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An Evaluation of Foundation Phase Reading Processes in an Independent School Context.

By:

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A Research Project submitted to:

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In fulfilment of the degree M.A Speech Pathology by Research

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that the research report titled *"An evaluation of Foundation Phase reading processes in an Independent School context"* is my own work produced in completion of a masters study. The information discussed, statements made, and conclusions drawn were done so of my accord from my own research with the guidance of my supervisors. I further declare that this research report has not been submitted to any other academic institute for any other purposes nor has it been previously published. Credit and references have been provided for any data, literature or texts from other sources referred to within the report.



Demi Du Toit

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ABSTRACT

Rationale: An evaluation of the foundation phase reading processes within an independent girls school will provide insight into the status of reading within the elite context. Whilst the public schooling sector participate in a number of national and international assessments with results being made publicly available, the national and international assessments within the independent schooling sector are less readily available. Questions arise as to what the level of performance and proficiency of reading is within the independent schooling sector and how this level is achieved.

Aims: (1) To describe the educators' approach to reading. (2) To describe the implementation of a phonics program within the school and the educator's perception thereof. (3) To describe educator strategies and intervention strategies in assisting students with reading. (4) To describe the setting in which children learn within the independent school including resources available. (5) To determine the reading proficiency of students within the foundation phase.

Method: Eight educators responsible for teaching of the main curriculum subjects within the independent school completed a survey and participated in a focus group. Analysis of the educator's approaches, opinions and strategies for the teaching of reading was conducted. Reading scores for students in Grade 1, 2 and 3 on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the New Group Reading Tests (NGRT) were analyzed in comparison to age appropriate norms.

Results: The participant educators were all female with five or more years of experience in education. Jolly Phonics is currently being implemented at the school but only one participant expressed confidence in the Jolly Phonics approach. Other factors relating to reading i.e. how reading is taught, how frequently various methods, techniques and activities are utilised in the classroom and the educator's opinions on reading development were inconsistent from participant to participant. The participants' experience significant pressure to ensure that the students achieve in reading but demonstrate confusion in the methodology used to reach success in reading. Whilst the majority of the participants reported feeling good or comfortable in the teaching of reading initially, a picture of uncertainty, dismay, pressure and educator confusion became evident. Within the assessments conducted by the school, the Schonell Single Word Reading Test showed that the majority of the students from grades 1- 3 score above average for reading. However, within the NGRT assessment of passage comprehension, sentence completion and phonics, a less proficient image of reading within the foundation phase was depicted as a larger number of students scored below the average range. Weaker scores in the NGRT is of particular interest when considering: (1) the fact that the participants described not teaching comprehension skills due to limited understanding of the how to teach the skill and (2) the reading comprehension performance of students within the public schooling sector according to the PIRLS 2016.

Conclusion and discussion: The statistics on reading within one independent school were shown to be significantly better than what appears to be the case in the public schooling sector despite a significant number of students scoring below average, particularly within reading comprehension. The children and educators alike continue to experience confusion, pressure, anxiety and failure within the literacy domain despite context.

KEY WORDS: reading; comprehension; educators

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Reading is in crisis" is a common view shared amongst many South African citizens today. Educators, parents and allied professionals agree our country's youth are flailing in the literacy domain. Much has been reported regarding the current status of reading within the school-going population in South Africa with the alarming statistics regarding reading levels being common knowledge. Within the Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS) of 2016 only two percent of South African students were able to achieve the highest international benchmark for literacy, whilst three-quarters of South African students did not manage to achieve the lowest international benchmark for literacy (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & Palane, 2017).

South Africa's performance in the PIRLS emphasized the significant concerns regarding the reading and literacy skills of learners enrolled in primary school across in the country (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). The ability to read can be considered as one of the most essential skills acquired within the foundation phase and is considered a vital component contributing to high quality education. Literacy skills are crucial components affecting one's quality of life, education and vocation (Lyytinen & Richardson, 2014). It is therefore not surprising that a child's future learning and their efficacy within school, is reliant upon the development of a steadfast foundation in reading (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016). Within developing countries, such as a South Africa, the reading development is compromised by environmental factors such as access to education, quality of instruction, and availablity of resources (Lyytinen & Richardson, 2014).

The South African Schools Act of 1996 acknowledges that there are currently two categories of schooling within South Africa namely: public (state) and independent (private), in which the public schools are state controlled and independent schools are privately governed (Hofmeyr & Mccay, 2010). Within South Africa the independent schooling sector has shown significant growth due to the fact that parents want more, better and different education for their children (Hofmeyr & Mccay, 2010).

The current availability of research pertaining to reading within South Africa places emphasis on the public schooling system. It appears that individuals engaging in conversations regarding the literacy crisis in South Africa often make the assumption that reading failure is limited to and confined within the public schooling system. Parents are said to be electing private schooling, when affordable, with the supposition of better education. Awareness and knowledge of such suppositions and personal experience garnered from working within an independent school, raises the question regarding the status of literacy skills within the independent schooling sector.

The purpose of this study was to answer the question regarding the status of reading within the foundation phase in an independent girls school situated in Johannesburg. The issue of reading within the independent schooling sector is believed to be particularly relevant when considering that these schools are not obligated to participate in the large scale reading assessments conducted in the state governed schools. Personal experience within one reputable independent school within South Africa suggests that reading scores of foundation phase students may not be as good as is assumed and several parent discussions have alluded to concerns regarding reading levels within the school. This research therefore seeks to formally

explore the status of foundation phase reading processes implemented within a specific independent school in Johannesburg.

Fleisch (2008) reports that the majority of children in South Africa who are unable to read with fluency by the time they leave primary school, attended disadvantaged schools, whilst children who leave primary school as proficient readers attended well-resourced schools, thus indicating an inequity in school system. Furthermore, Rohde (2015) explains that the context of culture, community and demographic variables can either create a support or a barrier for a child's reading development. Factors which impact on the development of literacy skills include but are not limited to language proficiency, family literacy practices, availability of resources, classroom practices, educator knowledge and reading instruction (Fleisch, 2008).

There is currently limited data available on literacy practices in the classroom as well as how and why edcuators may experience challenges in the teaching of literacy skills (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). This study investigted these concerns and included an analysis of the approach to reading instruction implemented within an independent school through an exploration of the phonics program being used as well as the completion of a survey by foundation phase educators on classroom literacy practices. A focus group was also conducted with the foundation phase educators to yield insights into their liteacy practices.

Research by Van der Berg (2008) indicated that improved school performances could not be directly linked to the availability of resources but rather that the inequality in perfromance across various schools is linked to the school's capacity to convert resources to outcomes. This confirms the need to explore literary practices and achievement outcomes across schools of varying economic status. This research therefore reviews reading proficiency within the

independent school of choice. The school is considered to be of a high socio-economic status with readily available and ample resources.

The study also aimed to determine whether there is validity to parents' common-held beliefs that independent schools perform subtsantially better academically than public schools in South Africa with specific emphasis on reading skills in the foundation phase.

1.1 Rationale

The recent release of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) results of January 2020 makes it easy to assume that education within our country is in fact not as poor as the research suggests. However, a report by Spaull (2013) informs the public that whilst the pass rate may appear satisfactory, it is in fact misleading. The statistics of the NSC do not take into account the students who drop out before matric (Spaull, 2013). Spaull (2013) reports that out of 100 students who start school, only 50 students will write the NSC exams, of which 40 students will pass the exams and of these students, only 12 will pass with the opportunity to attend university. These alarming figures of the NSC results, paired with the results of the PIRLS indicate that South African students are underperforming significantly.

Whilst this study's focus is on the foundation phase of education, it is important to look at all levels of education due to the knock-on effect which occurs when foundation skills are inadequate. Tayob and Moonsamy (2018) claim that inadequate literacy and language development will directly impact on a child's learning and consequently limit their academic success, with many difficulties persisting from childhood into adulthood. Regardless of the measurement tool being used, students within the South African education system are performing significantly below expectations both within the curriculum standards, as well as

according to numeracy and literacy milestones (Spaull, 2013), suggesting that it is important to investigate reasons for this unsatisfactory outcome.

South Africa takes part in numerous local and international assessments of education achievement in an effort to benchmark itself against international standards. These measures include:

- The *Annual National Assessments (ANA's)*
- The *Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS)*
- *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*
- *Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMCEQ)*

In Spaull's (2013) report, an additional area of concern was raised pertaining to educators' academic standing. He referred to the SAMCEQ assessment in 2007 which assessed students and educators alike. It was found that a significant percentage of the educators were unable to answer the questions which were posed to their students (Spaull, 2013). Given the fact that an educator is unable to educate students on knowledge which he/she does not possess, the students' academic performance is compromised as a result of poor educator knowledge. This motivated this study's intention to explore the knowledge and practices of educators within the independent school context in South Africa.

Taylor and Yu (2009) claim that "the better educators tend to be concentrated in the wealthier schools" and when taking into account the fact that within South Africa two education systems exist, it is plausible to deduce that the majority of the "better educators" are teaching in the private school sector rather than the public sector. This study intended to investigate this claim given that the independent school selected is considered to be of high socio-economic status.

Whilst the public schooling sector participates in a number of national and international assessments with results being publicly available, the results of national and international assessments conducted within the independent schooling sector are less readily available. This situation may perpetuate the common-held beliefs that the independent private sector schools deliver better education and this is worthy of scrutiny. In the absence of published results, one could question whether educators and students in the private schooling sector are subjected to internal assessments by collaborative agreement or whether the assumption of a high academic standard has merely leant itself to a competitive approach between independent schools vying for superior matric results as opposed to evaluating their educational outcomes through recognised benchmark assessments.

This study therefore aims to review the status of reading in the junior school phase within an elite private school in Johannesburg. The study analysed the views of the educators within the foundation phase regarding reading and reviewed the scores of internal reading assessments conducted by the school. This research aims to answer a question regarding the status of reading in an independent school which is considered to be within the wealthy 25% of schools in South Africa and where socio-economic factors such as availability of resources, home literacy and educator investment are considered optimal. A potential practical value of the research was to assist in the development of plans and approaches to address any concerns identified in the evaluation of the status of reading.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review explores the current research available pertaining to the status of reading within South African schools. The study is based on a review of theories and concepts which have been previously researched in order to substantiate the need for this study and identify the current knowledge gap.

The literature review explores the scholastic systems within South Africa with specific emphasis on the independent schooling system. It reviews the manner in which reading develops, the teaching of reading, approaches towards reading and the research surrounding the status of reading in South Africa. The literature review further explores the Comprehensive Emergent Literacy Model (Rohde, 2015) as this is the framework in which the research is grounded.

2.1. Education in South Africa

The Department of Education is the single largest provider of Education in South Africa with an excess of 13 million students currently enrolled in public (state) controlled education institutes. However, due to an increased desire to improve the quality of schooling and student performance, maximise schooling options and meet the goals of promoting creativity and innovation within schools, the government's primacy in education is being challenged (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2012). This challenge is from the independent (private) school sector which has grown since the fall of Apartheid and the coming of democracy in South Africa. South African Market Insights (2016) records that dissatisfaction with public schools nationally arises from classes that are considered too large,

a lack of books, poor facilities, lack of teachers, teacher absenteeism and poor quality of teaching.

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2012), promotes the benefits of private schooling stating:

- Principals of private schools have more autonomy to manage than those of public schools.
- Private School systems have the authority to make employment decisions through hiring and compenstaion of educators and staff thus creating an opportunity to employ staff of quality as well as possibly provide incentives for effective performance.
- Private school systems have discretion on curricula as well as modes of instruction allowing for adaptions and adjustments based on interests and abilities of the students.

In addition to the above, the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, (2012) further states that due to the financial investments of parents into the private schooling systems, these schools are required to be sensitive to the demands of the parents regarding curricula, teaching methodology, discipline and facilities. Research indicates that if it were financially viable, parents would make the decision to place their children in a private school due to private schools being portrayed as being more accountable, with the educators being held to higher performance criteria and the parents having the liberty to give input with regards to expectations and satisfaction (Hofmeyr & Mccay, 2010). It is contended that the growth in the demand for private schooling and increased quality education is as a result of a decline in the quality of the state education system (Hofmeyr & Mccay, 2010).

When a child enters the foundation phase of education, parent and educator expectations accompany that child. A vast percentage of South African parent's report having high

educational expectations of their children with 41% of parents stating that they would like their child to complete a master's or Doctorate degree (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016).

Zimmerman (2017) reports that there may be a combination of reasons which determine the variation in scholastic success across different schools in South Africa. Within the South African context, the assumption is that schools with higher pupil achievement averages are most commonly situated in areas which are considered to be privileged. Zimmerman (2017) further reports that within "privileged" areas the parents are concerned about their children's education, show interest in their children's work, provide access to resources at home and will ensure that their children are exposed to reading as early as practically possible.

South Africa is currently in a period of transfromation whereby education is considered to be a means by which children from disadvantaged backgrounds can overcome adversity and be considered "equal" with those he/she comes across in the professional word (Taylor & Yu, 2009). However, when considering the current results in the PIRLS 2016 in which South Africa performed the lowest out of the 40 participating countries, one must question how realistic this expectation is and acknowledge the effect of socio-economic status (SES) on academic perfromance (Taylor & Yu, 2009). Since South Africa's liberation from Apartheid there has been an aim to rectify the previous inequity in educational spending, and whilst progress has been made in this regard, many previously disadvantaged schools continue to experience shortages in resources and present with fragile infrastructures (Taylor & Yu, 2009).

In the light of the above, the Coleman report of 1966 should be considered. James Coleman conducted a study on the inequalities in education. He came to the conclusion that whilst funding was beneficial, the funding of education had minimal impact on students academic

performance, but rather that a student's family backgorund and SES directly impacted academic acheivement (Taylor & Yu, 2009).

It is important to acknowledge that SES not only impacts academic performance but is a determining factor in the quality of education, thus creating what could considered as a "vicious cycle." A "vicious cycle" is created in that education provides individuals with the skills required to gain work opportunities later in life. A child from a poor SES environment, may not achieve well enough academically to gain employment at a level which may result in remuneration significant enough to change his/her SES. Research by Van Der Berg, Burger, Burger, De Vos, Du Rand, Gustafsson, Moses, Shepard, Spaull, Taylor, Van Broekhuizen and Fintel (2017) reports that notable academic variance exists in children who fall into the bottom 20% of the population in comaprision to the children who fall into the top 80% of the population from the age of eight. As opposed to rectifying the inequity of the SES's between poverty and priviledge, the current eductaion system in South Africa appears to be reinforcing it (Van Der Berg, et al., 2017)

Zimmerman (2017) deduces that a study of high performing primary schools indicated five broad themes which were linked to literary success, namely:

1. A safe, orderly and positive learning environment
2. Strong leaders
3. Competent, collaborative, committed and caring educators
4. A shared sense of competence, pride and purpose for the school
5. High levels of school and community involvement.

In the South African context, it is necessary to consider both public and private school sectors in education. Spaull (2013) explains that a focus on a single schooling system when there are

in fact two school systems can lend itself to misleading and inauthentic results. To date the research has focused on reading within a single schooling system, namely the public schooling system in South Africa. Current research available pertains to the conetxtual factors which vary across the two schooling systems within South Africa as opposed to the formally reviewing students' reading proficiency in the independent schooling system. An assessment of reading proficiency in this context is essential due to the impression that the availability of resources, cost of schooling, classroom size and parent investment in these schools, result in the level of education, and in this instance, the status of reading, being superior to that of the public sector.

Most of the available research regarding the status of reading within South Africa places emphasis on schools in which reading development is compromised. However, Zimmerman (2017) states that it is equally important to study schools where literacy skills are developing successfully. This research aimed to determine whether reading within setting of a private school is in fact developing successfully. If a discrepancy is found between the development of literacy skills between public and private schooling sectors, it may be helpful to determine the reasons behind the discrepancy in order to improve reading across the country.

2.2. Reading in South Africa

There is a plethora of information regarding the current status of reading within South Africa. Reading is encouraged and emphasized within the primary grades with fluency, accuracy, comprehension and prosody receiving attention (Baatjies, 2003). Currently evidence supports the notion that the South African Education system is in crisis and Spaull (2003) asserts that despite several initiatives to monitor the quality of education in the country, the education system continues to fail South Africa's youth.

Van Staden and Bosker (2014) state that it is possible to consider reading as a cultural practice as children's first exposure to reading and writing is initiated in their homes. Research has further indicated that a correlation exists between children's reading achievement and the childs participation in activites involving literacy prior to beginning school (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014). In the South African context, the impact of a poor reading culture cannot be overstated but Spaull (2013) contends that the main factor that contributes to the South African reading crisis refers to how teachers teach reading.

The majority of children being educated in South Africa are unable to read for comprehension by the end of Grade 4, with almost a third of those remaining functionally illiterate by the end of Grade 6 (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016). When a child does not acquire basic reading skills within the foundation phase, difficulty is experienced when engaging with the curriculum in higher grades (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016).

Of importance is the finding in the PIRLS study (IEA, 2018) that the reading gap in South Africa is gender-related, with Grade 4 girls outperforming boys by a year. Furthermore, the PIRLS 2016 study revealed that this gender gap in reading is the second highest in the world.

2.3. Reading development

Reading is considered one of the most influential and critical skills required by young students. Reading forms the basis upon which learning occurs across various subjects, facilitates recreational and personal growth whilst assisting individuals to be able to participate within and contribute to society (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014).

The teaching and development of reading is multifaceted with various approaches and stances being used country wide. Reading development is a broad subject and can be approached from various perspectives which range in validity, thus making the instruction and approaches to teaching reading susceptible to crazes and trends (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016).

Learning to read is a complicated linguistic achievement which requires effort, considerable knowledge and incremental skill development, over several years, through study and supervised practice (van der Merwe & Nel, 2012). Reading is described as being a process in which visual information progresses through visual, phonological and episodic memory systems in order to be understood in the semantic system (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). It is said that the processing which occurs at each stage within reading is a learned process and can be assessed for accuracy and automaticty (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974).

Chall (1983), describes reading development in stages which progress from prereading to advanced reading and include the development of decoding, comprehension and critical evaluation. The process of reading development is described in the figure below.

Chall's Stages of Reading Development
Source: Jeanne S. Chall, *Stages of Reading Development*. N.Y.: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1983.

Stage	Approximate Age/Grade	Characteristics and Masteries by End of Stage	How Acquired	Relationship of Reading to Listening
Stage 0: Pre-reading "pseudo reading"	6 months – 6 years Preschool	Child "pretends" to read, retells story when looking at pages of book previously read to him/her, names letters of alphabet; recognizes some signs; prints own name; plays with books, pencils and paper.	Being read to by an adult (or older child) who responds to and warmly appreciates the child's interest in books and reading; being provided with books, paper, pencils, blocks, and letters. Dialogic reading.	Most can understand the children's picture books and stories read to them. They understand thousands of words they hear by age 6 but can read few if any of them.
Stage 1: Initial reading and decoding	6 – 7 years old 1st grade and beginning 2nd	Child learns relation between letters and sounds and between printed and spoken words; child is able to read simple text containing high frequency words and phonically regular words; uses skill and insight to "sound out" new one syllable words.	Direct instruction in letter-sound relations (phonics) and practice in their use. Reading of simple stories using words with phonic elements taught and words of high frequency. Being read to on a level above what a child can read independently to develop more advanced language patterns, vocabulary and concepts.	The level of difficulty of language read by the child is much below the language understood when heard. At the end of Stage 1, most children can understand up to 4000 or more words when heard but can read about 600.
Stage 2: Confirmation and fluency	7 – 8 years old 2nd and 3rd grade	Child reads simple, familiar stories and selections with increasing fluency. This is done by consolidating the basic decoding elements, sight vocabulary, and meaning context in the reading of familiar stories and selections.	Direct instruction in advanced decoding skills; wide reading (instruction and independent levels) of familiar, interesting materials that help promote fluent reading. Being read to at levels above their own independent reading level to develop language, vocabulary and concepts.	At the end of Stage 2, about 3000 words can be read and understood and about 9000 are known when heard. Listening is still more effective than reading.
Stage 3: Reading for learning the new Phase A Phase B	9 - 13 years old 4th – 8th grade Intermediate 4th – 6th Junior high school 7th – 9th	Reading is used to learn new ideas, to gain new knowledge, to experience new feelings, to learn new attitudes, generally from one viewpoint.	Reading and study of textbooks, reference works, trade books, newspapers, and magazines that contain new ideas and values, unfamiliar vocabulary and syntax; systematic study of words and reacting to the text through discussion, answering questions, writing, etc. Reading of increasingly more complex text.	At beginning of Stage 3, listening comprehension of the same material is still more effective than reading comprehension. By the end of Stage 3, reading and listening are about equal for those who read very well, reading may be more efficient.
Stage 4: Multiple viewpoints	15 – 17 years old 10th – 12th grade	Reading widely from a broad range of complex materials, both expository and narrative, with a variety of viewpoints.	Wide reading and study of the physical, biological and social sciences and the humanities, high quality and popular literature, newspapers, and magazines; systematic study of words and word parts.	Reading comprehension is better than listening comprehension of materials of difficult content and readability. For poor readers listening comprehension may be equal to reading comprehension.
Stage 5: Construction and reconstruction	18+ years old College and beyond	Reading is used for one's own needs and purposes (professional and personal); reading serves to integrate one's knowledge with that of others, to synthesize it and to create new knowledge. It is rapid and efficient.	Wide reading of ever more difficult materials, reading beyond one's immediate needs; writing of papers, tests, essays, and other forms that call for integration of varied knowledge and points of view.	Reading is more efficient than listening.

Figure 1. The stages of reading development. From Chall, J. S., Jacobs, V. A., & Baldwin, L. E. (2009). The Reading Crisis. Havard University Press.

In order to be considered a successful reader an individual has to acquire the ability to associate a meaning with a word and thereby develop analytical thinking skills (Nel, Mohangi, Krog, & Stephens, 2016). Phonological awareness, print concepts and knowledge of letter sounds form the foundation for literacy (Moats, Carreker, Meisel, Spear-Swerling, & Wilson, 2010).

Perhaps the most significant factor which contributes to reading development is educator input. Reading development is directly linked to the amount of time provided for learning paired with consistent and effective instruction (Fleisch, 2008).

2.4. Theoretical framework

The development of reading can be viewed in relation to a theoretical framework which influences the approach adopted for reading instruction. The Comprehensive Emergent Literacy Model (CELM) creates awareness of skill development within a context, allows for learning opportunities which engage children in learning and assists in their development into successful readers (Rohde, 2015).

Rohde (2015) explains that the CELM approaches reading development within a holistic framework, in which each component is related to and overlaps with the other. According to the CELM framework early literacy development has three main components namely: language development, phonological awareness and print awareness (Rohde, 2015). These three components overlap to facilitate the development of integrated literacy skills namely:

1) lexical restructuring (overlap between language development and phonologcial awareness)
2) comprehenshion strategies (overlap between language development and print awareness)
3) code based knowledge (overlap between phonological awareness and print awareness) (Rohde, 2015)

The figure below indicates how the CELM describes the development of reading.

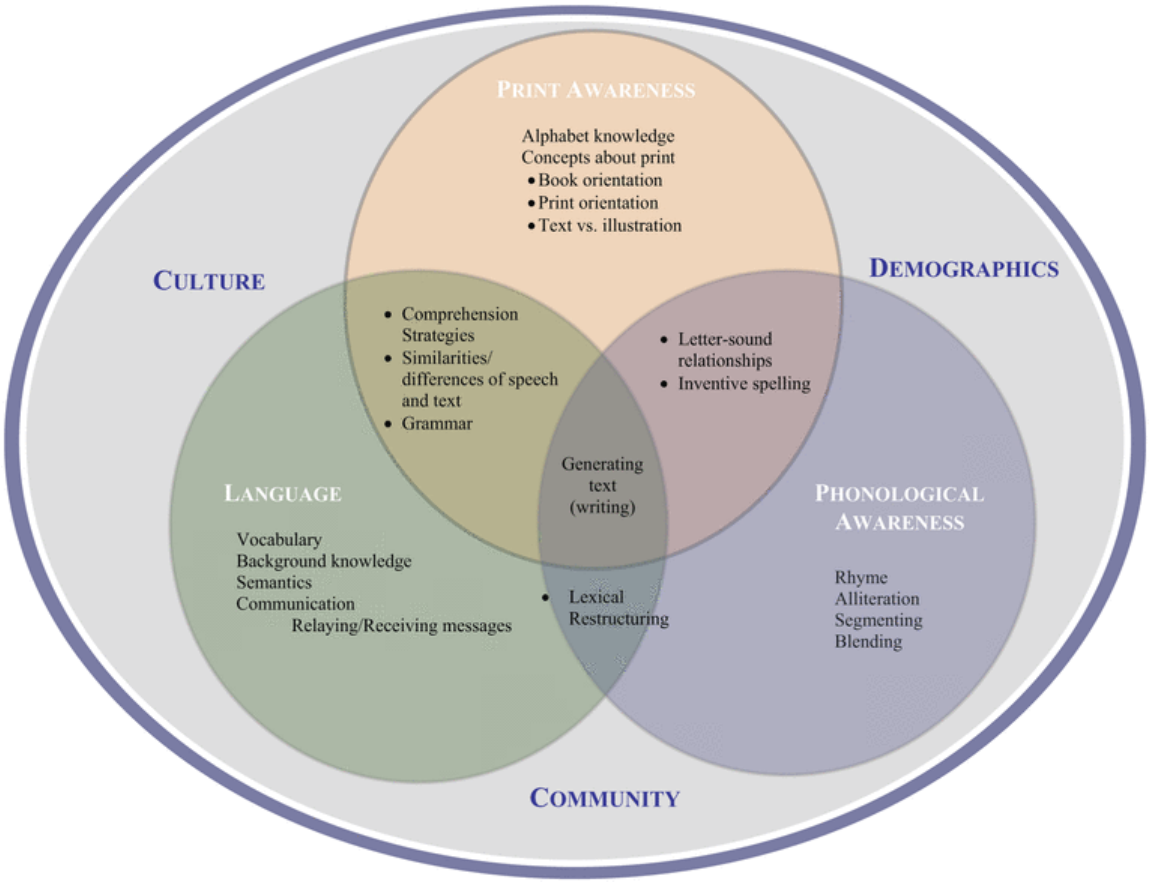


Figure 2. The CELM decription of reading. From Rohde, L. (2015). The Comprehensive Emergent Literacy Model: Early Literacy in Context. SAGE, 1-11.

Perhaps the most significant is the fact that the above mentioned, interlinked components of reading development all exsist within a context, which in turn is influenced by community, culture and demographics (Rohde, 2015). Nel, Mohangi, Krog and Stephens (2016) state that reading development is influenced by environmental, school and biological factors. Early literacy skills and the crucial influence of the enviromental context and setting are paramount in the children's acquisition of the awareness and skill base required in order to develop into successful readers (Rohde, 2015). A link can be drawn between the CELM in which emergent literacy is explained as an interactive process of skill development, and the South African reading crisis.

This view is shared by Fleisch (2008), who stated that achievement in reading is vastly influenced by health, nutrition, welfare and family literacy practice. Fleisch contends that achievement in reading is more realistic if books and reading material are distributed, available and accessibile in and out of the school enviroment (Fleisch, 2008).

In researching the factors affecting South African students' performances in the PIRLS 2016, Van Staden and Bosker (2014) stated the following as factors contributing to worrying results:

- Educators having insufficient knowlegde.
- Communication barriers between student and educator in the Language of Learning.
- Teaching is insufficient.
- Scarcity of instructions materials.
- Educator difficulty in the effective management of clasroom activities.
- Pressure on the educators to complete the syllabi for assessment.
- Full and heavy teaching loads for educators.
- High student numbers within classrooms of limited space resulting in overcrowding of the classrooms.
- Inadequate communication between educators and policy makers.
- Insuffucient support provided to staff due to a shotarge of staff within the eductaion department.

Research by Spaull (2013) determined that only 11 of the 30 factors which affect reading efficiency are shared between the wealthiest (25%) and the poorest (75%) of schools indicating the significant effect of context. The effect of context on the development of early literacy cannot be overlooked as a child always learns within a context and this context will guide the child's development.

2.5. Approaches to teaching reading

The South African education system has undergone transformation from an approach to learning that involved a transmission of knowledge from educator to student, to an approach which is characteristically student-centred and aims to prepare students for the increasing competitive economy that exists today (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014). Educators require a mind shift when taking on student-centred approaches to curriculum as traditional teaching roles need to be released and students given greater responsiblilty for their own learning (McCabe & O'Connor, 2014).

According to Baatjies (2003), an effective reading policy should incorporate:

- The development of tools in order to monitor and measure reading abilities and progress.
- The employment of training programs for the educators involved in the teaching of reading.
- The provision of ample reading materials in order to support literacy development.
- Reliable assessment and monitoring systems.

Phillips, Norris and Steffler (2017) state that the number of programs and methods used to improve early reading instruction and development are numerous and readily available. However, the pros and cons of these programs and methods have not been subjected to much research. In education systems where effective practice exists, children are encouraged to read multiple books on a weekly or monthly basis with systems put in place to ensure the child's progress and interaction with literacy (Baatjies, 2003).

Research has established a distinct link between literacy success and the processing of phonemes. Phonological processing can be defined as awareness, manipulation and use of sounds within words (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 2009). Chall, Jacobs and Balwin (2009) further distinguish between phonological sensitivity, phonological naming and phonological memory, all of which have significant influence on a child's ability to decode. A child who has difficulty with phonological processing will experience difficultly with reading. Whilst a child with proficiency in identifying rhymes, syllables or phonemes is more likely to read sooner than a child whose proficiency in these phonological processes is comprised (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 2009).

There are currently two methods of teaching reading through the use of phonics namely: analytic phonics and synthetic phonics. Analytic phonics is an approach in which children are taught to read from a sight word base within meaningful text before being exposed to letter sounds (Johnston & Watson, 2005). This allows for children to learn about letter sounds within a whole word context (Johnston & Watson, 2005). Synthetic phonics is considered an accelerated form of phonics in which children are taught the letter sounds prior to learning sight words (Johnston & Watson, 2005). Following the teaching of letter sounds in isolation the children are taught how the letter sounds are blended in order to form words (Johnston & Watson, 2005). In synthetic phonics the children's exposure to letter sounds occurs prior to exposure to books (Johnston & Watson, 2005).

Multiple national reports indicate the effectiveness of the use of synthetic phonics instruction on early literacy development however, several studies indicate that whilst educators responsible for early literacy are knowledgable about children's literature, they appear uncertain regarding the basic concepts of the English language (Joshi, et al., 2009). A study in

which a survey was administered to educators regarding language concepts indicated that educators demonstrated an awareness of syllable knowledge but performed inadequately when asked about morphemes and phonemes (Joshi, et al., 2009). Another study indicated that a vast majority of educators defined phonological awareness as grapheme-phoneme correspondence and held the view that a synthetic phonics approach towards the teaching of early reading was not effective (Joshi, et al., 2009).

The teaching and development of reading is multifaceted with various approaches and methodolgy being used country wide. Three popular synthetic phonics programs utilised within the indepenedent and public school settings in South Africa are discussed below.

Jolly Phonics

Jolly Phonics is an enjoyable, systematic approach which was developed with the aim of developing the literacy skills of young students (Ariati, Padmadewi, & Suarnajaya, 2018). Jolly Phonics approaches reading through five stages namely; 1. Learning the letter sounds; 2. Learning letter formation; 3. Blending; 4. Segmenting; 5. Tricky words (Lloyd & Wernham, 2018).

Jolly Phonics teaches the children the 42 sounds in English, blending, reading and writing through visual, auditory and kinesthetic means (Ariati, Padmadewi, & Suarnajaya, 2018). The program comprises of 15 minute lessons in which the children are taught a new sound each day (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010). The program continues for a duration of six years. It progresses from a phonics stage at 4-5 years of age, through six grammar stages ending with children aged 10-11 years (Lloyd & Wernham, 2018). The program teaches children 42 of the 44 phonemes in English as well as 46 of the most common graphemes (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010). The

Jolly Phonics website indicates that research to date has been conducted in various countries where the program is being implemented, including research in African countries, however, no such research within South Africa is available on their website to date.

Teaching Handwriting, Reading and Spelling Skills (THRASS)

The THRASS program approaches reading development through ten stages with the children being taught 44 phonemes and 120 graphemes through 15 minute sessions daily (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010). THRASS makes use of a chart of images which correlate to two, three and four letter graphemes for the educators to utilise in order to assist the children in identification of phonemes and the associated spelling variations (Callinan & van der Zee, 2010). These images and letters are put together on a learner's THRASS chart. THRASS prides itself on the fact that it has shifted away from the phonics approach of "one letter makes one sound" but rather teaches children that letters can make multiple sounds according to the letter's role within a word (Next Level Learning PTY, 2017). THRASS makes use of a multi-sensory approach which is adaptable to all students thus making it a teaching tool which is applicable to a range of settings (Next Level Learning PTY, 2017).

Letterland

Letterland phonics approach aims to teach children reading and spelling through methodical and clear phonics instruction (Souther, 2015). The Letterland program associates each letter of the alphabet with a character. Each character within Letterland exists within a world of objects which begin with the same letter as the character (Souther, 2015). Letterland aims to stimulate children's visual memory in order to promote learning as well as assist children in the retention of sounds by making use of a multi-sensory approach which engages them in phonics. (Souther, 2015).

Currently, Jolly Phonics is being implemented within a range of independent schools in South Africa in order to teach reading and spelling due to the programme being considered a fun approach to teaching reading which is able to be implemented with minimal cost or training (Bates, 2019). The independent school which participated within this research makes use of the Jolly Phonics programme as their primary approach to the teaching of reading. Jolly Phonics, having been developed in the United Kingdom is utilised in two-thirds of the primary schools and special needs schools in the United Kingdom (Bates, 2019).When critically reviewing the Jolly Phonics programme one must take into considered the variance between the schooling systems in the United Kingdom and the schooling systems in South Africa. In the United Kingdom formal schooling begins when children are 4-5 years of age and these children are thereby exposed to Jolly Phonics from age 4-5. However, in South Africa's schooling system the formal schooling of Grade 0/R is accessible to children aged 5-6, with multiple primary schools within South Africa not having a Grade 0/R but rather starting from Grade 1 at an age of 6-7 years thus delaying the onset of the programme. There is currently little research and information available regarding the implementation of the program within the schools, the educators' views on the program and the effect of the program on the development of reading and writing.

The ongoing "fads and fashions" approach to reading instruction is resulting in educator confusion regarding their personal approach to the teaching thereof. Reading achievement is influenced significantly by what the educators and students do within school and within the classroom (Fleisch, 2008). The degree of reading development that a student achieves is dependent on the educators' knowledge and expertise with a lot of emphasis being placed on the educators' view of the child's capabilities and the curriculum requirements (Fleisch, 2008).

Knowlegable educators, who approach reading from an evidence-based standpoint and create learning environments which are rich in print, are able to prevent reading difficulties and promote a positive reading trajectory for children exposed to their practice (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016). Van der Merwe and Nel (2012), state that one of the essential components which ensure students reach their potential in literacy is the formal training and experience of the educators. The quality of teaching is consistently identified as a predictor of student success as educators require the ability to provide instruction in a variety of ways, interpret errors and give corrective feedback (van der Merwe & Nel, 2012).

2.6. Research Aims

The aim of the study was to evaluate the foundation phase reading processes within an independent girls' school in Johannesburg. The study aimed to determine the foundation phase educators' perceptions, knowledge and opinions regarding reading and the teaching of reading within their school. It explored the approach taken by the school to facilitate the teaching of reading and considered the reading proficiency of the foundation phase students based on the results obtained from the school through the administration of standardised reading assessments conducted annually. A further sub-aim of the study was to assist in the development of plans and approaches to address any concerns identified in the evaluation of the status of reading.

More specifically, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of the foundation phase educators with regards to the teaching approaches used for the teaching of reading?

- How is a phonics program being implemented within the foundation phase of an independent school in Johannesburg?

- What reading instruction strategies and interventions are used in the acquisition of reading skills for students in the foundation phase of an independent school in Johannesburg?

- What are the reading proficiency levels of students in the foundation phase at an independent school in Johannesburg?

- How do the reading attainment levels of learners in the foundation phase of an independent school setting in Johannesburg compare with those of the public school setting?

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Aims

The aims of this study were:

- To describe the educators' approach to reading and their perceptions of this.
- To describe the implementation of a phonics program within the school and the educators perception thereof.
- To describe educator strategies and intervention strategies in assisting students with reading.
- To describe the setting in which children learn within the independent school including resources available.
- To determine the reading proficiency of students within the foundation phase.

3.2. Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design. The cross-sectional design allowed for the research to combine both qualitative and quantitative data in order to make deductions regarding a specific population at a specific point of time (Zheng, 2015). The survey comprised of a combination of qualitative and quantitative questioning whilst the focus groups data was qualitative and the data from the test scores quantitative. Considering that a single independent school participated in the research a case study design could also have been considered for the research.

The study was predominantly a quantitative study with aspects of a qualitative study. Qualitatively, the aim of the study was to understand and interpret the schools' approach

towards reading as a whole through the gathering of data on the approaches and opinions of the educators through the use of a survey and focus group.

Quantitatively, the study looked at the statistics of the educator's responses on the survey as well as the reading assessment results of the learners within the foundation phase (Grade 1, 2 and 3) at the independent school. The results from standardized reading assessments conducted by the main curriculum educators with their respective classes were compared to age appropriate norms and a conclusion drawn regarding the reading proficiency within the foundation phase. The results were reviewed retrospectively due to data only being available from 2018.

The survey, focus group and test scores resulted in a triangulation of results for analysis. In triangulation the researcher made use of a variety of methods in the data collection process in order to test the consistency of the qualitative and quantitative results thus eliminating the prejudice of results which would exist in single method research (Zheng, 2015).

3.3. Sample

The study employed a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is a technique which involves the deliberate selection of a group of participants due to the characteristics or qualities that the participant possesses (Tongco, 2005). Purposive sampling was the technique of choice as there is limited research available within the independent school environment and this sampling technique is typified through the key informant technique whereby a few participants are selected to be a guide to the culture (Tongco, 2005). The purposive sampling links back to the cross-sectional research in which data is collected from a small part of the population as a sample element of the population as a whole (Zheng, 2015). The research took place at one

independent school within Johannesburg as a representation of the independent schooling sector.

3.4. Site Description

The study took place at an independent girls' school in Johannesburg. The school provides education to girls from Grade R to Matric. The foundation phase comprises of two classes of approximately 25 students per class per Grade from Grade R to Grade 3. Each class per Grade consists of a main curriculum educator, an educators' assistant or teaching intern as well as subject educators who are responsible for the teaching of subjects such as Afrikaans, isiZulu, computer skills, physical education, art and music.

3.5. Description of Participants

The participants comprised of eight educators who were recruited to participate in the study. The inclusion and exclusion criteria of the participants is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.

Summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants of the study.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Educator at an independent girls school. • Educator in the foundation phase. • Main curriculum educator. • Educator experience in teaching of five years or more. • Educators were teaching at the school in 2018.	• Educator not currently employed within an independent school • Educator not currently working in the foundation phase • Subject educator, not responsible for the teaching of core literacy skills.

The study provided the two main curriculum educators per Grade from Grade R to Grade 3 with the opportunity to participate in the study i.e. eight educators in total as they met the inclusion criteria.

A description of the demographic information obtained from each educator who participated in the study is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2.

Frequencies for gender, qualification and major area of study for the participant group.

Variable	N	n
Gender	8	
Female		8 (100%)
Male		0 (0%)
	N	n
Highest qualification	8	
University degree		4 (50%)
Honours' degree		1 (12,5%)
Masters' degree		1 (12,5%)
Doctorate		0 (0%)
Diploma in Education (HDE)		2 (25%)
	N	n
Major area of study	8	
Foundation Phase Education		5 (62,5%)
Intermediate Phase Education		1 (12,5%)
Senior Phase Education		0 (0%)
Further Education and Training (FET)		0 (o%)
Other		2 (25%)
	N	n
Did you complete a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)?	8	
Yes		3 (37,5%)
No		5 (62,5%)

The frequency statistics presented in Table 2 show that all participants were female educators. The majority of the educators completed a university degree with the major area of study being Foundation Phase Education. The educators who did not study education as their primary qualification completed a PGCE.

Table 3.

Continuous data of age and years of experience of the participant group.

Variable	N=8	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Range	Maximum Range
Age		44,5 years	9,25	30-39 years	50-59 years
Teaching Experience		19,6 years	11,52	7 years	35 years

All the main curriculum educators teaching within the foundation phase at the time of the study were aged 30 years or older with majority of the educators falling into the age range of 50-59 years. No educators within the foundation phase were 60 years or older. All of the main curriculum educators had five or more years of experience in teaching with an average of 19,6 years of experience across the 8 educators. These results indicate an experienced team of educators, particularly when considering that with three years of experience individuals are considered entry-level employees in the workplace, whilst with five years of experience, they are considered mid-level employees and after eight years or more experience, they are considered senior level. The staff within the independent school of choice therefore all fell into the mid-level and senior-level experience bracket. A limitation to this question was that the years of experience overlapped i.e. participants with experience of 10, 15, 20, 30, 35, or 40 years could select one of two categories.

3.6. Instruments

Three instruments were utilised in the study. Additional information pertaining to each of the instruments are outlined in detail below.

a. Survey

The questions in this instrument (Appendix G) were generated and adapted from the educator survey used in the PIRLS 2016 study (IEA, 2018). The survey included both open and closed ended questions. Closed ended items were quick to administer and easily analysed to produce statistics concerning the topic whilst open ended questioning was more demanding on the participants but provided insightful information from the participants (Kelley, Clark, Brown, & Sitzia, 2003). The participants were required to complete the survey within a day in order to avoid discussion around the survey. An outline of the contents of the survey is summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4.

Table indicating the contents of the survey

Question Category	*Question Number*	*Rationale*
Demographics	1 – 5	This questioning aims to gain information regarding the characteristics and background of the educators.
School context	6 – 10	This questioning aims to establish an understanding of the school environment and factors which influence teaching.
Approach to reading	11 – 19	This questioning aims to gather data on the approaches towards reading as well as the methodology used to teach reading within the classroom.
Phonics Programs	19 – 21	This questioning aims to gain information from the educators regarding the use, training and implementation of phonics programs within the school.
Reading resources	23 – 28	Questioning around the availability of resources allows for data to be gathered on the children's access to reading resources and their opportunity to interact with reading materials
Assessment of reading and intervention	29 – 30	Questioning in this regard aims to provide detail on the monitoring and assessments used by the school and educators to determine the children's reading proficiency.

b. Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with the participants who completed the survey. The focus group was led by the researcher with questions being posed to the participants for discussion. The line of questioning focused on the influence of context on reading development as well as the implementation of a phonics program. The focus group provided the educators with an opportunity to offer additional thoughts, opinions and reasons for their responses on the survey as well as provided the educators a platform for discussion. The researcher posed the following questions to the group:

- How do you teach reading?
- What has been the most effective technique you have used in teaching reading?
- How do you feel about phonics programs?
- What would empower and better equip educators in teaching reading?

An auditory recording of the focus group was conducted with the educator's consent. The auditory recording was transcribed (Appendix H) for analysis. A qualitative thematic analysis was conducted on the data obtained from the focus group in accordance with the aims of the study.

c. Reading Assessments

The children's reading proficiency had been assessed per Grade using standardised tests according to age related norms. The Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the New Group Reading Test (NGRT) were the measures employed by the school. The assessments are conducted by the main curriculum educators with their respective classes every year. These tests were administered in November/December 2018 and were scheduled to take place in

May/June 2019, however, the school postponed the testing session and it has not taken place to date. It was the aim of the study to make use of the most recent data (from the May/June 2019 assessments), however, due to the postponement of the assessments, the results from the November/December 2018 assessments were used. A total of 143 students' results were supplied by the school.

Each of the assessment tools used in the study are described below.

1) *Schonell Single Word Reading Test* is a single word reading test used to determine the child's age and Grade equivalent score for reading. The test comprises of 100 single words read from left to right. The test takes approximately 5-15 minutes to administer. The responses are marked correct if the child reads a word correctly, self-corrects or decodes the word accurately. The test is stopped when ten consecutive words are read incorrectly. The Reading Age (RA) is the total number of words read correctly and matched to an age equivalent. The age equivalent range is from 6 years to 12 years 6 months. There is currently no evidence on the reliability and validity of the Schonell Single Word Reading Test. The test is considered to be outdated as it was first published in 1950. Furthermore, it was developed in Australia, therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution as it has not been standardised on the South African population.

2) *New Group Reading Test (NGRT)* is a computer-generated assessment used for children aged 6 – 16 years. The children's reading and comprehension skills are assessed in a digital format and converted into reading ages and standard age scores. The NGRT comprises of two parts: sentence completion (assesses decoding and comprehension); and passage comprehension (assesses graded comprehension skills). The NGRT was

developed in the United Kingdom, therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution as it has not been standardised on the South African population.

The archival data obtained through the administration of the above mentioned test was utilised in the study. This allowed for a retrospective analysis of the existing reading ability within the independent school context.

3.7. Procedure

a. Ethical Considerations

Permission to carry out this research was obtained (Appendix A) from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand (Protocol No: H19/06/28). A letter requesting permission for the research to be conducted at the school was issued to the principal as well as the head of department for the foundation phase of the school (Appendix B). The researcher approached the main curriculum educators per class per Grade and provided them with an information letter (Appendix C) outlining the aim of the study and a consent form (Appendix D). A time was arranged with the educators in order to issue the survey as well as answer any questions the educators may have had regarding the research. The educators' survey did not require disclosure of personal or identifiable details thus ensuring anonymity. An information letter was issued to the parents of the students in the foundation phase (Appendix E). The school issues a consent form (Appendix F) to each students' parents/guardians annually, in which parents/guardians are required to give consent to the educators to perform standardised tests on their children at school. Following the receipt of permission the school provided the researcher with the data comprising of assessment scores (Appendix H, I, J) from the reading assessments in 2018. The assessment scores obtained by the school are utilised by the school for statistical and tracking/monitoring purposes, and to

assist in identifying learners in need of support. The data did not include any personal or identifiable details of the children.

b. Educator Survey

A date and time were arranged with the school in which the main curriculum educators were provided with the permission letter to participate in this study and allowed to ask the researcher any questions pertaining to the research. Educators were assured of confidentiality as confidentiality of the educator's personal information and responses was secured by assigning a number to the educators' surveys. Once the consent form was completed, the participants were issued with the survey. The participants were given a day for the completion of the survey.

c. Assessment of the children's reading proficiency

The students' proficiency of reading was analysed using the results obtained from reading assessments administered by their main curriculum educators in November/December 2018. The school provided the results of the assessments to the researcher with the omission of all personal or identifiable details of the children and specification of the classes, but rather as a collective group of scores per grade.

d. Focus group

Following the completion of the survey the researcher arranged a time and date in order to conduct a focus group with the educators who participated in the study, in order to gain additional information of their views and perceptions regarding reading development. The focus group placed emphasis on the topics broached in the survey and explored additional details pertaining to the implementation of phonics programs, pros and cons thereof and the use of phonics resources. The focus group involved the posing of questions to the educators

based on trends noted from the responses within the survey and allowed for discussion to ensue around those questions. The focus group took place at the school premises for 30 minutes after school hours on a date which was suitable for the participants.

e. Feedback

A feedback session was held with the school and the educators on completion of the research. Feedback on the findings of the research and discussion around the findings was conducted. The research aimed to provide a greater understanding of the views, perceptions and approaches undertaken by the school and educators so as to work towards enhancing the status of reading at the school.

3.8. Data Analysis

A quantitative analysis of the closed ended questions from the survey was performed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics enables the researcher to explain what the data presents in a controllable manner (Trochim, 2020). Descriptive statistics were also used to analyse the reading assessment results of the students. The distribution and the measures of central tendency of the data were calculated and displayed on box and whisker charts. The reading scores of the students were compared to age related norms to determine their level of reading proficiency.

A qualitative analysis was done on the responses to the open-ended questions in the survey and focus group discussion.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from the focus group. Thematic analysis is an effective manner in which various perspectives of research participants can be

analysed through the identification of similarities and differences (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The following steps were followed within the thematic analysis as outline by Sharp & Sanders (2018):

1. The researcher familiarised herself with the data.
2. The research created categories and sub categories within the data.
3. The researcher used the data in order to develop themes.
4. The researcher reviewed the themes which were generated.
5. The researcher provided labels for the themes which were generated.
6. The research identified exemplars for use in the reporting of the data.

3.8.1. Reliability and Validity.

a. Survey

A pilot study of the survey was completed. A pilot study was conducted in order to determine the feasibility of the survey created by the researcher in order to make any modifications required prior to the survey being used in the research study (Leon, Davis, & Kraemer, 2011). The survey was sent to an experienced speech therapist and an educator currently working within a different independent school to ensure an adequate line of questioning, that questions were clear and understandable and the layout easy to follow. Feedback was received and the survey adjusted accordingly.

The reliability of the survey was based on internal reliability. Internal reliability is the correlation which exists between participant responses on a measure (Price, Jhangiani, & Chiang, 2015). Internal reliability aims to ensure that the underlying construct of the research measure is consistent. The responses to the survey were consistent for each participant for the multiple items.

The validity of the survey is based on content validity. Content validity is the extent to which a research tool targets the content being explored in the research (Yaghmaie, 2003). The survey considers the participants' attitude towards teaching reading and phonics and the implementation thereof. The validity of the questions within the survey underwent qualitative expert reviews within the pilot study.

b. Reading assessments

The reliability of the reading assessments is based on internal consistency. Internal consistency is the estimate of the degree to which the reading scores would differ in instances where the children underwent testing using different tools (Salkind, 2010). The expected responses for each child will reflect the same result according to their age norms across the test. The validity for the reading assessment is based on criterion validity. There is an expected linear correlation according to age norms for the test. The reliability and validity of the children's assessment, however, could not be entirely guaranteed as the researcher did not conduct the assessments thus making it post hoc.

3.8.2.Trustworthiness

c. Focus group

Throughout the study trustworthiness was ensured by taking steps to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Trustworthiness is an indication that the researcher has conducted data analysis in a credible manner (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The trustworthiness of focus was ensured as follows: (1) Credibility was determined by the triangulation of data collection to ensure that the findings of the research are accurately

presented and reviewed. (2) Transferability was ensured through the in-depth description of the research methodology to allow the study to be able to be replicated. (3) Dependability was determined by the research being administered in a logical and replicable manner with documentation of each step of the research. (4) Member checks to ensure the participant's responses were accurately recorded and reported were completed with the participants on the data collected. (5) Participants were recruited and had the option of refusing to participate. (6) The researcher's thematic analysis was systematic following the steps of analysis outlined in literature and thus effective research methods were employed in this study.

Chapter 4: Results

The results captured below provide the descriptive statistics of the closed ended questions in in the survey, the themes identified from the thematic analysis of the focus group discussion and descriptive statistics of the students' reading proficiency through an analysis of their reading scores in relation to age norms.

As outlined in Chapter 3, a survey and focus group were administered to the main curriculum educators currently teaching within the foundation phase of the school (grade R - 3). The researcher recruited eight main curriculum educators in total. These findings will be discussed according to the aims of the research as outlined in Chapter 3.

The results have been structured in accordance with the aims and are presented in the following order:

1. The survey results related to each aim.
2. The thematic analysis of the data obtained from the focus group related to each aim.

The results for the final aim are covered in the quantitative analysis of the reading proficiency of foundation phase students using results from the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the New Group Reading Test (NGRT) obtained by the school in 2018.

Tables, graphs and figures have been included where necessary as visual representation and summary of the data obtained and analysed.

4.1. Description of educators' approaches to reading and their perceptions thereof.

4.1.1. Survey Results

a. The educators were asked about their feelings towards the teaching of reading.

Table 5.

Frequencies for the educators feeling towards teaching of reading

Variable	N	n
How do you feel about teaching reading?	8	
Don't like it		0 (0%)
Need some guidance		1 (12,5%)
Ok		0 (0%)
Good		1 (12,5%)
Confident		5 (62,5%)
No response		1 (12,5%)

All participants enjoyed teaching reading to a degree. The majority of the participants felt confident about teaching reading. Whilst one participant felt good about teaching reading, one felt she needed guidance and one gave no response.

b. Within the 2018 school year, the educators indicated the amount of time that they spent on professional development related to reading.

Table 6.

Continuous data of time participants spent in professional development related to reading

Variable	N=8	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Range	Maximum Range
Time spent in professional development (hours)		6,8	2,99	2-4	>10

Within the 2018 school year, the average amount of time spent on professional development relating to reading was 6,8 hours. Surprisingly, there was an 8-hour difference between the most and least amount of hours spent in professional development related to reading.

c. The educators were asked to indicate how many minutes they spend on reading within an average school week

Table 7.

Continuous data of the minutes spent on teaching reading or reading activities of with students within an average school week.

Variable	N=8	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Range	Maximum Range
Time spent on teaching reading per week (minutes)		442,5	333,19	150	1000

The average number of minutes spent in the classroom per week on reading was 442.5. A difference of 850 minutes was found between the classes who spent the most and least amount of minutes reading. This was not Grade specific.

d. The researcher investigated how often various reading activities are completed within the classroom.

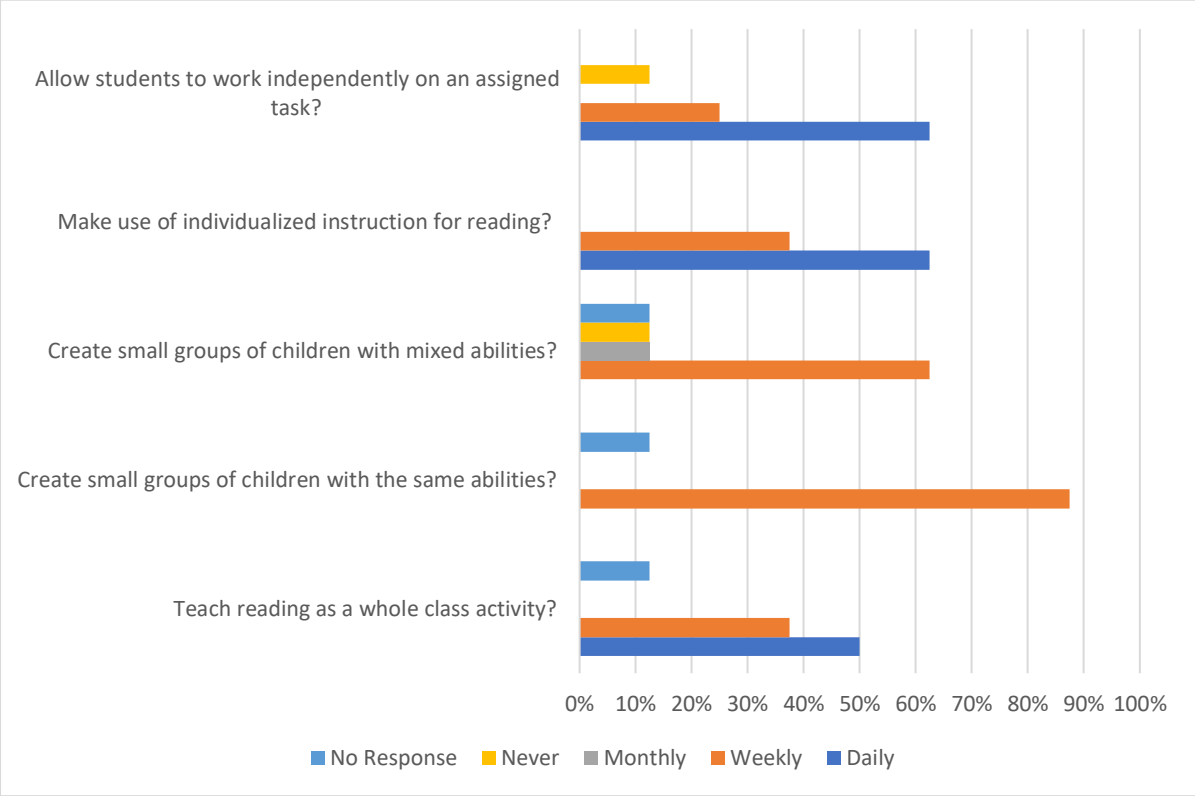


Figure 3. Graph depicting how often the educator performs various reading activities within the classroom (n=8)

The majority of participants performed reading tasks on a weekly basis, with most taking time to create small groups of children with the same reading abilities on a weekly basis. Participants then stated that on a daily basis they would: (1) allow students to work independently on an assigned task; (2) make use of individualized instructions for reading and (3) teach reading as a whole class activity.

e. Time devoted to reading instructional activities

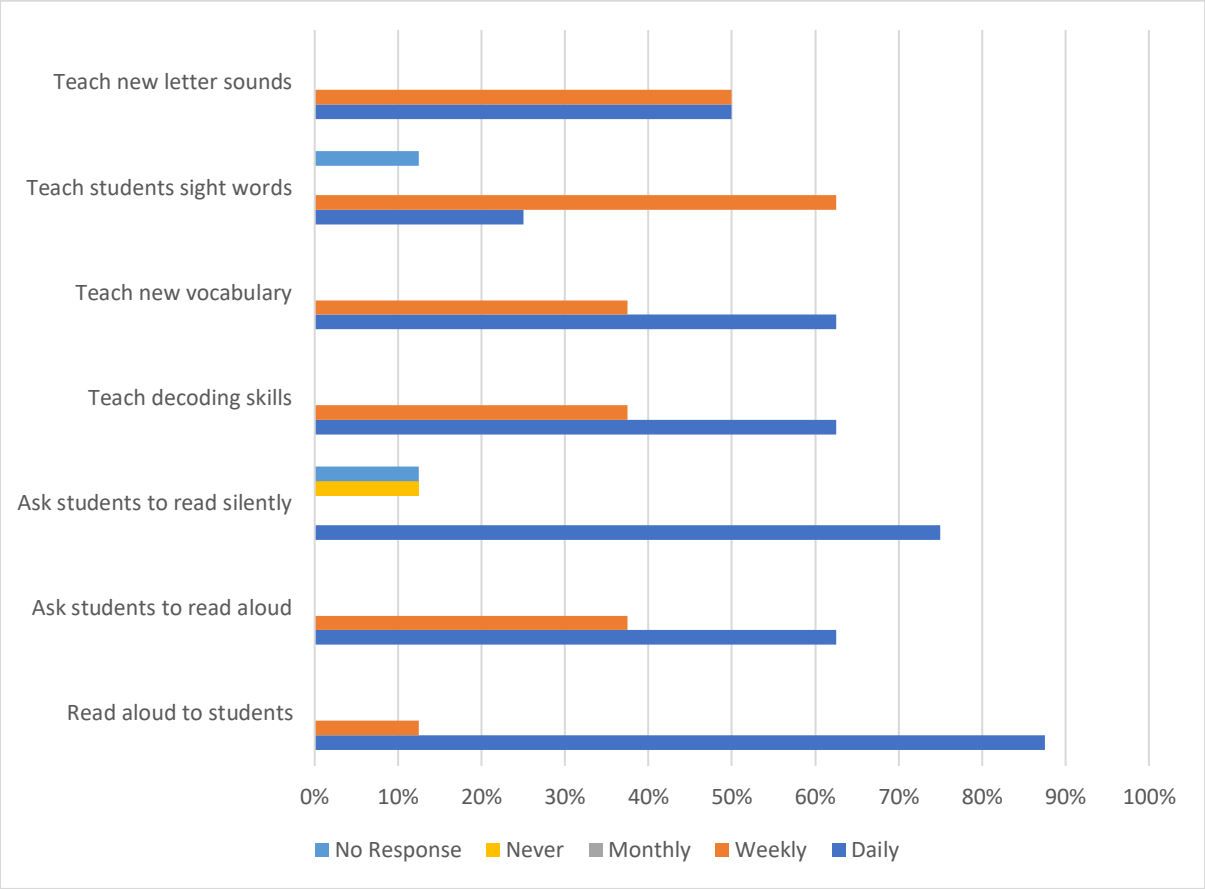


Figure 4. Graph depicting how often the educator teaches various readings skills. (n=8)

More than 50% of participants taught sight words on a weekly basis, whilst more than 50% of participants (1) taught new vocabulary; (2) taught decoding skills; (3) asked students to read silently; (4) asked students to read aloud; (5) read aloud to students on a daily basis. One participant stated having never told students to read silently

f. Frequency of developing reading

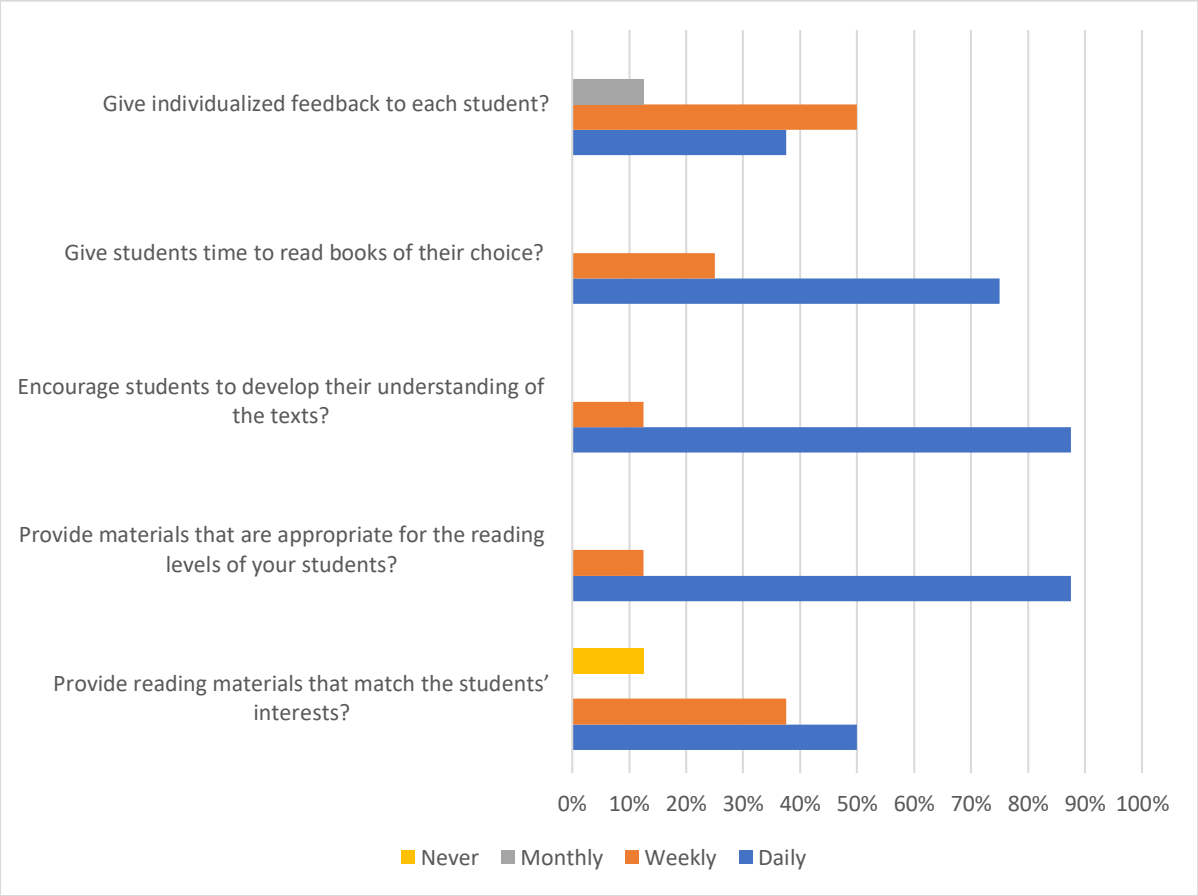


Figure 5. Graph depicting the frequency with which educators develop reading in various ways

50% of participants gave individualized feedback to their students weekly. Whilst 50% and more participants (1) Provided materials that were age appropriate for the reading levels of the students (2) encouraged students to develop their understanding of the texts; (3) gave students time to read books of their choice and (4) provided reading materials in keeping with the students' interests. One participant stated that she only gave individualized feedback monthly to students, whilst, one participant stated that she has never provided reading materials that match the students' interests.

g. Frequency of teaching reading comprehension skills

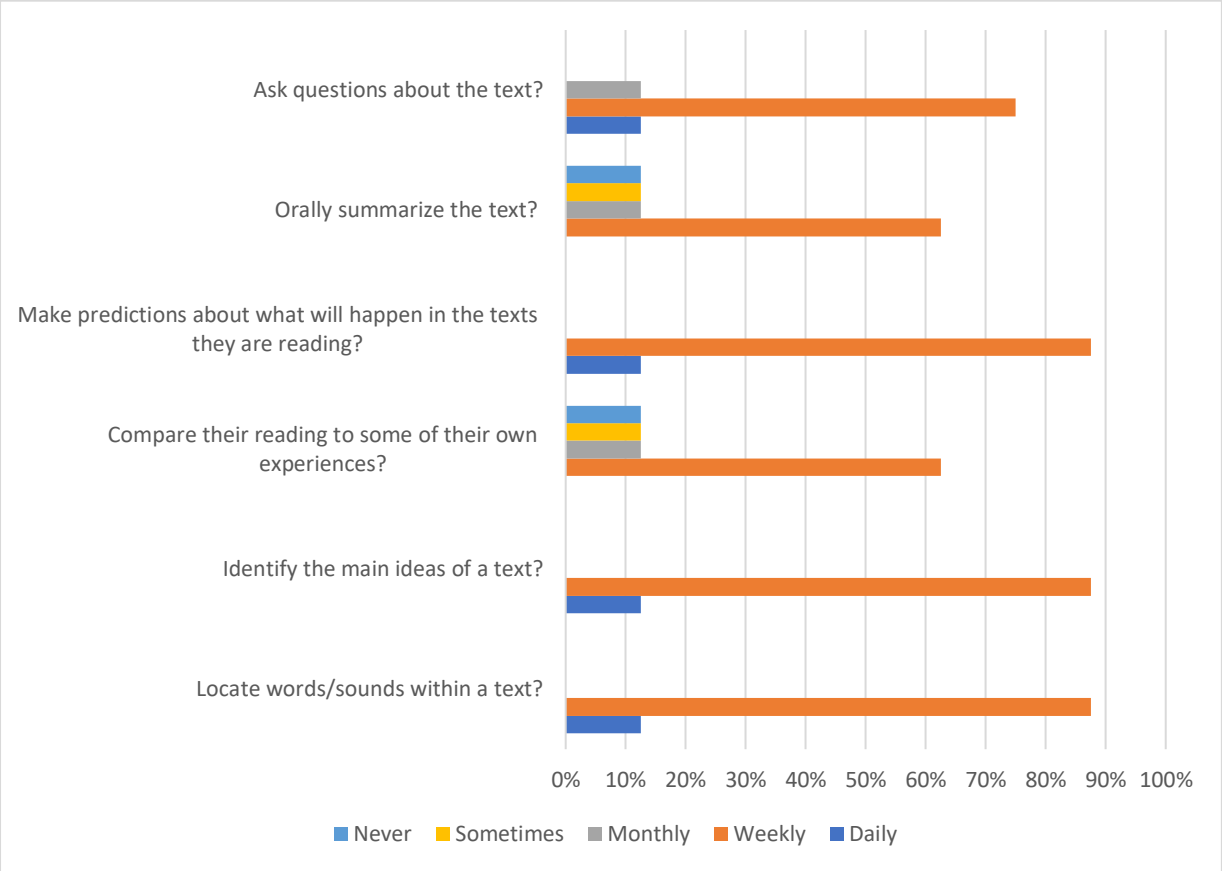


Figure 6. Graph depicting how often the educators use tasks to develop reading comprehension skills .

More than 70% of participants required their students to (1) ask questions about the text; (2) make predictions about what will happen in the texts they are reading; (3) identify the main idea about the text and (4) locate words/sounds within a text, on a weekly basis. More than 50% of participants further asked students to (1) orally summarize the texts and (2) compare their reading to some of their own experiences on a weekly basis.

h. Educators were asked what they believe the three key elements essential for successful teaching of reading are and the following responses were recorded:

Table 8:

Key elements which participants deem essential for the teaching of reading.

Participants	Key elements
1	*"Exposure; Repetition; Comprehension."*
2	*"Exposure to text/sounds; Fun and interactive approach/multisensory; Keep the interest going and take away any pressure/anxiety."*
3	*A love of reading in both teacher and child; A good phonics program which teachers have been trained in and phonological awareness; Collaboration between the grades and teachers."*
4	*"Phonological awareness; Phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension; A love of books, stories, poems and an enthusiasm to read"*
5	*"Phonics- recognition of sounds; Phonemic awareness – manipulation; Vocabulary and comprehension."*
6	*"Sight Vocabulary; Know the phonemes; Confidence/curiosity/ love of words."*
7	*"Phonological awareness; Decoding; Text understanding."*
8	*"Discrimination of words and sounds; Identification/segmenting/blending of syllables and sounds; Comprehension."*

Thus the participants did not have consistent views regarding the key elements of reading.

i. **The schools approach to homework regarding reading tasks is outlined below.**

Table 9.

Frequencies of assigning of reading as a homework task

Variable	N	n
How often students receive reading as homework per week	8	
Daily		7 (87,5 %)
3-4 times		1 (12,5%)
1-2 times		0 (0%)
Less than once		0 (0%)
Never		0 (0%)
Variable	N	n
How much time students are required to spend on reading homework	8	
15 minutes or less		4 (50 %)
16-30 minutes		4 (50%)
31-60 minutes		0 (0%)
More than 60 minutes		0 (0%)

The majority of participants gave their students reading homework on a daily basis, with the time spent on reading evenly split between 15 minutes or less and 16-30 minutes.

4.1.2. Focus Group Discussion

The educators approaches and methods used to teach and develop reading were explored. The following themes emerged with regards to teaching and reading development.

Negative emotions

The participants (6) expressed feeling *"stressed"* and *"pressured"* with regards to teaching reading. Every participant (P) alluded to or reported feeling "*overwhelmed"* by the number of reading programs available.

Limited reading development knowledge

Amongst all of the participant's there was limited depth of knowledge of specific reading programs resulting in uncertainty as to which program or approaches are most effective for which children. It was discussed that due to the fads and fashions within the education system new programs, methods and approaches are being introduced year on year. One participant commented: *"You must implement the initial program as well so it is not just educator confusion but also pressure because we are still grappling with the first program and are now expected to implement new ones" (P5).*

All foundation phase teachers (8) were taught the stages of reading development in university but have long forgotten what these exact steps and stages are. A participant pointed out: *"We have forgotten since varsity the process of reading" (P7).* No participant was able to describe the stages of reading development but rather four of the eight participants collaborated before describing the steps to the teaching of decoding, beginning with sound awareness and progressing to blending. Half of the participants (4/8) discussed being uncertain of how and when reading comprehension is taught *"At what point are they expected to know what they are reading?" (P6)* and all of the participants indicated that they do not currently teach reading comprehension skills. "*There is no comprehension" (P8)*.

Eclectic approach

All of the participants have attended short courses on reading programs "*in my career I've been exposed to about seven different ways to teach reading and spelling" (P1).* and have started to use snippets of these programs to encourage reading within the scholastic context. *"So, we tried to use the best from one program and what we love from another program and elements from another program and items from each of them and put them together." (P2).* One

participant explained that they [educators] select and implement the best elements of various programs with their students as not all students respond to a single program. *"I will be honest with all the different phonics ways I have learned I have found that even now, using Jolly Phonics, that the weaker students do not grasp the concept" (P1).*

Most of the participants (7) stated that an approach to reading cannot be "*one size fits all*" *(P7).* The same participants reported using a range of approaches to assist children of varying reading ability. For example: *"the weaker students do not grasp the concepts then I will use what I know from other programs to try and assist them." (P1).* The educators have many tools at hand but may not be utilising them all correctly or using them in parts and not as a whole. *"We have too many tools and we don't know which one to use" (P8).*

The participants reported using finding various methods effective in the teaching of reading such as the:

- <u>The V A K T method</u>

  " I do visual, auditory, kinetic and tactile and do syllables." (P1);

  "Multi-sensory" (P2)

  "Love the language first before doing what you doing and use the multi-sensory approach with that so that they can be involved in it and can identify with it." (P8)

- <u>Phonemic Awareness</u>

  "I love to work on white boards on the desk's so they can be rubbed out and then manipulate the words" (P3);

  "I love to use word boxes. They build their own words and play with the letters and I tried to make them love it." (P4)

- Learning through comprehension

  "The girls need to understand the words they are learning so that they can use the word in multiple ways in a range of contexts. Reading must be listened to and reading must take place every day" (P5);

  "We use comprehension box and the children absolutely love it because it has different themes broken up into paragraphs with little questions on the back which is really good to see who can actually understand what they have just read." (P7)

- Whole word approach

  "Making shape boxes around the word and the whole word approach and many battle with that." (P6)

Another method which participants referred to briefly was phonological awareness activities.

4.2. Description of the implementation of a phonics program within the school and the educators perceptions thereof.

4.2.1. Survey results

Table 10 reflects the frequencies of phonics programme training, implementation and use.

Table 10.

Frequencies of phonics program training, implementation and use

Variable	N	n
Have you been trained in a phonics program?	8	
Yes		8 (100%)
No		0 (0%)
	N	n
Which phonics program have you been trained in?	8	
Jolly Phonics		8(100%)
Letterland		2 (25%)
THRASS		2 (25%)
Letters and Sounds		1 (12,5%)
Writing to Read		1 (12,5%)
	N	N
Do you implement a phonics program at the school?	8	
Yes		8 (100%)
No		0 (0%)
	N	N
Do you implement the program as trained?	8	
Yes		5 (62,5%)
No		0 (0%)
Some aspects		3 (37,5%)
	N	N
Do you make use of the program materials as trained to do?	8	
Yes		7 (87,5%)
No		0 (0%)
Some aspects		1 (12,5%)

All of the participants had been trained in a phonics program, specifically Jolly Phonics, with some additional training in four other phonics programs. All the participants reported implementing a phonics program, with the majority stating they implemented the program as per the training. Three participants stated that they only implement parts of the program. The majority of the participants stated making use of the training materials as trained to do.

4.2.2. Focus Group Discussion

Two themes emerged around the limitation of the program and success of the phonics program being implemented by the school.

Limitation of the program

The majority of the participants (7) voiced concern around the current phonics program being implemented in the school, stating shortfalls of the program as well as problems with the pace of the program. i.e. *"Too many sounds, too quickly" (P1);* "*there is no comprehension" (P1)* and there is "*no phonological awareness as well." (P7)*. It was evident from the discussion that there is definite educator confusion and limited belief in the current phonics program. *"We do Jolly phonics and we get them to read but the other stuff underneath that is a little blurry and we need training on that" (P8*). Furthermore, the participants were not convinced by the accelerated pace of learning prescribed in Jolly Phonics, because they believed the accelerated pace only helps the elite readers and not the majority of the class. *"We have seven children who are going very far and we have a whole class, a bulk who are now anxious to read and a group of weak children who have no clue" (P1).*

Lastly, seven participants agreed that the focus of reading development in the foundation phase should be more individualized in order to meet all students' needs, which they found difficult to achieve in a large class. The notion that good readers will arrive at a ceiling at an older age was discussed. "*I have found with those [strong readers] they get to a ceiling.* The participant further stated concern that *"Yes there will be those [children] who are going to love it and read and that's fantastic but what about the bulk [majority of children], that are not getting it [reading] and they are going to hate it"(P1).*

Success of the program

Only one participant had a positive remark about Jolly Phonics. She stated having concerns initially but that she had been convinced about the program stating if *"…you push the sounds and do one a day and we thought, [that would] be ridiculous, but when you …expose it to them [the students]… here's the sounds, the flashcards on wall. The child who is five years old and is exposed to [sounds and flash cards]…. loves it and starts doing it [reading], it'll [reading will] start happening naturally" (P6).*

4.3. Description of educator strategies and intervention strategies in assisting students with reading

4.3.1. Survey Results

The participants were asked to indicate the proportion of children their classes who had reading difficulties and required assistance with reading . The results are reflected in Figure 7 below.

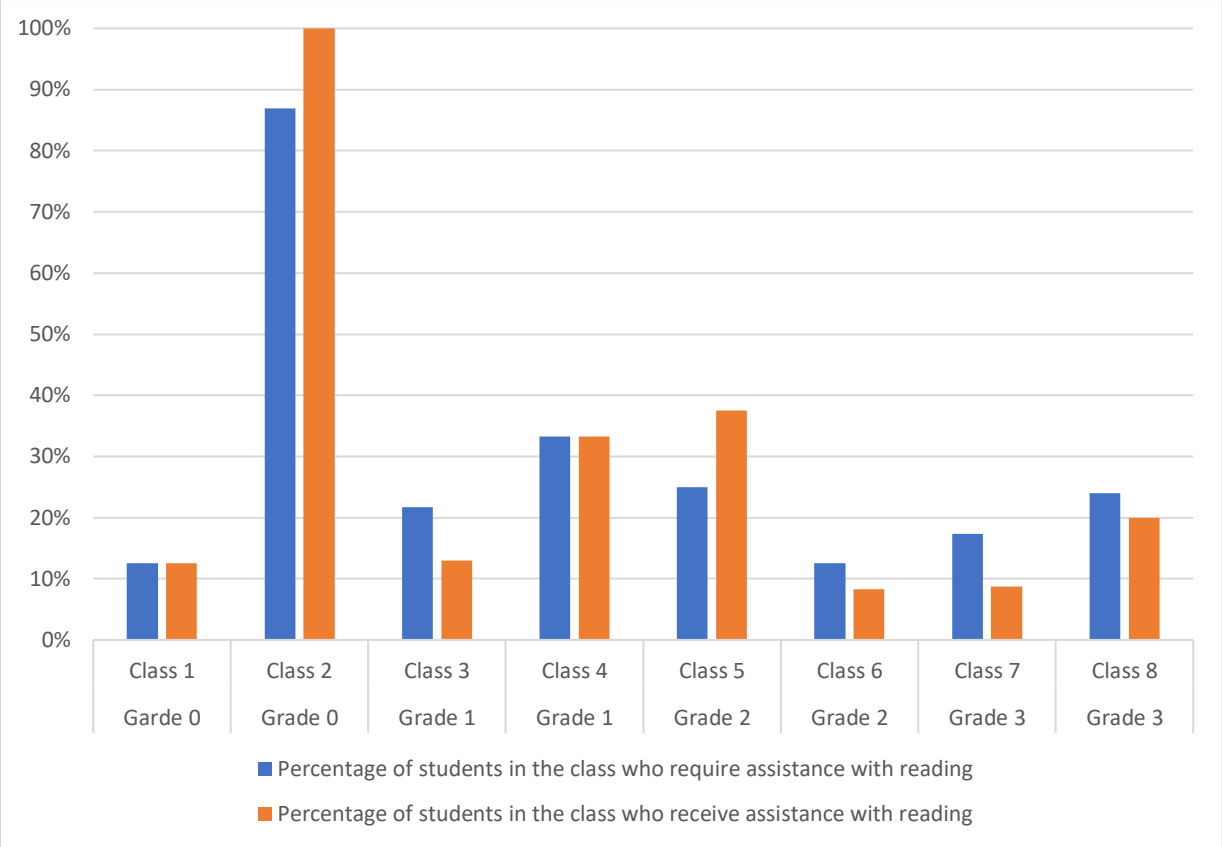


Figure 7. Graph depicting the number of children per class who have difficulty with reading and the number of children per class who receive assistance with reading by percentage.

Only two of the eight classes have an equal number of children who experience difficulty with reading and receive assistance with reading. Of the remaining six classes, four classes have a greater number of children who require assistance with reading than the number of children who receive assistance with reading whilst the two remaining classes have a greater number of children receiving assistance with reading than those requiring assistance with reading.

The educators were asked about the types of assessment and intervention strategies they use to assist children who have reading difficulties. The results are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11.

Frequencies of the assessments and intervention strategies for reading.

Variable	N	N
How often students' reading is assessed	8	
Daily		1 (12,5%)
Weekly		5 (62,5%)
Every two weeks		1 (12,5%)
Monthly		1 (12,5%)
Termly		0 (0%)
	N	n
Type of assessments used by educators to monitor reading	8	
Ongoing classroom assessments		7 (87,5%)
Weekly classroom assessments		5 (62,5%)
Grade assessments		5 (62,5%)
Institute assessments		3 (37,5%)
	N	n
The intervention options available for students who have difficulty with reading.	8	
A specialized professional		8 (100%)
A teacher assistant		6 (75%)
Reading intervention program		5 (62,5%)
	N	n
How educators respond to children having difficulty with reading	8	
I refer the student to a specialised professional		4 (50%)
I wait to see if the performance improves with maturation		3 (37,5%)
I spend more time working on reading with the student individually		8 (100%)
I ask the parent to help the student with reading		7 (87,5 %)
I recommend enrolment into a specialized reading program		6 (75%)

The majority of participants do reading assessments on a weekly basis, with most of the assessments being ongoing classroom assessments followed by weekly classroom assessments and Grade assessments. Students who have reading difficulties are have the availability of a specialized professional for intervention and being able to read with a teacher assistant. Implementing a reading intervention program was described as a third option respectively. When students have difficulties with reading, all teachers stated that they spend more

individual time with the student, and most ask the parents to assist the student. 75% of the educators would recommend a reading intervention program. Referral to a specialized professional is second last option which educators pursue when students are having difficulty with reading with the least popular option being to wait and see if the performance improves with maturity.

4.3.2. Focus Group Discussion

Once again, the theme of "pressure" and "stress" around reading assessments emerged in the discussion.

All of the participants reported that the school does reading assessments on the students in order to identify any areas of weakness or concern. *"At the end of the year, by November, now, when we would've done the assessments" (P1).* All of the participants described feeling pressure regarding the students reading abilities. The participants felt discouraged by the lack of achievement and poor performance in reading by some of the students, as they felt this was a direct reflection of their own teaching abilities. One participant elaborated on this by describing that when the children in her class are assessed and do not perform adequately, *"We ask ourselves. How? Why? How has this little girl spent a year with me, and she has only improved by a few months?" (P1).* All of the participants also described feeling proud when seeing students with reading difficulties improve in areas which may not necessarily be quantifiable on the school assessments but which the educators deem of significant importance from a qualitative perspective. i.e. *"You may not have arrived as a fluent reader and may have bad word attack skills and yet you look at her in November and you can't believe how well she's reading" (P1).* The participants were all dismayed at what the school deems most important. *"The school doesn't want to know or hear that she's loving reading. They want to*

know, "Okay Madam, she was 6.5 years why is she now 6.8?"" (P1). There was a consensus amongst the participants that they would opt to re-evaluate the assessment process. *"It is a bit of a stress in terms of what the school is expecting our children to be at realistically" (P1).*

The participants spoke of testing and benchmarks assessments seven times in the discussion. All the participants raised the fact that they experience additional stress as the school does not release the results of the benchmark assessments to the parents. *"I think it's also very stressful that the parents do not know the ages because I think if half our parents knew the ages, I think many of them would be upset with the ages" (P1).* It was discussed that the parents would more than likely be unimpressed with the status of reading and that is of concern to the educators as they feel it is their sole responsibility.

4.4. Description of the setting in which children learn within the independent school including resources available.

4.4.1. Survey results

The educators were asked about their opinions regarding school contexts and resources available for teaching reading. The results are reflected in Table 12.

Table 12.

Educator opinions of context and resources.

Variable	N	n
Does context influence reading development?	8	
Yes		6 (75%)
No		2 (25%)
Variable	N	n
Do you have sufficient resources for reading at your school?	8	
Yes		8 (100%)
No		0 (0%)

The majority of participants believed that context influences reading development. All participants stated having sufficient resources to teach reading.

In an attempt to describe the school setting, class sizes were identified, as well as the number of children who may have difficulty with the English language. The results are reflected in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13.

Continuous data depicting the number of children per class within the foundation phase of the school

Variable	N=8	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Range	Maximum Range
Number of children per class		23,7	0.7	23	25

There was an average of 23.7 children in the classes, with the most being 25 and the least being 23 in one class.

Table 14.

Frequencies of the number of children who have difficulty understanding English per class.

Class 1		
Variable	N	n
Number of students who have difficulty understanding English	23	
Yes		2 (8,7%)
No		21 (91,3%)
Class 2		
	N	n
Number of students who have difficulty understanding English	24	
Yes		1 (4,2%)
No		23 (95,8%)

Of the eight classes in the foundation phase only two participants reported having students who have difficulty understanding English with Class 1 having two students who have difficulties understanding English and Class 2 having one student who has difficulties understanding English.

The questions relating to the available reading resources revealed the following:

Table 15.

Frequencies of the availability and use of libraries

Variable	N	n
Do you have a library /reading resources in your classroom?	8	
Yes		6 (75%)
No		2 (25%)
Variable	N	n
How often do students make use of the classroom library?	8	
Daily		7 (87,5%)
Weekly		1 (12,5%)
Monthly		0 (0%)
Variable	N	n
Are students allowed to take classroom library books home?	8	
Yes		4 (50%)
No		4 (50%)
Variable	N	n
How often do students visit a library that is not in their classroom	8	
Weekly		4 (50%)
Every two weeks		3 (37,5%)
Monthly		1 (12,5%)
Termly		0 (0%)
Never or almost never		0 (0%)
Variable	N	n
The number of books within the classroom library	8	
0 - 10 books		0 (0%)
11 - 25 books		0 (0%)
16 - 50 books		0 (0%)
51 - 100 books		1 (12,5%)
More than 100 books		6 (75%)
No response		1 (12,5%)

The majority of participants reported having access to a library in their classroom, with most students utilizing the classroom library daily. 50% of participants allow the students to take library books home. 50% of students reportedly make use of libraries outside the classroom library on a weekly basis. Most of the classroom libraries reportedly had more than 100 books.

4.4.2. Focus Group Discussion

Themes of pressure of working at an elite school, parental involvement, and resources emerged within the focus group.

All eight of the participants acknowledged that parents are currently opting to send their children to independent schools, when possible, due to the notion that independent schools provide better education. The participants were unanimous in reporting "*the overwhelming pressure*" associated with working at an elite independent school and the related parent expectations for academic results associated with the higher school fees. *We know how much the parents are paying for school fees, but we also know that every child is not an innately good reader" (P1).* All participants agreed that reading performance is not directly proportionate to the cost of schooling. *"We know that half our class or just under half our class have issues with reading and spelling" (P1).*

Parent involvement

An additional theme that emerged in this discussion was that of "*parent involvement."*

The word parent was documented 27 times in the discussion with the participants. Perceptions of working to achieve good results on benchmark tests do not appear to have impacted the manner in which the educators teach, as one participant described not teaching for a benchmark: *"I am not teaching so that on my performance management I can get a 50% raise, I am teaching ethically" (P1).*

In spite of the high socioeconomic status of families with children attending the school, the participants believe that the children present with individual academic abilities, strengths and weaknesses. *"We also know that every child is not an innately good reader" (P1).* For the children who may not be achieving academically a participant described how parents "*are willing to throw money at it"* (P8). All of the participants agreed that parents within the independent school are very willing to pay for extra lessons or buy opportunities for their children, however, the level of parent involvement was described to be on par with that experienced by the participants when working in public schools. One participant described a lack of parental involvement saying: *"I think they are just as abandoned as other children" (P8).* The participant went on to explain that whilst one may perceive the children who attend independent schools as having greater parental involvement, the opposite is true as the parents hold high profile jobs and the children are *"shipped off to after- care, going home with an aupair or doing extra murals until 6 o'clock."* This participant concluded: *"the child is still alone" (P8).*

It was further debated amongst all of the participants, that children within the private school setting do not necessarily have greater parent involvement but have greater exposure to reading at home. Half of the participants agreed with the perception that reading exposure and reading ability is higher in the independent school setting, due to the fact that the parents are in high-

profile jobs, therefore, their level of education is higher, which in-turn affects the manner in which they communicate with their children and the topics of conversation the children are exposed to: "*I wonder if the education of the parents who are involved in private schooling, maybe their education is more in line with the way they communicate with the children and the topics they discuss with the children is better than the absent parent who leaves the child with a guardian to look after for however many years." (P3).* However, not all participants agreed with this notion: the other four participants held the view that children from higher socio-economic status families are exposed to more screen time than adult conversation and so "*their babysitter is a screen" (P8).*

Resources

In spite of being an educator within an independent school, where all participants described having sufficient resources at their school for the teaching of reading, when asked what the educators needed more of in order to better teach reading, the consensus of responses fell into two categories: more resources and more training for the staff - *"We do Jolly phonics and we get them to read but the other stuff underneath that is a little blurry and we need training on that (P8).*

4.5. Description of the reading proficiency of the students within the foundation phase

A further aim of the research was to establish the reading proficiency of students from Grade R to Grade 3. The school, however, has to date not conducted any literacy assessments on the Grade R students. Therefore, results from the Grade R students were unavailable. Furthermore, the school conducted no standardised reading assessments on the students in 2019. Thus, the results outlined below are solely based on the data from the test results obtained by the school in November/December 2018.

The Grade 1 students participated in the Schonell Single Word Reading Test whilst the Grade 2 and 3 students participated in two tests: the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the New Group Reading Test (NGRT). The results of the Grade 2 and 3's on both tests will be displayed together in order to draw comparisons. The school has devised a method to interpret the results from the benchmark assessments on students' reading proficiency as displayed in Table 16 below.

Table 16.

Interpretation of the age equivalent score in comparison to chronological age.

Age equivalent score	Schonell Reading Test	NGRT
>15 months below age	Significantly below average	Significantly below average
10 – 15 months below age	Well below average	Well below average
4 – 9 months below age	Below average	Below average
3 months below – 3 months above age	-3 months low average Average +3 months high average	-3 months low average Average +3 months high average
4 – 9 months above age	Above average	Above average
10 – 15 months above age	Well above average	Well above average
16 – 21 months above age	Significantly above average	Significantly above average
22 – 27 months above age	Significantly above average	Significantly above average
28 – 33 months above age	Significantly above average	Significantly above average
>33 months above age	Significantly above average	Significantly above average

4.5.1 Grade 1 reading results

The Grade 1 students' reading ability was assessed by their classroom educators using the Schonell Single Word Reading Test. The reading test age bands range from 6 years to 12 years 6 months +. The youngest student in Grade 1 was recorded as being 6 years 11 months old whilst the oldest student in the Grade was recorded as being 7 years 11 months old. 49 Grade 1 students completed the assessments. The test was scored according to age equivalent norms per child by comparing the age equivalent with their chronological age. Figure 8 shows the proportion of Grade 1 children who scored within each age band on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test (Appendix H). However, as pointed out previously, this assessment is outdated and was developed in Australia therefore, the results should interpreted with caution.

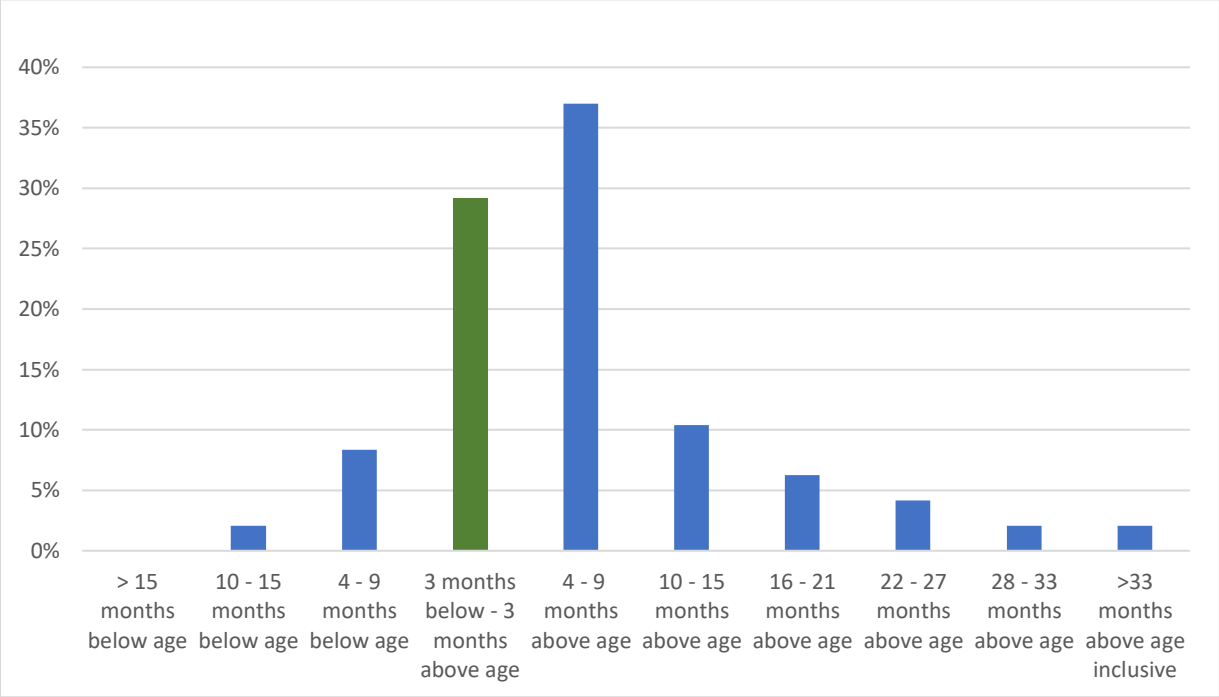


Figure 8. Graph depicting the proportion of Grade 1 students scoring within each age equivalent band on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test .

On the Schonell Single Word Reading Test the majority of students tested 4-9 months above the age norm, with more than 25% testing within the age norm.

The spread of the data as well as the mean and median for Grade 1 students is depicted in the box and whisker graph below.

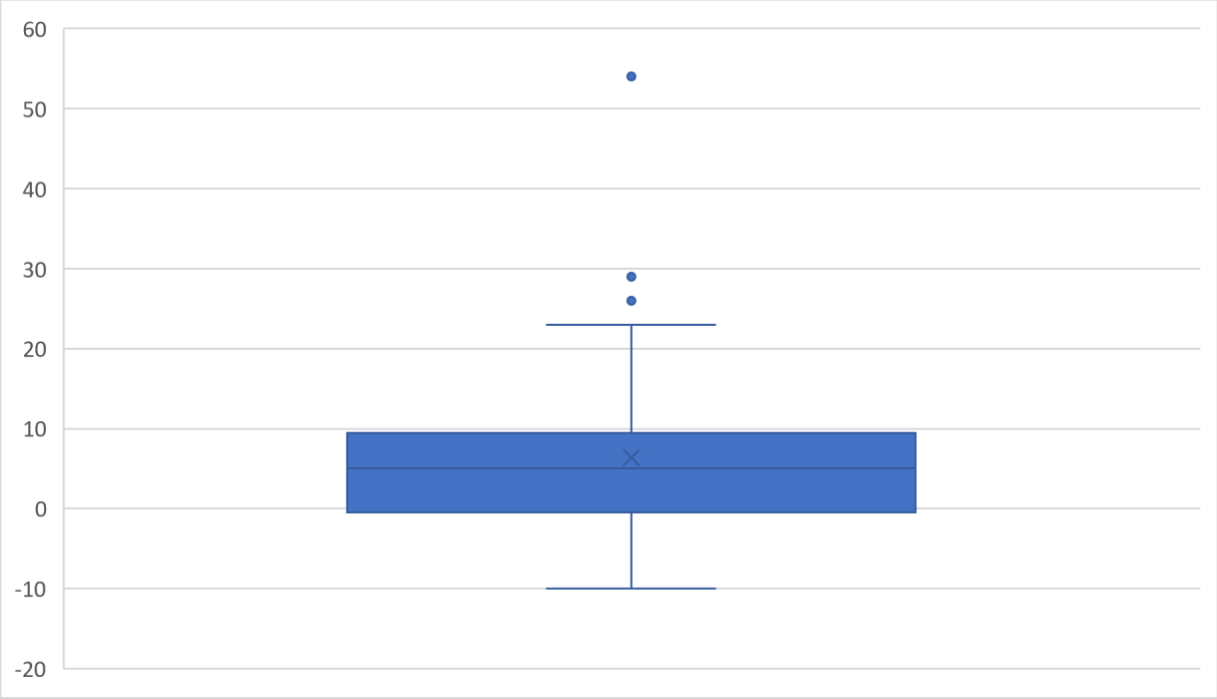


Figure 9. Graph depicting the mean, median and spread of Grade 1 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test.

Within the box and whisker graph three outlier scores were omitted in order to allow for a more accurate depiction of the data. The majority of the data lies below the median whereby the median is indicated by the line within the box. The mean has been calculated to be larger than the median indicating that the data is positively skewed. The indication that the data is positively skewed indicates that majority of the students present with reading abilities above the age norm.

4.5.2. Grade 2 reading results

The Grade 2 students reading ability was assessed by their classroom educators using the Schonell Single Word Reading Test as well as the digital New Group Reading Test (NGRT). As stated above these assessments were both developed in other countries and therefore, the

results should be interpreted with consideration of the fact that the tests were not standardised on the South African population. Whilst the Schonell is a single word reading test the NGRT tests passage comprehension, sentence completion and phonics in order to determine a reading age. The youngest student in Grade 2 was recorded as being 7 years 10 months old whilst the oldest student in the Grade was recorded as being 9 years old. 45 Grade 2 students completed the Schonell Single Word Reading Test whilst 47 Grade 2 students completed the NGRT assessment. The tests were scored according to age equivalent norms by comparing the age equivalent with their chronological age (Appendix I).

4.5.2.1 Grade 2 Results on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test

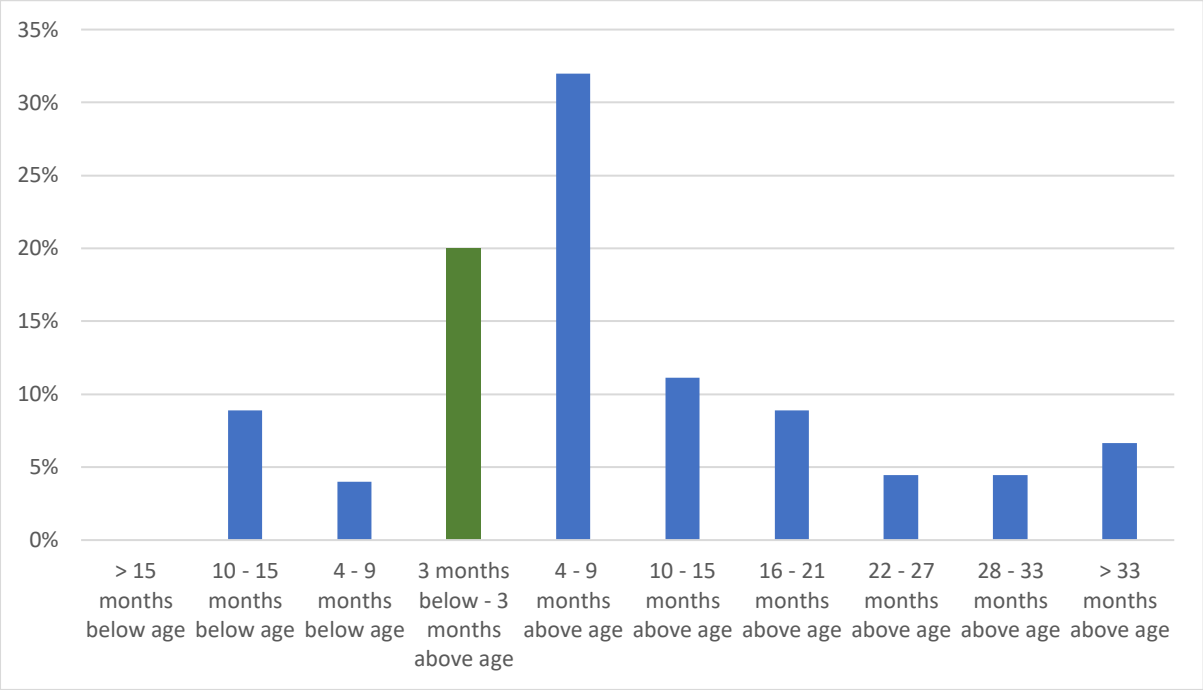


Figure 10. Graph depicting Grade 2 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test

On the Schonell Single Word Reading Test, the majority of Grade 2 students tested 4-9 months above the age norm, with 20% testing within the age norm. There is a notable increase in the

percentage of students scoring in the well below and significantly above brackets, resulting in a spike on the outer limits of the graph below.

The spread of the data as well as the mean and median for Grade 2 students on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test, is depicted in the box and whisker graph below.

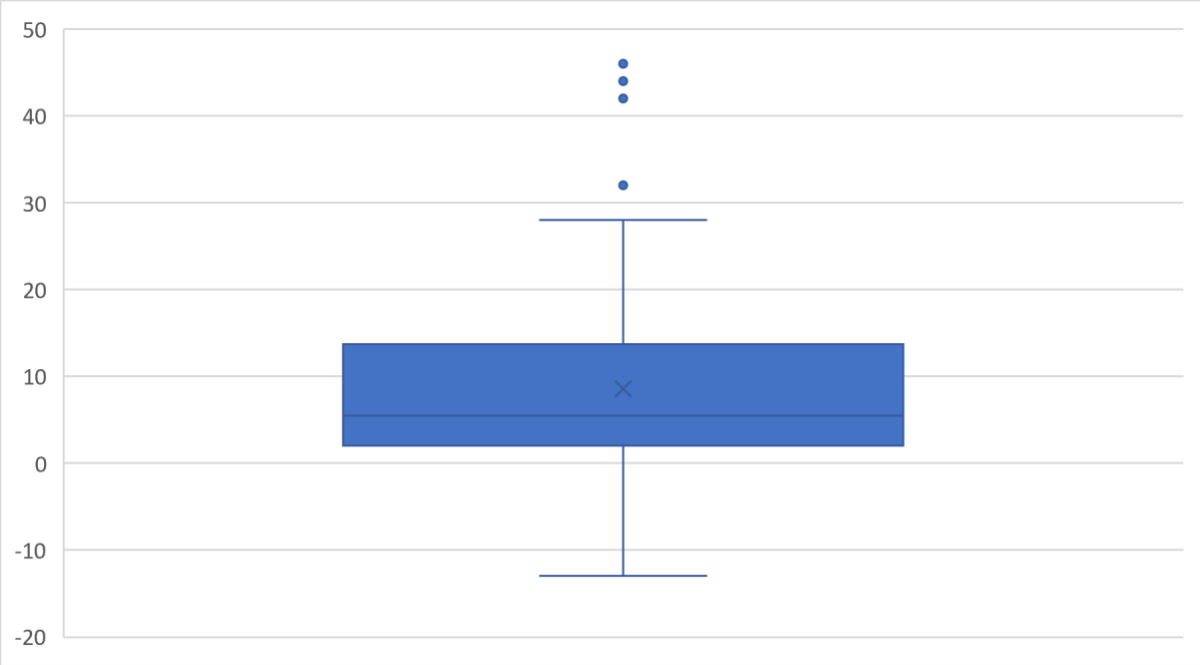


Figure 11. Graph depicting the mean, median and spread of Grade 2 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test.

Within the box and whisker graph of the Schonell test, four outlier scores were omitted in order to allow for a more accurate depiction of the data. As indicated above, the majority of the data lies above the median whereby the median is indicated by the line within the box. The mean has been calculated to be larger than the median indicating that the data is positively skewed. This indicates that the majority of the students present with reading abilities which are above the age norm.

4.5.2.1 Grade 2 Results on the New Group Reading Test (NGRT)

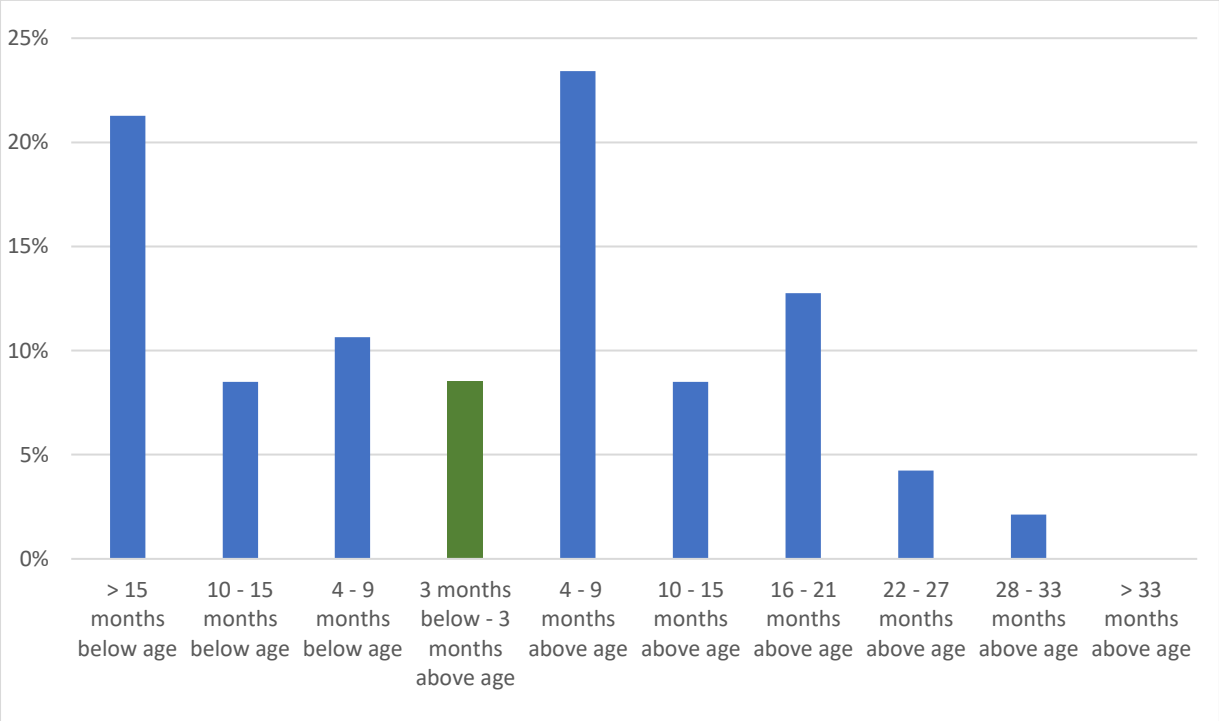


Figure 12. Graph depicting Grade 2 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the NGRT.

The NGRT scores are notably different from the Schonell reading scores. As opposed to the 20% of students who scored within the average range on the Schonell test, less than 10% scored within the average range on the NGRT. There is a significant increase in the percentage of children scoring in the significantly below their age norm band.

The spread of the data as well as the mean and median for Grade 2 students on the NGRT is depicted in the box and whisker graph below.

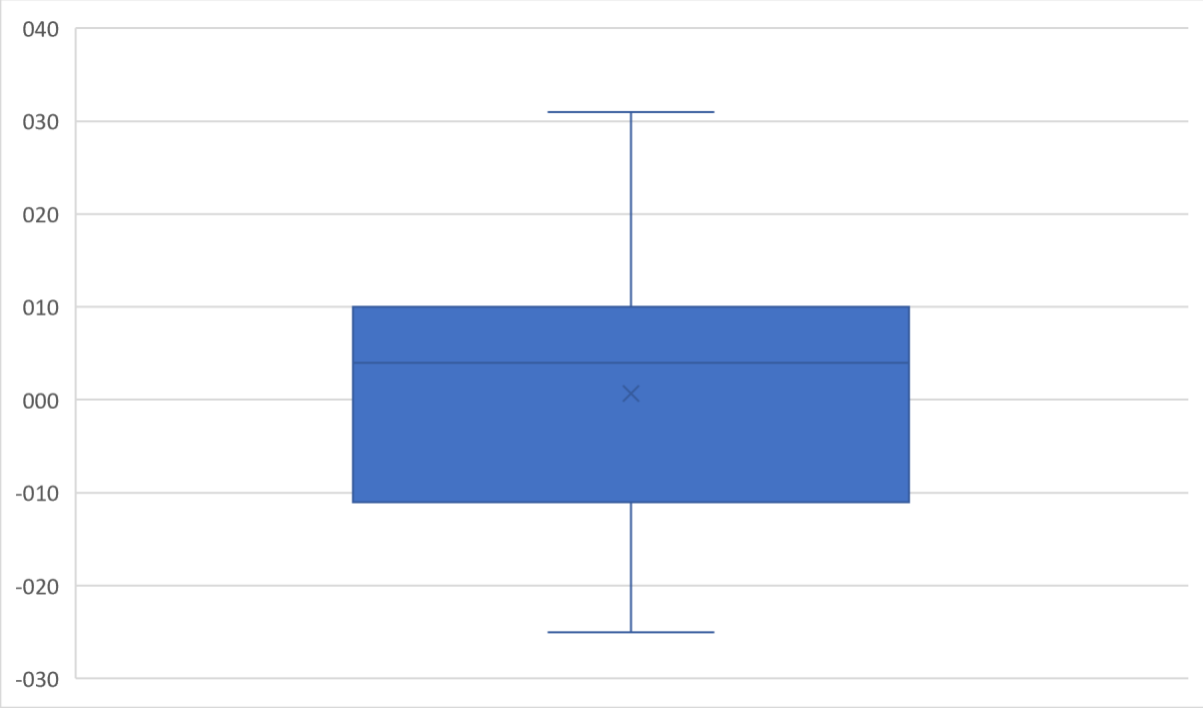


Figure 13. Graph depicting the mean, median and spread of Grade 2 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the NGRT.

Within the box and whisker graph of the NGRT the majority of the data lies below the median whereby the median is indicated by the line within the box and the mean by the x. The mean has been calculated to be of a lower value than the median indicating that the data is negatively skewed. This indicates that the majority of the students present with reading abilities which are below or on par with the age norm.

4.5.3. Grade 3 reading results

The Grade 3 students' reading ability was assessed by their classroom educators using the Schonell Single Word Reading Test as well as the digital New Group Reading Test (NGRT). Whilst the Schonell is a single word reading test the NGRT tests passage comprehension, sentence completion and phonics in order to determine a reading age. The youngest students in Grade 3 were recorded as being 8 years 9 months old whilst the oldest student in the Grade

was recorded as being 9 years 11 months old. 47 Grade 3 students completed both the reading assessments. The tests were scored according to age equivalent norms by comparing the age equivalent score with their chronological age (Appendix J).

4.5.3.1 Grade 3 results on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test

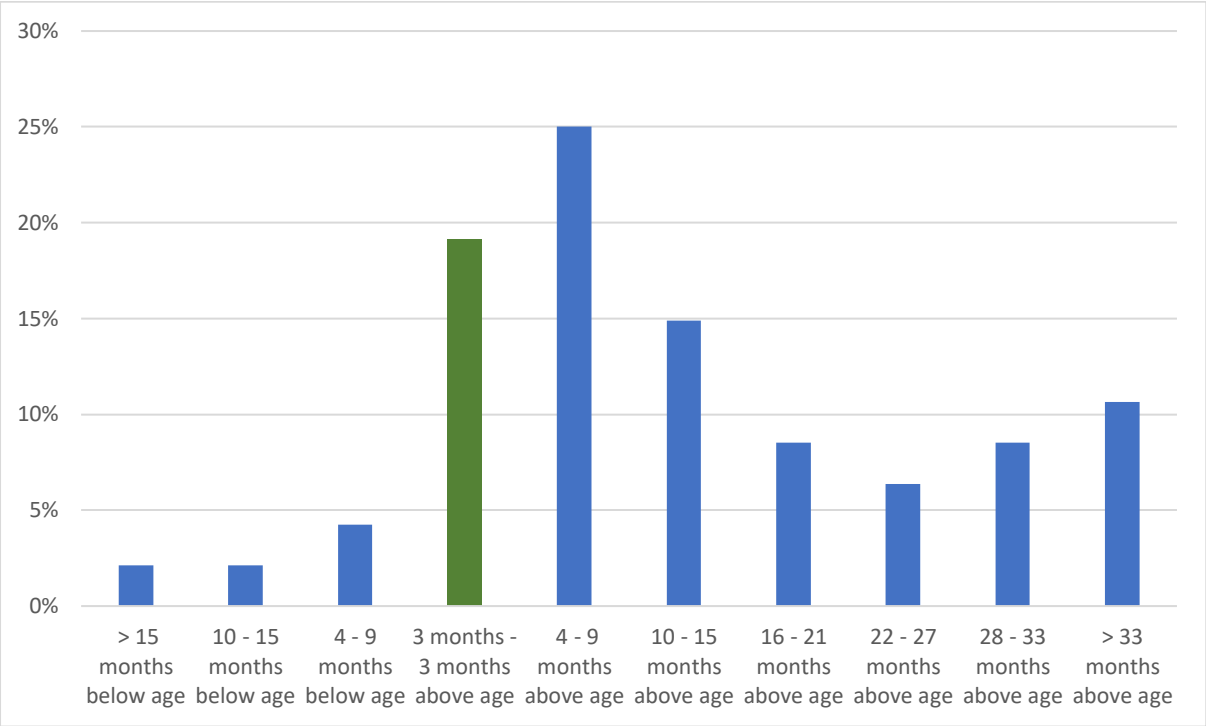


Figure 14. Graph depicting Grade 3 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test

On the Schonell Single Word Reading Test, the majority of Grade 3 students tested 4-9 months above the age norm, with 15% tested within the age norm. The majority of students appeared to score on or above the age equivalent for this test.

The spread of the data as well as the mean and median for Grade 3 students on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test, is depicted in the box and whisker graph below.

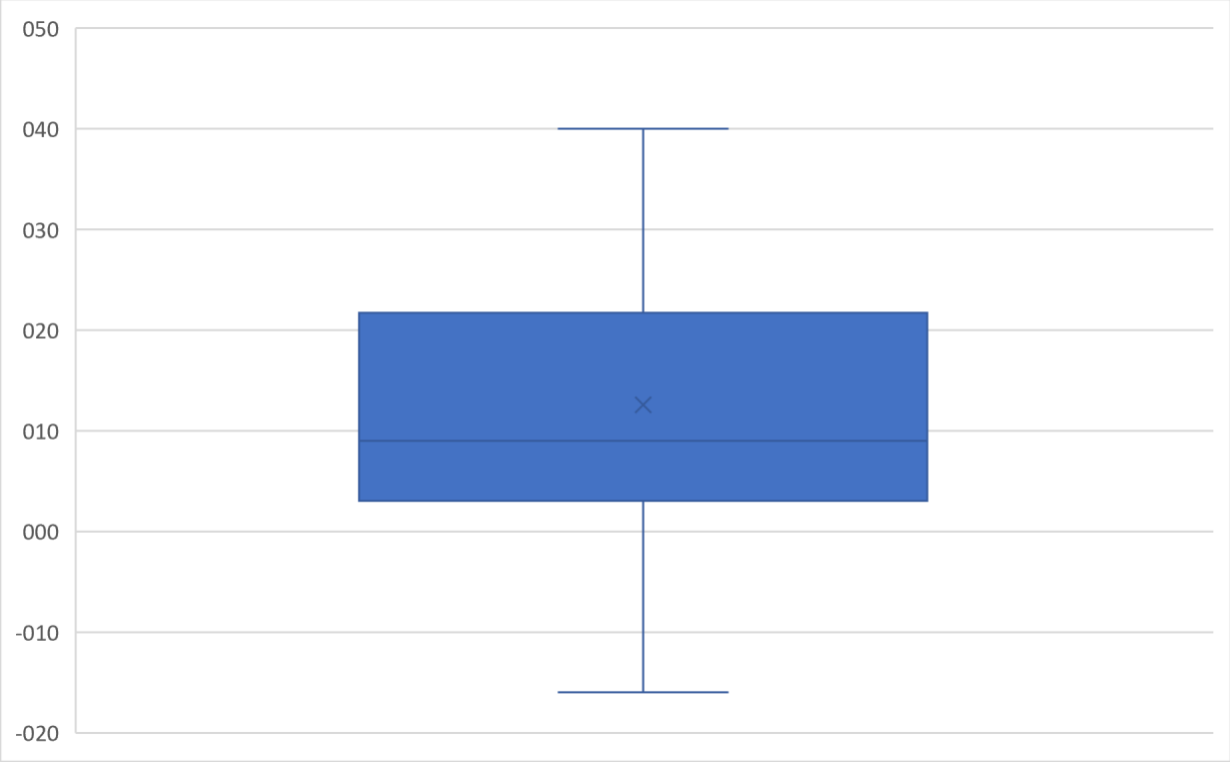


Figure 15. Graph depicting the mean, median and spread of Grade 3 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the Schonell test.

Within the box and whisker graph of the Grade 3 results on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test, the majority of the data lies above the median whereby the median is indicated by the line within the box. The mean (indicated by the x) has been calculated to be larger than the median indicating that the data is positively skewed. This indicates that the majority of the Grade 3 students present with reading abilities above their age norm.

4.5.3.1 Grade 3 results on the New Group Reading Test (NGRT)

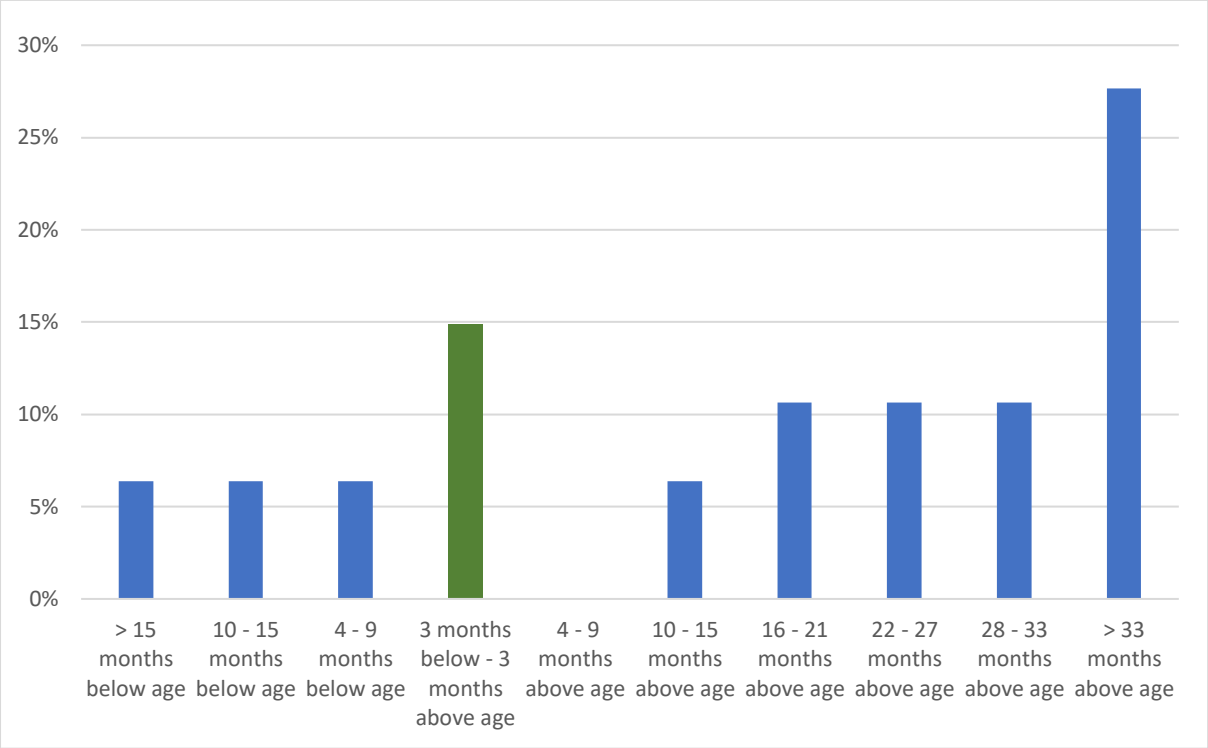


Figure 16. Graph depicting Grade 3 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the NGRT

The Grade 3 NGRT scores are notably different from the Schonell reading scores. As opposed to the 19% of students who scored within the average range on the Schonell, 15% scored within the average range in the NGRT. No students fell within the 4-9 months above average range. However, the majority of students fell within the significantly above average range.

The spread of the data as well as the mean and median for Grade 3 students on the NGRT is depicted in the box and whisker graph below.

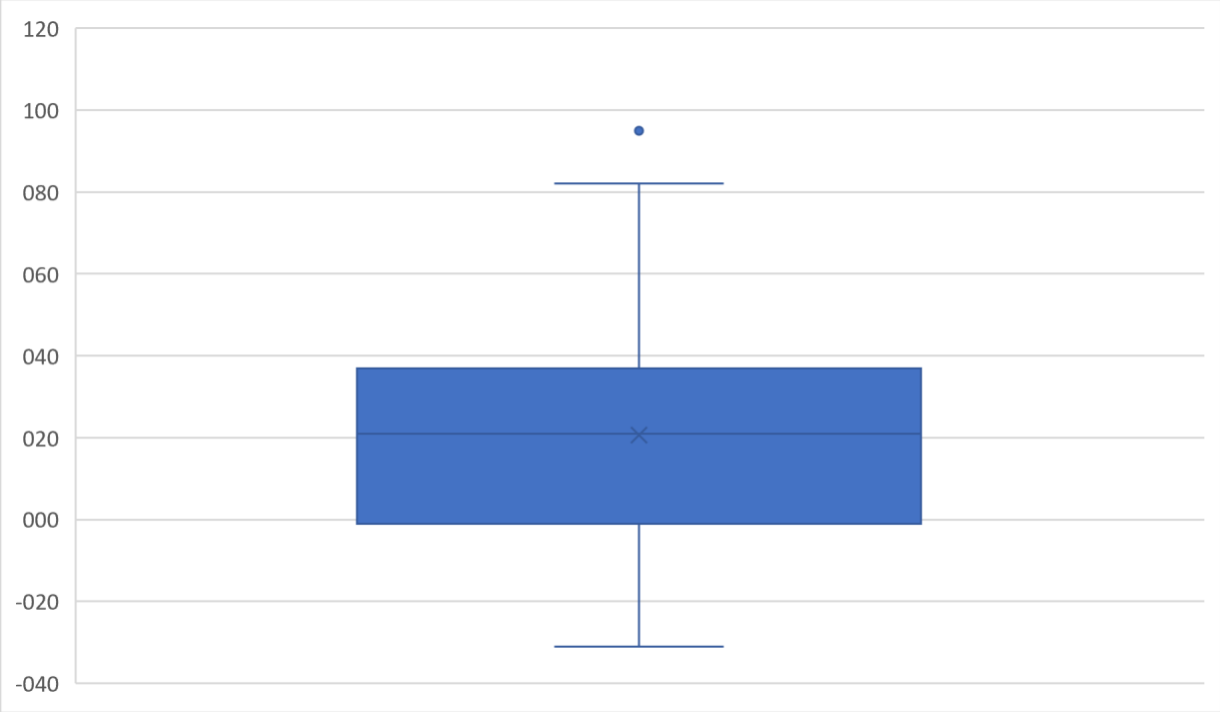


Figure 17. Graph depicting the mean, median and spread of Grade 3 students' reading abilities in comparison to age related norms on the NGRT.

Within the box and whisker graph of the NGRT, one outlier score was omitted in order to allow for a more accurate depiction of the data. As indicated above, the majority of the data lies below the median whereby the median is indicated by the line within the box. The mean has been calculated to be equal to the median indicating that the data is evenly distributed. This indicates that the students' achievements are evenly spread from significantly above average to average to significantly below average.

It is evident from the reading scores on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test that the majority of the students from Grade 1, 2, and 3 are scoring above the average range for their age. The majority of the students per Grade scored 4-9 months above their chronological age. However, a trend on the results of the Grade 2 and 3 students on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test in comparison to the NGRT, is that the number of students scoring below the average range for their age increases whilst the number of students scoring within the average

range for their age decreases and the number of students scoring above average for their age increases. The difference across the grades is tabulated in Table 17 below.

Table 17.

Proportion of Grade 2 and 3 students obtaining below average, average and above average age equivalent scores in comparison to chronological ages on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the NGRT.

Grade 2		
	Schonell	NGRT
Below Average	13%	41%
Average	20%	9%
Above Average	67%	50%
Grade 3		
	Schonell	NGRT
Below Average	8%	18%
Average	19%	15%
Above Average	75%	67%

It is clear from the table above that the majority of Grade 2 and 3 students obtained above average results on both the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the NGRT, but it is concerning that 41% of Grade 2 students obtained below average results on the NGRT.

4.6. Summary of Results

The aim of the study was to evaluate the foundation phase reading processes within an independent school in Johannesburg. The study aimed to determine the foundation phase educators' perceptions, knowledge and opinions regarding reading and the teaching of reading within their school. It aimed to explore the approach taken by the school to facilitate the teaching of reading as well as to determine the reading proficiency of the foundation phase

students based on the results obtained by the school through the administration of reading assessments conducted annually. Based on the above results the following was found:

The educators currently teaching in the foundation phase of an independent school in Johannesburg are all female and all have five or more years of experience in education. The main phonics program currently being implemented at the school is Jolly Phonics. However, it appears that only one educator displayed confidence in this specific approach. In the survey the educators indicated that they implement one phonics programme but also admitted to not implementing the programme in its entirety. The educators admitted within the focus group that they take an eclectic approach towards the teaching of reading whereby aspects from a range of programmes are used in accordance with the learners needs. Other factors relating to reading such as how reading is taught, how frequently various methods, techniques and activities are utilised in the classroom in the teaching of reading and the opinions on reading development are inconsistent. The educators experience pressure in ensuring that the students achieve good reading outcomes but demonstrate confusion in the methodology used to achieve success. Whilst the majority of the educators reported feeling good or comfortable in the teaching of reading on the survey, within the focus group a picture of uncertainty, dismay, pressure and educator confusion was evident. Contradictions were present between information obtained from the survey versus information provided by the educators in the focus group i.e. within the survey the educators outlined the frequency and manner in which they taught reading comprehension but informed the researcher in the focus group that they have limited understanding of the teaching of reading comprehension and reported not teaching reading comprehension.

Within the assessments conducted by the school annually on the children's reading proficiency, results on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test show that the majority of the students from Grades 1-3 score above average in their reading ability. However, when analysing the results of the NGRT which assesses passage comprehension, sentence completion and phonics, a less proficient picture of reading within the foundation phase was depicted as a larger number of students scored below average. Weaker scores in the NGRT is of particular interest when considering the discussion that the educators had during the focus group, regarding the fact that comprehension skills are not currently being taught as the educators currently have limited understanding of the teaching of comprehension skills. Despite the above, the overall status of reading within the independent school in Johannesburg is above average.

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion

Proficient reading is an important skill for every individual to be able cope on a day to day basis. However, in the South African education landscape there is a growing concern regarding the public schooling sector's ability to produce proficient readers and evidence currently supports the notion that the South African Education system is in crisis (Spaull, 2003). Alongside other factors, such as the number of students per class and the availability of resources varying from school to school, it is true that where possible, parents are making the decision to send their children to independent schools due to the assumption that the quality of education is better. Whilst there is concern about the reading statistics in the public schooling domain, there is currently little research on the status of reading within the independent schooling sector.

Fleisch (2008) reports that the majority of children in South Africa who are unable to read with fluency by the time they leave primary school, attend disadvantaged schools, whilst children who leave primary school as proficient readers attend well-resourced schools, thus pointing to an inequity in school systems and reading outcomes in South African schools. This research thus aimed to examine the status of reading and reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg, with further investigation into the educators' opinions and approaches towards reading. The results of the study have been summarized in chapter 4.

This chapter will comprise of sections. The sections will explore the sample, instruments and methodology used in the research. A discussion of the results of the survey and focus group, as well as the children's reading abilities as per the school assessments will follow. The chapter will conclude with sections discussing the implications of the study, limitations of the study, implications for future research and the conclusion of the research.

5.1. The research

The research was conducted in the foundation phase of an elite independent girls school in Johannesburg. Due to the study only taking place at one independent school a very small population sample was used. Only eight main curriculum educators participated in the study by completing the survey and participating in the focus group. The reading status of the children was analysed from data which the school had collected in 2018. No data was available from the school for 2019. Two reading assessments were used by the school to collect data namely, the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the New Group Reading Test (NGRT). Both the tests were developed in overseas countries and therefore, have not been standardised on the South African population. Furthermore, the data provided by the school in 2018 comprised of reading scores on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test for Grade 1, 2 and 3 and the reading scores on the New Group Reading Test (NGRT) for Grade 2 and 3 only. Despite including the Grade R educators in the study, the school did not have any reading data on the Grade R students, thus the reading proficiency for this group could not be analysed.

5.2. Survey and Focus group

The survey and focus group were conducted with eight participants. The content from the survey and the focus group were analysed in Chapter 4 and will be discussed under the relevant subheadings.

All of the educators currently teaching in the foundation phase of the independent school are female, aged 30 or older with five or more years of experience. All of the educators had completed a minimum of a university degree, with the majority studying in the field of

Foundation Phase Education. It was established that the majority of the educators who did not study Foundation Phase Education had completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Education. Van der Merwe and Nel (2012), state that one of the essential components which ensures students reach their potential in literacy is the formal training and experience of the educators. The survey showed that the educators who participated in this study were well trained and had sufficient experience to deliver adequate reading instruction.

5.2.1. Description of educator approach to reading and their perception of this.

It is a common misperception that any foundation phase teacher knows and understands the foundational building blocks/stages to reading. Despite the majority of the educators (5/8) describing feeling confident in the teaching of reading, many educators in this study, were uncertain of the exact stages of reading development. Chall (1983) describes reading as developing in stages and progressing from prereading to advanced reading, including the development of decoding, comprehension and critical evaluation. Only 4 of the 8 educators attempted to describe how reading develops and referred primarily to the decoding stage. The educators omitted any reference to the teaching of comprehension and critical evaluation, with all of the educators reporting that they do not teach reading comprehension, nor do they know how or when to begin the teaching of these skills. The effective teaching of reading requires the effective teaching of not just decoding skills but also comprehension skills (Pretoruis & Klapwijk, 2016). Educators need to understand that time spent teaching the mechanics of reading does not automatically develop effective readers who can comprehend and engage with the texts they read (Pretoruis & Klapwijk, 2016).

Educators expressed feelings of pressure and stress in teaching reading and cited the number of reading programs available as one of the sources of their stress. Generally, the educators are

overwhelmed by the numerous approaches to reading as they do not feel they have enough knowledge of all the approaches and thus feel pressure to implement a single program effectively. Within the focus group, the educators describe having too many tools with limited knowledge of how to implement them. Research shows that the quality of teaching is consistently identified as a predictor of student success thus insufficient knowledge by educators on reading approaches and tools can compromise their ability to deliver quality reading instruction (van der Merwe & Nel, 2012).

The majority of the educators stated having attended courses in professional development with a focus on reading, ranging from two hours of training to more than ten hours of training in a school year. This wide range of responses is of concern as the amount of training reported by educators varies by 8 hours owing to some educators spending significantly more time on learning about reading than others. It is a common assumption that knowlegable educators who approach reading from an evidence-based standpoint and create learning environments which are rich in print are able to prevent reading difficulties and promote a positive reading trajectory for children exposed to their practice (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016). This underscores the need for consistent professional development in reading for all educators, which was not a finding in this study.

When analyising the approach to reading within the independent school, there was inconsistency. The amount of time spent on reading within the average school week fluctuated significantly with the least time being 150 minutes and the most being 900 minutes. Skills, activities and tasks were seldom taught with the same frequency. These inconsistencies reflect confusion and uncertainity amongst the educators and shows that educators resort to their own discretion in prioritising certain skills above others. This inconsistency is of concern

considering the fact that Fleisch (2008) reports that reading development is directly linked to the amount of time provided for learning paired with consistent and effective instruction.

Educators reported that according to the phonological reading program being implemented in the school context that children are only compared to age norms. The educators were of the view that that some consideration of qualitative improvement needs to be acknowledged and included factors such as love of reading, a growth in confidence and reading fluency as being important.

5.2.2. Description of the implementation of a phonics program within the school and the educator perception thereof.

It is commonly believed that the implementation of a phonics program covers all aspects of teaching reading and is suitable for all children of varying abilities, i.e., the use of a phonics program is a formula for successful readers. This research study confirms that the implementation of a synthetic phonics instruction is a successful practice for early literacy development (Joshi, et al., 2009) as the results of the reading assessment confirmed average and above average reading ability in the majority of the Grade 1, 2 and 3 students. However, amongst the educators sampled, it was commonly agreed that one specific phonic program is not suited to every child and as a result, the use of one program only is insufficient to meet the instructional requirements of all learners. This is confirmed in this study, as not all students achieved average or above average scores on the reading assessments. In a study by Cooter and Cooter (2004), the notion that children are forced into learning reading through a one size fits all approach regardless of reading ability or need, is explored. They point out that although having a reading program is beneficial in the stabilizing of reading instruction within a school,

it is essential that the program is used as a resource and not a substitution for educator judgement or decision making (Cooter & Cooter, 2004).

All of the educators reported in the survey that the Jolly Phonics program is being implemented at their school. Jolly Phonics is described as a fun, systematic approach that was developed with the aim of developing literacy skills (Ariati, Padmadewi, & Suarnajaya, 2018). However, at least half of the educator's state that they do not implement all aspects of the program or make use of the program materials as trained to do as *"the weaker students do not grasp the concept".* The shortfalls of the program as well as problems with the pace of the program, were discussed by the teachers in detail. Concern around the pace of the program could be relevant when considering that the porgram was developed in the United Kingdom and set to be implemented from age 4-5 which is a year earlier then the age at which South Africa's schooling system starts in Grade R.

The educators described perceiving pressure at being forced to make use of a single phonics program describing being exposed to many other methods of teaching reading over the span of their careers. Educators explained that they implement aspects from various programs in order to find the best approach for their students as a phonics approach cannot be *"one size fits all".*

Only one of the educators felt that the phonics program being implemented was effective specifically for children who are reaching and/or are above the average reading potential. The inconsistencies and range in the educator's opinions and feelings were thus in keeping with the statement by Pretorius et al (2016), that reading development is a broad subject and can be approached from various perspectives which range in validity, thus making the instruction and approaches to teaching reading suseptible to crazes and trends.

5.2.3. Description of educator strategies and intervention strategies in assisting children with reading

The educators' perceptions of children who may be having difficulty with reading are inconsistent with their views on the number of children who have difficultly with reading ranging i.e. One edcuators reported 86% of her class requiring assistance with reading and another educator reported that only 12,5% of her class requires assistance with reading. Furthermore, of concern is the fact that the number of children who receive assistance with reading at times exceeded the number of children who required assistance i.e. Depite the 86% of the students in the class needing assitance with reading the educator reported that 100% of the class are currently receiving assistance with reading.

The educators described having a specialized professional available on site to assist students who have diffculty with reading. However, when noticing a student is having difficulty with reading all of the educators reported first doing additional individual reading with the student with reading difficulty, 88% of the educators call on assisstance from the parents to support reading at home, 75% enrol the child in a specialized reading intervention and only 50% of the educators reported referring the student to the specialized professional when noticing a difficulty with reading. The only approach used less frequently then the referral to a specialised professional is the educators waiting to see if perfromance improves with maturity. It is of concern that a specialized professional is the approach which is the second to last approach used by the educators.

South Africa's public schools take part in numerous local and international assessments which include The *Annual National Assessments (ANA's),* The *Progress in International Literacy*

Study (PIRLS), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the *Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMCEQ).* However, when asking the educators regarding the assessments that take place with their students in an independent school only 15% of the educators reported taking part in institutional benchmark assessments, whilst the majority of the educators reported using ongoing classroom assessments as the main form of assessment. Inconsistency existed even in the frequency of these ongoing assessment measures as the educators varied in how often the children were assessed with 62% assessing the children weekly and the remainder split between assessing daily, monthly or fortnightly.

It was apparent within the focus group that the educators have mixed views regarding the assessment of reading. It was communicated that there was a need to review the manner in which the children's reading is assessed and that the emphasis cannot always be placed on age equivalent scores. The educators described pressure to ensure their students improve and score accordingly but displayed anxiety around the fact that often a growth in confidence, fluency or love of reading is not measured in this format of testing.

It was of notable concern to the educators that the school is focused on scores and ensuring that children are not just meeting their age equivalent requirements but exceeding them as opposed to prioritising the child's love of reading, growth in confidence to read and efforts to read with more fluency.

It may be conjectured that this situation arises from parent expectations of the independent schooling system. Parents have high expectations of the schools that their children attend and therefore a competitiveness between the schools to attract students exists (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015). Immelman & Roberts (2015), emphasise that the intensity of the competitiveness within the independent schools is due to the current market. In a range of

studies, academic performance was repeated as a key factor which affects parents' decisions on school choice, alongside school reputation, facilities, class size, environment and discipline (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015). It can be speculated that educators in this sector may feel pressure to deliver excellent learning outcomes. In this study, educators indicated that there was an over-reliance on scores, yet this was not borne out by the evidence: standardised reading tests were performed in 2018 and were not scheduled in 2019.

5.2.4. Description of the setting in which children learn within the independent school including resources available.

Between 1994 and 2012 the number of independent schools in South African increased by more than three times, from 518 to 1571, indicative of a greater number of students attending these schools due to parents' faith in the public schooling system waning. (Immelman & Roberts-Lombard, 2015).

School context is of importance because it affects a child's academic success. To date, the majority of the available research regarding the status of reading within South Africa, places emphasis on schools in which reading development is compromised by a host of factors, including large class sizes, poorly trained educators and a lack of resources . This research did not take place in a compromised school environment. Class sizes ranged between 23 and 25, teachers are well-trained with more than five years of experience and 100% of the edcuators stated that the school has sufficient resources. According to Fleisch (2008) children who leave primary school as porficient readers attended well-resourced schools. However, Zimmerman (2017) states that it is equally important to study schools where literacy skills are developing successfully.

The educators of the independent school indicated awareness that context influences reading development. However, the educators dicsussed concerns around parent involvement in this context, stating that the children are *"just as abandoned."* Zimmerman (2017) reports that within advantaged areas, parents are concerned about their children's education, show interest in their children's work and provide access to resources to ensure that their children are exposed to reading as early as practically possible. The educators sampled in this study did not share this view. It was their opinion that whilst the parents of the children who attended priviledged schools have money, the parents frequently work in high profile jobs, meaning that the level of parent involvement remains limited. It was reported that children often stay at school until late, attend after care, have an aupair or are exposed to more *"screen"* time as opposed to parental involvement. It was said that the childrens have *"a screen as their babysittter".* It was further dicsussed that due to parents being in high powered jobs and paying significant amounts of money in school fees the educators perceive a level of pressure and stress to make sure that the children perform well academically.

Within the school, the largest number of children per class was recorded as 25. Within the foundation phase only 2% of the children were recorded as having difficultly understanding English. The small class sizes and the overall English proficency of the students provides them with a supportive context for learning as opposed to a barrier. However, in spite of this, the research showing improved school performance could not be directly linked to the availabilty of resources, but rather the ability of the school to convert resources to outcomes (Van der Berg, 2008).

There is no doubt that resources are of crucial importance in the development of reading. In addition to attending a library on the school premises, the majority of the educators also

reported having a library of books within their classrooms, which the children interact with, often on a daily basis and at times take books home. Within the focus group the educators discussed their most effective techniques and resourced used in the teaching of reading as being: the use of multisensory techniques, comprehension boxes, white boards, word boxes and the Rave-O reading program.

Research has further indicated that a correlation exists between children's reading achievement and the child's participation in activites involving literacy prior to beginning school (Van Staden & Bosker, 2014). The importance of parent knoweldge and training on the teaching of phonics in order to achieve consistency at home was raised, however, very little homework is provided to the children with an average of bewteen 15-30 minutes of homework being given to the children per week. This is of importance as Van Staden and Bosker (2014) state that it is possible to consider reading as a cultural practice as children's first exposure to reading and writing is initiated in their homes. The practice of reading must,therefore,be encouraged in the home environment and the provision of daily reading homework can be taken under review to inculcate children with a culture of reading.

5.2.5. Description of the reading proficiency of the students within the foundation phase

In 2018, the students took part in an assessment on their reading abilities. The Grade 1's were tested using the Schonell Single Word Reading Test whilst the Grade 2 and 3 students were tested using the Schonell Single Word Reading Test as well as the New Group Reading Test (NGRT). The scores and spread of reading proficency was presented in detail in Chapter 4. No testing took place in the 2019 academic year and no test results are available for the Grade R students due to no testing being conducted.

There is a significant and concerning difference between the spread of scores in the Schonell Single Word Reading Test in comparison to the NGRT which tests comprehension, with more favourable outcomes being achieved in the former compared to the latter. Across Grade 2 and 3 a total of 21% of the students scored below average in the Schonell Single Word Reading Test in comparsion to the NGRT comprehension test where, amongst the same group of students, 59% scored below average. A additional 38% of students scored below average in the comprehesion testing compared to the single word testing across the Grade 2 and 3 students. In Grade 2 the number of students scoring below average increased by 28% from the Schonell Single Word Reading Test to the NGRT and in Grade 3 the number of students scoring below average increased by 10% from the Schonell Single Word Reading Test to the NGRT. The scores are of additional concern when consideration is given to the research that shows that the majority of children being educated in South Africa are unable to read for comprehension by the end of Grade 4, with almost a third of those remaining functionally illiterate by the end of Grade 6 (Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray, & Spaull, 2016). The importance of reading comprehension and instruction in comprehension skills is imperative in all educational settings. Reading comprehension is when meaning is established within a text (Ahmadi, Ismail, & Abdullah, 2013). When surveyed, educators in this study did not include comprehension as a stage of reading and they indicated that they did not instruct their students in comprehension skills. This may account for the discrepancy evident in their outcomes on the two assessment measures: students fared better on a test concerning the mechanics of reading, rather than on the comprehension of what was read. Ahmadi, Ismail and Abdullah (2013), describe reading comprehension as an essential skill for learners to establish but it remains one of the domains which educators implement the least.

Furthermore, it was noted that across the grades the number of children scoring within the average range slowly declines with more children beginning to read above the average age as they get older. However, the number of children who read below average across the grades is consistent with no significant change in the percentages. This indicates that the current curriculum does not assist in building reading abilities for students who find literacy skills challenging. One educator described this as "*we have seven children who are going very far and we have a whole class, a bulk who are now anxious to read and a group of weak children who have no clue."*

It is evident from the focus group discussion and the varying results between the two tests that whilst the majority of the students remain above average for their age in decoding of words in isolation, reading comprehension is an area of difficulty with the educators admitting to not teaching the skill or knowing when the children are expected to grasp the skill. One educator admitted to teaching decoding but wondering when the decoding becomes comprehension. Despite the fact that comprehension is considered the ultimate goal in the teaching of reading, research indicates that educators are spending the majority of their time teaching the mechanical skills of decoding above the teaching of meaning and comprehension (Pretoruis & Klapwijk, 2016).

Some may make the assumption that the independent schooling sector does not experience challenges with reading as public sector schools have been shown to do, but this research indicates otherwise. Whilst the difficulties may not be on the same scale as experienced in public schools, similar trends to those observed in public schools were noted in this study. This points to a need for educators in both sectors to collaborate on the reading process and to share knowledge, resources and expertise. Regardless of the educational setting i.e. public or private

it is a national educational imperative to make South African children as literate as their global counterparts.

5.3. Limitations of the study

This study was conducted within a single independent school in Johannesburg. The results are only representative of one independent school and cannot be generalized to all independent schools. Furthermore, this study drew on a small sample of participants (N=8) and their views may not reflect the views of other educators in the sector. This study also used reading data from a limited population (N=143) and it is not known whether the status of reading may vary significantly across various independent schools. A further limitation of the study was the fact that more recent results of reading tests were not available, and not all students took the same tests. The Grade R children did not participate in any testing, whilst the Grade 1's only did the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the Grade 2 and 3's did both the Schonell Single Word Reading Test and the NGRT. No data was available on any phonological awareness testing. Another limitation was that the study was based on foundation phase learners and this prohibited comparisons with the PIRLS 2016 study where reading is assessed in Grade 5 students. Furthermore, this study was conducted at an all-girls school, so results cannot be generalized to boys, so this study does not give an inclusive account of reading skills in foundation phase students. Considering that the PIRLS 2016 study shows that reading skills are gendered with girls outscoring boys, a study conducted in an all-girls school might present an inflated account of reading abilities in foundation phase students, which do not represent this population as a whole.

5.4. Theoretical and practical implications of the study

The study concerned itself with the status of reading within the independent schooling sector. The study explored the reading proficiency of students within the foundation phase as well as educator's approaches, opinions and practices towards the teaching of reading.

The findings of the study revealed that there is significant educator confusion concerning the teaching of reading. The educators described being forced into a *"one size fits all"* approach with seven of the eight participants admitting to not implementing such an approach in its entirety. The educators are experiencing high levels of stress and pressure due to parental expectation, school fees and the demand for high levels of academic achievement for students who attend the school. Furthermore, the reading assessments conducted on the students within the foundation phase indicated notable variation in the performances on a single word reading test in comparison to performances in reading comprehension.

The notably higher fallout in reading comprehension can be related back to the concern regarding reading comprehension in the public schooling sector indicating that, despite parents' assumptions and common-held beliefs in South African society, the independent schooling sector presents with similar challenges in reading, just on a smaller scale.

The reasons for children's difficulty in the comprehension of reading must be explored further. This study indicated that the educators were not teaching reading comprehension and confessed to not knowing how or when reading comprehension develops. The educators admitted to "forgetting" how reading develops since studying the stages at university and requested additional, specialized and focused training on how to improve their approach to reading, and to teaching comprehension skills in particular.

Perhaps the status of reading and the alarming reading comprehension findings documented in South Africa can be attributed to the lack of follow-up training for educators on the foundation blocks of reading development and instructional methods. Research indicates that reading success is directly linked to effective reading instruction and educator knowledge and this was reflected in this study. A shift in focus appears to be required from the fads and fashions of phonics programs and approaches in teaching reading to the effective training of educators in order to equip educators to develop successful readers in all contexts, regardless of the child's socio-economic status. Educators from both public and private sectors need to come together to address the reading process so that this nation's learners may become proficient readers.

5.5. Directions for future research

It is recommended that future research on the status of reading within the private schooling sector be conducted on a larger sample. This sample should include boys and girls and should be drawn from a range of independent schools. It would be of value to assess Grade 5 learners from the independent school sector so that direct comparisons can be made to the PIRLS 2016 study. Educator input on the challenges within the teaching of literacy is of critical importance due to the significant role educators play in developing literacy skills for children. Thus, a larger survey of educators from the independent school sector could yield valuable insights which may allow for additional training and input for educators in order to ease the anxiety linked with the teaching of reading and ensure optimal methods and opportunities for children to become good readers.

Additional research on the reading proficiency of children in the private schooling sector is necessary since if those factors which contribute to successful reading outcomes are identified,

then these may be utilized in the various schooling settings in order to improve the status of reading in South Africa.

5.6. Conclusion

The research established that within an independent school in Johannesburg which implements Jolly Phonics, the children's reading proficiency is mostly positively skewed. 61% of the students in Grade 1, 62% of students in Grade 2 and 75% of students in Grade 3 are currently reading above the average range for their age on the Schonell Single Word Reading Test. 50% of the Grade 2 students and 67% of Grade 3 students scored above average for the comprehension of reading in the NGRT. Within the South Africa educational landscape these statistics may be considered to demonstrate successful reading in comparison to the alarming statistics within the public schooling sector. However, as in the public schooling sector reading comprehension remains an area in which students and educators alike do not show enough confidence or knowledge.

The educators within the independent school were all female with five or more years of experience in education. However, both the survey and focus group responses revealed inconsistencies. Significant confusion exists in instructional methods and the use of program material which has resulted in the educators using their own discretion in how skills are taught, how frequently skills are taught and the prioritizing of various skills. The educators did not show agreement on the manner in which the school manages reading and whilst trained in phonics programs and indicating the validity of a phonics program, the educators do not implement the program with the materials as trained.

In a school where there are inconsistencies in the manner in which reading is taught, it is to be expected that the status of reading will become comprised. Whilst the majority of the students are scoring above average at present a significant number of students score below average. The current curriculum is not one in which the students who are having difficulty with reading show improvement over the years and this situation cannot be left unattended.

Whilst the statistics on reading within one independent school are significantly better than what appears to be the case in the public schooling sector, children and educators alike continue to experience confusion, pressure, anxiety and failure within the literacy domain. A national, collaborative effort and more research is required to address this situation.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Certificate of Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Du Toit

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H19/06/38**
PROJECT TITLE	An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Miss D Du Toit
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Human and Community Development/
DATE CONSIDERED	21 June 2019
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved
EXPIRY DATE	06 October 2022

DATE 07 October 2019 **CHAIRPERSON** _____ (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Dr H Jordaan and Dr A Mupawose

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 resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ **Signature**

_____/_____/_____ **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix B: School permission letter



Dear Head of School

My name is Demi Du Toit and I am a faculty Masters' student in the Speech Pathology and Audiology department at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of my study, I am undertaking a research project titled: *An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg.*

As part of my research project, I would like to hereby request permission to conduct the study on your school premises. I would like to request your permission to:

- Invite the foundation phase educators to serve as participants in my study through the completion of a survey and participation in a focus group
- To review the performance results of the children from Grade 0-3 (with parental consent) on the reading assessments administered by the school
- Review the implementation of the phonics program currently being utilized by the foundation phase educators.

The survey will be provided to each participant for completion with and they will be given one week to complete it. Following collection of the completed surveys a focus group with the participants will take place in the week following. The focus group will take place for 30 minutes after the school day on the school premises, on a day which is suitable for all participants.

Neither the school nor the participants will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not those not willing to participate. All information obtained and collected will be kept strictly confidential with all entities remaining anonymous. None of the research documents require any personal details from the children, teachers or the school.

The survey will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for any personal or identifying information, and the information provided will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. At the conclusion of the study, overall results will be written up in a research report and will be available to you through contacting of the University of Witwatersrand, Speech Pathology and Hearing Therapy department or will be available online through the university library website.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

Researcher: Demi du Toit (dutoitdemi@gmail.com; 082 450 6972)

Research Supervisor: Heila Jordaan (Heila.Jordaan@wits.ac.za; 011 717 4571)
Anniah Mupawose (Anniah.Mupawose@wits.ac.za; 011 717 457

SPEECH PATHOLOGY & AUDIOLOGY
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Dear School,

Thank you for taking the time to consider the possibility of the study: *"An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg."* being researched by Demi Du Toit taking place on your premises and using data previously obtained by the school.

Please read the statements below, tick the relevant response and sign your consent should you agree.

		Yes	No
1.	The school has read and understood the Information Sheet	✓	
2.	The school has been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered accordingly	✓	
3.	All information gathered will be kept confidential by the researcher	✓	
4.	The data may be used in the writing of a research report which will become available from the University of Witwatersrand	✓	
5.	The school agrees to the research taking place on the premises	✓	
6.	The school agrees to the above-mentioned use of data for the study.	✓	

Mrs M Raines
Head: St Margaret's
Date: 9/8/2019

School Signature — Date: 8/8/2019

Researcher Signature — Date: 08/08/2019

Appendix C: Educator Information Letter



Dear Educator,

My name is Demi Du Toit and I am a faculty Masters' student in the Speech Pathology and Audiology department at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of my study, I am undertaking a research project titled: *An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg.*

As part of my research project, I would like to invite you to take part in my research study through the:

- Completion of a survey in relation to reading development, instruction and practice within your classroom and school.
- Participation in a focus group discussion based on the line of questioning from the survey

The survey will be provided to each participant for completion and you will be given one week to complete it. Following collection of the completed surveys a focus group with the participants will take place in the week following. The focus group will take place for 30 minutes after the school day on the school premises, on a day which is suitable for all participants. With your permission, I would also like to take an auditory recording of the focus group using a Dictaphone.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this research, and there are no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The survey will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else.

Please be advised that although I, as the researcher, will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data obtained from the focus group, the nature of focus groups prevent the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. At the conclusion of the study, overall results will be written up in a research report and will be available to you through contacting of the University of Witwatersrand, Speech Pathology and Hearing Therapy department or will be available online through the university library website.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

Researcher: Demi du Toit (dutoitdemi@gmail.com; 082 450 6972)

Research Supervisor: Heila Jordaan (Heila.Jordaan@wits.ac.za; 011 717 4571)
Anniah Mupawose (Anniah.Mupawose@wits.ac.za; 011 717 4571)

Appendix D: Educator Consent Form



Dear Educator,

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in the study:
"*An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg."* being researched by Demi Du Toit.

Please read the statements below, tick the relevant response and sign your consent should you agree to be part of the study.

		Yes	No
1.	I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet		
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.		
3.	I will complete the survey associated with this study		
4.	I will attend and participate in a focus group		
5.	The focus group may be recorded for data collection purposes		
6.	The researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report		
7.	My participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason		
8.	All information gathered will be kept confidential by the researcher		
9.	To respect the privacy of my fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.		
10.	The data may be used in the writing of a research report and will become available from the University of Witwatersrand		

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

Appendix E: Parent Information Letter Issued by the school

25 November 2019

Dear St Margaret's Parents,

"Reading is in crisis" is a term frequently heard and used amongst parents, educators and schools within South Africa. When looking at the current statistics regarding reading efficacy within South Africa one cannot help but be alarmed. Roedean School (SA) is pleased to announce that in order to ensure that we as a school maintain a high level of reading success, our in-house speech therapist, Demi Du Toit, has opted to conduct her masters' study about reading at our school.

Demi Du Toit is a Masters' student in the Speech Pathology and Audiology department at the University of Witwatersrand. As part of her study, she is undertaking a research project titled: *An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg.* This letter aims to inform you of the study taking place at the school through a collaboration with both the school and the educators. Demi has Roedean's consent to make use of anonymous school data which pertains to reading and was collected by the school in 2018 for use in her study. The data collected comprises of reading scores from assessments conducted in class by the educators.

Only Demi, as the researcher will have access to the information mentioned above. All information obtained and collected is kept strictly confidential with all entities remaining anonymous. None of the research documents or data provided for the study contain any personal details from the children, teachers or the school.

If you have any additional questions about or objections to this research, feel free to contact Demi on the details listed below. At the conclusion of the study, overall results will be written up in a research report and will be available through contacting of the University of Witwatersrand, Speech Pathology and Hearing Therapy department or will be available online through the university library website. Furthermore, Demi will be providing extensive feedback to the school following the completion of the study for us to continue to improve and progress as a school of high academic success.

If you have any queries regarding the ethical procedures of this study, please don't hesitate to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za

Researcher: Demi du Toit (dutoitdemi@gmail.com; 082 450 6972)

Research Supervisor: Heila Jordaan (Heila.Jordaan@wits.ac.za; 011 717 4571)
Anniah Mupawose (Anniah.Mupawose@wits.ac.za; 011 717 4571

Yours sincerely,

Ms G Boltman
Headmistress: Junior School

Appendix F: Schools permission letter for conducting of assessments

Dear Parents

Part of our continuous assessment procedures involve various standardized testing that give us progressive benchmarks to ensure that your child is performing at an age and grade appropriate level. Any information gathered will be used collaboratively for necessary school and classroom interventions.

These tests will be conducted at various points throughout your daughter's Junior School years and will provide us with relevant progression standards.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter by signing consent and returning it to the school.

Pupil's First Name and Surname …….

Grade / Form …….

Parent/Guardian Name ……

Signature ……..

Date …….

Ms G Boltman
Headmistress: Junior School

Appendix G: Survey

EDUCATOR SURVEY: *An evaluation of the status of reading instruction, assessment and children's reading proficiency within an independent school in Johannesburg.*

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Are you male or female?

- Male
- Female

2. How old are you in 2019?

- – 25 years
- 25 – 29 years
- 30 – 39 years
- 40 – 49 years
- 50 – 59 years
- 60 +

3.a. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?

- Did not complete high school
- Matric certificate
- Completed a university degree
- Completed an honours degree
- Completed a masters degree
- Completed a doctorate

3.b. What as your major/main area of study at university?

- Foundation Phase Education
- Intermediate Phase Education
- Senior Phase Education
- Further Education and Training (FET)
- Other

3.c. If you selected "other" did you complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)?

- Yes
- No

4. How many years have you been teaching in total?

_____ years

5. How many hours in 2018 did you spend in professional development that targeted reading?

- 0 hours
- 1-2 hours
- 2-4 hours
- 4-6hours
- 6-8 hours
- 8-10 hours
- More than 10 hours

6. How do you feel about teaching reading in your school?

- Don't like it
- Need some guidance
- Ok
- Good
- Confident

7. How many students are in your class?

_____ students in the class

8. How many students in your class have difficulties with understanding English?

_____ students in the class

9.a. How many students in your class require assistance with reading?

_____ students in the class

9.b. How many students in your class receive assistance with reading?

_____ students in the class

APPROACH TO READING

11. In a typical school week how much time do you spend on teaching reading/ reading instruction or activities of reading with the students?

_____ minutes per week

12. When completing teaching of reading/reading instruction or reading activities how often do you:
(Tick the column which best applies to your current practice)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Teach reading as a whole class activity?				
Create small groups of children with the same abilities?				
Create small groups of children with mixed abilities?				
Make use of individualized instruction for reading?				
Allow students to work independently on an assigned task?				

13. Do you have sufficient resources for reading at your school?

- Yes
- No

14. Do you feel that context (community, culture or demographic) influence reading development?

- Yes
- No

15. With your class how often do you do the following?
(Tick the column which best applies to your current practice)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Read aloud to students				
Ask students to read aloud				
Ask students to read silently				
Teach decoding skills				

Teach new vocabulary				
Teach students sight words				
Teach new letter sounds.				

16. How often do you teach reading in the following ways to your class?

(Tick the column which best applies to your current practice)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Provide reading materials that match the students' interests?				
Provide materials that are appropriate for the reading levels of your students?				
Encourage students to develop their understanding of the texts?				
Give students time to read books of their choice?				
Give individualized feedback to each student?				

17. How often do you ask your students to do the following?

(Tick the column which best applies to your current practice)

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Never
Locate words/sounds within a text?				
Identify the main ideas of a text?				
Compare their reading to some of their own experiences?				
Make predictions about what will happen in the texts they are reading?				
Orally summarize the text.				
Ask questions about the text?				

18. How would you define phonological awareness?

_____

_____

_____

_____

19.a. Do you implement a program for phonics at the school?

- o Yes
- o No

19.b. What is the name of the phonics program you implement?

_____
_____

20.a. Have you been trained in phonics programs?

- Yes
- No

20.b. Which phonics programs have you been trained in?

_____
_____
_____
_____

20.c. Do you implement the program as trained/instructed to do?

- Yes
- No
- Some aspects of the program

20.d. Do you make use of the program materials?

- Yes
- No
- Some of the materials

21.a. Do you think a phonics program is an effective approach to teaching reading?

- Yes
- No

22. What are 3 key elements you believe are essential to the successful teaching of reading?

_____
_____
_____
_____

_____

_____

READING RESOURCES

23.a. Do you have a library or reading corner in your classroom?

- Yes
- No

(if no, proceed to question 23, if yes answer 22 b, c, and d)

23.b. On average how many books do you have in your classroom?

- 0 - 10 books
- 11 - 25 books
- 26 - 50 books
- 51 - 100 books
- More than 100 books

23.c. How often do you give your students time in the classroom to use the classroom library or reading corner?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Less than monthly

23.d. Are the students allowed to borrow books from the classroom library or reading corner to take home?

- Yes
- No

24. How often does your class attend a library that is not your classroom library?

- Weekly
- Monthly

- Termly
- Never or almost never

25. How often do you assign reading as a homework task?

- Daily
- 3-4 times a week
- 1-2 times a week
- Less than once a week
- Never

26. Which resources do you have available to assist students who battle with reading?
(Mark all that apply)

- A specialized professional (e.g. speech therapist; remedial therapist)
- A teacher assistant
- Reading intervention program
- A volunteer

27. What do you do when you initially notice a student falling behind in reading?

- I refer the student to a specialized professional
- I wait to see if the performance improves with maturation
- I spend more time working on reading with the student individually
- I ask the parents to help the student with reading
- I recommend enrolment into a specialized reading program

28. How much time are your students expected to spend on reading as a homework task?

- 15 minutes or less
- 16 – 30 minutes
- 31 – 60 minutes
- More than 60 minutes

ASSESSMENT OF READING

29. How often do you assess the students reading ability?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Termly

30. How are the students reading abilities assessed?

- Ongoing classroom assessments
- Classroom assessments
- Grade assessments
- Provincial/ institute assessments

Appendix H: Grade 1 reading test results

Schonell Single Word Reading Test Scores						
	Chronological age	Adjusted age	Reading score	Adjusted score	Difference	Difference in months
1	7:09	7.75	6:11	6.92	-0.83	-10
2	7:10	7.83	7:02	7.17	-0.67	-8
3	7:07	7.58	7:00	7.00	-0.58	-7
4	7:02	7.17	6:10	6.83	-0.33	-4
5	7:06	7.50	7:02	7.17	-0.33	-4
6	7:09	7.75	7:07	7.58	-0.17	-2
7	7:09	7.75	7:07	7.58	-0.17	-2
8	7:07	7.58	7:05	7.42	-0.17	-2
9	7:08	7.67	7:07	7.58	-0.08	-1
10	7:02	7.17	7:01	7.08	-0.08	-1
11	7:08	7.67	7:07	7.58	-0.08	-1
12	7:02	7.17	7:01	7.08	-0.08	-1
13	7:07	7.58	7:07	7.58	0.00	0
14	7:05	7.42	7:05	7.42	0.00	0
15	7:00	7.00	7:00	7.00	0.00	0
16	7:06	7.50	7:06	7.50	0.00	0
17	7:05	7.42	7:06	7.50	0.08	1
18	7:06	7.50	7:09	7.75	0.25	3
19	7:01	7.08	7:04	7.33	0.25	3
20	7:02	7.17	7:06	7.50	0.33	4
21	7:00	7.00	7:04	7.33	0.33	4
22	7:01	7.08	7:05	7.42	0.33	4
23	7:07	7.58	7:11	7.92	0.33	4
24	6:11	6.92	7:04	7.33	0.42	5
25	7:07	7.58	8:00	8.00	0.42	5
26	7:03	7.25	7:08	7.67	0.42	5
27	7:07	7.58	8:00	8.00	0.42	5
28	7:04	7.33	7:10	7.83	0.50	6
29	7:06	7.50	8:00	8.00	0.50	6
30	7:04	7.33	7:10	7.83	0.50	6
31	7:02	7.17	7:09	7.75	0.58	7
32	6:11	6.92	7:06	7.50	0.58	7
33	7:09	7.75	8:05	8.42	0.67	8
34	7:08	7.67	8:04	8.33	0.67	8
35	7:08	7.67	8:04	8.33	0.67	8
36	7:00	7.00	7:09	7.75	0.75	9
37	7:07	7.58	8:04	8.33	0.75	9
38	7:07	7.58	8:05	8.42	0.83	10
39	7:11	7.92	8:09	8.75	0.83	10
40	7:09	7.75	8:07	8.58	0.83	10
41	7:06	7.50	8:06	8.50	1.00	12
42	7:00	7.00	8:02	8.17	1.17	14
43	7:00	7.00	8:04	8.33	1.33	16
44	7:09	7.75	9:02	9.17	1.42	17
45	7:08	7.67	9:02	9.17	1.50	18
46	7:03	7.25	9:02	9.17	1.92	23
47	7:07	7.58	9:09	9.75	2.17	26
48	6:11	6.92	9:04	9.33	2.42	29
49	7:01	7.08	11:07	11.58	4.50	54

Appendix I: Grade 2 reading test results

Schonell Single Word Reading Test Scores						
	Chronological age	Adjusted age	Reading scores	Adjusted score	Difference	Difference in months
1	8:08	8.67	7:07	7.58	-1.08	-13
2	8:08	8.67	7:07	7.58	-1.08	-13
3	8:05	8.42	7:07	7.58	-0.83	-10
4	8:05	8.42	7:07	7.58	-0.83	-10
5	8:08	8.67	7:10	7.83	-0.83	-10
6	8:00	8.00	7:05	7.42	-0.58	-7
7	8:08	8.67	8:03	8.25	-0.42	-5
8	8:05	8.42	8:03	8.25	-0.17	-2
9	8:06	8.50	8:07	8.58	0.08	1
10	8:05	8.42	8:06	8.50	0.08	1
11	8:09	8.75	8:11	8.92	0.17	2
12	7:10	7.83	8:00	8.00	0.17	2
13	8:08	8.67	8:10	8.83	0.17	2
14	8:05	8.42	8:08	8.67	0.25	3
15	8:04	8.33	8:07	8.58	0.25	3
16	8:00	8.00	8:03	8.25	0.25	3
17	8:08	8.67	9:00	9.00	0.33	4
18	8:03	8.25	8:07	8.58	0.33	4
19	8:06	8.50	8:10	8.83	0.33	4
20	8:01	8.08	8:09	8.50	0.42	5
21	8:10	8.83	9:03	9.25	0.42	5
22	8:07	8.58	9:00	9.00	0.42	5
23	8:08	8.67	9:01	9.08	0.42	5
24	7:11	7.92	8:05	8.42	0.50	6
25	8:07	8.58	9:01	9.08	0.50	6
26	8:05	8.42	8:11	8.92	0.50	6
27	8:06	8.50	9:00	9.00	0.50	6
28	7:11	7.92	8:06	8.50	0.58	7
29	8:05	8.42	9:02	9.17	0.75	9
30	8:09	8.75	9:06	9.50	0.75	9
31	8:04	8.33	9:02	9.17	0.83	10
32	7:10	7.83	8:08	8.67	0.83	10
33	8:04	8.33	9:03	9.25	0.92	11
34	8:00	8.00	9:00	9.00	1.00	12
35	8:04	8.33	9:05	9.42	1.08	13
36	9:00	9.00	10:04	10.33	1.33	16
37	8:11	8.92	10:04	10.33	1.42	17
38	8:07	8.58	10:01	10.08	1.50	18
39	8:06	8.50	10:01	10.08	1.58	19
40	8:03	8.25	10:01	10.08	1.83	22
41	8:01	8.08	10:03	10.25	2.17	26
42	8:04	8.33	10:08	10.67	2.33	28
43	8:10	8.83	11:06	11.50	2.67	32
44	8:02	8.17	11:08	11.67	3.50	42
45	7:10	7.83	11:06	11.50	3.67	44
46	8:07	8.58	12:05	12.42	3.83	46

NGRT Reading Scores						
	Chronological age	Adjusted age	Reading score	Adjusted score	Difference	Difference in months
1	8:07	8.67	11:2	6.58	-2.08	-25.00
2	8:09	8.33	10:3	6.50	-1.83	-22.00
3	8:06	8.25	10:0	6.50	-1.75	-21.00
4	8:04	8.67	10:0	6.92	-1.75	-21.00
5	8:07	8.67	10:0	6.92	-1.75	-21.00
6	7:11	8.00	9:10	6.33	-1.67	-20.00
7	8:02	8.00	9:7	6.33	-1.67	-20.00
8	8:01	8.83	9:7	7.58	-1.25	-15.00
9	8:06	9.75	9:7	8.50	-1.25	-15.00
10	8:07	8.42	9:7	7.17	-1.25	-15.00
11	8:11	8.33	9:5	7.33	-1.00	-12.00
12	8:05	8.67	9:3	7.75	-0.92	-11.00
13	7:10	7.83	9:3	6.92	-0.92	-11.00
14	8:05	8.50	9:3	7.75	-0.75	-9.00
15	8:08	8.75	9:3	8.17	-0.58	-7.00
16	8:07	8.33	9:0	7.75	-0.58	-7.00
17	8:08	7.92	9:0	7.33	-0.58	-7.00
18	8:04	8.75	8:10	8.33	-0.42	-5.00
19	8:03	8.67	8:10	8.33	-0.33	-4.00
20	8:04	8.50	8:8	8.50	0.00	0.00
21	8:01	8.42	8:8	8.67	0.25	3.00
23	8:05	8.42	8:8	8.67	0.25	3.00
24	8:04	8.25	8:8	8.50	0.25	3.00
25	8:05	8.33	8:8	8.67	0.33	4.00
26	7:11	8.67	8:6	9.00	0.33	4.00
27	7:10	8.00	8:6	8.33	0.33	4.00
28	8:06	8.58	8:6	9.00	0.42	5.00
29	8:03	8.92	8:6	9.42	0.50	6.00
30	9:09	8.33	8:4	8.83	0.50	6.00
31	8:09	8.08	8:4	8.67	0.58	7.00
32	8:08	8.67	8:4	9.25	0.58	7.00
33	8:00	8.25	8:2	8.83	0.58	7.00
34	8:09	7.83	7:9	8.50	0.67	8.00
35	8:04	7.92	7:9	8.67	0.75	9.00
36	8:08	8.42	7:9	9.25	0.83	10.00
37	8:06	8.42	7:7	9.25	0.83	10.00
38	8:10	8.58	7:4	9.58	1.00	12.00
39	8:04	8.50	7:4	9.58	1.08	13.00
40	7:11	8.58	7:2	10.00	1.42	17.00
41	8:05	7.83	6:11	9.25	1.42	17.00
42	8:08	8.17	6:11	9.58	1.42	17.00
43	7:10	8.75	6:11	10.25	1.50	18.00
44	8:08	8.50	6:7	10.00	1.50	18.00
45	8:03	8.08	6:6	9.58	1.50	18.00
46	8:04	8.33	6:6	10.00	1.67	20.00
47	8:00	7.92	6:4	9.83	1.92	23.00
48	8:00	8.58	6:4	11.17	2.58	31.00

Appendix J: Grade 3 reading test results

Schonell Single Word Reading Test						
	Chronological age	Adjusted age	Reading scores	Adjusted score	Difference	Difference in months
1	9:05	9.42	8:01	8.08	-1.33	-16.00
2	8:09	8.75	7:10	7.83	-0.92	-11.00
3	9:05	9.42	8:11	8.92	-0.50	-6.00
4	9:07	9.58	9:03	9.25	-0.33	-4.00
5	9:08	9.67	9:05	9.42	-0.25	-3.00
6	9:11	9.92	9:09	9.75	-0.17	-2.00
7	9:07	9.58	9:07	9.58	0.00	0.00
8	9:06	9.50	9:07	9.58	0.08	1.00
9	8:11	8.92	9:00	9.00	0.08	1.00
10	9:07	9.58	9:09	9.75	0.17	2.00
11	9:07	9.58	9:09	9.75	0.17	2.00
12	9:05	9.42	9:08	9.67	0.25	3.00
13	9:07	9.58	9:10	9.83	0.25	3.00
14	9:08	9.67	10:01	10.08	0.42	5.00
15	9:05	9.42	9:11	9.92	0.50	6.00
16	9:01	9.08	9:08	9.67	0.58	7.00
17	9:09	9.75	10:04	10.33	0.58	7.00
18	9:06	9.50	10:01	10.08	0.58	7.00
19	8:11	8.92	9:06	9.50	0.58	7.00
20	9:00	9.00	9:07	9.58	0.58	7.00
21	9:09	9.75	10:05	10.42	0.67	8.00
22	9:07	9.58	10:03	10.25	0.67	8.00
23	9:06	9.50	10:03	10.25	0.75	9.00
24	9:08	9.67	10:05	10.42	0.75	9.00
25	9:07	9.58	10:04	10.33	0.75	9.00
26	9:07	9.58	10:05	10.42	0.83	10.00
27	9:01	9.08	9:11	9.92	0.83	10.00
28	9:04	9.33	10:04	10.33	1.00	12.00
29	9:01	9.42	10:05	10.42	1.00	12.00
30	9:02	9.17	10:03	10.25	1.08	13.00
31	9:02	9.17	10:03	10.25	1.08	13.00
32	9:02	9.17	10:05	10.42	1.25	15.00
33	9:10	9.83	11:04	11.33	1.50	18.00
34	9:01	9.08	10:09	10.75	1.67	20.00
35	9:07	9.58	11:04	11.33	1.75	21.00
36	8:11	8.92	10:08	10.67	1.75	21.00
37	8:10	8.83	10:08	10.67	1.83	22.00
38	8:10	8.83	10:10	10.83	2.00	24.00
39	9:11	9.92	12:00	12.00	2.08	25.00
40	9:10	9.83	12:04	12.33	2.50	30.00
41	9:05	9.42	12:01	12.08	2.67	32.00
42	9:03	9.25	12:00	12.00	2.75	33.00
43	9:01	9.08	11:10	11.83	2.75	33.00
44	9:07	9.58	12:05	12.42	2.83	34.00
45	8:10	8.83	11:08	11.67	2.83	34.00
46	9:08	9.67	12:06+	12.50	2.83	34.00
47	9:04	9.33	12:06+	12.50	3.17	38.00
48	9:11	9.92	13:03	13.25	3.33	40.00

NGRT Reading Test						
	Chronological age	Adjusted age	Reading score	Adjusted score	Difference	Difference in months
1	9:01	9.42	17:00	6.83	-2.58	-31.00
2	9:07	9.42	16:05	7.33	-2.08	-25.00
3	9:09	8.75	15:10	7.08	-1.67	-20.00
4	9:05	8.83	14:07	7.75	-1.08	-13.00
5	9:03	9.92	13:08	9.00	-0.92	-11.00
6	9:11	8.92	13:08	8.00	-0.92	-11.00
7	9:05	9.67	13:05	9.00	-0.67	-8.00
8	9:04	9.17	12:11	8.50	-0.67	-8.00
9	9:09	9.17	12:11	8.50	-0.67	-8.00
10	9:10	9.42	12:07	9.25	-0.17	-2.00
11	9:07	9.00	12:07	8.83	-0.17	-2.00
12	8:11	9.50	12:07	9.42	-0.08	-1.00
13	8:10	9.58	12:04	9.58	0.00	0.00
14	9:00	9.58	12:01	9.58	0.00	0.00
15	9:07	9.42	12:01	9.42	0.00	0.00
16	9:08	9.75	11:10	9.83	0.08	1.00
17	9:04	9.58	11:10	10.67	1.08	13.00
18	9:01	9.50	11:07	10.67	1.17	14.00
19	8:10	9.08	11:07	10.25	1.17	14.00
20	9:07	9.58	11:04	10.92	1.33	16.00
21	9:07	9.58	11:04	10.92	1.33	16.00
22	9:05	9.50	11:04	10.92	1.42	17.00
23	9:01	9.58	11:02	11.33	1.75	21.00
24	8:10	9.58	10:11	11.33	1.75	21.00
25	9:01	9.08	10:11	10.92	1.83	22.00
26	9:07	9.42	10:11	11.33	1.92	23.00
27	9:06	9.08	10:11	11.17	2.08	25.00
28	9:07	8.83	10:11	10.92	2.08	25.00
29	9:07	9.67	10:08	11.83	2.17	26.00
30	9:06	9.58	10:08	12.08	2.50	30.00
31	9:01	9.33	10:03	11.83	2.50	30.00
32	9:09	9.08	9:10	11.58	2.50	30.00
33	9:07	9.83	9:07	12.58	2.75	33.00
34	9:07	8.83	9:07	11.58	2.75	33.00
35	9:05	9.58	9:05	12.58	3.00	36.00
36	9:06	9.00	9:05	12.08	3.08	37.00
37	9:05	9.75	9:03	12.92	3.17	38.00
38	9:11	8.83	9:00	12.33	3.50	42.00
39	9:08	9.33	9:00	12.92	3.58	43.00
40	9:00	8.92	8:10	12.58	3.67	44.00
41	9:02	9.92	8:06	13.67	3.75	45.00
42	9:02	9.42	8:06	13.42	4.00	48.00
43	8:11	9.25	8:00	13.67	4.42	53.00
44	8:10	9.42	7:09	14.58	5.17	62.00
45	9:05	9.75	7:04	15.83	6.08	73.00
46	8:09	9.58	7:01	16.42	6.83	82.00
47	9:05	9.08	6:10	17.00	7.92	95.00

Appendix K: Transcription of the Focus Group

Researcher: *"Reading is in crisis in South Africa is a view that everyone shares across the board. All of the research says it. It is scary that our youth are flailing in the literacy domain. Three quarters of South African students did not manage to receive the lowest international benchmark for reading in the standardized assessment done in 2016 in the public schools and only 2% were able to meet the highest benchmark in the standardized assessment. I want to know what your response is? As an educator, when you hear statistics on how poor reading is in South Africa. What does it evoke in you?"*

Participant 1: *"May I say that many years ago when we were at school. I think that this does have an effect on the data that is currently available because it was mostly, if I may say, white schooling and all the other children in disadvantaged groups were not at the white schools and that is where the data was taken from. There are many children from my age group and people I know who are very poor readers and I think that it feels like maybe it's in crisis now but it's always been in crisis. It's just that at that time they were only to measure the white schools so now we have disadvantaged groups and we are now getting very accurate data on what is happening but I can tell you even having taught in the 80s that reading was already in crisis. It's just that we didn't have that the data."*

Participant 2: *"It is now more realistic."*

Participant 1: *"What you think about that?"*

Other Participants: *"It's still very scary*."

Researcher: *"If we work off that assumption that then the reading is being impacted by demographic and the lower demographic in the lower social economic area. People are then making the assumption that I'm sending my child to a private school for better education. Do you feel as an educator pressure on children's performances as a result?"*

All Participants: *"Yes, definitely*."

Researcher: "*In what way? How does that affect your teaching?"*

Participant 1: *"Because you think, and we know what the parents are paying but we had a meeting this morning and we also know that not every child is innately a good reader"*

Researcher: "*Absolutely"*

Participant 1: *"So we know that possibly half of the class or just under half will have reading issues and spelling issues but we also know that at the end of the year like this year we have a reading test and anyone who is lower than our age, reading age of however many years. We then feel that pressure and we do ask ourselves now why? How has this little person spent a year with me and she has only improved by a few months? "*

Participant 3: *"What did I do wrong?"*

Participant 1: "*Did I fail? Where did I fail her? Yet when you look at her she may have arrived not being a very fluent reader, may have had bad word attack skills and yet you look at her in November and you can't believe how well she's reading but the results are not showing that amazing improvement§ If you are in Grade 3 you should be reading at least 8 ½ year old level. Am I right? Realistically? If you are doing your job correctly."*

Researcher: "*Are you referring to the end of the year?"*

Participant 1: *"At the end of the year, by November, now, when we would've done the assessments."*

Researcher: *"So do you feel that as a private schooling system we are not only targeting necessarily age-appropriate scores, but we are targeting beyond that?"*

Participants: *"Yes"*

Researcher: *"Does that affect the way that you teach?"*

Participant 1: "Not really. I am speaking for myself but not really because when I'm teaching, I'm not teaching for benchmark. I am not teaching so that on my performance management I get a 50% raise. I'm teaching ethically because I have to get that little girl who is reading at six years five months to at least reading at seven years five months and the little girl who is age-appropriate I have to extend her but I'm also very aware that I'm getting the girls to love reading. For me, in the classroom, loving to read is my ultimate. If a little girl can come to me and become excited because, look I'm reading this, I think that's where we should be, but the school does not want that. They don't want me to tell them she wouldn't pick up a book, she was terrified to read, she would tense because obviously a home when she's reading to mom and dad, someone's going *"no"* and you know you can see when a child is reading to you there's that tension. And then you can see that little girl has relaxed and she leans into you and she's reading but you can't tell the school that she was a tense reader and now she's not tense anymore.

Participant 4: *"Or that she didn't love reading and now she does."*

Participant 5: "*Or that she was forgetting her reader at school every day and now she takes it home and she's reading half the book."*

Participant 6: *"Because they are looking for a benchmark*"

Participant 7*: "Or they have to read at a specific level."*

Participant 1: "*The school doesn't want to know or hear that she's loving reading. They want to know, "okay Madam, she was 6.5 years why is she now 6.8?" It doesn't show that she is loving that book or that she's loving just getting taken into a story even if the story is, as a Grade 3, she's loving a Grade 2 story because she can read it. So I think we have two things here."*

Researcher*: "Do you think then that we need to help review how reading is being ass*essed or the amount of emphasis that is put on the aged norm?"

Participants: "*I think so. Yes."*

Researcher: *"If so how?"*

Participant 7: *"We haven't had testing this year. Why have they decided to do away with it? I am not arguing about it I am just wondering."*

Participant 3: *"No testing was done this year as the feeling was: If the testing is done at the end of the year the results are just passed on to the next teacher and you as the teacher do not work with the child further. It was therefore decided that the assessments would take place at the start of next year and they would be two assessments in a year."*

Participant 2: *"There are two sides to it, it is nice to have an age to know that the child should be at that age for the reading. However, on the other side it is stressful if you, if that child is not performing."*

Participant 1: *"I think it's also very stressful that the parents do not know the ages because I think if half our parents knew the ages, I think many of them would be upset with the ages, but I think it's like anything in life, you get the Grade 2 who can tell the time at the end of Grade 2 and you get a Grade 2 who can't read and so I don't know. You know that silly little story about you don't judge a fish, or you can't copy a fish and a bird you know? It's the same thing but I do understand that we need to know when we've got a crisis in reading."*

Researcher: "That brings in the question of the development of reading, how reading develops because there is, we all know there is the analytical approach and the synthetic approach, so do you think we are using the right approach?"

Participant 1: *"Can I say, personally, but with this Jolly phonics, I do believe that in Grade 0 you are doing too many sounds too quickly and that is not setting the foundation and we'll go wow they can read "sit, pit, lip" whatever but there is no comprehension, there is nothing."*

Participant 8: "*There is no comprehension."*

Participant 7: *"There is no phonological awareness as well."*

Researcher: "*So then, how would we define reading development? How do you view reading developing? What are the steps in reading development?"*

Participant 5: *"I think they first have to be able to identify individual letters"*

All Participants: *"The sounds"*

Participant 5: *"That's the first thing, but know them, as in what they look like, trace them, you know all of the tactile, multi-modality."*

Participant 8: *"but with no benchmark to hit"*

Participant 1: *"Look around the room for sounds and so then I know it looks like that and it makes that sound. So, it's both auditory and visual and then they have to be able to put it together to find words."*

Participant 2: *"But that comes later."*

Participant 7: *"But there are a whole lot of pre-literacy skills that come before this."*

Researcher: "*Yes, there are whole lot of pre-skills but let's just leave the pre-skills and let's go from sound awareness, then what do we progress to?"*

Participant 7: "*Then you start to know what the letter is called."*

Researcher: *"So from phoneme grapheme correspondence, then?"*

Participant 7: "*Then I have to put them together."*

Participant 2: *"Blending."*

Participant 1: "*Then they have to recognize not just on the sound page. They have to know what other words start with the sound. So, they have to recognize the sound and generate words with the sound and I do not I recall. From being very little, I really got phonics and I really got reading, you must like extend and I think that's what tells you what a good reader or speller is because they are not just limited to finding the "s" for example. They will suddenly start to find the sound everywhere and they just love finding the sounds."*

Participant 5: "That comes with the love of reading then love of phonics."

Participant 3: *"I think that, I know we talking about schools, but the love of reading starts at home. It starts with parents reading stories to the children and looking at books with you and I think that we as teachers, when we teaching phonics, maybe we need to, maybe in nursery school, primary school send home an information pack about how to teach phonics to your children because I know so many children who ask how do I spell my name? And the parent will say "S A M" so everything is in capital letters. They don't start with the phonics, the sounds. So I know that we are talking about at the school but the parents and the teachers need to be in communication with each other with regards to that because that is a problem that you pick up in the parents. They need to be made aware of that we need, to teach the parents how to sound out the words so that it makes sense for the children just so that there is consistency with it."*

Participant 1: *"I think. I just remembered now why I l loved reading, poetry and rhymes."*

Participant 8: "I also love rhymes, nursery rhymes."

Participant 1: *"We don't do enough nursery rhymes."*

Participant 5: *"Some girls, even in Grade 3, don't know nursery rhymes. The girls will say they have never heard them before."*

Participant 4: "The Grade ones do it as a theme and they don't know, even Little Miss Muffet."

Participant 1: *"Things like "she sells sea shells on the sea shore." That's gone. Nursery rhymes, rhymes, poetry those are essential."*

Participant 8: *"But it's because we are in a rush to get them reading. The school's policy is that we will read by the end of Grade 0."*

Participant *1: "and in doing that we miss out on the nursery rhyme skills and the fun stuff that builds the love like poetry like Mrs. pick pigeon, it teaches you alliteration."*
Participant 2: *"It comes along the phonological awareness and the incidental learning of language without you actually having to teach it. It's a loss of that."*

Researcher: *"So do you think that's what should be focused on school or at home?"*

Participant 1*: "At school."*

Participants*: "At school."*

Participant 8: *"It's a lot to put on a parent to have them doing all of that especially with both parents working."*

Participant 1: *"Can I explain why? I was an immigrant when I started in Grade one. I have just arrived, I did not know English, I did not have a single vowel sound, I loved those rhymes. My mother had no idea that the "a" was said "a". She was speaking from her language it was "o". She could've done that phonics with me and I would've gone to school speaking it wrong. That's why I think its best that it is kept at school. Many of our little girls, English is the second language and they not always pronouncing the sounds correctly, so if we are letting parents do it, it may not be correct."*

Participant 8: *"Parents also put pressure on the children and then it's not fun for the child."*

Participant 3: *"I think that if we talking about reading in crisis we are looking at the younger generation, and just it's not our job to teach the older parents or people but if we can give them something to help them then the level of reading will go up because then you're not just working with the Grade 0, one, two you are reaching out into the community as well. I'm not saying educate everyone but the little but you can do to educate, like a handout, you should."*

Participant 1: *"It's okay to do that with the patient parent but take a very stressed-out parent, say a single parent, now you have to go through this whole phonological awareness thing, you have supper to cook, you come home late, you are going to say "Come on now why don't you know this?" and then the child becomes a tense child. So I hear what you are saying but it may not be right."*

Participant 8*: "but it is nice to send something home because then parents can see and with perhaps games."*

Participant 4: "For my child who is five I get little bits of homework. So, we do a new nursery and she cuts out the pictures and sings the rhyme and puts it in the order but we haven't received guidance on phonics.

Participant 8: *"The parents at our school are high powered corporate parents. There are some stay-at-home parents but if your mom and dad are working till six and then coming home late it's stressful if you have to do something."*

Researcher: *"So the research says that high achieving schools are considered to be in privileged areas. Of that 25% of the wealthiest schools in comparison to 75% of the poorest schools share 11 out of the 50 factors that affect reading development. They say that reading is at a higher level in the private schools due to parent involvement."*

Participant 8: *"I think they are as abandoned as other children."*

Researcher: "This is what I want to know. The research says that it is due to parent involvement because the parents are willing to put resources in place to put the children in a school where reading is approached early on and to be present and work with the children at home? Is that accurate?"

Participant 8: *"I think they are willing to throw money at it, like send them to the school and send them to other lessons or aupairs, but I think the level of parent involvement is very much the same here as it was when I taught at a public school because with our parent's they are in a high profile job or unemployed. She has been shipped off to after care or going home with an aupair, or going to extra-murals until 6 o'clock. They'll still on their own."*

Participant 3: *"I wonder if the education of the parents who are involved in private schooling, maybe their education is more in line with the way they communicate with the children and the topics they discuss with the children is better than the absent parent who leaves the child with a guardian to look after for however many years."*

Participant 1: *"It's also exposure to stimulation."*

Researcher*: "So context?"*

Participant 8: *"However most of the children here are just exposed to screens, their babysitter is a screen."*

Researcher: "*So do you think reading is more relevant in this day and age?"*

Participant 1: *"They do need to read to play the games, they can't play them if they can't read"*

Researcher*: "We are in an era where everything is emails texts, apps, WhatsApp's, all of it compared to in the past with everything was radio and auditory more than literacy so is reading now more important?*

Participant 8: *"I think we are moving towards a more visual world. Things are becoming infographic; the average millennial doesn't have time to read so the kids are just looking at pictures to get information."*

Participant 3*: "All watching YouTube videos."*

Participant 1: *"That's they could."*

Researcher*: "So should reading be of concern?"*

Participant 8*: "I'm not saying we shouldn't I'm just saying."*

Researcher*: "I am asking? Is it still something we should be worried about?"*

Participants: *"Yes"*

Participant 1: *"Because if you think about it, if you don't have a single idea about how to read you might be able to learn from the infographics things because it's all about symbols, this symbol correlates to that symbol. So if you don't have that grounding you are not going to understand other symbols. You know those mathematical symbols."*

Participant 5*: "and even when it does come to maths you need to be able to read properly to solve the problem and even to solve maths problems."*

Participant 1*: "So reading is very important."*

Participant 3: *"It comes back to what was said that if you have a love for reading you are extended and even though we are in a visual world you need to read because of the business sector. For example, people want employees with high EQ and a high EQ means you need to be able to have a conversation with someone. You need to be able solve problems and things and you need the vocabulary to go with that so you need to be exposed to the symbols and things that you can further your own reading and build up your vocabulary."*

Participant 6: *"Can I go back to when we are talking about Jolly phonics and learning about sounds? And I know it's been a debate at school and I know there's the whole comprehension side of it, which Jolly phonics are very aware of and they do want to fill that gap but it was a trainer who said. She convinced me. That you push the sounds and do one a day and we thought, don't be ridiculous, but when you see it from the other side and say why not? Why not expose it to them, like here it is, here's the sounds, the flashcards on wall. The child who is five years old and is exposed to and loves it and starts doing it, it'll start happening naturally. Yes, for some it is to fast and won't get it and it takes them longer but what about the few that do get it and they love it and they go and they reading and it suddenly opens this whole new world and you realize that they can"*

Participant 1: "I have found with those they get to a ceiling. By the time I go to Grade 7 I was no better than the child who took longer to read so yes there will be those who are going to love it and read and that's fantastic but what about the bulk, that are not getting it and they are going to hate because what do you do with the group that can go you have to extend them but now we have created a thing where we have seven who are going very far and we have a whole class, the bulk you are now anxious to read and the weak children who have no clue. So, we created a problem."

Participant 6: *"But what if they, if we weren't going fast"*

Participant 8*: "I think it's fine how we doing but I don't agree with giving the readers in Grade 0 because they don't understand what they are reading, they just don't."*

Participant 6: *"But at what point are they expected to know what they are reading?"*

Researcher: *"The current education system is susceptible to fads and fashions, is that causing teacher confusion?"*

Participant*s: "It is."*

Researcher: *"How?"*

Participant 1: *"In my career I've been exposed to about seven different ways to teach reading and spelling. There is an amazing program called writing to read. It was the wrong way around; the children write stories for them to read so they started writing before they knew sounds and it worked."*

Researcher*: "So we are susceptible to these fads and fashions and it is creating confusion for the teachers as well as the kids. Do you think we're focusing too much on one thing like Jolly*

Phonics for example? So, we teach the sounds, we teach the blending, we teach, at what point do we think that the decoding will become comprehension?

Participant 6*: "That is what I am saying so I'm teaching them to read, to blend, they taking readers now and loving the fact that they reading and they've been excited but they are not comprehending that, they are just learning to read and they are excited so, I think that comprehension is the next step."*

Researcher: *"So are we teaching that?"*

Participants*: "No."*

Researcher: "The school is to focus on decoding, they are not teaching comprehending."

Participant 1: *"As opposed to sending her sight word readers perhaps we should be having them make sentences with sight words."*

Participant 3: *"The picture books assist in comprehension because the children are able to look at the pictures to understand what they were reading."*

Participant 4: *"I think that it is hard to start reading in Grade 0 because there are girls who come from lots of different schools and we do not know the foundation they have. They may have not done any phonics or done various phonics programs."*

Participant 5: *"That also places extra pressure on the teachers because we are bound by a specific program. You have to follow it, for example we are following this now then the next year we will follow growth mindset but the next step maybe habits of mind, but you must still implement the initial program as well. So, it is not just confusion its pressure because we are still learning the first program and are expected to use new ones.*

Participant 8: *"We have to many tools and we don't know which one to use."*

Participant 2: *"So we tried to use the best from one program and what we love from another program and elements from another program and items from each of them and put them together.*

Participant 1: "*And I will be honest with all the different phonics ways I have learned. I found many times, even now with Jolly phonics, that the kids who are weaker are not getting it so then I will use what I know from other programs and then they start to get it."*

Participant 7: *"What works for one child does not work for the others. It is not a one-size-fits-all. Sourcing little bits from program."*

Researcher*: "So can I ask each teacher if you were asked for one best technique for teaching reading what would be?"*

Participant 1: *"I do the V A K T method where I do visual, auditory, kinetic and tactile and do syllables."*

Participant 2: *"Multi-sensory"*

Participant 3*: "I love to work on white boards on the desk's so they can be rubbed out and then manipulate the words"*

Participant 4: "*I love to use word boxes. They build their own words and play with the letters and I tried to make them love it.*

Participant 5*: "The girls need to understand the words they are learning so that they can use the word in multiple ways in a range of contexts. Reading must be listened to and reading must take place every day."*

Participant 6: *"Making shape boxes around the word and the whole word approach and many battle with that.*

Participant 7*: "We use comprehension box and the children absolutely love it because it has different themes broken up into paragraphs with little questions on the back which is really good to see who can actually understand what they have just read."*

Participant 8: *"Love the language first before doing what you doing and use the multi-sensory approach with that so that they can be involved in it and can identify with it.*

Participant 2: *"That's what I like about rave-o, it does all of that. Rhyming and repetition."*

Participant 1*: "I must reiterate that I think Fear has a lot to do with not reading well."*
Researcher: *"How can we change it for you? How do we make it easier for you and how do we make you feel comfortable? What do you need more of? What support do you need more of?*

Participant 1: *"What helped a lot was when people come into the class and they give us guidelines about don't do more of this, trying do this."*

Participant 2*: "More training and resources to use with the training."*

Participant 8*: "We do Jolly phonics and we get them to read but the other stuff underneath that is a little blurry and we need training on that."*

Participant 3*: "We want more training for our grades specifically and training in general"*

Participant 8: *"Resources for us games, for our training."*

Participant 7: *I don't think we know. We have forgotten since varsity the process of reading. I have done Jolly phonics training, but I don't know about the comprehension and the other stuff.*

Participant 1: *"I think we have a discrepancy because we as teachers forget and we listen to the reading and forget whatever, that even as they get older there are new skills, we have to teach them and we have to train them in"*