: Teaching inference

Variable: **Teaching inference**	
T1	*We teach our pre-service teachers that learners cannot infer the meaning of the texts if they do not comprehend it. It is therefore crucial that they teach pre-service teachers the different techniques they can use to see if learners are able to infer the meaning of what they are reading. Some of the pragmatic techniques include playing video clips and asking learners to infer the meaning of what is happening in the clips, or to show them photographs and pictures and ask them to discuss the meaning of them. This is crucial, because visual literacy is part of reading.*
T2	*I always encourage my students that as learners' reading skills improve, they need to make inferences from what they have read. The inference should be essential, meaningful, and comprehending difficult text to provide a thoughtful analysis on the meaning of the text.*
T3	*T3 reported that explicit instruction can help to guide learners to make meaningful inferences. For example, they can make inferences in the reading comprehension about the characters while referring to the evidence from the text. They can also use visuals to help create inference.*
T4	*Learners may also infer the meaning of the text by being given a task to role play what they have read or watched. They can also do the text-picture matching exercise to see if they are able to match the text with the image. Lastly, teachers can also use the technique of comparing and contrasting characters. This can be achieved by making use of a character comparison chart in order to identify and illustrate similarities and differences of characters in the reading passage or video clip. In that way, learners will be able to infer the meaning of what they read or watched.*
T5	*Inferences are one of the most important mechanisms for reading development. I coach my students that they need to encourage their learners to make inferences during the reading process, as this will aid learners to make implicit information more explicit and be able to draw conclusions from the text.*
T6	*T6 indicated that they teach their students about making inferences while reading, as this will allow learners to decode words into a smaller meaningful part.*

T7	*In the Intermediate Phase grades, we educate our pre-service teachers to use visual aid materials to help learners to make inferences that they will not easily forget. This could include images or pictures about the textbook.*

Participants shared insightful views pertaining to educating pre-service teachers to teach learners to make inferences. Their strategies are both comprehensive and meaningful in improving learners' reading development. The lecturers' insights suggest that teachers are trained to teach inferencing techniques, however, their do not describe how inferencing techniques should be particularly taught to at-risk readers in inclusive classrooms.

8.2.2.5 Preparing pre-service teachers to teach phonemes

Phonemics is one of the primary mechanisms in developing reading proficiency. Phonemic awareness is a crucial element of successful early education; however, teachers frequently overlook it (Moats, 2020; Liben & Liben, 2019). Preparing teachers to explicitly teach phonemes is an essential element of preparing them to teach reading for meaning. Table 8.9 presents lecturers' responses to Question 12: ***How do you guide pre-service teachers to teach phonemics to at-risk readers?***

Table 8.9: Teaching phonemics

Variable**: Teaching phonemics**	
T1	*Phonemics are all about understanding sound letters in a word. Before phonemics instruction, we advise our pre-service teachers to have a strong background knowledge of decoding a word so that they will automatically be able to segment certain sound letters of the word. We also use various reading linguistic theories that will lay a concrete foundational knowledge about phonemics instruction.*
T2	*Even though we do not focus deeply on the reading linguistic components such as phonemics and spelling in the methodology content, we do, however, instruct our pre-service teachers that they must have a strong background understanding of these components of reading. Also, they need to develop printed reading charts in the classrooms that will assist learners to practise reading.*
T3	*We emphasize to our pre-service teachers that teaching phonemics requires the ability to distinguish sound letters and be able to blend certain sound letters into a word. In their classrooms they need to use an explicit strategy to explain to learners how letter sounds are different and how they can be used to create a meaningful word. We indicate that if a learner has a strong background of phonemics, it becomes easy to decode words.*
T4	*They can use pictures of items that are common and ask learners to name what is in the picture or play the sounds and ask learners to identify what they are. Learners can also play a memory game by using certain words that rhyme. Teachers may have these words printed on the pasteboard/card stock. Lastly, teachers may give learners the task of coming up with their own new words using syllables that are furnished on the flash cards.*

T5	*Our Methodology course does not have strong background content on reading targeting learners with reading problems. However, we do highlight the significance of the four language skills, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking, but we do not focus intensively on the linguistic part of it.*
T6	*T6 mentioned that they encourage their pre-service teachers to create different sound letter charts that will educate learners about phonemics such as blending of words. T6 further stressed that they also incorporate much reading theory to enable students to have in-depth linguistic knowledge.*
T7	*Our Methodological content has a section that focuses on the phonologic sound system such as (i) phonological processes, (ii) phonemes, and (iii) phonemic analysis of text. In this section, we educate our pre-service teachers about the importance of speech sounds, the ability to break the word, or segment the word into individual sounds. We also prescribe some reading textbooks that will help them understand the linguistic knowledge of reading, but we do not focus on at-risk readers in the inclusive classrooms.*

Participants shed light on the importance of sound letters as part of phonemics knowledge. Pre-service teachers are trained to use components such as decoding and syllables to enable learners to recognize certain sound letters, and to engage learners in various activities that improve their ability to blend sound letters of a word to allow smooth reading. Although phonemics is under-addressed in the teacher preparation courses, Ehri (2022) states that phonemics is imperative in developing the ability to decode words needed for independent reading. Intermediate Phase teacher preparation programmes must provide adequate phonological and phonemic awareness training to pre-service teachers.

8.2.2.6 Challenges pre-service teachers encounter when teaching inclusive reading

While there is vast research critiquing teachers' poor teaching practices in classrooms, the literature is devoid of studies addressing teacher educators' accountability to prepare teachers adequately (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018; Phala & Hugo, 2022; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). By identifying the challenges faced by pre-service teachers when teaching inclusive reading, lecturers would be able to assess how well the imparted pedagogical strategies are executed in practice. Table 8.10 presents lecturers' insights into Question 13: ***What challenges are faced by pre-service teachers when teaching inclusive reading*****?**

Table 8.10: Challenges pre-service teachers encounter when teaching inclusive reading

Variable: **Challenges pre-service teachers encounter when teaching inclusive reading**	
L1	*Most of the student teachers get frustrated and lose their temper in their teaching practice. This is because they are not trained well to handle the learners who are at risk. When student teachers are assessed they become depressed, thinking that these learners will get them into trouble, which can easily lead to developing a negative attitude towards at-risk readers. As a lecturer I talk to my student teachers about the challenges they encounter when they go for teaching practice. There is a journal where they write down all these challenges in their practice so that, when the lecturer reads that journal the lecturer will see all the problems that a student teacher has encountered during the practice lesson. However, the bottom line is that teacher students are not trained to handle at-risk readers.*
L2	*I must confess that as trainers of teachers we do not consciously focus on the methodology for teaching reading. It is something that does not receive too much attention, hence there is a variety of studies that prove that there is a reading crisis in our country. However, much attention has been given to the fact that teachers cannot teach reading, while universities' teacher programmes do not focus exclusively on reading in its methodology courses. Even the workshops that we run in the universities hardly touch on the side of reading in the methodology.*
L3	*Pre-service teachers **struggle during their teaching practice** when they come across such learners. This is because higher institutions of learning do not provide student teachers with adequate training on how to deal with learners who have reading difficulties. For example, "Our course does not have a reading methodology that trains teachers to teach isiZulu reading comprehension."*
L4	*Pre-service teachers are well-equipped in terms of content and pedagogical knowledge to face any challenges they may encounter during their teaching practice. How they handle those challenges entirely depends on their personal and professional discretion. However, the teacher education institution (TEI), plays its part. Challenges they may face are lack of teaching resources and cramped classrooms. Pre-service teachers are taught the skills of developing their own resources and how to cope with contexts such as cramped classes.*
L5	*When the student teachers do their teaching practice, they do not often focus on learners with learning problems, but their purpose is to get marks. Therefore, they do not concentrate on teaching learners with reading problems.*
L6	*Our students struggle during their teaching practice when they come across such learners, because our institution does not give them training on how to deal with these learners. In other words, our course does not have a Methodology course that trains teachers to teach isiZulu reading.*
L7	*Pre-service teachers in teaching practice struggle to deal with learners with reading problems in isiZulu because this institution does not offer thorough training on reading Methodology content.*

The responses show that 86% (*n=6*) of the lecturers indicated that the challenges faced by pre-service teachers are due to the fact that they are not specifically trained to deal with reading problems, or how to create an environment that accommodates at-risk readers in inclusive reading classrooms. While the majority of respondents concur that pre-service teachers struggle to deal with at-risk readers, L1 indicates that most of the pre-service teachers become frustrated and lose their temper when teaching at-risk readers in inclusive classrooms. L4 is of the opinion that pre-service teachers are equipped with the necessary skills to handle at-risk readers;

however, the way teachers handle the challenges they face may depend on their personal and professional discretion. Teachers with low self-efficacy are often pessimistic about embracing diversity in the classroom, as opposed to their counterparts with higher self-efficacy (Farr, 2020). Poor self-efficacy among pre-service teachers may engender anxiety, frustration and lack of confidence to manage classrooms with at-risk readers. The respondents' insights revealed that pre-service teachers are not adequately trained to deal with at-risk readers. The simple-view of reading approach (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) provides a mapping position for the reader from Q1 to Q4, which may assist both pre- and in-service teachers to plan ahead adequately for their inclusive reading lessons and then identify at-risk readers who require extra support.

8.2.2.7 Improving the reading pedagogical strategies

It was necessary for this study to understand the lecturers' insights into how reading pedagogical strategies can be improved to teach at-risk readers in mainstream schools. Improving reading pedagogical practices, particularly for teaching African languages, is imperative to curb the reading crisis evident from the PIRLS 22/23. Table 8.11 presents lecturers' responses to Question 14: ***Suggest ways to improve the pedagogical strategies for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu language to at-risk readers.***

Table 8.11: Improving the reading pedagogical strategies

Variable: **Improving the reading pedagogical strategies**	
L1	*L1 stated that we should challenge the curriculum and policies that guide our education system. L1 indicated that there is a need to have a lower number of learners in the class, teaching 80 learners in one class and expecting effective and quality education may not be feasible. She said, "In order to use our teaching strategies in the class, let us firstly reduce the number of learners in the class. Our strategies are not working effectively as the result of the so-called inclusive education which expects of teachers to deliver inclusive learning, while it does not provide proper teaching methods that cater for all learners."*
L2	*One strategy that can be used, is to group learners according to their performance, for example, when teaching pronouns or vocabulary, one is teaching them at different levels based on their performance; it is easy to move from one level to another. Hence, one can easily apply different strategies in each group, provided that one knows their level of reading. However, this may not be possible if there is a large number of learners in one class.*
L3	*L3 mentioned that there should be advocacy around the importance of teaching reading because there is this notion that learners must just write without understanding; hence they do not know where the writing comes from. The writing comes from being able to identify the phonemes and being able to read fluently and see those graphemes and start writing. L3 said that these are the aspects that need to be advocated to the school management, district officials and all the school stakeholders and emphasises that reading is integral. If one cannot read, no learning takes place.*

L4	*We need to educate our pre-service teachers and teachers and make them aware that the information that one has learned does not mean that one must discard the old information. They should merge all information and move along. The tendency that we have seen with the teachers is that once you give them the new information they tend to run with the new information, and they would discard the old information. This is supported by the current curriculum CAPS. Some of the important information that was in the old curriculum such as the Bantu Education curriculum was automatically discarded because we received new information. Even though Bantu Education had its own downfalls, we should keep the essence of preparation and some methods of teaching and merge them with the one we have in our current curriculum.*
L5	*Our course does not offer this; you have made me aware of such and this is something we need to include in our programme. However, I would say that we need to educate our teachers to plan. They must plan for reading, because once they have a proper plan, they will be able to assist these at-risk readers.*
L6	*Flexibility, innovation, proper planning, and keep an open mind are key aspects in improving the way IP teachers employ the existing methods and strategies when teaching isiZulu language to at-risk readers.*
L7	*Offering teachers relevant workshops is crucial. It should not be a long workshop, but it should be a workshop that is intended for a specific section in the subject such as reading comprehension in the subject isiZulu. Thereafter, follow-up support must be given to find out how teachers respond, and if they are able to implement what they were taught in that workshop.*

The above responses from lecturers are quite informative and relevant to the question posed by this study on the improvement of reading pedagogy for teaching isiZulu inclusive reading comprehension. The views show strong concerns with the inclusion policy, which does not seem to be feasible in the huge mainstream classrooms. As L1 mentioned, pedagogical strategies currently used do not serve the purpose of inclusive education due to the lack of effective inclusive learning strategies. In addition to this problem, teachers who are expected to deliver inclusive education are not properly trained to teach learners with learning challenges using different methods of teaching. Some of the challenges stated by L1 and L2 involve the negative impact caused by overcrowded classes in implementing effective pedagogical strategies in the inclusive classrooms. By grouping learners according to their reading ability, a teacher may assist a learner struggling in a particular reading area such as vocabulary, phonics or spelling. However, implementing this strategy may not be ideal in a classroom that consists, for example, of 85 learners. This calls for an urgent remedial intervention in terms of school service delivery to provide enough classrooms for effective learning and teaching to take place.

If these factors are not taken into consideration, they may continue to hamper the process of developing reading proficiency for learners. Apart from that, there is a need to ensure that the reading material currently used is relevant and can develop reading competence. For example, the textbooks could elaborate on isiZulu vocabulary which a child could read and enjoy.

In line with that, L4 provided a thoughtful insight into teachers' tendency to discard old information. Old texts can still play a major role in dealing with learning challenges such as reading problems. Old text should be screened to ensure it stimulates learners' interest. Lastly, L7 regards teacher workshops literacy development as imperative.

Participant views indicate some misalignment between policy makers in education and the implementers of these policies. According to the respondents of, the policy designers establish policies and procedures that are not feasible in practice; furthermore, they seldom follow up to check the implementation of the policies during teaching practices. This speaks strongly of poor collaboration among education stakeholders, which consequently results in poor reading outcomes in schools.

8.2.2.8 Promoting inclusive reading in the mainstream schools

Even though 86% (n=6) of the lecturers interviewed in this study mentioned that their methodology courses do not factor in inclusive reading content, they managed to state how they think inclusive reading should be promoted in mainstream schools. Inclusive reading is important as a supporting structure for promotion of inclusive education stipulated in the White Paper Six (DoE, 2001). When pre-service teachers are not equipped with information about inclusive reading, they will likely encounter challenges in the attempt to teach reading in a diverse classroom (Subban & Mahlo, 2017). Table 8.12 presents lecturers' responses to Question 15: ***How can inclusive reading be promoted in mainstream schools?***

Table 8.12: Promoting inclusive reading in the mainstream schools

Variable: **Promoting inclusive reading in the mainstream schools**	
L1	*L1 indicated that inclusive education policy is a huge challenge to teachers because including all learners in one class, regardless of their learning problems, can automatically mean the academic exclusion of some of them. They need to have a separate learning environment where they can receive the attention they deserve and have teachers who are fully trained to deal with them. Teachers in the general schools are not trained to handle learners with problems such as reading problems. The inclusion is not feasible.*
L2	*L2 mentioned that inclusive reading could be promoted by providing different texts, e.g. if a certain group of learners struggle to read, teachers need to provide such learners with an easier text. In other words, they should be categorized as per their reading ability. The participant said those who are at risk should put more effort into reading and once they can read better, they should be grouped among skilled readers.*
L3	*L3 said inclusive reading could be promoted by changing the mindset that at-risk readers need to be sent to remedial schools and be separated from capable readers when activities are carried out in the classroom. The stigma had to be removed, and this can be achieved if in-service teachers are given*

	adequate training in the form of professional development or workshops on how to accommodate learners who have reading difficulties.
L4	*Reading strategies should not be English based; they should be based on African languages. There is this stigma that English is seen to be superior to other languages; at some stage one finds that English is oppressing the African languages, even in the reading strategies. Sometimes we cannot learn to read in our own languages because we use the strategies used to teach English to read. We also need to have resources in our own languages and rely on the strategies that share the values and linguistic realities of our local languages and not align them with English.*
L5	*L5 was of the view that universities need to start introducing an inclusive reading methodology course so that pre-service teachers can be trained adequately to teach at-risk readers.*
L6	*I think it has to start in the primary schools, but time must also be dedicated to reading. Teachers often focus on developing grammar and language, but very little time is allocated to reading comprehension, which is unfortunate, because reading is a skill that needs to be enhanced. Pedagogy still needs to be revised, because there are too many problems, especially regarding pedagogy in teaching our African languages.*
L7	*We must remember that the school cannot function on its own; there is a community and stakeholders that need to be involved. The community needs to promote reading and make it their culture. In the community there should be libraries and learning centres where a learner can go to practise reading and do drama to develop oral language proficiency. In other words, the work of promoting reading cannot be left in the hands of the school; the community needs to take charge and encourage their children to read. Let the community have different learning activities that will promote reading.*

Participants in this study described various approaches which they think could promote inclusive reading in mainstream schools. L2 indicated that promoting inclusive reading should be done through implementing inclusive reading pedagogical strategies. In support of these remarks from L2, the central argument presented by this study is that the inclusive education policy stipulated in White Paper Six expects of teachers to cater for all types of learners included in the classroom, despite their learning challenges, without providing pedagogical methods to teach learners with learning challenges. In the context of reading comprehension there is a need for inclusive reading knowledge, together with inclusive reading strategies that focus on at-risk readers in the mainstream school. The teacher education departments should take the lead in promoting inclusive reading through training pre-service teachers for inclusive reading and effective reading pedagogical strategies for specifically teaching at-risk readers.

From a different angle, L3 pointed out the impact of the stigmatization attached to learners with reading problems. This speaks volumes of teachers' negative attitudes towards teaching at-risk readers, which means these learners are often academically neglected. Reading stigmatization by teachers is hazardous in the sense that a teacher may cause an unnecessary sense of rejection and show poor self-efficacy towards teaching at-risk readers.

L4 alluded to the issue of reading strategies that are not based on African languages. The fact of the matter is that the prestige of English reading instruction overrides African language reading instruction. This is significant in the sense that even the current curriculum does not have African language reading strategies. Such implied inferiority in reading African languages has the likelihood to delay or even supress the development of African language reading materials.

L7 speaks of the importance of community involvement in promoting reading development by establishing different facilities such as libraries and language centres that can assist learners with the necessary materials to enhance their reading skills. Apart from the need for community involvement in reading development, the lack of parental involvement in teaching children to read is also a matter of concern. Poor parental involvement in reading is still one of the main factors hindering the attempts to address the spreading of reading problems in primary schools (Boonk et al., 2018). Parents should take the responsibility to ensure that their children continue to read even at home. They can buy them reading materials such as interesting short stories, which will motivate them to read frequently.

The following section presents data collected from lecturers regarding teaching and learning resources suited for teaching inclusive reading.

8.2.3 Teaching and learning resources suited for teaching inclusive reading

At-risk readers are typically in need of appropriate reading materials that will motivate them to cultivate their reading skills (Merga, 2019). Table 8.13 presents lecturers' responses to Question 16: ***Which teaching and learning resources are best suited for teaching inclusive reading to at risk readers?***

Table 8.13: Teaching and learning resources suited for teaching inclusive reading

Variable: **Teaching and learning resources suited for teaching inclusive reading**	
L1	*We do not have sufficient learning materials written in our languages for developing reading, as opposed to English and Afrikaans. The current available books are mainly translated versions of Western languages and they do not convey the exact meaning in the African languages, so we need more of African language textbooks in schools.*
L2	*L2 stated that teachers need to design different printed reading materials such as charts that will constantly remind learners to read all the time. L2 stated that when one goes to schools one finds no resources designed in our African languages, but many are English resources, which is the problem.*
L3	*Even though we do not have sufficient textbooks in our African languages, there must be reading programmes in the schools that promote reading. Teachers need to design materials where even parents are invited to play a role in assisting their children to become skilled readers.*

L4	*L4 stated that there is a lack of resources available in African languages, particularly in isiZulu. Zulu authors hardly produce learning textbooks written in our language and other African languages. We have been using old books such as Shaka Zulu for quite long enough, and it is becoming boring now. We need to have books that will stimulate their reading and talk about things that happen in their presence that fascinate them. I am not saying we should abandon our history and never educate our children about the history, but for the sake of stimulating the love of reading among these learners, books should talk about fun things that happen in their present lives.*
L5	*For at-risk readers there is a need to come up with a system that will motivate children to read and write books. Parents, teachers and learners must all read, let parents buy reading materials for their children, have conversations with them and ask them to read aloud in the presence of their parents. This speaks to parental involvement. Parents need to have material such as recording devices that will record a story and allow learners to read further in the textbook to enhance their understanding of reading. If the reading problem is severe, schools need to buy the materials that are often used in the special schools to help these children read better.*
L6	*We encourage our students always to have a reading book corner. In other words, in their classes they must have a corner where they put books so that at-risk readers can easily access the reading corner without having to come to the teacher to request a book.*
L7	*Teaching and learning resources suitable for inclusive reading to at-risk readers should not be of a lower quality, because that will prevent these learners from progressing in terms of their reading proficiency. Teachers should therefore give struggling readers the reading materials that are equal to the grade they are in – not above or below the grade.*

Although a similar question had been posed in the interviews with the teachers, it was also necessary to obtain lecturers' insights into learning resources to teach inclusive reading, given that the course contents of teacher education programmes provide the outline and description of adequate materials required to teach language literacy. L1, L2 and L4 prompt a discussion on the shortage of African language reading materials, including teachers' reluctance to design African language reading materials. This is true in the sense that this study also discovered that teachers often rely on outdated printed materials to teach isiZulu reading comprehension. Therefore, there is a need for updated reading materials in African languages. Also, pre-service teachers need to be made aware of the significance of creating reading materials such as reading charts in African languages.

L3 mentioned the significance of implementing reading programmes that will generate enthusiasm for reading in learners. Effective reading programmes are of paramount importance for all learners in mainstream education, but for disadvantaged and minority learners with reading difficulties, who depend on schools to achieve reading success, reading programmes and sufficient reading materials are in a sense even more important.

L5's insights suggest that there is poor parental involvement in helping children to read. Undoubtedly, parents play a crucial role in assisting their children to read; however, it is an

unfortunate fact that the majority of rural parents are not educated; hence they may be less capable or motivated to teach children to read. That leaves educators with the entire responsibility to be at the centre of reading development. Alternatively, parents should be educated on how they could encourage their children to read, and which reading materials they need to buy for their children.

L7's views seem to condemn the idea of giving at-risk readers reading material that is below their grade level. Through observations and interviews conducted with teachers, it was noted that teachers believe that giving at-risk readers such material is in fact the right strategy to assist weak learners to enhance their reading skills. This entails that teachers should provide a variety of reading materials to at-risk learners. Providing below grade level reading material should be strategically used to allow learners to close the reading gaps they may have without polarizing these nor increasing the gap between the healthy-progress and readers and at-risk readers.

While there seem to be shortage of reading materials in most rural schools, community libraries can have a positive impact on learners' reading literacy by donating reading books and other necessary reading materials that will aid learners to improve their reading proficiency.

Section 8.6 presents data on policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

8.2.4 Policy regarding at-risk readers in mainstream schools

The present study argues that while various education policies cater for inclusive learning, there are no specific guidelines that explain the importance of inclusive reading to at-risk readers in mainstream schools; yet teachers currently in practice are expected to deal with at-risk readers as part of inclusive education. The inclusion of at-risk readers in mainstream schools without proper guidance is equivalent to their academic exclusion. Table 8.14 provides lecturers' responses to Question 17: ***Which South African Education policy provides guidelines for inclusive reading?***

Table 8.14: South African policy guidelines for inclusive education

Variable: **South African policy guidelines for inclusive education**	
L1	*L1 stated that it is the Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001), which was followed by the guidelines of 2005 and 2010. The Education White Paper 6 for Special Needs Education was developed after the legal framework provided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996 and the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996.*
L2	*I know that there is National Reading Strategy gazetted by the DoE; however, I do not think these policies contribute enough to change the status of reading especially for at-risk readers.*

L3	*The right to read and write is enshrined in our Constitution, which allows everyone access to basic education. There is also a White Paper Six published in 2001.*
L4	*There is the White Paper Six, Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS).*
L5	*Inclusive education is found in White Paper Six established in 2001. It guides teachers on how to cater for learners with learning challenges included in mainstream schools.*
L6	*There is SIAS and White Paper Six, which aim to support inclusive education.*
L7	*The Education White Paper 6 for Special Needs Education, which is supported by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, No. 108 of 1996, in line with the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996.*

The policies mentioned by the participants provide a guideline towards implementing inclusive education in mainstream schools. However, there seems to be a gap in policies focusing on inclusive reading and teaching at-risk readers who are included in mainstream primary schools. Nonetheless, the policies mentioned by the participants should be acknowledged and recognized as the least of the interventions made by the DBE to ensure inclusive learning. However, the main question in this context remains with the implementation of these policies and the capabilities of teachers in mainstream schools to execute the stipulations of these policies. One of the DBE Teacher Development Unit and university teacher education departments is to ensure that there are fundamental resources and effective pedagogical practices in place that aid teachers in implementing inclusive policies to ensure that no learner is left behind despite their learning challenges such as reading problems in the context of this study.

8.2.4.1 Changes in the current South African Education policies on inclusive reading

Since South Africa's democracy in 1994, educational policies have consistently been adapted to provide equal learning opportunities to all learners in mainstream schools. For example, among the issues highlighted in this study are the revision of reading pedagogical strategies in the CAPS for teaching African language literacy. Policies governing inclusive learning need to be reviewed regularly to check if they still align with the current conditions in schools. The review of these policies will allow curriculum planners and policy designers to identify gaps and challenges of implementation and then make the necessary amendments. Table 8.15 provides lecturers' responses to Question 18: ***What changes should be made to the current South African education policies regarding inclusive reading****?*

Table 8.15: Changes in the current SA education policies on inclusive reading

Variable: **Changes in the current South African education policies on inclusive reading**.

L1	*L1 mentioned that there was nothing wrong with the policy per se. The problem lies with the failure of the schools and governing bodies to implement the policy. The policy was meant to address barriers to learning in the South African education system.*
L2	*L2 stressed that there is a need to go back to the Foundation Phase and change the CAPS document, because CAPS used the English version and translated it to other South African indigenous languages without taking into account the characteristics of these other languages. For example, the phonemes in the CAPS need to be corrected and replaced with isiZulu phonemes.*
L3	*L3 mentioned that there is a need to minimize the number of activities in the Intermediate Phase so that teachers can focus optimally on reading, because currently what teachers know is how to assess learners in a written form, but not knowing on what basis they assess them. Also, our curriculum is too packed; there is therefore a significant need to reduce it.*
L4	*We need to investigate the issue of monitoring; there must be a strong leadership for monitoring what is happening in the IP such as monitoring the resources that they buy and type of activities they use to assess learners. Sufficient time must also be provided for teachers to help learners develop reading skills and ensure that there is sufficient printed work in schools.*
L5	*L5 was of the view that the curriculum demands a lot from teachers within a short period of time and sometimes this is the reason why teachers tend to use a one-size-fit-all strategy to cover the syllabus while being mindful of the high number of learners they have in one class. The curriculum needs to allow teachers to use their own creativity to tackle learning problems such as reading challenges, but to do that enough time must be allocated for teachers. The curriculum needs to remove some other irrelevant aspects that do not contribute much to the cognitive ability of a learner.*
L6	*The policies established under the DoE need to provide teachers with effective pedagogy that can be used to teach learners with learning difficulties such as at-risk readers. The policies suggest inclusive learning, but state less about the pedagogy to be used in inclusive classrooms.*
L7	*Pedagogical strategies prescribed in the CAPS document do not seem to suggest how at-risk readers need to be taught in a classroom that also has skilled readers. Strong pedagogical content should be prescribed in the CAPS to deal with reading problems.*

86% (*n=6*) of the lecturers' responses above appear to be advocating a change not only in the policies, but also in the current curriculum on the basis that it is too packed. DBE polices need to be designed in a manner that will accommodate the conditions of rural education. The current policies treat schools uniformly, regardless of the marginalized and disadvantaged teaching conditions of the majority of schools in the country.

14% (*n=1*) of the lecturers had a different point of view about implementing changes in the policies. They believed that nothing seems to be inadequate in the current policies. However, they mentioned that the responsibility rests with teachers to familiarize themselves with these policies and learn to implement them. However, it is also important that policy designers contribute towards developing pedagogical approaches that will align with the nature of inclusive learning such as inclusive reading, as well as with the current conditions of rural schools for implementation to be effective.

8.3 Conclusion

This chapter discussed data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with seven isiZulu methodology lecturers selected from five public universities in the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal Provinces. While there are concerns about poor literacy skills in South African primary schools, there is a lack of research on how university teacher education departments prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. In the light of the current reading crisis in the South African education sector, one of the key recommendations of this study is the urgent need for lecturers to prepare pre-service teachers for adopting pedagogical strategies for inclusive reading through their tertiary education methodology courses. The current inclusive teaching and learning policies imply that at-risk readers should be catered for in mainstream schools. Without the necessary policy stipulations on inclusive reading (and adequate implementation strategies), pre-service teacher preparation and classroom practice remain at risk of indirectly perpetuating the reading crisis that prevails in mainstream primary schools.

Chapter Nine presents a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

9.1 Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the pedagogical methods that can be suggested as effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools. Following the presentation and analysis of findings in the previous three chapters, this chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the outcomes of this study. The chapter is divided into three sections: (i) discussion of themes and subthemes emanating from the qualitative data, (ii) a discussion of findings on how isiZulu Intermediate Phase reading teachers teach reading comprehension and (iii) how pre-service teachers are prepared to teach inclusive reading. The findings are discussed based on the themes that relate to the research questions. The chapter concludes by presenting the consolidated finding from this study.

The researcher employed thematic analysis to analyse and discuss these findings. Through thematic analysis data were grouped and the groups were assigned into broader categories of related meanings and themes. The findings based on the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and non-participants' classroom observations were used to develop knowledge about pedagogical strategies that could be used not only in teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers, but also the preparation of pre-service teachers in teacher education programmes to teach inclusive reading in mainstream schools.

9.2 Themes emanating from the study

9.2.1 Approaches to reading

Respondents mentioned that teaching common words assists learners to understand word structure, including the pronunciation of certain complex letter sounds (Suraprajit, 2019). Respondents were of the view that spelling contraction is essential when teaching at-risk readers. It also equips learners with knowledge to decode words to form a meaning (Suraprajit, 2019 & Ahmadi et al., 2013) According to the respondents: a reading-aloud strategy is essential in reading comprehension, because it affords learners the opportunity to develop fluency through practice and pronunciation of words that are not familiar to them (Suraprajit (2019). Respondents indicated that text structure can be used teach learners about how the text is structured, including a text coherence strategy that educates learners about text coherence to

avoid unnecessary gaps (Brevik, 2019). Respondents were of the view that an explicit reading strategy is paramount, because it helps learners get a clear understanding of the text and what it entails (Deshpande, 2016). Respondents posited that one way to assess learners' understanding and activating their memory is through using the strategy of activating prior knowledge. This strategy enables learners to remember different types of words they learnt previously including pronunciation, spelling and accuracy. As observed in the classrooms, this strategy is conducted during the pre-reading stage (Deshpande, 2016).

While these strategies are crucial within the context of evidence-based instruction in reading development comprehension, the mentioned strategies can only be used to teach healthy-progress readers. This indicates that teachers should not use any random pedagogical reading strategies in the inclusive reading classroom; there is a need to bridge the gap between healthy-progress and at-risk readers.

9.2.2 Importance of pedagogy and curriculum content in stimulating positive teachers' beliefs and behaviour in the reading classroom.

Values and beliefs that shape teachers' practice and pedagogical strategies: Respondents believe that teaching reading comprehension is all about providing a reading text for learners to read aloud, but there is no extensive reading engagement that seeks to cultivate learners' linguistic reading knowledge such as preparing learners to understand the different reading comprehension components (Chetty, 2019 & Ramdan, 2015). A teacher's own experience of acquiring reading skills has the potential to influence beliefs about learning and teaching to read.

Values and beliefs that shape lecturers' practice and pedagogical strategies: Lecturers believe that teaching language literacy in their courses automatically prepares pre-service teachers to teach reading comprehension adequately, even to at-risk readers included in the mainstream schools (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

There is a knowledge gap between what teachers and lecturers seem to believe is the way how reading practice should be taught in the inclusive classrooms. There is little understanding of what is the standard skill required to teach inclusive reading through implementing pedagogical practices that accommodate not only healthy-progress readers but at-risk readers as well. The classroom practice of teachers and lecturers in teaching reading comprehension has the effect of isolating at-risk readers in mainstream schools.

9.2.3 Comprehension courses for language teachers

Developing teachers' literacy teaching skills: There is a lack of guidance for university lecturers regarding the inculcation of effective pedagogical practice for teaching literacy, especially inclusive reading within pre-service teacher education courses (Klapwijk, 2011)

While many teacher education lecturers interviewed in this study believe that they prepare pre-service teachers adequately to teach reading, there is a sense that no focused attention given to reading comprehension, since it falls under the broad umbrella concept of language literacy. As a result, teaching of reading is done haphazardly with no specific focus on adequate pedagogical practice required to teach inclusive reading.

There is a pedagogical knowledge gap in literacy courses. Literacy lecturers believe that education psychology courses are responsible for the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. However, it emerged that inclusive reading pedagogical content should be included in the language literacy courses as a way of preparing pre-service teachers to deal with at-risk readers in the inclusive classroom.

The major gap is the inadequate training of teachers to teach inclusive reading in the teacher education programmes. Teachers' beliefs and values about reading should resonate with African languages reading pedagogical knowledge.

9.2.4 Assessment as a way of improving reading comprehension

Assessing oral reading accuracy: Even though accuracy is a fundamental aspect in reading development, it requires much practice to be implemented optimally. Thus, respondents believe that accuracy and oral fluency work collaboratively to enhance reading skills.

Assessing rate of oral reading: Assessing a rate of oral reading is imperative in developing reading comprehension, because it helps teachers to identify at-risk readers and provide extra reading support. In most cases, the reading pace of at-risk readers is slow, as opposed to that of healthy-progress readers (Setianingsih, 2016).

Assessing quality of oral reading: The quality of oral reading is assessed during the actual and the post-reading stage. Learners are assessed through verbal questions with the intention of defining and understanding unknown words found in the reading text.

The major problem also highlighted by the respondents is the fact that the curriculum is too packed with many assessment activities and extra administrative activities, which then

compromise the primary task of teaching. Currently, what teachers know is to assess learners' reading skills in a written form, but not knowing what to base their assessments on, which gives an indication of poor assessment planning.

9.2.5 Learner/Teacher attributes conducive for inclusive reading

Learner motivation: Teacher respondents mentioned that learners only practise reading when they are at school and instructed by the teacher to read. There is no motivation or desire that pushes them to read independently. A lack of reading materials in rural schools contributes immensely towards poor learner motivation. In addition, learners are demotivated to read at home due to poor parental involvement (Willingham, 2017; Daries & Probert, 2020).

Teachers' preparedness to motivate at-risk readers: Classroom observations pointed to a lack of teacher preparedness to motivate at-risk readers. The reading pedagogical strategies currently used by the teachers are addressed separately from learner motivation. It is essential that reading pedagogy strategies should have elements of motivation for the purpose of encouraging at- risk readers to read. There is a gap between what the inclusive education policy expects from teachers and what teachers are capable to deliver.

9.2.6 Resources that support inclusive reading

Overcrowded classrooms: Internal factors such as classroom overcrowding hamper the idea of organizing reading according to learners' reading abilities.

Availability of adequate books for learners to read/reading corner in a classroom: From the observations, all the teachers observed were using the Department of Education isiZulu textbook titled *Masihambisane*. Learners had to sit in groups to share because there were insufficient copies of the book . Other teachers mentioned that they relied on the old reading story books to teach isiZulu reading comprehension. In addition, they did not have reading materials targeting at-risk readers.

Availability of school libraries (to store books, provide quiet space for reading outside the classroom): Based on the observation conducted all the schools had no libraries nor any technological reading equipment to help learners read such as computer-based reading materials and reading voice recorders.

The fact that overcrowded classrooms contribute to an environment not conducive to learning is the indication of poor infrastructure in most rural schools. An environment conducive to

learning has the potential to yield excellent reading performance. Based on the observations and interviews where teachers raised significant concerns about poor reading material supply in rural schools, there is a sense that the DoE district office does not do enough to ensure a provision of adequate reading materials needed. This places constraints on reading teachers who are expected to meet the standard expectations of CAPS.

Strategic learner sitting arrangements work effectively in a large, open classroom, but they are not feasible in an overcrowded setting; a reason many teachers could not arrange a proper sitting plan. Teachers lack classroom management skills to enforce discipline and good behaviour of learners. Learners lack discipline, which consequently leads to negative behaviour and lack of respect in the classroom.

9.2.7 Education policies governing inclusive reading in South African Primary Schools

Teachers in schools are of the view that the inclusive policies do not serve the purpose of guiding and providing extra support to learners such as at-risk readers. In addition, it is challenging to implement regulations of inclusive policies practically without sufficient learning materials and proper pedagogical practices.

While this study acknowledges the effort made by the government through research projects and reading campaigns to deal swiftly with the reading crisis facing primary schools, there is a need to provide a comprehensive way forward in terms of current education policies. Given the findings of this study, which illustrate a policy with nothing to say on inclusive reading, there is a need for policy designers to establish an inclusive reading policy as well as inclusive reading pedagogical strategies. In the current education policies, there are no specific stipulations that provide guidance on how inclusive reading should be taught. This indicates a policy void when it comes to inclusive reading.

9.3 Discussion of findings: Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading teachers teaching reading comprehension

9.3.1 Inadequate preparation for reading lessons

A teacher should have the ability to plan for teaching reading effectively, including setting reading goals for learners and determining clear lesson objectives (Straessle, 2014). A reading lesson plan should include five elements: overall aim, specific objectives, skills, activities and evaluation (Fujii, 2019). The lesson plan structure should act as a clear guide to the teacher for

the objectives to be achieved by the end of the reading lesson. Often reading objectives take priority as they provide a clear description of what is to take place in the classroom, including specifying the content and the level of reading proficiency to be achieved at the end of the lesson (Straessle, 2014). In that regard, one may say that reading objectives in the reading lesson plan serve as a road map for both the learner and the teacher as they assist teachers to plan in advance what they aim to teach and specify the time frame within which they will teach. It was evident in the classroom observations that the majority of teachers did not plan adequately for their reading lessons. Lack of planning resulted in substandard activities used (in pre-, while- and post-reading phases) to accommodate the at-risk readers present in the lessons observed.

Through interviews and observations it was evident in this study that teachers do not prepare for their reading comprehension lessons because they are insufficiently knowledgeable about how reading comprehension should be taught, specifically to learners with reading problems who are included in mainstream schools (Fujii, 2019). The views are confirmed in the literature review, which indicated that teachers do not have adequate skills to teach reading comprehension (Pretorius, 2013). It is often said that the lack of adequate reading comprehension skills teaching will most likely compromise the reading lesson plan (Pratt & Urbanowski, 2016). Straessle (2014) states that unclear reading objectives and poor reading lesson plans can create psychological issues such as anxiety, stress and confusion. On top of that, lack of planning resulted in substandard activities the in pre-, while- and post-reading phases, which meant that it was impossible to accommodate the at-risk readers present in the observed lessons.

9.3.2 Structuring reading strategies for inclusive reading

The Word Learning theory (Erhi & McCormick, 1998) guides teachers on reading development. For example, during the pre-alphabetic stage, the teacher should focus on letter recognition and phonics awareness (Ehri, 2020). Thus, teachers must assist learners to match letters with word sounds, incidentally, also learning spelling rules, and then use this knowledge to decode and encode words (Castle et al., 2018). In other words, when words are repeated, learners become familiar with them and recognize them in chunks. For example, in the isiZulu terms *asifundi, bafundile* and *zisafunda*, learners will eventually understand the common root, which is *-fund-*, meaning ‘to learn’. In the partial-alphabetic phase, teachers’ pedagogical strategy should model how to manipulate sounds and words. The third phase emphasises that

teachers should allow learners to re-read the text many times while practising pronunciation, including the various sounds to encode them. At-risk readers can identify unfamiliar terms when these are repeated frequently. Ehri and McCormick (1998) posit that oral reading fluency assessments should be conducted regularly by observing learners and providing the necessary support that will help them to move from one step to another. Data from both the lesson observations and teacher interviews revealed that unstructured pedagogical strategies tend to compromise the extra support that is supposed to be rendered to at-risk readers.

9.3.3 Agglutinativity of African languages

South African indigenous languages are agglutinative, consisting of syllabic language structures with transparent orthography as compared to English, which has opaque orthography. In other words, English can be regarded as non-agglutinating, disjunctive language; apart from the tenses and plurals, modifiers in meaning result in a separate word form such as “is, not”. The structure of English has the effect of making words shorter, as opposed to African languages such as isiZulu. IsiZulu consists of features of orthography that produce long and complex words. According to Land (2015), this is because isiZulu has the highly agglutinative structure of Nguni languages, comprising short morpheme clusters rounded central words. One of the illustrations provided by Land (2015) to show agglutinativity of isiZulu shows this:

> *Wawunezindlu ezingamaqhugwana ezithathu zakhiwe ngaphansi kwegquma.*
>
> You had three traditional huts built at the base of a hill.

In the isiZulu version there are 6 words which are translated into 12 words in English, but the isiZulu takes up more space than the English. As a result of this long, complex orthography in isiZulu, learners may have reading challenges if reading teachers are not fundamentally skilled to assist learners on how to read long and complex words. The importance of orthographic knowledge is supported by the lexical hypothesis (Perfetti, 2007) framing this study. Orthography forms part of the four important reading constituents (phonology, semantics, morphosyntax and orthography). These are word recognition and interconnected lexical representations that need to be understood to develop reading comprehension skills, particularly for young readers in primary schools. Therefore, in this case the knowledge of orthography can educate teachers about the need to understand language structure when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension.

Based on the difference between isiZulu and English orthography, this study found that the participant isiZulu teachers were clueless about the features of isiZulu language that are the building blocks for developing comprehensive reading skills for at-risk readers. For example, through observations conducted, not a single teacher attempted to segment a word into syllables or morphemes. There were no reading materials to assist leaners with agglutinative words, which can be bafflingly long and complex for learners who are struggling to read. In many cases teachers are inadequately trained to teach reading in South African local languages (Ntshangase & Tshuma, 2023); and they do little reading themselves to develop their teaching of reading skills in African languages.

Apart from teachers' failure to teach reading comprehension in African languages, this shortcoming continues to marginalize the status of African languages in society as well as in the South African education system. De Vos, Van der Merwe and Van der Mescht (2014) point out that very little has been done to develop cognitive-linguistic processes, which includes reading in African languages. The authors argue that it is still unclear what successful reading trajectories in African languages would look like, and what similarities or differences they would evince across African languages. This study posits that strong, empirically based research is required to develop an insight into reading in African languages and creating effective reading pedagogical strategies that are not adopted from English in order to reduce African languages' inadequacies in the education system.

9.3.4 Teachers' competence in cognitive reading components

The components of reading comprehension (vocabulary, spelling, fluency, phonological awareness, morphological awareness) can be viewed as the cardinal pillars of reading instruction providing comprehensive guides on how reading comprehension should be developed (Kendeou, McMaster & Christ, 2016). Each of the components plays a fundamental role in realizing effective reading comprehension. However, it is important to note that these components of reading comprehension can be integrated differently, depending on the reading language taught (Pretorius, 2013). For example, blending phonemes to form isiZulu words such as *s/i/y/a/f/u/n/d/a* cannot be the same as blending an English word, which then means there is a need to be knowledgeable about how to break down, identify and manipulate the phonological structure of a word in that language. This demonstrates that teaching isiZulu reading comprehension goes beyond the point of reading practice and reading aloud in class.

The empirical evidence gathered from the participants suggests that reading teachers are not

adequately equipped with an understanding of the reading linguistic components required to teach reading comprehension effectively. This indicates that there is a problem with how teachers are trained to teach reading comprehension in inclusive classrooms. Bharuthram (2012) maintains that many teachers do not have the necessary skills to develop oral language proficiency. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on written language proficiency. As Bharuthram (2012) points out, improving language proficiency does not automatically improve reading comprehension, but the attention devoted to reading improves reading comprehension skills, which automatically enhances language proficiency. There is a gap in the oral language training of teachers, which then compromises their ability to teach reading comprehension components, which are the key in developing reading skills in learners. The implications of the simple view of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), also framing this study, are that explicit instruction plays a pivotal role in the development of word recognition as well as reading vocabulary. It is also worth noting that all of the reading components and reading subskills are intertwined and integrated to develop reading skills, as also indicated in the lexical hypothesis (Perfetti, 2007).

As explicitly stated in the review of literature and also evident in the findings of this study, in many cases teachers view reading lessons as a matter of facilitation by means of asking learners in the classroom to read aloud without paying attention into a specific reading skill such as decoding or word recognition that may be a challenge to learners. These findings prove without any reasonable doubt that teacher education programmes do not prepare pre-service teachers adequately to teach isiZulu reading comprehension in the inclusive classrooms. Data gathered from the study participants suggest that IP isiZulu teachers have not mastered the necessary pedagogical strategies required to teach reading skills to both healthy-progress and at-risk readers.

9.3.5 The role of inclusion in teaching reading comprehension

The role of a teacher in the classroom is explored as a facilitator who teaches reading skills and reinforces inclusion. Mulholland and O'Connor (2016) state that inclusion in the classroom signifies that every learner should be treated as an individual, respected, valued and accommodated. Inclusion connects with the idea that every learner should be provided with an environment conducive to learning that fully accommodates them and provides the necessary resources for learning. This implies that a reading teacher should make use of pedagogical

methods that accommodates learners at various levels of reading. The notion of inclusion is viewed as a major aspect of the CAPS curriculum as explicitly stated in its general aim that,

> Inclusion should become a central part of the organization, planning and teaching at each school. This can only happen if all teachers have a sound understanding of how to recognize and address barriers to learning, and to plan for diversity (DBE, 2012: 5).

To deliver successful learning inclusion in classrooms, curriculum differentiation is the key approach that sees teachers adjusting their pedagogical strategies to accommodate learners with different needs, which then influences both learning and motivation (DBE, 2021). A curriculum differentiation can be achieved through the level of content taught, with the same content being taught using different pedagogical strategies to accommodate all learners and providing a variety of learning activities to measure their capabilities. Among the major challenges identified by this study is that teachers feel overwhelmed by the idea of multilevel teaching in the inclusive learning environment. Furthermore, teachers are expected to complete the curriculum, which is too packed, in their view; teachers are not adequately trained to implement different inclusive teaching strategies that accommodate diversity in the classroom; and they are less knowledgeable about effective inclusive policies that govern inclusion in the classroom. Research indicates that this situation is not unique KwaZulu Natal or South Africa; many countries experience the same dilemma (Cortez, 2017; Haager & Vaughn, 2013; Lufumbo, 2016). Teachers teaching different categories of at-risk readers in one classroom tend to utilize their own teaching pedagogies that are not tried nor tested to be effective in the inclusive classrooms. As observed in the reading lessons, at-risk readers become isolated during a lesson as they are not provided with the support they need.

9.3.6 Amount of time reserved for reading instruction in the inclusive reading classrooms

Among the major contributing factors to inclusive reading challenges identified by this study was the instructional time for teaching at-risk readers. Many teachers observed had difficulties completing the entire reading lesson plan in the prescribed time period. Teachers' failure to manage reading instructional time does not only jeopardize their reading objectives or lesson plans; it also compromises learners' academic performance. Teachers claim that the prescribed time allocated to teach reading in the overcrowded inclusive classroom that has inadequate reading materials is quite unrealistic. Teachers' concerns about prescribed reading instructional time makes sense; one may look at the issue from a different perspective, namely that teachers

fail to utilize the allocated time to plan and organize their reading lesson to teach meaningful reading aspects that will aid at-risk readers to develop reading comprehension skills. Also, it may be that teachers have inadequate classroom management skills, which consequently affects how effectively the allocated reading instructional time can be utilised.

One of the most crucial strategies to strengthen academic interventions in subjects like reading is to extend learning time. Enhancing reading instruction time can afford teachers the time to examine more reading topics and materials in greater depth for the benefit of at-risk readers. Time is a valuable resource in schools, so determining the best way to increase it for enhancing reading instruction is crucial. Evidence also suggests that certain learners need longer periods of time to develop readings skills. Even increasing the frequency or duration of the reading lesson can enhance outcomes for individuals with reading challenges (Rivkin & Schiman, 2015). Reading teachers should be aware that some learners may need additional weeks or months of assistance, especially if the objective is to aid cognitively challenging activities like isiZulu reading comprehension that are unlikely to be corrected quickly. Research studies offering extensive interventions of 100 sessions or more (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2007) have reported successful results for learners who struggle with reading. Additionally, studies in early reading (kindergarten through second to grade) indicate that learners who have significant reading challenges might require more time to advance their learning (Rivkin & Schiman, 2015).

There are various interventions which reading teachers can utilise to manage the reading instruction timeframe in the inclusive reading class. One of them is small-group instruction, which is one of the most feasible strategies for intensifying reading instruction time for learners. While extending instructional time aids some learners who struggle with making academic progress, research highlights that elementary learners who learn in smaller groups of three to four learners perform better than those who learn in bigger groups of eight to ten students (Harahap, 2019).

In addition, Rivkin and Schiman (2015) mention that learners who receive one-on-one training also significantly outperform those who receive the same instruction in groups of ten learners. This suggests that the way teachers organise reading groups in the classroom may have an impact on the reading instruction time and learners' reading cognitive achievement. However, even though this may appear to be an effective way of managing reading instruction, this study found that it is impossible for teachers in rural primary schools to organise small-group reading

instruction as a result of disruptive factors such as lack of reading resources, unfavourable learning conditions and overcrowded classrooms.

This discussion of findings based on the data obtained from the IP isiZulu teachers indicate that there is a clear disconnect between research on teaching reading comprehension and what teachers perceive teaching reading comprehension entails. Most of the teachers believe that ideally teaching grammar and reading aloud meet the pedagogical needs for teaching reading comprehension in African languages] findings speak volumes about the extent to which pedagogy is a challenge to many teachers in teaching isiZulu reading comprehension skills (Ntshangase, 2023).

9.4 Discussion of findings: Preparation of pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading

9.4.1 Absence of an inclusive reading policy

Regarding teaching and learning, the adoption of an inclusive education policy outlined in the White Paper Six on Education has had both beneficial and negative effects (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). While embracing diversity in the classroom and making sure that no learner is left out because of a learning disability is part of its mandate, it does not offer comprehensive teaching strategies for inclusive classrooms. While there is guidance on enhancing general literacy skills in various reading campaigns, inclusive reading is not specifically addressed. Similar to this, inclusive reading is not expressly covered by the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ). Regarding the implementation of successful pedagogical strategies for teaching inclusive reading in pre-service teacher education courses, university lecturers are not providing pre-service teachers with the relevant guidance. This suggests that there is a gap in the policy regarding the necessary training for the implementation of inclusive reading. There are requirements in the policy that offer guidance on inclusive learning, but no particular guidelines that direct teachers on how to teach inclusive reading. If inclusive reading is not taken into consideration, inclusive education falls short of its goal of guaranteeing inclusive learning.

9.4.2 Standardization of inclusive reading in university teacher education departments

The SIAS policy (DBE, 2014) standardizes the identification and evaluation of learners in need of assistance at school level. Standardization for university teacher education departments

means that various universities follow a common set of minimal standards to be met concerning preparation of pre-service teachers' to deal with inclusive reading (Ntshangase & Tshuma, 2023). In the absence of standardization, graduates from various universities will approach inclusive reading differently, depending on whether or not they have received the necessary training on pedagogical strategies. The degree of detail in their courses, if they were taught, will determine how much they know. Therefore, a platform for levelling the playing field entails the standardization of the concept of inclusive reading. Misquitta and Joshi (2022) assert that a significant obstacle to the implementation of inclusive reading is a lack of professional development. The results of this study suggest that a non-standard approach to inclusive reading pedagogy jeopardizes the professional development of pre-service teachers.

9.4.3 Inclusive reading as a way of addressing poor reading skills at primary school level

According to the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), learner reading outcomes were distressingly low, particularly in African languages. According to Howie et al. (2017), 86% of fourth-grade learners studying isiZulu as a First Additional Language (FAL) were found to be completely illiterate, because they were unable to read the language with comprehension. Pre-service teachers are not sufficiently prepared by South African education faculties to teach reading in the home languages, including isiZulu, (Spaull, 2022). Low literacy rates in elementary schools suggest that most of these learners are struggling readers, potentially falling into the category of at-risk readers. Many learners in primary schools are identified as at-risk readers, but they still do not receive the additional assistance they need (Donohue & Bornman, 2015). This is a result of teachers' incapacity and ignorance to instruct at-risk readers in mainstream primary schools effectively. The reading crisis in mainstream primary schools in South Africa needs to be halted, so university teacher education departments should rewrite their curricula to include a section on isiZulu inclusive reading and pedagogical strategies for teaching at-risk readers.

9.4.4 Reading teacher education program

Findings that emerged from this study show that there is insufficient attention to the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach reading comprehension in most undergraduate and postgraduate education programmes. Many South African university teaching education programmes do not have specific modules focusing on preparing pre-service teachers for inclusive reading; often reading comprehension is taught haphazardly (Gottfried et al., 2019). As also found in this

study, 86% of teacher educators interviewed mentioned that they did not study a specific module focusing on inclusive reading only. However, lecturers haphazardly tell pre-service teachers to be aware of learners who may have reading challenges and that they must use other reading pedagogical strategies, which this study has found do not entirely accommodate at-risk readers in the mainstream classrooms. This indicates that there is a gap between the standard expectations of the CAPS and how teachers are trained in the South African university teacher education programmes. These inadequacies need to be addressed effectively through teacher education programmes and curriculum policy designers.

Various studies have collected comprehensive descriptive data on how pre-service teachers in the teacher education programmes can be supported with professional knowledge to teach reading comprehension (Hikida et al., 2019; Moats, 2020; Tortorelli, Lupo & Wheatley, 2021). Meanwhile, Quinn and Paulick (2022) suggest that coursework should focus on building the knowledge of pre-service teachers that is flexible, responsive and adaptive to learners who require extra support in reading. This knowledge may vary, depending on the reading outcome aimed to be achieved at the end of the lesson.

In addition to the points above, the knowledge provided to pre-service teachers should educate them how to link new knowledge learned at university level to instructional practice during field experience. A field-based teacher education programme that provides support, guidance-intensive experiences, supervised, relevant field-based and critical feedback to pre-service teachers has a more positive impact in preparing pre-service teachers to teach reading (Hoffman et al., 2005). Many novice teachers often have difficulty transferring what they have learned in the coursework to the classroom. However, Rao and Zongjin (2021) believe that this is because beginner teachers usually allow the school culture to determine the norms of their pedagogical practice. As a result, these teachers tend to submit to the school standards of teaching practice that do not necessarily have any relevancy to their theoretical knowledge. This indicates that there is a demand for research that seeks to understand the connection between the teacher education programmes and teaching practice, and how knowledge taught during training is transferred in practice in classrooms.

9.5 Findings emanating from the key research question

What pedagogical methods can be suggested as being effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?

The key finding in this study indicates pedagogical strategies suggested by the respondents as: structuring the reading process into three stages (before, while and after reading); activation of prior knowledge; paired/group reading; using graphic organisers; learner engagement and motivation to read; vocabulary instruction; using a comprehension checklist; and silent reading of learners' own selected texts. These strategies are in teaching reading comprehension, particularly to the healthy-progress readers.

Strategies suggested by the teachers are not structured to address particular reading problems; as a result, at-risk readers in mainstream schools remain inadequately catered for. Teachers lack fundamental knowledge about reading components such as phonemics awareness, phonics, morphological awareness and fluency. It is important that the reading strategies used by teachers should incorporate elements of reading linguistic components if the aim to improve learners' reading comprehension skills is to be realised.

9.5.1 Findings emanating from research sub-questions

Q1. What are the pedagogical strategies currently in use for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?

It emerged that different pedagogical strategies are used by teachers to teach isiZulu reading comprehension. They use strategies such as a whole-class reading, reading aloud, peer reading and individual reading. The suggested strategies do not incorporate inclusive reading. For example, there is no learner identification nor grouping based on their reading abilities. Teachers lack creativity in ensuring the inclusion of learners with reading difficulties. These findings support Pretorius's (2013) views, who mentions that the majority of South African teachers do not teach reading comprehension adequately; instead, they facilitate reading lessons by providing reading practices only, without cultivating the reading skills required to improve at-risk readers' reading abilities.

Many learners with learning challenges in mainstream schools are still left behind (Hodgson & Khumalo, 2016). Inasmuch as these learners are physically included in the mainstream schools, the majority of them are academically excluded because of insufficient support and inadequate reading pedagogical strategies implemented in the reading classroom such as a whole-class reading approach (Donohue & Bornman, 2015).

Q2. What are the pedagogical challenges faced by Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers while teaching reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools?

Findings suggest that teachers have challenges with the fact that they are expected to deliver inclusive reading without proper guidance on pedagogical practices to advance inclusive reading. Some of the challenges pointed out by the participants include overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of reading materials, too many expectations set by the DBE without proper and necessary support, inadequate education policies that cannot be translated into practice due to poor learning equipment and the necessary support.

The policies supporting inclusive learning do not provide a deeper comprehensive guide on the pedagogical principles that are to be utilised by teachers in the inclusive classrooms (Donahue & Bornman, 2015; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Phahlamohlaka, 2017). For example, the text-based approach prescribed in the curriculum does not provide clear reading pedagogical strategies to accommodate at-risk readers. Alternatively, it expects all the learners to be competent in reading comprehension and move at the same pace, despite the inclusion of at-risk readers and lack of reading materials to support struggling readers. There is a void of pedagogical strategies to teach reading comprehension in African languages such as isiZulu in this case.

Q3. How do isiZulu methodology lecturers prepare pre-service teachers for teaching inclusive reading to accommodate at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

The finding of this study is that university teacher education departments do not equip IP isiZulu pre-service teachers with the necessary pedagogical strategies to teach inclusive reading to at-risk readers in mainstream schools. There is high variability in the implementation of inclusive reading pedagogical strategies among the sampled university teacher education programmes, and this results in inconsistent practices with pockets of good practice, but also very poor practices. The findings show that teacher education departments teach inclusive reading haphazardly and do not focus on it specifically as part of their methodology content. While there is evidence of reading problems in South African schools, confirmed by PIRLS, the teacher education programmes provide no clear guidance for training pre-service teachers to support at-risk readers.

Q4. What challenges do pre-service teachers encounter when teaching inclusive reading to at-risk readers as observed during teaching experience?

Many pre-service teachers experience challenges as a result of insufficient knowledge or poor training to teach learners with reading problems in mainstream schools. While there is a lack of training of pre-service teachers for inclusive reading, most pre-service deviate from the actual pedagogical practices taught during their training. Pre-service teachers have to adapt to the school's pedagogical practice, which at some point hinders or compromises inclusive reading.

Lecturers also imply that the theoretical knowledge taught in the teacher education courses do not correlate with practical teaching in the classroom. isiZulu Methodology lecturers should demonstrate explicitly that teaching reading comprehension does not proceed only from the bottom up (Verbeek, 2010). Reading assessment integration for at-risk readers should be part of pre-service teacher training. The fact that reading teachers cannot adequately assess learners' reading is an indication of the lack of teacher training to teach reading, including inadequate knowledge on how to assess different reading components.

Q5. What are the progressive policy stipulations focusing on pedagogical practices for developing reading comprehension skills for at-risk readers in mainstream schools?

Emerging findings show that teachers are not knowledgeable about education policies focusing on pedagogical practices for developing inclusive reading comprehension among at-risk readers. As also stated in Chapter nine, there is a policy void on inclusive reading. Reading guides and policies such as Early Grade Reading (EGR) do not adequately outline reading pedagogical strategies that should be used in the inclusive reading classroom to accommodate at-risk readers. The findings indicate that reading policies currently in place are generic and do not address how teachers should teach both at-risk readers and healthy-progress readers in one classroom.

While there is a policy void pertaining to inclusive reading, it emerged that teachers face intense challenges when they identify learners with serious learning difficulties who need to be transferred to special schools. These challenges include long and strenuous procedures that need to be adhered to, poor collaboration between the DBE and Department of Health in providing support to the schools, the identified learners. Findings reveal a lack of knowledge and unwillingness from parents to cooperate and play their part in the process of transferring their children with learning challenges such as intensive reading problems to special schools. These hindrances mean that the guidelines stipulated in the SIAS policy may not be effective and implementable due to structures that are not geared towards working collaboratively to

ensure the provision of support in the process of transferring learners who need special education care.

9.6 Conclusion

This study concludes that teachers lack the fundamental knowledge about reading components necessary to guide at-risk readers. While there are concerns about poor literacy skills in South African primary schools, there is a lack of research on how university teacher education departments prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. The current inclusive teaching and learning policies imply that at-risk readers should be catered for in mainstream schools. Without the necessary policy stipulations on inclusive reading (and adequate implementation strategies), pre-service teacher preparation and classroom practice remain at risk of indirectly perpetuating the reading crisis that prevails in mainstream primary schools.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the findings that emerged from this study as well as a consolidated summary of the key findings to the key research questions and sub-research questions underpinning this study. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with Intermediate Phase isiZulu teachers and methodology lecturers. The aim of this study was to investigate the pedagogical methods that could be effective for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude District mainstream schools. This chapter presents the study conclusions and recommendations. The recommendations provided were not only limited to the research questions, but additional recommendations emanating from the general findings of this study were also provided.

10.2 Recommendation emanating directly from this study

10.2.1 Recommendation 1: Provide pre-service teachers with explicit instruction and guidance regarding the appropriate strategies guiding literacy development among at-risk readers

After a review of the curricula of South African universities' teacher education programmes, Spaull (2022) found that various programmes lack coherence when it comes to methodology. This study follows up on this and further emphasizes that curriculum design at university level should include methodology courses that include inclusive reading courses (or sections of courses) with a specific focus on catering for at-risk readers at primary school level. To achieve adequate academic inclusion in mainstream schools, teacher education programmes at the universities must be of a high quality and, hence, ought to produce teachers who are innovative and creative in implementing instruction that can lead to a breakthrough in teaching, among others, at-risk readers. The recommendation is thus that IP isiZulu methodology lecturers need to provide explicit instruction and guidance regarding the appropriate strategies guiding literacy development among at-risk readers.

10.2.2 Recommendation 2: Provide in-service teachers with capacity development initiatives focusing on how to deal swiftly with the reading problems facing a leaner

Providing continuous professional development courses on inclusive reading for in-service teachers may not be the sole responsibility of university teacher education departments, but research by these institutions could provide a firm foundation for how these courses should be designed. The facilitators of the DBE teacher development workshops need to ensure that teachers are trained to choose the best reading pedagogy that accommodates diverse learners' needs. The teacher workshops should not be designed under the umbrella objective of training 'language teachers' but should mainly target training teachers to teach reading comprehension specifically to at-risk readers who are included in the mainstream schools.

10.2.3 Recommendation 3: Motivate and support at-risk readers as they navigate the reading challenges

While it is important for teachers to identify at-risk readers, the identification should be followed by an efficient intervention, including the effective use of timely repair strategies to restore successful engaged learning (Knight et al., 2017). To prevent overloading at-risk readers who have limited processing capacity, teachers should manage content and task loads effectively. In order for at-risk readers to make good reading progress, they must spend a lot of time learning and practising, so teachers need to make sure that the learning process is enjoyable, motivating and engaging. Teachers must make at-risk readers feel supported. Therefore, in order for learners to comprehend their unique learning challenges and feel strongly supported, teachers must offer strong emotional support as part of the reading instruction process. Knowing that their teachers are aware of how challenging it is for them to learn and that they should be rewarded for their efforts gives at-risk readers confidence (Knight et al., 2017).

10.2.4 Recommendation 4: Provide adequate grade level reading materials in African languages in mainstream schools

One of the key findings that emerged from this study is the fact that rural primary schools do not have sufficient reading materials available in isiZulu. This deficit places constraints on teachers who are supposed to improve learners' reading skills.

The primary focus of the DBE should be on the distribution of relevant African language reading materials, if their objective is to address the reading crisis in South African local

languages. While the DBE ensures the distribution of reading resources, it is recommended that Learning and Teaching Source Material (LTSM) developers design reading comprehension textbooks that range across different interests and genres to stimulate learners to read various kinds of texts to foster isiZulu reading comprehension. In addition, the African Languages reading material should be updated regularly to meet learners' level of understanding, given that most of the schools use outdated reading textbooks with content that may not be really relevant to learners in the current education context. In other words, reading textbooks' topics should have contemporary interest. Apart from reading textbook materials, at this point, the researcher believes that a literacy-rich environment is paramount for developing reading development and democracy.

This study found that classrooms have more printed reading materials in English than in isiZulu, even though the 2022/23 PIRLS outcomes show a drastic decrease in reading skills in South African local languages. In this regard, it is recommended that teachers be encouraged to create and put up isiZulu reading posters and pictures in their classrooms to stimulate learners' participation in reading comprehension activities.

10.2.5 Recommendation 5: Revise the White Paper Six, National Reading Strategy and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements to incorporate specific stipulations on inclusive reading

Teachers' knowledge about the inclusion policy and curriculum innovation implementation is essential in ensuring learners' success. This is because teachers in the mainstream schools play an integral part in the implementation of any educational policy. This study suggests that teachers' conception of the role of inclusive policy and curriculum implementation particularly in teaching reading comprehension should be investigated thoroughly because it seems deficient. If teachers' views about inclusive policy and curriculum are not incorporated into the official White Paper Six document and CAPS document, there is a mismatch between the official policy developers and the actual implementation taking place in the classrooms.

To address the policy void, this study recommends that the White Paper Six, National Reading Strategy and the CAPS be revised to incorporate specific stipulations on inclusive reading. There should be thorough training and support not only to the teachers but also to the subject specialists, as well as the school management in order to achieve the objectives, inclusive reading. Subject specialists should monitor teachers and support them to implement the inclusive reading practices in order to gauge what is taking place in the classroom context.

10.3 Recommendations emanating indirectly from this study

10.3.1 Expose pre- and in-service teachers to a transformative learning context to foster inclusive reading

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief about his/her performance in a specific task (Burić, Slišković & Sorić, 2020). Reading teachers in the inclusive classroom should be knowledgeable and confident about their self-efficacy when teaching inclusive reading comprehension. Teachers with low self -efficacy are often pessimistic about the disconcerting diversity in the classroom; hence they are less motivated and more likely to resign, as opposed to their counterparts with higher self-efficacy (Farr, 2020). To achieve proper results in the diversified classroom, this study recommends that teacher education programmes should be adapted to transform teacher capacity development in a manner that will equip them with knowledge of how to promote inclusion. Exposing teachers in transformative learning will bolster their efficacy when it comes to inclusive reading. This will then improve their ability to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies that will cater for all learners in the classroom. This study further recommends that field experiences and coursework ought to focus on the teaching of learners with learning problems to enhance pre-service teachers' self-efficacy and disposition. This will then improve their self-efficacy and capabilities to accommodate change and diversity and implement the inclusive pedagogical strategies that will cater for the needs of all learners in the classroom.

The recommendations presented in this study are not exhaustive; instead, they call for intensive engagement with university teacher education departments and relevant stakeholders in education to incorporate inclusive reading in their isiZulu methodology content to prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading.

10.4 Recommendations for future research

Although this study has reached its goal of investigating effective isiZulu reading pedagogical strategies in teaching inclusive reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers and understanding the methodology for the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach isiZulu inclusive reading comprehension in IP mainstream schools, there is room for future studies. This study suggests that future studies can extend the discussion on inclusive reading comprehension through focusing on the following research areas:

- This study observed that there is still a gap in the transition stage of reading comprehension between the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase. Teachers lack understanding of what the difference is and what is expected of them to deliver in these two phases when it comes to reading development. It would be appropriate to conduct a study that investigates learner reading development during the transition from FP to IP and teachers' understanding of what is expected of them.
- While a lot has been revealed about the development of reading pedagogical strategies in African languages, little is done to establish African languages theories that specifically underpin and address reading challenges in African languages. Many African studies conducted use international reading theoretical perspectives to study reading in African languages. More studies are required that will look into this gap and seek to establish comprehensive frameworks that are originally centred on reading African languages' repertoires.
- There is a need for further research on the implications of policies governing inclusive reading in mainstream schools. It is necessary to examine the role of reading policies in reinforcing inclusive reading knowledge, specifically in African languages at mainstream schools.
- Through the findings of this study it emerged that there are enormous obstacles that hamper the process of transferring learners with intensive reading challenges from general mainstream schools to special schools by adhering to the SIAS guidelines. Yet these challenges and delays compromise learners' educational performance as they find themselves repeating every grade because of the overwhelming expectations that do not accommodate their learning capacity. Therefore, there is a need for studies to broadly understand the challenges faced by schools and teachers in the processes of transferring learners with intensive reading challenges to special schools.
- There is a need for further research on inclusive reading, and most specifically on how inclusive reading is treated in other (minority) African languages. Further research is needed to determine the challenges faced when teaching inclusive reading from the teachers' point of view. In that way, researchers and curriculum developers will develop a balanced understanding of the preparation of pre-service teachers to teach isiZulu inclusive reading.

10.5 Conclusion

Reading problems in South African schools have been recognised as a crisis which requires urgent solutions; hence the government has sought to make interventions to curb this problem. However, the PIRLS 2022/23 outcomes reveal that reading challenges still persist in African languages. Many teachers cannot teach isiZulu reading comprehension in a classroom that includes both at-risk readers and healthy-progress readers. The ability to read and comprehend is a critical aspect in learners' education. In other words, reading should not only fall within the parameters of the language subjects, but all other academic subjects must play a key role in ensuring that reading is developed efficiently and effectively by applying the appropriate pedagogies. Teachers of all subjects are required to work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive plan through which at-risk readers can be assisted to improve their reading skills. This study has argued that one of the contributing factors to the poor reading performance is inadequate pedagogical approaches stipulated in the CAPS, which do not resonate with African languages' linguistics repertoires. Hence, the PIRLS 2022/23 findings show that 81% of Grade 4 learners struggle to read in African languages. On the other hand, the CAPS do not provide a clear guide on how at-risk readers should be accommodated in inclusive reading. The National Reading Strategy (2008) also points out that the lack of reading materials in African languages contributes immensely towards poor reading performance in primary schools. These discrepancies should be addressed urgently if the aim is to improve reading performance in primary schools.

While there are concerns about poor literacy skills in South African primary schools, there is a lack of research on how university teacher education departments prepare pre-service teachers to teach inclusive reading. In the light of the current reading crisis in the South African education sector, one of the key recommendations of this study is the urgent need for lecturers to prepare pre-service teachers for adopting pedagogical strategies to promote inclusive reading through their tertiary education methodology courses. The current inclusive teaching and learning policies imply that mainstream schools should cater for the needs of at-risk readers. Without the necessary policy stipulations on inclusive reading (and adequate implementation strategies), pre-service teacher preparation and classroom practice remain at risk of indirectly perpetuating the reading crisis that prevails in mainstream primary schools.

When all has been said, the most essential cognitive constituent of higher-quality education is language literacy. Without the ability to read and comprehend, people remain uninformed and

deprived of access to essential information that has an impact on their lives. Illiteracy in South Africa has been declared as a phenomenon which is rapidly growing and becoming a threat to the democratic dispensation. It hampers the transformation and development of the country. It is then of paramount importance that reading is given the spotlight it deserves and be treated as a matter of the utmost urgency, including to the benefit of at-risk readers.

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APPENDIX 1

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

R14/49 Ntshangase

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H22/01/20**
PROJECT TITLE	Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to At-Risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr C Ntshangase
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	School of Literature, Languages and Media/
DATE CONSIDERED	28 January 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved

Risk Level: Minimal

EXPIRY DATE	29 March 2025
DATE 30 March 2022	**CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr L Tshuma

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10004, 10th Floor, Senate House, University. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

_____ _____/_____/_____

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

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APPENDIX 2

Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work.

Non-Participants classroom observation schedule

Observer:

Date:

Name of School:

Grade observed:

Section A: Demographic Information for observed teacher

Gender	Male			Female	
Age (Year)	Less than 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	More than 50
Ethnicity	Black African	Colored	Indian	White	Other
Highest qualification	BEd	Honors Degree	Master's degree	PhD	Other (Specify)
Experience Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu FAL	Less than 2	2-4 years	5-7 years	8-10 years	More than 10 years
Total No. of learners in the classroom:					
Total No. of at- risk readers in the classroom					

Section B:

1. Classroom organization during reading lesson:		
Individual work:		**Comments:**
Yes	**No**	
Pair Work:		**Comments:**
Yes	**No**	
Group Work		**Comments:**
Yes	**No**	
Whole class discussions:		**Comments:**
Yes	**No**	

2. Teacher Activities Before Reading		
a. Does the teacher select learners based on similar reading ability, similar interest, or similar skills?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment**
b. Does the teacher introduce the text to scaffold the reading?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
c. Does the teacher prepare learners to read by previewing text elements and vocabulary and making predication about the text based on prior knowledge?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**

d. Does the teacher emphasize the targeted reading skills before reading takes place?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
3. Learner Activities While Reading: Areas in which reading problems manifest		
a. Do learners have problems in remembering instruction?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
Do learners have problems to recognize familiar words?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
b. Do learners keeps losing the place where they are reading or pointing with a finger to keep the place		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
c. Do learners have problems with re-telling the central idea of the paragraph?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
d. Do learners have problems with fluency, spelling, vocabulary and sounding out words		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
4. Teacher Activities While Reading: Code Focused Reading Strategies		
a. Does the teacher emphasize on letter sounds and spellings?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
b. Does the teacher provide fluency practice and inferences?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**

c. Does the teacher engage learners in multisensory (audio visual) activity?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
d. Does the teacher engage learners to manipulate materials such as books and comprehension reading?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
e. Does the teacher (assist learners to) decode individual words?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
f. Does the teacher engage learners to manipulate words to practice phonemics?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
5. Teacher Activities After Reading: Meaning Focused Reading Strategies		
a. Does the teacher ask for text summary?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
b. Does the teacher ask questions about text?		
Yes	**No**	**Comment:**
c. Does the teacher define words or concepts?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
d. Does the teacher ask learner to read connected text?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
e. Does the teacher ask learners to write about the read text?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**

f. Does the teacher align the level of task (challenge) to the level of the learner performance?		
Yes	**No**	**Comments**
6. Evidence of Text based Teaching and learning resources in the classroom		
Textbooks		**Comments:**
DBE Workbooks		**Comments**
Dictionaries		**Comments**
Learners' work displayed on classroom walls		**Comments**
Charts		**Comments:**
Class library: ***Magazines, catalogues, brochures, newspapers***		**Comments:**
Computer based reading material		**Comments:**

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APPENDIX 3

Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work.

Teacher Semi-structured interviews schedule

Interviewer:

Date:

Name of School:

Section A: Demographic Information for teacher semi-structured interviews

Gender	Male			Female	
Age (Year)	Less than 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	More than 50
Ethnicity	Black African	Colored	Indian	White	Other
Highest qualification	Bed	Honors Degree	Master's degree	PhD	Other (Specify)
Experience Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu FAL	Less than 2	2-4 years	5-7 years	8-10 years	More than 10 years
Total No. of learners in the classroom:					
Total No. of At- Risk readers in the classroom					

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Section B: Teachers' semi-structured Interview schedule

Introduce myself and the purpose of semi-structured interviews. Thank teachers for their participation. Explain the ethical consideration and request for the permission to tape-record the session.

Teacher Preparation to teach At Risk Readers

1. In your methodology lectures, did you have a course / module focusing on inclusive reading for at risk readers in mainstream schools?
2. If yes, to question 3 above how long was the module / course?
3. After graduation, did you attend any short courses or workshops focusing on inclusive reading for At Risk readers?
4. If yes, to question 4 above how long was the course?

Classroom organization for At Risk Readers

1. How do you identify at-risk readers in your Intermediate Phase isiZulu class?
2. What sitting arrangement do you think works better for at-risk readers within a mainstream classroom?
3. What are the benefits of organizing the at-risk Readers in that way?
4. What aspect of this lesson were specifically targeting at-risk readers?
5. How does the selection of learners to read, assist them in improving their reading skills?

(Probe on how the teacher selects readers to read)

Pedagogical Strategies for At Risk Readers

6. What are the pedagogical strategies you use when teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers? *(Probe on why the mentioned strategies are chosen)*
7. What are challenges you encounter using the current pedagogical strategies in teaching isiZulu reading comprehension to at-risk readers? *Probe on how these challenges may be mitigated to)*

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8. What challenges do you face when teaching fluency practice, word-identification and phonemics to at-risk readers?

Reading materials for At Readers

9. What reading material do you have available for your at-risk
10. Readers? (*Probe on how the available material improves at Risk readers' reading skills)*

Policy Regarding at-risk Readers in Mainstream Schools

11. Are you aware of any policy documents that provide guidelines for teaching at-risk readers in the mainstream classroom?
12. If yes to Question above, please list them *(Probe on the key guidelines provided by these policy documents)*
13. Suggest improvement for curriculum developers and policy designers in terms of pedagogical strategies for at-risk readers in the Intermediate Phase mainstream classroom?

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APPENDIX 4

Teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu reading comprehension skills to at-risk readers in uMkhanyakude mainstream schools: Pedagogical strategies that work.

Lecturer Semi-structured interviews schedule

Interviewer:

Date:

Section A: Demographic Information

Gender	Male			Female	
Age (Year)	Less than 20	20-30	31-40	41-50	More than 50
Ethnicity	Black African	Colored	Indian	White	Other
University:					
Position:					
Highest qualification	BEd	Honors Degree	Master's degree	PhD	Other (Specify)
Experience lecturing isiZulu Methodology Inclusive reading to Pre-service teachers	Less than 2	2-4 years	5-7 years	8-10 years	More than 10 years

Section B: Lecturers' semi-structured Interviews schedule

Introduce myself and the purpose of semi-structured interviews. Thank the lecturer for their participation. Explain the ethical consideration and request for the permission to tape-record the session.

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Lecturer guidance on inclusive reading for At- Risk readers

1. What is your understanding of inclusive reading?
2. In your methodology course, do you have a section focusing on inclusive reading?
3. If yes, to question 3 above how long is the inclusive reading section?
4. How do you guide pre-service teachers to identify at-risk readers?
5. How do you guide pre-service teachers to accommodate at-risk readers?

Pedagogical strategies for at-risk readers

6. What reading strategies are recommended for use when teaching reading comprehension to At Risk Readers?
7. How do you guide pre-service teachers to teach fluency, inferences, vocabulary, and phonemics to at-risk readers?
8. What challenges do preservice teachers encounter when teaching inclusive reading to At Risk Readers as observed during teaching experience / teaching practice?
9. Suggest ways to improve the pedagogical strategies for teaching Intermediate Phase isiZulu language to at-risk readers.
10. How can inclusive reading be promoted in mainstream schools?
11. Which teaching and learning resources are best suited for teaching inclusive reading to At Risk Readers?

Policy Regarding At- Risk Readers in Mainstream Schools

12. Which South African Education policy provides guidelines for inclusive reading?
13. What changes should be made to the current South African Education Policies regarding inclusive reading?

APPENDIX 5

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200

Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Tel: 033 392 106

Enquiries: Phindile Duma **Ref.**:2/4/8/1819

Mr CL Ntshangase
1 Jan Smuts Avenue Braamfontein
JOHANNESBURG 0001

Dear Mr Ntshangase

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH
IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"TEACHING INTERMEDIATE PHASE ISIZULU READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS TO AT - RISK READERS IN UMKHANYAKUDE MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS:**

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES THAT WORK", 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 02 November 2021 to 02 November 2023.
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 Phindile Duma at the contact numbers above.

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 X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

UMKHANYAKUDE DISTRICT



Dr MJB Mthembu

Acting Head of Department: Education Date: 05 November 2021