

**Educational needs and assets of language
educators for teaching vernacular reading - A
case study**

by

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DEDICATION

Firstly, I dedicate this mini-dissertation to the glory of God.

Secondly to my late beloved father, Joseph Masilo Mateta, who always encouraged me to further my studies. It was so difficult and stressful that I wanted to quit, but you motivated me to study even harder.

Even though you are no more, you will always be remembered for your love, motivation and support. I will always remember your unconditional love.

DECLARATION

I, **Mangedi Naom Mateta**, declare that this mini-dissertation submitted to the University of Limpopo for the degree of Master of Education in Community and Continuing Education, has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other University. It is my own work in design and in execution, and all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Mangedi Naom Mateta

Date

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify the educational needs and assets of language educators for teaching vernacular reading. A qualitative research study was conducted to examine what educators have and need to teach Sepedi reading skills at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. Six vernacular teachers participated in the study. The teachers were assisted in identifying the educational needs and assets for teaching learners to read Sepedi. The study has highlighted the areas where language educators need support in order to teach vernacular reading proficiently. The study revealed a lack of Sepedi reading material and adequate training for vernacular teaching in both schools, especially in the Foundation Phase. The educational assets for vernacular language teachers were also assessed.

Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework and defines key concepts. Assumptions were formulated about what teachers need to proficiently teach reading of a vernacular language. These include issues such as adequate training, Sepedi reading materials and sufficient space in the classrooms, among others.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology. It clearly explains the research design, data collection and data analysis. This study was purely qualitative and took the form of a case study. This enabled a detailed and intensive study of the case as it exists in its physical setting. Data collection included document analysis, observations, one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. A data matrix was used in the analysis of data.

Chapter four constitutes the presentation and analysis of the findings of the study. The milieu and physical location of the schools are also described. The chapter further outlines both the educational needs and assets of the two schools for teaching reading in a vernacular language, i.e Sepedi.

Chapter five presents the conclusions from the outlined educational needs and assets from the two schools. The recommendations, which might assist in the creation of a Sepedi-reading culture, are based on the findings. Included in this chapter are reflections

on the research process. Recommendations are made for further research towards developmental programmes for Sepedi teachers in the primary schools of Limpopo.

KEY CONCEPTS

Language

Vernacular

Reading strategies

Fluency in reading

Phonics

Mother tongue instruction

Educational needs

Educational assets

Assessment

ACRONYMS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
ALRU	Academic Literacy Research Unit
ANA	Annual National Assessment
CAPS	Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
CASAS	Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society
CDE	Centre for Development Enterprise
CRS	communicative reading strategies
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
IIEP	Inclusive Education Policy
LiE	Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learner and Teacher Support Materials
NCS	National Curriculum Statement
OBE	Outcomes Based Education
PAR	Participatory action research
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study
QUIDS-UP	Quality Improvement, Development and Support Upliftment Programme
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council of Educators
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SBA	School Based Assessment
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team
TPPS	Tok Ples Preparatory School
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The research assessed the educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading in primary schools, in this case Sepedi. It is a single-case study which was conducted at two primary schools, respectively the Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School, in the rural area of the Mopani District, Limpopo province. These schools are located on the same premises in the Mashiloane village and are in the process of amalgamation. Mashiloane village is about twenty-three kilometers from the Lenyenye Township in the Tzaneen area of the Limpopo Province. Mashiloane is an isolated rural village and densely populated. Learners at the two primary schools are from Masoma, Mashiloane, Moname and Hweetji villages. The two schools accommodate approximately 420 learners. Vernacular reading is a difficult issue as most parents are illiterate.

The research emanates from the author's 22 years' experience as vernacular Sepedi teacher at Tours Junior Primary School. The main motivation for this study is the complications inherent in teaching vernacular reading, for learners are unable to read their home language proficiently.

According to Ebersohn and Eloff (2006:458) a school may become a place where full participation is prevented should learners and teachers lack adequate learning and teaching facilities and materials. They further state (2006:462) that in order to address the needs and problems of an institution, the skills and social resources of the people concerned should first be identified. An important asset is that vernacular teachers are trained to teach a language. Language teachers need adequate training and relevant resources to teach vernacular reading efficiently.

This research is classified under Curriculum Development, one of the four research pillars of the Department of Community and Continuing Education at the University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA 1996) grants equal status to the country's eleven languages as official languages. The Language in

Education Policy states that all learners should reach a high level of proficiency in at least two languages, namely their home language (L1) and one additional official language (L2). Competency in the additional language should be acquired while the home language is maintained and developed (SA The Language in Education Policy 1997:106). It is the task of every teacher to teach learners how to read their home language fluently and with understanding (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2011:1). However, many teachers do not know how to teach reading, for they are only familiar with one teaching method, which may not suit the learning styles of all learners (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:8). Apparently, it is a problem for learners to express themselves freely in their home language, the Sekgaga dialect used by the Bakgaga of the Maake tribe in the Shiluvane area, for they have to think in Sekgaga before translating it into Sepedi when doing oral work in classrooms.

Related studies were conducted by various researchers in South Africa. Luthuli (2003:5), for example, who conducted a quantitative study in KwaZulu-Natal, states that learners' home language is not considered in desegregated schools. Apparently language teachers lack vernacular reading material, like readers and learner's books. Both teachers and learners use Sepedi mixed with the Sekgaga dialect as their home language; at home and outside the classrooms learners speak Sekgaga and during Sepedi periods they use Sepedi. Research indicated that educational problems encountered in South African rural schools, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape and Limpopo revolve around the unavailability of reading material in vernacular languages.

This study could close the gap left by other researchers, for the main focus is to identify the needs of teachers towards improving learners' performance in vernacular reading. Educational needs and assets for vernacular teachers were identified in order to provide teachers with adequate training and vernacular reading material. This is supported by the National Reading Strategy (2008:15) which states that teacher training, development and support are key pillars of the National Reading Strategy. Ryan (2008:9) refers to assets as skills, resources and strengths that are shared with individuals and institutions.

For the purpose of this study *educational needs* refer to adequate training and reading material for vernacular teachers. *Language* refers to voice sounds, gestures and written

words which are used by people to communicate effectively. *Vernacular* refers to the language spoken by a certain group of people in a specific geographical context.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study could be beneficial in assisting vernacular teachers to deliver good reading instruction. Educational needs serve as a barrier to successful teaching in vernacular reading, which prevents easy access to teaching. It seems there is lack of adequate resources for the teaching of vernacular reading at the Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. Teachers seem to lack the basic necessities required in teaching vernacular reading such as reading strategies, teaching and learning materials which are relevant and essential for teaching vernacular reading. The Sekgaga dialect is also the reason why teachers find it difficult to teach vernacular reading. They share their first language (the Sekgaga dialect mixed with Sepedi) with learners and tend to use it a great deal in class to explain the learning material to their learners. They are, however, not acquainted with multiple teaching methods to teach vernacular reading due to inadequate training in teaching such a specialised subject. Although these two schools have language teachers, which the present study valued as assets, the educational needs are their lack of training to teach vernacular reading. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:17) states that teachers need adequate resources to teach reading proficiently. Vernacular reading has become a serious problem.

For the purpose of this study the researcher has identified the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading, in this case Sepedi. The study could motivate language teachers to measure learners' levels in reading through continuous assessment. Due to the two schools' merging, teachers can interrelate during various occasions for the benefit of learners.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to identify the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading in the two rural primary schools.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess how effective language teachers can teach vernacular reading.
- To identify reading strategies applied by language teachers when teaching vernacular reading.
- To establish teacher development programmes for the improvement of language education in general and vernacular education in particular.

1.5 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The phenomenon of vernacular educational needs and assets has been discussed very briefly and concisely. Crowe (2005:33) states that reading is viewed as a communicative process. Through reading a community can share its heritage and traditions, but adequate vernacular reading material is needed.

1.6.1 Educational significance

The findings from the present research could be valued by language teachers since it could identify their educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading. The present researcher will assist them in improvising Sepedi texts for the benefit of the learners. Nagai (2004:116) states that teachers at Maiwala Elementary School in Papua New Guinea developed appropriate reading material through his encouragement. Teachers could be encouraged to motivate learners to read for enjoyment and use different strategies when teaching Sepedi reading. They could also be offered training on how to teach Sepedi reading. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:17) states that all Foundation- and Intermediate Phase classrooms should provide reading corners equipped with story books for learners and reference materials for teachers. This study could be

useful in this sense, for the researcher intends to encourage teachers to create reading corners in their classrooms.

1.6.2 Social significance

Schunk, Pintrick and Meece (2008:362) state that parental and community involvement is needed for a positive influence in schools. However, vernacular reading materials are needed in rural primary schools, for language teachers need adequate resources to teach vernacular reading proficiently. Desai (2012:24) states that the teaching staff and physical resources allocated to schools reflect the level of inequality between urban and rural areas.

Reading skills are crucial in modern society, and it is important for a community to share its heritage and traditions. Parents and families could be actively involved in the learning and development of their children. Parents from Masoma, Mashiloane, Moname and Hweetji could, for example, be motivated to attend Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) to enable them to assist their children to read at home.

1.6.3 Theoretical significance

This study could assist the Department of Education (DoE) in understanding the educational needs for teaching vernacular reading. In addition, if the intervention of the DoE could be in the form of providing libraries to rural schools, equipped with Sepedi readers and language laboratories, it would have a significant meaning to the community at large. Learners would be able to read their home language fluently and with understanding.

Additionally, this study could also impress the importance of vernacular reading to language teachers. This would connect with the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:5) who aims to improve the reading level and competence of learners.

1.7 Literature Review

Several national and international studies concerning vernacular reading were conducted by various authors.

Wilson and Peterson's (2006:2) study was conducted in Washington in the United States of America (USA), focusing on new teaching strategies, new curricula and assessment of learners' work via their portfolios. They argue that these factors impact negatively on learners' proficiency in reading a vernacular language.

Nagai (2004:107) researched vernacular education in Papua New Guinea, Australia, combining qualitative research with a participatory action research (PAR) process. Her study population was the Maiwala Elementary School. In her study she argues that schools lack teaching materials and trained teachers to teach vernacular reading.

Mostert and Wikan (2008:95), using a qualitative research approach, determined the effect of accessibility to vernacular reading material at home. In their study they compared their results from Norway and Namibia. In both instances they found that a lack of vernacular reading material at home has a negative impact on learners' reading habits and attitude. Another study focusing on Namibia's several dialects is that of Murray (2007). According to him, an important consideration for one to understand language problems is to consider these various dialects (Murray 2007:70).

Gacheche's (2010:1) qualitative research focused on challenges in implementing vernacular language education in Kenya. The study comprised a literature review, ethnographic studies, research findings and interviews with linguists and sociologists, and states that rural schools need greater allocation of vernacular based resources (Gacheche 2010:23). Gacheche's (2010) study correlates with the findings of Nagai (2004), who conducted her study in Papua New Guinea.

Phajane (2012:3) applied a qualitative research method in her study conducted in the North West Province of South Africa. She states that there are many methods and approaches for teaching Grade 1 learners in Setswana reading, but teachers are uncertain

about the methods and approaches to teach beginners. This results in Foundation Phase learners experiencing problems in learning to read their home language.

Hugo's (2010:133) research project focused on Grade 1-3 teachers from 11 schools in Gauteng, South Africa. Apparently Foundation Phase teachers struggle to properly teach learners to read due to the language spoken by learners and teachers. Hugo also found that a lack of vernacular teaching materials in the classrooms add to the problem of effective teaching of vernacular reading.

Another Gauteng study was conducted by Van Rooyen and Jordaan (2009:271). They believe that learners spend too much time watching television, playing video- or computer games instead of reading. They further state that additional reading could facilitate better language comprehension skills (Van Rooyen & Jordaan 2009:279). Their results revealed that teachers need to be well trained and flexible in the use of various reading methods.

Lemmer and Manyike's (2012:19) used a quantitative research method for their study in Tzaneen in the Letsitele area of the Limpopo Province, South Africa. Their study population consisted of Grade 7 learners from four different types of primary schools in the rural area, where learners' first language (L1) is Xitsonga, with English being the second language (ESL), i.e the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). They concluded that the type of school as well as the limited reading materials for ESL learners has implications for acquiring English proficiency in a rural setting (Lemmer & Manyike 2012:19).

An asset-based approach focuses on assets, i.e the available skills and social resources of people and their communities, before considering what they need (Ebersohn & Mbetse 2008:323; Ebersohn & Eloff 2006:462). This approach is internally focused, which means that a community first has to identify its own resources before external resources can be effectively utilised. Since individuals within a particular community and various institutions have to work together in identifying their resources, this approach is relationship driven. Relationships continuously change over time and need to be built and rebuilt through the process of facilitation.

For the purpose of this study the educational assets for teaching vernacular reading will be identified before considering their needs. An educational asset is that vernacular language teachers are all trained to proficiently teach vernacular reading.

A qualitative research method will be used in this study to focus on the educational assets and needs for teaching vernacular reading. This study might serve as encouragement for the Limpopo DoE to introduce development programmes for language teachers in general and vernacular teachers in particular.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.8.1 Design of the study

Cohen *et al* (2007:173) state that an effective qualitative study uses multiple methods for data collection, such as individual interviews, focus group discussions, observations and reviewing of existing documents (Hancock & Algozzine 2006:7).

This single case study adopted a qualitative research approach, focusing on the vernacular language teachers from two schools, namely Tours Junior Primary School and Mashiloane Higher Primary School were interviewed. Being on the same premises, these two rural schools are in a process of amalgamation.

1.8.2 Sampling

Non-probability purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Cohen *et al* (2007:76) state that when the potential sample is too large, a smaller subsample can be used. The study population thus comprised of six vernacular language teachers out of the eleven teachers from both schools took part in the study.

1.8.3 Data- collection

Phase 1. The language policy document and assessment policies were analysed to establish how often learners are assessed in vernacular reading.

Phase 2. Chilisa and Preece (2005:200) state that the researcher focuses on questioning the research participants during individual interviews to obtain information. One-to-one semi-structured interviews with the vernacular language teachers were conducted to determine their assets and needs to effectively teach vernacular reading.

Phase 3. Chilisa and Preece (2005:209) state that observations enable an elaborate discussion of a specific issue. Teachers were therefore observed while teaching vernacular reading to identify their reading strategies. These observations were regarded as a supportive and supplementary technique. An observation guide was used to include important issues.

Phase 4. Chilisa and Preece (2005:205) state that focus group discussions allow the researcher to understand the range of responses and gain insight into how people perceive a situation. A focus group discussion was conducted to establish the quality of training the teachers have, observing all language teachers in general and particularly focusing on the vernacular language teachers.

1.8.4 Data-analysis

According to Chilisa and Preece (2005:226) researchers create frameworks for retrieval that are workable, given the nature of the study. Cohen *et al* (2007:184) state that early analysis reduces the problem of data overload. The present study used a data matrix to summarise the data; an example is presented below. The data is based on the interviews with vernacular language teachers, and is categorised into various themes.

Table 1. An example of a data matrix

	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (Teachers)					
THEME	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nature of training offered	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
Teacher support materials	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
Learners reading materials	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
Reading strategies	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response
Monitoring learner assessment	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response	Response

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A consent letter from the head of the Community and Continuing Education Unit at the University of Limpopo was presented to the principals of both schools. The purpose and significance of the study was explained to all participants before obtaining written consent from them. They were briefed on their roles and assured of the confidentiality of their information before, during and after the research, and they were assured that their names would be concealed and that participation in the study was voluntary.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the background and general orientation of the study and highlighted its context. The social problems, aim of the study, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and ethical considerations were explained. International educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading were outlined and narrowed down to South Africa with focus on the rural primary schools in the Limpopo province. The lack of teacher and learner support material for vernacular reading has also been described. For the purpose of this study teachers should provide texts for learners to practice reading their home language on daily basis. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:19) states that reading is the most important linguistic skill in young children and it is fun. The love for reading in young children is a lifelong learning gift which needs to be developed.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: EDUCATIONAL ASSETS AND NEEDS FOR TEACHING VERNACULAR READING IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a literature review of educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading in two rural primary schools, Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. A brief discussion about the situation in South African education and some of the methods in teaching vernacular reading are also included.

SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:9) states that parents should encourage their children to enjoy reading their home language, however, some parents cannot read their vernacular language, resulting in them not reading to their children at home. Parents should thus develop their own literacy and language skills to support their children in vernacular reading.

Educational assets and needs were identified, focusing on why learners were unable to read their home language proficiently. The educational assets are the trained language teachers and the learner and teacher support material (LTSM) available at the schools. The schools' educational needs reflected a lack of basic necessities for teaching vernacular reading - which would be adequate training for vernacular teachers to teach reading effectively, poor support from the schools and the DoE, as well as a lack of Sepedi reading material. The DoE investigated the poor reading levels to find solutions to deal with the problem. The Limpopo DoE's goal is to improve literacy scores across the province focusing on the primary school grades. Separate training programmes or separate sessions for literacy should be provided, catering for the particular needs of home languages, especially African languages. Teachers should be encouraged to read and write on their own level. The success of this depends on improved access to sufficient, appropriate and high quality literacy resources in all languages for learners.

However, there is no evidence for any of this at the target schools. For the purpose of this study the author intend to assist teachers in developing reading material for Foundation Phase learners at the target school.

According to the present author's observation and experience teachers should be encouraged to read and write on their own level. This literature review entails a discussion based on the reasons for teachers struggling to teach vernacular reading. Parents, teachers and the department of education need to work together to solve this vernacular reading problem. Research indicated that educational problems encountered in South African rural schools, especially in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo revolve around the unavailability of reading materials in vernacular. Inadequate training of language teachers in general and vernacular teachers in particular has a negative impact on vernacular reading in rural schools. According to Murray (2007:69) a common cry amongst teachers at all levels in Namibia is that the majority of learners cannot read, for they lack the necessary vocabulary.

2.2 THE EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND ASSETS

Maphutha (2005:15) refers to "educational needs" as what a school is lacking and what is needed to achieve the desired educational goals, and defines educational assets as "all valuable resources, skills strengths and opportunities available in the target school, learners' families, and the local rural community (Maphutha 2005:16)."

Ebersohn & Mbetse (2003:145) note that the need-based approach has met with a growing resistance by many South African professionals, for the focus is mainly on problems, deficiencies and needs (Ebersohn & Mbetse, 2003:148).

Contrary to the needs-based approach which focuses on what is lacking or problematic, an asset-based approach focuses on what is currently available in the environment i.e the community (Ebersohn & Mbetse 2003:151). This does not imply that additional resources from outside is not needed, but it suggests that outside resources can be utilized more effectively if the community has already identified its own resources. The importance of

intrinsic creativity is emphasised, i.e problem solving and mission development need to come from within. The strengths and talents of individuals must be considered and not the weaknesses and problems. One method of recognising assets is by means of an “asset map” of all the available skills, talents, capacities and resources.

According to Ebersohn & Eloff (2003:462) the asset-based approach must be considered in terms of supporting vulnerable children in education. In the context of this study the available vernacular reading material at the two schools are identified as assets, while the lack of more and updated reading material is classified under educational needs, for the teachers from the two primary schools usually have to share the available resources for the benefit of the learners.

According to Spaul (2013:54) a report from the Centre for Development Enterprise (CDE) suggests a system which can identify teachers who need assistance. This was suggested after it was discovered that South African teachers have less than the basic knowledge about the content of the subjects they teach. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know; therefore it should be ensured that every teacher in the system has a basic knowledge of curriculum content of the subjects they teach.

According to Veriava (2013:2) the public interest organisation SECTION27 initiated an investigation into the non-delivery of textbooks at schools in the Limpopo province. This followed media reports that schools in the province had not received their textbooks at the beginning of the 2012 academic year. It is a case study of the litigation and the subsequent three court orders to protect learner rights.

Veriava (2013:3) further stated that SECTION27 is a public interest organisation that spearheaded the Limpopo case, and which was the first applicant in this case. Veriava (2013:12) states that the Limpopo textbook case was thus not only about ensuring that every learner has access to textbooks; it was also about ensuring that teachers are adequately equipped in the classroom. In February 2012 a team of SECTION27 staff visited several schools in Limpopo. Each of the schools visited confirmed that textbooks had not yet been delivered. The textbooks should have been delivered in December 2011 or early January 2012. On 2 May 2012 in e-mail correspondence to Mark Heywood, Dr

Karodia undertook that the supply of textbooks will take place through the month of May and definitely be completed by 15 June 2012.

Spaull (2013:55) further adds that one of the most pressing needs in South African education is a strong commitment to accountability and transparency. Accountability should be increased on all levels of the system, for it is essential for democracy. Weak accountability means that there is little motivation to procure and retain skilled individuals. Textbooks that are not delivered or delivered incorrectly are examples of a lack of accountability, not forgetting the recent issue of discarded textbooks in the Limpopo province.

According to the SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:14) any approach to literacy must cater for learners' educational needs in vernacular reading. In classrooms where there are sometimes partially hearing impaired learners, other modes of communication are needed to support them. The human resource capacity should be increased to deliver and manage effective literacy teaching and learning in primary schools. The needs of specific grade levels and phases must be taken into account, especially in the Foundation Phase. The training of Foundation Phase teachers should have specific sessions dedicated to the needs of learners in Grade 1, Grade 2 and Grade 3, which should be separately considered. Specific difficulties faced by teachers, e.g. large classes, over-age learners, and multi-grade classes should be covered. Training based on needs analysis is one of the characteristics of good teacher development and support programmes for this literacy strategy.

2.3 TEACHING READING AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Learners should become independent readers already at primary level. Teachers should encourage learners to enjoy reading by equipping them with appropriate reading material. According to Da Rocha (2009:35) learning is supported by reading at school. Learners who acquire reading skills by Grade 3 are able to use reading as a source of learning in written tasks. While successful learners can recognise, predict and recall writing patterns,

inexperienced readers cannot read with comprehension. However, barriers to learning need not be permanent.

According to Navsaria *et al* (2011:6) barriers at the school system level are, *inter alia* the lack of inclusive education practice, limited training and lack of support for teachers, disrupted and incompetent teaching, poor foundation skills, large teacher-learner ratios, limited reading and writing opportunities, language barriers and the fact that many schools do not have access to a library. At home socio-economic difficulties and lack of parental support impede learners' reading abilities.

2.3.1 Teaching vernacular reading

Several studies concerning vernacular reading were conducted globally and locally. Wilson & Peterson's (2006:2) study was conducted in Washington, USA. They argue that teachers encounter transformation proposals as they are required to use new curricula, new teaching strategies and new assessment modes like assessing learners' work through their portfolios and performance standards. The many changes result in teachers spending more time on administration than teaching, which could be the reason for learners' incompetence in reading. Another study in the USA reasons that reading comprehension is affected by a lack of academic language (Costa 2009:7). Readers derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional problem solving thinking processes. A new curriculum, new teaching strategies and new methods of assessment should be introduced; for teachers spend such a lot of time preparing learners' portfolios that teaching takes secondary place.

Crowe (2005:38) compares the effectiveness of two different types of oral reading feedback strategies which were used in facilitating the reading comprehension of learners with low reading abilities. Eight learners between eight and eleven years (Grades 3 and 5) participated in the study. They were all from the same elementary school in a Midwestern town with approximately 50 000 inhabitants. All eight learners had a low reading ability (Crowe, 2005:34).

Mostert and Wikan's (2008:96) study focused on the reading attitudes and habits of Norwegian and Namibian learners. Their survey included 155 Grade 6 learners. They state that children need basic skills in both decoding and reading comprehension in order to become voluntary readers. They argue that the primary home language has an influence on how much time learners spend on reading for enjoyment on a daily basis. Murray (2007:69) states that teachers in Namibia complain about learners' inability to read their home language proficiently. The majority of learners find it difficult to comprehend and process reading material. It was found that Grade 4 learners lack the necessary vocabulary. Added to this is the variety of dialects found in Namibia which makes the problem of language more deceptive.

Another study which used a qualitative research approach was conducted by Gacheche (2010:1) in Kenya, who states that challenges in implementing vernacular language in Kenya revolved around resource allocation in rural schools (Gacheche 2010:23). Nagai's study correlates with that of Gacheche, who based their findings on a lack of reading material and inadequate training of language teachers.

Phajane (2012) conducted a study in the Bojanala District in the North West province of the methods applied by Foundation Phase teachers in teaching reading Setswana as the home language. The perspective of teachers on teaching reading to beginners were also examined (Phajane, 2012:7). The four schools are situated in semi-rural areas and serve learners from the Garankuwa, Mothutlung and Mmakau areas, which formerly were part of the then Bophuthatswana homeland, which had a different system from that of South Africa. The Primary Education Upgrading Project (PEUP) was used and comprised of the Breakthrough to Literacy (Setswana) programmes as approaches to teaching reading (Phajane, 2012:71).

Desai's (2012) study was conducted in the Western Cape focusing on mother tongue education and the history of inequality in South African Education. The study was conducted at the Themba Primary School in Khayelitsha, with Xhosa as home language. Desai (2012:24) states that the level of inequality in a society is indicated by how well schools are resourced in terms of teaching staff and physical resources. Poor

performance in reading comprehension revolves around a serious lack of a reading culture in schools (Desai 2012:210).

Luthuli (2003:25), who conducted a study in KwaZulu-Natal, argues that learners in desegregated schools have an inadequate vernacular vocabulary. According to Da Rocha (2009:20) language forms the foundation on which learning and teaching is based. All subjects in the curriculum finds meaning through language and learners should start schooling with the language they know well enough, which is their mother tongue. All subjects in the curriculum finds meaning through language and learners should start school with the language they know well enough, which is their mother tongue.

A study comprising Grade 7 learners and their teachers was conducted at the Socrates Primary School in the Cape Flats by Da Rocha (2009). The languages offered at the school are English, Afrikaans and Xhosa. Learners are expected to work independently by reading from worksheets and dictation, for literacy is the ability to write, read and speak vernacular comprehensibly and proficiently. Teachers need to be proficient in all languages offered by the school, for schooling creates competent readers and writers. Da Rocha (2009:25) states that a home language, as well as additional languages, must be fully supported and developed in and outside of school. Learners' attitudes to reading affect language learning. Language proficiency is measured by those who have the socio-economic, political, educational, and cultural power in a community and society.

An explanatory, inductive case study research design was used in Cape Town to determine the views of Intermediate Phase teachers on the reasons for learners experiencing difficulties in the written language and how it might be overcome (Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011:1). The research participants were two teachers for Grade 5 and Grade 6. Apparently learners prefer other interests rather than reading and writing both in- and outside school, which explains why they do not use the library (Navsaria *et al* 2011:9).

Maphutha's study was conducted in Ga-Masemola in the Greater Sekhukhune District in the Limpopo province. He used a qualitative research approach in identifying the needs and assets of a primary school in a rural community. He states that the needs and assets

of every community are hidden and unknown, which should be identified in partnership with all community stakeholders (Maphutha 2006:63). The study could lead to changes in rural schools into community learning centres if every community member could be engaged in education programmes that will foster lifelong learning. The school manager and teachers should initiate extended use of public facilities (Maphutha, 2006:102).

According to SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:18) the province seeks to implement a clear and coherent language policy in order to support the literacy strategy. The Provincial Language Policy should be used by all schools to develop the School Language Policy which must answer the following questions, among others:

- What languages should be taught as learning areas? When should this be introduced?
- When should they be assessed for promotion purposes?
- What should the LoLT be at different grade levels? When should this be introduced?
- What are the implications of the policy for examinations and learner support materials, for example, in what language should the LTSM be for the different grade levels in the different learning areas, and what language should be used for examination papers?

The present author's main aim is to identify the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading, in this case Sepedi. Firstly, the available materials for teaching vernacular reading will be identified at both primary schools, after which the researcher will assist the teachers in identifying their needs to teach vernacular reading proficiently. The researcher herself teaches Sepedi at Tours Juniors Primary school, which would facilitate the needs evaluation. The study could encourage the DoE to support vernacular teachers in teaching vernacular reading proficiently, by providing appropriate training and adequate material.

2.3.2 Early reading development

Several studies have been conducted by various authors globally and locally. This study has focused on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading, in this case Sepedi, in the Limpopo Province. Nagai (2004:108), who researched an elementary school in New Guinea, notes that the children's first three years

of formal education (preparatory, Grade 1 and Grade 2) are delivered in their home language. This first three years of schooling is referred to as Elementary Education. In the classrooms children acquire various skills and gain knowledge and attitudes, through sound educational practices, important in their community. Nagai believes that teachers do not have sufficient working knowledge of vernacular themselves, and elementary trainers are hastily trained without actually having taught in the vernacular themselves.

Mostert & Wikan (2008:96), who conducted a study in Namibia and Norway, state that children need basic skills in decoding and reading comprehension in order to become voluntary readers. Their study has also shown that the time children spend on voluntary reading remains stable, which indicates that children who read a lot during their early years, retain their reading habits in later years and thus became even better readers. Primary home language has an influence on how much time learners spend on reading for enjoyment on a daily basis. Crowe (2005:33), who conducted research in Manhattan, states that decoding-based feedback strategies are the most widely used procedures for promoting children's word recognition and reading comprehension during oral reading activities. This approach focuses on the surface aspects of reading, particularly in assisting children with low reading abilities, to read with greater fluency and accuracy. Techniques common to this approach include pre-teaching vocabulary, sounding out words, and using word structure cues to decode unfamiliar words.

For the purpose of this study educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading were identified. Teachers are trained as language teachers in general and not particularly as vernacular teachers, which makes it difficult to teach vernacular reading proficiently. Classrooms are overcrowded and do not have sufficient Sepedi reading material. Hugo (2010:134) notes that young learners attend school without the tools they need to begin the task of learning to read in their home language. These tools include knowing how to listen, how to interpret or read non-verbal messages and how to follow directions independently. According to Hugo these learners were not exposed to pre-reading activities as part of their development in becoming readers. She explains that pre-reading is characterised by a child's ability to listen to a book or story being read aloud. Children should be able to retell a favourite story by turning the pages in a book and reading the pictures from an early stage, while emergent readers should be able to read

names of familiar people (Hugo 2010:134). Hugo found that teachers lack reading and teaching materials, and that the language of learning and teaching is not always the learner's home language.

Teachers and learners share the same home language, the Sekgaga dialect mixed with Sepedi. At home and outside classrooms learners speak Sekgaga and during Sepedi periods they are supposed to switch to Sepedi. According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:10) learners who experience barriers to learning often do not receive the necessary support they need to become fluent readers. There is not much vernacular reading material at the two schools. Classrooms need to be equipped with Sepedi reading material. Generally, vernacular reading resources are inadequate in South African schools. This is the case despite demonstrated intentions in the country's constitution to support a stronger culture of reading. Although campaigns such as "Masifunde Sonke" (a Zulu phrase meaning "let us all read") were launched in 2000 to develop a culture of reading in the country, there is still inadequate reading material available in rural schools. The situation is so deficient that up to five learners have to share one book in a classroom (Buthelezi, 2002).

Learners in the study area speak the Sekgaga dialect, which could be the reason why they are unable to talk and read Sepedi, the language of teaching and learning, fluently and with understanding. The language teachers also speak the Sekgaga dialect, which means they know Sepedi as they were trained as language teachers.

2.3.2 Teaching reading in the foundation phase and intermediate phase

Wilson and Peterson (2006:6) state that learner differences are related to a variety of resources, such as different experiences, capacities, understanding, and background. Cross-cultural research on teaching also supports the notion that individual students' differences could be due to resources. Teachers have to learn to deal with the inevitable differences among learners, and they are urged to think of differences as resources to use, not as obstacles to overcome. Teachers should motivate learners by respecting and

understanding these differences, and assume that these can serve as a foundation on which to build bridges to new understandings.

Wilson and Peterson (2006:9) further add that resources are mediated by teachers and learners. Teachers need to be familiar with the specific third graders they meet at the beginning of each year, as well as with the new subject matter they teach. First-class teachers must make an effort in planning what they want their learners to learn, expecting countless questions.

Nagai (2004:115) assisted teachers to develop an integrated curriculum for the Maiwala Tok Ples (vernacular) Preparatory School (TPPS) into a three year curriculum for the Maiwala Elementary school. They produced many more "Big Books". By reading these Big Books together, and supplementing it with learning about particular themes, the children were able to develop basic concepts and related practices. Teachers made the shared reading experience into rote learning and memorisation of the story. Nagai (2004:118) has shown through the Maiwala experience that elementary education in the vernacular could be very effective if teachers were well trained and sufficient materials were developed through on-going encouragement and advice. Learners' achievements depend on quality teachers, who depend on the training they have received. For the purpose of this study it is suggested that teachers should be encouraged to create their own Sepedi texts for learners to read on a daily basis. The DoE should offer adequate training for vernacular teachers in order to teach reading proficiently.

Crowe (2005:33) states that the reader develops greater consciousness of the purpose of vernacular reading if they use multiple levels of information. Learners with low reading abilities could be motivated to read by providing them with adequate vernacular reading material. The use of tape-recorded stories could motivate learners to love reading in their home language, which would lead to reading for enjoyment. Mostert & Wikan (2008:101) state that learners do not visit libraries because they do not have access to vernacular reading material at home. The availability of vernacular reading material at home would be a motivating factor to use library facilities for further reading. Learners who have books at home appreciate receiving yet another book to add to their collection. It was also shown

that regular storytelling by parents had a positive influence on the attitudes of learners towards reading.

According to Gacheche (2010:19) one of the issues that predominates discussions on the effectiveness of a first language (L1) based system is the ability of teachers to efficiently and effectively transmit cognitive skills and values in the learners' first language. The present researcher thus values the Sekgaga dialect as an educational asset for teaching vernacular reading, because it is the home language of all the teachers from the study area. This allows them to understand learners when they express themselves during Sepedi periods. Learners' first language or home language is important as learners think in their first language before switching to an additional or second language. Gacheche (2010:20) further adds that teachers regress to old systems of teacher controlled interaction, where learners are merely required to repeat content after the teacher, which allows little opportunity to ask questions or express doubts they may have. Rote learning was encouraged and teachers found it easy to use for they considered it to save time. The main focus was on the acquisition of the second language (L2), since it was the language of examination, even though the language policy advocated the use of a first language. It is assumed that if teachers can speak learners' L1 then they can also teach it, a misleading fact which leads to education ministries neglecting specific training for L1 teachers.

Van Rooyen and Jordaan (2009:273) note that the great partiality children show towards television and computer games may reflect a changing preference for visual, as opposed to advisory stimulation, and it is postulated that individuals who watch more television or play more video and computer games spends less time reading.

Hugo (2010:135) states that teaching reading revolves around decoding the text and comprehension during reading. Decoding refers to those abilities used for reading whereby written signs and symbols are translated into language comprehension which concerns understanding of the text during which process meaning is assigned to the text as a whole. The language experience approach to teaching reading is also a whole word or whole sentence approach. This approach allows learners the opportunity to rehearse speaking before they read and write it. This approach, which could be of value in many

South African classrooms, integrates reading and writing with some kind of life experiences of the learner. The learner is thus actively involved and in control of his/her own learning. This approach enhances learners' self-concept when their stories are considered important enough to be written down, discussed and read. The knowledge and cultural scheme of learners are becoming increasingly varied, not only locally but also globally, and teachers need to take cognisance of this tendency. This study clearly show that language teachers lack vernacular reading material, teachers are not trained to teach vernacular reading.

According to Navsaria *et al* (2011:3) the purpose of writing is to communicate ideas: "Spoken language provides a critical foundation for the development of reading and written language." Navsaria *et al* (2011:1) acknowledge that there are barriers and opportunities in the school system. Educational needs create barriers towards learning, while educational assets create opportunities for learning.

2.3.3 The nature of reading and the pedagogy of literacy

The International Group for the study of Language (1997:148) states that the learning of reading and writing is not a built-in competence: there is no such thing as a language acquisition device (LAD) for written language. Many children surrounded by written material and literate siblings seem to learn to read without formal teaching. This study correlates with that of Mostert & Wikan (2008:101) who note that learners with a lot of reading material at home could be motivated to use libraries and that they enjoy reading. According to The International Group for the study of Language (1997:149) the analysis of reading as a process involve not mere decoding of written symbols but also the knowledge of context and of the world around us, which has important implications for the teaching strategies to be used in different contexts. It further states that in almost every country teachers have been blamed for the lack of progress in literacy, for they are certainly one of the cornerstones of literacy operations everywhere. However, the single factor most hampering literacy progress in primary schools is weak management and organisation of reading within the class (i.e the teacher's inability to teach). Well-planned progressive reading and writing activities are important factors influencing the standards of reading;

therefore teacher training is very important (The International Group for the study of Language, 1997:151). The study conducted at the two primary schools clearly indicates that vernacular teachers need adequate training to teach vernacular reading.

2.3.4 Annual National Assessment (2011 and 2012; Grades 1-6 and 9)

The Annual National Assessment (ANA) assessment was first implemented in February 2011 (testing 2010 content) and, most recently in September 2012 (testing 2012 content) (Spaull, 2013:3). It is one of the most important policy developments of the last ten years which identifies schools and learners who need support. ANA consists of annual, national-standardised tests of achievements for Grades 1 to 6 and 9. ANA provides some standardised indications of learning in the primary grades, which allows for the early identification and remediation of learning discrepancies. Learners were tested in their home language, additional language and mathematics. South African learners performed poorly in ANA, for it was discovered that learners cannot read their home language proficiently; Sepedi speaking learners struggled to read their home language. Spaull (2013:53) further argues that for the ANAs to fulfill the role for which they were created, these assessments should be trustworthy, reliable and properly utilised, and the process should be planned well in advance. The tests should be well aligned with the curriculum and the difficulty levels of each grade should be grade appropriate.

2.3.5 The Breakthrough to Literacy Programme

The Breakthrough to Literacy Programme was developed by the Molteno Project in the late 1990s. This programme was translated into various African languages. The Breakthrough to Setswana programme was introduced to present reading and writing skills in Setswana. In the Breakthrough to Literacy programme learners were provided with learning materials, such as sentence makers, sound and word cards, posters and books. Reading was successfully facilitated and learners were able to construct their own sentences, which they enjoyed to read. The approach integrated all aspects of language in each lesson, which includes reading, writing, speaking and spelling. The teacher

encouraged learners to construct sentences and create stories from their own experience and from pictures (Phajane, 2012:26).

2.3.6 Reading strategies

According to SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:7) *“it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide, plan and teach an effective reading programme that could enable the learner to become a skillful reader. Every teacher should strive to teach and model these activities in the Reading and Writing Focus Time by: acting as a model reader for the learners in Shared and Guided Reading Sessions, teaching learners to apply reading strategies when they are not sure about the text, providing a rich and varied literacy environment that includes interesting reading material, displays and engaging multimedia resources (for example, audio, video and overheads) that reflected the cultural diversity of the school and community, providing opportunities for discussion, teamwork and other social interaction that make reading interesting and fun, using effective practices for engaging learners in large groups (Whole Shared Reading and Writing Sessions), small groups (Guided Reading and Writing Sessions) and individual instruction (Independent Reading), using reflective practice, observation and a variety of assessment strategies to identify each learner’s needs and provide differentiated instructions.”*

It is assumed that the language teachers from the two schools, represented in this study, lack adequate vernacular reading material and appropriate training. The use of the Sekgaga dialect by learners is also a possible reason for the poor situation. If teachers are provided with sufficient reading material, they could implement different reading strategies; another possibility is for them to create their own reading texts for learners.

Skillful readers make meaning when they read. In order to do that, they need general knowledge, be familiar with letters and letter sounds and understand the language. They also need to read fluently enough to not forget the beginning of a sentence when they reach the end of it: this is the only way to make meaning of a sentence. Skillful readers use different strategies when they read, and teachers should assist in developing these skills by doing specific reading exercises.

For the purpose of this study, teachers need Sepedi readers and adequate training to teach vernacular reading proficiently. The Sekgaga dialect could be the reason why learners are unable to make meaning when they read, for although the learners are familiar with it, the sounds they know are different from what they should read.

Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:8) points out the reading processes that could be used by a skillful reader:

- **Before reading:** Reads the title, looks at the contents page and index pages, reads the sub-headings and chapter titles, reads the short description of the contents, usually printed on the back cover, looks at the illustrations.
- **During reading:** Reads a range of words “on sight” without needing to break them into syllables and letters, keeps checking that the meaning of the text is clear, gets a general idea of the meaning of an unfamiliar word by reading the sentence or paragraph where it is, or by breaking the word down into sounds or syllables.
- **After reading:** Links the content of the text to his or her own ideas, experiences or opinions, remembers new words and their meanings when seeing them again in other contexts.

SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:12) states that there are five components of teaching reading:

Component 1 - Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how sounds in words work. They need to understand that words are made up of speech sounds or phonemes. Learners instinctively “know” about phonemes, otherwise they would not be able to speak or understand speech. When they learn to read and write, they need to become aware of these units of language, they need to know the sounds in (phonemes) within each word.

Component 2 - Word recognition

Word recognition refers to the skills that readers need in order to read unknown words. The two main elements involved in word recognition are **phonics** and **sight words**.

Phonics. Phonics means decoding a word by breaking it down into units (syllables and letters). Phonics instruction teaches learners the relationship between the letters of written language and individual sounds of spoken language. Knowing this relationship between spoken sounds and letters teaches learners to read and write words. The purpose of phonics instruction is to give the learner tools so that he or she could easily decode the words. They may not understand the words they are reading; especially if they are in an unfamiliar language. However, phonics instruction is an important building block in the teaching of reading and writing which is making and understanding meaning. When you put together phonics (ability to decode the words) and vocabulary (knowledge of what the words mean), then you are on your way of being able to construct meaning.

In indigenous African languages, as well as Afrikaans, there is a nearly direct correspondence between the alphabetical letters and the sounds they represent. The names and the sounds of letters are generally the same, and letter sounds do not vary depending on what other letters are near it. Therefore, it is easier to teach phonemic awareness and phonics in these languages than it is in the English language.

In the English language, there are 26 letters in the alphabet; there are 44 phonemes (sounds) and 120 graphemes (letter and combination of letters). These variations explain why the teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics takes so much longer in English than in African languages. According to Phajane (2012:35) phonics instruction teaches learners the relationship between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language.

Sight words. Sight words (or “look and say” words) involve the learner in recognising a word by its shape, length and other features.

Component 3 - Comprehension

Teachers who teach reading need to keep a close check on whether learners are simply “barking at print” or whether they really understand and interpret what they are reading. Comprehension has to be developed from the very start; it cannot be left until the learners are able to break words down into their components or until they can read a certain number of sight words.

Ways of developing comprehension is to activate the learner’s prior knowledge. In the Foundation Phase, the teacher encourages the learner to activate his or her prior knowledge whenever they read a new text. Once learners reach the Intermediate Phase, they should be encouraged to activate prior knowledge for themselves.

Component 4 - Vocabulary

To develop as readers, learners need to have knowledge and understanding of a wide range of words. A good vocabulary will improve fluency as well as comprehension of text. Some vocabulary can incidentally be learned from the context of the text that the learner is reading, but there is also a need to teach vocabulary in a planned, deliberate way.

Component 5 - Fluency

Fluency in reading means the ability to read text smoothly, accurately and with understanding, for it is a key indicator of comprehension. If learners read hesitantly, only one word at a time, it probably means that they also have problems in comprehension.

How to help learners to develop fluency. The only way for learners to become fluent readers is by reading a lot: the more they read, the more fluent they will become. Learners need to be motivated to enjoy reading in their home language. It is the duty of parents and teachers to encourage learners to read for pleasure. Phajane (2012:37) further states that “*Fluency is the ability to read orally with speed, accuracy and proper expression. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension, and can be achieved through repeated oral reading with teachers, peers and parents.*”

2.3.7 Support for learners with reading difficulties

Children who experience reading difficulties are no exception. The foundation phase of good reading is the same for all learners. All readers, regardless of their age, gender or ability, need to develop the motivation to read fluently and with comprehension. Learners with reading difficulties should be identified as early as possible and appropriate support must be implemented.

2.3.8 Comparison of two oral reading feedback strategies in improving reading comprehension

The best and most effective reading facilitation techniques has been on going with oral reading feedback strategies generally founded on one of the two reading approaches, namely linear or integrated. Linear models of reading instruction focus on unidirectional processing, starting either from the bottom up or from the top down (Crowe, 2005:32). Reading instruction and corrective feedback based on the bottom-up approach use discrete hierarchical tasks to develop quick, accurate and fluent word identification. Corrective feedback directs the reader to analyse the structure of words and make sound-symbol associations or “sound out” the word. As the reader becomes more proficient in decoding and recognising a greater number of words, meanings become attached to individual words, sentences and text passages. Top-down strategies assist the reader in making predictions and testing hypotheses about the passage to be read. The focus of top-down procedures is on contextual processing and accessing the reader’s background knowledge about events or information presented in the text. In this approach, corrections or interruptions during reading would not occur. Reading feedback strategies that promote multiple levels of processing have been termed integrated or interactive. Integrated procedures encourage the reader to activate background knowledge while simultaneously attending to more discrete elements, such as word structure or word function within the context of the passage. In this approach, reading is viewed as a communicative process (Crowe, 2005:33).

2.3.8.1 *Decoding-based feedback strategies*

The decoding-based feedback strategies of Crowe (2005:33) are the most widely used procedure for promoting children's word recognition and reading comprehension during oral reading activities. The bottom-up approach focuses on the surface aspects of reading, particularly in assisting children with low reading ability to read with greater fluency and accuracy. Techniques common to this approach included pre-teaching vocabulary, sounding out words and using word structure (Crowe, 2005:33).

2.3.8.2 *Integrated approach*

One integrative approach to reading facilitation is called communicative reading strategies (CRS). It has been used as an effective intervention approach for learners who exhibit low reading abilities. CRS uses contextually supported feedback to help children reconstruct the author's message (Crowe, 2005:34). The adult mediates the child's reading through the use of discussion; prompts and cues that help establish the topic, simplify complex sentences, explain new and unfamiliar vocabulary and connect ideas across passages and units of text. CRS has been used as an effective intervention approach for school-age children and adults who exhibit low reading abilities (Crowe, 2005:34).

2.4 ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Nagai (2004:109) states that Elementary Education in Papua New Guinea refers to the first three years of formal education (Preparatory, Grade 1 and Grade 2) which is delivered in the children's community. While a TPPS is a non-formal, community-based school, an elementary school forms part of the formal education system. Many children speak Tok Pisin and some parents recognised that learners were quick to learn to speak in the local vernacular; but English (the language most children did not speak) was chosen as instructional medium for these schools. The local DoE seemed to have forgotten the benefits of initial vernacular education. Nagai (2004:109) explains that since teachers at the English elementary schools did not have sufficient working knowledge of English themselves, the children were not able to adequately learn English. The new elementary schools also lack teaching materials and trained teachers.

The Maiwala Elementary School successfully provided three years of initial education for the children in the language familiar to them. In the classrooms, children have learnt various skills and have gained knowledge and attitudes important in their community through sound educational practices. According to Crowe (2005:38) the Midwestern Elementary school is composed of families with lower middle to low socio-economic status within the large community population. All participating learners showed a low reading ability. The results of two oral reading feedback strategies, a decoding-based (linear) and a meaning-based (integrated) strategy were compared. Learners subjected to the integrated approach performed better than those in the linear approach.

2.4.1 The aims of elementary education

At TPPSs in the North Solomon's Province, approximately 25% of class time was spent on vernacular literacy. In the case of the Maiwala TPPS, nearly 50% of class time was spent on vernacular literacy, because all other subject areas were integrated parts of one theme from the Big Book story for the week. Unfortunately, many trainers and elementary school teachers do not seem to understand that the purpose of reading is to make meaning relative to various subject areas. Thus they made the shared reading experience into rote learning and memorisation of the story. Since less time was spent on reading for meaning, learners did not readily become fluent readers (Nagai, 2004:115).

According to Nagai (2004:118) there is a need for on-going monitoring of teachers and in-service courses. In order to meet these needs, extensive retraining of trainers or teachers in the practical aspects of teaching is necessary. Their qualifications also need to be reconsidered.

2.4.2 Reading habits and attitudes of primary school learners

Mostert and Wikan (2008:95) state that the dilemma of learners not learning to read on a desirable level seem to be a universal problem and finding possible causes and solutions for this predicament is an on-going process. They focused on the reading habits of Namibian and Norwegian learners, in the hope to shed some light on this world-wide

phenomenon. A survey, using questionnaires for data collection, included 155 Grade 6 learners. The aim was to identify general tendencies, similarities and differences based on selected variables. The variables that seemed to have the greatest impact on reading habits and attitudes was gender, availability of reading material at home, storytelling and reading by parents, as well as primary home language. Mostert and Wikan (2008:96) state that children need to have basic skills both in decoding and reading comprehension to become voluntary readers. It was also shown that the time learners spent on voluntary reading remained stable, indicating that children who read a lot during the early years retained their reading habits and thus develop even better reading skills.

Comparable to Crowe (2005:33) Mostert and Wikan (2008:96) stress that learners need to have basic skills in both decoding and reading comprehension. Mostert and Wikan (2008:97) emphasise that learners are expected to do a number of household chores that might take up most of the day after school and therefore find it very difficult to keep up with school expectations. Some parents do not have any formal education and are therefore not in a position to assist learners with academic problems. They usually also lack self-confidence to discuss their problems with teachers. Some learners are subject to abuse and neglect, while others need to take care of sick or elderly family members. Many Namibian learners struggle to master reading and writing skills. SACMEQ results clearly demonstrate that there are serious gaps in reading competency of learners in the upper primary phase. Mostert and Wikan (2008:98) further state that learners were tested in reading competence: Namibian learners in Grade 6 scored poorly compared to learners from other countries, obtaining third place from the bottom. The SACMEQ study also shows an extremely large variation between different Namibian regions, with the Northern region, where about two-thirds of the population live, showing the lowest scores in reading competency. Not surprisingly, not all teachers in these regions had obtained the desirable level of reading competence.

2.4.3 Reading and gender

Mostert and Wikan (2008:95) agree with Crowe (2005) and the DoE (2008) who include gender in the variables that seem to have the greatest impact on reading habits and

attitudes. The research shows that girls generally have a more positive attitude and habits with regard to reading than boys. While 69% of the girls regularly read to improve their schoolwork this is the case for only 42% of the boys. Furthermore, 57% of girls enjoy reading in comparison with the 35% of boys. In the Norwegian study, the difference between boys and girls is even greater, and an alarming 13% of the boys do not enjoy reading as opposed to none of the girls. It also became clear that more females, 53%, than males, 35%, often borrow books from the library. Similarly, more girls than boys are interested in additional opportunities for reading, 74% and 55% respectively (Mostert & Wikan, 2008:100). The table below shows the differences between genders in reading for enjoyment.

Table 2. Reading material by gender (Adapted from Mostert & Wikan 2008:100).

GENDER	TYPE OF READING MATERIAL					
	Magazines	Cartoons	Novels	Other books	e-mail/Web	Newspapers
Male	43%	54%	56%	16%	25%	35%
Female	49%	26%	88%	20%	13%	52%

2.4.4 Reading and storytelling by parents

It is believed that if parents read to their children it will have a positive effect on their attitudes towards reading later in life. Learners who are told stories almost on a daily basis spend more time reading for enjoyment than other learners. As much as 33% of learners, who are not told stories, also do not read for enjoyment at all. It was found that 61% of those learners, who are occasionally told stories, enjoy reading, much in contrast to only 22% of those who claim that they were never told stories. Storytelling by parents has a positive influence on the attitudes of learners towards reading (Mostert & Wikan, 2008:102). Inadequate reading material, especially to poor people who cannot afford to buy books and magazines for themselves, is also problematic. The unavailability of vernacular reading material hampers the development of a culture of reading in South Africa. African learners in disadvantaged schools do not become competent readers as

their parents have no reading material to read to them, therefore “bedtime stories” does not exist in the African home, especially in rural areas. The habit of reading for enjoyment will not be nurtured in learners due to the unavailability of vernacular reading material at home. Many African parents tell stories from oral traditions to their children. It is unexceptional that the few available books in rural schools are stolen or torn (Buthelezi, 2002).

2.4.5 Primary home language

Language diversity is gradually becoming a more common phenomenon in Norwegian schools due to increased immigration. Multilingual schools are also common in Namibia, for 25% learners have Oshiwambo and 24% Afrikaans as their primary home language, followed by 16% Nama/Damara and 8% English speaking learners. A small percentage of learners are Otjiherero and German speaking. Since only two of the thirteen regions were included in the sample, the primary home language percentages do not reflect the national percentages. For the schools included in the sample, most learners are taught in their vernacular during the lower primary phase. Primary home language had an influence on how much time learners spend on reading for enjoyment on a daily basis (Mostert & Wikan, 2008:103), as indicated in the table below.

Table 3. Time spent reading (Adapted from Mostert & Wikan, 2008:103)

LANGUAGE	None	>30 min	30-60 min	<60 min	Total
Norwegian	11%	61%	26%	3%	100%
English	8%	33%	8%	50%	100%
Oshiwambo	3%	33%	49%	15%	100%
Otjiherero	0%	100%	0%	0%	100%
Nama/Damara	13%	29%	21%	38%	100%
Afrikaans	19%	46%	14%	22%	100%

2.5 FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS: THE 'BATTLE' TO TEACH READING

According to Hugo (2010:133) there is evidence that learners attending South African schools experience reading difficulties. Teachers „battle“ to teach reading appropriately due to the following problems: Home language spoken by the learners and teachers, the reading methods used in the classrooms and lack of reading material in the classrooms. Hugo (2010:133) explains that the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase was not effective, resulting in many young learners attending South African schools have reading problems. Hugo (2010:143) further adds that research on reading in South Africa indicates that in general learners' reading skills are poorly developed. Teachers involved in this research project, like many South Africans, spoke more than one African language. They therefore often have to use code switching to explain the content of lessons to those learners, who do not speak the language of instruction used in the classroom because the language of learning and teaching is not always the learners' home language. As far as the learners' home languages are concerned, many problems are raised by teachers. One Grade 1 teacher indicated, for instance, that in her class of 40 learners they speak seven different home languages, namely isiZulu (the language of instruction), Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiXhosa and Sepedi, as well as Shona and Shangane. Another problem raised by teacher is that some learners do not know their home language. Often a family is uncertain as to which language should be regarded as their home language, for the father and the mother speak different languages.

In the context of this study, all learners speak the same language dialect, Sekgaga, but during vernacular periods they are expected to switch to Sepedi, the language which they hardly ever hear at home. For learners to understand when reading, teachers should explain that in the classroom they must speak Sepedi so that they could be familiar with what should be written and read. For example, learners would say: “Rakhadi o namede more gore a khone go kha mago”, for as they had to say “Rakgadi o nametše mohlare gore a kgone go kga mago”. The teacher should always encourage learners to speak Sepedi in the classroom so that they could read effectively. Teachers who do not assist learners in switching from the Sekgaga dialect to Sepedi during lessons find it difficult to teach vernacular reading. Learners should be encouraged to use Sepedi in the classroom for them to be able to read with understanding. It seems the two schools lack Sepedi

reading material and vernacular teachers need adequate training. The classrooms are not conducive to teaching and learning since they are overcrowded, the building is old and the windows are broken.

2.6 THE SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Spaull (2013:3) states that there is an on-going crisis in South African education and that the current system is failing the majority of South Africa's youth. A variety of independent assessments of learners' achievements were conducted in South Africa. The report shows that with the exception of a wealthy minority, most South African learners cannot read and write. South Africa participated in the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) in 2011, and performed poorer than many low-income African countries. There was no overall difference between PIRLS 2006 and PIRLS 2011 (Spaull 2013:21).

There are inequalities between language groups in their ability to read by the end of Grade 4. Half of all Grade 4 learners whose home language was either Sepedi, Xitsonga or Tshivenda, could not read by year end, compared to about 10% of Grade 4 learners whose home language was English or Afrikaans. The reading performance for Grade 4 is presented in the table below.

Table 4. Reading performance (Adapted from, Spaull, 2013:21)

Languages	Reading scores
English	531
Afrikaans	525
SiSwati	452
IsiZulu	443
isiNdebele	436
isiXhosa	429
Setswana	428
Sesotho	425
Xitsonga	407

Languages	Reading scores
Tshivenda	395
Sepedi	388

According to Spaul (2013:23) the quality of a country's teachers is related to the quality of its education system, for the quality of a teacher influences learner achievement.

“A quality teacher is someone who possesses the following four attributes (in no particular order):

- *Some requisite level of professionalism (values),*
- *The inclination to teach (attitudes and desires),*
- *The ability to teach (knowledge, skills and pedagogy), and therefore,*
- *The competence to teach (imparting and instilling the knowledge, skills and values pupils should be acquiring at school)”*

According to Spaul (2013:23) a competent teacher should acquire all the above attributes.

South African Grade 6 teachers participated in the teacher testing component of the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ), where language teachers took a reading test in which they underperformed. There are a number of current policies that indicate that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is addressing some of the causes of underperformance (Spaul 2013:7). The recent workbook initiatives, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), the Action Plan to 2030, and the implementation of ANA are all steps in the right direction. The following are some of areas which should be addressed if we are to improve teaching and learning in most South African classrooms:

- Increase the managerial, administrative and technical capacity of the national and provincial bureaucracies.
- Increase accountability by formulating implementation plans which are logical, clear and systematic.
- Implement a nation-wide system of diagnostic teacher testing and training.

- Externally evaluate the ANAs of one primary school grade.
- Provide a clear articulation of who is responsible for ensuring that learners are learning.
- Use the externally evaluated ANAs to determine which schools are most dysfunctional and require the most support.

Most South African learners perform below the curriculum. Poor school performance in South Africa reinforces social inequalities. According to Phajane (2012:19) many South African learners cannot read independently because of the RNCS and the NCS. The RNCS and NCS were supportive in literacy development in theory, but not in practice, which resulted in South African learners leaving school with inadequate literacy levels. The DoE has implemented numerous and radical changes to the curriculum. The first Outcomes Based Education (OBE) introduced in the democratic South Africa in 1998 was known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005). These curriculum changes influenced the way teachers teach and how principals manage schools.

Reagan (2009: vii) note that everyone has a strong view about language, for language is an intrinsic component in the classroom and also serves as the mediator of social reality for learners and teachers. The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy state this important aim: *“To ensure that every South African is able to read, write, count and think. However, systematic evaluations - those conducted by the Department of Education, provincial Departments of Education as well as international bodies show that learners in South African schools performed poorly when tested for their ability to read at age-appropriate levels”* (SA DoE 2008:5). The language policy insists that indigenous languages be equally used, even though English dominates in many schools. Some teachers prefer English for they are of the opinion that English proficiency is essential for educational success, and similarly most parents think that fluency in English will assist their children to obtain decent jobs. Learners should, however, first acquire their vernacular – or first language - in order to form a cognitive base for learning a second language. Reading resources in South African schools are inadequate. This is the case despite demonstrated intentions in the country’s constitution to support a stronger reading culture. Despite the fact that literacy programmes, such as Masifunde Sonke, were

launched in 2000 to develop a culture of reading in the country, reading materials are still lacking in rural schools (Buthelezi, 2002). According to Buthelezi (2002) the publishing sector has been very reluctant to publish reading materials in indigenous languages. The majority of children in South Africa start school without the necessary pre-literacy skills, without a concept of what reading means and consequently do not develop the skills conducive to subsequent acquisition of literacy (ALRU 2013:3). Buthelezi's (2000) paper argues that researchers should not make assumptions on vernacular reading when developing research principles, because countries differ.

A reading project was started by Ms Snoeks Desmond in 2000 in KwaZulu-Natal, which operated in the deep rural and mountainous areas of south-western KwaZulu-Natal. She developed an approach of family literacy that integrates formal adult literacy with early literacy development and participatory tools. The project provided books and promotes literacy via child-to-child groups. The project assessed Zulu reading skills of Grade 1 and Zulu and English reading skills of Grade 4 learners from various schools. The findings showed that learners who were exposed to home based literacy practice and Zulu storybook reading outperformed their peers who were not in similar programmes in terms of language and literacy skills (ALRU News Archives, 2013:2).

Another reading project was started in 2002 at the Flavius Mareka High School in Atteridgeville, a township west of Pretoria. The main aim of the project was *"to establish a culture of reading at the school."*

The following three-pronged approach was adopted to achieve its aim:

- *"To build teacher capacity and to establish a practical and sustainable reading programme at the school.*
- *To improve the reading skills of the learners.*
- *To build up a library at the school."*

The Flavius Mareka High School offers home language instruction in Sepedi, Venda, Tsonga, English and Afrikaans. The findings showed that reading levels are low in both English and African languages. Most learners read fluently and quicker in English than in

their home language. This raised the question about the quality of reading instruction in primary schools and the amount of exposure that learners have to books (ALRU 2013:2). The Mavula Primary School in KwaMhlanga, north-east of Pretoria, had approached ALRU for assistance in improving its Ndebele learners' reading skills. A three-hour workshop was attended by the Foundation Phase teachers, the principal, vice-principal and 43 parents of Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners. The starting point of a discussion on reading was moulded by a 20-minute video of Sepedi storybook reading. A donation of 20 children's storybooks in Ndebele was made to the school by the family Literacy Project.

Phajane (2012:23) further adds that the Foundations for Learning campaign was launched in 2008 aiming to improve learner performance in reading. The campaign was aimed at all South African schools, with the intention to encourage parents and teachers to motivate learners to read. The most recent results of the ANA, conducted by the Department of Basic Education in 2011, indicate poor reading performance at Grade 3 and Grade 6 levels (Desai 2012:210). The results for the reading comprehension task were the weakest of the three tasks – reading, comprehension and expository writing - in both Xhosa and English for both grades. Reading often got associated with decoding rather than meaning making (Desai 2012:211).

2.6.1 Specific challenges in implementing the National Reading Strategy

Many teachers simply do not know how to teach or stimulate reading, most being only familiar with one method, which does not necessarily suit the learning style of all learners (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:8). They need adequate training where they could become acquainted with various approaches in teaching vernacular reading proficiently.

2.6.2 Language competence of Intermediate Phase learners in South Africa (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:6)

There has been a misunderstanding about the role of teachers in teaching reading in Curriculum 2005 and in the NCS. Many teachers believed that they did not have to “teach” reading, but simply had to “facilitate” the process in the belief that learners would teach

themselves to read. The expectation that teachers were to develop their own teaching materials and reading programmes further aggravated the situation, for they had no experience in developing reading materials (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:8). Teachers need support to create their own reading materials. Teachers at the Maiwala Elementary School were assisted by Nagai to develop their own reading materials. The process was successful to such an extent that they eventually could assist other teachers in developing their own reading materials (Nagai, 2004:111).

Many foundation phase teachers have not been explicitly trained to teach reading, which explains why they find it difficult to assist learners with reading difficulties. Consequently, many teachers have resorted to rote learning as the only option, and tend to be satisfied with rote learning by their learners. The Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Survey in 1999 found that the employment of under-qualified teachers, particularly in the Foundation Phase and in rural schools, has been common practice (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:8).

2.6.3 Libraries

The majority of schools in the MLA survey (1999) had no access to libraries, which also impacted negatively on the quality of teaching and learning. In the absence of school libraries, classroom book collections can promote reading and understanding. Classroom book collections can only be possible if reading material is available in all classrooms.

In this study, neither of the two schools have access to library facilities and there are no evidence of reading corners in any of the classrooms. Learners are also not exposed to daily vernacular reading (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:8).

2.6.4 Teaching conditions

Crowded and under-resourced classrooms hamper the implementation of the National Reading Strategy. Poor physical conditions and inadequate facilities for teaching and

learning, such as inadequate instruction support material, make it even more difficult to deliver quality education.

2.6.5 Print Environment

The MLA survey found that about 40% of the parents interviewed had not completed their primary education. In the greater part of the province, about 60% of parents had not completed primary school. Such parents are unable to read printed material to their children at home.

It is assumed that most parents in the current research area cannot read their vernacular and as such cannot assist their children to read at home.

2.6.6 Language issues

Despite the Language in Education Policy of 1997, still most learners in South Africa do not learn in their mother tongue. Most schools have inadequate language policies which do not address the learning needs of learners. They do not ensure the right of learners, especially Foundation Phase learners, to learn in their mother tongue (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:9). Foundation Phase teachers have generally not been taught to teach reading in the home language of African learners. Another problem is that African languages are structured differently from either English or Afrikaans (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:10).

2.6.7 Inclusive education

Despite the policies of inclusive Education that identify the special needs of learners in all sectors of education, learners who experience barriers to learning often do not receive the support they need to become fluent readers (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:10).

2.7 TEACHER AND LEARNER SUPPORT MATERIALS

According to Mostert and Wikan (2008:97), reading challenges in the Namibian education system revolved around income and resources. Most learners lived in dwellings without electricity and do not have a specific room or desk where they could do their homework. The main variables that had an impact on the reading habits and attitudes of the sampled group were gender and the availability of reading material at home, storytelling or -reading by parents during their early years and the primary home language (Mostert & Wikan, 2008:99). Special attention was paid to the availability of reading material at home as one aspect that may be determined by socio-economic status which had an influence on learners' reading ability. The literature confirms that a family's socio-economic background tends to have an influence on reading competence and attitude. More learners from homes lacking reading material did not read to improve their homework as opposed to those from homes with sufficient reading material (Mostert and Wikan 2008:101): 13% of learners with limited access to books at home reported that they had never read to improve their homework. The table below shows these differences.

Table 5. Reading to improve homework (Adapted from Mostert & Wikan 2008:101)

AVAILABLE READING MATERIAL	READ TO IMPROVE HOMEWORK			
	Never	Occasionally	Often	TOTAL
Limited	13%	44%	42%	100%
Sufficient	4%	26%	70%	100%
Ample	7%	42%	52%	100%

More learners with limited access to reading material at home (17%) reported that their parents did not read to them when they were young compared to those with sufficient (9%) and ample (5%) access to these materials. None of the learners with limited reading material spent more than one hour on reading as opposed to 28% of those with access to ample reading material. This is a clear indication that the availability of reading material at home has a positive effect on the time that learners are willing to spend on reading and the enjoyment they find in reading. It therefore seems that access to reading material at home

serves as a motivating factor to use library facilities for further reading and that the availability of books serves as a motivating factor to acquire even more books. Therefore, learners with access to many books at home appreciate receiving yet another book to add to their collection.

Nagai (2004:109) states that vernacular education in the Maiwala community stemmed from dissatisfaction with new elementary schools which lacked vernacular teaching material. Nagai and language teachers worked together to develop appropriate teaching materials and a curriculum that recognises and respects the language and culture of the community. Nagai's involvement as facilitator and consultant started when the community invited her to assist them in the development of their TPPS (Nagai 2004:111). In the first few years, Maiwala teachers taught without pay. The local DoE often invited Maiwala teachers during school holidays to assist with material production for the development of other TPPSs in the region. The teachers' involvement was again on a voluntary basis. According to Nagai (2004:117) the first elementary schools in the Milne Bay Province started out with many problems, such as the choice of English as the language of instruction, lack of materials and trained teachers. The Maiwala teachers continued to develop more appropriate reading material through Nagai's encouragement, while other schools' teachers struggled to produce a basic set of Big Books by translating stories to accompany the pictures provided by the DoE. She further states that the Maiwala situation has shown that elementary education in the vernacular can be very effective when sufficient material is developed through on-going encouragement and advice (Nagai, 2004:118).

According to Gacheche (2010:19) instructional material was one of the educational barriers preventing the effective implementation of a vernacular-based system in Kenya. Instructional material also hampered transmission of content in local languages (Gacheche 2010:22). Later attempts to provide reading material have proved the issue of providing instructional material in local languages as a challenge.

Gacheche (2010:23) further adds that the lack of vernacular material was also often explained away by the fact that there are too many languages in African countries to justify publishing in them. The work done since 2000 by the Centre for Advanced Studies of

African Society (CASAS) has revealed that about 85% of Africans speak 12 - 15 core languages as first, second or third language. The main aim of CASAS is that:

“... by standardising core African languages, the economies of scale that follow should make it possible to, among other things, produce learning materials for mother tongue based education”.

The results of the CASAS and Uganda project are likely to take a long time to be realised, because community members were not involved in the rendition of local languages into written script. If community members could receive in-service training, and become involved in the production of instructional material, they could become excellent teachers. Communities working with linguists and ethnographers in the development of L1 materials with age-appropriate language reflect cultural situations familiar to learners. Community members can write the text and made illustrations during materials production workshops, and the texts can be reproduced for schools using simple and cheap methods.

Hugo (2010:140) states that during the interviews in the “battle” to teach reading, some teachers raised the issue of reading and other teaching materials not being available or insufficient in the various African languages, and that only “non-African” or old books are available. Additionally, according to some, the languages used in some of the materials written in the African languages are sometimes incorrect. Although the teaching of Mathematics did not form part of the research project, some teachers mentioned that the “language of mathematics” posed the biggest problem of all, for many mathematical concepts had not been translated into any of the African languages and therefore English words has to be used. It was apparent that in many classrooms (including Grade 1 and 2) from these eight schools, all the pictures used were pictures accompanied by English words, even though it is not the language of instruction in these classes. This relates to the young learners not seeing words in their vernacular on the walls of their classrooms.

The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:17) states that a good learning and text-rich environment in schools encourages learners to perform better. Teachers need adequate resources to teach reading. The DoE has mounted a “Drop All and Read” campaign in which Grade R and Grade 1 learners were provided with personal story books and bags.

They could take these books home to read, enjoy and experience the pleasure of possessing their own books. Good readers need access to good reading material. Learners should have access to appropriate reading material throughout the school year, and they should be able to take this home to practise reading. Magazines and other material could also enrich the reading experience, and encourage the whole family to engage in reading. Although the Department organised campaigns to provide schools with good reading material, which include books, magazines and even comics, it seems that the schools in rural areas have not received those packages.

Learners are encouraged to perform better in a good learning and text rich environment in schools. However, language teachers need adequate resources for the teaching of reading. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) had therefore embarked on several interventions to provide all teachers with the resources they need to carry out their pivotal task. These included the 100 Storybook Projects, the Drop All and Read Campaign, the Reading Assessment, the workbooks and others. The National Reading Strategy (2008:8) states that the majority of schools in the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Survey (1999) had no access to libraries, which impacts negatively on the quality of teaching and learning. According to the SA Limpopo Provincial Government (2008:4) the success of the strategy depends on improved access to sufficient, appropriate, high quality literacy resources in all languages for learners and teachers. The DoE in Limpopo will ensure, through its systematic provision and support, that schools have appropriate resources to successfully implement the curriculum. The DoE will facilitate and monitor the increase in the availability and accessibility of local writing in all the languages that predominate in Limpopo. Schools will also have to take the initiative to access relevant resources in creative and innovative ways.

In the present study the educational needs and assets at the two rural primary schools can lead to barriers in teaching vernacular reading, for the teachers need appropriate resources for teaching vernacular reading. There is a shortage of vernacular work books for Foundation Phase learners, while teachers are not improvising to develop reading material for their learners. The Limpopo DoE has not supported these schools by supplying appropriate reading resources, even though it ventured to do so. The present

author intends to assist language teachers in developing Sepedi comprehension passages for learners to read at home.

2.8 MONITORING AND SUPPORT

The essential focus of the National Reading Strategy is to enable learners to read fluently and with comprehension. Monitoring learners' progress through School Based Assessment (SBA) and ANA is a critical part of the Reading Strategy. Learner improvement depends on whether teachers are able to assess the reading level of each and every learner on a regular basis without fail. This would enable teachers to identify struggling learners. Teachers have to be able to assess whether their teaching methodologies in the classroom have resulted in improved reading by the learners (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:7). According to the SA Limpopo Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:19) literacy initiatives should be monitored and evaluated on a number of levels throughout the five year time frame of the strategy. This will inform the nature and location of required intervention to enable continuous improvement.

- **Schools**

In support of the new strategy, schools will need to develop a total school plan for literacy teaching and learning, for progress monitoring and for staff development. This will involve setting certain school targets for literacy. One teacher should be identified as literacy coordinator for the different initiatives of the literacy strategy:

- Support for teachers of all learning areas to develop teaching and assessment programmes which should value a range of literate practices appropriate for contemporary subject-specific contexts.
- Structure a literacy hour into their time-tables.
- Make provision for two additional literacy activities. Teachers should read aloud to learners, especially in the Foundation and the Intermediate Phases. During each school day, learners from all grade levels should be allowed time to read something of their own choosing.

Apparently learners are given turns to read to the school during morning devotions, even though most learners prefer to read English texts.

- **The community**

The local and broader communities need to be mobilised to support the Literacy Strategy. It is important to assess the needs of the parent community in supporting their children's learning, for they are the key players in their children's literacy development. Parents need support in strengthening and developing their own literacy skills, where necessary (SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools, 2008:19). It is envisaged that this aspect of the strategy would be spearheaded by the relevant school principals with the support of the school governing body and staff.

2.9 ASSUMPTIONS

For the purpose of this study it is assumed that the educational needs will lead to barriers in teaching vernacular reading, e.g. teacher and learner support materials, monitoring and support, teaching practice and methodology, teacher training, development and support, monitoring learner assessment, management of teaching reading and research, partnership and advocacy, and the dialect which is used by learners. These assumptions are explained with the support of literature.

2.9.1 Teacher and learner support material

Teachers at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary lack relevant resources to teach vernacular reading proficiently. According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:17) teachers should have adequate resources to teach vernacular reading proficiently. Learners with access to appropriate vernacular reading books will be able to read fluently and with understanding if they are exposed to more Sepedi texts on a daily basis. Learners also need books to take home, for their parents could also teach them to read. Parents could read stories for their children at bedtime. A culture of reading could be developed. Additionally, as part of the National Reading Strategy, all Foundation- and

Intermediate Phase classrooms will have reading corners equipped with vernacular story books.

The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:17) states that schools, who are part of the Quality Improvement, Development and Support Upliftment Programme (QIDS-UP), will receive a range of reading support materials in the form of a Reading Toolkit. Schools could order a complete range of reading programme/schemes in all eleven official languages (through the General Education & Training Band Learning and Teaching Support Material Catalogue). A number of schools in disadvantaged communities have already been supplied with reference materials, including multi-lingual dictionaries to support reading in all eleven official languages. As part of the National Reading Strategy, all Foundation and Intermediate Phase classrooms will have a “reading/library corner”, with exciting story books in all the languages spoken in class as well as reference materials for teachers and learners.

Literature confirms that socio-economic background tends to have an influence on reading competence and attitudes (Mostert and Wikan 2008:100). The more reading and other literacy-related experiences children have during their early years, the better prepared they will be to master the complex task of learning to read and write when they enter school. Pupils with better access to reading materials at home have more positive reading habits and attitudes. Mostert and Wikan (2008:101) further explains that none of the pupils with limited reading materials spent more than one hour on reading as opposed to 28% of those with sufficient and 20% of those with ample reading materials at home. Only 19% of pupils with limited access to reading materials at home regularly borrow books, compared to 51% who have sufficient and 52% who have ample access to books at home. Pupils who have good experiences with reading at home tend to seek more opportunities for reading and this may enhance the differences between pupils.

According to Murray (2007:69) resources and social dynamics vary widely from country to country; factors addressed in the paper cannot be generally applied. Their main focus is therefore on factors pertaining specifically to Namibia and the Namibian context. A common cry amongst teachers at all levels in Namibia was that learners do not read. Furthermore, when learners reach levels of education where higher order literacy skills are

required, further deficiencies become evident. Teachers complain that the majority of learners have difficulty comprehending and processing reading material, decoding meaning and identifying important points. Misinterpretation of questions in examinations, tests and assignments often become a major obstacle.

Gacheche (2010:22) points out that without an adequate Language in Education (LiE) policy, political will and allocation of resources for the development of local languages, a vernacular education system like the one advocated by the Kenyan language policy has a small probability of being successful. The lack of instructional materials also hampers the transmission of content in local languages. The International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP) (1997) notes that up until the 1980's many of the indigenous languages in Kenya did not have a written form. However, later attempts to provide reading materials have proved challenging as the issue of providing instructional materials in local languages was heavily influenced by donor interests, evangelical motives, strong economic interests from overseas publishing companies and global relations.

2.9.2 Teacher training development and support

Language teachers are not specifically trained to teach vernacular reading and they are not offered appropriate materials for teaching and supporting reading. The DoE, National Reading Strategy (2008:15) states that teachers are crucial for the successful teaching of reading. Teacher training, development and support are therefore an important pillar of the National Reading Strategy. The DoE will provide teachers with a manual on reading strategies, which will contain practical guidelines and strategies for teaching reading in Grades R-6. In addition, teacher guidelines on strategies to address the strengths and weaknesses, as revealed by the Systemic Evaluation, will be distributed to all schools. The Early Grade Reading Assessment provides teachers with a tool for assessing the reading competence of the learners, as well as a range of other resources. The Department will also develop and maintain a catalogue of appropriate learning and teaching support material for the General Education and Training band, which will include material for teaching and supporting reading.

The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:15-16) states that, *“to support teacher development accredited training courses in strategies for teaching reading will be offered at tertiary institutions. These courses will enable teachers to earn credit points in accordance with the South African Council for Teachers (SACE) requirements for continuous professional teacher development. Teacher development programmes in reading strategies, for both pre-service and in-service teachers, will focus on the pedagogy of reading, and give special guidance for teaching reading in the mother tongue. The Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in school leadership will offer training in the management of the curriculum and reading programmes. District curriculum officials will provide further support. These curriculum officials will be specially trained in reading strategies. They will help teachers by mediating the reading material and other resources that will be made available to teachers. Family literacy programmes will help parents to support their children in their reading. Families were encouraged to take responsibility to ensure that reading continues even after the bell has rung for the end of the day. Business and other organisations that wish to support the National Reading Strategy will help by supplying schools with some of the selected materials, providing incentives and showing an interest in the work of the teachers and learners at particular schools.”*

Teachers lack sufficient training on how to carry out vernacular teaching. School-based support is however awkward, intensive and thus expensive in terms of time and human resources. Financial- and human resources or time is needed to provide on-going support to teachers in their classrooms. Teachers also need adequate training to teach vernacular reading, for the training they received was deprived (Gacheche, 2010:20, Adler & Reed, 2002:6, Phajane, 2012:73).

2.9.3 Teaching practice and methodology

Teachers at the two rural primary schools have been trained as language teachers in general, not as vernacular teachers in particular. This could be the reason for them experiencing problems in teaching vernacular reading. Phajane (2012:19) points out that curriculum changes influences the way teachers teach. According to Phajane (2012:19) many South African learners cannot read independently because the DoE has

implemented numerous and radical changes. The White Paper emphasises the need for a major change in education and training in South Africa. The first OBE introduced in democratic South Africa, which was known as Curriculum 2005 (C2005) confused teachers about methods to teach reading. Many South African learners cannot read fluently with understanding because of the RNCS and the NCS. According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:14) teaching happens in a special relationship between teacher and learner. The teacher has to be trusted to provide each learner with the competence and skills of reading, and cultivate a love of reading. The best teacher for reading is a teacher who conveys not only the value of reading, but also the joy of reading. Reading is a competence that teachers have to actively teach since learners do not simply “pick up” reading skills. There is no clear pathway for progress in learning to read unless the teacher has a plan for teaching the learners how to read.

The National Reading Strategy (2008:14) further explains that teachers need to know what is expected of learners, they need to know exactly how to help learners to achieve satisfactory reading levels, and where necessary, they should ask for extra professional support. Teachers should use special DVDs, which show learners reading at different levels, to establish appropriate expectations and standards. These DVDs show good reading and classroom management practices and can also help teachers to learn how to apply good practice in their classrooms. A capable reading teacher allows for different learners’ learning styles and can use a range of teaching methods. Learners should know a range of techniques to help them to attain appropriate reading levels of comprehension for information and enjoyment. Too often, teachers use whole class reading from the same book as the only reading experience in the classroom. To meet the crisis of reading, one practice promoted by the DoE is that all schools (especially primary schools) should arrange an additional half hour per day to “Drop All and Read”. This campaign created a culture of reading in the classroom and at school. Everyone, from learner to teacher, principal and support staff can be seen reading for enjoyment for half an hour a day. If learners enjoy reading, literacy levels will be raised and the ability of learners to learn will improve. A reading recovery programme will be made available for learners who, owing to a variety of circumstances, are unable to master reading skills in the early grades.

Teachers apply different reading methods to teach vernacular reading in various classrooms (Hugo 2010:139), e.g some first use phonics and then introduce words, basic sight words and sentences. The table below represents the reading methods which the Grade 1 to 3 teachers use to teach reading:

Table 6. Reading methods (Adapted from Hugo 2010:139)

Reading method	Frequency	%	Cumulative frequency	Cumulative %
Phonics	15	50.00	15	50.00
Phonics, whole words	3	10.00	18	60.00
Phonics, read syllables	3	10.00	21	70.00
Phonics, words, sentences	5	16.67	26	86.67
Phonics, basic sight words	2	6.67	28	93.33
Whole-word approach	2	6.67	30	100.00

Wilson & Peterson (2006:2) state that they focused on three big ideas which underlie most current scholarship and practice: learning as a process of active engagement, learning as individual and social, and lastly learner differences as resources to be used, not obstacles to be confronted. Practice is driven by theories according to which all teachers must operate; and these theories assist teachers in explaining why they teach the way they do. Good quality teaching requires teachers to create learning and teaching theories, and their implications lead readers to consider important questions in reading. Wilson and Peterson were interested in teacher learning and knowledge and connections between teacher reforms. Policy, practice, new teaching strategies, new curricula and assessment are also in their debate. Crowe (2005:32) compares the effectiveness of two different types of oral reading feedback strategies which facilitates reading comprehension in learners with low reading ability. A decoding-based procedure (linear) and a meaning-based (integrated) procedure, termed communicative reading strategies (CRS) for promoting reading comprehension in elementary learners with low reading ability. Comparative to Crowe (2005:32) Mostert & Wikan (2008:96) note that learners need basic skills in decoding and reading comprehension to become voluntary readers. Pinnock (2007:1) states that in order to save learners we must focus on working to gradually bring

schools, communities and government closer to good practice of teaching reading over time.

2.9.4 Monitoring learner performance

The present researcher assumes that teachers do not monitor learner performance during reading periods to detect learners who struggle with vernacular reading. According to SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:35) reading assessment must be well planned since it aids the teacher to determine learners' developmental stage of reading and the progress they make. Assessment is needed to establish whether the reading programme is presented at the learners' level and to evaluate the reading resources. Learners should be provided with books appropriate to their grade.

According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:13) the essential focus of the National Reading Strategy is to enable learners to read fluently and with comprehension. Monitoring learners' progress is a critical part of the strategy. This monitoring will take place through the National Systemic Evaluation at Grade 3 and Grade 6 levels. Provincial Education Departments also conducted systemic evaluations to monitor reading competencies. Improvement depends on teachers' ability to assess the reading level of each learner. Teachers need to be able to measure whether their teaching methodologies in the classroom have resulted in learners' improved reading. The DoE provides Foundation Phase teachers with Early Grade Reading Assessment tools to assess reading performance (DoE 2008:14). These tools will be available in all official languages, and will be used to establish benchmarks for reading competence in South African schools. Continuous assessment is embedded in current teaching practice; it assists teachers in monitoring the on-going progress of the learners, and supports and guides further development.

Monitoring and support of any strategy are essential elements to ensure effective service delivery. The function of the DoE in this regard is to monitor teaching and learning standards in all schools. This monitoring will assess whether the education system has achieved its reading goals by measuring the performance of learners. The results from the

research, monitoring and evaluation will be used by the education system to enhance the work that was being done in the classroom.

2.9.5 Management of the teaching of reading

It seems that teaching vernacular reading is not appropriately managed at the two schools under study. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:16) explains that good management and leadership is essential for successful teaching and learning. It is essential that the principal takes a direct and personal interest in reading in school. The principal needs to show a persistent determination in pursuing the National Reading Strategy. Being responsible for the reading programme in the school, the principal must organise staff training and support, and also involve parents in the reading programme. It is the principal's responsibility to ensure that every learner learns to read, that steps are taken to promote reading, and that reading strategies are integrated in all school subjects and a culture of reading is instilled in the school. Heads of Department within the school and district officials, including the district director, must support the principal in the management and leadership of the reading campaign. At a provincial and national level, senior officials must take responsibility for leading, managing and driving reading improvement. At a national level, the Minister of Education heads the drive to improve reading.

2.9.6 The dialect used by learners

Learners of the two schools come from a Sekgaga-speaking background, which could be the reason for teachers not successfully teaching learners to read in the vernacular, which is Sepedi. Learners are not familiar with Sepedi, e.g it is difficult for some to pronounce words like "*tla*", substituting it for "*da*", "*bosego*" for *bošego*, etcetera. It is clear that teachers need adequate training on how to help these learners to read vernacular.

Most words in the Sekgaga dialect cannot be written, for example, "*ke namede more*" for "*ke nametše mohlare*", which means, "I climbed a tree"; "*bomme ba do boa ka motshwana*" for "*mma o tla boa gosasa*", meaning "my mother will come back tomorrow".
Learners do

not know that “*mmotlha*” is not used when learning in Sepedi; a teacher has to explain that “*lehono*” is the correct word, which means “today” in English.

This is evidence that learners need to be taught vernacular reading by teachers who are familiar with the Sekgaga dialect. In the context of this study it could therefore be assumed that vernacular teaching teachers are not trained to teach reading in rural primary schools. The workshops and short courses offered were conducted for a few hours only, which left vernacular teachers with lot of unanswered questions on methods to teach reading.

2.9.7 Definition of key concepts

2.9.7.1 Language

Grayling, Schrag, and Lubbock (2009:23) state that language development includes teacher guided activities that promote the use of proper language like grammar, syntax and vocabulary.

Luthuli (2003:7) defines “language” as the primary means of communication, each language comprising a standard set of symbols, signs/signals for the exchange of messages by means of which a member of a cultural group communicates.

“Local language” refers to the language spoken in the homes and marketplaces of a community, as distinguished from a regional, national or international language (UNESCO, 2008:7).

For the purpose of this study “language” refers to voice sounds, gestures, signs and written words which are used by people to communicate effectively.

2.9.7.2 Vernacular

Vernacular signifies the ways in which everyday creativity is practiced outside the cultural value systems of either high culture (art) or commercial creative practice and the need to

pay attention to the material, cultural and geographical contexts in which they occur (grammar.about.com>About.com>Education>Grammar & composition). Vernacular refers to a language that is not formally recognized and that is used in informal contexts only (UNESCO, 2008:6). Adejunmobi (2006:164) states that “vernacular” is a language with a specific function as mother tongue.

For the purpose of this study “vernacular” refers to the language spoken by a certain group of people in a specific geographical context.

2.9.7.3 Reading strategies

Grayling *et al* (2009:136) states that reading strategies are methods used by students in reading to determine meaning and are specifically taught by the teacher.

SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:19) defines “reading strategies” as ways of solving problems which the learners may come across while reading.

For the purpose of this study “reading strategies” are methods used by the teacher to help learners in making predictions while reading and to use phonics for better understanding.

2.9.7.4 Fluency in reading

SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:17) defines “fluency in reading” as the ability to read texts smoothly, accurately and with understanding. Fluency in reading refers to the accurate way of reading with no noticeable effort (reading urogon edul.1flu what.php).

For the purpose of this study “fluency in reading” refers to the accurate way of reading sounds, words and texts.

2.9.7.5 Phonics

Grayling *et al* (2009:8) state that phonics-based instruction is an approach that emphasises the mechanics of reading at the expense of comprehension and appreciation.

SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:13) defines “phonics” as decoding a word by breaking it down into units such as syllables and letters.

For the purpose of this study “phonics instruction” comprises methods used by a teacher to teach learners how to relate vowels and consonants to create words when learning to read and write.

2.9.7.6 *Mother-tongue instruction*

Mother-tongue instruction refers to the use of the learner’s mother tongue as a medium of instruction (UNESCO, 2003:14). The Nawa Journal of Language Communication (2007:72) defines “mother tongue” as the language that one has learnt first, the language one identifies with or the language one knows best. “Mother tongue” refers to a child’s first language, the language learned in the home from older family members (UNESCO: 2008:7).

For the purpose of this study “mother tongue instruction” refers to the use of home language in teaching learners how to make meaning in the real world.

2.9.8 Educational needs

Maphutha (2006:15) refers to “educational needs” as what the school is lacking and that which is needed to achieve the desired educational goals. According to Ebersohn and Eloff (2006:148) the needs-driven approach has a strong focus on problems, deficiencies and needs.

For the purpose of the study “educational needs” refer to reading resources needed by language teachers to teach vernacular reading proficiently.

2.9.9 Educational assets

Maphutha (2006:16) defines educational assets as *“all valuable resources, skills, strengths and opportunities available in the target school, learner’s families, and the local rural community.”*

According to Ebersohn & Eloff (2006:462) the asset-based approach start out from what the community has, rather than what it does not have.

Ryan (2008:9) defines “assets” as skills, resources and strengths that are shared with teachers and schools. “Educational assets” refer to reading resources available at the target primary schools for teaching vernacular reading.

In the context of this research, “educational assets” refer to reading resources available at the target primary schools for teaching vernacular reading.

2.9.10 Assessment

The SA Department of Basic Education (2011:viii) defines “assessment” as a process of collecting, analysing and interpreting information to assist teachers, parents and other stake holders in making decisions about the progress of learners.

In the context of this research “assessment” refers to a way of measuring learners’ performance by gathering information using various assessment tools like checklists and rubrics.

2.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the debates surrounding the issues of vernacular reading in rural primary schools, citing from previous researchers in the area of study. It has sought to cover the literature that informs the study. The literature concerned with language and literacy learning states that teachers need to be proficient in all the languages offered by the school in order to teach learners proficiently. It is assumed that teaching vernacular

reading in rural primary schools are faced by a lack of educational needs, e.g inadequate teacher and learner support materials, funding at all levels for the delivery of vernacular texts, developing texts in African languages, the lack of libraries in rural primary schools and developing parents' literacy skills and support strategies. It constitutes a collaborative effort to enable all teachers to teach reading effectively which involves a whole-school approach to reading, inspired by the principal, district officials, parents and the wider community (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades, 2008:55).

Learners from low socio-economic backgrounds should be identified at an early age and be given space and additional opportunities for reading within the school environment after normal teaching hours (Mostert & Wikan.2008:104). Without adequate vernacular reading material teachers will always struggle in teaching Sepedi reading. Good readers need access to good reading material. If Sepedi reading materials were available at the target primary schools, learners would be able to take books home in order to practise reading. Families could be engaged in reading if magazines and other reading materials were available (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:17). District curriculum officials should be specially trained in reading strategies to provide further support of the teachers by mediating the reading material and other resources that should be made available to teachers. There should be pre-service and in-service programmes in reading strategies for teachers. Special guidance for teaching reading in the mother tongue should be offered to teachers (SA National Reading Strategy (2008:16). Teachers should develop appropriate or additional reading material for their learners and motivate them to read. Teachers need to be flexible and well trained in the use of various reading approaches for the benefit of the learners. The consideration of learners' socio-cultural background when teaching reading is very important. Reading should be encouraged in all schools and sufficient and relevant reading material in the learners' home languages should be considered (Hugo 2010:141).

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research design methodology and methodological considerations used in this study. The four research pillars in Adult Education at the University of Limpopo, South Africa, are the following: Policy and Implementation Issues, Curriculum and Community Development, Young Adults at Risk, and Health Adult Education. This research sorts under the Curriculum and Community Development pillar. This chapter will show the sampling and data collection techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, data analysis procedures, as well as the limitations of the study. Ethical considerations in the collection of data as well as the measures needed to promote the trustworthiness of the research are detailed.

A letter of intent from the Head of Department of Community and Continuing Education was handed to the principals of the two rural primary schools, and the purpose of the study was explained to the School Management Team (SMT) and how their schools could benefit from the study. The theme for the research programme would enable language teachers to instruct learners in reading their vernacular with fluency and comprehension (SA National Reading Strategy, 2008:8). The researcher was motivated by difficulties encountered by language teachers in connection with educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading.

3.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Three uses of the term “research design” can be distinguished in the literature, roughly ordered from general to specific. At the most general level it means all the issues involved in planning and executing a research project, from identifying the problem through to reporting and publishing the results. The design of a study refers to the way a researcher guards against, and tries to rule out, alternative interpretations of results (Punch, 2009:67).

This study examines difficulties faced by language teachers in teaching vernacular reading, by identifying the educational needs and assets at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School in the Shiluvane circuit of the Mopani District, Limpopo Province. Due to the planned amalgamation, the teaching environment is characterised by a complex network of staff members interacting on various levels as a team for the smooth running of the two schools. Although they are not yet formally amalgamated, they operate under one School Governing Body (SGB) and one School Management Team (SMT). The Department of Education has approved the management of both schools by one principal while waiting for the process to be finalised.

A qualitative research design was applied, using a single case study, due to the intended amalgamation. The decision to carry out a single case study allows the investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events (Muwaniki, 2012:27). A conscious effort was made to guard against bias, for it would influence data collection and analysis.

The research focus was on vernacular reading and how it was taught at the targeted primary schools. The researcher attended several vernacular reading periods, observing the teachers in an attempt to understand their interpretation and experience of reading approaches and strategies in teaching reading to foundation phase readers (Grade R - 3), as well as the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4 - 6) learners who struggle to read. The educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading were also investigated. Vernacular teachers were assisting each other in most cases regarding learners' interests.

A brief discussion of each of the educational needs include the following:

- *Vernacular reading resources*, for teachers criticised the lack of vernacular reading books and textbooks;
- *Teaching practise and methodology*, for teachers stated that they were not effectively trained, lacking knowledge of methodology and strategies for teaching vernacular reading.

The educational assets include the following:

- *Learners' achievements* and progress in reading;
- *Teachers are Sepedi speaking* and as such they can differentiate between spoken and written language in formal and informal settings;
- All language teachers have more than 20 years *teaching experience*; and
- The possible *programmes* put in place for language teachers.

3.2.1 Qualitative research design

Qualitative research is conducted through an intense and/or prolonged contact with a “field” or life situation (Punch 2009:72). Chilisa and Preece (2005:218) add to this, stating that qualitative research study people’s experiences as they occur in natural settings, the meaning that people attach to these experiences, and the multiple contexts within which these experiences occur. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006:34) qualitative approaches, using interviews and observations are grounded in first-hand experience. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport, (2011:196) qualitative research refers to the type of inquiry which the present researcher has applied in her research of vernacular teachers’ experiences in a natural setting, by means of interviews, discussions and observations.

A qualitative research study was employed to understand the personal perceptions and views of vernacular teachers’ choice of reading approaches which they apply in teaching vernacular reading, and the meaning they have construed about their experience in teaching vernacular reading (Ryan 2008:35). The researcher, also regarded as an instrument for data collection and data analysis, observes non-verbal as well as verbal communication, process, clarification and checking with respondents for accuracy of interpretation. The product of a qualitative study is thoroughly descriptive.

Teachers were observed during reading periods, after which they were interviewed by the researcher, asking open ended questions. The interviews made it clear that learners’ home language is the Sekgaga dialect, but that they are expected to learn and read in Sepedi. However, observation has established that some teachers do not teach learners

to read during Sepedi reading periods, despite the fact that policy documents state that learners are supposed to read Sepedi on a daily basis for 30 minutes.

3.2.2 Case study

According to Maphutha (2006:65), case studies closely examine the behaviour and relationships of a specific society. Although there are different types of case studies, the present researcher only mentions the intrinsic, single case study which is applicable to her research conducted at the selected two rural primary schools which are in the process of amalgamation. Participants were selected on the basis of non-probability sampling in which the vernacular teachers of these schools were targeted, knowing that it does not represent the wider Limpopo rural schools, but simply represent its uniqueness. Participants were selected on the basis of random purposive sampling in which they were selected for their knowledge and experience of more than 20 years in teaching vernacular reading. This approach is especially applicable when participants are too numerous for all to be included in the sample (Chilisa & Preece 2005:224). The teachers' experience in teaching vernacular reading is viewed as one of the assets. All participants have experience in the Bantu Education teaching style, Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study an ethno methodological approach was used, which allowed the researcher to become familiar with the educational needs and assets of the two schools under study. Additional to observation of classroom practice, different reading strategies suitable for primary school learners were also discussed with the teachers. According to SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:19), reading strategies are means of solving the problems which learners may come across while reading, for example, they might not know the meaning of a word, or they might find a section of the text difficult to understand. When these situations occur, learners should have a strategy for knowing what to do. The following are the reading strategies which were discussed:

- Word Attack Skills (How to work out the meaning of an unfamiliar word)
- Comprehension (How to make meaning)
- Read Aloud
- Group Guided Reading
- Independent Reading

3.4 SAMPLING

One of the features of qualitative research in purposive sampling is that researchers can handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgment. In this way, they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. In many cases purposive sampling is used in order to access knowledgeable people, which are those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues (Cohen *et al* 2007:114). Random purposive sampling allows for the uses of a smaller subsample when the potential sample is too large (Cohen *et al* 2007:176).

The process of sampling, as a principle of qualitative data gathering, has been defined in chapter one of the study. This section focuses on how sampling was utilised to maximise the data gathering process. There is a number of sampling procedures which include purposive and random sampling. In this research, purposive sampling was convenient for the following reasons: The research sample consists of two primary schools, drawn from 26 governmental primary schools of the Shiluvane Circuit in the Mopani District, who offer Grade 1 - 7 levels. These two schools were selected for they are representative of the many primary schools in the Shiluvane Circuit experiencing problems in teaching Sepedi reading to beginners in Grade 1. The information collected included only vernacular teachers. In this study one teacher from each grade (Grades 1 – 6), i.e six in total, of the target schools was selected as a smaller subsample.

The number of days spent in each teacher's class varied, for various observations were made, and interviews with the entire sampled group were conducted afterwards. These interviews were conducted during breaks and free periods. Observations were

documented in detailed field-notes during vernacular related lessons, in particular the reading lessons.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection methods need to be in line with a qualitative research approach. De Vos *et al* (2011:171) state that the researcher should plan for the recording of data in a systematic manner that is appropriate to the setting, research participants, or both.

For this study, language policy documents were analysed to obtain information on the frequency of learner assessment in Sepedi reading. Observation of teachers during Sepedi reading lessons had the purpose of obtaining information about reading strategies and methods used in the various classrooms. Open-ended interviews with vernacular teachers were afterwards conducted. These interviews assisted in the identification of educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading. The research participants thus had the opportunity to identify their educational assets for teaching vernacular reading. Lastly, a focus group discussion was conducted to obtain valuable data from the research participants.

According to De Vos *et al* (2011:171) the researcher should be aware that techniques for recording observations, interaction and interviews should not intrude excessively on the on-going flow of daily events. In some situations, even taking notes interferes with, or in some way acts on the setting and the participants. Plans to use audio recorders, video recorders, MP3 players, mini-discs, iPods, cameras and other mechanical devices should be considered carefully. Special consideration should be paid to data-recording strategies, which should fit the setting and the research participants' sensitiveness, and that these will only be used with their consent.

For the purpose of this study, different research techniques were used for data collection, which include interviews, focus group discussions and note taking. All interviews were audio-taped to ensure verification afterwards and for the purpose of analysis. The

discussions were presented in Sepedi since all six research participants are Sepedi-speaking.

The asset-based approach focuses on the assets in a community rather than needs, with the purpose to develop strategies in addressing these needs (Eloff & Ebersohn 2010:462). This approach suggests that outside resources can be more effectively utilised once the school has already identified its own resources. It is internally focused, for it starts from the assets available to language teachers to teach vernacular reading before considering what they need. It is also relationship driven for relationships need to be built and rebuilt between individuals and institutions through the process of facilitation, which empowers communities. School can become a place where full participation is prevented and learning and recreation is inhibited, as experienced especially by vulnerable children (Eloff & Ebersohn 2010:458).

In the focus group discussion participants identified the educational assets of the target primary schools. The school should consider how to use the available materials to assist learners in learning to read their home language proficiently. Some of the educational assets identified are briefly discussed below.

- **Language teachers.** According to the SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:9), language teachers should read and write fluently for pleasure as well as for information purposes. As language teachers they should also encourage learners to read for enjoyment and with comprehension. All research participants are trained language teachers, although not particularly as vernacular teachers. However, since they have been specifically trained as language teachers, and can speak Sepedi, this is valued as an educational asset.
- **Language policy documents.** The DBE has provided schools with policy documents which guide teachers on the frequency of teaching vernacular reading in various grades. These policies were also received by the two target schools. The aim of the “Language in Education” policy is to maintain the home language while providing access to the acquisition of additional languages (SA Literacy Strategy in Primary Schools 2008:10).

- **Old Sepedi story books.** The two schools own a few old Sepedi storybooks. Because teachers can use it to teach vernacular reading, it is valued as an asset. Additional reading material can be written by teachers and they can collect old newspapers for the purposes of teaching vernacular reading (SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools 2008:17).
- **Departmental workbooks.** Workbooks delivered to the schools are insufficient to provide for all learners, and although some grades have enough books, other grades experience shortages. Some teachers improvise by photocopying the necessary pages for learners who did not receive workbooks.
- **Achievements and progress in vernacular reading.** Learners' achievements and progress in vernacular reading are regarded as an asset, for it assists vernacular teachers in improving their attitudes towards teaching vernacular reading.
- **Home language for both teachers and learners.** The fact that all language teachers are Sekgaga-speaking is a valuable asset for these schools, for they can differentiate between the written and the spoken language and therefore can assist learners to differentiate between Sekgaga and Sepedi.

The findings from this study can assist in making generalisations about the problems at hand and in the formulation of recommendations that can serve as support materials for schools. The qualitative research techniques used to collect data for the study are briefly discussed below.

3.5.1 Document analysis

The language policy document and assessment policy was analysed to determine the prescribed frequency of Sepedi-reading in class, as well as the method and frequency of assessment of learners' reading. The policy could also verify whether teachers adhere to the time table or not. Reading time for the foundation and intermediate phase are suggested by Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:2). Ideally, teachers should

allocate one hour per day to reading and writing. The table below indicates the amount of time which should be allocated for the Literacy Learning Programme.

Table 7. Time allocation for reading (Adapted from: *Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:2*)

GRADE	TIME ALLOCATION PER DAY	TOTAL PER WEEK
Foundation Phase		
Grade R-2	1 hr 50 min	9 hrs 10 min
Grade 3	2 hrs	10 hrs
Intermediate Phase		
Grades 4-6	1 hr 30 min	7 hrs 30 min

3.5.2 Interviews

According to Cohen *et al* (2007:349) interviews should empower the research participants – Interviewees - and interviewers to discuss their interpretations of the educational needs and assets of the two schools. The interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used, e.g verbal and non-verbal. Chilisa and Preece (2005:196) divide interviews into individual and focus group interviews: an individual interview is a conversation or interaction between the researcher and a research participant, while all participants are present during focus group interviews, which allows discussion of various viewpoints.

Both individual and focus group interviews were conducted to obtain information from the vernacular teachers relating to teaching Sepedi reading. The interviews were guided by specific questions pertaining to the study.

Interview guide. The interviews were conducted at two rural primary schools located on the same premises in Mashiloane village. After the initial introductions, six vernacular teachers were interviewed; these semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions created opportunities for further probing, i.e all interviewees were asked the same basic questions in the same order (Cohen *et al* 2007:353). The Foundation Phase teachers

were first interviewed to obtain a picture of their assets and needs for teaching vernacular reading and their approaches or strategies they were using.

The purpose of the interviews was to establish the reasons for the teachers experiencing difficulties when teaching vernacular reading. In commencing with the interviews the vernacular teachers were first requested to identify the schools' educational assets and needs for teaching vernacular reading, as suggested by Chilisa and Preece (2005:200). The following questions were asked:

- When have you started to teach vernacular reading?
- How have you ended up teaching vernacular reading?
- What kind of support do you get from the School Management Team (SMT)?
- What kind of additional support would you prefer to enable you to teach vernacular reading effectively?
- Are you satisfied about the way in which the subject advisors visit you for monitoring and support? Why?

After establishing the participants' individual viewpoints about their educational assets and needs, they were questioned about their training as teachers in vernacular reading. The interviews focused on the following questions:

- What kind of difficulties do you experience when teaching vernacular reading?
- What strategies do you use when teaching vernacular reading?
- What resources do you have for teaching vernacular reading?
- How effectively were you trained to teach vernacular reading?
- What kind of support do you get from the SMT?
- How often does the DoE visit your school for monitoring and support in teaching vernacular reading?

By choice four teachers were interviewed in English, and one in Sepedi (her home language), which was transcribed and coded. The interviews determined that they were inadequately trained to teach vernacular reading: workshops were conducted over one to

two days only; language teachers leave the workshops with more questions than answers about teaching vernacular reading in primary schools.

This information obtained during these interviews provided an idea of what to expect of the focus group interview.

3.5.3 Observation phase

According to Chilisa and Preece (2005:209) researchers conduct observations to enable an extravagant discussion of a specific issue, to verify findings and to triangulate or complement data gathered through focus group interviews and individual interviews.

In this phase the vernacular teachers were observed during Sepedi reading periods while teaching vernacular reading, in this case, Sepedi. Non-participant observation was also conducted with the Foundation Phase language teachers, who were not aware of being observed while they were assisting the learners in reading. This was accomplished while the present researcher was teaching Sepedi in the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4). These observations are regarded as a supportive and supplementary technique (Phajane, 2012:61). During observations it became clear that most teachers do not teach vernacular reading in their classrooms. Learners struggle to read with no assistance from their teachers, being left unattended during vernacular reading. Most teachers do not assess learners in reading, and additionally, teachers do not manage their time properly. The following observation schedule for teachers was observed:

- How does the teacher teach learners to read vernacular?
- How do Grade 1 teachers introduce sounds, words and sentences to these beginners?
- Are learners able to read fluently and with understanding?
- Is the classroom well-resourced to motivate learners?
- Do learners follow in their readers while the teacher is reading to them?
- Can learners answer questions about the story book?
- Do learners understand the story when the teacher reads to them?
- Can they play any word games with others?

The following educational needs and assets were observed:

- Teacher and learner support materials.
- Nature of teacher development and support.
- Reading approaches and strategies.
- Management of the teaching of reading.

Observation instrument

NAME OF SCHOOL:

DATE:

TIME:

OBSERVATION POINTS TO NOTE

Classroom management

- Are learners grouped according to their reading abilities?
- Is there evidence of Sepedi reading texts in various classrooms?
- Is there evidence of learners' records of assessments in reading?
- Are the classrooms neat and conducive to teaching and learning?
- Has the teacher completed a lesson plan?

Methodology

- Does the teacher use reading strategies well?
- How learner-centred is the lesson?
- Does the teacher read for learners and with learners?
- Is the poor achievers given time to read?
- Is learners given time to read with comprehension?

3.5.4 Focus group

A focus group interview is a discussion based interview in which multiple research participants simultaneously produce data on a specified issue. The research takes a less directive and dominant role. A focus group interview allows the researcher to understand and determine the range of responses and gain insight into how people perceive a situation. Steps in the focus group process include deciding on the purpose of the focus group interview, the stimulus used for the discussion, the composition of the group and the place for the interview as well as the time and duration of the interview (Chilisa & Preece 2005:205).

The focus group interview was employed in attempting to answer the main research question, namely what are the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School?

It was conducted at Tours Junior Primary School and included six vernacular teachers. This interview method was used to interview the Intermediate Phase teachers, all of them being vernacular teachers. The group had 35 minutes to discuss the difficulties they encounter when teaching vernacular reading, during which each participant was allocated time to express themselves in the discussion without being overshadowed by the extroverts in the group. The interview was audio-recorded and later transcribed for clarity and to enable reference more easily during analysis. During the group discussion participants were requested to discuss the educational needs for teaching vernacular reading in the two primary schools.

According to Eloff and Ebersohn (2010:147) many South African professionals focus mostly on what is lacking or needed during intervention. They further argue that the needs driven approach has a strong focus on problems and needs. However, each classroom setting, school or learning environment boasts a unique combination of assets and capacities. Problem solving and mission development need to come from within because every individual has something to contribute. The strengths and talents of the individuals must be considered by drawing an asset map of all the available skills, talents, capacities

and resources. The educational needs, as identified in the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:6) were discussed by the focus group.

3.5.4.1 Vernacular reading resources

Teachers need adequate resources for the teaching of vernacular reading. Murray (2007:69) states that educational resources vary widely from country to country. Nagai (2004:107) has shown that schools in Australia lack teaching materials and trained teachers to teach vernacular reading. In South Africa, Buthelezi (2002) has found that, despite demonstrated intentions in the country's constitution to support the culture of reading, resources in South African schools are inadequate, as proven by the two schools under study: learners have no Sepedi story books; not enough workbooks were delivered for the Foundation Phase learners; most books in the school library are in English, while there are no Sepedi textbooks; and the Intermediate Phase had received no workbooks for 2014.

3.5.4.2 Teaching practice and methodology

According to Costa (2009:4), the lack of academic language directly affects reading comprehension. Readers derive meaning from the text when they engage in an intentional problem-solving process. The more learners actively use and become familiar with cognitive reading strategies, the more successful they will become in comprehending text. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:8) states that many teachers in South Africa simply do not know how to teach reading as they know only one method of teaching reading, which may not suit the learning styles of all learners. The teachers in the study have no sound knowledge of multiple methods or strategies to teach vernacular reading to create an appropriate balance of methods needed to teach children. They also do not know how to stimulate reading inside and outside the classroom.

3.5.4.3 Teacher training, development and support

Although the DoE has the responsibility of initiating teacher development programmes, teachers are dissatisfied with the training they are offered by the support group. Short term interventions, as suggested by the DoE, to improve their classroom practice are not

yet put into practice. According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:8) many Foundation Phase teachers have not been trained to teach reading in the home language of learners, as such they find it difficult to assist learners who experience reading difficulties.

3.5.4.4 Management of the teaching of reading

According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:16) the principal is responsible for successful teaching and learning, and is also accountable for the reading programme in the school by taking the following steps: “*organising staff training and support in the teaching of reading; recognising achievement amongst learners and teachers; and involving parents in the reading programme.*” The principals from the two schools do not ensure that staff members are properly trained through analysis of learners’ results and involving parents in the reading programme. Teachers criticize the time allocated to reading and its effective use.

The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:16) states that it is the principal’s responsibility to ensure that:

- every learner learns to read,
- steps are taken to promote reading,
- reading strategies are integrated in all school subjects, and
- a culture of reading is instilled in the school.

3.5.4.5 Infrastructure

According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:9) high learner-teacher ratios make it difficult for teachers to teach vernacular reading. Poor physical conditions and inadequate facilities for teaching and learning make it even more difficult to deliver quality education.

The classrooms are not conducive to teaching and learning. The Foundation Phase classrooms have holes in the walls and floors to such an extent that teachers find it difficult

to put posters up on the walls. All the classrooms are overcrowded, resulting in some teachers having more than 70 learners per classroom. It is the responsibility of the principal to approach the DoE for immediate intervention.

3.5.4.6 Parental involvement

Learners often do not receive the support they need from their parents, for apparently most of them are illiterate. The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:9) states that poorly educated parents find it difficult to help their children to read. According to Schunk *et al* (2008:9) parental involvement can have a positive influence on the school, learners and teachers.

3.5.4.7 Libraries

According to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:8), the lack of libraries impact negatively on the quality of teaching and learning. In the absence of school libraries classroom collections of books can promote reading and understanding. The targeted primary schools have no libraries, and no space is allocated for the few available books where learners can have access to it.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

An audio-recorder was used to record all interviews which were conducted in Sepedi and English. Interviews conducted in Sepedi were translated into English. The data was transcribed after each session, and each transcription was read repeatedly to get a holistic understanding. The themes that emerged were encoded, refined and adjusted as the analysis proceeded.

According to De Vos *et al* (2011:166) the idea of analysis implies some kind of transformation. The researcher collects qualitative data and then processes it through analytic procedures, into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis. According to De Vos *et al* (2011:169) the researcher should reconsider the initial

research question. Different themes should be identified and the underlying similarities between them should also be considered.

Cohen *et al* (2007:86) state that the prepared researcher will need to consider how data will be analysed. According to Cohen *et al* (2008:183) data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data, that means making sense of data in terms of participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. This is an important aspect, since it has a specific viewpoint on the format of the arrangement. The planning of data collection will need to take into consideration how it will be processed and analysed, how the results of the analysis will be verified, cross-checked and validated.

Chilisa and Preece (2005:226) state that in qualitative research the analysis is tied to the data collection, as well at the end of the study. By the time data collection has been completed there will be volumes of field notes, data transcribed from tape recorders and information from documents (Chilisa & Preece 2005:226).

In concurrence with the above authors, the language and assessment policies were first analysed. After all phases of data collection had been done, there was a mass of raw data that had to be grouped and reduced into meaningful workable data.

The data was analysed by transcribing and translating audio-taped interviews from Sepedi into English before it was coded and categorised into major and sub-themes before analysis, and field notes were typed. The identified categories were composed in a data matrix. An example of the data matrix used in this study is presented below in Table 8. Interviewees' responses and data from documents were categorised under major themes through content analysis in the data matrix. The educational needs and assets were categorised into four categories, as noted by Maphutha (2006:72), which included the principal, teachers, learners and the SMT. The barriers were also categorised into four categories, namely:

- teacher and learner support materials,
- teaching practice and methodology,

- teacher training, development and support, and
- monitoring learner assessment.

Table 8. An example of the data matrix used in the study.

THEME	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (Teachers)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nature of training offered						
Teacher support materials						
Learners' reading materials						
Reading strategies						
Monitoring learner assessment						
Teaching practice and methodology						
Management of the teaching of reading						
Monitoring and support						

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission for research was sought and granted by the school managers from the target schools. Each principal was presented with a copy of a letter from the university outlining the focus and nature of the research, assuring anonymity and confidentiality. A relationship of respect and trust was established between the researcher and the teachers within and outside the work situation. As the main focus of this research was human beings, the researcher deemed it her responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of those involved, and they were invariably treated with respect and dignity. The research objectives were clearly explained to the participants. They were also reminded of their right to participate in their own language and to decline participation, thereby insuring voluntary participation. The interviews were conducted in the staffroom. Good ethical practice was maintained by not interfering with the participants during the interviews by not interrupting them. The information provided was treated with due respect, and the participants' anonymity was preserved by using pseudonyms.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has covered the research design of the study, research methodology, sampling procedures and how data was collected and analysed. The place and role of the researcher within the context of the research process was also explained. The context in which the study is premised has been highlighted. Educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading is a universal problem, as illuminated by other sources.

In this study the lack of teacher and learner support materials for teaching vernacular reading, as well as the poor or lack of training for vernacular teachers has been identified as the main causes of learners' difficulties in learning to read in the vernacular, in this case Sepedi.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to investigate why vernacular teachers at the two primary schools in a rural area in Limpopo are experiencing difficulties when teaching Sepedi reading. This was done by identifying vernacular teachers' educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading, in this case Sepedi, so that on-going teacher training, development and support can be maintained. This study can also inform other rural primary schools experiencing educational needs in teaching vernacular reading, such as learners' reading material, teacher support materials, the nature of training offered, reading strategies, monitoring learner assessment, support from the subject advisors and others.

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of findings from various classrooms and explains how vernacular reading is taught. It also provides an interpretation of the data on teachers' educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading in Grades 1 - 6. The key findings were obtained from observation, open-ended interviews, document analysis and focus group discussions. In identifying the educational needs and assets of language teachers, an indication is also given whether the aim of the study was achieved. The chapter is organised in terms of the aim, research questions and objectives.

Aim of the study

To identify the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading in the two rural primary schools in the Mopani District, Limpopo province.

Main research question

What are the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School?

Research questions

- To what extent are language teachers trained to teach language subjects?
- To what extent can language teachers teach vernacular reading?
- What kinds of teacher development programmes are in place to improve language education in general and vernacular education in particular?

The findings and details supporting each finding is discussed. All names are pseudonyms in order to maintain the confidentiality of participants.

4.2 BACKGROUND OF THE SCHOOLS

The two schools, located on the same premises, are in the Shiluvane circuit in the Mopani District of Limpopo in an isolated rural area and serve learners from Mashiloane, Masoma, Moname and Hweetji. Mashiloane Higher Primary School offers Intermediate Phase programmes and Tours Junior Primary School offers a Foundation Phase programme. Teachers at the two schools collaborate in many instances. Amalgamation of the two schools is contemplated since learners' enrolment is declining due to parents relocating from the isolated rural areas to developed areas. With the introduction of the Curriculum Assessment Policy System (CAPS), the new approach to teaching, teachers are expected to apply appropriate and relevant knowledge and skills, required by the new curriculum, in the new education system. It is clear that teachers, using the new curriculum, need adequate training to teach Sepedi reading.

4.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Vernacular teachers in various classes were observed while teaching vernacular reading. The Intermediate Phase teachers were aware that they were observed for permission was obtained before observation commenced. However, non-participant observation was conducted in the Foundation Phase classrooms, the teachers being unaware of being observed. The reason for this was that the researcher needed to ascertain whether teachers are really teaching and assisting learners during reading time. For learners to read proficiently they need a strong foundation in phonemic awareness, which is taught in

the Foundation Phase. Phonemic awareness is “*the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how sounds in words work*” (SA Teaching Reading in the Foundation Phase 2008:12). For learners to understand speech they need to know the smallest parts, the sounds, in a spoken word. The observation of the Foundation Phase reading lessons was to establish whether teachers are developing phonemic awareness through poems, songs and rhymes. These components need to be practised on a daily basis. Prior to the interviews, an overview of teachers’ names, professional qualifications, gender, teaching experience, age and their home language were obtained. Their details are supplied in the table below.

Table 9. Qualifications and demographics of the research participants; all are female.

School	Teacher	Professional qualifications	Teaching experience	Age	Home language
Tours	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PTC (Primary Teachers’ Course) ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) 	26	61	Sepedi
	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● PTC (Primary Teachers’ Course) ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) ● ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) 	33	60	Sepedi
	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) ● ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) ● B.ED (Hons) 	23	47	Sepedi
	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) ● ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) 	27	51	Sepedi
Mashiloane	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) ● ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) 	20	50	Sepedi
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SPTD (Senior Primary Teachers’ Diploma) ● B.A degree ● B.ED (Hons) 	24	48	Sepedi

4.3.1 Teachers' demographics

4.3.1.1 Professional qualifications

All vernacular teachers have recognised teaching qualifications and they have furthered their studies at various Universities.

- *Teacher 1* is professionally qualified having obtained the Basic Education Teacher Diploma and has attended a remedial course, suggesting she might be proficient in teaching vernacular reading in the Foundation Phase.
- *Teacher 2* has a Basic Education Teacher Diploma and an Advanced Certificate in Education, which suggests she too must be skilled in teaching vernacular reading.
- *Teacher 3* obtained the Basic Education Teacher Diploma, the Advanced Certificate in Education and a B.ED (Hons).
- *Teacher 4* has a Basic Education Teacher Diploma and an Advanced Certificate (ACE) in Education Management.
- *Teacher 5* is in possession of a Basic Teacher Diploma and Advanced Certificate in Education.
- *Teacher 6* has obtained the Basic Education Teacher Diploma, Bachelor of Arts in Education and B.ED (Hons).

4.3.1.2 Age and gender

All research participants are female. It is commonly known that female teachers are passionate, motherly and considerate towards learners in general. Learners feel safe around them (Phajane, 2012:73). According to their qualifications, it is believed that they can take good care of Foundation Phase learners.

Tours Junior Primary School

- Teacher 2, Grade 1, 60 years.
- Teacher 1, Grade 2, 61 years.
- Teacher 3, Grade 3, 47 years.
- Teacher 4, Grade 4, 51 years.

Mashiloane Higher Primary School

- Teacher 5, Grade 5, 50 years.
- Teacher 6, Grade 6, 48 years.

4.3.1.3 Teaching experience

All teachers are mature in age, and their teaching experience ranges from 20 to 33 years. They have experienced the old Bantu Education System, OBE, NCS and Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and are familiar with the present CAPS. All Foundation Phase teachers have been teaching vernacular reading since they started teaching. All the teachers have started their teaching careers at these two schools. This increases their experience since they are familiar with the learners and their parents as well as the socio-economic problems inherent to a rural area.

The teachers' experience is definitely an educational asset for teaching vernacular reading.

4.3.1.4 Teachers' home language

The home language of both the teachers and learners is Sepedi with a mixture of the Sekgaga dialect. It is assumed that the Sekgaga dialect can be one of the issues that avert learners from reading vernacular reading proficiently. Learners speak the Sekgaga dialect outside the classrooms and at home, but during Sepedi lessons they are expected to learn and speak in Sepedi. This could account for the difficulties learners experience in differentiating between the spoken and the written language. They find it difficult to communicate and read in Sepedi, due to their familiarity with the Sekgaga dialect, which is difficult to write and read. Sepedi sounds differ from the Sekgaga dialect, for example, "tla" in Sepedi is pronounced "da" in Sekgaga, "bošego" in Sepedi is pronounced "bosego" in Sekgaga. Murray (2007:70) argues that the complication of language in the Namibian education could be apparent when one considers the variety of languages and dialects found in the country.

4.3.2 Classroom factors impacting teaching vernacular reading

Spaull (2013: 3) states that the current education system is failing the majority of South Africa's youth since learners cannot read and write. In her present study, the researcher focused on five factors in the classroom, namely: reading strategies used in teaching vernacular reading, teacher-learner interaction, reading lesson activities or methods, classroom size (overcrowding) and learning environment (availability of resources).

According to the findings of this study, learners at the two schools cannot read Sepedi proficiently. It is quite apparent that the issue of educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading needs urgent attention. Teachers do not use different approaches in teaching vernacular reading because they lack information regarding the curriculum (Phajane, 2012:100). It will be necessary to plan in-service courses to address this problem, allowing for the needs of both learners and teachers (Phajane 2012:102).

4.3.2.1 Reading strategies used in teaching vernacular reading

Reading strategies are methods of solving learners' difficulties in reading (Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:19).

Foundation Phase. According to Phajane (2012:62) the information obtained from non-participant observations may be more valid. None of the vernacular teachers were aware that they were being observed. The teachers were each using their own methods in teaching vernacular reading.

Teacher 1 does not teach reading for learners are always writing tasks in their class-work books. Learners are left to read on their own during reading periods while the teacher continues with her own work. Three learners have to share one book. Most learners just stare at their books because they cannot read. Some words are difficult to spell, but they continue to read on their own, since there is no intervention from the teacher.

Teacher 2 teaches vernacular reading on a daily basis. She prefers the shared reading strategy, in which the teacher reads text aloud to the class and discuss it with them to

understand it. A favourite word game she plays with them is to read a word, to which the learners have to reply in words rhyming with it. She uses group guided reading where she supports the small group of learners when reading in their home language.

Teacher 3 also use group guided reading in teaching vernacular reading although not on a daily basis. In her class learners have to write, in front of the class on the blackboard, words she dictates to them.

Teacher 4 applies the “read aloud” and independent reading strategies in teaching vernacular reading. She teaches vernacular reading to the enjoyment of the learners, inspiring them to read, but this happens infrequently, once in three to four weeks.

Most Foundation Phase teachers could teach vernacular reading proficiently because they all experienced the Breakthrough to Literacy approach before the introduction of OBE. Some teachers are discouraged in teaching vernacular reading because of the unavailability of reading materials.

Intermediate Phase. *Teachers 5 and 6* usually request learners to read and afterwards have to write their tasks in their classwork books. Neither of them interacts with the learners while reading. Both assume reading was taught in the Foundation Phase level, and as such they are not supposed to teach vernacular reading. It was not possible to identify their reading strategies, since the learners read while the teacher listens. Once finished, learners are requested to repeat their reading. Both teachers were aware that they were being observed, but they thought they were acting accordingly.

4.3.2.2 *Teacher-learner interaction*

In the Foundation Phase level, teachers 2 and 3 interact with their learners most of the time. Learners are grouped according to their abilities for guided reading. This is done to identify learners who experience problems in vernacular reading.

Teacher 3 habitually observes her group, interacts with the learners and assesses them accordingly to identify problem areas. Teacher 4 does not interact with her learners, and

vernacular reading is irregularly taught. The Intermediate Phase teachers do not interact with their learners during vernacular reading under the impression that they should be able to read on their own.

According to Desai (2012:210) poor performance in reading comprehension revolves around a serious lack of reading culture in schools. Although there is evidence that reading is taught at the target schools, in most instances it is done in English. Learners are given the opportunity to read to their peers and teachers during morning devotions, although this is done in English. According to Phajane (2012:103) teachers need to learn more about how to intervene when learners experience difficulties in reading their home language.

4.3.2.3 Reading lesson activities

Teachers 3 and 4 start their lessons with the teaching of sounds, which is followed by the introduction of syllables and then words. They are certainly trying to teach vernacular reading. The other teachers merely request learners to read from their texts - usually workbooks since they have a shortage of reading books. In most classrooms activities consist of writing, for reading is not taught.

- **Phonics instruction.** Phonics instruction teaches learners the relationship between letters of the written language and the sounds of spoken language. This assists the learners in decoding words (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:13).
- **Vocabulary instruction.** A good vocabulary is the foundation of reading comprehension. Readers should know the meaning of words and be able to pronounce those words correctly in order to become proficient readers (Phajane 2012:35, SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:16).
- **Fluency instruction.** *“Fluency in reading means the ability to read texts smoothly, accurately and with understanding”* (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (2008:17).

4.3.2.4 Classroom size

Navsaria (2011:2) points out that the previously black schools are still overcrowded and under-resourced because basic infrastructures have not been put into place.

The classrooms of both schools are overcrowded, with the most learners (84) in the Grade 2 classroom. All learners are taught by one teacher, offering all four subjects, namely Sepedi, English, Mathematics and Life Skills. During observation it became clear that all teachers are teaching under a lot of pressure. Teacher 1 teaches in a congested classroom which allows no flexibility, for learners are seated in two's and three's on chairs at tables of tightly packed rows. Learners thus cannot enjoy learning, for they are often asked to leave the class in order to vacate space for writing activities. In general, learners in all classrooms are arranged in a "church-style", facing one direction.

4.3.2.5 Learning environment

The classroom environment is not conducive to teaching and learning, for no reading materials are available in the Foundation Phase classrooms. This results in teachers using workbooks to teach vernacular reading. Some of the chalkboards are too small. All bulletin boards are old and it is difficult for teachers to put up pictures or posters on the walls, for they easily fall off. Almost all classrooms have broken windows, holes in the floors and broken ceilings. Two classrooms are built of stone with holes in the walls, where lurking snakes had been found. Learners cannot work co-operatively due to classroom congestion. Even when learners are to complete individual activities, the teachers set them the same tasks.

4.4 RESPONSES TO INTERVIEWS

QUESTIONS

Question 1. What kind of difficulties do you experience when teaching vernacular reading?

Teacher 1 (Grade 2) said that learners cannot read and write because they do not recognise the alphabetic letters and they cannot write between lines. She added that her classroom is overcrowded to such an extent that it is difficult to monitor learners while they are reading.

Teacher 2 (Grade 1) said that some of her learners cannot read fluently and they do not participate actively during oral lessons.

Teacher 3 (Grade 3) said that learners find it difficult to pronounce words or understand punctuation and stammer when reading. Teacher 4 (Grade 4) also stated that learners cannot read fluently. Teacher 5 (Grade 5) found that some learners cannot even pronounce the sounds of words, while Teacher 6 (Grade 6) said that learners find it difficult to read their home language.

Question 2. What strategies do you use when teaching vernacular reading?

Teacher 1 divides the learners into groups and splits the words into syllables. Teacher 2 uses flashcards and pictures to teach vernacular reading, but admitted that she is unfamiliar with strategies to teach vernacular reading. Teacher 3 read some important verbs to the learners, and shows pictures to them, which they then have to identify. Teacher 4 prefers the guided reading strategy. Teacher 5 reads the same passage twice to the learners, which they then have to repeat to ensure that their pronunciation is correct. Teacher 6 hands texts to the learners to read on their own, for, according to her, they are in the Intermediate Phase and expected to be able to cope on their own.

Question 3. What resources do you have for teaching vernacular reading?

Teacher 1's only resources for teaching vernacular reading are charts and five Big Books. Teacher 2 prefers using self-made pictures, pictures from magazines and flash cards. The only reading material in Teacher 3's classroom is workbooks, of which there are insufficient numbers. Teacher 4 has some readers, learners' books and workbooks for teaching vernacular reading. Teacher 5 also has readers, learners' books, posters and alphabet charts. Teacher 6 has only a few readers in her classroom and each learner has a workbook to use during Sepedi reading.

Question 4. How effectively were you trained to teach vernacular reading?

Teacher 1 received no training for teaching vernacular reading, except for the Old Bantu Education System, where they were effectively trained in the Breakthrough to Literacy Programme. She added that Grade 1 learners were then fluent readers in their home language. Teacher 2 has also never been trained to teach vernacular reading, except in the old Bantu Education System, when it was a joy to teach learners to construct sentences and read fluently with understanding. Teacher 3 has not received training to teach vernacular reading since education transformation after South African democracy. Teacher 4 was never trained to teach vernacular reading, for the training which was in place never included teaching vernacular reading. Teacher 5 was not fully trained, for the facilitators included only theory in the workshops which lasted only two to four days. The facilitators were also unable to answer questions pertaining to teaching vernacular reading. Teacher 6 was also not trained to teach vernacular reading; the workshops merely provided them with policy documents.

Question 5. What kind of support do you get from SMT?

Teacher 1's classroom is monitored once a month, although Teachers 2 and 3 are never monitored. Although Sepedi subject advisors visit schools infrequently, Teacher 6 mentioned that no support is ever made of vernacular reading. Teacher 4's Sepedi reading is never monitored or supported by the SMT. Teachers 5 and 6, whose classes are both excluded from these visits, are of the opinion that it is due to the SMT having no idea about teaching vernacular reading and their inability to provide assistance.

Question 6. What kind of support do you get from the Department of Education officials when they visit your school?

Teacher 1's class is visited once every quarter for other subjects. Teacher 2 said that only her lesson plans are checked during these visits when the Foundation Phase teachers are invited to the circuit office. Apparently they focus on examining the Grade 3 teachers' work, while excluding vernacular reading (Teacher 3). During these visits, teachers' portfolios and other documents are viewed. Teacher 4 too stated that only the other learning areas receive attention, but not Sepedi reading. According to Teacher 5, only completed work is examined, e.g. classroom activities, tests and lesson preparations. Teacher 6 confirmed that Sepedi subject advisors visit schools once in two years, however, none for Sepedi and vernacular reading is never mentioned.

Question 7. How would you like the Department of Education to assist you in teaching vernacular reading?

Teacher 1 needs Sepedi reading material, a teaching assistant to assist her with the 84 learners, and new classrooms at Tours Junior Primary School. Teacher 2 needs relevant material like vernacular reading books, story books and a teacher's guide. Teacher 3 would like the DoE to provide in-service training for vernacular teachers, perhaps twice in a year, while Teacher 4 stressed the importance of adequate training in vernacular reading. According to Teacher 5 guidance for vernacular teachers would be an asset. Additionally, Teacher 6 is of the opinion that, together with frequent teacher training programmes, more teachers should be employed, and together with more classrooms, learners would receive much improved schooling.

The research observations, document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions are provided according to the participating schools and teachers and focused on teaching methods used for vernacular reading, teacher-learner interaction, lesson activities or methods, classroom size, and learning environment (i.e the availability of resources).

4.5 DISCUSSIONS FROM OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS

4.5.1 Educational assets for teaching vernacular reading

All teachers are Sepedi speaking mixed with Sekgaga dialect and the author valued this as an educational asset for teaching vernacular reading. Teachers could differentiate between written and spoken *language*. They know that Sekgaga dialect is not the language of teaching and learning. Teachers have the knowledge on how to translate Sekgaga words into Sepedi, the language of teaching and learning at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. The research participants were all females and these make them to be gentle when teaching learners to read. The teaching experience of the research participants serves as an asset as all teachers have experienced the Old Bantu Education System, OBE, RNCS and the then CAPS. All the research participants have more than twenty years teaching experience. The achievement and progress of learners assist teachers in assessing their abilities in teaching Sepedi reading. Workbooks were delivered to the two primary schools, even though they were not enough for learners in some grades.

4.5.2 Educational needs for language teachers

Language teachers need the following to teach vernacular reading:

- *Adequate training for teaching vernacular reading*
All vernacular (Sepedi) teachers need adequate training for the teaching of CAPS vernacular reading.
- *Sepedi reading material*
Readers and other reading material are scarce while some classrooms have no readers at all, which makes it difficult for teaching vernacular reading. Only the Intermediate Phase learners received Sepedi readers, however not in sufficient quantities. They have to share these, which makes it difficult for teachers to assist learners struggling to read their home language.

- *Sufficient space*
Teachers need sufficient space in their classrooms so they could group learners during vernacular reading lessons. The majority of classrooms are overcrowded, e.g Grade 2 with 84 learners.
- *Parental support and assistance*
Teachers need the support of parents and guardians to link what was learnt at school and home. Parents and guardians should read Sepedi stories to their children.
- *Familiarity with reading strategies*
Teachers need to be familiar with different reading strategies, which will be only possible via adequate training.
- *Monitoring and support from the School Management Team (SMT)*
The SMT does not monitor teachers because they themselves were not trained to teach language reading in general - and vernacular reading in particular - and is therefore unable to assist the teachers.
- *Support from subject advisors*
Vernacular teachers complained about the lack of support from Sepedi subject advisors. The Intermediate Phase teachers have never been invited for Continuous Assessment Support System (CASS), like in other subjects.

A lack of resources and limited support from the government would result in problems in teaching vernacular reading (Buhmann & Trudell 2008:25). None of the vernacular teachers from the target schools has received any support from the DoE. They have no Sepedi reading material, especially the Foundation Phase. There are not enough workbooks for all the learners. It is impossible for learners to share workbooks, for learners have to write inside these books. Another teacher prefers not to even use these books, due to the fact that there are not enough. Vernacular teachers never received training to teach vernacular reading, and as such each relies on her own methods. The workshops they have attended were facilitated by people who don't know how to train teachers to teach languages in general.

4.6 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

The researcher has studied the time table, language policy document and assessment policies. The time table clearly indicated daily vernacular reading periods of 60 minutes, which is in agreement with the language policy.

4.7 OBSERVATIONS

The researcher observed that some teachers do not teach Sepedi reading, whereas others at least make an attempt. Teacher 1 experiences problems in teaching due to an overcrowded classroom. The extent of the problem is as such that the teacher cannot move between the rows while monitoring the learners while reading and writing, while the learners cannot move freely to perform poems and dramas. Learners have to copy some of the work from the chalkboard. The teacher does not even bother to let the learners read. It was noticed that she does not follow the stipulated time table, for learners are always occupied with Mathematics and Sepedi, with no time for reading or performing poems.

The SA National Reading Strategy (2008:19) states that reading is an important linguistic skill since it serves as a building block of all other learning areas. Teachers are therefore responsible to develop a love for reading in young children. Reading is the aspect that measures learners' ability to identify, pronounce and read words effectively (Mubanga 2010:22).

Except for learners not allowed time to read in the vernacular, some classrooms also do not have Sepedi readers. Very few of the classrooms are conducive to teaching and learning, since most have big holes in the floors and cracks in the walls, windows and ceilings are broken, and some chalkboards are too small. The broken windows made it difficult for teachers to display Sepedi posters on the bulletin boards. The posters in the Foundation Phase classrooms were covered with dust, some being torn and hidden by different objects placed on top of them. Often an entire week will pass without any reading instructions, while vernacular reading is taught on a daily basis by some of the teachers. None of the Foundation Phase classrooms have reading corners.

4.8 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Research participants were asked to consider any issue regarding educational needs and assets for teaching vernacular reading which they thought was left out during their interviews. They made it clear that they would dedicate themselves to teach vernacular reading, provided they are supplied with CAPS reading texts. Due to the lack of Sepedi readers in the Foundation Phase, it was difficult, almost impossible, for them to teach vernacular reading effectively. The present researcher suggested that they should compromise by using copies of the sample readers supplied to schools by various publishers, and to be creative and write their own texts for Grades 1 to 3 learners.

The issue of assessing learners' vernacular reading was also discussed. Most teachers agreed that assessing individual learners' reading is difficult for they are supposed to use rubrics to examine learners' fluency, confidence, posture, audibility and spelling mistakes. They also complained about the late arrival of workbooks at the school and that there are not enough for all learners. The Intermediate Phase learners cannot read their home language and are even unable to read Grade 1 books. Assessment of learners' reading is time consuming. The researcher suggested that they should assess less than ten learners per day and to group learners according to their capabilities in order to observe them while they are reading.

Implications of findings

In this section the researcher will discuss the findings and to what extent they address each research question.

Questions

1. *What kind of difficulties do you experience when teaching vernacular reading?*

The study has demonstrated that teachers experience difficulties when teaching vernacular reading, as they all commented that learners find it difficult to pronounce words and they cannot read fluently. They do not give learners much time to practice reading (see section 2.3.2, paragraph 2). This finding is confirmed by Mostert and Wikan (2008:96). This implies that if learners could read a lot during their early years,

they could retain the reading habits in later years. Therefore the contribution of the study is that teachers should be empowered to encourage learners to read a lot in the Foundation Phase.

2. *What strategies do you use when teaching vernacular reading?*

The study demonstrated that teachers are not familiar with the reading strategies (see section 2.3.1, paragraphs 1 and 2). This finding of the study has been confirmed by authors such as Wilson and Peterson (2006:2) and Costa (2009:7). This implies that teachers are not equipped with reading strategies to assist learners when struggling to read their home language. Therefore the contribution of the study is that there should be effective training where teachers are trained to use various reading strategies to teach vernacular reading in particular.

3. *What resources do you have for teaching vernacular reading?* The study has demonstrated that teachers have insufficient material to teach vernacular reading. Therefore the author intends to assist teachers in creating their own reading material in the Foundation Phase. This is confirmed by authors such as Nagai (2004:115) (see section 2.3.2, paragraph 9).

4. *How effectively were you trained to teach vernacular reading?* The study has demonstrated that teachers were not trained to teach vernacular reading (see section 2.3, paragraph 2). This is confirmed by Navsaria, Pascoe and Kathard (2011:6). This implies that teachers are not adequately trained to teach vernacular reading. Therefore the contribution of the study is that the DoE should offer adequate training for language teachers.

5. *What kind of support do you get from the Department of Education officials?* The study has demonstrated that there is no adequate support from the DoE in teaching vernacular reading.

6. *How would you like the Department of Education to assist you in teaching vernacular reading?* The study has demonstrated that teachers need frequent training programmes and reading material. Therefore the contribution of the study is that

teachers should be very strict on correcting the use of Sepedi words during Sepedi reading lessons. Learners revert to Sekgaga dialect due to teachers who relax in classrooms. Learners should be given rhymes in Sepedi to practice reading; this could assist learners in using Sepedi, not Sekgaga, in the classroom. Teachers should not rely on the shortage of reading material as the reason for not teaching vernacular reading. I therefore recommend that Foundation Phase teachers should write short texts for learners to read.

4.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter data was presented, analysed and discussed through the use of policy documents, observations, one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions, as well as the study's findings based on the teaching of Sepedi reading in the various grades. The setting of the research was also provided. The primary finding of this study is that vernacular teachers at the two schools lack the necessary resources to teach vernacular reading proficiently. While addressing the research question, in identifying the educational needs and assets the aim of the study, and whether it was accomplished, was considered. The demographics of the research participants were accounted for and data was analysed by focusing on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading.

The following chapter presents the conclusion, recommendations and reflections of the study, based on the research and the findings presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This research aims to identify the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School, located in an isolated rural area namely, Mashiloane village in the Shiluvane Circuit of the Mopani District, Limpopo province. This study was inspired by the fact that language teachers are faced with many difficulties when teaching vernacular reading due to the fact that their educational needs and assets are not considered. The assumptions of this study are that language teachers lack reading material, sufficient space, parental support, knowledge of reading strategies, monitoring and support, and adequate training to teach vernacular reading proficiently.

These assumptions are based on data collected during interviews, observations, document analysis and focus group discussions. The conclusion and recommendations could lead to on-going teacher development programmes in the rural primary schools of Limpopo.

The chapter also contains reflections of the research process, presenting research experiences, and also refers to limitations that might have influenced the research outcome.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions from this study are based on the research questions and findings of this study. Based on the findings, the two schools' language teachers experience difficulties when teaching vernacular reading. According to Phajane (2021:62) non-participant observations represent a more objective approach to data collection, and therefore the

information obtained from the Foundation Phase is considered more valid because none of the Foundation Phase teachers were aware that they were being observed.

The Foundation Phase has no story books in Sepedi and therefore the teachers rely on Sepedi workbooks to teach reading. Teachers read stories from posters and write selected words from the story on the chalkboard. Generally, teachers use stories from the workbooks to promote reading, which is good practice (Phajane, 2012:112). However, some books are characterised by spelling mistakes. Words like “*tšhelete*”, “*tšhese*” and others are written as “*tshete*” and “*tshese*”. This is obviously confusing to learners when learning to read their home language. Adding to these problems is the fact that there are not enough workbooks for all learners, and they therefore have to share these, often in two’s or three’s. After the reading lesson, the teachers write key concepts on the chalkboard and use flashcards for learners to read. Some teachers do not even teach Sepedi reading in their classrooms.

Classroom observations confirm that some vernacular teachers do not teach Sepedi reading, as is the case with the Intermediate Phase. Learners receive only grammar tuition while vernacular reading is neglected; they are left to read on their own and answer questions in their classwork books. Some teachers do not follow the stipulated time table.

The above mentioned problems serve to prove, *inter alia*, great uncertainty about methods for teaching vernacular reading due to inadequate training of language teachers. Further restrictions are the lack of reading material and overcrowding of classrooms, for learners cannot be divided into groups and teachers cannot move through the class for monitoring purposes. The classroom environment is definitely not conducive to teaching vernacular reading.

From the teachers’ interviews it is clear that language teachers do not receive support in teaching vernacular reading. Although they are qualified teachers with many years of teaching experience, they still lack training specific to teaching vernacular reading. One possible reason is the adjustment to the new curriculum. One teacher remarked that she is tired of changing from one curriculum to another. Apparently she doesn’t bother to read the policy statements anymore, and just continues to teach. There is no collaboration

among vernacular teachers, each using their own methods. It is concluded that vernacular teachers have inadequate knowledge pertaining to reading strategies.

The problems identified during research makes it clear that vernacular teachers need urgent assistance and a few possible solutions are suggested below.

- Teacher development, such as in-service courses, should take into account the needs of teachers responsible to teach vernacular reading.
- More classroom-based research is necessary to support the teaching of vernacular reading. The shortage of reading material and texts is apparent. It is necessary to develop locally based materials, such as stories told by teachers and parents. This would be possible by means of voice-recording on audio recorders (or electronic storage devices) which could then be transcribed. It would be valuable to learners, for it will always be available in print for learners to listen and learn to read. Opportunities should be created where teachers could acquire practical experience to develop learners' reading skills to proficiently read vernacular. The DoE should appoint knowledgeable people to train practising teachers in developing reading skills through practical workshops or information sharing sessions, for example, the Grade 1 teachers' learners could be used during training. None of the teachers at these schools understand the teaching methods and strategies for teaching vernacular reading.
- Approaches and methods that have been overlooked should supplement those identified in this study. Teachers confuse teaching methods for reading with other elements of teaching reading, but they have to become familiar with the correct and proper methods, for they have to assist learners to comprehend their reading material (Phajane, 2012:104).

5.2.1 Educational assets for teaching vernacular reading

For a better understanding of what language teachers need to teach Sepedi reading proficiently, the educational assets of language teachers for teaching Sepedi reading

should be identified. For the purpose of this study language teachers' skills, talents and strengths are regarded as educational assets for teaching vernacular reading. These findings are consistent with Ryan (2008:9) who argues that assets refer to how language teachers assist learners in reading their home language proficiently. Despite the fact that language teachers experience many problems, as mentioned above, it is clear that they have some valuable assets. They all are Sepedi-speaking and they are professionally qualified as language teachers, which relates to sufficient experience in teaching vernacular.

5.2.1.1 Gender

All language teachers are female and they know how to cope with young children. According to Phajane (2012:73) female teachers are known to be passionate and motherly.

5.2.1.2 Teaching experience

All the language teachers have teaching experience of not less than twenty years. Additionally, they all started their teaching careers at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. This fact is also valued as an educational asset since they are obviously familiar with the schools' background and the community.

5.2.1.3 Teachers' home language

The vernacular teachers are all Sepedi speaking with a good background of the Sekgaga dialect since they all are members of the Bakgaga tribe. They can differentiate between the spoken and written language.

Teachers must translate new words for the learners to understand what they are reading. Due to the fact that vernacular teachers are from the Bakgaga tribe and are fluent in Sekgaga, they speak a mixture of Sepedi and Sekgaga but still find it difficult to teach Sepedi reading. An example of this is that teachers, prior to a Sepedi lesson, have to remind the learners that they are not allowed to speak Sekgaga. The fact that the teachers all speak Sepedi is valued as an educational asset in teaching vernacular

reading, for it enables them to assist learners in code-switching between Sekgaga and Sepedi.

Learners from both schools' home language are Sekgaga, however, they are taught Sepedi as their home language. The Sekgaga dialect is complicated for those not familiar with it. Although the teachers were trained as language teachers in general, they do not know how to teach Sepedi reading without reading books.

5.2.2 Educational needs of language teachers

Language teachers need various resources to teach vernacular reading. Special attention should be paid to their requisites to teach Sepedi. The educational needs of language teachers are summarised below.

5.2.2.1 Specific training for teaching vernacular reading

Proper teacher training and support initiatives is characterised by training based on needs and analysis (Phajane 2012:100, SA Literacy Strategy 2008:14). According to Nagai (2004:107) schools lack reading material and trained teachers to teach vernacular reading.

Sepedi tuition teachers at the target schools experience difficulties in teaching Sepedi reading as a result of inadequate vernacular training. Teachers are not well informed about the curriculum and each has a different approach to teaching Sepedi reading.

5.2.2.2 Sepedi reading material

The DoE does not provide vernacular teachers with appropriate reading material. Conversely, vernacular teachers are not creative in developing their own reading texts. It is apparent that, without appropriate reading material, teachers will experience difficulties in teaching Sepedi reading. Learners need access to appropriate reading material throughout the school year to become good readers (SA National Reading Strategy 2008:17).

5.2.2.3 Sufficient space

All classrooms at the two schools are overcrowded to such an extent that one classroom has 84 learners. Learners require sufficient space to act out dramas and to perform rhymes when learning vernacular reading. It is thus clear that the classrooms are too small (and too few) to cope with the quantities of learners' yearly enrolling at the schools.

5.2.2.4 Knowledge of reading strategies

Reading strategies are ways of solving difficulties confronted by learners while reading (SA Teaching Reading in the Early Grades 2008:19). None of the language teachers have sufficient knowledge about vernacular reading strategies, and without it, learners cannot be taught to read their home language proficiently.

5.2.2.5 Monitoring and support from the School Management Team

The School Management Team (SMT) of the two schools does not support the teachers in teaching Sepedi reading, since they do not know how to lend support.

5.2.2.6 Support from subject advisors

The DoE is not doing enough in supporting vernacular teachers, who, in order to teach successfully, need strong support from their subject advisors.

5.2.2.7 Reviewing language policy

The language teachers are unfamiliar with the language policy. The assessment guidelines for languages in the Foundation and Intermediate phases should be reviewed.

5.2.2.8 Empowering learners to appreciate their home language

Vernacular teachers are responsible to empower their learners to appreciate and enjoy reading their home language. Learners have to be equipped with Sepedi reading material, and the teachers should be able to improvise in developing it. The lack of support for teachers, limited training, limited reading opportunities, incompetent teaching of reading,

poor foundation skills, large teacher-learner ratios, language barriers and the unavailability of a library at a school will discourage learners in appreciating their home language (Navsaria, 2011:6). Teachers need to empower their learners to appreciate and enjoy reading Sepedi. This could effectively be done by teaching rhymes and dramas.

5.2.2.9 Parental support and assistance

The importance of parental involvement in Sepedi reading has been emphasised in this study. The findings, however, has shown limited parental involvement in their support of the children reading in their home language. This is, however, mainly due to the fact that some parents themselves cannot read their home language. Some parents, especially those that are literate, work away from home in large cities, while their children are in the care of grandparents. It is also usual, in rural areas, for girls to leave school before Grade 8.

5.2.2.10 Active School Governing Body and School Management Team

An active School Governing Body and School Management team is necessary to support the learners. However, the findings of the study have shown that apparently, the community at large is reluctant to become involved in their children's education. One could therefore conclude that the two parties do not interact for the benefit of their children in Sepedi reading.

5.2.2.11 Improvement in the teaching of Sepedi reading

Language teachers are responsible for the improvement of vernacular reading at school. The research has emphasised the importance of vernacular teachers in the improvement of Sepedi reading at the two schools.

5.2.2.12 Library equipped with Sepedi reading books

Neither of the two schools have libraries. Some old books are stored in boxes in each classroom. It is of the utmost importance that schools should have libraries to create an

atmosphere of reading and learning in general, and more particularly, in this case, Sepedi reading books.

5.2.2.13 Language laboratory

A language laboratory at the schools would have a positive effect in acquiring a proficient knowledge of Sepedi, for learners would be able to listen to recorded speech. One language laboratory should be sufficient to satisfy the needs of the vernacular teachers from all grades, for the two schools are in the process of amalgamation.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are based on the findings, analysis and conclusions of this study and presented within the framework of the educational needs and assets of the two target schools.

5.3.1 Specific training for teaching vernacular reading

Specific training for teaching vernacular reading is necessary. It is therefore recommended that the DoE should introduce workshops where language teachers could be trained, with special reference to vernacular reading. Training should be practical and conducted by expert facilitators; in-service training should be ideal for practicing vernacular teachers. Teachers in rural areas should be trained according to their learners' specific language environment.

5.3.2 Sepedi reading material

Reading material and workbooks should be supplied to all rural areas. Delivery should be early enough for learners to have access to it at the commencement of a new year. The delivery programme should be seriously monitored, especially in the Limpopo province. The number of books must correlate with the number of learners in each grade. Reading material should also correspond with the vernacular language spoken in the specific area.

5.3.3 Classroom space

Since the classrooms at the two schools are too small to sufficiently accommodate all the learners, it is recommended that the DoE should assess all school buildings in the rural areas. Schools, like Mashiloane and Tours, need urgent intervention concerning the state of disrepair of these buildings. It is suggested that the old buildings should be upgraded, in other words floors, ceilings and windows should be repaired, and new (and possibly larger) classrooms, a library and language laboratory should be built. And of course, more teachers should be employed! Teachers would have enough space to teach, the learners will gain enormously from proper space to write and read and perform their classroom activities - the learning environment will be more flexible regarding space.

5.3.4 Familiarity with reading strategies

It is recommended that Sepedi teachers at the two schools should improve their familiarity with vernacular reading strategies, which could only be achieved if the DoE could provide training for vernacular teachers.

5.3.5 Monitoring and support from the School Management Team

The monitoring and support of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading in all schools is important. It is therefore recommended that the SMT should become involved with the teaching of the vernacular and provide vernacular teachers with relevant Sepedi reading material.

5.3.6 Support from subject advisors

Well-informed subject advisors are needed to offer support to the language teachers of the two schools for teaching Sepedi reading.

5.3.7 Reviewing language policy

Insufficient familiarity with the language policy affects the teaching of Sepedi reading at the two schools. Sepedi teachers should read the language policy so that they could become familiar with methods of teaching vernacular reading.

5.3.8 Parental support and assistance

Parental support and assistance is needed in becoming skillful readers in one's home language, and the SMT should encourage parents in this. Parents and other family members could support their children in vernacular reading by visiting their schools to ensure their children's progress.

Strong parental support is needed at the two schools. Parents should therefore motivate and assist their children in reading their home language. The SA Literacy Strategy for Primary Schools (2008:9) states that parents can use various strategies to create a culture of vernacular reading at home. The parents will, however, have to be informed about such strategies, which they can only learn from the teachers - the teachers who are not well informed about teaching methods.

It is clear that it is the responsibility of the DoE to properly train and support language teachers who have to expand their task to include and inform the parents on reading methods.

5.3.9 Active School Governing Body and School Management Team

Based on the conclusions above, it is recommended that the School Governing Body and the School Management Team should collaborate on various levels for the benefit of learners at the two schools. This could perhaps lead to the building of a library and language laboratory.

5.3.10 Improvement in teaching Sepedi reading

Vernacular teachers are responsible for the improvement of teaching vernacular reading. Without sufficient reading material provided by the DoE, and until such time, they should be creative in the development of their own reading texts for learners.

5.3.11 Libraries

Wilson & Peterson (2006:2) state that a community shares its heritage and traditions through reading, however, according to the SA National Reading Strategy (2008:8), the majority of rural schools in South Africa have no access to library facilities. Since neither of the two schools - in the process of amalgamation - have libraries, it is recommended that the government should be responsible to provide one. The schools lack vernacular reading books, therefore a library could be equipped with more Sepedi story books as well as references for language teachers. Once a library has been built, learners should be encouraged to use its resources.

5.3.12 Language laboratory

A language laboratory is needed at the two schools where learners can listen to recorded speech which will enable them to read Sepedi. It is recommended that the government should provide it.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The present study is limited in the sense that its goal was to identify the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School. Further studies on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for Sepedi reading in all rural primary schools in the Limpopo province are therefore recommended. For purposes of comparison, similar studies can be undertaken in other provinces. Difficulties could be overcome in various

ways. Further research could be executed by other researchers focusing on Sepedi versus the Sekgaga dialect.

5.5 REFLECTIONS

The reflections on the research reveal how the researcher values the research process which was undertaken. Various insights were gained during the various processes of writing the research proposal, the field work and the final writing of this research.

5.5.1 Research proposal

No difficulties were encountered during the research, for it was squarely based on the research proposal. A thorough literature research on teaching vernacular reading in rural primary schools was done. Based on the literature, the information gap that exists in relation to teaching vernacular reading in South Africa has been identified. It became clear that language teachers need adequate training, specifically in vernacular reading. Training should be explicit and practical, executed by well-informed subject advisors.

5.5.2 Research experiences and fieldwork

It was gratifying to conduct research at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School, for the vernacular teachers were very co-operative. The researcher is also a language teacher at Tours Junior Primary School; her interviewees were therefore also her colleagues. It was easy to conduct non-participant observations and interviews could be conducted during breaks, when the staffroom was available. The outcomes of the study were achieved during document analysis, observations, interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher is grateful for her achievements during fieldwork.

5.6 CONCLUSION

This mini-dissertation reports a case study on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School.

This research revealed that vernacular teachers at the schools experience difficulties in teaching Sepedi reading due to lack of some educational resources. It was concluded that these schools lack adequately trained teachers, Sepedi reading material, a library and many other educational needs presented in this report. However, if the recommendations of this study could be unified, major improvement in teaching vernacular reading could be realised.

5.6.1 Conclusion from observations

The findings confirm the researcher's observations, herself a teacher in the field, about the uncertainty regarding different teaching methods in teaching vernacular reading. The teachers employ different methods, yet they are all employed at the same school. Not all Foundation Phase teachers teach vernacular reading according to the prescribed time. Grade 1 to 3 teachers confirmed that learners encounter difficulties with certain sounds, either in identifying it or while reading. However, teachers experience several restrictions in teaching vernacular reading, such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of reading material, and ambiguity about strategies to assist learners with reading difficulties.

The manner in which reading is conducted is influenced by the classroom environment. All Foundation Phase teachers write words on the chalkboard or use flashcards for learners to read. Intermediate Phase learners are requested to read from their workbooks because there are not enough Sepedi readers. The present researcher regards this as an innovative solution, which complements Nagai's (2012) research, who mentions the teachers from Maiwala Elementary School solution to this problem by developing Big Books. A positive aspect of the research is that teachers nevertheless succeed in teaching Sepedi reading despite the many difficulties they have to confront.

5.6.2 Conclusion from interviews with Sepedi teachers

From the teachers' responses during the interviews, it became clear that there is inadequate support from parents. Most teachers mentioned that parents do not come to school, even when invited. One teacher stated that she does not involve parents in remedial reading because most can scarcely read or write their home language and therefore fail to assist their children with school work, while others are absent from home, working elsewhere, while the children are tended by grandparents. More confirmation of parental indifference is that another teacher has given learners some word cards to read at home, being assisted by their parents, only to find out that most learners did not read at home.

With regard to teachers' views on learners' sound-identification difficulties, it could be concluded that learners have difficulties in reading certain sounds, such as "*tla, hla, sa, tš'a*" as they are used to the Sekgaga dialect. It was confirmed that learners mainly use the Sekgaga dialect as their home language.

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APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VERNACULAR TEACHERS

SECTION A

My name is Naom Mateta. I am a Masters student at the University of Limpopo. I am currently conducting research on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching Sepedi reading at Mashiloane and Tours primary schools. My study falls under the Department of Community and Continuing Education.

For the purpose of this study, I need information that will enable me to write a report that will be submitted to the relevant stakeholders on the above stated title. Your participation will be voluntary. Whatever you say will be kept confidential between you and me. It will be my pleasure to share the findings with you after the research.

Thank you

Date

SECTION B

QUESTIONS FOR ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW

1. What kind of difficulties do you experience when teaching vernacular reading?
2. What strategies do you use when teaching vernacular reading?
3. What resources do you have for teaching Sepedi reading?
4. How effectively were you trained to teach Sepedi reading?
5. What kind of support do you get from the SMT?
6. How often do the Department of Education officials visit your school for monitoring and support?
7. How would you like the Department of Education help you in teaching Sepedi reading?

APPENDIX 2

OBSERVATION GUIDE

SECTION A

My name is Naom Mateta. I am a Masters student at the University of Limpopo. I am currently conducting research on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching Sepedi reading at Mashiloane and Tours primary schools. My study falls under the Department of Community and Continuing Education.

For the purpose of this study, I need information that will enable me to write a report that will be submitted to the relevant stakeholders on the above stated title. Your participation will be voluntary. I will be conducting observations on how you teach Sepedi reading.

It will be my pleasure to share the findings with you after the research.

Thank you

Date

SECTION B

In this phase I will conduct observations. In the Foundation Phase, Tours Junior Primary School I will conduct the non-participant observation whereas in the Intermediate Phase, Mashiloane Higher Primary School I will notify my research participants about the observations.

ASPECTS TO OBSERVE

- Sufficient space
- The availability of Sepedi reading material
- Teacher learner interaction
- Methods and strategies used in teaching Sepedi reading
- Lesson activities and methods

APPENDIX 3

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A

My name is Naom Mateta. I am a Masters student at the University of Limpopo in the Department of Community and Continuing Education. I am currently conducting research on the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School.

For the purpose of this study, I need information that will enable me to write a report that will be submitted to the relevant stakeholders on the above mentioned title. I am requesting your participation in my study. Your participation will be voluntary. Whatever you say will be kept confidential between you and me. Everyone must speak without fear, feel free to contribute and you may use any language.

It will be my pleasure to share the findings with you after the research.

Thank you

Date

SECTION B

I will utilise the focus group interviews in an attempt to answer the main research question:

What are the educational needs and assets of language teachers for teaching vernacular reading at Mashiloane Higher Primary School and Tours Junior Primary School?

There will be one group for this discussion. The group will start by identifying the assets available at their schools for teaching vernacular reading, in this case Sepedi. My research participants will share the knowledge they have concerning the educational needs and assets.

APPENDIX 4

Table 10. Example of Data Matrix used in this research based on interviews with Sepedi teachers of Mashiloane and Tours primary schools

THEME	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS (Teachers)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
What kind of difficulties do you experience when teaching vernacular reading?	Learners cannot read and write, they cannot recognise letters of the alphabet and they cannot write between lines.	Learners cannot read fluently and they do not participate actively in orals.	Learners experience difficulties in pronouncing words, punctuation and they are stammering.	Learners cannot read fluently.	Some learners cannot pronounce properly, and even sounds are difficult for them to pronounce.	Learners find it difficult to read their home language.
What strategies do you use when teaching Sepedi reading?	I divide learners into groups and I also divide words into syllables.	Flashcards and pictures.	Show learners some pictures to identify and read some important verbs for them.	Group guided reading.	Read while learners are listening, read again followed by learners to make sure they pronounce well.	Learners are given texts to read on their own as they are in the Intermediate Phase.
What resources do you have for teaching Sepedi reading?	Charts and five big books.	Self-made pictures, pictures from magazines and flash cards.	Workbooks only.	Readers, learners' books and workbooks.	Readers, learners' books, posters and alphabet charts.	Readers and workbooks.
How effectively were you trained to teach Sepedi reading?	No training offered, except in the old Bantu Education System where we were effectively trained in Breakthrough to Literacy.	Never trained to teach vernacular reading. Training was offered in the old Bantu Education System where learners were reading fluently and with understanding.	Never trained to teach vernacular reading since education transformation after South African democracy.	Never trained to teach vernacular reading. Training which was put in place never covered teaching Sepedi reading.	Not fully trained as the facilitators were unable to assist us.	Never trained, the workshops were just for providing policy documents.

Data matrix (continue)

THEME	1	2	3	4	5	6
What kind of support do you get from the SMT?	The SMT encourage me to provide copies of Sepedi texts for learners to read.	No support.	No, they never visit for support.	They encourage me to attend workshops.	They do not visit because they also have no ideas about teaching vernacular reading.	They monitor learners' books once in a term.
What kind of support do you get from the DoE??	They visit to check lesson plans, but once a year.	They visit once a year and they check learners' books, assessment tasks and assessment tools. They do not support in teaching reading.	Never visit schools for monitoring vernacular reading.	They come for other subjects not for Sepedi.	They request for work done, e.g class work, tests and lesson preparations.	They come for other subjects, not for Sepedi.
How would you like the DoE help you in teaching vernacular reading?	Teaching aids.	Relevant materials like Sepedi reading books.	Arrange in-service training for language teachers, maybe twice in a year.	Offer training in vernacular reading.	Offer guidance on how to teach vernacular reading.	Adequate Sepedi reading materials.