



Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study



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DECLARATION

I, Lerato Moopelwa, declare that the study titled "***Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study***" is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in English and has never been submitted by me for a degree at this University or any other. I further declare that I planned and conducted this project alone, and that all materials used were appropriately cited and recognised.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the late Prof. Bernard Nchindila, who believed in my potential even during moments when I doubted myself. Your guidance, encouragement, and unwavering confidence in my abilities shaped this academic journey in profound ways. Thank you for serving as my supervisor and mentor. May your soul rest in eternal peace. I also dedicate this work to my sister, who has been the mother I never had. Your love, prayers, strength, and constant support carried me through the most challenging days, even when I felt like giving up. I would not have reached this milestone without you. Finally, I dedicate this study to myself for the resilience, discipline, and perseverance required to complete this journey. Through every obstacle, I remained committed to the goal, and this achievement stands as a testament to that determination.

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension remains a critical concern in South Africa, with many learners failing to acquire age-appropriate literacy skills in the early school years. The continued poor results in national and international testing, especially the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS), highlight the systemic nature of this challenge. PIRLS 2021 found that 81% of South African Grade 4 learners could not read for meaning in any language, failing to reach the lowest international benchmark for reading comprehension. This points to a foundational literacy crisis with long-term consequences for learners' academic progress. The current study investigated the reading-comprehension achievement of Grade 5 learners. It examined the instructional and environmental factors which influenced the development of literacy in both public and private schools at Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, in the North-West Province of South Africa.

A convergent mixed-methods case study approach was used to examine variations between English Home Language (HL) teaching in private schools and English FAL teaching in public schools. The quantitative data were collected using two PIRLS 2021 reading passages (informational and literary) and the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) checklist to assess literacy richness in classrooms with 85 Grade 5 learners. Qualitative data was gathered using semi-structured interviews and classroom observations with four Grade 5 English teachers.

The results indicated that most of the learners had simple decoding and retention ability, and struggled with higher-order comprehending accomplishment, e.g., inference, integrating and evaluating, especially in Test 2, which was the literature test. The performance of learners in the private HL schools was higher compared to public FAL schools, although the difference between several categories of classroom environment was not statistically significant, which shows that the general foundational literacy offers converge. The research clarifies that the convergence of mind processes influences the development of reading comprehension, the instructional methods and classroom setting, optimal language of teaching and the learner involvement.

The availability of resources alone was not sufficient to account for differences in reading comprehension outcomes. Instead, the findings point to the importance of systematic instruction that explicitly addresses the reading comprehension processes assessed in the study, together with consistent opportunities for learners to engage with literacy activities. These findings have implications for teacher professional development, assessment of literacy, and equitable literacy provision in multilingual and resource-constrained educational contexts. The observed differences in structured literacy engagement, classroom environments, and technological resources further suggest variation in the organization and enrichment of classroom literacy environments. Therefore, schools should prioritize ongoing teacher development in reading comprehension instruction strategies and ensure that available literacy resources are used purposefully to provide learners with regular opportunities to engage with texts.

OPSOMMING

Leesbegrip bly 'n kritieke bekommernis in Suid-Afrika, met baie leerders wat nie ouderdomsgeskikte geletterdheidsvaardighede in die vroeë skooljare ontwikkel nie. Die volgehoue swak prestasie in nasionale en internasionale toetse, veral die Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), beklemtoon die sistemiese aard van hierdie uitdaging. PIRLS 2021 het bevind dat 81% van Suid-Afrikaanse Graad 4-leerders nie vir betekenis in enige taal kan lees nie en nie die laagste internasionale maatstaf vir leesbegrip bereik nie. Dit dui op 'n grondliggende geletterdheidskrisis met langtermyngevolge vir leerders se akademiese vordering. Die huidige studie het die leesbegripsprestasie van Graad 5-leerders ondersoek. Dit het die onderrig- en omgewingsfaktore ondersoek wat die ontwikkeling van geletterdheid in beide openbare en private skole in die Dr Kenneth Kaunda-distrik in die Noordwes-provinsie van Suid-Afrika beïnvloed.

'n Konvergerende gemengde-metode gevallestudiebenadering is gebruik om verskille tussen Engels Huistaal (HT)-onderrig in privaatskole en Engels Eerste Addisionele Taal (EAT)-onderrig in openbare skole te ondersoek. Die kwantitatiewe data is ingesamel deur gebruik te maak van twee PIRLS 2021-leesgedeeltes (informatief en literêr) met 85 Graad 5-leerders, asook die Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP)-kontrolelys om die geletterdheidsrykheid in klaskamers te evalueer. Die kwalitatiewe data is versamel deur middel van semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude en klaskamerwaarnemings met vier Graad 5 Engels-onderwysers.

Die resultate het aangedui dat die meeste leerders oor basiese dekoderings- en onthouvermoë beskik, maar gesukkel het met hoërde-begripsvaardighede, soos afleiding, integrasie en evaluering, veral in Toets 2, wat die literêre toets was. Die prestasie van leerders in private HT-skole was oor die algemeen hoër as dié in openbare skole, hoewel die verskille tussen verskeie kategorieë van die klaskameromgewing nie statisties beduidend was nie, wat daarop dui dat die algemene grondliggende geletterdheidsaanbod ooreenstem. Die navorsing toon dat die samewerking van kognitiewe prosesse die ontwikkeling van leesbegrip beïnvloed, saam met onderrigmetodes, klaskameropset, die optimale onderrigtaal en leerderbetrokkenheid.

Die beskikbaarheid van hulpbronne alleen was nie voldoende om die verskille in leesbegripsuitkomst te verklaar nie. Die bevindinge dui eerder op die belangrikheid van sistematiese onderrig wat uitdruklik aandag gee aan die leesbegripsprosesse wat in die studie geassesseer is, tesame met konsekwente geleenthede vir leerders om aan geletterdheidsaktiwiteite deel te neem. Hierdie bevindinge het implikasies vir die professionele ontwikkeling van onderwysers, assesseringsgeletterdheid en billike geletterdheidsvoorsiening in meertalige en hulpbronbeperkte onderwyskontekste. Die waargenome verskille in gestruktureerde geletterdheidsbetrokkenheid, klaskameromgewings en tegnologiese hulpbronne dui verder op variasie in die organisering en verryking van geletterdheidsomgewings in klaskamers. Daarom behoort skole deurlopende professionele ontwikkeling van onderwysers in

leesbegripsonderrigstrategieën te prioriseer en te verseker dat beskikbare geletterdheidshulpbronne doelgerig gebruik word om leerders gereelde geleenthede te bied om met tekste om te gaan.

KAKARETSO

Go tlhaloganya se se balwang e santse e le bothata jo bogolo kwa Aforika Borwa, ka gonne bontsi jwa baithuti ba palelwa ke go fitlhelela bokgoni jwa go bala le go tlhaloganya jo bo tshwanetseng dingwaga tsa bona mo dingwageng tsa ntlha tsa sekolo. Diphetho tse di tswelelang di le kwa tlase mo ditekong tsa bosetšhaba le tsa boditšhabatšhaba, segolo jang mo go Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), di bontsha gore bothata jo ke jwa tsamaiso yotlhe ya thuto. PIRLS 2021 e fitlhetse gore 81% ya baithuti ba Mophato wa 4 kwa Aforika Borwa ga ba kgone go bala ka go tlhaloganya mo puong nngwe le nngwe, mme ga ba fitlhelela maemo a a kwa tlase a boditšhabatšhaba a go tlhaloganya se se balwang. Se se supa bothata jo bo tseneletseng jwa motheo wa kitso ya go bala, jo bo nang le ditlamorago tsa lobaka lo loleele mo katlegong ya dithuto tsa baithuti. Patlisiso eno e ne ya sekaseka maemo a go tlhaloganya se se balwang mo baithuting ba Mophato wa 5. E ne ya sekaseka mabaka a a amanang le thuto le tikologo ya thuto a a amang tlhabololo ya kitso ya go bala mo dikolong tsotlhe tsa puso le tsa poraefete mo kgaolong ya Dr Kenneth Kaunda, kwa Porofenseng ya Bokone-Bophirima ya Aforika Borwa.

Go dirisitswe mokgwa wa patlisiso o o kopanyang mekgwa e e farologaneng (mixed-methods case study) go sekaseka dipharologanyo tsotlhe magareng ga go ruta Seesemane e le Puo ya Gae (HL) mo dikolong tsa poraefete le Seesemane e le Puo ya Ntlha ya Tlaleletso (FAL) mo dikolong tsa puso. Datha ya dipalo e ne ya kokoanngwa ka go dirisa ditemana tse pedi tsa PIRLS 2021 (tsa tshedimosetso le tsa dingwalo) le baithuti ba le 85 ba Mophato wa 5, mmogo le lenane la tlhahlobo la Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) go lekola maemo a tikologo ya go bala mo diphaposeng. Datha ya boleng e ne ya kokoanngwa ka dipuisano tse di rulagantsweng ka fa gare le tsotlhe tsotlhe tsa phaposi ya borutelo le barutabana ba bane ba Seesemane ba Mophato wa 5.

Diphetho di bontshitse gore bontsi jwa baithuti ba na le bokgoni jwa motheo jwa go bala mafoko (decoding) le go gakologelwa, mme ba thatafalelwa ke bokgoni jwa maemo a a kwa godimo jwa go tlhaloganya, jaaka go dira dikakanyo (inference), go kopanya dikakanyo le go sekaseka, segolo jang mo Tekong ya 2 e e neng e le ya dingwalo. Tiriso ya baithuti mo dikolong tsa poraefete (HL) e ne gantsi e le kwa godimo go feta ya mo dikolong tsa puso, le fa go ntse jalo dipharologanyo mo dikarolong tse di farologaneng tsa tikologo ya phaposi di ne di se botlhokwa ka dipalo, se se bontshang gore metheo ya kitso ya go bala e a tshwana. Patlisiso e bontsha gore tisanommogo ya ditsamaiso tsa tlhaloganyo e ama tlhabololo ya go tlhaloganya se se balwang, mmogo le mekgwaya go ruta, tikologo ya phaposi, puo e e dirisiwang go ruta le seabe sa moithuti.

Go nna teng ga didirisiwa fela go ne go sa lekana go tlhalosa dipharologano mo dipoelong tsa go tlhaloganya se se balwang. Go na le moo, diphitlhelelo di bontsha botlhokwa jwa thuto e e rulaganeng sentle le e e tswelletseng, e e lebisang ka tlhamalalo mo ditsamaisong tsa go tlhaloganya se se balwang

tse di neng tsa sekasekwa mo thutong eno, mmogo le go naya barutwana ditshono tse di tswelelang tsa go nna le seabe mo ditirong tsa go ithuta go bala le go kwala. Diphithlelelo tseno di na le ditlamorago mo tlhabololong ya borutabana ka go tswelela, mo bokgoning jwa barutabana jwa go tlhaloganya le go dirisa tekanyetso, le mo phithlelelong e e lekalekaneng ya ditshono tsa go ithuta go bala le go kwala mo dikonteksteng tsa thuto tse di dirisang dipuo di le mmalwa le tse di nang le ditlamelo tse di lekanyeditsweng. Dipharologano tse di lemogilweng mo go nneng le seabe ka tsela e e rulagantsweng mo ditirong tsa go ithuta go bala le go kwala, mo tikologong ya diphaposi tsa borutelo le mo didirisiweng tsa thekenoloji di supa gape dipharologano mo tseleng e tikologo ya go ithuta go bala le go kwala e rulagantsweng le go humisiwa ka yone mo diphaposing tsa borutelo. Ka jalo, dikolo di tshwanetse go baya kwa pele tlhabololo e e tswelelang ya barutabana mo mekgweng ya go ruta go tlhaloganya se se balwang, mme di netefatse gore didirisiwa tse di leng teng tsa go ithuta go bala le go kwala di dirisiwa ka maikaelelo go naya barutwana ditshono tse di tlwaelegileng tsa go dirisana le ditemana.

Key terms

reading comprehension, reading instruction, Grade 5, English home language, English first additional language, public schools, private schools, classroom literacy environments

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANA	Annual National Assessments
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CLASS	Classroom Assessment Scoring System
CLEP	Classroom Literacy Environment Profile
DIF	Differential Item Functioning
ESL	English as a Second Language
FAL	First Additional Language
FVR	Free Voluntary Reading
HL	Home Language
LiEP	The Language in Education Policy
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NWU	North-West University
ORF	Oral reading fluency
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
RMT	Rasch Measurement Theory
SCT	Social Constructivist Theory
SPSS	Statistical Package of the Social Sciences
WSS	Wordworks Story Spark

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	II
DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	IV
ABSTRACT	V
OPSOMMING	VI
KAKARETSO	VIII
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	XI
LIST OF FIGURES.....	XVI
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background and conceptualization	1
1.2 Problem Statement.....	5
1.3 Research Objectives	6
1.4 Research Questions	6
1.5 Research Approach.....	7
1.5.1 Literature Review.....	7
1.5.2 Empirical Study (Research Methods).....	8
1.6 Significance of the Study	10
1.7 Limitations of the Study	10
1.8 Chapter Breakdown.....	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	12
2.1 Introduction.....	12
2.2 Reading Comprehension Performance	13
2.2.1 Reading Comprehension Conceptualization	14
2.2.2 Reading Comprehension and Multilingualism	14
2.2.3 The Transition from “Learning to Read” to “Reading to Learn”	17
2.2.4 Reading Comprehension Performance Trends and Evaluation.....	18
2.2.5 Literacy Interventions and Instructional Support	20

2.3	Classroom Literacy Level and its Effect on Comprehension of Reading	21
2.3.1	Physical Classroom Environment	22
2.3.2	The Availability of Resources	23
2.3.3	Learner Engagement and Social Interaction in Reading	26
2.4	Implementation of Reading Comprehension Instruction.....	28
2.4.1	Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction Models	29
2.4.2	Teacher Reading Instruction Practices and Professional Development	29
2.4.3	Strategy-Based Instruction and Scaffolding	31
2.4.4	Effective Teaching Practices	33
2.5	Reading Literacy Theoretical Framework	34
2.6	Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		38
3.1	Introduction.....	38
3.2	Research Paradigm.....	38
3.3	Research Design and Approach	39
3.4	Research Site.....	40
3.5	Population	40
3.5.1	Sampling Techniques	41
3.5.2	Selection Criteria	42
3.6	Data Collection Methods.....	43
3.6.1	Quantitative Data Collection Tools.....	44
3.6.2	Qualitative Data Collection Tools.....	46
3.6.3	Incorporation of Data Collection Tools	47
3.7	Data Collection Procedure.....	48
3.8	Data Analysis Procedures	52
3.8.1	Quantitative Data Analysis.....	52
3.8.2	Qualitative Data Analysis.....	53
3.8.3	Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data (Side-by-Side Analysis)	57

3.9	Ethical Considerations	58
3.9.1	Ethical Procedures	59
3.9.2	Benefits and Potential Risks	60
3.10	Validity and Reliability	61
3.10.1	Validity	61
3.10.2	Reliability	62
3.11	Summary	63
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....		65
4.1	Introduction.....	65
4.2	Overview of the Data Analysis	66
4.3	Quantitative Data Analysis.....	67
4.3.1	Progress In Reading Literacy Study Results.....	67
4.3.2	Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP)	76
4.3.3	Summary of the Quantitative Results.....	100
4.4	Qualitative Data Analysis.....	100
4.4.1	Theme 1: Classroom Literacy Environment and Resource Availability.....	101
4.4.2	Theme 2: Instructional Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension.....	104
4.4.3	Theme 3: Learner Engagement and Participation in Reading Activities	109
4.4.4	Theme 4: Assessment and Feedback Practices	113
4.4.5	Theme 5: Challenges and Constraints in Teaching Reading Comprehension.....	117
4.5	Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings.....	122
4.5.1	Convergences Across Data	123
4.5.2	Divergences Across Data	126
4.6	Summary	128
CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS		130
5.1	Introduction.....	130
5.2	Summary of the Study	131
5.3	Summary of Key Findings.....	132

5.4	Overview of Key Findings	135
5.5	Implications of the Study.....	137
5.5.1	Implications for the Framework.....	138
5.5.2	Implications for Practice.....	139
5.5.3	Implications for Research	141
5.6	Recommendations.....	141
5.6.1	Practice and Policy Recommendations.....	142
5.6.2	Future Research Recommendation	143
5.7	Limitations of the Study	144
5.8	Concluding Remarks	146
REFERENCE LIST		148
APPENDICES.....		157
Appendix A: PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test.....		157
PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test 1.....		157
PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test 2.....		162
Appendix B: Classroom Observation Checklist.....		170
Appendix C: Lesson Observation Checklist		175
Appendix D: Semi-Structured Teacher Interview		179
ANNEXURES		181
Annexure A: NWU-HSS-REC Ethics Approval Letter of Study		181
Annexure B: NW Department of Education Approval Letter of Study		183
Annexure C: Participant Information Leaflet		184
Annexure D: Teacher Participant Consent Form		190
Annexure E: Parental Consent Form		197
Annexure F: Learner Participant Assent Form		205
Annexure G: Ethics Certification.....		211
Annexure H: Editor's letter		212

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1: PIRLS Test 1 and 2 data Interpretation: School A (Private School, English HL)68

Figure 4.2: PIRLS Test 1 and 2 data Interpretation: School B (Public School, English FAL) 69

Figure 4.3: Box plot Interpretation: School C (Private School, English HL)..... 70

Figure 4.4: Box plot Interpretation: School D (Public School, English FAL) 71

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1: Data collection timeline	48
Table 3.2: Demographic Characteristics of Learner Participants	51
Table 3.3: Initial Codes.....	54
Table 3.4: Preliminary Themes.....	55
Table 3.5: Reviewed Themes.....	56
Table 3.6: Final Themes.....	56
Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for School.....	68
Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for School B (Public – English FAL)	69
Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for School C (Private – English HL).....	70
Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for School D (Public – English FAL)	71
Table 4.5: Comparative Summary – Private (HL) vs Public (FAL) Schools.....	72
Table 4.6: Independent Samples t-test for PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 (Public vs Private Schools).....	73
Table 4.7: Independent Sample t-test (Effect size) for PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 (Public vs Private Schools).....	74
Table 4.8: Two-Way ANOVA of PIRLS Scores by School Type and Individual School	75
Table 4.9: Descriptive statistics for CLEP results of the individual schools (Part 1)	78
Table 4.10: Descriptive statistics for CLEP results of the individual schools (Part 2)	81
Table 4.11: Comparison of Classroom Literacy Environment Indicators by School Type Using Independent Samples t-Tests.	85
Table 4.12: Comparison of Classroom Literacy Environment Indicators by School Type Using Independent Samples t-Tests.	86
Table 4.13: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Environment Rating and Type of School.....	88

Table 4.14: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Quantity of Literacy Tools and School Type	89
Table 4.15: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Utility of Literacy Tools and School Type.....	90
Table 4.16: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Quantity of Text Materials and School Type	91
Table 4.17: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Print Used in the Classroom and School Type.....	92
Table 4.18: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Format and Content of Text Materials and School Type.....	93
Table 4.19: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Literacy Product Displays and School Type.....	94
Table 4.20: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Availability of Reference Materials and School Type.....	95
Table 4.21: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Availability of Writing Utensils and School Type.....	96
Table 4.22: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Technological Resources and School Type	97
Table 4.23: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Library Provision and School Type.....	98
Table 4.24: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Participation in Literacy Events and School Type.....	98
Table 4.25: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Authentic Literacy Events and School Type	99

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and conceptualization

Reading comprehension is one of the basic cognitive abilities needed to succeed academically and grow intellectually (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). It is that of deriving meaning from texts, conceptualising complex ideas and thinking critically. It involves the combination of decoding, vocabulary knowledge, working memory, and metacognitive regulation (Kirby, 2007; Zimmerman, 2017). Nevertheless, Elleman and Oslund (2019) assert that reading comprehension is a complex process that is level-based and hard to both teach and examine. More so, studies often indicate that proficient readers are likely to achieve better in school subjects (Matjila & Pretorius, 2004). However, in multilingual education settings like South Africa, building reading comprehension in the Intermediate Phase level (Grades 4–6) has been a longstanding issue, especially as learners transition from learning to read to reading to learn. In Grade 5, learners are expected to work independently with a variety of texts, beyond basic reading, to construct meaning and transfer information across subjects (Department of Basic Education, 2011a).

Reading comprehension outcomes have emerged as a growing concern in South African education. Access to schooling has grown significantly since 1994, but literary achievement has been unequal and, in numerous places, appallingly low. International assessments, especially the PIRLS, have proven that a significant percentage of learners in South Africa have difficulties constructing meaning from what they read by the time they exit the Intermediate Phase (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Mullis *et al.*, 2023). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2021 report showed that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not attain the lowest reading benchmark, meaning that a considerable proportion of learners' transition to the Intermediate Phase without having fully developed reading comprehension abilities (Roux *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, this transition has everlasting academic implications because reading becomes the key channel through which academic knowledge is accessed and processed. Learners with limited comprehension skills are consequently at heightened risk of underperformance across content subjects, where the ability to interpret instructions, analyse information and engage critically with texts is assumed rather than explicitly taught.

In the South African context, language is also an important consideration when interpreting reading performance. Research examining South African PIRLS data has demonstrated the importance of considering language interpreting reading assessment results, particularly in multilingual educational contexts (Roux *et al.*, 2022). South Africa recognises 12 official languages (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2023). Notwithstanding this constitutional multilingualism, English functions as the dominant Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in most schools beyond the

Foundation Phase (Department of Basic Education, 2023). This linguistic shift presents pedagogical challenges, particularly in contexts where English is acquired as an additional language rather than as a home language. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP), promulgated by the Department of Basic Education (2011b), permits learners to receive instruction in their home language during the Foundation Phase (Grades R–3).

Although this transition is policy-based and typical of most public schools, studies show that in most cases it takes place prior to the learners attaining adequate academic skills in English, which creates a Grade 4 slump (Heugh, 2018; Cummins, 2000). The early transition to English as the LoLT may result in learners being able to decode English texts while struggling, to construct meaning, particularly when reading comprehension requires inference, interpretation, and evaluation. The reading struggles that learners experience are sometimes as a result of socioeconomic factors. Urban and higher-income schools have larger amounts of books, fewer learners, and more instructional resources, but many of the public schools, especially those around historically disadvantaged communities, have fewer resources and often have overcrowded classrooms (Spaull, 2015; Pretorius & Spaull, 2019).

This current study considers school type and language of learning and teaching as important contextual dimensions. The comparison between public and private schools provides an opportunity to examine similarities and differences in learner reading comprehension performance and classroom literacy environments across the selected educational settings. This comparison provides a basis for examining how differences in classroom resources, learning conditions, and instructional practices are reflected within the participating schools. South African PIRLS 2021 results validated the fact that there are high-performance disparities between learners in more affluent settings and underserved settings (Mullis *et al.*, 2023). Such differences imply that the issue of literacy development can never be documented in only specific terms of personal cognitive capacity. Instead, it forms a close relationship with reading comprehension instructional practices, classroom settings, and structural provisions to a wider extent.

Reading comprehension instructional practices refer to practices through which teachers support learners in understanding texts, including instructional strategies, questioning practices, learner participation and additional support during reading lessons. These dimensions are considered important because learners' opportunities to engage with texts and the instructional practices used to support comprehension form part of the context in which reading development occurs. Research notes that explicit and strategy-based reading teaching is crucial in facilitating the development of comprehension (Elston *et al.*, 2022; Mbambo-Marimirofa *et al.*, 2023). In addition, research across different educational contexts have shown that learners' reading comprehension can be supported when teachers purposely teach and model comprehension strategies, including vocabulary

development, marking inference, summarisation, questioning, and connecting information within and beyond the text (National Reading Panel, 2000; Pearson & Duke, 2002; Pretorius & Murray, 2023). South African studies have similarly emphasised the importance of explicit reading comprehension instruction and have reported challenges in teachers' knowledge and implementation of reading strategies, particularly in English First Additional language (EFAL) context (Cekiso, 2017; Madikiza *et al.*, 2018; Fatyela *et al.*, 2021; Tibe, 2023). Nevertheless, there are differences in the implementation of such strategies in different classrooms, which are driven by teacher training, availability of materials, and contextual constraints. In other instances, reading instruction is focused on surface decoding and preparation for assessment rather than the development of deeper reading comprehension processes.

However, these instructional patterns do not occur in isolation but are shaped by broader socio-cultural and institutional conditions within the education system. Within the South African context, such conditions have contributed to marked inequalities between public and private schools, particularly in relation to literacy instruction and learner performance. In private schools, learners benefit from an increased amount of flexibility in the curriculum delivery, and enrichment activities and literacy programmes are more organised. On the other hand, in public schools, there are sets of systems that are restrictive when it comes to resources and policies, such as more learners, limited access to reading materials, and policy-driven pacing requirements.

Despite structural differences between public and private schools, there remains a need for classroom-based research that examines how instructional practices and literacy environments in these contrasting contexts influence learners' reading comprehension outcomes. Classroom literacy environment refers to the literacy-related conditions within the classroom, including the availability and accessibility of reading, print resources displays, and opportunities for learners to engage with reading literacy. The current study, therefore, aims to compare Grade 5 learners' reading achievement and explore the instructional and classroom environmental factors that may account for observed differences between school contexts. This dimension was examined using the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP).

Reading comprehension does not occur independent of the classroom context. Using the PIRLS theoretical framework, this study positions the conceptualised reading literacy as the ability to construct meaning from written texts for both literary experience and the acquisition and use of information (Mullis & Martin, 2019). Within this framework, reading comprehension involves processes such as retrieving explicitly stated information, making inferences, interpreting ideas, and evaluating textual content. The framework acknowledges the fact that reading comprehension is influenced not only by cognitive processes but also by the contextual conditions in which learners engage with texts. Through the data analysis of Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension

performance and the classroom literacy conditions and reading literacy instruction methods used by teachers, this study aimed to provide a contextualised understanding of the reading comprehension development between public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District.

Reading Comprehension performance provides evidence of what the learners demonstrate when engaging with the texts, and the classroom literacy environment provides information about the literacy resources and conditions available to the learners, while the examination of the reading comprehension instructional practices provide insights into how teachers supported learners' understanding and engagement with the texts. Together these dimensions enabled the study to address national issues of concern, focusing on the achievement of literacy, and to report on how the school context, instructional practice and availability of resources combined, influenced reading comprehension outcomes in the Intermediate Phase. The approach is consistent with the PIRLS framework, which views reading literacy as the interaction between the reader, the text, the purposes for reading, and the context in which reading occurs (Mullis & Martin, 2015). The PIRLS framework was used in the study because its reading comprehension processes align with the PIRLS-based assessment used to examine the Grade 5 learners reading comprehension performance. However, the framework does not fully account for the linguistic complexities of multilingual classrooms, particularly where learning takes place in a language that may differ from the language used in their homes.

Although curriculum changes and continuous national literacy campaigns have been conducted, national and international assessment results continue to show limited improvement in foundational reading outcomes. The PIRLS 2021 findings, conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, show that four out of five South African learners fail to demonstrate basic comprehension skills by the end of Grade 4 (Department of Basic Education, 2023; Mtambo & Tshuma, 2023). These reading problems are pronounced in English, which is taught as the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) from Grade 4 and above. Subsequently, learners were unable to retrieve explicitly stated information from short and simple texts.

These findings of the PIRLS suggest that systemic interventions have not yet translated into measurable improvements in reading comprehension proficiency at scale. The learners' reading struggles are often influenced by the interaction of multiple factors at the learner, classroom, and school-level dynamics. Such disparities in schools, literacy classroom environments, and instruction also present issues of equity, quality, and accessibility to effective reading comprehension instruction. In this context, it is important to examine the role that classroom literacy settings and teaching methods play on the reading comprehension of Grade 5. Grade 5 is an important stage in the Intermediate Phase, during which learners are increasingly required to read independently and use texts to acquire knowledge across the curriculum. At this stage, learners are expected to engage

with increasingly complex texts and demonstrate comprehension processes that extend beyond basic decoding (Department of Basic Education, 2011; Mullis & Martin, 2015). Therefore, Grade 5 was selected to provide insight into how learners' reading comprehension develops beyond the early primary grades and how classroom conditions and instructional practices may support or constrain this development.

1.2 Problem Statement

Even though reading comprehension is one of the fundamental requirements for the Grade 5 curriculum, a significant number of learners are still reported to be experiencing comprehension deficits (Department of Basic Education, 2023). Teachers and reading literacy researchers have also raised concerns about the distinction between learners' ability to read passages aloud and their ability to construct meaning from what they read and answer questions about texts, especially the questions demanding inferences, combinations of ideas, or analysis (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Mtambo & Tshuma, 2023). The observed gap between decoding proficiency and meaningful comprehension suggests that learners are not being adequately supported in developing higher-order reading skills, such as inference-making, interpretation, and critical engagement with texts (Mullis & Martin, 2015; Tiba, 2023).

It is noted that the nature of the classroom-level factors (e.g., the quality of the literacy setting, access to and utilisation of reading materials, the approach followed by the teachers) is strongly associated with the reason behind the development of comprehension difficulties (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). These issues are also compounded in situations with multilingualism, in which there is little exposure to the outside classroom and where instructional methods can emphasise surface-level reading, which does not lead to meaning-making (Fleisch, 2008).

Nevertheless, despite the increased awareness level for these concerns about reading comprehension in South Africa, there is still a need for a study that examines how learner reading comprehension performances relates to the classroom literacy environment and reading instruction in the Intermediate Phase. The existing literature focused more on the learners' reading outcomes through large-scale assessments or on early-grade literacy development in the Foundation Phase rather than on Intermediate Phase classroom-level instructional practices (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Spaull, 2023). Consequently, less attention has been given to how the availability and use of literary resources, teachers' approaches to reading comprehension instruction, and learners demonstrated reading comprehension performance interact within Grade 5 classrooms. Therefore, this creates a knowledge gap in understanding how reading comprehension is taught and supported during the Intermediate Phase, particularly in various school settings.

The purpose of this study was to investigate Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English Home Language and First Additional Language, and to examine how classroom literacy environments and instructional strategies influence comprehension outcomes in 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North West Province. The study focused on four participating schools, comprising two public schools and two private schools and involved Grade 5 learners and their English teachers. The study aimed to provide a contextualised understanding of reading comprehension development in English Intermediate-Phase classrooms, informed by both learner performance data and teachers' instructional experiences.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of the current study are:

1. To measure the reading comprehension performance of Grade 5 learners in English Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL) in public and private schools in Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of North-West Province by administering two reading comprehension tests based on the adapted Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assessment.
2. To examine the classroom literacy environments in the 4 selected schools by using the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) checklist to document the availability of literary resources, such as reading materials and literacy displays, in Grade 5 classrooms.
3. To investigate how reading comprehension instruction is implemented in the 4 selected schools by conducting English reading lessons observations and semi-structured interviews with the Grade 5 English teachers to explore their instructional practices and strategies for developing reading comprehension skills in the selected schools.

1.4 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this current study:

1. What is the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English HL and FAL in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it differ between 2 public and 2 private schools?
2. What is the classroom literacy environment for Grade 5 learners in 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it vary between them?
3. How is reading comprehension instruction implemented between 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of North-West Province, particularly with regard

to the teaching of inference, interpretation, integration of ideas, evaluation, and the instructional strategies teachers use to support learners' reading comprehension development?

Research questions 1 and 2 were answered using a quantitative research approach with a 2016 PIRLS reading test measure and classroom literacy environment profile, whereas question 3 was answered using qualitative measures of lesson and classroom observations and teacher interviews.

1.5 Research Approach

To achieve the research objectives and address the research questions, the study comprised two complementary components, namely a literature review and an empirical investigation. The literature review provided the theoretical and conceptual foundation for the study, while the empirical component generated both quantitative and qualitative data to examine Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance and the instructional and environmental factors associated with it in the four selected public and private schools.

1.5.1 Literature Review

The literature review, presented in Chapter 2, focuses on several interrelated components that influence reading comprehension development. It begins by exploring operational definitions of reading comprehension, drawing on cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural perspectives to frame reading as a multidimensional process which extends beyond the accuracy of decoding. The review further examines the contribution of the higher-order comprehension processes in the development of literacy by assessing how vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, inferential reasoning, and metacognitive strategies influence the development of meaning-making. It also considers the LoLT in the South African multilingual environment, particularly the transition from home-language teaching in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3) to English as the LoLT in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6). The analysis questions how this language change can affect the development of reading comprehension, especially among learners of English as a First Additional Language.

Moreover, socioeconomic and contextual factors affecting reading outcomes, such as resource and literacy support between public and private schools, are discussed in the literature review. The classroom literacy environment is also explored in terms of print-rich materials' availability, structured literacy programmes, and opportunities for meaningful engagement with texts. The review also considers the instructional practices that are linked with effective reading comprehension development, which includes explicit strategy instruction and the pedagogical approach of the teacher. Lastly, the findings of national and international assessments, especially those that arise out of PIRLS and South African literacy research, are discussed to situate the current study within

broader empirical trends. Collectively, these components establish the conceptual and contextual framework of the current empirical research.

The study is guided by the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework, developed by the International Association to the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, in which the concept of reading literacy is defined as the learners' ability to retrieve information, make inferences, interpret ideas, and evaluate textual content (Mullis *et al.*, 2016). Furthermore, the PIRLS framework focuses on three dimensions in the relationship with one another: the reasons behind reading, the cognitive processes of reading comprehension, and the factors that influence the development of reading.

The framework is relevant to this study because it underpins the examination of reading comprehension through adapted PIRLS-based tests. These tests distinguish between reading to obtain and use information and reading for literary experience, both common among Grade 5 learners. The framework also recognises some of the important processes of reading comprehension, such as the retrieval of information, inference, interpreting thoughts and assessment of content. These processes were used as an analytical lens to examine the performance of learners and the teachers' reading comprehension instructional practices. Subsequently, the analysis of these processes, together with the examination of classroom literacy environment and instructional practices, provided a basis to determine how these factors influence the reading comprehension processes of learners.

1.5.2 Empirical Study (Research Methods)

The empirical component of the study employed a mixed-method research approach to examine reading comprehension scores and the classroom-level factors in the four participating schools; two public and two privates in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. The selection of multiple schools allowed a comparative analysis across different educational contexts. The research approach was used because the quantitative and qualitative data collected were at the same time, analysed independently and integrated to give a complete picture of teaching and learning of literacy in the sampled schools.

The quantitative component dealt with the assessment of reading comprehension performance of learners through the adapted PIRLS-based test instrument. The PIRLS assessment instrument included both literary and informational reading passages with various types of questions aimed at assessing the ability to retrieve information, make inferences, interpret thoughts, and evaluate the content as required by the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework (Mullis *et al.*, 2023). The assessment consisted of two tests, each completed in approximately 40 minutes. Test 1 was based on an informational text, *Antarctica: Ice Land*, and the test assessed learners' ability to retrieve information, interpret ideas, and integrate meaning. Test 2 was based on a literary narrative text, *Little Lump of*

Clay, and it assessed learners' ability to make inferences, evaluate information and elements presented in the narrative. The two tests therefore assessed different comprehension processes across informational and literacy texts, providing an opportunity to examine learners' ability to construct meaning beyond the retrieval of explicitly stated information.

Additionally, the CLEP checklist was employed to measure characteristics of the classroom literacy environment in the participating schools. This tool evaluated literacy-supportive features in classrooms along a continuum rather than fixed categorical thresholds. The CLEP quantitative data analysis was done through descriptive statistics, which were used to generalise the performance trends, using Independent-sample t-tests to compare the results the the public and the private schools, and an analysis of variance for the elements to investigate correlations between the literacy environment ratings of both schools and the reading results.

The qualitative component sought to provide contextual insight into instructional practices and classroom dynamics. The collected data were gathered from lesson observations and semi-structured interviews with Grade 5 English teachers. The observations were done during a lesson presentation when the teacher was teaching reading comprehension as part of the Annual Teaching Plan (ATP) and the CAPS English curriculum schedule. The semi-structured interviews with the four English teachers examined the attitude learners have towards reading comprehension, teaching techniques, learner involvement in the learning process, and the limitations of the situation. The interviews were transcribed verbatim after being audio recorded with permission. The qualitative data were analysed on a thematic level based on the research questions and the PIRLS framework to identify any commonalities and themes.

By combining reading comprehension performance data with classroom observations and teacher insights, the methodology enabled the study to move beyond measuring outcomes alone and towards understanding how school context, literacy environment, and instructional strategies are interconnected to shape reading comprehension development.

The research design was a case study involving 85 Grade 5 learners from four participating schools. In addition, four English teachers, one from each four each participating schools, took part in semi-structured interviews to provide information about reading comprehension instructional practices and classroom contexts.

Data collection was preceded by ethical clearance obtained from the North-West University: Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) under the ethics number NWU-01156-24-A7 (Annexure A). In addition, permission was secured from North West Province Department of

Education (Annexure B), the principals of the selected schools (Annexure C), the teachers (Annexure D), parents (Annexure E), and the learners (Annexure F).

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for several stakeholders. For teachers, it offers insight into how instructional strategies and classroom practices may support or constrain reading comprehension development. The current study further contributes to a better understanding of the factors that influence the reading performance of the learners themselves, which will inform improved instructional approaches that will strengthen their reading comprehension skills and overall academic success. Additionally, this study is beneficial to the parents because the findings highlight the importance of a supportive literacy environment, offering guidance on how parental involvement can develop reading comprehension.

School principals and school management teams will benefit from data-driven insights that may inform resource allocation and the development of targeted literacy improvement strategies within their schools. At a higher level, the finding will assist policymakers by highlighting the importance of creating supportive literacy environments and providing targeted professional development. For researchers, the study contributes context-specific evidence on reading comprehension teaching in the Intermediate Phase and demonstrates the value of integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to Grade 5 learners and teachers in selected public and private schools. It specifically studied reading comprehension in the English language and did not explore the literacy development in other languages or in other grades. The results must hence be considered in these contextual lines.

1.8 Chapter Breakdown

- Chapter 1: Introduction

The chapter outlines the research objectives and questions that guide the study, highlights the significance of the research, and discusses its potential contributions to the field of reading literacy.

- Chapter 2: Literature Review

The second chapter presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature on reading comprehension. It explores the theoretical background and past research on proficiency in reading comprehension, such as language proficiency, and the learning literary environment of learners on

reading comprehension at school, without considering the home literary environment. In addition, the chapter outlines the gaps in the literature. Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology by focusing on the research environment, the participants, the sampling techniques, materials, and tools that will be employed in the research. It also outlines the ethical considerations and study limitations.

- Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The fourth chapter presents findings for each of the three research questions, discussions of the findings, and the interpretation.

- Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

This chapter provides a summary of the findings. It further discusses the contributions of the study to existing literature and the implications it has. In addition, practical recommendations are proposed, and the chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the current study's aim of examining Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance and the instructional and environmental factors influencing literacy development in selected public and private schools. The chapter reviews and critically analyses existing literature related to reading comprehension, with a particular focus on the interplay between socio-linguistic factors, the classroom literacy environment, and reading instruction practices. The review focuses on international and South African bodies of literature, particularly the theories of literacy development, the models of comprehension instruction, and empirical research examining classroom practices, resource availability, and language context. The review situates the current study in context with the larger ongoing debates about reading literacy development and, consequently, demonstrates that there are research gaps that justify the need for this study.

The review draws on several literature bodies that collectively inform the analytical and conceptual foundation of this current study. These include socio-linguistic and policy studies that explore how the language of instruction and broader systemic inequalities impact literacy outcomes, particularly within the South African education system. In addition, the chapter engages with research on access to learning materials and classroom literacy conditions because all these variables could possibly influence learners' opportunities to engage with texts and develop their reading comprehension. The literature review also considers empirical research on the instructional practices and teacher pedagogy in reading comprehension, focusing on how teachers plan and implement reading instruction across diverse school contexts. Lastly, the chapter discusses the theoretical frameworks that inform the study, including Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Schema theory, Cummins' linguistic interdependence perspective with a particular focus on the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework.

The chapter is structured into five interconnected parts, which reflect major academic discussions and reflect on the aims of the study. In Section 2.2, the performance of reading comprehension is reviewed by positioning international and national studies on the reading comprehension outcome of learners. Section 2.3 examines the importance of classroom literacy environments and how the material, instructional, and emotional components of the classroom impact reading motivation and comprehension. Section 2.4 focuses on the instruction of reading comprehension, which examines pedagogical models and teacher practices in supporting the learners in developing comprehension skills. Section 2.5 outlines the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework used in the current study, and how the framework conceptualises the processes and purposes of reading comprehension. Section 2.6 then concludes the chapter by synthesising the reviewed literature.

The chapter progresses from the conceptual discussions of reading comprehension to the discussion of contextual and instructional factors that influence reading comprehension development, thus narrowing the focus towards the research questions of the current study. Collectively, the reviewed literature provides the analytical base for examining the link between learner achievement, learning environment, and reading-comprehension teaching. Although reading comprehension in South Africa has been widely studied (Howie *et al.*, 2017, Department of Basic Education, 2023, Spaull, 2023), less attention has been given to research that examines the learner performance alongside classroom literacy environmental and reading comprehension instructional practices in both public and private schools at the Intermediate Phase. In particular, there is a need for research that brings these dimensions together at the Grade 5 level.

2.2 Reading Comprehension Performance

The importance of reading comprehension extends well beyond literacy itself, as it is a multifaceted cognitive and linguistic process that goes beyond simple word recognition or decoding. It involves using existing knowledge, grammar, vocabulary, and logical skills supported by syntactic awareness and the ability to make inferences and conclusions (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Grabe & Stoller, 2019; Snow, 2020). As Oakhill *et al.* (2015) and Pretorius and Spaull (2016) argue, effective reading comprehension requires the combination of decoding skills of a learner and motivation, background knowledge, and language structure and understanding. Learners who struggle with comprehension are consequently disadvantaged across subjects, as reading serves as a gateway to knowledge in subjects such as Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences (Department of Basic Education, 2023; Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). As a result, reading proficiency is one of the most efficient predictors of future educational and social performance.

Evidence from large-scale reading assessments and South African literacy research continues to reveal widespread challenges in reading literacy, with particular concern regarding levels of reading comprehension among South Africa (Howie *et al.*, Mullis *et al.*, 2023, Department of Basic Education, 2023). Consequently, it has become increasingly important to understand both the patterns of reading comprehension performance and the factors that influence these outcomes. The results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and the Annual National Assessments (ANA) have consistently highlighted that comprehension is a continuous national concern because a significant number of learners can decode texts but fail to extract meaning (Department of Basic Education, 2013; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Mullis *et al.*, 2023). The evidence suggests that some learners may demonstrate aspects of word-reading or fluency while continuing to experience difficulty with higher-level from texts. Moreover, linguistic diversity, the unequal distribution of resources, and the diversity of instruction within schools further complicate learners' reading comprehension outcomes.

2.2.1 Reading Comprehension Conceptualization

Reading comprehension is an interactive and complex process that lies at the centre of literacy development. As Snow (2020) explains, comprehension is evident when readers actively engage with texts using strategies that build reading comprehension, such as predicting, summarising, questioning, and self-monitoring. Effective reading comprehension involves the use of prior knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and inferential reasoning to construct meaning from texts. Cognitive and linguistic processes are not the only factors of effective reading comprehension, but an interplay between the ability to apply higher-order thinking strategies, engagement, and motivation (Oakhill *et al.*, 2015).

Readers are expected to decode words efficiently while simultaneously integrating this information into meaningful mental representations of the text. The importance of linguistic proficiency, especially vocabulary and grammar, is important in the process, as the lack of linguistic knowledge limits the ability to gain an understanding or follow complex textual relationships (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to reflect on one's understanding during reading, is equally essential for identifying confusion and making relevant changes in reading strategies (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006).

The process of reading comprehension is, therefore, a socially mediated process that is influenced by learners' prior experiences, motivation, and access to supportive learning environments. As noted by Pretorius and Spaull (2016), ineffective decoding foundations, exposure to limited vocabulary, and inadequate instructional opportunities for guided reading are possible factors contributing to reading comprehension difficulties among South African learner. Reading comprehension is, therefore, not one element, but a process of interactive acquisition of cognitive, linguistic, and contextual processes that should be developed through sustained and systematic learning.

2.2.2 Reading Comprehension and Multilingualism

In multilingual education contexts such as South Africa, language is one of the most powerful determinants of reading comprehension performance. Reading Comprehension takes on additional complexities because learners may be reading in a language that is not their home language, so their performance depends heavily on their proficiency in that language and their exposure to it. Although multilingualism itself is not a barrier to reading literacy development, differences in proficiency between learners' home language and the LoLT may create difficulties when learners are required to understand vocabulary, make inferences, and integrate information across a text (Cummines, 2000; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). These difficulties may become more evident when learners have limited opportunities to develop language proficiency in the language in which they are expected to read and learn.

The language of instruction influences how learners decode texts and their capability to interpret meaning, apply prior knowledge, and critically interact with the content. Sebole *et al.* (2019) investigated reading comprehension performance among Grade 5 Setswana-speaking learners, comparing comprehension outcomes in learners' home language and in English. Using a descriptive quantitative design, the study found that learners achieved significantly higher comprehension scores in their home language than in English. Their results revealed that learners performed better when reading in Setswana, showing that home-language instruction supports comprehension through linguistic familiarity. Nonetheless, Sebole *et al.* (2019) have also noted poor levels of comprehension in both languages, indicating that familiarity with a given language does not suffice to offset general flaws in teaching and resource delivery.

The finding from Sebole *et al.* (2019) is consistent with the findings by Garcia and Kleifgen (2018), who highlighted that the most effective way of literacy development is to allow learners to build strong foundations in their home languages, thus allowing them to transfer literacy proficiency to other languages positively. In contrast, premature transitions to English as the LoLT are often implemented before learners have achieved sufficient proficiency in their home language, which can hinder the development of English language proficiency as well as broader literacy skills. Mohohlwane *et al.* (2024) expanded the evidence of language of instruction by comparing the effects of home language instruction (L1) and English (L2) instruction using large-scale quantitative research. Their findings revealed that learners who were instructed in their home language performed better in the reading tasks in both L1 and English, which offers solid empirical evidence to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis of Cummins (2000). The hypothesis assumes that literacy skills learned in one language can positively transfer to another if learners have developed a strong cognitive and linguistic foundation in the first language. These findings further suggest that linguistic familiarity enables comprehension because the learners can easily use syntactic, phonological, and semantic cues when reading in a language they understand (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Mthimkhulu, 2023).

Although the transition from learning through home language to English as the LoLT occurs in Grade 4 in South African schools, research indicates that many learners are not fully supported during this transition, particularly in relation to language transfer and bilingual scaffolding (Cummins, 2001; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). The transition is particularly problematic in under-resourced and rural schools, where learners have little experience with the English language beyond the classroom, and teachers themselves may lack advanced English proficiency (Mboacha, 2015; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Heugh, 2018; Madikza *et al.*, 2018). As a result, learners are expected to learn new linguistic forms alongside new academic content at the same time, which in many cases leads to surface-level decoding without deep comprehension. The results from Mboacha (2015) showed that urban

learners who were exposed to English at an earlier age performed better than their counterparts in the rural areas, demonstrating the role of unequal exposure and the inconsistent implementation of language policies on reading comprehension differences by region and school.

Learners who use English as an additional language may require additional support when engaging with reading texts, particularly when the exposure to English outside the classroom is limited. Difficulties may arise from unfamiliar vocabulary, synthetic structures, or culturally unfamiliar content, which can affect a learner's ability to construct meaning even when they possess some basic decoding skills. Effective reading comprehension instruction therefore requires attention to both reading structures and the linguistic demands of the text. Recent evidence from South African reading intervention indicates that vocabulary development, comprehension strategy instruction, teacher support, and appropriate resource use are important components of reading developments in multilingual contexts (Gazibegovic *et al.*, 2024). Such support is particularly relevant where learners have difficult different levels of exposure to English and therefore enter the classroom with varying linguistic resources.

Nonetheless, other scholars offer a more subtle explanation of bilingual literacy. Verbeek *et al.* (2022) and O'Connor and Geiger (2009) argue that positive language transfer could be practised when learners have successfully acquired literacy skills in the home language before transitioning to English. Through this process, the learners can apply cognitive strategies like inferencing, summarising, and comprehension checking across languages. Similarly, Heugh (2011), Bamgbose (2014), and Brock-Utne (2017) maintain that the high level of proficiency in the mother tongue does not only facilitates the acquisition of other languages but also strengthens the overall metalinguistic awareness of the learners. These arguments suggest that the core challenge is not in bilingualism as such but in the lack of proper support for the language transition and the insufficiency of the use of the successful practices of bilingual instruction. Another issue arises in English HL, where its linguistic exposure is usually at a higher level, but can still be inadequate at higher-order comprehension, especially inferential and critical reading because classroom instruction focuses predominantly on retrieving explicitly stated information rather than on interpreting, integrating and evaluating ideas (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). Therefore, even in English HL, successful reading comprehension depends on the explicit teaching of vocabulary, reasoning, reading and analysis of text instead of exposure to English print.

Overall, it is highlighted in literary studies that language serves as the window of communication as well as the means of communication. Proficiency in the language of instruction gives learners the tools to create meaning, while linguistic incompetence may cloud understanding despite excellent decoding abilities.

2.2.3 The Transition from “Learning to Read” to “Reading to Learn”

“Learning to read” refers primarily to the development of foundational reading abilities, including word recognition, decoding and fluency, which enable learners to access written text. “Reading to learn” refers to using reading as a means of acquiring, interpreting and evaluating information and knowledge from increasingly complex texts. In the South African curriculum context, this distinction is particularly relevant at the transition from the Foundation Phase (Grade 1-3) to the Intermediate Phase (Grade 4-6), the transition is a pivotal stage in learners’ literacy development where additional support is vital (Beck *et al.*, 2017; Nkomo, 2021). During this transition, learners are expected to progress beyond basic decoding and fluency to use texts as tools to learn throughout the curriculum (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). However, the “Learning to Read” to “Reading to Learn” processes should not be understood as completely separate stages, because reading comprehension and meaning-making continue to develop alongside foundational reading skills such as word recognition, decoding, fluency, and basic comprehension. (McKee & Carr, 2016). This change, as it emerges, requires the development of more advanced cognitive and metacognitive skills, including inferential thinking, information summarising, evaluation, and synthesis of information sources (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). As a result, the meaning-based reading ability would be structural, not just in language subjects, but also in core subjects such as Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Social Sciences, where the key to academic success is determined by their ability to read and understand the written instructions, problem statements, and informational reading.

Empirical evidence indicates that many South African learners enter the Intermediate Phase without sufficiently developed foundational reading skills, consequently limiting their ability to participate in the more complex comprehension demands of later grades (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Spaull *et al.*, 2020; Department of Basic Education, 2023). Furthermore, the Department of Basic Education (2023) notes that learners often enter Grade 4 without having mastered decoding or vocabulary knowledge, leaving them unprepared to work with more advanced reading materials. By Grade 5, learners are expected to have developed foundational reading skills through their Foundation Phase schooling, however that is not the case because the learners often do not have identical levels of reading proficiency as they enter the grade level. The literacy bottleneck is especially visible in schools in low socio-economic communities, where access to print materials and uneven instructional support contribute to the problem of reading comprehension.

South African research indicates that some learners enter the Intermediate Phase with weaknesses in foundational reading skills, which may affect their ability to engage with more demanding reading comprehension tasks (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Spaull *et al.*, 2020). For Grade 5 English HL and FAL learners, reading instruction therefore involves more than developing fluency. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) requires learners to engage with a range of literacy and

non-literacy texts and to develop comprehension through activities such as retrieving information and critically responding to texts. In the Intermediate Phase, reading is consequently developed alongside vocabulary, language structures, oral language, and writing rather than treated as an isolated skill (Department of Basic Education, 2011). The curriculum is important when considering the reading comprehension performance and instructional practices reported in the current study.

Learners who struggle to master the abilities of successful comprehension by the Intermediate Phase are likely to fall further behind in higher grades because the amount and intensity of reading across subjects increase (Zimmerman & Smit, 2014). The achievement gap between schools with sufficient resources and those with limited ones, as well as between learners in the English HL and English FAL classes, may progressively increase due to the cumulative impact of differences in literacy resources, opportunities for reading engagement, language proficiency, and instructional support. To address this challenge, a clear understanding of comprehension instruction is necessary, where the teachers' model and scaffold the higher-order reading strategies to enable the learners to navigate and read complex texts and engage in critical content analysis as well.

2.2.4 Reading Comprehension Performance Trends and Evaluation

Reading comprehension is a major barrier to educational progress in South Africa. The 2021 PIRLS highlights the scale of this issue, reporting that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not read for meaning, an increase from 78% in 2016, which places the country last among participating nations (Mullis *et al.*, 2023; Roux *et al.*, 2023). The comprehension performance of learners in English HL classrooms remained well below the international average, while learners in English FAL classrooms demonstrated significantly low-performance outcomes. The low comprehension performance observed among South African learners demonstrates that many learners struggle to read for meaning, indicating that although many learners can decode words accurately, their reading comprehension ability remains limited.

Both the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4–6) and the Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3) reading comprehension tasks in South Africa's Annual National Assessment (ANA) have consistently revealed low achievement results, suggesting that reading comprehension is not yet being assessed or taught with sufficient depth. In the 2012 ANA, the national average for Grade 3 Language was 52%, while the corresponding averages for Grade 4 were 43% for Home Language (HL) and 34% for First Additional Language (FAL), and Grade 5 were 40% for HL and 30% for FAL (Department of Basic Education, 2012). Among Grade 6 learners, the national average was 43% for HL and 36% for FAL. Moreover, only 57% of Grade 3 learners achieved at least 50% in Language, compared with 39% of Grade 6 HL learners and 24% of Grade 6 FAL learners (Department of Basic Education, 2014). These results indicate that substantial difficulties in language achievement persisted as learners progressed from the Foundation Phase into the Intermediate Phase. These findings point

to persistent language difficulties across the transition from the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase and highlight the need to examine whether learners are adequately supported as the cognitive and linguistic requirements of reading to learn.

Furthermore, the performance of reading comprehension in South Africa is systemically informed by factors that determine the ways in which the capabilities of learners are evaluated and interpreted. A study by Mthimkhulu (2023) indicated the issues with the assessment validity and interpretation of multilingual and under-resourced environments, which shows that learners assessed in African languages such as isiZulu frequently score much lower than those assessed in English. This disparity raises fundamental questions about whether the poor performance in the reading comprehension test is a representation of true performance differences or a reflection of the inefficiency of the test tools. Such Concerns are particularly relevant where the language used for assessment differs from learners' familiar languages, as language proficiency may affect learners' ability to demonstrate their comprehension of the assessed texts. Scholars such as Menken and García (2010) have similarly cautioned that large-scale international assessments, such as the PIRLS, often disadvantage bilingual learners when the language and content of test questions are unfamiliar to them. For example, a learner may understand a concept but struggle to answer a question when it is presented in a language or context with which the learner has limited experience. These inequities may mask the true reading potential of the learners and contribute to misleading interpretations of national literacy standards.

The issues of fairness and authenticity of scale in the reading measures are also a problem in the context of multilingual education. The study by Mthimkhulu (2023) is a contribution to the research field as it highlights the way that standardised testing fails to consider differences in language and culture among South African multilingual learners. Based on Rasch Measurement Theory (RMT) and Differential Item Functioning (DIF), it was concluded that problems with translation, especially the application of culturally inappropriate items or the inability to translate terminologies, undermined the reliability of PIRLS in isiZulu speakers (Mthimkhulu, 2023). These results highlight the importance of reading comprehension performance being assessed not only in terms of the ability of a particular learner, but also in terms of the language of testing, cultural suitability, and classroom conditions.

Although the work by Mthimkhulu (2023) is based on a quantitative study of a large-scale dataset on PIRLS, the Rasch model, and the validation of the obtained data, it emphasises the significance of placing such results in the larger educational context. Through a mixed-methods case study design, the current study contributes to this discussion by examining on how classroom practices, instructional strategies, and literacy environments contribute to actual reading comprehension performance of learners in real-life school environments. By bringing together learner assessment

results with evidence from classroom observations, teacher interviews and classroom literacy environments profiles, the study has the potential to provide a more contextualised understanding of the factors associated with differences in reading comprehension performance in multilingual South African Classrooms.

2.2.5 Literacy Interventions and Instructional Support

While large-scale assessments such as PIRLS and ANA provide valuable diagnostic data on the level of literacy performance, they reveal insufficient information on how to improve reading comprehension in the classroom context. The empirical studies of literacy interventions and instructional support provide more practical and micro-level evidence of how teachers and schools can foster reading comprehension through sustained, structured programmes. These studies highlight the importances of explicit vocabulary development, guided reading, meaning-making strategies, and opportunities for learners to engage actively with texts, particularly in multilingual and under-resourced settings (Mokoena, 2019; Pretorius & Murry, 2023).

Long *et al.* (2023) evaluated the Wordworks Story Spark (WSS) intervention at a no-fee primary school in Makhanda to determine whether structured, story-based literacy activities improve learners' reading comprehension. Their review presents WSS as a compelling example of an effective, localised intervention. The study demonstrated that learners who participated in guided discussions, story-based literacy activities, and structured comprehension exercises showed significant improvements in reading comprehension. It is interesting to note that learners who completed the programme in three successive years had higher gains in comprehension as compared to those who had had one year of intervention. This observation adds to the conversation on the effectiveness of long-term literacy interventions compared to once-off or short-term literacy projects, especially in situations where learners have limited exposure to reading materials.

The importance of the long-term intervention approach is justified by McGill-Franzen and Allington (2010), who maintain that interventions that are designed to improve literacy development have the greatest impact when applied as an instructional practice but not taken as remedial add-ons. Their study also reveals that if the strategies of reading comprehension are integrated through school subjects (Life Orientation, Mathematics, etc) and endorsed by a steady teacher assistance, learners are effectively driven to higher levels understanding and interest in reading. Equally, in this regard, Pretorius and Spaull (2016) observe that it is necessary to undertake systematic teaching of vocabulary acquisition, decoding, and fluency with teacher modelling and guided learning to enhance comprehension. Unless there is regular teaching support, learners often find themselves going back to rote reading, with no comprehension.

In education policy terms, these findings are resonated in the Department of Basic Education (2023), which emphasises the importance of long-term teacher professional development and classroom support systems. There has been an attempt to fill in these gaps with national frameworks, such as the National Reading Strategy, but the implementation process is often uneven because of resource constraints and lack of monitoring (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). As a result, the effectiveness of literacy interventions usually depends on how much the teachers are mentored, provided with materials, and given feedback to revise their teaching approaches. In the context of the current study, the literature on the literacy intervention and instructional support highlights the necessity of investigating how teachers implements reading comprehension instruction across different school types and language contexts. This study therefore examined classroom observations, teacher interviews and classroom literacy environment data to understand how instructional conditions that may support or constrain the development of reading comprehension among Grade 5 learners.

Together, the studies discussed in this section (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Spaull & Pretorius, 2019; Mokoena, 2019; Long *et al.*, 2023; Pretorius & Murrar, 2023) indicate that the development of reading comprehension depends not only on the ability of individual learners but also on the interaction between interconnected ecological factors such as language, instruction, environment, and policy. Despite progress in understanding these dynamics, limited research has explored how these factors interact within the everyday classroom context, particularly across different school types (public and private) and language contexts (English HL and FAL). This gap justifies the current study's focus on examining how classroom literacy environments, instructional practices, and language contexts collectively shaped reading comprehension outcomes among Grade 5 learners in the North-West Province. Section 2.3, discussion classroom literacy level and its effect on comprehension of reading focusing on the physical, emotional, instructional, and linguistic aspects of the classroom that shape learners' engagement with texts and the development of their comprehension.

2.3 Classroom Literacy Level and its Effect on Comprehension of Reading

Reading comprehension performance, both in South Africa and internationally, is shaped not only by individual cognitive skills but also by the quality of learners' classroom literacy environments. The classroom is defined as a physical and social environment where learners are expected to interpret and engage with print materials, which promotes vocabulary growth, fosters the development of critical thinking, and the desire to read (Sutrian, 2025). Pianta *et al.* (2007) conceptualise these spaces in terms of their organisational design, availability of resources, and affective climate, and whether they have a measurable impact on learners' literacy achievement.

This section, therefore, explores three interrelated aspects of the classroom literacy environment, (2.3.1) the physical classroom environment, (2.3.2) the accessibility and availability of literacy resources, and (2.3.3) social and motivational support that influences the way learners engage with reading. These dimensions are examined in the context of English HL and English FAL when it comes to the Intermediate Phase, specifically focusing on the differences that exist between public and private schools.

2.3.1 Physical Classroom Environment

The physical organisation of a classroom has a significant influence on learners' literacy engagement and comprehension. International studies have shown that well-organised, print-rich classrooms promote fluency in reading, vocabulary development, and long-term motivation (Olifant *et al.*, 2022; Pianta *et al.*, 2007). In a longitudinal study conducted in the United States (US) elementary schools, Reutzel *et al.* (2019) reported that classrooms designed with structured, literacy-rich environments, featuring guided reading, access to print materials, and teacher support, resulted in lasting developments in comprehension scores across a span of three years. The physical layout of the classroom, with strategically positioned reading stations, chairs, and mini libraries, is an inherent part of the systems that encourage learners to read regularly (Chisunum & Nwodiokwu, 2024; Mol & Bus, 2011). Such environments promote exploration and independent reading, thus supporting the idea that accessibility and comfort are key to the development of reading.

The learning environment in which a child develops plays a pivotal role in shaping their reading comprehension and general literacy skills. South African learning environments, particularly the classroom, tend to mirror the socioeconomic disparities at large, leading to unequal access to resourceful and literacy-rich environments. Numerous schools, especially in remote and poorly funded regions, face a shortage of reading materials, a lack of libraries, and a general absence of structured literacy support, thus limiting learners' exposure to print and engagement with reading activities. According to Mojapelo (2023) and Olifant *et al.* (2022), rural and township schools did not have sufficient library areas, display materials, or comfortable reading areas to facilitate learner engagement with texts. By comparison, most private schools and urban public schools tend to have organised reading areas and available classroom libraries that create a welcoming environment that promotes voluntary reading.

Classrooms that are characterised by the availability of print materials, interactive learning opportunities, and supportive teacher-learner relationships contribute significantly to reading motivation, vocabulary development, and comprehension outcomes (Neuman & Celano, 2012; Reutzel *et al.*, 2019). The PIRLS 2021 (Roux *et al.*, 2023) results indicate that the performance of

learners in rural provinces, including Limpopo and the North West, was significantly lower than that of their counterparts in urban provinces such as the Western Cape and Gauteng. According to Mojapelo (2023), the low performance rate is due to lack of reading culture in rural areas, where most households do not have access to books, and schools have inadequate library facilities. The lack of exposure to reading materials results in limited opportunities for learners to develop sustained reading habits, which directly affects comprehension and the development of vocabulary.

Labelled materials, bilingual posters, and visual cues that bridge conceptual and linguistic gaps are beneficial to learners of English FAL classrooms who require additional language scaffolding (Cummins, 2000; García & Kleifgen, 2018). Many South African classrooms, according to Pretorius and Spaull (2016), do not offer much environmental language support, leaving English FAL learners to work with complex texts without the necessary contextual support. The lack of language-sensitive literacy conditions contributes to a larger gap in performance between English HL and FAL learners in Grade 5. Although international studies have examined the relationship between classroom literacy environments, access to print sources, and learners' reading engagement and achievement (Neuman & Celano, 2012; Reutzel *et al.*, 2019). In South Africa, research has similarly highlighted inequalities in learners' access to literacy resources and the quality of literacy resources and environments across different socio-economic and school context (Mboacha, 2015; Majopelo, 2023). However, fewer studies have systematically compared the classroom literacy environment of English HL and FAL classrooms across public and private schools in the Intermediate Phase. The current study empirically evaluates the classroom design using the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) and the investigation of the relationship between classroom features and the reading comprehension achievement of learners.

2.3.2 The Availability of Resources

In addition to physical space, the relevance and diversity of available reading materials significantly influence the engagement and comprehension of learners. A classroom with a heterogeneous mix of texts, such as fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and digital media, helps support the development of flexible reading strategies that support various learning styles (Chisunum & Nwodiokwu, 2024). Such textual diversity is similar to the idea of a literacy-rich environment, proposed by Neuman and Celano (2012), introducing learners to a variety of textual genres and modalities to help them build vocabulary, deepen the understanding of textual structures, and engage critically with print and digital media. Both studies converge that effective literacy environments should not just be confined to the availability of print resources but also include the culturally and developmentally appropriate resources that appeal to the lived experience of learners and linguistic realities (Neuman & Celano 2012; Chisunum & Nwodiokwu, 2024).

In a comparative study conducted by Neuman and Celano (2001), the data provided empirical support for this perspective by demonstrating that the quantity and quality of available literacy resources are directly linked to children's literacy development. Their research in contrasting urban areas showed that high-resource environments not only offered greater access to books but also fostered richer opportunities for language interaction and cognitive engagement. This micro-level evidence of environmental influence finds strong resonance in broader systemic analyses by Fleisch (2008) and Spaul (2016), who both argue that structural inequalities in school infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum implementation reinforce literacy gaps between socio-economic groups. Fleisch (2008) puts into focus the role of poor resource provisioning and the poor performance of curriculum delivery in the limiting of successful instruction, whereas Spaul (2016) considers the role of the accumulating disadvantages that may begin with limited exposure to early literacy experience and reading opportunities, contributing to the persisting poor performance of low-income backgrounds. All these scholars provide a multi-level perspective of literacy development, which connects the material conditions in the classroom to the macro-educational inequities.

Despite this conceptual alignment, there are still gaps and limitations. Although Neuman and Celano (2012) shed light on the effect of access to the available resources on the performance in literacy, their analysis does not go further to discuss the way the instructional practices of teachers could facilitate the use of those resources. On the other hand, Fleisch (2008) and Spaul (2016) explore the systemic causes of unequal reading outcomes and persistent literacy inequalities, but provide less detail on how policy-level inequalities manifest in everyday classroom pedagogy. Mojapelo (2023) addresses this by examining the interaction between linguistic challenges and socio-economic inequalities within a South African educational setting, showing how these factors can constrain reading instruction. However, the findings presented by Mojapelo (2023) requires additional classroom-based evidence, which can capture the effects of the resources, teacher practices, and the engagement between learners. The current study directly addresses this gap by combining classroom observations, literacy environment profiles, and teacher interviews to explain how school context and variations in instructional strategies affect the development of reading comprehension of learners. By examining both public and private schools in the North-West Province, this research contributes to understanding how resource availability and pedagogy overlap to sustain or mitigate literacy inequalities.

Additional reading beyond prescribed classroom texts can provide learners with opportunities to extend their exposure to written language and practice reading independently. Such reading may include novels, library books, supplementary texts, or other materials selected according to learners' interests and reading levels. However, participation in such opportunities may vary according to learners' interests, motivation, reading proficiency, and access to suitable materials. Additional

reading can further be viewed in relation to the broader learning opportunities available within a school. Reading beyond the minimum requirements of formal lessons may contribute to the development of reading habits and provide experiences that are not necessarily captured through formal curriculum activities. Consequently, independent and voluntary reading provides opportunities for learners to encounter a wider vocabulary, different text structures, and varied content while developing greater familiarity with written language. Making a reading motivation relevant because learners are more likely to engage consistently with additional reading when they perceive reading as meaningful and interesting.

Expanding the idea of differentiated and resource-rich literacy environments, researchers focus on the role digital resources play in facilitating differentiated and inclusive reading (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012; Leu *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, they contend that e-books, audiobooks, and educational reading applications have the potential to improve the literacy experience of the learners using individualised and interactive systems. Through these online tools, learners can learn at their own pace and adapt different levels of reading to a unified classroom, thus eliminating the continuous challenge of learner diversity. Their work collectively highlights how the interactivity and multimodality of digital platforms expand learners' engagement beyond traditional print, providing opportunities for collaboration, exploration, and independent learning.

This is extended by Leu *et al.* (2015), who situate literacy development within a 21st-century framework, arguing that the ability to navigate, interpret, and critically evaluate digital texts has become central to contemporary reading comprehension. Digital literacy is, however, not meant to replace the traditional reading culture, but it could be incorporated smoothly with print-based word instruction to develop a hybrid multimodal literacy environment instead. When implemented thoughtfully, this integration allows learners to synthesise media-based information, make evaluative judgments, and interact with text in interactive and culturally relevant ways (Biancarosa & Griffiths, 2012; Selwyn, 2016). Although research on educational technology has demonstrated the potential of digital tools to support literacy development and learner engagement (Neuman *et al.*, 2017), it frequently underexplores how teachers mediate these technologies in resource-limited classes or how the socio-economic background of learners affects their accessibility and the advantages of digital tools. Digital tools enrich the literacy landscape through interactivity and accessibility, meaningful literacy development also depends on the social interactions and collaborative practices that occur within the classroom. Therefore, understanding how learners engage with teachers and peers during reading activities provides crucial insight into how literacy is co-constructed through dialogue, participation, and shared meaning-making.

2.3.3 Learner Engagement and Social Interaction in Reading

Learner engagement is also an important consideration in the development of reading comprehension. Learner engagement in reading involves more than being physically present during a reading activity, it includes learners' attention to the text, their participation in reading-related activities, interaction with the text individually or with teachers and peers (Wigfield *et al.*, 2016). Access to reading materials does not necessarily result in meaningful reading activity when learners have limited motivation or willingness to participate. Engagement influences the extent to which learners attend to texts, participate in classroom discussions, practices reading strategies, and persist when reading comprehension becomes difficult. Recent evidence indicates that interventions aimed at increasing reading motivation can positively influence both reading motivation and comprehension, particularly when learners are actively engaged with reading activities (Schiefele *et al.*, 2023). In the South African context, reading comprehension interventions have similarly identified active engagement, structured opportunities to interact with texts, and appropriate instructional support as important features for effective reading development (Gazibegovic *et al.*, 2024).

Reading motivation and learner autonomy play a critical facilitating role between social interaction and reading comprehension, influencing the extent to which learners engage meaningfully with texts. Reading motivation is also associated with learners' participation in reading and their development of comprehension, suggesting that engagement should be considered alongside instructional practices and other contextual factors (Schiefele *et al.*, 2023). The investigations by Wigfield *et al.* (2016) revealed that motivated learners are more involved with the texts, using more complex strategies of comprehension, including inference and assessment. Likewise, the idea of engaged reading presented by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) highlights that learner choice and the agency to select reading materials add intrinsic motivation, which then results in more valuable engagement with texts. The International Literacy Association (2018) supports this, adding that learner independence, collaborative group discussion, and differentiated instructions are not just supportive features of literacy-rich environments but are part of them. All these studies imply that reading comprehension develops well in classrooms where learners are provided with instructional support and social freedom in interacting with texts in a collaborative manner.

Equally important to resource availability is the role of social interaction in developing learners' comprehension and motivation to read. Cekiso (2017) noted that, in the process of teaching, facilitating guided reading activities, encouraging a learner to express ideas, and managing collaborative classroom discussions, teachers create opportunities for learners to clarify and practice metacognitive reading strategies. These interactional practices position learners in the centre as meaning makers of texts and not just receivers of texts. This idea is expanded by Daniels (2018),

who promotes reading circles and book clubs to inspire the exchange of meanings, opinion-making, and independence among learners in literacy communities supported by their peers. These dialogic spaces not only foster comprehension but also confidence, cooperation and independence, which are some of the qualities that are required to maintain reading engagement outside the classroom.

The home literacy environment can complement the literacy experience learners receive at school. Parental and household support may include encouraging reading, providing access to books or other reading materials, discussing texts, monitoring reading activities, and assisting learners when they experience difficulties in reading activities. However, opportunities for literacy support are not equally available to all learners. Differences in household resources, parents' availability, educational backgrounds, and the languages used at home may influence the extent and nature of literacy support learners receive. Research has shown that differences in access to literacy resources and literacy experiences outside school can contribute to differences in learners opportunities to develop reading related knowledge and skills (Neuman & Celano, 2006; Pretorius & Spaul, 2016). Parental involvement should therefore be understood as one component of the broader home literacy environment rather than as the sole explanation for differences in learners reading development.

The importance of emotional and relational dimensions in reading instruction is empirically demonstrated by Pianta *et al.* (2008), whose longitudinal study using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) established a strong link between teacher-learner interactions, emotional support, and literacy achievement. Their findings demonstrate that higher reading outcomes across different grades can be achieved in classrooms characterised by consistent instructional routines, emotional support, and interesting classroom materials. This model emphasises the idea that the processes of literacy development are holistic and are often influenced by social-emotional relations as much as cognitive ability development. Likewise, the current study uses the same analytical perspective by using the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP), which can assess the overall impact of classroom resources, print exposure, and pedagogical practices on reading comprehension. CLEP provides a systematic way of examining both instructional and environmental aspects of literacy teaching, similar to CLASS, allowing this current study to explore the interaction between differences in relational support, classroom organisation, and resource availability in the context of varied schools, to influence the comprehension achievement of learners.

Reading development is a complex combination of physical, emotional, instructional, and linguistic factors within the classroom environment. As stated by Pretorius and Spaul (2016) these factors cannot be understood without considering the instructional practice. They argue that the effectiveness of the literacy environment is shaped by how teachers' structure and mediate reading comprehension development through purposeful reading instruction and not the availability of

resources. Furthermore, they argue that well-structured literacy classrooms also actively facilitate reading comprehension through intentional instruction of inference, decoding, and vocabulary development, requiring both pedagogical intentionality and linguistic sensitivity. Additionally, the availability of the print resources and the language policy do not always define the reading success but rather depend on the ability of the teacher to facilitate the cognitive and linguistic development of learners using targeted strategies. The role of teachers in facilitating cognitive and linguistic development positions them as key contributors to the development of an effective literacy environment. Pretorius and Spaull's (2016) findings link micro-level classroom practices to broader educational inequalities, demonstrating how the lack of resources, as well as the linguistic barrier, makes reading instruction a form of pedagogical and social intervention.

The current study contributes to the existing body of literature by investigating how reading comprehension performance, classroom literacy environments, and instructional strategies interact within public and private school contexts. The classroom literacy environment was considered in relation to the availability and diversity of reading materials, access to literacy resources, and other classroom features captured through the CLEP. Instructional practices were examined with particular attention to teacher questioning, the type of text used, opportunities for learners to engage with texts, and the strategies teachers used to support comprehension, including inference and interpretation. By addressing these dimensions together, the study directly answers the research questions and clarifies how classroom-level practices shape comprehension outcomes in multilingual Grade 5 classrooms. The next section focuses on the implementation of reading comprehension instruction, exploring how teachers design, deliver, and adapt comprehension activities to meet the linguistic and cognitive needs of learners within their specific contexts.

2.4 Implementation of Reading Comprehension Instruction

At the core of academic achievement and literacy development is the effective instruction of reading comprehension. This process involves systematic and explicit teaching strategies that do more than teach learners how to read but equip them with the cognitive and metacognitive skills to extract meaning from texts on their own (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Snow, 2020). The quality of instruction is an effective in-school factor that determines learner achievement (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). In South Africa, reading comprehension instruction remains challenging due to persistent resource inequalities and the demands placed on learners who are expected to develop literacy in a second or additional language. Teaching is still informal, with teachers focusing on decoding and oral reading fluency instead of higher-order meaning-making (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019).

This section reviews literature on classroom implementation of reading comprehension, focusing on models of explicit comprehension instruction (section 2.4.1), the role of teacher practice and professional development (section 2.4.2), strategy-based instruction, scaffolding (section 2.4.3), and challenges limiting effective implementation (section 2.4.4).

2.4.1 *Explicit Reading Comprehension Instruction Models*

Explicit comprehension instruction is the intentional practice of teaching where the teachers demonstrate, define, and direct how a particular strategy is applied to assist learners to comprehend and analyse texts (Duke & Pearson, 2011). This study indicates that effective readers actively keep track of their understanding, make inferences, summarise, and synthesise information with existing knowledge (Snow, 2020). Readers can be taught directly in terms of instructional models, including reciprocal teaching and guided reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017), where the learners are prompted to explain the thinking processes as they read. However, studies show that explicit comprehension instruction is not consistently implemented in South African classrooms (Zimmer & Smit, 2014; Hlaethwa, 2013). Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) found that many teachers equate comprehension with answering post-reading questions rather than engaging learners in metacognitive strategy use. Lessons often focus on literal recall, with minimal guidance on how to draw inferences, identify key ideas, or evaluate meaning. These findings highlight the need for systematic teacher support to promote explicit, strategy-based comprehension instruction, particularly in linguistically diverse and under-resourced classrooms.

Although explicit instruction provides learners with direct explanations, modelling, and guided practice using reading comprehension strategies, reading instruction may also incorporate more implicit approaches. In implicit instruction, learners are encouraged to develop an understanding of reading strategies through exposure to texts, guided questions, collaborative discussions, and opportunities to discover how particular strategies support meaning-making. Rather than viewing explicit and implicit instruction as mutually exclusive, teachers may combine these approaches according to learners' needs and the demand of the reading task. Such an approach can provide learners with an opportunity to gradually recognise and apply reading strategies independently while still receiving appropriate guidance when required.

2.4.2 *Teacher Reading Instruction Practices and Professional Development*

The level of knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers plays a decisive role in the effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction. The concepts of effective instruction require both literacy-related content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, which is the ability to model, scaffold, and differentiate comprehension strategies for diverse learners. The empirical research in South Africa consistently indicates that a significant percentage of teachers lack both components,

leading them to use instructional methods that are more focused on rote learning rather than deep reading comprehension (Erasmus, 2022; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016).

In their study of 159 teachers across three South African provinces, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) found that many teachers lack both the content knowledge and pedagogical strategies necessary to teach reading effectively despite the existence of a structured curriculum. The research findings also showed that there was a notable discrepancy between instructional practices reported by teachers and learners' actual reading performance, a fact that is most notable in high-poverty schools, where teachers often struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice. The discrepancy between reported instructional practices and learners' reading performance suggests that the persistence of one-size-fits-all teaching approaches and poor teacher training continues to constrain literacy development despite ongoing curriculum reforms. These findings support the need to focus on the adaptive and learner-based pedagogies that can address the linguistic and cognitive diversity in South African classrooms. Similarly, Hlaithwa (2013), found that learners experienced difficulties with reading comprehension despite being able to read texts, highlighting the distinction between basic reading skills and the construction of meaning from text. The finding to current study because it draws attention to the need for reading instruction that extends beyond basic reading skills to support deeper comprehension. Fleisch (2008) and Zimmerman and Smit (2014) also argue that the teacher-centred pedagogy (with recitations, reading aloud, and memorisation) may restrict opportunities for learners to engage actively with texts. Such teacher-centred practices may limit learners' opportunities to explain their interpretation, ask and answer questions, and make inferences. This may be particularly problematic in disadvantaged schools where learners have fewer opportunities to access rich literacy experiences outside the classroom.

Erasmus (2022) expands this discussion by emphasising teachers' instructional beliefs and classroom literacy practices, which include their own reading habits, attitudes toward texts, and exposure to diverse materials, directly affecting their classroom practice. Active readers, in turn, tend to teach reading with increased enthusiasm, choose more diverse reading materials, and apply a wider range of strategies for understanding. Research suggests that access to appropriate literacy resources, together with how teachers use and integrate these resources into instruction, can support learners' engagement with texts and reading development (Zano, 2023; Long *et al.*, 2023). Rather than suggesting that the availability of resources alone improves comprehension, these studies indicate that the instructional use of resources is an important consideration in creating opportunities to engage meaningfully with texts.

The readiness of a teacher is a critical factor that influences the results of comprehension reading outcomes or scores. Erasmus (2022) supports this view, confirming earlier findings by Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) and Van Staden and Howie (2010), indicating that many teachers working in the

Intermediate Phase are underprepared to teach reading literacy effectively, a problem reflected in PIRLS outcomes that have continued to position South African learners among the world's lowest in reading comprehension. According to Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016), Mbambo-Marimirofa *et al.* (2023) and Tiba (2023) South African teachers need professional growth to enhance their knowledge of reading instruction strategies. These results suggest that prolonged, high-quality professional development prepares teachers to meet the diverse literacy needs of learners, including those that require differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and additional language support (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2017; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). The combination of sustained professional development and effective teaching methods enable teachers to develop literacy rich environments in which learners are better supported to develop their reading abilities. However, these opportunities are still rare in South Africa, where, in many cases, professional development is often disaggregated and does not correspond with teachers' daily instructional challenges. To fill this gap, there is a need to have systemic, school-based professional learning that develops the ability of teachers to implement comprehension strategies, differentiate instruction, and manage linguistically diverse classrooms.

Instructional time is another contextual consideration in the teaching of reading in the Intermediate Phase. CAPS allocates 6 hours per week to English HL and 5 hours English FAL in the Intermediate Phase. Within these allocations, Reading and Viewing is allocated 5 hours per two-week cycle for Grade 5 in English HL and English FAL. Reading instruction occurs within a broader language curriculum that also includes Listening and Speaking, Writing and Presenting, and Language Structures and Conventions. In Grade 5 English FAL, for example, five hours per two-week cycle are allocated to Reading and Viewing, while Language Structures and Conventions are integrated into the different language skills and are also given time for formal instruction (Department of Education, 2011a). The English HL curriculum similarly emphasizes the integration of Language Structures and Conventions with Reading, Writing, Listening and Oral activities (Department of Education, 2011b). Consequently, teachers need to balance the development of reading comprehension with other language learning requirements. Effective reading instruction requires reading activities that include explicit modeling, guided practice, classroom discussions, vocabulary development, and opportunities for independent reading. Therefore, the time available for sustained reading comprehension instruction is an important consideration.

2.4.3 Strategy-Based Instruction and Scaffolding

The development of effective comprehension teaching is based on a strategy-based pedagogy that allows learners to purposefully apply the cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the process of reading. To enable the learners to construct meaning actively, instead of passively receiving information, strategies to summarise, visualise, infer, question, and monitor, comprehension should

be incorporated in the learning process (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). The Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) provide theoretical grounding for scaffolding comprehension instruction. The models promote systematic exchanges between teacher modelling (I do), guided practice (We do), and independent practice (You do). Through this process, learners become independent while receiving consistent support. However, for learners in conditions similar to those examined in the current study, more learners in the class, limited instructional time and restricted resources may make it more difficult for teachers to provide individualised scaffolding and support. Such conditions may particularly affect learners who require additional assistance with reading, although the extent to which these factors influence comprehension depends on the specific classroom and school context (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019).

Research shows that even minimal teacher modelling, when applied consistently, can make a significant difference in the ability of the learners to think critically about texts. Teachers who scaffold comprehension through shared reading, guided questioning, and reflective discussion help learners develop the metacognitive awareness necessary for independent reading success. In this regard, Mpofu and Mavambe (2023) offer valuable insights into the effective methods of teaching that can assist struggling readers in higher primary grades. Their study examined teachers' use of strategies to support struggling readers and found that pre-reading activities, vocabulary scaffolding and visual materials were used to help learners engage with unfamiliar and challenging texts in Grade 5 English Second Language classrooms in Namibia. Such interventions were found to develop comprehension through the activation of background knowledge and the reduction of language barriers. Interventions were also observed to aid in making sense through the activation of prior knowledge and the reduction of language barriers. Mpofu and Mavambe (2023) used reinforcement techniques like vocal encouragement, interactive conversations, and traditional teaching methods in line with the study by Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) that adaptive literacy instruction is essential in meeting learners where they are.

Despite its small scale and scope, the study by Mpofu and Mavambe (2023) emphasises the importance of context-sensitive instruction that responds to learners' diverse learning needs, drawing on data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. While Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) focus more specifically on motivation and engagement as drivers of reading achievement, both studies underscore the central role of learner engagement in successful comprehension development. The findings from Mpofu and Mavambe (2023) contributed to knowledge of the strategies that ESL teachers use to assist learners who struggle with reading. The results illustrate how teachers combined standard phonics and summarisation strategies, then customised them using the schema theory to suit the reading levels of the learners. The study also

highlights the importance of differentiated learning-centred instruction and the need for ongoing professional development for teachers to implement the reading strategies effectively, especially in linguistically diverse and resource-variable classrooms.

An essential component of successfully implementing such comprehension strategies is ongoing professional development that empowers teachers to refine and adapt their instructional approaches in response to learners' needs. Desimone (2009) emphasises that effective professional learning is collaborative, allowing teachers to engage in shared reflection, peer observation, and collective problem-solving. Such teamwork fosters a professional culture that encourages innovation in literacy instruction and improves collective teaching efficacy.

2.4.4 Effective Teaching Practices

Effective reading comprehension instruction involves equipping learners with metacognitive strategies that help them process and interpret texts more deeply. The effectiveness of this type of instruction is predefined by the quality of the pedagogical techniques used, but not by using text-processing strategies only. Skilled teachers combine explicit instructional approaches, varied instruction, and cooperative education to promote learner understanding and enthusiasm (Tomlinson, 2014; Snow, 2020). The model of differentiated instruction coined by Tomlinson (2014) highlights the necessity to adjust the pedagogical strategies, material, and tasks so that they can be aligned with the level of readiness of learners and involve them in the process, as well as assist teachers in adjusting the lessons based on the needs of the learners. Other similar claims have been made by Hall (2017) and Vygotsky (1978), who state that differentiation of instruction improves the chances of learners understanding meaning from texts, thus developing comprehension.

A range of reading strategies can support learners before, during, and after reading. Pre-reading strategies such as prediction and vocabulary preview can activate prior knowledge and prepare learners for unfamiliar concepts and foreign language. During reading, chunking a text into smaller sections can help learners process information progressively, while questioning and discussions can support understanding. Post-reading strategies such as summarization require learners to identify and reorganize important information from the text. These strategies can be particularly relevant in multilingual classrooms where learners may need additional support with vocabulary and the linguistic demands of English texts. Evidence from South African classrooms suggests that explicit teaching and modelling of comprehensive strategies can assist learners in developing purposeful approaches to reading (Elston *et al.*, 2022; Mbambo-Marimirofa *et al.*, 2023).

Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) and Mokoena (2019) argue that the concept of insufficient implementation of learner-centred strategies limits the comprehension-building process in most

South African classrooms. When teachers are dependent only on the traditional teacher-directed instruction, learners become passive recipients rather than active participants in meaning-making exercises. Conversely, classrooms guided by the Social Constructivist Theory, where discussions, reflections, and peer collaboration encourage learners to take ownership of their reading and thus develop independent comprehension strategies.

The literature shows that effective comprehension instruction depends on explicit teaching strategies, teacher proficiency, inclusive pedagogy, and sustained professional development. Nevertheless, South African classrooms are still faced with systemic obstacles such as under-preparation, inaccessibility of resources, and rigid ways of teaching that hinder the introduction of such pedagogies. Empirical research conducted by Erasmus (2022), Mokoena (2023), and Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) showed that the ability to contextualise instructions among teachers is important, yet underdeveloped. The current study addresses the research gap by examining how teachers implement comprehension instruction in diverse Grade 5 classrooms. The following Theoretical Framework (section 2.5) outlines how the PIRLS Reading Literacy Theory provides the conceptual foundation for analysing the relationships among learners' reading comprehension performance, classroom literacy environments, and reading instructional practices, and guiding the interpretation of findings across both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

2.5 Reading Literacy Theoretical Framework

This section briefly discusses the theoretical frameworks that inform the study, namely the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Schema Theory, and, the Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Perspective. These perspectives provide complementary ways of understanding the cognitive, linguistic, social and contextual dimensions of reading comprehension and literacy development. Grant and Osanloo (2014), explain that a theoretical framework is an important tool that helps the researchers stay on track throughout the study by providing a theoretical lens through which a research problem can be explained and interpreted. It connects the study to existing theories and provides a basis for understanding the relationship between the concepts and phenomena under investigation (Jones & Carter, 2020). Using a theoretical framework allows researchers to structure main concepts and variables, write focused study questions, and conduct a systematic analysis of their findings.

In the current study, the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework serves as the primary theoretical framework because it provides a multidimensional approach to understanding reading comprehension. The framework conceptualises reading literacy in relation to the processes involved in comprehension, the purpose for reading, and the context in which reading occurs (Mullis & Martin, 2019). The PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework is relevant in the current study because it gives a

detailed and recognised framework for studying and assessing reading ability among learners in primary school. Furthermore, the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework integrates the cognitive, contextual, and affective elements of reading, making it suitable for studies that focus on academic performance and educational practices.

The supporting theoretical perspectives further strengthen the interpretation of the study. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasises the role of interaction, teacher support and scaffolding in learning and development (Vygotsky, 1978). Schema Theory highlights the importance of learners' existing knowledge in constructing meaning from texts and making the connection between new information and prior knowledge (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Perspective proposes that knowledge and skill developed through first language can contribute to the development of academic skills in an additional language (Cummins, 2000). Together, these perspectives complement the PIRLS framework by providing additional ways of understanding how social interaction, prior knowledge and linguistic experiences may shape learners' reading comprehension.

The PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework provides a thorough framework for evaluating and interpreting reading comprehension, making it a valuable resource for this research study. The study combined three interconnected components: reading process, reading context, and reading aims (Mullis *et al.*, 2016). The first component, the 'reading process', refers to the use of specific cognitive abilities like decoding, identifying words, understanding vocabulary, and making meaning from the text read. At this stage, Grade 5 learners transition from simple decoding to reading to gain knowledge and comprehension (Duke *et al.*, 2011; Snow, 2020). The second component the 'reading context' highlights how the learners' reading is affected by their environment and educational background. These 'reading contexts' include the effectiveness of reading instruction, teachers' use of reading comprehension strategies, the availability of books and other reading resources, the LoLT, and socioeconomic conditions that may affect learners' access to literacy resources and support. All of these components are important factors in the multilingual and resource-variable classrooms of the North-West Province. Neuman and Celano (2012), as well as Spaul and Pretorius (2019), have pointed out that differences in school context play a key role in determining reading comprehension results, while Cummins (2001) and García and Kleifgen (2018) advocate that teaching should adapt to learners' languages and cultures. The third component of the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework highlights reading objectives that develop good feelings about reading, encourage personal interest, and prepare readers to use their reading abilities in academic contexts and beyond.

To accomplish these reading objectives, learners depend on four important cognitive processes: retrieving and using information, integrating and interpreting ideas, critiquing and evaluating texts,

and reflecting on content in relation to personal experiences (Mullis *et al.*, 2016). The first process, retrieving and using information, involves searching the text for specific main ideas. The second process, integration and interpretation, involves learners combining pieces of information from various parts of the text to understand it well. The third process, critiquing and evaluating, requires examining whether the text is accurate, objective, and free from bias, and exploring what the author's intentions are in the text. The final process, reflecting and evaluating, involves self-monitoring, metacognitive awareness, and drawing connections between text, personal experiences, and prior knowledge. These processes align with established models of metacognitive strategy use and higher-order thinking skills necessary for deep comprehension (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Pressley & Gaskins, 2006).

The current study adopts the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework because it provides an internationally recognised multidimensional model to assess reading comprehension alongside the context and purpose in which reading occurs. Since the adapted PIRLS-based test was also used as a quantitative instrument in the current study, aligning with the PIRLS framework ensures internal coherence between the theoretical perspective and the assessment of learners' reading comprehension. Furthermore, the emphasis of the framework on both individual cognitive processes and broader contextual factors supports the mixed-methods approach of the study, which investigates how classroom practices, literacy environments, and school type influence reading comprehension results for English learners of HL and FAL. Therefore, using the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework allows the study to situate its findings within a global literacy discourse while remaining sensitive to local educational realities.

However, the application of the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework in the current study has limitations. PIRLS was developed as an international assessment framework and does not fully capture the linguistic and educational realities of multilingual context. The limitation is particularly relevant in South Africa, where many learners speak a different language at home from the language used for learning and assessment. The South African PIRLS 2021 report found differences in reading achievement according to how frequently learners spoke English at home, with learners who never spoke English at home recording the lowest mean score (Department of Education, 2023). Consequently, the PIRLS results in the current study were interpreted alongside the reading lessons observations, teacher interviews, and classroom literary environment data rather than being treated as a complete representation of learners reading comprehension skills.

2.6 Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to examine existing research on the factors influencing reading comprehension among Grade 5 learners, with a particular focus on instructional practices,

classroom literacy environment, learner motivation, language of teaching and learning, as well as socioeconomic conditions. The literature indicated that effective teaching practices, such as differentiated approaches and explicit instruction based on comprehension strategies, are the key characteristics of teaching that contribute to literacy development. However, there are still challenges, particularly in under-resourced environments with limited access to reading materials, stimulating learning spaces. Additionally, language inequities, especially the transition to English as the LOLT, continue to affect the learner's ability to engage meaningfully with texts.

The review also shows that reading comprehension development cannot be achieved without additional contextual factors, such as access to reading opportunities and learner motivation. Although various interventions have illustrated great support in reading comprehension development, most of the available interventions are limited to the Foundation Phase and provide little attention to the Intermediate Phase. It is clear from both local and international studies that reading development depends not only on instruction but also on access to engaging texts, supportive environments, and teaching practices responsive to learners' linguistic and social contexts. Thus, reading comprehension is shaped by cognitive processes and contextual factors in which reading takes place. Examining these dimensions collectively allows for a more integrated understanding of how classroom instruction, literacy environments, and linguistic factors interact to influence learners' comprehension development, particularly in cases where reading progress is slower.

Building on the insights drawn from the reviewed literature, Chapter 3 presents the research methodology that underpins this study. It outlines the research paradigm, design, and approach adopted. The chapter also gives details regarding the research site, target population, sampling procedure, data-collection tools, and analytical procedure.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was a critical literature review of the studies related to the reading-comprehension proficiency of Grade 5 learners in multilingual and socio-economically heterogeneous settings. The literature review demonstrated that reading comprehension development is shaped by the interaction of linguistic, instructional, and environmental factors rather than by a single variable. The current chapter outlines the research approach used to examine the reading-comprehension achievements of Grade 5 learners and the classroom conditions that affect them. In accordance with the research questions of the study, the methodology was designed in such a way that it would produce both measurable evidence of learner performance and contextual information about instructional practices and classroom literacy environments.

This chapter begins with an introduction and followed by section 3.2, which provides an overview of the research paradigm grounding the study, and section 3.3, which gives reasons to justify the research design and the research approach in general. Section 3.4 describes the research location and section 3.5 detailing the population of the participants, along with the sampling protocols applied. Data-collection methods are then described in section 3.6, comprising the tools used in the study. Section 3.7 details the procedures followed in the data collection process. Section 3.8 addressed the data and analysis procedures, focusing on the statistical and thematic data-analysis steps that were adopted to answer the research questions. Section 3.9 discusses ethical considerations that governed the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Section 3.10 then discusses validity and reliability showing how the methodological rigour was maintained during the research process. The chapter concludes with section 3.11, thus providing the procedural and theoretical base where results and explanations of the study are built.

3.2 Research Paradigm

This study is positioned within the pragmatic research paradigm, which provides a foundation for addressing research questions through the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Pragmatism focuses on the research problem and the usefulness of different forms of evidences in developing understanding of that problem. Rather than the study to rely on either quantitative or qualitative methods, pragmatism allows the researcher to select and integrate methods that are appropriate for addressing the research questions. The paradigm is suitable for the current study because reading comprehension proficiency, reading instructional practices, and contextual understanding, because it provides a foundation for exploring participants' subjective experiences and perspectives within their specific social contexts. This paradigm

acknowledges the existence of multiple realities constructed through interaction and interpretation (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). It therefore seeks to understand how teachers and learners make sense of reading instruction within their school contexts.

The study focused on reading comprehension proficiency, the classroom literacy environment, and the reading instructional practices of Grade 5 learners in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. A pragmatic approach therefore provided a conducive framework for examining learners' reading comprehension performance alongside the instructional and contextual conditions within which reading took place. The study analysed the factors that enhance literacy practices between teachers and learners, using Grade 5 reading comprehension as the context. It discusses the teaching strategies and classroom setting in governmental and privatised schools with a specific focus on English as a Home Language (HL) versus English as a First Additional Language (FAL).

Overall, pragmatism provided a foundation for the mixed-methods design of study. It enabled that researcher to draw on quantitative and qualitative evidence according to relevance to the research questions and to integrate the findings develop a contextualised understanding of Grade 5 reading comprehension proficiency, reading instructions, and classroom literacy environments in the participating public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District.

3.3 Research Design and Approach

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to obtain an impartial perspective on the research problem. The mixed-methods design was considered appropriate in this case because it triangulated data from multiple sources, thereby increasing the validity and richness of the results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Overall, the mixed-method approach allowed examining the "what" and the "how" of reading comprehension instruction, and provides a holistic view of the practices, materials, and outcomes of literacy progress in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district.

The quantitative component included reading comprehension tests administered to Grade 5 learners in both public and private schools. These assessments evaluated learners' reading ability and enabled comparison of reading-comprehension scores across the two school contexts, as well as classroom observations of the literacy environment in the Grade 5 English classes. The qualitative component included English reading lessons and semi-structured interviews with Grade 5 English teachers. It was designed to examine teachers' instructional practices, attitudes, and experiences in teaching reading comprehension. By doing so, the researcher was able to obtain detailed, coded descriptions of how these instructional methods play out in the classroom literacy scene as well as in the teacher-learner relationship.

A case study involving mixed methods was used. The case-study approach was selected because it allowed the exploration of a phenomenon in detail within a real-world setting (Yin, 2018). In this study, the 'case' refers to Grade 5 classrooms in selected public and private schools, where the instructional practices and literacy environments were examined in relation to learners' reading comprehension. The case-study approach enabled a close analysis of the teaching practices, learner comprehension of reading and literacy resources in the chosen schools, thus providing an in-depth idea of the situational influences that affect reading-comprehension development.

3.4 Research Site

The research was conducted at the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district, located in the North-West Province of South Africa. The district comprises more than 200 primary schools distributed across various towns and regions. It is characterised by linguistic diversity, with Setswana being the predominant home language, followed by Afrikaans and English. However, other languages, such as Sesotho, isiXhosa, and isiZulu, are found in certain school settings, due to the mining industry and internal migration patterns (Statistics South Africa, 2022). This multilingual context makes the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district an appropriate area for studying learners' reading comprehension and teachers' teaching reading strategies, particularly given the different language contexts in which English is taught and learned in South African schools (Department of Basic Education, 2011a)

The contextual differences are important to the study because the language of instruction may affect how reading is taught and how well learners understand texts. The research factored in the instructional situation involving teachers teaching English as an FAL or as an HL, and the pedagogical context of learner-based reading-comprehension scores in public and private schools. Since the learners' language background information was not independently collected, reading outcomes in this study are defined specifically in terms of performance on the reading comprehension test.

3.5 Population

In research, a population refers to the entire set of people, objects, or events that share at least one characteristic relevant to a research project and on which the researcher aims to conclude (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, the population comprised Grade 5 learners and their English teachers in primary schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, North-West Province, South Africa. Although the formal transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" typically occurs in Grade 4, Grade 5 was selected because it represents a consolidation phase in which learners are expected to apply comprehension skills more independently across subject areas. Challenges at this stage are usually indicators of underlying deficits in literacy that will translate into subsequent academic

achievement. The sample of 85 Grade 5 learners and four Grade 5 English teachers was drawn from the general population across four schools (two public and two private).

3.5.1 Sampling Techniques

Sampling is an indispensable component of the research design because it involves selecting a subset of participants that can be considered representative of the population, thereby enabling researchers to generalise their findings while maintaining feasibility and cost-efficiency (Taherdoost, 2016). Therefore, both probability and non-probability sampling methods were employed in this study, consistent with the mixed-methods approach adopted. This involved random and non-random sampling to obtain a representative subset.

Random sampling presents a defined population with an equal chance of being selected and can reduce the likelihood of sampling bias when appropriately implemented (Kothari, 2004; Etikan & Bala, 2017). Guided by this principle, the quantitative component used random sampling to select schools. From approximately 200 primary schools in the district, the selected schools were chosen based on accessibility. From this pool, 10 public and 10 private schools were randomly selected to create a balanced group of 20. A final random selection from the 20 identified schools yielded four study sites: two private schools and two public schools. This approach ensured transparency and fairness in selection while maintaining feasibility for data collection. The two public schools and two private schools were selected to enable comparison between the school contexts within the scope of the case study. The selection was intended to provide representation of both school types rather than to achieve statistical representation of public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District.

The random selection process involved preparing two distinct containers: one for public schools and another for private schools. Each of the ten schools in these categories was labelled with its name on identical slips of paper to ensure consistency and remove bias. The slips were placed in the appropriate container, thoroughly mixed, and the researcher, without looking, picked two slips from each container. Although schools were initially identified by name, code names are used in reporting to maintain confidentiality. This process ensured impartiality and fairness in the selection process, although it was not without challenges. The process guaranteed fairness and impartiality in the selection, though it encountered difficulties. One of the initially selected schools declined to participate, and another school did not respond to the invitation. These schools were replaced with others that met the selection criteria and were accessible to the researcher, thereby maintaining the required number of study sites. This highlights the challenge of securing the school's involvement despite a clear selection process.

The initial sampling plan aimed to include 80 learners from the four participating schools. Due to the small sample size in the other participating school, more interested participants were invited from the school with higher learner numbers which increased to the total number of participants to 85. This helped to balance the lower participation in some schools. The final sample consisted of 6 from School A (private school), 39 from School B (public school), 16 from School C (private school), and 24 from School D (public school). The lower numbers in Schools A and C were mainly due to their smaller Grade 5 enrolments and the number of learners who had obtained parental consent and were available during the data collection period. As part of the sample process, a census approach was adopted within the four selected schools. All eligible Grade 5 learners who were present during the data collection, had parental consent and met the participation requirements were included in the study. This approach enabled maximal participation while accurately reflecting the actual composition of the Grade 5 classes in the participating schools. The census was therefore limited to the eligible Grade 5 learners within the four participating schools and did not include all Grade 5 learners in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District.

A census approach was used in the qualitative section of the research design because all teachers responsible for teaching English to Grade 5 students in the selected schools consented to participate in the current study. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019), a census approach is a data collection method designed to cover the entire population of interest, thereby eliminating the possibility of sampling error. The inclusion criterion was thus limited to Grade 5 English teachers in the 2025 academic year, regardless of their prior knowledge of instructional practices. Their classroom teaching responsibilities were directly relevant to the research objectives, ensuring that the data reflected authentic instructional contexts across the participating schools.

The study aimed to obtain a sample that reflected variation in reading comprehension performance while also providing in-depth insights from teachers with direct experience teaching English reading. Random sampling facilitated a fair and impartial selection of schools, thereby reflecting the overall school population. Purposive sampling, on the other hand, enabled the researcher to get rich, context-based information from teachers who are actively involved in teaching reading. The combination of these techniques enabled a thorough understanding of the role of reading-comprehension instruction in both public and private school settings.

3.5.2 Selection Criteria

The learner selection criteria included not only parental consent but also the learner's willingness to participate in the study. In the public schools, where Grade 5 classes consisted of approximately 40 learners, purposive sampling was employed. Teachers assisted in identifying learners representing different levels of reading proficiency (low, average, and high) to ensure diversity in reading

performance within the sample. These teacher recommendations were based on the learners' school performances in other subjects and overall participation in English-language reading activities. In contrast, the private schools had smaller classes. One private school had a total of 7 Grade 5 learners, while the other had 20 learners, of whom only 16 provided parental consent. Hence, all learners who provided parental consent were included in the study.

The opportunity to participate in the study was offered to all learners in the selected classes who obtained parental consent, including those with identified learning difficulties, such as dyslexia. Within the public schools, the teacher-recommended learners included learners who experienced learning challenges. Similarly, learners in private schools were identified by their teachers as having learning difficulties. As all these learners were part of mainstream classrooms, their inclusion allowed the study to reflect the diversity of learning needs found in the mainstream classroom contexts and to explore how reading comprehension instruction and assessment function within such classroom settings.

The teachers included in the study were purposively selected because they were Grade 5 English teachers at each of the representative schools. All selected teachers had at least one year of experience teaching English at the Grade 5 level, hence, they could provide informed insights into instructional practices and classroom literacy environments. Additionally, the researcher had no personal relationship or prior connection with any of the participants, which reduced the risk of conflict of interest.

The participation of the population enabled the study to remain feasible and to investigate reading comprehension performance and instructional practices within the district's educational context. Moreover, the inclusion of both public and private schools enabled the study to compare how reading comprehension instruction and classroom literacy environments operate across different educational settings, thereby leading to a greater understanding of the literacy dynamics in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Data collection is a crucial part of the research process, providing the empirical data required to answer research questions and address research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure a comprehensive coverage of the objective, the study used a mixed-method design that incorporated quantitative and qualitative research tools to simultaneously measure the objective outcomes of reading comprehension and provide descriptive information related to instructional strategies and classroom settings.

The quantitative component included an adapted PIRLS-based reading-comprehension test of Grade 5 learners and the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) checklist, assessing classroom literacy materials and supportive systems. The qualitative sub-division involved semi-structured interviews with teachers and observations of the English reading lessons. Interviews examined teachers' instructional practices, their understanding of learner comprehension and contextual issues, and their understanding of the role of contextual factors in shaping learner engagement. Observations examined instructional procedures and learner engagement during a reading lesson.

3.6.1 Quantitative Data Collection Tools

3.6.1.1 PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test (Appendix A)

The PIRLS reading-comprehension test was the key quantitative tool used in this study. The PIRLS 2016 test, designed by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), is a standardised international test that is often used to assess reading-comprehension proficiency in learners (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). PIRLS assesses a continuum of comprehension processes, including the processes of retrieval of overtly described information, inference-making, processing and synthesis of concepts, and critical review of written statements. The range of comprehension processes assessed by PIRLS informed the selection of the instrument for the study, given its established reliability and international use in assessing reading outcomes. The test was intended to measure Grade 5 learners' reading-comprehension proficiency in English based on the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework, which defines reading literacy as having the ability to understand and use written language for different purposes (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). Particularly, the test investigates the understanding of two reading functions: information retrieving and exploiting, and literary experience.

The PIRLS assessment consisted of two sections, each to be completed in approximately 40 minutes. Test 1 was based on an informational text, *Antarctica: Ice Land*, and assessed learners' ability to retrieve information, interpret ideas, and integrate meaning. Test 2 was based on a literary narrative, *Little Lump of Clay*, and focused on understanding characters, events, and implicit meaning. However, the two tests were administered as independent measures of comprehension rather than as pre- and post-intervention tests. Items in each section were designed to emphasise both multiple-choice and constructed-response formats, with a focus on key processes of comprehension, such as retrieval of explicit information, interpretation of information, and generation of inferences.

Scoring followed the PIRLS rubric, with multiple-choice questions scored as either correct or incorrect and constructed-response questions were scored with partial or full marks depending on

the accuracy of the response. The scores were changed into percentages and were then combined into aggregate scores to analyse and compare the reading comprehension performance of the learners across different school contexts.

PIRLS has demonstrated high reliability and validity across a variety of global contexts and is supported by internal consistency and evidence of validity (Mullis *et al.*, 2017; Mullis & Martin, 2021). However, a few modifications such as the selection of two PIRLS-compatible texts, adjustment of administration time scales to school schedules, and converting the raw scores into percentages rather than using the PIRLS international scale were applied in the current study. Importantly, both the basic framework and cognitive needs of the test were not violated, which ensured fidelity to the Reading Literacy Framework of PIRLS. As a result, the adapted PIRLS 2016 measure was a valid, theory-informed measure of Grade 5 reading- comprehension achievement, which provided comparability both across public and non-public schools and English HL and FAL settings.

3.6.1.2 Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) Checklist (Appendix B)

Classroom Literacy Environment Profile is a structured observational tool that was developed by Wolfersberger *et al.* (2004) to measure the depth to which a classroom facilitates literacy growth. The CLEP was used in the current study to record the characteristics of the classroom literacy environment in Grade 5 English classrooms. In addition, the instrument was modelled on an existing classroom literacy environment framework, widely used in reading research, and conceptualised to align with the PIRLS contextual framework. Several adjustments were done to make it relevant to the South African context of the Intermediate Phase and aligned to the study objectives.

The checklist featured a list of items in categories, which were arranged under the main groups, such as the physical literacy environment, the accessibility and use of reading materials, and so forth. The observations were recorded using a presence-absence simple frequency indicator, which recorded whether an item in the CLEP was present or absent within that classroom rather than scaled ratings. CLEP ensures consistency and comparability in the data collected. The data were obtained by systematic observation of the features observed during classroom visits and their consequent descriptive analyses to identify patterns of the data across schools and to compare the situation of literacy in public and private schools. Although the classroom observation instrument did not provide numerical scores (such as the PIRLS reading assessment), it provided organised quantitative data that could be aggregated and compared across different classroom literacy environments.

The CLEP categories were interpreted using a continuum framework that reflects varying levels of literacy support rather than fixed thresholds. This pragmatic approach allowed the study to compare classroom literacy environments across schools while recognising that literacy resources and

practices may exist along a range of levels rather than in absolute categories. The administration of the CLEP is a construct-validated measure, making it appropriate for assessing classroom situations rich in literacy that shape how learners understand. Additionally, the CLEP checklist was employed to assess classroom literacy environments systematically, thus providing complementary data that supports and contextualises the findings obtained from the PIRLS assessment. Moreover, this instrument enhanced the credibility of the study by aligning the items observed with the PIRLS constructs and the research questions.

3.6.2 Qualitative Data Collection Tools

3.6.2.1 Lesson Observation Checklist (Appendix C)

A structured lesson observation checklist was designed and employed to describe the teachers' instructional practices, classroom management strategies, and learner engagement related to reading comprehension during Grade 5 English lessons. The checklist functioned as a structured qualitative observation instrument and was adapted specifically for this current study in the South African Intermediate-Phase curriculum context. The adapted version allowed the researcher to focus on comprehension-focused instruction rather than general classroom management. The checklist consisted of a set of structured items grouped into key instructional domains, such as lesson organisation, teacher questioning, and learner participation. The researcher used descriptive notes and categorical indicators instead of numerical scales, enabling systematic comparison across lessons and schools while still capturing contextual details through reflective notes.

The purpose of the Lesson Reading Observation Checklist was to capture how teachers taught reading comprehension during regular English lessons. Unlike the PIRLS assessment, which measured learners' comprehension performance, the CLEP checklist, which documented environmental features, focused on instructional processes. Specifically, it recorded how teachers introduced texts, supported meaning-making, engaged learners in discussion, and used strategies such as questioning, scaffolding, re-reading, and vocabulary explanation. Data generated from the checklist were analysed thematically to identify recurring instructional patterns and differences between public and private school contexts. The Reading Lesson Observation checklist did not yield scores. Instead, it produced structured qualitative data that were later triangulated with interview data and learner performance results. Adapting the checklist ensured contextual relevance while maintaining conceptual alignment with the PIRLS framework. The Reading Lesson Observation strengthened the credibility of the findings by allowing direct comparison between observed teaching practices and reported instructional approaches.

3.6.2.2 Semi-Structured Teacher Interviews (Appendix D)

Semi-structured interviews were employed to examine the reading comprehension instructional practices used by the Grade 5 English teachers in the participating schools. The researcher developed interview questions informed by the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework and adjusted them to fit the objectives of the study. The semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to steer discussions in key areas; additionally, the teachers were provided with the opportunity to narrate their experiences on reading comprehension in their classes.

The interview guide contained approximately ten open-ended questions, with no predetermined response categories, but was structured around broad themes. These themes included reading comprehension strategies, learner engagement, and the difficulties encountered in teaching reading. Follow-up questions were used to clarify teachers' initial responses and to obtain deeper insight into their reading instructional practices. For example, teachers were asked to explain how they activate learners' background knowledge before reading a text or how they can assist learners who have difficulties understanding texts. Data collected using interviews was not numerically rated, however, the audio-recorded responses of the interviewees were transcribed verbatim and analysed in the form of themes. The interview data were analysed using systematic coding, which allowed the identification of recurring themes and patterns across teachers and school contexts.

The credibility of the data collected during the interview was facilitated by factoring close correspondence between the interview questions, the research questions, and the PIRLS Reading Literacy framework. Semi-structured interviews have long been considered a valid approach to teacher cognition when it comes to research in the field of literacy (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Their applications in reading comprehension have been highly presented in the qualitative research of the educational curriculum, especially in the multilingual educational setting, as well as the classroom setting.

3.6.3 Incorporation of Data Collection Tools

Collectively, the four instruments formed an integrated mixed-methods system designed to address the study's research questions coherently and sequentially. The PIRLS-based reading comprehension assessment provided quantitative evidence of learners' comprehension performance, establishing the outcome patterns that required further explanation. The CLEP checklist captured the material and instructional conditions within which reading instruction occurred, offering contextual insight into classroom-level influences. Lesson observations documented how reading comprehension was enacted in practice during regular lessons, allowing the researcher to examine instructional strategies as they naturally occurred. Semi-structured teacher interviews complemented these data sources by exploring teachers' perspectives, decision-making processes,

and perceived challenges in teaching reading comprehension. Together, these instruments enabled triangulation across performance data, classroom environments, instructional practices, and teacher perceptions, ensuring that findings were interpreted holistically within the PIRLS theoretical framework.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks across four schools (two public and two private) in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension, the procedure combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Table 3.1: presents the timeline followed during data collection.

Table 3.1: Data collection timeline

Date of gathering of the data set	Activity	Description
28-07-2025 until 01-08-2025 (WEEK 1)	Distribution of consent and assent forms	- Monday: Private schools visited. - Tuesday: Public schools visited. Assent forms distributed to learners; consent forms to parents and teachers.
	Collection of forms	Wednesday: All forms collected. Final sample established (85 learners; 4 teachers).
04-08-2025 until 08-08-2025 (WEEK 2)	PIRLS Section 1 administration (<i>Antarctica: Ice Land</i>)	- Monday: Private schools. - Tuesday: Public schools. Administered during regular English lessons (40 minutes).
11-08-2025 until 14-08-2025 (WEEK 3)	CLEP administration English reading lesson observations	Monday–Tuesday: CLEP checklist completed alongside structured classroom observations during English reading lessons.
	PIRLS Section 2 administration (<i>Little Lump of Clay</i>)	- Wednesday: Private schools. - Thursday: Public schools. Administered during regular English lessons (40 minutes).
	Semi-structured teacher interviews	Conducted during Week 3 at times convenient to teachers (30–45 minutes each). Audio-recorded with consent.

In Week 1, the researcher focused on the distribution of consent forms and assent forms. On Monday, the two private schools were visited, followed by the two public schools on Tuesday. Learners received assent forms (Annexure F), while parental consent forms (Annexure E) were

distributed to the learners to take home to their parents to review and sign. Participating teachers received separate participation consent forms (Annexure D). All the completed and signed forms were collected on Wednesday of the same week. Ultimately, a final sample of 85 learners was established: 16 from one private school, 6 from the second private school, 24 from one public school, and 39 from the other. All four Grade 5 English teachers returned signed consent forms, officially confirming their participation. This preparatory phase laid the foundation for the subsequent data collection activities. All available and consented Grade 5 learners, as well as all Grade 5 English teachers responsible for teaching English, participated in the study.

In Week 2, the first PIRLS Test (Test 1) was administered during the Grade 5 learners' regular English lessons to ensure a familiar and comfortable environment. The learners read a passage (*Antarctica: Ice Land*) and answered the questions that followed. The test measured whether the learners can acquire and use information. Most learners completed the assessment within the allocated time; however, about 10% of the learners submitted answer sheets with incomplete answers. Learners were given the full 40 minutes, and the incomplete answer sheets occurred because a small number of learners chose to submit incomplete scripts before the allocated time had elapsed, rather than due to time constraints. The test was administered for the private schools on Monday and for the public schools on Tuesday, with the class teachers present to maintain continuity of the classroom routine.

The CLEP checklist was administered in week 3, on Monday and Tuesday at all four schools. The checklist was used as a tool to assess the literacy-richness of the classroom environment, such as the availability of reading materials, the organisation of the classroom space, as well as learners with texts within the different school contexts. Additionally, the second PIRLS Test (Test 2), which required the learners to read a passage (*Little Lump of Clay*) for literary experience, was administered on Wednesday to private schools and Thursday to the Public schools in the same week. Similar to Test 1, Test 2 was administered during the English period with a time allocation of 40 minutes. Furthermore, to understand the reading instructional strategies used by teachers, the researcher observed regular English reading lessons as they normally occurred in the classroom over a period of three weeks. These lessons followed the prescribed curriculum and were not changed or adjusted for the study.

Finally, during Week 3, the semi-structured interviews with Grade 5 English teachers were conducted. These interviews were guided by an interview schedule but allowed flexibility for probing and follow-up questions, making them ideal for exploring teachers' perspectives and practices. They were scheduled at times convenient for the teachers, primarily on Monday and Tuesday, and each lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by detailed note-taking. During the interviews, some adjustments were required; With two

interviews (one in a public school and one in a private school) with the first and second teachers conducted during break in the teachers' classrooms, although learner noise occasionally caused disturbances. The interview with the third teacher, at a private school was initially scheduled for an earlier date but had to be rescheduled because the teacher was unavailable. The interview was subsequently conducted on Wednesday, 13 August 2025, during the administrations of the PIRLS reading comprehension assessments. The final interview with the fourth teacher, at a public school, was conducted at the teacher's staff room during school hours, which was convenient for both the researcher and the teacher, as there were no disturbances.

All the collected data was managed with strict ethical care. The PIRLS results, CLEP checklists, reading lesson observation notes and interview audio recordings and transcriptions are securely stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher and supervisor. In line with North-West University ethical guidelines, these records are retained for three years before being permanently deleted. Collectively, the systematic sequencing of tasks ensures comprehensive data collection. The inclusion of PIRLS test scores, CLEP evaluations, lesson observations, and teacher interviews allowed the researcher to construct a holistic view of reading comprehension skills and instructional practices in the participating schools. Consistent with the mixed-methods approach used in this research, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods to achieve a thorough grasp of the research goals.

Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference. presents the demographic characteristics of the participants of the current study. Demographic information was collected to provide contextual detail about the learner and teacher sample and to support the interpretation of the findings. The final learner sample consisted of approximately 85 Grade 5 learners drawn from two public and two private schools. Learners represented a range of genders, ages, home languages, and modes of English instruction. Learners were taught English either as a Home Language or as a First Additional Language, with the majority receiving instruction through English FAL. Gender distribution was imbalanced as there were more girls than boys in this current study. The distribution was broadly reflective of the overall gender composition of the participating classes.

Table 3.2: Demographic Characteristics of Learner Participants

Variable	Category	n
School Type	Private (English HL)	22
	Public (English FAL)	63
School Distribution	School A (Private)	16
	School B (Public)	24
	School C (Private)	6
	School D (Public)	39
Gender	Female	52
	Male	33
Age	Range	10–15 years
	Mean Age	11 years
Home Language	Setswana	59
	Sesotho	8
	Afrikaans	8
	English	6
	Sepedi	3
	isiZulu	1

The language sample used reflected the multiple languages of the South African context. A total of 59 learners spoke Setswana as their mother tongue, with a few minor groups speaking Sesotho (8), Afrikaans (8), English (6), Sepedi (3), and isiZulu (1). The learners were aged between 10 and 15 years of age, with most learners being 11 years of age, which is the average age of Grade 5. There was, however, a small number of older learners who were identified in some schools, particularly in public schools, where patterns of grade repetition happened occasionally. The mean performance varied among age groups, which indicated that age was not the sole factor in determining the results of reading comprehension.

In addition, demographic information was collected from participating teachers. The teaching experience of the participating teachers varied across the four schools. Teacher 1 from Private School A had one year of teacher experience and was the teacher with the least experience. Teacher 2 from Public School B had seven years of teaching experience, five of which were spent teaching Grade 5 learners. Teacher 3 from Private School C had five years of teaching experience, which included three years of teaching Grade 5. Teacher 4 of Public School D had the most teaching experience, with 10 years in the profession, six of which were spent teaching Grade 5 learners, all at the same school. Class sizes also differed notably between school types, with public school teachers responsible for larger classes. These contextual factors were considered during the interpretation of instructional practices and classroom observations in Chapter 4.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis was done through cleaning, inspection, transformation, and interpretation to reveal significant patterns, relationships, and insight (Bryman, 2016). The analytic framework of the study reflected the research questions: the quantitative data were statistically analysed to evaluate the results of reading comprehension of learners and the classroom literacy environment. In addition, the qualitative data were analysed in the form of themes to understand the instructional practices of teachers as well as the lessons observed.

3.8.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The data collected during the administration of the adapted PIRLS released tests and the CLEP checklist were initially recorded on a Microsoft Excel sheet, and then coding was done as the data was being prepared to be analysed using IBM Statistical Package of the Social Sciences 30.0.0.0 (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were calculated to provide a general impression of the scores of the learner in terms of reading comprehension performance and classroom environment. The means and standard deviations allowed to compare the average reading scores and performance variability of schools. The scores obtained from the adapted PIRLS released tests were reported as percentage scores and were therefore not directly comparable with the international PIRLS benchmarks or scale scores.

To address Research Question 1 (*What is the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English HL and FAL in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it differ between public and private schools?*), both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. To answer the first part of the research question on learners' reading comprehension performance, descriptive statistics were used to summarise learners' scores from the PIRLS tests. To address the second part of the question, inferential statistical analyses were conducted to examine differences in performance between public and private schools. In addition, a Two-Way ANOVA was used to examine the interaction between school type (public and private) and language category (HL and FAL) on learners' reading comprehension performance.

For Research Question 2 (*What is the classroom literacy environment for Grade 5 learners in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it vary between them?*), both descriptive and inferential statistics were employed. Descriptive statistics, such as mean scores, were computed to give a summary of the classroom literacy environment in both public and private schools. The t-tests, independent of samples, were then conducted to compare the overall CLEP scores of the two types of schools. This analysis was used to determine whether the observed differences between the two school contexts were statistically significant. Crosstabulations and chi-square tests were used to examine item-level

differences across CLEP domains, providing additional understanding of certain aspects of classroom settings that varied among school type categories.

3.8.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected consisted of classroom observation checklists as well as semi-structured interviews conducted with Grade 5 English teachers. The observation checklists provided structured descriptive data of how reading lessons are administered, with a special focus on the instruction methods, interactions between learners and teachers, the use of teaching materials, and the classroom environment in general. The process was supplemented by the interviews that focused on the experiences of teachers, their problems, and the strategies they used to teach reading comprehension.

The interviews with teachers were transcribed word-for-word. Qualitative data (transcripts) along with the notes from the classroom observation were transferred into ATLAS.ti to be analysed. To enhance the rigour and transparency of the analysis, ATLAS.ti data-management tool was used to facilitate the coding and organisation of the data, the creation of themes, and the systematic retrieval of coded excerpts. The tool also assisted in identifying and examining relationships between themes. The interviews in this research were recorded in audio and then transcribed, some of the non-verbal forms of communication were not vividly expressed in the written form. The physical cues like nodding, hesitation, or any other physical expression that teachers employ to demonstrate uncertainty or confirmation, were not captured in the transcripts because the data collection protocol did not include video recording. Participants were also not instructed to limit their responses to a verbal expression. Instead, they were encouraged to express their views naturally and authentically during the interviews.

Furthermore, there were incidences of laughter, coughing, or background noise during certain interviews, which were not transcribed, as analysis involved what was said in relation to reading instruction and classroom activities. In some instances, portions of the recordings were not clear or audible, and the unclear or inaudible portions of the recordings are indicated in the transcripts by use of ellipses. As they were indicators of hesitation, but important in their respective contexts, hesitation markers (*er*, *um*, etc.) were kept where appropriate, and they added to the meaning of the data. They were considered in the analysis and are admitted as some small shortcomings in the process of audio-based transcription.

The qualitative data obtained from teacher interviews and English lesson observations were thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, which comprises familiarisation with data, code creation, theme search, review of themes, defining and naming of themes, and creating a report.

- Phase 1: Familiarisation with the Data

The analysis began with familiarisation. The researcher closely engaged with the data, repeatedly reading verbatim teacher interview transcripts and detailed observation notes to gain an overall sense of the data. The dependent data set was perused in a way that instructional practices and environmental characteristics were construed in their contexts of natural teaching. This step included reading and re-reading the content to have a holistic comprehension of the content and context. The transcripts were uploaded as primary documents to ATLAS.ti, where the researcher was able to make notes and underline some key parts to be analysed later.

Table 3.3: presents the initial codes in the second phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

Table 3.3: Initial Codes

Data Source	Initial Code	Description of Code
Teacher interview	Lack of reading materials	References to shortages of books, worksheets, or reading resources
Teacher interview	Insufficient storybooks	Mentions of a few or shared storybooks in the classroom
Classroom observation	Limited print-rich environment	Absence of posters, labels, reading corners, or learner work
Teacher interview	Teacher-led questioning	Comprehension lessons dominated by teacher questions
Classroom observation	Limited learner engagement	Learners off-task, passive, or minimally involved in reading
Teacher interview	Time constraints	Lack of time to focus on reading due to curriculum pressure
Teacher interview	Use of code-switching	Teacher switching between English and the home language
Classroom observation	Chunking of text	Teacher breaking passages into smaller sections
Teacher interview	Learner motivation issues	References to learners not wanting to read

- Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

In the second phase, the researcher proceeded to process the data systematically to generate the first codes. Coding dealt with meaningful units concerning reading comprehension teaching, reading classroom setting, learner interaction, measurement, and teaching issues. ATLAS.ti supported this process by using its AI-assisted coding option to produce initial coding recommendations, but these had to be automatically endorsed. Rather, all the codes were critically examined, revised, and

modified by the researcher to reflect the research questions and the realities of the classrooms. This step ensured that the analysis remained researcher-driven rather than tool-driven.

Table 3.4: presents the preliminary themes in the third phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

Table 3.4: Preliminary Themes

Initial Codes	Preliminary Themes
Lack of reading materials	Classroom dynamic
Insufficient storybooks	Classroom dynamic
Limited print-rich environment	Classroom dynamic
Teacher-led questioning	Instructional strategies
Chunking of text	Instructional strategies
Use of code-switching	Instructional strategies
Limited learner engagement	Learner participation
Learner motivation issues	Learner participation
Time constraints	Teaching constraints

- Phase 3: Searching for Themes

Once the initial codes had been generated, they were reviewed and organised into potential themes within ATLAS.ti. Codes that were related were then pooled in larger groups, enabling an analysis to proceed beyond a superficial description to more interpretive meaning-making. For instance, codes relating to “lack of reading materials” and “insufficient storybooks” were clustered under the potential theme “classroom dynamics”. This phase switched to descriptive coding to interpretive thematic analysis, which allowed the emergence of initial themes that represented recurrent ideas in the dataset.

Table presents the reviewed themes in the fourth phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

Table 3.5: Reviewed Themes

Theme	Focus Areas Covered
<i>Classroom dynamic</i>	Availability and suitability of reading materials, reference resources, print-rich displays, reading corners, and classroom displays, highlighting material shortages or richness.
Instructional Practices	Teacher-centred reading instruction methods (oral reading, rote questioning) with few learner-driven activities, despite using guided reading, questioning techniques, chunking, vocabulary support, and code-switching.
Literacy and reading	Motivation, attention, voluntary reading, and participation in discussions. Questioning during reading, formative feedback, and comprehension checks.
Teacher support	How teachers differed in how much they directed and assisted learners during reading activities. Factors included time constraints, curriculum requirements, parental involvement, and learner-specific challenges.

- Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

The fourth phase involved evaluating the preliminary themes on the coded data and dataset based on coherence and internal consistency. The network view option of ATLAS.ti enabled the researcher to create a visual representation of relationships between themes and subthemes. The researcher continuously moved between the data extracts, coded segments, and research questions to confirm that each theme was both internally consistent and analytically meaningful. Some were refined, merged, or discarded as necessary to strengthen analytical clarity.

Table 3.6: presents the final themes in the fifth phase of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

Table 3.6: Final Themes

Theme	Focus Areas Covered
Classroom Literacy Environment and Resource Availability	Availability of reading materials; print-richness; appropriateness of texts; use of reading corners
Instructional Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension	Guided reading; shared reading; vocabulary instruction; questioning techniques; differentiation
Learner Engagement and Participation	Motivation to read; participation levels; voluntary reading; learner confidence
Assessment and Feedback Practices	Informal questioning; comprehension tasks; feedback methods; assessment literacy
Challenges and Constraints in Teaching Reading Comprehension	Learner-related barriers; parental involvement; systemic constraints; language challenges

- Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Phase five entailed defining and naming the final themes. The finalised themes were well defined in terms of scope and focus, and how they helped in addressing the research questions. These themes provided the framework for presenting and interpreting the qualitative findings in Chapter 4.

- Phase 6: Producing the Report

In the final stage, the researcher integrated the themes into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions. Code frequency and co-occurrence tools of ATLAS.ti (2025) presented the evidence of predominant themes in the dataset. In the analysis, verbatim replicas of teacher interviews and classroom observation notes were included in the results and interpretation of Chapter 4. To illustrate, one teacher remarked, *“Usually it is unprepared, I find a text and ask them to read and then answer questions”*, which reflects the theme of ‘Instructional Practices.’ These passages were used to highlight and support each theme, thus improving the credibility and clarity of findings. Through the codification of the raw data and their correspondence with codes and interpretations, the qualitative analysis offered deep, contextualised understandings of the process of teaching and learning reading comprehension in Grade 5 classrooms. This analysis answered Research Question 3 (*How is reading comprehension instruction implemented between 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of North-West Province, particularly with regard to the teaching of inference, interpretation, integration of ideas, evaluation, and the instructional strategies teachers use to support learners’ reading comprehension development?*).

Using thematic analysis, the study uncovered recurring patterns related to teaching practices, classroom dynamics, and contextual factors that shape reading instruction. This qualitative insight added depth to the numerical findings and contributes to a nuanced understanding of how reading comprehension is supported or hindered across different types of schools.

Moreover, quantitative and qualitative analyses applied together provide a comprehensive view of the research problem. Whereas quantitative data emphasise the quantifiable differences in the learning results of learners and classroom experiences, qualitative data can illuminate the causes of these differences by providing insights into the teachers and classroom experiences. The combination of quantitative (PIRLS tests and CLEP checklist) and qualitative (classroom observations and interviews) approaches gave a well-rounded view of the differences in instruction in the public and private schools. The combination of statistical trends and contextual insights ensured that findings were grounded in both measurable outcomes and lived experiences.

3.8.3 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data (Side-by-Side Analysis)

A quantitative-qualitative combination of data in this research was conducted through a side-by-side analysis. Quantitatively, descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), independent

samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA were used to analyse the PIRLS reading comprehension results and calculate effect sizes to determine the practical importance of the differences. Results of the CLEP checklist were analysed using descriptives, independent samples t-tests to compare results between public and private schools, and crosstabulations used with chi-square tests to assess whether individual items had differences in classroom literacy environment. At the qualitative level, data for teacher interviews and classroom observations were thematically analysed based on the six-step model of Braun and Clarke (2006). This process was facilitated using the ATLAS.ti 2025 software, which assisted in coding, arranging the data, and formulating themes.

Integration was achieved by comparing quantitative outcomes with qualitative insights. The PIRLS scores of the learners were understood alongside the observed instructional teaching practices, and the CLEP scores were associated with the reflection of the teachers based on the interviews. This process facilitated the learning of the performance of the learners in the daily classroom practice. The analysis was done by looking at convergence, where the two informational streams complemented each other, and divergence, where the results contradicted (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

In the analysis, class size, teacher practices, resources, and infrastructure were taken into consideration. The findings highlighted how different school contexts influenced classroom practice and reading comprehension outcomes when private and public schools were compared. This descriptive exploration of the reading comprehension of Grade 5 learners in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District investigated the mode of instruction, the classroom environment, and reading performance, and attempted to identify trends that might inform future literacy studies and policy.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are regulated by well-defined moral principles, during which the rights and dignity of the participants of the research are preserved (Richards, 2016). They are built into the research design, and their principles define how researchers and participants must carry themselves and take all the necessary steps to prevent bias, deprivation, or exploitation of human subjects (Martin *et al.*, 2022). The Nuremberg Code (1949) provided the foundation for ethical research with human subjects, as it defined the principle of informed consent under which it should be conducted. Nijhawan *et al.* (2013) propose that informed consent grants the participants the right to make a full understanding of the nature of the study, and the free choice to participate or not.

As part of ethical compliance, all participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the study, and written informed consent and assent were obtained from relevant stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, parents or guardians, and learners. These documents are attached as

Appendices E to J and were used to ensure that participation is voluntary and based on a clear understanding of the research procedures.

3.9.1 Ethical Procedures

In this study, all necessary ethical procedures were followed to protect the rights and well-being of all participants before the start of the study. The ethical clearance was obtained from the North-West University: Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) under the ethics number NWU-01156-24-A7 (Annexure A). In addition, formal permission was secured from the Department of Education (Annexure B) and the principals of the selected schools through emails with an information leaflet (Annexure C). Informed consent was secured from the participating teachers (Annexure D) and from the parents of all learners (Annexure E), and assent was obtained from the learners themselves (Annexure F) before any data collection. These steps served as the foundation for all data-gathering activities conducted in the participating schools.

All participants were provided with clear information about the study, including the purpose of the study, procedures followed, and their right to withdraw at any stage. The data were collected in a comfortable, safe classroom facilities within normal hours for familiarity. Financial or material rewards were not given to keep the participation voluntary and unbiased. With their consent, the interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone, and additional observations were documented through written field notes.

Although the interviews were supposed to be held in a calm setting during a quiet time, there were some that were held during break times and school hours because of the availability of the teachers. Comfort, privacy, and voluntary participation were always given a priority. A semi-structured interview format allowed teachers to cogitate on their practices in teaching reading comprehension, based on the challenges and achievements.

3.9.1.1 Informed Consent

Teachers and parents received informed consents, while the learners received assent forms, which were given to the learners before the commencement of data collection. A consent form was provided to the teachers, describing the purpose of the research and procedures of the study, potential risks, and benefits. The parents were given a detailed consent form that explained the aim, the purpose, and procedure of the study. Assent forms were given to the learners in an age-appropriate and easily understandable format so that they would be completely informed of the study process and the rights of a participants. To facilitate learners' understanding, the assent form was explained to the learners in a step by step process, in accordance with the data collection procedures by the relevant ethics committee. The research read the form and explained further what each

statement meant for them as the participants. This created an opportunity for learners to ask questions and clarify before they could sign the form as an indication of an agreement to participate. Privacy and Confidentiality

Strict privacy and confidentiality measures were enforced throughout the study. Codes and pseudonyms were used in reporting the collection of personal information. Data is stored in password-protected and encrypted devices, and it will be stored for three years, after which it will be destroyed. Handling of the data was done in a manner that maintained confidentiality and anonymity, and steps to reduce any possible risks involved in the study were also taken.

3.9.2 Benefits and Potential Risks

3.9.2.1 Benefits

This study has several benefits, including valuable information for educational stakeholders, such as policy makers, school administrators, teachers, parents, and learners. The results provide evidence-based information regarding the effects of instructional practices and classroom conditions on the results of reading comprehension. These enlightenments could be used as an indicator of decisions made on curriculum development, especially English HL and FAL programmes. Its addition can influence the allocation of resources to teacher training, literacy resources, and classroom intervention in schools which are under-resourced.

School administrators (principals and heads of department, curriculum coordinators, etc.) can use the findings to evaluate the existing practices in reading instruction and to identify areas of further improvement in their school, which may include providing structured support for teachers, improving opportunities for literacy-focused professional development initiatives and collaborations. The teachers can also use the findings of the study to have a better knowledge of the existing approaches to reading instructions, finding the areas where issues are frequent, and assessing the classroom practice in their backgrounds. Furthermore, the findings can contribute to reflective practice by motivating teachers to analyse their teaching choices critically, change strategies according to the learners' needs, and revise methods of teaching reading comprehension. Even though the research does not involve exploring other instructional approaches, the study gives evidence on classroom conditions and practices that correlate with a higher outcome in reading comprehension.

3.9.2.2 Risks

Working with child participants introduces certain ethical risks, such as potential discomfort, anxiety, or disruption to their normal school routine. The study was conducted in the classrooms of the participants. All the activities were coordinated during school hours, and no learner was forcefully recruited to participate in them. Reduction of risk mitigation minimised any emotional or educational

disturbance to learners. The administration of the test was coordinated in a way that minimised disruption to the learners' regular school activities and ensured that the assessment did not interfere unnecessarily with classroom teaching and learning. Ethical standards were preserved through anonymity and free will, whereas further procedures, like rapport development and observation of distress, were crucial to an ethical manner of conducting the research with children.

To ensure ethical integrity throughout the research process, the researcher participated in regular debriefing and supervision sessions with academic mentors. These meetings aided in the predictive, diagnostic, and reactive solution of ethical problems that emerged during data collection. The research design attempted to balance the possible risks and benefits since maximisation of the study benefits to the participants, schools, and educational stakeholders was achieved at minimal risks. All data were collected in accordance with the approved ethical procedures and with attention to the confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the rights of the participants.

3.10 Validity and Reliability

For research findings to be meaningful, they must be both valid and reliable (Blanche *et al.*, 2006). Validity may also be defined as the degree to which research measures what it actually measures, whereas reliability is defined as the consistency of results in case they are used anywhere at any point in time or under different circumstances, or with different subjects (Golafshani, 2003; Noble & Smith, 2015). In this current study, validity and reliability were considered for both quantitative and qualitative data. The adapted PIRLS tests, and the CLEP checklist were administered and scored using consistent procedures. For the qualitative data, structured classroom observations and interviews were used to ensure consistency in data collection, while the interview and observation data were systematically coded and analysed thematically.

3.10.1 Validity

Various data-gathering tools were used to improve the overall validity of the study since different aspects of the research questions were measured in a proper and complementary manner. In the case of learner performance, the PIRLS test (Mullis *et al.*, 2017) presented an internationally recognised, reliable and standardised reading comprehension test. The test was conducted in two sessions: this design was aimed at limiting fatigue to the learners and to have an inclusive coverage of the ability of the learners to comprehend the information taught, but not to compare the pre- and post-instructional results.

The CLEP checklist was used in determining the availability and utilisation of reading resources in each classroom. Classroom literacy-environment scales like CLEP that have been established through construct validity in the previous research exhibit strong correlations between print-rich

environments, instructional support, and reading gains (Duke, 2000; Neuman & Celano, 2001). As a result, the CLEP is consistent with the findings in the schools that are a part of the present study, thus corroborating its ability to reflect the existence of literacy-rich environments.

Lesson observations and semi-structured interviews were used to verify the information about the teachers in relation to their teaching activities. The direct evidence of the teaching strategies in action is the lesson observation, and the teacher interviews that gave the teachers a chance to explain their decisions, difficulties, and views in their own words. The combination of these four sources of information, the PIRLS, CLEP, observations, and interviews, enhanced the internal validity of the study through cross-checking and corroboration of multiple sources of information.

3.10.2 Reliability

Reliability was addressed through the choice of instruments and the way they were administered. The PIRLS instrument has gained widespread acceptance of reliability in other countries (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). Internal consistency in this research was also established through a review of the responses of the learners on the items in the test to ascertain the same measurements of comprehension skills. Although not all the learners answered all the questions in the 40 minutes allocated, the pattern of responses was similar, which provided the reliability of the data. In the case of the CLEP checklist, the reliability was improved through the systematic administration of the checklist in all four classrooms during the English reading lesson. This similarity in time and situation minimised observer bias and made it comparable. Also, the researcher was using a standardised format of observation procedure in schools, thus improving inter-item reliability in the classroom data.

Thematic analysis was done through a coding framework, which ensured qualitative reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis of classroom observation records and transcripts of interviews was systematised, and the themes were triangulated with various data sources. During lunch break, background noise was occasionally present when teachers were interviewed. The researcher took note of these environmental conditions when reviewing the interview recordings and transcripts. Audio recordings and detailed field notes ensured that the process of capturing the responses of the teachers was accurate.

By carefully combining structured, quantitative tools with flexible but systematic qualitative methods, the study presented findings that are both valid and reliable. The data-collection process included measures which ensured that the conclusions made regarding reading comprehension and teaching activities were credible and trustworthy, i.e., through triangulation, consistent administration, and systematic analysis. In this study, the research tools were rigorously planned, carefully implemented and meticulously documented to ensure the accuracy and consistency of data collection and

analysis. Johnson and Onwuezbuzie (2004) note that areas of consistency in data-collection processes, compliance with research standards, and a clear record of research methodology are very crucial in improving both validity and reliability. The study presented credible findings that addressed research questions by identifying factors that promote or discourage reading comprehension in Grade 5 classrooms within different contexts in South Africa.

3.11 Summary

This chapter outlined the study design that was used to investigate reading comprehension performance and teacher instructional strategies used in English Grade 5 classrooms in public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. The study adopted the pragmatic paradigm as the philosophical foundation of the research and the rationale of using a mixed-methods design to thoroughly interrogate both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research questions. The chapter also explains the rationale for adopting a case study approach and for selecting the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District as the research site. The district's linguistic diversity and socio-economic variation made it an appropriate context for examining reading comprehension and classroom practices.

Learner participation followed a census approach, whereby all the available Grade 5 learners from the four schools who had parental consent were included. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select the Grade 5 English teachers in the four participating schools. All teachers responsible for teaching Grade 5 English in the selected schools were invited to participate, regardless of their teaching experience. Their inclusion was based on their direct responsibility for teaching Grade 5 English, which made their classroom practices and experiences relevant to the objective of the study. Data collection tools involved the adapted PIRLS test (to measure learners' reading comprehension), the CLEP checklist (to evaluate classroom literacy environments), a classroom observation checklist (to capture instructional practices), and semi-structured interviews (to gather teacher perspectives). Qualitative data were analysed using the thematic method to identify trends in the instruction practices and teachers' experiences.

A careful consideration of ethical factors was conducted, in which the procedures to protect the rights, confidentiality, and welfare of the participants were outlined. Informed consent, privacy, and data security were reinforced while undertaking the research. Validity and reliability were supported by the validated instrument of data collection, standardised data-collection procedures and strict analytical approaches.

Overall, the methodological framework was well developed to provide credible and context-related information about reading comprehension skills and instructional practices within diverse South African educational settings. However, the study was delimited to four selected schools in one

district in the North West Province, and the findings should therefore not be generalised to all schools or learners in the province. The next chapter outlines the findings of the study and the interpretation while addressing the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This study investigated the reading comprehension performance of Grade 5 learners and examined how literacy environments and instructional practices influence the learners' performance in public and private schools at the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of the North-West Province. The quantitative and qualitative research data are presented in this chapter. The quantitative data collection was conducted using adapted Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) comprehension tests and Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) checklist, while the qualitative data were collected through lesson observations and semi-structured interviews with the teachers. All these integrated approaches were suitable to provide a detailed perspective of the literacy experiences of the learners and the reading instruction practices of the Grade 5 English teachers. The research also aimed at exploring the influence of the language of instruction, resources, and teaching methods on the reading comprehension results.

To achieve this, the study focused on three key research questions:

1. What is the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English HL and FAL in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it differ between public and private schools?
2. What is the classroom literacy environment for Grade 5 learners in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it vary between them?
3. How is reading comprehension instruction implemented between 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of North-West Province, particularly with regard to the teaching of inference, interpretation, integration of ideas, evaluation, and the instructional strategies teachers use to support learners' reading comprehension development?

This chapter presents the findings of the study together with their interpretation and discussion. The presentation of the results is structured according to the three research questions, allowing the quantitative and qualitative data to be examined in relation to one another. Section 4.2 provides an overview of the analytical methods used in the study and explains how both the quantitative and qualitative data were analysed before presenting the findings. Section 4.3 covers the quantitative data analysis, which presents the findings and discussion for research question number one, specifically focusing on the adapted PIRLS test results and the insights that they give on the performance ability of learners about reading comprehension in both public and private schools. The

second research question is also addressed in this section by analysing the CLEP results, thus characterising and explaining the classroom literacy environments of learners in context. Section 4.4 discusses the qualitative data obtained from lesson observations and teacher interviews, focusing on instructional practices and classroom dynamics, which serve to answer the third research question. In addition, Section 4.5, introduces the combination of the quantitative and qualitative findings, by focusing on the areas of convergence and divergence to provide a holistic explanation of the teaching and learning of literacy in the context of the study. Lastly, the chapter concludes in section 4.6. Collectively, these findings contribute to the general knowledge of how the process of reading comprehension is affected by the complex interaction between language, pedagogy, and the learning environment in South African primary schools.

4.2 Overview of the Data Analysis

The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collected from four schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District, comprising Grade 5 learners with two public schools and two private schools. The sample included 85 Grade 5 learners and four English teachers, one teacher from each school. Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the quantitative data. Data was described to obtain descriptive and inferential statistics by cleaning, coding, and analysing it. The performance of the learners on the adapted PIRLS comprehension tests and in the CLEP checklist was summarised using the descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions). Other data inferences that were employed to examine data were t-tests, ANOVA, chi-square tests, and a measure of association to conduct additional inferential analysis. These techniques assisted in determining whether any differences in the comprehension scores and classroom settings were significant over the random probability. The qualitative data consisted of classroom observations and checklists used to document literacy-related classroom environment, as well as semi-structured interview data collected from the four participating Grade 5 English teachers.

The data was coded and analysed thematically following the six-phase model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (i) familiarisation of data, (ii) generating initial codes, (iii) theme search, (iv) reviewing of themes, (v) naming, and (vi) defining themes, and finally producing the report. Thematic analysis has been selected based on its flexibility in finding patterns in all qualitative materials and describing similar and diverse experiences among teachers. Codes emerging from the observation and the semi-structured interview data were grouped into broader themes as well.

To strengthen the reliability and validity of the results, both quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated through a triangulation approach. This was done by analysing and correlating the patterns of statistical analysis with the themes identified in the qualitative data. For example, variations in

comprehension performance and classroom literacy environments observed in the quantitative phase were compared to the description of teacher instructional practices and the observations made by the researcher. The comparison of quantitative findings with teacher accounts and researcher observations provided a more comprehensive and holistic explanation of how the classroom environment and instructional strategies contribute to the development of reading comprehension. The next section (section 4.3) presents the quantitative findings, beginning with the results of the adapted PIRLS reading comprehension tests, followed by the CLEP analysis of classroom literacy environments.

4.3 Quantitative Data Analysis

This section presents the quantitative findings for research questions 1 and 2. The quantitative data were collected using the adapted PIRLS tests and the CLEP checklist.

4.3.1 Progress In Reading Literacy Study Results

Question 1: What is the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English HL and FAL in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it differ between public and private schools?

This section answers the research question by providing the comprehension scores of learners on standardised adapted PIRLS reading assessments that assess different aspects of reading comprehension as opposed to instructional gains. It gives descriptive as well as inferential statistical analyses of performance in the four schools that participated. Quantitative analysis involved the measures of central tendency (means and standard deviations) and the inferential tests (t -tests; ANOVA) to determine whether the differences in performance observed between the groups represented statistically significant results. The adapted PIRLS assessment included two tests that assessed learners' skills in information retrieval, meaning interpretation, and synthesis of ideas in short texts.

4.3.1.1 Descriptive Statistics of PIRLS Results

This section presents descriptive statistics for the participating schools to examine the reading comprehension performance of Grade 5 learners across different school contexts. It provides scores obtained from the adapted PIRLS-based reading comprehension tests and compares the learners' performance between private and public schools. These statistics include the mean, standard deviation, and the sample size in the adapted PIRLS assessments (Test 1 and Test 2). The results of the two PIRLS reading comprehension assessments revealed clear differences in learning performance across the participating schools.

The table below presents the results of the PIRLS for School A, a private school where English is used as a HL.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for School

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIRLS 1	6	10	65	38.33	21.602
PIRLS 2	6	0	70	41.67	24.221

The descriptive statistics reveal that the learners performed on average in PIRLS Test 1 (38%) and PIRLS Test 2 (42%). The mean increased by three points, while the standard deviations were large, with values of 21.60 in PIRLS Test 1 and 24.22 in PIRLS Test 2. The results also show the scores as low as 10% for PIRLS 1 and 0% for PIRLS 2. The median for PIRLS Test 1 is slightly lower than PIRLS Test 2, indicating modest improvement.

Figure 4.1 shows the distributions of PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 scores.

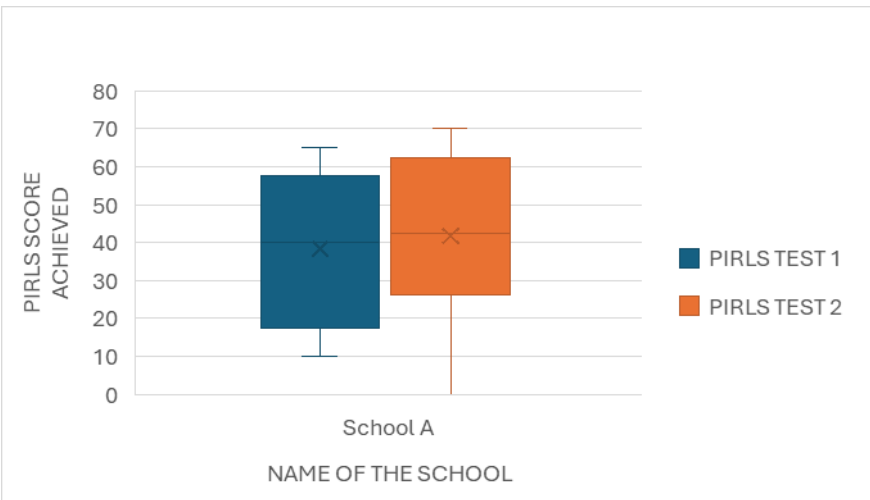


Figure 4.1: PIRLS Test 1 and 2 data Interpretation: School A (Private School, English HL)

Both tests have wide interquartile ranges, especially the PIRLS Test 2, showing substantial variation. Several scores cluster near the lower end in both tests, indicating persistent difficulties for some learners, while the wider spread in PIRLS Test 2 suggests uneven responses to the literary passage.

The table 4.2 below presents the results for 35 learners at School B for PIRLS Tests 1 and 2, a public school where English was the first additional language (FAL).

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for School B (Public – English FAL)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIRLS 1	35	25	85	55.86	18.767
PIRLS 2	35	5	70	30.71	17.411

The descriptive statistics reveal that the learners performed on average in PIRLS Test 1 (56%) and PIRLS Test 2 (31%). The standard deviations were 18.77 for PIRLS Test 1 and 17.41 for PIRLS Test 2, reflecting a moderate degree of variation, with more scores concentrated around the mean in PIRLS Test 2. School B's performance was low, with most learners performing poorly in the PIRLS Test 2. Because the PIRLS Test 2 focuses more on inferential comprehension and text integration, this suggests that many FAL learners at School B struggle to construct meaning beyond the text and are unable to use higher-order comprehension strategies in reading. In addition, the minimum score for Test 2 is considerably lower, reflecting a weaker performance.

Figure 4.2 below is a box plot for School B, which illustrates the distribution of PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 scores for the learners.

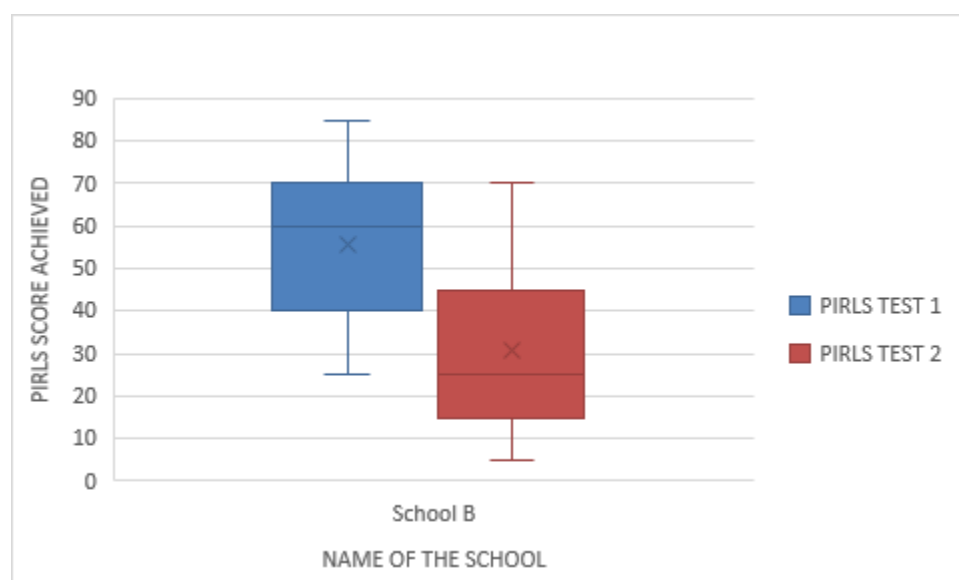


Figure 4.2: PIRLS Test 1 and 2 data Interpretation: School B (Public School, English FAL)

The median for adapted PIRLS Test 1 sits noticeably higher than that of PIRLS Test 2, confirming that most learners performed better with Test 1. The box plot indicates that scores for Test 2 are substantially lower overall than those for Test 1. The interquartile range for Test 2 has shifted downward, with the median positioned well below that of Test 1. Overall, the box plot highlights that the learners struggled more with literary comprehension and performance in both tests.

Table 4.3 presents the findings of 16 learners in School C, a private school where English is the HL.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for School C (Private – English HL)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIRLS Test 1	15	25	90	72.67	18.791
PIRLS Test 2	16	0	90	51.25	28.665

Note: One learner did not complete PIRLS 1

The average score for the adapted PIRLS Test 1 was 72.67%, while PIRLS Test 2 indicated an average score of 51.25%. The standard deviation rose from 18.79 in PIRLS Test 1 to 28.67 in PIRLS Test 2. Despite the learners in this school struggling with PIRLS Test 2, they outperformed those at the other schools, particularly on PIRLS Test 1, which focused on interpretive comprehension.

Figure 4.3 below is a box plot for School C, which illustrates the distribution of the adapted PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 scores for the learners.

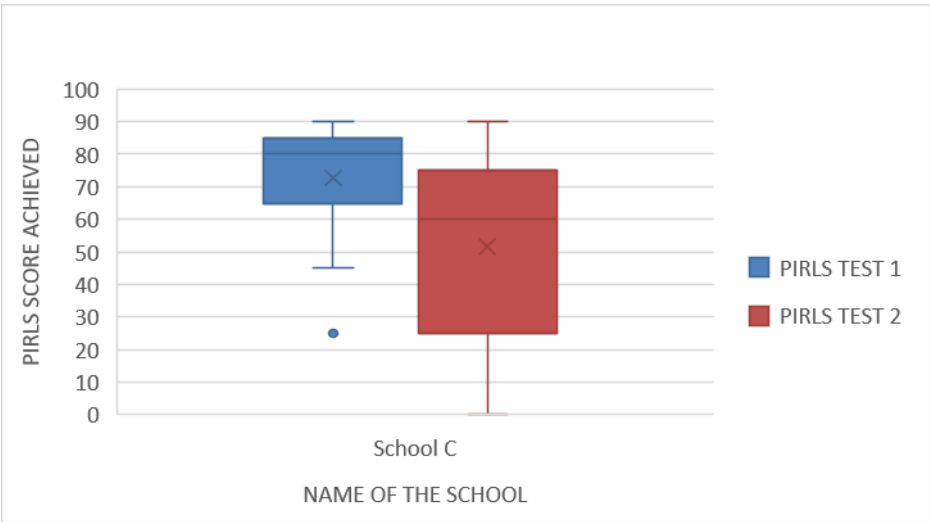


Figure 4.3: Box plot Interpretation: School C (Private School, English HL)

School C shows a stronger performance trend than the other schools. The medians for both PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 are high, though PIRLS Test 2 declines in line with the descriptive statistics. The narrow interquartile range for PIRLS Test 1 indicates consistently strong results on the informational passage. In contrast, the wider spread in PIRLS Test 2 suggests that, while many learners did well, some struggled with the literary text. A few low-end outliers in PIRLS Test 2 indicate isolated weak comprehension.

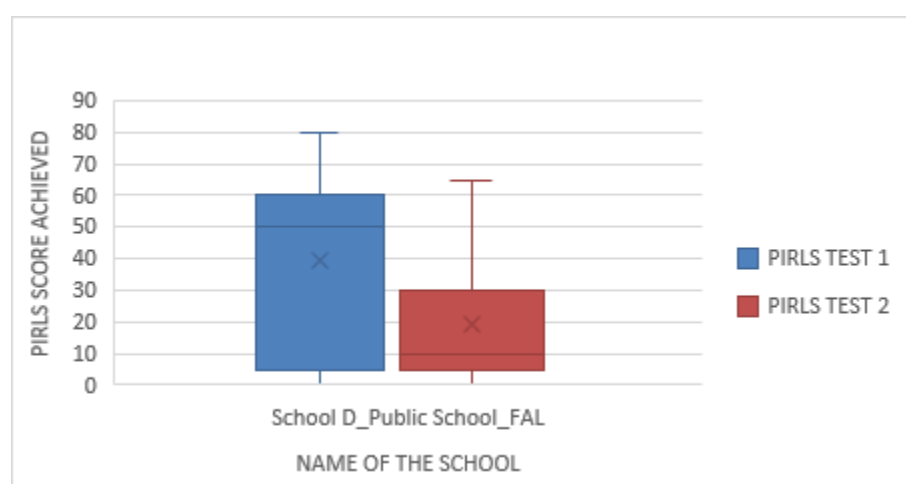
Table 4.4 summarises results for 27 learners from School D, a public school where English was taught as a FAL.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for School D (Public – English FAL)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PIRLS 1	26	0	80	41.15	28.541
PIRLS 2	27	0	65	19.26	18.999

The average score was 41.15% on the adapted PIRLS Test 1 and 19.26% on PIRLS Test 2, indicating a difference of 21.89 points. Standard deviations (28.54 for PIRLS Test 1 and 18.99 for PIRLS Test 2) show high variation in the first test but less spread in the second, where most learners performed poorly, with minimum scores of zero in both assessments. This pattern indicates that comprehension outcomes in School D were the weakest among all schools, suggesting that many learners struggled even with basic text retrieval and interpretation, and found inferential comprehension particularly challenging.

Figure 4.4 below is a box plot which illustrates the distribution of the adapted PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 scores for the learners in School D.

**Figure 4.4: Box plot Interpretation: School D (Public School, English FAL)**

School D performed the weakest of all four schools. The adapted PIRLS Test 1 has a very wide interquartile range, indicating large ability differences within the class. In contrast, PIRLS Test 2 shows a narrower but exceptionally low cluster, meaning learners performed more similarly on the literary text, but at a consistently weak level. The low-level scores in both tests highlight serious comprehension difficulties.

Table 4.5 below is a comparative summary of the aggregated performance of learners from private HL and public FAL schools. The statistical significance of the differences between the two groups, including the t-value, degree of freedom (df), p-value, and effect size, is presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.5: Comparative Summary – Private (HL) vs Public (FAL) Schools

Group	N	PIRLS Test 1 Mean	Std. Deviation	N	PIRLS Test 2 Mean	Std. Deviation
Private HL	21	62.86	24.838	22	48.64	27.307
Public FAL	61	49.59	24.346	62	25.73	18.585

When comparing the schools, the private school learners achieved overall means of 62.86% (PIRLS Test 1) and 48.64% (PIRLS Test 2), while the public-school learners achieved 49.59% (PIRLS Test 1) and 25.73% (PIRLS Test 2). In both tests, learners in private schools performed better than those in public schools. However, both groups also showed a decline in the average score in the PIRLS Test 2, suggesting that learners in both the public and private schools contexts experienced greater difficulty with comprehension demands assessed in Test 2. The larger standard deviation observed among learners in the private schools indicate greater variation in performance, whereas the lower standard deviation in the public schools suggests a low range of performance. The comparatively higher performance in PIRLS Test 1, for instance among learners in School B, may be related to differences in learners' familiarity with test format, or the type of text used. However, these possible explanations cannot be confirmed from the quantitative results alone and should therefore be considered alongside the classroom observations and teacher interview findings.

Overall, the participants in all four schools showed evidence of comprehension deficiency during higher-order reading comprehension skills, such as inference and interpretation in PIRLS Test 2, as compared to the higher scores on literal comprehension in PIRLS Test 1. In addition, the private schools (Schools A and C) had higher scores compared to the public schools (Schools B and D). These results show that both the school type and the language of instruction significantly influenced and contributed to comprehension performance. This finding aligns with broader literacy research (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016), which shows that learners in well-resourced environments tend to perform better on comprehension tasks as compared with those in under-resourced contexts. The standard deviations were significantly higher in the case of learners in the public schools, which showed more variability in performances, and higher chances of discrepancies in language competency in the classes.

The descriptive statistics provide an overview of how learners performed across individual schools. However, further statistical analysis was necessary to determine whether the observed differences were statistically significant. Inferential tests were conducted to compare English reading comprehension performance between public FAL and private HL schools and to assess how school type and individual school identity influenced learner outcomes. These analyses also helped

establish whether the performance gaps identified in the descriptive results were a result of random variation or reflected consistency and meaningful differences in reading achievement across educational contexts.

4.3.1.2 Inferential Analysis of PIRLS Results

To determine the statistical significance of the observed differences in performance, an independent samples t- test and two-way ANOVA were used. The independent t-test was used to compare the mean scores of two non-related groups, and the test was conducted to define the information on whether the difference between the mean scores was statistically significant. This comparison investigated the relationship between school type and language of instruction as well as differences in comprehension results. The t-test not only determined the significance of the differences in mean scores ($p = .05$) but also made it possible to calculate the effect sizes (Cohen's d) that could provide the real meaning of the differences in scores, rather than simply their statistical significance. In addition, a two-way ANOVA was performed to address the question of whether the interaction effect between school type (public versus private) and individual schools (A, B, C, and D) influenced the dependent variable, reading comprehension performance from PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2.

The following table presents the results of an Independent Samples t-test, conducted to compare the reading comprehension performance of learners in public and private schools as measured by PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2.

Table 4.3: Independent Samples t-test for PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 (Public vs Private Schools)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			
		F	Sig.	t	df
PIRLS Test 1	Equal variances assumed	.063	.802	2.143	80
PIRLS Test 2	Equal variances not assumed	7.350	.008	4.326	82

The t-test was used to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores between the two groups, based on school type. The Levine's Test for Equality of Variances indicated that there was a variance for PIRLS Test 1 ($F = .063$; $p = .802$). However, PIRLS Test 2 ($F = 7.350$; $p = .008$) did not indicate any variance. Therefore, equal variance was observed for PIRLS Test 1, while unequal variance for PIRLS Test 2 was assumed. For the t-test, the results showed that for PIRLS Test 1, private school learners achieved significantly higher comprehension scores than public school learners ($t(80) = 2.143$, $p = .045$). For PIRLS Test 2, the performance gap widened, with private school learners again outperforming public school learners ($t(82) = 4.326$, $p = .001$). The

comparison should also be in relation to the LoLT of the participating schools. The two private schools offered English as a Home Language (HL), whereas the two public schools offered English as a First Additional Language (FAL). According to CAPS, learners in Grade 4-6 are expected to develop progressively more advanced reading and comprehension skills, however HL and FAL constitutes different of language-learning context with different curriculum expectations (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). The results were therefore interpreted with consideration of both school type and language status. In addition to determining the statistically significant difference, the effect size was also measured.

Table 4.7 presents the results of the effect size from the independent sample t-test.

Table 4.4: Independent Sample t-test (Effect size) for PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 (Public vs Private Schools)

Comparison	Mean Diff	T	df	p	Cohen's d
Public vs Private (PIRLS Test 1)	24.468	2.143	80	.045	0.542
Public vs Private (PIRLS Test 2)	21.343	4.326	82	.000	1.073

In PIRLS Test 1, the learners obtained a higher mean score (24.47%), and the effect size was moderate (Cohen's $d = 0.54$), indicating a meaningful difference in reading comprehension performance between the two school contexts. The independent sample t-test, however, demonstrates that PIRLS Test 2 had a mean score of 21.34% with a large effect size (Cohen's $d = 1.07$). The findings suggests that as reading tasks became more complex, differences in language proficiency, instructional quality, and classroom support had an even greater impact on learner performance.

To further explore differences in reading comprehension performance, Table 4.5 presents a Two-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) that was conducted to examine the combined effects of school type (public vs private) and individual schools on learners' PIRLS Test 1 and PIRLS Test 2 scores. By including the school type and individual schools, the analysis allowed for a more detailed understanding of how the school environments interacted to influence reading performance. The dependent variable in this test was the learners' reading comprehension score, while school type and individual schools were the independent variables. The ANOVA provided a way to assess whether observed differences in performance were primarily due to the broader type of school (e.g., language of instruction and resources) or the unique characteristics of individual schools within those categories.

Table 4.5: Two-Way ANOVA of PIRLS Scores by School Type and Individual School

Source	Dependent Variable	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	PIRLS Test 1	7.237	<.001	.218
	PIRLS Test 2	7.770	<.001	.230
Intercept	PIRLS Test 1	283.623	<.001	.784
	PIRLS Test 2	153.924	<.001	.664
Individual Schools	PIRLS Test 1	8.148	<.001	.173
	PIRLS Test 2	2.538	.086	.061
Interaction (School Type × Individual School)	PIRLS Test 1	–	–	.000
	PIRLS Test 2	–	–	.000

The results of the Two-Way ANOVA (Table 4.5) revealed significant differences in learners' reading comprehension performance across individual schools and school types. For PIRLS Test 1, the Corrected model explained approximately 22% of the variance in scores ($R^2 = .218$, Adjusted $R^2 = .188$), indicating that school-related factors accounted for a meaningful portion of performance differences. The effect of individual schools was statistically significant ($F(2,78) = 8.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .173$), indicating that School C performed better as compared to School A within the private school category.

In contrast, the interaction between school type and individual school was not significant, meaning that the influence of being a public or private school was consistent across schools. The lack of a significant interaction effect further suggests that the observed differences in reading comprehension between English HL in private schools and English FAL in public schools were not shaped by unique characteristics of individual schools, such as class size or specific teacher practices. Instead, the language-of-instruction context appears to function as a broader structural factor influencing reading outcomes.

For PIRLS Test 2, the model accounted for a similar amount of variance ($R^2 = .230$, Adjusted $R^2 = .200$), but the results were not statistically significant ($p = .086$). The results suggests that differences between individual schools were less pronounced in the second test, where the overall performance declined. The lack of a significant interaction effect further suggests that the observed differences in reading comprehension between English HL at private and English FAL at public schools were not shaped by unique characteristics of individual schools, such as class size or specific teacher practices. Instead, the language-of-instruction context appears to function as a broader structural factor influencing reading outcomes.

The findings of ANOVA are consistent with the results of the independent t-test that indicated that school type, language of instruction, and the availability of educational resources influenced reading

comprehension of the learners more than the school. It means that wider systemic influences such as instructional language, provision of resources, and teaching practices are important predeterminants of the results for reading comprehension. The inferential statistical analyses, therefore, explained the effect that school type and learning context had on the performance of learners. While these tests demonstrated a clear distinction between the groups, visually representing the data provided a more intuitive view of the identified performance patterns.

Overall, the PIRLS analysis indicated that learners in private HL schools generally performed better in reading comprehension than learners in public FAL schools, which is consistent with the expectation that learners receiving English as HL would have a greater English Language proficiency and exposure than learners receiving English as a FAL. The observation highlights how language proficiency, classroom atmosphere, and the quality of instruction affect the comprehension of written materials by learners. However, the results also revealed an unexpected pattern at individual school level, where learners from a public FAL school outperformed learners from a private HL school on one of the PIRLS tests. The findings suggest that reading comprehension outcomes may be influenced by factors beyond school type and LoLT. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of considering language proficiency, classroom literacy environments, and instructional practices when interpreting differences in learners' reading comprehension.

The next section presents the findings of the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP), which was used to gauge the quality and nature of the literacy environments in both the public and private schools. The findings of CLEP are centred on the accessibility of reading materials as well as the arrangement of the classroom space and the existence of literacy-supportive resources. Additionally, the CLEP findings complement the PIRLS assessment results by providing contextual information about the classroom literacy in which reading instruction takes place.

4.3.2 Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP)

The Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) checklist was used to assess the literacy-rich features of each Grade 5 classroom at the four schools. The CLEP was designed as a measure of the existence, availability, and use of print and literacy-related resources and the literacy quality of the classroom reading environment in general (Wolfersberger *et al.*, 2004).

In this study, CLEP served as a tool for understanding how differences in classroom resources and literacy practices might contribute to learners' reading comprehension outcomes. The quantitative analysis of CLEP data was used to identify trends in the classroom literacy setting and to point out the differences between the two educational settings (private and public schools). The checklist was administered in both educational settings during the English lesson observations, allowing for direct comparison of the literary environments in which the reading instruction occurred. The analysis

focused on several key indicators, such as the quantity and variety of text materials, the use of print and literacy tools, and the organisation of reading spaces and displays.

This section identified environmental factors that support or hinder literacy development, providing context for the PIRLS comprehension results. Comparing the classrooms of Grade 5 in the chosen classrooms, the study employed CLEP as the means of variation of the classroom literacy environment. The data were examined on the basis of cross-tabulations and descriptive statistics. Moreover, the Chi-square tests have been applied to explore the relationship between the classroom characteristics and the school type. The descriptive analysis is a summary of how frequently and how common the key elements that promote literacy in the school were, meaning how each school encourages literacy participation. Chi-square tests were done to determine the significance of these characteristics between schools of different types.

This systematic analysis allowed the identification of both the strengths and limitations within the classroom literacy environment in each school, as well as the broader patterns associated with the availability of resources and instructional practices. These findings are presented in the following tables to describe the factors which can be used to distinguish between literacy-rich classroom environments and those with more limited opportunities for reading development.

4.3.2.1 CLEP data sorting

In this section, the descriptive statistics of the CLEP data are provided. These findings are classified according to the key aspects of a literacy-rich classroom that include reading content, print displays, reference materials, and literacy tools. These characteristics were entered into a binary system (observed = (1)), not observed (= 0), allowing for a straightforward comparison of the presence or absence of specific elements across public and private schools. The CLEP results are presented descriptively and interpreted using category-specific ranges that distinguish between low, moderate, and high literacy environments relative to the maximum possible score for each category. This approach allows for a more context-sensitive interpretation of classroom literacy conditions rather than relying on absolute scores alone.

4.3.2.2 Findings of the CLEP data

This interpretive framework was used consistently across all CLEP categories to support comparative analysis between public and private school classrooms, and it is important to note that the category reflects a continuum and not a fixed threshold. To answer research question 2, the descriptive analysis of CLEP data is presented below:

Research Question 2: *What is the classroom literacy environment for Grade 5 learners in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it vary between them?*

The CLEP categories are presented in two sets of tables to provide a clearer overview of the descriptive statistics across the four participating schools. Table 4.9 presents the first set of categories, while Table 4.10 reports the remaining categories related to classroom literacy environments. This division allows the results to be displayed more clearly without overcrowding a single table.

Table 4.6: Descriptive statistics for CLEP results of the individual schools (Part 1)

School Type	School ID		Classroom environment	Quantity of text materials	Literacy product displays	Participation in literacy events	Utility of literacy tools	Reference materials
Private School	School A	Mean	13.00	11.00	7.00	9.00	12.00	5.00
	School C	Mean	11.00	8.00	6.00	8.00	10.00	8.00
	Total	Mean	12.00	9.50	6.50	8.50	11.00	6.50
		Std. Deviation	1.414	2.121	.707	.707	1.414	2.121
Public School	School B	Mean	11.00	8.00	6.00	4.00	9.00	5.00
	School D	Mean	10.00	8.00	6.00	4.00	9.00	8.00
	Total	Mean	10.50	8.00	6.00	4.00	9.00	6.50
		Std. Deviation	.707	.000	.000	.000	.000	6.50

The CLEP findings (Table 4.6) reveal noticeable variation in classroom literacy environments between public and private schools, although the differences are not uniform across all categories. While private schools generally demonstrated richer and more consistently organised literacy environments, public schools showed strengths in selected areas, particularly in the functional use of available resources. The Classroom Environment category assessed the organisation of the physical space, the presence of print-rich displays, and the visibility of literacy-related materials. With a maximum possible score of 15, scores between 11 and 15 were interpreted as indicating a high literacy environment, scores between 6 and 10 as moderate, and scores of 5 or below as low. The mean score of the private schools was 12.00 (SD = 1.41) in this category, which ranks them squarely in the high category. The results indicates that those classrooms were in order, visually appealing, and explicitly designed to aid reading and writing. Variations show that classrooms in a private school are likely to be better structured and better equipped in special reading areas, clearly posted reading guidelines, and generally a greater assortment of readily available printed materials.

On the other hand, public schools received the mean score of 10.50 (SD= 0.71), which is considered in the upper moderate range. The results suggests that even though there were certain literacy-supportive elements, like simple displays on the walls and teacher-led print materials, they were less comprehensive and not as regularly incorporated into the day-to-day classroom routine. The distinction between the two school types indicates dissimilarity in spatial structure and prioritisation of print visibility rather than a complete absence of literacy support in public school classrooms.

The Quantity of Text Materials category assessed the availability of books and written texts that are available to learners, such as storybooks, informational texts, and additional reading materials. The scores of 9 -14 were considered high (14 being the highest score) with 5 - 8 as moderate, and 4 or lower were considered low. The mean school score of the private HL schools was 9.50, which put them in the high range. The score is an indication that learners in these schools had access to a range of reading materials regularly, during the instructional process, and during self-reading. The availability of a wide range of print materials provides learners with greater opportunities for exposure to written texts, which is linked to better reading exposure and comprehension acquisition. Neuman and Celano (2012) emphasise that exposure to different genres and forms of text can support vocabulary development, understanding of textual structures, and engagement with print, while Neuman and Celano (2001) demonstrate that the quality and quantity of language resources can provide richer opportunities for language the language interaction and cognitive engagement. Similarly, Fleisch (2008) and Spaul and Pretorius (2016) highlight how inequalities in the provision of educational resources can contribute to differences in literacy development across socio-economic context.

Conversely, public schools got a mean of 8.00, and it is in the moderate or average range. This means that even though there was availability of reading materials, there were not many, and these materials were usually shared amongst learners. This finding is consistent with other studies, which show that vocabulary growth, background knowledge acquisition, and higher-order understanding have restricted means when limited time is spent on diverse reading materials (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Spaul & Pretorius, 2019).

The Literacy Product Displays category focused on the extent to which learners' written work, reading responses, and other literacy products were displayed in the classroom. There was a maximum score of 10 on this category, with a score of 7–10 as a high score, 4–6 as a moderate score, and 3 or less as a low score. Both the private and the public schools were in the middle range bracket of this category, with mean scores of 6.50 and 6.00, respectively. These findings suggest that although there were slightly higher scores achieved by private schools in this category, both school types made some effort to display learners' work and provided some opportunities for showcasing reading and writing activities. However, the small difference between the two different

school types shows that this factor, on its own, is not a major contributor to reading comprehension performance.

Participation in the Literacy Events category addressed the level at which the learners were exposed to activities associated with literacy other than regular classroom classes, including reading competitions or book-focused events. With a maximum score of 10, scores between 8 and 10 were considered high, 4 to 7 as moderate, and 3 or below as low. The average score of private schools was 8.50, which was in the high range, this score indicates regular participation in activities that promote reading as a social and celebratory practice, such as reading days, storytelling, and book displays. These activities can help in motivating learners and achieving positive attitudes towards reading.

On the contrary, the 4.00 mean score recorded in public schools was in the lower part of the moderate range. While the low score suggests minimal exposure to enrichment activities related to literacy, it, nevertheless, indicates some level of organised literacy engagement. The difference, therefore, appears to relate to the frequency and the organisation of such events rather than their complete absence. It has been shown that involvement in literacy-related activities encourages reading and the development of reading comprehension, especially when socially supported reading experiences engage the learners (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Mullis *et al.*, 2017). These activities help to establish a culture of literacy in the school context that is linked to positive reading results (Pretorius & Murray, 2023).

The Utility of Literacy Tools category assessed the effectiveness and frequency of utilisation of the available literacy tools, such as dictionaries, charts, and reference materials, as they were used during instruction. With a maximum score of 10, scores of 8 - 10 were interpreted as high, 4 - 7 as moderate, and 3 or below as low. Interestingly, the mean score of the public schools was 8.00, and the schools ranked in the high range, whereas the private schools had a mean score of 7.00, which dwells in the upper moderate range. The higher score achieved in public schools suggest that, even though the overall number of resources accessible by the public-school teachers was lower, more intentional use of the available tools was made in terms of instruction. Reading comprehension development is supported by the availability of basic materials, including writing materials and print displays (Wolfersberger *et al.*, 2004). This finding complicates assumptions that richer environments automatically lead to better instructional practices and highlights the importance of teacher agency to mediate constraints in resources. Nevertheless, it has been stressed in the literature that the availability of materials does not necessarily imply better learning outcomes because materials must be implemented in instruction in a meaningful way (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016).

Similarly, within the Reference Materials category, both school types had a moderate level of availability (Private M = 6.50; Public M = 5.50). Although the scores depicts some form of support for writing literacy, it does not portray a complete print-rich or highly stimulating literacy environment. It has also been discovered that long-term exposure to print, reference books, and organised literacy displays enhances engagement and understanding of reading (Wolfersberger *et al.*, 2004; Pretorius & Spaul, 2016).

Table 4.7: Descriptive statistics for CLEP results of the individual schools (Part 2)

School Type	School ID		Quantity of literacy tools	Writing utensils	Format and content materials	Tech resources	Classroom library	Print used for the classroom	Authentic literacy events
Private School	School A	Mean	6.00	7.00	5.00	5.00	6.00	9.00	5.00
	School C	Mean	8.00	8.00	8.00	4.00	6.00	8.00	5.00
	Total	Mean	7.00	7.50	6.50	4.50	6.00	8.50	5.00
		Std. Deviation	1.414	.707	2.121	.707	.000	.707	.000
Public School	School B	Mean	8.00	7.00	5.00	4.00	6.00	4.00	4.00
	School D	Mean	8.00	8.00	8.00	3.00	6.00	4.00	4.00
	Total	Mean	8.00	7.50	6.50	3.5000	6.00	4.00	4.00
		Std. Deviation	.000	.707	6.50	.707	.000	.000	.000

On the contrary, the 4.00 mean score recorded in public schools was in the lower part of the moderate range. While the low score suggests minimal exposure to enrichment activities related to literacy, it, nevertheless, indicates some level of organised literacy engagement. The difference, therefore, appears to relate to the frequency and the organisation of such events rather than their complete absence. It has been shown that involvement in literacy-related activities encourages reading and the development of reading comprehension, especially when socially supported reading experiences engage the learners (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Mullis *et al.*, 2017). These activities help to establish a culture of literacy in the school context that is linked to positive reading results (Pretorius & Murray, 2023).

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though the overall number of resources accessible by the public-school teachers was lower, more intentional use of the available tools was made in terms of instruction. Reading comprehension development is supported by the availability of basic materials, including writing materials and print displays (Wolfersberger *et al.*, 2004). This finding complicates assumptions that richer environments automatically lead to better instructional practices and highlights the importance of teacher agency to mediate constraints in resources. Nevertheless, it has been stressed in the literature that the availability of materials does not necessarily imply better learning outcomes because materials must be implemented in instruction in a meaningful way (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016).

Similarly, within the Reference Materials category, both school types had a moderate level of availability (Private M = 6.50; Public M = 5.50). Although the scores depicts some form of support for writing literacy, it does not portray a complete print-rich or highly stimulating literacy environment. It has also been discovered that long-term exposure to print, reference books, and organised literacy displays enhances engagement and understanding of reading (Wolfersberger *et al.*, 2004; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016).

Table 4.7 presents additional descriptive statistics for the remaining Classroom Literacy Environment Profile categories across the four participating schools. In terms of the quantity of literacy tools in the category, both school types recorded moderate to high levels of availability. The private schools obtained a mean score of 7.00 out of a possible 10, while the public schools recorded a slightly higher mean of 8.00. Both scores lie within the high range, which means that most classrooms tend to be equipped with basic literacy materials like charts, worksheets, and printed materials.

In the writing utensils category, the mean scores of 7.50 were observed in both the public and the private schools. Both school types within the high category, meaning that there is enough supply of pens, pencils, and other materials that learners can use. Additionally, the findings indicate that both school types had similar foundations for offering standard classroom aid. Although these findings indicate some structural support of literacy instruction, previous research emphasises the importance of effective use of classroom libraries and print resources to support sustained reading and growth of reading comprehension (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Pretorius & Murray, 2023).

Moreover, in the format and content of reading materials, the same trends were visible in both school types. The mean score was 6.50 in both the public and the private schools, indicating moderate support. The moderate scores suggest that although reading material was available to learners in both settings, the breadth and suitability of reading were narrow despite the differences in the ability of a given text to cover a wide range of reading levels.

Both school types had a low score in the technology resources category, with private schools obtaining a mean of 4.50 and public schools a mean of 3.50. Although private schools showed slightly better access, both means are in the low to moderate range. The low technology-resource category scores of both school types suggest that neither of the settings used digital literacy tools, including tablets, computers, or online reading systems, in high numbers. These results correspond to the body of literature that highlights inconsistent and, in most cases, restricted adoption of digital literacy materials in the South African classrooms, especially in the Intermediate Phase (Howie *et al.*, 2017; Department of Basic Education, 2011b).

The classroom library category revealed moderate levels of support across both school types. Both schools, public and private, had the same mean of 6.00, which fell within the moderation range. The moderate classroom library scores indicates that there were libraries or collections of books present in most classrooms. Nevertheless, there seemed to be limited size, variety, and availability of these collections. Although the existence of classroom libraries is a positive development, the moderate scores imply that they may not be sufficiently stocked or actively used to support sustained independent reading, particularly for learners at varying proficiency levels.

The average score of 8.50 for private schools is high in the print used in the classroom category. The high score for classroom print suggests that print was actively and intentionally incorporated into the instructional activities, such as using charts, labels, anchor texts, and displayed learning materials to facilitate reading comprehension. Conversely, the mean score in the case of public schools was 4.00 and fell within the range of moderate to low. The lower classroom print score suggest that although there was some instructional print present, it was not actively used as a teaching tool as often. The distinction between the types of schools illuminates that the print-rich settings are not simply about the visibility, but rather about the integration of instruction (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016).

Finally, the authentic literacy events category revealed a contrast. Private schools recorded a mean score of 5.00, while public schools recorded a mean of 4.00. The scores are both in the middle. Such activities encompass writing displays and other occasions that exalt literacy beyond the monotonous classroom instruction, falling under this category. These findings are an indication that although they exist, those activities are not so entrenched or practised in a uniform manner, particularly in public schools.

Considering the CLEP results show that while basic literacy tools were evenly distributed, private schools consistently demonstrated stronger literacy environments in areas that require sustained planning, instructional integration, and institutional support. These patterns support findings by

Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016), who argue that meaningful literacy environments extend beyond material availability to include how resources are used to promote engagement and comprehension.

4.3.2.3 Interpretation of the CLEP descriptive data

The findings indicate that the conditions of literacy in the private schools are more stimulating and well-equipped than those in the public schools. Classrooms in the private schools were printed with visible word posters on the wall and regular learner engagement. Instead, in the public schools' classrooms, there were a few print resources displayed, and learners shared interactive resources such as textbooks, indicating that only a few were made available to them. Thus, these differences demonstrate more extensive socio-economic inequalities in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District and the South African education system more broadly. Private schools often benefit from smaller classes and access to diverse resources, whereas the conditions in public schools are more limited, with operation within the parameters of government regulations (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Department of Basic Education, 2019; Zimmerman, 2020). The importance of such contextual differences in classroom settings is of critical relevance, as they directly influence the educational experience of learners, particularly in relation to the development of reading comprehension skills. The outcome of CLEP descriptive results is that school type continues to be a defining factor in determining the quality of the literacy environment, which offers essential background on patterns observed in the PIRLS reading comprehension results.

Although the descriptive statistics presented the general picture of the literacy state given in both public and private schools, it does not specify whether the differences identified are statistically meaningful. The following section reports the results of the Independent Samples t-test due to the comparison of the mean scores of the two types of schools according to the main categories of the CLEP checklist. This comparison would determine the statistical significance of differences in resource availability, classroom print exposure, and literacy practices, thereby providing a greater insight into how school context influences literacy development among Grade 5 learners in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality.

The following section offers an overview of how the two types of schools differ in creating literacy-rich environments. They highlight the degree to which the learners were introduced to written content, motivating them to interact with the print, and provided reading material to assist them in reading and writing by themselves. These findings are summarised in the following section, which shows which elements of literacy were regular and which gaps were significant.

4.3.2.4 Independent Sample T-Test Rational

To determine the substantive significance of the discrepancies between the indicators of the classroom-based literacy environment found in both private and public schools, an Independent

Samples t-test was used to compare the differences in the category of the classroom-based literacy environment for the school types. Even though descriptive statistics provided a preliminary picture of the differences in the schools in terms of resources, print exposure, and literacy support features, the t-test helped identify whether the differences were caused by statistical significance or by coincidence.

Table 4.8 and Table 4.12 present the Independent Samples t-Test results. The tables are divided into two sets to provide a clearer picture of how classroom literacy environments differ between private and public schools by showing the mean differences, p-values, C-values, and indicating whether the variances are homogeneous or not.

Table 4.8: Comparison of Classroom Literacy Environment Indicators by School Type Using Independent Samples t-Tests.

		t-test for Equality of Means		Significance			
		T	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
The environment of the classroom	Equal assumed	1.342	2	.156	.312	1.500	1.118
	Equal V not assumed	1.342	1.471	.175	.350	1.500	1.118
Quantity of literacy tools	Equal assumed	-1.000	2	.211	.423	-1.000	1.000
	Equal V not assumed	-1.000	1.000	.250	.500	-1.000	1.000
Utility of literacy tools	Equal assumed	2.000	2	.092	.184	2.000	1.000
	Equal V not assumed	2.000	1.000	.148	.295	2.000	1.000
Quantity of text materials	Equal assumed	1.000	2	.211	.423	1.500	1.500
	Equal V not assumed	1.000	1.000	.250	.500	1.500	1.500
Print used for the classroom	Equal assumed	1.000	2	.211	.423	.500	.500
	Equal V not assumed	1.000	1.000	.250	.500	.500	.500
Format and content of text materials	Equal assumed	.000	2	.500	1.000	.000	2.121
	Equal V not assumed	.000	2.000	.500	1.000	.000	2.121

In each of these categories, the p-values exceeded the conventional threshold of .05, indicating that the observed mean differences between private and public schools were not statistically significant.

Although private schools often recorded slightly higher mean scores, the wide confidence intervals, many of which included zero, suggest substantial overlap between school types. The substantial overlap between the school types suggests that variation in these aspects of classroom literacy environments may reflect normal classroom-level differences rather than systematic distinctions between public and private schools.

The most substantial difference was found in participation in literacy events, where private schools scored $t = 9.000$, and the two-sided significance value (.012) indicates a statistically significant difference. The mean difference (4.50) combined with a narrow confidence interval (2.349 to 6.651) confirms that private schools consistently provide more structured literacy-related activities than public schools. This category represents the strongest point of divergence between the two schooling contexts, which implies differences in access to enrichment opportunities such as reading clubs, book fairs, and school-based literacy competitions.

Table 4.9: Comparison of Classroom Literacy Environment Indicators by School Type Using Independent Samples t-Tests.

		t-test for Equality of Means		Significance		?	
		t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Classroom literacy product displays	Equal V assumed	1.000	2	.211	.423	.500	.500
	Equal V not assumed	1.000	1.000	.250	.500	.500	.500
Reference materials	Equal V assumed	3.000	2	.048	.095	1.500	.500
	Equal V not assumed	3.000	1.000	.102	.205	1.500	.500
Writing utensils	Equal V assumed	.000	2	.500	1.000	.000	.707
	Equal V not assumed	.000	2.000	.500	1.000	.000	.707
Technological resources	Equal V assumed	1.414	2	.146	.293	1.000	.707
	Equal V not assumed	1.414	2.000	.146	.293	1.000	.707
Participation in literacy events	Equal V assumed	9.000	2	.006	.012	4.500	.500
	Equal V not assumed	9.000	1.000	.035	.070	4.500	.500

Other categories such as Classroom Environment (Private M = 12.00; Public M = 10.50), Quantity of literacy tools (Private M = 7.00; Public M = 8.00), reference sources (Private M = 6.50; Public M = 5.50), technological tools (Private M = 4.50; Public M = 3.50), and involvement in literacy events (Private M = 8.50; Public M = 4.00) showed that the differences between the school types were

statistically significant. In most of these categories, the mean scores of the private schools were higher, especially in the category of participation in literacy events and classroom settings, which speaks of a more structured and enriched literacy engagement. The higher scores for participation in literacy events and classroom settings suggests that sufficient resources and more interactive literacy spaces may encourage greater involvement in reading and support the development of reading comprehension.

Public schools, on the other hand, achieved lower mean scores in most categories, such as in the Usefulness of Literacy Materials category ($M = 8.00$ against $M = 7.00$ in the case of private schools), which could imply that available resources were considered useful in classroom instruction. The usefulness score suggests that, despite possible variation in resource diversity, the use of available resources for instructional purpose was evident in public schools. The comparatively small sample size could partially be a reason why the variation was minimal in some categories; however, the similarity in underlying categories, like Writing Utensils ($M = 7.50$ in both school types) and Classroom Library ($M = 6.00$ in both school types), demonstrates that there is a similarity between the baseline of the provision of the necessary classroom items.

Although several aspects of the classroom literacy environment are similar between the two types of schools, participation in literacy-related classroom activities emerged as a statistically significant area of difference. These results highlight that private schools may not necessarily possess more tools, print resources, or even materials, but that more literacy-oriented activities are facilitated by them, which implies an extended or extensive reading culture and the overall outside-classroom culture. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests while the two types of schools provide the basic elements of a literacy environment, private schools offer a more dynamic and effective range of literacy-supportive activities and instructional opportunities (Mullis *et al.*, 2017).

The significant results for literacy practices and environmental factors were further analysed using Chi-Square analysis. The series of chi-square tests was used to obtain a more detailed insight into divergent factors, such as the accessibility of books, exposure to print, access to technology, or the existence of reading corners. Such item-based analyses provide a thorough instrumental study regarding the distribution of resources and practices, hence, providing a description of the literacy and environmental factors.

4.3.2.5 *The Chi-square test for the CLEP Test*

The Chi-square test is a non-parametric statistical procedure used to examine whether an observed distribution of categorical variables differs from what would be expected by chance. In the context of this study, the test assisted in establishing whether factors like those involved in the CLEP, like

classroom environment rating, amount of literacy resource and utility, or use of literacy resources, take place in a different way between the public schools and those in the private schools. The Chi-square analyses were used to provide an additional layer of evidence beyond descriptive summaries. They explore whether the classroom conditions observed in each school type diverge in statistically meaningful ways, or whether the patterns seen reflect small-sample variation with no real association.

Table 4.13 below presents the Chi-square results examining whether there is a difference between the overall classroom environment score, as assessed using the CLEP, between public schools and private schools.

Table 4.10: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Environment Rating and Type of School

Public school or a private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	8.000 ^a	6	.238
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 12 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.				
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.				

Table 4.10 presents the Chi-square results examining whether there is a difference between the overall classroom environment score, as assessed using the CLEP, between public schools and private schools. Through comparison between the distributions of the categories for environmental quality between the two school types, the analysis helps determine whether school context plays a meaningful role in shaping the literacy environment. In both the private and the public schools, the Chi-square values are small, and the associated p-values exceed the .05 threshold (private school $\chi^2(1) = 2.00$, $p = .157$; public school $\chi^2(1) = 2.00$, $p = .157$; total $\chi^2(6) = 8.00$, $p = .238$).

These results show no statistically significant correlation between school type and classroom environment ratings. Whether a school was public or private, there was no negative or positive influence on the classroom environment score. However, the non-significant result must be interpreted with caution. Moreover, all comparisons indicate that there is a small count of valid cases, and many of the cells contain expected frequencies lower than 5. The CLEP scores represented by this sample do not seem different across school types, which is not due to the potential similarity

between the environment in a public and a private school, but rather because the sample size is too small to identify any meaningful differences.

In practical terms, these results suggest that the classroom environment components of the CLEP did not differ significantly between public and private schools in this dataset. Therefore, the overall results of the reading corners, displays, and general environmental organisation indicate that there are no significant differences between private and public schools. Another important note to consider is the availability of specific literacy tools within these settings.

Table 4.14 presents the number of literacy tools present in the classroom, including books, posters, dictionaries, reading cards, as well as other print-based instruction materials in both the public and private schools.

Table 4.11: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Quantity of Literacy Tools and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^c		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.				
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.				
c. No statistics are computed because QUANTITY OF LITERACY TOOLS is a constant.				

Table 4.11 focuses on the number of literacy tools, enabling the analysis to examine whether variations in the wider context are mirrored in the concrete instructional resources accessible to teachers and learners. This part of the CLEP focuses on the availability of materials that enable literacy engagement. The Chi-square test evaluated whether the categorisation of quantity per school type has a change or result, and these indicators show whether resource allocation is patterned by institutional context.

The Chi-square results for the private school yielded a small and insignificant value ($\chi^2(1) = 2.00$, $p = .157$). For public schools, the test was not calculable because the number of literacy tools was constant. The constant number of literacy tools in the public schools suggests in the available of these resources across the observed classroom, although the results does not establish whether the level of provision was consistently low or consistently adequate. When all cases are combined,

the total Chi-square test remains non-significant ($\chi^2(3) = 4.00$, $p = .261$). The lack of statistical significance cannot be viewed as evidence of equality between schools, but as an instance of limited variability in the data set. The CLEP scores could still have variations, yet the Chi-square test cannot confirm that the variations follow a systematic pattern that is consistent with the type of schools. Although the amount of material is one dimension of the literacy environment, the way these resources are used can provide a clearer view of classroom practice.

Table 4.12: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Utility of Literacy Tools and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^c		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	8.000 ^a	6	.238
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. No statistics are computed because UTILITY OF LITERACY TOOLS is a constant. b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count to be less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50. c. No statistics are computed because UTILITY OF LITERACY TOOLS is a constant.				

Table 4.12 shifts the focus from availability of resources to actual use, investigating whether the frequency and purposes of literacy tool use differ between public and private schools. For private schools, the Pearson Chi-square result again shows a small and non-significant value ($\chi^2(1) = 2.00$, $p = .157$). For public schools, the test could not be computed because the utility of literacy tools was constant, meaning all observed classrooms showed the same level of material use. In addition, uniformity in the ratings makes statistical testing impossible within that subgroup. In the combined analysis, the total Chi-square value is also non-significant ($\chi^2(6) = 8.00$, $p = .238$).

As with the previous tables, all expected cell counts fall below 5, which limits the interpretive strength of the test. Based on this dataset, the observed differences in how the teachers use materials were not statistically significant between public and private schools. The finding that school type was not strongly associated with classroom practices related to reading materials suggest that, within this small sample, these practices may be influenced more by factors such as how materials are used in instruction, teacher preferences, professional preparation, and classroom culture than by whether a school is public or private. The availability of materials also appears to influence how they can be used in classrooms instruction.

Table 4.16 presents the quantity of materials available in classrooms and whether they differ significantly between public and private schools, providing a focused view of resources that underpin learners' reading development.

Table 4.13: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Quantity of Text Materials and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^c		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. No statistics are computed because QUANTITY OF TEXT MATERIALS is a constant. b. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25. c. No statistics are computed because PRINT USED FOR CLASSROOM is a constant.				

The CLEP framework highlights resource availability as a core contributor to the literacy environment. Table 4.13 explores whether private and public classrooms provide meaningfully different levels of printed material for learners. The Chi-square analysis for the private schools shows a Pearson Chi-square value of 2.000 ($p = .157$), indicating that the difference in the quantity of text materials is not statistically significant. This pattern is reflected in the total sample ($\chi^2 = 4.000$, $p = .261$), which implies that there are no significant differences in the two types of schools.

For public schools, the analysis could not be computed because there was no variation in scores, with both public schools reporting identical values for text materials. Even though the difference is not statistically significant, it was observed that in private schools, learners are more likely to be provided with text materials than in public schools. The limited of print materials in some classroom is consistent with previous research on South African schools, which has highlighted inequalities in classroom literacy resources and the challenges teachers face in creating supportive literacy environments (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Howie *et al.*, 2017). The finding therefore supports the importance of adequate literacy resources for creating opportunities for reading engagement.

Another analysis that was done was whether the quantity of text materials varies across school types. It is also important to note how print is used within these classrooms. Table 4.14 thus shifts the focus to the presence and display of print-based materials, a category that explains how schools generate a visual stimulating environment in which reading comprehension takes place.

Table 4.14: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Print Used in the Classroom and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^d		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^b	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25. b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50. d. No statistics are computed because PRINT USED FOR CLASSROOM is a constant.				

Table 4.14 presents whether the two types of schools show distinct patterns in their use of printed materials. The Pearson Chi-square for the private school is 2.000 ($p = .157$), which does not demonstrate any significant relationship between school type and the quantity or variety of classroom print. In the case of public schools, this test could not be calculated since the use of prints was identical in both schools. The Pearson Chi-square in the total sample is once again not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.000$, $p = .261$).

The non-statistical significance is due to the small number of classrooms. Nonetheless, the descriptive statistics indicate that the use of print in private schools was more variable and purposeful, whereas in public schools, the use of print was more uniform and restricted. Therefore, the Chi-square findings indicate that the differences are not significant.

Although Table 4.17 analysed the use of print in the classroom setting, there is yet another important dimension, the type and form of texts the learners are exposed to may influence the development of their reading comprehension skills. Table 4.15 presents the data that assesses whether the format and content of classroom text materials, such as fiction, non-fiction, age-related texts, multimodal resources, and similar ones, differ between public and private schools.

Table 4.15: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Format and Content of Text Materials and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.				
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.				

The importance of this CLEP category is in the way diverse text formats support overall literacy development. In the case of private schools, the Pearson Chi-square stands at 2.000 ($p = .157$), which shows that the type of schools and the type and quality of the text formats have no significant relationship. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$) was not statistically significant for public schools. The Pearson Chi-square of the entire sample is 4.000 ($p = .261$), which is non-significant, and its likelihood ratio (5.545, $p = .136$) is slightly greater and indicates some degree of unevenness of distribution, but still below statistical significance.

Although no statistically significant differences emerged, the descriptive trend suggests that private schools tended to have more varied and richer text formats, while public schools had limited or repetitive formats. The absence of significance reflects the sample size rather than the absence of meaningful differences. This finding supports the CLEP descriptive patterns, which indicate greater diversity of reading materials in private school classrooms. However, the data also shows that public schools demonstrate strengths in other categories, particularly the use of resources. These findings suggest that while differences exist between the school contexts, both school types displayed important elements that contribute to literacy development.

Further analysis was done on learner-created materials and how they shape the literacy environment.

Table 4.16 presents data on whether there are learner-generated literacy displays, such as written work, reading projects, and comprehension tasks, displayed on the classroom walls and how they compare their presence in public and private schools.

Table 4.16: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Literacy Product Displays and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^c		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25. b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50. c. No statistics are computed because CLASSROOM LITERACY PRODUCT DISPLAYS is a constant.				

The Pearson Chi-square test in private schools revealed no statistically significant association between school type and classroom literacy displays ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$). In the public schools, the test could not be meaningfully calculated because both classrooms recorded identical display scores, resulting in no variability. When all four schools were analysed, the Pearson Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 4.000$, $p = .261$) was also not statistically significant. However, descriptively, learner-generated literacy work was more prevalent in private schools, indicating a more active literacy context, whereas there was less variation in public schools, indicating that there were fewer opportunities for learners to show reading-related tasks. These tendencies satisfy overall CLEP results that show that private classrooms tend to be more literacy-infused and visual.

Table 4.17 presents the data that assesses the availability of reference materials such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, atlases, and subject-specific reference guides, and how they differ between public and private schools.

Table 4.17: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Availability of Reference Materials and School Type

		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (2- sided)	Exact Sig. (1- sided)
Public school or a Private school						
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^d				
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	8.000 ^a	6	.238		
	N of Valid Cases	4				
a. 12 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.						
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.						
c. No statistics are computed because REFERENCE MATERIALS is a constant.						

Reference materials are an important category of the CLEP because they support independent inquiry, vocabulary development, and content comprehension. The Pearson Chi-square test for private schools ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$) indicated that there was no significant relationship between the type of school and availability of reference materials. In the case of public schools, the test could not be calculated as the variable was constant, as both classrooms received the same rating. When all cases were combined, the Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 8.000$, $p = .238$) was also not significant. Although the results were not statistically significant, the descriptive ratings suggest private schools may have richer reference material, while public schools have uniform and limited resources, which is a pattern commonly reported in public school contexts (Spaull, 2013).

Another key classroom resource, writing utensils, was also one of the items that were analysed. Table 4.18 presents an analysis of the difference in the availability of writing utensils, including pens, markers, whiteboard tools, and writing accessories in both public and private schools.

Table 4.18: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Availability of Writing Utensils and School Type

		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Public school or a Private school						
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261		
	N of Valid Cases	4				
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.						
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.						

The writing tools are an important addition to the classroom resource because without the writing tools, learners will not be able to produce written information. In the case of both the private and the public schools, the Chi-square values were the same ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$), which means that there is no significant correlation between school type and writing material availability. The conclusion was supported by Fisher's Exact Test, which suggested that the results were not significant. The Chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 4.000$, $p = .261$) for the combined sample was not statistically significant and was further constrained by small, expected frequencies in several cells, reducing the statistical power of the test.

The pattern here suggests that both school types provided writing utensils at comparable levels, or at least that the variation was insufficient to produce statistical differences. Within the context of Research Question 2, this variable represents one of the few CLEP indicators where public and private schools displayed similar patterns. The lack of statistical significance, therefore, aligns with the observation that writing utensils were available, regardless of school type. However, writing tools alone do not capture today's literacy environment.

Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference. presents the data that examines whether there are discrepancies in the availability of technological resources, such as computers, tablets, projectors, and digital reading resources, between the public and the private schools. These resources are increasingly relevant to reading instruction because they provide learners with additional opportunities to access, engage with, and respond to different type of texts, including multimodal reading and digital texts.

Table 4.19: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Technological Resources and School Type

		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Public school or a Private school						
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	8.000 ^a	6	.238		
	N of Valid Cases	4				
a. 12 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.						
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.						

The Chi-square results for public and private schools ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$) indicated a non-significant value ($\chi^2 = 2.000$, $p = .157$) between the type of school and the availability of technological resources. The non-significant association suggests that the resource distribution and availability of technological resources were relatively similar across the two school types. Classroom observations suggested that functional technological tools such as computers, projectors, or digital learning tools were more commonly available in private schools, whereas access to such tools was minimal in the observed public schools. This difference could not be statistically proven by the Chi-square analysis, which is limited by a small number of cases. In terms of Research Question 2, the pattern suggests that technological disparities exist in practice but cannot be statistically validated within this small sample.

Beyond technology, the structure and presence of classroom libraries play a significant role in shaping learners' reading habits.

Table 4.20 presents an analysis of whether there are differences found in school libraries or reading corners in the classrooms that were observed between the public and private schools. These spaces are defined as reading areas equipped with a variety of books available to learners.

Table 4.20: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Classroom Library Provision and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^a
	N of Valid Cases	2
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^a
	N of Valid Cases	2
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^a
	N of Valid Cases	4
a. No statistics are computed because CLASSROOM LIBRARY is a constant.		

One of the key CLEP indicators is classroom libraries, where such indicators have a strong effect on reading frequency and text exposure. The results revealed that all the schools did not show differences in the availability of a dedicated library or a classroom reading corner. The lack of variation suggests that none of the participating schools had a fully functional library or reading corner.

Table 4.21 presents the data that evaluates the difference in the participation of the learners in literacy activities, including reading contests, book week, storytelling, or visiting the library, between the public and private schools.

Table 4.21: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Participation in Literacy Events and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	2.000 ^b	1	.157		
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^c				
	N of Valid Cases	2				
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	8.000 ^a	6	.238		
	N of Valid Cases	4				
a. 12 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .25.						
b. 4 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.						
c. No statistics are computed because PARTICIPATION IN LITERACY EVENTS is a constant.						

The involvement in such events indicates how much the schools offer the learners extended literacy opportunities. For private schools, the Chi-square test yielded $\chi^2 = 2.000$ ($p = .157$), indicating no significant difference. On the other hand, public schools showed no differences in the ratings of participation in both schools. The overall sample Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 8.000$, $p = .238$) did not indicate any significant correlation between the type of school and participation in literacy events.

These constant values in the category of public-school reference reflect homogeneous low literacy event participation. Therefore, although the Chi-square test has not found any significant difference, the pattern still aligns with larger disparities in extracurricular literacy opportunities. Lastly, the analysis explores the daily practice for informal reading, real-world writing opportunities, and project-based literacy tasks in classrooms. Table shows data on whether practices, such as informal reading moments, real-world writing opportunities and project-based literacy tasks, are present in these types of schools.

Table 4.25: Chi-Square Test for Association Between Authentic Literacy Events and School Type

Public school or a Private school		Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Private School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^b		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Public School	Pearson Chi-Square	. ^b		
	N of Valid Cases	2		
Total	Pearson Chi-Square	4.000 ^a	3	.261
	N of Valid Cases	4		
a. 8 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.				
b. No statistics are computed because AUTHENTIC LITERACY EVENTS is a constant.				

Authentic events reflect how literacy is embedded in everyday classroom practice, rather than confined to formal exercises. For both private and public schools, the Chi-square statistics could not be computed because authentic literacy events were constant within each group. The Chi-square ($\chi^2 = 4.000$, $p = .261$) was not significant in the total sample. These unchanging rates indicate that the authentic literacy opportunities were limited in all the sampled classrooms, irrespective of the type of school. The consistent limitation of authentic literacy opportunities is significant because, even in private schools, which displayed richer literacy environments in other CLEP indicators, they did not consistently incorporate real-life literacy experiences into classroom practice.

4.3.2.6 *The Chi-square CLEP categories*

Although the chi-square test results show that all the observed differences in the CLEP indicators (categories) were not significant in both the private and public schools, there were significant patterns in the descriptive patterns. The literacy resources of private schools were more resourceful and heterogeneous, whereas the literacy resources of public schools were uniform and with comparatively limited availability opportunities. Notably, some characteristics, such as classroom libraries, authentic literacy events, and provision of reference material, had an overall weak consistency in both types of schools. These findings illustrate that although the statistical data will not support the claim of the existence of significant differences by the type of school, the macro-scale observation of the classroom still suggests imbalanced and frequently unsatisfactory settings of literacy. The observed limitations support the necessity not only to look at the availability of literacy tools but also the way teachers deploy, plan, and combine these materials into daily practice, to the more detailed, complex structures that arise out of the descriptive data of CLEP.

4.3.3 *Summary of the Quantitative Results*

Although the quantitative findings provided important information about learners reading comprehension proficiency and the classroom literacy environment, they could not fully explain why differences in performance and classroom conditions occurred or how reading instruction was experienced in every classroom setting. The PIRLS results provided evidence of learners comprehension performance across the participating schools, while the CLEP findings provided information about aspects of the classroom literacy environment, including the availability of print, reading materials, and other literacy resources, as well as classroom conditions related to reading literacy learning. The quantitative findings therefore established patterns in learner performance in classroom literacy conditions but provided limited information about how these resources were used, how teachers interpreted and implemented the curriculum, how learners engaged with reading activities, and how instructional practices supported or limited reading comprehension development.

The qualitative component provided deeper insight into instructional practices by foregrounding classroom context, teachers' decision-making, and the conditions that shaped the development of reading comprehension. The qualitative data helped in the interpretation of the quantitative data. Moreover, the qualitative data enabled the study to transcend the statistical tendencies to human experiences, which are behind the tendencies.

4.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative findings presented in this section respond directly to Research Question 3.

Research Question 3: *How is reading comprehension instruction implemented between 2 public and 2 private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District of North-West Province, particularly with regard to the teaching of inference, interpretation, integration of ideas, evaluation, and the instructional strategies teachers use to support learners' reading comprehension development?*

To address this question, qualitative data were gathered by observing English lessons and semi-structured interviews with the four participating teachers. These interviews provided insights into the teachers' perception of their teaching of reading comprehension instructional strategies, including the strategies they used, such as questioning, prediction, inference, and interpretation, as well as the challenges they experience when implementing these strategies in their day-to-day classroom practice.

The analysis of the transcripts of interviews and the notes of observations was conducted using open coding and further streamlining with the theme analysis. This approach enabled the identification of common themes and patterns related to classroom literacy environments, teacher instructional practices, and the constraints that influenced the learning and teaching of reading. The presentation of the themes is through narration as a way of giving a barrier-free explanation of the qualitative results. The selected excerpts of interviews and observations support each of the themes, and they indicate how the experiences and practices of the teachers occurred in the different school settings.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Classroom Literacy Environment and Resource Availability

This theme explored how teachers across the public and private schools perceived the availability, suitability, and use of literacy resources in their classrooms and how these conditions influence the daily literacy experiences of Grade 5 learners. The accounts indicate significant disparities in the two school settings (private and public) and have substantial consequences for the access of the learners to print-rich environments and the opportunities to build the reading comprehension skills.

4.4.1.1 Teacher Perspectives

During interviews, teachers presented different descriptions of their classroom literacy settings. Teachers in private schools seemed to enjoy a large variety of reading material, although they complained they were not getting enough time to utilise it properly. Teacher 3 from Private School C explained:

"There's more than enough, but I don't think there's enough time to use them in class... we focus more on the language part... so we don't really focus that much on reading."

Another private school teacher, Teacher 1 at School A, indicated that they have access to reading material in their classroom, which helps with reading:

"I have been reading books in my class that help with reading, and I give them printouts sometimes."

The two teachers of the public schools shared a different perspective compared to what the private school teachers stated. The public-school teachers reported massive gaps in book supplies, a lack of choice of text type, and forced reliance on what government-provided materials they could find. Teacher 4 from School D reflected:

"The resources are just a few... and those books are few. Others want to read that book, but there are no pictures... they would be more fascinated with books that have more pictures and maybe a few words."

Teacher 2, working at a public school (School B), gave multiple reasons explaining why comprehension struggles are not only due to the scarcity of books but also to learner attitudes:

"Even if you can give them thousands of resources... a person must have willingness... but if you're not willing, it's not going to work."

Teacher 2's observation highlights importance of learner willingness and engagement in reading activities. The teacher's response therefore suggests that, from his perspective, access to additional reading resources may not automatically result in greater engagement when learners are reluctant to participate in reading activities (Olifant *et al*, 2023). The perspective is consistent with the literature discussed in Chapter 2, which identifies learner engagement and motivation as important dimensions of reading development (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Wigfield *et al.*, 2016). However, learner engagement should also be understood in relation to opportunities and conditions provided for reading, rather than as an individual learner characteristic alone.

Teachers also spoke about the appropriateness of materials. In private school C, resources such as online Oxford Reading Buddies, novels, and level readers enabled teachers to scaffold learning systematically. By comparison, most teachers in the public-school setting reported using books available through the library committee or borrowing books used by other classes when selecting reading texts for their learners. This suggests that the issue was not only the quantity of available materials, but also whether the materials provided sufficient variety and were appropriate for learners' reading levels.

4.4.1.2 Classroom Observations

The observations in the classrooms were practical and confirmed the interview data. Print-rich environments, reading corners, and structured materials were more observed in the private schools (Schools A and C). Nonetheless, even in such environments, learners occasionally experienced difficulties with comprehension, which proves that the availability of resources is not enough to make sense. The resources in public schools (Schools B and D) were significantly more restricted, such

as missing textbooks, poorly maintained reading corners, a small number of visual aids, and a few learner-generated prints displayed in the classroom. The conditions are a direct reflection of the responses of the teachers and a reinforcement of the research on resource deprivation in the public schools. It is important to note the fact that learners in School C had better results when compared to those in School A, showing that the quality of learning and resource utilisation are significant factors, as well as the availability of resources.

4.4.1.3 Interpretation

The qualitative data reverberate the results of the quantitative CLEP results, which show that there is a significant difference in the classroom literacy environment between public and private schools. Even though the Chi-square tests showed no statistically significant difference between resource categories, the interviews and observation show that there was an evident and consistent gap in available material and their suitability.

These findings align closely with the literature that states that South African literacy research consistently notes that resource inequity is one of the strongest contributors to reading underperformance (Neuman & Celano 2006; Spaul, 2016). There is often a lack of variety in the types and developmentally appropriate texts in public schools, especially those serving a lower-income population. This pattern reflects the frustrations experienced by Teacher 4 from Public School D regarding books containing extensive written text and few illustrations. The limited presence of pictures is, however not in itself regarded as evidence that a text is inappropriate for Grade 5 learners, as many literary texts rely primarily on written language to develop comprehension and imagination. Illustrations may nevertheless provide additional support by attracting learners' attention, stimulating interest and helping them construct meaning from a text. so much writing and few pictures in them, which is a direct consequence of the improper correlation between the level at which learners read and the level at which books can meet their reading levels. As Pretorius (2015) argues, comprehension cannot develop effectively when a learner is exposed to a limited number of surpassing texts that support meaning-making, vocabulary growth, and background knowledge.

The private school data affirms another equally significant fact that shows that plenty of resources do not necessarily lead to efficient reading lessons. A teacher of one private school, School C, admitted that there were ample resources, but the curriculum pressure meant that little instructional time was given to reading. The limited instructional time allocated to reading in the private school also points to a challenge associated with the curriculum and assessment pressure. Teachers may experience pressure to cover prescribed content and prepare learners for assessments, which can result in greater emphasis on completing the curriculum and achieving satisfactory pass rates than on providing sustained opportunities for reading and comprehension development. In such circumstances, the quantity of curriculum content covered or the number of learners who achieve a

pass may become more visible indicators of success than the quality of learners' reading comprehension abilities. This concern is particularly evident where learners may progress through the grades despite reading substantially below the expected grade level, meaning a learner may therefore reach Grade 5 while still requiring reading support associated with earlier grade levels. The finding that ample resources may not translate into increased reading opportunities reflects international research showing that the quantity of materials only matters when teachers have structured opportunities to integrate them into daily routines (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). The combination of ample resources and limited instructional time implies that private schools may have "*more than enough*" but systemic pressures, such as weekly testing, measurement of language-skills orientation, and the instructional necessity might hinder the quality of reading involvement. Therefore, access to resources must be considered alongside the amount of instructional time devoted to reading and the extent to which assessment and curriculum demands allow teachers to provide meaningful reading comprehension instruction.

A clear observation made by the public schools is that efforts are usually made to justify the reading difficulties in terms of the motivation of the learners rather than solely in terms of structural limitations. Teacher 2 from Public School B, for example, referred "laziness" when explaining some learners' reading difficulties. Her explanation therefore places learner engagement alongside the availability of resources as a factor that may influence learners' participation. The contrast between the teacher's emphasis on learner willingness and the structural factors identified in the literature suggest that reading difficulties may be understood from different perspectives. Nonetheless, the literature in Chapter 2 identifies several factors that can limit learners' opportunities for reading interaction, including limited exposure to print, language related challenges, and fewer opportunities for oral language development (Nel & Muller, 2010). These more systematic issues are concealed by blaming the willingness of learners. Therefore, suggest that learner attitudes should not be considered in isolation from the broader conditions in which reading instruction takes place. The findings therefore suggest the attributing reading difficulties primarily to learners' willingness to overlook the influence of contextual and instructional factors that shape learners' opportunities to engage with reading.

Although the physical literacy environment is the background of reading development, the resources do not solely influence the results of comprehension. Teachers must mediate texts, provide strategies, and direct learners in meaning-making processes. Thus, the next theme examines the instruction methods applied by teachers to develop understanding, illuminating the context in which teaching practices interact with literacy environments to provide learners with a positive experience for reading.

4.4.2 Theme 2: Instructional Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension

This theme focuses on the instructional practices teachers use to support reading comprehension in Grade 5 classrooms and how these practices differ across school contexts. Furthermore, it examines teachers' deliberate instructional strategies, including vocabulary pre-teaching, guided reading, text chunking, and shared reading, as well as informal practices that emerge in response to classroom-level challenges. The theme also focuses on the way teachers design their teaching methods to address learners with different languages, learning constraints, and different reading abilities. Research Question 3 seeks to explain the factors that influence reading comprehension in Grade 5 classrooms; an examination of instructional strategies provided insight into how meaning-making is scaffolded, disrupted, or constrained during classroom instruction.

4.4.2.1 Teacher Perspectives

Teachers in both the public and private schools emphasised that learners often “*read without understanding*”, which motivates them to use a range of teaching methods. Private School Teacher 1 described trying to simplify reading demands for struggling learners:

“Yes, there are learners who struggle with reading, but I try to make it easy... I try to make it work every day.”

The teacher described adapting her teaching approach according to the needs she observed in her classes. Her response indicates that she made adjustments during instruction to respond to learners' difficulties, although the interview data does not provide sufficient detail to identify the specific adaptations or strategies. Public School Teacher 2 emphasised the difficulties in decoding and phonics, explaining that many learners can verbalise words, but said that learners:

“Don't read with understanding.”

Moreover, they often mispronounce or lose the meaning overall. These early literacy differences contribute to the way teachers implement reading instruction in their classrooms.

The experience of Teacher 3 from Private School C illustrates the challenges of teaching reading comprehension in a heterogeneous classroom, where learners were autistic, international learners with limited exposure to the English language, and learners who had their schooling interrupted due to COVID-19. The teacher explained that some learners could written words but struggled to understand what they read:

“They know how to read some of them, but they don't know how to comprehend what it is they've read.”

This distinction is important because it suggests that reading difficulty was not necessarily limited to the ability to recognise or pronounce words but also involve constructing meaning from the text. In

response, the teacher used shared reading, guided reading, underlining difficult words, and sequential discussion for every paragraph. These practices provided opportunities to slow down the reading process, clarify vocabulary, and check learners' understanding as they progressed through the text. Teacher 4 of Public School B explained a similar but more limited approach. The teacher broke down the reading comprehension text and reread sections, underlined main words, and checked understanding several times. According to the teacher, learners' errors were common, particularly when they had difficulty interpreting comprehension questions, identifying what the question required, or relating the question to information in the text. The teacher explained:

"Normally, when I teach comprehension, I'll do it per sentence and per the small paragraphs... The first paragraph xxxx I will break it also into chunks, so that at least they could understand."

In both school types, the teachers also outlined other support systems. Teacher 2 from Public School B mentioned having a reading club:

"We have, (..) we do have even a reading club, some participate, some they don't come (...) Some are not interested."

This comment suggests that while support initiatives exist, sustained learner engagement remains a challenge. Similarly, Teacher 3 from Private School C also reported offering weekly extra classes as supplements to support learners who were foreign language speakers or those who had learning barriers. These strategies reflect the support created by the teachers for the multiple needs of the learners and the need to provide additional scaffolding outside of regular teaching time.

4.4.2.2 Classroom Observations

The observations provided strong confirmation of the instructional patterns described in interviews. In Private School A, teachers used shared and guided reading, group discussions, and peer assessment, yet learners still struggled with comprehension. This finding supports Private School Teacher 1's concern that reading comprehension remains difficult even with varied instruction. In contrast, Public School B used guided and shared reading inconsistently because of limited resources. Learner disengagement and lack of materials undermined efforts to build comprehension.

Nevertheless, Private School C demonstrated a more systematically organised approach to reading instruction. The teacher provided clear instructions, responded to learners' needs and gave continuous feedback during reading activities. This approach was consistent with the practices described by the Teacher 3 and appeared to provide learners with opportunities to participate comfortably and remain engaged during lesson. The interview with Teacher 4 of Public-School D indicated the use of text chunking, repeated reading, and individual support to address learners'

reading comprehension difficulties. The teacher also used translation-oriented strategies to support learners' understanding of the English text. These practices provided additional opportunities for learners to clarify meaning and access the content of the text when English presented a barrier to comprehension. In all the schools, it was observed that there is a strong correlation between consistency of instructions, support to the learners, and their understanding of instructions. In those cases where instructional delivery was systematic and responsive, learners generated greater depth of understanding, and in those places where instruction was atomistic or limited by resources, learners developed cursory comprehension.

4.4.2.3 Interpretation

The qualitative data provide a clear image that instructional strategies used in the public and private schools are conditioned by the linguistic, cognitive, and structural issues the learners bring into the classroom. Although the specific instructional approaches varied, the teachers faced a common challenge of addressing the gap between learners ability to decode text and their ability to comprehend and construct meaning from it. This is consistent with the findings reported in PIRLS 2021 and South African literacy research including Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016) and Pretorius and Spaull (2016) which highlight persistent difficulties in reading comprehension among South African learners.

Within private school settings, there is an increased pattern of teachers who follow a more organised comprehension-building strategy in their approach, including explicit vocabulary instruction, one-on-one reading, and the use of materials such as highlighters and worksheets. Such practices are in line with the suggestions made by Duke and Pearson (2011), who argue that explicit strategy instruction plays a significant role in developing strong readers. The approach of Teacher 3 from Private School C, using prediction, chunking, vocabulary preview, and summarisation, is linked to the evidence-based practice of aiding comprehension in multilingual classrooms (Snow, 2020).

The scaffolded strategies that are used by the teachers in the public schools serve the same purpose as compensatory actions to fill gaps in the earlier stages of literacy development. Public School D Teacher 4 was also a consistent scaffolder, as evidenced by the consistent chunking of texts and repeated reading of important sections. This approach corresponds with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasised the role of guidance and support in helping learners performs tasks that they may not yet be able to complete independently. In the context of the present study, teacher support during reading, including breaking texts into manageable sections, clarifying difficult words, and checking understanding, provided learners with assistance as they worked towards greater independence in comprehension. Although teachers expressed using a range of reading comprehension instruction strategies, not all the strategies were implemented consistently. The inconsistent implementation of these strategies was attributed

limitations and the large number of learners, as highlighted in Theme 1: Classroom Literacy Environment and Resource Availability.

There is also an evident discrepancy between the cognitive and linguistic requirements of comprehension questions and the interpretative capacities of learners, particularly when questions require inference, evaluation, judgments, or abstract reasoning. These processes require learners to move beyond recalling stated information and to interpret, analyse, evaluate, or draw conclusions from the text. The South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) requires the Barrett taxonomy to be applied to reading-comprehension activities and emphasises such as making inferences, clarifying meaning, rereading, drawing conclusions, and expressing opinions (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). Bloom's revised taxonomy similarly places analysis and evaluating among increasingly complex forms of cognitive processing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The difficulty experienced by some learners may therefore arise when comprehension questions require higher-order thinking while learners are still developing the linguistic proficiency and reading skills necessary to engage with such questions.

As indicated by Teacher 4 in Public School D, the learners would reason that they know the passage during the discussion but cannot interpret the meaning of the comprehension questions. The difficulty learners experienced in interpreting comprehension question may indicate an assessment literacy barrier, whereby the challenge is not necessarily limited to understanding the text itself but also involves interpreting the questions, identifying the required tasks, determining the relevant information, and connecting the questions to the corresponding parts of the reading. It is also very similar to the reading discussed in Chapter 2, which indicates that the questions of comprehension can often be heavily dependent on inferencing and scholarly language, as well as conventions peculiar to a test, that multilingual learners are frequently unable to find (Snow, 2010; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Mullis *et al.*, 2017). In general, the findings suggest that the teaching approaches used by the teachers were influenced by several contextual factors, including the diversity of learners' language backgrounds, the curriculum pressure faced at school, and availability of resources influence the potential outcomes of these teaching methods. Effective reading comprehension instruction requires teachers to provide systematic and explicit support while responding to learners' particular needs (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Pretorius & Spaul, 2016).

The nature and effectiveness of the instructional approaches appeared to depend on the consistency and depth with which reading strategies were implemented. The private school teachers reported using a wider range of planned strategies, whereas public school teachers more frequently described adapting their strategy in response to learners' immediate reading comprehension difficulties. This difference should be interpreted in relation to the specific classroom observed and the experience reported by the participating teachers rather than a general discussion

between public and private schools. The finding is consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of explicit, systematic, and responsive reading instruction in supporting reading comprehension development (Duke & Pearson, 2011; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016)

Theme 2, which focuses on instructional strategies for teaching reading comprehension, directly addresses Research Question 3 by examining the classroom practices that influence Grade 5 learners' comprehension development. The findings show that teachers employ a range of explicit and adaptive instructional strategies shaped by resource availability, learner diversity, and linguistic context. However, the data also suggests that consistent scaffolding and structured instruction are more effective than sporadic or informal approaches, and that instruction alone is insufficient without learner motivation, assessment literacy, and adequate language support. Overall, instructional practices are a key determinant of comprehension outcomes, mediating the effects of the classroom environment, learner engagement, and language proficiency.

While Theme 2 examines teachers' strategies for supporting reading comprehension, their success depends on learners' willingness to engage with texts. Teacher accounts and lesson observations show that well-planned instruction can falter when learners are disengaged or lack confidence. The next theme, therefore, focuses on learner engagement and participation, exploring how motivation, interest, and behaviour shape the effectiveness of comprehension instruction.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Learner Engagement and Participation in Reading Activities

This theme focuses on how learners participate in reading activities, how motivated they are to read, and how teachers interpret learners' engagement with comprehension tasks. Reading comprehension is an active process and involves attention, interest, and cognitive activity, learner engagement becomes an important variable in multilingual classroom settings. This theme is, therefore, the exploration of the behavioural and affective aspects of understanding how well the learners are willing to read, maintain their concentration, undertake tasks, and engage in reading habits. It also discusses the meanings of these behaviours to teachers, and how engagement affects instructional outcomes in both public and private schools.

4.4.3.1 Teacher Perspectives

Teachers in both public and private schools reported a lack of uniformity in the engagement levels of learners. Some learners read enthusiastically, whereas others either did not participate in any reading or did it on a superficial level. Learner willingness and engagement levels was described by more than one teacher as a factor influencing participation in reading activities. Teacher 1 in Private School A described disengagement bluntly:

"No, they don't want to read."

The comment indicates that the teacher perceived a lack of willingness to participate in reading as an important challenge in their classroom. Similarly, Teacher 2 in Public School B shared the same concerns. Although there is a reading club, many learners do not attend this club. The teacher said:

“Some participate; some they don’t come... some are not interested.”

The limited participation in the reading club suggests that learners had varying levels of engagement with opportunities for additional reading. Such differences in engagement can influence the classroom experience by affecting learners’ willingness to participate in reading activities, discuss texts, and sustain attention during reading comprehension tasks. Research on reading engagement similarly indicates that learners’ motivation and active involvement are important dimensions of successful reading development (Guthrie et al., 2012; Wigfield et al., 2016)

In another example involving the private school setting, Teacher 3, whose classroom was highly heterogeneous, described a group that included autistic learners, international learners with limited exposure to English, and learners whose schooling had been interrupted by COVID-19. The teacher linked learner engagement to their different emotional, linguistic, and educational experiences, suggesting that these differences influenced the ways in which learners participated in reading activities.. The teacher explained that their class discussions often extend beyond academic content:

“We talk about our lives... what happens in future, the pressures... and they enjoy it.”

It means that the interest level grows when the process of reading becomes personally relevant.

Subsequently, Teacher 4 from Public School D encouraged reading various types of reading materials at home, such as newspapers, magazines, or books, but he observed that not all learners took part. According to Teacher 4, learners who achieved well in reading would use the reading materials provided wisely, and those learners who scored poorly in reading would just read the books only at a surface level:

“And then having realised the type of learners, maybe they would be more fascinated with (...) with books that do have more pictures and maybe a few words.”

The teachers also considered the impact of these patterns of engagement on the outcome of comprehension. Teacher 3 from Private School C rated the class’s reading comprehension at “5.5” out of 10, while Teacher 4 from Public School D estimated the learners’ reading comprehension at approximately “6 to 6.5” out of 10. Teacher 2 from Public School D similarly rated learners’ performance as “5” out of 10. These ratings reflect the teachers estimates provide insight into their

perceptions of the level of reading comprehension demonstrated by learners in their respective classrooms. The perceptions suggest that fluctuating engagement affects both the quality and depth of learner reading comprehension. The ratings also suggest that the teachers perceived reading comprehension as an area in which learners that suggest that the teachers perceived reading comprehension as an area in which learner experienced varying degrees of difficulty, although the estimates differed. These teachers' perceptions can be considered alongside the PIRLS results presented earlier in this chapter, PIRLS results showed differences in reading comprehension performance across the participating schools, with the private HL schools generally achieving higher scores than the public FAL schools.

4.4.3.2 Classroom Observations

The observations provided confirmation of the engagement patterns described in the interviews. Private School A showed significant disruption and distractibility. Although the class size was small and opportunities for interactions were available, learners struggled to remain focused during reading activities. This observation reflects Teacher 1's concern that many learners show limited interest in reading rather than sustained engagement with texts. Therefore, instructional interactions around texts were inconsistent and limited, reducing opportunities for guided meaning-making. Learners at Public School B were disengaged because most of them ignored the reading task, focused on irrelevant topics, or barely communicated. The observed learner disengagement supports Teacher 2's observation that learners do not attend the reading club and often choose to play rather than engage in literacy activities.

A notable exception was Private School C. The learners were confident, willing to read aloud, and eager to comment. This observation closely correlated with the description of Teacher 3, who said he connected reading to the lives of the learners and provided further assistance to those with impairments. School D was engaged with a small number of high performers being engaged, while many other learners participated only superficially in the reading activities. The limited participation observed in School D corresponds with Teacher 4's observation that very few learners were actively involved in the reading corner, while the remaining learners are primarily looked at the pictures.

4.4.3.3 Interpretation

The narratives given by the teachers reveal that motivation and cognitive and contextual factors interact to encourage the engagement of the learner. Learners will need not only decoding skills but linguistic comprehension to be able to read tasks and attempt at making meaning out of texts. The importance of comprehension sustained attention, and engagement in the reading process is consistent with the studies by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) and Snow (2020), which indicated that reading comprehension requires emotional commitment, sustained attention, and cognitive

processing. The PIRLS 2021 report supports the disengagement revealed by Teacher 1 from Private School A and Teacher 2 from Public School B, who indicated that many learners in their classes find it hard to read and comprehend the meaning, and often do not view reading as enjoyable or purposeful.

The short attention span described by Teacher 2 from Public School B may reflect motivational challenges that are often associated with under-resourced schools, where reading is not consistently reinforced at home through supportive literacy practices. In private schools, the engagement barrier appears more subtle but equally significant. Reflections from Teacher 3 from Private School C illustrate how learners with learning barriers, foreign-language backgrounds, or disrupted early schooling require more than traditional reading tasks; they require relational and personalised engagement to connect emotionally with texts. This aligns with socio-cultural theory of literacy (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978), which argue that reading becomes meaningful when embedded in familiar, shared social contexts.

Across both types of schools, the engagement is strongly connected to the confidence of the learners. As discussed in Chapter 2, multilingual learners who are not yet proficient in English often experience anxiety or avoidance when engaging with texts, which can result in limited participation and reduced comprehension development (Cummins, 2000; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). Research shows that learners who lack reading competence distract themselves to shield away from embarrassment or failure (Guthrie *et al.*, 2012). A similar pattern of limited attention to the reading activity was evident in the lesson taught by teacher 4 at public school D, where the teacher reported that some learners were “surfing pictures”.

The experiences of the teachers also point to the primary role of intrinsic motivation. The findings suggest that reading was sometimes be seen as an academic task than as an enjoyable or meaningful activity , which may limit learners’ willingness to participate actively in reading and may contribute to more passive engagement with texts. Teacher 3 from Private School C also highlighted the importance of connecting reading activities to the learners’ personal experiences. Research indicates that when reading resources are personally meaningful to learners, motivation, engagement and reading comprehension often improve (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Duke & Person, 2011; Wigfield *et al.*, 2016).

Finally, the Learner Engagement and Participation theme demonstrates that engagement is not merely a learner attribute, but it is generated by the interaction of instructional practices, linguistic challenges, and classroom culture. All these factors determine the level of interest of learners while reading the text and the level of comprehension. The findings indicate that learner engagement was an important consideration in the reading comprehension activities observed in the participating

classroom. Learners who showed limited attention or participation had fewer opportunities to interact with the texts, discuss meaning, and receive guidance during reading. The findings also suggest that uncertainties about tasks, language difficulties, or limited interest may contribute to reduced participation. While teachers' ability to foster engagement depends on resources, classroom structure, and time, motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional connection to texts all play a critical role in comprehension outcomes. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that reading motivation and interest influence learners' willingness to engage with reading activities (Wigfield *et al.*, 2016; Schiefele *et al.*, 2023). Thus, engagement can both limit and enable comprehension, therefore, shaping whether instructional strategies lead to understanding.

While learner engagement shapes how they approach reading tasks, teachers evaluate comprehension through assessment and feedback. The next theme examines how reading comprehension is assessed, how teachers interpret performance, and how feedback influences progress. These practices offer another view of the factors affecting comprehension, especially in multilingual settings where learners may struggle to interpret questions and show understanding.

4.4.4 Theme 4: Assessment and Feedback Practices

This theme investigates how teachers assess reading comprehension and provide feedback to Grade 5 learners. Reading comprehension involves learners' ability to construct meaning from a text, it cannot always be determined from observable reading behaviours such as reading aloud or decoding words. Assessment practices play a significant role in identifying learners' reading comprehension difficulties and informing teachers' instructional responses. Assessment and Feedback Practices thus explore how teachers track comprehension, what challenges exist in interpreting the performance of learners, and what feedback tools are used to encourage better performance. In both the public and private schools, teachers indicated that in many instances, assessment revealed a disparity between learners' ability to decode text and their ability to interpret meaning, a trend that reflects a significant challenge highlighted in earlier themes.

4.4.4.1 Teacher Perspectives

Teachers consistently emphasised that assessment exposes persistent problems with comprehension. Teacher 1 from Private School A described an approach aimed at marking reading activities easier for struggling learners:

"I try to make it easy... every day so that they get better."

The teacher's response suggests that she attempted to adjust reading activities in response to learners' difficulties and to provide repeated opportunities for practice. Teacher 2 from Public School B explained that learners can read aloud, but

“don’t read with understanding.”

Teacher 2’s observation is consistent with the finding discussed in Theme 2, that the learners’ ability to decode written words does not necessarily indicate that the learners have developed effective reading comprehension or meaning making skills.

Teacher 3 from Private School C also noted that learners’ diversity creates complications in the process of assessment practices, which created additional challenges when assessing reading comprehension progress within the class. According to this teacher, some learners:

“know how to read... but they do not know how to comprehend,”

suggesting that standard comprehension tests may underestimate learners’ understanding by privileging linguistic and test-navigation skills rather than actual text comprehension. In Public School D, Teacher 4 explained a particular challenge of having learners who may understand the text but not answer questions in the correct format. The teacher explained that learners often struggle with connecting the question prompt to the relevant section of the text:

“They could have comprehended the comprehension, but in terms of relating and connecting what they have been asked with what is in the comprehension becomes a problem.”

The difficulty in connecting question prompts with relevant information in the text suggests a literacy assessment challenge, as opposed to challenge with text comprehension alone.

When asked to estimate overall reading comprehension performance on some level of informality with a scale of 1 meaning a very weak understanding of reading comprehension and 10 being a very strong understanding of reading comprehension, the teachers gave modest ratings. Teacher 2 from Public School B described learners as “5 out of 10”, while Teacher 3 from Private School C rated the class “5.5 out of 10”. Teacher 4 from Public School D estimated performance at “6 to 6.5” out of 10. The teachers’ estimates broadly reflected their perceptions of learners’ comprehension difficulties, but they did not correspond directly with the standardised assessment results because the estimates were based on professional judgement rather than systematic assessment scores. Therefore, the differences between the teachers’ perceptions and the PIRLS results are important because they suggest that teachers’ knowledge of their learners’ reading abilities was informed by their everyday experiences, but that these perceptions did not necessarily capture the full range of learners’ performance measure through the assessment. This reinforces the value of using both quantitative PIRLS assessment results and teachers’ accounts when interpreting reading comprehension performance.

4.4.4.2 Classroom Observations

In Private School A, Teacher 1 regularly checked learners' understanding through questioning, peer evaluation, and self-assessment activities, indicating an attempt to make comprehension visible during the lesson. However, regardless of these practices, learners found it challenging to find ways to understand the meaning of the text. The finding is consistent with Teacher 1's observation that providing support on a day-to-day basis is not enough to bridge the reading comprehension gap experienced by some learners. The finding suggests that ongoing support may assist learners during reading activities but may not be sufficient to address deeper reading comprehension difficulties. In contrast, Public School B demonstrated limited evaluative activity during the observed lesson, with few structured comprehension checks and minimal opportunities for learners to explain or justify their understanding. The teacher asked superficial memory questions, and learners provided partial or false information. Teacher 2 from Public School B suggested that most learners can decode and not understand, and they demonstrated how resource constraints limit the assessment process, as well as behavioural issues.

On the other hand, Private School C had a great deal of systematic assessment. During the lesson, the teacher assessed prediction, summarising, vocabulary, and inferencing, and gave instant feedback. This confirmation was reiterated by what Teacher 3 from Private School C had emphasised on the importance of structured differentiation and demonstrated how effective assessment can enhance better comprehension results. Teacher 4 from Public School D used chunked questioning and repeated re-reading. The teacher asked questions following every section and prompted learners to find the answers in the text. These observations supported the remarks made by Teacher 4 from Public School D on how strategic questioning can be used to enable learners to connect their questions with textual clues. Combined, the observations imply the significant role of the school context in assessment practices, specifically the availability of resources, teacher training, and the number of learners in a classroom, as well as a direct impact on the quality of feedback obtained by the learners.

4.4.4.3 Interpretation

The experiences of the teachers are consistent with the studies by Duke and Cartwright (2021) and Snow (2020), who highlighted the complexity of reading comprehension as a cognitive task demanding inferencing, vocabulary knowledge, and metacognitive control. Evaluation is also important in assessing the ability of the learners to use these skills on their own. One important finding among teachers is that the ability to decode fails to predict ability in comprehension (Pretorius, 2019; Spaull *et al.*, 2020), as some learners may be able to recognise words and decode but fail to grasp the meaning of the text. The teachers also indicated that learners cannot read with

understanding. The findings reflect the PIRLS 2021, which show that even though most learners can break down words and sound out their names, they cannot decode the text to form meaning.

The other important trend is the lack of correspondence between assessment tasks and the linguistic or developmental levels of learners. Teacher 3 from Private school C had trouble assessing multilingual and neurodiverse learners, which supports research that standardised comprehension tasks tend to favour learners who have a good command of English (Nel & Muller, 2010; Probyn, 2018). Such learners can comprehend when scaffolds are provided for the text, but with test formats that require inferencing or a decontextualised language, they may have difficulties. Another point highlighted by all the teachers was that learners often fail to connect the question to what they read, revealing an assessment–literacy gap that meant learners struggle not with the text’s content but with understanding the question itself. Many comprehension assessments implicitly assume familiarity with academic vocabulary, question formats, and testing conventions, skills that many Intermediate-Phase learners have not yet fully developed, even when they understand the text content (Cummins, 2000; Pretorius & Murray, 2023).

The practices of feedback appear similarly informal. The process of oral correction, repetition, and constant prompting is extensively used by teachers instead of developing feedback loops. Although having daily support (as explained by Teacher 1 from Private School A) has its advantages, the lack of specific and deliberate feedback can hinder the capacity of learners to internalise improvement strategies.

In general, the interpretation demonstrates that the assessment may only highlight the challenges, but not always eliminate them, especially in cases where learners do not understand the basic general principles of assessment or face a language barrier. The persistence of these challenges may contribute to the moderate levels of performance reported by teachers. Specifically, the findings show that although assessments can assist in identifying gaps in learners’ knowledge, it does not often work to close these gaps because learners have trouble with the cognitive and linguistic requirements of the test items themselves and not just with the reading texts.

Additionally, feedback received by the learners is often informal and not adequately structured to address the diverse needs of the learners. Whereas systematic assessment practices were observed more frequently in classrooms with stronger instructional support and greater access to resources. As such, assessments can be identified as one of the most important aspects of reading comprehension achievement in multilingual classrooms. While assessments reveal where learners struggle, it also exposes the broader systemic and contextual constraints that shape comprehension development. The final theme on challenges and constraints in teaching explores these challenges

in depth, examining the structural, motivational, and environmental barriers that affect teachers' ability to support reading comprehension across school contexts.

4.4.5 Theme 5: Challenges and Constraints in Teaching Reading Comprehension

This final theme examines the limitations that teachers face when supporting Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension across public and private schools. The theme includes structural barriers, learner-related difficulties, limited home-literacy support, and motivation challenges that all contribute to the outcomes of comprehension. These issues affect teachers in terms of their instructional decisions, restrict the efficiency of reading strategies, and influence the current relationship between decoding and comprehension. These findings indicate that reading comprehension development does not occur in isolation within the classroom. Instead, it is influenced by contextual and systemic factors that are often beyond the teacher's direct control.

4.4.5.1 Teacher Perspectives

Teachers in both school types found that there are several barriers that hinder comprehension teaching. Teacher 1 from Private School A highlighted a common challenge she experienced where learners often:

"just read."

In some cases, learners were primarily focused on decoding the text without demonstrating a clear understanding of the meaning of the text. This suggests that reading becomes a mechanical process rather than an active process of interpretation. Teacher 2 from Public School B shared the same sentiment, explaining that many learners can articulate words, but they fail to:

"comprehend... that's the greatest challenge,"

which indicates the underlying limitations in vocabulary, inferencing, and text engagement.

Teacher 3 from Private School C was more descriptive in reporting reading difficulties, Reporting that most learners in the class were reading approximately two years below their expected reading proficiency level for the grade. The reported development delay suggests that learners who did not develop strong early literacy skills in the Foundation Phase (Grades 1–3) may fall behind in the upper grades, subsequently causing a cumulative delay in reading proficiency. Teacher 4 from Public School D described a distinct but related challenge, where learners are able to read the text but struggle to interpret the questions or prompts. As a results, learners provided incorrect answers even when they were able to read the relevant information in the passage.

A major concern raised by all the teachers was the lack of parental involvement in learners' literary development. The teachers' responses suggest that opportunities for reading support were not confined to the classroom, as the level of support learners received at home was also perceived to influence their engagement with reading. Teacher 1 from Private School A noted that parents often do not read classroom messages often shared online (WhatsApp), whereas Teacher 2 from Public School B stated that parental involvement is not there at all. Teacher 3 from Private School C described parents working long hours and struggling to assist their children with reading at home. Teacher 4 from Public School D estimated that 10-15 learners out of a class of approximately 35 learners receive meaningful support at home, leaving the majority without reinforcement outside the school setting. The teachers' perceptions are consistent with literature highlighting the importance of the home literacy environment in providing learners with additional opportunities to practice reading and engage with literacy beyond the classroom. However, the findings should not be interpreted as indicating that parental involvement alone determines learners' reading development. Household literacy practices are shaped by a range of contextual factors, including access to resources, available time, language used, and the forms of support provided within the home (Neuman & Celano 2006; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016).

Another major barrier was learner engagement. Teacher A openly remarked that learners do not want to read, whereas Teacher 2 from Public School B explained short attention and disruptive behaviour. Teacher 3 from Private School C stated that only a few interested learners read the extra novel. Teacher 3's observation that only a few interested learners read the additional novel suggests that access to supplementary reading opportunities do not necessarily result in participation by all the learners. The finding highlights the role of learner interest and motivation in determining whether learners take advantage of opportunities for additional reading. Although the extra novel created an opportunity for extended reading, participation remained limited to learners who were interested in reading it.

4.4.5.2 Classroom Observations

Classroom lesson observations revealed limited access to reading materials and restricted learner engagement, which substantiated the data collected from the teacher interviews. Private School A had a problem related to frequent interruptions and irregular attendance. The interruptions included other teachers requesting assistance, and cultural activities that took place during the lesson observation. These interruptions occasionally disrupted the continuity of reading activities and reduced the time available for sustained engagement with the reading material. Public School B had insufficient reading resources, such as textbooks, and other written materials. Although learners had been exposed to concepts and topic through classroom instruction, the limited availability of written materials reduced their opportunities to engage independently with the texts. Chapter 2

discussed the broader inequalities reflected by the findings, where limited access to literacy resources is identified as challenges affecting learners' opportunities for reading literacy development. However, resources limitations do not necessarily prevent teachers creating additional opportunities for literacy engagement. Teachers may draw on available resources, create supplementary reading materials, reuse existing texts or incorporate locally relevant materials into reading activities when resources are limited. Such practices can provide learners with additional opportunities to engage with written material despite access constraints.

The lack of parental involvement was also reflected in the nature and consistency of learners' homework completion. Although learners were expected to complete their homework independently, teachers reported that the support available at home varied. In some cases, learners completed homework without sufficient assistance when they experienced difficulties, while the quality and consistency of completed work differed across learners. The limited support at home may reduce opportunities for learners to practice reading and receive guidance when they encounter difficulties. However, parental involvement should not be understood only in terms of parents assisting directly with schoolwork, as learners may receive support from grandparents, siblings, or other knowledgeable individuals within their households or communities.

On the other hand, Private School C was not the same because resources (posters, reading corners, projectors, etc.) were in excess, although they were not fully used during the lesson. However, not all of these resources were used during the observed lesson. The availability of resources therefore did not automatically translate into greater learner engagement with print. Teacher 3 indicated that the curriculum pressures and time restrictions limit their time devoted to focused reading instructions. Public School D featured a small number of visual objects and a disorganised reading area. During the lesson, the teacher used learners' familiar languages to clarify the meaning of difficult words and concept in the English text. Although this language support assisted learners in accessing the text, the limited classroom literacy resources and the disorganised reading reduced the opportunities available for sustained engagement with written materials. Teacher 4 from Public School D explained that they relied primarily on resources received from the government. The teacher's reliance on government-provided resources is consistent with the findings from the lesson observations. In all schools, the lack of parental support was indicated in how the learners do homework, lack of consistent reading fluency, and lack of effective independent working habits. This observation aligns with the discussion in Chapter 2, particularly the section on home literacy environments, which highlights parental involvement and exposure to reading at home as key predictors of reading comprehension development (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016; Mullis *et al.*, 2017; Zano, 2023).

4.4.5.3 *Interpretation*

The limitations revealed by teachers indicate the broader systemic challenges that are reported in South African literacy studies. Other studies have reported that comprehension difficulties come from multiple interacting factors, such as language barriers, limited vocabularies, socio-economic barriers, and the lack of exposure to print-rich environments (Nel & Muller, 2010; Spaull, 2016; Pretorius, 2015). These patterns are highly reflected in the teacher interviews. For example, Teacher 3 from Private School C observed that some learners read below grade level. The observation that some learners were reading below grade level suggests that early literacy gaps may persist over time, making reading comprehension increasingly difficult in later grades (Spaull et al., 2020).

Learners who experience difficulties in foundational reading skills may face increasing challenges as texts become longer, more complex, and cognitively demanding across the Intermediate Phase. In the Foundation Phase, learners develop foundational skills such as decoding, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and reading fluency, which provide a basis for increasingly complex comprehension tasks in the Intermediate Phase. As learners progress through Grades 4-6, they are expected to use increasingly sophisticated reading comprehension strategies to engage with texts. Therefore, if the foundational skills remain underdeveloped, learners may struggle to meet the increasing demands and may face further difficulties as they progress to the Senior Phase. The progression therefore highlights the importance of addressing reading difficulties before they become more established in the later grades (Department of Basic Education, 2011b; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016).

Minimal parental involvement in supporting reading development was reported by several teachers, as discussed in Section 4.4, where teachers described the challenges learners face when reading is not reinforced at home. According to Abadzi (2012) and Pretorius and Spaull (2016), comprehension is highly predicted by home reading practices, parental modelling, and access to books. The absence of sustained home and classroom support contributes to limited daily reading, weak fluency development, and declining learner confidence, patterns that were evident in both the public and private school contexts. Teacher 4 from Public School D's observation that learners are unable to correlate text with questions highlights the cognitive burden that learners in a second language must experience. The difficulty may be particularly challenging in multilingual classrooms where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) differs from the learners' home language. In such contexts, learners may need to process the language of the text, understand the wording of the question, and determine the relationship between the question and the information presented in the passage. Language-related challenges can therefore increase the cognitive demands of comprehension tasks and may affect learners' ability to interpret questions and make inferences from texts (Probyn, 2018).

The teachers' observation reading learner disengagement are consistent with research showing that reading motivation and engagement are associated with reading comprehension. The remarks of teachers regarding disengagement are consistent with the research that motivation, as well as reading identity, have a significant impact on comprehension (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Schiefele *et al.*, 2023). The findings of the current study therefore suggests that learners' limited engagement with reading may have implications for their opportunities to develop comprehension skills. Teacher 2 from Public School B said:

“they don't want to read,”

implying that it is a matter of learners losing interest in reading. Learners who lack confidence or habitually avoid reading often perform poorly in comprehension tasks, perpetuating a cycle of disengagement. Teachers in the public schools talked about limited books, overcrowding, and inconsistent access to resources. According to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the availability of literacy resources forms an important part of the classroom literacy environment. However, the presences of resources (posters, reading corners, and multiple texts) does not automatically mean improved reading development but the ways in which the teachers use and integrate available resources into instruction are also important (Neuman & Celano, 2006; Fleisch, 2008; Zano, 2023; Long *et al.*, 2023). These organisational constraints increase challenges to teachers and learners as well. The limitations point to the fact that the development of comprehension is not rooted in an isolated cause; it is determined by the network of interdependent factors.

Theme 5 on Challenges and Constraints in Teaching Reading Comprehension addresses how teachers interpret the factors influencing reading comprehension outcomes and how these, in turn, inform classroom practice. The results indicate that a teacher views reading comprehension challenges as a combination of developmental, motivational, linguistic, and environmental variables. These multiple factors influence teachers' instructional decisions and may, in some cases, limit those decisions because of the resources available, the diversity of the learners, parental involvement, and classroom behaviour. Moreover, they change their teaching approaches as much as they can, yet numerous variables, especially the lack of initial literacy, are beyond their control, and the difficulties reported by the teachers are not one-off occurrences but rather reflect the overall national comprehension issue.

Consequently, Theme 5 shows that reading comprehension is not just an instructional issue but a complex ecological one shaped by school conditions, home contexts, and learner characteristics. These limitations indicate the interdependence of the development of literacy. Despite all strategies and assessments, the work of the teachers is constrained by systemic, motivational, and contextual barriers outside the classroom. The section below synthesises the quantitative and qualitative

findings, focusing on the PIRLS assessment performance outcomes, CLEP results, teacher interviews, and classroom observations.

4.5 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

This section brings together evidence from the PIRLS results and CLEP classroom observations as part of the quantitative findings, as well as the qualitative finding, which include reading lessons observations and teacher interviews, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of reading comprehension and reading instruction in the participating Grade 5 English classrooms. The integration of the findings is organized around the main themes identified in the study, namely reading comprehension performance, the classroom literacy environment, and the implementation of reading comprehension instruction.

In relation to the reading comprehension performance, the PIRLS results show differences in learners performance across the participating schools, with the private school learners generally achieving higher schools than the public-school learners. The qualitative findings provided further insight into these performance patterns by identifying challenges reported and observed by teachers, including difficulties with reading comprehension despite some learners being able to read texts aloud, challenges with unfamiliar vocabulary and language, and difficulties interpreting questions and relating them to information in the text. The qualitative findings therefore helped contextualize the learner performance reflected in the PIRLS results

With regard to the classroom literacy environment, the CLEP description results generally showed more favorable conditions in the private schools in terms of the availability of reading materials, print available, and literacy resources, although the statistical tests did not establish significant differences in most cases. The classroom observations and teacher interviews provided further details about these conditions. Private schools were observed to have more print rich environments, reading corners, and a great variety of reading materials, whereas teachers in the public schools reported shortages of suitable resources and the need to share or rotate available materials. At the same time, the qualitative findings showed that the availability of resources does not necessarily mean that all materials were consistently used during instructions.

The findings concerning the implementation of reading comprehension instructions showed both convergence and variation across the school context. Teachers in both public and private schools used several reading comprehension strategies including questioning, changing, vocabulary support, rereading, and summarization. These similarities suggest that reading comprehension strategies were not absent from the participating classrooms. However, the qualitative findings showed differences in the consistency, explicitness, and organization with which these strategies were implemented. Some teachers provided more systematic modelling, guided practice, and

individual support, while other lessons provided fewer opportunities for sustained interaction with the text the learners read.

The findings further highlighted learner engagement as an important aspect of the reading experience. The quantitative instruments do not directly measure language engagement, observations, and teacher interviews revealed differences in learners' attention, participation, willingness to complete reading activities, and interaction with reading texts. Some learners participated actively, while others showed limited attention or engagement with reading tasks. These qualitative findings provide contextual information that helps explain the classroom experiences surrounding reading comprehensions, although they do not establish a direct causal relationship between engagement and the learners' PIRLS reading test results.

Taken together, the quantitative and the qualitative findings demonstrate both convergence and divergence. The quantitative results identified patterns in learner performance and classroom literacy conditions, while the qualitative findings provided contextual explanations of how reading was taught and experienced in the classrooms. Where the findings converged, the qualitative evidence added depth to the quantitative patterns. Where they diverged, the differences demonstrated that classroom literacy and reading comprehension cannot be fully understood through numerical measures alone. The integration of the two data sets therefore provides a clear understanding of the factors associated with grade 5 reading comprehension and the ways in which reading instruction and classroom literacy conditions were experienced across the participating school contexts.

4.5.1 Convergences Across Data

The findings in this study showed that there are concerns regarding the quality of the classroom literacy environment. The descriptive statistics of the CLEP recorded consistently higher scores among the private schools when it came to the availability of text materials, the presence of print, and the array of literacy tools. Even though, in most cases, no statistically significant differences were observed in the independent samples t-tests, the overall tendency was towards favourable classroom literacy conditions in private schools. These conditions included greater availability and variety of reading materials, more visible print in the classroom, functional reading corners, and a wider range of supplementary literacy resources.

The qualitative findings support this general pattern. Teachers in the private schools reported having sufficient, and in some cases more than sufficient, reading materials, while classroom observations identified print-rich spaces and reading corners containing levelled texts and supplementary materials. In contrast, teachers in the public schools reported shortages of suitable reading materials and described situations in which available resources had to be shared or rotated among learners.

These reports were supported by observations in schools B and D, where relatively few literacy displays and reading materials were visible in the classrooms. These patterns reflect broader inequalities in access to literacy resources documented in South African education research, where material constraints continue to shape instructional possibilities in under-resourced schools (Fleisch, 2008; Spaul, 2016).

The convergence between the descriptive quantitative results and the qualitative findings is therefore evident in the overall pattern of learners' comprehension difficulties, assessment practices, and classroom literacy conditions. However, the qualitative findings provide additional information about the nature and the use of these resources that could not be established through the club scores alone. For example, the presence of literacy materials did not necessarily mean that all available resources were used consistently or effectively during reading instructions. The qualitative data consequently provided a more contextualized understanding of how differences in classroom literacy conditions were experienced and reflected in daily instructional practices. The findings are consistent with South African research showing that unequal access to literacy resources can shape the opportunities available for reading instruction, particularly in under resourced school contexts (Neuman & Celano, 2006; Zano, 2023).

4.5.1.1 Learners' Comprehension Difficulties

The outcomes of the quantitative PIRLS showed that most of the learners performed poorly, especially on Test 2 (19.26), which required deeper literacy involvement. The learners' reading comprehension difficulties were reflected in qualitative data. Teachers frequently reported that although several learners can read aloud, they often struggled to understand the meaning of the text and interpret questions related to the text. As noted during the reading lesson observation in three out of four schools, the learners could decode the sentences within the text (reading activity provided) but often struggled to respond accurately to inference-based questions. The observation is important to note because comprehension instruction in the Intermediate Phase is expected to move beyond the recall of explicitly stated information towards more complex forms of comprehension.

The CAPS curriculum requires the Barrett taxonomy to be applied to reading-comprehension activities using a 40:40:20 distribution (Department of Basic Education, 2011a). The difficulty observed among learners in responding to inference-based questions therefore needs to be considered in relation to the cognitive demands of the assessment tasks. The adapted PIRLS 2016 tests used in the present study are particularly relevant in this regard because they allow the learners' performance to be considered according to the types of comprehension processes required by the questions. The findings indicate that learners could often access information explicitly stated in the text but experienced greater difficulty when required to make inferences or construct meaning that

was not stated. All these trends lead us to a larger problem that has been discovered in literature: reading is often limited to a superficial level since learners have insufficient vocabulary and background knowledge or strategic awareness that would allow them to dive deeper into their reading, which suggests that difficulties were not limited to decoding but extended to higher-level comprehension processes.

Both the quantitative assessment data and the qualitative interview and observation data highlighted the importance of instructional strategy use, although the consistency and depth of strategy implementation varied across the different classrooms. The means of the CLEP were slightly greater for the private schools when it came to instructional interactions and supportive practices, when compared with the means for public schools. This was consistent with the interview data in which the teachers at the private schools detailed much more systematic methods, like dividing texts into paragraphs, drawing attention to unfamiliar words, and guiding reading intentionally.

Although similar reading comprehension strategies were used in public schools, the observations indicated differences in how systematically and consistently these strategies were implemented. Rather, teachers were more likely to adopt these strategies as a reactive tool in response to immediate learner confusion in the lessons as opposed to being integrated into an instructional sequence. The findings suggest that the issue was not necessarily an absence of instructional strategies, but differences in the consistency, explicitness, and systematic implementations of those strategies. School C demonstrated clear progress in designed comprehension teaching, as compared to Schools A, B, and D, which demonstrated comprehension teaching on an ad hoc basis. The finding is consistent with recent South African research emphasising the importance of explicit and systematic teaching reading-comprehension strategies. Tiba (2023) highlights the role of teachers in explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies, while Elston *et al.* (2022) found that the consistent and explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, together with teacher guidance, supported the development of higher-order thinking particularly for learners who are developing. The findings of the current study therefore suggest the effectiveness of comprehension instruction may depend not only on the strategies teachers use, but also on how explicitly, consistently and systematically those strategies are implemented.

4.5.1.2 Assessment Practices

The PIRLS results indicated significant scores in school types, and teachers in both the private and public learning settings experienced continuous challenges in evaluating reading comprehension. Some teachers reported that learners struggled to understand and answer the reading comprehension questions, which often resulted in incorrect responses. In Schools A and B, teachers posed the questions, but the learners were frequently unable to connect them with the text. School C, however, used more structured questioning and monitoring strategies that improved learner

understanding. These observations align with research on assessment literacy, suggesting that multilingual learners benefit from clear guidance on how to interpret the linguistic and cognitive requirements of reading comprehension questions (DeLuca & Klinger, 2010; Mullis *et al.*, 2017; Pretorius & Spaul, 2016).

4.5.2 Divergences Across Data

Although the two data sets aligned with many key issues, there were also areas where they diverged or highlighted different aspects of the same classroom reality. One notable divergent concerns the statistical result of the CLEP, T-tests, and chi square analyses. The qualitative findings revealed observable differences in the classroom literacy environments of the private and public schools, particularly in relation to the availability and the use of literacy resources, learner engagement, and instructional practices. At the same time, similarities were identified in some of the reading comprehension strategies used by teachers across the two school contexts. However, the quantitative analysis did not indicate statistically significant differences between the groups. The absence of statistical significance does not necessarily contradict the qualitative findings, as the two approaches examined the phenomenon from different perspectives.

The relatively small number of participating schools and learners may have limited the statistical power of the quantitative analysis and, consequently, the ability to detect differences between the participating groups. In addition, the CLEP provided structured indicators of the presence or frequency of classroom literacy resources, whereas the qualitative data provided more detailed information about how these resources were used and experienced in practice. For example, the presence of reading materials in a classroom did not necessarily indicate that learners regularly used those materials or that teachers were able to integrate them consistently into reading instruction. The qualitative data therefore provided contextual information that could not be fully captured through the quantitative measures alone.

The convergence of the two datasets therefore strengthens the interpretation of findings where similar patterns were identified, while the areas of divergent demonstrated the value of using mixed methods to examine reading comprehension and literacy instruction. In the study, the quantitative findings provided an indication of patterns across the participating schools while the qualitative findings helped explain how those patterns were experienced within individual classroom contexts.

4.5.2.1 Learner Engagement

The quantitative tools used in this current study were designed to measure learners' reading comprehension performance and observable classroom resources, but they did not assess learners' motivation and attentiveness. These factors emerged more clearly through the qualitative data. Teachers reported poor concentration, lack of interest or lack of confidence, and the results proved

the observations because the engagement was diverse in the different schools. The level of learner engagement in Private School C was high, whereas Private School A and Public School B showed frequent off-task behaviours among the learners. This difference explains the importance of qualitative data in elucidating the interpersonal and emotive aspects of classroom existence, which tend to be minimised in standardised tools.

4.5.2.2 Teacher Beliefs

The teacher interviews presented a view from the teachers' perspective on how their instructional methods and approaches influence the way the teachers address learners' reading comprehension difficulties. For instance, Teacher 2 from Public School B identified laziness as an issue related to learners' reading, implying a movement towards the attribution of structural constraints due to individual behaviours. These beliefs cannot be quantified but have a serious impact in practice, expectations, and support extended to the learners.

Collectively, the two data strands reveal a far more intricate understanding of reading comprehension. The quantitative analysis showed trends of inequality between public and private schools, but the qualitative data gave an understanding of the experiences of these trends and their impact on the day-to-day teaching. The interviews and observations revealed that the resource scarcity is consistent with the motivational difficulties, language barriers, inconsistent assistance in the home, and time constraints that affect the outcomes perceived by learners. In addition, even at the private schools where provision for resources was made, the teachers were experiencing time pressures, diversity of learners, and curriculum provisions. These layered insights help to explain why the PIRLS results often remain low despite ongoing efforts to improve literacy teaching.

What becomes evident is that not only is comprehension a mental skill by itself, but it is also the by-product of a wider instructional ecology. These include the effectiveness of the literacy setting, application of strategies by the teachers, evaluation practices, learner engagement, linguistic diversity, and involvement of the home. When these factors interact favourably, as is the case in Private School C, reading comprehension tends to improve. When they interact under pressure or strain, as in Private School A, and Public Schools B and D, comprehension difficulties persist. The integration of findings in this section demonstrates that problems in reading comprehension cannot be reduced to only one factor. Rather, they are a product of a series of structural, pedagogical, and affective factors that influence the way learners read. The next section provides a summary and an overview by discussing the implications of the findings and drawing together the key arguments that will guide the recommendations in the next chapter.

4.6 Summary

Chapter 4 presented and interpreted the study's quantitative and qualitative findings, showing that learners' comprehension reflects both the strengths and limitations of their classroom contexts. For example, School C displayed more structured instructional strategies and a wider range of reading resources, whereas School A and School D experienced shortages of classroom reading resources, such as age-appropriate books that follow the curriculum, which may have limited opportunities for sustained reading development. However, across the school settings, teachers adapt their practices, but systemic constraints limit what is possible. The current chapter illustrates how these factors combine to shape Grade 5 English reading comprehension.

The combined quantitative and qualitative data gave a concrete perspective of the way reading comprehension is performed and subjective within the participating Grade 5 classrooms. The quantitative results were not always significant enough to produce statistically significant differences based on the school typologies, but general patterns showed that the four schools had systematic dissimilarities in terms of literacy surrounding and learner accomplishment. Qualitative data were used to enlarge this perspective by demonstrating how these patterns are actualised in everyday teaching, how the teachers are addressing the resource shortage, and how the learners are responding to the reading-based activities in the multilingual and frequently complex classroom setting.

A consistent pattern was observed in the five themes, which illustrated that a combination of instructional, contextual, and affective factors shapes reading difficulties. The problems that learners faced went far beyond decoding and included vocabulary, understanding questions, inferences, and overall engagement problems. Moreover, the teachers in both public and private schools recognised these struggles, though they experienced them in different ways. Although the private schools had a variety of resources, they were still faced with the requirements that limited their capacity to focus on comprehension, caused by stricter curriculum pacing and increasingly diverse learner needs. The limitations to which learners in the public schools were exposed were resource insufficiency, inconsistent home support, and overcrowded learning conditions, which compounded the difficulties learners encountered when making meaning from text.

These findings demonstrate that reading comprehension in schools evolves following the interaction of both environmental, pedagogic, linguistic, and social factors. The findings of the current study support existing South African and international research showing that comprehension gaps occur at a young age, then become wider, and are influenced by the school context, availability of resources, and language of learning. Other studies, such as Fleisch (2008), Mullis *et al.* (2017), Pretorius and Spaul (2016), and Spaul (2016), also reveal that instructional strategy cannot

counteract structural inequalities, lack of literacy exposure, or low learner engagement. A combination of quantitative outcomes of the PIRLS-based comprehension test and the scores on the CLEP test, combined with qualitative evidence of teacher interviews and classroom observations, supports the significance of instructional ecology. The better the literacy environment and the systematic nature of instructional guidance, the better the results in reading comprehension. On the other hand, under-resourced classrooms struggle to foster deep understanding, even with committed teaching. Both experiential and interpretive reading processes are also mediated by learner involvement, parent involvement, and linguistic access.

Overall, the findings indicate the necessity of explicit, long-lasting instruction that is sensitive to the language and cognitive profile of the learners, superior resources, family involvement, and assessment that truly support learning. These insights culminate in the following concluding chapter, which discusses the larger implications of the study, the practical and policy recommendations, as well as to reflect on the study's contributions and limitations.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English Home Language and First Additional Language, and to examine how classroom literacy environments and teachers' instructional strategies shape comprehension outcomes in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. The study was motivated by persistent concerns about low literacy levels in South Africa, particularly the gap between learners' ability to read words and phrases and their ability to construct meaning from texts. National assessments such as the Annual National Assessments (ANA), have contributed to understanding patterns in learners literacy performance, although such assessments provide limited information about the classroom processes and instructional practices that may contribute to these patterns. International assessments, such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), have similarly provided important evidence of South African learners reading comprehension performances. However, the assessment results alone provide limited insight into the everyday classroom context in which reading comprehension is taught and developed. These limitations highlight the need for research that considers learner performance alongside classroom literacy conditions and reading instruction.

Against this background, the current study investigated Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction in selected schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda (KK) District of the North West province. The study examined learners reading comprehension performance, the classroom literacy environment, and the implementation of reading comprehension instruction across the participating public and private schools. By bringing together quantitative and qualitative evidence, the study sought to provide a contextualized understanding of the factors associated with Grade 5 reading comprehension within the selected schools in the district. The findings should therefore be understood within the context of the participating school and the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District and should not be generalized to all schools or learners in South Africa.

This chapter summarises the study's key findings. Section 5.2 provides an overview of the study, and Section 5.3 synthesises findings for each research question. Section 5.4 presents broader conclusions, while Section 5.5 discusses theoretical, practical, and research implications. Section 5.6 translates the findings into practical recommendations, and Section 5.7 outlines the study's limitations. Finally, Section 5.8 concludes the chapter and provides a brief reflection on the study's overall significance and future directions.

5.2 Summary of the Study

The research aimed to examine the factors that influence the reading comprehension performance of Grade 5 learners among the selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. The research problem was informed by South African literacy research concerns that most learners can read aloud but struggle to understand what they are reading. Based on this observation, the study aimed at investigating the reading comprehension performance of Grade 5 learners in English classes, the literacy environment, as well as the instructional practices used by the teachers in improving the reading comprehension performance of the learners. In doing so, the current study sought to explore how differences in school context influence the reading experience of learners and how reading comprehension in English is taught in both public and private schools.

To meet these research goals, the mixed-methods design was implemented. The quantitative approach collected data from reading comprehension tests. The PIRLS was used to explore the performance of learners, and the Classroom Literacy Environment Profile (CLEP) was used to investigate the quality of the literacy environment in schools. In addition, the qualitative approach collected data from the teacher interviews and lesson observation, which provided more in-depth information about the pragmatic practice of the reading instruction as experienced by the teacher and looked further into the challenges of teaching comprehension. The mixed-methods design provided a more detailed and comprehensive view that explained the research problem by combining the quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data offered numerical evidence of learners' reading comprehension performance and classroom literacy environments, while the qualitative data helped explain how these numerical patterns emerged in practice through teacher interviews and lesson observations.

The findings from the data collected from PIRLS found discrepancies between the learners in the selected public and private schools. The results for public schools showed lower scores compared to private schools. In addition, the learners scored lower on the literary comprehension task, implying that the learners struggled with inferential reading and evaluative reading. The CLEP checklist results indicated the unequal provision of resources and quality classroom environment between private and public schools, with private schools having a variety of resources, making their classrooms print-rich and resource-rich environments. Third, qualitative data showed that teachers in both public and private school settings experienced several challenges in implementing reading comprehension instruction. These challenges included limited instructional time, diverse learner needs, learners weak foundational reading abilities, and varying levels of learner engagement. Despite these challenges, teachers applied various comprehension-support strategies, although the consistency, explicitness, implicitness, and organization of their implementations varied across the participating classrooms.

Together, these results indicate that performance in reading comprehension is determined by the conjunction of the school resources, teacher practices, and participation of learners and other contextual factors. Moreover, research highlights the fact that intervention is needed to improve both learning conditions and instructional methods that lie at the base of learners receiving effective comprehension development.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings

This section sums up the key findings that emerged from the research questions. The chapter highlights the main findings derived from both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study.

- Research Question 1:

What is the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance in English HL and FAL in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it differ between public and private schools?

The PIRLS results provided a direct basis for answering Research question 1. The results showed that learners in the participating private schools, where English was taught as a Home Language, generally achieved higher scores in both comprehension tests than learners in the participating public schools, where English was taught as a First Additional Language. The differences in scores indicates that, within the schools included in the current study, learners in the English HL context demonstrated stronger reading comprehension performance than those in English FAL context.

Moreover, among the participating schools, performance was also slightly lower in the PIRLS Test 2 than in Test 1. The lower performance in Test 2 indicated greater difficulty with the comprehension processes required by the questions in the test, particularly where learners needed to interpret information, make inferences, and evaluate meaning rather than rely primarily on information explicitly stated in the text. The PIRLS results therefore provided evidence not only of differences in overall performance between the participating school contexts but also of differences in learners' ability to engage with more demanding comprehension processes.

Research Question 1 was therefore answered by establishing that reading comprehension proficiency differed across the participating public and private school settings. However, the differences in performance should therefore be interpreted cautiously. In the current study, school type and Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) were closely associated in the sample, with the participating private schools using English HL and the participating public schools using English FAL. Consequently, the study cannot isolate the independent effect of school environment from the

effect of learners English language proficiency and language of learning status or the interaction of all these factors. The findings nevertheless suggest that the combination of the classroom at school context and the language in which learners encountered the assessment may have shaped the conditions under which reading comprehension was demonstrated.

- Research Question 2:

What is the classroom literacy environment for Grade 5 learners in selected public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province, and how does it vary between them?

The findings indicate that the classroom literacy environment differed across the participating public and private schools, particularly in the availability, variety, and organization of literacy resources and print materials. The private schools generally provided more print rich classroom environments, with greater access to reading materials and more organized literacy resources. In contrast, the public-school classrooms had more limited access to suitable books, visual material, and other literacy resources. These differences were also reflected in the classroom observations, which showed variation in the organization and use of literary spaces and material. Some of the necessary resources are available in both contexts, but at public schools, more resources are either inadequate, do not motivate learners, or are too limited to promote the development of understanding.

However, the findings should not be interpreted as indicating that the availability of resources alone determined learners reading comprehension performance. The CLEP results provided evidence of differences in classroom literacy conditions, but the statistical analyses did not establish significant differences across all the major aspects of the classroom literacy environment. The qualitative findings further showed that the availability of resources did not necessarily result in their consistent or effective use. For example, resources that were available in some private school classrooms were not always fully integrated into reading instruction because of curriculum demands, time constraints, or other classroom considerations.

The findings therefore answer Research Question 2 by showing that the participating private schools generally had more favourable classroom literacy conditions in terms of print exposure, reading materials, and the organizations of literacy resources, whereas the participating public schools experience greater resource constraints. At the same time, the study demonstrated that a classroom literacy environment involves more than the physical presence of resources. The ways in which teachers use available materials, organize literacy activities, and create opportunities for learners to interact with texts are also important aspects of the literacy environment. These findings are

therefore consistent with South African research that highlights inequalities in access to literacy resources, and the importance of how such resources are used in support of reading development (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Van Staden & Howie, 2010). These findings are specific to the selected Grade 5 classroom in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District and should therefore not be generalized to all public or private schools in the North West Province or South Africa.

- Research Question 3:

How is reading comprehension instruction implemented between two public and two private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality of North-West Province?

In both public and private schools, teachers use various strategies of reading comprehension, guided reading, shared reading, text chunking, questioning, and repeated reading. However, the extent, complexities, and uniformity of strategy implementation differ between teachers and the schools. In private schools, the teachers used a more systematic and scaffolded approach, often aligned with additional materials and systematic reading courses. Subsequently, teachers in public schools used similar strategies, such as guided reading and questioning. However, these were applied less consistently and were often adapted informally in response to the lack of resources, insufficient pre-existing knowledge of basic reading abilities, and immediate learner difficulties. However, in both settings, teachers agree that learners can read aloud but fail to comprehend the text, and the learners often require more detailed instruction to address reading comprehension shortcomings.

The qualitative findings from the teacher interviews and lesson observations showed that reading comprehension instruction was implemented in all four participating schools through a range of reading instruction strategies. However, the findings also showed differences in the consistency, organization, and extent to which these strategies were implemented across the Grade 5 English classrooms. The lesson observations showed that teachers in the participating schools used several comprehension support strategies and the teacher interviews provided further insight into these classroom practices.

Taken together, the teacher interviews and lesson observations show that reading comprehension instruction was present in both the public and the private school context, but its implementation differed in terms of consistency, explicitness, organization, and scaffolding. The findings therefore answer Research Question 3 by showing that teachers in all four participating schools employed comprehension support strategies, but these strategies were implemented differently according to the classroom context, learner needs, language proficiency, teacher practices, and availability of resources. The findings do not suggest an absence of comprehension instruction in the public

schools. Rather, they indicate differences in how systematically and consistently comprehension strategies were implemented across the participating Grade 5 English classrooms.

5.4 Overview of Key Findings

The current study shows that reading comprehension develops unevenly and is strongly shaped by classroom context, instructional practices, and learner engagement in both school types. It finds that school resources, classroom literacy conditions, and teachers' instructional approaches are interrelated and linked to Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension. None of the components works in total isolation. Instead, reading comprehension is mutually shaped by different components within their background, teacher pedagogical skills, and the contextual circumstances that influence instruction and learning.

For instance, one of the conclusions that is drawn from the data collected is that the context of the school has a great impact on the learners, not only concerning the language of instruction or the resources available but also concerning the accessibility of resources. Learners who are in private schools where English is the HL scored high in the reading comprehension test when compared with learners who learn English as an additional language and are in public schools. The finding is consistent with the Evidence from South African research, including findings from the Annual National Assessments (ANA) and studies examining English reading comprehension among second-language learners in South African schools. Research has shown that learners who read in English as a second or additional language may experience difficulties in reading comprehension when the English language proficiency does not adequately support the linguistic demands of increasingly complex texts. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for the Intermediate Phase expects learners to develop increasingly complex reading and understanding skills. Therefore, the linguistic demands identified in the current study should not be understood as inappropriate expectation of the curriculum. Rather, the difficulty may arise when some English FAL learners have not yet developed sufficient support for engaging with increasingly complex texts. The poor performance on the PIRLS Test 2 by all the schools further reveals that the competencies of deeper comprehension, including inferencing, information assessment, and literary analysis, are still poorly developed among the learners of Grade 5.

In addition, the analysis showed that there are differences in classroom literacy environments between public and private schools. In private schools, there is an established condition that emphasises the richness of print and other well-equipped environments, whereas in public schools, there are often limited reading materials, which are neither age-appropriate nor engaging nor motivating the learners to read. However, the findings indicate that the availability of resources does not automatically translate into stronger reading comprehension outcomes. Rather, how these

resources are used instructionally plays a more decisive role. Time limitations and assessment requirements in small classrooms observed at private schools indicated that the availability of materials did not translate to the use of these materials. On the other hand, the limited availability of materials such as reading books, visual literacy materials, posters, and other classroom reading resources, in the public school constrained the range of resources that teachers could use to support reading development. Public school teachers had fewer suitable reading materials available for learners to engage with, which limited opportunities to provide varied texts and additional reading practices during instruction. suitable for instructing learners in reading development.

Furthermore, the amount of effort put into the support of reading comprehension by teachers in both contexts is similar, but the implementation of the strategies is different in consistency and depth. Included in these are the instructional practices that were typically more structured and scaffolded by teachers in private schools and adaptive strategies structured by the needs of the learners and the educational context by the teachers in public schools. In all the schools, the teachers observed that most learners could decode the text but failed to retrieve meaning, raising awareness on the need for effective strategies in teaching comprehension in a systematic manner. The observations are consistent with the research showing that difficulties in reading comprehension may persist when instruction does not explicitly develop the strategies required to construct meaning from texts. South African research has similarly identified challenges in explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, including limited attention to strategic reading, questioning, feedback, and learner engagement with texts (Pretorius & Klapwiji, 2016; olifant *et al.*, 2022). More recent evidence from a systematic review of South African multilingual reading interventions further indicate that explicit reading strategy instructions, vocabulary development, teacher development, and adequate resource can support reading comprehension, although the evidence base remains limited and context dependent (Carter *et al.*, 2024).

Additionally, the engagement levels of learners and the involvement of parents are regarded as the most common challenges. Under-engagement, short attention, and less support with home-reading were also typically reported in all schools with low participation in reading activities. Learners' motivation, confidence, and reading-related behaviours emerged as important mediating factors that influence how learners respond to instruction and the extent to which they engage meaningfully with texts. Interview and observation data revealed that reading was not a regular or habitual practice for many learners, which in turn sustained limited exposure to texts and constrained the development of higher-order comprehension skills.

The study revealed that Grade 5 reading comprehension can be affected by numerous, compounding challenges and not a single deficit. The observation report revealed that it will require more than books or learning to decode to improve comprehension. It requires an in-service

enhancement of the classroom literacy conditions, enabling teachers with a relevant understanding of instructional strategies and helping multilingual learners to master reading with the help of linguistically sensitive pedagogies, as well as giving the family continued participation in the reading process.

Although the private schools benefited from access to resources and a more supportive language environment, teachers in both schools' contexts reported similar challenges in helping learners develop the level of language proficiency required to understand the curriculum-based texts. In summary, reading comprehension in Grade 5 is not merely an individual skill, but the outcome of an interaction between systemic learner and teacher support, the classroom environment, and the motivation of the learner. These factors interact because learners ability to construct meaning from texts is shaped by more than their individual reading ability. Teachers influence this process through the explicit or implicit teaching of comprehension strategies, questioning, modelling, feedback, and scaffolding, while the classroom literacy environment influences the availability and use of reading materials and opportunities to engage with different texts. Learner related factors, including language proficiency, prior knowledge, motivation, and engagement, further influences how learners respond to these instructional opportunities. In multilingual classrooms, these factors may interact more strongly because learners may need to process both the content of the text and the language in which the content is being presented. The findings therefore suggest that reading comprehension development should be understood as an interaction between instructional support, the literacy environment, and learner characteristics rather than as an individual learner attributes alone. Subsequently, addressing limitations in only one of these areas, without attending to the other areas, is unlikely to result in sustained improvements in reading comprehension. This broad perspective forms the basis for the implications and recommendations discussed in the sections that follow.

5.5 Implications of the Study

By integrating quantitative performance data with qualitative insights into teaching practices and classroom environments, the study provided a more comprehensive understanding of reading comprehension within the participating Grade 5 English classrooms in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda district of the North West Province. The findings highlighted the interconnected nature of learner performance, instructional practices, classroom literacy environments, and the linguistic context in which reading takes place. Rather than viewing reading comprehension performance as the result of a single factor, the findings demonstrated the importance of considering these dimensions together when interpreting learners reading development in English.

The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to the study's contribution to the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework, as well as their implications for practice and future research. The

discussion of implications for practice focuses specifically on literacy development in multilingual contexts and on the understanding of classroom literacy environments and reading instruction strategies. The section also considers the implications of the findings for future research, particularly in relation to further investigation of English reading comprehension development, instructional practices, and the contextual factors that shape learners opportunities to develop reading literacy skills.

5.5.1 Implications for the Framework

The study provided information that supports and extends the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework in the South African context. The PIRLS frames the conceptualisation of reading comprehension in terms of a dynamic relationship between cognitive processes and reading purpose as well as reading environments that support the development of reading (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). This multi-dimensional view is also supported by the empirical evidence that Grade 5 learners do not have a single factor that controls their reading comprehension, but it is the interaction of instructional practices, classroom literacies, home environments, and learner engagement. The interaction among these factors aligns with broader theoretical perspectives of reading comprehension that focus on the combination of decoding, linguistic comprehension, and contextual factors (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014; Snow, 2002).

First, the PIRLS distinction between reading for information and reading for literary experience is clearly reflected in the documented findings. Learners in both school types scored higher in Test 1, where skills of informational reading were required, as opposed to Test 2, where literary interpretation tasks were required. These findings support the PIRLS data, stating that according to high-order interpretive and evaluative tasks, the common literary texts are more cognitively demanding (Mullis *et al.*, 2023). Reading comprehension requires inferencing, integration of ideas, and evaluation of authorial intent, as well as processes that are cognitively more complex than retrieval-based tasks. In this way, the theoretical assertion is that reading comprehension difficulties become more noticeable when learners are required to engage in deeper levels of meaning construction, particularly in multilingual contexts where language proficiency may constrain higher-order processing (Cummins, 2000; Heugh, 2018).

Second, retrieving information, making inferences, interpreting, and integrating ideas, and evaluating content are the cognitive processes outlined in the PIRLS framework that are clear in the challenges that were reported by teachers and observed in classroom practices. Throughout all the participating Grade 5 English classrooms, the teachers reported that the learners were able to find information or decode the text, but had difficulties with inference, integration, and evaluation. The reported difficulty with higher-order comprehension processes is in line with PIRLS results, which

show that South African learners cope with a primary type of retrieval but have serious challenges where higher-order comprehension is concerned (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, the qualitative information suggests that the lack of vocabulary, poor assessment literacy and exposure to densely texted reading materials limit the richness of the learners' ability to engage fully with cognitively demanding questions. These results align with Pretorius and Murray (2023), who maintain that difficulties in reading comprehension in multilingual contexts are frequently tied to linguistic demands rather than solely to cognitive constraints.

Third, the PIRLS framework also emphasises the influence of contextual factors such as the role of school, home, and classroom contexts in developing reading comprehension. In this study, the CLEP results of the study and lesson observations showed significant differences in the literacy environment between private and public schools. The literacy environment in the private schools was more diverse, rich, and the instructional routines more organised, whereas public schools faced resource limitations, and the contextual conditions were more restrictive. Nevertheless, the results also show that resource availability alone does not guarantee strong reading comprehension outcomes. The classroom observations indicated that educational value of literacy resources dependent partly on how consistently and purposefully teachers incorporated them into reading instruction. The finding is consistent with South African research showing that the availability and use of resources from part of the broader conditions supporting reading comprehension, but that resources needed to be integrated into meaningful instructional practices (Pretorius & Klapwijk 2016; Cekiso & Boakye, 2022; Zano, 2023). Similarly, Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) confirm the concept of a mediating role of motivation and engagement in the translation of environmental support into reading comprehension development.

Overall, the study reinforces the PIRLS theoretical framework, demonstrating how the interaction of cognitive, instructional, and contextual variables determines the outcome of comprehension in South African Intermediate Phase classrooms. The application of the PIRLS framework to the findings demonstrates that PIRLS serves not only as a measurement tool but also as a valuable lens through which to understand the complexity of teaching and learning reading comprehension in real classroom contexts. In doing so, the current study situates local classroom realities within an internationally recognised theoretical model while highlighting the specific challenges and contextual nuances of the South African education system.

5.5.2 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for classroom instruction, teacher development, curriculum implementation, and school-level planning. First, there is a difference between decoding and comprehension, which can be regarded as a sign that higher-order

comprehension skills taught should be explicitly supported by teachers (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014; Snow, 2002). While most teachers rely on oral questioning and repetitive reading, few use explicit strategy teaching as per PIRLS cognitive processes, such as modelling inference-making, guiding evaluative reasoning, or systematically teaching comprehension strategies. Research by Pearson and Duke (2002) and Shanahan *et al.* (2010) emphasises that explicit strategy instruction, including predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarising, and making inferences, significantly enhances comprehension outcomes. As a result, the findings suggest that professional development initiatives must be part of incorporating focused strategies like using guided inference-making, modelling evaluative thinking, and contextualised vocabulary learning.

It was also noted in the study that enhancing classroom literacy environments enhances reading engagement and comprehension development. As argued by Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016), print-rich classrooms and meaningful exposure to texts are associated with stronger literacy outcomes. The CLEP findings in this study indicate disparities in literacy resources, particularly between public and private schools. While large-scale resource redistribution may require systemic intervention, schools can implement low-cost strategies such as posters designed by the learners or find reading materials donations from the community and place these objects in the reading corners of the classrooms to create more interesting print spaces. The organisation of classrooms and access to materials would seem to affect the rate at which learners engage with the texts, thus indicating the need to integrate literacy environments as part of the fundamental education and learning delivery. These practical adjustments align with the argument that engagement and motivation are closely linked to environmental support and opportunities for authentic reading experiences (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Additionally, the findings reveal the importance of assessing literacy. Learners often demonstrated partial understanding of texts, but they failed to understand the questions to respond appropriately. The difficulty learners experienced in interpreting assessment questions supports the argument that, in multilingual settings, comprehension challenges may be shaped by linguistic demands rather than solely by cognitive constraints (Cummins, 2000; Pretorius & Murray, 2023). The need to address assessment-related language demands suggests that teachers should explicitly teach learners how questions are structured, clarify the meanings of command words such as “explain” and “infer”, and demonstrate strategies for locating supporting evidence in the text. Explicit instruction in assessment language is particularly crucial in multilingual classrooms, where the language used in assessment may hinder learners’ understanding.

Finally, the study has different implications for the involvement of parents and communities. The teachers reported that learners engaged in very little reading outside the school. This finding is consistent with Pretorius and Spaul (2016), who identify the home literacy environment, including

access to books and opportunities for reading practice, as a strong predictor of reading development. Research shows that simple interventions such as sending short reading materials home, offering parent workshops, and encouraging shared reading practices can positively influence learners' comprehension development (Mullis *et al.*, 2017; Pretorius & Spaull, 2016). The PIRLS framework similarly identifies parental involvement and early exposure to books as key determinants of long-term literacy development (Mullis *et al.*, 2017). The importance of parental involvement and early exposure to books suggests that simple interventions, such as sending short reading materials home, conducting parent workshops, and encouraging shared reading practices, may support the development of learners' reading comprehension over time.

5.5.3 Implications for Research

The current research fits into the growing body of literature regarding the study of literacy in South Africa to illustrate how the incorporation of PIRLS-consistent assessments may be coupled with qualitative classroom-based information to develop a more comprehensive understanding of reading comprehension. In terms of methodology, the study demonstrated the usefulness of using standardised tests alongside the information gathered through interviews and observations, since the combination of the two brought a more illuminating and intricate perspective of why learners achieve low reading comprehension scores.

Furthermore, the findings also indicate that there are many avenues that future research can take. It requires deeper research to understand how these questions are interpreted by the learners with comprehension, when it is conducted in a multilingual environment, where English is not the native language (Cummins, 2000; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). The gaps in early literacy development need longitudinal studies to monitor the progress of the gaps. Moreover, further studies are needed to determine how teacher training programmes combine PIRLS cognitive processes and whether explicit instruction increases learner performance on two question types. Lastly, it would be valuable to conduct more extensive research on literacy conditions in more South African schools to understand better how structural inequalities still influence the process of developing reading and how they can be alleviated through specific interventions.

5.6 Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight several areas in which meaningful changes can be made to enhance the effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction in Grade 5 English language classrooms. The findings indicate that addressing reading comprehension difficulties requires action not only in teachers instructional practices but also in the availability and purposeful use of literacy resources, learners' language and reading needs, and the opportunities provided for sustained

engagement with texts. Some of these areas can be addressed at classroom level, while others require coordinated action by school management, education authorities, and other stakeholders.

The recommendations in the sections are therefore presented in two areas, namely practice and policy recommendations and future research recommendations. The practice and policy recommendations focus on actionable measures that teachers, schools, and relevant education stakeholders can implement to strengthen reading comprehension instruction, support literacy development in multilingual classrooms, improve the purposeful use of classroom literacy resources, and provide learners with regular opportunities to engage with texts. The future research recommendations identify areas requiring further investigation, particularly those arising from the limitations of the current study and the need for research involving broader samples, different educational settings, and long-term examination of reading comprehension instruction and development.

5.6.1 Practice and Policy Recommendations

The first recommendation involves the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. In the schools that were sampled, learners were observed to struggle not only with basic decoding, but also with deeper levels of comprehension. Therefore, strategies such as prediction, summarising, questioning, and making inferences should be organised in ways that support teachers. The ways to incorporate these strategies into the routine reading lesson can be facilitated by training workshops or in resource guides that would comply with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), instead of making them rare exceptions.

Access to literary resources was unevenly distributed across the participating schools. This pattern was reflected in the classroom literacy environment, where the private schools displayed a wider range of literacy supportive resources compared to the public schools. The study highlights the importance of creating rich literacy environments, particularly within public schools. Therefore, the second recommendation is the distribution of print-rich classroom displays, reading corners, and access to library resources. Schools should increase access to graded readers, high interest reading materials, and appropriate visual literacy resources to provide learners with varied opportunities to engage with texts at different levels of reading ability. Policymakers could explore options such as special funding sources that can be used for literacy materials or centrally managed district resource kits that can be shared among schools throughout the academic year. Financial constraints might be eased by partnering with non-governmental organisations (NGO), nearby universities, or community libraries. These partnerships could assist schools by providing additional reading materials, literacy programs, teacher development opportunities, reading clubs, and access to library resources.

Subsequently, the third recommendation is based on linguistically responsive instruction. The teachers teaching in multilingual classrooms require assistance with translanguaging, vocabulary scaffolds, and simplified questions that can help learners manage the linguistic requirements of both English Home Language (HL) and English as a First Additional Language (FAL). An effective set of instructions outlining how the teachers ought to incorporate the home languages in their comprehension assessment would help the teachers who already adopt such strategies but lack systematic instructions. Teachers should also be supported to adapt the wording of questions when necessary to improve linguistic accessibilities without removing the intended comprehension process being assessed. The support is important because home language designation does not necessarily mean that English is the language learners speak at home, in the South African context, home language is also a curriculum category associated with a particular level of language proficiency. Moreover, the need to enhance parent involvement is emphasised by the evidence. Many learners did not receive support at home, and teachers claimed to be isolated in their teaching practices. Schools would be able to start low-cost programmes, for instance, sending out short reading tasks that require parent input, providing parent-reading workshops every quarter, or creating bilingual communication resources, which clarify how families might help children develop reading. These interventions can exist between homes and the school despite scenarios where the time spent with parents is minimal.

Lastly, more uniform evaluation practices need to be developed. Learners who were in confusion often did not understand the idea of the text, but it was a result of students misinterpreting the test questions. The teachers might need some help with preparing or choosing age-based comprehension tasks that best fit the linguistic and cognitive characteristics of their groups. Grade or cluster-wide planning would also help to improve the quality and comparability of assessment across schools.

5.6.2 Future Research Recommendation

The current research study reveals several gaps that require further research. The first gap is the lack of work on assessment literacy, particularly in multilingual classrooms. Learners' difficulty in responding to comprehension questions suggests a need to examine how question formulation, language complexity, and cognitive demand affect performance. Therefore, future research could explore how learners respond to different types of reading comprehension questions, such as inferential, literal, and evaluative questions. Understanding these differences may help teachers design assessment tasks that better match learners' levels of reading comprehension.

Secondly, longitudinal literacy development holds a good frontier. Since this current study only employed a cross-sectional approach to measuring performance and practices at a single time point,

another study could conduct a longitudinal study and thus observe the development and association of decoding, vocabulary, engagement, and instructional support.

Thirdly, teacher knowledge and training constitute a sensitive research area. The four teachers who participated in the study reported varying levels of confidence in implementing explicit reading instruction, particularly when teaching learners with different levels of reading ability. However, the small number of teacher participants limit the extent to which these findings can be used to characterize teachers knowledge or training beyond the participating classroom. The findings should therefore be understood as reflecting the experiences and practices of the four participating teachers rather than providing a broader assessment of teacher knowledge in the district. Future research could also examine the professional development models designed to support and develop teachers in mixed-ability and multilingual Intermediate Phase classrooms. Such studies could provide valuable guidance for training providers and the schools seeking to strengthen instructional practices that support reading comprehension development.

Lastly, research on learner engagement and motivation should be investigated further. Multiple teachers further indicated that learners do not want to read, but the reasons behind learners being disengaged were not central to the current study for further exploration in answering the research questions. Therefore, the willingness of learners to read and engage in comprehension exercises with respect to identity, confidence, reading culture, and peer dynamics could be researched in the future. The findings inform these recommendations of the current study and aim to support both educational practice and future research efforts aimed at improving reading proficiency levels in the Intermediate Phase across diverse school contexts.

5.7 Limitations of the Study

This study, like other empirical studies, encountered several limitations that should be recognised to put the study into perspective. The most obvious restriction is one that deals with sample size. The original design involved 80 Grade 5 learners, two groups in the public and the private school (20 from each school). However, due to factors such as availability, absenteeism, and administrative limitations, the cohort was slightly larger, and the learners were not equally distributed among the four schools. Although the current study provided a useful comparison between public and private schools, the sampling approach focused on a limited number of schools. Learners were selected to represent different performance levels within the classroom, such as low, middle, and high-performing learners. Future studies with much larger sample sizes may provide broader insights into reading comprehension performance across different contexts.

Additionally, the geographical scope of the sample was limited to four participating schools, comprising two public and two private schools. This division allowed a plausible comparison,

although the chosen schools are not very representative of the heterogeneity of literacy contexts that are common across the Dr Kenneth Kaunda Municipality in the North-West Province. The difference between school culture and leadership and even classroom practice within the framework of the same district is significant, and these particularities of the context were not present in the present study. The sample sizes were also unequal across the schools, which limits the comparability of school-level results and requires inferential findings to be interpreted with caution. In particular, the findings for School A, which had a very small number of participating learners, are primarily descriptive and should not be interpreted as representative of the school as a whole.

Another limitation relates to the analysis tools that were used. To be selected, considering the internationally documented reading standards, the PIRLS 2016 passages (Tests 1 and 2) were chosen; they were not directly related to classroom reading instructional material that was observed. Such a deliberate mismatch could have influenced the performance of learners, particularly those who are already faced with challenges by not knowing what they are doing. Although such tools provided helpful feedback on understanding, they might not represent the depth of learner skills, especially in the context of informal reading. Furthermore, there was an additional restriction provided by the CLEP. As much as the CLEP documents visible literacy resources and instructional practices, it does not account for important aspects of classroom culture, such as teacher beliefs, peer interactions, or the invisible instructional routines, which cannot be measured using the checklist. In addition, the limited sample size of observed classrooms is indicative of the fact that the quantitative CLEP results are to be regarded as descriptive but not conclusive.

Furthermore, the qualitative data, interviews and observations rely on self-reports and interpretation by the researcher. The teachers could have put their practices in a better perspective, or they could have focused on certain difficulties with given attention to individual experience or classroom demands. The classroom reading lesson observations were conducted over a limited period and therefore provided only a snapshot of reading instruction in the participating grade 5 English classrooms. Although the observations provided useful information about the reading practices and classroom interactions that occurred during the observed lessons, they may have not captured the full range or depth of teachers' reading comprehension instruction over an extended period. The teachers may have used additional instruction approaches during lessons that were not observed. A long-term or longitudinal study involving repeated observation over an extended period could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how reading comprehension instruction is planned, implemented, and adapted over time. However, the English reading lesson observations conducted in the current study, together with the teacher interviews and quantitative findings, provided complementary evidence for addressing the objectives of the study. The use of careful analytical methods, interpretations may have been affected by the specific dynamics that were involved during

the periods of observation. Lastly, the study was impacted by time constraints as there would be deeper patterns of pedagogy, engagement, and development of understanding revealed through long, longitudinal observation over a series of weeks or months. The current study, which is limited to several lessons and interview sessions, therefore, only presents a picture of classroom dynamics, not a picture that encompasses the entire instructional cycle.

Despite these limitations, the current study provided valuable and plausible knowledge. The quantitative and qualitative evidence in the triangulation work, coupled with the internationally standardised reading measures, can provide an effective basis for understanding the complexity of literacy teaching in the multilingual Southern African classrooms. The mentioned limitations do not weaken the relevance of the findings but instead outline the research gaps that future studies can address in their attempt to elaborate and transform the work discussed.

5.8 Concluding Remarks

The current study set out to investigate Grade 5 reading comprehension within multilingual classrooms and to determine how instructional practices and classroom literacy environments shape learner achievement in public and private schools in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District. The findings of the study indicate that reading comprehension is influenced by multiple interlinked factors, such as linguistic, cognitive, contextual, and instructional factors. The quantitative and the qualitative findings show that learners comprehension difficulties occurred alongside differences in the classroom literacy environment, language context, and instructional practices. These findings therefore suggest that comprehension difficulties cannot be understood solely in terms of learners' decoding abilities. The findings additionally confirm that comprehension development is complex and multi-dimensional rather than determined by a single cause that depends not only on classroom teaching but also on the learning environment, household, and the overall sociolinguistic environment that frames child learning.

Although some learners demonstrated decoding abilities, a substantial number of learners struggled with decoding accuracy and fluency. Additionally, major problems were observed in higher-level comprehension processes, including making inferences, integrating information across the text, and evaluating meaning. These challenges are significant in relation to the PIRLS Reading Literacy Framework, which conceptualizes reading literacy as the ability to construct meaning from written texts rather than simply decoding words. The findings suggest that some learners could access the surface features of the text but experienced greater difficulty when comprehension required them to infer information, connect ideas presented in different parts of a text, or evaluate meaning. The difficulties experienced were enhanced in multilingual situations where vocabulary, language proficiency, and assessment literacy played a role in determining the capacity of learners to

comprehend questions and form meaning. The variation in classroom literacy conditions also influenced engagement opportunities, though having plenty of resources failed to support better results. On the contrary, reading comprehension development relied on the interaction among structured teaching, learner motivation, language support, and broader contextual factors.

Despite contextual constraints, teachers demonstrated long-term interest in helping learners. Nevertheless, the results indicate that enhanced professional assistance, greater access to literacy resources, and multilingualism-sensitive pedagogic practices are needed. Although limited to one district, this study provided a grounded account of how reading comprehension developed within real classroom contexts. It added to the existing discussion about the emerging literacy in South Africa. It solidified one of the key findings, that to enhance reading comprehension, there must be a coordinated effort related to instructional methods, environment, language, and learner engagement. Only through such integrated efforts can schools develop confident and critically engaged readers who will achieve long-term academic success.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test

PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test 1

PIRLS 2016 Test 1

Instructions for the reading test

Duration: 40 minutes

Dear learner

This question paper contains two sections. Each section has a passage followed by a set of questions.

Read the passages and answer the questions that follow by writing in the spaces provided or circling the letter of the correct choice as required.

Please write your details below:

Name: -----

Age: -----

Gender: -----

Name of school: -----

Home language: -----

Date of test: -----

TURN OVER

Antarctica: Land of Ice

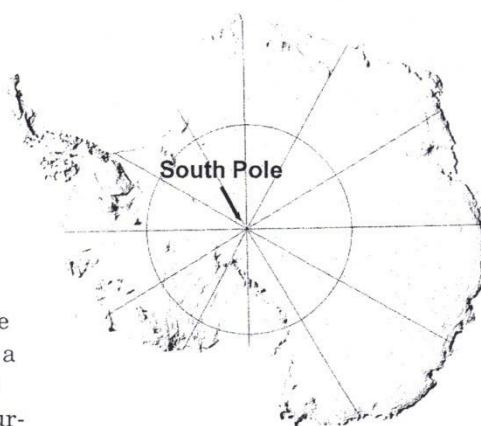
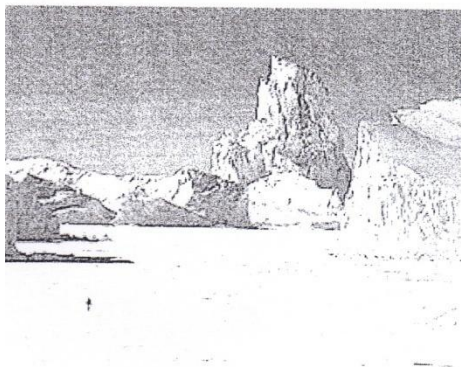
Introducing Antarctica

What is Antarctica?

Antarctica is a continent that is right at the south of the planet. (If you try to find it on a globe, you will see that it is at the bottom.)

It takes up one-tenth of the Earth's surface and is covered with a blanket of ice that can be as thick as 1,500 metres or more. The South Pole is right in the middle of Antarctica.

Antarctica is the coldest continent, as well as the driest, the highest and the windiest. Very few people live there all year round. Scientists stay there for short periods, living in specially built research stations.



A Map of Antarctica

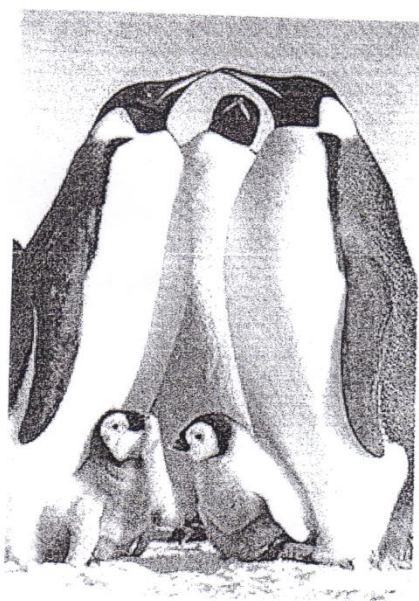
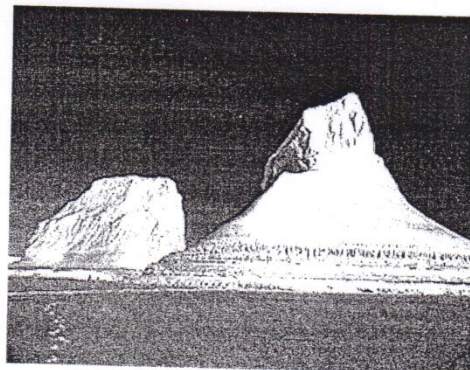
Summer in Antarctica is between October and March. During this time there is non-stop daylight. In winter, April to September, the opposite happens and Antarctica is plunged into six months of constant darkness.



TIMSS & PIRLS
International Study Center
Lynch School of Education, Boston College

In Antarctica, it is colder than you can possibly imagine, even in the summer! The South Pole is the coldest part of Antarctica. The average temperature for January, the middle of the summer, is minus 28 degrees Celsius (written as -28°C). Minus means colder than the freezing point, which is 0°C .

In the winter, April to September, the average temperature at the South Pole can be as cold as -89°C . When it is that cold, a mug of boiling water thrown in the air would freeze before it hit the ice. Sometimes the scientists have to use fridges to keep their samples warm!



Penguins in Antarctica

There are more penguins in the Antarctic than any other bird.

They cannot fly but use their short wings as swimming flippers. They are superb swimmers. On land, they waddle upright or move in short hops.

Penguins have many feathers that overlap each other. These, together with woolly down feathers and a thick layer of fat, keep out the cold air, wind and water. For extra warmth, penguins huddle together in groups.

Questions: Antarctica: Land of Ice

1. Where can you find Antarctica on a globe?

2. Antarctica is the coldest place on Earth. What other records does it hold?

Circle the right answer

- a. driest and cloudiest
- b. wettest and windiest
- c. windiest and driest
- d. cloudiest and highest

3. What is the coldest part of Antarctica?

4. Think about what the article says about Antarctica. Give **two** reasons why most people who visit Antarctica chose **not** to go there between April and September?

1. -----

2. -----

5. Why does the article tell you that ‘a mug of boiling water thrown in the air would freeze before it hit the ice? **Circle the right answer**

- a. to tell you how hot the water is in Antarctica
- b. to show you what they drink in Antarctica
- c. to tell you about scientists’ jobs in Antarctica

d. to show you how cold it is in Antarctica

6. According to the article, what do penguins use their wings for? **Circle the right answer**

a. flying

b. swimming

c. keeping chicks warm

d. walking upright

7. Give **three** ways penguins are able to keep warm in Antarctica.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

8. What are **two** things you learn about food in Antarctica from Sara's letter?

1. _____

2. _____

9. Think about whether you would like to visit Antarctica. Use what you have read in both *Introducing Antarctica* and *A Letter from Antarctica* to **explain why you would or would not like to visit.**

10. Which section of the article tells you how thick the ice is in Antarctica? **Circle the right answer**

a. What is Antarctica?

b. The weather in Antarctica

c. Penguins in Antarctica

d. A Letter from Antarctica

11. In this article, there are two different ways of finding out about Antarctica:

- *Introducing Antarctica*
- *A Letter from Antarctica*

Which of these kinds of information do you find more interesting, and why?

PIRLS Reading Comprehension Test 2

Instructions for the reading test

Duration: 40 minutes

Dear learner

This question paper contains two sections. Each section has a passage followed by a set of questions.

Read the passages and answer the questions that follow by writing in the spaces provided or circling the letter of the correct choice as required.

Please write your details below:

Name: -----

Age: -----

Gender: -----

Name of school: -----

Home language: -----

Date of test: -----

TURN OVER

The Little Lump of Clay

by Diana Engel

Way up high, in an old tower, there was a workshop. It was a pottery workshop, filled with barrels of colourful glazes, potter's wheels, kilns and, of course, clay. Near the window stood a big wooden bin with a heavy lid. There the clay was kept. Way at the bottom, squashed into the corner, was the oldest lump of clay. He barely remembered the last time he had been handled, a long time ago. Every day the heavy lid would open. Hands reached in, quickly grabbing bags or balls of clay. The little lump of clay could hear the cheerful sounds of people busy at work. "Will it be my turn?" he wondered. As each day passed in the darkness of the bin, the little lump of clay lost hope.

One day a large group of children came into the workshop with their hands. Any hands reached into the bin. The little lump of clay was the last to be chosen, but he was out!

"It's my big chance!" he thought, squinting in the light.

The boy put the clay on the potter's wheel, spinning it as fast as he could.

"I'll be a potter!" thought the little lump of clay. The boy tried pulling the clay up as he went around. The little lump of clay felt the excitement of becoming something!

After trying to make a bowl, the boy gave up. He pushed and pounded the clay into a neat ball.

"Time to clean up," said the teacher. The workshop was filled with the sounds of children sponging and wiping and washing and drying. Water dripped everywhere.

The boy plopped the lump of clay near the window and rushed to join his friends. After a while, the workshop emptied. The room was quiet and dark. The little lump of clay was terrified. Not only did he miss the moistness of the bin, he was in danger.

"I'm all over," he thought. "I'll just sit here and dry out until I'm as hard as a rock."

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He sat by the open window, unable to move, feeling the moisture seep out of him. The sunlight beat down, the night breezes blew in, until he was rock hard. He was so hard he could hardly think. He only knew that he was filled with hopelessness.

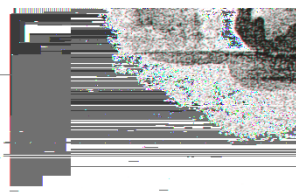
But somewhere deep inside the little lump of clay, a tiny drop of moisture was left, and he refused to let it go.

"Rain," he thought.

"Water," he sighed.

"Please," he finally squeezed out of his dry hopeless self.

A passing cloud took pity on the little lump of clay, and a wonderful thing happened. Huge raindrops hammered through the open window, falling on the little lump of clay. All night it rained, and by morning he was as soft as his old self.



Voices drifted into the workshop. a woman. She was a potter who often used the workshop. the window open all weekend! We've got a mess to work with some clay while I find the towels," she said

saw the lump of clay sitting at the window.

"A perfect lump for me," she said.

pressing and kneading the clay into pleasing shapes. To the her fingers felt heavenly.

right as she worked, and her

purpose. The little lump being gently pushed into a shape. A few pinches, and he



"Oh no," said "Someone has left clean up. You can't leave it to her daughter.

The little girl

"This looks like

Soon she was little lump of clay,

The girl thought her hands moved with purpose. The little lump of clay felt himself being gently pushed into a shape. A few pinches, and he

"Mommy, Mommy," called the girl, "I made a cup!"

"It's wonderful!" said her mother. "Put it on the shelf and it will be fired in the kiln. Then you can glaze it any colour you like."

Soon the little cup was ready to be taken to his new home. Now he lives on a shelf in the kitchen, next to the other cups and saucers and mugs. They are all very different and some are very beautiful.

"Breakfast!" calls the mother, setting the new cup on the table and filling him with hot chocolate.

The little girl holds him gently. How happy he feels with the smooth lines of his new shape. How well he does his job!

The little cup sits proudly. "At last—at last I am something."



1. Number the sentences below in the order the events happened in the story. Number 1 has been done for you.

---- The rain made the lump of clay moist and soft
---- A boy tried to make the lump of clay into a bowl
---- A girl made the lump of clay into a cup
---- The lump of clay dried out
1 The lump of clay was in the bin

2. Why was the lump of clay in the bin for such a long time?

3. At the beginning of the story, what did the lump of clay wish for?

4. Why was the clay eventually taken out of the bin?

- a. All the other lumps of clay were used
- b. It was on top of the other lumps of clay
- c. The boy chose that lump because he especially liked it
- d. The teacher told the boy to use that lump

5. What did the boy do that was careless?

- a. He left the clay on the potter's wheel
- b. He was spinning the wheel as fast as he could
- c. He put the clay near the window
- d. He pushed and pounded the clay

6. The boy left the lump of clay in danger. What was the danger?

7. How did the lump of clay feel right after the boy left the pottery workshop?

- a. satisfied
- b. scared
- c. angry
- d. proud

8. What wonderful thing happened after the lump of clay had been lying by the window for a long time?
Why was this so wonderful for the lump of clay?

9. Which words in the story show that the little girl knew what she wanted to make?

- a. 'her fingers felt heavenly'
- b. 'The little girl saw the lump of clay'
- c. 'The little girl holds him gently'
- d. 'her hands moved with purpose'

10. Describe the different feelings the clay had at the beginning and the end of the story. Explain why his feelings changed.

11. The little girl is an important person in this story. Explain why she was important to what happened.

12. The author of the story writes about the lump of clay as if it were a person. What is the author trying to make you imagine?

- a. what it is like in the rain

- b. how a lump of clay might feel
- c. what it is like to work with clay
- d. how it feels to make something

13. What is the **main** message of this story?

- a. People are easy to knead and shape like clay
- b. There is a great deal of unhappiness in the world
- c. Everything is happiest when it finds a purpose
- d. Pottery is the best way to do good in the world

Appendix B: Classroom Observation Checklist

Classroom Observation Checklist

1. Date: _____
2. School: _____
3. Teacher: _____
4. Grade Level: Grade 5
5. Classroom (*select one*): English (HL) English (FAL)
6. Observer: _____
7. Observer Email: _____

General Directions

This instrument may be used with or without the teacher and students present in the classroom. No feedback is needed from anyone to respond to the items. All judgments are made based on the observable literacy tools, materials, arrangements in the classroom.

Time schedule

30 min. - Completing rating scale in classroom.

10 min. - Scoring rubric and interpreting score

40 min. - Total time required.

Directions for Responding to the Rubric

The rubric consists of two sections:

- Physical characteristics
- Interactional aspects

In each section, several criteria are presented for which the observer determines how the classroom environment is based on the following classifications:

- Exceeded (4)
- Met (3)
- Not Met (2)
- Not Applicable N/A (1)

For each criterion, the observer must provide evidence/ comments to explain their classification.

Indicate whether the classroom exhibited each of the observations. If there was nothing to observe, select

N/A (Not Applicable).

Definition of Terms

Literacy tools

Physical objects present in the environment which support literacy learning, such as paper, writing tools, published reading materials like books and magazines by both adults and children, electronic devices, and bookshelves. Literacy tools are resources, techniques, or assistance employed to improve literacy abilities, including reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These tools may be tangible or digital, intended to assist learners of diverse ages and proficiencies.

Literacy event

Literacy events are activities where reading or writing has a role and usually involves a written text or texts central to the activity. According to (//////////) they are described as "observable events" that come from literacy practices and are shaped by them.

Literacy products

Literacy resources are a range of materials or tools accessible for purchase, aimed at aiding literacy growth across different age groups and proficiency levels. They're made by companies that specialize in education. These products can be books, computer programs, websites, games, or teaching tools.

I. CLE Observation Checklist developed from CLEP

	Implementation				Evidence
	N/A	NOT MET	MET	EXCEEDED	
A. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT					
Was the classroom clean?	1	2	3	4	
Areas do not have adequate space to accommodate the number of students, literacy tools, OR literacy products occupying the space.	1	2	3	4	
Was there adequate seating?	1	2	3	4	
No literacy purposes are associated with any classroom areas.	1	2	3	4	
B. QUANTITY OF LITERACY TOOLS					
No literacy tools are available.	1	2	3	4	
Literacy tools are limited to books, paper, pencils, AND crayons	1	2	3	4	
Several literacy tools are present that contain print, produce print, and support literacy events	1	2	3	4	
Many literacy tools are present that contain print, are used to produce print, AND support literacy events such as writing.	1	2	3	4	
C. UTILITY OF LITERACY TOOLS					
Literacy tools books, pens can be used only in a prescribed manner	1	2	3	4	
Non-consumable literacy tools are durable and in good working order.	1	2	3	4	
Extra consumable literacy tools are visible (e.g., extra sharpened pencils by pencil sharpener, box of staples by stapler).	1	2	3	4	
Literacy tools are complex, having multiple uses in a variety of settings and eliciting multiple responses	1	2	3	4	
D. QUANTITY OF TEXT MATERIALS					
No texts are displayed in the classroom	1	2	3	4	
There are several different texts displayed on the wall	1	2	3	4	
The text collection includes mainly one genre (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, poetry, con- temporary, or classic).	1	2	3	4	
The various genres are equally represented (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, poetry, contemporary, and classic).	1	2	3	4	
E. PRINT USED FOR CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION					
No printed directions, schedules, OR labels are visible.	1	2	3	4	
Some displayed print is used for organization (e.g., class rules and expectations; daily, weekly, or monthly assignments; school lunch menus) AND labeling (e.g., contents of shelves and storage containers) purposes	1	2	3	4	
Some displayed print is associated with literacy tools and events (e.g., timetables for use of materials and areas, project guidelines, sign-up sheets for reading/writing conferences).	1	2	3	4	

A wide assortment of print in the form of directions, schedules, AND labels is visible.	1	2	3	4	
F. FORMAT AND CONTENT OF TEXT MATERIALS					
Only textbooks are present.	1	2	3	4	
A few of the text materials include varying formats (e.g., newspapers, magazines, paperback books, hardcover books, big books, catalogues, directories) AND content (e.g., plays, joke and riddle books, books about movies or television shows, books reflecting cultural and ethnic diversity, picture books, word- less books, student-authored).	1	2	3	4	
The collection of text materials includes a wide assortment of formats AND content.	1	2	3	4	
G. CLASSROOM LITERACY PRODUCT DISPLAYS					
No displays of student or class activities include print.	1	2	3	4	
Several of the displays of student or class activities include print AND most of the print is teacher- produced.	1	2	3	4	
Both teacher- and student produced print is included in displays of student or class activities with the majority of the print being student- produced.	1	2	3	4	
H. REFERENCE MATERIALS					
No reference materials are present.	1	2	3	4	
Reference materials of frequently used information are present (e.g., students' names, calendar, alphabet, maps, globe, student dictionaries, a set of encyclopedias, almanac, atlas).	1	2	3	4	
I. WRITING UTENSILS					
No writing utensils are present.	1	2	3	4	
Writing utensils are limited to crayons, #2 lead pencils, white or yellow chalk, AND dry erase pens	1	2	3	4	
Writing utensils include several different types of pens and pencils AND a computer with a word processing program.	1	2	3	4	
A variety of many difference types, sizes, shapes, and colors of writing utensils are present (e.g., lettering stencils, alphabet stamps with assorted colors of inkpads).	1	2	3	4	
J. TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LITERACY EVENTS					
No technological resources to support literacy learning are present.	1	2	3	4	
Several technological resources are available for teacher use in supporting literacy events (e.g., overhead projector, laser pointer, computer with printer) AND for prescribed student interactions in literacy events (e.g., listening center with phonograph, cassette or CD player and books with text recorded on records, tapes, or CDs; television and VCR with recorded stories on video tapes; computer with literacy-learning programs).	1	2	3	4	
K. CLASSROOM LIBRARY					
No part of the classroom functions as a library.	1	2	3	4	
A small collection of books is placed at one location	1	2	3	4	
A clearly identifiable area is labeled as the library. Bookshelves or furniture are used to establish boundaries and create privacy. The library is located in a quiet area outside the general traffic pattern and accommodates at least 5-6 learners	1	2	3	4	

L. PARTICIPATION IN LITERACY EVENTS IN ENCOURAGED					
There is no written or artistic evidence to encourage reading and writing OR identify them as pleasurable activities.	1	2	3	4	
Several commercially- and teacher-produced print items encourage reading and writing AND identify them as pleasurable activities (e.g., posters, signs, book covers).	1	2	3	4	
The classroom is filled with students' written and artistic responses which encourage reading and writing and suggest that reading and writing are pleasurable activities.	1	2	3	4	
M. AUTHENTIC LITERACY EVENTS					
There is no evidence of attempts to connect reading and writing with authentic events	1	2	3	4	
Several displays of written texts indicate that reading and writing are included in daily routines (e.g., student completed assignment sheets, sign- up sheets for equipment use, written schedules of classroom activities).	1	2	3	4	
Many displays of written texts indicate students use reading and writing for their own purposes and interests (e.g., recording field trip experiences, science experiments, library check-outs; responding with thank you cards, letters, notes on message board).	1	2	3	4	

Appendix C: Lesson Observation Checklist

Lesson Observation Checklist

General Information

- School Name: _____
- Teacher Name: _____
- Observer Name: _____
- Date of Observation: _____
- Grade Level: 5
- Subject: English HL/FAL
- Class Size: _____
- Lesson Topic: _____

Tick ☒ on the items observed during the lesson

1. Reading Comprehension Performance

- ☐ Learners are engaged in a reading activity (individual, group, or whole class).
- ☐ The text used is appropriate for Grade 5 level (English HL/FAL).
- ☐ The teacher uses formative assessment methods (e.g., questioning, discussions) to measure comprehension.
- ☐ The teacher uses summative assessment methods (e.g., quizzes, written responses) to assess comprehension.
- ☐ Learners demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., answering questions, summarizing).
- ☐ The teacher provides immediate feedback on students' reading comprehension.

2. Classroom Literacy Environment

- ☐ The classroom has a designated reading area.
- ☐ There are a variety of reading materials available (books, magazines, digital resources).
- ☐ The classroom environment is print-rich (posters, word walls, student work displays).
- ☐ Learners have access to age-appropriate and diverse reading materials.
- ☐ Learners are seen using reading resources independently or in groups.
- ☐ The classroom layout is conducive to reading activities (e.g., group seating, reading areas)

- ☐ Are writing materials easily accessible, including paper, pencils, pens, markers, and crayons?

3. Reading Comprehension Instruction

- ☐ The teacher explicitly teaches reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, questioning, summarizing).
- ☐ Instructional methods observed (e.g., guided reading, shared reading, independent reading).
- ☐ The teacher incorporates interactive activities (e.g., discussions, group work) to enhance comprehension.
- ☐ The teacher checks for understanding regularly throughout the lesson.
- ☐ The teacher uses supplementary materials (e.g., graphic organizers, worksheets) to support comprehension.
- ☐ The teacher uses differentiated instruction to cater to diverse learning needs.
- ☐ The teacher provides additional support to struggling readers (e.g., one-on-one instruction, peer assistance).
- ☐ The teacher involves learners in self-assessment and peer assessment activities.

4. Additional Notes:

- **Strengths Observed:**

- **Areas for Improvement:**

- **Any notable differences between public and private schools:**

- **Other Observations:**

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Teacher Interview

Teacher Interview

The interviews will be audio-recorded and comprehensive notes will be taken during the discussions with the teachers.

General Information

- **School Name:** _____
- **Date of Interview:** _____

Section A

Questions about the teacher.

1. How many years of teaching experience:
2. How many years of experience in teaching Grade 5:
3. Briefly tell me what you understand about reading.
4. How do you see yourself as a reader?

Section B

Questions about the school

1. Are there any challenges or barriers you have encountered in implementing reading instruction in a school with diverse socioeconomic demographics?
2. How do you support learners who may face economic barriers to accessing books or other reading materials outside of school?
3. What is the parental involvement like? (homework supervision, projects)
4. Can you share stories on the positive outcomes of improving reading (such as intervention programmes and strategies that worked)

Section C

Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension performance

1. Are the learners in your classes interested in reading?
2. Do you have informal talks in class about the importance of reading? Please elaborate.
3. How would you describe the overall reading comprehension performance of your Grade 5 learners in English Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL)?
4. What specific areas of reading comprehension do your learners tend to struggle with the most?

Classroom literacy environment

1. How would you describe the literacy environment in your classroom?
2. What types of reading materials and resources are available to your learners? How do you incorporate them into your teaching?

3. How do you select reading materials or texts for your learners? What factors do you consider when choosing texts?
4. How do you create a supportive literacy environment for your learners? Can you give examples of specific strategies or activities?
5. How do you assess reading comprehension in your classroom? What tools or methods do you use?
6. What differences do you notice in the literacy environments between public and private schools?
7. How does the availability of resources (such as books, technology, and teaching aids) affect the literacy environment in your classroom?

Implementation of reading comprehension instruction

1. Can you describe your approach to teaching reading comprehension to Grade 5 learners?
2. Can you walk me through the typical reading comprehension lesson or activities you conduct with your Grade 5 learners?
3. What specific strategies or instructional methods do you use to enhance reading comprehension skills?
4. Are there any specific challenges or barriers you face in implementing effective reading comprehension instruction?
5. How do you tailor your reading comprehension instruction to meet the needs of different learners in your classroom?
6. How does the implementation of reading comprehension instruction in your school compare to that in other schools (public or private) you are familiar with?
7. Can you share any best practices or successful strategies for teaching reading comprehension that you have observed or implemented?

Section D

Do you have any additional information other than the ones you have mentioned?

ANNEXURES

Annexure A: NWU-HSS-REC Ethics Approval Letter of Study



Private Bag X1290, Potchefstroom
South Africa 2520

Tel: 018 299-1111/2222
Fax: 018 299-4910
Web: <http://www.nwu.ac.za>

Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics
Training and Support

North-West University Human Social Science
Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HSSREC)

Tel: +27 18 289 2899
Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 016 103 4446
Email: Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

28 March 2025

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the North-West University Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HSS-REC) on 28 March 2025 the North-West University Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby approves your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SCRE) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study
Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Prof BM Nchindila
Co-supervisor: Dr P Fakude
Student: Ms Lerato Moepelewa (28638352)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	1	1	5	6	-	2	4	-	A	7
Institution			Study Number						Year		Status			

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single study (MA)

Commencement date: 28 March 2025

Risk Category:

Medium Risk

Expiry date: 30 March 2026

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

- Translation of the informed consent document to the languages applicable to the study participants should be submitted to the NWU-HSS-REC (if applicable).
- Any research at governmental or private institutions, permission must still be obtained from relevant authorities and provided to the NWU-HSS-REC. Ethics approval is required BEFORE approval can be obtained from these authorities.

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-HSS-REC:
 - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and
 - without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.
- The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the NWU-HSS-REC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and NWU-HSS-REC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-HSS-REC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- NWU-HSS-REC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via HSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za or 016 910 3132.

The NWU-HSS REC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-HSS REC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely



Prof E. Idemudia
Chairperson NWU Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

Current details: (22351930) M:\DSS1\8533\Monitoring and Reporting Cluster\Ethics\Certificates\Templates\Research Ethics Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.1 NWU-HSS-REC Ethical Approval Letter.docm
5 December 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

Annexure B: NW Department of Education Approval Letter of Study



education

Department:
Education
North West Provincial Government
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Garona Building, Mmabatho
First Floor, East Wing,
Private Bag X2044,
Mmabatho 2735
Tel.: (018) 388-3429/33
e-mail: sgedu@nwpg.gov.za

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT-GENERAL

Enquiries: Dr PP Kgatitsoe
Telephone: 018 388 1046
Email : ppkgatitsoe@nwpg.gov.za

TO: Ms Lerato Moopelwa
Researcher: Faculty of Humanities - Sociolinguistics

SUBJECT: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Permission is hereby granted to you, Ms Lerato Moopelwa to conduct research titled **"INVESTIGATING GRADE 5 ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION PROFICIENCY AND READING INSTRUCTION: A CASE STUDY"** in the Department, subject to the following conditions

- Collection of data and implementation of the study be accompanied by approval letter signed by the Acting HOD
- The relevant principals of the schools be consulted with approval letter signed by the HOD.
- The administration of data gathering tools shall be ethical as determined within the University and the Departmentally approved requirements.
- The involvement of 80 learners and 4 educators from the different schools in the project should be done conveniently not to disturb the teaching and learning processes.
- Participation in the project will be voluntary.
- The principles of informed consent and confidentiality will be observed in strictest terms
- The findings of your research should be made available to the North West Department of Education upon request as when progress would have been made.
- The Department of Education reserves the right to monitor and observe the project implementation processes.
- The Final Report of the research will be made available to the Department as soon as project comes to an end.

Best wishes

MR PRINCE MASILO
ACTING SUPERINTENDENT-GENERAL

06/06/2025
DATE



Let's Grow North West Together



Annexure C: Participant Information Leaflet



Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)

DATE:

HSSREC Authorisation

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Title of the research project	Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study
Ethics number	N W U - 0 1 1 5 6 - 2 4 - A 7
Principal investigator	Lerato Moopelwa
Student number	28638352
Email address	28638352@g.nwu.ac.za / moopelwalerato@gmail.com
Contact number	0649541285

You are being invited to take part in a research project that forms part of my study: **Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study**. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part. Prior to publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the **Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) of the Faculty of Humanities of the North-West University (NWU)** and will be conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (2010) and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that I (the researcher) am conducting research in an ethical manner.

What is this research study all about?

- This study is an investigation of the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension skills and reading instruction of English in public and private schools in North-West Province and will involve the use of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to create a thorough and multifaceted view of the research topic. The CLEP checklist will be used to document the presence of a literacy-rich environment as well as the quantitative data acquired from a PIRLS test which will be administered to the grade 5 learners in the different schools. Qualitative data will be gathered through lesson observations of reading instruction implementation, as well as interviews with the grade 5 English teachers in the selected schools.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods mentioned in the previous sentence.
- Approximately a total of 80 grade 5 learners will be included in this study, including 4 grade 5 teachers from both public and private schools
- The objective of this research is to investigate the reading comprehension skills and reading instruction of Grade 5 learners in public and private schools in North-West Province in English as a Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL).

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You have been invited to participate because you are a grade 5 English teacher in the respective school randomly selected for the study.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to participate in the noted study by *taking part in an interview and a lesson observation* of how you implement reading lesson/instruction will be conducted
- You will have 2 weeks to indicate whether you would be willing to participate.

- You will be requested to sign this Informed Consent Statement before the commencement of the study.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

- The direct benefits for you as a participant will probably be gaining effective reading instruction strategies to help improve the reading skills of your learners.
- The indirect benefit will probably be identifying factors that influence the development of reading comprehension skills among grade 5 learners in South Africa which will help you navigate better as a teacher.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk	Mitigation strategy
Tiredness and discomfort.	Comfort breaks of 5 minutes.
Lack of privacy and comfort during interviews due to busy schedule of the teacher or availability of suitable place for interview	This will be addressed by conducting the interview during lunch or at the most convenient time for the teacher.

- However, I believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study.
- Should I learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then I must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.

Who will have access to the data?

The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):

Principle	How will this be done?	When will this be done?
Anonymity	Anonymity will be ensured by I (the primary investigator) assigning a false name to you before the interview starts. Only this name will be used in the research process.	After the interview has been conducted.
Confidentiality	Confidentiality will include the use of aliases for participants. It involves not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual, organisation and location.	Throughout the study
De-identification of data	All identifiable personal information will be de-identified to ensure that no information identifies any participants, organisations and locations.	After the fieldwork has been completed.
Data storage	I will ensure data that both hard-(printed) and soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only approved people in my research team (<i>i.e. my supervisors</i>) will/may have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification, hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.	Throughout the study.

Privacy	<i>Privacy</i> will be ensured by not probing unnecessarily if you do not wish to discuss particular matters.	During the fieldwork.
Transcription/coding of data	I will use a <i>transcriber</i> for the purpose of the transcripts after the interview.	I Lerato Moopelwa as the primary investigator will be responsible for transcribing the data. Therefore, no other person will have access to the data.

Collection of only relevant personal information:

Collection of only relevant personal information	I, the principal investigator, will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I/we are studying.	Type of school Questions about the school and surrounding areas Teaching experience Thoughts on reading. Your classes
---	--	---

What will happen to the data?

- The data from this study will be reported in the following ways: In the form of a dissertation. In all of this reporting, you will not be personally identified.
- This means that the reporting will not include your name or details that will help others to know that you participated.
- The data will be stored safely in electronic form for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed.

Will you be paid/compensated to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be compensated to take part in the study, but pre-packaged refreshments will be provided during the interview for the study.

How will you know about the findings?

- The general findings of the research will be shared with you by via email in the form of a summary/dissertation/thesis.

- If you would like feedback on your personal results, then please contact the primary researcher (Lerato Moopelwa)

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Lerato Moopelwa at 064 954 1285 and 28638352@g.nwu.ac.za if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erharbor Idemudia) at 018 389 2899 or Erharbor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Annexure D: Teacher Participant Consent Form



Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)

DATE:

HSSREC
Authorisation

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project	Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study
Ethics number	NWU - 01156-24-A7
Principal investigator	Lerato Moopelwa
Student number	28638352
Email address	28638352@nwu.ac.za
Contact number	064 954 1285

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in a research study entitled: "*Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study*".

I declare that:

- I provide *informed consent*.
 - Thus, I have read and understood this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
 - Thus, I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I provide *voluntary consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and I have not been pressurised to take part.
 - Thus, I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
 - Thus, I am aware of the fact that I may request that the researcher does not continue with said recording if I request it.
- I provide *specific consent*.
 - Thus, I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identity.
 - I provide *specific consent*. Thus, I consent to an audio and/or audio-visual recording of the interview and lesson observation).

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher and participant

Additional declaration by participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding Covid-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before the commencement of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of researcher

Declaration by person obtaining consent (if not the researcher/primary investigator)

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of person obtaining consent

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher/primary investigator

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____
- I encouraged them to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that they adequately understand all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of researcher

Signature of witness

- You may contact me again ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I would like a summary of the findings of this research ☐ Yes ☐ No
- I would like feedback on my functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires I completed ☐ Yes ☐ No

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____
Postal Address: _____
Email: _____
Phone Number: _____
Cell Phone Number: _____

Annexure E: Parental Consent Form



Building F13, Room 116

Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)

21081719@nwu.ac.za

DATE: _____

HSSREC Authorization

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of the research project	Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study
Ethics number	N W U - 0 1 1 5 6 - 2 4 - A 7
Principal investigator	Lerato Moopelwa
Student number	28638352
Email address	28638352@nwu.ac.za / moopelwalerato@gmail.com
Contact number	0649541285

You are requested to familiarise yourself with this document to consider whether you would be willing to consent to your child taking part in a research project that forms part of my study: **Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study**. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the researcher any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research is about and how you could be involved. Also, your child's participation is **entirely voluntary**, and you, as parent, and your child are free to decline to participate. If you and/or your child say no, this will not affect either of you negatively in any way whatsoever. Your child is also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you and they do agree to take part. Prior to the publication of the study's results (or the point that publication is in the process), you may also withdraw the data you generate.

This study has been approved by the **Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)** of the **Faculty of Humanities** of the **North-West University** and will be

conducted according to the ethical guidelines and principles of the international Declaration of Helsinki and the ethical guidelines of the National Health Research Ethics Council. It might be necessary for the research ethics committee members or relevant authorities to inspect the research records to make sure that I (the researcher) am researching ethically.

What is this research study all about?

- This study will be done to investigate the Grade 5 learners' reading comprehension skills and reading instruction English in public and private schools in North-West Province.
- To collect this information, I will administer a PIRLS test to the grade 5 learners in the presence of their teacher. A classroom checklist adopted from the CLEP checklist will be used to document the presence of a literacy-rich environment. Additionally, there will be lesson observations of reading instruction implementation, as well as interviews with the grade 5 English teachers in the selected schools.
- The researcher has been trained to use the methods which will be used in the study.
- With your consent, as parents or legal guardians and the assent (permission) of your child, I will conduct the research: *Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study* and record it to ensure that all the information is as detailed as possible.
- Approximately a total of 80 grade 5 learners will be included in this study, including 4 grade 5 teachers from both public and private schools
- The objective of this research is to investigate the reading comprehension skills and reading instruction of Grade 5 learners in public and private schools in North-West Province in English as a Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL).

Why has your child been invited to participate?

- Your child has been invited to participate because they are in grade 5 and grade 5 learners are an ideal participant for this study because they are at a critical developmental stage for reading skills, transitioning from learning to read to reading to learn, which makes it an optimal time to assess reading comprehension and instruction effectiveness
- The researcher has no relative power over you or your child, and therefore you and they will be free to give information freely and without any bias or fear of being victimised.
- They will be asked to take a test administered by their teacher in class in two different lessons, the test has 2 sections 40 minutes each. The first test section will be before the reading lesson takes place and the second section will take place on a different day after the lesson. The class observation will take place as the teacher gives a reading lesson.
- The test may cause stress or discomfort, but it does not contribute towards your child's academics/school results.
- I will ensure that no-one is not pressured to answer questions that they are not comfortable with.

I will also ensure that:

- Since your child is under the age of eighteen, you as *parents or legal guardian* will first provide permission (*consent*) before we proceed with the interview.
- After you have provided permission, they will have the chance to **freely decide** whether they want to participate or not. If yes, they provide *assent* by signing the document before we start with the interview. If not, they will not be required to participate at all – even if you provided permission.
- They clearly understand that they may decide to discontinue whenever they wish during the interview process.
- All necessary information you need about this research is available to you at any time and will be presented in the simplest way possible for you to clearly understand.
- I will allow you and your child to ask me any questions, and you are assured of honest and understandable answers.
- The consent to participate is voluntary, and there has not been any coercion from anyone to participate

You will be excluded if: you and your child do not agree with any of the above inclusion criteria items.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be requested to sign this parental permission letter before I approach your child for their assent/consideration to assent to participate.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

The study may provide your child with information about the benefits of reading comprehension and the strategies that can help improve their reading skills. By taking part in this study, they will help contribute valuable insights into enhancing reading instruction and promoting equitable literacy development among grade 5 learners in South Africa.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research and how will these be managed?

The possible risks in this study, and how these will be managed, are summarised in the table below:

Possible risk	Mitigation strategy
Tiredness and discomfort.	Comfort breaks of 5 minutes.

However, we do believe that the benefits to you and to science (as noted in the previous section) outweigh the risks we have listed. If you disagree, then please feel free not to participate in this study. We will respect your decision.

Should we learn, in the course of the research, that someone is harming you, or that you are intending to harm someone, then we must tell someone who can help you/warn the person you are intending to harm.

Who will have access to the data?

The only other people involved in coding and transcribing, apart from the researcher, are members of the research team (i.e. my supervisors) and will sign confidentiality clauses as part of the ethics requirement.

- **Who will have access to the data?**
- *The following procedures will be observed in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA):*

Principle	How will this be done?	When will this be done?
Anonymity	Anonymity will be ensured by I (Lerato Moopelwa) assigning a fictitious code to you before the tests starts. Only this name will be used in the research process.	Other (A code will be given during data analysis therefore, when answering the test the learner will not write their name.
Confidentiality	Confidentiality will include the use of pseudonyms/codes for participants, schools and locations. It involves not disclosing any information gained from the study deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual, schools.	During analysis and the write-up of findings. During the reporting of findings.
De-identification of data	All identifiable personal information will be de-identifies to ensure that no information identifies any participants, schools.	After the fieldwork has been completed. Before data analysis and the write-up of findings start.
Data storage	All data collected for the purpose of the research will be stored safely in electronic format/hardcopy format for a period of five years after which it will be destroyed. The I will ensure data that both hard-(printed) and soft copy (electronic) are safely locked away and password-protected, respectively. Only approved people in my research team (<i>if applicable</i>) will/may have access to my raw data where the need arises. At the analysis stage, as will be the case throughout, the use of coding will reinforce participants' non-identification,	Throughout the study.

	hence upholding the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.	
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Collection of only relevant personal information:

Collection of only relevant personal information	I, the principal investigator, will only collect personal biographical and opinion-related data about the topic I am studying.	Type of school (public or private). Where the school is located. The classroom environment.
---	--	---

Will you be paid/compensated for taking part in this study and are there any costs involved?

The participants will receive no reward for their participation.

How will you know about the findings?

- You will be fully informed of the purpose of the study and your role in the study
- You will be informed of the results of the study will be made available to you after the study has been completed via email in the form of a summary/dissertation/thesis.
- Once the data has been analysed, the results will be made available to participants for member checking. The parents should read through this.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Lerato Moopelwa at 064 954 1285 and 28638352@g.nwu.ac.za if you have any further queries or encounter any problems.
- You can contact the chair of the Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Prof Erharbor Idemudia) at 018 389 2899 or Erharbor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za if you have any concerns or complaints that have not been adequately addressed by the researcher.
- You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by the parent

By signing below, I _____ agree to allow my child to take part in a research study entitled: *“Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study”*.

I declare that:

- I have read and understood this information and consent form, and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that by allowing my child to take part in this study is **voluntary**, and neither I nor my child have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I and my child contribute (what we report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to our personal identities.
- My child may choose to freely leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- My child may be asked to leave the study before it has finished if the researcher feels it is in their best interests.
- If my child does not assent to participating in the study, I will respect their decision to do so. They may only participate if both I (as parent/legal guardian) and my child agree to participate.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 ____

Signature of parent

Signature of witness

- | | |
|---|--|
| • You may contact us again | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like a summary of the findings of this research | ☐ Yes ☐ No |
| • I would like feedback on my child's functioning/wellbeing as reflected in the questionnaires, I completed | ☐ Yes ☐ No |

The best way to reach me is:

Name & Surname: _____
 Postal Address: _____
 Email: _____
 Phone Number: _____
 Cell Phone Number: _____

In case the above details change, please contact the following person who knows me well and who does not live with me and who will help you to contact me:

Name & Surname: _____

Phone/ Cell Phone Number /Email: _____

Declaration by the researcher

I (*name*) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____ and _____.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 _____

Signature of researcher

Signature of witness**Declaration by researcher and participant****Personal face-to-face interviews during COVID-19 restrictions**

Additional declaration by the participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding COVID-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No

- I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with 80% alcohol content before the interview commencement. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**
- I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ **Yes** ☐ **No**

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 ____

Signature of participant

Signature of the researcher

Annexure F: Learner Participant Assent Form



Building F13, Room 116

Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC)

21081719@nwu.ac.za

DATE: 28/02/2025

HSSREC Authorization

ASSENT FORM

Title of the research project	Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study
Ethics number	N W U - 0 1 1 5 6 - 2 4 - A 7
Principal investigator	Lerato Moopelwa
Student number	28638352
Email address	28638352@u.nwu.ac.za / moopelwalerato@gmail.com
Contact number	064 954 1285

You are invited to take part in a research study about how Grade 5 learners understand English reading and how teachers teach reading. This study is part of my university research. It is very important that you understand what the study is about and how you will be involved. Your participation is completely your choice. You do not have to take part if you don't want to, and nothing bad will happen if you say no. If you decide to join but later change your mind, you can stop at any time. You can also ask me to remove your answers from the study before I share the results.

What is this research study all about?

WHAT RESEARCH DOES*****

- This study will help me learn how well Grade 5 learners understand what they read and how reading is taught in English in public and private schools in North-West Province.

- To collect this information, I will give a reading test (PIRLS test) to you (Grade 5 learners) while your teacher is there.
- I will also check if the classroom has things that help with reading and learning, using a special checklist. I will also watch how teachers teach you reading in their lessons.
- I will talk to your Grade 5 English teachers to learn more about how they teach reading.
- If your parents give permission and you also agree, I will give you a reading test and record the marks, this will not affect your school marks. This helps me keep a record of everything correctly.
- The purpose of this research is to learn more about how Grade 5 learners in public and private schools in the North-West Province and to understand what they read and how reading is taught to them in English as a Home Language (HL) and First Additional Language (FAL).

Why have you been invited to participate?

- You are invited to take part in this study because you are a Grade 5 learner. At this stage, you are moving from learning to read to reading to learn, so this is a great time to check how well you understand what you read and how reading is taught.
- I am not your teacher or someone in charge, so you can share your answers freely without worrying about getting into trouble.
- You will do a reading test in class, given by your teacher. The test has two parts, each taking 40 minutes. The first part will be before a reading lesson, and the second part will be on a different day after the lesson.
- The test is just for research, so it will not affect your school marks. It might feel a little stressful, but don't worry—there are no right or wrong answers.
- You don't have to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.
- Because you are under 18, your parents or guardian must first give permission before we can do the interview.
- After they agree, you can choose if you want to take part or not. If you do, you will sign a form to show that you agree.

I will also ensure that:

- You will always have access to information about this study, explained in a simple way so you can understand.
- I will always give you clear and honest answers when you can ask me any questions.
- Joining this study is completely your choice. No one is forcing you to take part.

What will your responsibilities be?

- You will be invited to take the PIRLS reading test.
- Before taking the test, you will need to sign a consent form to show that you agree to participate.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

By joining this study, you will help improve the way reading is taught and support fair learning for all Grade 5 learners in South Africa.

You will also learn about the benefits of understanding what you read and find strategies to improve your reading skills.

Are there risks involved in your taking part in this research, and how will these be managed?

Potential risk	Mitigation strategies
Tiredness and discomfort	Breaks of 5 minutes

I believe that the benefits of this study are greater than the risks. But, you do not have to take part if you do not want to. We will respect your choice.
If we find out that someone is harming you or that you plan to harm someone, we must tell someone who can help.

Who will have access to the data?

- The only other people who will help with coding and transcribing the information are my research supervisors.
- I will sign a confidentiality agreement to make sure that all information is kept private, following ethical rules.

What will happen to the data?

- Keeping your information safe is very important. I will store printed documents in a locked place and protect electronic files with a password.
- Only my research team (me and my supervisors) will have access to the raw data if needed.
- To keep your identity private, I will give you a made-up name before you take the test. This name will be used throughout the research.
- I will also use fake names for participants, schools, and locations when there is a need, so no one can identify you.
- Your information will be kept safe for five years, then it will be deleted permanently.

Will you be paid/compensated for taking part in this study and are there any costs involved?

- You will not receive any prizes or rewards/money for taking part in the study

How will you know about the findings?

- After the data is looked at, the results will be shared with your school, your parents and you so you can check if everything is correct.
- After the study is finished, a summary of the study will be shared with your school administrators, teachers and your parents in their preferred way of communication.

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

- You can contact Lerato Moopelwa at 064 954 1285 and 28638352@g.nwu.ac.za if you have any questions.

Declaration by minor participant

By signing below, I _____ agree (assent) to take part in a research study entitled: "*Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study*".

I declare that:

- My parent or legal guardian has provided consent for participation in the study.
- That even if my parent provided permission for me to participate, I may still decide not to do so. Both me and my parent/legal guardian should agree on my participation, otherwise the interview may not take place.
- I have read and understood this information and consent form, and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.
- I have had a chance to ask questions to both the person obtaining consent, as well as the researcher (if this is a different person), and all my questions have been adequately answered.
- I understand that by taking part in this study is **voluntary**, and I have not been pressurised to take part.
- I understand that what I contribute (what I report/say/write/draw/produce visually) could be reproduced publically and/or quoted, but without reference to my personal identities.
- I may choose to freely leave the study at any time and will not be penalised or prejudiced in any way.
- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished if the researcher feels it is in my best interests.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of participant

Signature of witness

Declaration by the researcher

I (name) _____ declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to _____ and _____.
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter.

Signed at (place) _____ on (date) _____ 20 _____

Signature of researcher

Signature of witness

Declaration by researcher and participant

Personal face-to-face interviews during COVID-19 restrictions

Additional declaration by the participant in those instances where the participant requests to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview:

By signing below, I _____, acknowledge the following information related to the required measures regarding COVID-19:

I declare that:

- It is my personal choice and preference to participate in a personal face-to-face semi-structured interview with the researcher.
- This requires that I consent to the following strict measures to safeguard the personal health and safety of myself and that of the researcher/interviewer/primary investigator:
 - I consent to the researcher taking my temperature before the interview using a thermometer. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I confirm that my temperature measured at _____ degrees. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to use the three-ply mask provided by the researcher. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to wear the three-ply mask for the full duration of the interview. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher sanitising the interview context using a sanitiser with 80% alcohol content before the interview commencement. ☐ Yes ☐ No
 - I consent to the researcher using a sanitiser with an 80% alcohol content before and during the interview if required. ☐ Yes ☐ No

Signed at (*place*) _____ on (*date*) _____ 20 ____

Signature of participant

Signature of the researcher

Annexure G: Ethics Certification



Certificate

May 22, 2024

This is to certify that Ms. Lerato Moopelwa has successfully completed the Macquarie University Human Research Ethics Online Training Module for the Social Sciences and Humanities.

Macquarie University

Annexure H: Editor's letter



Website: www.chiefeditors.net

Email: info@chiefeditors.net or boldwin@chiefeditors.net

Cell: +27 63 022 3162 or +27 72 492 6144

23 March 2026

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Confirmation of editing and proofreading

This letter informs the responsible authorities that our team proofread and edited the work authored by Leigh Moopelwa (Investigating Grade 5 English reading comprehension proficiency and reading instruction: A case study) to the best of its ability. Our editing involves spelling check, punctuation, grammar, sentence construction, word reduction, reference check, basic formatting (general layout), presentation style, indexing, and other mechanics of the English language. No technical alterations have been made.

Corrections were made using track changes, which have been clearly outlined for the author's reference. It is the onus of the author to accept or reject the suggested changes.

Please do not hesitate to contact us using the details provided above for more information.

Disclaimer: The editor will not be held responsible for any errors introduced due to the changes made after editing.

Yours,

Dr. B. Mutsvene - PhD (Coordinator)

Affiliation: International Affiliation of Writers Guilds (IAWG)

IAWG