



**GRADE 4 TEACHERS' FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE READING  
INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO ISIXHOSA LEARNERS**

by

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## DECLARATION

I, Nomalibongwe Siphungu, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

**Signed: N.Siphungu**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'N. Siphungu', enclosed within a faint rectangular border.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates how teachers' understanding, attitudes, and classroom experience affect the ways they support Grade 4 isiXhosa learners in developing EFAL reading skills. This study aims to investigate how teachers cope with isiXhosa mother tongue learners experiencing reading difficulties in Grade 4. Intervention strategies are required to attend to the needs of learners who have challenges in reading in the Intermediate Phase.

This study identifies an unresolved research gap in Grade 4 teachers' perspectives on solving learners' challenges in teaching and learning. In light of its findings, teachers' knowledge and perspectives are important in understanding the implementation of inclusive education in classrooms.

This study draws from the social constructivist theory as well as Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to understand how Grade 4 teachers' pedagogical knowledge, belief systems, and practical classroom experiences influence the support strategies they apply to strengthen EFAL reading among Grade 4 learners. The planning and design of this study incorporate the concepts and guidelines of Mouton's (2001) qualitative research methodology. For the current study, an interactive design was preferred as it intends to explore and explain teachers' practices. Therefore, the study qualifies as a case study due to its focus on Grade 4 teachers instructing IsiXhosa learners who are in the process of developing reading skills. Semi-structured interviews as well as classroom observations were conducted to obtain data as part of a qualitative methodology. Observations were primarily employed to obtain the most accurate image of the events under investigation and their context on how a reading lesson is delivered, with techniques executed concurrently. Purposive and convenience sampling models were utilised to choose participants. A purposive sampling technique was used to identify five Grade 4 teachers in three primary schools situated in disadvantaged urban settlements in the Metro East Education District of Cape Town. The researcher has selected the schools for convenience and easy accessibility to collect data.

Permission to collect data at schools was obtained by sending request letters to the principal of the school, the Western Cape Education Department, as well as the teachers. The letters provided full details of the study. Interviews lasted between 15 and 20 minutes per participant. The researcher met with one participant at a time. The researcher decided and planned to conduct interviews during after-school hours. Interviews were conducted in person.

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The opinions and conclusions expressed in this thesis remain solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the CPUT Postgraduate Scholarship.

## **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

PhAst - Phonological Awareness Skills Training

EFAL - English First Additional Language

WCED -Western Cape Education Department

DBE - Department of Basic Education

CAPS - Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

LOLT – Language of Learning and Teaching

SGB - School Governing Body

PIRLS- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

BOT- Back on Track

ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development

PAM – Personnel Administrative Measures

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## **CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

Reading and writing are essential skills for learners. It is therefore imperative that teachers are well-equipped to assist learners in acquiring those skills (Itumeleng, 2011:14). The Department of Basic Education (2011:8), states that learners first acquire their mother tongue. The emphasis in Grades 4-6 is placed on the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Learning to read and write in another language, such as English, allows learners to expand their knowledge and skills in mathematics, science and technology, social studies, life skills, business studies, and other areas (Moresebetoa, 2016:15).

According to the Western Cape Education Department (2020:3), reading is an essential component of a child's early development and a fundamental skill that serves as the foundation for future education. Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that all learners can read and write at the required levels for their grades. Commeyras and Ketsitlile (2013:207) define reading as the process of gaining meaning from text. It could be viewed as a dialogue between the reader and the text that leads to comprehension. Singh (2009:93) states that the context in which young children are taught their first reading skills is critical to their future development.

English and isiXhosa are unrelated because they do not belong to the same language family (Sibanda & Graven, 2018:3). The Language Policy Act No. 27 of 1996 stipulates that a learner in Grade R to Grade 3 in the (Foundation Phase) has to be taught in one official language as a home language (Government Gazette, 1996).

In the Western Cape, the official language can be English, isiXhosa, or Afrikaans. Additionally, schools must offer one other official language as a subject to learners. In many township schools of the Western Cape, learners are taught in their home language, which primarily is isiXhosa. Following the completion of the Foundation Phase, they enter the intermediate phase, which starts in Grade 4 and ends in Grade 6. Nkosi (2016:10) notes that learners encounter numerous challenges during this phase as they begin to use English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). It is at this phase that many content subjects are introduced, and all these content subjects are taught in

English, unlike in the Foundation Phase, where the learner gets taught by a single teacher and in their home language.

Matthews (2014:4) conducted research revealing that learners whose mother tongue is isiXhosa struggle to comprehend English texts in tests and exams, leading to a negative impact on their academic performance. According to Manyike (2013:188), many learners in South Africa do not master bilingual literacy because they do not have access to supportive factors such as well-informed language pedagogy, language-enriched learning spaces, and community exposure to English. Furthermore, it is now recognised that improving reading and writing is a critical foundation of achieving universal access to education for all children (Commeyras & Ketsitlile, 2013:205).

Teachers encounter several obstacles both within and outside the classroom, as learners struggle to use their home language due to limited opportunities for its integration in classroom activities (Fesi & Mncube, 2021). Akbari (2015: 395) states that teaching English as a First Additional Language to Grade 4 learners in developing countries like South Africa is challenging. This occurs because learners' proficiency is below the expected standard for additional language learning, limiting their ability to read with understanding. What causes this is that learners in Grades 1–3 are focusing on “learning how to read,” while Grade 4 focuses on “reading to gain knowledge” (Spaull, 2015). In South Africa, there is a strong focus on developing the speaking of the English language amongst learners in Grades R and 1, whereas in Grade 3, they focus on literacy language in EFAL (South African: Department of Basic Education, 2011:11). Grade 4 signifies the beginning of English as a teaching and learning instruction, with content expanding into many topics, each having its own technical terminology, ideas, and discussions. Learners who cannot read with fluency in Grade 4 are often confronted with challenges with the rest of the curriculum (Spaull, 2015:34). Nkosi (2016:6) asserts that vocabulary, both explicitly and implicitly taught, plays a crucial role in comprehension and reading, enhancing both spoken and written word knowledge.

Knowledge and perspectives of teachers are important in understanding the implementation of inclusive education in classrooms. Therefore, a teacher's role is learner-centred teaching. The responsibility of teachers is to accommodate all

learners in their classrooms, including those with learning barriers. To meet the varied curriculum needs of all learners, teachers must adapt their classroom practices, adjust their teaching methods, and make effective use of suitable technology (Landsberg et al., 2011:75).

One of this study's objectives is to investigate how teachers cope with isiXhosa mother tongue learners who are experiencing reading difficulties in Grade 4. Intervention strategies are essential to attend to the needs of learners facing reading challenges in the Intermediate Phase (South Africa: Department of Education, 2001:17). As a result, teachers must have a variety of ways to help learners overcome reading challenges.

Hansen and Moore (2012:29) recommend that "to ensure that all learners engage in personally relevant, high-interest educational activities, teachers must carefully plan their lessons." According to Pritchard (2009:31), while teachers use lesson plans as a vehicle to implement intervention strategies, they need to consist of a clear focus and goals with explicit learning objectives. Moreover, lesson plans must be based on the learner's prior knowledge, be set in an appropriate context, include opportunities for social interaction and activity, and be planned to move the learner's learning beyond the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky described ZPD as "the difference between the level of potential development as determined by problem-solving under adult guidance or in cooperation with more capable peers and the level of actual development as determined by independent problem-solving" (Shabani, Khatib & Ebadi, 2010). According to Mahlo (2017:2), teachers must investigate how to cope with various learners' abilities in the classroom and how to accommodate them. To accommodate diverse learners, teachers must allocate sufficient time to prepare and adapt their teaching activities (Bouwer, 2011:54).

Numerous scholars have explored the challenges teachers face when teaching EFAL to isiXhosa mother tongue learners, revealing recurring structural and pedagogical constraints. Mengwai and Molotja (2025:54) attribute persistent learning barriers to overcrowded classrooms and insufficient teaching materials, reflecting systemic inequities that shape the social environment of learning. Similarly, Mthembu (2022:32) contends that teachers' limited training and heavy workloads restrict their capacity to scaffold learning effectively. However, while these studies identify what impedes EFAL

teaching, they seldom engage with how teachers mediate learning within such contexts, a key concern of sociocultural and constructivist perspectives.

From a sociocultural standpoint, language learning is a socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978), in which teachers play a central role in constructing meaning through interaction, dialogue, and scaffolding. In this regard, the practices described by Probyn (2015) and Uys and van der Walt (2020), particularly the strategic use of code-switching and contextual adaptation can be interpreted as examples of mediated learning, where teachers use linguistic and cultural resources to bridge learners' zones of proximal development. Yet, these studies rarely theorise such strategies explicitly within a sociocultural frame, often presenting them as pragmatic rather than pedagogically grounded choices.

Furthermore, Mengwai and Molotja's (2025) findings on teachers' frustrations with curriculum constraints underscore the tension between policy expectations and contextual realities a tension that social constructive theory conceptualises as the dialectic between social structures and individual agency. This highlights a theoretical gap: how teachers exercise agency within structural constraints to support learners' transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn."

Therefore, this study draws on social constructivism theory to illuminate how teachers' experiences, strategies, and contextual negotiations reflect broader social and institutional dynamics influencing EFAL learning. By synthesising these existing insights within a theoretical lens, the study seeks not merely to describe challenges but to explain the social processes through which Grade 4 EFAL teachers construct meaning, mediate understanding, and foster language development among isiXhosa-speaking learners.

## **1.1 Problem statement**

Learners who are mostly affected by the challenges encountered in EFAL in Grade 4 are those who are unable to read and answer with comprehension (Fesi & Mncube, 2021:1). The causes contributing to reading ability issues include language barriers, lack of enthusiasm to read, and movements away from phonics instruction to reading comprehension (Mohammed & Amponsah, 2018:274). This study highlights an

unresolved research gap in Grade 4 teachers' perspectives on addressing learners' challenges in teaching and learning. The knowledge and perspectives of teachers are important for gaining insight into how inclusive education is applied in classrooms to ensure that all learners' diverse needs are met and that quality learning is achieved.

## **1.2 Research questions**

### Main Question

- What intervention strategies do Grade 4 teachers employ to assist learners who have difficulty in reading EFAL?

### Sub-questions

- What challenges do Grade 4 teachers experience to support IsiXhosa learners who have difficulty reading in EFAL?
- What is Grade 4 teachers' knowledge and perspectives on supporting IsiXhosa learners with reading in EFAL?
- How are the needs of each learner determined when creating intervention strategies for learners who experience difficulty in reading EFAL?

## **1.3 Aims and objectives**

### Aims of the research

This study aims to foreground the perspectives of Grade 4 teachers on their experiences in supporting isiXhosa-speaking learners with reading in EFAL. It creates a platform for teachers to reflect on the challenges they encounter when teaching English as a First Additional Language. Understanding these difficulties is essential, as it enables the identification of practical strategies to address both the barriers faced by educators and the learning difficulties experienced by their learners.

This study's objectives are:

- 1) To explore and describe Grade 4 teachers experiences of supporting Grade 4 isiXhosa learners with reading in the EFAL.
- 2) To identify challenges that Grade 4 teachers experience when supporting isiXhosa learners with reading in the EFAL.
- 3) To explore how the understandings, beliefs, and experiences of Grade 4 teachers influence their implementation of support strategies aimed at

enhancing the reading development of isiXhosa-speaking learners in English First Additional Language (EFAL).

- 4) To establish a guideline, that emphasis on reading strategies and support mechanisms that could be used by mainstream Grade 4 teachers.

#### **1.4 The researcher's position**

Interviews were done on a one-on-one basis with participants after working hours. Classroom observation was during the EFAL periods with the arrangements of the school and Grade 4 teachers. The research was conducted in three different schools. The researcher is not employed at the schools where the study took place nor teaching Grade 4. The researcher is a Learning Support Teacher. While conducting interviews, the researcher's role was to ask questions and record the conversations, as well as take field notes to document the lessons observed (Basit, 2010:114). During the implementation of the EFAL reading lesson on supporting IsiXhosa learners, the researcher was a non-participate observer, taking field notes to record the observation.

#### **1.5 Contribution of the study**

The main aim of this research is to add to the corpus of literature on literacy in the Intermediate Phase by finding intervention options for Intermediate Phase learners who struggle with reading and writing. The findings of this study will be compiled for the benefit of teachers and researchers, given the importance of reading and writing EFAL in the classroom in educational institutions. This study will also be beneficial to the researcher's future development because it will allow her to improve critical thinking and analytical abilities while also increasing her knowledge and grasp of the issue through hands-on learning.

#### **1.6 Chapter division**

##### **Chapter 1: Overview of the study**

This chapter provides a summary of the research. It covers the study's importance, the study problem, the research questions, and the abstract.

##### **Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review**

This chapter provides a detailed literature review and the theoretical approach used in this study. It also provides an in-depth discussion of constructivist theory.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Design**

This chapter clarifies how the qualitative approach is used in the study to conduct research and achieve the study's objectives. The research design and methodology utilised to investigate the research problem in this study are covered in this chapter.

### **Chapter 4: Empirical results and discussion**

The chapter concentrates on the interpretation and analysis of the information obtained from the interviews.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The research findings are revealed in this chapter, and the whole study is summarised and concluded. This chapter also provides recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A literature review primarily serves to situate the study within existing research and to identify a gap that current investigation aims to address (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). This literature review examines intervention techniques for Grade 4 learners facing difficulties in EFAL reading. Therefore, the reviewed literature will contribute to a well-informed research topic, in addition to establishing a much-needed core understanding of it. Existing research will be used to identify gaps in the field of EFAL remediation solutions. The aim of this research is to discover different approaches used for intervention in EFAL in the Intermediate Phase.

### **2.1 Importance of knowing how to read EFAL**

Bester, Meyer, Evans, and Phatudi (2019:109) state that literacy is the key to learning, and through reading as a core literacy aspect, meaning is communicated. Reading goes beyond decoding symbols into words and sounds. Reading is a problem-solving activity that improves with use. It requires learners to make sense of written words and derive meaning from them. Reading is the ability to interpret made-up words. As stated by Winebrenner (2014:91), the reader's capacity to comprehend meaning from a text depends on how much prior knowledge they have about the subject. Reading with comprehension continues to be a problem for many learners and schools. Teachers everywhere are concerned about their learners' reading comprehension. According to PIRLS Mullis et al. (2023), 81% of Grade 4 learners in 2021— up from 78% in 2016— cannot read a language for meaning. This indicates that only 19% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa in 2021 were able to interpret any language for meaning (all 11 languages were tested). Nineteen thousand of the 1,127,877 Grade 4 pupils in 2021 were unable to read any language for meaning since PIRLS is a nationally representative sample. SA's PIRLS score dropped by nearly 0.8% over the course of learning, from 320 in 2016 to 288 in 2021. Furthermore, teachers complain that learners are unable to engage in reading lessons and cannot remember what they have read (Oczkus, 2018:1).

### **2.2 Reading challenges**

According to Dendam (2011:143), "the reading-writing relationship begins when learners begin with written language and continues throughout their school career." In Grade 4, learners are expected to read English fluently and with comprehension. Learners should be able to construct sentences, spell words, and punctuate properly. Lumadi (2016:1) explains that learners who experience reading and writing difficulties are unable to pronounce words, punctuate, and spell words correctly. The majority of learners in South Africa struggle to read and write EFAL because they receive instruction in English, despite their home language being a different one (Wentzel, 2021:7). The Department of Basic Education's (2016:1) research in PIRLS, reading literacy issues, has primarily caused a "learning crisis," with more than 100 million people unable to read and children in primary schools failing to achieve the minimum proficiency required for reading. Within the Intermediate Phases, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (2011:9) states that "learners keep improving their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities." Currently, most learners receive instruction in English as their first additional language, despite many still struggling to communicate effectively in this language. According to the National Reading Strategy (South Africa: Department of Education, 2008:8), most South African teachers have a limited understanding of how to teach reading and writing. Contributing factors include the hiring of untrained or underqualified teachers, as well as their lack of experience in teaching reading. Therefore, many teachers lack the necessary skills to teach reading effectively. Teachers frequently have one method to teach reading, and this may not be appropriate for all learners due to different learning styles. The National Reading Strategy claims that sometimes teachers are unsure of how to encourage learners to read both within and outside of the classroom. Gündogmus's (2018:333) research identified the following causes of reading and writing challenges as among the challenges that instructors encounter when working with learners who are struggling to read and write. These are parental lack of involvement, learners' unreadiness, physical deficiencies, a lack of professional experience, and a lack of interest on the part of learners. Furthermore, a study conducted by Cekiso, Rabelemane, Jadezweni, Mandende, and Dieper (2022) revealed that numerous parents are unable to help their children with their schoolwork in English due to language barriers such as lack of knowledge, low-grade passing, and lack of enthusiasm in their children's education. During the study of Cekiso et al. (2022), learners were interviewed and reported that "they did not have any books at home to

read due to their parent's inability to purchase books. Furthermore, they claimed that even if they were able to acquire books, these would likely be lost at home due to the limited number of rooms that are shared by everyone. The participants also mentioned that their parents did not give them time to read at home because they firmly believed that academic work should only be completed at school and not at home”.

### **2.3 Early identification of learners who encounter learning difficulties in EFAL in the Intermediate phase**

The White Paper 6 on Education (2001) shows a move away from labelling children based on their difficulties in learning. It assigns schools the obligation to identify learning impediments and create an environment in which all children can learn (Winkler, Modise & Dawber, 2004). If learning barriers are identified too late in a child's life, it can lead to academic backlogs and possible learning difficulties (Mel, Nel & Lebeoane, 2013:47). This is why it is advised that children should never be blamed for having special educational needs. To achieve inclusive education, Mahlo (2017:2) states that teachers must recognise and accommodate a variety of different learners in their classes who have special learning needs. The South Africa Department of Basic Education's (2014:13) screening, identification, assessment, and support (SIAS) policy is designed so that teachers are aware of each learner's need for support and to improve participation in the learning process. Furthermore, Haager, Dimino, and Windmueller (2007:21) suggest three kinds of assessment for early reading intervention, such as screening, diagnosis, and ongoing progress monitoring assessment. Research conducted by Mkhuma, Maseko, and Tlale (2014:444) shows that to effectively support learners, teachers' in full-service schools must have the knowledge and abilities to recognise those who are having learning obstacles. To eliminate misidentification, over-identification, and non-identification, teachers should understand learning issues before attempting to identify learners who have difficulties in reading and writing (Mkhuma, 2012:12). Teachers must be aware of which learners are struggling and with what topics/subjects.

According to Adam et al. (2015), teachers in preschools and primary schools must identify the precise components of early reading abilities that are challenging for EFAL learners such as reading with fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary.

According to Ruttle (2009), before accurately identifying reading and writing difficulties, teachers must investigate a variety of reasons why a learner might be reluctant to read and write. Reading difficulties can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including their reading experiences at home, their preschool understanding of books, and their personal interest in reading. The literacy skills and abilities of the learners in a given primary school are likely to be diverse. Teachers who use interactive strategies in the classroom are encouraged to consider this variation when planning and delivering whole-class and small-group literacy teaching (Anderson, Scanlon & Sweeney, 2017), as well as reading aloud, silent reading, cognitive reading, and metacognitive reading strategies (Fesi & Mncube, 2021).

Cooper, Chard, and Kiger (2006:14) have created a framework that enables the early recognition of learners experiencing reading difficulties. This framework also outlines strategies for supporting these learners and creating personalised plans based on their individual needs. Figure 1.1 provides the steps that teachers may follow to identify learners and plan interventions.

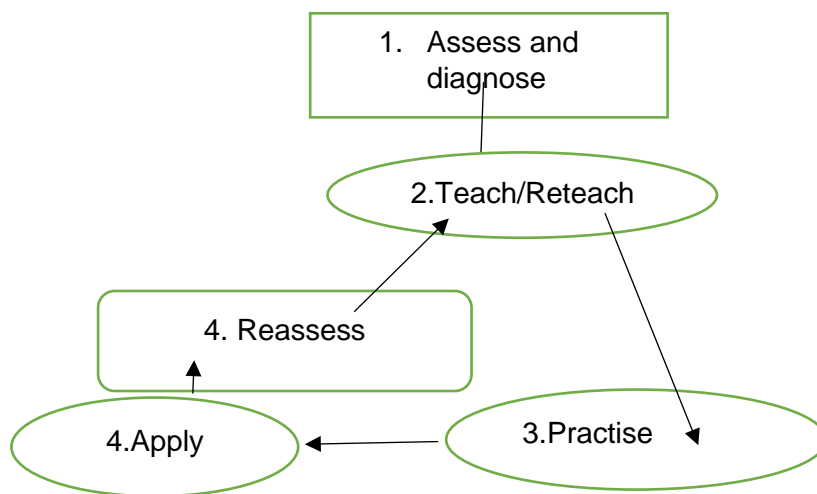


Figure 1.1 Adapted from (Cooper, Chard, and Kiger, 2006:14).

The concepts mentioned above will be discussed briefly below (Cooper, Chard & Kiger, 2006:14).

1. *Assess and Diagnose*: At this stage, the teacher assesses the learner's performance to gauge their understanding and identify areas for improvement. This evaluation entails the standardised informal measures, teacher observation, test or a combination of the three. Furthermore, Walton (2013;124) claims that baseline

assessment should take place before beginning a new section or introducing a new concept. However, the intentions of a baseline assessment is to identify the learner's ability or knowledge levels, pinpoint any gaps in their learning, and plan appropriate support for those who need it.

2. *Teach/Reteach*: In this level, the teacher provides a detailed and well organised support intervention skills that learners need, based on the assessment and diagnosis.
3. *Practice*: Here, teachers provide learners repeated opportunity to apply the newly taught knowledge under the teacher's guidance. The tactic, ability, or procedure being learnt will determine the type of practice. Learners should engage in both guided practice and individual practice.
4. *Apply*: This level is when learners read and utilize a tactic, skill or process independently. This may include reading sentences, longer text or words depending on what has been taught.
5. *Reassess*: At this step, teachers reassess to ensure that the learners' has understood what was taught. Most assessments should happen after the learner has implemented the skill, technique, or process. However, some of it may also happen during the application step through observation of how the learners employs the approach or skill in question.

For teachers to know their learners' barriers to reading English, a baseline assessment should take place. The Eastern Cape Department of Education (2019:2) explains baseline assessment as an easy way to determine your learner's reading proficiency. Teachers are encouraged to do baseline assessments at the beginning of the year. Baseline assessments determine the learners' current level and abilities as well as identify any gaps in their knowledge skills so that learners can be placed into their ability groups. The teacher will know each learner's reading ability and group them according to their level.

## **2.4 Reading Intervention Strategies**

Chaka and Boo-Ncetana (2015:1) state that for learners at any stage of their educational journey, being able to read fluently aloud in EFAL is a necessary skill. Word recognition abilities that are both efficient and effective are essential for

proficient reading. Learners must be proficient readers for their education to be successful and productive. Consequently, the use of EFAL in both learning and teaching underscores its essentiality.

Furthermore, the Western Cape Education Department has equipped teachers with the Phonological Awareness Skill Training (PHAST) tool, an intervention strategy for struggling readers in EFAL. According to Davis (2022), PHAST is a structured, systematic, and explicit phonological awareness skills training program designed to help learners develop the phonological and phonemic awareness abilities that serve as the fundamental building blocks of reading and writing. The PHAST Program is organised and systematic, progressing from the most basic to the most advanced phonological awareness skills.

The software guides learners through each level step-by-step while offering sufficient scaffolding and repetition to encourage success and mastery at each level.

According to Davis (2022) there are four levels in the program.

Level 1: “Compound word level”

Level 2: “Syllable level”

Level 3: “Onset – rime level”

Level 4: “Phoneme level”

The ability to connect sounds to letters and utilise those sounds to create words is known as the alphabetic principle. It involves understanding that spoken words have written counterparts, and that these sounds align with the letters used to represent them (Orpi, 2023:1). Speed, accuracy, and expression when reading text are all characteristics of fluent reading. A proficient reader can read words and phrases effortlessly, and the reading's purpose is to comprehend what is being written; this is what reading is all about (Haager, Dimino, & Windmueller, 2007:17). Nkosi (2016:6) states that a crucial component of understanding and reading is vocabulary, which is taught explicitly and implicitly to improve both spoken and written word knowledge.

Browne (2007:50) states that for a reader to read effectively, they need to establish four different strategies. These include contextual knowledge, grammatical understanding, word identification, graphic understanding, and phonic sounds and spellings.

- Contextual knowledge encompasses understanding the characteristics of various text styles, such as poetry or fairy tales, understanding the subject matter of the text, such as families or school life, and applying prior knowledge and life experiences to the text to enhance comprehension.

- Grammatical understanding denotes that learners' grammatical understanding is reinforced when they read what teachers write and when they start to explore their writing. When composing a text, teachers discuss the importance of producing whole sentences and solicit ideas for terms that might be used. They will encourage learners to suggest terms that will be appropriate or make sense while asking them to provide grammatically correct answers. As learners begin to read more independently, the application of their grammar skills becomes an invaluable strategy. This enables them to predict unidentified terms in a text based on their understanding of how language functions.
- Word recognition signifies sighting words, also known as "look and say" words. These are words that the child learns to recognise "on sight" by repeating them continuously. This method can be used to learn high-frequency words, which are words that regularly appear in the literature (South Africa: Department of Basic Education, 2011:15).

Recognising patterns both within and between words is necessary for graphic interpretation. Proficient readers may recognise groups of letters as cohesive units as they read. They anticipate specific letter combinations, such as two letters followed by one. They can recognise word groups like "ing" as a collection of one or more letters. Using graphic information, we can distinguish between words like hair and hear that are similar in length, shape, and beginning and ending letters. It (graphic information) enables connections between related concepts, such as "help", "helper", and "helping", facilitating a deeper understanding.

- Phonics and spelling involve understanding how sounds map onto written letters. They are key components of reading and writing, and therefore the spelling activities for the week should align with the phonics focus for that week. South Africa: Department of Basic Education, 2011:15).

Nel (2011:179) claims that teachers must consider the physical classroom setting, material grouping, and lessons while instructing isiXhosa mother tongue learners in reading. To support language acquisition, the use of wordless graphic books in the learner's mother tongue, as well as multicultural literature in English (as the LOLT), can be beneficial. Additionally, visual aids such as object labels, guidelines, rules, and

directions can aid in comprehension. Designating a specific wall in the classroom as a "word wall" and placing it in a prominent and accessible location can further facilitate reference to key vocabulary and concepts (Bergen, 2013:27).

To give isiXhosa mother tongue speakers meaningful and productive interaction with the English text they read, there are three different strategies that teachers can implement to teach in EFAL, such as learners reading independently, reading aloud, and shared reading (Lemov, Driggs & Woolway, 2016:207). When reading independently, learners practice independence-related skills in a text appropriate for their level of independence. While learners are encouraged to choose texts for independent reading, it is recommended that the teacher engage in regular check-ins with them as they read, adopting a reader-to-reader approach.

Reading aloud is a whole-class instructional activity, and every learner should get a chance to read aloud. The advantage of reading aloud is that learners' are able to listen models of fluent reading. Learners' actively participate in reading the book alongside the teacher, who provides guidance and support throughout the session. Learners are taught different methods to solve words and problems and to think through whole-class/small-group interactions (Nel et al., 2013:101).

As learners engage in reading activities, the South African Department of Basic Education (2011:17) proposes the utilisation of the "five-finger strategy."

- *The thumb*: Leave the word out and read to the end of the sentence.
- *The first finger*: Look at the picture.
- *The second finger*: Look at the word and see if any part of the word is known.
- *The third finger*: Sound the word out.
- *The fourth finger*: Ask for help in reading the word or understanding its meaning.

## **2.5 Learning support available in the school**

Learning support acknowledges each learner's ability to progress at their own pace towards the highest degree of independence in their learning, using a variety of approaches and styles (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2011:53). Morelle and Tabane (2019) state that educational diversity does not just relate to different races; in South

Africa, it may also refer to different types of schools and diverse learning styles. To overcome learning barriers, teachers must have a variety of ways to help.

While acknowledging learners' differences, it's equally important for them to establish developmental relationships with their peers in the classroom (Lenski & Lewis, 2008). Mahlo (2011:60) explains that inclusive teaching entails assisting learners with the skills they are unable to acquire or complete on their own in school. Therefore, if learners possess the necessary skills, the learning support team can equip teachers with strategies such as print-rich resource ideas, group guide reading, shared reading, and independent reading to help them overcome learning difficulties (South Africa: Department Basic Education, 2011).

The Western Cape Education Department (2020) states that all learners should be given the required support to achieve effective learning. The Western Cape Education Department proposes the following action plan to provide learning support in schools, guaranteeing that all learners are afforded equitable learning opportunities.

- Learners participate in many levels of speaking, reading, writing, and listening development activities. Each level provides a clear overview of the tasks needed to master the skill.
- Offering a variety of activities or multiple approaches to the same task can accommodate different learning styles.
- Learning pace: Make optional extra activities, additional reading, or additional research available for both learners with barriers and above-average learners.

A demonstration could be the most powerful tool in our pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. Demonstrating the writing process allows teachers to experience and model the writing procedure whilst simultaneously explaining the mental processes underpinning those activities (Rog, 2014). To become good writers, learners should be provided with as many opportunities as possible to critically read a wide range of texts, including books, wikis, blogs, and magazines (Optiz & Schendel, 2011). Furthermore, classroom teachers are encouraged to use small group reading instruction daily to target the needs of children who face the most challenges with literacy acquisition. Lessons are carefully designed to align with the learners' individual

requirements (Anderson et al., 2017). Almas and Fullerton (2012:21) suggest that teachers should use "intervention that teaches learners how to use a set of strategies flexibly as they read [which] is much more effective than teaching learners to use individual strategies one at a time."

## **2.6 Parental involvement in children's reading**

The role of parents in the running of a school and their own children's education cannot be understated. The Department of Basic Education has conferred School Governing Bodies (SGBs) the privilege to play a critical role in the day-to-day operational functions of schools, as outlined in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Department of Basic Education 2020). SGBs consist of parents of learners, learners, teachers at the school, and community members where the school is located. The Western Cape Government (2018) outlines the roles of the SGBs in public schools to establish the school's admissions policy and language policy as well as to decide regarding the religion that will be practiced at the school. It also establishes disciplinary measures and develops a learner's code of conduct. These actions and decisions must adhere to national policies. Therefore, parental involvement plays a vital role in children's education. It is a shared responsibility where parents are dedicated to actively supporting their children's learning and development. The school and other community agencies and organisations are committed to being involved in meaningful ways (Maluleke, 2014).

Peters, Seeds, Goldstein, and Coleman (2007) explain that parents play a crucial role in shaping their children's goals and achievements. According to Landsberg et al. (2011:183), emphasis that schools should establish strong relationship and effective communication regarding the progress of the child. Active parental involvement in learners' schoolwork often contributes to progress improved academic progress and overall achievement. According to Sapungan and Sapungan (2014: 43), parental involvement improves children's morale, attitudes, academic performance, behaviour, and social adjustment in all school subjects. Effective teaching and learning in schools can only be accomplished if parents, teachers and learners especially the main investors, are involved in the process (Maluleke, 2014).

The National Reading Strategy (2008:10) emphasises that both parents as well as the broader community should place value on books and reading. Parents are encouraged to read to their children and to create opportunities for regular reading practice. Reading is considered one of the most essential educational activities, and parental involvement plays a critical role in shaping learners' attitudes towards reading (Shiguang, Shuang, Ke & Haoyue, 2021:1). According to Topping and Wolfendale (2017:18), parental support in children's reading contributes to a range of educational goals. These goals include the development of core learning skills—such as reading—as well as the use of inquiry-based and exploratory reading strategies at home.

Parental involvement in schoolwork also enables parents to monitor their children's academic progress. This engagement benefits not only teachers and learners, but parents as well, as it strengthens their understanding of their child's learning needs (Sapungan & Sapungan, 2014). A lack of parental recognition or participation often results in low commitment, reluctance, or resistance to involvement in school activities. To foster active participation, schools should create inclusive opportunities for parents through events such as parent meetings and fun days, where they can receive progress updates and be encouraged to contribute meaningfully (Morelle & Tabane, 2019). Research by the Wits School of Governance and Bridge (2016:2) also highlights that effective collaboration requires active cooperation between parents, teachers, and school stakeholders in setting goals, monitoring progress, and providing appropriate support and resources.

However, communication barriers and misunderstandings between teachers, learners, and parents can hinder parents' ability to assist with homework (Makiwane-Mazinyo & Pillay, 2017). Broader social challenges such as inadequate family support structures, unemployment, single-parent households and poverty continue to obstruct meaningful parental engagement in South Africa (Abrahams, 2013). In many cases, the limited income families receive barely covers basic needs, making it unrealistic to hold parents solely accountable for limited participation in their children's education. Communities affected by poverty, along with a high dependence on social grants, further contribute to frustration and disengagement among parents (Munje & Mncube, 2018:81).

Epstein and Salinas (2004:13) identified “six requirements for forming a strong relationship that will benefit learners, parents, schools, and communities in their quest for successful learning”, which are outlined below:

- “Parenting” this involves helping families develop effective parenting skills and supporting them in understanding child and youth development. It also includes creating a home environment that is conducive to learning for children across all age groups and grades. Through this engagement, schools gain insight into learners’ family backgrounds, cultures, and aspirations.
- “Communicating” this refers to keeping parents informed about school programmes, policies, and their children’s progress. Effective communication structures between home and school ensure that families remain connected and aware of learners’ academic experiences.
- “Volunteering” this dimension focuses on encouraging family members to participate as volunteers or supporters in school activities. It includes strategies for improving the recruitment, training, and coordination of volunteers. Such involvement enhances teachers’ ability to work with individuals who are invested in the well-being of learners and the school.
- “At-home learning” this involves promoting family participation in homework, goal-setting, and other curriculum-related tasks that support learning outside the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to provide meaningful activities that learners can complete at home with family involvement.
- “The institution makes decisions” this principle refers to including parents in school councils, development teams, committees, and parent organisations. Families become partners in policy development, decision-making, governance, and advocacy efforts within the school.
- “Working together with society” this entails building partnerships with community organisations such as businesses, social agencies, cultural groups, and higher education institutions to provide resources and services for learners and their families. Schools should ensure that opportunities for community involvement and service are accessible to all.

Furthermore, to promote parental involvement in schools, all communication with parents, whether oral or written, should be available in the language spoken in the home. Efforts by the school to provide this service will go a long way toward making

parents feel that the school is truly interested in communicating with them (Winebrenner 2014:228).

The literature review highlights the necessity of intervention strategies in schools to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all learners in EFAL classrooms. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of providing adequate support to learners facing reading challenges. However, through identifying and addressing the needs of learners, teachers, and schools, the assistance must have a comprehensive focus on the teaching and learning process (South Africa: Department of Basic Education, 2014). While numerous studies have investigated EFAL instruction in South African classrooms, few have centered on teachers' perspectives, particularly at the Grade 4 level, where learners transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." For example, Probyn (2015) highlights how educators rely extensively on code-switching to address comprehension challenges, but her research primarily focuses on secondary schools and offers limited insight into foundational phase transitions. Similarly, Uys and van der Walt (2020) explore EFAL strategies in intermediate grades, but their quantitative approach restricts a deeper examination of teacher agency and contextual dynamics. In contrast, Mengwai and Molotja (2025) provide qualitative findings on Limpopo educators' frustrations with curriculum constraints, though these insights are not compared with urban contexts, leaving gaps in understanding regional differences.

## **2.7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theoretical framework encompasses the theories articulated by experts in the relevant field of study, serving as a resource to underpin the data analysis and interpretation of research outcomes (Kivunja, 2018:46). Grant and Osanloo (2014:12) assert that a study's theoretical framework acts as the foundation upon which all knowledge, both metaphorically and physically, is based. It serves as a structure and support for the study's rationale, problem statement, purpose, meaning, and research questions. The theoretical framework provides a grounding basis or anchor for the literature review and, most crucially, discussion of approaches and analyses. This study is informed by social constructivist theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which together provide a framework for examining how Grade 4 teachers'

knowledge, beliefs, and experiences influence their use of support strategies to enhance EFAL reading among Grade 4 learners. The social constructivist and Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theories will be used in this study to emphasise the significance of every aspect of a person's learning having a history based on real-life experiences, much of it acquired before a child starts formal school (Gray & MacBlain, 2015:92).

### **2.7.1 Social constructivist theory**

Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah, and Okoro (2020) state that Lev Vygotsky first proposed the social constructivism theory of learning in 1968. According to the idea, language and culture frame human interaction, perception, and understanding. Language and culture, in Vygotsky's view, are crucial to both the intellectual growth of people and how they view the world. This suggests that people use language to convey concepts, which they then interpret and understand through their experiences and interactions within a cultural context.

The idea that humans are social beings and that without our social connections, we would not be human is fundamental to constructivism. In other words, we shape ourselves and others into the types of beings we are. In contrast, our actions and speech towards one another serve as how we construct the world, utilising the basic components provided by nature as raw materials. Indeed, communication is the most significant way that we contribute to shaping the world as it is today (Nicholas, 2012:4).

Furthermore, social constructivists hold that people make society and make people. This is a continuous, two-way process. Therefore, language serves as a means of communication between individuals and contains all of the social constructions that have ever existed in a community. We acquire knowledge, understanding, and experiences about values, facts, and worldviews through language (Nel et al., 2013:31).

Kim (2001) states that the foundation of social constructivists is a set of beliefs about reality, knowledge, and education. It is crucial to grasp the fundamental beliefs of

social constructivist approaches to learning in order to apply and comprehend them. The concepts, reality, knowledge, and education will briefly be discussed below:

- **Reality:** Social constructivists hold the view that human behaviour shapes reality. Characteristics of the world are jointly created by members of a society (Kukla, 2000). Social constructivists argue that since society created reality, we cannot discover it.
- **Knowledge:** Knowledge is a human product that is also socially and culturally created, according to social constructivists (Ernest, 1999; Gredler, 1997; Prat & Floden, 1994). Through their relationships with others and their surroundings, people build meaning in their lives.
- **Learning:** Learning is seen as a social process by social constructivists. It doesn't just happen within an individual, nor does it stem from passively letting external factors shape one's behaviour (McMahon, 1997). People learn meaningfully when they participate in social activities.

Social Constructivists rely on guided practice as an effective instructional method and encourage four principles that a teacher can utilize to assist learners who experience difficulties in reading EFAL such as establishing a cooperative sociomoral atmosphere, appealing to children's interests, promoting children's reasoning and choosing content that challenges children (DeVries, Edmiaston, Zan, Hildebrandt & Salesart, 2002:35). Sociomoral atmosphere refers to the entire network of interpersonal relationships within the classroom. It permeates all aspects of a child's experience at school and has a profound impact on their social, moral, intellectual, personality and emotional development. Every classroom has a social and moral atmosphere that can be seen along with the urge to cooperate.

Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah, and Okoro (2020) posits that social constructivism is also known as collaborative learning because it is built on interaction, discussion, and sharing among learners. This teaching strategy provides for a variety of groupings and interactive tactics. These may include whole-class conversations, small group discussions, or learners working in pairs on specific projects or tasks. The theory's underlying principle is that learners work in groups, sharing ideas, brainstorming to

identify cause and effect, answers to problems, or just generating something new to contribute to current knowledge.

Walker and Shore (2015) states that although social constructivist inquiry-based curriculum is learner-centred and focused on learners' interests and curiosities, it helps to create an authentic learning environment that supports a person's innate desire to learn more about their subject matter. This emphasized inquiry as a proactive process that is motivated by learner curiosity, with knowledge construction as the primary aim while constructing abilities for developing hypotheses and addressing problems. DeVries, Edmiaston, Zan, and Hildebrandt (2002:39) state that constructivist teachers' involve learners' in making classroom rules and decisions, ask what they want to learn about, centre the curriculum around children's interests, and engage children in social and moral discussions about issues that arise in the classroom as well as issues found in learners' literature. To determine interest, the teacher observes what learners do spontaneously.

Pritchard (2009:24) asserts that the social constructivist learning theory prioritises the interaction between learners' and others. Social constructivism is a learning philosophy that emphasises the importance of questioning, considering, and evaluating information to gain knowledge of concepts (Muller, 2013). A basic principle of constructivism in education, according to Shi and Xu (2018), is that society produces knowledge and understanding in a learner-centred environment where learning occurs. According to Mercer (2020:15), Piaget's constructivism theory focuses on how learning occurs rather than what motivates it. The importance of teachers cannot be ignored. According to this idea, teachers act as facilitators of learners' knowledge rather than lecturing. Olusegun (2015) highlights the benefits of the constructivism learning theory, which integrates learning activities into authentic, practical settings, thereby stimulating and engaging learners. In constructivist classrooms, learners develop their questioning skills and use their inherent curiosity to learn about the world. In addition, a constructivist learning environment allows learners to become thinkers and collaborators while also equipping them with the skills they need to succeed in modern society (Mercer, 2020). Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) find constructivism to be fascinating, as it relates to the acquisition of knowledge and the process of learning." When learners participate in an issue or subject, learning becomes more relevant.

Learners have a variety of learning styles; which teachers must accommodate. Teachers must abide by rules and be guided by the curriculum.

Akpan, Igwe, Mpamah, and Okoro (2020) claim that teachers in social constructivist classrooms are expected to:

- Create a social constructivist classroom atmosphere to encourage group engagement.
- Encourage collaboration and the sharing of experiences among learners while discouraging competitiveness.
- Value the learner's opinion or contribution, whether correct or incorrect.
- Provide the required resources and assistance to encourage learners to create knowledge in the right direction.
- Make sure learners feel safe asking or answering questions, interacting with others, and contributing freely to group discussions.
- Ensure that both academically advanced and less advanced learners learn from one another.
- Provide scaffolding support as needed, at the appropriate time and level.

### **2.7.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems**

This study guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory examines how a child develops in connection to the framework of relationships that make up his or her environment. According to Bronfenbrenner's hypothesis, a child's development is influenced by many "layers" of their environment, each impacting their development and growth (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:1). The Bronfenbrenner model demonstrate a multidimensional approach of human development. Such a framework suggests that there are layers of interacting systems that lead to change, growth, and development, such as physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural (Swart & Pettipher, 2011:10). Furthermore, events within one system impact and influence other systems. Landsberg et al. (2005:9) state that Bronfenbrenner's ecological model explains the direct and indirect influences on a child's life by referring to the many environmental levels or contexts that influence a person's development. Understanding how learners are shaped by and interact with numerous surrounding systems represents a

significant challenge for modern educational practice. Bronfenbrenner proposed that the learners' environment is a nested arrangement of structures, each contained within the next. He organised them based on the level of impact each has on a child's development. He named these structures microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Mcleod, 2023). The five levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model will be briefly discussed below.

### **Five levels of the Bronfenbrenner ecological level model**

**Microsystem** - This level refers to the environment closest to the learner, where direct face-to-face interactions with others occur. This system affects learners' physical, social, and psychological well-being and is concerned with the close environment (Condy & Blease, 2014).

**Mesosystem** -The mesosystem explains the links and interactions between numerous microsystems in a person's life, such as family, school, and peer groups. These systems influence each other, shaping an individual's experiences and growth. For example, a child's school experience can be affected by their family life, and instructors' communication with parents can affect a learner's learning (Swart & Pettipher, 2011:14).

**Exosystem** –This level describes the larger social system, which does not directly include the child. Due to interactions with certain microsystem structures, the structures in this layer affect the child's growth. Bronfenbrenner (1994) claims that this level includes the linkage process that takes place between two or more settings, where at least one does not directly include the developing individual but contains events that indirectly affect processes in the individual's immediate environment. (e.g., for a child, the relationship between the home and the parents' workplace; for a parent, the relationship between the school and the neighbourhood peer group).

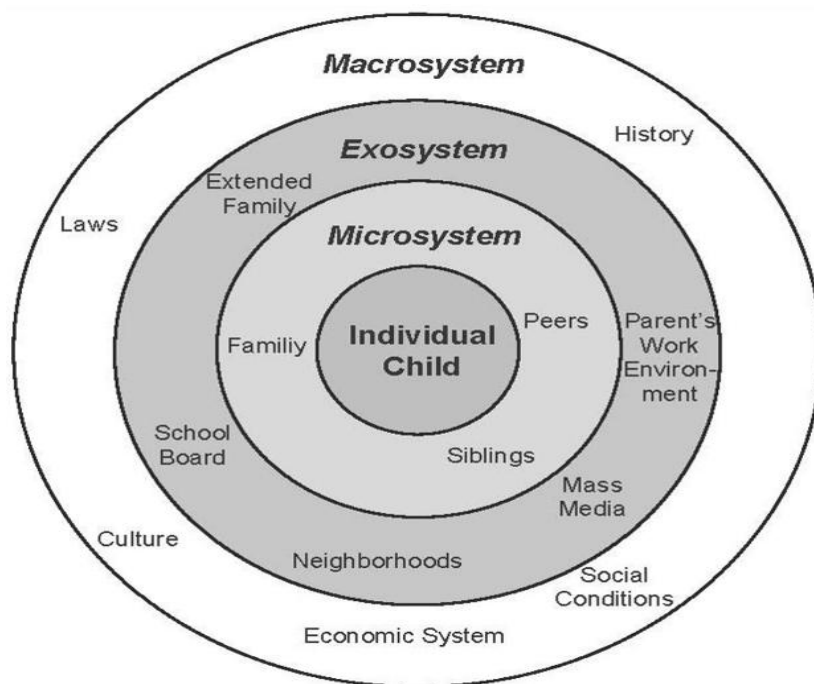
**Macrosystem**- This layer could be considered the uppermost layer of the child's environment. This layer consists of cultural values, rules, and practices without being a defined framework. The interactions between all other levels are cascaded by the

impact of the bigger principles established by the macrosystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:1).

**Chronosystem-** It considers the developmental timelines that traverse interactions among various systems and their impact on individual development. This indicates that at this stage, the learner will remain the focus, regardless of how much they have improved or progressed as the systems work together (Mahlo, 2011).

This study will employ the Bronfenbrenner ecological level model of mesosystems, which includes connections amongst the child's microsystems, such as those between siblings and school peers or among teachers' and parents (Guy-Evans, 2020). Teachers build on what learners already know. The emphasis is on interactive and learner-centred learning. Teachers discuss with learners to help them construct their knowledge and encourage them to work in small groups (Western Governors University, 2020). Amineh and Asl (2015:10) state that learners use their existing knowledge to create new understandings. A learner's existing information influences new knowledge. Learning is not always a passive process. On the contrary, it is a dynamic process in which learners negotiate their understanding in light of new learning situations. Existing knowledge can change to accommodate new information if what the learner encounters is not consistent with their current understanding. However, learners are expected to learn academic content through the language of instruction [English] whilst learning the language of instruction (Cummins 2000:57). The fundamental aspect of Zone of Proximal Development, by Vygotsky's theory, states that children can learn through guidance from others such as parents, siblings, and significant others (MacBlain, 2022:79).

The figure below shows how each level relates to each other.



Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Kristianstad University of Sweden, n.d).

Social constructivist theory in education shows that learners actively interpret experiences in the physical and social worlds and thus construct their knowledge, intelligence, and morality (DeVries, Edmiaston, Zan & Hildebrandt, 2002:35). The Bronfenbrenner ecological theory, on the other hand, states that children grow and develop during a society—the people, places, objects, and ideas they encounter from their learning and development (Hayes, O'Toole, & Halpenny, 2017). These theories align with the findings of this study, highlighting the difficulties Grade 4 teachers face in assisting isiXhosa learners with their reading in EFAL. The literature in this study has shown the importance of parental involvement in their children's education and the positive and negative impacts it has on the school. While the National Reading Strategy has claimed that one of the reading challenges in Grade 4 is unqualified or underqualified teachers, the study aims to integrate these two theories to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the reading difficulties faced by isiXhosa learners.

For the most part, this study draws from the social constructivist as well as the Bronfenbrenner ecological level model, which acknowledges the influence of social structures on individual development. Social constructivism emphasises how learning is a collaborative process. How people interact with one another, their culture, and

society at large forms their understanding. Learning from others gives learners essential building blocks to shape their understanding and make sense of their world. (Western Governors University, 2020). Although this study focuses primarily on the microsystem level of the Bronfenbrenner ecological model, which applies to the school environment, it also investigates intervention strategies for addressing reading challenges in Grade 4 learners who speak isiXhosa as their mother tongue (South Africa: Department of Education, 2001:17). This study aims to understand how teachers manage such learners experiencing difficulties with reading.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the qualitative phenomenological approach adopted in this research to accomplish its research purpose. The study investigates how Grade 4 teachers support isiXhosa mother-tongue learners who experience reading difficulties in English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). A qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences, perspectives, and practices, providing rich, descriptive insights that cannot be captured through quantitative methods. Quantitative approaches, which rely on numerical measurement and statistical analysis, were deemed unsuitable for this study as they cannot fully capture the complexity, depth, and nuance of teachers' lived experiences in supporting isiXhosa learners with reading difficulties (Creswell, 2014). Instead, a qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted, allowing for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, beliefs, and practices.

This chapter further discusses the philosophical and methodological paradigms guiding the study, the research design, and the data collection and analysis procedures. To ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness, the researcher employed bracketing, a key strategy in phenomenology, wherein personal assumptions, biases, and preconceived notions are deliberately set aside (Moustakas, 1994). This process ensured that the findings authentically reflected the teachers' experiences rather than the researcher's perspectives. In addition, measures were implemented to safeguard the ethical integrity, credibility, and validity of the study.

Effective intervention strategies are essential for addressing reading challenges in the Intermediate Phase (White Paper 6, 2001:17). To address these challenges, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What intervention strategies do Grade 4 teachers employ to assist learners who have difficulty in reading the EFAL?
2. What is Grade 4 teachers' knowledge and perspectives of supporting isiXhosa learners with reading in the EFAL?
3. How are the needs of each learner determined when creating intervention strategies for learners who experience difficulty in reading EFAL?

4. What challenges do Grade 4 teachers experience to support isiXhosa learners who have difficulty reading in EFAL?

### **3.1 Research paradigm**

The study adopts an **epistemological perspective** to explore how Grade 4 teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and classroom experiences affect the strategies they apply to support EFAL reading development among isiXhosa Grade 4 learners. The section that follows provides a detailed explanation of the epistemological assumptions guiding this research.

### **3.2 Epistemology paradigm**

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:2) state that the term "epistemology" is derived from the Greek term episteme, which means "knowledge." Epistemology is utilised in study to describe how we come to know something — how we know the truth or reality. Furthermore, Rehman and Alharthi (2016:1) epistemology is like the ultimate question-asker. It's the branch of philosophy that digs deep into what knowledge really is, how we get it, and how we know it's true. Think of it like being a detective, searching for clues to figure out what's real and what's just an idea. It's all about understanding how we know what we know, and how we can trust that knowledge. The study utilises the phenomenology paradigm. Connelly (2010) explains phenomenology is a philosophical approach that explores how individuals experience and interpret events in their lives often called their "lived experience." A phenomenological researcher typically relies on interviews, observations, or personal stories from people who have experienced the phenomenon in order to understand its key features and meaning.

A phenomenologist researcher uses narratives, observations, or interviews with people who have the experience of interest to explore the characteristics or essence of the experience. Therefore, this study utilises interview and observation tools to collect data. Participants of this study are the teachers in the Western Cape province who are currently teaching Grade 4, to gain understanding and knowledge of their experiences in intervening with isiXhosa mother tongue learners who struggle to read EFAL.

### **3.3 Design**

The research design describes the plan that guides and directs all activities and processes. The planning and design of this study are based on the ideas and guidelines proposed by Mouton (2001) for qualitative research. According to Mouton, qualitative research can use various designs, some of which are interactive and some non-interactive. This study, therefore, prefers an interactive design because it intends to explore teachers' practices and explanations of their practices. Therefore, this study qualifies as a case study, as it focuses on Grade 4 teachers who are assisting isiXhosa learners in their reading journey. Case studies offer a unique portrait of real people in a genuine social setting through detailed descriptions of events, feelings, and perceptions (Basit, 2010:19). A phenomenological design will be used. The phenomenological investigation, according to Creswell and Poth (2018:75), focuses on what "everyone has in common as they encounter a phenomenon" and describes the daily lived experiences of different people.

### **3.4 Methodology**

Methodology refers to the theoretical or philosophical foundation that guides the choice of methods, while methods encompass the specific processes and instruments used to generate data (Koopman, 2013).

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, which involves the use of semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to collect data. Such an approach enables the researcher to develop a rich and detailed account of human actions, interactions, experiences, and viewpoints, thereby allowing for a deeper understanding of social realities (Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). Observation, in particular, is employed to obtain an accurate portrayal of the phenomena under investigation and to understand the context in which a reading lesson is delivered and support strategies are applied. Through observational techniques, the researcher is able to examine participants' behaviours, roles, and activities (Chitiyo, Simon, & Chitiyo, 2015:78).

Furthermore, the researcher seeks to explore participants' perceptions and attitudes, gaining insight into the circumstances surrounding the intervention strategies used to address challenges experienced in EFAL within the Intermediate Phase.

### **3.5 Site selection (or social network)**

This study employs purposive sampling as the most suitable approach for identifying the main participants. (Groenewald, 2004; Chan, Walker-Gleaves & Remedios, 2013). The researcher selects samples based on the research's aim and purpose (Gutman & Midgley, 2000). Five Grade 4 teachers from three primary schools in disadvantaged urban communities of the Metro East Education District, Cape Town, were identified using purposive sampling. The researcher chose the schools based on their convenience and ease of data collection. In this study, a purposive and convenience method has been utilised to identify and select the schools, and a total of five teachers in three different schools were invited to participate. Creswell (2008:213) states that in purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects individuals and sites to learn or comprehend the main phenomenon. All these schools are in one neighbourhood, and the dominant home language of learners in this community is isiXhosa. This location is ideal for the researcher because it is easily accessible, and teachers live nearby.

This research will be conducted in selected no-fee schools, which are quintile two and three schools in the Western Cape, the schools are situated in a low-income community that is surrounded by socio-economic issues such as poverty, a high unemployment rate, drug abuse, and violence. Grant (2013) In South Africa, the quintile system is used to classify public schools into five groups based on their socio-economic status. This system helps determine how resources are allocated to schools, with the goal of addressing inequalities and supporting those with the greatest need. The "poorest" quintile is quintile one, while the "least poor" quintile is quintile five. These poverty rankings are computed nationally, based on the level of poverty in the neighbourhood surrounding the school and a few infrastructure-related variables. Quintiles one, two, and three have been designated as non-paying fee schools, while quintiles four and five require learners to pay fees.

### **3.6 Participant selection**

The model that will be utilized to select participants is purposive sampling and convenience. When a participant is specifically chosen based on the characteristics of the subject, this is known as purposive sampling (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016:2). Participants are selected based on teaching EFAL in Grade 4. The researcher is interested in the way teachers identify the needs of learners who have reading difficulty and how they develop intervention strategies. The sample size is three schools with five teachers. Schools A and B have four Grade 4 classes, and there are two teachers in this grade. Each teacher is teaching two classes to isiXhosa EFAL learners, while school C has four classes, with one teacher teaching all four classes. The home language of the participants is isiXhosa. Teachers are encouraged to share their knowledge and perspectives on supporting IsiXhosa learners with reading in the EFAL.

### **3.7 Data collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews as well as classroom observations to establish how the intervention is implemented during an EFAL reading lesson. Initially, the researcher collected data in an open-ended manner, then examined the skills taught to improve the learners' reading and determined the pedagogical principles used to inform and underscore these skills. Semi-structured interviews serve as an effective method for gathering the necessary information to carry out the task (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Consequently, the researcher took on the role of being an observer-as-participant. This required the researcher to observe the lesson in the classroom. However, in the role of observer-as-participant, the researcher does not participate in the activities of the classroom that is being studied, and their role is known by those being observed (Chitiyo, Simon & Chitiyo, 2015:283).

Permission to collect data at schools was obtained by sending a request letter to the principal of the school, the Western Cape Education Department, as well as the teachers. The letter provides full details of the study. Interviews took 15 to 20 minutes per participant. The researcher met with one participant at a time. The researcher

decided and planned to conduct interviews during after-school hours. Interviews were conducted in person. Following participant responses, the data was recorded right away. The recorded text was transcribed using Google Cloud Speech-to-Text®. The questions were open-ended. The data was then stored in a password-protected folder on Google Drive®, which will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

### **3.8 Data analysis**

To analyse data from the qualitative interviews and classroom observations used in this study, content analysis was used. According to Basit (2010:194), content analysis is a systematic coding and categorisation approach that can be used to covertly examine large amounts of textual information to identify trends and patterns in the words used, their frequency, their relationship, and discourses of communication.

This study used Rubin & Rubin's (1995:31) description of qualitative interviews and classroom observation. The approach to conducting qualitative interviews places a strong emphasis on cultural relativism, the interviewer's active engagement, and the significance of providing the interviewee with a voice. The researcher uses the six steps outlined by Creswell (2008:243) to analyse and interpret qualitative data. These are: collecting and organising the data into files or folders and organising the material (all interviews and all classroom observation); examining and categorising the database; identifying and describing themes; representing and reporting findings; interpreting the findings' significance; and confirming the validity of the findings. This approach is used when the goal is to explore and understand phenomena rather than to test or confirm them. The raw data for this study is the "description" of the teachers' perceptions of the intervention strategies that they use. This indicates that the description reflects a first-person account of participants' perceptions, as experienced and interpreted in their everyday, common-sense understanding (Broomé, 2011). The interview transcripts were read carefully and repeatedly to identify emerging themes. This was followed by detailed reading at the sentence level, then a selective approach, and finally reading holistically. Throughout all this, the researcher's biases were acknowledged and considered valuable (Chan, Walker-Gleaves, and Remedios, 2013).

### **3.9 Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that a research study's credibility significantly influences its value. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are all required to establish a sense of trustworthiness. Choosing the appropriate data collection approach to answer questions of interest is the very first step in ensuring the credibility of content analysis (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Kyngas, Pölkki, & Utriainen, 2014). For this study to be reliable, the researcher chose the qualitative approach of semi-structured interviewing as set out by Polit and Beck (2012), which is appropriate for this research. Conformability of findings relates to the idea that the data fairly represent the information provided by the participants and that the inquirer did not create their interpretations of those facts. Thus, content analysis is a methodology that requires researchers to provide compelling evidence that their data is trustworthy.

Researchers can establish credibility by making sure the study technique is logical, traceable, and well-documented (Elo et al., 2014). Making sure the study method is rational, traceable, and well-documented will help researchers establish trustworthiness (Begley & Tobin, 2004). According to Middleton (2019), reliability and validity are essential ideas in research that help us assess the quality and rigour of a study. Reliability refers to the regularity and dependability of a measurement or procedure. Reliability is concerned with a measure's consistency, whereas validity is concerned with a measure's accuracy. When creating a study design, dependability and validity must be considered. In this study, member checking was employed to increase the authenticity, credibility, and validity of what was recorded during a research interview. It is most employed in qualitative inquiry methodologies (Harper & Cole, 2012:1). In-person interviews were conducted directly by the researcher. To ensure that the study was valid, reliable, and trustworthy, participants were allowed to write down their answers anonymously and put them in a box. The researcher then recorded the interviews and documented the responses to ensure accurate interpretation of the participants' responses.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

All research investigations must ensure the protection of human participants by following suitable ethical standards (Arifin, 2018). Ethical considerations during research include informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. The research procedure would not be complete without informed permission. The following steps are involved in obtaining consent: Consent should be given freely (voluntarily), and the subject should be aware of its implications. As a result, participants were informed of their rights when given information about the study's contents and its purpose, including its intended possible uses, their participation in the research, and given some time to think about the implications of providing consent (Basit, 2010:58). During the visits, the participants are expected to answer the questions posed to them, and all parties involved must cooperate (Arifin, 2018). Participants were given consent documents. Volunteers signed permission forms consenting to provide any information requested by the study. The researcher conveyed to the participants that they were not under any obligation to provide information. The researcher informed the participants of their rights and assured them that they could withdraw at any time without any repercussions. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:139) state that "confidentiality must be assured as the safe primary guard against unwanted exposure." Therefore, this study maintains the privacy and confidentiality of all information, solely for research purposes. The following ethical procedure was followed:

### ***Confidentiality***

All information provided by the participants has been treated with strict confidentiality. The data is securely stored on a Google Drive, which will be kept until the research is submitted.

### ***Anonymity***

Each volunteer received a research number to serve as a reference, maintaining their anonymity. Participants were given consent forms. The study required participants to sign consent forms, indicating their agreement to provide the requested information. The participants were not compelled to provide any information they were unwilling to provide. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews and gave interviewees adequate preparation time. The collected study data will be safeguarded for five years after the submission of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION FINDINGS

This study investigates intervention strategies to assist isiXhosa mother tongue learners in Grade 4 who face challenges in reading English First Additional Language. Its purpose is to explore various approaches used to assist these learners. This chapter discusses the study and provides a comprehensive content analysis. According to Basit (2010:194), content analysis is a systematic approach used to examine numerous types of data, including written, visual, and vocal information that has been gathered based on the qualitative methodology employed, which includes interviews with teachers and classroom observations in grade 4.

The insights and perspectives of teachers are important in understanding the implementation of reading intervention strategies for isiXhosa mother tongue learners. The primary question addressed is:

- What intervention strategies do Grade 4 teachers employ to assist learners who have difficulty reading EFAL?

The two sub-questions are:

- How are the needs of each learner determined when creating intervention strategies?
- What are the measures taken for learners who do not respond well to intervention strategies?

This chapter addresses these questions by analysing the responses of the research participants. It is structured in sections, namely data analysis, discussion of findings, suggestions for solutions, and conclusion. The collected data demonstrated the application of teachers' reading intervention strategies for learners encountering difficulties in English as a Second Language. The discussion connects the findings with the literature review and the theoretical framework.

During the data collection procedure, the study employed two approaches to obtain the necessary information:

- Category 1: classroom observation and
- Category 2: interview questionnaires with teachers.

The researcher carried out the study in EFAL classrooms at three different schools. The researcher will begin by discussing the classroom observation method. Observations made in the classroom are classified as Classroom 1 to Classroom 3. The focus will then shift to the interview questionnaire approach. The interview questions and answers are presented as P-25768, P-25769, and P-25770, which are the anonymous numbers given to the research participants.

These two distinct approaches will be discussed in detail below.

#### **4.1 Category 1: Data collection from classroom observations**

This research incorporates classroom observations to yield more precise results and a deeper understanding of the execution of reading lessons. The purpose is to explore strategies employed to aid learners experiencing challenges in reading EFAL.

The following significant observations were made during the classroom observations and discussion of results.

- Lesson plan availability.
- Intervention strategies utilized.
- Challenges encountered by teachers.
- Challenges encountered by learners.

##### **4.1.1 Lesson planning**

According to Cui, Fan, Popping, and Shen (2007:229), lesson planning enables teachers to examine various aspects of pedagogical subject knowledge. Teachers can thoroughly consider the subject matter when creating lesson plans, ensuring its alignment with textbooks and other curriculum components, such as standards and goals. In addition, they should allocate time to devise educational activities or methodologies that facilitate learning of the subject matter. Ultimately, lesson planners may contemplate the learners existing knowledge and choose the most effective way for them to comprehend the topic.

*Observations made regarding the availability of the lesson plan are as follows:*

Classroom observation 1 - The lesson plan was not available.

Classroom observation 2 - The lesson plan was not available; however, the teacher used a departmental basic education workbook and back-on-track activities.

Classroom observation 3 - The lesson plan was available and detailed.

#### *Discussion of findings:*

Lesson planning emerged as a critical yet inconsistently practised element in the participating schools. Although teachers recognised the importance of planning, only one teacher had an updated lesson plan in her file. The rest relied primarily on Department of Basic Education (DBE) workbooks and *Back-on-Track* activities to guide daily teaching. This pattern suggests that lesson preparation is often treated as a compliance exercise rather than a pedagogical tool. According to Anderson et al. (2017), lesson planning should enable teachers to anticipate learner needs, differentiate instruction, and align strategies with learning outcomes. However, the findings here indicate that most teachers adopt a reactive, resource-driven approach, drawing directly from pre-packaged materials instead of tailoring lessons to the contextual realities of multilingual classrooms.

From a social constructivist perspective, this limited engagement with lesson planning constrains opportunities for learners to build meaning collaboratively. Planning is not only an administrative task but a cognitive and social process where teachers design learning experiences that scaffold understanding within learners' zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). The absence of individualised lesson plans may therefore reduce the potential for interactive and differentiated learning, particularly for learners struggling with English comprehension.

Interestingly, one teacher demonstrated stronger planning and integration of learner-centred activities, aligning lessons with peer learning and group discussions. This contrasts with others who relied heavily on DBE materials, suggesting variability in teacher agency and professional confidence. Such differences highlight that contextual constraints such as workload, policy pressure, and limited support affect teachers unevenly, producing a non-uniform landscape of pedagogical practice.

As one teacher explained, *"I use the workbook because it's already done for us; there is no time to plan every day."* This reveals a practical adaptation to systemic constraints rather than negligence. It also raises questions about how curriculum

policy and administrative expectations shape teacher autonomy. Scholars such as Hoadley (2018) and Spaul (2019) similarly note that South Africa's prescriptive curriculum pacing undermines teachers' capacity for contextual decision-making. In this study, therefore, the reliance on pre-prepared materials may be interpreted as a form of survival pedagogy, balancing institutional compliance with the realities of overcrowded, under-resourced classrooms.

#### **4.1.2 Intervention strategies**

The study aims to explore intervention strategies that can help learners struggling with EFAL reading in grade 4. Through an investigation, this study has shown alignment between the research theory, which is social constructivism theory, and Bronfenbrenner's stipulation in Chapter 2: how learners learn through their surroundings. Social constructivism is a process where the teacher becomes the facilitator that allows learners to work with their peers, and that is part of the intervention strategies that teachers highlighted that they implement (refer to Addendums 1-3).

An intervention strategy is a plan of action that teachers can use to help each learner achieve a specific learning objective. Intervention strategies use specific methods, techniques, cues, programs, or tasks that help the learners achieve a certain objective. Intervention strategies are greatly used as a resource to assist learners who are experiencing various learning challenges and are implemented during teaching and learning (Cekiso & Madikiza, 2014:2).

The following observations have been made regarding intervention strategies employed to help learners with reading difficulties understand the activity.

Classroom observation 1 - Reading using pictures to connect the text for understanding. The instructions are repeated, and the instructions explained in isiXhosa, the mother tongue of the learners.

Classroom observation 2 - Reading was done in English and translated into isiXhosa throughout the lesson. Learners work in pairs to assist each other in reading.

Classroom observation 3 – The text was read in English but explained in isiXhosa, with the teacher using both languages, English and isiXhosa during the lesson. Learners were grouped according to their work abilities.

## Discussion of findings

The findings demonstrated that teachers used different strategies such as code-switching, peer learning, instruction repetition, and allowing learners to work in pairs to help learners with reading challenges understand what they were doing.

The study defines each technique below:

- Code Switching - Mati (2004:2) defines code-switching in an EFAL classroom as the practice of using various languages inside a single communication episode. In addition, code-switching demonstrates linguistic creativity and complexity.
- Peer learning - Peer learning is an essentially collaborative activity in which learners collaborate to seek information, answers, and deeper insights in their respective fields of study. The use of peer guidance can result in heightened motivation and favourable attitudes towards the learning and teaching process, as well as greater multi-channel interactions between learners and teachers (Power, Huijser, Rathnayaka, 2022).
- Repetition of instructions – McDermid (2003) defines repetition as an effective method for enhancing comprehension and expertise in a certain subject. Through the process of revisiting and reapplying topics, learners develop a deeper and more extensive comprehension of the subject matter. Repetition enables learners to strengthen their basic knowledge, expand upon it, and establish connections between new material and their prior learning.
- Working in pairs during activities – Working in pairs helps learners to create and build positive interpersonal relationships and creates a high level of academic solidarity and confidence amongst learners (Sert, 2005:236).

Despite limited planning, teachers displayed adaptive strategies to engage learners, notably through peer collaboration and code-switching. Teachers encouraged learners to work in pairs or small groups to decode English texts collectively. These strategies embody the social constructivist principle of learning as a social process, where meaning is co-constructed through interaction.

However, the implementation of peer learning varied. In one school, structured group activities were evident and learners supported each other effectively; in another, groups became noisy and disengaged, suggesting that the success of collaboration depends on teacher facilitation and classroom management. Keerthinane (2020) argues that peer learning is most effective when teachers actively guide interactions and when parents and learners share a culture of participation. The findings here partially support this claim: while teachers valued collaboration, overcrowded and linguistically diverse classrooms often made it difficult to sustain focused peer dialogue.

A teacher noted, *“They help each other with words they don’t know, but sometimes it becomes noise.”* This quote encapsulates both the promise and the limitation of social learning in EFAL contexts peer interaction can promote engagement, yet without adequate structure, it can degenerate into off-task behaviour. This duality reflects Vygotsky’s notion that social interaction is productive only when properly scaffolded.

In comparison with Probyn (2015), who found that teachers use code-switching as a bridge between English and learners’ home languages, the current study extends that understanding by showing that bilingual strategies also serve an emotional and motivational purpose. Learners seemed more willing to participate when teachers validated isiXhosa as part of instruction. Thus, while the literature emphasises linguistic mediation, these findings highlight an affective dimension of code-switching that nurtures confidence and inclusion.

#### **4.1.3 Challenges encountered by teachers**

The following observation was made when the researcher focused on specific challenges encountered by the teachers’ in supporting isiXhosa learners who have challenges reading in EFAL.

Classroom observation 1- For the learners to understand, the teacher had to explain everything in their native tongue.

Classroom observation 2 - Learners were unable to comprehend everything that the teacher taught, and the teacher looked tired and frustrated to the point that she said, *“Andiyazi ndithini ngani kengoku kudala ndizama, I have tried my level best”* (basically meaning, I don’t know what to do anymore).

Classroom observation 3 - The learners were causing disruptions, and the teacher found it difficult to reach the learners in the back due to the limited space. There was only a single chalkboard, measuring approximately 900 mm to 1200 mm. Learners took their time to write the given task from the chalkboard, and the teacher was unable to erase the work and continue. The teacher had to wait for all learners to complete their writing.

#### Discussion of findings

All observed classrooms were overcrowded, with 50–57 learners packed into limited space. Teachers struggled to move between groups, and learners at the back received minimal attention. The cramped arrangement of desks less than one centimetre apart restricted mobility and interaction, undermining the very social engagement that constructivist learning requires.

This pattern reflects systemic issues within the South African education landscape rather than individual teacher shortcomings. Overcrowding is widely documented as a structural barrier to quality learning (Inamullah & Shah, 2012; Spaul, 2019). Teachers in this study expressed frustration at being unable to implement differentiated support: *“I can’t reach those at the back; there are too many of them.”* Such realities highlight how policy ideals of learner-centred pedagogy clash with material conditions on the ground.

Furthermore, while some teachers responded creatively—grouping learners or rotating tasks others appeared demotivated, signalling variation in coping mechanisms. This contradicts the uniform portrayal of teacher struggle often found in the literature. Mengwai and Molotja (2025) note that educators in resource-poor settings frequently adapt with resilience, while others succumb to exhaustion and disengagement. The mixed responses in this study thus extend existing research by illustrating that teachers’ experiences are not monolithic, but shaped by school culture, leadership support, and personal efficacy.

The implications of overcrowding extend beyond physical constraints. Learners’ limited comprehension and frustration led to behavioural disengagement, not because of poor discipline, but due to linguistic and cognitive overload. This finding reinforces Carlson’s (2000) and Iqbal & Khan’s (2012) observations that overcrowding diminishes instructional quality and learner motivation. Yet, in contrast to these studies, this

research found pockets of engagement even in large classes some learners remained enthusiastic when teachers used familiar language and interactive tasks. This nuance underscores that constructivist learning can still occur in constrained environments, provided teachers create socially meaningful learning opportunities.

#### **4.1.4 Challenges encountered by learners**

The researcher conducted observations to identify the challenges experienced by learners who struggle with EFAL:

Classroom observation 1 - Learners were unable to communicate in the language of instruction. The classroom was overcrowded, and learners were unable to move freely in the classroom due to limited space, with some learners having to share a single chair. Furthermore, some learners were struggling to read fluently, which hindered their comprehension of the lesson.

Classroom observation 2- Through observations, the researcher noticed that learners were not comfortable communicating in EFAL, and they were stuttering when they were speaking, while their voices were shaking. The researcher noted that learners lack confidence, which has made it difficult for them to communicate and engage. They were struggling to express themselves in English, and they ended up switching to speaking their mother tongue.

Classroom observation 3 – Learners were unable to answer questions in English. Many learners felt uncomfortable asking questions due to the fear of being ridiculed by their peers.

#### **Discussion of findings**

According to classroom observations, the schools participating in the study are dealing with overcrowded classrooms. These issues have become hurdles to the teaching and learning processes. Teachers are unable to reach learners, particularly those who are far from the chalkboard. Learners are sharing a single chart, which impacts their ability to write well. A study conducted by Inamullah and Shah (2012) states that

overcrowded classrooms may have a direct impact on learners' learning. Teachers are faced with challenges such as discipline, behavioural issues, poor health, stress, and higher learner drop-out rates. Furthermore, overcrowding in classrooms leads to poor learner performance. Carlson (2000) reported that overcrowding in classrooms hinders quality learning. Among the many challenges that teachers and learners face, classroom overcrowding has an impact on creating barriers and hindrances to overcoming the challenges. Because of the large number of learners in class, teachers are unable to give extra attention to struggling learners (Iqbal & Khan, 2012).

Table 4.1: Summary of lesson plan observation and theory interpretation

<b>CLASSROOM</b>	<b>LESSON PLAN AVAILABILITY</b>	<b>PLAN RESOURCED USE</b>	<b>THEORY LINK</b>
1	Not available	DBE Work book	Reflects external systemic influence (Exosystem Bronfenbrenner), limits teacher autonomy and learner scaffolding (Constructivist theory).
1	Not available	DBE + Back on Track	Demonstrates adaptation under constrained conditions, limited constructivist engagement opportunities due to lack of structured planning.
1	Available and well detailed	Teacher uses her own planning	Shows strong pedagogical reflection and scaffolding aligned with Vygotsky's ZPD, effective microsystem functioning (Bronfenbrenner).

#### **4.2 Category 2: Presentation of semi-structured interviews with teachers**

In this study, the teachers shared their perspectives. For confidentiality and ethical purposes, we assigned each teacher a unique number (P-25768, P-25769, and P-25770). For the sake of clarity, the interview analysis will be organised as follows: first, the questions will be presented; second, each participant's response will be detailed; and finally, the researcher will analyse the common difficulties encountered by the participants.

Below are the questions, along with the relevant verbatim responses from participants. The researcher then focuses on the common difficulties, followed by the findings and discussion.

#### 4.2.1 Learning barriers

##### **Questions 1: *What learning barriers are you currently faced with in your EFAL classroom?***

Responses from participants

- *P- 25768: “Our learners lack creativity and are too lazy to think (bayonqena ukucinga). Technology has a huge impact on their lives. Learners read EFAL with isiXhosa pronunciations, such as “was”, they pronounce it as “wazi” in isiXhosa. My learners are unable to read with understanding and they like to answer without thinking. Being unable to read without understanding, they lost confidence. Abafundi babonisa ungakuthandi ukufunda kwezintsuku (learners have shown that they lack interest in their studies). Change of language takes a lot of our time because I must translate the whole task.”*
- *P-25769: “My classroom is overcrowded; we don’t have enough time to teach because I must translate the text to their mother tongue for them to understand and I am unable to reach every learner during lessons. Learners are unable to cope with the Grade 4 load; they take a few periods in EFAL to complete one task. Learners are unable to read with understanding, don’t show interest in reading whether it is their home language, they get bored and they lack confidence. As a result of this they hardly participate in class.”*
- *P- 25770: “My classroom is overcrowded. Learners are unable to read fluently and they are not reading with understanding. Being unable to read has caused challenges with their confidence. They are unable to participate in lessons. The learners are still struggling with the setting of Grade 4 and LOLT while adjusting to different educators and periods that have caused challenges.”*

Common difficulties encountered by participants

- All the teachers have reported that learners are struggling with reading without understanding.

- Classrooms are overcrowded, and learners lack confidence.

#### Discussion of findings

The collected data provides clear evidence that teachers are presently facing the learning obstacles described and discussed below:

- Lack of interest in learning
- Reading without comprehension
- Limited proficiency in English
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of engagement
- Disturbance of the learning process through code-switching

#### Lack of interest in learning

The researcher noted that learners encountering an EFAL barrier, exhibit disinterest in the language and a sense of disconnection (see Addendum 1-3). While the teacher teaches, learners play or sleep. Particularly during the EFAL period, learners lose interest because they don't comprehend the lesson. Research conducted by Mohammed and Amponsah (2018) discovered that the desire of learners to learn to read is insufficient since teachers and parents did not spark their interest in reading, while teachers lack an understanding of the phonemic awareness approach to teaching reading, a lack of reading clubs, and a lack of reading competition among learners in the school.

It was also discovered that there was insufficient parental involvement in helping learners learn to read fluently at home and that both the school and the parents are reluctant to encourage learners to acquire good attitudes around reading. Acedillo and Saro (2023) state that time and effort are needed for both academic teaching and language learning. As a result of negative emotions such as low self-esteem, low confidence, and excessive anxiety, as well as teachers' inappropriate approaches to managing classrooms and psychologically insecure learning environments, learners frequently lose interest in and willingness to participate in the classroom.

#### Reading without understanding

Participants have indicated that when it comes to reading EFAL, many learners are unable to read with comprehension even in their mother tongue (refer addendum 1). Teachers shared a common challenge that significantly impacted them, recurring annually as a persistent obstacle to overcome. One of the challenges teachers face is when learners in Grade 4 fail to complete the assigned work within the allotted instructional time. These learners struggle to read and write English because they read and write slowly. It is time-consuming, causes learning gaps, and becomes challenging for learners when they are unable to complete increasingly challenging activities. Grade 4 learners are not accustomed to reading and writing in English, and they have a particularly demanding task in this subject, such as reading with understanding and being able to write. The transition from Grade 3 to Grade 4 impacts the learners' interest. Due to the language barrier, overcrowded classroom, inability to read English, and struggle to get the teachers' attention due to limited space to move within the classroom, learners prefer to engage in play rather than reading or writing activities. The 30-minute learning session proves insufficient for struggling learners, who require more extensive support and instructional time to adequately address their learning needs and challenges.

The core LOLT setup and workload have overwhelmed the learners. Teachers initially thought that learners would improve with time and experience, but by then, they had lost a significant amount of time. Teachers observed that learners are unable to identify consonants in a word and pronounce them incorrectly in English (refer addendum 1). Additionally, when attempting to read, learners tend to use isiXhosa sounds in EFAL communication. Teachers have highlighted that language significantly affects learners' comprehension and reading skills. Grade 4 IsiXhosa mother tongue learners must adjust to a new setting that alters their pathways and requires them to acquire a new language.

In addition to being unable to read, Learners also struggle to comprehend the language of instruction, which is English. Their lack of comprehension of the LOLT also has a major impact on their overall academic performance, as it directly affects their ability to understand other subject matters. A significant problem in certain schools and communities is the inability of parents to assist learners, as many of them struggle with reading English. Learners use their mother tongue, isiXhosa, at home, although they cannot read it.

The PIRLS research conducted in 2021 states that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa struggle with comprehension reading by the time they are ten years old. This information was gathered from several South African provinces. The learner's socio-economic context, resource constraints at home and/or at school, and lack of parental interest in their achievement are further findings that the PIRLS emphasises as contributing variables to these issues (Mahlokwane, 2023).

#### **4.2.2. Intervention strategies:**

**Question: Which intervention strategies do you apply with learners who struggle to read or write?**

Responses from participants

- P-25768: *“After conducting a baseline assessment, I group my learners according to their abilities and cater to their diverse learning styles. While using a projector to engage learners, I've observed that some learners appear disinterested and bored with screen-based learning. To address this, I strive to connect learners with their surroundings and incorporate alternative resources, including the Phast program and Reading cards, to create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. Correction plays an important role in my learners to understand the work and know where they went wrong.”*
- P-25769: *“Mhmh zeziphi kanene” Which one is It? There is no time for intervention, these learners were pushed from Grade 3. I have to repeat the instruction when I am teaching and change the language to their mother tongue.”*
- P-25770: *“Peer learning and past work corrections. The most crucial one, though, is translating all the exercises into isiXhosa so that students can comprehend the lesson and the activity itself. I'm currently using a new program called Bot (Back on Track).*

Common difficulties encountered by participants

- All three teachers highlight that learners have challenges with EFAL; however, the problems are not the same.

## Discussion of findings

Based on the collected data (refer to Addendum 2), it is apparent that teachers employ the intervention strategies listed below to overcome the challenges associated with reading in a non-native language. Teachers utilise a range of approaches to facilitate learners' reading development and overcome the challenges associated with reading in a non-native language, such as:

- Code Switching
- Corrections
- Repetition of instructions
- Back on Track program
- Phast

## Code-Switching

Morrison (2024) defines code-switching as the process of switching from one language or dialect to another based on the social context or conversational situation. The goal of code-switching is to help multilingual speakers understand their experiences, understand the target language, and even the subject matter more deeply (Park, 2013:51). Teachers have emphasised that they use code-switching in their intervention strategies for Grade 4 EFAL to help learners better understand the tasks assigned to them. Code-switching to their mother tongue serves as a crucial coping mechanism for these learners, who are transitioning from Grade 3, where the LOLT was IsiXhosa, to Grade 4, where the LOLT has shifted to English. This sudden shift in language instruction requires learners to utilise their linguistic resources, including their mother tongue, to aid in comprehending and navigating the new language of instruction.

Teachers often switch between English and learners' mother tongue languages in the classroom due to various circumstances. While learners may struggle to comprehend content presented in English as a First Additional Language, teachers recognise the importance of facilitating understanding. To bridge the language gap and enhance teaching and learning, code-switching has emerged as a vital communication strategy for both teachers and learners to convey their ideas and meanings effectively (Shinga

& Pillay, 2021:2). Furthermore, simultaneous usage of one's native language and the process of learning a new language are of utmost importance. According to Wales (2001), when a learner learns one language, they develop a range of abilities and metalinguistic information that may be used while using another language.

By incorporating code-switching in EFAL classrooms, teachers foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment, building strong rapport with their learners. This leads to a deeper understanding between teachers and learners, facilitating a more comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. As a result, learners feel encouraged to think creatively and strive for academic success, while the positive teacher-learner dynamic reinforces a productive and engaging learning experience.

### The Corrections

Teachers have highlighted the positive impact corrections of previous work have on learners who are struggling to read and write in EFAL. Corrections enhance learners' understanding by providing specific feedback on their errors, enabling them to recognise and rectify their mistakes, and facilitating the process of relearning. Corrections in classwork prepare learners for their assessments and assist them in improving their knowledge. As part of their intervention strategies, EFAL subject advisors (teachers) have identified the need to provide corrective feedback, which is documented in learners' workbooks. This approach aims to empower struggling readers by offering a scaffolded learning environment where teachers adopt a facilitative role, guiding learners as they explore diverse reading strategies. Additionally, peer learning opportunities are integrated into this approach, enabling learners to collaborate and support one another in their reading development. By adopting this corrective feedback and facilitative approach, teachers seek to enhance learners' reading proficiency and promote a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The timing of error correction plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of an English lesson. For EFAL lessons, correcting mistakes at the right moment can significantly enhance their learning experience and improve their ability to retain new information. Effective error correction can make all the difference in their language learning journey (Kawasaki, 2020).

### Repetition of instructions

Teachers have stated that they employ the model of repetition of instructions as an intervention tool to assist learners who are having trouble in reading (refer to addendum 3). Repetition of instruction is conducted using the isiXhosa mother tongue rather than the learners' LOLT. Repeating instructions in the Grade 4 EFAL classroom is utilised as an intervention strategy for learners who are experiencing a language barrier. This model ensures that learners can participate in teaching and learning with a clear understanding. Teachers view this method as a means of encouraging learners to focus on the details of instruction, thereby facilitating a clear understanding of how to complete a given task. Repetition of instruction is an intervention that teachers utilise to reinforce learning.

According to Brunner (2000), repetition is the foundational idea of all instruction; it improves learning. The researcher has made it clear that learning, not instruction, is what matters most. Repetition in the classroom supports a variety of high benefits for learners who are having difficulty understanding what they are reading in a foreign language, including self-paced learning, reflection, consistency, and clarity of thought. These benefits encourage deep learning. Brunner does, however, highlight some of the drawbacks of repetitions in the classroom, including boredom, time consumption, learner passivity, and rote learning.

### Back on Track Program (BOT)

The back-on-track program was designed to help learners recover from the time they lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers are using the completed lesson resources as part of their intervention program to assist learners who are struggling to read EFAL. Teachers receive prepared lesson plans from the program to utilise. Teachers are expected to utilise these lessons and integrate them into their teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of their learners. The program takes place twice a month on Saturdays. Learners who are selected for this program are learners from the top achievers, moderate, and high-risk learners. Teachers describe the lesson as primarily a review of the work covered throughout the week. Teachers who are part of this program are trained every Monday for the upcoming week. The host of this program is the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute (Western Cape Education Department, 2023).

The purpose of this program was to take decisive action to address this crisis, and this program marks a significant shift from traditional approaches. The BOT program will continue over the next three years. The program supports all stakeholders in the learning process, including teachers, learners, and communities. By combining innovative teaching methods, resources, and 21st-century pedagogies, both in-person and online, we can improve learning outcomes and create a brighter future for our children in the Western Cape. Nevertheless, teachers have emphasised that the program would have been more effective if all learners were permitted to participate, and the time was not restricted to an hour per session (refer addendum 3). However, it only accommodates a limited number of learners, and other learners continue to experience curriculum learning gaps. WCED monitors the progress of learners who receive intervention from the BOT program by requesting that their term reports be submitted to the head office.

#### Phonological awareness skills training (Phast)

According to Davis (2022:2), Phast is a methodical and clear training program that focuses on developing structured and explicit phonological awareness abilities.

The program has been created based on the Science of Reading, which is the widely accepted understanding derived from numerous interdisciplinary research undertaken worldwide over the past thirty years. These studies have examined various languages and provided insights into how humans read. Additionally, it explores ways to effectively avoid and assist learners who struggle with reading problems.

Teachers can utilise the Phast program as an intervention strategy to help learners who are having difficulty reading. Nevertheless, the teachers received no training on how to utilise this program (refer to addendums 3). They learnt from co-workers who face the same difficulties in the classroom (refer addendum 1-3). Others received an invitation from their school's learning support system for informal training. Teachers have mentioned that learning support staff members, who help learners in their schools, use this kind of intervention (refer to addendum 3). Additionally, this program helps students detect sounds, decipher words, build sentences, and replace words.

Numerous elements impact learners, and teachers have identified parental participation (refer to addendum 3) as a significant obstacle that affects education and hinders teaching and learning. Parents who prioritise their child's education and provide consistent support at home greatly enhance their child's chances of success, even in the face of challenges.

#### **4.2.3 Parental Involvement:**

**Questions: How is the parental involvement regarding the learner's progress?**

Responses from participants

- *P-25768: "Parents don't understand the challenges their children are faced with. A parent has accused me of disliking her daughter after the baseline test during feedback of the assessment, while others told me "I am working she must call me, if I do not go to work I will be fired". Others do not even respond. Some parents will say it out loud that "I am going to ask your brother to accompany you to that school meeting".*
- *P-25769: "Parental involvement is poor. Some Parents are unable to read and write English, which makes it difficult for them to assist learners."*
- *P-25770: "The school at large lacks parental involvement. Parents are in denial of their children's problems. While some are not even looking after their learners, others are struggling to make ends meet".*

Common difficulties encountered by participants

- All teachers have expressed that family involvement is notably deficient, particularly for academically challenged learners.

Discussion of findings

Duriscic and Bunijevac (2017), among several researchers who have studied parental involvement, have discovered that modern parents are frequently concerned with the diversions and demands of daily life. Some parents find it difficult to consistently

participate in their children's education or attend school events due to limited income, rigid work schedules, and language challenges. Lack of education and limited financial means are two things that prevent parents from participating in their children's education. According to the participants, schools are facing significant challenges in securing parental support and involvement (refer to addendums 1). Various obstacles often hinder the essential partnership between teachers and parents in promoting learners' development. Learners' struggling with reading frequently submit incomplete assignments, and parents often fail to attend scheduled meetings, citing concerns about job security or remote work schedule conflicts. This lack of parental involvement poses a significant barrier to providing adequate support for learners, particularly those who require extra assistance with reading. The study discovered that many parents are struggling to assist their learners because of the language barrier, and they have low self-esteem, while others lack the knowledge and self-assurance to support their kids. Parents may find the staff, curriculum, and language intimidating. As a result, they avoid communication with the school.

The support of parents and school administration is one of the many factors considered in schools; this expectation is vital in assisting teachers and learners in attaining the desired educational outcomes.

#### **4.2.4 Availability of support for struggling learners at school**

**Question: Is there any support available at school for struggling learners?**

##### **Responses from participants**

P -25768 - “Yho! Ithande ubanzima into (it has become difficult to speak about), learning support in our school is available however it's supporting learners in their first language which is isiXhosa. The advisors come to our school with their paper to ask us for things and never solve the challenges we are faced with”.

P-25769 – “There is no learning support teacher in our school because there is no space for her class. The schools trust us to develop the plans to assist learners. However, when we ask for resources, the school does not have funds.”

P -25770 – “Mmhm hayi (no) our school does not have learning support available on our site, we get visitors from the advisor to ask about the programme we do for slow learners”.

Common difficulties encountered by participants

- School-based learning support is non-existent.

Discussion of findings

To improve learners’ academic performance, social and psychological well-being, and school climate, schools must develop their ability to identify and address a variety of learning challenges. One key tactic in this regard is providing support services for teaching, learning, and school management. Learning support teachers in schools offer a variety of services, including extracurricular activities, remedial instruction, curriculum intervention guidance, and other programs. These services are designed to address individual learning needs and prevent learning difficulties.

Technical help with reading, writing, and numeracy is another form of learning support. It can also involve assisting learners in integrating technology into their studies to make the learning process more engaging and productive (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

According to the participants (refer addendums 3) the availability of learning support plays a vital role in the schools by aiding learners with barriers to learning. Learning support teachers assist Grade 4 learners who are experiencing difficulties with their isiXhosa mother tongue. Amongst the participants, some reported that there is no learning support teacher in their schools due to unavailable space for the teacher as the school is new and still using prefab buildings. Another participant disclosed that the school has one learning support teacher, and their school has been identified as a full-service school. The school receives visits from district officials to monitor the interventions. However, participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the inadequate support from the district officials and learning support teachers. They have emphasised that officials do not provide assistance during their visits to the institutions; rather, they conduct documentation and critique the facilities. Teachers state that “whenever we express our concerns, they consistently commit to respond or direct us to the appropriate section, but this never transpires. Early in 2023, we referred severe-

case learners for a psychological assessment; however, we have yet to observe a psychologist attending to the learners.”

This study revealed multiple, interconnected barriers affecting Grade 4 learners in EFAL classrooms. A prominent challenge was reading without comprehension, with learners often substituting isiXhosa sounds for English words (e.g., “was” pronounced as “wazi”; P-25768). This reflects the systemic impact of transitioning from isiXhosa as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in Grade 3 to English in Grade 4, consistent with Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of linguistic scaffolding for meaningful learning. Learners’ struggles were compounded by overcrowded classrooms (50–57 learners), which limited teacher mobility and individualized support, confirming prior findings that overcrowding negatively affects learning outcomes (Carlson, 2000; Inamullah & Shah, 2012).

Learners exhibited low confidence and engagement, often hesitating to participate for fear of peer ridicule (P-25770), while code-switching to isiXhosa became a coping strategy to facilitate comprehension. These affective and linguistic barriers are interrelated, highlighting the complexity of EFAL learning and the insufficiency of a uniform instructional approach. Variations between schools were also evident: some lacked learning support entirely (P-25769), while others had support limited to isiXhosa interventions (P-25768), underscoring systemic inequities in resources and instructional support.

Teachers reported employing a variety of intervention strategies, including code-switching, corrective feedback, repetition of instructions, and formal programs such as Back-on-Track (BOT) and Phonological Awareness Skills Training (Phast). Code-switching served as both a remedial and confidence-building tool (Morrison, 2024; Park, 2013), while corrections and repeated instructions provided scaffolding for struggling learners (Bruner, 2000; Kawasaki, 2020). BOT and Phast programs were valued but constrained by limited reach, insufficient training, and resource limitations, highlighting systemic challenges in implementing evidence-based interventions (Davis, 2022; WCED, 2023).

A critical barrier identified was limited parental involvement, with many parents unable to support learners at home due to low literacy or socio-economic pressures (Durisic

& Bunijevac, 2017; P-25769). This lack of home support exacerbates learners' low engagement and reading difficulties, further illustrating the complex interaction between learner, school, and community factors. Similarly, school-based learning support was largely inadequate, with teachers reporting either absent or minimally effective interventions from advisors and learning support staff (Bojuwoye et al., 2014; P-25770).

In summary, the study demonstrates that EFAL learning challenges in Grade 4 are shaped by the intersection of linguistic, affective, systemic, and socio-economic factors. Teachers employ a combination of individualized and programmatic interventions, yet these are limited by classroom overcrowding, insufficient support, and uneven parental involvement. This analysis confirms, extends, and nuances existing research: while previous studies have documented overcrowding and low literacy as barriers, this study highlights the interdependency of these factors with learner confidence, engagement, and systemic inequities. As one teacher succinctly stated: "My classroom is overcrowded; we don't have enough time to teach because I must translate the text to their mother tongue for them to understand" (P-25769). This quote encapsulates the multi-layered challenges faced by both teachers and learners, emphasizing the need for targeted, context-sensitive interventions and systemic reform.

#### 4.2 Summary interviews, themes, theoretical links, and supporting literature

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Theoretical Connection</b>	<b>Interpretation (Meaning)</b>	<b>Supporting Literature</b>
Lack of interest in learning	Learners disengaged from EFAL lessons due to comprehension barriers.	Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory	Limited scaffolding from teachers and parents reduces learner motivation.	Mohammed & Amponsah (2018); Acedillo & Saro (2023)
Reading without understanding	Learners fail to transfer literacy skills from L1 to English.	Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis	Weak L1 literacy foundation hinders L2 comprehension.	PIRLS (2021); Mahlokwane (2023)

Code-switching	Teachers use isiXhosa to aid understanding.	Translanguaging Theory	Bilingual mediation enhances comprehension and inclusivity.	Shinga & Pillay (2021); Park (2013)
Limited parental involvement	Parents unable or unwilling to support literacy at home.	Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory	Weak home-school linkage limits literacy reinforcement.	Durisic & Bunijevac (2017); Bojuwoye et al. (2014)
Learning support constraints	Lack of trained staff and resources for intervention.	Inclusive Education Framework	Systemic barriers restrict equitable learning opportunities.	WCED (2023); Bojuwoye et al. (2014)

### 4.3 Recommendations

Teachers have proposed recommendations and remedies that they believe could aid them in addressing the obstacles they face when attempting to teach IsiXhosa mother tongue speakers to comprehend English EFAL (refer to addendums 1-3). These include:

- Training
- Planning
- Resources

These recommendations will be discussed below:

Teachers believe that learners may overcome learning difficulties with sufficient support through training, planning, and the provision of necessary resources.

#### 4.3.1 Training

Participants (see Addendum 1–3) acknowledged that understanding how Grade 4 teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and experiences influence their implementation of EFAL reading-support strategies is essential for improving learner outcomes. This insight also empowers them to strengthen their professional competence through ongoing training and development.

Social constructivism, in addition to empowering teachers to understand the social interactions and culture that shape learners' experiences with language as their EFAL and LOLT in Grade 4, aims to assist learners and teachers in creating a supportive learning environment that accommodates every learner who faces various barriers regarding their EFAL. This study's underlying reasons, which are a theme and a gap in addressing the issues teachers face due to their interest in "learning and reading without understanding," can be better understood by applying social constructivism.

Social constructivism theory encourages learning as socially dependent since language is acquired through social interaction. To solve this dilemma, teachers are proposing that district officials, including curriculum advisers, school management, and WCED/DBE, provide training that outlines the issues they currently encounter daily. Enhancing teaching and learning will be greatly aided by continuous professional development for teachers. Learning, in the words of Vygotsky, is "the process of picking up ideas, knowledge, and problem-solving techniques via interactions" with what he called the "more knowledgeable other" (Medical College of Wisconsin, 2023:1).

According to Ithindi (2023), teachers should assign learners a variety of English-language reading texts, and learners can pick up vocabulary on their own or through class discussion. Learners will be exposed to new vocabulary that they can use in their speaking, writing, and listening. More focus on reading instructions is needed to enhance the fourth-grade learners' understanding of EFAL.

The Western Cape Education Department, alongside the Cape Teaching and Leadership Institute, has partnered with Klopper in 2021 to provide a two-week workshop for teachers who are teaching languages in the intermediate and senior phases called "How to read for meaning." This training equipped teachers with strategies to deal with learners who are struggling to read for meaning. It takes a lot of training and learning to be able to know how to work with different learners (Maffea, 2020).

Klopper's training workshop included the following reading strategies:

- Activating prior knowledge

- Using text preferences
- Making predictions
- Asking questions
- Making inferences
- Making connections and visualising
- Integration

The strategies presented in 2021 by Klopper and the classroom observation in this study are consistent with the limited intervention strategies that teachers implemented during the lesson. The following strategies were implemented by teachers:

- By asking relevant questions about their environment, teachers facilitated learners' existing knowledge (refer Addendum 1).
- Text feature: Teachers employed texts that included illustrations.
- Critical thinking questions were asked to learners before the reading, during, and after the reading of the text.

#### **4.3.2 Planning**

Teachers maintain that the Western Cape government department (refer to addendum 1-3) never takes for granted the efforts it makes to support schools; however, some challenges, such as poor behaviour, poverty, a lack of resources, and language barriers, are beyond their control. Teachers have indicated that while the South African curriculum outcomes expect lessons to accommodate all learners, they fail to consider the diverse communities and their unique challenges. They are provided a workshop that presents challenges for practical implementation within their township school context (see addendums 1-3). Teachers are expressing dissatisfaction with the planning and are looking for practical solutions to problems that crop up in the classroom and across the curriculum.

#### **4.3.3 Lack of Resources**

Teachers have expressed their frustration that their overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources are impeding their ability to teach and learn effectively (refer addendum 1-3). Nkosi (2022:1) cited Minister of Education Motshekga in 2022, "Post provisioning

norms establish an ideal maximum class size for each subject, ranging from 6 learners per class for music to 37 for subjects with larger class sizes." These are optimal benchmarks that the industry aims to attain by consistently enhancing the provision of resources. Because of the overcrowding in schools, there aren't enough resources to give learners a quality education (Nkosi, 2022). As a result, learners find it difficult to study and eventually lose interest in the language. Teachers are interested in learning diverse approaches to managing resources that are currently available as well as creating new ones. Maffea's (2020) research reveals a global resource shortage, resulting in insufficient supplies in classrooms. Not only are high-poverty places devoid of resources; middle-class neighbourhoods also suffer from a lack of them. Nonetheless, the schools located in impoverished communities are in desperate need of supplies, assistance, and support.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This study concentrated on teachers approaches for implementing intervention strategies with learners who are having trouble reading EFAL. Even more significantly, this investigation explored challenges teachers encounter when teaching 4th-grade learners who are native IsiXhosa speakers. Strategies that teachers implemented to resolve these challenges were subsequently detailed.

The collected data reveals the intervention strategies used by teachers in their classrooms, the impact of parental participation, and the availability of learning assistance from district officials on learners. Additionally, it emphasises the significant impact the lack of resources has on learners. This study has demonstrated that learners who are studying English (EFAL) and who speak IsiXhosa as their mother tongue face challenges in reading comprehension and are unable to answer questions. Furthermore, the transition from the foundation phase to Grade 4 has a substantial impact on learners, as they are not accustomed to studying EFAL and the LOLT is English.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research investigated the impact of Grade 4 teachers' understanding, attitudes, and experiences on the implementation of techniques aimed at improving English reading skills among isiXhosa learners. Data was gathered through interviews and classroom observations. Specifically, we interviewed three teachers actively teaching isiXhosa mother tongue learners in EFAL across various schools. This chapter offers a thorough summary of the study's findings, implications, limitations, conclusions, recommendations, and future directions.

### **5.1 Summary of findings**

The literature analysis and theoretical framework of this research, as stated in Chapter 2, highlight the significance of investigating strategies for intervention for Grade 4 learners who are experiencing difficulties in reading EFAL. The research identified the issues faced by teachers while teaching EFAL to isiXhosa mother tongue learners, as well as the strategies used by teachers to overcome these difficulties. It has also shown the influence of parental engagement and the assistance provided by district authorities on the learning outcomes of learners and teachers.

The results of this study have confirmed a strong alignment with the previous study conducted by CAPS (2011:9) and Gündogmus (2018:333), confirming that the challenges that teachers encounter are related to literacy and writing. Additionally, the causes include learners' lack of readiness, parents' lack of involvement, physical deficiencies, a lack of professional experience, and learners' lack of interest.

While the majority of learners in the intermediate phase are currently learning in their first additional language, which is English, many learners are still unable to communicate effectively in their additional language.

In line with the theoretical framework, this research has shown that collaborative learning among learners, teachers, and parents is crucial for the growth of a learner and for promoting social interaction among learners. During classroom observation, teachers conducted a lesson in learners' native language, utilising code-switching to facilitate communication and comprehension of the content.

In line with the theoretical framework, the research highlighted that elements like the learning environment, language barriers, involvement of parents, and learners' behaviour influence the approaches teachers adopt to assist Grade 4 learners who struggle with reading English.

A summary of data findings and results will be discussed below.

Learners who struggle to read with comprehension are faced with challenges due to reasons such as limited language proficiency, limited resources, overcrowded classrooms and language barrier:

- Teachers are using various ways to support learners who speak isiXhosa as their first language.
- Several issues impact the teaching and learning process for learners. The absence of parental engagement and the socio-economic challenges have negatively impacted parents, hindering their ability to fully participate as expected.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study**

During data collection, this study encountered several limitations, including misunderstandings of ethical procedures and challenges related to time management. The researcher encountered many problems, including a lack of understanding of ethical principles and discrepancies in the agreement between the school and the teacher. The administrators were not allowing teachers to participate in the research willingly but rather compelling them to do so. Although several instructors consented to participate, the administrator was uneasy about the staff being questioned. However, the research had to exclude schools that did not adhere to ethical standards.

During the classroom observations, the researcher had scheduled time with the teacher based on the timetable. However, unexpected events disrupted the scheduled periods and timetable, necessitating the researcher to patiently wait for an appropriate time to conduct the observation. During the interviews, it was challenging to schedule a meeting with teachers due to their hectic schedule with workshops and upcoming end-of-term assessments.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Considering the findings from this study on teaching EFAL to Grade 4 learners who are isiXhosa mother tongue speakers, the following recommendations are proposed for teachers and educational authorities to enhance teaching effectiveness and learner outcomes.

#### **5.3.1. The necessity of lesson plans and use of resources.**

A lesson plan is a detailed outline of the learning process, encompassing the specific topic to be taught, the instructional approach, timing and location, and the assessment of learners' progress. Lesson planning is the initial stage that precedes the commencement of the learning process (Emiliasari & Jubaedah, 2019:367). It is therefore advisable for teachers to conduct lesson planning to facilitate both their teaching and learning, as well as to effectively monitor their own progress and that of their learners. The Personnel Administrative Measures (PAM hereafter) Documents (2022:17) state that it is required for every teacher to create a lesson plan that considers the objectives, provincial curriculum, innovative teaching methods, instructional procedures, assessment strategies, and informative guidelines.

Planning a lesson not only prepares the teacher but also ensures that time is not wasted. According to Farhang, Hashemi, and Ghorianfar (2023:2), the lesson plan serves as the foundation of education. A lesson plan serves as an educational blueprint and is crucial in facilitating the process of learning. It aids teachers in structuring their instruction to prevent confusion or disorientation. Teachers' confidence will increase when they effectively arrange their lessons. A lesson plan typically encompasses all the ideas and considerations that a teacher considers while preparing a lesson.

#### **5.3.2 Reduction of class sizes**

It is confirmed by DBE (2003) that the government remains dedicated to the creation of an educational system that is inclusive and broadly representative of our society, as

well as the improvement of quality throughout the entire system. The government is specifically focused on enhancing the primary input of school allocations for all public institutions in the nation. It is therefore recommended that the WCED and DBE assist teachers with initial challenges, such as reducing the number of learners in the classrooms by employing teachers and constructing new classrooms to accommodate them, considering the DBE's objective.

### **5.3.3 Professional development**

The objective of education is to equip learners with skills and information that they may use to construct a more promising future. Undoubtedly, the primary objective of both the WCED and DBE is to provide equitable access to high-quality education for everybody, irrespective of their ethnicity, race, or gender. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for learners and teachers if educational authorities organised workshops on effective reading strategies. These workshops should specifically include parents as well as equipping them with the essential skills needed to support learners' at home. The WCED should urge that all schools create dedicated reading sessions to support struggling learners.

### **5.3.4 Dedicated reading sessions**

Creating a reading culture is crucial. It is advisable for each school to implement dedicated reading sessions for learners, which will help them to read for meaning and foster a genuine interest in learning to read. Teachers can organise groups within their grade levels during allocated time for extra-mural activities at school, provided that each extra-mural activity is allocated one hour at school. It is therefore advisable that learners who are struggling to read start reading for 10 minutes to 15 minutes. After this initial period, we should allow them to engage in other activities. According to the PAM Document (2022:30), teachers are required to partake in extra-mural and curricular activities. They are also expected to help the department head in identifying areas within their school that need extra care and to help with the necessary actions. It is recommended that this can be done through the school management team, school governing body, and parents.

#### 5.4 Recommendations for Future Study

Based on the findings of this study, which explored Grade 4 teachers' intervention strategies for isiXhosa learners struggling with EFAL reading, the following recommendations are made for future research:

- **In-depth Exploration of Specific Intervention Strategies:** While this study provides an overview of intervention strategies, future research should delve deeper into the effectiveness of specific strategies mentioned by teachers, such as Phast (Phonological Awareness Skills Training), reading aloud, group work, and the use of visual aids. A comparative study of different strategies could identify the most effective approaches for isiXhosa learners in EFAL.
- **Investigate the Impact of Resource Availability:** Explore the relationship between resource availability (e.g., reading materials, technology, support staff) and the implementation and effectiveness of intervention strategies. This could involve comparing schools with varying levels of resources to identify the impact on teacher practices and learner outcomes.
- **Focus on Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Given the importance of teacher knowledge and skills in implementing effective interventions, future research should investigate the impact of specific teacher training programs and professional development initiatives on teachers' ability to support isiXhosa learners' EFAL reading development. This could include exploring the effectiveness of different training models and identifying the key components of successful professional development programs.
- **Longitudinal Study of Learner Progress:** Conduct a longitudinal study to track the progress of isiXhosa learners receiving specific reading interventions in EFAL over multiple grades. This would provide valuable insights into the long-term impact of interventions and identify any potential challenges or gaps in support as learners progress through the education system.
- **Qualitative Study of Learner Perspectives:** Complement the findings of this study by exploring the perspectives of isiXhosa learners themselves on their experiences with reading in EFAL and the interventions they receive. This could involve conducting interviews or focus groups with learners to understand their challenges, preferences, and suggestions for improving support.

- **Examine the Role of Language Proficiency in Both isiXhosa and English:** Future studies could investigate the correlation between a learner's proficiency in their home language (isiXhosa) and their ability to acquire reading skills in EFAL. This could help determine whether strengthening isiXhosa literacy skills can positively impact EFAL reading development.
- **Develop and Evaluate Culturally Relevant Reading Materials:** Research could focus on the development and evaluation of culturally relevant reading materials in EFAL that are specifically designed to engage isiXhosa learners and promote their reading comprehension. This could involve incorporating familiar themes, characters, and contexts into reading materials.
- **Mixed-Methods Approach to Intervention Evaluation:** Employ a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the effectiveness of reading interventions, combining quantitative data (e.g., reading scores, standardized assessments) with qualitative data (e.g., teacher interviews, classroom observations, learner perspectives) to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing learner outcomes.
- **Investigate the Role of Parental Involvement:** Explore the role of parental involvement in supporting isiXhosa learners' EFAL reading development. Research could investigate the impact of parental literacy levels, home language practices, and parent-teacher collaboration on learner outcomes.
- **Replicate the Study in Different Contexts:** Conduct this study across various geographical areas and types of schools to assess whether the findings can be applied more broadly and to explore contextual factors that might affect the success of reading interventions.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This study explored the intervention strategies employed by Grade 4 teachers to support isiXhosa learners who experience difficulties in reading English as a First Additional Language (EFAL). Through qualitative data collected from teacher interviews and classroom observations, the research illuminated the challenges teachers face, their knowledge and perspectives on supporting these learners, and the methods they use to determine individual learner needs when designing intervention strategies.

The findings revealed that while teachers are aware of the challenges faced by isiXhosa learners in transitioning to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT), they employ a range of intervention strategies, including phonics-based approaches, reading aloud, group work, and the use of visual aids. However, the study also highlighted the constraints imposed by limited resources, large class sizes, and the pressure to meet curriculum demands. Furthermore, the research underscored the importance of teacher knowledge, beliefs, and experiences in shaping their intervention practices.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on literacy in the Intermediate Phase by providing valuable insights into the perspectives and practices of Grade 4 teachers working with isiXhosa learners in EFAL. The findings can inform the development of more effective reading interventions, teacher training programs, and support mechanisms to address the specific needs of these learners. By giving voice to the experiences of teachers, this research highlights the critical role they play in supporting learners' reading development in multilingual contexts. It also underscores the need for ongoing research, collaboration, and resource allocation to ensure that all learners can succeed in reading and writing in EFAL, thereby bridging the gap between "learning to read" and "reading to learn."

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