

**EXPLORING TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES IN LITERACY IN  
ENGLISH IN GRADE ONE: A CASE STUDY OF TWO URBAN PRIMARY  
SCHOOLS IN THE SHISELWENI REGION OF SWAZILAND.**

**By**

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**B.A Humanities, PGCE, M.Ed**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**In the College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**Supervisor: Professor A. Sheik**

**May 2018**

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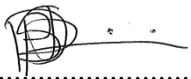
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**May 2018**

## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work contained in this thesis was completed by the author at the University of KwaZulu-Natal between September 2014 and May 2018. It is original work except where the due reference is made to other writing. The work will not, and has not been, submitted for any award to any other university for any diploma or any degree, except to the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Signature .....

Date:.....  
08/01/2019

## DECLARATION BY SUPERVISOR

As the candidate's supervisor, I agree to the submission of this thesis entitled:

*Exploring teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: A Case Study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni Region of Swaziland*

**Signature:** -----

Professor Ayub Sheik

08/01/2019

-----  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my two angels; Ntsikie and Baya. Girls, now you know that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give God the glory for sustaining me through this journey, I would not have made it on my own; Ebenezer!

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	Antiretroviral
CA	Continuous Assessment
EAL	English as an additional language
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELL	English Language Learners
EMM	English Medium Mainstream
ORF	Oral Reading Fluency
ESL	English as a second language
FPE	Free Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
ELL	English Language Learners
ICT	Information Computer Technology
IT	Information Technology
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IRA	International Reading Association report
L2	Second Language
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NRP	National Reading Panel
NICHHD	National Institute for Child Health and Human Development
NCC	National Curriculum Centre
NERCOM	National Education Review Commission

NDP	National Development Plan
NDS	National Development Strategy
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
SADC	South African Development Community
SMM	SiSwati Medium Mainstream
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCPM	Word Comprehension per Minute
ZAD	Zone of Actual Development
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development



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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Exploring teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: a case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni Region of Swaziland**

This research study sought to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. The main focus of the study was to establish what instructional practices teachers used in their literacy lessons in classrooms, why they used those instructional practices, and how they experienced the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One. The study was based on the premise that literacy was a social practice that was essential for life-long learning, therefore mastering sound literacy practices at the foundation phase was critical for learning and social wellbeing. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory was used as a lens to understand teachers' instructional practices in teaching Grade One literacy in their English classes. This research was a case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, and it followed a qualitative approach. Three teachers from two urban schools were purposively sampled and were main participants in the study. The study utilised semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussions with teachers who had experience of teaching literacy in English in Grade One, and documents analysis for data collection. Data were analysed thematically using content analysis. The findings of the study showed that teachers' instructional practices reflected their lack of pedagogical knowledge for teaching literacy in English in the foundation phase.

The study also found that the challenges teachers experienced in the schools were mainly their rationale for the instructional practices; lack of pedagogical knowledge; lack of appropriate teaching materials for foundation phase learners; lack of early childhood education and lack of support for learners at home, and cultural and linguistic diversity of the learners. The study further showed that teacher resilience is important for teachers to thrive under trying school conditions; developing a positive attitude towards literacy teaching enabled teachers to develop strategies to improve literacy teaching and learning. The study recommends that government pay more attention to improving foundation phase education by posting qualified foundation phase teachers, and also to provide appropriate teaching-learning materials for effective literacy instruction.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MOTIVATION FOR AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

“All progress is born of inquiry. Doubt is often better than overconfidence, for it leads to inquiry and inquiry leads to invention”

(Hudson Maxim, 1853)

#### **1.1 Introduction**

The problem of literacy in the Swazi education system has been perennially a cause for concern. Many factors account for this shortcoming. Evidence suggests that some of the key factors that account for the high rate of continuous failure of learners include; lack of resources, lack of qualified teachers, poor instructional practices and lack of support generally (Dlamini; 2009; Hugo & Nieman, 2010; Mzimela, 2012; Ramdan, 2015). This study intends to consider these factors in relation to a specific problem; exploring teachers’ instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: a case study of two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. The study focused on Grade One teachers because their task is to provide a sound foundation for children’s future education. The research problem is as follows: in Swaziland, there is a high failure rate in Grade One; as a result, some learners spend many years at primary school, more than they ought to. The problem is further marked by the fact that some learners reach Grade Three not having mastered the basic skills of reading and writing and eventually they drop out of school at this level something that compromises learners’ future academic achievement. The researcher holds that the Grade One class is critical in the students’ academic life because it is a grade where most children define themselves as good or poor readers, (Gee, 2012). Literacy at this stage therefore should be prioritised.

As a language educator, the researcher holds the view that development of literacy skills is critical for every individual to function effectively in society. It is important to mention that there are various types of literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these include; digital literacy, media literacy, visual literacy, technological literacy, information literacy, and computer literacy (Werts, 2017). This research study will focus on foundational literacy, the basis for all the other forms of literacy. From an educational perspective, foundational literacy is generally associated with an individual’s ability to read, write and to make meaning.

According to Seligmann, (2012), foundational literacy is fundamental for teaching and learning, which includes reading, writing and technological development. In essence, the other forms of literacy are largely depended on foundational literacy which one develops at an early age. Khaliliaqdam (2014), on the other hand, sees literacy as knowledge of language and its effective use for social interaction. Khaliliaqdam (2014) argues that the most effective way for children to acquire literacy is through their use of language in a social context. This could be as a result of interaction with family members and later peers, a view also held by socio-cultural theorists (Freire & Macedo, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978; Dyson, 2013; Lantolf, 2000; Daniels, Cole & Wertsch, 2007).

Literacy, in the context of this study refers to the ability to listen, speak, think, read and write meaningfully at school and for everyday functioning. That being the case, the development of literacy which is said to begin at birth with language development, as a result of interaction with parents and caregivers, plays a crucial role in the development of children's foundational literacy (Bornfreund, 2012). When children begin school, teachers join in as key players in their literacy development. As literacy is the core and foundation for learning and teaching, the elementary school years become critical for children's foundational literacy development. This idea is supported by Joubert, Bester, Meyer and Evans (2015) who hold that proper language and literacy teaching should be the focus of teachers in the foundation phase. Consequently, teachers' instructional practices become critical in shaping children's literacy development in the foundation phase. A weak foundation of literacy in the early years results in poor functioning of the individual in the other forms of literacy. This study, therefore, addresses the area of literacy in English teaching and learning in the foundation phase in the geographic context of Swaziland. The focus in this study is teachers' instructional practices in Grade One in the teaching of literacy in the English language.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

Practitioner experience and existing literature have shown that the problem of literacy in the foundation phase emanates from poor instructional practices (Joubert, Bester, Meyer & Evans, 2015; Bornfreund, 2012). This study intends to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English with a particular focus on Grade One. The researcher envisages that an exploration of the teachers' instructional practices will offer insight into the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase.

As a teacher educator, the researcher supports the view that literacy is the foundation for learning the world over. Renowned researchers in the area of literacy teaching and learning agree that a strong literacy foundation is essential for children to be successful in any academic subjects and life in general (Ahmed, 2011; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-MacDonald, Morrow Tracey Baker, Brooks, Cronin Nelson & Woo, 2001) In more recent research, Lesaux (2013, p. 3) supports this claim by saying that “children’s early literacy skills are a foundation for all their academic efforts and are closely linked to their health and wellbeing.” In essence, literacy is the base upon which most learning and teaching is built. Specialised personnel are needed to lay a strong literacy foundation. However, in Swaziland where this study is situated, teachers who teach Grade One are not trained to teach at the foundation phase. These teachers were only trained to teach from the intermediate phase, but they are made to teach from Grade One to Grade Seven. The first qualified foundation-phase teachers graduated with a Diploma in Early Childhood Education in 2016 but, to date, the government has still not employed them and only the private sector employs these teachers in private schools.

In addition, the *World Bank Swaziland Literacy Rate (2010) Report* shows that only 87.47% of children above the age of 15 are literate, 12.53% of children are illiterate and often times are victims of poor health, unemployment and crime. From this report, the researcher understands that mastering literacy in the early years of school helps to give children a strong foundation for lifelong learning, which has the potential to curb serious social problems such as unemployment and crime that are associated with failure to complete school on time. This view is corroborated by Chowdhury (1995) who states that literacy combats poverty, improves health and promotes social development. He further says;

“The spread of literacy has emerged as a major factor in economic and social development. In fact, the linkages between education, health and nutrition are mutual and complementary. The strong linkages between education, health, nutrition and reduced fertility results in synergies, which can transform vicious cycles of poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and diseases into virtuous cycles of learning and health, equality and sustainable development p. 6.”

According to Chowdhury (1995), literate people are more aware of their health and nutritional status and are more likely to utilise social services in their communities than illiterate people. In essence, literacy also has non-market benefits to individuals and society at large.

Dlamini, Dlamini, Matsebula, Gamedze, and Dlamini, (2016) share a similar view. They observed that inappropriate approaches to literacy teaching in the foundation phase lays an unstable foundation which would impinge on learners' ability to further their education as expected.

A study by Hernandez (2011) shows that children who did not read well by the end of the Third Grade were four times more likely not to complete high school with their counterparts who could read well by the end of the Third Grade. Other researchers support the view that mastering the basic literacy skills in the early years of school is fundamental in ensuring a smooth progression of learners from one grade level to the next (Banai, & Yifat, 2012; Butlin, 2011; Hugo, 2008). Hernandez (2011) further argues that failure to complete high school on time is closely linked to poor health, unemployment and crime. This is also true for Swaziland (where this study is based) On the same note, Magagula (2015) observed that in Swaziland, 25% of learners enrolled at primary school are unable to complete their primary school education, and 50% completed primary schools after many years, some taking up to 12 years to complete primary school which ordinarily should take seven years. These learners are said to struggle with literacy skills in the foundation phase and cannot proceed to the next class as literacy is critical for learning all subjects and academic success in the future (Magagula (2015).

The researcher also observed that currently, Swaziland's education system is still battling with the implementation of a clearly defined and common Early Childhood Education Programme (ECE) (Dlamini, *et al.*, 2016). Government policies show that the ECE programme exists, but in terms of implementation, it is still wanting. Mundia (2007) states that one of the major challenges for Early Childhood programmes in Swaziland is the low participation rate as only 30% of age-eligible children participate in ECE programme due to its high cost. The low participation rate of children in early childhood education and in the development programme could be one factor that accounts for the high repetition rate in Grade One.

The practical implementation of the ECE programme in Swaziland is contradictory to what government policy says it is. For instance, the Ministry of Education and Training in a document entitled: *Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education (2016, p.19)* states that foundation phase education, which begins in Grade zero, is critical to bring a smooth transition that links pre-school with primary school. This grade is also critical in providing a common starting point for all learners. However, in practice, Grade Zero has still

not been introduced in public schools. As a result, there is a great deal of learning disparity in the learners who enrol in Grade One. Teachers, who are themselves not specialists in foundation phase education, are faced with a huge responsibility to introduce these learners to literacy in contemporary English skills.

The diverse challenges that surround foundation phase education in Swaziland could be seen to account for the learners' poor performance in literacy in the foundation phase. Consequently, there is a dire need to address this challenge. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore teachers' instructional practices in English literacy at Grade One level. Three Grade One teachers from two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland were the main participants for this study; two teachers from one school and one teacher from the other school. The teacher from the latter school teaches both the classes of Grade One in the school. The researcher envisaged that this study will show how teachers engaged with literacy in English in Grade One in Swaziland and reflect upon effective instructional practices in teaching literacy in the foundation phase. The study will also provide an understanding of the contextual dynamics involved in the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase in the case schools.

### **1.3 Education system in Swaziland**

Swaziland is a landlocked country between South Africa and Mozambique. The majority of the approximately 1.4 million people speak one common first language, siSwati. English, on the other hand, is used as a second official language. In short, siSwati and English operate concurrently in Swaziland and are said to be on par with each other in terms of status (*Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland, 2005*). However, in practice, English is afforded a higher status in the country as it is used as a medium of instruction in the education system from Grade Three up to tertiary level. Also, it is a language of the judiciary, and commerce, as well as the language for international communication (*National Education Review Commission (NERCOM) (1985)*).

The researcher has observed that due to economic development, Swaziland is quickly becoming a heterogeneous country with more languages being used by her inhabitants. A large number of people from different African countries such as Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, as well as those of Arab origin, now live in Swaziland in significant numbers mainly as investors, (Terdiman, 2013). These people come to Swaziland mainly for employment and business opportunities. The majority of these immigrants

subsequently apply for permanent residency. The researcher also observed that the majority of immigrants are clustered in the cities and towns of the small country that has a surface area of approximately 17 000 square kilometres. In addition, Dube and Lubben, (2011), observed that Swaziland is faced with an increased rural-urban migration of people in search of employment opportunities. This scenario, therefore, has created an increased demand for essential services such as health facilities and schools.

The influx of foreign nationals into Swaziland and the rural-urban migration has resulted in the country's urban schools having learners of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The current situation is such that in most public schools, learners are studying English as a first additional language. There is, therefore, an unresolved argument that English is in actual fact taught more as a foreign language than as a second language (Dlamini, 2009). Teachers of literacy in English, themselves as second-language speakers of English language, have the responsibility to develop a sound literacy foundation in these diverse learners. This is based on the fact that most teachers employed in government primary schools are Swazis either by birth, marriage or naturalisation (Swaziland Education sector policy, 2011).

Swaziland recognizes the value of education for the socio-economic development of the country. This is clearly articulated in its mission statement on the education system: "to provide relevant, quality and affordable education and training opportunities for the entire populace of the kingdom of Swaziland in order to develop all positive aspects of life for self-reliance, social and economic development, and global competitiveness" (*The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy, 2011, p. 1*). The education of Swaziland is controlled by legal government documents: *the 2005 Constitution, the Education Act of 1981 and the Swaziland Free Primary Education (FPE) Act of 2010*.

The structure of formal school education covers seven and five years, with seven years at primary school and five years at secondary school. Learners begin formal education in Grade One as the pre-school education that prepares children for formal learning is still not compulsory.

The next chapter discusses the education system of Swaziland in detail together with the language-in-education policy.



#### **1.4 Literacy problems in the foundation phase in Swaziland**

The background and the section on the education system of Swaziland stated above shows that Swaziland is faced with a number of problems in its system of education notably the problems that engulf the foundation phase of education. The main problem in the foundation phase is that most learners who begin Grade One are not ready for school since pre-school education is still not compulsory though education policies state clearly that this is an important phase in the education cycle. According to *The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011)*, the mandate of Early Childhood Education is to develop children's health and personalities in preparation for school. The policy further states that, "failure to invest in the early cognitive development of children requires disproportionate investment in remedial actions in later years but cannot recover the position" (*The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy, 2011, p. 27*). This means that poor investment in children's early years of schooling can be very costly in the later years both to the child and the parent, as resources will be wasted in trying to mend the weak background.

Moreover, exposure to Early Childhood programmes boosts the cognitive and social development of the learner needed for successful schooling (Barnett, 2011; Castro, Paez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011), and it is evident that lack of this exposure inhibits the child's cognitive and social development. This is supported by many researchers in literacy teaching and learning, who agree that strong literacy skills in the foundation phase are critical for the development of reading proficiency and lifelong learning (Pressley, *et al.*, 2001; *The National Early Literacy Panel*; 2008; Banai & Yifat, 2012).

National reports show that the government of Swaziland has made education its priority since the inception of independence in 1968 (NERCOM, 1985: *The Education for All (EFA) 2015 National Review Report: Swaziland*). Many reforms have been undertaken to ensure that the country offers quality and relevant education to meet the needs of the people. *The Education for All 2015 National Review Report Swaziland* states that since the 1980s, Swaziland has been steadily reviewing her curriculum both at primary and secondary level in an effort to meet the Millennium development goals. However, such reviews have shown very little improvement in foundation phase education as high failure rates in literacy in English have continued to be a thorny issue with parents, learners and all stakeholders in the education system of the country.

One may argue that the limited support that government offers to early childhood education has minimal impact. The *Swaziland Education for All Review report (2015)* shows that less than 1% of the budget administered by the Ministry of Education and Training goes to ECE. This shows that the government is not committed to improving the situation in the foundation phase as the report also states that pre-school education was not a pre-requisite for children to enrol into Grade One (*The Swaziland Education for All Review report 2015, p. 2*). The report further states that government was not responsible for training, engaging and remunerating early childhood education teachers, the very people who are responsible for laying a solid literacy foundation for learners. In the researcher's view, government's status in relation to early childhood education is counterproductive to creating a strong foundation for Swaziland's children who are recipients of its education. As a result, the low achievement of learners in literacy in English is evident from the foundation phase through primary school. This has hindered learners from progressing from one grade level to the next and some eventually dropped out of school after failing literacy in English in the early years of school.

The low literacy rate in the foundation phase in Swaziland is evident throughout primary schools. *The National Education Profile, 2014* update shows that there is a high repetition rate of learners due to poor literacy in English in the first five years of school (17.9% in Grade One, 19.3% in Grade Two, 20.7% in Grade Three, 18.9% in Grade Four and 18.5% in Grade Five). The situation of low literacy becomes more pronounced at Grade Seven; a level where learners need to progress from primary to secondary school. The results show that most pupils who fail the National examination are said to have failed literacy in English. The Director of Education and Chairperson of the Examination Council of Swaziland in a press statement stated that; "English Language *linyeva*" (Swazi Observer, 2016, p. 3). This means that English Language is a 'thorn in the flesh' as it hinders most pupils from progressing from one grade level to the next. This statement was released after an analysis of the 2016 Grade Seven examination results showed that 46.80% of the total failures were those pupils who failed English language.

The Director of Education voiced a great concern about the high number of pupils who failed literacy in English in the national examinations. She remarked, "This is a national issue and we will need all the stakeholders to be involved in working out solutions even institutions of higher learning..." (Nhlabatsi, 2017, p. 3). This shows that the standard of literacy in English in Swaziland is still wanting, and more needs to be done to address the situation. This

researcher hopes that this study, that explores teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One, will reflect the current state of literacy in the foundation phase and identify practical guidance on effective instructional practices that may be useful in improving the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase in Swaziland, and Grade One in particular.

The researcher is of the view that teachers' knowledge of subject matter and pedagogic skills are critical for the success of the teaching and learning process. Initiatives to boost teachers' pedagogic knowledge are necessary to improve the education system of any country. This idea is based on the suggestions made by Shulman and Shulman (2004) that an important relationship exists between subject matter content, pedagogic content knowledge and curriculum knowledge. Shulman and Shulman (2004) also see teaching and learning as critical in developing the individual holistically. As a result, he argues that teaching should emphasize comprehension and reasoning, transformation and reflection. According to Shulman and Shulman (2004), these areas have been ignored in teaching and he advocated for a reform in teaching that will emphasize these aspects.

### **1.5 Statement of the problem**

The researcher's practitioner experience as a subject advisor indicates that the problems of literacy in English in the foundation phase in Swaziland stem from poor instructional practices in the classroom. The problem is that, in Swaziland, there is a high failure rate in Grade One. As a result, some learners spend more years at primary school than they should. *The National Education profile (2014)* update shows that repetition rate in Grade One in 2014 was at 17.9%, with a 29% dropout rate. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that some learners reach Grade Three not having mastered the basic skills of reading and writing and some end up dropping out of school at this level. The 20.7% failure rate in Grade Three is evidence of the problems the learners experience in literacy learning and is something that compromises their future academic achievement. This is counterproductive to the view that a strong literacy foundation is the cornerstone for education and economic development for all nations. Researchers agree that children who acquire strong foundational literacy in their early years are more likely to progress well academically than children who fail to develop literacy in the early years (Barnett, 2011; Castro, Paez, Dickinson & Frede, 2011). It is in view of the value of the foundation phase in the education cycle that the researcher developed interest in studying the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. The reason

for the focus on the Grade One class is that this is the level where most learners in Swaziland begin their education in public schools. The researcher wanted to understand what teachers do in their teaching of literacy in English classrooms, why they do what they do and how they experienced the teaching of literacy in English to the diverse Grade One learners.

## **1.6 The Gap**

The search of the literature showed that there are very few studies on the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase in Swaziland (Dlamini, 2009; Mbatha, 2002). This is a cause for concern since, just like many developing countries, Swaziland is battling with learners' poor literacy development in the foundation phase. The few studies that are available do not particularly address teachers' instructional practices. For instance, Dlamini (2009) conducted an ethnographic study of four young children's early language and literacy development, in an attempt to establish the literacy, language and communicative practices these children brought from home to school and vice versa, and the effect of the exchange of sites on the children's development and schooling. Dlamini's study was particularly focused on the learners and how they developed literacy as a result of interaction with parents or care givers and the teachers at school.

Mbatha (2002) on the other hand, looked at how two approaches to language teaching impinged on learners' performance in English language in Grade One, in Swaziland's schools. Mbatha's study was broad in the sense that it focused on an analysis and evaluation of Language-in-education policy application in the classroom. The study also solicited parents' views on their beliefs and attitudes towards the two approaches used in the Grade One classroom. The teachers' instructional practices were however, overshadowed by the other aspects that her study explored.

To date, no researcher has looked specifically into teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the foundation phase in the context of Swaziland. This study, therefore, aims to address that gap as it focuses, as already declared, on teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. The unique contribution of this study is that it provides a clear picture for analysis and understanding on what actually goes on in Grade One literacy in English classrooms in the case schools studied. This study adds to the few studies in Swaziland that have addressed the issue of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase.

### **1.7 Focus and purpose of the study**

The broad purpose of the study was to explore, analyse and understand teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. Three Grade One teachers were the main participants for this study. These teachers were from two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. The main issue of concern was the teachers' instructional practices in the Grade One literacy in the English class. The research study focused on the literacy practices of the teachers, why they engage in those literacy practices and how they experience their engagement with Grade One literacy in English learners. In the context of Swaziland, most learners in the Grade One classrooms are at school for the very first time due to low participation rate in early childhood education (*National Curriculum Framework for General Education, 2016*).

The researcher envisages that this study will unveil how literacy in English in Grade One is taught in the case schools; what teachers do in their literacy classrooms as they meet learners from different socio-economic backgrounds, the rationale for their practices and their experiences. The significance of this study, therefore, was to unearth an area of research in the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase in Swaziland.

### **1.8 Rationale**

This section outlines the rationale for this study, and the potential contribution that this study may have. The main reason for the researcher's focus on the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase is because, globally, literacy is identified as the most vital ingredient for academic success. However, *the Swaziland Education for All Review Report (2015)* reports from the Ministry of Education and Training shows that there is a high rate of repetition in Grade One, which leads to some learners dropping out of school before they master basic literacy skills.

Moreover, national reports such as the *Swaziland Education for All Review Report (2015)* and the *World Vision Education Technical Approach Plan, (2013)* show that Swaziland faces numerous challenges in the education sector. These include lack of teaching and learning resources in the schools, inadequate training of teachers in important aspects of education such as literacy, numeracy and life skills. The effect is that the teachers cannot impart the core skills to learners. Also, poor participation of age-eligible learners in early childhood

programmes, and high rates of failure in Grade One are challenges that undermine the quality of education in Swaziland.

The teacher who is directly involved with the learners is faced with the task of executing his or her duties regardless of the numerous challenges. This is because the teacher is seen as one of the important players who can make a difference to improve learner achievement. This is supported by Hattie (2012) who argues that excellence in teaching is the most significant factor that influences students' achievement in school. Farstrup (2002) corroborates this view and maintains that the art of teaching is grounded in the teacher's experience, talent, insight and the decisions he or she takes about the students entrusted to his or her care. Also, teachers are believed to assist learners in adapting to multicultural classes and to support their oral communication (Beck, 2007).

In addition, reports from the *Examination Council of Swaziland between 2013 and 2016* show that a large number of learners who fail the Grade Seven National Examination display low literacy skills in their academic work, an indication that they did not master literacy in English in the foundation phase. The poor mastery of basic literacy skills in the early years has long-lasting effects on the learners and the impact is felt increasingly as they continue with the grades. Their chances of mastering other skills become narrower due to poor mastery of literacy in the foundation phase, (Allington, 2002; Moats, 2009; Barnett, 2011; Lesaux (2013).

Tellez and Waxman (2006, p.1) clearly stated that Literacy in English is fundamental to achievement in every academic subject—and to educational and economic opportunities beyond schooling. That being the case, effective teaching and learning becomes critical, especially in the foundation phase to ensure that the much desired educational and economic success of learners is accomplished. The statement made by Tellez and Waxman (2006) is in line with declarations by world organisations such as *The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2004)* that explains literacy as the “ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts” (*UNESCO, 2004, p.21*). This then renders literacy as a goal to be achieved by all nations as opposed to being a skill that one can learn voluntarily. A similar idea is held by Willis and Harris (2000, p.76) who state that education and literacy are fundamental human rights. Education being a fundamental right means that all individuals are entitled to education regardless of race, religion and socio-economic

background. Moreover, quality education that will open academic and economic doors for learners anywhere in the world is a global concern.

*The Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report Policy Paper 07 of (2015)* addressed the crisis in early grade teaching and it states that at the heart of children's learning is teacher knowledge and abilities. However, the report shows that teachers are insufficiently prepared to teach, resulting in many children missing basic literacy skills at primary school. This is shown by the high number of pupils who complete early grades of primary school that are unable to read or are reading below their age level. This is of great concern as the early years of school are critical for acquiring basic literacy for lifelong learning. The EFA (2015) report states that if children miss basic literacy skills in the early years of school, their chances of acquiring other skills in subsequent grades are slim. Swaziland, where this study is located, faces a similar challenge in the education sector. Learners show low achievement in literacy skills in the foundation phase and end up dropping out of school before acquiring these literacy skills.

The EFA (2015) report also shows that poor level of learning at lower grades of primary school is the major cause of a high number of children dropping out of school before they acquire basic literacy skills. This is not surprising as children who are unable to read and write in the first three years of schools are unlikely to be committed to education and have little chances of benefiting from a higher primary school grade. That being the case, it is very important for Grade One teachers to ensure that children master basic literacy skills to reduce the high number of children who fall victims of failure in Grade One and become school dropouts in the early years of school due to poor performance in literacy in English. This therefore, becomes the pretext and justification for this study.

### **1.9 Research aim and objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore teachers' instructional practices in the Literacy in English class focusing on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, and the rationale for the teachers' practices as well as their experiences of teaching literacy in Grade One.

The objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Study the instructional practices with which teachers engage, in their Grade One literacy in English classrooms;

- 2) Establish the teachers' rationale for the use of these instructional practices in their Grade One literacy in English classrooms;
- 3) Establish the teachers' experience of teaching literacy in English in Grade One; and
- 4) Find out reasons for them teaching literacy in English in Grade One the way they do.

### **1.10 Research questions**

This research study was guided by the following questions and it aimed to answer these questions:

- What instructional practices do teachers use in the Grade One literacy in English classrooms?
- Why do teachers use these instructional practices?
- How do teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in the Grade One classrooms?
- Why do they experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do?

### **1.11 Significance of the study**

The study was important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it contributes to current knowledge of the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase, particularly in Swaziland as a developing country. Secondly, it brings recommendations for action to different stakeholders in the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland. The goal of these recommendations is to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase, the Grade One class in particular. Hopefully the study will provide some useful insights for policymakers in the country as it makes them aware of the state of literacy teaching and learning in the case schools. They would be enlightened on the plight of teachers who teach literacy in English in the foundation phase. Moreover, the findings should help primary school teachers gain insight into effective strategies that teachers in the case schools use in their Grade One literacy in English classes. In addition, the findings should help parents to understand clearly the role they need to play in supporting their children to develop strong literacy skill in English, especially in their early years of school. More importantly, the findings offer practical guidance to all relevant stakeholders in the Ministry of Education and Training on ways to improve literacy in English teaching and learning in



the foundation phase. A study that particularly explores teachers' instructional practices in Grade One, focusing on urban schools has not been undertaken in Swaziland, so this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in the area of literacy in English teaching and learning in the foundation phase, the Grade One class in particular.

### **1.12 Scope of the study**

This study focused on two primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. As a result, the findings will only be applicable to these two primary schools chosen and the researcher has no intention of generalising these teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One to other schools. The researcher is particularly interested in finding out what instructional practices the teachers from the sample schools engage in and why they engage in these practices. The researcher also wants to discover how they experience the teaching of literacy in English to Grade One learners. The researcher is optimistic that exploring teachers' instructional practices may reveal the actual state of literacy in English in the case schools and, in turn, give practical guidance on ways to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. It is worth mentioning that, though the findings of this study may not be generalised, since this is a case study design, the result may offer practical guidance to education practitioners on effective strategies in the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. These education stakeholders, teachers, parents, inspectors, school administrators and curriculum designers will get an insight of what actually occurs in the field. The researcher is hopeful that by addressing the issue of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase, this may improve the low achievement of learners' in literacy in English in Grade One.

### **1.13 Limitations of the study**

The study was qualitative in nature and used a case study design and this was a major limitation as the findings cannot be generalised (Yin, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 2000, Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). As the study followed a case study design, a small number of participants were purposively sampled based on their experiences of teaching literacy in English in the foundation phase. Only three Grade One teachers were interviewed and observed in their literacy teaching in English classrooms and the focus group discussions had four to six participants. Another limitation was that the study focused on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland because the purpose was to get a rich, deeper

understanding of the phenomenon as opposed to generalising the findings. Consequently, the findings were exclusively applicable to the case schools.

#### **1.14 Delimitations of the study**

The study was delimited to the exploration of teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. The study was also delimited to urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, the rationale was that the Shiselweni region had only three urban schools and the third one was used for piloting the study. Another delimiting factor for this study was that it focused on the Grade One class and only teachers who had an experience of teaching literacy in English at this level were deliberately chosen to participate. This was because first-hand experience of teaching literacy in English in Grade One was needed for the data. In addition, the study was delimited to interviews, observations, focus group discussions and document analysis. Finally, for data analysis, the study was delimited to content analysis and the thematic approach was followed to make sense of the all the information collected from the different data collection instruments.

#### **1.15 Organisation of the study**

The chapters that constitute this thesis are as follows:

**Chapter One** gives an overview of the rationale for conducting this empirical research. The chapter presents the following aspects: background to the study, the Education system of Swaziland, problems facing the foundation phase in Swaziland, the statement of the problem, the gap in the foundation phase research in Swaziland, the focus and purpose of the study, rationale, scope of the study, as well as the research objectives and questions that this study seeks to find empirical answers to. Also included in this chapter are the limitations and delimitations of the study, and the organisational structure of the entire thesis.

**Chapter Two** gives the general background of education in Swaziland, and the language in school policy in Swaziland. Also included is the structure of the education system in Swaziland as stated in the *Education Sector Policy (2011)* and different initiatives that the government, through the Ministry of Education and Training, has embarked on in an effort to improve the system of education in the country.

**Chapter Three** presents a literature review for the study and this comprises themes that are critical in early literacy teaching and learning. These include literacy as a global

phenomenon, the role of the teacher (and Grade One teacher in particular), practices of effective teachers of literacy and the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for the teaching and learning of literacy, including effective teaching approaches in the foundation phase. Also included in this chapter are factors that account for teachers' instructional practices.

**Chapter Four** presents a detailed theoretical framework that underpins this study. The theoretical framework is basically a tool used in exploring the phenomenon and also used as an analytical tool to explain the findings of the study. An overview of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory was given together with the key concepts that define the socio-cultural theory.

**Chapter Five** presents an outline of the research design and methodology for the study. This includes the paradigm the study is based on; the case study design, data collection instruments (semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, lesson observation, and document analysis. Also included are data analysis procedures and ethical measures the study followed. A rationale for the research design the study followed is also presented.

**Chapter Six** presents the data gathered for the study and provides a discussion of the findings. A summary of the main findings is presented guided by the research questions and theoretical framework.

**Chapter Seven** presents the summary of the study and the main findings. Conclusions from the study are also presented showing implications for education policy and practice. The area that this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge of teaching and learning of literacy in English is also presented in this chapter. Important recommendations based on the findings of the study are presented as well as areas for further research.

## **1.16 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented a detailed background and rationale for the study. The background clearly shows the genesis of the problem that this study addresses. The value of the study is derived from the conclusions that are drawn from it and the recommendations made based on understanding of the realities involved in the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. The contextual dynamics of the whole process of literacy teaching in the foundation phase, that result in the current problem in Swaziland, were used to make recommendations. This research study adds to the existing body of knowledge in the area of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The next chapter presents the general background of the education system of Swaziland, the language-in-school policy in

Swaziland and initiatives that have been implemented to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in the country.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SWAZI EDUCATION SYSTEM IN CONTEXT

#### 2.1 Introduction

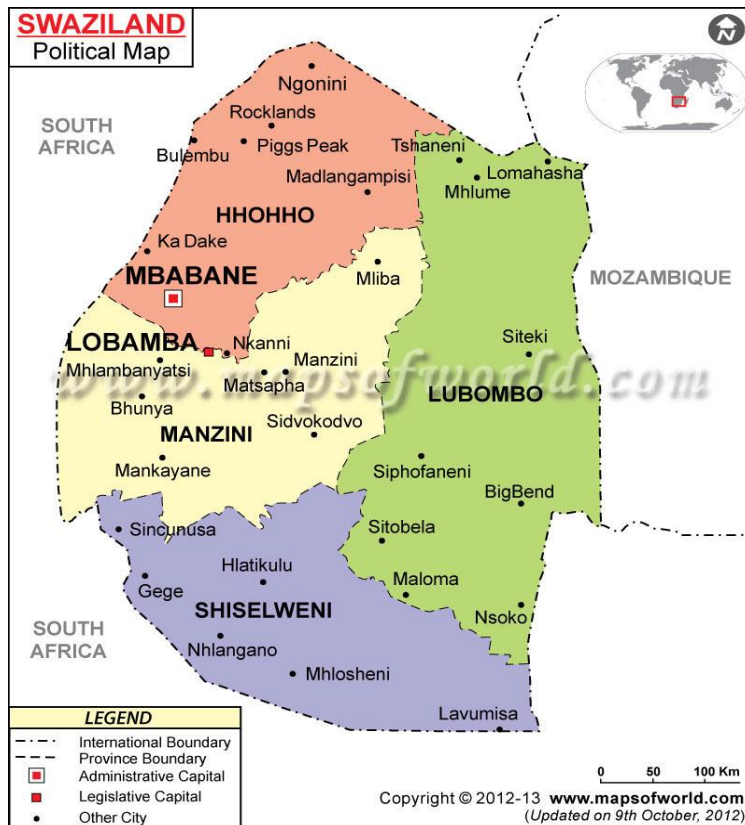
This chapter is a brief consideration and overview of the history of education in Swaziland, its structure, initiatives undertaken to improve the education system and the language-in-education policy. It is important to consider the history of education in Swaziland and the general structure of the education system to show how the problem addressed in this study relates to the education system as a whole. The focus of this study is on literacy in English teaching in the foundation phase and in the Grade One class in particular. In most cases, in Swaziland, the Grade One class is where all learners in public schools begin formal education regardless of their socio-economic background. *The Swaziland, Education for All Review report (2015, p.2)* states that pre-school education was not a pre-requisite for children to enrol into Grade One and the government was not responsible for training, engaging and remunerating early childhood education teachers. This implies that early childhood education in Swaziland was being handled by inadequately-trained teachers. Based on this state of affairs, the Grade One class becomes a crucial level in the education system of Swaziland.

#### 2.2 An overview of Swaziland: geographically

Swaziland is a landlocked country located on the South-Eastern part of Africa in between South Africa and Mozambique. It is a monarchical country and one of the former British colonies in Africa (Hamid, Bisschoff & Botha, 2015; Moudern, 1990; Matsebula, 1980). Its size is approximately 17,200 square kilometres and it is one of the smallest countries in Southern Africa. It is a lower-middle income country with an estimated population of 1.363 people and is rated number 153 in the list of countries and dependency by population. Swaziland is a predominantly rural country as 73.3% of the population is rural and only 26.7% is urban, with about 5% annual rural-urban migration contributing to the rise of the urban population (Makhala, Mokaeane & Poloki, 2005, p. 2).

Hamid, Bisschoff and Botha (2015, p.129) state that Swaziland has four administrative regions namely; Shiselweni, Hhohho, Manzini and Lubombo. Each of these regions has unique climatic conditions which determine the kind of agricultural activities in which the people are engaged. Mbabane is the capital and administrative city of Swaziland, where most of the country's cabinet administration is centralised, and Lobamba is the royal and

legislative capital. The Shiselweni region where this study is situated has 17.9% urban population (*Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2014*). The figure below shows the political map of Swaziland that depicts its geographical location and the four regions as described above. The study is focused in the Shiselweni region, in two urban primary schools in Nhlangano town.



**Figure 2.1** The political map of Swaziland. [www.mapsoftheworld.com](http://www.mapsoftheworld.com) (Retrieved: 07/01/2018).

Figure 2.1 shows that Swaziland is a landlocked country between South Africa and Mozambique. These two countries are important to the economic stability of Swaziland as they share important resources such as rivers and border posts. Moreover, since the colonial period, many Swazis have worked in South Africa as migrant labourers on the mines and farms (Matsebula, 1980; Booth, 1997).

### 2.3 Socio-economic conditions of the people of Swaziland

It is important to mention that Swaziland is still a developing country, categorised among lower-middle income countries as a high number of able-bodied people, especially females, (about 29%) are unemployed and live in abject poverty (Sukati, 1994; *World Bank, 2010*).

Nindi and Odhiambo (2015) reported that one major contributing factor to poverty in Swaziland was the high income inequalities that prevail. According to Sukati, (2013), in 2010, 50% of the total income in Swaziland went to the richest 20% of the population. This high income inequality impinged on various social and economic sectors including the education sector. Children of the privileged received the best education and those of the underprivileged experienced the realities of the socio-economic injustice in the country.

Khoza (1999, p.134) noted a clear linkage between rural and urban poverty in Swaziland. He observed that the rural-urban migration of people in search of jobs and other income-enhancing opportunities transferred rural poverty into the urban areas resulting in an increase of low-income peri-urban settlements which exacerbated urban poverty in Swaziland. This situation impacted negatively on various social services such as health facilities and schools. The available schools in the urban centre experienced high enrolment of children who lived in abject poverty in the peri-urban areas. The Nhlangano town where this study is based is also affected by urban poverty. The children enrolled in the urban schools are victims of this socio-economic condition.

Moreover, Swaziland is rated among the countries with high Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Aids) prevalent in the world. By 2017 adult prevalence was at 27.2 % with 80% on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment and 64% of children on ARV treatment (*UNAIDS 'AIDSinfor', 2017*). This situation has rendered most children vulnerable because they are orphaned. The UNAIDS, 2017 Data book shows that in 2016, about 3900 people died of aids-related illness. As a result, 24% of children aged 0-17 years are orphaned and an overwhelming 45% lost one or both parents to aids-related illness. The situation impacted heavily on the education system of the country because most school-going children are probably vulnerable to the pandemic.

The researcher is of the view that teachers themselves are no exception. The high HIV/AIDS prevalence in Swaziland means that there is the likelihood that some teachers are living with the virus and or are also caring for HIV-positive family members. The teachers who are faced with this social problem have the duty to teach literacy in English effectively to young learners whom about 24% are weak due to health challenges that come with HIV and its treatment (*UNAIDS 'AIDSinfor', 2017*).

A study by Motsa and Morojele (2017) corroborates the report of the *National Plan of Action for children (2015)*. The study shows that in Swaziland, school-going children undergo

severe conditions due to the HIV pandemic and poverty. The effects of the high HIV/AIDS pandemic in Swaziland has led to poverty and rendered many children vulnerable as some live in child-headed families under very trying conditions and the school expects these vulnerable children to perform in the same way as children who were not exposed to the trying conditions and their plight is overlooked by teachers and their privileged peers.

The researcher has observed that, although government introduced a fund for orphaned and vulnerable children in 2003, these children still experienced challenges that make their school experiences unpleasant and upsetting. In the researcher's view, the children's wellbeing impacted negatively on the education system of the country as learners lacked essential materials for school such as uniforms and money for transport. Sukati, (2013, p.2), for instance, reported that vulnerable children, regardless of age, have to travel long distances to school and arrive there hungry and tired. This situation is experienced both in the rural and urban contexts as urban poverty is rife in Swaziland.

Marope (2010) reports that the Shiselweni region, which is the focus area of this study has a high failure and dropout rate especially at primary school. Moreover, this region is reported to have a high number of unqualified teachers at primary school compared to the other regions in the country. In the researcher's opinion, the social and economic conditions that prevail in Swaziland have the potential to influence the quality of education and it is in view of the current socio-economic condition in Swaziland that the researcher developed an interest to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the foundation phase and their rationale for practice that may contribute practical guidance in solving the social problem of poor literacy in the foundation phase in Swaziland.

## **2.4 The historical background of the education system of Swaziland**

This section discusses the historical background of the education system of Swaziland. Mazibuko, (2013, p.211) states that the history of Swaziland shows that before the introduction of western education, Swaziland, as an African traditional society, had her own traditional education. The homestead was regarded as the main social unit where continued education occurred from infancy to adulthood. The home and the community had a responsibility to educate children to perform their roles effectively and efficiently in society. The community instilled a good way of life in the young people and it was culturally-based. The purpose of the traditional education was to prepare each child for their adult roles: it ensured that the youth grew up to perform their roles in a satisfactory way in the community



and society at large. Booth (1997) in her records of the educational history of Swaziland holds that from the age of six, boys were separated from their mothers to be trained by the youth and older men in the different roles they needed to play at home and in the community. For instance, they were trained to herd cattle while girls remained with their mothers to learn how to perform women's duties such as weaving mats, cooking and raising babies. This kind of education instilled both practical life responsibilities for males and female children and also moral and cultural values they had to uphold as the Swazi people. Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2003) affirm that African societies had their traditional education which extended from the womb to the tomb.

The Western style of education was introduced in 1902; the aim was to a large extent to cater for the European children who were then permanent residents of Swaziland. This kind of education segregated black children just like the education which was offered for white children in South Africa in the Transvaal province. In 1920, western education became free and compulsory for all European children. In 1924, a very small number of Swazi children enrolled in Christian mission schools, and the curriculum was centred on agricultural and manual training (Matsebula, 1980).

Matsebula, (1980) states that it was only in 1929 that Swazis started to be directly involved in issues relating to education through the Swaziland Progressive Association. In the years just before independence in 1968, Swaziland rejected the racially segregated system of education and implemented a racially integrated system of education. This change saw an emphasis on academic subjects such as languages and arithmetic on the curriculum instead of manual labour. After independence, the National Education Commission (1975) crafted new guide lines on the education system; that it should reflect Swazi life and custom and include practical subjects in addition to the academic subjects that were already in the curriculum. In his research on Swazi history, Matsebula (1980) observed that, although Swaziland is a landlocked country between South Africa and Mozambique, her education system does not reflect that of her neighbouring countries. Instead, it was based on the education system of her colonisers, the British. It is, therefore, not surprising that the education system reflects a blend of traditional Swazi culture and British tradition as formal education in Swaziland is originally a British phenomenon (Matsebula (1980; Moudern, 1990).

Researchers who traced the history of education in Swaziland such as Booth (1997), Moudern, (1990) and Matsebula, (1980) claim that the development of Western schooling in

Swaziland by 1968 was administered by one structure and a common syllabus was offered in all schools. An interesting aspect noted was that though education was limited in quantity and quality to female children in most African countries, in Swaziland, some girls did have access to education, though not on a large scale. These researchers observed that during the colonial period, parents felt alienated from the school as an institution in the country, but after independence, the attitude changed.

Soon after independence, the government of Swaziland drafted policies that clearly articulated the value of education to the people. *The Post-Independence National Development Plan of (1969, p. 47)* stated that the long-term goal of education and training is that primary education should be free and universal. However, Swaziland has not been able to achieve this goal until 2010 when free primary and universal education was first introduced in the country at Grade One and Grade Two levels respectively. Financial constraints have been cited as the main cause for Swaziland's failure to introduce (FPE). It took over forty years before it was eventually introduced. The *Imbokodvo Manifesto (1972)* document, further articulated the idea contained in the Post-Independence National Development Plan of (1969), that education was a right of every child and every citizen. Booth, (1997, p.433) affirms this idea and states that after independence, parents developed high professional aspirations for their children. They realized that there was a strong correlation between education and modern sector employment. The school was then seen as an institution for creating change in the general lives of the people. This change of attitude in terms of societal influence saw parents enrolling their children in schools. There was general agreement among scholars that one's social environment played a critical role in the development of positive attitudes and the home environment had the greatest influence on one's desire to attend school, progress well and use the knowledge acquired to make life better (Perry, 2012; Daniels *et al.*, 2007). Given the value of one's social environment in the development of positive attitudes towards learning, the current situation of most Swazi children; that of being orphaned and vulnerable, defeats this value.

*The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of 2014* reported that in 2007, enrolment rate of age-eligible children in Swaziland's primary schools was 85%. However, after the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2010 at Grade One and Grade Two in all public schools, the enrolment rate increased by 32% for both male and female students. The MICS 2014 survey further shows that though the enrolment of children in Grade One increased, not all of them were ready for schools as 39.4% had not attended pre-school. Only

60.6% of children in Grade One had attended pre-school the previous year and were believed to be ready for school. This is based on the declaration of the *Education Sector Policy of (2011)* that states clearly that Early Childhood Education is important as it prepares children for school. Moreover, the Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education (2016, p.19) emphasizes this point. It states that foundation phase education, which begins in Grade zero, is critical to facilitating a smooth transition from preschool to primary school. This grade is also critical in providing a common starting point for all learners.

This drastic increase of enrolment in the public schools had implications for the education system of the country. It meant increased teacher-pupils ratio, inadequate infrastructure and inadequate supply of teaching-learning resources by government thus lowering the standard of education (Mushoriwa, Mlangeni & Kurebwa, 2016). Mushoriwa *et al.*, (2016) showed that the pressure of the introduction of FPE at Grade One and Grade Two in Swaziland was felt by the foundation phase teachers. They were the ones who had to teach in overcrowded classrooms with very limited teaching-learning resources. Using this background, that shows the socio-economic condition of Swaziland, this study, as declared earlier, seeks to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English at Grade One level in two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland.

## **2.5 The general goal of education in Swaziland**

*The Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education (2016)* states that the overall goal of general education in Swaziland is:

*To develop individuals for the realisation of a knowledge-based society which contributes to the eradication of poverty through promoting self-reliance, gender equity and improved health so as to foster global competitiveness and accelerated socio-economic growth with environmental sustainability while instilling responsible citizenship and maintaining moral and cultural values. (The Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education, 2016, p. 5)*

As an educator, the researcher understands that the goal of education for Swaziland is the backbone on which the curriculum framework is grounded. This educational goal for Swaziland also safeguards the interests of the citizens to ensure that they receive quality education that will make them competitive in the labour market and remain relevant in all aspects of life.

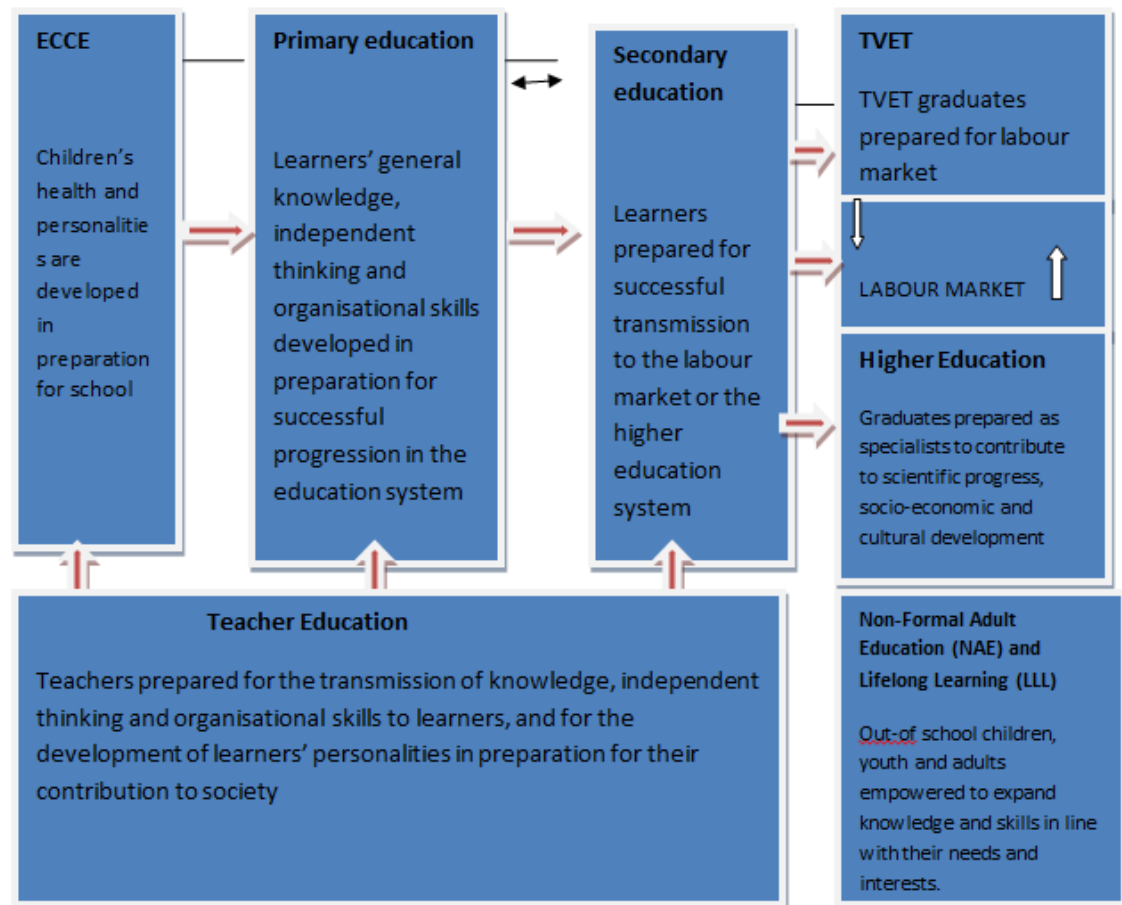
The idea of the main goal of education for Swaziland; that of preparing enlightened and productive citizens, was first articulated in the *National Development Plan (NDP, 1973)*, and since then Swaziland has not relented in ensuring that this main goal is achieved to the greatest extent possible. The goal of education for Swaziland is also stated in other government documents such as *the National Development Strategy (NDS, 1999)* and *the Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland (2005)*.

Based on this goal, the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase becomes a priority. The researcher is of the conviction that strong literacy education lays a solid ground for a child's education and general functionality in society. With the proper foundation, children should be able to use English effectively both in written and spoken discourse. Poor literacy grasp in the early years has a negative effect on the children's development as lifelong learning is strongly linked to a strong literacy foundation as discussed in detail in the previous chapter.

## **2.6 The general structure of education**

This section introduces the structure of the education system of Swaziland. *The Education Act (1981)* states that the education system of the country comprises primary education where formal instruction starts from Grade One to Grade Seven, and the secondary school education that begins from Form One to Form Five. However, recent reforms have seen a marked shift of focus to the elevation of the neglected early childhood and care education. In policy, the structure of the education system shows that education begins in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), and its mandate is to develop children's health and personalities in preparation for school. After formal school education, successful learners are expected to enrol at tertiary institutions where they are prepared for the labour market. In the *Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education (2016)*, the school system is now structured in these phases for primary and secondary education:

- Foundation Phase (Grade 0 and Grades 1-2);
- Middle Primary Phase (Grades 3-4);
- Upper Primary Phase (Grades 5-7);
- Junior Secondary Phase (Forms 1-3); and
- Senior Secondary Phase (4-5) and (Form 6 optional).



**Figure 2.2,** The general structure of the education system in Swaziland; (*Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for general Education*, 2016, p.17).

Figure 2.2 shows the general structure of education in Swaziland as presented in *the Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education* (2016, p.17). The focus of this research study from within this structure is the foundation phase, in particular, the Grade One class. The researcher finds the foundation phase critical in the education structure because the whole structure of education depends on it; a strong foundation ensures a successful progression in the education structure and a weak foundation cripples the structure.

## 2.7 Initiatives to improve literacy teaching and learning in Swaziland

The government of Swaziland, through the Ministry of Education and Training, introduced some programmes in an effort to curb the high failure rate and dropout at primary school level and the foundation phase in particular. These initiatives include the continuous assessment and the literacy-boost programme.

### **2.7.1 The Continuous Assessment (CA) programme in Swaziland**

The introduction of the Continuous Assessment (CA) at all primary schools in 1993 was the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Training to improve the quality of education, literacy instruction included. The rationale for the introduction of CA was that, if properly implemented, it would help teachers make an early diagnosis of learners' academic challenges. Teachers would identify learners who were struggling to meet the stipulated learning objectives and then bring in needed interventions such as remediation for those left behind and enrichment for those ahead. According to Peres-Johnson and Maynard (2007), early remediation significantly reduces the rate of repetition and dropouts and improves the education system of a country. Moreover, CA helps teachers identify more able learners and engage them in enriching activities that would increase learning outcomes.

Peres-Johnson and Maynard (2007, p.587) argue that if properly implemented, the CA programme could be an effective approach to improve the quality of education as it caters for the different learners' abilities. However, an evaluation of the programme shows that in Swaziland it failed to be established in the schools due to teachers' lack of clear understanding of the CA concept, inappropriate attitudes towards it and inadequate practices (Gule, 1999; Nsibandé & Modiba, 2012). The researcher is of the view that the failure of this initiative in the country also impacted negatively on literacy in English instruction and the continued poor achievement of learners in English shows that the foundation is still shaky. As a result, more research needs to be done to find lasting solutions.

### **2.7.2 The literacy boost programme**

Literacy teaching and learning has been among the major goals of education for Swaziland as literacy and education has been declared a fundamental human right by international organisations such *UNESCO Literacy Decade 2003-2013, United Nations, 2006*). One intervention that has made an effort to improve literacy performance in Swaziland is the Literacy Boost programme. This programme is a joint partnership between World Vision and Save the Children and its “*mandate is to help improve children's literacy achievement in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UNESCO Global and monitoring report 2013/2014)*”. The move to improve learners' performance in literacy is based on the fact that literacy unlocks the individual's potential to perform effectively in society. Moreover, a nation with a highly literate population is believed to be more economically-liberated than a nation with low number of literate people. *The UNESCO Global and monitoring report 2013/2014* also states

that failure to develop children's literacy in the early years hinders their academic progress in later years and further narrows their opportunities for economic development resulting in poverty and diseases as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Researchers such as Prinsloo (2008), and Jourbert, Bester, Meyer and Evans (2008) support the idea of the significance of a strong literacy foundation. Prinsloo (2008, pp. 7-8) believes that literacy reading achievement for children provides a baseline for their future learning achievement. On the same note, Jourbert *et al.*, (2008, p. 82), in their work on literacy in the foundation phase, emphasise the value of reading for literate individuals. They all see reading as one of the powerful ways of receiving information which is essential for language learning. That being the case, Swaziland also needs to prioritise literacy teaching and learning by welcoming interventions that aim to improve the low literacy rates at the foundation phase and, particularly, the high repetition rate in Grade One. It is hoped that this study will add to the body of literature in this regard.

*The UNESCO Global and monitoring report 2013/2014* further shows that there are three main components that the Literacy Boost programme focused on. The first one was reading assessment. Its aim was to measure children's reading levels, assess their needs in literacy learning and to assist schools and other relevant stakeholders to monitor children's progress. The second component of the literacy boost programme was teacher training. It focused on equipping teachers with strategies to integrate the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing into the curriculum. The programme further enabled the teachers to create a literacy-friendly classroom environment. The third component of the Literacy Boost programme deals with community action. It sought ways to involve parents and community members in children's learning, supporting children to develop a love for reading by creating materials that relate to their socio-cultural environment.

*The UNESCO Global and monitoring report 2013/2014* indicates that in a period of about six months, there has been some improvement in children's reading in countries where this project has been implemented. Swaziland is among these countries that has benefited from this global investment. The researcher hopes that from the teachers' instructional practices, she will gain more insight into the extent to which this intervention boosted literacy in English teaching and learning.

## 2.8 Language-in-education policy in Swaziland

Swaziland, just like many African countries is a former British colony. She attained her independence from the British in 1968 and is classified among the so-called English-speaking countries. One may argue that classifying Swaziland among the English-speaking countries is based on the fact that it is a former British protectorate and all her legal and economic enterprises are conducted in the English language. Zwane (2003, p.63) states that English was introduced as a subject in Swazi schools in 1904 because of its value in the operations of the country. The *Imbokodvo Manifesto* (1972) document also highlights the power of English in Swaziland's social, political and economic enterprises. It states that "siSwati and English will be official languages in Swaziland." *The Imbokodvo Manifesto* also declared English as the official medium of instruction in Swaziland's schools. One may argue that during the colonial rule, English was given a higher status than siSwati the mother-tongue. This shows the power and influence of English in different parts of the world.

Janks (2010, p.136) addresses the subject of *the power of English*. She states that English is used globally as a language of trade and its position was established by the rise of America into a superpower, rendering English a viable commodity for economic, technological and scientific use. Furthermore, the British council is said to have also played a major role to market English as a language for economic and political use. This is evident in the speech made by Pennycook the Minister of Education in England:

*English is a commodity in great demand all over the world...We are, therefore, looking at the language mainly as a valuable coveted export, which many nations are prepared to pay for...English is, moreover, an export which is likely to attract other exports - British advisers and technicians, British technological administrators of education, British plant and equipment and British capital investment* (Pennycook, 1994, p.155).

In Swaziland where this study is situated, siSwati and English are official languages and the *Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy* (2011) states that both languages have equal status in education. However, in practice these languages do not have equal status in the education system. English enjoys the privilege of a higher status than siSwati. Just like other Anglophone countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Malawi, English has an important role alongside the indigenous language, siSwati. It is used as the major vehicle for economic development and international trade and communication (Mordaurnt, 1990; Kamwangamalu & Moyo 2003). This means that all administrative, legal and economic activities are carried out in the English language. *The Swaziland Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English*



(1989) supports this scenario. It states that the use of both siSwati and English is of paramount importance because English is an international language and “serves as a medium of communication for official, commercial, diplomatic, technical and cultural exchanges with other countries and with the people of Africa” (*The Swaziland Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English* (1989, p.2). This means English is actually the language that connects Swaziland with the outside world.

The value of English in the education system of Swaziland was earlier articulated in *The Imbokodvo Manifesto*, (1972) later the *National Education Review Commission (NERCOM, 1985)* policy document. Both documents stated that siSwati will be the medium of instruction in Grade One and Grade Two only and from Grade Three up to tertiary level, English should be the medium of instruction. As policies are constantly reviewed, *The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011)* extended the use of siSwati as a medium of instruction to four years in primary school. This means teachers were at liberty to teach in siSwati in the first four years of school to explain where learners have difficulty in understanding, after which they were expected to use English as a medium of instruction. However, this policy exists only on paper. In practice, teachers often prefer English as the language of instruction the moment learners begin school. The researcher’s concern is that the teachers themselves are not highly proficient in English as they are also second-language speakers of English. In fact, they are known to use siSwati for daily communication (Dlamini, 2009).

The situation in Swaziland is that there is imbalanced bilingualism as public schools use both siSwati and English as a medium of instruction with an exception of private schools that use English as a medium of instruction. The privilege enjoyed by English emanates from the fact that it is an international language. It is also a language of technology. Moreover, people have always believed that English is a route to a white-collar job, without it, one is excluded from high profile jobs (Ferguson, 2012).

The value of English language in Swaziland’s education system is predominantly seen in the fact that it is a passing and failing subject from Grade One to senior secondary level; meaning, if a student failed to reach a minimum of 40% he or she is considered to have failed the whole examination and cannot proceed to the next level (Zwane, 2003, p.64). According to Zwane (2003), declaring English a passing or failing subject indirectly declared the language in education policy of the country. The value of sound literacy in the second language is further deepened by the fact that, from the researcher’s observation, in some

primary schools, proficiency in both spoken and written English is a requirement for enrolment into Grade One. This is evident from the interviews that prospective learners undergo before they can be enrolled into the schools. This practice has seen many prospective learners, especially those from under-privileged families suffering prejudice as they are rejected based on the fact that they have failed the interview. This is common practice in private schools and some public schools in the cities.

The policies used to guide the education system in the country show some bias in the use of languages. The rationale given for the teaching of English shows that it is highly valued and not mastering it at an early age has long-lasting effects on the child's career. For instance, *The Swaziland Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English (1989, p.2)* states that fluency in English enables students to perform better in all other subjects since most materials are printed in the English language for convenience and for international acceptability. This clearly shows that Swaziland regards English more highly than siSwati as a language of education.

Though English has a high status in Swaziland, Dlamini (2015, p.69) observed that the majority of rural children have minimal exposure to English before they enter school. The increase of urban poverty has also seen some children who live in the town suffer a similar plight as those children who live in the rural areas. This is because, local communities carry out their daily activities in siSwati, and no written text in either siSwati or English is accessible to the children until they begin school. Vygotsky (1978) explains clearly that the social setting of the learners influences their learning and in the same way shapes classroom practices. Consequently, if the learners begin school without much exposure to any text whether in siSwati or English, their learning will show some disparity from learners who have had exposure to written text in their social setting. This situation could explain the high failure rate in Grade One in most public schools.

Research of literature has shown that many African countries have been involved in the debate on the language-in-education policy. Lin and Martin, (2005) observed that the language-in-education policy is mainly informed by political ideology as opposed to educational concerns. The language-in-education policy debate has not only been for African states. Other non-African countries such as India and Iran have experienced a similar situation (Lin & Martin, 2005). In Africa, countries such as Malawi, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya and Botswana, to mention just a few, have had heated arguments over the language-in-

education policy, which informs the language of instruction in the schools. Malawi for instance, has come a long way, not without obstacles to craft the language-in-education policy (Kamwendo, 2008).

Kamwendo (2008) states that Malawi uses Chichewa as the language of instruction in the first four years of school (Grades 1-4) after which English becomes the medium of instruction until tertiary level. A similar situation applies in Botswana and Zambia where English is offered as a subject from Grade One, but not as the language of instruction. These countries are former British colonies and fall within the SADC region, of which Swaziland, the location of this study, is part. The unclear language- in-education policy observed in Swaziland is a route that many African countries have travelled. The researcher is optimistic that relevant studies like this one will enlighten policy makers to come up with a clear language policy that all schools can follow to improve the country's education system.

## **2.9 Mother tongue position in the curriculum**

SiSwati is a mother tongue in Swaziland. It is used as the primary means of communication among the people of Swaziland. According to *the Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English*, (1989, p.2) the use of siSwati is important to preserve the customs and traditions of the Swazi people. It also gives the people identity through which their heritage is protected and cultural development encouraged. One would say that siSwati is included in the school curriculum for political and cultural reasons. In the school curriculum, siSwati is offered from Grade One to senior secondary school. However, it is not a compulsory subject since some learners decide not to learn it in favour of other foreign languages such as French, Portuguese or Afrikaans, especially in urban and private schools. Making siSwati an optional subject is contrary to *The Swaziland Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English (1989)*, which stipulates that siSwati should be the medium of instruction from Grade One to Grade Four, after which English becomes the medium of instruction. This current situation in the schools shows that teachers do not recognise the value of siSwati as they continue to teach in English even at the foundation phase. This is not surprising because English has always been given higher status than siSwati. Even government policies are in the English language as very few have been translated into siSwati. Moreover, print media houses also ceased to publish articles in siSwati. According to Zwane (2003), this situation does not auger well for the Swazis who cannot read English.

In recent years, *The Ministry of Education and Training policy (2008)* proposed a two-tier education system. This system advocates for siSwati Medium Mainstream (SMM) and English Medium Mainstream (EMM) School to cater for the learners' language needs. The SMM is basically for the children who do not understand English. In this system, English will be introduced as a subject and be taught by specialized teachers. The EMM is for both siSwati mother-tongue language speakers who are fluent in English and the non-siSwati mother tongue learners. The policy states that in EMM schools, siSwati will be taught as a second language by specialised teachers (*Ministry of Education and Training policy, 2008, pp.2-3*). This proposal by the Ministry of Education was received with mixed feelings in the schools as teachers continue to use English as a medium of instruction and code-switch when a need arises. In the researcher's opinion, this proposal posed a challenge for parents when choosing schools for their children. As stated earlier, English is an international language widely used in commerce and legal institutions and all parents aspire to see their children mastering it as soon as they begin school. Mbatha, (2002) observed that the ambiguity in the Language-in-education policy in Swaziland and poor learning resources resulted in teachers not effectively implementing a stated policy that could improve learners performance in literacy if implemented the correct way.

In her study, Mbatha (2002) sought teachers and parents' perception on two instructional approaches to the teaching of English in Grade One: 'Early English' immersion approach and 'Delayed English' immersion approach. One of the questions in the study was how parents choose schools for their children? The findings showed that parents from rural areas utilised community schools within reach of their children. However, parents from urban areas stated that they purposely chose schools for their children as they wanted them to experience 'Early English immersion'. The parents believe that knowing English will make their children competitive in the labour market.

Mbatha (2002) recommended that Swaziland adopts 'Additive Bilingualism' as a strategy to achieve the language-in-education policy in Grade One to Four and ensure that it was implemented. She stated that proper implementation of the policy would require strong financial input from the government. This would be in the form of appropriate and adequate teaching-learning materials, provision of adequate personnel and modification of policy at pre-service and in-service training of teachers. In a more recent speech the Prime Minister of Swaziland declared that siSwati be compulsory in all schools in Swaziland; public and private (Nhlabatsi, 2017).

## 2.10 The Grade One literacy in English syllabus

*The Nine year programme of instruction for English (1989)* designed by the National Curriculum Centre (NCC), Swaziland, is an official document that guides the teaching and learning of English at primary school. The following key areas are stated as critical for the Grade One literacy in English and assessment must be based on all of these.

**Table 2.1**

*Grade One literacy in English programme in Swaziland*

At the end of Grade 1 learners can be assessed on:				
Strands	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
	<i>Listening for different kinds of information:</i>  Listen for different kinds of instruction  Finding and using information	<i>Convey different kinds of information:</i>  retell stories and events from their own experiences in simple and correct sequence.	Sounds and word recognition; name and sound the letters of the alphabet.  Blend sounds to read the 3-letter words.	<i>Creating texts:</i> draw and write short narratives and factual accounts,
	<i>Listen to text for pleasure:</i> Listen with enjoyment to short stories, songs and poems and respond appropriately.	<i>Expressing thoughts, views and ideas:</i> express their thoughts in a way that communicates what they want to say.	Use of context and syntax to check that what they are reading makes sense	<i>Organizing and using information:</i> write and present information using captions, labels, lists and instructions,

Table 2.1 shows specific strands that assessment objectives are based on for Grade One literacy in the English syllabus. These assessment objectives guide the teachers in their instructional practices.

### **2.10.1 English Language teaching and learning materials**

The Ministry of Education and Training through the National Curriculum Centre provides some teaching and learning materials for schools. For Grade One English, they provide the *Teacher's Guide*, the *Pupil's Book*, the *Pupil's Workbook* and charts. The use of supplementary picture books is encouraged. The *Teacher's Guide* gives a summary of how the lessons are organized in each unit and how each lesson should be taught. Also, a summary of what the *Pupil's Book* and the *Pupil's Workbook* contain is shown. These NCC materials are provided by government for the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One public schools. Specific competencies are stated in the syllabus and the *Teacher's Guide* assists the teacher in preparing for the lessons.

### **2.10.2 Specific areas of literacy covered in Grade One**

*The Nine Year programme of instruction for English (1989)* designed by the *National Curriculum Centre (NCC), Swaziland*, shows specific aspects covered in each language skill (listening, speaking, reading and writing). *The Grade One English Teacher's Guide* used in the schools shows that content in each unit is mainly oral work that requires the teacher to engage learners in a lot of activity for them to learn new vocabulary and to understand sentences. The table below shows the skills and objectives for undertaking each skill in Grade One literacy in the English syllabus.

**Table 2.2***Skills and objectives for Grade One literacy in English*

<b>Literacy Activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>
Reading	Phonics emphasised
Speaking	Working in pairs encourages (collaboration and interaction)
Listening activities	Teacher creativity in composing stories to tell to the learners and even reading to them is encouraged
Grammar	use of grammatical structures in context encouraged
Stories	Dramatization of the stories encouraged
Games	Allows for group work and peer learning, with the teacher being part of the game. This keeps learners motivated and interested in the lesson. (Mother tongue may be used to explain a game).
Song	Important in reinforcing the language usage
Rhymes	Actions that accompany the rhyme are encouraged
Drawing	Improves the writing skill, listening and reading ability

Spelling and Dictation	Helps learners to master how to write/spell words correctly
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Table 2.2 shows the skills and objectives for undertaking each skill in Grade One literacy in the English syllabus. These skills are stated in the *Grade One Teacher's Guide* that teachers use to prepare for their lessons. It states what teachers need to teach, the objective of teaching that aspect and also makes suggestions on strategies the teacher may use to achieve the stated objectives.

## 2.11 Critique of the education system of Swaziland

The structure of the education system of Swaziland as presented in the (*The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy (2011)*) shows an ideal picture of the system; it shows different sub-sectors in the education system of the country, beginning from early childhood and care education up to tertiary education. Moreover, each sector and sub-sector has clearly stated goals and objectives. And the goals are further divided into short term, medium term and long term goals. This policy presents an orderly structure which articulates the primary mandate of the Ministry of education and Training in the country; which is to provide access to relevant quality education at all levels.

However, the actual practice in the country is contrary to what the documents state. For instance, a very small number of the population go through the presented structure. This is shown by the very low participation rate of age eligible children in early childhood care and education programme as only 30% of age-eligible children participate in ECE programme due to its high cost. In the researcher's view, there is poor monitoring of the different sub-sectors in the education system of Swaziland. If government had the best interest of children and valued life-long learning for the citizen, all public schools would have a fully-fledged ECCE programme to ensure a strong literacy and numeracy foundation for all children. One would say that the policies are merely for political reasons; to make the country acceptable to international organisations.

Another shortfall of the education system of Swaziland is that recommendations from research studies are not adequately implemented. For instance, a study by Nsibande, and Modiba (2012) found that an evaluation of the continuous assessment programme in



Swaziland failed to be established in the schools due to teachers' lack of clear understanding of the CA concept, inappropriate attitudes towards it and inadequate practices. If government looked into the findings of that study and implemented the recommendation to re-socialise teachers to the concept of continuous assess and its use, the country's education system would be gradually improved as teachers would use effective instructional practices to meet the varied learners' needs in their classrooms. Adopting effective initiatives without constantly engaging in research to evaluate their effectiveness is counterproductive. The researcher is of the view that for any country's education system to improve, research and teaching should go hand-in-hand.

## **2.12 Chapter summary**

This chapter has presented a brief historical background of education in Swaziland, showing that the formal education is originally a Western phenomenon and, to a large extent, has shaped the education system to be a blend of Swazi tradition and British practices. The socio-economic overview of Swaziland shows that the country is challenged by poverty and high HIV/AIDS prevalence which renders most learners vulnerable. The structure of the education system shows an ideal picture of the system, beginning from early childhood and care education up to tertiary education. However, the actual practice in the country shows that a very small number of the population go through the presented structure. The chapter also presented some initiatives taken by government through the Ministry of Education and Training to improve the quality of education, especially at primary school level. The introduction of the C.A at primary school and Literacy Boost are some initiatives to improve the education system. Also presented was the language-in-education policy. Debates surrounding the language-in-education policy show that there is no consensus among the stakeholders. Government declares policies which the implementers on the ground undermine, and the public also has its own perception on the said policy contrary to empirical studies guiding the policies. An outline of the Grade One English literacy syllabus was also presented. The chapter showed that political underwriting was the guiding force for the ever-changing education policies. The next chapter presents literature reviewed for this study and it was based on effective teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase and factors that influence it. Relevant aspects were identified and supported with empirical studies conducted by different scholars and international organisations.

## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents literature reviewed in the area of literacy teaching and learning in the Foundation Phase, with particular focus on Grade One. Boote and Beile (2005), in their article, stated that a literature review is an evaluative report of studies found in the literature related to a selected area of focus. Hart (2018) shares a similar idea and states that literature review is an overview of relevant and significant literature in the research area, and is limited to a particular research problem, issue or timeframe. Hart (2018) further states that the purpose of literature review is to show the reader what body of knowledge and ideas in the shape of theoretical assertions have already been advanced on a given topic. According to Hart (2018), undertaking a literature review is important for every research study because it enables the researcher to get a better understanding of the topic, and to understand how other researchers have approached their studies and what key issues have been addressed in that area.

For the presentation of this chapter, the researcher first gives the definition of literacy as espoused by different scholars and international organisations. The discussion of the value of literacy as a global phenomenon follows. The researcher then discusses the role of the teacher in general and the First Grade teacher in particular. A discussion of effective practices of teachers is discussed and the *Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)* for the teaching and learning of literacy, including teaching strategies of effective literacy teachers is presented. Assessment of literacy is also discussed as the teaching-learning process is incomplete without assessment (Hugo, 2013; Mooney, Nichols, Bachman, & Reid, 2010; Ferreria, 2009). In addition, factors that influence the teaching and learning of literacy are discussed as the teaching-learning process is not only confined within the four walls of a classroom. In the discussion of the above-mentioned aspects of the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase, local and international studies on the teaching and learning of literacy were used to situate the study within current research.

In the literature reviewed, the researcher has made use of books, journals, peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, and dissertations pertaining to the study. The researcher explored what goes on in the literacy classrooms in Grade One, what exactly the teachers do

in their literacy classrooms and why they do what they do in the way they do it. That being the case, literature that directly addresses the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase was used. A thematic approach to the review of literature was followed. The researcher identified themes pertinent to the study and literature addressing those themes was used to guide the study.

This study is influenced by works of renowned researchers in the field of literacy teaching and learning such as Pressley, *et al.*, 2001; Lonigan, Schatschneider, and Westberg, (2008). These researchers have looked into the different aspects in the teaching and learning of literacy and have agreed that strong literacy skills in the foundation phase are critical for the development of reading proficiency and lifelong learning. These have focused on the importance of the development of reading abilities and linguistic awareness as crucial aspects in the academic field. Best practices in the teaching and learning of literacy have also been looked into by researchers such as; Goodman, Calfee & Goodman, 2013; Duffy, 2005; Padak & Rasinski, 2006).

### **3.2 Definition of literacy**

Literacy teaching and learning is the phenomenon of study in this research and, that being the case; definitions of literacy as espoused by different schools of thought have been given. The researcher believed that giving different definitions of literacy should increase one's understanding of the concept. The definition of literacy that guides this study was also stated.

One proponent of literacy claims that literacy is the mastery of the ways of being, people's manner of interacting, perceiving and appreciating something and the manner of reading, writing and expression of knowledge adopted by a group of people (Gee, 2001). From this definition, the researcher understands that literacy is the mastery of these practices by a people in a society for everyday functions. Gee (2001) further argues that literacy is not so much about the bare mechanics of the observable physical acts of reading and writing, it is about the ideology or the theories undergirding the observed behaviour.

In his definition of literacy, Gee (2001) brings to our attention to the fact that literacy is a social practice that is linked with the ideological model of literacy proposed by Street (2014) and has a lot to do with the culture, knowledge and power of a group of people in a given context. The everyday communication of the people in a society is important and lays the foundation for literacy to which it also gives meaning. The idea of literacy as a social practice

is also supported by Razfar and Guiterrez (2013, p.56) who argue that learning itself is a socially-mediated practice that emerges within a particular social context, and literacy learning is largely influenced by the social context of the learner. Since educators and researchers agree that a strong literacy foundation is critical for success in school, a favourable social context for literacy learning should be created at school and at home to support learners. For the purposes of this study, the school becomes critical because this is where children spend most of their time. The literacy practices of the teachers and the learners become an important aspect in the successful learning of literacy by the child. Moreover, the home, as another social context for the child, can either enhance or inhibit the teaching and learning of literacy in children. This is because both the home environment and the school environment have a bearing on the teaching and learning of literacy and as such they are interdependent.

From the perspective of the cognitive psychologists, literacy is defined as the ability to read and write and as a matter of decoding the alphabetic system in the target language, (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky & Seidenberg, 2001; Doku, 2007; Hugo & Nieman, 2010). From this perspective, literacy is about the individual's ability to make sense of what is written with sufficient speed and accuracy. This definition is supported by Labov (2003, p.3) who views literacy as a skill that can be taught in school with the appropriate instructional methods to any learner who has not been diagnosed with any learning disabilities.

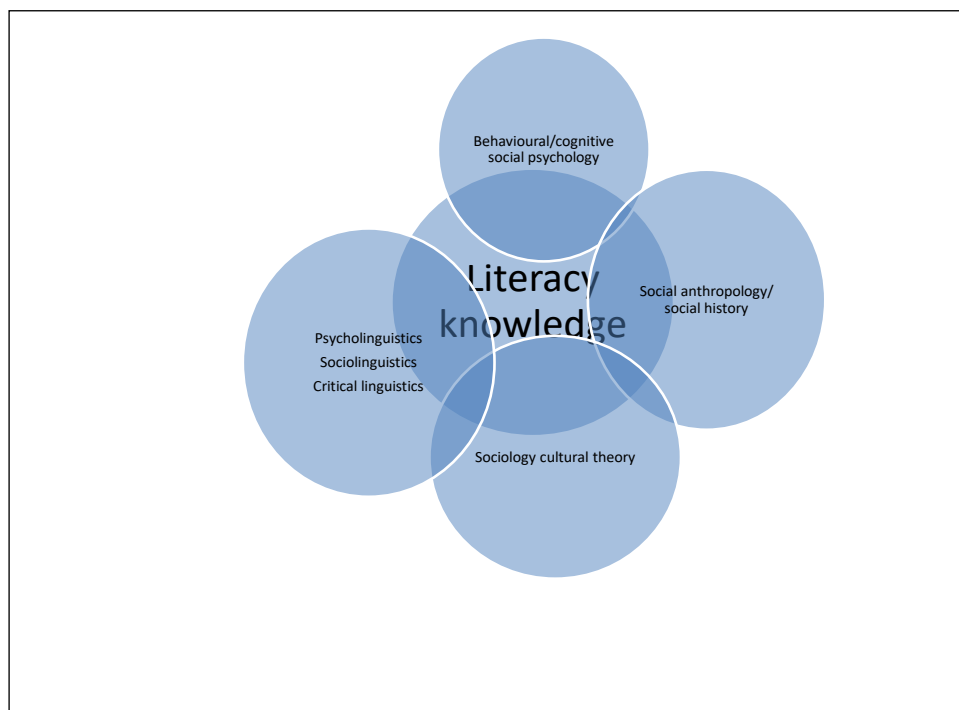
Cronin (2014, p.46) also proposes a definition of literacy that touches on the cognitive psychologists' perspective. For her, literacy is the ability to decode text and to produce text to make meaning. It is both a science and a skill; it is the mechanics of reading and writing. Literacy also provides the structures and patterns that enable literature to exist and a foundation for word-based communication. A closer look at this definition shows that it is the acquisition of literacy that enables one to create text for others to absorb and enjoy. This definition makes one argue that without literacy, there can be no literature.

Ahmed (2011, p.182) asserts that being literate can be defined as having the ability to read and write, to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. This simply means that literacy is a ground where individuals can stand firmly and be able to participate effectively in this ever-changing world of new discoveries. In short, the ability to read and write is for a particular purpose: one has to be able to identify what he or she reads and writes, understand it,

interpret it and also create a text to be read and understood by others. In this case, the person can be said to be literate. For learners, they have to be able to do all these in a particular language, and for the purpose of this study, in the English language.

From a socio-cultural perspective, literacy refers to the way people respond to their immediate environment. According to Rueda and Dembo (2006, p. 225), students make sense of activities within their classroom, a context where learning takes place. This renders both the teacher and the students as active participants in the classroom in order to make sense of the teaching and learning activities. In addition, the socio-cultural perspective acknowledges that the students' environment is not confined within the classroom; the home and community also influence the learning process. As a result, literacy learning can be seen as a student's meaning-making process for all activities that take place in his or her context. Theorists of literacy as a social practice such as Barton and Hamilton (2012, p.15) state that literacy is what people do with literacy in their contexts. For them, literacy practices involve actions with text and other learning devices in relation to values, attitudes, feelings and social relationships. They view literacy as influenced by relationships between people within a community, as opposed to literacy being a set of skills possessed by an individual. This study will follow the socio-cultural definition of literacy as it sees both the teacher and the learners as active participants in the teaching and learning of literacy within their social contexts.

In defining literacy, Rassool (2009, p.22) holds that literacy is perceived to be *organic* because it is viewed as a cultural practice that deals with people in conscious and reflective action in different situations encountered in their daily lives. The literacy practices they engage in daily, shape their lives. Similarly, the teachers' instructional practices in class provide a definition of literacy in that particular context. Rassool, (2009) also presents the view that literacy serves different purposes in different contexts: educational purpose, economic, political, and religious.



**Figure 3.1** Literacy as a regionalised field of study (Rassool, 2009, p.22)

Figure 3.1 shows that literacy is multi-dimensional as it serves a variety of purposes: social, economic, ideological and political. Teachers have to keep themselves abreast of the multi-dimensional nature of literacy to be able to modify their teaching to suit the 21<sup>st</sup> Century contextual demands of literacy. Makeleni, (2014, p.103) affirms this and maintains that literacy is constantly changing as a result of the rapid increase in global knowledge, technology and skills. Consequently, the focus of this study is on exploring instructional practices of Grade One teachers of literacy in two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland.

The researcher aimed to understand how a teacher's perception of literacy and his or her personal construct of literacy is critical in shaping their instructional practices in promoting literacy in their classrooms and this may show how they experience the teaching of English literacy in Grade One. For the researcher interested in exploring Grade One teachers' instructional practices in English literacy, literacy simply refers to the different activities the teachers engage learners in, in the English literacy classroom. This includes the oral activities, and the reading and writing activities that take place in the Grade One English

literacy classroom. In the Swaziland English literacy syllabus, essential components for the English language literacy in Grade One include listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, punctuation, structures, pronunciation and reading programme (*The Nine year programme of instruction for English, 1989*, p. 20). The researcher was guided by the socio-cultural perspective of literacy to understand teachers' instructional practices in English literacy in Grade One. The researcher shares a similar view with Chikovore, Makusha, Muzvidziwa, & Richter, (2012) who believe that instruction in schools is to a large extent shaped by the social and cultural contexts where it occurs. In these researchers' perspectives, the socio-cultural contexts provide learners with varied experiences and opportunities to learn.

### **3.3 Literacy as a global phenomenon**

Having defined literacy, as expounded by different scholars, and the researcher's understanding of it based on the socio-cultural perspective, this section discusses literacy as a global phenomenon. Joubert *et al.*, 2015 have shown that literacy has value in the life of an individual and the society at large; it serves multiple purposes in the lives of people; social, economic, ideological and political purposes. Thus it is said to be a global phenomenon.

Ronson and Rootman, (2012) view the value of literacy from a health perspective. They have looked at the implications of literacy for health and education. Their study found that a majority of people's lives have been put in danger due to low literacy. This shows that there is a very close relationship between education and health and, that being the case, professionals in all sectors should acknowledge this relationship and ensure that children are exposed to literacy at an early age to improve their health. Joubert *et al.*, (2015, p.18) affirm that literacy is the key to knowledge, power and economic prosperity of various kinds. As a result, illiterate people are believed to be unfortunate, unsophisticated and unemployable. Thus, the teaching and learning of literacy has become of critical concern for both developed and developing countries.

Kennedy (2013) for instance, noted that the underachievement of children in literacy is a universal social justice issue preventing many individuals from reaching their dreams. Kennedy reported that in Ireland, a remarkable intervention on this issue was the publication of the *National Strategy to improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011-2020*. This document stipulated policies to be developed for schools to implement in an effort to address the problem of children's underachievement in literacy.

Exploring different teaching approaches and best practices that will improve children's learning of literacy in the English language has been the focus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century educational research. Burke and Hammette (2009) for instance, in their article *Engaging with the foundations of literacy-supporting ESL and EAL students across the international school curriculum*, explores how ESL (English as a second language) and EAL (English as an additional language) learners may be engaged in reading across the curriculum through use of the foundations of literacy. In this article, Burke and Hammette argue that inter-disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning and sharing of best practices among teachers can yield positive results in the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase. Burke and Hammette (2009) are supported by Palmer and Corbett (2003) in the idea that learning to listen, speak, read and write all work together to develop literacy in the foundation phases as they each act to strengthen each other.

To show the importance of literacy as a global phenomenon, Stanovich (2009) coined the term 'Matthew effect' to describe a phenomenon where students who did well in reading continued to perform well in school in general, but students who performed poorly in reading continued to underachieve throughout their schooling. Stanovich (2009) affirms that children with good comprehension skills demonstrate improved reading competency and the opposite is true for children who have a poor grasp of comprehension as a pillar for reading. This claim is also supported by Dubeck and Gove, (2015) who reported that students who fall behind because of their reading competency tend to stay behind, thereby widening the gap between those who fall behind and those who are assessed on reading at grade level.

This observation was earlier made by Allington, (2006) who concluded that struggling readers will forever remain behind because they get very little appropriate instruction compared to average students. Otto (2015) also observed that illiteracy in adults may affect their children's development of literacy as they were less likely to have reading materials at home. Moreover, they were likely to be unemployed or have lowly paid jobs that kept them away from home; as a result they were unable to support their children's learning of literacy especially in the early years of school where parental support was of paramount importance. Furthermore, parents who were uncomfortable in reading and writing were less likely to engage their children in literacy development activities (Otto, 2015).

From this claim, one begins to realise that instructional practices of teachers in the foundation phase is of fundamental importance as it influence students' learning and



achievement on literacy. This affirms that literacy teaching and learning is a global concern as mastery of the basic literacy aspects is essential for future learning and one's social wellbeing. The following section will explore the role of the teacher in the teaching-learning process.

### **3.4 The role of the teacher**

The review of literature has shown that teachers are crucial role players in the teaching-learning process, without which there would be no expected outcome. Mantei and Kervin (2009), for example, assert that teachers get recognition for their pedagogical expertise and their efforts to meet the various needs of the students. Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, (2015) hold a similar view and identified teacher expertise as a critical aspect in ensuring that the desired result for learning is achieved through teacher' observation of classroom learning experiences and making necessary adjustments to classroom practices to accommodate different students' abilities. Hattie (2012) commented on the value of the teachers in the education system by saying that excellence in teaching is the single most powerful influence in students' achievement. By this Hattie brings to our attention the fact that having the school, the learners and the curriculum is not enough, but a teacher who has the expertise to read and understand the curriculum and the skills to prepare a lesson to accommodate different learners' needs is critical in the education cycle. The researcher believes that learner achievement is a result of the different activities that take place in the class, and it is the teacher that directs those activities.

Goodman, Calfee and Goodman (2013) explained the role of the teacher by stating that skills and knowledge are not enough for learners' success, but teacher wisdom and passion are important. They hold that allowing learners to acquire literacy practices that would enable them to participate freely in society is vital for effective teachers. In examining the role of teachers in the education system, Goodman *et al.*, (2013) proclaim that effective teachers possess extraordinary minds and hearts. This means that teachers need to be people who are innovative to come up with effective strategies to suite their contexts and also have a deep desire to see learners succeed. Researchers agree that teacher education demands a multifaceted role from a teacher, as they possess great influence upon the effectiveness of schools and that, behind the classroom doors, teachers determine how and what students are taught (Van den Berg, 2002; Labbo, 2005; Dlamini, 2015). Van den Berg (2002, p.615), for instance, argues that teachers have great impact and that this affects all kinds of students from

the average to the exceptional student. Labbo (2005, p.782) holds a similar view that teachers are equipped to move from the tried and true to the new as they use pedagogically sound practices to explore new contributions to the literature in different contexts.

Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, (2015) argue that, although curriculum guidelines are provided, individual teachers differ in their interpretation of the curriculum guidelines, use of teaching and learning materials, experiences, focus of instruction, and also vary in their professional preparation. That being the case, a study to explore their instructional practices becomes very important. This study aims to establish what teachers do in their Grade One literacy in English classrooms and their rationale for their instructional practices. The researcher's purpose of conducting the study is supported by Gandy (2005) who stressed the need to understand teachers' perceptions in terms of why they carry out certain instructional techniques and other practices in their classrooms. Exploring what they do in their classrooms, therefore, is important to get an understanding of their practices for teaching literacy and a rationale for their instructional practices. Yearrian (2011) concurs that teachers are central to the teaching-learning process as their styles of instruction and knowledge of their students is a driving force behind the learners' academic success. The Constructivist perspective also views teachers as mediators for learning.

Barthes (1986) proposed three educational practices: teaching, apprenticeship and mothering. According to Barthes, teaching is concerned with transmitting knowledge through spoken and written forms, classroom presentation, lectures and use of print materials such as books. Barthes affirms that, in early-years education, there is a need for some form of telling and reading about some literacy skills. On the other hand, the role of the literacy teacher as an apprentice demands that at some point the teacher is one who has mastered the literacy practices performance for the students to observe and that in the process the teacher offers assistance. The mothering role of the teacher requires that the teacher gives support, encouragement and incitement to learn; the teacher desires to see the students succeed and derives pleasure and satisfaction from the success of the students. A teacher is also seen as a child observer, a classroom organizer, a guide and a link with the community. One may say that the role of a teacher is complex and it is important for all teachers to understand what it means to be a teacher in order to execute all their duties to the best of their ability.

The invaluable role of the teacher was further articulated by Farstrup (2002, p.1), who wrote;

*The art of teaching is rooted in the experience, skill, judgement and intuition of the teacher dedicated to the best interest of the students he or she serves, while scientific knowledge, revealed by effective, contextually relevant research, forms the rational knowledge base for instructional decisions.*

This assertion by Farstrup, (2002) shows that effective teaching is influenced by multiple factors some of which are internal, within the teacher as a person. Other factors are external and they are based on the depth of research work done in the area and other contextual dynamics.

Dlamini, (2015) observed that the complexity of the role of the teacher is also created by the fact that teaching itself is governed by policy that dictates the learning goals and learning outcomes that are expected from the students after receiving instruction and teaching. Moreover, these policies are subject to different interpretations by curriculum designers and even teachers. Consequently, the different interpretations of policies, curriculum and syllabus impact on the teachers' instructional practices.

### **3.4.1 First Grade teachers**

Numerous studies have shown that First Grade teachers play an important role in shaping the foundation for early literacy skills for primary school learners (Clay, 2005; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow, 2001; Roskos, Tabors & Lenhart, 2009; Lenyai, 2011). The teachers are the implementers of the curriculum and their expertise is central in the teaching-learning process as they are the ones to select the appropriate approaches, methods and techniques for fostering literacy in English (Lenyai, 2011). In earlier research, Clay (2005) asserted that the first years of school are very important because this is when a solid foundation for literacy learning is laid. Verbal learning, central to an individual's academic life, is also developed at this level.

This means that the foundation has to be sound as becoming a competent reader and writer is a fundamental aspect for lifelong education. Clay (2005) went on to state that the knowledge and skills a teacher needs to effectively carry out literacy instruction are complex and difficult to describe. She contributes suggestions on knowledge and skills that a foundation teacher should possess. In her numerous works with foundation phase teachers and learners, Clay (2005) concluded that foundation phase teachers should have a broad understanding of the reading and writing process and what literacy users understand and do with literacy. They must also have a deep understanding of the processes involved in acquiring literacy, together

with the progress in behaviour that shows development in learning complex concepts by children. Moreover, she observed that the teachers' understanding of the complex structure of written text is fundamental, and knowledge of individual learners in the class acquired through constant interaction with them is critical for effective literacy learning. Another important conclusion she made was that observing and assessing the behaviour and work of the learners, forms part of the teachers' critical role in teaching of literacy in the classroom. She also encouraged teachers to use a range of effective instructional approaches learned and practised over time in order to accommodate different learner abilities in the literacy classroom.

Maynard, Morgan, Waters and Williams (2010) in their research conducted in Wales on teaching and learning in the foundation phase concluded that foundation phase practitioners need a high level of training and progressive professional development for them to be effective. They believe that teachers should reflect constantly on their instructional practices to identify strengths in their practices and areas that need improvement. They also stated that for success to be seen, teachers need to be well acquainted with the philosophy underpinning foundation phase teaching and learning as this would give them ownership of their instructional practices and confidence to execute their duties. Fox, Medwell, Poulson & Wray (2003) are also of the view that high quality literacy teaching demands high quality literacy teachers and it is, therefore, of paramount importance that education systems invest in the production of teachers with high-level expertise in teaching literacy.

In essence, foundation phase teachers need to be well-trained people with a broad understanding of how children learn in accordance with their developmental stages. Also, a deeper understanding of the subject matter, content and various instructional approaches has to be employed in the teaching-learning process. The teacher has to develop a good rapport with the learners to execute his or her duties effectively, to get positive results. This shows that the teaching-learning process depends on a number of activities. Sound pre-service training and regular in-service workshops are required for the teachers to be able to play their role well in the teaching of literacy. Goodman, Calfee and Goodman (2013) add to this view by stating that effective teachers are those who consider the varied needs of the learners. Sensitivity to students' needs and passion to see students succeed are viewed as central qualities in foundation-phase education.

In a study conducted in Zambia on investigating the quality of teaching in primary schools, it was shown how this affects literacy rates among learners. In this case study of three primary schools in the Kasama district, the focus was on the fact that, as *The Zambian National Survey Report (2006)*, had shown, most of the primary school children were unable to write and they did not progress from one grade to another and the passing rate at Grade Seven was poor. The study used the case-study approach employing qualitative methodology based on non-probability sampling. Semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions were used to collect data from 15 respondents and 12 participants. The results of the study showed that there was poor quality teaching in Zambia resulting from inadequate staff, lack of teaching-learning materials, overcrowded classrooms, poor preparation among other teachers, and weak school policies. All these factors had a negative impact on the learners thus they were unable to progress from one grade to another.

The study carried out in Zambia is in contrast to the suggestions and requirements of primary school teachers made by Clay (2005). The following section will discuss practices of effective teachers of literacy based on findings by renowned researchers on literacy teaching and learning.

### **3.5 Practices of effective teachers of literacy in English**

Having discussed the role of the teacher in the education system in general and the importance of the First Grade teacher in particular, this section discusses the general practices of an effective teacher of literacy in the foundation phase. Researchers on literacy teaching and learning agree that investing in effective teaching is the most research-based strategy to attain the goal of ‘no child left behind’ (Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015; Taylor, Pearson & Duke, 2013; Pressley *et al.*, 2001). According to Pressley *et al.*, (2001), effective teachers are able to achieve the desired goal regardless of curriculum materials used, pedagogical approach, or reading programme used.

There is a general agreement among researchers on eight basic principles for effective literacy instruction (Pressley *et al.*, 2001; Mooney *et al.*, 2010; Allington, 2006; Joubert *et al.*, 2015). The following are the principles stated for effective teachers of early literacy based on findings by different researchers in the area of literacy teaching and learning.

### 3.5.1 Principle 1: effective teachers understand how children learn

Teachers should have a clear understanding of how children learn reading and writing as this understanding influences their instructional practices. The teacher's knowledge of learning theories is essential in order to prepare the teacher for the task of guiding and assisting children to learn literacy effectively. Below is a table giving a summary of the theories that inform early literacy instruction as retrieved on 07/05/2014 from <http://www.pearsonhighered.com>.

**Table 3.1**

*Theories that inform literacy instruction*

	Behaviourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Teacher provides direct instruction</li><li>-teacher motivates students and controls their behaviour</li><li>-Teacher uses test to measure learning</li><li>-children are passive learners</li></ul>	Teachers apply behaviourism when they use basal reading programmes, post words on the wall in the classroom, and use tests to measure students' learning. Children also apply this theory when they complete workbook activities.
Student - centred	Constructivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>-Children are active learners.</li><li>-Children relate new information to prior knowledge.</li><li>-Children organize and</li></ul>	-Children apply constructivism when they use K-W-L charts, make personal, world and literacy connections to books they read. Also, when choosing books to read and topics to write on.

		arrange information in schemata.	
	-Interactive	<p>-Students use both prior knowledge and features in the text they read.</p> <p>-Students use word identification skills and comprehension strategies.</p> <p>-Fluent readers focus on comprehension as they read.</p>	<p>-Teachers apply this theory when they use guided reading and model strategies on think-aloud activities.</p> <p>-Students also apply this theory to their reading and writing activities to assist their comprehension.</p>
	Sociolinguistics	<p>-Thought and language are related.</p> <p>-students use social interaction as a learning tool.</p> <p>-Teachers provide scaffolds for students.</p>	<p>Teachers apply sociolinguistics when they read aloud to children, use shared reading, the language experience approach, and the interactive writing because teachers provide scaffolds.</p>

	-Reader response	<p>-Readers create meaning as they read and write</p> <p>-Students vary how they read and write according to different purposes.</p> <p>The goal is for students to become lifelong readers and writers.</p>	<p>-Children apply reader response theory when they respond to literature by writing in reading logs and participating in grand conversations and instructional conversations. Reading and writing workshops are also important here.</p>
	-Critical literacy	<p>-Children are empowered through reading and writing.</p> <p>-Readers think critically about books they are reading.</p> <p>-Children become agents for social change.</p>	<p>-Children apply critical literary theory when they read multicultural literature, think about social issues on books they read, write letters for various purposes.</p> <p>-Teachers also apply the critical theory when they create inclusive communities of learners in their classrooms.</p>

The summary of the theories of learning as presented in table 3.1 shows how a teacher is expected to handle an early literacy class and students' roles are also clearly stated. The researcher believes that a good knowledge and clear understanding of the theories of learning is critical for teachers as their work demands that they constantly put these theories into



practice. Sometimes there will be a need for the teachers to integrate some theories for different tasks in the classroom as each theory has its strength. This would cater for the varied students' learning styles.

### **3.5.2 Principle 2 effective teachers support children use of the cuing systems**

Researchers have agreed that language is the medium through which meaningful communication is created in socially shared conversations (Vygotsky, 1978; Turbill, 2002; Burke, 2010). They are of the view that effective teachers of literacy promote the four cuing systems of English which are the:

- the phonological or sound system;
- the syntactic or structural system;
- the semantic or meaning system; and
- the pragmatic or social and cultural use system

The four-cuing system together makes up communication and they are used by children in their reading, writing, listening and speaking activities. It is important to mention that all the four-cuing systems are critical in effective communication, but at the foundation phase much emphasis is placed on the phonological system as it is critical for beginning readers and writers in mastering the sound system that, in turn, helps them to learn how words are spelt. The four-cuing system is also in line with the development of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and as a result, they are central in literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. Chapman, Greenfield, Rinaldi (2010) argue that one cuing system is not adequate for children to learn reading because the child's acquisition of the written language in the foundation phase depends on all the other cuing systems. Consequently, an integration of all the cuing systems is important for children to learn how to read and write and also how to use language for effective functioning in society. This has implications for the foundation phase teacher's instructional practices as clear knowledge of how the cuing system works is important in guiding classroom activities that would facilitate literacy learning in the Grade One classroom.

Duffy (2005) views the ultimate goal of effective teachers of literacy to be that of inspiring learners to be readers and writers. Duffy believes that classroom activities should be genuine and that they should deliberately create opportunities for learners to develop literacy skills. According to Duffy, this should be achieved by visionary teachers; those who desire to see

children succeed in literacy learning. The teachers deliberately identify evidence-based literacy practices to develop an integrated instructional strategy to accommodate the varied needs of the learners. Duffy holds that the vision of the effective teacher should be knowledge-based in order to articulate clearly the objectives for each lesson. He argues that without a vision, the teacher will do things haphazardly and fail to meet the differentiated needs of the learners.

### **3.5.3 Principle 3: effective teachers of early literacy create a community of learners**

Another important principle of an effective early literacy classroom is where a suitable learning environment is created by both the teacher and the students. Classrooms are viewed as social settings in which students interact with one another, read different works, talk about what they read and then write. Effective teachers of early literacy engage the students in creating a suitable environment where every child participates freely in all reading and writing activities. They all work in a collaborative and purposeful manner. The teachers motivate the students to work hard, accept and appreciate one another's contribution in the learning process (Wells & Chang-wells, 1992; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Researchers agree that language and word-rich environment is essential for children to learn literacy (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; Justice, 2004; Dlamini, 2015). This kind of environment ideally has books and other reading materials that give students opportunities to read, listen to, and apply what they read, in their writing activities. According to Snow *et al.*, (1998), the teacher and students work together to create a classroom filled with curiosity and excitement. They argue that this kind of environment promotes incidental and intentional learning of new words and writing styles. In support of this view, Eilam (2012, p. ix) states that visuals such as maps, charts, artworks and photographs form a fundamental part of the cognitive, cultural and social aspect of learning.

It is important to mention that in this kind of classroom, the teacher still maintains his or her duties as the leader in the classroom guiding the student, monitoring all activities done in class, motivating and instructing the students, as well as assessing their works. Medwell, Wray, Poulson, & Fox (1998), in their study of practices of effective teachers of literacy, observed that teachers made a conscious effort to create literate environments which assisted children's understanding of the work of literacy and offered opportunities for children to practise literacy skills. This included provision of literacy materials in dramatic play areas,

use of labels and notices to draw the attention of children to use literacy, and encouraging them to write for a range of audiences.

According to Harvey and Goudvis (as cited in Butlin, 2011, p.12), an active literacy classroom bursts with joyful, enthusiastic learning. They observed that with the right approach, students become strategic and independent learners who monitor their own learning. They end up developing a self-improvement system which allows them to learn more about reading every time they read (Clay, 2005). It is therefore, the role of the teacher to support the growth of learners towards becoming independent learners by creating an environment that allows them to explore and develop a wide range of learning strategies. In their study of practices of effective teachers of literacy, Pressley, *et al.*, (2001) observed that a conducive classroom atmosphere with positive reinforcement improved students' achievement. Moreover, having high expectations for students and a positive attitude were also viewed as crucial in creating a safe learning environment where students can take risks in learning. Pressley *et al.*, (2001) concluded that for a classroom to be conducive to learning, the focus should be on the learner and the learning. A similar view is shared by (Ferreria, 2009; Dlamini, 2009) who agree that the learners should have a central role in their learning and they should be able to contribute knowledge from their socio-cultural experiences to the learning activities. Ferreria, (2009) is of the view that linking classroom activities with learners' socio-cultural contexts has an immeasurable value in supporting learners in the classroom.

Pressley, *et al.*, (2001) observed that a conducive classroom community is characterized by; responsibility, opportunities, engagement, demonstration, risk-taking, instruction, response, choice, time, and assessment of every activity done. Furthermore, classroom management also forms part of effective instruction. Reutzel and Clark (2011, p.96) hold that a teacher's ability to manage daily activities and learners' behaviour in the classroom accounts for his or her success as a professional. Reutzel and Clark (2011) further advocate for collaboration between the teacher and students to create a literacy-friendly environment. They commented; "Wall displays are most effective when students and teachers co-produce these, consequently, classroom wall space need not be filled on the first day of school" (Reutzel & Clark 2011, p. 97). The researcher notes that the teaching-learning process is a joint venture between the teacher and the students, where the different meaningful classroom activities are shared by both parties in a friendly classroom environment.

#### **3.5.4 Principle 4: effective teachers adopt a balanced approach to literacy instruction**

The balanced approach to literacy instruction has been identified by Allington (2006) as the most effective approach to literacy instruction and that effective teachers of literacy are said to adopt the balanced approach. This comes after the controversy over which approach was most effective in literacy instruction in the foundation phase. The phonics approach and the whole-language approach have also been the main approaches used and the balanced approach is actually a combination of the strength of both the phonic and whole-language approach, striking a 'balance' in the process (Dlamini, 2009). Thus, the balanced approach came into being and proved to be effective (Butlin, 2011; Duffy 2000). A strong literacy curriculum, especially at the foundation phase, is paramount in developing proficient early readers and writers. Consequently, an effective approach is important (Tompkins, 2014). Butlin (2011) suggests that an important aspect to include at elementary level is a concise and balanced literacy system. Uzuner, Girgin, Kaya, Karasu, Girgin, Erdiken and Tanridiler (2011, p.126) define a balanced approach to literacy as a mixture of whole language and skill development approaches. The advantage of this approach is that it increases students' comprehension of literacy as it integrates the skills-based approach and the meaning-based approach.

In the same vein, Duffy (2000) states that a balanced literacy instruction is a diverse and flexible research-based approach to language instruction that caters for diverse needs of the learners. This approach requires the teacher to engage learners in authentic reading and writing experiences and offers explicit teaching of literacy skills. The researcher is of the opinion that balanced literacy instruction caters for students from different socio-economic backgrounds, cultures and varying degrees of cognitive development. This is because the approach requires the teacher to integrate instruction with authentic experiences in all literacy activities: reading, writing, and oral language. In essence, the advantage of a balanced literacy approach is that all students benefit from it as it combines direct instruction on literacy skills, practical activities, authentic literature and meaningful and purposive writing activities (Fitzgerald, 1999). The balanced approach requires the teacher to be flexible and it demonstrates a deeper understanding of the diverse approaches to teaching and learning in order to make thoughtful decisions (Harvey & Goudivs, 2005). In the researcher's understanding, the balanced approach requires the teacher to make purposeful and well-thought-out decisions to help students acquire literacy.

Butlin (2011), in her study of First Grade teacher's exploration of her students' literacy development, used the balanced approach in the teaching of literacy in her First Grade class and the results showed an improvement of students' performance in their reading level as they improved in their ability to read fluently and with comprehension. The students were able to retell a story with details. The findings of the study showed that an advantage of the balanced approach is its ability to show the strength and needs of each student. One would say that the diagnostic property of this approach helps the teacher to plan instructional activities that would meet the varied needs of the learners.

Wharton-McDonald, Pressley and Hampston, (1998), in a study of 9 First Grade teachers from 4 districts who had been nominated by the language arts co-ordinators as outstanding to help students develop literacy skills, used observations and in-depth interviews to gather data on teachers' characteristics and students' achievement. The results showed that effective First Grade teachers used a balanced integration of high quality reading and writing experiences and explicit instruction of basic literacy skills. In my understanding, the teaching of literacy cannot rely on one approach, as each approach has its strengths and weaknesses; rather a combination of approaches will provide effective literacy instruction. Moreover, a combination of different approaches is able to accommodate diverse students' needs.

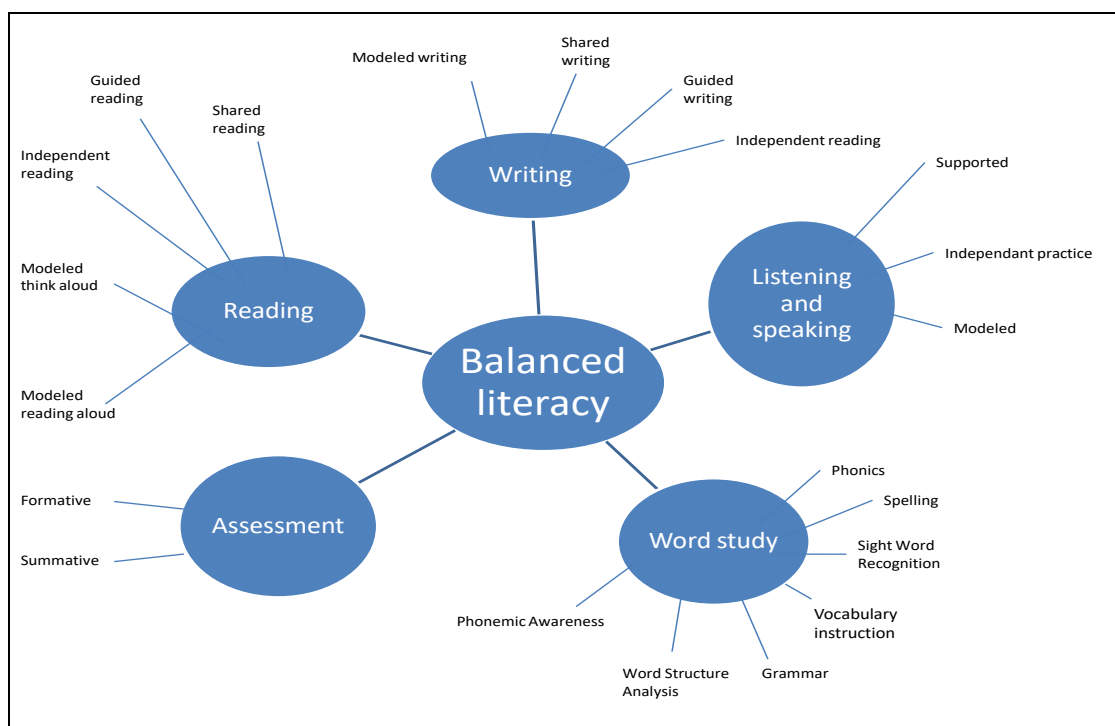
Asselin (2005) states that a balanced literacy approach incorporates the features of both the meaning-based and the skills-based approach as each approach constitutes the meaning of the balance. The meaning-based approach advocates for the use of whole text in teaching literacy and emphasizes comprehension, whereas the skill-based approach uses part of a text and emphasizes the teaching of discrete skills. The basal reader is an example of a skills-based approach and the whole-language and use of literature are examples of a meaning-based approach to teaching literacy.

Fitzgerald (1999) identified three principles of the balanced approach to literacy instruction. The first thing in the balanced approach is for teachers to develop basic skills knowledge among the students such as the decoding skills, so developing students' ability to respond to literature and to show comprehension of and love for what they read. This is based on the affective domain of the learners where their love and appreciation of literature will be nurtured. The second principle is the use of various instructional approaches, some of which will appear to be conflicting with one another. The aim is to meet the diverse learning needs of students. For instance, the use of direct instruction on phonics and engaging students in

reading workshops can be used in the classroom to cater for diversity. The third principle of the balanced approach is to engage students in reading a variety of materials with the vocabulary at their appropriate level. The ultimate goal of this approach is to develop lifelong readers and writers.

The following are basic characteristics of the balanced approach as presented in (Baumann & Ivey, 1997; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996):

- literacy is viewed comprehensively as involving both reading and writing;
- literature is at the heart of the programme;
- skills and strategies are taught directly and indirectly;
- reading instruction involves word recognition and identification, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension;
- writing instruction involves learning to express ideas in a meaningful way, and how to use spelling, grammar and punctuation appropriately; and
- Students use the reading and writing as the critical means to learn in other content areas, (Baumann & Ivey, 1997; McIntyre & Pressley, 1996).



**Figure 3.2** balanced approach used by effective teachers (adopted from Ritter Elementary School, 2013)

Figure 3.2 shows an outline of the balanced approach used by effective teachers as presented by the Ritter Elementary School (2013). It was adopted in this study to show the different aspects of literacy and activities under each aspect. This figure works as a guide for the literacy teacher on what activities learners need to be engaging in when the balanced literacy approach is followed.

### **3.5.5 Principle 5: effective teachers scaffold children's reading and writing experiences.**

Scaffolding is another effective principle for effective reading and writing instruction (Gibbons, 2015; Verenikina, 2008; Fox, Medwell, Poulson, & Wray, 2003; Hall & Harding, 2003; Pressely, *et al.*, 2001). Gibbons (2015) states that scaffolding is a term 'borrowed' from the construction industry, "a scaffold is a temporary structure that is used as support when constructing or repairing a building" (Gibbons 2015, p.16). Scaffolding, therefore, is widely used to refer to any kind of support given to an individual to enable him or her to achieve a task that would not be achieved easily without some assistance from a more competent person. In the educational perspective and instructional context in particular, it was first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) in their examination of talk between parent and child in his or her early years. They used this term as a metaphor to describe "a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted effort" (Wood *et al.*, 1976, p.90). This definition was taken a step further by Graves and Graves (2003, p.30) who state that, in addition to helping children complete a task they could not complete on their own, scaffolding assists students to complete a task better with less stress in minimal time, as well as to gain understanding of the task.

The definition of scaffolding shows that the assistance given to students is temporary and is withdrawn at a certain point to allow the students to complete tasks independently. It is also at the discretion of the teacher when to give the scaffold, to what extent and for what reason (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2004). The teacher in this case plays a major role in assisting the students to gain confidence in learning a concept. The teacher and the student will interact as the teacher assists the students to move towards independence and in the process their relationship is strengthened. However, critiques of scaffolding argue that it does not provide teachers with definite guiding principles on how it should be used. Instead, it is taken to be any kind of support teachers provide to students (Jacobs, 2001). As an educator the researcher

can say that scaffolding is largely determined by the teacher, based on the abilities of students in his or her class. The teacher has the liberty to plan different activities to be used as scaffolds for the varied learners in the classroom based on his or her knowledge of the learners.

Burch (2007) conducted a study that examined the impact of scaffolding on young children's acquisition of literacy in the First Grade. Ten First Grade students were followed in their reading and writing activities. The objective of the study was to establish the complexities of scaffolding in the First Grade. The results showed that the use of scaffolding during the reading and writing lessons supported the students' acquisition of literacy concepts and they learnt new strategies that made them independent learners who were able to initiate their own reading and writing activities. This shows that scaffolding is actually a useful strategy to help young students to be independent learners. However, teachers should be knowledgeable on when and how to use or provide a scaffold.

Hugo (2013, pp. 45-46) identified the following procedure to be used when providing scaffolding for children learning English as a second language: first, the language should be simplified and no use of idiomatic expressions and sentences should be shortened through the use of simple present tense. Second, children should be provided with opportunities for completion; this could be partially-completed words, sentences and paragraphs. Third, visual materials should be used and the teacher could present information through the use of pictures, charts, tables and graphs, then allow students to discuss the visual forms. Fourth, if a learner makes a mistake, the teacher can narrow down the location of the mistake by going back to the part where the mistake was made and by involving the learners in correcting it. Moreover, the teacher can also identify the nature of the mistake and make the learner think about it so that a similar mistake is avoided in future. In addition, clues may be provided to help learners arrive at a correct word when reading. Furthermore, the teacher may also provide the correct form and should justify his or her actions, for instance when all clues have failed to help the learner get to the correct answer.

The stated procedures show that scaffolding is important in English literacy classrooms, especially with young learners as it makes the task interesting and easier because everyone is able to perform a task. Moreover, scaffolding helps to keep anxiety low as frustration is controlled in the process of solving the problem and ensuring effective literacy learning (Hugo, 2013; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). One can say that the main purpose of scaffolding



in an English literacy classroom is to support the learners to construct the language and then gradually withdraw that kind of support as the learners gain mastery of the language and are able to use it independently. According to Vygotsky (1978), scaffolding can also be defined in terms of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which equates to the distance between what a novice can accomplish alone and that which they can only accomplish with the help of a more experienced other.

The continuum of literacy instruction, as adopted from Lyons and Pinnell, (2001), Fountas and Pinnell, (2007) and *www.pearsonhighered.com* shows levels of support teachers can give to the learners. This continuum of literacy instruction was adopted to show the gradual process involved in literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase.

**Table 3.2**

*A continuum of Literacy Instruction*

<b>A continuum of Literacy Instruction</b>			
<b>Level of support</b>		<b>Reading</b>	<b>writing</b>
High ↑	<b>Modelled</b>	Teacher reads modelling how good	Teacher
	writes in front of		
		Readers read fluently and with expression.	students,
	creating the		
		Books too difficult for students to read	text, doing
	the writing		
		themselves are used. Examples: reading	and
	thinking aloud		
		aloud to students and listening centres.	About
	writing strategies		
			and skills.
	Example:		

	demonstrations	
<b>Shared</b> and students	Teacher and students read books together,  With the students following as the teacher text together;  Reads and then repeating familiar refrains. teacher does  Books students can't read themselves are writing.  Used. Examples: big books, buddy assist by  Reading familiar or  words	Teacher  create the  Then the  the actual  students may  spelling  High frequency  Example:  Experiential approach to language
<b>Interactive</b> and students	Teacher and students read together, and take  turns in doing the reading. The teacher helps text and  them to read fluently and with expression. pen to do  Instructional-level books are used.	Teacher  create the  share the  the writing.

Low	teacher  Examples: choral reading and readers' and students talk  theatre.
	<b>Guided</b> Teacher plans and teaches reading lessons Teacher plans and  to small, homogeneous groups using teaches lessons on a  instructional-level books. Focus is on writing procedure,  supporting and observing students' use of strategy, or skill and  strategies. Examples: guided reading groups students participate  in supervised practice activities  such as class collaboration
	<b>Independent</b> Students choose and read self-selected Students use the writing  books independently. Teachers process to write stories,  conference with students to monitor informational books and  their progress. Examples: reading other compositions.

	workshop and reading centres. monitors students	Teacher
	workshops	Examples: writing and centres
<b>Independent</b>	Students choose and read self-selected the writing books independently. Teachers stories, conference with students to monitor books and their progress. Examples: reading compositions. workshop and reading centres. monitors students	Students use process to write informational other Teacher
	workshops	Examples: writing and centres

Table 3.2, the continuum of literacy instruction shows that the level of support is high in the early years of literacy learning and as the learners grow older, the level of support decreases. This has implications for literacy teachers in the foundation phase, especially in Grade One where, in the Swaziland context, some learners have their first encounter of formal instruction. The continuum shows that the teacher needs to spend more time offering high support to the learners as modelling is critical at this stage. More individual attention to learners may also be seen as the teacher has to ensure that each pupil can follow the reading and writing activities.

### **3.5.6 Principle 6: Effective teachers organize literacy instruction in four ways**

Another important principle identified by researchers on effective teachers of literacy is that these teachers organized their literacy instruction in four ways: the Basal reading programme, literature focus units, literature circles and reading and writing workshops. This basically shows that literature is at centre of literacy instruction for effective teachers of literacy. The teachers create opportunities for students to engage in reading literature which will be followed by writing activities based on direct instruction on literacy skills.

The Basal Reading Programme basically involves the use of any reading materials, commercially-produced story books, workbooks and other supplementary materials. Reading instruction is done using these materials to address the five pillars: phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, grammar and spelling. The effect of basal reading on literacy learning is shown in a study by Aukerman and Chambers Schuldt (2015) who reviewed 15 basal reader series and the findings showed that all the readers contained a reading readiness programme as they provided the children with visual and auditory discrimination, alphabet, sound-system association and shaping of letters. The use of picture books in early grade level and a supplementary word identification booklet that matched the story yielded positive results in the children's learning of literacy.

In another study, Tully (1991) examined the effectiveness of the basal reader selection process in a Midwestern school district. The conclusion reached from this study was that an effective basal reader selection is central for the teacher as it is the one that brings about the desired reading instruction appropriate for the students at a particular grade level. In the researcher's understanding, the teacher should be knowledgeable on how to choose the effective reading material for the students in his or her classroom for maximum benefit.

It is important to mention that though the Basal Reading Programme has yielded positive results as seen in the studies just discussed. Tully (1991) noted that the Basal Reading Programme has a limitation in that the selection of readers may not be perceived the same way by all students; it may be too difficult for others and lack the authentic flare of good literature. Moreover, the programme includes many worksheets that demand the students to be engaged in and other students, especially the struggling readers, may be discouraged by these. A further consideration is that most of the instruction on basal reading is presented to the whole class and not much time is available for individual attention.

In the context of Swaziland, the Basal Reading Programme is not applicable. The main materials used in English literacy classrooms are the books provided by the National Curriculum Centre (NCC). Swaziland, as a developing country, still does not have special reading programmes to support learners in early literacy development.

Literature focuses units involves the use of books chosen for literature and every student is expected to read and participate in the discussion of that literature and, in the process, benefit from the different activities done through the use of the selected books. These books are at the appropriate level of the students at every grade.

In a study conducted by Ross (1994) the findings showed that a literature-based programme is one of the effective ways of teaching reading at the elementary level. The recommendation made from this study was that teachers create an environment where students have reading materials readily available and create opportunities for students to read in order to see themselves as good readers and in the process, achieve the ultimate goal of learning literacy. However, using literature-focus units, as an approach, has some limitations just like any other instructional strategy. The basic ones are that students read the same book whether they like it or not and whether or not it is at their reading level. More so, many of the activities are teacher-directed and leave minimal students' control over the learning activities. These limitations therefore demand that teachers be very careful not to dominate the teaching-learning process when using literature focus units.

Literature circles are activities that involve the use of a range of related books either by theme or by author and they vary in their level of difficulty to allow students to develop their understanding of literature. Students choose the books they want to read and engage in activities based on the chosen book. The effectiveness of literature circles was shown by Meyer (1992) in an examination of three First- and Second-Grade meaning-emphasis series and one-word recognition used in schools. The results showed that two of the meaning-emphasis series were similar and served the same purpose and only the third one differed. It was shown that all the series demonstrated instructional flow from First Grade to Second Grade. In the researcher's opinion, the instructional flow was an advantage to the students as they transcended smoothly from First Grade to Second Grade and it eased any frustration on the part of both students and the teacher.

Reading and writing workshop involves students' identifying books of their choice as individuals and reading these independently. At a later stage the books that each one has read

are discussed with the teacher. The writing workshop involves students' writing on topics of their choice and then the teacher discussing their writings with them and offering support where needed.

The researcher understands that literature is an integral part of literacy instruction, engaging students widely in reading literature of varying degrees of difficulty at any level from kindergarten up to high school has positive effect on literacy learning. This idea is also supported by Al Darwich (2014) in a study that examined areas that needed to be developed in English as a foreign language (EFL) reading programme in elementary stages in Kuwaiti public schools. Classroom observations of ten students teaching reading using children's literature was done over three weeks involving Fifth Grade students. The results showed that using children's literature in reading instruction improved students' attention span, comprehension skills and critical thinking.

Moreover, the use of children's literature brought enjoyment to the students. Consequently, they learnt literacy without much strain as the literature kept them motivated and less anxious. The results also showed that literature plays a vital role in all aspects of oral language development. It develops children's imagination and vicariously exposes them to other people's cultures and ways of life. Most importantly, the study showed that well-selected children's literature can be a valuable resource for integrative EFL literacy learning. The vocabulary and comprehension skills of students can also be improved through listening to stories read to them by the teacher and through individual reading of children's literature. The researcher believes that the use of literature is also important in developing one's literacy in the second and even first language. The more one is exposed to literature of a given language, the more she or he learns how it is used.

This argument is also supported by Morrow (1992) who conducted a study on '*The impact of Literature-based achievement on literacy achievement, use of literature and attitude of children from minority backgrounds*'. The results of the study showed that where the teacher modelled the use of literature by reading aloud to learners, their interest was stimulated and they desired to engage in similar activities. In the process, literacy development occurred. In view of this, one may argue, therefore, that the use of literature in the literacy classroom creates a motivating context for literacy learning. Brabham and Lynch-Brown (2002) in their study of the effects of teachers' reading-aloud styles on vocabulary acquisition and comprehension of students in early grades showed that this was an effective strategy to teach

vocabulary and comprehension. The results of the study showed that interactional reading instruction enhanced vocabulary acquisition more effectively than performance reading. The availability of reading materials, therefore, is important in early grade classrooms where the teacher models reading aloud to the learners.

### **3.5.7 Principle 7: effective teachers connect instruction and assessment**

Literature has shown that quality education cannot be attained without quality assessment (Wolterinck, Kippers, Schildkamp, & Poortman, 2016; Popham, 2010). Assessment of literacy behaviour is another important aspect of teachers' instructional practices in literacy in Grade One. It determines whether the goals of education are met or not. Researchers such as Hugo (2013), Mooney *et al.*, (2010), Sieborger and McIntosh, (2002) agree that when planning any teaching and learning cycle, assessment and evaluation is an integral part, without which the cycle is incomplete.

Assessment basically is an aspect of teaching and learning because it measures the extent of learning that took place and determines what learners learn, the way in which they do the learning, what is taught and how it is taught (Sieborger & McIntosh, 2002). It is therefore, an on-going process that starts when learning starts and is at the heart of teaching and learning in any given context. Its central benefit is that teachers constantly monitor their students' progress (Mooney *et al.*, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2005).

Assessment can be classified into two categories: formal and informal (Dorn & Soffos, 2001). Formal assessment provides teachers with a systematic way of assessing and evaluating the learner's progress. Moreover, formal assessment needs careful planning and recording. On the other hand, informal assessment happens by observing oral, practical and written activities that learners do independently, in pairs or groups. The teacher observes what learners can do well and where they are struggling and this does not require formal records. As a teacher herself, the researcher believes that teachers should choose appropriate and relevant forms of assessment that suit the varied learning styles and ability of the learners. Moreover, all forms of assessment should be age-appropriate.

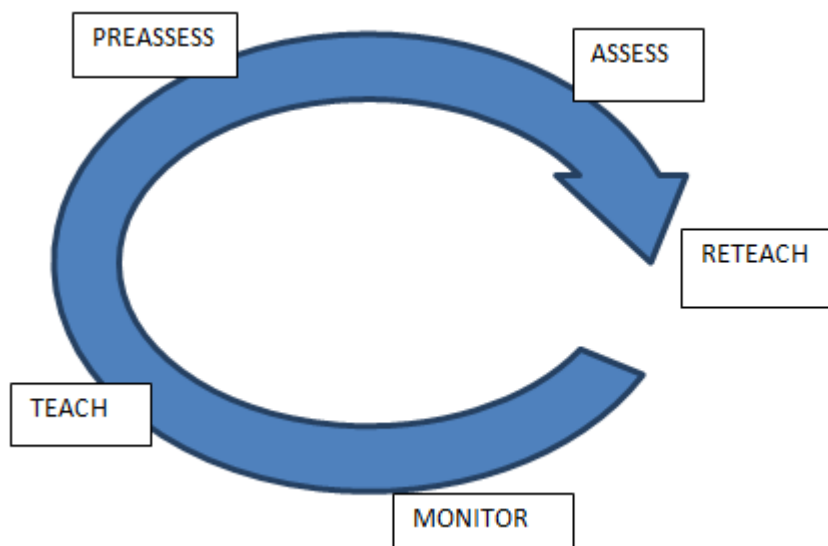
A study conducted by Mthethwa-Kunene, Masuku, Mkhalihi, and Khumalo (2016) on Lower primary school teachers' knowledge, attitudes towards and practice of formative assessment in Swaziland showed that teachers have a good knowledge of formative assessment as most of them are qualified teachers but they lack knowledge of the nature and



purpose of formative assessment. They did not know that in formative assessment, the learners' performance is compared against the curriculum not against the performance of others. The results of the study show that the teachers actually practised formative assessment without knowing what it entailed. This is an indication that teachers need in-service training in the value of instructional practices in order to have a clearer idea of what they do in their classrooms and why they do it the way they do it.

The central aspect in literacy education is that teachers should understand that students learn to read and write as a result of different activities that include direct instruction on strategies and also creating opportunities for the students to apply what they have learnt in actual reading and writing activities. Teachers, therefore, are expected to use assessment information that reveals the complex achievements students make in reading and writing activities. Focus on single aspects, for example, vocabulary exercises, is not adequate to measure success in reading. Nor is it appropriate to measure success in writing through spelling exercises only (<http://www.pearsonhighered.com>).

The following are important assessment procedures in literacy as taken from <http://www.pearsonhighered.com>. These assessment procedures are crucial in the teaching-learning process and they are known as teach-assess cycle. They include the following: determine students' background knowledge, identify students' reading levels, monitor students' learning, identify strengths and weakness in students' reading and writing activities, analyse students' spelling development, document students' learning, showcase students' best works, assign grades and use the results of standardized achievement tests as indicators of students' literacy levels and their strong and weak areas to assess the effect of the instruction. In summary, the teach-assess cycle requires that the teacher balances instruction with assessment as it is assessment that gives the teacher ideas on what learners need; and how the teacher needs to structure instruction.



**Figure 3.3; the teach-assess cycle adopted from [www.pearsonhighered.com](http://www.pearsonhighered.com)**

The Teach-assess cycle in figure 3.3 shows a general process to follow in the classroom. However, the teacher's discretion is also important because he or she is the one who plans the classroom activities based on the needs of the learners.

*The Nine-year Programme of Instruction for English* (1989, p.17) states that assessment should cover the following areas; cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The following areas are what should be covered in assessment activities under the cognitive domain:

- *Knowledge Content*: - how much a learner can retain and recall;
- *Level of understanding*: - how far the required knowledge has been built into the working system of the individual learner's- ability to use language effectively;
- *Ability to judge and to evaluate*: - how far the learner is able to appreciate and evaluate statements, literature and other written material;
- *Ability to analyse* : - how far the learner can breakdown given materials into components and be able to see relationships;
- *Ability to synthesize*: - how far the learner can use parts of knowledge to build up a holistic concept or body of information; and
- *Ability of application*: - how far the learner can apply his or her knowledge to new situations.

*The Nine-year Programme of Instruction for English (1989)* states some basic areas that should be assessed in the English literacy syllabus in Swaziland. It shows that assessment is actually an important part of the teaching-learning process. The previous chapter showed the different assessment areas in the Grade One literacy in the English syllabus in detail.

### **3.5.8 Principle 8: Effective teachers become partners with parents**

Literature on practices of effective teachers shows that parental involvement in the teaching-learning process is of paramount importance to ensure high achievement of learners. According to Hughes and Kwok, 2007 and Dlamini, 2009, 2015, effective teachers understand that parents are valuable partners in education and even parents with minimal education have a role to play. The teachers understand the fact that regardless of various socio-cultural backgrounds, and different ways of literacy use, most parents have a desire to see their children succeed in school. Their involvement in the education of their children, therefore, should never be undermined. Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler, (2007) share a similar view and believe that when parents are involved in their children's literacy development, children become better readers and writers since they have a powerful influence on their children's literacy development, especially in the foundation phase. Green, *et al.*, (2007) observed that supporting children by spending time in their classroom gives the parent an opportunity to understand the child and appreciate the diverse cultures of his or her children's peers. The context of most African schools does not allow parents an opportunity to sit in their children's classroom to have insight of their own children and their children's peers.

Parental involvement in young children's literacy development is also articulated by Anorl and Colburn (2006, p. 31) who said; "The single most significant factor influencing a child's early educational success is the introduction to books and being read to at home prior to beginning school". This is not evident in most third world countries as the culture of reading has not been instilled in parents themselves, very few middle class families have developed the culture of reading to children at home (Dlamini, 2009).

A study conducted by Roberts and Kaiser (2012) on assessing the effects of a parent-implemented language intervention for children with language impairments, thirty-four children with language impairment between the ages of 24 and 42 months were randomly assigned to a treatment or non-treatment experimental condition. Participants in the treatment group received 24 bi-weekly 1-hour sessions for 3 months. An additional sample of 28 age

and gender-matched children with typically developing language was also included. Observational measures and norm-referenced child assessments were used to assess changes in children's language growth. The results of the study showed that children in the treatment group made greater improvements than children in the control group on most language measures. On the other hand, at the end of the intervention, children in the treatment group had lower language scores than children with typical language. A conclusion drawn from this study was that a child with a receptive language parent matched predicted expressive language growth in both groups of children; those with language impairment and those without it. The study showed that parent-implemented interventions, therefore, can be used effectively to treat children with expressive and receptive language impairment. From this study, the researcher gathers that if parental-guided interventions were successful on children with language impairments, it could also be an effective way to develop early literacy in children without any impairment. Countries like Swaziland that use English as a second language should consider establishing parent-guided interventions to support young learners' early literacy development.

On the same subject, Carroll (2013) conducted a study on the effects of parental literacy involvement and child reading interest on the development of emergent literacy skills. A hierarchical regression analysis was used to examine the effect of storybooks exposure and direct parental involvement on emergent literacy in addition to a child's interest in reading and other literacy activities. Pre-school children from diverse ethnic groups of low socio-economic status were used in this study. The results showed that early exposure to books and other reading materials had a positive effect on the development of oral language in children. Children whose parents exposed them to reading materials at home and who were involved in literacy activities developed oral language faster than their underprivileged counterparts. The development of oral reading was seen to be an important factor because it ensured later reading achievement. Povey, Campbell, Willis, Haynes, Western, Bennett, Antrobus and Pedde (2016) support the value of parental engagement. They argue that parental engagement was deeper than parental involvement as the former helped develop the children socially and emotionally. They are of the view that children benefited holistically when parents were fully engaged in their children's learning by visiting the school and monitoring their progress.

Maynard *et al.*, (2010) had a similar observation. Their study showed that an open-school setting with the community has a positive impact on the learners, especially in the early years of school. They stated that effective implementation of foundation phase requires

collaboration at different levels; the classroom, school and community. The collaboration ensures a rich and supportive environment for the learners. They argue that the role of parents in children's learning is of paramount importance and it can avoid challenges that may be encountered at a later stage. They recommended that education practitioners should support parents as first and lasting teachers of their children. A collaborative effort between all parties could benefit the children and the teachers.

This section gave a lengthy discussion of the practices of effective teachers of literacy. Basic principles involved in effective teaching of literacy were discussed and supported with empirical studies. The following section will focus on pedagogical content knowledge in literacy teaching and learning.

### **3.6 Pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) in literacy**

Pedagogical content knowledge is another critical aspect for effective teaching and learning and can influence students' achievement (Flynn 2007; Turnuklu & Yesildere 2007; Hall & Harding 2003). It is important to discuss pedagogical content knowledge as it is believed to be at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Shulman and Shulman (2004, p. 257) define pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) as the knowledge of teaching methods teachers have for teaching a particular subject. The PCK balances what teachers should know about the subject they teach (subject matter knowledge) with preparation on how the content should be taught (pedagogy).

Hashwesh (2005, p. 273) views the pedagogic content knowledge as a category that brings together different kinds of knowledge a teacher must possess; teacher knowledge and beliefs, knowledge of subject matter, orientations, student characteristics, aims and purposes, resources and pedagogy. According to Hashwesh (2005), all teachers must possess this knowledge regardless of their contexts and the age of learners they teach. This means that the PCK is actually what defines a teacher, whether it is a teacher in the foundation phase, high school or institution of higher learning. Balls, Thames and Phelps (2008, p. 389) affirm the notion that PCK is a critical aspect for teachers as it assists them in understanding their roles as teachers.

To understand this concept, Turnuklu and Yesildere (2007) conducted a study on the pedagogical content knowledge in mathematics on pre-service primary mathematics teachers' perspectives in Turkey. Four open-ended problems were used to collect data from 45 primary

mathematics teacher candidates, and analysed based on pre-determined criteria. The findings showed that deep understanding of mathematical knowledge was necessary, but not adequate to teach mathematics. Basically, the main finding emphasised the relationship between knowledge of mathematics (subject content) and knowledge of mathematics teaching (pedagogy). From this concept, the researcher understands that teachers should possess both the knowledge of content and pedagogy in order to be effective in their subjects and increase students' achievement, as the synthesis of content knowledge with the awareness of the unique learning needs of individual learners is what defines an effective teacher.

Ford, Foxlee and Green (2009, p.47), in their study of subject literacy, found that until teachers become confident in the language of the subject they are required to teach, they cannot embrace more child-centred methodologies in their teaching such as participatory learning. Basically, teachers must understand what subject literacy means in their specific discipline. The PCK, therefore, makes teachers understand specific subject literacy. Flynn (2007, pp.137-146) shares a similar view in a study entitled; *What do effective teachers of literacy do; Subject knowledge and pedagogical choice for literacy*. The findings showed that the extent to which teachers engage participatory methods in their classes was to a large extent determined by their level of confidence in subject content and teaching skills. He argues that the age and gender of the teacher is not an issue so long as the teacher is competent in the subject content and is conversant with the teaching skills. He or she can engage in participatory learning with students. The content knowledge alone is inadequate as the teaching skills are critical for participatory learning to be meaningful. On this subject, Hall and Harding (2003, p.3) said, "The effective teacher of literacy [including content] uses an unashamedly eclectic collection of methods which represents a balance between direct teaching and more holistic approaches". This assertion is also supported by other researchers whose findings showed that reading competency of primary school learners is directly related to teachers' content knowledge which, in turn, influence their instructional practices (Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Dlamini, 2009). The following subsections will present different aspects of literacy content knowledge for foundation phase classes, with particular focus in the Grade One class.

### 3.6.1 Oral language as a foundation for literacy

Oral language is the foundation of learning to read and write and the essential ingredient for general success in school (Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart 2009). Roskos *et al.*, (2009, p. 1) are of the view that if children have a strong grasp of the oral language skill in the early years, they are able to question, converse, investigate, initiate and link meanings in any subject area. Based on this opinion, Roskos *et al.*, (2009) state that it is important for teachers to identify children who have difficulty with language at an early stage so that they can be given an opportunity to catch up with their more capable peers. This is important because researchers agree that literacy builds on a foundation of oral language, making the latter a subset of the other (Roskos *et al.*, 2009; Snow, Eadie, Connell, Dalheim, McCusker & Munro, 2014).

Snow *et al.*, (2014, p.495) assert that the development of oral language involves various activities such as storytelling and drama. The foundation phase teacher therefore, is seen as an ‘educator and an actor’ whose role is to engage learners in the storytelling activities and drama to develop their oral language in a more stimulating way. O’Neill, Banoobhai and Smith (2016) share a similar view. In their article on teaching literacy through dramatic storytelling, their findings showed that dramatic storytelling has tremendous impact on children’s learning of a language as it gives them an opportunity to engage with the oral language in a natural and realistic way. Their engagement is through listening to the drama being performed and actual participation in the drama as part of the characters and spectators. Moreover, follow-up activities that develop literacy are easily linked through writing new words learnt from dramatic storytelling.

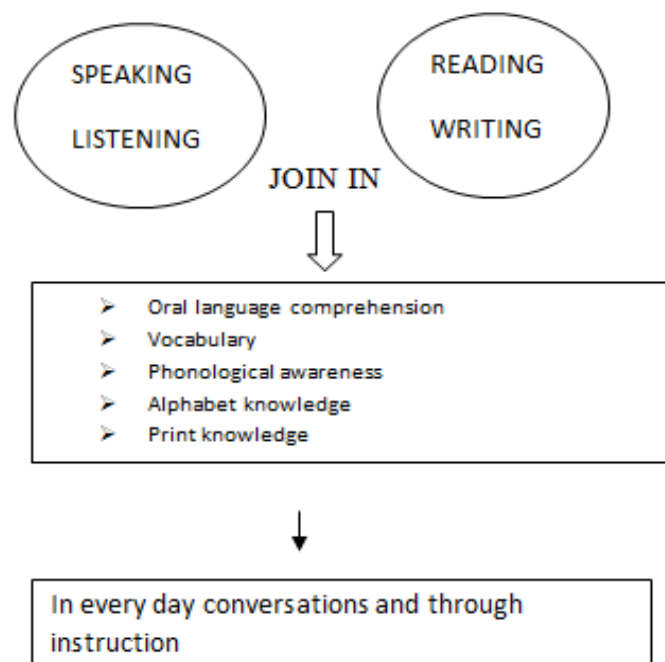
Roskos *et al.*, (2009, p. 4) suggest that teachers in schools should be aware of the language needs children have and address this problem by integrating language development into all areas of the school curriculum. In short, in their lesson organization, teachers should set explicit learning objectives that will engage learners in activities that will explore language and, in the process, develop the needed skills. Kirkland and Patterson (2005, p.3) share a similar view. They state that the development of oral language at an early stage is fundamental to a development of literacy in children in areas such as listening, speaking, and reading and writing. According to Kirkland and Patterson, (2005), in addition to oral language being the foundation for literacy development, it also gives children knowledge about the world.

In view of the importance of oral language in the development of literacy, teachers, therefore, should have a clear understanding of the link between the two to be able to assist students to establish a relationship between speaking, reading and writing. Roskos *et al.*, (2009, p.4) provide five primary areas children need to develop in oral language:

- Semantics: Developing meaning for the words children would hear and say in their conversation with others;
- Syntax (grammar): Learning the rules of how words are linked together;
- Morphology: figuring out how to manipulate the smallest units of meaning in the language (morphemes);
- Phonology: understanding the sound structure of language; and
- Pragmatics: understanding the social uses of language and basic social rules like ‘greetings’, and taking turns in conversations.

It is the role of the teacher to understand these areas to be in a better position to facilitate the development of these critical aspects of oral language in children, especially in the early years of school. According to Woolley (2011, p.7), good knowledge of language systems places a teacher in a strong position when making instructional decisions. In my experience as a teacher and a teacher educator, these aspects of oral language are learnt at preschool and First Grade. In the context of Swaziland, as has been pointed out already, not all children are privileged to attend pre-school, so the First Grade becomes critical in developing these oral language skills (Dlamini, *et al.*, 2016).





**Figure 3.4** a framework for joining oral language and early literacy as presented by Roskos *et al.*, (2009, p.3)

Figure 3.4 shows the inexplicable relationship between the different language skills and how they are all connected to oral language. Literacy development, therefore, involves the connection of all the language skills and the learners' ability to use them effectively for daily operation in the social environment. The structure shows that there is no way the teacher can separate these skills in an English literacy classroom as they all link to one another to develop a literate learner in the English language. Classroom practices, therefore, should reflect this link. *The Nine year programme of instruction* (1989, p. 2) stipulates that pupils should first be introduced to English through oral work, and then very basic reading and writing skills could be introduced in the first and second language. The document states: 'The use of oral work is of utmost importance for the development of both siSwati and English. In essence, oral communication is the foundation of reading and writing development.'

### 3.6.2 Reading as a component of literacy in Grade One

Researchers in the area of literacy teaching and learning claim that reading is a critical area in literacy, as it makes all other areas of learning possible (Snow *et al.*, 1998; *The National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)*, 2000, Prinsloo, 2008; Machet & Tiemensma, 2009; Whitebread & Coltman, 2015). According to Prinsloo (2008),

reading literacy achievement in children ensures their future success in learning. In the same vein, Whitebread and Coltman (2015) argue that reading is the most difficult skill of language among the four basic language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Maphumulo (2010, p.20) defines reading as the making of meaning from print based on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency and comprehension. For Maphumulo, reading is all about making sense of the print material and developing fluency that leads to comprehension.

Machet and Tiemensma (2009, p.58) state that reading is a complex skill and that it relies on the other skills in order to make meaning from text as comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading. Reading is also considered as the most powerful way of receiving information, ideas and stories and is an essential competency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Joubert *et al.*, 2015). Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn (2009) identified five critical areas for successful reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Researchers such as McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, and Levitt (2006) talk of four content areas in reading: comprehension, phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and concept about print.

Neuman and Dickinson (2001) argue that young children need meaningful experience in these five critical areas of literacy because their knowledge of early literacy concepts predicts their reading achievement at a later stage in their learning. That being the case, the researcher believes that successful teaching of literacy in Grade One will draw upon these critical aspects. The instructional practices of teachers would mean that they integrate these components to develop the reading and writing skills of students. The following section will discuss each of these critical areas of reading as a part of literacy. They are also referred to as the five pillars: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

### **3.6.2.1 Phonemic awareness**

The first pillar that needs to be developed in the early years of school for young learners to be competent readers is phonemic awareness. The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) defines phonemic awareness as the knowledge that words are made up of a combination of individual letter sounds. For example, the word *pot* is made up of three letter sounds which are called (phonemes) 'p' 'o' and 't'. If a child knows that these words; *pot*, *put*, *potato* all have the same sound at the beginning of the word, then that child has phonemic awareness. Pinnell and Fountas (2010, p.1) state that "phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the discrete sounds in spoken words". It involves training children to recognize, isolate, and manipulate phonemes. Hugo (2013, p.40) defines phonemic awareness

simply as the ability to isolate the different sounds of a language. And this is done orally when the learner has to relate different sounds of the letters of the alphabet. Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn (2009, p.2) assert that, before children learn to read any printed material, they need to be conscious of how the sound in words works; they must get an understanding of the manner in which words are formed; that words are made up of speech sounds also known as phonemes.

Phonemic awareness is said to be a central precursor to reading and it is also critical in the development of students' writing and spelling as it lays the groundwork for learners to associate individual sounds with written letters (Snow *et al.*, 1998). That being the case, phonemic awareness instruction should be emphasized in the kindergarten and First Grade to enable students to read connected text by end of the First Grade (Hagan-Burke, Burke & Crowder, 2006). This idea is supported by Hempenstall (2009) who states that for children to be able to link their knowledge of spoken language to their knowledge of written language, they must first master the alphabetic code, the system of grapheme-phoneme correspondence (letter-sound correspondence) that links written words to their pronunciations. Scholars agree that to read, children must know how to blend isolated sounds into words; to write, they must know how to break words into their component sounds. First-grade learners who don't yet know their letters and sounds will need distinctive catch-up instruction. In addition to such phonemic awareness, beginning readers must know their letters and have a basic understanding of how the letters of words, going from left to right, represent their sounds. First-grade classrooms must be designed to ensure that all children have a firm grasp of these basics before formal reading and spelling instruction begins (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Taylor, 2008; Lenyai, 2011; Tompkins, 2014).

The findings of the study conducted by *The National Reading Panel 2000* on the role of phonemic awareness in early reading showed that thorough development of phonemic awareness in the early years ensured learners' ability to read in later years. Phonemic awareness, therefore, is a predictor of reading achievement in the future. The study recommended that teachers use creative ways of teaching phonemic awareness that motivates learners in literacy learning. It further recommended an integration of other components of reading for learners to be accomplished readers as phonemic awareness was only a component in a reading programme.

The findings from *The National Reading Panel, 2000* study also showed that phonemic awareness instruction assisted different types of learners regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds, including at-risk and disabled learners. However, for disabled learners, reading was improved only by phonemic awareness instruction, not spelling. The study showed that phonemic awareness instruction was more effective when letters were used and when fewer skills were taught than when many skills were taught at a time. This means that though phonemic awareness makes a significant contribution to reading instruction, teachers need to be conversant with the effective ways of using it, lest they do not realise its effectiveness in their English literacy classrooms. Taylor (2008) shares similar sentiments and asserts that learners in the foundation phase would benefit from a systematic instruction in phonemic awareness in the foundation phase as it also enhances fluency and vocabulary in learners. The researcher is of the view that foundation teachers should be well versed in the teaching of phonemic awareness to be able to assist learners to grasp it. An effective literacy classroom should engage learners in activities that would develop their awareness of the discrete sounds of spoken words.

### **3.6.2.2 Phonics**

Phonics has been identified as another important component in the teaching and learning of reading and is a critical area of literacy (Hugo, 2008, 2013; *National Institute of Child Health and Development of the National Reading Panel, 2000*; Garton & Prat, 1998; Pinnell & Fountas, 2010). Pinnell and Fountas, (2010) state that phonics is the relationship between a specific letter and its sound, *only* as it relates to the written word. Armbruster *et al.*, (2009, p. 12) share a similar view. They clarify that phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Armbruster *et al.*, (2009, p.12) argue that the goal of phonics instruction is to assist children to learn to use the alphabet principle correctly with the understanding that there are logical and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words.

In support of phonics instruction, Pinnell and Fountas, (2010) argue that phonics are useful in reading because they assist the reader to read an unknown word by focusing on specific sounds of each letter as he attempts to read the word. For example, a reader may not be familiar with the word 'employ'. She may thus break the word into segments to come up with /e/ /m/ /p/ /l/ o/y/. An appropriate sound will be assigned to each letter. Then the reader can

combine the sounds to come out with a word, 'e-m-p-l-o-y'. The NRP (2000) researchers further argue that the knowledge of phonics is also critical in writing as it teaches strategies to spell words correctly. Richards and Renandya (2002) support this view and confirm that the advantage of the phonic method in teaching reading is that learners are able to practise letter sounds which, in turn enables them to devise a strategy to decode words they have never seen. However, the learners' ability to decode the word does not ensure comprehension of the word, which is the ultimate goal for reading.

Al-Hazza, Fleener, and Hager (2008) conducted a study to examine teachers' overall knowledge of phonological awareness as perceived by teachers' years of experience. The results showed that there was no significant difference in knowledge between new teachers and experienced teachers. The two groups of teachers acknowledged the importance of phonological awareness in the teaching and learning of reading in the foundation phase. The only difference was in their expertise in using it to teach learners how to read. Out of one hundred and forty one teachers who participated in the study, one hundred and two teachers (72%) rated their phonological awareness as high, a sign that they were experts in the area. Only thirty nine teachers (28%) rated their knowledge as low, meaning that they had minimal knowledge of phonemic and phonics awareness. Quantitative research design was used to collect data for the study by Al-Hazza *et al.*, (2008). For this study, the researcher will follow a qualitative design and utilise interviews, focus group discussions and observation to explore instructional practices of teachers of literacy in Grade One.

Al-Hazza *et al.*, (2008) concluded that participants benefited from training in phonic segmentation and phonemic spelling skills. The LPA group received more training during the course of the study and that made it outperform the LO group. The study showed that it cannot be taken for granted that teacher knowledge of phonics and phonological principles means they are in a position to support learners experiencing difficulty in reading. Consequently, the study showed that thorough training of teachers in these basic reading components is essential for improved performance in literacy. Teachers should provide explicit instruction and practice with sound structures that lead to familiarity with spelling-sound conventions and their use in identifying printed words. All children have to learn to sound out words rather than to rely on context and pictures as their primary strategies to determine meaning.

Al-Hazza *et al.*, (2008) also examined teachers' actual knowledge of phonics; in particular, the terminology and actual ability to apply phonetic principles in the classroom. The results showed an average of 61% on phonetics knowledge, which is not satisfactory for teachers' ability to teach primary children phonetics material. This is because, according to Al-Hazza *et al.*, (2008), the English language is structurally complex and not phonetically regular. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be conversant with the basic rules and concepts of phonics and phonological awareness least they misrepresent the concept and confuse learners.

A conclusion Al-Hazza *et al.* (2008) reached was that without mastery of these basic reading components, teachers may use inappropriate examples and misinform students on the complex sound systems in the English language. A common view by researchers on reading instruction is that there should be a systematic approach to word attack strategies. They agree that well-sequenced phonics instruction early in first grade has been shown to reduce the incidence of reading difficulty even as it accelerates the growth of the class as a whole. Given this, it is probably best to start all children, most especially in high-poverty areas, with explicit phonics instruction. Such an approach does require the continual monitoring of children's progress both to allow those who are progressing quickly to move ahead before they become bored and to ensure that those who are having difficulties get the assistance they need (Al-Hazza *et al.*, 2008; *The National Reading Panel*, 2000). As a language educator, I support the view that early in first grade, a child's reading materials should feature a high proportion of new words that use the letter-sound relationships they have been taught. It makes no sense to teach decoding strategies and then have children read materials in which these strategies won't work. While research does not specify the exact percentage of words children should be able to recognize nor sound out, it is clear that most children will learn to read more effectively with systematic phonics instruction.

### **3.6.2.3 Fluency**

Fluency is another important component in the development of reading. According to *National Reading Panel*, 2000, fluency is the ability to read connected text with speed and accuracy. Armbruster *et al.*, (2009, p.22) define fluency as the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. As a result, fluent readers exert less effort and show expression when reading either silently or orally and this enhances their understanding of the text. Armbruster, *et al.*, (2009, p.22), in their article *Put Reading first*, argue that during silent reading, fluent readers recognize words automatically and group them to understand easily what they are reading as

they focus on what the text means instead of focusing on decoding words. This, therefore, renders their reading effortless as they are able to recognize and comprehend words at the same time. Researchers on reading agree that fluency is a prerequisite for comprehension (Rasinski, & Samuels, 2011; Swanson, & O'Connor, 2009) as slow readers have to focus on decoding and in the process very little comprehension is achieved.

Yildirim and Ates (2012) conducted a study to learn whether or not in silent reading, fluency was the predictor of reading comprehension and which variable, silent or oral reading, fluency was the best predictor of reading comprehension. Co-relational design was used on One hundred Fifth-Grade Turkish elementary students in urban schools. An appropriate grade level text was used to measure students' silent and oral reading fluency through one-on-one sessions. A reading comprehension test was administered to all students. The main finding was that in silent and oral reading, fluency was moderately related and had a significant correlation with reading comprehension. Silent reading, however, had a more significant input to prediction of reading comprehension than oral reading fluency. This finding is useful in helping teachers decide on how to handle reading fluency instruction in their classrooms.

On the same subject of fluency, Swanson, and O'Connor (2009), investigated whether or not practice in reading fluency had a causal influence on the relationship between working memory (WM) and text comprehension of 155 students in Grade 2 and Grade 4 who were poor and average readers. Dyfluent check readers were randomly assigned to repeated reading and compared with untreated dyfluent checks and fluent readers on post-test measures of literacy, word identification, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The main finding was that, although continuous reading increased comprehension, fluency practice did not compensate for working memory. This means that, though fluency is important for reading comprehension, it does not guarantee retention of what was read. Cunningham and Allington (2006) hold a similar view that fluency is an acquired trait, but does not always guarantee understanding of concepts. This means that a reader may be fluent, but fail to comprehend fully what he or she reads. Teachers therefore, should understand this and be able to engage learners in activities that would develop their fluency in reading whilst preserving comprehension.

#### **3.6.2.4 Vocabulary**

The development of vocabulary is said to be another essential aspect in the effective teaching and learning of literacy. Lehr, Osborn & Hiebert (2004, p. 1) define vocabulary as knowledge

of words and word-meaning in both oral and print language and in both receptive and productive forms. Armbruster, *et al.*, (2009, p. 34) state that vocabulary is critical in reading comprehension because readers cannot understand what they read unless they have a clear meaning of most of the words. In short, knowing what the words mean enables readers to understand the content of any text. Without knowing the meaning of words, one cannot understand a text and reading would not benefit the individual in any way.

Researchers agree that vocabulary is the most significant predictor of text difficulty for Second Language (L2) readers, and insufficient vocabulary in English is the major hindrance to successful reading (Mehrpour, Razmjoo & Kian, 2011; 2005; *NRP, 2000*). *The National Reading Panel, 2000* concluded that the growth in reading power relies on continuous growth in word knowledge. Similarly, in their research, Pikulski and Templeton (2004, p.1) state that the greatest weapons that can be given to students for academic success, and life in general, is a large, rich vocabulary and skills to use it. In their view, the ability to function effectively in today's complex social and economic world lies in the use of language skills and word knowledge. The researcher is of the opinion that availing age-appropriate reading materials in the classrooms and motivating learners to read widely could help increase their receptive and productive vocabulary.

On this subject, Solari, Aceves, Higareda, Richards, Filippini, Gerber and Leafstedt (2014) conducted a study to determine which early reading skill in kindergarten and First Grade predict performance on English oral reading fluency (ORF) by the end of First Grade and Second Grade in a population of 150 Spanish-speaking English Language Learners (ELL). The students were assessed on different early reading skills that included phonological awareness, letter knowledge, vocabulary, word reading, and oral reading fluency. These measures were analysed using hierarchical multiple regression to determine which early reading skills predicted English oral reading fluency scores at the end of the First and Second Grades. The results suggest that a level of English receptive vocabulary at kindergarten was a significant predictor of oral reading fluency in First Grade. However, after kindergarten, the relation between these two variables was no longer significant. This was a longitudinal study focusing on children from kindergarten up to the First and Second Grades. In the case of Swaziland, where some children just begin in the First Grade without going to pre-school, it would mean that English receptive vocabulary at First Grade could be a significant predictor of oral reading fluency in the Second Grade up to the Third Grade. Consequently, this study focuses on instructional practices of teachers of literacy in the First Grade.



In another study, Mehrpour *et al.*, (2011) administered a vocabulary level test (for measuring depth) and word associates test (for measuring breadth) to sixty participants (thirty male and thirty female students). The main objective of the study was to determine which one of the vocabulary aspects, depth and breadth, makes a remarkable contribution in second language learning. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between the scores. The more words a learner knows the easier and faster they comprehend a text. The conclusion they drew was that the size of vocabulary knowledge is as important as the depth of vocabulary knowledge and the two were interconnected and need to be developed alongside each other. This means that teachers in the early grades should emphasize both aspects of vocabulary knowledge (breadth and depth) to ensure that students become proficient readers as research shows that, by exposing children to rich vocabulary and using all kinds of words, children build a verbal storehouse they can draw on later in their reading. Attention should be given to the acquisition of basic skills and exposure to rich literature for learners to be proficient users of language. As a language advisor, the researcher is of the view that teachers should engage learners with texts that include words that they can decipher to give them the chance to apply their emerging skills. Moreover, children should practise reading independently with texts slightly below their frustration level and receive assistance with slightly more difficult texts. Before reading, teachers can establish the purpose for the reading, review vocabulary, activate background knowledge, and encourage children to predict what the story will be about (Morrow, Pressley, Smith & Smith, 1997).

Contrary to this view, McKeown, Beck and Sandora (2012) observed that, in schools, there is a tendency to pay little attention to explicit vocabulary instruction, and to only use the dictionary as a source of word meaning. This practice minimises students' opportunities to learn vocabulary in class. In this study of instructional practices of teachers in English literacy in Grade One, the researcher hopes to understand how teachers handle this aspect of reading in their classrooms.

### **3.6.2.5 Comprehension**

Comprehension is another component identified as critical in the Five Big Ideas in reading and is also an advanced skill in reading (*National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading study group, 2002; Sweet & Snow, 2003; McCoach, O'Connell, Reis & Levitt, 2006; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010*). The RAND Reading study group (2002, p.11) defines comprehension as the process of extracting and constructing meaning as a result of

interaction and involvement with written language or even spoken language. According to the RAND Reading study group (2002), comprehension consists of three interrelated elements; the reader, the text and the purpose of reading, all of which are influenced by the social and cultural context in which the reading occurs. This definition of comprehension is supported and further simplified by McCoach, O'Connell, Reis, and Levitt (2006, p.14) who define comprehension as the process of deriving meaning from action, speech, and text by connecting what you are learning to what you already know. They go on to say that comprehension enables children to make sense of what they see, hear, and read. The main idea in the definition of comprehension is that the linkage between new information and what one already knows is critical to enhance comprehension. This is supported by Duke and Pearson (2009) who noted that children form new cognitive schema that alter the way they see, think, and comprehend. The new cognitive schema accommodates a new word well if connected to previous understanding. Teachers, therefore, should have a clear understanding of how children develop comprehension so that they always create the link between new schema and previous knowledge.

Sweet and Snow (2003) argue that comprehension becomes more critical to students in the upper elementary grades as it provides the foundation for learning at secondary school level. This view is supported by Butler, Urrutia, Buenger and Hunt (2010) who state that a student's academic progress is shaped by his or her ability to understand what is read. Armbruster, *et al.*, (2009) concur with this idea, stating that teachers should build students' comprehension by predicting, asking questions, helping students find access to background knowledge and making connections during reading. This is basically enabling students to relate what they read to what they know in order to understand clearly the new information. As a language educator, the researcher is convinced that reading comprehension skill can develop in Grade One learners by strategically planning reading activities. For instance, after reading a story, children may be asked to retell or summarize stories, to create graphic organizers such as word maps, cause-and-effect charts, or to put pictures of story events in order to make meaning.

In an effort to understand comprehension as a component of reading, Neddenriep, Fritz and Carrier (2011) conducted a study on reading comprehension improvement of primary school students through an intervention in reading fluency instruction. The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between increase in reading comprehension and changes in reading fluency among 5 Fourth Grade students.

Students' initial reading performance levels and the effectiveness of the reading fluency intervention were assessed using AIMS web R-CBM sight phrases and passages, stopwatches, kitchen timers, and a Maze passage. Firstly, a brief intervention assessment was administered on the participants to determine the most effective intervention components to improve reading fluency and comprehension. Secondly, participants were instructed by the researchers using the reconciliation of repeated practice with feedback, error correction, instructional-level reading materials, and weekly progress monitoring by AIMS web twice a week for the fifteen weeks of intervention. Data collected were examined for changes in trends and levels from baseline to intervention periods.

The results showed an increase in both reading fluency and reading comprehension for the participants. The participants also showed an increase in comprehension by one word selected each week with Maze passages after 5 weeks of fluency intervention. The conclusion by these researchers was that, overall, fluency intervention improved participants reading comprehension as among the 5 participants, 4 participants showed some remarkable improvement in word comprehension per minute (WCPM), though not at the same rate. This study shows that there is a close relationship between fluency and reading comprehension. And that being the case, teachers should pay attention to these reading skills as comprehension, which is the goal of reading, is dependent on all the other areas of reading such as phonemic awareness, phonic, vocabulary and fluency.

In its intensive work on reading research, *The National Reading Panel, 2000* reported that there was need for explicit and systematic instruction in vocabulary and comprehension in the foundation phase. The panel was for the idea that students have to know the meaning of words in order to develop comprehension. According to the *NRP, 2000*, lack of explicit and systematic teaching of comprehension in primary grades slowed down literacy development among primary school learners. In pursuing this study on teachers' instructional practices in literacy, the researcher hopes to ascertain how teachers handled the different reading skills in their Grade One classrooms. The following section will discuss writing as an aspect of literacy.

### **3.6.3 Writing as a component of literacy in Grade One**

Having discussed reading as an important component in literacy that needed to be developed in the children's early years, writing is another important pillar that needs to be developed at an early stage in order to lay a solid foundation for life-long learning and social, economic

and political freedom. This section, therefore, discusses writing as an aspect of literacy in the foundation phase.

Hugo (2013) noted that a prerequisite for developing writing skills in the foundation phase is to expose the students to written text in the form of reading. This means that students must get used to seeing letters, words and sentences in order to be able to produce their own written works. Vygotsky (1978), a well-known constructivist theorist addresses the importance of developing the writing skill in young children. Vygotsky (1978) took a keen interest in children's writing and he views the origin of writing in the child's gesture. He writes:

Gesture is the visual sign that contains the child's future writing as an acorn contains a future oak. Gestures, it has been correctly said, are writing in the air, and written signs frequently are simply gestures that have been fixed (Vygotsky 1978, p.109).

In this assertion, Vygotsky was of the view that drawing is actually a preparation to literacy and, as a result, teachers should not take children's drawing lightly. A similar observation was made by McLane and McNamee (1990) who conducted a study of writing with children at an afterschool day care programme. The findings of the study showed that with adult involvement and support, writing can actually be used to develop children's interest in drawing and pretend play activities. They also observed that the act of a child's writing or even scribbling something on a piece of paper also developed the child's ability to tell a story, and to act out an imaginary role in a play. This notion is also held by Vygotsky (1978), he stresses the importance of writing in developing sound literacy skills in a child and advised that writing should be meaningful and be taught naturally using methods that incorporate the child's social setting.

Researchers such as (Garton & Pratt, 1998; Clay, 2005) suggested that to develop the writing skill, children should be provided with writing-friendly environments so that they are encouraged to experiment with written language. Print activities such as books, magazines, paper, pencils, and block with alphabet letters, crayons and plastic letters should be readily availed to students. This is because children's writing develops best when they are engaged in authentic written tasks for different purposes. *The Nine year programme of instruction* (1989, p.7) stipulates that in Grade One, students are expected to:

- Write the letters of the alphabet in the upper and lower cases;
- Copy words and understand their meaning;
- Form a sentence from a set of words;
- Perform simple gap filling exercises; and
- Have acquired a small repertoire of words which can be written legibly.

*The Nine year programme of instruction for English* (1989) also states that the skill of writing becomes easier to develop if the skills of speaking, listening and reading are covered sufficiently. In my understanding, all the four language skills are related and each one is essential to strengthen the other.

A study by Hudson and Walmsley (2005) showed that elementary school teachers had scanty training in writing as a result; their instructional practices show that they had greater inadequacy of knowledge on the teaching of writing than on the reading. Moreover, the Bay Area writing project by Kim, Al Otaiba, Sidler, and Grulich (2013) shows that in order for teachers to develop competency in reading instruction, they need to be involved in writing projects themselves. This would increase their knowledge of writing and further yield positive results in their classroom practices. The study further showed that the quality of writing, children's grammatical knowledge, reading comprehension and letter knowledge were related in a unique way and enhanced literacy and language behaviours.

There has been a debate on the teaching and learning of writing. Some researchers such as Dyson (2013) argue that writing is actually an advanced process of language skill that depends on the other language skills for it to be successful and that children should learn to write when they attend school because it is a complex process that needs formal instruction by qualified teachers. Moreover, writing should follow on from learning to read as the skills involved in reading such as phonemic awareness lay a foundation for learning to write. This view is challenged by Garton and Pratt (1998), Clay, (2005) and Fields, Groth and Spangler, (2008) on the basis that learners are not seen as active participants in their learning and the teachers are crucial for instruction. It overlooks the fact that children are from different environments and some learn to write before they even start school. Moreover, Fields *et al.*, (2008) argue there is no linear order in learning how to read and write as children can naturally develop how to read and write through playful exploration and even learn rules from it.

In her study, Clay (2005) observed that some children show some interest in writing before they can read and this has four important benefits. First, in writing children are actively involved and pay attention because they are interested in doing it. Second, they begin to link the written word with spoken words as they write down what they say. In the process, literacy is developed. Third, when children write they realize that words are formed by individual phonemes, in learning the alphabet principles that letters represent sounds, a basis critical for learning to read and write, is formed. Lastly, children will attempt to read what they have written, therefore, realizing that writing and reading are related activities. Clay (2005) concluded that once children realize the connection between writing and reading, literacy develops as they will be able to write and read more meaningful text. Clay (2005) asserts that writing can contribute to the building of various kinds of inner control of literacy learning that is needed by the successful reader. And there is no known order in which the learning will occur.

A meta-analysis of effective instructions holds that the process approach in teaching writing is effective, especially with young learners (Graham, Hebert & Harris, 2015). Graham *et al.*, (2015) recommend that teachers create an environment that should support learners' writing, set routines, provide instant feedback, pay particular attention to certain writing strategies and maximize time for writing activities. These recommendations by Graham and his colleagues support the notion that teachers remain the focal persons in the classroom; their practices can either develop or even inhibit learners' acquisition of literacy.

### **3.7 Effective teaching approaches in the literacy classroom at foundation phase**

The foundation phase is said to be the most important level in the child's academic life as it lays the foundation for future learning. *The Swaziland National Curriculum Framework for General Education* (2016, p.19) states that the foundation phase is the start of the development of essential literacy, numeracy and life skills. At this stage, children engage in learning activities through play and collaborative work that would develop their communication skills and their sense of wellbeing. The document also states that it is crucial for the teacher at this level to pay maximum attention to each learner and their needs.

Sarigoz (2012) states that there is no one suitable approach for teaching a foreign language to young learners, rather an eclectic and age-appropriate approach is recommended. According to Sarigoz (2012), the eclectic approach is able to meet varied learner needs in different contexts. The researcher maintains that an eclectic approach is effective as it allows the

teacher to explore various strategies that work best with the type of learners and available resources in a particular environment.

### **3.7.1 Play as basis for literacy instruction in the foundation phase**

There is a general agreement among researchers on literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase that instructional approaches must be meaningful and well planned with activities that incorporate multiple goals and that are embedded with content and process (Wharton-McDonald, *et al.*, 1998; Allington, 2006). These researchers also agree on the importance of allocating adequate time for engagement in literacy activities by learners to enhance the breadth and depth of learning. They identified play-based instruction and explicit instruction as the two strategies that teachers can use in literacy instruction. Sarigoz (2012) also supports the play-based approach to teaching literacy to young learners. He states that techniques such as games, songs, puzzles, crafts, stories, drama are suitable to create children-friendly language learning environment.

In view of the critical nature of the early years of schooling, Vygotsky (1962) advocates for the promotion of foundational competencies through play. He presents the importance of play in children's cognitive development by stressing the significance of the acquisition of symbols and rules during play. It is in play that children are able to establish rules that will govern the play and attach their own meaning to symbols or objects (Daniels, Cole, and Wertsch, 2007, p.255). Daniels *et al.*, (2007 p.255) claim that for Vygotsky, it is during play that one can see how children's early forms of perception can show their narrative and dialectical knowledge forms.

Sarigoz (2008) advocated for the learner-centred approach where the focus is on the individual learner and his or her needs. Sarigoz's (2008) idea is based on the constructivist theory that puts the learner at the centre of the teaching-learning process. In the literacy classroom, the teacher is expected to create opportunities to engage in different literacy skills in meaningful and realistic ways in order to develop competency in their use. For young children to learn literacy in a foreign language the classroom activities should be enjoyable for the learners and they should be linked closely to their everyday social and cultural practices. Sarigoz (2012) is of the view that effective instruction in literacy learning in a foreign language could be offered in an enjoyable manner through games, crafts and songs. He argues that games are beneficial in the sense that language is presented in a natural way and for a particular purpose without any anxiety about making mistakes.

Roskos, Christie and Richgels (2003), in their study of the essentials of early literacy instruction, concluded that play has a significant role to play in children's education in the early years. Therefore, linking literacy and play is one of the most effective means to make literacy activities meaningful and enjoyable for children. They suggested eight strategies teachers could use with learners in the foundation phase and even later at the primary school level. These include: rich teacher talk, storybook reading, phonological awareness activities, alphabet activities, support for emergent reading, and support for emergent writing, shared book experience, and integrated-focused activities. Below are the instructional strategies as suggested by Roskos *et al.*, (2003, pp. 52-60).

### **3.7.2 Rich teacher talk**

Roskos *et al.*, (2003) suggest that teachers engage learners in rich conversations in groups of various sizes; large, smaller, pairs and one-on-one settings to enable learners to talk. Teachers are also required to use new words which are not common so that the children can learn new vocabulary. They are also required to elaborate on what learners say using more descriptive and more grammatically complex statements. This will help bring clarity to what is learnt. Roskos *et al.*, (2003) also suggest that teachers discuss mind-provoking content, and use topics that demand the learners' knowledge of the world, or require them to reflect on language. Furthermore, they suggest that teachers listen and respond to what learners say no matter how trivial. This instructional idea by Roskos *et al.*, (2003) is based on the socio-cultural theory of learning that advocates the involvement of the learners' socio-cultural context.

### **3.7.3 Storybook reading**

Teachers are expected to read aloud to the class at least once or even twice a day to expose learners to various enjoyable stories, poems and general information. In this activity, teachers should provide supportive conversations and activities before, during and after reading. A repetition of favourable books is encouraged as it builds familiarity with the story and learners may have a desire to read the books on their own. Sarigoz (2012, p.254) shares a similar idea and argues that reading a storybook with illustrations enhances learners' literacy learning as they are able to associate illustrations with the printed word. In essence, teachers should make use of the pictures and illustrations in storybooks to assist learners to grasp what the story is about. Moreover, this increases the learners' awareness of the styles of writing; they understand that writing is functional and used for specific purposes.



### **3.7.6 Support for emergent reading**

Hiebert and Martin (2009) remind us that creating opportunities for learners to read is critical in a literacy classroom. However, Hiebert and Martin, (2009) hold that for the reading to be effective, this depends on a number of factors such as adequate time, difficulty of the text, genre of text, and learner's proficiency in reading. Roskos *et al.*, (2003, p.54) share a similar view. They state that teachers should encourage children to read books and other printed materials and this should be done by providing an attractive library centre with user-friendly and age-appropriate reading material. Also, teachers should use appropriate display material connected to class activities such as charts, posters and labels. Repeated reading of books should be encouraged so that learners become more familiar with what they read. According to researchers on literacy-best practices (Gambrell, 2011; Gambrell, Malloy & Mazzoni, 2011) reading books repeatedly fosters independent reading by learners. In addition, as they read widely and independently, learners are able to grasp the basic mechanics of written language such as alphabet principle, text structures, genre and the five pillars of reading.

### **3.7.7 Support for emergent writing**

Roskos *et al.*, (2003, p. 55) further suggest that teachers should support emergent writing in learners. They state that learners should be encouraged to write so that the reading skill is associated with written activities. Scribble writing and invented spelling should be tolerated and support offered to motivate them to write. They also suggest that writing activities should vary from shared writing where teachers write what learners say, functional writing activities such as writing sign posts for their classroom and also engaging learners in play-like writing activities like writing Christmas cards.

### **3.7.8 Shared book experience**

There is a consensus among researchers that practice in any literacy activity improves learners' performance (Allington, 2006; Hiebert & Martin, 2009; Roskos *et al.*, 2003). Hiebert and Martin (2009) maintain that creating opportunities for the teacher and the learners to read together is critical in a literacy classroom. Roskos *et al.*, (2003) suggest that the teacher should actively be involved in reading together with the learners to help develop their interest. The teacher can read enlarged books to the learners aloud and draw their attention to the print as he or she reads so that they can begin to make a distinction between print and picture. They hold that shared reading also helps learners to establish the writing style that it is from left-to-right, top-to-bottom or what is technically referred to as

directionality. Allowing learners to join the teacher in reading could also help them learn to read in a playful and enjoyable manner.

### **3.7.9 Integrated, content-focused activities**

The last strategy Roskos *et al.*, (2003) suggest is that, in using play activities in learning, teachers should also utilize the learner-centred strategies by providing opportunities to discuss topics that are of interest to the learners. In the process, the learners will be integrating the oral language, reading and writing skills to learn about the world. They also state that learners can listen to the teacher read and then write what they have observed. By so doing the skill of writing is strengthened.

Moreover, teaching literacy for authentic meaning-making purposes; for pleasure, to be informed and to perform a task is an effective strategy to teach literacy in the foundation phase. Gambrell *et al.*, (2011) are of the view that young children learn best when they know the reason and purpose for the activity they are engaged in. That being the case, it is the responsibility of the teachers to state clearly the purpose of any reading and writing activity. To give information and pleasure should be the central purpose. Gambrell *et al.*, (2011) further suggest that teachers can maximise the value of their literacy lessons by making the four language skills genuine tools for learning. The benefit of this strategy is that when children engage in authentic literacy learning, they are likely to transfer their classroom literacy practices to their real life experiences outside of school. This reinforces the knowledge they acquire in class. The instructional strategies discussed here are suggestions to teachers of literacy in the early years of schools. However, teachers may incorporate other strategies and even modify these to suit their varied contexts and students' varied needs for maximum achievement.

## **3.8 Factors influencing teachers' instructional practices**

This section discusses factors that influence teaching and learning. The researcher included this section because one of the research questions in this study seeks to understand why teachers use the instructional practices they use in their English literacy classroom in the foundation phase. Literature shows that there are various factors that are said to influence teaching and learning in the schools and these factors include those that directly pertain to the teacher. Some pertain to the learners themselves. Others have to do with the role of the administration, the role of parents and the entire community where the school is located

(Maphalala & Makondo, 2017; Klibthong, 2012; Clay, 2005). The following sub-sections will discuss those factors.

### **3.8.1 Interpersonal relationships in the classroom**

Interpersonal relationships have been found to be another factor that influences learner achievement. Constant interaction between the teacher and the learners, and also interaction among learners themselves has been shown to contribute to the development of the learners in a literacy classroom. A study conducted by Klibthong (2012) in Thailand explored the role of interpersonal interaction in early literacy development. The teacher was viewed as a model, responsible for directing the interaction, a pedagogic practice detected by the hierarchical structure of the Thai society where adults are viewed as superiors to the young. Consequently, this structure views the teacher as the one with authority in the classroom.

The study was based on the observation of 82 learners in their literacy classroom and the activities teachers engaged them in. The results of the study showed that interpersonal interactive activities were effective in developing collaborative writing, collaborative storytelling, collaborative meaning-making and learner-to-learner partnership in the literacy classroom. The conclusion drawn from the study was that teacher educators and in-service education officials should make an effort to raise professional awareness among teachers and prospective teachers on the fundamental role of interpersonal interaction in a literacy classroom as it influences teaching and learning. Klibthong (2012, p.122), explains that interaction is not confined to communication among people. It goes beyond that to include the physical environment, such as instructional tools available in the classroom and all activities learners may be engaged in. Moreover, the social environment also forms part of the interpersonal interaction where the verbal and nonverbal language of the teacher plays a significant role in developing literacy in the learners' early years of schooling (Klibthong, 2012). This idea is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory that sees children's development as a result of interaction with people in their cultural context.

### **3.8.2 Teacher attitudes and beliefs**

Saad (2011) observed that teachers' instructional practices were to a large extent influenced by their beliefs. This perspective was based on the sociological study that emphasized teacher thinking. Saad holds that it is difficult to talk of teachers' instructional practices without looking into their beliefs. Beliefs are said to play a crucial role in how teachers make sense of

the curriculum and the manner in which they implement them. Saad (2011) argues that ignoring teachers' deep-rooted beliefs about innovations to improve an educational programme is one factor that accounts for their failure.

In the same vein, Borg (2015) hold that it is important to understand 'how and why' the process of teaching operates the way it does. They contend that teachers have a rationale for their classroom practices which derives from their beliefs about teaching and learning process. Borg (2001) expresses a similar idea when he states that an exploration of teacher beliefs should shed some light on the choice of their instructional practices. In agreement with this view, Freeman and Richards (1996, p.5) observe that in order to understand the nature of second language teacher education, we need to work with teachers to understand how they conceptualise and make use of their experiences both in formal education and in their classrooms. Accordingly this study seeks to understand what factors influence teachers' instructional practices in English literacy in Grade One in the context of Swaziland.

Borg (2001, p.186) states that a belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held. It is evaluative in nature and accepted as true by the individual. Beliefs are seen as a guide to one's thoughts and actions. This definition gives the idea that beliefs are important in our daily lives and have a way of influencing our practices whether we are aware of them or not. Likewise, teachers also have beliefs that influence their classroom practices and shape learners' development. Freeman and Richards (1996, p.6) observed that, teachers' prior learning, knowledge, and beliefs about teaching were powerful determinants of their perceptions and practices and these prompted opposition to change. Furinghetti and Pehkonen (2002) in their work; *Rethinking characteristics of beliefs* found that beliefs reflected an individual's subjective knowledge; and this knowledge is not subject to outside evaluation. This means that an individual's perception of a particular concept is critical in his or her practice and the individual is entitled to those beliefs.

Squires and Bliss (2004, p.756), in their article entitled *Decades of research on the connection between teachers' theoretical beliefs and their practices* concluded that: all teachers bring to the classroom some beliefs that influence their critical decision-making. In the researcher's understanding, this article says that the work of the teachers in the classroom is guided by certain convictions that teachers hold about their work and about their roles as teachers. Freedman and Carver (2007) share a similar opinion. A conclusion they made after

viewing many studies was that the beliefs and values individual teachers held, influenced their instructional practices.

Hall (2005) also observed that what teachers deliver as content knowledge and the way they deliver it in their various classrooms is, to a large extent, influenced by their beliefs. Hall (2005, p.405) goes on to assert that it is the teachers' beliefs that are more likely to dictate their actions in the classroom rather than the amount of knowledge that they possess. This shows that the underlying ideas teachers hold about the process of teaching and learning guide their classroom practices even without them being conscious of this. Dlamini *et al.*, (2016) argue that even appropriately qualified teachers tend to teach the way they were taught. This is a belief they unconsciously hold about the process of teaching and learning.

From the stated arguments, one may say that teachers' beliefs supersede their pre-service preparation and in-service training in informing the teachers' professional attitude and behaviour in the classrooms. In essence, it is important for teachers to know the beliefs they hold about their work and their roles as classroom teachers. This is because the pre-service knowledge they possess is largely dependent on their personal beliefs being utilized effectively or ineffectively.

The researcher believes that teachers' attitude towards teaching together with the kind of learners they work with are important factors for effective learning and teaching. A positive attitude can yield positive results and the opposite is also true. This is because teachers have a role to motivate learners to learn literacy in the foreign language. Santisi, Magnano, Hichy, and Ramaci, (2014) share a similar view. They state that teachers are of paramount importance in students' motivation through the quality of their teaching and development of teacher-student relationships. Karr (2013) conducted a study to determine teachers' attitude towards teaching reading in the content areas. The study showed that teachers possessed an average attitude towards teaching reading in the content areas and an improved attitude was attributed to appropriate training. This means that teachers who have not got adequate training in the content of what they were required to teach were less likely to have a highly positive attitude towards their work.

In a study of her own instructional practices, also termed action research, Santa (2006) observed that her work as a literacy specialist was also influenced by her beliefs. She states that she held three basic beliefs that guided her work. The first one was that classroom communities and relationships were paramount in effective teaching and learning of literacy

with adolescent students. The second belief she held was that, clear knowledge of the principles and philosophy of learning are important in improving performance. Thirdly, professional expertise plays an essential role in the academic success of adolescent learners in literacy. One can say that Santa's (2006) knowledge of the beliefs she held about her work and her role as a literacy specialist enabled her to be effective in her work. However, some teachers may not be comfortable to spell out their personal beliefs. Yet, either way, their beliefs directly or indirectly influence their instructional practices. The researcher hopes that this study will establish what factors are responsible for teachers' instructional practices in the Grade One literacy in English class in the case schools and any beliefs they might hold about literacy in English teaching in Grade One.

### **3.8.3 Pedagogical knowledge**

As discussed earlier, pedagogical knowledge is another factor that influences teachers' instructional practices (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). Pedagogical knowledge basically refers to the preferred ways of teaching employed by teachers (Chai, 2010). Teo, Chai, Hung and Lee (2008) state that pedagogic beliefs are generally categorized into the *knowledge transmission view* and the *knowledge construction view*. These categories largely describe the kind of beliefs teachers hold. According to Teo *et al.*, (2008), teachers who hold the knowledge transmission view, embrace teacher-centred approaches, whereas those teachers who embraced the knowledge construction view emphasize more student-centred activities in their classrooms.

Lyons and Pinnell (2001, p.35) contend that teachers of literacy spend a lot of time thinking about the literacy experiences they want their students to have, based on the content that is in the curriculum. The most important concern the teachers have is their individual learners; their strengths, habits, attitudes and needs. When teachers know their learners individually, it is easier for them to guide and support them in their literacy needs. Lyons and Pinnell (2001, p.35) wrote:

*Knowing our students is critical to teaching literacy successfully, because they bring knowledge and experience to the literacy process. Recognizing what the students bring to reading and writing powers our instruction. The meaning and the pleasure of literacy reside within the individual.*

This assertion by Lyons and Pinnell (2001) shows clearly that the learning and teaching of literacy is grounded on the joint experiences of the learners and the teacher. Exploring the knowledge learners bring to the literacy classroom is fundamental for the success of literacy learning. Teachers of literacy, therefore, need to have this idea as a guiding principle for their instructional practices for the success of the teaching and learning of literacy. In essence, teacher knowledge of the learners and the potential they have is an important pedagogical knowledge that should be instilled in pre-service training.

In a study conducted by Chai (2010), an investigation of seven Singaporean in-service teachers' epistemic beliefs and their pedagogic beliefs was undertaken. Data were collected through interviews. Data were analysed following analysis for case study design. The results showed that all seven teachers held unstable epistemic beliefs and on the pedagogical beliefs, they embraced the 'transmissionist' view. Their knowledge of students' readiness to learn was seen as the factor that mediated the epistemic beliefs and the pedagogical beliefs. In essence, beliefs have a role to play in influencing teachers' practices in their classroom. What the teachers do in their classrooms, the way they do it and why they do what they do is largely influenced by both their epistemic and pedagogical beliefs whether they are aware of those beliefs or not.

Another aspect that contributed to teachers' pedagogic knowledge is the kind of support they get in the course of their practice. This includes mentoring of novice teachers and continued professional development of practicing teachers. In my view, mentoring of new teachers is important to help them get acquainted with the demands of the curriculum. Professional development on the other hand, helps teachers to refresh their classroom practices. This is supported by Rutgers (2012) who conducted a study in the Eastern Cape on coaching foundation phase teachers as leaders; a professional development strategy. The findings of the study showed that coaching foundation phase teachers as leaders in their classrooms could improve literacy teaching and learning. The study showed that ongoing coaching of teachers was more effective than once off training which leaves the teachers not having grasped the concepts presented to them in a rush. Wium and Louw (2011) support this idea, in their work on the exploration of how foundation phase teachers facilitate language skills. They assert that the development of a child involves an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that teachers bring to the profession. This is an indication that the teacher needs adequate training and use of social experiences in order to be effective in the classroom.

### **3.8.4 Learners' characteristics that influence teachers' instructional practices**

Having discussed teacher-related factors that influence their instructional practices, it is also important to look into learner related factors. Studies show that learners' maturity level influences their learning of literacy in a foreign language and the nature of instruction in the classroom. Phillips, Clancy-Menchetti, and Lonigan (2008) state that factors that influence learners' maturity to learn include the age of the learners, their home background, culture, their sex, and the expectations from peers, parents and teachers. These factors combined determine the rate at which the learners would grasp different literacy skills.

#### **3.8.4.1 Learners' developmental stage**

Learners' developmental stage is important for teachers' decisions for instruction. This is supported by Siraj-Blatchford (2010, p.463) who states that the first six years are vitally important for children's development of language and identity. Vygotsky (1978, 1987) shares a similar view, arguing that language and thought are inseparable and that language supports children's cognitive and social development. Consequently, teachers' instructional practices should be designed in such a way that this development is enhanced. Likewise Gestwick (2013) states that instructional practices should be on par with the learners' developmental stage and that this requires a clear knowledge of the learners' language, strengths, needs, social and cultural context.

#### **3.8.4.2 Learners' home background**

The learners' home background also influences their learning and teachers' instructional practices. In a study conducted by Govender (2015) on factors that affect foundation phase English as a second language learners' reading and writing skills in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the findings show that learners' home language affected their literacy learning in a number of areas. This included their pronunciation of words in the English language, their ability to use phonics in writing and their capacity to use the male and female gender in sentence construction. On the other hand, learners from privileged families, whose parents exposed them to reading, mastered literacy faster and easier than their under-privileged peers. Carroll (2013) shares a similar view. She conducted a study on the effects of parental literacy involvement and child reading interest on the development of emergent literacy skills. The result of the study showed that children whose parents exposed them to reading materials at home and who were involved in literacy activities, developed oral language faster than their counterparts whose parents did not involve themselves much in their school activities. By



extension, the exposure children from privileged families got from home increased the world in their heads. They came to school with various experiences that enhanced their literacy learning. Teachers, therefore, are expected to use the learners' experiences to help them master new literacy concepts.

de Schonewise and Klingner (2012) recommend that the diverse learner home backgrounds should be utilised effectively to enhance language and literacy learning in contemporary classrooms. They state that it is important for teachers to understand the diversity of the learners in their classroom in order to situate their practices accordingly. They argue that the diversity learners bring to the classroom is valuable, for the teacher to plan on the best ways to teach them. They bring to the fore the vitality of teacher knowledge of linguistic issues and the processes involved in second language learning. In addition, they hold that teacher knowledge of cultural issues and cultural-responsive pedagogy, assessment procedures and instruction that enhance language and literacy development in learners are of vital importance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. According to de Schonewise and Klingner (2012), teachers' understanding of these critical issues should produce theoretically sound, culturally sensitive and effective instructional practices.

#### **3.8.4.3 Learners' prior knowledge**

Learners' background knowledge is another important aspect that influences their learning of literacy especially in the second language. This is basically the knowledge that they bring to school, knowledge they have acquired from their social context, home, and from peers in their immediate environment. This knowledge is important for learning, it acts as a 'cushion' for the new knowledge they get from school. Rittle-Johnson, Star, Durkin, K. (2009) also supports the use of learner prior knowledge for effective learning and teaching. He argues that children do not come to the language class with empty heads; they come with a well-formulated set of instincts, skills, and characteristics that enhance their learning of a new language. This is an indication that learners linked new literacy concepts to the already existing knowledge in their heads and effective teachers utilise that 'world' in their heads. The researcher also believes that learners' background is important for literacy learning and teaching. Teachers need to understand the background of the learners so that instructional practices are structured in a way that the background and experiences of the learners enhances the learning and teaching. In support of this idea, Dean (2013) states that it is important for the teacher to assess what knowledge the learners bring to school. This helps

the teacher to know where they have to go and how best to get there. Moreover, it improves learner progress and achievement in the classroom.

#### **3.8.4.4 High expectations of the learner**

High expectations of the learners also influence their learning of literacy and the nature of instruction. Researchers such as Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) agree that a task just beyond the learners' competences was important to help them develop cognitively and to master ways of dealing with more challenging activities. They emphasized that the task should not be so difficult that it overwhelms the learners, but should challenge them to go a step further than where they were cognitively. This means that teachers who understand this concept would be able to structure instruction in such a way that learners are challenged to devise problem-solving strategies that would help them master new literacy concepts. They argue that a little challenge was good, and expecting children to improve consistently was important for the effective teacher. In essence, laying high expectations on the learners had positive results.

In a study by Pressley, *et al.*, (1998) on the nature of effective First Grade instruction in New York, observations of effective First Grade teachers were done and the results showed that effective teachers of literacy had increasing expectations of the children's writing activities and they were readily available to offer support as needed by the students but allowed them to make progress on their own. Pressley *et al.*, (1998) is supported by Wharton-McDonald *et al.*, (1998) who made similar findings that an effective teacher provided opportunities for learners to develop cognitively by offering appropriate tasks that would challenge them. The researcher predicts that if a teacher has high expectations of the learners, her instructional practices would be structured in such a way that the expectations are met. High expectations also motivate learners to strive for excellence and when they perform well, teachers too become motivated to work hard and to maintain the standard. They use various strategies to accommodate learner diversity. In short, the way the teacher views the learners also influences his or her instructional practices. If teachers expected more from the learners, he or she is more likely to engage them in more challenging activities that would develop their cognitive and social faculties and little expectation from learners deprives them of being engaged in cognitively and socially enhancing activities.

#### 3.8.4.4 Motivation

Motivation is another important factor that influences learners' performance in any lesson. Gambrell (2011, p.173) holds that motivation distinguishes between superficial face value learning and learning that is insightful and internalised. He states that motivation is imperative as children need both the skill and the will to learn literacy and to become competent readers and writers. Each skill complements the other. It is therefore the responsibility of the teacher to foster motivation in the learners to achieve the goal of literacy learning; that of developing learners who can read competently, and choose to read on their own. This could be done in different ways such as by deliberately creating a classroom environment that would appeal to the learners' senses. Also, the classroom environment should be welcoming and should encourage social interaction among the learners and between the teacher and the learners. Gambrell (2011) argues that a teacher's effort to engage in best literacy instructional approaches alone cannot yield maximal satisfactory results if the learners were not intrinsically motivated to read, they will fail to reach their full potential in literacy.

The International Reading Association report (IRA) also emphasized the importance of the development and sustainability of motivation in reading. The IRA paper shows that engaged readers were motivated and they chose to read of their own free will. This view is corroborated by the main findings of the *Organisation for Economic Development Co-operation* (2010) study done in 64 countries. The findings of the study showed that students who were motivated to read performed far better than students who lacked motivation to read. The disturbing finding in the study was that a majority of students (73%) were reported as not enjoying reading. The probability was high that those students underperformed in literacy because reading is the fulcrum of literacy. The study showed that the best decoding and comprehension skills alone were not adequate if students lacked motivation to read. Motivation therefore was an essential ingredient for students to attain their full potential in literacy learning. Bentea and Anghelache, (2012) claim that motivated teachers are fundamental in the education system as they are the main players in the implementation of the curriculum. Moreover, they have an impact on both the organization and on the individual learner.

### **3.9 Literacy teaching in the foundation phase; focus on South Africa and Botswana**

Literature review on the teaching and learning of literacy in Southern African countries; including Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland is very limited, an effort to tackle this world phenomenon is seen in South Africa. There are national studies that department of Basic Education has undertaken in an effort to curb the poor performance of learners in literacy and numeracy especially in the foundation phase. In South Africa, most studies undertaken on literacy teaching and learning show that South African learners have consistently performed poorly in literacy and numeracy as compared to learners of other Southern African countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, This is an indication that the standard of education in South Africa in the foundation phase is wanting. Reports by the Department of Basic Education from 2001, 2004, 2007 showed that the standard of literacy was very low; a mean literacy score of 30% in 2001, and it stood at 36% in 2006 (Reeves, Heugh, Pronslloo, Macdonald, Neitshtangani, Alidou, and Herbst, 2008). A 2011 report showed a slight improvement, however, there was evidence that language was a major barrier in learners responding to questions. They had an understanding of the questions but lack the appropriate vocabulary and English expression to present the response (Madiba, 2013).

#### **Botswana**

Botswana is another Southern African country that has been battling with low standards of literacy from foundation phase to tertiary level since independence in 1966 (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006). The report of the Millenniums goals shows that Botswana did well in increasing access to Universal Primary education that consisted of a ten year basic education by 2004, but faced major challenges in ensuring quality in the education system (Republic of Botswana/ United Nations, 2004, p. 31). The report shows that there was a high failure rate and school dropouts more especially in the remote parts of the country. This was partly attributed to poor supply of teaching and learning equipment by government, teachers' unreceptive attitudes to children from these isolated areas and the socio-economic conditions of the families of these children as most were reported to travel long distances to and from school. These conditions altogether were not conducive for learning. Consequently, learners performed poorly and ended up dropping out of school in lower grades not having attained even basic literacy (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2006). Lekoko and Maruatona (2005) observed that half of the student population who enrolled in the first grade

dropped before completing primary school thereby creating a large number of students who ended up enrolling for adult basic education in later years.

An overview of literacy teaching and learning in these two Southern African countries shows that it is still a concern for most developing countries as none has reported an outstanding learner performance. Another important issue is that education policies in these countries have no clear definition of academic literacy in the foundation phase as it is only referred to as emergent literacy. Moreover, the overview shows that teachers are not well equipped to teach literacy in the foundation phase as they have not received explicit training on these areas, as a result, learners continue to exhibit poor literacy achievement in Grade 6 as shown by the SACMEQ report. Moreover, the socio-economic conditions of the schools in these countries were not favourable as classes were often overcrowded and teachers did not attend to classes on a regular basis. Furthermore, most learners did not get any assistance on school work from their parents as their average education was mainly primary and hardly had secondary education (SACMEQ Report by the Department of Basic education, 2010). This did not argue well for the learners especially at the foundation phase where parental involvement was critical (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010).

### **3.10 Key literacy issues found in this literature review**

In the review of literature related to literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase, the researcher found that a high number of research outputs on literacy education are undertaken in developed countries. Not much research on the teaching and learning of literacy has been done in developing countries (O'Sullivan, 2003; Perry, 2012; Dlamini, 2009; Ramdan, 2015). The paucity of research into literacy teaching and learning in developing countries is disheartening especially because literature shows that literacy teaching and learning is a critical aspect in a child's education as it promotes positive and enduring learning in children if carried out effectively (Padak & Rasinski 2006; Dlamini *et al.*, 2016).

The central issue in the literature reviewed was that literacy teaching and learning is of great concern the world over. Consequently, many developed countries have taken initiatives to put forward some interventions that should improve the learning and teaching of literacy in schools, especially in the foundation phase. International and small-scale studies were

undertaken in an effort to strengthen the learning and teaching of literacy at elementary school level. The results of these studies revealed some practices that are considered to be best as they were used by effective teachers of literacy. The best practices include; parent-oriented practices, (Carroll, 2013; Maphalala & Makondo, 2017), learner-oriented practices; (Pressley *et al.*, 1998; Rittle-Johnson, Star, Durkin, 2009), and teacher-oriented practices; (Lyons & Pinnell, 2001; Wharton-McDonald *et al.*, 1998; Chai, 2010; Santisi *et al.*, 2014), to mention just a few.

The literature also showed some factors that account for teachers' instructional practices including learners' background knowledge and expectations (Bentea & Anghelache, 2012), teacher belief and attitudes, (Chai, 2010; Teo *et al.*, 2008) and motivation (Gambrell, 2011). However, to date, very few studies have been conducted in Swaziland to address the problem of poor literacy in the foundation phase. This study, therefore, aimed to address this gap. The findings should be useful in informing education policy makers about the state of literacy learning and teaching in the foundation phase, particularly at a time when increasing focus the world over, is on this level, to ensure a strong foundation for life-long learning that should have a positive impact on the world's economy. Teachers would be informed on the use of effective instructional practices in literacy at Grade One level. Also, institutions of higher education that prepare teachers for implementing the English literacy curriculum would be informed of the scenario in the schools and they could then try to strengthen their programmes where possible to meet the curriculum demands and needs of the learners.

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined primary issues involved in effective instructional practices as related to literacy in the foundation phase, with particular emphasis on Grade One, A level, where all learners from different environments begin school in Swaziland. It has been stated very clearly that effective instructional practices are imperative in developing literacy in young learners, especially in the foundation phase. The teacher is seen as an important player in developing meaningful literacy practices in learners in the school setting. The literature reviewed has shown that the teacher is faced with multiple roles of interpreting the curriculum and framing all classroom practices in literacy in ways that will benefit the learner to function effectively as a literate individual in society.

This study is guided by worldwide issues on literacy learning and teaching. Research undertaken internationally and in neighbouring South Africa particularly, have been useful to

substantiate the key issues raised in the literature. Thus, the researcher owes a factual and interpretive debt to all works done on this subject. This study differs from other studies in that it explores instructional practices in Grade One literacy utilised by three teachers from two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. It investigates what goes on in a literacy classroom at Grade One level; what the teachers actually do in their Grade One classrooms; why they do what they do and how they experience the teaching of English literacy in Grade One. The information gathered from this study can then join the vast literature from other countries that explores instructional practices in literacy in the foundation phase.

This study is based on the belief that clear and effective instructional practices on literacy in the foundation phase are important as a solid literacy foundation is a strong predictor of academic success among young learners. It is, therefore, important for government and policy makers to ensure that teachers are constantly capacitated in effective instructional practices in literacy. This would help them to be abreast of international standards and to produce learners who are global citizens. The next chapter presents a theoretical framework that guides the study. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is discussed at length as it clearly unpacks the role of a teacher in effective teaching of literacy in English in the foundation phase.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for this study. It has used Vygotsky's socio-cultural ideas which were later refined by his colleagues Luria and Leont`ev to the socio-cultural theory as a lens through which to both scrutinize and appreciate teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the foundation phase, the Grade One class in particular. The reason to use a theory for this study is because it explores teachers' instructional practices, and Jaramillo (1996, p. 143) states that the teacher as a practitioner uses theory to construct the curriculum and instructional strategies. That being the case, it is imperative to use a particular theory when engaged with activities that deal with the teacher and his or her practices. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is basically a learning theory but the researcher has used it for this study that explores teachers' instructional practices in literacy based on the idea of Jaramillo (1996) who argues that there is a common relationship between each learning theory, the curriculum and teaching strategies. In short, the curriculum used in a particular system of education and the teaching strategies used to meet the curriculum objectives reflect the theories of learning they uphold. Altogether, these three guide teacher practices.

#### **4.2 Theoretical framework**

Labaree (2003) defines a theoretical framework as a theory that explains the concepts, definitions and knowledge available in the area of study. This study used Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory of learning to understand teachers' instructional practices in the Grade One English literacy classroom. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory pays attention to the relationship between instruction and development, thus the researcher finds it relevant for this study that explores teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. Moreover, Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory also takes into consideration the multicultural and multilingual nature of the classroom where the learners acquire literacy in English as a second and third language. Since the focus of this study is on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland and these schools have learners of multicultural and multilingual nature, the researcher finds the socio-cultural theory most suitable for this study. The researcher envisages that Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory will work as a guide to help



one make sense of literacy in English instruction in Grade One in a multicultural context. The theory guides the assumption in this study that the role of the teacher is of vital importance for the development of literacy in English in Grade One learners. The teacher is seen as the one who guides, and facilitates literacy learning in the classroom.

### **4.3 An overview of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory**

This section gives an overview of the socio-cultural theory as offered by Vygotsky (1962/1978). Lev Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist whose works had tremendous influence on teaching and learning in general, and second language learning in particular. Hugo (2008), for instance, states that Vygotsky was the first proponent of the socio-cultural view and his works acknowledges the influence of one's society and culture in learning a language. For Vygotsky, knowledge is seen as social in nature and constructed through the processes of interaction, communication and collaboration among children in social settings (Hugo, 2013, p. 32). In essence, Vygotsky sees social experiences as fundamental in shaping one's thinking and view of the world around him or her. Consequently, a learner constructs knowledge both as a result of and on the basis of his or her social experiences. Language as part of one's social and cultural experience is important in the teaching-learning process. According to Dlamini (2009), most Grade One learners are already competent in their first language, based on the socio-cultural theory; their first language should in a way, support their learning of literacy in the second language.

In linking the socio-cultural theory to teaching and learning, Lantolf (2000) holds that in the early years of school, learners largely depend on the teacher and other adults to support them with different tools in order to transform what they learn into personal knowledge they can internalise for future use. It is the responsibility of the teacher therefore, to utilise the learners' socio-cultural experiences as a frame of reference in learning literacy in the second language. Vygotsky (1978) was of the view that it is not practical to understand the cognitive development of an individual outside his or her social and cultural context; one's mental skills are considered to develop as a result of communication with other people in the social context. Daniels *et al.*, (2007, p. 247) state that Vygotsky views the development of school-going children to be a result of systematic school instruction. That being the case, the instructional practices of teachers are principal in making the learner develops systematic thinking and make sense of his or her world, which they have already partially experienced. This perspective resonates with socio-cultural scholars such as Freire and Macedo (2005) and

Dyson (2013) who concur that, in any event, children first read the world before they read the word. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the scientific concepts within the academic subjects are important for the school going child as they give the child an opportunity to use them consciously and intentionally. The teacher, therefore, is essential in unpacking these concepts in the academic subject for the students to develop as learners.

In his socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky (1978) was of the view that learning is what leads to development, not the other way around. And it is through the use of language as a socially-mediated cultural tool that leads to cognitive development of the child. The language that is exchanged among people in their social settings becomes critical for learning. It acts as a mediating tool for students' learning, and it is what the children use to make sense of their experiences in their environment (Newman & Holzman, 2013).

Vygotsky was interested in the ways children were challenged and stretched in their learning. He strongly believed that successful learning occurs when children are guided by adults towards learning things they could not have done on their own. Vygotsky (1978), particularly, addresses literacy instruction in the classroom and advises that teachers create an effective environment for literacy learning. He wrote:

*Teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something...That writing should be meaningful...That writing be taught naturally...and that the natural methods of teaching reading and writing involve appropriate operations on the child's environment (pp.117-118).*

This shows clearly that Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory views learning and teaching as embedded in the social and cultural experiences of the learners. For Vygotsky, effective literacy instruction is one that uses social and cultural experiences that learners bring to school. In support of this view, Hugo (2013) holds that in Vygotsky's view, a learner learns through carrying out an activity under the guidance of a more skilled person, and in the classroom environment, the teacher is the more skilled person. Consequently, the focus in this study is to explore the role of the teachers, the more skilled persons in three Grade One English literacy classrooms.

#### **4.4 Basic concepts in the socio-cultural theory**

Literature shows that there are certain concepts that are central to the socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Daniels *et al.*, 2007). These concepts present a clear link between teaching and learning and they also describe the role and responsibility of the teacher explicitly in engaging the learners in active construction of knowledge through the use of tools within their socio-cultural context.

The critical concepts that make up the socio-cultural theory are: social interaction, collaboration, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, mediation, and meaning. These ideas are closely linked and show that learning is not an isolated activity; teachers, learners and other adults work collaboratively to achieve the common goal, that of literacy teaching and learning. The subsequent sections will discuss each of these major concepts of socio-cultural theory in detail. Their discussion justifies the researcher's choice of the socio-cultural theory as a lens to explore teachers' instructional practices in Grade One English literacy classrooms in the context of Swaziland.

##### **4.4.1 Social interaction**

In reading literature concerning the socio-cultural theory, the researcher realised that social interaction is the most important descriptor of this theory. On the subject of literacy, Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) argues that it is through social interaction and the use of culturally-determined tools and symbols that basic literacy processes are transformed into intellectual functions. In explaining this concept, Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the intellectual function is at two levels: first, it is between two people on a social, external level (*inter-personal*), second, it is on a personal, internal level within the child (*intra-personnel*). This means that social interaction between the child and family members and between the child and teacher is important in literacy learning. The interaction is what fosters the personal, internal learning of language and literacy. The social environment, therefore, is seen as the actual context in learning to be literate, it is the one that equips the individual to participate effectively in society. In essence, the psychological aspect of learning, which is within the individual, is shaped largely by the social and cultural aspect within the environment in which the person lives.

The common adage 'it takes a village to raise a child' is what Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory espouses because it emphasizes the value of interaction, conversations and

joint participation for the development of the child. The theory views development as inseparable from the social and cultural contexts of the child. The adult is seen as central in helping the child develop as he or she is the one who provides the cultural tools for the child to manipulate and construct knowledge in their social environment (Beloglovsky & Daly, 2015, p.17). Moreover, the interaction that takes place between the child and the adult, a teacher in the case of literacy instruction, is pertinent in the child's development and construction of knowledge. In explaining of this concept, Swain, Kinnear, and Steinman (2015) state that interaction is part of human nature as they always interact with one another and the symbols in their world.

In the researcher's understanding, interaction is basically at two levels. First, it is when the child interacts with human beings, parent, teacher and peers, and the second level of interaction is when the child interacts with objects and tools in his or her environment. Learning, therefore, is the result of the child's interaction with everything in his or her social context. In view of this idea, learners in their literacy classroom need to interact with the subjects and objects around them in order to develop meaning of what is happening in the classroom. In concurring with this idea, Jaramillo (1996, p.135) argues that, in the classroom setting, students learn through interacting with their peers, the teacher and any other manipulative objects. Jaramillo (1996) illustrates this idea with a math lesson, where learners are to solve a mathematical problem involving addition. The teacher provides objects for the learners to manipulate, the learners interact with one another to make sense of the operation, and then construct abstract meaning by manipulating the tangible objects through relating them to written symbols. And later, they develop abstract problem-solving skills without the use of tangible objects. The same strategy could be used in a literacy classroom.

Vygotsky (1978) states that social settings have rules known by adults and knowledgeable peers and that they pass these on to the children during their interaction with them. Similarly, the school environment operates within rules that govern its operations. Through interaction, the teacher initiates the learners into those rules of the classroom and the teacher acts as a rule-maker and curriculum-planner in the classroom. Price, Van Kleeck & Huberty, (2009) also support classroom interaction and hold that quality interaction creates an opportunity to build positive student-student relations and a student-teacher relationship which are a basis for literacy and language learning.

In trying to understand Vygotsky's (1978) concept of social interaction in literacy learning, Klibthong (2012, p. 121) conducted a study on the 'role of interpersonal interaction in early literacy development in Thailand. The focus of the study was to explore and analyse the nature of interpersonal interaction and collaborative activities teachers used when teaching literacy to children. Eighty-two students and three teachers were observed based on Vygotsky's (1978) socio-historical theory. The findings of the study showed that interpersonal activities were important to develop collaborative writing, story reading, and collaborative meaning-making and also child-to-child relationships. The significance of this study is that pre-service teacher preparation must raise awareness among aspiring teachers on the value of interpersonal interaction in the teaching and learning of literacy with young learners.

#### **4.4.2 Collaboration**

Along with social interaction is the concept of collaboration. Vygotsky acknowledges the significance of peer collaboration in literacy learning. He is of the view that peers have influence on one another in meaning construction. Consequently, his theory advocates for teachers and curriculum designers to recognize peer collaboration when preparing learning activities. Rogoff (1994) is one Vygotskian's scholars who elaborated the idea of peer collaboration and its contribution to learning. He noted that young children influence one another and further influence the adults who socialize with them. Rogoff (1994) explained the idea of peers in two forms: those peers who are equally competent and those who are more competent. The Vygotskian scholar advocates for the pairing of a more competent peer with a less competent one so that the less competent peer may be assisted by the more competent one. This idea of peer collaboration in the social context was seen by Vygotsky (1978) as a means to enhance cognitive growth in learners. He believed that more competent peers are able to assist one another to negotiate meaning to solve a problem in the classroom. The collaboration that takes place among peers and the teacher in the classroom is a way for students to meet their learning needs.

The idea of peer collaboration is based on the belief that when learners work together to solve a problem, they bring different perspectives about it and, through interaction, they build on one another's ideas of solving the problem. The teacher only participates in this interaction by guiding the students to find ways of solving the problem. Rogoff (1994) noted that the result of Vygotsky's concept of peer interaction in small groups makes students develop

interdependency on one another. Also, the small group interactions encourage students to be responsible for their own work as they explain to the rest of the class how they solved a problem. In essence, peer collaboration promotes a learner-centred approach where the students are active participants in the teaching-learning process.

It is important to mention that peer collaboration does not make the role of the teacher secondary in the learning process. The teacher's role is that of guider of the peer collaboration. The teacher actively participates in the joint construction of knowledge with the students through mutually creating learning situations. The roles of the teacher and learners are, therefore, reflective. Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova (2015) observed that the use of technology such as iPad in foundation phase classrooms can enhance peer communication, interactive collaboration and independent learning.

#### **4.4.3 The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**

The *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)* is one of the most important concepts in Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory in education. This concept is important because teachers can use it as a guide to a child's development as it allows the teacher to know what a learner is able to achieve through the use of mediation, and then the teacher is able to help the learners progress a step further on their own.

According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 86), the zone of proximal development is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". This definition is based on his belief that learning always precedes development along the ZPD. He viewed the learning process to occur when the learner is able to do a more challenging task independently as a result of guidance from a more competent person. For Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD refers to those problem-solving abilities of the learner that are not yet developed, but have a potential of being developed through the assistance of a more knowledgeable person such as parent, teacher, adult and a more capable peer. The researcher finds Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD critical in this study that explores teachers' instructional practices in English literacy in Grade One. The teacher, who is the main focus in this study, is the one expected to work in the child's region and assist him until he learns ways to solve problems independently. According to Wertsch (1985, p. 60) the ZPD is a sensitive region whereby transition from inter-psychological to intra-psychological functioning takes place.

The teacher in this study is viewed as the more competent person who has a mandatory role in designing instructional activities that would develop the learners' potential to solve problems independently. The instruction should be able to awaken intellectual functions in the child which are not yet matured in the child's ZPD.

In presenting Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development*, Gredler (2012, p. 116) asserts that Vygotsky (1978) describes two levels of cognitive development: an actual level indicated by independent problem-solving, also referred to as the zone of actual development (ZAD), and, at this level, the learner relies on internalized mediation. The other level of cognitive development is the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), which is shown by assisted problem-solving. The ZPD is seen as the structure of joint activity in any context where there are participants who exercise differential responsibility by virtue of differential expertise (Cole & Wertsch, 2007). This means that the ZPD is actually a working area where the teacher challenges the learner to do more with minimal support.

A more recent Vygotskian perspective of the ZPD is forwarded by Berk and Winsler (1995, p.24) who explain the ZPD as "the region in which the transfer of ability from collaboration with adults or more competent peers to internalization of the new capacities occurs". One common idea by the different authors who explain the concept of the ZPD is the importance of collaborative activity on tasks that are not yet mastered by the learner. This has very important implications for the classroom teacher. It requires that effective instructional activities be designed in such a way that the learner is challenged to move from *the Zone of Actual Development (ZAD) to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*.

Lightbown and Spada (2013, p. 119) clarify the ZPD by stating that it is not only confined to the interaction between the expert and the novice. It also includes communication between novice and novice, meaning that learner-learners' collaboration is important in helping children construct new knowledge. As explained earlier, the learner-to-learner collaboration should be between a more competent learner and a less competent one for the latter to benefit. In essence, the ZPD within the socio-cultural perspective acknowledges the importance of learner-to-learner collaboration in the classroom for effective learning. In view of this idea, teachers should make a conscious effort to create opportunities for learners to interact among themselves in their literacy classrooms as they can learn a lot in the process of communicating with their peers. The researcher hopes to establish how teachers utilize the ZPD in their classrooms.

Vygotsky (1962, p. 204) suggested four ways which teachers can use to identify the maturing higher cognitive functions that have to do with the learners' ZPD. This could be done first by demonstrating the solution to see if the child can imitate the step. Second, begin to solve the problem to see if the child can complete it. Third, have the child co-operate with another, more fully-developed child. Fourth, explain the principles of solving the problem, ask leading questions, and analyse the problem for the child. These strategies are suggested to help the teacher assess the learner's ZPD so that he or she plans effective instructional activities for the class. The justification for the use of these assessment methods is that the social environment is responsible for shaping the child and interaction between the child and the adult are necessary for the development of the learning behaviour of the child. The Vygotskian thinking sees the adult as the one who engages the child in problems slightly above his or her unassisted problem-solving abilities. Consequently, the child's intellectual function matures. The role of the literacy teacher, therefore, is to ensure that children are engaged in literacy activities that will help them mature intellectually as they learn to solve problems independently.

Kuzulin (2003), states that there are three aspects of the ZPD. These are *generality assumption*, *assisted assumption* and *potential assumption*. *Generality assumption* is based on the belief that an individual is able to perform some learning tasks independently, and can perform even more difficult tasks with the help of somebody more competent than him or her. *Assisted assumption* refers to the manner in which a more competent person interacts with a child, the way in which the competent person directly or indirectly influences the child's learning. *Potential assumption* basically refers to the qualities of the learner such as his or her potential to engage in learning or even readiness for the learning tasks. In the researcher's understanding, this aspect requires that the teacher clearly identifies the child's zone of actual development so that she or he would know how to assist the child to perform a greater number of learning tasks independently.

These three aspects of the ZPD show that the ZPD is critical in learning generally and in literacy learning in particular. This notion is supported by Clapper (2015). He affirms that it is within this zone that a person's potential for new learning is strongest. The idea is that the most effective outcome for any teaching is achieved when it is done within the ZPD. In a literacy classroom, for instance, learning becomes meaningful when the books provided to the learner are readable, and do not pose any threat (frustration and discouragement) yet are challenging enough to help the learner acquire new knowledge. The concept of ZPD



therefore, requires teachers to plan instruction in such a way that it leads to development of the child's intellectual abilities and not the other way round.

#### **4.4.4 Scaffolding**

Scaffolding is another important concept in the socio-cultural theory. There is a general consensus among educational researchers that Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory and the ZPD are at the centre of the concept of scaffolding (Larson & Marsh, 2015; Daniel, *et al.*, 2007; Verenikina, 2003). However, it is important to mention that *scaffolding* is not a concept proposed by Vygotsky, but it is a Neo-Vygotskian concept developed by the psychologists, Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) to explain the role of adults in education, and that of teachers in instructional context. Though not originally a Vygotskian concept, scaffolding fits in well with Vygotsky's idea of the *Zone of Proximal Development*.

Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) used this term as a metaphor to describe a process that enables a child to solve a problem greater than his own independent abilities. Wood *et al.*, (1976, p. 90) define scaffolding as a process that "enables a child or a novice to solve a task or achieve a goal that would be beyond his unassisted efforts." In explaining the concept of scaffolding, Wood *et al.*, (1976) go on to point out the duties of effective educators as follows: they capture the attention of the learners, adjust and break down the task into manageable activities for the learner to be able to tackle, they keep the learner motivated to achieve the goal, they identify from the task what the learner is able to do successfully, they minimize frustration in solving given tasks and model the task to meet the needs of the learners. Rogoff (1994) shares a similar idea on the role of the educator, and states that adults support children's learning by regulating the level of difficulty of the task given to them and motivating them to focus on completing this task. The researcher supports the suggestions of Wood *et al.*, (1976) and Rogoff (1994) as they show the multiple roles of an effective teacher in the use of scaffolding in the classroom. And she believes that if teachers of literacy in English could adopt these practices, the learning of literacy could be a rewarding experience that develops the intellectual faculties of the learners.

The literature shows that the concept of scaffolding is largely presented in metaphorical form by different scholars. Hugo (2013, p.45), for instance, states that the idea of scaffolding is derived from construction. She explains that a scaffold is used to offer temporary support to a building while it is erected. The scaffold is used only as a support system when the building is still weak and it is slowly removed as the building gets stronger and can stand on its own

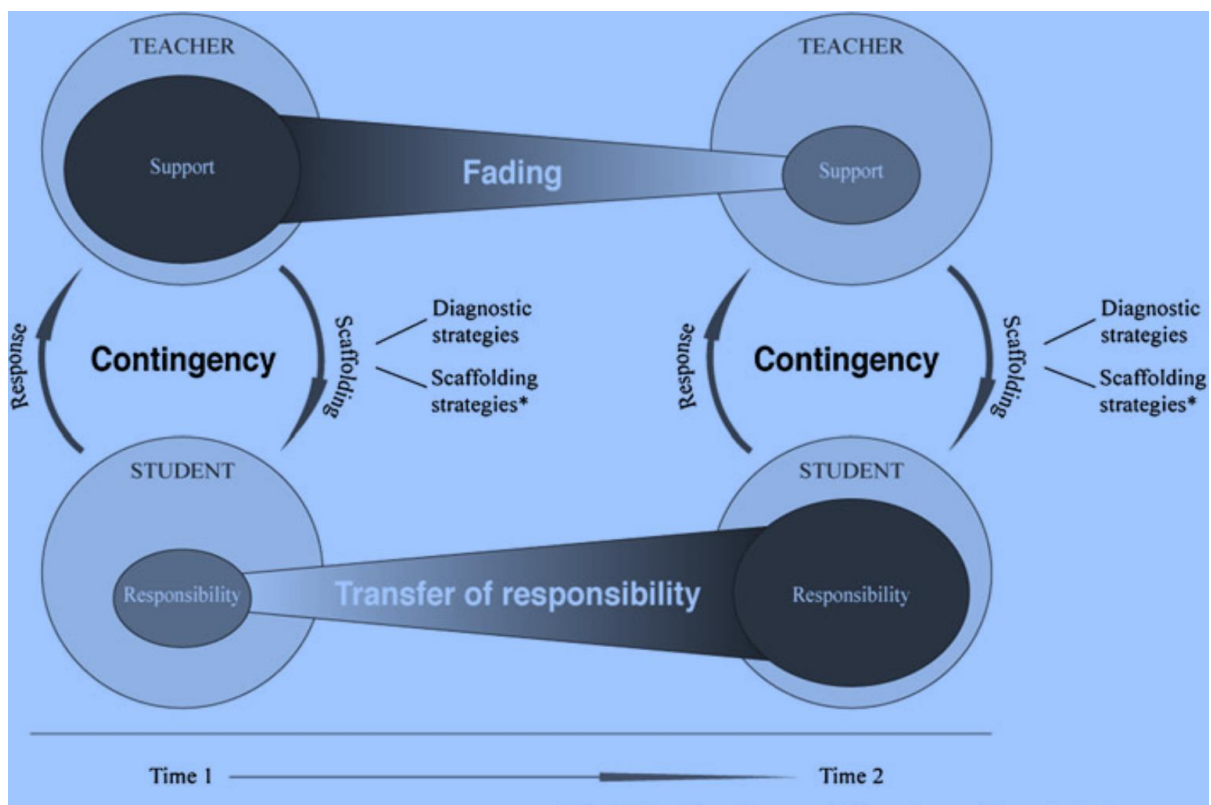
without crumbling. In the school context therefore, it is the teacher who provides appropriate scaffolds to the learners in his class in order for the learners to construct knowledge of literacy in English. These scaffolds are according to the needs of the learners as they are of diverse abilities and are from diverse cultural backgrounds. Hugo (2013, p. 45) holds a similar view. She states that the scaffolds the teacher supplies may depend on the age of the learners and their existing knowledge. This, therefore, means that the teacher has to know the learners well enough to be in a position to offer the needed scaffold.

Van de Pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010, p. 274) give a conceptual model of scaffolding by summarizing the characteristics of the concepts that best describe it. The first concept is that of *contingency*, which is the teacher's act of giving support to learners and renders him or her, as an agent of contingency. The teacher is the one who diagnoses the needs of learners so that the support given is appropriate and achieves its goal.

The second characteristic is *fading*; this refers to the gradual withdrawal of the scaffold (Van de pol *et al.*, 2010, p. 275). They assert that the rate of fading is determined by the cognitive development of the learners through showing some competence in what is being taught. In the fading process, teacher-support becomes minimal as the learner becomes more confident in doing a task on his or her own.

The fading process prepares the learner for the third characteristic of scaffolding which is *transfer of responsibility*. This is when the responsibility of performing the task is steadily transferred to the child, for example, when a child is able to say the letters of the alphabet without any assistance from the teacher in a literacy classroom.

In unpacking the concept of scaffolding, Van de pol *et al.*, (2010) put forward that this technique can be used as a teaching-learning method that can develop the child holistically. They are of the view that, if learners work on given tasks and the teacher offers the support in line with what the learners need because he or she understands them, then that teacher is teaching contingently. Their model shows that when the learners demonstrate competences in the tasks given, then the teacher can gradually fade the support for the learners to work independently. In the process of fading the support, the responsibility is transferred to the learners as they master ways to perform given task on their own. The diagram below shows the conceptual model of scaffolding as presented by Van de pol *et al.*, (2010, P. 274).



**Figure 4.1** A summary of scaffolding as presented by Van de pol, Volman and Beishuizen (2010, p. 274)

Figure 4.1 shows that both the teacher and the student are responsible for the effective use of the scaffolds. Collaboration between the two parties is what makes scaffolding meaningful as Larson and Marsh (2015) observed as the complexity of scaffolding is when the teacher has to transfer the responsibility of the task to the learner; that is making scaffolding literacy real. A conclusion that one can reach is that the learner is central to the teacher's use of scaffolding as an instructional practice in the English literacy classroom and that, without the co-operation of the learner; the scaffold would not achieve its intended function.

#### 4.5 Mediation and meaning

Vygotskys' socio-cultural theory also emphasizes two other important concepts, that of *mediation* and *meaning*. Kozulin (2002) observed that among the concepts that are embedded in the socio-cultural theory, mediation and meaning are more related to linguistic processes. Since the focus of this study is teachers' instructional practices in the Grade One English literacy classroom, the researcher finds it appropriate to discuss the concepts of mediation and meaning when presenting the theoretical framework for this study. The following section

therefore, discusses the concepts of mediation and meaning, and their relevancy in the teaching and learning of English literacy in the foundation phase.

#### **4.5.1 Mediation**

Daniels *et al.*, (2007, p. 180) assert that mediation is a central theme that cuts across Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and influences the works of different educational practitioners, psychologists, teachers and other professionals involved in working with children and adults with special needs. In simpler terms, mediation refers to the part played by the knowledgeable other in the teaching-learning process. According to Minick, as cited in Eun and Lim (2009, p. 15), mediation is when activities which are socially meaningful and natural behaviours are impulsively transformed into higher mental processes through the use of instruments or tools.

Daniels *et al.*, (2007) assert that Vygotsky's concept of mediation has two perspectives; *explicit* and *implicit* mediation. Vygotsky (1987) was of the view that mediation involves social language. Consequently, it can be seen and sometimes may occur without it being seen. They state that explicit mediation is when an individual overtly and intentionally introduces a 'stimulus means' into an ongoing activity. In explicit mediation, the materials of the stimulus are obvious and not temporary. For instance, when a teacher places different signs of rules to be observed by all students in the classroom; (keep quiet, raise your hand when you want to talk).

The other form of mediation is implicit mediation, which is less obvious and difficult to detect. In this type of mediation, the role of social and inner speech to mediate human consciousness is central. Vygotsky (1987) is of the view that implicit mediation is not clearly visible and is not intentionally introduced into an ongoing activity like the former. Implicit mediation is part and parcel of an ongoing communication. For instance, the use of gestures in communicating comes naturally with human beings and could be a form of implicit mediation. Similarly, a teacher can mediate a literacy lesson in implicit forms.

This study shows that, in the teaching and learning process, the teacher is seen as the mediator for learning, either explicitly or implicitly. The various instructional practices the teacher engages in results in the learners' unmediated memory developing into mediated memory. In explaining the concept of the teacher as a mediator, Vygotsky (1987) states that the teacher is the one who facilitates the teaching and learning process. In explicit mediation,

Vygotsky sees the teacher as the one to bring in a tool within the social environment of the learners that will enable the learner to interact with it. Once the teacher has created the stimuli for interaction, it is within the abilities of the learner to select and organize the stimuli in ways that suits his or her learning styles. In the process, the thought of the child is developed. This is an indication that learning follows development, not the other way round as suggested by Daniels *et al.*, (2007). Implicit mediation, on the other hand, is constantly immersed in the ongoing classroom activities. The researcher is of the understanding that the learners and the teacher should know each other very well in order for implicit mediation to be meaningful and benefit the learners.

The concept of mediation was further developed by Vygotskian scholars such as Wertsch, (1991) and Feuerstein (1990). They hold the view that understanding is constructed through various forms of mediation tools and concluded that different experiences of people are mediated in order to be meaningful. Wertsch (1991) for instance, states that it is not always the face-to-face human interaction that mediates the interpretation of messages, but other tools are critical to mediate understanding of concepts. Feuerstein, (1990) a researcher who carried on the ideas of Vygotsky, identified two faces of the mediation process; *human mediation* and *symbolic mediation*.

#### **4.5.1.1 Human mediation**

Human mediation, according to Feuerstein (1990), is the kind of adult involvement that is available to support the child's learning. Human mediation comes in different forms; the mere presence of the adult to provide the child with a secure learning environment is a form of human mediation. Also, the motivation and encouragement the adult gives to the child and the challenging activities and feedback offered by the adult to the child are other forms of human mediation (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015). In the school environment, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure that the learning environment is conducive and the learners are less anxious for effective learning to occur. This could be implicit mediation as it is not clearly visible, but is important to mediate learning.

A study conducted by Wertsch and Stone (1985) shows that in an interactive classroom environment, children become involved in complex and challenging activities they would not have been able to do on their own. This shows that the instructional practices of the teacher are critical as she or he is the mediator for learning. Joint activity between the teacher and the learner results in the learners mastering what is taught. Allowing learners to interact in the

classroom could explicitly and implicitly mediate learning as human mediation is not only limited to the teacher in the school environment, but the learners themselves are mediators of learning.

#### **4.5.1.2 Symbolic mediation**

Symbolic mediation is another important aspect that features prominently in the Vygotskian theory. Vygotsky (1978, p.127) argues that cognitive development and children's learning depend on their mastery of symbolic mediators. These symbolic mediators need to be clearly aligned to what the children know so that they are able to internalize them. In developing this idea, Kuzulin (2002) claims that teachers and adults should not assume that children will just detect a symbolic relationship regardless of how simple it may appear to them to be. He believes that children need to be guided systematically in order for them to acquire symbolic relationships. For example, children need to be guided by an adult on the operations of literacy.

In essence, symbolic mediation means that children need to be exposed to the use of literacy in order for them to learn how to use it. It is not a spontaneous occurrence for children to learn, for example, how to read and write letters of the alphabet and how to describe the day's weather. The teacher has to be there to support them through symbolic mediators. Kuzulin (2002) argues that the symbols may remain useless if the teacher does not mediate them to the learners. The writing skill is one common example of symbolic mediation. The letters may not make any sense to the child unless someone older and more knowledgeable mediates them with the child. The central idea in this argument is that in the literacy classroom, the teacher has to mediate English literacy content as cognitive tools that will develop the learners for life-long learning.

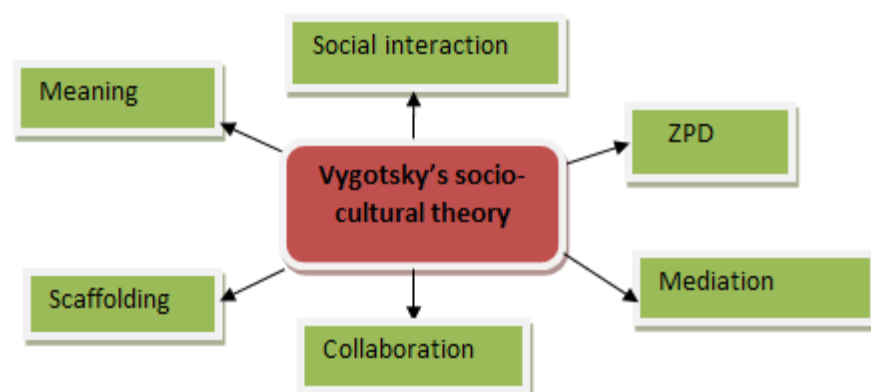
#### **4.5.2 Meaning**

In explaining the concept of *meaning* in the socio-cultural theory, Vygotsky (1987) says that meaning is to be understood in terms of the level of generalization and objectivity. In his view, when there is social communication between two parties in the social environment, then there is meaning. The people are able to understand each other in an oral discourse. In the case of a written discourse, one is able to understand what is written. In addition, gestures and body language also convey meaning. Thus Vygotsky (1978) concluded that humans are able to have meaningful speech in different ways of communication with one another. This

means that the form of communication, such as gestures and body language, does not matter as long as meaning is not thwarted. What is critical in any form of communication is the retention of meaning.

Similarly, in a classroom environment, any form of communication between the teacher and the learners is important for learning. As a teacher educator, the researcher has observed that through the body language, a learner can send a message to the teacher who has to understand it and act accordingly. For instance, if a learner is not following what is being taught, his or her facial expression may show the frustration, even the body posture. It is therefore, the duty of the teacher to read and understand the meaning of the non-verbal messages sent by the learner in the literacy classroom. The same applies to the learners; they should be able to read and understand the non-verbal message from the teacher.

From the Vygotskian perspective, teachers as mediators for learning should ensure that whatever form of mediation is used in their instructional practices, it retains the desired meaning. It is *meaning* that matters as opposed to any sign or form of communication. Consequently, in a literacy classroom, it is through the retention of meaning that thoughts that lead to literacy learning are developed. For Vygotsky, social interaction is critical for meaningful mediation in the classroom environment. This is also supported by John-Steiner, Ponofsky, and Smith (1994) who hold that meaningful exchange between people is central to development. Similarly, in literacy teaching and learning, meaningful teacher-learners interaction and learner-learner interaction is essential for effective literacy learning.



**Figure 4.2** Key concepts in the socio-cultural theory

Figure 4.2 shows the different aspects that form the socio-cultural theory. All these aspects are relevant to teachers' instructional practices. They show the intricate relationship between the teacher, learners, curriculum and the role of the learners' socio-cultural experiences in learning. The researcher noted that a harmonious integration of all these aspects in the classroom ensures successful literacy learning.

#### **4.6 The relevance of Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective to this study**

Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective is pertinent to my study because it clearly articulates the critical role of the teacher of literacy in English. Vygotsky's perspective shows that a sound curriculum without a teacher with pedagogically-sound instructional practices cannot yield the desired learner achievement. It shows that the teacher is a critical role player in the teaching-learning cycle. The teacher as the knowledgeable other is the one to produce effective learning outcomes by carefully and skilfully working on the learners' zone of proximal development to ensure that varied learners' needs are met. Vygotsky's perspective showed that it was through carefully planned classroom activities with appropriate models and materials that the teacher is able to develop the learner from the actual zone of development to the zone of proximal development. The kind of scaffold the teacher offered to support the learner is material for the learner to internalise new literacy concepts and to apply them performance of a task and, or solve, a problem independently. From Vygotsky's point of view, the teacher is presented as an individual who possesses the skills of a juggler to meet the diverse needs of the learners and also to challenge them further. The Vygotskian perspective was also significant in developing the observation guide for this study and also worked as an analytical tool.

#### **4.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory as an important lens through which English literacy learning and teaching in the foundation phase can be viewed. From a Vygotskian perspective, the teacher is an important role player in the classroom as she or he is a mediator for learning. Their primary role is to create opportunities for meaningful learner interaction through different mediating tools. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory also acknowledges the importance of the social and cultural context of the learners. Vygotsky



views the social and cultural experiences of the learners as imperative in the learning and teaching of literacy especially in the foundation phase. These contexts provide the framework for learning. Moreover, socio-cultural artefacts are considered important in mediating meaning as they shape the child's learning and development. The teacher, parents and more competent peers are seen as main players in defining the kind of learning that occurs as a result of the interaction between children and their social environment.

The conclusion that one may draw from Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is that literacy learning and teaching is a socially-mediated process where a knowledgeable other; teacher, parent and more competent peer offer the desired assistance to the child so that she or he is able to develop the learners' ZPD and enable them to complete a task unassisted, thereby constructing new knowledge. Moreover, this theory shows the dynamic role of the teacher in working with the curriculum and instructional techniques such as play in order to fit them into the learners' socio-cultural contexts. For Vygotsky, instructional practices in a classroom involve teachers and students working together through exploration and collaboration in a competency-based curriculum.

Vygotsky's theory also helps us to understand that the collaborative activities in the literacy classroom are vital for learning. All learners should feel part of the learning process as their socio-cultural experiences are used in their learning. The researcher maintains that the use of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory for this empirical study helps one to make sense of the teachers' instructional practices in literacy in the Grade One classroom as it emphasizes the significant role of the teacher in facilitating the learners' construction of new knowledge in the literacy classroom. The researcher saw the socio-cultural theory as useful in her exploration of teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One in the two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. The next chapter presents the methodology and research design that this study followed.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an outline of the methods and procedures that were followed to put together the design of this study. It presents the research paradigm chosen, and the research methodology that was used. A qualitative research method was used to gather, record, and analyse data. Data collection strategies appropriate for a qualitative research design will be explained and a rationale for their choice will be given. A case study research design will be used to get a deeper understanding of what goes on in English literacy classrooms in Grade One as the researcher intends exploring the teachers' instructional practices.

The researcher believes that the case study design is suitable for this study as it is aimed at getting a rich, thick description of what actually happens in literacy in English classrooms in the first year of schooling. This includes everything that goes on in the English literacy classroom and includes class arrangement, teaching strategies, displays on wall and bulletin board, class activities, including assessment of students and any other activity that learners engage with in the English literacy classroom and what influences all these practices. Teachers' experiences of teaching literacy in English in the First Grade also form part of the study. The main aim is to explore teachers' instructional practices in the Literacy in English class focusing on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, and the rationale for the teachers' practices as well as their experiences of teaching literacy in Grade One.

#### **5.2 Research objectives**

The following objectives were followed in order to achieve the aim of this study as stated earlier:

- To explore instructional practices used by teachers in literacy in English in Grade One in two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland;
- To discover why the teachers opt for the instructional practices they use in literacy in Grade One in the two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland;
- To discover how teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One in these two urban schools. ; and

- To establish why teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do.

### 5.3 Research paradigm

The concept of a research paradigm is explained by Patton and Cochran (2002) as one's view of the world; how the individual perceives the world. A research paradigm is also defined as the framework that is directed and, or, influenced by belief systems held by people on how the world should be viewed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In essence, a research paradigm has to do with people's assumptions about a particular phenomenon.

In their work in the social science research, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) came up with three categories to explain people's beliefs and views about how the world should be studied to gain understanding of the different phenomena in it. These are: ontology, epistemology and methodology. The main concern of ontology is reality; the nature of the phenomenon under study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Crotty (2003, p. 10) defines ontology as the study of being. Ontology basically answers the question, what is? Epistemology is concerned with nature and forms of knowledge (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The focus is on how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated to other people. It answers the question, what it means to know. Guba and Lincoln (2005) say that epistemology focuses on the relationship between the researcher in a quest of knowledge about a certain phenomenon and what can be known about it.

Methodological assumption which is another category of the research paradigm is basically concerned with the ways and strategies people use to know the world. It is the plan of action in acquiring knowledge and the methods used to acquire knowledge about the world (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In explaining methodological assumptions, Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.108) state that the major question in this category is: how can the researcher go about finding out what they believe can be known about a particular phenomenon? Consequently, it addresses questions such as why, what, from where, when and how data was collected and analysed (Crotty, 2003, p.3).

Cohen *et al.*, (2011, p.22) point out that the three assumptions of paradigm are intricately linked to one another in such a way that, from looking at the instruments used to collect data and ways of analysing the data, one is able to tell the ontological and epistemological assumptions guiding the study. These researchers claim that, altogether, these assumptions

influence the design of the study. Based on this knowledge about paradigm, the researcher found the interpretive research paradigm most suitable for this study.

#### **5.4 The interpretive paradigm**

This study used an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive refers to theories about how we gain knowledge of the world through understanding people's interpretation of their actions (O'reilly, 2012, p.2). Guba and Lincoln (1994, p.110) are of the view that reality is subjective and differs with individuals. They maintain that reality is mediated by human senses and that without full consciousness of these senses, the world has no meaning. In explaining the same concept, Crotty (1998, p.43) argues that there is no definite reality as it is individually constructed and this leaves us with as many realities as the individuals who construct them. The researcher holds the ontological assumption that the participants' social construction of the world will give her a deeper understanding of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase, the Grade One class in particular.

For this study, the researcher believes that the interpretive paradigm would enable her to understand how the participants construct and understand their instructional practices and how they experience their roles as teachers of English literacy in Grade One. The researcher believed that the interpretive paradigm was more appropriate for this study as it seeks to understand the phenomenon in a real-life setting; exactly how the participants experienced it. The interpretive paradigm also allowed the researcher to focus on understanding what actually happens in a given context, how it happens and how the people interpret what happens in their social context. This paradigm suggests that reality is socially constructed and is fluid; that is, what we know is influenced by culture, social setting and relationships with other people (Bevir, & Kedar, 2008; Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) share a similar view, that in interpretive research, access to reality is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings.

Reeves and Hedberg (2003, p.32) contend that the interpretive paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context in order to understand the world from the point of view of the individual. This means that an interpretive paradigm is subjective in nature as it requires that the researcher understands the individual's interpretation of the world around them and his or her experiences of the world. Cohen *et al.*, (2011, p.21) note that "to retain integrity of the phenomenon being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the person and to understand from within". This means that there is no room for imposing external influence as this will

‘pollute’ the views of the individual directly involved in the experience. The researcher’s concern in this paradigm is to understand the *participants’* interpretation of the world not what the researcher holds about the world, the participants’ ontological and epistemological assumptions. Moreover, Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Cohen *et al.*, 2011) state that an interpretive paradigm theory is emergent as it arises from a particular situation and it should be based on data generated by the research.

The interpretive paradigm was specifically used in this study for its principle to rely on the individual participants to construct knowledge about a particular phenomenon based on lived experiences and personal constructions. The epistemological assumptions of the participants were the researcher’s main focus as the aim was to understand the phenomenon from their perspective. The researcher interpreted the participants’ constructions of the teaching of English literacy in Grade One in the case schools. The researcher remained objective and accepted the views of the teachers as they gave an account of their experiences concerning what they did in their English literacy classrooms; why they did that and how they experienced the whole idea of teaching English literacy in Grade One.

The researcher respected the teachers’ responses as she believed that they gave honest accounts of their lived experiences and were, therefore, regarded as primary sources that provided rich, thick data on the phenomenon of study.

#### **5.4.1 Application of the interpretive paradigm in the study**

The table below shows how the interpretive paradigm has been used in this study.

**Table 5.1**

*The application of the interpretive paradigm in the study*

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Description</b>
Main research question of the study	What instructional practices do teachers use in the Grade One English literacy classroom?
Purpose of research	To explore teachers’ instructional practices in English literacy in the Grade One class. .

ontology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are multiple realities and an exploration of these realities was done through interacting and observing three Grade One teachers in action.</li> <li>• Reality can be explored, and constructed through human interactions and meaningful actions.</li> <li>• Discover how teachers make sense of their social worlds in their natural setting through their everyday routines, conversations and writing as they interact with the Grade One learners in their classrooms.</li> <li>• Social realities exist due to different human experiences, including knowledge people possess, views, experiences of the world and their interpretation of the world. Similarly, teachers experienced the teaching of English literacy in Grade One in different ways due to a number of factors.</li> </ul>
epistemology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events are understood through interpretation of the world that is influenced by social contexts.</li> <li>• Those involved in research socially construct knowledge by experiencing the real world or natural setting.</li> <li>• Inquirer and the inquired- into are interlocked in an interactive process of talking and listening, reading and writing.</li> <li>• More personal and interactive modes of data collection.</li> <li>• Similarly, teachers' explanations and interpretation of their instructional practices in this study were understood through their interaction and actions as observed by the researcher.</li> </ul>
methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes of data collection for this study were by: interview, focus group interviews, observations, and document analysis.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research is a product of the values of the researcher.</li> </ul>
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Table 5.1 presents the interpretive paradigm that has been used in this study. The researcher believes that the table shows a clear map the study follows in exploring teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One, focusing on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland.

### 5.5 The research design

The researcher decided to use the case study design for this research study. The rationale for this choice was based on the fact that, from the literature reviewed, the researcher realised that most qualitative studies have used the case study design to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. It has proven to be the most popular research design in the field of education, particularly in qualitative studies. The researcher also found the case study design logical to use and cost-effective and yet it is able to yield the rich, thick data desired for the research. The most important reason for the choice of this design is that the researcher is able to study the subject in its natural setting, thereby getting a holistic picture of the case being studied and the case study enabled the researcher to explore teachers' instructional practices from their settings in the school, and in their Grade One literacy English classrooms.

Cresswell (2009) asserts that, a case study focuses on how the participants view the world and construct meaning as a result of their experiences. In support of the case study design, Small and Uttal (2005) state that in a case study, the focus is on gathering information to inform practice on context as opposed to generalising findings. As a teacher educator, the researcher found the case study an effective design that enabled her to study a particular subject in depth and to obtain results that are useful to inform practice.

In this research study, the cases are two primary schools located in a small town of Nhlangano in Swaziland and the focus is on the instructional practices of three Grade One teachers of literacy in English . What the teachers do in their English literacy classrooms, what influences their practices, how they experience their practice and why they experience their instructional practices the way they do are the central units of analysis in this study.

### 5.5.1 Definition of case study research

In an extensive reading on case study research design the researcher established that Yin (2003, p.13) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, more especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and, as a result, a case study relies on multiple sources of evidence. This means that the use of case study is purposeful, when the researcher wants to tackle the phenomenon in its natural context. To substantiate his definition Yin (2003, p. 12) includes words of Schramm, (1971) who emphasised that:

*The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or a set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result.*

Yin's (2003) use of Schramm's words clearly hinges on this particular study as the researcher's interest was to explore what instructional practices teachers used in the Grade One literacy in English class, why they used those instructional practices and how they experienced the teaching of literacy in English in the Grade One class.

This idea corroborates the one by Gerring (2006), who says that a case study is a systematic inquiry into an event which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest. What the researcher gleaned from this definition is that there is an orderly pathway the researcher follows when using a case study to understand a certain phenomenon. Also, detailed description and explanation are involved in a case study to give a clear understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This is supported by Cohen *et al.*, (2011) who claim that case studies can penetrate situations in ways not very easily analysed in numerical form.

Another important point to note about case studies is raised by Simons (2009, p.21) who defines them as an in-depth explorations from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, programme or system in a real-life context. The main idea in this definition is that particular care is taken to understand every detail of the case being studied in its natural setting. Moreover, the researcher goes deeper into the investigation of that phenomenon of interest and clear descriptions and explanations of the case are given. The liberty for deeper exploration of a phenomenon gives a clearer understanding of what is being studied, which may not be the case when other research designs are used. Merriam (1988, p.16) shares a similar view when she asserts that "case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in



handling multiple data sources”. This means that it is the data that enables the researcher to draw any conclusion, not a theory set in advance.

For this study, two case schools were used to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied; instructional practices of teachers in literacy in English in Grade One. These case schools had the same characteristics and the researcher hoped that using these two case schools would give a deeper and clearer understanding of the topic. Practitioner experience had equipped the researcher with theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon, and made an effort to guard against any bias that may have the potential to influence and even distort the findings. The researcher acknowledges a major limitation of this case study as suggested by Rule and John (2011) that the results may not be generalised to other cases. However, the findings of studied cases may still be related to similar cases yet to be studied.

### **5.5.2 Rationale for choosing case study research**

There were many reasons for the researcher’s choice of the case study design for this research. The strength of a case study design as presented by different researchers (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Yin, 2003; Rowley, 2002) caused the researcher to choose it for this research project. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) claim that a case study provides a comprehensive exploration of a single case that constitutes a unique presentation of real people in real situations. Moreover, it focuses on studying an issue based on one or more cases in a bounded system, with the aim of getting a full understanding of each case. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) believe in addition that the strengths of a case study are that it is able to report on complex dynamics and at the same time it offers an in-depth description of the subject in varied contexts. The researcher agrees with the case study approach.

Rowley (2002, p.17) brings out another important strength of a case study that caused the researcher to decide on using it for this research study. Rowley (2002) holds that case studies support deeper and more detailed investigation of the research type that wants to answer ‘*how*’ and ‘*why*’ questions. The case study was relevant as it aimed to answer ‘why the teachers opt for the instructional practices they use in literacy in English in Grade One’ and ‘how teachers experienced the use of these instructional practices. Why they experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do is to be investigated. In addition, case study research is useful for investigating contemporary events when the relevant behaviour cannot be manipulated (Rowley (2002) and the instructional practices of teachers in literacy in English cannot be manipulated. Rowley (2002) also states that case

study research uses a variety of evidence from different sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and artefacts. Yin (2003, p. 97) shares a similar view. He claims that the fundamental strength of case study is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence which other research strategies lack. In principle, data triangulation is a major strength of case studies.

### **5.5.3 Limitations of case study research**

As much as there are several advantages to case study research that influenced the researcher to choose it for this research project, there are also some potential limitations, as presented by Ary *et al.*, (2002). They state that case study research lacks breadth in the sense that the particular dynamics of the case studied may bear little relationship to the dynamics of others; consequently, they cannot be representative of other cases. Another criticism against case study research is that possible bias may arise on the part of the researcher. They argue that the probability for subjectivity is high, as preconceptions of the researcher may influence him or her on which behaviour is observed and which is ignored and the way the observations are interpreted. Moreover, they observed that some observations are explained in ways that are difficult to confirm or refute through empirical study. Furthermore, a common criticism of case studies is that they do not allow valid generalisations to be made applicable to any other section of the population until follow-up research has been done. In the researcher's view, the limitations of the case study design do not out-weigh its strength and so it was chosen for this particular study.

### **5.5.4 How the researcher intends to control the limitations**

The researcher aimed at getting full understanding of teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the First Grade but there was no intention to generalise the findings. However, the researcher utilised different data collection instruments to gather data on what the study investigated. She hoped that the use of various data collection instruments would improve the credibility and dependability of the study. She was also conscious to guard against any personal bias by remaining as objective as possible by allowing herself to view the world from the perspective of the participants.

For this study, the researcher used teachers from two primary schools; those who were currently teaching Grade One for the face-to-face interviews and observations. For the focus-group interview, the researcher gathered data from four teachers in school A and six teachers

in school B, all had an experience of teaching literacy in English in Grade One. The aim of this case study was basically to extend findings as opposed to generalising the results. The researcher hopes that descriptions made in this study will allow others to get a deeper understanding of similar cases and to extend their understanding by undertaking further research.

The researcher followed a structured pattern to gather data for this case study. Suitable data collection tools were used to answer the research questions and to achieve the objectives of the study. The researcher believed that correct use of these data collection methods would generate a deeper and holistic understanding of teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One in the two selected urban schools and control any biases.

## **5.6 Data collection instruments**

This study is a qualitative case study, situated in the interpretive paradigm. Various data collection methods were used to gain a holistic understanding of the case. Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, document analysis and focus group interviews were the main data collection instruments for this study.

### **5.6.1 Interviews**

Interviews were used to collect data from teachers who were currently teaching Grade One. From the review of literature, the researcher established that the interview is the most popular data collection method in qualitative research. According to Maree (2007, p.87), an interview is a two-way conversation in which the interviewer asks the participants questions to collect data to learn about the ideas, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviour of the participants. The aim is to see the world through the eyes of the participants. In essence, the objective of a qualitative interview is to get a rich or thick description of the phenomenon that will help the researcher to understand the participant's construction of knowledge and social reality in his or her environment.

Cohen *et al.*, (2011, p.9) regard an interview as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest for the purposes of producing knowledge. This notion is further supported by Seidman (2013) who states that interviews are an effective way of gaining understanding into educational and other important social issues by comprehending experiences of people whose lives reflect those issues. Seidman (2013) further states that interviews are also consistent with the way people make meaning through language. In the

researcher's understanding, interviews allow people freedom to express themselves in the simplest way possible on their understanding of a particular social issue.

Simons (2009, p.43) suggests the following purposes of interviews: firstly, interviews are done to establish what an individual thinks of a certain social issue. Secondly, interviews allow active engagement and learning as issues are identified and analysed. Thirdly, interviews allow flexibility to take on emerging issues and probe further to get a deeper understanding from the perspective of the participant. In addition, interviews have the potential to reveal unobserved feelings and events that cannot be observed. Ary *et al.*, (2002, p.434) clearly articulate this idea; "An interview has an advantage of supplying large amounts of in-depth data quickly. And also provides insight on participants' perspectives, the meaning of events for the people involved, information about the site, and perhaps information on unanticipated issues". The underlying idea is that interviews are more flexible because they allow the researcher to make an immediate follow-up on a point and seek clarification on participants' responses. Cohen *et al.*, (2011) share a similar idea with Simons (2009) and Ary *et al.*, (2002) and state that the advantages of using interviews are that they permit enquiry in greater depth, and probing to obtain more complete data. Also, they make it possible to establish and maintain rapport with participants and even determine when rapport has not been established.

It is on the basis of the above-mentioned purposes and advantages of the interview that made the researcher decide on the use of semi-structured interviews as the key data collection instrument for this study. When collecting data for her master's research project, creating conducive environment for the interview helped the researcher to make the participants more relaxed and free to share their experiences. Also, the relaxed atmosphere allowed probing that yielded rich data. The researcher observed that using interviews afforded her an opportunity to observe, discern and record in detail verbal and non-verbal cues such as gestures including frowns, and body movement of any kind. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three Grade One teachers from two urban schools after they had completed their day's work. Appendix J shows an interview schedule conducted with the three Grade One teachers.

#### **5.6.1.1 Advantages of semi-structured interviews**

The advantages of semi-structured interviews are presented by different researchers. Cohen, *et al.*, (2011) and Maree, (2007) agree that an important aspect of semi-structured interviews is that the researcher prepares key or guiding questions in advance; therefore he or she goes

to the interview prepared and clear on what he or she is looking for. The strength of this type of interview is that it allows questions that were not included in the guide to be asked as they are picked up during the interview and this helps to unearth rich data for the study. Moreover, it also allows participants to express their views in their own terms and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. It was on the basis of these advantages of semi-structured interviews that the researcher opted to use them for this study. The researcher believed that careful administering of the interview guide and appropriate probing would yield rich data that would give an insight into the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One in the case schools. This belief proved to be well-founded.

#### **5.6.1.2 Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews**

As much as semi-structured interviews allow the respondents to elaborate on issues for clarity, they do, however, have some disadvantages. Cohen, *et al.*, (2011) and Ary *et al.*, (2002) suggest some disadvantages of semi-structured interviews. They state that with interviews, it is easy to be carried away by trivial matters that have no relevance to the study whilst an incompetent interviewer may bring bias into the interview. They also complain that interviews are time-consuming and expensive. In addition, they maintain that a major setback is that interviewees may not be willing to share information, or may even offer false information that may lead to wrong conclusions with regard to the phenomenon being studied.

Remaining objective and focused on the phenomenon under study helped the researcher to control these disadvantages to a large extent. The researcher allowed the participants to express themselves without digressing too much from the objectives of the study by constantly stating the focus of study each time a question was asked.

#### **5.6.1.3 Process for conducting interviews**

The interview was based mainly on the teachers' constructions of literacy teaching; what they did in their literacy in English classroom and why they did this. The interview also enquired into their experiences of teaching Grade One literacy in English. The interview schedule comprised eighteen key questions. In conducting the interview, the researcher noted each verbal and non-verbal cue made by the teachers (participants) such as facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and general body language as per the suggestions of Maree (2007). The researcher asked teachers which language they preferred for the interview and they all

preferred to use English and thus the medium used for the interviews was English throughout. The researcher also requested to audio-record the interview and permission was granted by the participants to record the interview so that no information was missed. Notes were also taken as a backup to the audio recording.

Prior to the interview, the researcher explained to the participants the purpose of the interview, and made them aware of their ethical obligations. She explained that they had a right to remain or to withdraw from the study at any time they desired and that there would be no consequences for their actions. Thereafter, consent forms were signed. A good rapport was established with all participants, by first having a brief general talk about the appearance of their schools and sports activities they offered. This was a warm-up session the researcher used to develop a rapport with the interviewees. Moreover, respect for their emotions was constantly kept in mind throughout the interview. Since the interviews for all the three teachers were conducted after school, during the course of the interview the researcher would pause and ask if the teacher was still comfortable to sit in the interview and they all affirmed that they were. As a result, the interview progressed smoothly 'till the end.

The interview questions comprised varying types of questions from simple straight-forward questions to complex questions that demanded respondents to reflect on their practices in order give a clear response. The researcher allowed slight pauses and rephrased the questions to get further details from the participants. A relaxed atmosphere between the researcher and the participants was sustained by allowing participants enough time to say what they wanted on the issue but the researcher was careful not to allow them to stray from the focus of the question. In instances where the participants were straying, the researcher made an effort to bring them back to the focus of the research questions without offending them. Transcriptions of the audio recordings were done on the eve of the interview while the researcher's memory was still fresh.

### **5.6.2 Lesson observation**

Lesson observation was another data collection tool used to gain a clearer insight into aspects of this research study. Maree (2007, p.83) holds that; "observation is a systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with them." Driscoll (2011) shares a similar view. He asserts that observation is a data collection method whereby the participants' behaviour is observed in their natural settings. And its advantage is that it gives the researcher a first-hand

experience of the natural life of the participants. For this study, classroom observations helped to capture real-life experiences of teachers in their literacy teaching context in Grade One classrooms. All activities that Grade One teachers engaged in with their learners were observed live. The researcher assumed the status of a non-participant observer and this helped her to gain understanding based on a first-hand experience, as opposed to a second-hand account, which might be biased for various reasons.

#### **5.6.2.1 Advantages of using lesson observations**

There are a number of advantages to using observation as a data collection tool. For this study, lesson observation offered the researcher a detailed and clearer perspective of the problem being investigated. It also allowed the researcher to get a real-life experience of literacy teaching as she watched every action that unfolded during the course of the lesson. Moreover, lesson observation enabled the researcher to identify participants' attitudes and actions in a natural setting and she tried to understand the phenomenon of literacy in English teaching from their perspective. This is in agreement with the suggestion of Kawulich (2005) that the researcher becomes part of the event in order to record the participants' behaviour in their natural settings. The data gathered from lesson observation provided vital supplementary information to data gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

#### **5.6.2.2 Procedure for lesson observations**

The researcher observed the literacy in English lessons that comprised oral activities, reading and writing activities in three Grade One classrooms; one class from school A; and two classes from school B. Ten visits were made to each class on different dates. The topics of the lessons observed were planned by the teachers.

The researcher assumed a non-participant observer's stance in the classroom. The teachers and the students were aware of her presence, but she did not take part in the classroom activities. For this study, a lesson observation tool was prepared based on the findings of the literature review regarding effective literacy instruction in the foundation phase and on factors that influenced literacy instruction at this level. Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which was used as a framework for this study also guided the development of the observation schedule. The classroom observation focused on four basic aspects: the general appearance of the classroom (physical), the personal or human behaviour (classroom atmosphere), the

interactional aspect (interaction between teacher and learners), and the programme (all activities that the teacher engaged the learners in for the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade One). The researcher had an observation guide that assisted her to stick to the purpose and focus of the observation. This was linked to the research questions guiding the study as suggested by (Maree, 2007). The researcher had undertaken a pilot study in another school to observe Grade One literacy in English lesson. This had lasted for one-and-a-half hours. This gave her an opportunity to reflect on the suitability of this data collection tool for this study. It also enabled the researcher to develop confidence in recording all observable behaviour in the classroom and to make meaning out of this.

**Table 5.2**

*Lesson observation guide*

<b>Context</b>	<b>Focal areas for observations</b>
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical appearance of the classroom; arrangement of desks; availability of chalkboard, notice board, shelves, charts, flash cards, books, worksheets.</li> <li>• Rules employed in the classroom</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The gender of the teacher and the students' composition in the class, inclusivity, general behaviour, co-operation with the teacher and peers</li> <li>• Ways in which the teacher conversed with the learners and how the learners approach the teacher (respect for other)</li> <li>• Interpersonal activities used to develop English literacy in the students</li> </ul>
Interactional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The actual teaching-learning activities, formal and informal interactions between teacher and students, and peers</li> <li>• Strategies used in teaching</li> <li>• General activities going on in the classroom</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language used by teacher and students in the classroom</li> </ul>
Programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The teaching-learning resources used</li> <li>• Learning activities students engaged in.</li> <li>• Students' reaction to these activities</li> <li>• The objective of each activity students engaged in.</li> </ul>

Table 5.2 shows the researcher's focus during observation in the three Grade One literacy lessons in English classrooms. This guide helped to keep the researcher in line with the purpose of the study.

### 5.6.2.3 Conducting the classroom observation

For recording the observations, the researcher followed the advice of Maree (2007, p.85), to capture two dimensions: the description of what was observed and the reflections about what had happened. This template served as the researcher's reflective diary where entries were made during each classroom visit. The researcher recorded what was observed during the literacy lesson, what was said and done and the manner in which this took place and what the researcher thought of it. The researcher tried her best to write down everything that took place during the lesson so that she could draw valuable conclusions on what took place. Photos of significant classroom activities were taken to help the researcher strengthen her observation notes. The template below shows how the observation records were done.

**Table 5.3**

*Observation record*

Date and time	Situation	Participant(s)	Action observed	Reflection

Table 5.3 shows how the researcher recorded the data during classroom observation. This was important to ensure that the researcher kept records of what had happened, where, when and by whom. It also showed how the researcher viewed that action in her own reflection of what took place.

At the end of the lesson the researcher had a brief talk with the teacher about the lesson and what her intention was in delivering the lesson. The teachers' lesson plan was also examined for lesson objectives, classroom activities and teaching methods used. The researcher was interested in seeing how far the teacher's actual lesson presentation deviated from the way it was planned in the daily preparation book. The researcher then performed a content and thematic analysis of the observation data collected. Appendix L shows the observation guide for this study.

#### **5.6.2.4 Challenges encountered during lesson observations**

One major challenge encountered during lesson observations was that, in the first lesson, for all the three teachers, both the teacher and the learners were not at ease with the researcher's presence in their classroom. The teachers tried to present a 'perfect' classroom where there was order and strict co-operation and this rendered their lessons a bit 'artificial' for Grade One learners as the behaviour they showed was not typical of Grade One learners, they were not free. The researcher believed that because she was a college lecturer, this could be intimidating for the teacher at first and they feared that I had an agenda to find their faults regardless of the fact that I had assured them that this was not the purpose. However, as they got used to my presence in their lessons, they became less anxious and allowed the lessons to flow in a natural way. I also made a conscious effort to remain neutral and not to become emotionally attached to the participants.

### **5.6 3 Document review and analysis**

Document analysis is another data-gathering tool that was used in this study. The researcher decided to include it in this study after conducting a pilot study in one urban school in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. She realised that reviewing certain documents used by the teachers in literacy in English teaching practices was important to get a deeper understanding of what they should do and to get a rationale for their classroom practices. The documents reviewed include; the English literacy syllabus, textbooks (teachers' guide & learners' books), schemes of work, lesson plans and tests given to learners.

Yin (2003. p.87) claims that documents are important for case study research in that they provide the correct spelling and appropriate names of organisations and titles of people who were mentioned during interviews or focus group discussions. Furthermore, documents have

the potential of providing specific detail to substantiate or to reveal contradictions in data from other sources and this challenged the researcher to pursue the problem further until authentic information emerged (Yin, 2003, p.87).

According to Ary *et al.*, (2002, p.442) document analysis refers to the reviewing of all written or visual materials for the purposes of identifying specified characteristics of the material. The materials could be books, newspapers, speeches, notes, and official schools' documents such as syllabuses, schemes of work, daily preparation books and students' written work. Maree (2007, p.82) states that document analysis refers to all types of written communication that may shed light on the phenomenon investigated. These may include published and unpublished documents.

The researcher regarded document analysis as being relevant to this study because it helped her to understand the content that teachers need to teach in the Grade One literacy classrooms and the approach they need to use. Also, the researcher was able to get some ideas on what to observe during the lesson observations such as what resources and teaching methods were used. The documents analysed to gather data for this study included the syllabus, scheme of work, lesson plan, teachers' guide and pupil's books.

In selecting the documents to be used, the suggestions of Maree (2007) were followed so that the purpose of choosing the document should be valid and related to the study. All the documents chosen were important in order to explore the phenomenon and to validate the data from other sources. The documents may also be useful to guide the interpretation of interviews and observational data (Cohen, *et al.*, 2011). This proved to be true for this study as the documents gave the researcher an idea of what is expected in the Grade One Literacy in English classroom.

#### **5.6.3.1 Procedure for document analysis**

The researcher produced a specific instrument to guide her in analysing the documents which was adopted from the works of Ramdan (2015) who undertook a study on literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The documents helped to shed light on what guided teachers in their teaching of literacy in English in the foundation phase; how they organise and plan their literacy lessons and what type of activities they use to assess learners' mastery of literacy activities. The syllabus was used to inform the researcher of the different components of literacy in English taught in Grade One. From the textbooks, the researcher

was interested to see if there was clear pedagogic alignment, from the schemes of work and lesson plans, the researcher was interested to see the details teachers included, including activities that learners were engaged in. By analysing the test teachers gave to learners, the researcher wanted to see how teachers structured the test questions including clarity of questions and instructions, and simplicity of language. Appendix M is a guide for document analysis.

#### **5.6.4 Focus group interviews**

Focus group discussion was another data generation tool used for this study. According to Ary *et al.*, (2002, p.444) “a focus group interview is a way of gathering qualitative data by asking individuals questions about their behaviour”. Ary *et al.*, (2002) stated that the advantages of focus group interview are that it is flexible and open as the respondents are free to respond briefly or at length in their own words. Maree (2007) affirms the idea, and states that a focus group interview is an important data collection tool because it helps widen the range of responses; activates forgotten details of experiences and releases inhibitions that may discourage participants from disclosing information, and more importantly, they produce rich data that is difficult to get through other means. It is on the basis of these strengths of focus group interview that the researcher decided to include it as one of the data collection methods for this study. For this study, two focus groups interviews were conducted; one in school A and one in school B.

Ary *et al.*, (2002) argue further that focus groups are helpful because they bring several different perspectives into contact and through their use, the researcher learned different perspectives about teachers involved in instructional practices in the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One in the two urban schools. The interaction and debates among the teachers on this issue enabled the researcher to get a better understanding of the issue as she was able to gain insight into what the participants thought of this phenomenon and why they thought the way they did (Ary *et al.*, (2002). However, the reviewed literature shows that the limitation of the focus group is that data collected may be biased due to some respondents dominating the discussion and not allowing the less assertive participants the opportunity to talk. As a result, the data may reflect an individual’s ideas as opposed to the various ideas from the group (Maree, 2007; Ary *et al.*, 2002). The researcher made an effort to control the discussion by assuming the role of a moderator to give all participants an opportunity to share their ideas. The researcher was interested in getting what the teachers

who had an experience of teaching Grade One thought about the teaching and learning of literacy in English. The interview was also audio-recorded and notes were taken. Verbal and non-verbal cues were recorded as they gave a true picture of how the teachers felt about teaching literacy in English in Grade One. The researcher also encouraged the participants to deliberate on the issue and asked for clarification where she was not clear. She also made an effort to keep all participants focused on the research questions and the interview guide. The table below shows a summary of the data-collection procedure, the methods and the participants involved in this study.

**Table 5.4**

*Summary of data collection procedure*

<b>METHOD USED</b>	<b>RESPONDENT</b>	<b>PROCESS</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION</b>
Interviews	Teachers	Interview with Grade 1 teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-teachers' understanding of literacy</li> <li>-what teachers did in their literacy classrooms</li> <li>-what resources they used</li> <li>-challenges experienced</li> <li>-ideas of best practices for teaching literacy</li> </ul>
Classroom Observations	Teachers and students	Observed literacy lessons in progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The entire classroom environment</li> <li>-Literacy activities engaged in</li> <li>-Strategies used</li> <li>-Teachers' use of learner</li> </ul>

			knowledge -learning resources -Assessment procedures -ideas for improvement
Document analysis	Teachers and students	Analysed teachers' official books and learners' workbooks	-syllabus -scheme of work -lesson plan -text (teacher's guide & pupils' workbook)
Focus group	Teachers	Held a focus group discussion with teachers who had an experience of teaching Literacy in English in Grade One. One focus group in each school.	-ideas on what literacy entails -effective strategies used -key classroom activities -rationale for practice -ways they experienced their work -ideas to improve literacy in English teaching in Grade One

Table 5.4 presents a summary of data-collection procedure for this study. It shows the participants in the study, instruments used to gather data and what process was involved in gathering the data.

## 5.7 The pilot study

The researcher conducted a pilot study before the actual data collection process commenced. The decision to conduct a pilot was based on the value attached to it in the research process. According to Ary *et al.*, (2002), a pilot study is a trial of the study with a few subjects to determine the appropriateness and feasibility of the research process and the data collection instruments. Silverman (2013, p.207) corroborates this view and, he holds that conducting a pilot study is an effective way of improving the research as it helps the researcher to learn from his or her mistakes. It helps the researcher to try out different styles of questioning that develop confidence and proficiency in handling the actual research interview or observation. According to Kim (2011), a pilot study improves the validity/credibility, reliability/dependability and practicability of the study. Moreover, it helps the potential researcher to familiarise herself with the project she is pursuing. In essence, a pilot study is an important part of the research process as it allows the researcher to modify the research instrument, where necessary, in order to get more valid data.

When piloting data collection instruments for this study, the researcher conducted an interview with three Grade One teachers, had one lesson observation and one focus group interview with teachers who had had experience of teaching Grade One in an urban school. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine if the questions were clear and it asked what they were intended to ask from the participants. The researcher then used the data gathered from the pilot study to establish if the data from the actual study would be relevant to the research questions. From the pilot study, the researcher was able to see some challenges that might arise during the actual data collection process. This helped the researcher to modify the questions; first by reducing the number of questions as some asked essentially the same question using different words and, secondly, the closed and judgmental questions were modified to be more open and non-judgemental.

After analysing the pilot study data, the researcher discovered that some important aspects on the teaching of literacy were missing. In this case, the interview guide for the actual study was modified accordingly. The researcher was able to break down the questions into fewer simple, open-ended statements that allowed participants to elaborate on the issues. She also realised that the questions were asked in a rush and participants were not given enough time to reflect on their instructional practices to be able to give a detailed view. From the pilot

study, the researcher learnt to proceed slowly as she asked the questions. She allowed participants to think carefully before responding.

Moreover, after conducting the pilot study, the researcher decided to include document analysis as one of the data collection instruments. She realised that analysing some documents, such as the syllabus, scheme of work, the lesson plan and some assessment exercises, would provide a deeper insight into the phenomenon.

## **5.8 Approach to analysis**

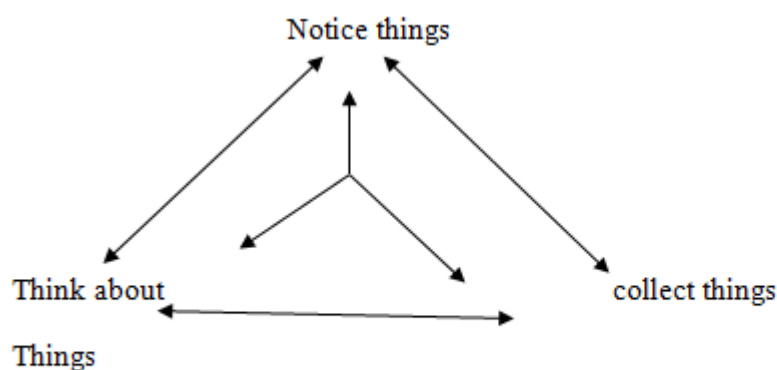
Data analysis is one of the most important stages in research. It refers to the process of reducing the volume of collected data and it identifies and puts together categories of data to emerge with meaning (Bengtsson, 2016, p.8). Polit and Beck (2006) share a similar idea and assert that the purpose of data analysis is to organise and elicit meaning from collected data in order to draw realistic conclusions from them. In view of the purpose of data analysis, scholars such as Patton (2002) and Silverman (2013) advise that it is important to ‘stay true’ to the data as this increases trustworthiness of the findings of the study.

As this is a qualitative case study, the most appropriate data analysis method that the researcher followed was content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2004, p.18), content analysis is a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use”. This data analysis method was appropriate for this study because the data were in written texts: interview transcripts, a focus group interview, and field notes from classroom observations and document analysis.

An inductive approach to content analysis was followed and this refers to the process of developing conclusions from collected data by knitting together emerging information into theory. Krippendorff (2004) claims that this approach requires the researcher to approach the data analysis process with an open mind in order to identify meaningful content addressing the research questions. In the same vein, Maree (2007 p.99) states that the purpose of inductive analysis is, “to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant, or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraint imposed by a more structured theoretical orientation”. This means that the researcher allows the data to speak for themselves on the matter being studied without setting preconceived ideas.



The figure below shows a model illustrating the *iterative process* suggested by Seidel, 1998. The researcher adopted this when analysing the raw data for this study. It allowed for constant reflection on the data collected, seeing if it answered the critical questions.



**Figure 5.1** The iterative data analysis process (Seidel, 1998, in Maree, 2007, p.100)

Figure 5.1 shows the processes the researcher followed when analysing the data from the different instruments. It shows that data analysis was not a straight forward route and required reflection on what happens in the field. This is an idea held by Maree (2007, p.100) that the iterative data analysis process allows collection of data, noticing things while collecting the data, thinking about what one notices and going back to the field if the need arises.

Data analysis began immediately the data collection process was started. The researcher wanted to be sure that the data gathered was addressing the research questions guiding the study. This is because researchers agree that qualitative data analysis is often based on interpretive philosophy that tries to establish how participants make meaning of a particular phenomenon (Maree, 2007; Neuendorf, 2002). This is achieved by analysing how they perceive a phenomenon; their attitudes and feelings, values they hold and their experiences of that phenomenon (Maree, 2007; Ary *et al.*, 2002; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

The data from the audio recorder was transcribed verbatim by the researcher who followed the advice of Bailey (2008) and personally transcribed all of it to get more familiar with it. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and focus group interviews. An interpretation of the oral responses of the participants in order to establish trends, views and feelings of the participants was done by the researcher. The audiotape was listened to carefully to ensure that the transcript carried a true reflection of

what the participants had said. The transcripts were then given to the participants to check, clarify and confirm if the transcript correctly captured their views.

The researcher started by coding the data to reduce them into manageable sections by categorising them into certain themes. The coding was done to each item of the data collected using different instruments. The coding of data prepares it for analytic interpretation. The coding process is the preliminary stage for a more intensive analysis. This is where the data is broken into concepts and categories and given a short name or phrase that better summarises it and gives it some identity (Maree, 2007).

The researcher read and re-read all the data transcripts to clarify what themes emerged and sorted these into units of meaning. Then codes were given to each single unit. The codes were allocated based on what each participant said in the interview and did in the case of classroom observation. The codes given were short phrases that described the essence of that category.

The next step that followed the basic coding was a more selective coding that identified certain concepts that emerged from the data. This was a more focused coding that identified the most significant or the most frequent codes and this facilitated further review of the data (Ary *et al.*, 2002). The researcher then decided on which codes made the best sense to analyse. The idea was to come up with a set of categories that provided a reasonable reconstruction of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The researcher made an effort to make the categories distinct from one another. Simple and clear phrases were assigned as codes to make them easier to understand.

The researcher then moved on to make a thematic analysis of the data. The codes assigned earlier became useful at this stage in order to identify patterns of similarities and differences in the data. Categories were grouped in a systematic way and patterns that would lead to particular themes were established. The themes were explored further and described in order to come up with a clear discussion that explained the case (Rule & John, 2011).

## **5.9 Measures to ensure trustworthiness of the study**

As this is a qualitative study, issues of credibility and dependability are central. The common term to refer to these is *trustworthiness* which gives the study rigour. There were certain measures the researcher followed to ensure that the findings of the study were credible and reliable. Researchers agree that the integrity of qualitative research depends on vigorous

focus on credibility (Ary *et al.*, 2002; Bryman, 2004; Maree, 2007). According to Ary *et al.*, (2002) credibility refers to the truthfulness of the findings of the study and how confident one can be on the interpretations and conclusions made by the researcher on the observations and interviews he or she conducted. For Bryman, (2004) credibility is explained as the fit between the views of the participants and the way the researcher has represented their views. In the researcher's understanding, credibility of a study has to do with accurately representing the views of the participants in such a way that at any time the participant would actually agree that the interpretations and conclusions made are a true reflection of what was meant on that issue.

To ensure trustworthiness for this study, the researcher followed some of the suggestions of Merriam (1998). *Crystallisation* was used which is the use of multiple data collection sources and methods to compare the findings with each other. The previous section showed the different data evidence used. Also, *member check* was done where the respondents had an opportunity to verify the data and findings made by the researcher. Member validation was used for the interviews and focus group interviews within the interview process as the researcher constantly confirmed, rephrased topics and probed further in order to get a holistic picture and clear meanings of what the participants had said. At the end of the data collection process the researcher asked the participants to review and critique the tape recordings and her interpretations to clear any miscommunication.

Moreover, a thick description of what actually happened in the classroom observations, verbal and non-verbal language of the teacher and the learners were recorded together with photos taken during observation which helped to increase the credibility of the study. In the course of the observation, self-reflection was also done to recognize the researcher's own bias. To ensure that bias was kept in check, a journal was kept every time a lesson observation was conducted. This journal stated clearly what was to be observed and only that was recorded as a reflection of what was happening. This is a suggestion made by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). The journal was also used to guide the analysis of data from classroom observations. All these were measures taken by the researcher to ensure internal validity of this study. For external validity, the researcher checked with other professionals in the field of curriculum studies in order to see if they found the data collection instruments credible and had the potential to yield useful results. Furthermore, the triangulation of data sources increased the validity and dependability of the study. The researcher also made an effort to focus only on the data as presented by the participants and the official documents analysed in

the interpretation of the findings. The researcher believes that these different techniques used helped to increase the trustworthiness of the study.

### **5.10 The sampling approach**

This study used the purposive sampling approach which was appropriate for this study because the researcher was interested in understanding the case: *instructional practices of teachers in literacy in English in Grade One*. Only a small group of teachers who were knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest were chosen to participate in this study.

Since this was a case study, the researcher was of the understanding that the size of the sample was not a concern as the interest was not to make any generalisations, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of the case from individuals who had the experience of the case in their natural setting was of a major concern. This is based on the assertions of Cohen *et al.*, (2011). The researcher was interested in getting an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. As a result, different data collection tools were used in an effort to get a clearer picture of the case being studied. The researcher hoped that the use of two schools with more or less similar characteristics would give her an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The aim was to enquire as much as possible into the phenomenon, reflect on them and describe as vividly as possible what was said and observed.

### **5.11 Selection of participants**

Foundation phase teachers who had an experience of teaching Grade One were purposively chosen because they were the ones who worked with learners from different environments. They knew what it was like to handle these First Grade learners. Some of them had, however, never been to a preschool and they were experiencing the classroom environment for the first time. Three Grade One teachers from two urban schools were selected; one teacher from school A and two teachers from school B. Teachers who participated in the focus group interview were those who had an experience of teaching literacy in English in the Grade One class. There were two focus group interviews conducted, one from each school, and there were four teachers who participated in school A and six teachers from school B.

All the teachers who participated in the study were Swazis, and they understood both siSwati and English. English was the main language used for the interviews. However, some siSwati

featured sometimes. The researcher had no problem with the use of siSwati since it is also her first language. The teachers and the researcher agreed to hold the interviews at the end of lessons in the afternoon so that no classes were disrupted.

### **5.12 Ethical Measures**

The researcher followed all ethical measures to undertake this study. The Ethics committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal issued an ethical clearance certificate after meeting all necessary requirements in applying for ethical clearance. The researcher sought permission to conduct the study from the Director of Education at the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland. The Director issued a letter granting permission to conduct the study and it was copied to the Shiselweni Regional Education Office (REO) and the Head teachers of the case schools. They all granted permission on condition that the schools' schedule would not be altered and no classes were disrupted.

The researcher adhered to the principle of research that ethics is a very important aspect in the research process as failure to meet these obligations may put the researcher in a moral predicament (which would be very difficult to resolve) (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). To the researcher, ethical considerations meant that the researcher should play a dual role; that of being a professional in quest of the truth and, at the same time, she must be a 'protector' of the informants that offer the information she needs. In short, it is the duty of the researcher to safeguard her integrity and that of the participants.

In this study, the researcher wrote letters to the Director of Education, Head teachers of the case schools, teachers and parents of the learners informing them about the purpose of this study, explaining that all data collected, will only be used for academic purposes. Consent forms were included in the letters where all their rights as participants were explained. The names of schools and participants were never used; instead, pseudonyms were used throughout the study. This is a measure the researcher took to protect the participants and ensure confidentiality and anonymity of all individuals and organisations involved in this study. Schools were referred to as school A and school B, and teachers were assigned numerical numbers as their codes, (teacher 1 to teacher 6). Appendixes A to F show letters to gatekeepers.

### **5.13 Research ethics**

Johnson and Christensen (2000) state that research ethics are a set of principles that guide the researcher throughout the research project. These principles direct the conduct of the researcher to avoid any physical, emotional and psychological harm that may be created while working with people involved in the study. Researchers are always cautioned to be sensitive to the research ethic in their choice of topics and data collection methods. Researchers agree that strict adherence to ethical standards in planning and conducting research is of utmost importance in any kind of research qualitative or quantitative as researchers have an obligation to their subjects and their profession (Ary *et al.*, 2002; Silverman, 2013).

To adhere to ethical standards in this study, the researcher did the following: She visited the two schools where Grade One teachers had agreed to participate in the study and she explained the purpose of the study, the purpose of the semi-structured interviews, the classroom observations, the document analysis, and the focus group interviews. Letters written in both English and siSwati were sent to parents of the children whose literacy lessons were observed, and they were given a consent form to read. The letter explained the purpose of the study.

The researcher also explained that participants were free to withdraw at any time and there would be no consequences for that action. Anonymity of participants and their schools was guaranteed. A convenient date and time for the interview was set with each Grade One teacher and a telephone call was made to confirm the date and time of the interview. The same process was followed for classroom observations and focus group discussions.

### **5.14 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a detailed research methodology that was followed in this study. The research design and data collection methods that were used in this study were stated and a rationale for their choice was given. This research design, therefore, acted as a tool to permeate theory, research and practice. Literature reviewed enabled the researcher to identify an appropriate methodology for this study and also develop suitable data gathering tools that would yield rich, thick data for comprehensive analysis. The research design allowed an exploratory, investigative and participatory research in a natural setting. This chapter also outlined the rationale for selection of participants, data-gathering tools, data analysis, means

to ensure credibility and dependability of the study and ethical measures taken. The next chapter gives a comprehensive data presentation and discussion of findings from the different data gathering instruments used: interviews, classroom observations, document analysis and focus group discussions.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents empirical data gathered during the fieldwork for this study. The presentation, discussion and interpretation of findings will be given. It connects to the previous chapters, which presented the literature reviewed, theoretical framework and methodology followed. Four data generation instruments were used: semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, observation and document analysis. Three critical research questions and objectives were used to guide the data-gathering process, analysis and discussion of findings for this empirical study.

This study sought to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One, focusing on two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. Data analysis is the focus for this chapter. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 150) data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Its primary aim is to reduce, organize and give meaning to the data. For this study, data analysis was done using qualitative content analysis to identify prominent themes and categories that emerged from the data. Content analysis allowed the researcher to look at the data from different angles in an effort to come up with main ideas that would form themes for interpretation (Neuendorf, 2016).

According to Krippendorff (2004, p. 18), content analysis is a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use." The content analysis method was appropriate for this study because the data were in written texts, interview transcripts, focus group interview, field notes from classroom observations and document analysis. In choosing this data analysis method, the researcher followed the ideas of Berg (2004) and Creswell (2009) who suggest the content analysis method for data of this nature.



## **6.2 Characteristics of the participants**

The researcher used teachers from two primary schools located in Nhlangano, the administrative town of the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. It is important to mention that these two primary schools are government-owned mixed schools where teachers are government employees, the curriculum followed is dictated by the government, education of learners is paid for by government under the Free Primary Education (FPE) and the general infrastructure in the schools is owned by government. Though these schools are both in the urban area, the students that were enrolled were mainly from the rural and peri-urban areas of the region. Most of these learners travelled to school by public transport as they stayed far from the schools. A very small number of learners stayed within town and walked to school. These learners who stayed within town were mainly those of foreign origin whose parents were business people in Nhlangano town.

Three teachers from the two schools were used as main participants for the study; one teacher from school A and two teachers from school B. In school A, one teacher taught literacy in English in both streams; A and B. In school B different teachers taught literacy in English in stream A and stream B; thus the researcher ended up with three teachers from the two schools. These teachers were interviewed and also observed in their literacy in English literacy lessons. Pseudonyms were used as means to ensure confidentiality and protection of the participants' identity. This was in line with the ethical standards in research as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2000) who assert that the researcher should guard against any possible physical, emotional and psychological harm that may occur to the participant during the course of the study. For the purpose of this data presentation, they were referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2 and Teacher 3. Teacher 1 was from school A and Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 were from school B.

**Table 6.1**

*Demographic information for the three teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations*

<b>Name of teacher</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age bracket</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Subject Major</b>
Teacher 1 <b>School A</b>	Female	50-59	PTD	35 years	Permanent	All subjects
Teacher 2 <b>School B</b>	Female	30-35	PTD	5 years	Permanent	Languages
Teacher 3 <b>School B</b>	Female	22-30	PTD	8 months	Permanent	Languages

Table 6.1 shows the demographic information of the three main participants for this study. These three teachers were the main participants in the study; they participated in the semi-structured interview and classroom observations. The table shows that the main participants in the study were all female teachers, aged between 22 and 59. The researcher had no control over the choice of gender for teachers who participated in the study because purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Yin (2009) believes that in purposive sampling the participants are selected to meet a specific purpose. Consequently, in this study, all the three Grade One teachers who were main participants were female teachers. They were interviewed and observed in their English literacy lessons. There was only one male teacher who participated in the focus group discussions. The finding that emerged from the biographic data of the participants was that there were fewer male teachers who taught in the foundation phase than who taught at the intermediate and senior phases. The researcher concluded that teaching at the foundation phase is still traditionally considered as a female role.

Teacher 1 was the only Grade One teacher from school A, and Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 were Grade One teachers from school B. They all possessed the Primary Teachers' Diploma as their highest academic qualification and were all employed as permanent teachers. Teacher 1 was the eldest and had taught at primary school for over thirty years. Teacher 2 had five years' experience. Teacher 3 was relatively new in the teaching profession and had a teaching experience of less than one year. The researcher believed that the combination of new and experienced teachers would bring a balanced view to the study. The new teacher would bring a fresh dimension to the teaching of literacy in English as she had never taught before and cannot compare teaching literacy in English in Grade One with any other class and her personal experience as a new teacher would be useful. The experienced teachers would bring realities of teaching literacy in English to Grade One learners from their personal experiences over the years.

The table further shows that Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 had majored in Language Arts in pre-service training and teacher 1 had no area of specialisation as she was trained as a general primary school teacher to teach all subjects because, at the time she did her training, there were no areas of specialization for primary school teachers at the colleges in Swaziland. The data showed that in the sampled schools, teachers who qualified to teach at primary school possessed a Primary Teachers' Diploma. Notable was that all three teachers were not trained to teach at the foundation phase but were trained as general primary school teachers. This is contrary to the suggestions of Maynard, Morgan and Waters (2010) that foundation phase practitioners need a high level of training and progressive professional development for them to be effective. They are of the opinion that teachers should constantly reflect on their instructional practices to identify strengths in their practices and areas of possible improvement. They also stated that for success to be seen, teachers need to be well-acquainted with the philosophy underpinning foundation phase teaching and learning as this would give them ownership of their instructional practices and confidence to execute their duties.

**Table 6.2**

*Demographic data for School A teachers who participated in focus group interview*

School A teachers' profile						
Name of teacher	Gender	Age range	Experience	Qualification	Majors	Grade taught
Teacher 1	F	55-60	Over 30 years	P.T.D	All subjects	Grade 1
Teacher 2	F	55-60	Over 30 years	P.T.C	All subjects	Grade 1
Teacher 3	F	50-55	Over 25 years	P.T.D	All subjects	Grade 2
Teacher 4	F	30-35	Over 10 years	P.T.D	Applied sciences	Grade 3

**Table 6.3**

*Demographic data for school B teachers who participated in focus group interview*

School B teachers' profile						
Name of teacher	Gender	Age range	experience	Qualification	Majors	Grade
Teacher 1	F	20-25	3 years	P.T.D	Languages	Grade 2
Teacher 2	M	25-30	1 year	P.T.D	Social studies	Grade 3
Teacher 3	F	30-35	4 years	P.T.D	Applied science	Grade 3
Teacher 4	F	30-35	3 years	P.T.D	Pure sciences	Grade 2
Teacher 5	F	30-35	2 years	P.T.D	Social studies	Grade 4
Teacher 6	F	40-45	15 years	P.T.D	Languages	Grade 4

Table 6.2 and table 6.3, respectively, show the demographic data for the teachers who participated in the focus group interviews from school A and school B. The tables show that only one male teacher participated in the study and the rest were female teachers. The researcher concluded that there were more female teachers who taught in the foundation phase than male teachers in the case schools. This might also mean that, generally, there are more females than males who choose teaching as a profession, especially at primary school level. Going through admissions' records at the teacher training college the researcher once worked at, the enrolment of students at the college showed that from 2000 to 2016, there have been more female students than male students who have enrolled at the college. The researcher is of the view that the lack of gender equity in the teaching profession is a subject for another research.

The demographic data showed that the teachers' ages ranged from 20 years to 59 years. The researcher is of the view that the mixture of older and younger teachers represented strength for the schools. The older teachers are believed to be experienced in the job with clear theoretical underpinnings that have worked for them over the years and the younger teachers are believed to bring newer technological innovations that could improve teachers' instructional practices. In the researcher's opinion, the mixture of experienced and new teachers, therefore, augurs well for the schools.

The data from tables 6.2 and table 6.3 also showed that there were no teachers with a bachelor's degree or any higher qualification who participated in this study. This data show that in Swaziland primary school teachers were mainly diploma holders and this study could not decipher why there were no teachers with a higher qualification in the sampled primary schools. One possible reason could be that so far, there are no posts for degree-holding teachers at primary school in Swaziland. Only the Head teacher, Deputy Head teacher and senior teacher were required to have a degree and they were remunerated for this. Other teachers who had acquired a degree were not remunerated for it unless they held the said posts. In the researcher's view, primary school teachers were not motivated to pursue their studies after attaining the Primary Teachers' Diploma that qualified them to be permanent teachers.

The data from tables 6.2 and table 6.3 further showed that among the ten teachers who participated in the focus group interviews, only two had languages as areas of specialization at pre-service training. These teachers had all taught literacy in English in Grade One, but

they had not done English language in detail at college as the tables show. The researcher thinks this had an effect on their instructional practices because teacher knowledge of the subject matter content is critical for instruction (Shulman & Shulman, 2004; Maynard *et al.*, 2010; Dlamini, 2015). The researcher is of the view that with regard to literacy, teachers need to understand the complex nature of language and possess the appropriate pedagogy for effective instruction. This is supported by Balls, Thames and Phelps (2008) who hold that PCK is a critical aspect for teachers as it assists them in understanding their roles as teachers. Lessing and De Wit (2008) corroborate this view and argue that teachers' lack of conceptual knowledge and the sub-skills necessary for the acquisition of literacy was the main cause of their use of traditional teaching methods that do not support effective learning.

The data presented in this chapter was from the semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, lesson observation, and official documents. The triangulation of the data collection instruments was the researcher's way to increase the rigour and trustworthiness of the findings. As this study was purely qualitative, data analysis began as soon as the data-gathering process commenced. This was done to create coherent interpretation of the data (Atkins & Wallace, 2012; Seidel, 1998). This process began by the verbatim transcription of data gathered from the three Grade One teachers who were interviewed. The transcription was backed up by notes taken during the interviews. The transcripts were read thoroughly to identify key themes that emerged from the data. The aim was to make sense of what the data suggested about the phenomenon of study and teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One.

After reading the transcripts from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and classroom observation, the data was broken down into smaller units to be coded according to the content they represented. Similar material from all the data sources were grouped and named under one code according to the content they represent (Creswell, 2009). Statements from the transcripts were used to substantiate the categories that were established. The categories were redefined when deemed necessary and put into broader themes for discussion. This idea of redefining categories is supported by Maree (2007) who views data analysis and coding as a fluid process that allows the researcher to move back and forth as new insights emerged from the data. The table below shows the themes and categories that emerged from the data. Meaning units were used to explain the categories that were under each theme for easy understanding of each category.

### 6. 3 The following research questions were used to guide the study.

1. What instructional practices do teachers use in the Grade One literacy in English class?
2. Why do teachers opt for these instructional practices?
3. How do teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One?
4. Why do teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do.

The researcher went through the data from the different data collection instruments several times to try and make sense of them. She identified data that were similar from each data collection instrument and gave them a specific code. She then examined the data from each specific code to identify a common theme in them. A careful analysis of the data showed that there were some subthemes that emerged from each broad theme, and they were further categorised. The table below shows how the data were categorised for analysis.

**Table 6.4**

*Shows themes and categories that emerged from the data*

Themes	Categories	Meaning units
<b>Theme 1</b>  Teachers' navigation between half-facilitator to half-transmitter	<b>Category 1.1</b>  Classroom activities and strategies to teach different literacy skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The different activities teachers engaged in with learners in a literacy class</li></ul>
	<b>Category 1.2</b>  Teacher use of teaching-learning resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher use of any object to support literacy learning</li></ul>

	<p><b>Category 1.3</b> Literacy environment in class</p> <p><b>Category 1.4</b> Teacher use of learner prior knowledge</p> <p><b>Category 1.5</b> Learner motivation</p> <p><b>Category 1.6</b> Assessment of literacy activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher ways of creating a conducive classroom environment to support literacy learning</li> <li>• Teacher effort to get what learners know and build on that</li> <li>• Teacher ways to encourage learners to learn literacy</li> <li>• Activities learners are engaged in as a way to check their understanding of literacy</li> </ul>
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Meaning Unit</b>
<p><b>Theme 2</b></p> <p>Rationale for teachers' instructional</p>	<p><b>Category 2.1</b></p> <p>Teacher pedagogic content knowledge in literacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What the teacher knows about the concept of</li> </ul>



practices in Grade 1	<p><b>Category 2.2</b></p> <p>Teacher beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy</p> <p><b>Category 2.3</b></p> <p>In-service training</p> <p><b>Category 2.4</b></p> <p>Learner academic needs</p> <p><b>Category 2.5</b></p> <p>Curriculum standards</p> <p><b>Category 2.6</b></p> <p>Learner background (pre-school and home background)</p> <p><b>Category 2.7</b></p>	<p>literacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideas teacher holds about the teaching and learning of literacy</li> <li>• Programmes that capacitate teachers who are already in the field</li> <li>• What learners long to know and ought to know</li> <li>• What the curriculum states as content to be taught at specific grade levels in school</li> <li>• The condition of the learners as influenced by their surrounding and</li> </ul>
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	Parental involvement	<p>experience of preschool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The degree at which parents work with teachers to support their children with literacy learning</li> </ul>
Theme	Category	Meaning unit
<p><b>Theme 3</b></p> <p>The experiences of teachers in the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade 1</p>	<p><b>Category 3.1</b></p> <p>Teacher experiences of teaching literacy in Grade 1</p> <p><b>Category 3.1</b></p> <p>Challenges teachers face in the teaching of English in Grade 1</p> <p>3.1.1 Teacher challenges</p> <p>3.1.2 Learner challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How teachers felt about their work</li> <li>• Difficulties teacher encounter as they engage with Grade 1 learners in the English literacy class</li> <li>• Problems that pertain the teachers themselves and affects their instructional</li> </ul>

		practices
	3.1.3 School challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems that directly pertain to learners and impact on teaching and learning</li> </ul>
	<b>Category 3.2</b> Strategies teachers use to counter challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problems faced by the school that directly impact on teaching and learning</li> <li>• Ways teachers employ to solve problems they experience in their English literacy classroom</li> </ul>

Theme	Category	Meaning unit
<b>Theme 4</b> Teacher ideas to improve the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade 1	<b>Category 4.1</b> Ideas to improve literacy teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Things to be done by key stakeholders to make the situation better</li> </ul>

Table 6.4 shows the themes and categories that emerged from the data, which means that units were also included to bring clarity on the meaning of the categories that emerged. For the presentation of data in this chapter, the theme and categories that go together with a specific theme were presented. Data that talk to that specific research question were taken from all the data collection instruments to support or dispute the theme and categories that emerged from that research question. Four major themes emerged from the analysis of data from the different data collection instruments. The presentation and discussion of the data, therefore, was based on the four themes that emerged, and under each theme category that go with them were presented and discussed.

#### **6.4 themes that emerged from the study**

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of the data for this study. Each theme had relevant categories that supported it. Below is a detailed description of the themes and their categories.

##### **6.4.1 Theme 1: Teachers' navigation between half-facilitator to half-transmitter in Grade One**

The data from the different sources, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and classroom observations showed that teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English involved multiple activities that teachers did together with the learners to ensure that learning occurred. This included classroom activities where teachers used to teach different literacy in English skills, teacher use of teaching-learning resources, ways to create a literacy-friendly environment in class, teacher-use of learners' prior-knowledge, learner motivation and literacy assessment strategies used. The categories will be discussed one-by-one and supported by data from the different data-collection instruments. The data showed that the

teaching of the different literacy skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing required a learner-centred approach that would keep the learners engaged throughout the lesson.

#### **6.4.1.1 Teaching the oral skills (listening and speaking)**

The teachers stated that listening and speaking skills were intertwined and that they taught these skills by engaging the learners in a number of activities that would require them to listen and speak. These activities involved *storytelling; use of the English language through play activities; and the modelling of correct use of language by teacher.*

The teachers stated that in storytelling, learners were made to listen to a story narrated or read by the teacher and then responded to questions to show that they were listening attentively. Teacher 3 from semi-structured interviews said:

They listen to what I say, when teaching English and I always speak in English and the pupils have to listen and follow through. To test if they have listened very well, there are some follow-up questions. When I have told them a story, they have to know the characters in the story. If they have listened and understood, they must be able to answer those questions (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers from focus group B agreed that storytelling was an effective way to teach the oral skills in the foundation phase. One teacher said:

I think one of the strategies that helps in the listening skill is storytelling, young ones really like storytelling, so, whenever you are telling them an interesting story, you will get them listening. (Teacher 2)

You also come with colourful pictures so that you can also draw their attention, they will listen to you as you talk about the picture. (Teacher 5)

Teachers also stated that the use of the English language through play activities was another activity they engaged learners in to develop the oral skills. The teachers said:

Children have to listen and be able to speak the English and do other activities where they have to take part in playing games, make some rhymes, involve the children to see if they understand what they are learning.(Teacher 1, Focus group A)

They learn by singing because children like it when they sing and dance.

(Teacher 2, Focus group A)

The researcher observed that, though teachers were aware that play was an important activity for developing the oral skills in learners at Grade One level as stated in *the Nine year programme of instruction for English (1989)*, they hardly engaged learners in play activities in their literacy classroom citing congestion in the classroom as the reason they were unable to do such activities and this deprived the learners of an opportunity to develop cognitively. This is supported by Vygotsky (1978) who argues that in play, the most important thing is not the satisfaction the child received through playing, but the objective use and objective meaning of the play, of which the child himself is unaware. Wohlwend (2013) is of a similar view and argues that play is significant to the expansion of reading and writing as it enriches new literacy curricular. She suggests that through careful 'kid-watching', teachers identify what learners can do on their own and areas where they have challenges then plan their instruction based on that information. Sarigoz (2012, p. 253) also supports the play-based approach to teaching literacy to young learners. He states that techniques such as games, songs, puzzles, crafts, stories and drama are suitable to create children-friendly language learning environments.

Teachers agreed that another effective way they used to teach the oral skills was through **modelling**. They believed that if they modelled the speaking of English, learners copied and practised what their teachers said. One teacher said:

They have to listen to me so that they can get the correct pronunciation of some words. It is important because you can find that some learners pronounce words in a wrong way, but then, if they hear me pronounce them correctly, they imitate me and learn how words are pronounced. (Teacher 2, interview)

Another teacher from the focus group supported the idea of teacher-modelling the use of English for the learners to pick up. She said,

The pupils like to imitate the teacher, so the teacher should speak English every time so that the pupils can learn from the teacher and pronounce words correctly, that helps us a lot. (Teacher 4 focus group 1)

Teachers in focus group B also stated that an effective way they used to conduct oral lessons was to have clear rules for learners to follow in the classroom. One teacher from focus group B said:

Oral activities need the teacher to be strict because once its oral time, every learner wants to say something and they usually talk at the same time, so they have to learn to talk in turns, each and every child must be given a chance to speak because there are those shy pupils, if you ignore them, they end up not learning and not participating in anything. (Teacher 2)

In the classroom observation, the researcher noted that teachers made an effort to model the correct pronunciation of words and they all modelled the use of English by speaking it throughout their lesson so that learners could copy from them. It was only when they explained a difficult concept that they used siSwati, the mother tongue, to help the majority of learners understand. For every lesson, the teachers were a model for the learners to learn from them how to pronounce the phonic sounds. The teachers called the words repeatedly for the learners to get the correct pronunciation. Learners were then made to repeat the words many times until the teachers were satisfied that they had picked the correct pronunciation. In the topic 'Meet my family', learners were made to pronounce words that begin with the sound letter /Dd/ (dog, door, duck) and /Ll/ (lion, lorry lid). They practised calling the words many times until they pronounced them correctly. The classroom practice of the teachers to model pronouncing words is in line with the balanced approach to literacy teaching that suggest the modelling technique for oral skills. The benefits of the balanced approach are clearly articulated by many researchers who claim that the teacher should make purposeful and consider decisions to help students acquire literacy, Harvey & Goudivs, 2005; Butlin, 2011).

Moreover, modelling the correct pronunciation by the teacher is a way of providing scaffolds for the learners and this is in line with the socio-cultural theory. Ovando, Collier and Combs (2003, p.345), state that 'scaffolding refers to providing contextual support for meaning through the use of simplified language, such as teacher modelling. Bull and Kay (2007) support the use of modelling language to young learners. They state that children need to hear language used in meaningful context before they can practise using it themselves. This is particularly important where English was used as a second language and, or, a foreign language.

The teachers' practice of modelling for the learners is also in agreement with *the Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English (1989, p. 3)* syllabus, which is the main official document used to guide the teaching and learning of English in Swaziland. In my analysis of this document, it stated that, 'for the listening and speaking activity, learners are expected to listen for different kinds of instruction and then talk about their own experiences in simple sequence.'

The proceeding of the lesson during classroom observation was more aligned to what the official document (syllabus) stated. Teachers were giving instructions and always required learners to listen to what was being said. Among the methods to be used for oral activities, as suggested in the syllabus, are: watching, doing, imitation, repetition, dramatization, participation, stimulation miming, stories, songs, language games, dialogue and conversation (*Nine-Year Programme of Instruction for English (1989, p.3)*). In short, teachers are viewed as models for spoken language for the learners. The teacher's role therefore, is that of being half-facilitator of the learning process and half-transmitter of knowledge to the learner.

#### **6.4.1.2 Teaching the reading skill**

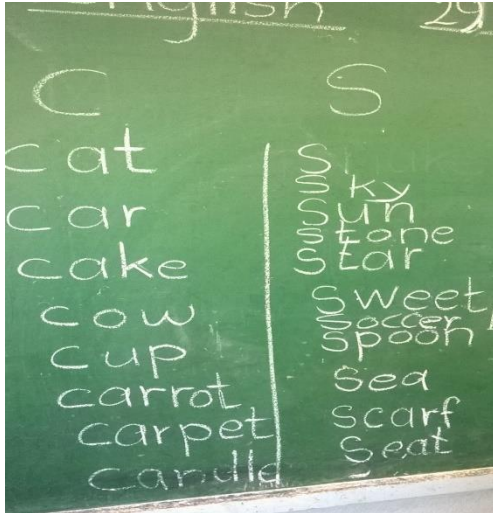
The data showed that teachers believed that **phonics** was important in the teaching of reading and explicit instruction was necessary. The teachers believed that learners need to understand the relationship between a specific letter and its sound as this helped them to decode even unfamiliar words. Teacher 1 from interviews said:

When we talk about words, the phonic method helps me a lot, it's simple because even when a child doesn't know the word, when you use the phonic methods, it becomes simpler, for an example, the word 'red', she can pronounce it like; 'r-e-d' and when she joins these sounds together, she can know that word is 'red'. (Teacher 1)

Classroom observation also showed that all the teachers placed emphasis on **phonics** to teach learners how to pronounce words. For every lesson, there were letter sounds learners needed to practise and read words that began with those letter sounds. The teachers wrote the words on the board and made learners to read out the words in groups, pairs and randomly picked individual learners to read the words aloud. This was the teachers' effort to ensure that learners mastered the words. In all the three classes observed, teachers would write the phonic sound on the board and give examples of words that begin with that letter. Then



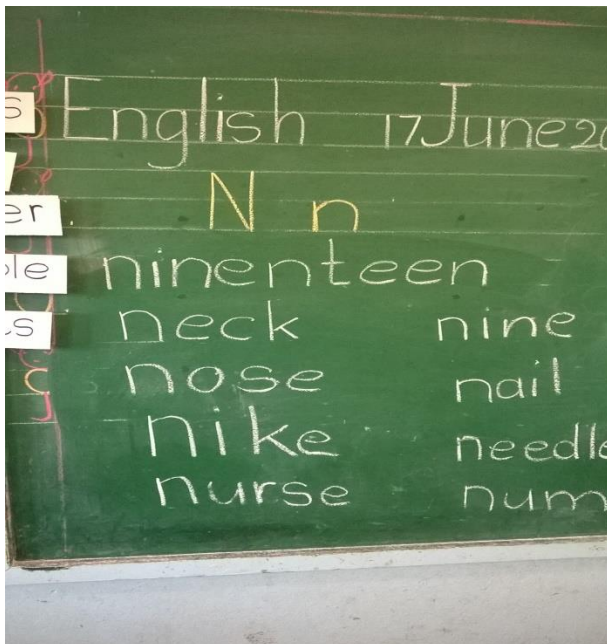
learners would be called to write their own words on the board to see if they were grasping what the teacher was explaining. The following are examples of different phonic sounds and words that learners wrote on the board.



Teacher 1 (letter-sound Cc, Ss)



Teacher 2 (letter-sound Oo)



Teacher 3's classroom (letter-sound Nn)

Figure 6.1 Sample of phonics activities in the Grades One classes

Figure 6.1 shows that all three teachers used phonic as a foundation for teaching literacy. Learners were made to pronounce words that began with the phonic sound written on the board. All reading and writing activities were based on the given phonic sound.

Even teachers from the focus groups stated that the **phonic method** was effective in teaching reading. The teachers said:

We always use the phonic method, and we cannot run away from it because even in spelling writing it helps a lot. (Teacher 2 focus group A)

The letter knowledge is important, it allows the pupils to have the ability to know letters of the alphabet and their sounds, and once they master that, they will be able to read words. (Teacher 3 focus group B)

The teachers' use of phonics in teaching reading is in agreement with scholars such as Hugo, (2013) and Pinnell and Fountas (2010) who are of the view that phonics is useful in reading because it assists the reader to read an unknown word by focusing on the specific sounds of each letter as he or she attempts to read a word. In the same vein Armbruster *et al.*, (2009) share a similar view. They claim that phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Furthermore, these researchers agree that early in first grade, all reading material should feature a high proportion of new words that depict letter-sound relationships that are being taught. It is of no benefit to the learners to have them read materials in which these strategies would not work.

**Use of pictures** was another effective strategy teachers used to teach learners how to read as they helped them associate a picture with a word. They believed that the use of pictures helped the learners to predict what the word is and also aided comprehension of what they read. The teachers had this to say:

You start with the pictures because they understand them better, and the pictures are accompanied with words. Whenever they see the pictures, they will be able to read the word. Then if they come across any book, they are able to read it. (Teacher 1, interview)

An interesting method of teaching reading in Grade One is to use the letters together with animals whose names start with that particular letter and group them. (Teacher 3, interview)

When you want the pupil to pronounce 'cat' you first use the picture of the cat, then you pronounce the word slowly as in c-a-t, which is how some of

the learners grasp the concept of pronunciation of words. (Teacher 4, focus group A)

The analysis of the official documents shows that the syllabus for English supports the strategies teachers used in the reading lesson. It supports the use of sounds and word recognition, names and sounds of letters and the use of signs, labels and captions around the classroom (Nine-Year Programme of Instruction in English, 1989).

This idea of helping learners to predict what they read by connecting with pictures of familiar objects is supported by Armbruster *et al.*, (2009) who state that teachers should build students' comprehension by making them predict, ask questions, help them access background knowledge and make connections during reading. Richards and Renandya (2002) also support this idea by stating that sentence and picture matching is an effective activity to teach reading through the look-and-say method.

The data also showed that the use of **body language** is effective in the teaching of reading. Teachers agreed that the use of body language was useful to scaffold learners in the literacy class. One teacher said:

When it comes to reading, there is a lot of body language that is needed there, for example, whenever you are talking about a lion, you have to imitate a lion because some of the learners especially in those from the rural areas do not have television at home to watch so it becomes a little bit easier when you use these gestures. (Teacher 2, interview)

The researcher observed that all three teachers used gestures and different body movement to teach the oral skills and reading. This helped to capture the attention of the learners as they looked at the teacher to see what she did. Moreover, some learners imitated the gestures made by the teacher and this kept the classes lively. For example, in the topic 'Look at me', in Teacher 3's classroom, learners were made to introduce themselves to others and then talk about a part of their body and say what it was used for. Learners would use gestures to show what that part of their bodies was used for and others would be looking at the one addressing the class. Learners enjoyed this activity because they felt involved in the lesson.

The teachers' idea of using gestures and body language to teach a foreign language is supported by Macedonia and Knosche (2011) in the findings of their study that investigated the impact of enactment in abstract word learning in a foreign language. Experimental design

was followed with 32 sentences where gestures were used to encode sentences. The findings of the study showed that learners were able to remember words encoded with gestures faster and easier than words without the use of gestures.

#### 6.4.1.3 The writing skill

The teachers who were interviewed stated that there was not much writing in Grade One, but it was important for learners to master this skill early as assessment to a large extent depended on it. The teachers agreed that they used **modelled writing and drawing** to teach young learners how to write. One teacher said;

When it comes to writing it is drawing that matters at this age and the writing of the words is not much as these learners are still young. (Teacher 3, interview)

The teachers' view is corroborated by Vygotsky (1978) who emphasises drawing with foundation phase learners. He claims that drawing is actually a preparation to literacy and that teachers should not take children's drawing lightly.

Classroom observation showed that in school A, the teacher constantly engaged learners in drawing activities. The teacher also instructed the children to draw their family members and learners were excited by the drawing activity. They were able to talk to one another as they drew the pictures and they were fascinated by the process of drawing. You could see them smiling with eyes wide open. From time to time, they looked at their neighbours' drawing and laughed about it. The learners raised their hands and kept on calling the teacher to see what they had drawn. The noise that was heard was that of calling the teacher several times at the same time and the class was lively as this activity got all the learners involved.

The teachers assumed the role of facilitators by moving around to check if all the learners were drawing. However, the finding from classroom observation in school B contradicted what the teachers said in the interview. There were minimal activities that engaged learners in drawing in this school. It was observed only in a lesson entitled 'Meet my family' when learners were engaged in a drawing activity and learners quickly took their pencils to start drawing. They talked to one another as they did the work and one could see that they were

keen on drawing their family members. This was seen from the noise and laughter that accompanied the activity.

The observation showed that teachers used writing as the main form of assessment in the English literacy lessons. This was contrary to what they said in the interview; that there is not much writing in Grade One. The researcher observed that for every lesson, learners were given writing activities to assess their mastery of what had been taught. The learners were given different tasks to write, ranging from copying words from the board to writing full sentences. The researcher also observed that there was nothing stimulating for the writing activity as learners only copied from their books or from the board. The writing activities teachers engaged learners in were contrary to the suggestions of Garton and Pratt (1998) who state that children's writing develops best when they are engaged in authentic written tasks for different purposes in a writing-friendly environment. These writing activities were rather formal and did not allow learners to do them as play activities that would stimulate their cognitive development as per the suggestions of socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), and Wertsch, (1985).

Teachers in the interviews and focus group interviews also stated that **spelling** was another activity that they engaged learners in to teach the writing skill. The teachers were of the view that learners' mastery of spelling in the foundation phase was critical in developing continuous writing skill. One teacher said:

With writing, there are activities such as spelling, that they have to master in Grade 1 and they will not have a problem with writing in the future.  
(Teacher 3, interview)

The analysis of the syllabus stipulates that spelling is the tool for writing and young learners master it by use of the mixture of inverted spelling and conventional spelling (*The Nine year programme of instruction, 1989, p. 20*). The teachers' activities in the teaching of writing were supported by the syllabus: they first taught the words, wrote them on the board, made learners read them several times, showed flash cards with the words clearly written. All three teachers used flash cards and called learners to identify the words from the flash cards and attached each word next to its correct counterpart on the board. This activity helped learners to read words carefully before they could match them to their correct counterparts. In the researcher's view, this activity challenged learners to master spelling of the words. It was also a gentle form of scaffolding.

Moreover, classroom observation showed that teachers used spelling to help learners master the writing skill. After teaching a lesson, all the teachers would write words on the board and mixed the letters. Learners were required to arrange the letters correctly to show that they had mastered the words which they had used for oral lessons and reading lessons.

Another activity that teachers considered important in the teaching of the writing skill was **handwriting**. They stated that neatly written work was important in class works, test and examinations as it was easy to read. Teachers stated that learners must know that letters are not of equal size. One teacher in the interview said:

We teach them how to write, their exercise books are faint and margin, we always teach them that with sky letters, they go two lines up, and then with ground letters, they have to go two lines down, then some letters fall in the middle such as /a/. (Teacher 3, interview)

One teacher from focus group B said it was important for learners to practise writing clearly in Grade One. However, it was a very demanding task on the part of the teacher. She said:

We drill their hand writing by writing on papers, they write on so many papers until you are convinced that their hand writing has improved, it is then that they can write in the exercise book, it's strenuous. (Teacher 4, focus group B)

Another teacher from focus group B said that they teach them how to space words so that their work may look neat. She said, "For spacing we tell them to use their fingers so that they are able to write neatly." (Teacher 6 focus group B)

Teachers in the interview also stated that it was important for teachers to teach learners how to use the different mechanics of writing in the early years of school. According to the teachers, the mechanics of language called punctuation marks are important in both reading and writing activities because they give meaning to the written and or reading task. One teacher said:

Punctuation marks in English are very important, even if you are reading a story, you must observe them. If it's an exclamation mark, you must show in your voice, your intonation must change to show that there is

exclamation mark, if it's a question mark, the voice must change and have the feeling that it's a question. That's how they learn. (Teacher 2, interview)

*The Nine-Year Programme of Instruction for English (1989)*, a document that guides teachers also states the important of teaching learners tools for writing, these are punctuation and structures which includes the correct use of capital letters and full stops; presentation of lower case correctly and in proportion; and also spacing of words appropriately.

Classroom observation showed that all three teachers were conscious of learners' presentation of written work. When they gave activities that needed the learners to write, they kept on reminding them about hand writing. Teacher 3 kept on saying, "Remember to write sky letters and ground learners correctly." Teacher 1 drew straight lines on the board and then drew a mouse and told learners to follow the picture of the mouse when writing. When teacher 1 was asked about the significance of the mouse, she said that it reminded the learners of the types of letters they must use when writing.

The researcher observed that the emphasis on learners' presentation of neat work put an unnecessary pressure on the learners as they were seen erasing what they have written and tried to write something else every time their teachers talked of neat presentation of work. Some learners resorted to go behind the door and pretended to be sharpening their pencils for a long time. It was observed that the moment the learners were engaged in a writing activity, some went straight behind the door to sharpen their pencils and they hardly wrote anything. The teachers focused more on those who were writing and almost ignored those who could not write anything. The presentation of writing activities did not show any play activities and this was contrary to the effective strategy for teaching literacy suggested by many researcher. Sarigoz (2012, p. 253) for instance, states that the play-based approach to teaching literacy to young learners involved techniques such as games, songs, puzzles, crafts, stories, drama. These are suitable to create children-friendly language learning environment. In the researcher's view, the writing activities were not friendly to the learners.

#### **6.4.1.4 Teacher use of teaching-learning resources**

The data from the different data collection instruments showed that teachers were aware that the teaching-learning resources were important in the teaching of literacy in Grade One as they captured the learners' attention and helped them understand what was taught. On this question the interviewed teachers had this to say:

“Yes, using the objects because the children are not the same, you cannot rely on one type of resources; children understand better when you use different objects.” (Teacher 1, interview)

Make sure you got all the teaching aids that are required for that particular lesson of the day. Their classroom should be full of objects they can see; it helps to show them what you are talking about, the right teaching aids; flash cards, real objects, even classroom objects are all useful. (Teacher 2, interview)

I just find pictures of whatever thing that I may need to talk about, for example, when I need to teach about ‘boy and girl, I make sure that I cut out pictures of boys and girls, you can even cut the words; boy and girl from whatever material that you find; magazines, newspapers, and old books, they always come in handy. (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers in the focus groups also emphasized the idea of capturing learners’ attention and participation in learning through the use of teaching-learning aids that learners can relate to; they had this to say:

When you are teaching Grade 1, that is where teaching aids are critical. Everything you teach, make sure that there is an example, maybe you are going to teach about the sound ‘a’, make sure you have an example, that apple so that they know that ‘a’ is for apple. You bring something that their eyes will be fixed on. (Teacher 4, focus group A)

You have to come with the pictures so that they don’t forget; this is a dog, this is a cat, they won’t forget because when they see the thing, and say oh that is a cat, although their cultures are different, they will see and understand. (Teacher 5, focus group B)

You can use any object the learners are familiar with, but then, you have to be careful of the things you use, and they should be about the learners’ experiences. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

Classroom observations showed that in both schools, teachers used flashcards, charts and classroom objects as the main teaching-learning resources. The classroom walls had charts



showing the days of the week, months of the year, and letters of the alphabet. But the researcher noticed that these charts have been on the walls for a long time, no new charts were added to these by teachers. The teachers were not always using teaching-learning resources in their lessons contrary to what they had said in the interviews and what their official documents state. Only teacher 1 in school A, made an effort to bring pictures to her class. For instance, on the lesson, 'Meet my family', she brought pictures of different family members; a man, woman, boy and girl to show learners that a family is made up of people of different ages, young and old. Teacher 1's use of pictures as visual representations is in agreement with Eilam (2012, p. ix) who states that visuals such as maps, charts, artworks and photographs form a fundamental part of the cognitive, cultural and social aspect of learning. The classroom observations in school B showed that the same lesson; 'Meet my family' was taught theoretically without any resource yet in their lesson plans, the teachers had stated that they will use pictures as learning resources in the lesson. What the teachers did in the classroom did not validate what they had said in the interview and what they have stated in the lesson plan. The researcher was of the view that the teachers in this school might not have been able to get the necessary teaching aids an indication that though these schools were in the urban area, they still faced the challenge of being under resourced.

In some topics an effort to use visual aids was made. For instance, charts were used to capture attention of the learners. The teachers' practices of using teaching-learning resources in their literacy classrooms was in line with what is stated in the syllabus that charts, flash cards and common objects should be used as resources to support learners in literacy learning.

The document states that:

Throughout the first year programme teachers should use NCC materials, paying particular attention to the Teacher's guide, and the prescribed reading texts. Use should be made of wall charts, flash cards, common objects, stimulate from the environment and any other suitable materials...(Nine year programme of instruction, 1989, p. 7).

The syllabus which teachers claim to follow is actually based on the socio-cultural theory that advocates for the use resources in the foundation phase to support children's understanding of concepts, structures and processes.

Vygotsky (1978, p. 127) supports this idea and presents the significance of symbolic and human mediation. He argues that cognitive development and children's learning depend on their mastery of symbolic mediators. He also states the importance of the teacher as a human mediator because the symbolic mediators cannot be effective unless the teacher mediates them. Based on this, the teachers' use of teaching-learning materials therefore becomes critical. Learners in their literacy classroom need to interact with the subjects and objects around them in order to develop meaning of what is happening in the classroom. The data shows clearly that teachers have a huge role in facilitating learning in the foundation phase. The provision of visual materials that learners can manipulate is a critical role of the teacher, without which there could be very minimal learning in Grade One.

#### **6.4.1.5 Literacy environment in class**

Teachers' ways of creating a literacy environment in the classroom was another category that emerged from the data. Teachers stated that for effective teaching and learning of literacy, the classroom environment must be conducive for learning; the classroom environment must support learners because most of them are from backgrounds where there is little support for English literacy learning. They were of the view that attractive objects should be displayed in class because they captured the learners' attention. Moreover, the classroom atmosphere must also be relaxed and welcoming to learner. The interviewed teachers had this to say:

Whatever we teach, the children must always see it because whenever they see it every now and then, they master that. We don't just put it for a few days, every time they see what is written it sticks into their minds. (Teacher 1, interview)

Bring a beautiful chart, those beautiful flash cards and also encourage them to speak, speak up their minds and at a wide range, don't put boards on the students because they know a lot. (Teacher 2, interview)

Encourage learners to speak English among themselves through play, it helps them to learn. There are games which are there to make sure that the learners interact as they play together and make the classroom lively. (Teacher 3, interview)

The teachers' classroom practice of creating a literacy friendly environment by allowing learners to interact freely is supported by researchers such as (Wells & Chang-wells, 1992;

Snow *et al.*, 1998; Medwell *et al.*, 1998) who state that Classrooms are social settings in which students interact with one another, read different works, talk about what they read and then write. They further hold that effective teachers of literacy made a conscious effort to create “literate environments” which assisted children’s understanding of the work of literacy and offered opportunities for children to practise literacy skills.

Teachers in both focus groups agreed with the interviewed teachers that a friendly classroom environment supported literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase and it encouraged independent learning. According to the teachers, displaying large, colourful materials on the walls and notice board helped learners to read out of their own volition. They said,

We make sure that the classroom supports literacy learning, first of all, we have the alphabet letters; those are always on the wall. Anything that they learn about, we have to make sure that it’s on the wall, each time they turn their heads around, they are able to see it and remember for example, the sound /c/ for cup, and the word ‘cup’ next to it. (Teacher 4, focus group A)

I try to create a suitable environment by providing some teaching aids all over the class so that if I am absent or busy with something, the children can read on their own. (Teacher 5, focus group B)

I place flash cards, charts and pictures on the wall to make them read anytime and that helps them a lot. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

The observations conducted in all three classrooms confirmed what the teachers said. The appearance of their classrooms showed that they made an effort to create a literacy friendly environment. Each classroom had basic charts and pictures, which learners could access on their own. However, the researcher noticed that some of the charts were old, an indication that there have been on the wall for a long time, but they were relevant to Grade One concepts. For instance, Teacher 1’s classroom looked attractive with the pictures on the wall, the class timetable, charts showing days of the week, months of the year, letters of the alphabet, vowels sound, chart showing different body parts, food groups, animals on a farm, kitchen utensils, flash cards, real objects such as toy car made from waste material, and writings of pupils such as letters of the alphabet spelling their names, and drawings made by learners.

The classroom atmosphere also encouraged learning. The teacher showed a motherly and temperate personality. She was relaxed in her classroom and looked confident of what she did. The classroom was fully packed with young learners who also looked happy and always calling out at the teacher. The teacher looked so much in-control of the situation in the classroom, she was able to bring order to the excited learners and they cooperated with her. The congestion in the classroom did not seem to interfere with the warm atmosphere that was there.

However, the researcher noted that in Teacher 2's classroom, the atmosphere was a bit tense; learners were not free, there were strict orders to be followed and any learner who did not observe the teacher's orders was reprimanded immediately. The teacher was the one who gave orders and the learners complied. The learners are used to the order and operations in the classroom. Learners have been taught that if they want to say something, they must raise a hand. Teacher constantly reminded them; "I will not point at someone who is standing and calling at me" The classroom atmosphere observed in teacher 2's class was contrary to what other scholars found. For instance, Pressley *et al.*, (2001) observed that a friendly classroom atmosphere with positive reinforcement improved students' achievement.

Classroom observation of teacher 3 showed that she is friendly to the learners. When she enters class they all want to embrace her and she tries to touch almost all those who come to hug her. The learners seem to be too comfortable around the teacher; they talk freely with her and among themselves. She constantly reminds the learners that there are lessons going on in the other classes so they must keep their voices low. The teacher tries to maintain order in the classroom by making learners move in their rows when they come to collect their books. The teacher is firm with the learners, she emphasizes that they must always raise their hands when they want to talk in class. She complains of the repeaters, she says they are uncontrollable and she sometimes exercised corporal punishment to bring them to order.

The teachers' effort to manage their classrooms is an indication that they understand that effective instruction goes hand-in-hand with effective classroom management. The teachers' efforts were in collaboration with different researchers who agree that a teacher's ability to manage daily activities and learners' behaviour in the classroom accounts for his or her success as a professional ( Reutzel & Clark, 2011).

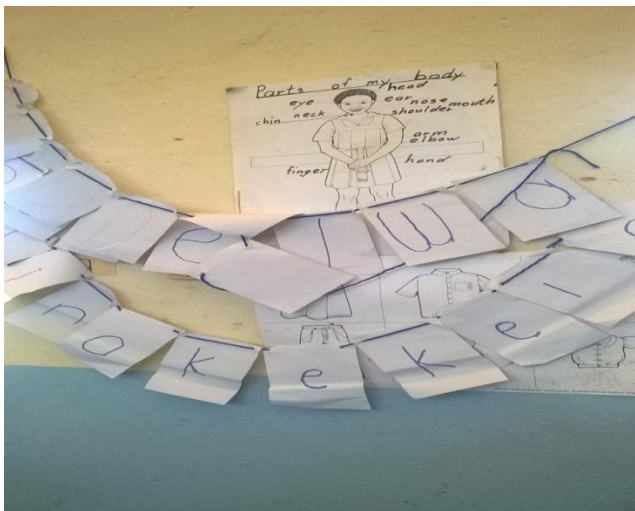
Classroom observation also showed that in addition to the teaching of the content, there were the mothering role Grade One teachers needed to offer to the learners. Teacher 1 and Teacher

3 made learners to feel comfortable in their classrooms. They always greeted the learners well and were ready to listen to the learners talk, or even complain about anything. For example, when one learner fell sick in class and vomited, Teacher 1 helped her; she cleaned the learner and her seat and took her to the deputy head teacher's office for medication. Teachers 3 always listened to the learners reporting what went wrong the previous day and encouraged them that everything will be alright as she will deal with those who bully them. She showed the learners love yet she was firm when giving orders. This practice is corroborated by Barthes (1986) who forwarded three educational practices, *teaching, apprenticeship and mothering*. The mothering role of the teacher requires that the teacher gives support, encouragement and incitement to learn. The researcher noted that the learners appreciated the kind gestures from their teachers as they brightened up with smiles when talking to them.

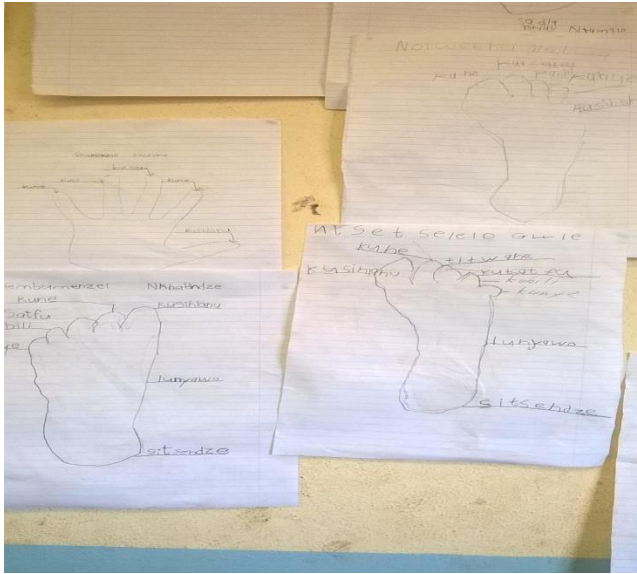
The researcher concluded that teachers were aware of the significance of a conducive classroom environment to support literacy in English learning in the Grade One class. However, they are not always able to prepare fresh charts and pictures that would make the classroom friendlier to the learners; they relied on old charts that were not so bright. The teachers' effort to create a literacy-friendly environment is at par with what educational researchers advocate for. For instance, Snow *et al.*, (1998) explain that a language and word-rich environment was essential for children to learn literacy. This kind of environment ideally has age-appropriate books and other corresponding reading materials that give students opportunities to read, listen to, and apply what they read in their writing activities. This idea is also supported by Lightbown and Spada, (2013) who hold that positive classroom atmosphere maximizes learning and encourages students' participation as they feel safe and important in the class. Lightbown and Spada (2013, p. 25) drew the conclusion that "in a supportive interactive environment, children are able to advance higher levels of knowledge and performance." The pictures below show the kind of pictures that were displayed on the walls of the classrooms to create a literacy environment.



**Figure 6.2** Picture shows food groups (displayed in Teacher 3s' classroom)



**Figure 6.3** work of learners displayed on the walls in school B



**Figure 6.4** sample of learners' drawings



**Figure 6.4** Picture of learning aid on my family displayed on the wall in school A

#### **6.4.1.6 Teacher use of learners' prior-knowledge**

The data showed that teachers were aware that the use of learners' prior knowledge was an important practice for an effective teaching-learning of literacy in English. They said that linking the known to the unknown was important to bridge the gap between home and school. All the three teachers agreed that there was some knowledge that children brought to the literacy classroom and was useful in their teaching and learning of literacy in English. They had this to say;

These kids, especially Grade Ones they know, these kids know more than you think and you must not underestimate them. They can tell you something which is very real, and which is good. (Teacher 2, interview)

Teacher 3 shared a similar view, she said:

There is a lot that these learners know and which enhances our lessons and make them easier to teach. You find that the learners have some of the facts and as a teacher you just have to build on that and not start everything from scratch. (Teacher 3, interview)

Teacher 1 had a deeper insight on this view; she believed that the knowledge learners brought to school needed teacher refining. She said,

When they come to school, they already have some knowledge, so you must first let the children show you what they know so that you can channel them to what they are expected to learn or the way they have to learn it. (Teacher 1, interview)

This means that teachers should know how to link learners' knowledge with the curriculum because what the learners know is a base for the new knowledge. The teacher has to be skilful in integrating learner knowledge from their sociocultural environment to what they do in the literacy in English lesson. This corroborates Vygotsky (1978) views that the social and cultural experiences of the learners are critical in the learning of literacy in the foundation phase.

Classroom observations also showed that teachers made an effort to tap into learners' prior-knowledge. Teachers acknowledged the fact that there is knowledge that learners bring to school and utilised that knowledge in the teaching of literacy. In earlier work on literacy



learning in Swaziland Dlamini (2009; 2015) decried the disregard of a wealth of children's prior-to-school and out-of-school repertoires or resources in early years of school in Swaziland in particular. In this current study all the teachers made an observable effort to hear what learners knew about anything that the lesson was about before they could introduce it. For example, on a lesson about 'Animals I know' Teacher1 first asked learners to name the animals they knew, say where those animals lived, and what they ate. The teacher allowed learners to talk freely on this topic. She then introduced the day's topic and explained that there are animals that are kept at home and those that are wild and stayed in the forest. Learners were also made to share their experiences on wild animals, learners who had attended pre-school shared their experiences on the tour they had where they saw different wild animals. Learners' knowledge and experiences were effectively used for learning and supported learners' understanding.

Teacher 2 also utilised learners' prior-knowledge. For example, when she was to teach a lesson on different careers, she first found out what jobs their parents and guardians did. Learners were able to say the different jobs their parents did and that was when the teacher introduced the lesson. The knowledge learners had on the different jobs made it easier for the teacher to teach this lesson and learners were actively involved throughout. Moreover, critical thinking skill was evident when they were giving justification for their favourite jobs. Each learner had to explain why she or he loved a particular job.

Teacher 3 also made an effort to use knowledge learners brought to school in her literacy classroom. For example, when she introduced a topic on 'Modes of transport', she started by asking learners how they travelled to school on a daily basis. She then used the different responses learners gave to introduce the topic for the lesson. She tried to relate what was in the textbook with what learners already knew.

The teachers' practice of using learners' prior-knowledge to teach literacy is based on the concept of assessment for learning educationists advocate for. For instance, Dean (2013) states that it is important for the teacher to assess what knowledge the learners bring to school as this helps the teacher to know where they have to go and how best to get there. Moreover, it improves learner progress and achievement in the classroom.

Rittle-Johnson, Star and Durkin, (2009) also support the use of learner prior knowledge for effective learning and teaching, he argues, "Children never attend the language class with empty hands. They come with well-constructed set of instincts, skills, and characteristics that

will assist them when learning a new language.” This is an indication that learners link new literacy concepts to the already existing knowledge in their heads and teachers should utilise that that ‘world’ in their heads.

Vygotsky (1978) and his colleagues hold a similar idea on their concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) that sees the prominent role of the teacher in working in the ZPD of the learners. They see the teacher as a planner of activities that will push the learners to function at the next level than she or he already is. In essence, using what learners already know to link new knowledge is critical to develop the learners’ faculties. In short, teachers’ understanding of where the learners are when they first meet them and where they need to be by end of term or year is critical for effective literacy in English instruction.

#### **6.4.1.7 Learner motivation**

The data showed that, among other things, teachers considered as part of their instructional practices in their English literacy classrooms was learner motivation. They stated that it was important for teachers to keep learners motivated to master literacy at an early age as it would enable them to function well in society. The teachers’ opinion corroborates Hugo’s (2008) suggestion that a person’s feelings and emotions have a critical role to play in the learning process, especially learning of a foreign language. The interviewed teachers stated that they used different ways to motivate learners such as displaying their works on the wall, creating competition among themselves, ask critical questions and praise their effort. The teachers had this to say:

You put some works on the wall so that the children can see them, it motivates them, and you can just put it for a few days and then put it down to create space for other works. (Teacher 1, interview)

They like to compete among themselves; everyone wants to be the best. You have to make sure that you make them to be in a competition in the class, they must not be relaxed; they must be in a competition, it helps to keep them motivated. (Teacher 2, interview)

You also ask for their views, what they think, they tell you even if it is wrong, you don’t discourage them, that No! No! No! You just let them think and they like it. (Teacher 3, interview)

In focus group B, one teacher raised the fact that teachers also need motivation, and the other teachers agreed that a motivated teacher is an effective teacher. She said,

What motivates me is that these kids know things, and this calls for me to do more research and find out more things about whatever I am going to teach them. When they bring these questions, they make me learn, they make me grow. (Teacher 4, focus group B)

In the classroom observations, the researcher noted that teachers made an effort to involve learners in critical questions and commended those learners who attempted to respond to the questions. For example, Teacher 2 one morning entered the classroom and told the learners to open the windows; she then asked them why it was important to open windows in the classroom at all times. This question was the teacher's effort to engage the learners in critical thinking. She did not underestimate what the learners were capable of. When one learner eventually gave a relevant answer; "we open windows to stop TB," she praised the learner, and asked the others to clap hands for him as a way to encourage the learners to share their thoughts. The teacher was motivated by the critical response from the learners and even said; 'I like children who can think'. The teachers' opinion on the value of teacher-learner's motivation is in support of the view posited by Santisi *et al.*, (2014) that teachers are critical in students' motivation through the quality of their teaching and development of teacher-student relationships. Bentea and Anghelache, (2012) are also of the view that motivated teachers are fundamental in the education system as they are the main players in the implementation of the curriculum. Moreover, they impact both on the organization and on the individual learner.

#### **6.4.1.8 Assessment of literacy activities**

Another finding of the study on teachers' instructional practices on literacy showed that teachers are aware of the important link between the teaching-learning process and assessment. They stated that the teaching-learning process is not complete if assessment was missing. The teachers' view is based on the assertion of Hugo (2013) who asserts that assessment is an on-going process that starts when learning starts and it is at the heart of teaching and learning in any given context. He posits that both formal and informal assessment is critical to give teachers a picture of the learners' progress in a literacy class.

The teachers said that oral questions directed to the whole class were used throughout their lessons to check if learners were following what was taught but written activities were mainly used to assess individual understanding of the different literacy concepts taught. They said:

Usually formal assessment is through written work, in the past we used to assess all the skills, even the speaking and listening skills, but because of the enrolment, we decided not to test oral skills. (Teacher 1, interview)

As for me it's spelling writing, I always do that; every week there is spelling writing. In the reading part, I pick those pupils who will be reading for that week, that is how you can tell that this one still can't read, or this one cannot pronounce the words correctly. (Teacher 2, interview)

Teachers in the focus groups also said that writing activities were the common forms of assessing learners' progress and mastery of literacy skills in their classrooms. Only one teacher stated that assessment of oral skills for each learner was also important but overlooked by teachers because of heavy workloads in the classrooms due to high enrolment. She said:

To me all the skills are equally important. It is unfortunate that in our country teachers consider the writing skill more important than the others, which is not good. Even assessment focuses more on the writing skill at all levels. I think our country needs to improve on that because there are some kids who cannot write well but are good speakers, so if they can be accommodated in examinations, learning would be enjoyable. (Teacher 5, focus group B)

Classroom observations also tallied with teacher responses from interviews and focus group interviews. In all three classrooms, oral questions were part of the teaching and learning process and every lesson was accompanied by a written activity. During the activity, the teachers moved around marking the work and helping learners who were struggling.

What was also observed was that there was a standard way of writing letters that learners had to follow. They were constantly reminded to write words following the *sky letters and ground letters principle* and to put a finger in-between word for a neat presentation of their work. Teachers ensured that learners mastered hand writing in the first year of school for their work to look presentable.

The researcher observed that formal tests were given for assessment. This was a very tedious exercise and the teachers carried out this activity patiently. The teachers read the instructions to the learners many times and they were given time to respond to each question before they could move on to the next question. The teacher moved around to check if all learners had attempted the question before reading the next question. Different types of questions were given in the tests and they comprised of all the literacy aspects that the learners have been taught. Samples of tests given to the Grade One learners in the two schools are appended. Mooney *et al.*, (2010) support a complete teaching-learning cycle, they hold that when planning any teaching and learning cycle, assessment and evaluation is an integral part, without which the cycle is incomplete.

#### **6.4.2 Theme 2: Rationale for teachers' instructional practices in Grade One**

Another important finding that emerged was that teachers had wide-ranging rationales for their instructional practices in the Grade One literacy in English class. Consequently, rationale for teachers' instructional practices was one of the themes of the study. Rationale refers to a justification for certain action and, for this study, it emerged that teachers had a strong basis for their instructional practices in the literacy in the English classroom. These included teacher-pedagogic content knowledge in literacy, teacher beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy, in-service training, learner academic needs, curriculum standards and learner background (pre-school and home background).

##### **6.4.2.1 Teacher pedagogic content knowledge in literacy**

The data from the interviews showed that teacher-pedagogic content knowledge in literacy influenced teachers' instructional practices to a large extent. The data showed that the teachers' general understanding of what literacy is and what components were critical in teaching literacy, guided teachers' practices. The finding showed that to a large extent, what teachers did in class reflected their understanding of what literacy is and how it should be taught. They viewed themselves as the most important people to help learners learn English literacy. They had this to say;

Literacy is the learning and reading of English, the way they learn and understand the English and teachers should try by all means to help learners speak English. (Teacher 1, interviews)

Literacy is more than understanding English and understanding writing, literacy is the correctness of the language and the rate at which the learner picks up the information the teacher gives. (Teacher 2, interview)

“Literacy is when you encourage learners to communicate in English to make them have a strong command of the language; they have to learn how to express themselves...” (Teacher 3, interview)

The teachers in the focus group stated that the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing were the components of literacy they considered important in Grade One. They said that literacy integrates all these skills and learners had to master them early in life because they were important for their education. For instance, one teacher said:

“I think verbal communication is important in literacy learning; speaking, learning of sounds, reading and writing of the language all make up literacy and this is what informs our teaching.” (Teacher 5, focus group B)

The teachers’ view is corroborated by proponents of the concept of *Pedagogic Content Knowledge (PCK)* such as Shulman and Shulman (2004) and Hashwesh (2005) who state that PCK balances what teachers should know about the subject they teach (subject matter knowledge) and preparation on how the content should be taught (pedagogy). Balls *et al.*, (2008) also emphasize the value of subject knowledge in the teaching and learning process. They view teacher knowledge of the subject matter as the pivot for the teachers’ instructional practices from planning for the lesson to giving feedback after every assessment. Moreover, it assists them in understanding their roles as teachers.

Classroom observations showed that all the three teachers placed their emphasis on the four language skills. Their lessons were structured in such a way that the oral skills introduced the lesson, followed by reading and then writing. Teachers used this as a way of formal assessment. The researcher noted that teacher 2 and teacher 3, both from school B, skipped some aspects of the oral skills stated in the teacher’s guide. For example, in the lesson entitled, ‘I can cross the street,’ Teacher 3 eliminated rhymes and play games based on the lesson. When the researcher asked her why she did this, she stated that she could not sing.

The data showed that though teachers were aware of the important components of literacy, classroom practices showed that they were not competent in carrying out some of these activities. This was contrary to what official documents stipulated. The English literacy

syllabus on orals states, “Pupils should be able to recite verse, and to sing songs without distortions. Act out simple plays, role play using some direct speech”, (*The Nine Year Programme of Instruction for English, 1989, p. 7*).

#### **6.4.2.2 Teacher beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy**

The data showed that teachers held some beliefs about the teaching and learning of literacy in English and these beliefs influenced their instructional practices. This finding corroborates what abounds in literature. For instance, Squires and Bliss (2004, p. 756) state that all teachers bring to the classroom some level of beliefs that influence their decisions. The interviewed teachers and those who participated in the focus group interviews believed that teachers were role models in the classroom and learners unconsciously copied what they did. Consequently, there should be careful planning to eliminate errors. The teachers had this to say;

They copy what I do, young children do what you as a teacher do, even the way you speak; they would speak like you, even writing. If I have made a mistake, they copy the mistake as it is. (Teacher 1, interview)

In Grade 1 what you must know is that the children depend very much on the teacher. How you pronounce words, they will do exactly, if there is a mistake, they take it from the teacher. If you make a mistake in a word, you have to correct it very fast because they just hold on to that. (Teacher 2)

One teacher in the focus group B elaborated on learners being imitators of their teachers. He said;

One thing to note when teaching Grade One is that, you must make sure that whatever you say to them is correct because any mistake you make, you will be damaging the child for the rest of his or her life because that mistake will affect the child for a life time. In fact, you need to be a researcher as a teacher and you must always provide the answers they need and whenever you are not sure you must indicate to the child, don’t try to make them understand something that you are not sure of, you better say; I will come back to you later. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

Observation showed that teachers corrected mistakes they would make in class quickly so that learners do not pick up incorrect information. For instance, in the lesson entitled, ‘I can cross the street’, for the speaking activity, learners were to practice pronouncing the sound /Oo/ and then give words that begin with the letter /o/. The learners gave the words; *orange*, *ox*, *ostrich* and one gave the word avocado. Teacher accepted the word and wrote it on the board as **ovacado**. Later, she realised that the word does not begin with letter /o/, but /a/ as in **avocado**, she tried hard to correct her mistake and told the learners to cancel the wrong spelling and copy the correct one. She was uneasy that she had made a mistake and as the lesson progressed, she constantly checked if she had written correct spelling of words on the board. At the end of the class she said to the researcher, “young ones are a problem, they always copy the teacher’s mistakes instead of the good things the teacher does.” (Teacher 1, observation)

The finding from the different data generation instruments show that, though teachers claimed to be following the learner-centred approach to teaching and learning of literacy that advocates for the knowledge construction view, they subconsciously held a knowledge-transmission view. This is in agreement with Teo *et al.*, (2008) who argue that teacher pedagogic beliefs are categorised into two, the knowledge-transmission view and the knowledge-construction view. The researcher observed that in all the Grade One classrooms, teachers’ instructional practices were more towards the knowledge-transmission view as opposed to the knowledge-construction view.

#### **6.4.2.3 In-service training**

The findings of this category showed that teachers’ instructional practices were, to a large extent, influenced by in-service training as opposed to being influenced by pre-service training. They stated that the workshops they attended were more useful in guiding them on how to conduct effective English literacy lessons in the foundation phase. However, teachers in focus group A complained of the time limit for in-service workshops though they benefited from them. They said:

We are learning from these workshops, the problem is that we are always rushing, even when you don’t understand; there is no time to go back step by step for us to master the way to teach the different literacy skills.  
(Teacher 3, focus group A)



Another teacher in the group said that the time for in-service training was inadequate. She said; “In-service workshops are useful, we learn from others but the time is not enough.” (Teacher 4, focus group A)

One teacher in focus group B also stated the benefits of in-service workshop, in particular, the literacy boost programme. She said;

In the literacy boost workshops, we as Grade One teachers have been enlightened on how to make some teaching aids like a word web; you take an A4 paper, you write the letter at the centre, capital letter and small letter [F, f] then you draw four lines and write; fish, fork, fun, it just looks like a web, then you paste this word web on the wall for all the letters, from letter A-Z. (Teacher 5, focus group, B)

The teachers in focus group B also expressed their frustration that at pre-service training, they were not exposed to the basics of teaching English literacy in the foundation phase. One teacher said,

We were not taught these things at college, it is only now that we realise that there is so much involved in the teaching of English literacy in the early years of school, and it is the in-service workshops that gives us a clue on what to do. (Teacher 1, focus group, B)

The teachers’ view on the importance of in-service training collaborates with the views of Okabia (2011) who conducted a study in Nigeria on the effects of in-service education on teachers’ knowledge of junior secondary school social studies curriculum and instruction. The finding of the study showed that in-service training of teachers as they were the implementers of the curriculum is an effective way to improve teacher professional competence in the education system.

The teachers’ concern on allocation of time in the in-service workshop is an important one as effective in-service training requires sufficient time. This is supported by educational researchers on [http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/go to /BES](http://educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/go%20to/BES) who argue that teacher professional learning and development is a complex process that goes far beyond the few days workshops that teachers normally experience. The teacher workshops only allow them to share new information and network. According to Dlamini (2015), in-service teacher training or ongoing professional development (OPD) affords practising teachers the

opportunity both to test emerging theories against the reality of the classroom and, at the same time, allows their practice to be informed by applicable fresh ideas. The researcher felt that teachers have no control over this as these workshops are funded by the government who direct their content.

#### **6.4.2.4 Learners' academic needs**

The findings showed that learners' academic needs influence teachers' instructional practices. The teachers stated that from the planning phase to the assessment phase, teachers need to consider the type of learners they had in their classrooms and their academic needs. The teachers said:

You need to see where the learners are lacking and maybe you start there and move on. You have to strategies in Grade 1, that's all I can say.  
(Teacher 2, interview)

As a teacher, you have to know what the learners need because you find that some of these things are not in the syllabus but then you have to teach them so that the learners may know them. (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers in the focus groups emphasized that learner needs are important for instruction. Two of the teachers said:

I have to know, in my mind whenever I prepare that there are those who come from different environments. If I happen to forget to accommodate them in my planning, the children will show that 'now me I am lost', then I have to change my teaching strategy to involve that child in the learning activity. (Teacher 1, focus group A)

I believe that we have to teach learners what is of immediate interest to them; we have to teach them the skill that they will need so that they can continue leaning English as they go further with their education. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

The classroom observations did not corroborate well with what the teachers said in the interviews and it was only Teacher 1 who made an effort to structure her instructional practices in a way that showed understanding that learners had diverse academic needs. She made an effort to accommodate the diversity by allowing learners to assist one another (peer-

tutoring). When some learners were struggling with an activity, she would ask those who were ahead to assist the struggling ones. For instance, on the activity of writing their names on pieces of papers to form a chain, those learners who had completed the task faster and accurately were asked to assist their peers. The researcher was of the view that since teacher 1 was an old experienced teacher, she had mastered some strategies of planning her instruction to meet the diverse needs of learners.

In school B, for Teacher 2 and Teacher 3, there was no evidence of structuring instruction to meet the different need of the learners. They would address learners in the whole class uniformly and would sometimes call individual learners to repeat what they had just said as a proof that they were following the lesson. When learners gave an incorrect response, the teacher would say, “That is a proof that you were not listening to me.” Teachers would not change the teaching strategy to accommodate learners who might not have grasped what was said.

Even an analysis of their official books did not reflect what they said in the interviews. These books did not show how teachers created appropriate learning experiences that would accommodate the diverse needs of the learners. The finding of the study is divergent to the assertion of other schools who argue that teacher knowledge of the learners’ needs was essential for effective literacy instruction. Lyons and Pinnell (2001) state that the most important concern teachers have is for their individual learners’ strengths, habits, attitudes and needs. When teachers know their learners individually, it is easier for them to guide and support them in their literacy needs. Lyons and Pinnell (2001, p. 35) write:

Knowing our students is critical to teaching literacy successfully, because they bring knowledge and experience to the literacy process. Recognizing what the students bring to reading and writing powers our instruction. The meaning and the pleasure of literacy resides within the individual.

Teachers knew about the importance of diversifying instruction to cater for different learner needs but lacked the effective strategies to do so. In the interview they had said, “We use different strategies to cater for different needs of the learners,” but classroom observations in school B did not show the diversity in teaching strategies. The teachers focused on asking oral questions and writing on the board. Peer collaborative activities were not evident in the classrooms. Only Teacher 1 allowed learners to work in pairs when she engaged them in an activity to write their names on pieces of papers and then put them in a string to form a chain.

The researcher observed that learners enjoyed working in partners as you could hear them arguing about the correct spelling and how to make the chain using the pieces of papers and a string. Teacher 1's practice of allowing collaboration among learners is supported by proponents of the socio-cultural theory. Rogoff (1994) is of the view that peers influence one another in meaning construction. Lantolf, Thorne, and Poehner, (2015) also support the view that for peer collaboration to be effective, teachers should acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity in their classrooms.

#### **6.4.2.5 Curriculum standards**

The teachers who were interviewed stated that their instructional practices were guided by official Government documents from the Ministry of Education and Training through the *National Curriculum Centre (NCC)*. This was in line with the *Swaziland Education Policy* that states that curriculum standards provide a framework for classroom implementation. Teachers used these as a guide for creating appropriate learning experiences. They stated that the syllabus they followed and textbooks they used to plan for instruction were all government documents. Their task as implementers of the curriculum was to unpack the syllabus and align it to the needs of the learners. One teacher said:

Well, we have a syllabus stating what has to be taught in Grade 1 and that is where we derive what we have to scheme for and what we have to prepare for our lessons, but you find that some of these things are not there in the syllabus but then you have to teach them so that the learners may know them. (Teacher 1, interview)

In the focus groups, teachers were not clear what the syllabus really stated on the teaching of literacy in English though they claimed to follow it. They stated that they used prescribed books and teacher's guide and learner's book to plan for their lessons. Classroom observation also showed that, though teachers claimed to follow government documents to plan for instruction, they were not following all the curriculum standards stated in these. For instance, some lessons were taught theoretically without the use of appropriate teaching and learning resources, contrary to what the curriculum standards stated. Also, for the teaching of oral skills, teachers did not follow what was stipulated as curriculum standards carefully in order to create opportunities for learners to acquire literacy in a natural and enjoyable way, such as through song and play. The finding shows that, although teachers understood the importance

of the curriculum standards, they had some challenges following them. And they cited a number of factors that hindered them from adhering to these standards.

The researcher's analysis of the teacher's guide and pupils' book showed that a number of oral activities which should have been done, were not. Only teacher One made an effort to engage learners in the oral activities. Teachers in school B rushed to engage learners in written activities, depriving them of the pleasure of learning literacy through songs and play.

#### **6.4.2.6 Learner background (preschool and home background)**

The findings of the study showed that learner background influenced teachers' instructional practices in the Grade 1 English literacy classroom. Learner background was two-fold: the pre-school and the learner home background. The findings showed that learners from underprivileged home backgrounds were often deprived of an opportunity to attend preschool. And learners from privileged home backgrounds had the opportunity to attend preschool. The data showed that the learners' attendance of preschool mastered of language and literacy better than their underprivileged counterparts. Consequently, teachers had to structure their instructional practices in an accommodating way. One teacher from the interviews said:

I have to know my children; I must know where they come from so that when I teach in my mind, I know that I'm teaching these type learners. They come from different environments so I have to involve all of them in my teaching. (Teacher 2, interview)

Teachers in the focus groups shared a similar view. They stated that knowing the learners' home and pre-school background was important. Teachers in the focus groups said;

Learners come from different places; some come from homes where this English is not spoken, check their background, and check their knowledge and understanding of English you can find that only a few are following. Then you have to accommodate them, you find yourself explaining in siSwati while you are trying to teach English. (Teacher 3, focus group A)

The learners' home background affects their pronunciation of words and as a teacher, you have to be aware of such and help them learn the correct one

otherwise, they will grow up with the incorrect pronunciation. (Teacher 4, focus group B)

Lesson observation showed that teachers were aware that some learners had not been to pre-school and they tried to accommodate them by using the mother tongue to explain some concepts in the literacy class. Sometimes the teacher would ask learners who had attended pre-school to share some of their experiences with the class. For instance, in the lesson on ‘Wild animals,’ the teacher asked learners who had attended pre-school to share their experiences with wild animals they saw in the game reserve with the class and learners were also given a chance to talk about what they watch on television. Teachers also asked learners to talk about their experiences because even those from underprivileged backgrounds had something to share with their peers.

The idea of learner background is important for literacy learning and teaching. In a study conducted by Govender (2015) on factors that affect foundation phase English Language second language learners’ reading and writing skills in Kwa-Zulu Natal, the findings showed that learners’ home language affected their literacy learning in a number of areas. This included their pronunciation of words in English and their ability to use phonics in writing and their capacity to use the male and female gender in sentence construction. Carroll (2013) supports the importance of a supportive home environment to learners. She holds that children whose parents exposed them to reading materials at home and were involved in literacy activities, developed oral language faster than their counterparts whose parents did not involve themselves much in their school activities.

#### **6.4.2.7 Learners’ developmental stage**

Teachers stated that the learners’ developmental stage also influenced their instructional practices in literacy and they designed their English literacy instruction to cater for the learners’ developmental stages. Teacher 1 said, “I think the teachers need to understand well how they can teach these young learners since they are beginners and they are still learning how to speak any language not necessarily only in English, but all the languages.”

Teacher 2 held the view that teachers’ instruction was determined by the age of the learners. She said, “The fact that they are still learning the language skills, even the mother tongue is key, sometimes it’s difficult to communicate well because they are still young; the learning of sounds is still a problem to them, and pronunciation is still a problem.”

A learners' developmental stage is important for teachers' decisions on how to teach. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) claim that the first six years are crucial for children's development of language and identity. Vygotsky (1986) shares the view that language and thought are inseparable and language supports children's cognitive and social development a view corroborated by Gestwick (2013) who maintains that instructional practices should be on a par with the learners' developmental stage which requires a clear knowledge of the learners' language, strengths, needs, social and cultural context.

The researcher observed that the Grade One learners' ages were mostly between six and seven since six is the mandatory age for learners to begin school in Swaziland. Moreover, since the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2010, most learners are enrolled at school at age six regardless of their socio-economic status. However, in school B, the researcher observed that there were a number of learners who looked older for a Grade One class. When she enquired from the English teachers about these learners, she was told that these were the ones who have failed Grade One at least twice and they were struggling to master basic literacy skills.

#### **6.4.2.8 Parental involvement**

The findings of the study showed that in school B, parental involvement was experienced and it influenced teachers' instructional practices in a positive way. Teachers stated that knowing that parents were supportive motivated them to do their work thoroughly because if they did a poor job, parents would be disappointed. One teacher from focus group B said:

In our school we have good support from parents, they monitor their children's work, and some of the learners will come to the teacher to say; 'mum said you didn't mark my work; mum said you didn't give me work yesterday.'(Teacher 4)

In the interview, one teacher stated that the school enjoyed parental support as parents would visit the school at any time to check their children's progress, she said:

It doesn't have to be an open day in our school for the parents to come..., it's a just a norm, a regular thing that they do. We interact mostly with the parents especially when you see that the child has got a problem, you can talk to the parents and they help us. They are just free to help... (Teacher 2, interview)

The findings of the study on school B concurred with other works done on the value of parental involvement in children's learning. For example, Carroll (2013) conducted a study on the effects of parental literacy involvement and child reading interest in the development of emergent literacy skills. The result of the study showed that children whose parents exposed them to reading materials at home and were involved in literacy activities developed oral language faster than their counterparts whose parents did not involve themselves much on their school work. In school B, teachers were motivated because they knew that parents were interested in their children's work.

In School A however, the data from focus group showed that there was very little parental support in the teaching and learning of literacy and this exerted too much pressure on the teachers. The lack of parental support in this school had a negative effect on the learners' development of literacy in English. One teacher said,

Parents only come to the school on the open day, they only need the report, they are only interested in their children's result, and they don't care about other things. When you talk to them, 'please help us with your child on this aspect, you could see that you are delaying them, they are rushing, that's the problem. (Teacher 3, focus group A)

The finding in school A is contrary to the views of Carroll (2013) on the benefit of parental engagement in children's literacy learning. This is because Carroll (2013) found that parental involvement yielded positive results in children's literacy learning. The researcher deduced that the teachers in school A were demotivated because they lacked parental support.

### **6.4.3 Theme 3: Teachers' experiences of teaching literacy in English in Grade One**

Another theme that emerged from the data collection tools used for this study was the experiences of teachers in their teaching of English literacy in Grade One. The analysis of the teachers' experiences brought two main categories: challenges teachers encountered in their work and strategies they had devised to counter the challenges.

#### **6.4.3.1 Challenges teachers faced in the teaching of English in Grade One**

The teacher interviews and classroom observations showed that there were some challenges that English literacy teachers encountered in their daily operations with Grade 1 learners. A



further analysis of the challenges showed that the challenges were three-fold: *teacher-related challenges*; *learner-related challenges* and *school-related challenges*. Since teachers are the implementers of the curriculum, all the three-fold challenges revolved around them. They had to battle with their own inadequacies, learner-inadequacies and the school's inadequacies. These challenges explicitly and implicitly impacted on their teaching and defined their experiences.

The role of the teacher is best articulated by Barthes (1986) and Yearrian (2011) who see teachers as key players in the learning and teaching of literacy and their role involves multiple and interdependent factors such as classroom curriculum, teaching pedagogies, the relationship between children and teachers and children and their peers in the social learning environment. It also involves the relationships of the class teacher and his or her colleagues, with school administrators, with parents and care-givers within a wider social and political community. Teacher challenges are presented in the subsequent subtopics.

#### **6.4.3.2 Teacher-inadequacies (Lack of mentoring)**

The finding from interviews showed that there was no mentoring of teachers in the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One and a teacher had to learn on the job. Consequently, they felt that they were not very conversant with some aspects involved in the teaching of English literacy in Grade One. Teachers had this to say:

The first time I taught Grade One, it was very difficult because I had no experience in teaching the lower grades, but I learnt a lot about the child. I did not know how they behaved and I had no one to help me on how to handle these young learners. The first year I was just confused, in the second year I started correcting myself, where I felt I wasn't sure of what I was doing. (Teacher 1, interview)

At first it was very challenging because I was fresh from college and no one helped me. The next year, it became better. (Teacher 2, interview)

Since it is my first time, there are challenges, and no one is there to hold me by the hand but then, as I continue teaching, I find it easier by the day. (Teacher 3, interview)

The absence of mentoring for teachers in the teaching of literacy in English, especially in the foundation phase, corroborates the views of Hanushek (2009) who affirms that the quality of teachers is the key element in improving student performance. Mentoring of the teachers ensures the desired quality and capacity. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) affirm this view; they observed that induction of new teachers improved their instructional practices on various aspects of teaching such as classroom management, use of appropriate resources and learner engagement. The finding of this study further contradicts what Rutgers (2012) observed in a study conducted in the Western Cape on coaching-foundation phase literacy teachers as leaders in school. Rutgers' study showed that coaching had the potential to develop and sustain effective teachers in the profession who would make sound decisions for their literacy instructional practices. Absence of this impacted negatively on the learners' achievement.

#### **6.4.3.3 Lack of time to prepare teaching and learning resources**

The findings from the interviews showed that teachers did not have time to prepare teaching and learning materials. All teachers interviewed in the focus group raised the issue of time to prepare the necessary resources because they had a lot of responsibilities in their classrooms. Teacher 1 said, "You find that sometimes the child maybe is left behind because you were not able to get all the resources on time and sometimes you are not even sure of what to use."

Teacher 1 elaborated on this issue. She said:

Sometimes you know that if I can have this resource or maybe share with other people the lesson could be effective, only to find that you don't have the time to visit some places where you can maybe get the material because we always busy. (Teacher 1, interview)

Teachers in the focus group shared this view and blamed the high teacher-pupil ratio for this. One teacher said:

We teachers need more time for our planning, and to be able to research on our work but we don't have enough time, sometime you have to do your own research only to find that there is no time. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

Classroom observation showed that teachers did not always have time to prepare appropriate teaching and learning aids for their literacy lessons and they would improvise by using any available classroom objects such as, a duster, broom, mop, pencil and learners' books. In one lesson, teacher 1 went out of class to make copies of pictures that were used as her teaching aid. She said, "I am sorry pupils, I got too busy and forgot to make you copies of these beautiful pictures." And she left the class and went to the secretary's office to make copies of the picture.

The analysis of the teachers' official books showed that in the scheme of work all the teachers did not state the basic resources to be used in each unit topic. It was only in their daily preparation books that they stated resources to be used. Yet the syllabus states; "Materials designed by the National Curriculum Centre (NCC) recommend the use of Teacher's guide, learner's textbooks, charts, flash cards, common objects (*The National programme of instruction, 1989, p.7*). This practice of not preparing teaching and learning aids on time goes against the aims of preparing the scheme of work as presented in *the National programme of instruction, (1989)* that the scheme of work provides a context and resources for the development of a comprehensive lesson plan.

#### **6.4.3.4 Heavy workload of teachers**

The findings of the study showed that teachers were over-worked in their classrooms. Consequently, they were not able to focus on thorough preparation. It came up It appears that there was too much paper work since the introduction of Free Primary Education (FPE) and this affected their teaching. One teacher said:

Even if you think of preparing something to support the learners, you cannot because of the work load; you have to do a lot of paper work in the classroom. Also, the enrolment is high and these children need a lot of patience. (Teacher 2, focus group A)

Classroom observations showed that Grade One teachers never had 'free' time because, even when it was tea break, some learners kept on coming to the teacher for different things. Moreover, the teachers always had official books and forms to complete and submit. Sometimes the researcher observed the teachers perusing through a pile of forms at break time and trying to eat soup at the same time. Teachers were obviously overwhelmed by

extra work and preparation for literacy instruction was outweighed by the amount of work and responsibilities teachers had.

Teachers' challenge of being over-worked at primary school has turned out to be a generic issue. In a study conducted by Ramdan (2015) on 'exploring literacy practices: A case study of a peri-urban primary school in KwaZulu-Natal, three Grade three teachers were interviewed and observed in their literacy in English literacy classes.. The results showed that one of the common challenges they faced was that there were too many assessments to be completed in Literacy and this exerted too much pressure on the teachers. The paper work demanded much time at the expense of preparation for instruction.

#### **6.4.3.5 Lack of required expertise**

The findings of the study showed that teachers lacked the required expertise to handle some aspects of literacy such as information technology skills. One teacher also lamented that teachers lacked technological skills though they may have an interest in the use of technological tools to improve the teaching of English literacy. She said, "I don't have the knowledge on technology yet I do have the interest in it." (Teacher 1, interview)

The data in the focus group A interview from school A showed that teachers themselves had no confidence in their own work as they felt that they were not trained to teach at the foundation phase. They stated clearly that foundation phase teaching required specialised training. They said:

I think the teaching of literacy must be something for the teacher who has the knowledge and the skills of teaching literacy with young learners.  
(Teacher 3, focus group A)

We find it very challenging to teach English literacy in Grade One because we don't have all the skills, sometimes we are not sure of what to do with these young learners because we were not trained to teach in the foundation phase. (Teacher 4, focus group A)

The situation in Swaziland is disheartening because the teachers who teach literacy in English in Grade One were actually not trained to be foundation-phase teachers. They *were* trained to teach at primary school yet literature shows that foundation phase teaching needs teachers who understand how young children develop and how they learn a language. This is in

agreement with Mooney *et al.*, (2010); Ferreria, (2009) who observed that there was a need to train teachers in literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase as most of them were inadequately trained and some were without any formal training.

#### **6.4.3.6 Learner-oriented challenges**

The findings of the study showed that in addition to the teacher-oriented challenges in teaching literacy in English, there were learner-oriented challenges that teachers had to deal with. These were lack of learners' common starting point for school, lack of environmental support for learning (parental support and community support), learners' lack of interest in reading, linguistic and cultural diversity. These challenges were also observed by Lockheed (2012) in his study of education in developing countries.

##### **6.4.3.6 (a) Lack of learners' common starting point for school**

The findings of the study showed that a glaring problem for Grade One learners in the participating schools was a lack of common starting point for school and learners began schools with different entry competence. Though *the Education and Training Sector Policy (2011, p. 27)* states that all children should have access to foundation phase education as it lays solid ground for formal schooling and future learning, in Swaziland there was still no strict monitoring of the Early Childhood Education (ECE) programme. Pre-schools were still privately-owned and not government-sponsored and followed their own curriculum. Parents were not compelled to take their children to pre-school as a result; learners began school with varying degrees of competency on language and literacy skills. This disparity in the learners was a challenge for the teachers who had to complete a syllabus and ensured that learners mastered the different literacy skills. Teacher 3 said:

The main challenge I have encountered is that most of the pupils were learning English for the first time since some of them did not even go to pre-school, you find that while you are teaching English, there are some things that you have to explain to them in SiSwati because some are just not following. (Teacher 3, interview)

One teacher from the interviews raised the fact that attending pre-school did not guarantee that the learners had picked up some basic literacy skills because even the pre-schools taught a different content. She said:

Even those learners who had attended pre-school differ, it depends on the kind of pre-school they attended, there are those that are more shining than others, you can tell from the learners what type of pre-school they attended. (Teacher 2, interview)

Findings from the focus group interview concurred with those of the semi-structured interviews that the learners' disparity, when they begin school, was a challenge for the teachers, especially now that the education policy had been advocated for inclusive education in the schools. The teachers said:

Sometime it is difficult, it depends with the learners because some are from preschool, some are not. So those who are from preschool, they have the idea, while those who are fresh from home it's a struggle, after a while nursing them, it becomes better. (Teacher 5, focus group B)

They are different, others have some impairment and the teacher has to identify those and help them catch up with the rest, it is not an easy task. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

The lack of early childhood education does not augur well for learners' education and scholars agree that early childhood education is critical in developing the child holistically, physically, socially, emotionally, cognitively and culturally for successful schooling to take place (Barnett, 2011; Castro, Paez, Dickinson & Frede, 2011).

#### **6.4.3.6 (b) Lack of environmental support to learners (parental and community)**

The study showed that, though both case schools were in the urban area, within Nhlangano town in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, the majority of learners were from the outskirts of the town and some came from rural places. Consequently, the varying socio-economic backgrounds provided little support for their literacy learning. The teachers said:

The children we teach come from different areas, you find that though we are in town, you will find that these children are coming from different places, far from the environment where we are. So they are not the same. (Teacher 1, interview)

We have to deal with the issue of attitude, maybe at home no one speaks English, and the child has no support. Also, there are those pupils who still

believe that they should only speak English in front of the teacher because of influence from friends in their communities. (Teacher 3, interview)

The findings of the research show that *most* learners were from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and lacked necessary support. They stayed in the townships with single parents who worked in the textile industries, and never had the time to support learners in their school work. They left home very early in the morning and returned tired in the evening. Data from focus group A confirmed what teacher 1 from school A had said and teachers agreed that, in cases like these, there was little support parents could offer to the learners which hindered the pace at which learners mastered literacy skills. The teachers lamented that parents hardly made voluntary visits to the schools to find out how their children were progressing and how they could assist them. Parents only visited the school when they were requested to do so and, when they came, they did not give themselves time to talk to the teacher to understand their children's challenges. One teacher said;

They come to the school on the open day, they only need the report, they are only interested in their children's result, and they don't care about other things. When you talk to them, 'please help us with your child on this aspect, you could see that you are delaying them, they are rushing, that's the problem!' (Teacher 3, focus group A)

Another teacher echoed these words and said; "The problem is that the parents we have now are working, they don't have time to help their children." (Teacher 2, focus group A)

The teachers also stated that parents seemed not to understand their role in their children's education. They see the teacher as the focal person responsible for the children's learning. One teacher said:

Parents lack the knowledge on why they have to support their children, and how to support them. One may think that they don't want to help but I think they are not aware that they need to be supportive to these children. (Teacher 1, focus group A)

The behaviour of the parents in School A is contrary to the findings of research on parental involvement in young children's learning. Carroll (2013); Siraj-Blatchford (2010) agree that a child's home environment and the parents' literacy levels are critical components to the development of their literacy before they begin school. They assert that a child's education

begins at home with the parent being the first teacher to build a strong language and literacy foundation and that, without this, the child's general education will suffer. The collaboration between parents and teachers is important and the socio-cultural theorists such as Vygotsky (1978), Wood *et al.*, (1976) and Bourdieu (1991) view the teaching-learning process as a social construct that is mediated by the people in that social setting. Consequently, the success of the teaching-learning process relies on the collaborative effort between the two parties.

#### **6.4.3.6 (c) Learners' lack of interest in reading**

The findings of the study showed that learners had generally lost interest in reading and this impacted negatively on their mastery of English literacy. Teachers stated that in the previous years, learners in urban schools were self-motivated on reading activities but that culture had since disappeared from the schools. The situation in the case study schools is contrary to research findings that show that reading is a critical area of literacy that promotes the other language skills (*National Reading strategy, 2008; Snow et al., 1998*). One teacher stated:

These days, our children have lost interest in reading, in the past the children would always go to the library to get some books on weekends and they would read on their own. Now that they do not have time to go to the library, they are lacking in the skill of reading. (Teacher 1, interview)

Classroom observations confirmed what was said in the interviews. In school B, The researcher did not see any reading materials for the learners except for the prescribed books from the National Curriculum centre. The teachers also did not use other reference books save for the official textbooks. This shows that the teachers did not share the culture of reading. Consequently, learners were not motivated to read as there were no role models for them. In school A, there were some reading books which were seen on the cupboard but there was no evidence that the learners ever read them because they were full of dust. Only one child came with a reading book in school B and told the teacher that her mother had bought the book for her. The child was visibly excited about having the book, but she was the only one among so many learners.

#### **6.4.3.6 (d) Linguistic and cultural diversity**

The teachers in the focus groups interview agreed that teaching learners of diverse cultural background was a challenge because the teacher had to be cautious of her expressions so that



all learners knew what she was talking about. They stated that sometimes there was a need to use the mother tongue to clarify what they taught, but the mixed cultures in their schools limited that. The issue of cultural diversity in the literacy classroom exerted some pressure on the teachers. Researchers in the area of Literacy, Culture and Language Education hold that teacher knowledge of the content is not sufficient without an understanding of the social and cultural issues that influenced teaching and learning (Lee, 2007; Street, 2014). In short, a general understanding of the children's cultures helps the teacher to use relevant examples when clarifying concepts.

One teacher opined:

It is difficult for the teacher sometimes because the teacher must be well versed with the different cultures of the children, it is not so easy. All the time you try to make them fit to the environment and be able to teach all these children even though you are not sure of what you are doing." (Teacher 1, interview)

Teacher 6 in focus group B brought a positive dimension to cultural diversity in the classroom when he said; "We have such cultural diversity in our school, for example, we have learners coming from as far as from Bangladesh, in my class, I have a learner from Cuba, therefore, I don't have time to tell stories in siSwati because I want to accommodate everyone in class." For this teacher, the cultural diversity was an advantage, as it enhanced strong literacy learning in the classroom because, he used English language full time in his class and this created a suitable environment for literacy learning, they were exposed to English and were most likely to copy the teacher.

Classroom observations showed that both schools had learners of mixed race. In school A, there were more learners who did not use siSwati as their mother tongue than in school B. This meant that the teachers communicated in English for the better part of the lessons in an effort to accommodate all learners. This did not favour the majority of the learners as they had siSwati as their mother tongue. Research in foundation phase education has shown that the use of mother tongue enhanced the learning of literacy in the foreign language (Mbatha, 2002).

In school A the researcher observed that the cultural diversity actually boosted literacy learning. In School A, in the lesson entitled, 'Caring for animals,' the teacher asked how

learners cared for animals they keep at home? One learner who was not Swazi told the class how he washed his family dog. The other learners were fascinated by the fact that dogs were washed because they were not used to that. They were laughing and asking questions about that. They gained knowledge from their peer on how to care for dogs. The idea of peer learning is supported by Jaramillo (1996, p. 135) who holds that in the classroom setting, students learn through interacting with their peers, the teacher and any other manipulative objects. Similarly, Rogoff (1994) stated that peer collaboration in the classroom is important because young children influence one another and further influence the adults who socialize with them.

In school B, teacher 2's classroom, the researcher observed that there were two learners who were seriously struggling with literacy in English as they were from a Francophone country. The teacher said that there was nothing she could do with the learners because they did not understand English and, even at home, their parents did use English as they were not from an English-speaking country. The learners were only exposed to English at school. The teacher was of the view that these learners needed to be taken to pre-school where they would learn the basics of English use in a playful approach. From the researcher's observation, the teacher was not ready to do anything to help these learners catch up.

The heterogeneous cultures of these two urban schools affected the learning of literacy in English and this is supported by de Schonewise and Klingner (2012) who assert that cultural issues in the classroom arise because learners and teachers who speak different languages normally vary in the way they live and view the world. de Schonewise and Klingner (2012) believe that it is important for teachers to understand the diversity of the learners in their classroom in order to situate their practices accordingly. They expose the vitality of teacher knowledge of linguistic issues and the processes involved in second language learning to ensure theoretically sound, culturally sensitive and effective lessons.

#### **6.4.3.6 (e) Learners' developmental stage**

The findings of the study show that teachers experienced challenges of having under-aged learners enrolled into Grade One as well. The three teachers who were key participants in this study agreed that they have cases of learners who come to Grade One before the mandatory age of six. They state that these under-age learners struggled with learning literacy in the second language as they were still learning their first language and they were not cognitively developed enough to learn literacy in the second language. The teachers said:

Teachers have a challenge of understanding how well they can teach these young learners since they are beginners and they are still learning how to speak any language not necessarily English but all the languages. (Teacher 1, interview)

The fact that they are still learning the language skills in the mother tongue is critical, sometimes it's difficult for some of the learners to communicate well because they are still young; the learning of sounds is still a problem to them, and pronunciation is still a problem. (Teacher 2, focus group A)

The situation in the case schools has negative effects on the children: Developmental psychology shows that beginning formal schools too early cripples the learners' cognitive development as they are not ready developmentally. Gestwick (2013) is in agreement when he states that lessons and the curriculum should be at the same level as the learners' developmental stage and this requires a clear knowledge of the learners' language, strengths, needs and social and cultural context. The researcher felt that the reason for enrolling learners in Grade One before the age of six could be the high cost of pre-school education as observed by the *UNESCO Global and monitoring report 2013/2014*.

#### **6.4.3.7 School-oriented challenges**

The analysis of the data showed that other challenges teachers experienced in the teaching of English literacy in the foundation phase were directly linked to the schools they worked in. The findings of the study showed that, though the case schools were believed to be privileged as they were in an urban area, there were challenges that included lack of resources, high enrolment, and poor library and ICT facilities.

##### **6.4.3.7 (a) Lack of resources**

Both schools experienced lack of resources which hampered the success of their lessons and this was due to lack of funds because they were government schools. The teachers supplied the schools with learners' stationary but the money was not enough to buy all the necessary teaching and learning materials. They said:

We are struggling sometime to get the resources, you know that my children will understand better if I can get this resource but you can't get it because there is no money at the school. (Teacher 1, interview)

We know that we have to use relevant materials such as pictures because children understand better when they see pictures and other reference materials... but the problem is that we don't always find them (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers from the focus group echoed what the interviewed teachers had said. They raised the issue of Free Primary Education as the main cause for lack of teaching resources in the schools. According to the teachers, the introduction of FPE deprived schools of resources they used to get from parents and government who paid an insufficient amount to run the school.

Teacher 2 from focus group B said: "Since the introduction of the free primary education, everything has been spoilt; the parents no longer support with any resources, they point at government and the schools suffer because government has no money."

Classroom observations showed that in most lessons, there were no proper teaching-learning aids and teachers sometimes improvised to assist learners get a grasp of what they taught. They sometimes used classroom objects in the place of the desired teaching and learning aids. For instance, all three teachers in both schools used the different classroom objects to teach prepositions. The teachers would also ask learners to give items they had to use as teaching aids, such as learners' hats, gloves, school bags and lunch boxes. Learners looked excited when the teacher asked for their possessions to use as examples. Most learners rushed to give the teacher their items to use. In teacher 3's class one boy moved from the back of the class to give his ruler to the teacher to use as example to teach preposition. The researcher concluded that learners liked it when teachers used their possessions as they were part of what was going on in the lesson. As a result, engaging learners in bringing learning aids had a positive effect on them.

The schools' lack of funds to provide resources frustrated the teachers' as they had to improvise for most of their lessons. In the event they failed to improvise, that lesson was taught theoretically without anything for learners to see and manipulate which was to their detriment. The negative effect in a lesson due of lack of appropriate teaching-learning resources is supported by other researchers on literacy instruction such as Clay (2005). She asserts that the use of relevant resources was encouraged in the foundation phase because, as the learner manipulates an object, new awareness is created; he notices features, analyses them and reaches an understanding. The role of the teacher, therefore, becomes that of guider

to provide an opportunity for the learners to be involved with the learning resources in a challenging way that would enhance independent learning. Lack of the resources in the case schools therefore, did not favour literacy learning especially because these were First Grade learners.

#### **6.4.3.7 (b) High enrolment in the schools**

The finding of the study showed that the schools had a high enrolment, which led to overcrowded classrooms. For instance, each class had more than fifty-five learners which were contrary to government's policy that each class should have no more than forty-five learners. Teachers stated firmly that was very frustrating to handle overcrowded classrooms and they were not able to do some literacy activities because of these numbers did not permit this it. The teachers stated that the high numbers made it impossible to effectively engage learners in all critical areas of literacy. According to the teachers, the high numbers effected assessment practices. For instance, oral activities that required individual learners to practise were not done and teachers did not engage learners in play activities stating that their classrooms were not conducive for any movement. They had this to say:

In the past we used to assess all the skills, even the speaking and listening skills, but because of the enrolment now we decided not to test oral work because of the enrolment, it takes most of the time when we are assessing learners one by one. (Teacher 1, interview)

It is difficult to even move around the classroom, you find that some learners would just sit and pretend to be doing some work yet they are not doing anything, and you cannot see everyone. (Teacher 2, interview)

Classroom observations showed that the overcrowded classrooms made it difficult for the teachers to effectively conduct assessment. In school B, for instance, when an assessment test was given, learners were divided into two groups to avoid learners copying from one another. This was a very cumbersome activity as Grade One learners could not write fast enough. The teachers had to spend the whole day giving one test as learners came in groups to write. Moreover, the teachers were strained by such an arrangement as they had to read the test questions for the two groups and moved around to see if they were all writing. The researcher observed that giving tests made the teachers exhausted.

The researcher also observed that, although teachers tried to maintain order in their classrooms, issues of discipline would sometime come up. In school B, Teacher 2 was a new teacher who had just come out of college and she struggled to control ill-disciplined learners in her class. She would frequently call some learners to order and sometimes resorted to corporal punishment to keep them in control for a while before they began to disrupt the teaching again. This wasted teaching time and impacted negatively on her work as one would hear her saying, “You guys have disturbed the lesson, and I can’t even remember where I was before you disturbed me.” The time she took to control the learners disturbed the flow of the lesson.

The teachers’ concerns over the large class sizes were similar to the findings of Lockheed (2012) who observed that most primary schools in developing countries were faced with challenges of overcrowded classrooms and lack of qualified teachers. O’Connor and Geiger (2009, p. 261) share a similar view in their findings of the study on ‘Challenges facing primary school educators of English second language learners in the Western Cape’ where they argue that, as the class sizes increased, the frequency of problems increased.

The researcher believes that smaller classes would allow the teacher to know the learners’ needs and plan classroom activities that would meet their specific needs. Dobbie and Fryer (2011), on the other hand, are of the view that class sizes had no correlation with school effectiveness but are data-driven, increasing tutoring and teaching time.

#### **6.4.3.7 (c) Lack of library facility**

The study revealed that lack of proper library facilities affected teaching of literacy in English. The teachers in the interviews and focus group interviews agreed that there were no functional libraries in primary schools and this inhibited learners’ achievement in literacy. The teachers had this to say:

We do have library material but we don’t have time because even if they go to the library, it must be the teacher who’s teaching the languages to help these children because there is no one employed for that, and with so much work to do, we don’t have that time. (Teacher 1, interview)

A teacher from focus group A stated that even if the books were available in the school, learners did not benefit because they were not allowed to take the books outside the room where they were kept. She said:

We do have the books but until last year (2015) we did not have a classroom where we can keep the books so that the children can have time to go there. Even then, the time to use the books is too little because they read and leave the books there; they are not allowed to take them out. (Teacher 2, focus group A)

Classroom observations showed that in both schools learners had no access to any other reading material save for prescribed books. In school A, there were some books in the cupboard but they were not used by the learners, there were just gathering dust there. Moreover, the room designated for library use was used by some teachers as a staffroom and learners had no easy access to the reading materials that were kept in that room. The researcher was of the view that the schools had no regard for the value of reading because the reading materials had been donated by non-governmental organisations like World Vision. In school B, there was no room that was used as a library and there were no books given to learners to read in order to improve their literacy achievement.

The researcher observed that the lack of reading materials in class hampered learners' literacy learning. The fast learners were left unoccupied for some time because they often finished writing activities faster than their counterparts and they ended up making a noise. This was observed when the teachers moved around marking and assisting slow learners. If there were reading materials readily available in the classroom, they would possibly be kept engaged with reading for pleasure and learn literacy in the process. This is in agreement with the view of Al Darwich (2014) who conducted a study that examined areas that need to be developed in English as a foreign language (EFL) in a reading programme in elementary stages in Kuwaiti public schools. The results showed that using children's literature in reading instruction improved students' attention span, comprehension skills and critical thinking.

The practice in these schools is contrary to what literacy researchers such as Clay (2005); Joubert *et al.*, (2008) advocate. They argue that reading is considered the most powerful way of receiving information, ideas and stories and also an essential competency in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Consequently, educators and parents must ensure that children are exposed to appropriate reading materials at an early age. The situation in Swaziland is similar to other developing countries where English is a second and, or, foreign language and limiting exposure to reading materials is a common hindrance to learners' progress in literacy (Lockheed, 2012; Govender, 2015).

#### **6.4.3.7 (d) Inadequate teaching time**

The findings of the study showed that time allocated to the teaching of Literacy in English was not adequate. Two of the teachers stated that the time allocated on the schools' timetable was not enough for them to cover all aspects of literacy. The teachers stated that too much time is wasted trying to help the different types of learners to catch up. Consequently, they were not able to finish the Grade One syllabus by the end of the year. This means that learners progressed from Grade One to Grade Two not having covered all literacy aspects. One teacher said:

I never finish the syllabus in Grade One, every time I feel I have not done everything because English is wide, and the children are not the same. I find myself lagging behind; maybe I'm too slow trying to nurse the children. (Teacher 1. interview)

Another teacher lamented that there was no time to help struggling learners catch up. She said; "Sometimes I give remedial lessons but you find that time is the main challenge." (Teacher 3, interview)

Teacher 2 had a different view. She stated that the allocated time for English literacy was adequate. She said, "English has got many periods, such that every day we do have periods for English which is adequate. English was given that grace, the time allocated is enough."

Teachers in the focus groups stated that the allocated periods given to literacy in English in the school's timetable were enough because other subjects have to be catered for. However, they were not able to finish the syllabus because of the work involved when dealing with young learners. They had this to say:

English literacy has many periods allocated to it but we never finish the syllabus because the learners are so different, you first need to understand them and try to bring them to order, make them understand what is expected because some of them have never been to a pre-school. (Teacher 4, focus group B)

The children are young, one needs to be very patient with them that's why we are unable to finish the syllabus yet we do English every day. (Teacher 5, focus group B)



The Free Primary Education has made it difficult for us to cover all literacy aspects in Grade One because the learners are many, some have disabilities and the progress is slow. That is why we feel that the time is not enough.  
(Teacher 3 focus group A)

The researcher observed that in both schools, English literacy featured every day of the week, from Monday to Friday and there were seven hours in all. This shows that schools realised the importance of English literacy in the foundation phase and that is why it was allocated more periods than the rest of the subjects.

#### **6.4.3.8 Strategies teachers in case schools use to counter the challenges**

The findings of the study showed that teachers in the case schools had devised some strategies to counter some of the challenges they experienced in their teaching of literacy in English in Grade One. They stated that their strategies helped them to cope with the different challenges and made their experience bearable. These strategies included; developing a positive attitude to the work, providing reading materials for their classes and organising internal workshops with other teachers.

##### **6.4.3.8 (a) Developing a positive attitude towards the teaching of literacy in English**

The findings of the study showed that developing a positive attitude towards the teaching of literacy in English to Grade One learners helped the teachers cope with the challenges they experienced. The teachers stated that developing love and appreciation for the different learners helped them to be patient with their inadequacies and tried by all means to help them learn. They had this to say;

I love the subject; I get involved and use whatever I come across if I think that it will help my children understand because I love the subject. (Teacher 1, interview)

I make sure that I motivate learners to love the subject and make them practice whatever I teach them for example, practice speaking English when they are playing outside, I make sure that they use the language and encourage them to love it. (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers in focus group B agreed that a positive teacher attitude is directly transferable to the learners. Consequently, what helps them as teachers is to be role models to the learners in the use of English so that they create a natural context for them. One teacher said:

As a teacher you need to be a role model to the learners. Give them the reason why they should speak in English rather than forcing them. I just use English every time so that they take it from me, and that has helped me over the years. (Teacher 4, focus group B)

An observation made by the researcher was that teachers practised what they said: they acted as role models for the learners in the use of English. The moment the researcher entered the schools' premises she could hear some learners conversing in English and the teachers in both schools used English to communicate with the learners. In the three classrooms observed, English was the medium of instruction. Teachers barely addressed learners in the mother tongue siSwati. This could be based on the fact that both schools had learners who were non-Swazi and used English for their daily communication in school. Though there were some learners whose first exposure to English was the school because they had not attended pre-school, teachers believed that immersing them in the English-language environment would help them learn.

The finding of the study brings a new dimension which is contrary to the finding of Karr (2013) who conducted a study to determine teachers' attitude towards teaching reading in the content areas. Karr' study showed that teachers possessed an average attitude towards teaching reading in the content areas and an improved attitude was attributed to appropriate training. This means that teachers who have not got adequate training in the content of what they are required to teach were less likely to have a high positive attitude towards their work. However, for this study, teachers' lack of adequate training in English literacy in the foundation phase did not discourage them from being role models to the learners.

#### **6.4.3.8 (b) Providing reading materials for their classes**

The finding of the study showed that teachers understood the importance of reading in literacy learning. They were of the view that learners needed to be exposed to reading materials in order for them to get familiar with printed materials for lifelong learning. This view is supported by Carroll (2013); Dlamini (2009); Allington (2006) who agree that a child's early exposure to reading develops a positive attitude and ensures success in learning.

To counter the challenge of non-functional libraries in their schools, the teachers took the initiative of providing some reading materials for the learners in their classrooms. Sometimes they asked parents who could afford it to buy reading books for their children. They said:

I go to the room where we keep the books, I ask the teacher responsible to get some of the books which are at their level and give them to read when they are through with their class work so that I can monitor them.  
(Teacher1, interview)

Those parents who are able to buy books for their children help us, we encourage learners to bring their reading books to class because they are those kids who are very fast in doing their work, just to keep their minds busy, and they can read their story books so that they don't make noise.  
(Teacher 2, interview)

Classroom observations were contrary to what the teachers said in the interviews that there were no additional reading materials that were given to learners except for the prescribed learner's book and workbooks. The teachers were not honest in answering this question. What they said they did was contrary to what was observed. They have a general knowledge that reading is important to improve literacy, but their schools did not have the facilities for this as no functional library was seen and no additional reading materials for learners.

It was only a few children whose parents understood the value of reading who bought some reading materials for their learners. In school B, for instance, one Monday morning, a learner came to the teacher carrying a story book and looked very excited about it as she showed the teacher. The learner told the teacher that her mother has bought the book for her. After class, when the researcher enquired from the teacher what profession the girl's mother had, she discovered that she was a hawker. This showed that some parents understand the value of children's early exposure to reading. If the schools could work collaboratively with parents, the teaching and learning of English literacy could be improved.

#### **6.4.3.8 (c) Remediation**

The data showed that remediation for challenged learners was one strategy teachers used to improve their teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. They said that learners were different and some needed special attention to catch up. However, time was always a challenge to them. One teacher said,

I help a challenged child in my spare time; I discovered that when I help a child alone as a teacher, the child improves because I get to understand the actual problem she or he has. If the challenge is serious, I arrange with the parent to see the child after school. If it's a group of children that is lacking behind, I try to do remedial in class for that lesson. (Teacher 2, interview)

In the focus group interview teachers stated that the large numbers made it difficult to give individual remediation, but they used groups to help struggling learners during class time. One teacher said, "We group the learners who are struggling with a certain concept and try to help them catch up. We give the capable ones more work to do so that they don't get bored, while helping the others." (Teacher 5, focus group 5)

#### **6.4.3.8 (d) Teacher-peer tutoring**

To counter challenges in the teaching and learning of literacy in English, teachers organised workshops among themselves in the school. The teachers did this based on the belief that they had different strengths and weaknesses in teaching generally and in literacy in English teaching in particular. Teachers stated that peer tutoring among teachers was helpful in solving some of the challenges they encountered. One teacher said:

An iron sharpens another iron, so teachers help one another. You find that in my class, I was not aware of how to handle a certain concept, then someone uses different strategies from mine, we come together in a round table and share ideas on how we can tackle the different areas in literacy. (Teacher 2, interview)

Coaching one another as teachers has helped us to handle the challenges of working with Grade 1 learners. We just hold workshops in our school to share strategies and the administration supports us. (Teacher 3, interview)

Teachers in the focus group B agreed with the interviewed teachers as far as working with other teachers in the school to improve their teaching was concerned. They stated that a collaborative approach to teaching was the practice. One teacher said, "There has to be team teaching, because you find that there is something that I don't know, even if I have the experience, I cannot know everything, so conducting workshops among ourselves really helped us." (Teacher 5, focus group B)

The idea of teachers' collaboration in the schools is supported by Wium and Louw (2011) in their work on the exploration of how foundation phase teachers facilitate language skills. They assert that the development of a child involves an interdisciplinary field of knowledge that teachers bring to the profession. In short, teachers' work as a collaborative team is important for the development of the learners' literacy knowledge and skills as they bring different ideas to improve their teaching.

#### **6.4.4 Theme 4: Possible strategies to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the Grade One Swazi context.**

The data showed that teachers had other ideas that they thought could improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One. These ideas included the integration of information technology in the teaching and learning, use of mother tongue, teacher specialisation in the foundation phase and teacher-parent associations.

##### **6.4.4.1 Integration of information technology**

The finding of the study showed that the integration of information technology facilities in the schools could improve children's learning of literacy. Teachers were of the view that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the use of information technology was essential in people's everyday lives and believed that integrating IT into the teaching and learning of English literacy could bring a positive change in the learners' performance because children were fascinated by the use of technology because information technology is the future of the world.

The findings showed that in school A, there was a computer laboratory with computers and a teacher who taught ICT. However, the room was small and there were not enough computers and not enough learners could use them because of the class sizes. The teachers stated that the children enjoyed the exposure to computers and they believed that the ICT integration into the English literacy syllabus could benefit the learners. One teacher said;

We do have the computer laboratory but the learners are too many to go there at the same time. The teacher takes them in groups because the computers are not enough yet the learners are fascinated by the use of technology. (Teacher 1, interview)

Teachers in focus group A shared a similar view. They believed that the use of computers and other technology-related gadgets in the English literacy lessons could motivate learners to do better. One teacher said;

The use of information technology tools can help, most of our children are advanced in the knowledge of these gadgets, and maybe even more than us because, at some homes they do have these resources but when they come to school, they find that we still don't have them. (Teacher 3, focus group A)

In school B, the teachers stated that they believed the integration of information technology could benefit learners in their literacy lessons, but the schools lacked these facilities. The teachers stated that in their school, there was a room designated to be a computer laboratory, but it was used by teachers as a staffroom and there were no computers there. This was the room where the focus group interview was conducted. One teacher said:

We were promised computers by a certain company but till now, we have not received any computer. We believe that the use of technology could help the learners because these days everything is about technology. (Teacher 6, focus group B)

Classroom observations did not show any use of information technology tools in the lessons. The researcher observed that teachers' understanding of information technology tools was limited to the use of computers as they did not make mention of other equipment that could be used to disseminate information and communication.

The analysis of the textbooks used, teacher's guide and pupil's books does not include any information to support English literacy learning in Grade One. The teachers' idea of the use of information technology in literacy teaching and learning is supported by Furlong (2011) who argues that the use of information technology motivates learners, supports knowledge construction and creates a context for supporting learning by doing and conversing. Based on the teachers' view supported by empirical research, the researcher concludes that an integration of IT in literacy learning, therefore, could benefit both learners and teachers to create a better classroom environment.

#### **6.4.4.2 Use of the mother tongue**

The teachers agreed that the use of the mother tongue helped in their teaching to assist learners who had very minimal exposure to English Language. The teachers believed that the use of the mother tongue eased the anxiety in the literacy classroom as learners were able to follow during the lesson. The use of the mother tongue, however, had a limitation in urban schools; it only accommodated learners whose mother tongue was the same as that of the teacher. One teacher in focus group B said:

Sometimes you have to divert and move away from the English, you have to explain maybe in their mother language, and then things get better for some learners but those who are not Swazis do not benefit. (Teacher 2, focus group B)

The importance of the mother tongue in children's learning is supported by language researchers (Hugo, 2013; Carless, 2007). In his works, Hugo (2013) states that children's competence in the first language was important in enhancing their knowledge of the second language as children can easily transfer skills from one language to the other and this also eased anxiety. Carless (2007) found that the use of the mother tongue contributed to second language learning positively because learners use it to compensate for deficiencies they may have in the second language. Kamwendo (2008) also shares a similar view and holds that mother tongue instruction has benefits in the foundation phase. This means that learners' first language is important in learning literacy in the second language. However, there are some challenges in urban schools with multi-racial learners and some learners do not benefit from the teachers' use of the mother tongue.

#### **6.4.4.3 Teacher specialisation in the foundation phase**

The finding of the study showed that the specialisation of teachers in the foundation phase could help improve the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade One. The data showed that teachers who were trained to be general primary school teachers were not very effective in the teaching of learners in the foundation phase. In Swaziland, foundation phase education, as stated in *the Education sector policy (2011)* has still not been effective in schools because teachers had not been trained in Early Childhood Education until 2016 when the first group of ECE teachers graduated from Ngwane Teachers' College. Moreover, these ECE teachers were still not employed by government because Swaziland had still not

introduced Grade Zero in the education system. One teacher from focus group A said; “We think maybe if the teachers could specialise in the foundation phase, so that these teachers developed all the skills and knowledge of handling young learners.” (Teacher 1, focus group A)

Another idea from focus group A was that, if teachers in the primary school could focus in teaching Literacy in English and not the other subjects, this could make them more effective in their teaching. They were of the view that teaching many subjects did not augur well for the teachers because they ended up not being competent in any of those subjects and they just remained with shallow knowledge and skills. One teacher said;

If only teachers could specialise, not in the foundation phase per se, but in teaching of literacy in English. Teaching all these subjects; Maths, Science, Religious education and English literacy was too much, you end up being a jack of all trade but a master of none. (Teacher 3, focus group A)

The researcher holds that foundation phase education is critical in the child’s education and the teachers need to possess the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate it in the classroom. This is supported by researchers in early childhood education such as Maynard *et al.*, (2010) who argue that teacher’s lack of knowledge to facilitate emergent literacy skills was a major concern in the United States of America and that \ foundation phase practitioners needed high levels of training and progressive professional development for them to be effective. The findings of this study corroborate what other researchers in different contexts found. That being the case, proper teacher qualification in English literacy teaching becomes a critical aspect for effective instructional practices. The findings of the study show that teachers who have specialised in early childhood education could be more effective than teachers who had a general primary teacher education qualification.

#### **6.4.4.4 Teacher-parent association**

The findings of the study showed that another way of improving the teaching and learning of English in Grade One is to form teacher-parents associations in the schools. The teachers in focus group A stated that parents did not offer the necessary support to children in the early grades because they were not aware of what to do and how to do it. The teachers said that if formal associations that could bring teachers and parents together in the schools could be



established, the relationship between the two parties could improve and they could understand how best they can work together to support the children. One teacher said;

I think the parents lacked the knowledge on why they have to support their children, and how to support them. Maybe you may think they don't want to but the knowledge is mostly lacking, it will take years for them to understand their role unless we try to have teacher-parents meetings so that we workshop each other on how to support Grade One children. (Teacher 1, focus group A)

The teachers' idea of a strong partnership between parents and the school for children's academic success is a concern the world over. The Michigan Department of Education took it seriously so that, in 2011, a policy document to guide the school-parent partnership was established. This document was named; "Collaborating for success", a parent engagement tool kit. Its major aim was to guide the operations of school-parents' partnership. The need for parental engagement was clearly articulated and research-based strategies and resources to overcome barriers to parental engagement were presented. The findings of this study showed that this is lacking in Swaziland. Povey *et al.*, (2016) support the value of parental engagement. They argue that parental engagement was deeper than parental involvement as the former helped develop the children socially and emotionally.

## **6.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study based on the teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. Four critical questions guided the study and four data-generation instruments were used: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussion, classroom observation and document analysis. Four major themes emerged from the data that were analysed inductively. These were, teachers' navigation between half-facilitator and half-transmitter; , rational for these instructional practices, teacher experiences of teaching literacy in English in Grade One and strategies teachers thought could be put in place to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One, particularly in the context of Swaziland as a developing country. The data from the teachers' interviews and classroom observations showed that the teaching of English to Grade One learners was a very challenging task, as teachers have to constantly navigate between being facilitators of

learning and transmitters of knowledge. The key issue that emerged was that there was very little environmental support for learners and teachers were inadequately trained for effective literacy instruction in the foundation phase. Consequently, teacher resilience was a critical ingredient for primary school teachers. The teachers agreed that there was a lot that needed to be done to improve the teaching of English literacy in Grade One, including the use of IT tools, teacher specialisation in the foundation phase of education and the formation of teacher-parent associations. The next and final chapter presents the researcher's interpretation of the findings, the conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations for action and further research.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a summary of the findings of the research and the researcher's conclusions and recommendations. The literature reviewed, theoretical framework and empirical research were used to draw the conclusions of this study. The aim was to explore primary teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English at Grade One level, focusing on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. The findings of this study were based on data gathered from four data collection instruments; semi-structured interviews with three Grade One teachers; classroom observations of these three teachers in their literacy practices in English lessons; focus group interview with teachers who had an experience of teaching literacy in English in Grade One and from official documents teachers used to teach literacy in English at this level. To understand teachers' instructional practices in the Grade One class, the researcher used Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory that views teaching and learning as embedded in the individuals' socio-cultural experiences. Moreover, the teacher is seen as the knowledgeable other who creates a conducive community of learning in the classroom. Four critical questions guided this study:

- What instructional practices do teacher use in the Grade One English Literacy class?
- Why do teachers use these instructional practices in the Grade One English literacy class?
- How do teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One?
- Why do teachers experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do?

#### **7.2 Conclusions from the literature study and theoretical framework**

The purpose of literature review was to show the current trends on the teaching and learning of English literacy in the foundation phase. The review of literature showed that the concept of literacy can be defined from different perspectives: cognitive psychologists' perspective, behavioural/cognitive social psychology, social anthropology and a socio-cultural perspective. The different dimensions of literacy also have an impact on teachers' instructional practices, especially in the foundation phase. The findings from different

studies the researcher went through in the literature reviewed resulted from the socio-cultural theory that sees literacy teaching and learning as a socially-mediated practice within a particular social context. The socio-cultural perspective also holds that literacy learning was largely influenced by the social context of the learner: the home background, pre-school background and the larger community. Consequently, a favourable social context for literacy learning should be created in school and at home for the effective learning of English literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978).

The researcher discovered that a more objective view to literacy supports an interdisciplinary approach to literacy teaching and learning. For instance, Burke and Hammett (2009) argue that inter-disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning and sharing of best practices among teachers can yield positive results in the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase. According to Burke and Hammett (2009), collaboration, co-operation and the explicit sharing of ideas and resources among teachers were best practices that can facilitate the teaching and learning of literacy in English. The idea of collaboration and co-operation between learners and the teacher and among learners themselves is also based on the socio-cultural perspective that views learning and teaching as embedded in the social and cultural experiences of the learners. For Vygotsky (1978), effective literacy instruction is one that uses social and cultural experiences that learners bring to school. Creating opportunities for interaction in the classroom and the teacher being the facilitator for that interaction is seen as an effective way to utilise learners' social and cultural experiences for meaningful learning.

The socio-cultural theory does not render the role of the teacher insignificant. Rather, it views the foundation phase teacher as the 'steering' in the classroom; the one who guides and directs learning activities by creating a favourable environment for effective literacy learning. Moreover, the teacher is expected to offer support to meet the different needs of the learners in their quest for learning literacy in the English language. This includes different verbal and non-verbal cues, visual images and other forms of resources other than just print materials. The socio-cultural theory also values collaboration among learners in the classroom. It was in view of the strengths and relevance of the socio-cultural theory to teaching and learning that the researcher used it as a lens to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the Grade One class.

Vygotsky (1978) views knowledge as social in nature and constructed through the processes of interaction, communication and collaboration among children in social settings (Hugo, 2013, p.32). In essence, Vygotsky sees social experiences as fundamental in shaping one's thinking and view of the world around him or her. Consequently, a learner constructs knowledge as a result of his or her social experiences. From this notion, teachers' instructional practices in a literacy classroom must be guided by the social, cultural and linguistic experiences of the learners. These experiences combined are instrumental in enhancing the learning of literacy in the second language.

In addressing literacy instruction in the classroom Vygotsky argues that the teacher's role is to create an effective environment for literacy learning. He wrote:

Teaching should be organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something...That writing should be meaningful...That writing be taught naturally...and that the natural methods of teaching reading and writing involve appropriate operations on the child's environment (Vygotsky (1978, pp. 117-118).

This statement means that classroom activities should serve a particular purpose for learners to find meaning in engaging with them. Moreover, strategies of teaching should relate closely to the learners' daily practices for them to find connection between what is taught and their social experiences and in that way, learning will occur in an almost natural way.

Vygotsky's perspective, in (Newman & Holzman, 2013) views learning as what actually leads to development, and not the other way round, and it is through the use of language as a cultural tool that development occurs. In essence, the language that is exchanged among people in their social settings becomes critical for learning; it acts as a mediating tool for learning. Furthermore, language is what the children use to make sense of their experiences in their environment. Teachers' understanding of the value of children's language, therefore, is essential in organising effective literacy in English instruction.

The Nine Year Programme of instruction for English (1989, p. 7) states that the teaching of English literacy should promote a level of attainment in the speaking, listening, reading and writing of the learners. Also, active learning through play and the use of visual and non-visual materials in groups and pairs should be part of the instructional practices. However, the findings of the study show that there is very minimal use of play-based activities in the two

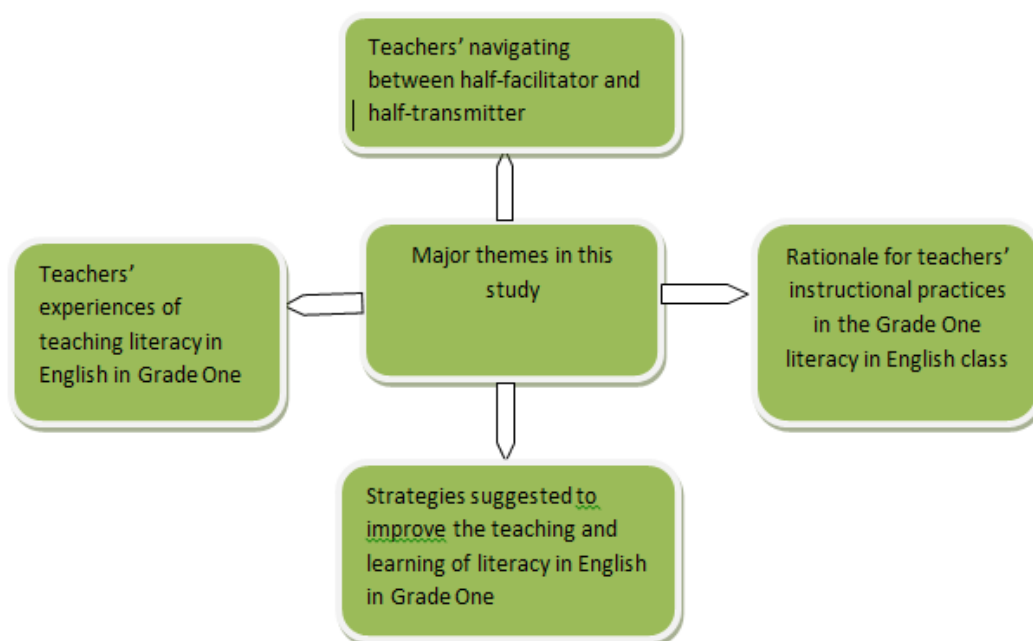
sample schools. Teachers state a number of challenges that hinder the use of play activities that would enhance young learners' mastery of literacy skills in a natural and meaningful way. Instead, literacy is taught in a more formal way with grammatical rules and the focus is on the writing skill where learners are expected to produce written work as an indication of their mastery of literacy skills.

### **7.3 Key issues from the literature and theoretical framework:**

- Literacy is a multi-dimensional concept that cuts across disciplines and the educational dimension of literacy is embedded in the learners' socio-cultural experiences;
- Literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase is fundamental for life-long learning and social functionality of the individual;
- Literacy teaching and learning should be guided by the learners' socio-cultural experiences for them to be able to master its use in their everyday lives;
- Play-based activities are critical in teaching literacy in the foundation phase to develop more advanced problem solving skills in the learners; and
- The role of the teacher is to mediate learning by providing appropriate scaffolds that would extend the learners' zone of proximal development as they construct knowledge with little or no guidance from the knowledgeable other.

### **7.4 Summary of themes that emerged from the study**

This research study yielded four major themes: instructional practices teachers used in their Grade One English literacy classrooms, rationale for teachers' instructional practices, teacher experiences of teaching English literacy in Grade One and strategies teachers suggested to improve the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade One.



**Figure 7.1** The four major themes that emerged from the study

Figure 7.1 shows the four major themes that emerged from this empirical study. These themes were generated from an analysis of data from four data collection instruments: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group discussion and document analysis.

#### **7.4.1 Teachers' navigating between half-facilitator and half-transmitter**

The findings of this study showed that teachers understood that the teaching of literacy skills required a learner-centred approach that would keep the learners engaged throughout the lesson. This transpired from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews that were conducted. However, classroom observations showed that teachers focused on teaching the literacy content in a traditional and rigid way as opposed to engaging the learners in activities, such as play, that would enable them to acquire different literacy skills. Their teaching was more inclined towards the explicit teaching of different components of literacy in a rigid way, more as transmitters of knowledge as opposed to being facilitators of learning through creating suitable situations that would foster active learner engagement. Consequently, much of the work was done by the teacher with very minimal active learner engagement and it was an exhausting experience for the teachers as they did much of the talking and walking around.

The teaching-learning process was more teacher-controlled, but the classroom appearance did enable voluntary literacy learning by the learners as there were educational charts on the

walls and notice boards. The appearance of their classrooms was colourful and enticed young learners with charts and pictures showing days of the week, body parts, food groups and letters of the alphabet. This was the teachers' efforts to create a literacy-friendly environment in their classroom. However, they complained that it was sometimes not easy to get all the resources they needed for effective teaching and learning of literacy. This was true as some lessons were taught without learning aids. This is reflective of Swaziland's struggle to provide resources because of a funding problem towards Education as it is still a developing nation.

In their instructional practices, teachers also made an effort to use learners' prior knowledge in the literacy lessons by asking questions that required learners to use their previous experiences from home, pre-school and Sunday-school. The researcher observed that learners were interested to talk about what they know. In the few instances where teachers asked about their experiences from outside of the school environment, they were all keen to talk. But such activities were not common in the classrooms and teachers turned to focus much on the textbook and writing activities with minimal examples that touched on the learners' experiences. It looked like teachers were more concerned about covering as much content from the text as possible rather than to allow learners to enjoy literacy learning by engaging in oral activities. This was contrary to what the teacher's guide and learner's book stated. They skipped oral activities that required them to engage learners in singing and reciting poems. It was only teacher 1, the old and more experienced teacher from school A, who made an effort to engage learners in oral activities. This could mean that years of experience can contribute to more effective instructional practices.

In their instructional practices, teachers made an effort to motivate learners in their classrooms and displayed their works on the wall and constantly praised and clapped hands for learners who made an effort to respond to oral questions. From the researcher's observation, teachers were keen to support learners in their efforts to acquire literacy in English. The challenge was that their teaching approaches were not balanced and they placed more emphasis on explicit teaching and writing activities at the expense of creating a more enabling environment for literacy learning. The teachers' practices were not clearly aligned to the socio-cultural perspective that advocate for the social and cultural experiences of the learners to be at the centre of their learning, especially at the foundation phase. The teachers' instructional practices were also contrary to the view of Uzuner, *et al.*, (2011) who argue that



it is important at an elementary level to include a concise and balanced literacy system that has the advantage of increasing students' comprehension of literacy.

#### **7.4.2 Rationale for teachers' instructional practices**

The findings of the study showed that teachers had various rationales for their instructional practices and these were mainly contextual and included the type of learners they had in their classrooms, the kind of support they got from stakeholders and the pedagogic knowledge they had as teachers.

Teachers stated that the kind of learners they had in their classrooms determined the kind of instructional practices in which they engaged. They raised a concern that learners who enrolled in Grade One had no common introductory ground as some were from pre-school and others were not. The study showed that the disparity of the learners who enrolled in these two urban schools was mainly caused by urban poverty in the region. The background showed that there was a high rate of rural-urban migration in Swaziland and this exacerbated poverty. Some learners who lived in the town and attended the two urban schools were actually from impoverished families and had no support from home. If it was not for the Free Primary Education some of these learners would not be at school. The high cost of pre-school education prevented most parents from enrolling their children for pre-school education which caused the disparity in the learners who enrolled into Grade One.

In addition to that, the kind of support the schools got from stakeholders also influenced the teaching. In school A, where there was little support from parents, the teachers were frustrated as they did most of the work that should have been done at home. Consequently, the progress was slow in the classroom. Struggling learners were often left behind because teachers had to deal with high numbers in the classrooms and no one else assisted the slow learners to catch up. Parents hardly had time to visit the school to find out about their children's progress as most of them worked in the textile industries. When they came to school on Open Day, they were always rushing and had no time to listen to teachers' suggestions on how to assist their children academically.

In school B, where some kind of parental support was offered, teachers were motivated to give learners some extra work as some parents assisted their children and questioned when no work was done by learners. The teachers were conscious of the fact that parents were 'watching' what learners did at school and they made an effort to keep learners engaged. The

conclusion drawn from school B shows that parental involvement in children's academic work motivated teachers to engage learners more because they were mindful of parents questioning their efficiency. More importantly, the close link between home and school helped the learners to get assistance early. The study showed that urban schools are not always at an advantage as urban poverty is on the increase which could result in learners being vulnerable and lacking the necessary support for learning.

The study also showed that the quality of the support from the administration through the provision of needed teaching and learning resources and allowing teacher-peer tutoring, influenced teachers' instructional practices. Provision of in-service training by the Ministry of Education and Training impacted positively on the teachers' instructional practices. Adequate time should be provided for in-service training as teachers lamented that the time offered for this was not enough. The teachers appreciated the kind of support they got from their administrators and this motivated the teachers and they developed some resilience. The administrators allowed them to hold internal workshops among themselves.

Teachers stated that the pedagogic knowledge that they possessed influenced their instructional practices. As teachers who had a general Primary Teachers Diploma, they felt ill-equipped for effective teaching of literacy in the English Grade One class since they were not specifically trained to teach in the foundation phase. They were of the view that specialised foundation phase teachers could do better than they could because of their training.

#### **7.4.3 Teachers' experiences of teaching literacy in Grade One**

Another major conclusion that emanated from this study was that teachers faced a lot of challenges in the teaching of literacy in English at Grade One level and these challenges made their experiences unpleasant especially for new teachers. The lack of mentoring for teachers who taught Grade One literacy for the first time was frustrating. Also, having to deal with learners who came to Grade One with different entry competencies because there was no common starting point for all learners, increased the teachers' challenges. However, the resilience that the teachers developed with time helped them to devise effective strategies that improved learners' achievement in literacy. These include development of a positive attitude, engaging learners in remedial work and organising internal workshops with other teachers. These mitigating measures helped improve the situation and made the teachers' experiences

bearable. The study showed that a positive attitude was important for teachers to develop resilience in their work.

Furthermore, the study showed that urban schools were not always at an advantage. With the introduction of FPE, the schools lacked funds to purchase teaching and learning resources. This impacted negatively on teaching. Also urban poverty due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic affected teaching as some learners were orphaned and vulnerable and lacked parental support.

#### **7.4. 4 Strategies to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One**

Another theme that emerged from the study was the teachers' suggestion of strategies that could be put in place to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase. These strategies include the use of information technology tools in the classrooms, the use of mother tongue to learn literacy, posting of specialised teachers in the foundation phase and the formation of teacher-parents associations in the schools to monitor learners' progress.

### **7.5 Responses to research questions**

#### *Research question 1*

*What practices do teachers use in teaching in their Grade One English literacy classroom?*

The findings of the study, showed that teachers' instructional practices in the case schools did not show a specific theory that was followed. Teachers just did what was suitable for them at that given time. The classroom activities were more teacher-dominated than being learner-centred. Teachers still took a dominant role in the teaching-learning process as they all focused on the explicit teaching of the different components of literacy. They predominantly used the question and answer method throughout their lessons. For them, continuously asking questions was learner engagement. Engaging learners in group work where they could share ideas on different activities was not evident in the Grade One classes observed.

The most common way of learner-engagement was mainly through oral questions, the demonstration of activities (requiring learners to jump, point to the window) and individual

writing activities. Only one teacher, the experienced one, made an effort to use peer learning by asking the more capable learners to assist their peers who were struggling with an activity (writing each letter of their names on a piece of paper and connecting the pieces to a string). The teaching was mainly focused on the instillation of knowledge in the learners as opposed to creating opportunities for them to construct knowledge themselves and the teacher mediating the process. The ideas of the socio-cultural theory were not very evident in the Grade One classrooms observed. Socio-cultural experiences of the learners were not used much to help them learn. The teachers spent most of the teaching time drilling learners on a particular concept, for example, “repeating sounding of words that begin with letter /s/, /t/ etc. Even the classroom arrangement did not allow learners to work in groups because in all the three classrooms observed, the learners sat in rows as the classrooms were full.

Among the teachers’ instructional practices, motivation was said to be an important aspect of an effective literacy in English classes. Teachers stated that they motivated learners by displaying their works on the wall and by creating competition among them in the classroom. Moreover, it emerged that the inquisitive behaviour of foundation phase learners motivates teachers to do research for their classroom activities so that they could be ready to respond to any question that may arise.

Furthermore, the instructional practices of teachers showed that learners’ experiences cannot be left out in English literacy lessons. The topics that formed part of the lessons related to the learners’ everyday life. For instance, a topic like ‘Animals we keep at home’ required a class discussion as most learners had at least one animal at home. Teachers made an effort to allow learners to talk about those animals, what they ate and why they loved them. The researcher observed that learners enjoyed this kind of class discussion as even the usually quiet ones were seen to be keen to participate.

### *Research Question 2*

#### *Why do teachers use these instructional practices?*

The study also showed that diverse factors influenced teaching which included the teachers’ expertise, learners’ inadequacies, and the schools’ inadequacies. One major finding was that teachers had a theoretical knowledge of how to teach literacy in English, but lacked the expertise to do this. For instance, from the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, the teachers stated that the use of teaching-learning aids was critical in the

foundation phase. However, classroom observations showed that they did not always use the required learning aids citing lack of time to prepare the necessary materials.

On the issue of teachers not having time to prepare teaching-learning materials, the researcher was of the view that teachers should act responsibly and prioritise their core business (teaching). Learners should not be deprived of effective learning because of lack of appropriate learning materials. Teachers should make an effort to collect teaching-learning materials well in advance to avoid them teaching without these materials. They must understand that teaching is a profession and that they needed to sacrifice their own time to prepare the appropriate materials to ensure that differentiated teaching and learning takes place.. The excuse of lack of time to prepare materials is counterproductive to effective literacy teaching in the foundation phase. Researchers in the area of literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase, such as Clay (2005) and Pressley *et al.*, (1998) agree that using age-appropriate teaching- learning aids is one of the most effective strategies to support learners in the foundation phase classroom.

The study also showed that teachers' instructional practices were influenced by the kind of knowledge they got from in-service training and internal workshops they held in their schools. The teachers in the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews stated that they relied on in-service workshops to grasp some ideas on effective literacy teaching in the foundation phase and some peer workshops among themselves in the schools. The challenge of in-service workshops was that they were not adequately carried out because of lack of time. The teachers were of the view that if there could be enough time for the Literacy Boost workshops, they could benefit from them.

The factors that directly pertained to the learners and the schools also influenced the teachers' instructional practices. Teachers had to plan their lessons in a way that would suit the kind of learners in their classrooms and the available materials in the schools. The teaching of learners from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds also influenced teachers' instructional practices. Teachers had to be mindful of the fact that some learners came from countries such as Mozambique, Congo and Pakistan where English was a foreign language. The teachers made an effort to use English all the time in the classroom. They seldom used siSwati, the mother language of Swaziland because some learners would not follow. The researcher observed that the cultural diversity also added some value in the Grade One classes observed because learners were able to share their experiences and helped others learn.

*Research question 3 & research question 4*

- *How do teachers experience the teaching of English literacy in the Grade One class?*
- *And why they experience the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they do?*

These two research questions were accommodated simultaneously. As participants responded to how they experienced the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One, the reasons for their experiences featured. Why they experienced the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they did clearly came out and this was based on the contextual dynamics that existed and their own pedagogic inadequacies.

This study showed that the contextual factors in the case schools were to some extent responsible for shaping the teachers' experiences. The teachers stated that teaching Grade One was challenging for new and inexperienced teachers due to lack of mentoring and inadequate teacher knowledge as they were not specialists in foundation phase instruction. The teachers stated that they lacked the expertise to teach literacy in English to foundation phase learners effectively. They were of the view that teachers who are specialised in the foundation phase were the most appropriate to teach English literacy in Grade One. One teacher said, "I think the teaching of literacy must be something for the teacher who has the knowledge and the skills of teaching literacy with young learners." The teachers who currently taught Grade One were not confident because they knew that there are teachers who are more specifically trained to teach at the foundation phase. In the classroom observations, there were some aspects that the teachers did not handle in their lessons. For instance, the two teachers who were key participants from school B hardly engaged learners in songs and rhymes to develop their oral skills.

From the study, it came out clearly that teachers' professional development was critical in ensuring effective teaching and learning. Teachers with the appropriate expertise for facilitating learning at any level were pillars in the education system as they influenced learner achievement. This is supported by Hattie (2012) who claims that excellence in teaching is the most significant influence for learner academic achievement. This indicates that teachers have a greater impact on the learners' accomplishment as they are the ones who prepare lessons to meet their varied needs. In the case schools, the finding was that teachers lacked the necessary expertise for foundation phase teaching.

In addition to the lack of adequate expertise for teaching English literacy in the foundation phase, the findings showed that teachers lacked mentoring in the schools. A teacher had to learn on the job and it was not a good experience especially for teachers who were fresh from pre-service training and had no experience. This concern was echoed by all the three teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. A teacher who had no experience of teaching and was allocated a Grade One class also raised a concern about the lack of mentoring in the schools. She lamented that lack of mentoring for new teachers was a great challenge as they had to figure out things on their own.

The researcher is of the view that adequate teacher knowledge from pre-service training, use of research based pedagogic practices, proper in-service support and proper mentoring of new teachers altogether contribute to high learner achievement and a lack of these vital services contributes to poor learner achievement. In the sample schools, these challenges were evident. However, the teachers had devised measures to mitigate these challenges.

#### **7.6 The original contribution of this study**

The original contribution of this study is, particularly, based on the context on which the study was carried out, the two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. Though the findings cannot be generalized, they have brought greater insight into what the teaching and learning of literacy entails and how it could be improved upon in the case schools.

An overview of the findings showed four critical issues that the study exposed which are:

- Teachers' navigating between half-facilitator and half-transmitter
- rationale for their instructional practices in the literacy classroom;
- Challenges faced by teachers in the sampled schools; and
- Teacher resilience to counter challenges and improve literacy performance.

The study has developed new knowledge in the field of literacy teaching in that it has shown that expert knowledge alone was not adequate enough to improve learners' achievement in literacy in English. Teacher passion towards the work was important because this is what develops resilience in the teacher; if the teacher loved the job, she or he was better able to withstand challenges that came with it. Moreover, the study has suggested ideas that could improve literacy teaching and learning in the First Grade.

The findings of the study showed that pedagogic knowledge was not enough to improve learners' achievement in literacy in English and that, instead, teacher attitude had a greater effect on their instructional practices and that teachers' positive attitude sustained them and enabled them to rise above their insufficiency. Their poor pedagogic knowledge in the foundation phase instruction and contextual dynamics in their schools did not dampen their spirits. They were able to come up with ways to help themselves cope with the learners from diverse cultural backgrounds where some were under-aged and had no parental support in their learning of literacy in English. This study showed that teacher knowledge and skills are crucial in the classroom, but that an extra trait, which is a positive attitude, was critical to enhance teacher efficiency.

Though the three Grade One classes observed were in the urban area (Nhlangano) an administrative town of the Shiselweni region of Swaziland, the learning conditions were wanting. The classes were over-crowded and included multiracial learners, teaching and learning resources were not readily available and teachers were over-loaded with administrative work and had no 'free' time. The patience the teachers showed to the learners, especially when written tasks were given, showed that they had passion for their work. Having to read one question at a time and wait for all learners to respond, and then moving around in congested classrooms to assist struggling learners was a really daunting task, but they patiently did that. The learners' performance in the tests reflected that, though these teachers were not trained to teach foundation phase learners, they had developed some understanding on how to deal with young learners. The love they had for their job helped them to strive for a better performance.

### **7.7 Limitations of the study**

The study was limited in its focus since it was a case study of two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland. Consequently, the findings of the study on teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One may not be generalised to similar contexts in Swaziland. However, the study has managed to show, though on a smaller scale, what teachers do in literacy in the English class in Grade One, the rationale for their actions and the contextual dynamics involved in the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade One. Moreover, the study raised some suggestions on how to improve the teaching of literacy in English in the foundation phase. A study that would bring a deeper understanding of the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase is needed, where



parents would be part of the participants, as literature shows that their input was critical in developing young children socially and emotionally for effective learning (Povey *et al.*, 2016).

Another limitation of the study was that it only focused on the teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in the Grade One class only and not the two other Grades that form the foundation phase. This was done to make the study manageable and focused where the researcher feared that spreading the study to all the foundation phase classes would make her lose focus and end up being shallow in the data collection and analysis. The researcher believed that keeping focus on the Grade One class would help her get rich data that could provide useful recommendations to assist key stakeholders to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in Grade One.

## **7.8 Recommendations for action**

From the findings of the study, the researcher came up with the following recommendations for different stakeholders in the education sector:

### **7.8.1 Recommendations for teachers**

The researcher recommends that teachers use differentiated instruction in their literacy in English lessons to accommodate varied learner abilities. Teacher knowledge about the value of using varied instruction to improve learner achievement, but not applying it practically does not help learners in anyway. The researcher's view is underpinned by Tobin and McInnes, (2008) who assert that effective teachers need to acknowledge the varied learner abilities and design instruction that would cater for the disparity in learner abilities. The researcher believes that differentiated instruction would also bring balance to the instruction. There should be effective grouping strategies and continuous monitoring in the classroom.

- It is recommended that teachers make an effort to support learners in every way possible through the use of visual aids so that learners would master different literacy concepts. This could be done by involving parents who could donate old magazines and other non-governmental organisations could offer financial support to buy needed materials. Mere stating that the use of visual aids is effective for foundation phase learners, but not practically using them in their lessons, is counterproductive. This is

supported by Richards and Renandya (2002) who state that sentence and picture matching is an effective activity to teach reading through the look- and-say method.

- The researcher also recommends that teachers who are assigned to teach in the foundation phase take their time to read and understand the syllabus so that they structure their instructional practices guided by the demands of the syllabus. The researcher observed that teachers lacked the pedagogic knowledge of handling young learners thus their instructional practices showed a dearth in their knowledge. They were not able to follow the demands of the syllabus effectively.

### **7.8.2 Recommendations for schools**

- From the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that schools provide mentoring for teachers who are posted to them, especially teachers who have to teach in the foundation phase. This recommendation is based on the fact that the teachers have not been trained to teach at foundation phase level. Moreover, during teaching practice, they are not allowed to teach Grade One learners and some schools do not even allow student teachers to teach Grade two. The first two grades are normally reserved for qualified teachers.
- The researcher also recommends that schools and communities start ‘Book drives’; campaigns that would ensure that every school has age-appropriate reading materials the learners would use. These reading materials should be within reach of the learners, so that there are no barriers in their access of the books. Foundation phase classrooms should have a literature corner for learners’ easy access to reading materials. This would help all learners develop their vocabulary and also keep fast learners occupied while teacher attends to slow learners.
- The study also recommends that all schools include reading time in the timetable; children should be spending more time on reading than is available at school. They should read at home on a regular basis, usually 20 to 30 minutes each evening. Parents should be assigned to send in signed forms indicating that children have done their home reading. This is in collaboration with the views of Anorl and Colburn (2006, p. 31) who said that the single most important factor for influencing a child’s early educational success is exposure to books and reading activities at home even before he or she begins school.
- It is also recommended that parent-teacher association be formed in the schools where there would be free communication between the teachers and the parents on best ideas

that could improve literacy teaching and learning in the foundation phase. The close link between teachers and parents would bridge the gap between home and schools and ensure that the learner gets the necessary support at both settings. This would also help parents understand the importance of parental engagement to support learners in the foundation phase as regular feedback on learner progress would be monitored by both teacher and parent and early remediation could be offered.

### **7.8.3 Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Training**

It is worth noting that these recommendations will need additional financial support from government to be realised.

- The researcher recommends that government implement the introduction of Grade 0 in all public schools so that the learners would have a common starting point before they enrol for Grade One. This would help save a lot of time that is wasted in Grade One trying to acclimatise the learners into the school environment and language use. They could all begin school on common ground having been prepared for Grade One at Grade 0. This could ease the pressure from the Grade One teachers and allow them to focus on devising and using better teaching methods.
- The researcher also recommends that government consider placing teachers who have specialised in Early Childhood Care Education to teach at foundation phase level (Grade 0-3). The findings showed that teachers who have not majored in Early Childhood Education (ECE) were not adequately equipped to engage young learners in literacy learning activities effectively as they lacked the pedagogic knowledge and training to do so. It is during the first grade that most children define themselves as good or poor readers. Therefore, literacy teaching in this grade should be prioritized.
- It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training through the Department of In-service training conduct regular and adequate workshops to support teachers in the teaching and learning of fundamental learning skills such as literacy. This would help strengthen the education system as teachers would be better equipped to teach these vital skills that are a backbone for lifelong learning.
- It is recommended that the National Curriculum Centre look into the literacy in English syllabus in Grade One critically and consider integrating contemporary instructional tools such as the use of digital technology and other Twenty-First century devices. The finding of this study showed that the integration of technology would ensure differentiated learning and increase both learner and teacher motivation.

#### **7.8.4 Recommendations for pre-service training**

- It is also recommended that teacher training colleges liaise with schools to allow student teachers to teach the Grade One class as well. This would give them an experience of working with diverse learners some of whom have different pre-school backgrounds and some who have never attended any preschool. The experience of teaching Grade One under the guidance of the class teacher and the college tutor would help the prospective teachers learn best practices from both the class teacher and the college tutor.

#### **7.8.5 Recommendations for further research**

This study looked at teachers' instructional practices in English literacy in the Grade One class and the focus was on two urban schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland and, consequently, the results cannot be generalised. The researcher has the following recommendations for further research:

- The researcher recommends that a study that would take a larger population of schools be carried out so that the results may be generalised. The population should be from different context; semi-urban and rural schools. The researcher believes that obtaining the views and experiences of the teachers from other contexts would give a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.
- This research study followed the case study design and sampling purposive and used four data-generation tools: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, focus group interviews and document analysis. It is recommended that a study that would use other research designs be undertaken to provide a deeper insight into the subject of study.
- The researcher recommends that the subject of literacy be researched from the point of view of parents who should be the first teachers of literacy. The researcher believes that exploring the role of parents in literacy development of children in the context of Swaziland would bring an important view that teachers could use to build on.

- The researcher also recommends that a longitudinal study that would focus on teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in all the foundation phase classes be undertaken so that a deeper explanation of what goes on at the foundation phase may be made. This would also show how instruction is carried out in the learners' progress from one grade level to the next.

The above-stated recommendations were based on the findings of this study that sought to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One. The researcher believes that implementing some of the suggestions made by the teachers who are actual implementers of the curriculum may improve learners' achievement in literacy in English in the foundation phase.

## **7.9 Chapter summary**

The fundamental aim of this study was to explore teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English with specific focus on the Grade One class. The researcher explored what instructional practices teachers used in their literacy in English classes; what influenced the practices they used; how they experienced the teaching of English literacy in the Grade One class and why they experienced the teaching of literacy in English in Grade One the way they did

To achieve this, the researcher used Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory. She looked at literacy teaching and learning from the point of view of this theory and saw classrooms as social contexts where literacy in English was practised and how the teachers mediated the teaching-learning process. The researcher was interested in understanding what activities they engaged learners in to help them learn literacy in English, a second language to the majority of the learners. She also wanted to understand what accounted for their classroom practices and their overall perspective of their job; teaching literacy in the second language to learners who have no common starting ground for school.

Relying on the socio-cultural theory opened the researcher's eyes to understanding how teachers carried out different activities in an effort to develop young learners' literacy in the second language. The activities in which the teachers engaged the learners showed that in practice teachers were half-facilitators for learning and half-transmitters for information to be learnt. Though in theory they claimed to be facilitators for learning, the transmission role could not be utterly ruled out in the Grade One classes observed. The researcher concluded

that a **‘blended model’** was suitable for young learners. Teachers’ explicit teaching of literacy concepts and a more interactive approach that allowed learner engagement with their peers through play activities was critical for the development of literacy in Grade One learners. This is because the researcher observed that learners were keener to engage in play activities such as drawing and reciting of poems. When such activities were done, even the quieter learners were seen talking and smiling in excitement. However, teachers seldom engaged the learners in play activities yet they were included in the Grade One books and syllabus.

The findings of this study showed that teachers’ understanding of their roles as facilitators for learning was clouded by the traditional ways of teaching, that of being transmitters of knowledge. Their classrooms were dominated by explicit teaching and they did their best to explain different concepts to the learners. Learners’ participation in the lessons was mainly through repetition of what the teacher said, for example, repeating pronouncing words and answering questions.

There were less hands-on activities, play activities and interaction among the learners, something that the socio-cultural theory of learning strongly advocates. Though all the teachers made an effort to use teaching-learning aids to facilitate learning, learners’ manipulation of these objects was not evident. The teachers were the ones who did most of the manipulation of objects and learners were more of observers of teacher in action than being active participants themselves. Influenced by the constructivist approach, the researcher believes that when a teacher is the one who is too active in the classroom, learners were lazy to even solve a problem within their normal ability. On the contrary, gradually removing scaffolds and engaging learners in more challenging activities helps them to develop problem-solving skills.

One notable thing about the three Grade One teachers who were interviewed and observed in their English literacy classrooms was that, though the classroom were crowded, the teachers knew their learners by name. They also had an understanding of the learners’ abilities. This was shown when they gave learners individual activities to do; they would pay particular attention to the struggling ones. This was the time when the teachers would explain for the individual learner. The problem was that not all learners who were struggling with a particular activity got the chance to get a one-on-one session with the teacher.

In addition, resilience has seen to be one aspect that Grade One teachers needed in order to be better equipped to guide multi-racial learners who are at different entry levels when they come to the literacy in English class was not an easy thing. The teachers interviewed stated that passion for the subject is what helped them cope under the trying conditions in the schools.

Furthermore, teacher resilience motivated teachers to organise internal workshops among themselves in the school. When the teachers realised that they were not adequately equipped to teach English literacy in the First Grade, they embarked on self-assistance strategies by conducting workshops among themselves. The teachers became more pro-active, instead of waiting for in-service training which was not adequately done due to lack of time and resources so the teachers empowered one another in the schools. They acknowledged the fact that, though they may have similar qualifications, they had different strengths on the grasp of specific concepts. The researcher recommends this practice highly in all schools. Learning from peers is not only restricted to learners because adults and professionals can also learn from one another. Collaboration among learners themselves and teachers at their work places is an important attribute of the socio-cultural theory which guides this study.

The researcher believes that the findings of the study will assist the teachers who are directly involved in the teaching and learning of literacy in the second language to Grade One learners to adopt some more learner-centred practices in their instructions and believes that, unless all stakeholders in the Ministry of Education and Training in Swaziland work collaboratively to improve the teaching and learning of literacy in English in the foundation phase, establishing a strong literacy foundation for life-long learning will remain a deferred dream.

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## **APPENDIXES**

### **APPENDIX A**

#### **REQUEST FOR OFFICIAL APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Ngwane Teachers College

P.O.Box 474

Nhlangano, Swaziland

10 April 2015

The Director of Education

Ministry of Education & Training

P.O. Box 39

Mbabane, Swaziland

Dear Madam

#### **RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

My name is Patience S. Dlamini, I am a Phd student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My student number is **213573747** and I am under the supervision of Professor A. Sheik in the School of Education, Edgewood Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I am a lecturer at Ngwane Teachers College that produces Primary school teachers. I am concerned about the poor literacy achievement among foundation phase learners and the high repetition rate at Grade One. As part of my doctoral studies (PhD), I am undertaking a study on:

**Exploring primary teachers' instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One:  
A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland**

I intend to conduct interviews, observations and focus group discussions with Grade One teachers in the two schools. I will provide the following undertaking:

- Participation in the study would be on a voluntary basis;
- School activities should not be disrupted;
- All information gathered from the participants will be kept confidential and used for this study only;
- I will follow the ethical code stipulated by the ethical clearance office; and
- Upon completion of the research study, a copy of the thesis will be handed to the Ministry of Education and Training.

My supervisor is Professor A. Sheik. His office is located in the School of Language, Literacy and Media Studies Building of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood Campus. Contact details: Tel: +27 745845221. E-Mail: sheik@ukzn.ac.za

Yours faithfully



Patience S, Dlamini

(Researcher)

**Telephone:** (W) +268 22078466/7

(C) +268 76132472

**Email:** [patiencesd33@gmail.com](mailto:patiencesd33@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX B

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH BY MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Government of the Kingdom of Swaziland



#### Ministry of Education & Training

Tel: (+268) 2 4042491/5  
Fax: (+268) 2 404 3880

P. O. Box 39  
Mbabane, SWAZILAND

4<sup>th</sup> May, 2015

**Attention:**

Head Teachers:

Evelyn Baring Primary School

Ngwane Practising Primary School

**THROUGH**

Shiselweni Regional Education Officer

Dear Colleague,

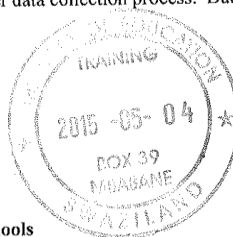
**RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL STUDENT – MS. PATIENCE S. DLAMINI**

1. Reference is made to the above mentioned subjects.
2. The Ministry of Education and Training has received a request from Ms. Patience S. Dlamini, a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, that in order for her to fulfill her academic requirements at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, she has to collect data (conduct research) and her study or research topic is: *Exploring Instructional Practices of Primary School Teachers in the Teaching and Learning of Literacy in Grade 1: A Case Study of Two Primary Schools in the Shiselweni Region of Swaziland*. The population for her study comprises of twelve teachers from the above mentioned schools and these teachers will include Grade 1 teachers from these schools. All details concerning the study are stated in the participants' consent form which will have to be signed by all participants before Ms. Dlamini begins her data collection. Please note that parents will have to consent for all the participants below the age of 18 years participating in this study.
3. The Ministry of Education and Training requests your office to assist Ms. Dlamini by allowing her to use above mentioned schools in the Shiselweni region as her research sites as well as facilitate her by giving her all the support she needs in her data collection process. Data collection period is 3 months.

Regards,

  
**DR. SIBONGILE M. MTSHALI-DLAMINI**  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

cc: Regional Education Officer – Shiselweni  
Chief Inspector – Primary  
2 Head Teachers of the above mentioned schools  
Prof. Ayub Sheik



## APPENDIX C

### REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM SCHOOL A

Ngwane Teachers College

P.O.Box 474

Nhlangano, Swaziland

10 April 2015

The Head teacher

School A Primary

P. O. Box 02

Nhlangano

S400.

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### **Request to conduct research study in your school**

This is to request your permission to allow me to conduct a research study in your school. I am a lecturer at Ngwane Teachers College, currently doing my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The title of my research study is:

#### **Exploring teachers instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland**

The general purpose of this study is to explore and understand the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 1. The research will involve conducting interviews with Grade One teachers and other teachers who will also participate in a focus group discussion. Apart from the semi-



structured interviews, I will need to carry out classroom observations where I will observe the teaching and learning of literacy lessons in their natural settings; Grade One classrooms.

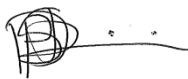
To achieve this, I request to be given access to the school for a period of six (6) months to generate data for the research study.

Kindly note that:

- Attempts will be made not to disrupt the day-to-day operations of the school;
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the school shall be upheld; and
- Data collected from the school will not be used to the detriment of the school and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study as well as any other publication that might arise from the study.

Should you require more information, please contact me on the contacts given below. You may also contact my supervisor Prof A. Sheik of the University of KwaZulu-Natal on cell No (+2774584522) Email: sheik@ukzn.ac.za. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



**Patience S. Dlamini**

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities: Faculty of Education (Curriculum Studies)

Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605

Durban, South Africa

Tel: +268 76132472

Email: patiencesd33@gmail.com

If you understand the contents of the letter and grant permission, please sign this declaration form.

### **Declaration Form**

I.....(full name of Head Teacher) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I give consent to the researcher to conduct her study at the school.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM SCHOOL B**

Ngwane Teachers College

P.O. Box 474

Nhlangano, Swaziland

10 April 2015

The Head teacher

School B Primary

P. O. Box 02

Nhlangano

S400.

Dear Sir/Madam,

#### **Request to conduct research study in your school**

This is to request your permission to allow me to conduct a research study in your school. I am a lecturer at Ngwane Teachers College, currently doing my PhD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa. The title of my research study is:

#### **Exploring teachers instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland**

The general purpose of this study is to explore and understand the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 1. The research will involve conducting interviews with Grade One teachers and other teachers who will also participate in a focus group discussion. Apart from the semi-

structured interviews, I will need to carry out classroom observations where I will observe the teaching and learning of literacy lessons in their natural settings; Grade One classrooms.

To achieve this, I request to be granted access to the school for a period of six (6) months to generate data for the research study.

Kindly note that:

- Attempts will be made not to disrupt the day-to-day operations of the school;
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the school shall be upheld; and
- Data collected from the school will not be used to the detriment of the school and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research study as well as any other publication that might arise from the study.

Should you require more information, please contact me on the contacts given below. You may also contact my supervisor Prof A. Sheik of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal on cell No (+2774584522) Email sheik@ukzn.ac.za. I look forward to your positive response.

Yours sincerely,



**Patience S. Dlamini**

University of KwaZulu-Natal: Edgewood Campus

College of Humanities: Faculty of Education (Curriculum Studies)

Private Bag X03, Ashwood, 3605

Durban, South Africa

Tel: +268 76132472

Email: patiencesd33@gmail.com

If you understand the contents of the letter and grant permission, please sign this declaration form.

### **Declaration Form**

I.....(full name of Head Teacher) hereby confirm that I have read and understood the contents of this letter and the nature of the research project and I grant permission to the researcher to conduct her study at the school.

## **APPENDIX E**

### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Ngwane Teachers College

P.O. Box 474

Nhlangano, Swaziland

10 April 2015

Dear Participant

#### **INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

My name is Patience S. Dlamini, student number 213573747. I am a Phd student under the supervision of Professor A. Sheik in the School of Education, Edgewood Campus University of KwaZulu-Natal. My PhD research is on literacy. The title of my study is:

**Exploring teachers instructional practices in literacy in English in Grade One: A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland**

Your school is one of the two schools where I will be conducting my research. In order to gather information for the research, you will be asked some questions, asked to participate in focus group discussions. Observation will also be conducted.

The information obtained from this study will be made available to you through a copy that will be given to the school administrator and may be kept in the school library to be accessed by anyone who has an interest in the teaching and learning of literacy in the foundation phase, Grade 1 in particular. The value of this research solely depends on your contribution as your perceptions and experiences of the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 1 form an integral part of this study.

Please note that:

- Your confidentiality is guaranteed as your inputs will not be attributed to you in person, but reported only as a population member opinion;
- The interview may last for about 1 hour and may be split depending on your preference;
- Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only; • Data gathered through the interview will be destroyed after submission of the thesis, audio tapes will be incinerated;
- You have a choice to participate, not participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action;
- The research aims to help the Swazi learners to improve their literacy skills;
- Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved; and
- If you are willing to be interviewed, please indicate (by ticking as applicable) whether or not you are willing to allow the interview to be recorded with the following equipment:

<b>Willing</b>	<b>Not Willing</b>
Audio equipment	
Video equipment	

I can be contacted at:

Email:patiencesd33@gmail.com

P.O. Box 474

Nhlangano

Swaziland

Cell: + 268 76132472

Work: + 268 22078466/ 7

As already mentioned above, my supervisor is Professor A. Sheik. His office is located in the School of Languages, Literacy and Media Studies Building of the University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood Campus. Contact details: Tel: +27 745845221. E-Mail: sheik@ukzn.ac.za

You may also contact the Research Office through:

**Phumelele Ximba**

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Research Ethics office: HSSREC

Private Bag X 54001

Durban, 4000

Telephone: + 2731 260 3587

Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za



## **APPENDIX F**

### **DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANTS**

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

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire and this decision will not affect me negatively. I understand that every effort will be made to keep my personal information confidential. I also understand that efforts will be made to provide me with feedback of the results of the completed research project.

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

---

DATE

#### **Additional consent to audio recording:**

In addition to the above, I hereby agree to the audio recording of this interview for the purposes of data capturing. I understand that no personal identifying information will be released in any form. I also understand that all recordings and manuscripts will be kept securely and be destroyed after all data capturing and analysis has been completed.

---

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

---

DATE

## **APPENDIX G**

### **FORMAT OF INTERVIEW**

#### **1. Introduction**

- Researcher introduces herself, welcomes and thanks interviewee for availing herself or himself;
- Interviewee introduction and filling in of biographic information;
- Researcher explains purpose and focus of the interview; and
- Researcher explains ethical conduct for the interview (confidentiality, respect and anonymity of the interviewee and the school).

#### **2. Questions:**

- The researcher poses questions and allows interviewee to respond; and
- Researcher guides interviewee when digression occurs.

#### **3. Closure:**

- Researcher thanks the interviewee; and
- Researcher requests permission to contact the interviewee to clarify any question that the researcher may have at a time convenient to the interviewee.

## APPENDIX H

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



01 June 2015

Ms Patience S Dlamini 213573747  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Dlamini

Protocol reference number: HSS/0424/015D

Project title: Exploring instructional practices of primary school teachers in the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 1: A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland.

#### Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 30 April 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

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

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

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

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

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Professor Ayub Shiek  
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor P Morojele  
cc School Administrator: Ms B Bhengu, Ms T Khumalo & Mr S Mthembu

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 3587/8350/4557 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 4808 Email: [ximbao@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbao@ukzn.ac.za) / [snymam@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:snymam@ukzn.ac.za) / [mohunp@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:mohunp@ukzn.ac.za)

Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)

1910 - 2010  
100 YEARS OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

## **APPENDIX I:**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS**

This form is designed to gather information on teachers' expertise and experience in their current profession which involves the teaching of English literacy in Grade 1.

**Please Tick next to the correct answer**

1. What is your position in the school

Foundation phase teacher-----, teacher-----, senior teacher-----

**Please Tick next to the correct answer**

2. What is your gender

Female-----

Male-----

3. What is your age range

22- 30-----, 31-39-----, 40-49-----, 50-60-----.

4. Experience as a teacher

0-5 years-----, 5-10 years-----, 11-20 years-----, 21-30 years-----, 31-40  
years

**Please fill in the blank spaces**

5. What is your highest qualification?

---

6. Are you employed as a permanent or temporary teacher

---

## **APPENDIX J:**

### **INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR GRADE 1 TEACHERS**

**Topic: Exploring teachers' instructional practices in literacy in Grade 1: A case study of two urban primary schools in the Shiselweni Region of Swaziland.**

1. What is your understanding of English literacy in your teaching of Grade 1?

-----  
-----  
-----

2. The English literacy curriculum comprises listening, speaking, reading, and writing, can you tell me how you teach each one of these skills?

**Listening:**-----

-----  
-----

**Speaking:**-----

-----  
-----

**Reading:**-----

-----  
-----

**Writing:**-----

-----  
-----

3. Why do you teach each one of these skills the way you do?

**Listening:**-----

-----

Speaking:-----

-----

Reading:-----

-----

Writing:-----

-----

4. Is there any alignment/relationship between the curriculum standards (stated in the syllabus) and your instructional practices?

-----

-----

-----

5. What resources do you find helpful in your teaching of literacy

-----

-----

-----

6. How do you ensure that there is an environment in your classroom that is conducive to the teaching of literacy??

-----

-----

-----

7. Which teaching strategies or methods do you find effective in your literacy classroom?

-----

-----

-----

-----  
-----  
8. How do you experience the teaching of Grade 1 English literacy in this school?

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

9. Is there any role that motivation plays in the learning and teaching of literacy (student and teacher motivation)

-----  
-----  
-----

10. What other factors influence your choice of the teaching and learning strategies you use in your Grade 1 English literacy class?

-----  
-----  
-----  
-----  
-----

11. In your experience, is there any knowledge that students bring to school and you find useful in your literacy class.

-----  
-----  
-----

12. Is there any way children learn literacy from one another

-----  
-----  
-----

13. How do you conduct literacy assessment in your classroom?

---

---

---

---

14. Are there any beliefs you hold about the teaching and learning of literacy?

---

---

---

15. Are there contextual dynamics involved your teaching and learning of literacy in Grade 1 (linguistic and cultural diversity) and how do you deal with them?

linguistic -----

---

---

cultural -----

---

---

16. In what way does the school administration partake in the teaching and learning of literacy?

---

---

---

---

17. Is there any role do you think parents can play to ensure that children learn literacy?--

---

---

---



18. How do you think the teaching and learning of literacy could be improved in Grade One if at all?

---

---

---

**Thank you**

## **APPENDIX K:**

### **QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. What is your understanding of English literacy?
2. As teachers what are your experiences of the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade 1?
3. What instructional practices do you find important when handling literacy in Grade One with regard to the following aspects:
  - a) Listening;
  - b) Speaking/ oral language;
  - c) Reading; and
  - d) Writing.
4. Why do you use the instructional practices you use in each of the literacy skills?
5. What is it that you find central in the teaching and learning of English literacy in Grade One?
6. In your experience are there any other factors you think influence the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade One?
7. Are there any challenges you have encountered in the teaching and learning of literacy in Grade One?
8. Are the students culturally and linguistically diverse (different), if yes how do you deal with this? (Some learners with languages and cultures different from the Swazi one).
9. Do you find your pre-service training adequate to equip you with the relevant knowledge to teach English literacy in the first grade?
10. How can teachers create a literacy environment in a Grade One classroom?
11. How can parents be incorporated in the teaching and learning of literacy?
12. How do you think the teaching and learning of literacy could be improved in Grade One if at all?

## **APPENDIX L:**

### **OBSERVATION SCHEDULES**

#### **Schedule 1 (classroom environment)**

1. The researcher will look at the appearance of the classroom; is it literacy friendly
  - Arrangements of desks;
  - Use of flash cards naming different objects;
  - Reading materials appropriate for Grade One students;
  - Students' writing on display; and;
  - Educational charts (weather, days of the week, months of the year etc.)
2. Teaching strategies used by the teacher in the teaching and learning of different components of literacy:
  - a) Oral language;
  - b) Reading;
  - c) Listening; and
  - d) Writing.
3. The teacher-student relationship. Is it conducive to the learning of literacy?
4. Literacy activities given to students.
5. Teachers' ways of overcoming challenges that may arise during the teaching and learning of literacy in the classroom.

#### **Schedule 2 (teaching-learning activities)**

1. How does the teacher accommodate different learners' abilities in the class?
2. Are there adequate teaching learning resources to enhance literacy in the class?
3. Was there an effort to utilise learners' knowledge?
4. Were the learners actively involved in the lesson?
5. Was the assessment of literacy appropriate, (aligned with the curriculum standards) to Grade One learners?
6. Is the assessment of literacy aligned to the curriculum standards stated in the syllabus (assessment objectives)?

**Schedule 3 (assessment activities)**

1. Were the instructions given to learners clear?
2. Were the learners able to complete tasks given?
3. How did the teacher assist struggling learners?
4. Was there any remedial element in the lesson?
5. How did the teacher motivate the learners?

## **APPENDIX M**

### **DOCUMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE**

Documents to be analysed include:

Syllabus

- Is there a literacy teaching component in the English syllabus the teachers use?

Scheme of work

- Is there a scheme of work prepared?
- What activities are in the scheme of work?

Lesson plan

- Is there a lesson plan for each lesson?
- What content goes into the lesson plan?

Prescribed text books (*Teachers' Guide, Pupil's books, and Pupil's work book*)

- Are there books available for literacy in English?
- Do all the learners have the books?
- Does the content in the books relate to what the syllabus states?

# TEACHER 1 (SCHOOL A)

Grade 1 English Language Test 2 April 2016

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

## Question 1 Spelling

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

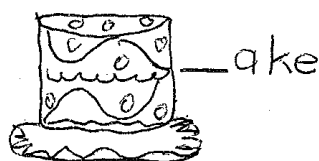
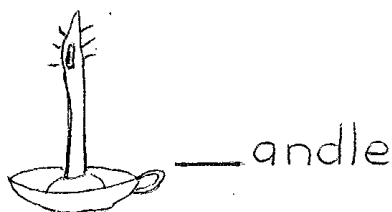
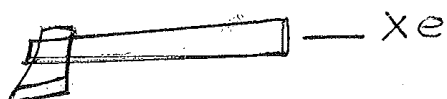
5. \_\_\_\_\_

[5]

## Question 2

Fill in the missing letter sound in the name next to the picture

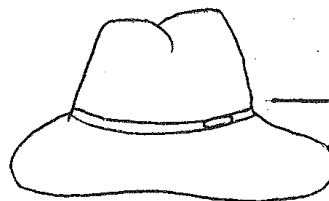
[10]



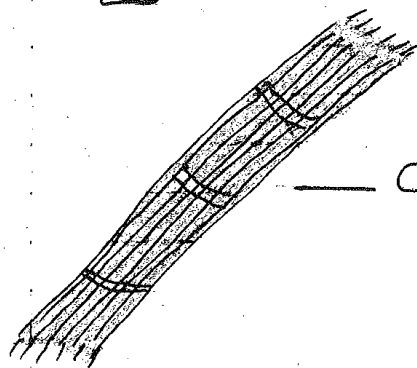
# TEACHER I (A look)



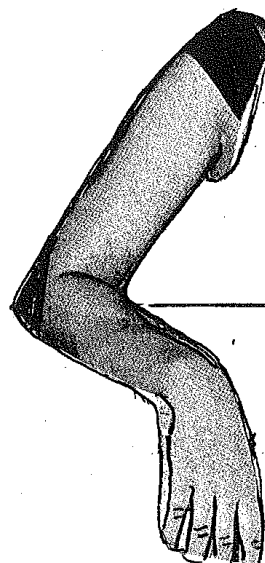
— up



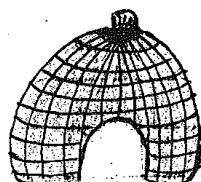
— at



— scarf



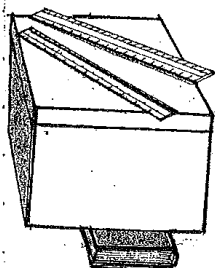
— arm



— hut

## Questions

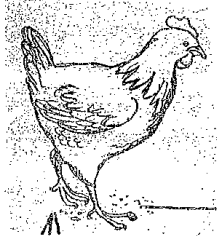
Where are they? Write: in,  
on, under in the blank  
spaces. [5]



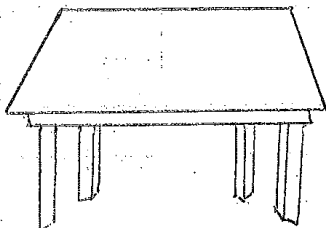
The book is \_\_\_\_\_  
the box.

# EXERCISE

1. Match the pictures with their correct names on the right side [5]



sun



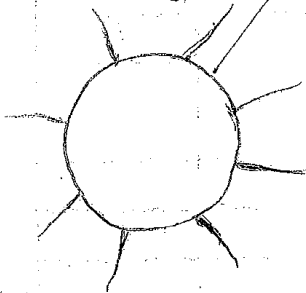
cat



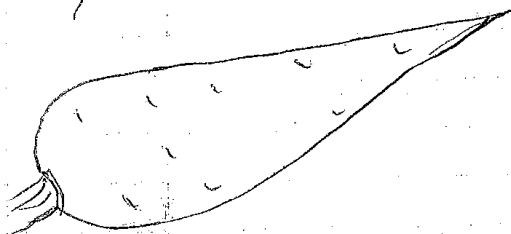
hen



ant



table



carrot



## APPENDIX O

### TEACHER 2 LITERACY IN ENGLISH TESTS GIVEN TO LEARNERS

Name : School B Teacher 2

English Test GRADE 1C July 2016


marks: 50 Answer all questions.

Question 1: (Myself)

1. My name is \_\_\_\_\_
2. My Surname is \_\_\_\_\_
3. I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
4. I am a boy / girl \_\_\_\_\_
5. I like the colour \_\_\_\_\_.


Prepositions: (on, in, under, next to)

Where is the ball ?

1.  \_\_\_\_\_ the chair.

2.  \_\_\_\_\_ the cup.

3.  \_\_\_\_\_ the cup.

4.  \_\_\_\_\_ the chair.

## Verb and Colour

Draw a line to the correct colour.

- |            |        |
|------------|--------|
| 1. Carrot  | Yellow |
| 2. meat    | White  |
| 3. banana  | red    |
| 4. milk    | green  |
| 5. Spinach | orange |
| 6. Orange  | orange |

## The present continuous tense (-ing)

1. Jump → Jumping
2. Sing → \_\_\_\_\_
3. wash → \_\_\_\_\_
4. walk → \_\_\_\_\_
5. Cook → \_\_\_\_\_

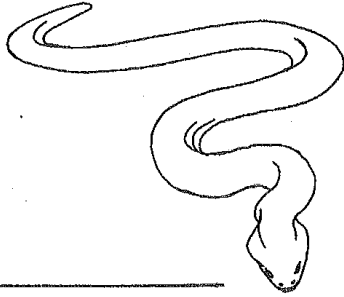
## Singular and Plural

one	many
1. book	books
2. dog	
3. ruler	
4. cup	
5. meat	
6. cat	

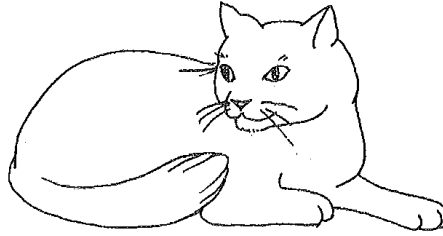
Question 3

Write their names on the line.

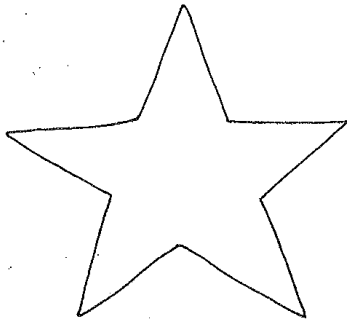
cake, snake, star, cat



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_\_\_

Write the missing letter.

1. C \_ w
2. d \_ sk
3. d \_ ll
4. W \_ ndow
5. t \_ ble.
6. C \_ r.

Question 4 • (listen to a story)

My dog



Answers

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

Spelling

- |          |           |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____  |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____  |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____  |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____  |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

Write big / small

1. This ball  is \_\_\_\_\_
2. This ball  is \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX P

TEACHER 3 LITERACY IN ENGLISH TESTS GIVEN TO LEARNERS

**Teacher 3 SCHOOL B**

QUESTION 1 NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in the blanks.

1. What is your name?  
my name is \_\_\_\_\_

2. How old are you?  
I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old.


3. Where do you live?  
I live in \_\_\_\_\_


4. I am a \_\_\_\_\_ (boy/girl)

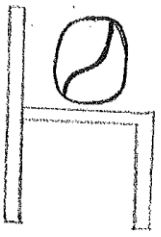
5. Which school do you go to?  
I go to \_\_\_\_\_


QUESTION 2

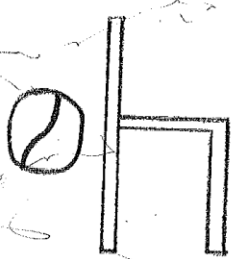
Where are the objects?  
Under, in, on, next to, behind

1.  \_\_\_\_\_

2.  \_\_\_\_\_

3.  \_\_\_\_\_

4.  \_\_\_\_\_

5.  \_\_\_\_\_

QUESTION 3

Change these verbs into the Present Continuous Tense.

verb	tense
run	running
mark	
sing	
count	
write	
bath	

QUESTION 4

Colour the following

1. The apple is green



2. The banana is yellow



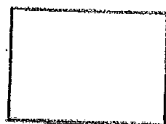
3. The tomato is red



4. Blue



5. Black



# QUESTION 5

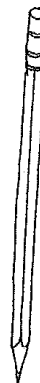
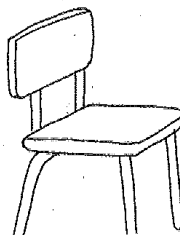
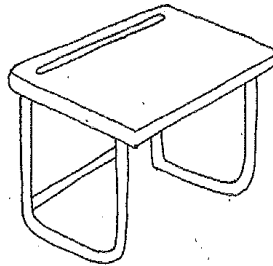
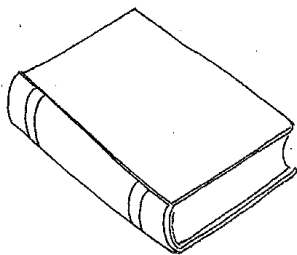
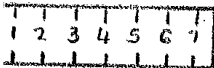
car, table, cook, lion, time, cow, candle, talk, line, tin, can, look, teeth, lid, lazy.

C	L
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

## QUESTION 6

name these classroom objects.

book, desk, chair, pencil, ruler



QUESTION 7

Fill in the missing letter

1. b - y

2. g - r l

3. d o - r

4. s - n

5. b - l l

QUESTION 8

Spelling

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

10. \_\_\_\_\_

Total Marks 50



## APPENDIX Q

### LANGUAGE EDITING CERTIFICATE

Asoka ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDITING

Declaration Certificate of THE  
the thesis



English LANGUAGE EDITING OF

*Exploring teachers' instructional practices in literacy-in-English in Grade One: A case study of two urban Primary schools in the Shiselweni region of Swaziland.*

Candidate: Dlamini P

#### DISCLAIMER

Whilst the English language editor has used electronic track changes to facilitate corrections and has inserted comments and queries in a right-hand column, the responsibility for effecting changes in the final, submitted document, remains the responsibility of the candidate in consultation with the supervisor/promoter.

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