

A SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR FOUNDATION PHASE ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATORS TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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in

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at the

Vaal Triangle Campus

of the

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November 2015

DECLARATION

I declare that: A SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR FOUNDATION PHASE ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATORS TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS is my own work; that all sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this mini-dissertation was not previously submitted by me or any other person for degree purposes at this or any other university.

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***A SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR FOUNDATION PHASE
ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE EDUCATORS TO IMPROVE
THE TEACHING OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS***

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- **ANA** - Annual National Assessment
- **APD** - Auditory Processing Disorder
- **ASHA** - American Speech and Hearing Association
- **BICS** - Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
- **CALP** - Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
- **CAP** - Central Auditory Processing
- **CAPS** - Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement
- **CS** - Code Switching
- **CUP** - Common Underlying Proficiency
- **CVC** - Consonant-Vowel-Consonant
- **DoE** - Before 2007, Department of Education
- **DBE** - After 2007, Department of Basic Education
- **ESL** - English Second Language
- **FAL** - First Additional Language
- **FP** - Foundation Phase
- **HEI** - Higher Education Institutions
- **IIAL** - Incremental Introduction of African Languages
- **LANGTAG** - Language Plan Task Group
- **LiEP** - Language in Education Policy

- **LoLT** - Language of Learning and Teaching
- **NCS** - National Curriculum Statement
- **NELP** - National Early Literacy Panel
- **NLBs** - National Language Bodies
- **NLPF** - National Language Policy Framework
- **NLU's** - National Lexicography Units
- **NWU** - North West University
- **OBE** - Outcomes Based Education
- **OECD** - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
- **PAN** - Policy Advisory Panel
- **P.A.T.** - Phonological Awareness Test
- **P.A.S.T.** - Phonological Awareness Skills Test
- **PIRLS** - Progress in International Reading Study
- **PLC** - Provincial Language Committee
- **RAN** - Rapid Automated Naming
- **RSA** - Republic of South Africa
- **SALB** - South African Language Board
- **ZPD** - Zone of Proximal Development

SUMMARY

This study aimed to explore the knowledge, perceptions and skills of Foundation Phase English Second Language educators as determinants for developing a support programme for educators to improve their phonological awareness teaching skills. Phonological awareness skills are the most important precursor to reading skills, meaning that there is a strong correlation between phonological awareness and reading ability. However, research indicates that many educators do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to teach phonological awareness effectively. All Foundation Phase learners are compelled to have English as a First Additional Language from Grade 1 in order to prepare them for when English becomes the LoLT from Grade 4. It is therefore critical that all the language skills (including phonological awareness skills) necessary for learning are well established in the Foundation Phase.

This qualitative study utilised a multiple case study with five ESL Foundation Phase (FP) educators in two rural schools in the Hartbeespoort area in the North West Province. These schools were quintile 1 government schools and all educators were employed by the Department of Basic Education.

Data were collected in two phases. The first phase involved collecting data on educator knowledge, perceptions and teaching skills of phonological awareness, using open questionnaires, individual interviews, classroom observations and document analysis. Based on the findings of phase 1 a support programme was compiled to enhance the effective teaching and assessment of phonological awareness in ESL Foundation Phase classrooms. The second phase involved conducting a training workshop for the educators on phonological awareness and the support programme, to enable them to implement it in their classrooms after training. During implementation data were gathered via classroom observations and a focus group interview was conducted afterwards to determine the value of the support programme.

The findings of this study revealed that, as a result of various factors, but especially because of FP educators' own limited proficiency in English and inadequate training with regard to phonological awareness, they did not have sufficient knowledge and teaching skills to purposefully develop learners' phonological awareness. After receiving focused and comprehensive training and follow-up in-service support, the FP educators

seemed to gain an in depth understanding of phonological awareness, as well as improved skills in the teaching thereof.

These findings were addressed in recommendations for the DBE and schools, emphasizing that pre-service, as well as in-service, educators need accurate training and constructive in-service support with regard to phonological awareness. This is essential in order to ensure that all learners learning English as a second language in the Foundation Phase, have developed sufficient phonological awareness skills to enable optimal learning in English as LoLT from Grade 4.

Key words: Educators, English Second Language (ESL), Foundation Phase, phonological awareness, support programme

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie het gepoog om die kennis, persepsies en vaardighede van Engels Tweede Taal-onderwysers in die Grondslagfase te ondersoek as determinante om 'n ondersteuningsprogram vir opvoeders te ontwikkel ten einde hulle onderrigvaardighede in fonologiese bewustheid te verbeter. Vaardighede in fonologiese bewustheid is die belangrikste voorganger van leesvaardighede, aangesien daar 'n sterk korrelasie tussen leesvermoë en fonologiese bewustheid is. Navorsing dui egter daarop dat talle opvoeders nie oor die nodige kennis of vaardighede beskik om fonologiese bewustheid effektief aan leerders te onderrig nie. Alle Grondslagfaseleerders behoort Engels as Eerste Addisionele Taal te leer van graad 1 af, ten einde hulle voor te berei op graad 4 wanneer Engels die onderrig- en leermedium word. Dit is dus krities belangrik dat alle taalvaardighede wat nodig is vir doeltreffende leer (fonologiese bewustheid ingesluit) in die Grondslagfase goed gevestig word.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie het gebruik gemaak van 'n meervoudige gevallestudie met vyf Grondslagfase-onderwysers (GF) in twee plattelandse skole in die Hartbeesport-distrik van die NoordWes-Provinsie. Albei skole was kwantiel 1-skole, en die onderwysers was almal in diens van die Departement van Basiese Onderwys.

Data is in twee fases ingesamel. Die eerste fase het behels dat data oor die kennis, persepsies en onderrigvaardighede van die onderwysers ingesamel is. Hiervoor is oop vraelyste, individuele onderhoude, klaskamerwaarneming en dokumentanalise gebruik. Op hierdie inligting gebaseer, is 'n ondersteuningsprogram saamgestel wat die suksesvolle onderrig en assessering van fonologiese bewustheid in die Engels Tweede Taal klaskamers in die Grondslagfase sou versterk. Die tweede fase het 'n werkswinkel behels waartydens die onderwysers opgelei en ingelig is oor fonologiese bewustheid en die ondersteuningsprogram, ten einde hulle in staat te stel om die program in hulle klaskamers te implementeer na die opleiding. Tydens implementering van die program is data verkry deur klaskamerwaarneming en 'n fokusgroep-onderhoud daarna, ten einde die waarde van die ondersteuningsprogram te bepaal.

Bevindings van die studies het aan die lig gebring dat, as gevolg van 'n verskeidenheid faktore, maar veral weens die GF-onderwysers se eie gebrekkige vaardigheid in Engels en ontoereikende opleiding oor fonologiese bewustheid, hulle nie voldoende kennis en

onderrigvaardighede het om doelbewus leerders se fonologiese bewustheid te ontwikkel nie. Na uitgebreide en gekonsentreerde opleiding en opvolgindiensondersteuning, het dit geblyk dat die GF-onderwysers in-diepte kennis en begrip rakende fonologiese bewustheid gekry het.

Hierdie bevindinge is vervat in aanbevelings aan die Departement van Basiese Onderwys en onderwysers. Dit beklemtoon dat voordiens- sowel as indiensopleidingprogramme aan onderwysers akkurate inligting en onderrig oor fonologiese bewustheid behoort te voorsien. Dit is noodsaaklik ten einde te verseker dat alle leerders van Engels Tweede Taal in die Grondslagfase voldoende fonologiese bewustheid kry om optimale leer deur Engels as onderrigtaal vanaf graad 4 te bewerkstellig.

Sleutelwoorde: Engels Tweede Taal, Grondslagfase, fonologiese bewustheid, ondersteuningsprogram, opvoeders/onderwysers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter an overview of this study is provided. Reference is made to the rationale and problem statement, research questions, purpose of research as well as an explanation of research methodology that entails an explanation of the selected theoretical framework, research paradigm, research design, strategy of inquiry including a synopsis of data collection and data analysis procedures. Mention is made of reliability, trustworthiness and validity as well as the role of the researcher.

1.2 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education White Paper 6, Special Needs Education, (Department of Education, 2001) highlights the crucial significance of acknowledging and respecting language differences in learners. The Constitution of South Africa (1996a) recognises eleven (11) official languages. These languages are English, Afrikaans, IsiNdebele, SeSotho, SePedi, SiSwati, XiTsongo, SeTswana, TshiVenda, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu. According to the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2, Clause 29) in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1997b) as well as the Schools Act (1996b), everyone has the right to receive education in a language of their choice in public education institutions, provided that it is an official language.

Since English is the language mostly used in academics and business, it is predominantly chosen by parents and schools as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) or as the First Additional Language. Several studies have found that learners' proficiency in English is lacking when employed in an academic environment (e.g. Van Wyk, 2014; Makgamatha, Heugh, Prinsloo & Winnaar, 2013; Posel & Casale, 2011; Evans & Cleghorn, 2010; Van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009), because it is not their first language. For some learners English could even be their third or fourth language (Heugh, 2011). For the purpose of this research, English will be referred to as the second language and learners learning English, their second language, will be represented as ESL (English Second Language) learners. (In terms of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) it refers to the First Additional Level).

Cummins (1996) describes two types of language proficiency. These are BICS, meaning Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, which are skills of listening and speaking, and CALP, which is Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, which forms the basis for a learner's ability to cope with the academic demands placed upon him/her in various subjects. It is claimed by Cummins (1996) that ESL learners can achieve a proficient CALP level only after five to seven years of plentiful exposure to English. It needs to be mentioned that this is also dependent on a proficient CALP level in the mother tongue. When ESL learners are forced into a second language learning environment without having attained a sufficient level of CALP, it impacts on their academic achievement negatively (Du Plessis, 2006; Heugh, 2011). Many ESL learners can acquire BICS in English, and are able to communicate in everyday conversations, but struggle with CALP when there is little context-embedded language to support them, ineffective teaching of the second language and a lack of adequate academic learning material (Du Plessis, 2006; Heugh, 2011). In South Africa, many learners learn in their mother tongue in the Foundation Phase, and are then abruptly subjected to English as LoLT from Grade 4. This means that ESL learners in South Africa have limited time available to gain a proficient CALP level in English before they are transferred to English as LoLT in Grade 4. Consequently, most of these learners have not reached the academic language proficiency levels required to learn in English as LoLT, which is their second language (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001; Broom, 2004; Heugh, 2011;).

Besides struggling with language proficiency in English, there are also additional barriers to learning for ESL learners that include the following (Deumart, Inder, & Maitra, 2005; Heugh, 2007; Lafon, 2009):

- Classes are overcrowded and under-resourced, both of which create obstacles for educators to support ESL learners with a limited English proficiency;
- many educators themselves are English second language speakers and are not proficient in teaching via the medium of English; and
- most learners from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds have little exposure to English outside the classroom.

Another essential issue that could be beneficial to ESL learners, but could also create obstacles to learning, is that many educators often resort to code switching (moving

from mother tongue to English between instructions and explanations) in an effort to ensure that ESL learners understand instructions and explanations. Some educators even provide full translations from mother tongue into English, which is a time-consuming process. The time wasted translating, could jeopardise covering the curriculum in full (Probyn, 2001; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2004; Lafon, 2009). When a combination of mother tongue and English are used in the classroom, learners often resort to rote learning, as they do not have the language proficiency and competency to gain a real understanding of the subject material. An even bigger challenge occurs when assessment has to be done in English while the instructions were given in another language (Probyn, 2001). This adds to learners not being on a proficient CALP level when they enter the Intermediate Phase where English is used as LoLT.

All the above barriers to learning that an ESL learner could experience may have implications for an ESL learner's instruction in phonological awareness (Stackhouse, Wells, Pascoe, & Rees, 2002). Phonological awareness consists of phonemic awareness and phonics.

The diagram below depicts how phonemic awareness and phonics link with phonological awareness.

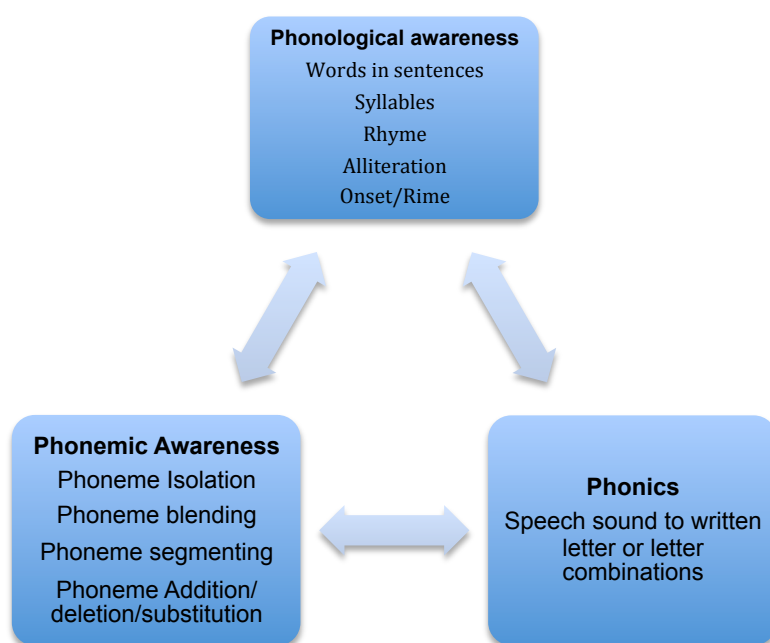


Figure 1.1: Link between phonemic awareness and phonics and phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is one of the most important contributors to learning and academic success (Stackhouse *et al.*, 2002). Goldsworthy (2001) describes phonological awareness as the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structure of an utterance into words, syllables and sounds as distinct from its meaning. It is the knowledge that a word consists of smaller units, and leads the learner to understand that he/she can divide these units into sounds, syllables and sub-syllabic constituents. Furthermore, the learner becomes aware that these constituents can be manipulated. From as young as two years of age, phonological awareness should be age-appropriately introduced and developed. Children in their early years of development are usually exposed to rhyme, alliteration and stories (Bernthal & Bankson, 2004). Consequently, phonological awareness encompasses awareness of sounds and various aspects of sounds such as alliteration and intonation, which develop reading ability. Phonics is the understanding that there is a relationship between the individual sounds (the phonemes) of spoken language and the letters (graphemes) that represent those sounds in written language. This understanding depends upon phonemic awareness because it is impossible to relate a letter to a sound, if the sound cannot be perceived (Snow & Juel, 2005). The learning of phonics therefore includes attaining knowledge of letters and letter sounds, and the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the letters that represent sounds in written language, and that there is association of sounds with letters (Stackhouse *et al.*, 2002). Phonemic awareness is therefore the ability to perceive and tune in to the separate single sounds. Identifying the separate single sounds, which are necessary before letters can be attached to the sounds, provides the foundation for reading. Phonemic awareness has sub-skills such as blending sounds, segmenting sounds and swapping sounds around (Konza, 2006).

Unlike the Egyptians who used pictures to represent words, the English language uses an alphabetic system. Learners need to understand that in English, an alphabet exists, and that it is imperative for them to identify the name, shape and sound of each letter in the alphabet in order to combine letters to form words and read. Learners need to use their knowledge of relationships between letters and sounds to pronounce, read and spell words (Rath, Kennedy, & Cerf, 2004). Since the understanding and the knowledge of the alphabet relate to the adequate development of phonological awareness, educators often refer to the Alphabet Principle as an important feature to develop

reading and writing skills. Rath, Kennedy and Cerf (2004) define the Alphabet Principle as the simple idea that the letters we use in print represent the sounds we use in speech.

Davis, Lindo and Compton (2007:160) emphasise the importance of developing and supporting phonological awareness in the Foundation Phase by stating: “When learners who experience problems with letter knowledge, phonological awareness and word recognition, are identified early in the Foundation Phase, and educators provide applicable intervention, most of the learners will enter the Intermediate Phase having the developed reading skills.” Consequently, learners with poorly developed phonological awareness skills will most likely struggle with reading and spelling (Goldsworthy, 2001). This is confirmed by various research findings, which indicate that an improvement of phonological awareness skills will lead to an improvement in reading and spelling skills (Muter & Diethelm, 2001; Roth & Baden, 2001). Invernizzi and Robey (2001), Bernthal and Bankson (2004), as well as Owens (2004), reveal that phonological skills are often framed within the context of the successful development of learners’ reading and spelling ability. This means that phonological awareness is a key component in preventing reading problems, because learners who are more effective in accessing phonological codes for lexical items (sounds, words and vocabulary), more readily learn the names of letters and the sounds associated with letters than children who are less efficient in phonological access. Bellis (2003) supports the above, saying that phonological awareness is an extremely important skill because age-appropriate development of this specific skill facilitates the development of reading and spelling skills. Plaza and Cohen (2007) conducted a study on the importance of the development of phonological awareness skills in the Foundation Phase, and they found evidence that good phonological awareness skills are good predictors of the successful achievement of reading outcomes in Grades 1 and 2.

Other local research conducted by Hugo, Le Roux, Muller and Nel (2005) identifies phonological awareness as the key issue in identifying at-risk readers and declare that phonological awareness skills are helpful tools in developing early reading abilities. They emphasise that solid phonological awareness, phonics, phonemic awareness and alphabetical knowledge, which are subsets of phonological awareness, go hand in hand with future reading success (Hugo *et al.*, 2005). The same authors also reiterate that

phonological awareness skills need to be taught and practised to ensure successful development of these skills.

Lately there has been an increased interest in research on phonological awareness. International research (e.g. Spencer, Schuele, Guillot, & Lee, 2008) has demonstrated that insufficient emphasis on developing phonological awareness of ESL learners by educators could result in poor literacy skills, leading to possible reading and spelling difficulties. Educators need sufficient knowledge of phonological awareness to provide effective instruction, which is an important component of early literacy instruction, particularly for learning to read. However, research in South Africa on the ability of English Second Language Foundation Phase learners' phonological awareness seems limited.

During a Foundation Phase Conference in 2008, Naledi Pandor, former Minister of Basic Education in South Africa highlighted the crucial importance of the early years in education. She emphasised the fact that quality teaching in the Foundation Phase will provide a solid foundation for learning in the further grades (Pandor, 2008). In 2007, 54 000 Grade 3 learners were tested to see how skilled they were in literacy and numeracy. The learners in Grade 3 achieved an average of 36% for literacy and 35% for numeracy (OECD, 2008). In 2007, the reading performance of Grade 4 and Grade 5 learners were assessed worldwide by PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) (as cited in Zimmerman, 2014). The study revealed that South Africa performed the weakest of all participating countries (Rademeyer, 2007; Zimmerman, 2014). Since literature has shown that phonological awareness can have a positive effect on learners' reading and spelling ability, it is a possibility that the learners who participated in this study had insufficient phonological awareness skills, which would include poor word recognition and poor letter knowledge, among several other skills (Wessels, 2011).

International studies, such as Burns, Griffin, and Snow (2000), as well as Snow and Juel (2005), and national documentation such as the teacher's manual for Teaching Reading in the Early Grades (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2007) emphasise the importance of teaching reading and language concepts to beginner readers (DBE, 2008). These concepts are taught by engaging learners in activities involving the printed word, as well as listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Coyne, Zipoli and

Ruby (2006) reiterate that reading problems in the Intermediate Phase can often be prevented if strong reading instruction and reading concepts are provided in the Foundation Phase. Therefore it is essential that there must be an improvement in the quality of education during the Foundation years to enable learners to develop abilities for reading to learn in the Intermediate Phase (Howie, 2007). De Witt, Lessing and Lenayi (2008) agree that it is imperative to identify learners who experience difficulties with reading skills, such as phonological awareness and phonics skills, early in preschool and in the Foundation Phase to prevent further difficulties with reading in the Intermediate Phase.

Based on the above, it is clear that competency in literacy skills, such as reading, spelling and writing in the Foundation Phase could have extensive effects on learners' academic success in later grades. It is therefore imperative that further research be undertaken to determine the perceptions, knowledge and skills of Foundation Phase educators to teach and support ESL learners' phonological awareness skills; such educators might experience problems with this, due to their limited CALP proficiency.

In the beginning of 2013, I was involved in a support structure in Hartbeespoort where I was asked to assist ESL (FAL in CAPS context) learners in the Foundation Phase with lessons in developing literacy skills. The Foundation Phase educators that I dealt with claimed that there was currently a lack of support and guidance from the Department of Basic Education regarding the developing of literacy skills. During an information session with these Foundation Phase educators, I realised that they had limited knowledge and understanding of phonological awareness in English as a Second Language. I also realised how important phonological awareness is for developing adequate reading, writing and spelling skills. After conducting a search into a variety of databases (such as Ebsco Host and Google Scholar), I found some national studies (e.g. Hugo, *et al.*, 2005; De Sousa, Greenop, & Fry, 2010; Cockcroft & Alloway 2012; Maphalala, Pascoe, & Smouse, 2014; Maike, Nel, & Van de Vijver, 2014) and international research studies conducted by researchers such as Snow and Juel (2005), and Burns, *et al.* (2000) on knowledge of phonological awareness skills of ESL Foundation Phase learners. However, there still seems to be a *lacune* in research regarding educators' ability to adequately understand and teach phonological awareness.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question of this study is:

What are the perceptions, knowledge and skills of educators as determinants for developing a support programme for Foundation Phase ESL educators to improve phonological awareness teaching skills?

In order to operationalise this research question the following questions have to be asked:

- What is the language in education scenario in South Africa?
- What is phonological awareness?
- What does teaching phonological awareness in English as a second language entail?
- Why is phonological awareness important for learning to read?
- How equipped are educators to teach phonological awareness?
- How equipped are educators to assess phonological awareness?
- What is needed to improve phonological awareness teaching and learning in ESL?

1.4 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to determine the perceptions, knowledge and skills of Foundation Phase educators regarding phonological awareness as determinants for developing a support programme for Foundation Phase ESL educators to improve their phonological awareness teaching skills.

1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

English Second Language (ESL) learning is when a learner acquires English as a second language (Cenoz & Garter, 2008).

Foundation Phase Learner: The term “learner” refers to all learners. The term “Foundation Phase” refers to Grade R to Grade 3 (learners aged between six and ten years old) (Department of Education (DoE), 2004).

Phonological awareness: Phonological awareness is the awareness that a word consists of smaller components that can be manipulated. It also implies the understanding that words can be divided into sounds, syllables, and sub-syllabic units (Goldsworthy, 2001).

Phonemic awareness: Phonemic awareness is a subset of phonological awareness. It is the ability to focus on the separate, individual sounds in words, called phonemes. Phonemes can therefore be seen as the smallest unit of sound that makes a difference to a word's meaning (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003). Phoneme isolation, blending and segmenting are skills that fall under phonemic awareness.

Phonics: Phonics refers to the relationship between individual sounds (phonemes) and the letters that represent the sounds (graphemes). Phonics is the term used to describe the teaching of letter-sound relationships (Konza, 2006).

Alphabet knowledge: The knowledge that English is an alphabetical system meaning that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of our speech. A learner has obtained alphabet knowledge when all letter-sound relationships as well as correct letter formation have been mastered (Rath *et al.*, 2004).

Support programme: A programme designed for learners who need additional support or expanded opportunities, developed by educators in consultation with the parents of the learners (DoE, 2008a).

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Theoretical Framework

A Social Constructivism perspective is a view that sees knowledge as actively constructed by individuals, groups and society and not just simply transferred (Vygotsky, 1978). One key concept, crucial in social constructivism, is the notion of mediation. This means learning and development take place through interaction Vygotsky (1978). The theoretical framework arises from this process of mediation, especially the key concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which will be discussed later (*cf.* 3.2.2).

Vygotsky's theory relates to the teaching of phonological awareness in the following way: The educator needs to consider herself as an active participant with learners in constructing their learning. An appropriate context should therefore be set up by the educator in which learners will become engaged in activities that interest and encourage them, and thus facilitate learning. In the context of this study, where the focus is on an ESL classroom, logical thought must be expressed through language practices as part of classroom activities. Learners must therefore be encouraged to ask questions and explore all relevant topics (Vygotsky, 1978).

The theoretical framework will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

1.6.2 Research Paradigm

Creswell (2009) claims that the nature of the issue to be addressed influences the choice of a research approach. The chosen approach therefore determines strategies for inquiry, and methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation.

This study is situated within the interpretive paradigm. This research paradigm is concerned with understanding events through a mental process of interpretation, which is influenced by interactions within a social context. Within interpretivism, human interaction constructs meaning and realities (Trafford & Leshem, 2011). My study fits in with the above paradigm as the participants' perceptions, knowledge and skills regarding phonological awareness, as well as the assessment of phonological awareness, were explored and interpreted. This informed the development of a support programme for the participants on how to teach and assess phonological awareness.

1.6.3 Research Design

A qualitative study was undertaken. Qualitative research is a form of interpretive research in which researchers present an interpretation of what they have seen, heard and understood (Creswell, 2009). It is an umbrella term used to describe forms of enquiry that assist us to understand and interpret the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible (Merriam, 2009).

This qualitative approach enabled the nature of a certain situation to be revealed. A qualitative approach helped me to uncover any limitations that existed regarding the

participants' perceptions, knowledge and skills to teach and assess phonological awareness. Furthermore, it enabled me to develop new perspectives about the phonological awareness of ESL learners in the Foundation Phase at the two schools (*cf.* 1.6.6), and in turn this knowledge assisted me with the compilation of a relevant support programme to help the participants teach and assess phonological awareness adequately.

1.6.4 Strategy of inquiry – Multiple Case study

A multiple case study was utilised for this research. Merriam (2009) describes a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. According to Creswell (2009), case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system.

This study involved an in-depth study over a period of time, exploring educators' knowledge of, and perception of, phonological awareness, as well as their ability to teach and assess phonological awareness at the two target schools (*cf.* 1.6.6).

1.6.5 Data collection methods

- **Open questionnaires:** Information gathered from the literature study was used to develop and design a questionnaire with open questions. This means that the participants could not simply answer “yes” or “no”; subsequently the answers given were detailed. The questionnaire was then utilised to gather information regarding participants' perceptions, knowledge and skills to teach phonological awareness to Foundation Phase ESL learners, as well as to understand what teaching phonological awareness in a second language entails, together with their opinion of support provided by the DBE. I personally administered the questionnaire to the participants individually. The questionnaire took more or less thirty minutes for participants to complete.
- **Interactive semi-structured interviews:** According to Nieuwenhuis, (2010) semi-structured interviews are commonly used in research to corroborate data emerging from other sources. The questions in the interview are predetermined, but the types of questions in interactive semi-structured interviews allow for the probing and clarification of answers (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). The interactive, semi-structured interviews were conducted by myself as individual interviews, before the

implementation of the support programme to gather more in-depth information on educator's knowledge, perceptions and skills to teach phonological awareness as well as to understand what teaching phonological awareness in a second language entails, together with their opinion of support provided by the DBE. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews verbatim, and made observational notes during the interviews.

- **Focus group interview:** I conducted a focus group interview after the implementation of the support programme to collect feedback regarding the effectiveness of the support programme. I audio-recorded the focus group interview. A focus group interview assumes that group interaction will take place and be productive in widening the range of responses as well as in retrieving forgotten details of experience (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). Focus group interviews contain the positive aspect of often releasing inhibitions and tensions possibly experienced by some participants, which may potentially discourage some participants from disclosing information. The negative aspect regarding focus group interviews is that some participants may find it intimidating to speak in front of colleagues. Outspoken individuals can often dominate the interview, and points of view of introverted individuals can be difficult to assess. Therefore, the researcher needs to observe the focus group process carefully and be attuned to this possibility (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). During my focus group interview, participants seemed comfortable to discuss their opinions and introverted individuals contributed to the discussion with ease.
- **Observations:** Observation is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of participants, objects and occurrences without necessarily questioning or communicating with the participants (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). In this study, I utilised what is known as “observer as participant” observation. This type of observation was relevant to this study as I focused mainly on the role of observing in the classroom. I looked for patterns of behaviour whilst the Foundation Phase educator participants taught phonological awareness skills. In addition to this, the process of observation was used to gain an understanding of the participants' knowledge, perceptions and skills regarding phonological awareness. Observations occurred in a natural setting (the classrooms) of the Foundation Phase participants prior to the phonological awareness training workshop in Phase 1 (*cf.* 4.5.4) and again during training and programme implementation in Phase 2. I made use of what is referred to by

Nieuwenhuis (2010) as member checking. This is where I verified my understanding of what had been perceived, with the participants observed (*cf.* 1.6.9; 4.9).

- **Document analysis:** All relevant curriculum, policy and support documents provided by the DBE (2011a), such as the CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement) for the Foundation Phase Grades 1-3, Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DBE, 2010b) as well as the English First Additional Language handbook for learners, Grades 1, 2 and 3 (DBE, 2011c) were reviewed to analyse phonological awareness concepts and skills that need to be covered and mastered in the Foundation Phase. Another reason for the document analysis was to determine strengths and weaknesses in the documents, and the participants' understanding and opinion of these documents.

Time allocated for literacy teaching and literacy assessment was also reviewed. Literacy teaching in this study refers to the time spent on teaching listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and language use in the First Additional Language, namely English (DBE, 2011b). Literacy assessment in this context involves the educator's evaluation or appraisal of the learners' knowledge of and skills in the particular content taught. In this study, it involved the assessment of the English Second language learners' phonological awareness skills.

1.6.6 Sample

A purposeful sample was utilised. The participants were all the Foundation Phase educators at two rural primary schools in the Hartbeespoort area, North West Province, in South Africa. Detail about this sample is provided in chapter 4.

1.6.7 Data collection strategy

Data were collected in two phases:

Phase 1: A pilot questionnaire was issued to five adults who were not involved in this study but who were willing to scrutinise the pilot questionnaire for me. All five adults had knowledge of phonological awareness and occupied careers in Education. The reason for the pilot questionnaire was to determine if any questions were ambiguous or confusing, and to establish any incorrect language usage. The pilot questionnaire determined if questions asked were relevant to what I was aiming to assess. Errors

(such as the construction of the questions) were corrected before the questionnaire was issued to the participants in this study.

I personally issued the open-ended questionnaires to the participants at the two selected schools, which they completed in their own time. Thereafter, I conducted interactive, semi-structured interviews, with the same participants on an individual basis to explore their answers in more depth. The purpose of these strategies was to gain in knowledge, perceptions and skills to teach phonological awareness as well as to understand what teaching phonological awareness in a second language entails, together with their opinion of support provided by the DBE. After the data from both the questionnaire and interviews had been collected, analysed and interpreted, a checklist was used during classroom observations of the participants in the time allocated for teaching phonological awareness. Observations took place until data saturation had been reached in a natural setting, i.e. the relevant classrooms of the participants, to determine their knowledge and perceptions of phonological awareness as well as their abilities and skills to teach and assess ESL learners regarding phonological awareness.

Relevant curriculum and other policy documents from the Department of Basic Education such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2011a), Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DBE, 2010b) as well as the English First Additional Language handbook for learners, Grades 1, 2 and 3 (DBE, 2011a) were scrutinised to determine what teaching and learning as well as assessment material is available to the participants regarding the teaching of phonological awareness.

All the data collected from the questionnaires, interviews, observations and documents from the Department of Basic Education were analysed, interpreted and integrated to compile a support programme for the participants to assist them with the teaching and assessment of phonological awareness to ESL learners in the Foundation Phase.

Phase 2: The support programme that I compiled was based on the information gathered via the above data collection strategies as well as the literature review, which formed part of Phase 2 of this study. The educational psychologist, the remedial therapist and the speech therapist at the Children's Enrichment Centre in Hartbeespoort were requested by me to peruse the programme and voice their professional opinions.

In addition to this, educators who did not form part of the sample as well as my study leader and co-promoter were requested to inspect the programme and discuss their opinions with me.

In-service training, specifically on phonological awareness and how to implement the programme, was conducted with the participants, where after they were requested to implement the programme over a period of six weeks. I conducted classroom visits during the implementation period, to observe the teaching and implementation of the applicable programme.

Focus group interviews, which I conducted, occurred after the participants had implemented the support programme. Answers given by the participants on the questionnaire and answers provided during the interviews in Phase 1 and Phase 2 were compared to establish whether the programme improved the participants' knowledge and perception of phonological awareness as well as their skills in the teaching and assessment thereof.

Observations of participants' teaching and assessment skills during and after implementation of the programme highlighted changes in their teaching skills of phonological awareness, however limited change was noted in their ability to assess phonological awareness skills of ESL learners.

This comparison established whether the programme made a positive difference to the participants and determined future adaptations. In other words, I planned, designed, implemented and evaluated a phonological awareness programme for ESL participants in the Foundation Phase to improve their ability to teach and assess phonological awareness skills.

The educational psychologist, the remedial therapist and the speech therapist at the Children's Enrichment Centre in Hartbeespoort, as well as the study leader, co-promoter and participants, were consulted to establish whether they agreed or disagreed that appropriate interpretations have been made by me, as researcher, and that valid conclusions from the data collected in Phase 1 and Phase 2 had been drawn.

The research design is illustrated next in Figure 1.2.

Data Collection Strategies

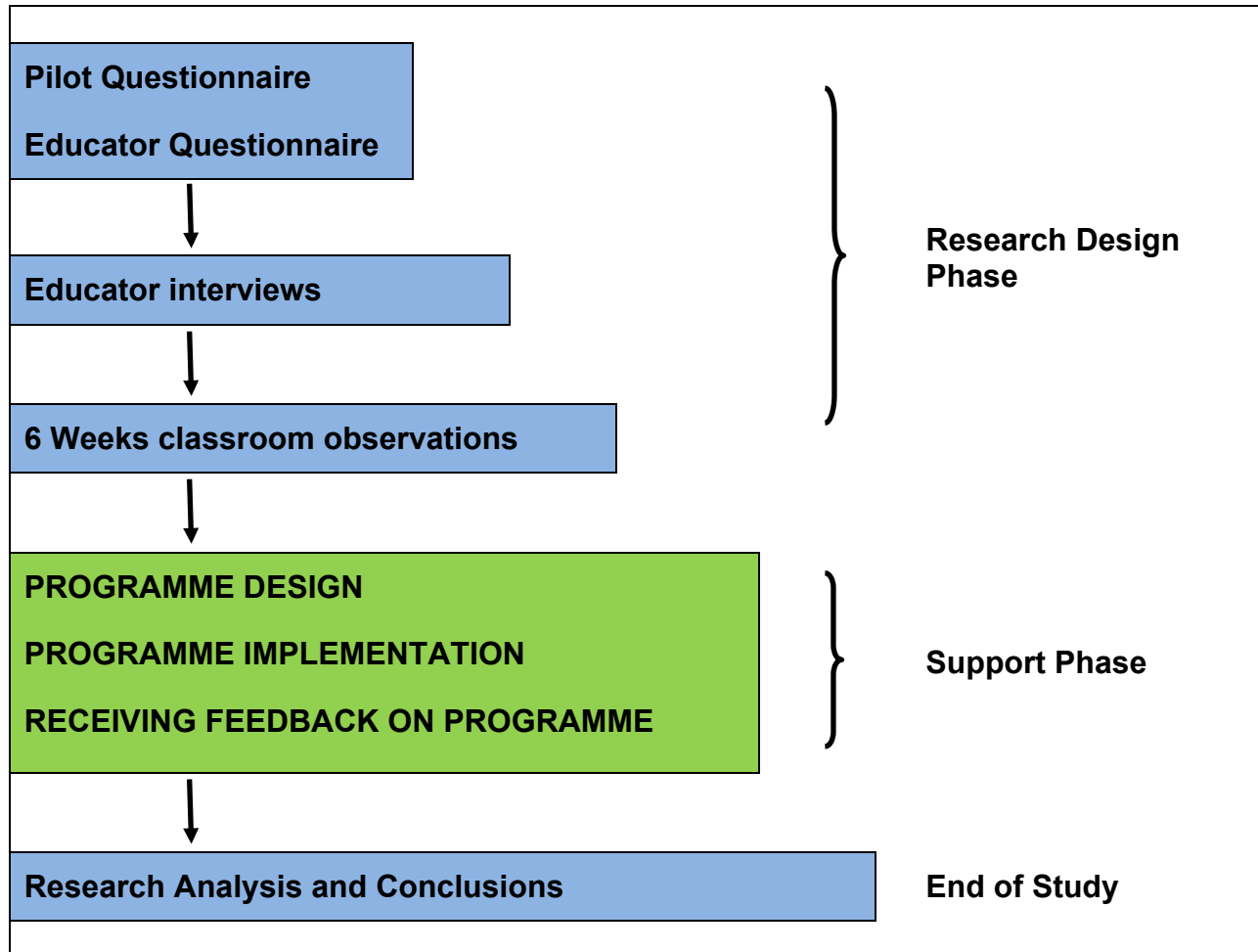


Figure 1.2: Research Design

1.6.8 Data analysis

The inductive and constant comparative data analysis was utilised. A constant comparative data analysis pertains to a constant and continuous comparison of all the data sources (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous process that begins after the first data collection strategy has been implemented, and continues throughout the study to ensure that no information is overlooked (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Merriam (2009) states that the preferred way of data analysis is to analyse data during data collection rather than waiting until all data have been collected. Ongoing data analysis ensures that data collected are not unfocused and repetitious.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data collected from the questionnaires, individual interviews, focus group interviews, observations and departmental documents were analysed in the following way:

- a) Emerging themes and subthemes: During Phase 1, comments, terms and notes from the first set of data gathered via questionnaires, interviews and observation notes were compared to determine recurring regularities or patterns of study. These patterns became the categories or themes into which subsequent items were sorted.
- b) Naming the themes: the names of the themes transpired from myself, the participants (member checking) and the literature review.
- c) Data of the group interviews after the implementation of the programme were used to form comparisons from data gathered from the questionnaires and interviews prior to implementation. This comparison established the changes/improvement with regard to the participants' knowledge, perceptions and skills regarding teaching and assessing phonological awareness.

In this study the criteria as proposed by Merriam (2009), were applied when constructing themes during data analysis. Themes were therefore:

- Responsive to the purpose of this research, and the answers to the research questions.
- Exhaustive: Detailed data were placed in categories and subcategories.
- Mutually exclusive: A particular unit of data could fit into only one category.
- Sensitizing: The naming of the data was as sensitive as possible to what is in the data meaning; outsiders should be able to read the categories and gain sense of their nature.
- Conceptually congruent: This means that all the categories could fit and work together in a meaningful way.
- Number of themes: The data were divided into manageable themes. The fewer the themes, the greater the level of abstraction and the easier it is to communicate the findings to others (Merriam, 2009).
- Becoming more theoretical: When themes were reduced and refined and linked together the analysis thereof moved toward the development of building a theory to

explain the data's meaning. The themes become findings of this study and a summary of the process and an account of the findings were given in narrative form (See chapter 5) (Merriam, 2009).

All analysed data accumulated in this study were in terms of themes and subthemes obtained from the data (as suggested above) to encompass a qualitative inquiry of the phonological awareness knowledge, perceptions and skills of ESL Foundation Phase educators as the participants at the two schools.

1.6.9 Reliability, trustworthiness and validity in qualitative research

Definition for reliability, trustworthiness and validity in qualitative research will now be provided.

Reliability in qualitative research can be defined as how accurately the research finding would be replicated in a second identical piece of research.

Trustworthiness is demonstration that evidence for the results reported is sound. Validity refers to how well the research findings reflect the reality it claims to represent (Creswell, 2009).

Data gathered from the open questionnaires, interactive semi-structured individual interviews, observations and focus group interviews were compared to search for common themes to support the validity of the findings. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest the following strategies that I employed to support the validity of findings in a qualitative study: extensive time in the field, thick description, feedback from others, and respondent validation. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

1.7 ROLE OF RESEARCHER

The researcher plays a crucial role in qualitative research. Creswell (2009) states that the researcher is key in collecting data and should clarify any existing bias from the outset of the study. The researcher should comment on biases and prejudices that may shape and influence the interpretation of the study, as well as comment on all past experiences.

Although I was possibly influenced by my own personal values and beliefs, past experiences and own opinions, all biases were accounted for and monitored in this study to determine the influence on the interpretation of the study.

1.8 ETHICS

Ethics refer to what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in terms of the research process. There should be a trust relationship between the researcher and the participants. According to Stake (2005:252) “Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict.”

The ethics in this research will fall under the following categories:

1.8.1 Protection from harm

The participants in this study were not exposed to any unnecessary physical or psychological harm (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

1.8.2 Informed consent

Participants were informed about the nature of the study to be conducted and given the choice of voluntary participation (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2010). Participants were requested to sign an informed consent form.

1.8.3 Right to privacy

Any information gathered from this study was not presented in such a way that it informed others of a particular participant’s response or behaviour. I kept the performance and behaviour of participants strictly confidential. To keep their names anonymous, the schools for this research were colour coded, namely, the blue school and the red school (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Participants were also informed that full confidentiality cannot be guaranteed during the group interviews.

1.8.4 Honesty

Findings of this study were reported in a complete and honest fashion without misleading others about the nature of the findings. Data were not fabricated to support a particular conclusion (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2010).

1.8.5 Right to withdraw

Participants were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, if they felt threatened, intimidated, or no longer interested in the study (Creswell, 2009).

1.8.6 Ethics approval from the university, the department and the principals

Permission from the North West University, the Department of Education in North West as well as the principals of the two schools was granted. The study only commenced once permission had been granted from the above-mentioned institutions.

1.9 RESEARCH CHALLENGES

Problems that arose during the research process were neither unique nor unheard of. Problems I anticipated were dealt with professionally and ethically at all times. Various problems pertaining to this research are reported in chapter 4.

1.10 CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter 1: Introduction

An overview is provided of the research problem, purpose of the study and the intended research process to determine ESL educator knowledge, perception and skills for teaching and assessing phonological awareness.

Chapter 2: South African language scenario

The language scenario in South African education is discussed in depth. In addition, this chapter concerns itself with learning in a second language and what the effects thereof are.

Chapter 3: Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is discussed in detail. The importance thereof, sequence of development, teaching and assessment of phonological awareness are described.

Chapter 4: Research methodology

The methodological framework for this study, data collection methods and participants are described. An overview of data analysis is provided.

Chapter 5: Data analysis

This chapter focuses on research results relating to educator knowledge of phonological awareness, perceptions of phonological awareness, skills to teach phonological awareness, educator language proficiency as well as opinions of support provided by the DBE.

Chapter 6: Programme

This chapter outlines the educator training workshop as well as activities from the support programme to teach and assess phonological awareness.

Chapter 7: Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

This chapter concludes with a summary of the research results and the implications thereof for the DBE, policy makers, educator training institutions and schools.

1.11 CONCLUSION

Chapter one stated the problem, purpose of the study and the intended research process to determine ESL educator knowledge, perception and skills for teaching and assessing phonological awareness.

The following chapter explains the South African Education scenario in depth.

CHAPTER 2

THE ISSUE OF LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Language is the main instrument of communication for the human race. If one does not have the required command of a language, one is restricted in options with regard to education, access to employment and various other opportunities (Alexander, 2007). In the case of this research, the premise is that many learners in South Africa learn in their mother tongue (first language) in the Foundation Phase while learning English as a second language (or First Additional Language), but then transfer to English as LoLT in Grade 4 without having a proficient academic foundation in the language (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001; Heugh, 2011).

It is essential to gain a comprehensive appreciation of the South African language in education scenario in order to understand what the challenges are for these learners with a limited English proficiency who are required to be able to learn in this language.

The conceptual framework for this chapter is set out below.

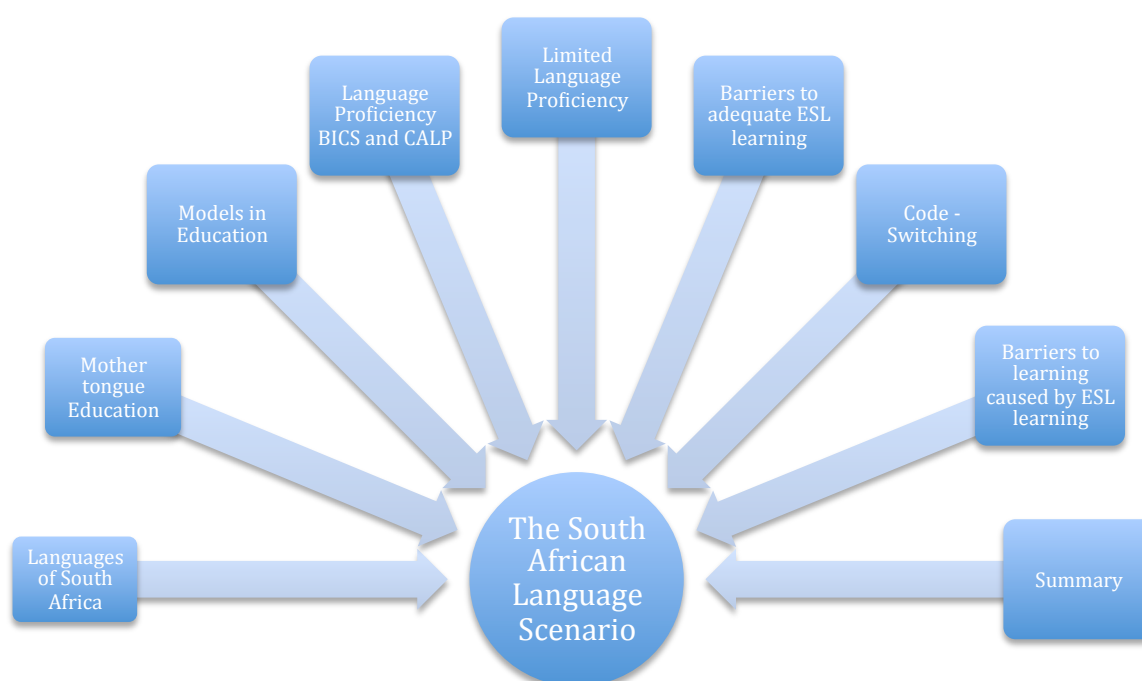


Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework of chapter 2

2.2 THE SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION LANGUAGE SCENARIO

2.2.1 Languages of South Africa

Before a discussion about the impact of the political transformation on the language in education scenario, it is important to provide a picture of the languages of South Africa in order to understand the context of this study.

South Africa has 11 official languages and this poses a huge challenge to ensure that all of them are treated equally as a LoLT. Consequently, English and Afrikaans still take precedence above the black languages as languages of learning and teaching in spite of special efforts taken by government to diversify all official languages (Moller, 2013).

According to the 2011 census (Statistics South Africa, 2011), Zulu is the mother tongue of 22.7% of South Africa's population, followed by Xhosa at 16%, Afrikaans at 13.5%, Sepedi (also known as Sotho sa Leboa) at 9.1%, English at 9.6% and Tswana at 8.0%. Sotho is the mother tongue of 7.6% of South Africans, while the remaining four official languages are spoken at home by less than 5% each of the population. Sign language is used by 0.5% of the population to communicate in the home (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Many South Africans are multilingual (able to speak more than one language). English and Afrikaans speaking people, however, tend to not have much ability in speaking indigenous languages, but are fairly fluent in each other's language. Most South Africans speak English (on different proficiency levels), which is universal in official and commercial public life. Although English is generally understood across the country and is used as the country's lingua franca, it only ranks fourth out of eleven as a mother tongue. It is interesting to note that South African English is littered with words and phrases from other South African languages such as Afrikaans, Zulu and other African languages (Olivier, 2013), making South African English unique.

The 11 official South African languages are represented in table form below (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

Table 2.1: South African languages

SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGES 2011		
Language	Number of speakers*	% of total
Afrikaans	6 855 082	13.5%
English	4 892 623	9.6%
isiNdebele	1 090 223	2.1%
isiXhosa	8 154 258	16%
isiZulu	11 587 374	22.7%
SePedi	4 618 576	9.1%
SeSotho	3 849 563	7.6%
SeTswana	4 067 248	8%
Sign language	234 655	0.5%
SiSwati	1 297 046	2.5%
TshiVenda	1 209 388	2.4%
XiTsonga	2 277 148	4.5%
Other	828 258	1.6%
TOTAL	50 961 443**	100%

(*Spoken as a mother tongue ** Unspecified and not applicable excluded)

2.2.2 Political and policy developments relating to the South African language scenario

In this brief discussion a few political incidents that had a major impact on the language of learning and teaching in South Africa will be referred to in order to create an understanding of the complexity of the LoLT context.

In 1976, the government introduced the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction from Grade 7 (then Standard 5) rather than English or any of the indigenous languages. Many educators at that time could not speak Afrikaans and could therefore

not teach learners adequately. As a result of this, many learners dropped out of school and educators resigned (Bonner & Segal, 1998). Tension increased as black African youth were enraged over government's unfair decision. Clashes between African youth and government lead to riots in Soweto. International pressure was placed on the apartheid government throughout the 1980's to change the law regarding Afrikaans as LoLT (Beukes, 2004).

In 1984, the South African government divided the national parliament into three chambers known as the tricameral parliament. This comprised one chamber for representatives of White voters (House of Assembly), one for representatives of Coloured voters (House of Representatives) and one for representatives of Indian voters (House of Delegates) (Bunting, 2002). No provision was made for any representation of Black Africans in the parliament (Bunting, 2002). The argument for this decision was that the National Party government claimed that Black Africans already had political rights within their respective homelands and tribes, where they could exercise their rights and therefore they did not qualify for representation in Parliament. The effects of this decree were that language decisions pertaining to education were often based on political and economic grounds rather than on what was educationally and linguistically best for learners (Bunting, 2002). Learning in English and Afrikaans was given a higher status than other languages during this period (Beukes, 2004). Various black languages, which are mother tongue to different African groups, were not viewed as a suitable medium of instruction at secondary level. Black learners who attended school were often only taught up to Grade 4. No provision for formal schooling was made for them onward, meaning that a large percentage of these learners dropped out of school (Beukes, 2004).

After the political transformation in 1994, several new political developments influenced a new approach to language in education. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) (South Africa, 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (South Africa, 1996b) acknowledged the right of all learners to receive education in an official language of their choice in public educational institutions where it is practicable. The constitution recognised the historically weakened use of the black languages as reflected in section 6, sub-section (3a) and therefore envisioned the implementation of positive and practical measures to promote their status (South Africa, 1996a). One

cannot dispute Government's attempt to encourage multilingualism in South Africa. To justify this, I will give a synopsis of these attempts.

In 1995, a Language Plan Task Group, also known as LANGTAG, was appointed to devise a National Language Plan for South Africa as well as advise government on developing a policy, based on the constitutional language provisions, as the country displayed a definite tendency toward monolingualism and not multilingualism. In 1996, the LANGTAG report, comprising a comprehensive framework for the development of a language policy and plan, was presented to Government (Mateene, 1996). A Language Policy Advisory Panel known as PanSALB (PAN South African Language Board) is an independent body and was appointed to draft the official language policy and plan, derived from the LANGTAG report. This body also has to monitor the implementation of practices relating to Constitutional language matters. Moller (2013) explains that the LANGTAG report and PanSALB were therefore responsible for providing goals to promote multilingualism in South Africa by creating conditions for the equal use of spoken and written language in all eleven official languages, and also to encourage the use of the other languages (other than English and Afrikaans) in South Africa. In addition to the above, the plan was to provide equitable and widespread language services to promote and develop the use of all official languages used by communities in South Africa, including the Khoisan languages and sign language (Moller, 2013).

Respect for all languages used by communities in South Africa had to be ensured, and Africans needed to be encouraged to become more enthusiastic about learning in their mother tongue. Since PANSALB came into fruition, other structures such as nine Provincial Language Committees (PLCs), thirteen National Language Bodies (NLBs) and eleven National Lexicography Units (NLU) have been instituted to assist language promotion and development for all official languages in South Africa (Mtenje, 2008). The PLCs assist Provinces with language policy formulation and implementation, while the NLBs focus on, e.g. spelling and terminology development. The role of the NLU is the compilation of comprehensive technical, translation and monolingual dictionaries (Mtenje, 2008).

In the year 2000, PANSALB produced a first draft of the Language Policy and Plan for South Africa, as well as a draft for the South African Languages Bill (SALB) (Janks, 2010; Moller, 2013). In 2003, the National Language Policy Framework (NLPF) was

approved. The NLPF consisted of a Policy Statement, Implementation Plan and the South African Languages Act (Janks, 2010; Moller 2013).

In this paragraph general issues pertaining to the language scenario and policy development have been discussed. In the next discussion the language in education scenario will be addressed.

2.2.3 Language in education policy

With regard to policies dictating the language in education scenario, the 1997 Language in Education Policy is still in place. After the development of the constitution (1996) and the schools act (1996), a South African Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) was introduced in 1997. The aims of the 1997 Policy for Language in Education (South Africa, 1997) in South Africa are as listed below, to

- promote full participation in society and economy through equitable and meaningful access to education;
- promote and develop all official languages;
- pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst learners, and hence to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education. Additive multilingualism has an important impact for language in education, meaning that learners will continue to develop their mother tongue and value their culture whilst the second and even third language are added;
- support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages that are important for international trade and communication, and South African Sign Language, as well as Alternative and Augmentative Communication;
- counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between mother tongues and languages of learning and teaching; and
- develop programmes for the redress of previously disadvantaged languages.

Alexander (2004), Mwaniki (2004), Du Plessis (2006), Kamwangamalu (2008), and Magwa (2013), assert that the government needs to take responsibility to ensure that all languages receive the same status in education as English and Afrikaans, thereby

encouraging the implementation of a multilingual language policy as envisioned in the Constitution. Currently, an Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) policy is on the cards (DBE, 2013). Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga declared that the learning of an African language is to be mandated in all government schools as soon as this policy comes into effect. This means that schools will have their chosen LoLT, a first additional language (either English or Afrikaans) and a second additional language (an African language). The new policy will be implemented from Grade 1 and will be incrementally introduced officially from 2015 until 2026 when it will be introduced in Grade 12. The implementation was preceded by a pilot project in 2014 in selected Grade 1 classes in government schools (DBE, 2014). Wright (2014) asserts that given proper education, South Africa can produce fluent trilingual learners.

The Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, proclaims that the long-term goal in higher education is to go beyond functional usage for communication (BICS), but to develop African languages into languages of teaching and research within universities. To contribute to the promotion of indigenous African languages, Nzimande appointed a ministerial advisory panel, to examine the development of indigenous African languages in higher education. This panel focused on obstacles relating to the installation of effective language policies and practices at Higher Education and Training institutions (Moller, 2013). The report indicated that barriers (such as limited availability of academic learning material) to develop African languages as LoLT at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) still exist (Moller, 2013). The implication of this is that many black Foundation Phase educators are not trained in their mother tongue at pre-graduate level and are therefore most probably not adequately prepared to teach in the African languages.

From the above discussion, it is obvious that policies and plans are in place to establish a proficient multilingual country. However, despite these strategies, it appears as if the language in education issue in South Africa is still complicated. Kerfoot and Simon-Vandenberg (2015:178) declare: "There is a need, therefore, to find more radical, systematic and contextually sensitive ways than currently in place to deal with the implications of diversity, especially linguistic diversity, in education." This is re-iterated by Alexander (2012) and Pluddeman (2015).

2.2.4 Curriculum policies

Since 1997, several changes have been made to the South African curriculum. In 1998, curriculum 2005, based on the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) approach was instated with the intention of promoting multilingualism as well as mother tongue education (Janks, 2010; Moller, 2013).

After a review of this curriculum the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) was introduced. Both Curriculum 2005 and the NCS aimed at promoting additive multilingualism (*cf.* 2.2.5.2) (Janks, 2010). The aim was for South Africans to be proficient in at least three languages with English as one of them, but not necessarily English as the LoLT (Janks, 2010; Moller, 2013). Although the intentions of these curriculums were well accepted by the education community, the implementation thereof showed more challenging than anticipated. Consequently, in 2009, the NCS was again reviewed and changed to the CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement), which was incrementally implemented in the different phases from 2011. From 2012 the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) of 2011 indicated that it is required for all Grade R-3 learners to take English as First Additional Language. Currently, time allocated for English First Additional Language is two to three (2-3) hours per week in the prescribed timetable for Grades 1 and 2 and three to four (3-4) hours per week for Grade 3. With the implementation of the IIAL pilot project from Grade 1, (*cf.* 2.2.3) a third language was introduced from 2014, requiring an equal number of hours as the first additional language. The consequence of this was that the prescribed timetable had to be lengthened. Foundation Phase instructional time had to be extended from 23 hours per week to 25 hours per week in Grades 1-2. Grade 3 will in turn, extend the instructional time from 25 hours per week to 28 hours per week (DBE, 2013).

According to a DBE report in November 2014, the Incremental Introduction of African Languages Pilot Programme in 2014 was successful and is “gathering pace” (DBE, 2014). The report states that time was successfully allocated on the timetable to accommodate the second additional language with an equal number of hours as the first additional language, and educators adhered to stipulated changes. Consequently, the IIAL for 2015 seemed promising (DBE, 2014).

2.2.5 Choosing a LoLT

Language in education according to Cummins (2005) plays a key role in effective teaching and learning. Cummins (2005) emphasises that academic success is determined by educator and learner proficiency in the LoLT. In South African schools, English is mainly chosen as the LoLT either from Grade 1 (*cf.* 2.2.5.3) or from Grade 4 (*cf.* 2.2.5.4), meaning that most learners are learning in their second language for most of their school career. Beukes (2009) asserts that little enthusiasm is shown among black mother tongue speakers to use their indigenous languages as LoLT.

The Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997) encourages a policy of additive multilingualism (promotion of a learner's mother tongue while facilitating the addition of a second language). Cummins (2005) suggests that learners who learn in an additive multilingualism environment succeed to a greater extent than learners in an environment where the mother tongue as well as the culture linked to it is devalued. Further research by Cummins (2009) suggests that English language proficiency of ESL learners require a conceptual foundation in the learners' mother tongue, which will facilitate and improve academic development in the second language, namely English. This necessitates that literacy skills such as reading and writing in the mother tongue are established and mastered (Cummins, 2009). Heugh (2011), supporting Cummins, postulates that if these skills are not mastered effectively, ESL as LoLT can prevent learners from coping academically.

Mother tongue education is therefore preferable to ensure academic achievement (Brock-Utne & Desai, 2003; Brock-Utne & Holmasdottir, 2004; Nel & Theron, 2008; Nel & Nel, 2012; Jordaan, 2015). Unfortunately the practice in South Africa does not always reflect this. Beukes (2009) declares that equal recognition of the eleven official languages in South Africa does not automatically translate into equal status for all eleven languages in education. As a result, more status and value is attached to English as the lingua franca at government level and at most universities. This kind of practice is aggravated in that many learners and their parents continue to associate English with social, educational and employment opportunities and therefore prefer it as the language of instruction (Dyer, 2001; De Klerk, 2002; Ngidi, 2007; Fleisch, 2008; Mtenje, 2008; Nel & Theron, 2008; Casale & Posel, 2010). Consequently, the black languages are neglected in being developed as LoLT (Magwa, 2013).

2.2.5.1 Mother Tongue Education

Lee (2004) defines mother tongue as the language a child acquires from birth. This language is spoken fluently and spontaneously, a person has intuitive knowledge of the language, they can communicate competently and also identify with the community who uses the same language (Lee, 2004). Consequently several researchers (Brock-Utne, 2005; Alidou, Boly, Brock-Utne, Diallo, Heugh, & Wolff 2006; Nel & Theron 2008; Nel & Muller, 2010; Heugh, 2011; Ngcobo, 2013; Hugo, 2014) agree that mother tongue education is the better choice as LoLT. Mgqwashu (2007) emphasises that common sense, educational and technical knowledge are more easily acquired when learning in the mother tongue. Supporting this, Jackson and Malone (2003) assert that proficiency in the language of learning will develop a well-educated citizen, which is a cornerstone of success in the economy.

Attention will now be given to the advantages of learning in the mother tongue in the following categories: cognitive, pedagogical, cultural identity, psychological, and assessment.

➤ Cognitive advantages

Quane and Glanz (2011) affirm that learners who acquire reading and writing skills in their mother tongue will have a better opportunity to achieve academically. The connection between sound and letter is made more easily by the learner if the language used in the classroom is familiar and has meaning for the learner (Iyamu & Ogiegbaen, 2007). The psycholinguistic theory of Cummins (1991) explains that the development of linguistic competencies and conceptual proficiency in the mother tongue results in higher academic performance levels.

When learners have mastered their own mother tongue, they are better able to transfer knowledge from their mother tongue to a second or third additional language (Malone, 2003). Cummins (2000) refers to this as “Common Underlying Proficiency” (CUP) which means that in the course of learning one language, a learner evidently acquires a set of skills and linguistic knowledge that can be used as a foundation when learning another language. Cummins (2005) further explains that if conceptual knowledge is developed in one language it helps to make the other language more comprehensible. In other words, if a learner understands the meaning of the word, e.g. “assessment” in the

mother tongue, all the learner needs to do is acquire the label for the term “assessment” in the other language. It becomes a difficult task when a learner has to acquire both the concept and the label in the second language at the same time.

Well-developed language skills and the ability to speak fluently is the foundation for building on what learners already know. Competent verbal expression is an important developmental area to ensure academic progress (Pieterse, 2007). When a learner is unable to verbalise his/her own thoughts, it will result in barriers to learning with regard to reading and writing. Consequently, when learners have limited language proficiency it will put them at a disadvantage to achieve academically, because they will struggle to express their thoughts (in writing and verbally) (Holmarsdottir & O’Dowd, 2009).

Relating to my study, Seeff-Gabriel (2003) found that ESL learners display poorer phonological awareness compared to English mother tongue (First Language) learners. Poor PA skills impact on proper pronunciation, reading, spelling skills and academic achievement in English (Pijper, 2003). Consequently, if phonological awareness skills are not adequately established in the FAL in the FP, it could result in learners who, when transferring to English as LoLT in Grade 4, experience barriers to learning.

Language and PA problems in ESL learning will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 3.

➤ **Pedagogical advantages**

Researchers such as Alidou *et al.* (2006) assert that mother tongue teaching facilitates mutual communication between educators and learners. Effective communication leads to better teaching and better learning. As a result learners are more alert and eager to participate during lessons and feel less intimidated by their educators (Alidou *et al.*, 2006).

➤ **Cultural and Identity advantages**

“Language, culture and literacy are elements that define individuals and their sense of belonging to a group or a nation” (Alidou *et al.*, 2006:3). When a learner’s mother tongue is used as LoLT, it creates a culturally sensitive curriculum that could develop a positive perception of their culture. Balfour (2012) suggests that an effective educator must function as cultural mediator in the classroom, using his/her understanding of the

language and culture to motivate the learners and help them understand the curriculum content and culture represented by the school.

➤ **Psychological advantages**

Mother tongue in an educational setting is considered a key source for the development of self-identity and self-confidence. Research has found that learners display fewer signs of resistance to learning when learning in their mother tongue, and success experienced in learning enhances self-esteem and motivation within the learner (Quane & Glanz, 2011). Learners also tend to be more comfortable and confident to express in their mother tongue exactly how they are feeling physically and emotionally (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2005).

➤ **Assessment advantages**

The reliability and validity of curriculum assessment are questionable if a language unfamiliar to the learner is used to assess the learner (Alidou *et al.*, 2006). The reasoning behind this statement is that curriculum assessment should focus on learners' ability to demonstrate mastery of knowledge. When learners do not have adequate language proficiency in the language they are assessed in, it will create obstacles in their demonstrating mastery of knowledge, and a true reflection of a learner's potential could be obscured (Alidou *et al.*, 2006; Kanzee, 2009; Nel, Nel, & Lebeloane, 2014). ESL learners often experience difficulties regarding assessment when they are expected to write academically, using the correct terminology pertaining to a specific subject they are assessed in (Nel & Booysen, 2015). Nel and Booysen (2015) suggests that in order to accommodate limited language proficiency and provide ESL learners opportunities to demonstrate mastery of knowledge, it is important to use various kinds of assessment strategies, such as practical application, besides written and oral tasks.

Various models in education will now be discussed.

2.2.5.2 A Model of Additive Bilingualism

An additive bilingual model, according to Guvercin (2011), is one that adds a language or languages to a learner's repertoire. It refers to the promotion of a learner's mother tongue while facilitating the addition of a second language. The second language is

therefore most unlikely to replace the mother tongue. With additive bilingualism, both languages could have a high level of proficiency and contribute positively to the development of the learner, socially and cognitively (Quane & Glanz, 2010; Guvercin, 2011; Nel & Nel, 2012).

Advantages of bilingualism, according to Benson and Kosonen (2013), Guvercin (2011) as well as Quane and Glanz (2011), are that when learners acquire and develop literacy skills in two languages, it will allow them to participate and communicate effectively in a multilingual society. Furthermore, this could assist in promoting self-confidence and motivation within the learners, the achievement of personal goals and the foundation for leadership in a diverse community (Benson & Kosonen, 2013).

When learners are proficient bilinguals, knowledge between languages is easily transferred and could prevent poor academic performance for ESL learners (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). When the mother tongue is also well established, language skills are more effortlessly conveyed to the second language (Cummins, 1998; Nel & Theron, 2008; Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). Thus, when a learner has a well-established mother tongue and continues to develop their mother tongue proficiency, in many instances their second language skills exceed those of learners taught through a second language, without a well-established mother tongue (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013).

2.2.5.3 Straight-to-English (Subtractive Education Model)

Subtractive bilingualism, also known as subtractive Education or the Straight-to-English model, refers to the promotion and development of the second language at the expense of the mother tongue (Patterson, 2008; Nel & Nel, 2012). In South Africa, this often occurs when ESL learners enter into a schooling system where English is the LoLT. In such a scenario, mother tongue and English are two competing languages instead of two languages complementing each other. In many cases learners also choose to not use their mother tongue at all, but only English (second language) for any kind of communication (Patterson, 2008), which could have a negative impact on their academic achievement (*cf.* 2.2.5.1).

Subtractive bilingualism may impede a learner's social and cognitive development due to poor performance academically as a result of ESL learners having to transition suddenly into English-medium classes (Ball, 2010). Studies conducted over the past

twenty years, claim the subtractive bilingualism model is a cause and effect model. This is because the lack of language proficiency displayed by many learners in the mother tongue, is as a result of implementing a subtractive bilingual model before the mother tongue of the learner has been sufficiently mastered, thus the mother tongue erodes (Heugh, 2007; Keeves & Darmawan, 2007). Cummins asserts this has a profound impact on ESL learning as the learner loses the opportunity to acquire academic proficiency in the mother tongue, thus disabling them to transfer mother tongue prior knowledge and skills over to the second language and in turn hindering the ability to analyse academic information and problem solving (Cummins, 1984; Cummins, 1988).

As far back as the nineties, researchers such as Auerbach (1993) argued and opposed mother tongue education in the learners' early years when transition to English in later years is inevitable. Auerbach believed that the more learners are exposed to English from an early age in the classroom, the quicker they will learn and comprehend English and the more they will learn to use English socially and academically. However, many researchers have contentiously argued Auerbach's point of view and consequently declared that mother tongue education in the first few years of schooling is more beneficial to learners academically (Brock-Utne & Desai, 2003; Butzkamm, 2003; Brock-Utne, 2005; Alidou *et al.*, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2007; Nel & Theron, 2008; Nel & Muller, 2010; Heugh, 2011; Ngcobo, 2013; Hugo, 2014). These researchers believe that using the mother tongue allows learners to not only learn to think and communicate adequately, but also to acquire an understanding of language rules and grammar, which will promote better academic achievement.

Another model is the early exit/transition model.

2.2.5.4 Early exit/transition model

Many learners in South Africa are taught in their mother tongue from Grade 1-3 and then experience a sudden transfer in the LoLT to either English or Afrikaans from Grade 4 onwards (as is the case in this study) (Brock-Utne & Holmasdottir, 2004; Nel & Theron, 2005; Nel & Theron, 2008; Nel & Nel, 2012). This could impact negatively on the academic performance of learners from Grade 4, as it has been found that the development of many learners' academic proficiency in their mother tongue has often not yet been attained by the end of Grade 3, and although they could have had some

exposure to English or Afrikaans, they are not academically prepared to suddenly learn in their second language (Viljoen & Molefe, 2001; Brock-Utne & Holmasdottir, 2004; Broom, 2004; Fleish, 2008; Van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009; Evans & Cleghorn, 2010; Heugh, 2011; Posel & Casale, 2011; Makgamatha *et al.*, 2013; Van Wyk, 2014). Proficiency in reading is a crucial skill for academic progress, further education, leisure activities, life outside school, and job opportunities (Fleish, 2008; Linnakyla, Malin, & Taube, 2004 cited in Howie, Venter, & Van Staden, 2008). Fleish (2008) claims that ESL learners have often mastered neither adequate reading skills nor reading comprehension competence in their mother-tongue at this stage, hence a limited reading ability in their second language will result.

Aggravating the transition to ESL in Grade 4 and causing further disruptions in learning, is often limited English proficiency of the educator, since many of them are also ESL speakers. Consequently, because of their own limited proficiency in English, the educators also do not require adequate English proficiency from the learners. As a result this transition phase cannot be managed effectively through proper communication and quality teaching. Limited language proficiency of learners and educators in the transition phase and the impact thereof on academic achievement is a concern reiterated by many researchers (e.g. Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Van der Berg, *et al.*, 2011).

The negative consequences of this model is confirmed in a study done by Brock-Utne (2007) who found that IsiXhosa speaking learners, whose teaching, learning and assessment had taken place in the mother tongue throughout their schooling, learnt better and scored higher marks with test scores than their mother tongue peers who had learnt in English from Grade 4.

2.2.5.5 Late-Exit Transition model

The late-exit transition model refers to the transition from mother tongue as LoLT to another language as LoLT from Grade 5 onward. If the mother tongue is kept and this model is applied proficiently, additive bilingualism is possible. The transfer of knowledge from the mother tongue to the second language seems to be more apparent when the transition occurs later in the learner's school career (Brock-Utne, 2007; Heugh, 2011; Nel & Nel, 2012).

In addition, pedagogical theories seem to emphasise the advantage of applying a late exit transitional model. This can be explained by referring to the notion of a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986). This notion suggests that all learning builds on existing skills and knowledge. It is therefore important that foundational knowledge and skills are well-developed, which in this case refers to academic language proficiency in the mother tongue. Consequently, if learners have limited academic language proficiency in their mother tongue, and understanding of literacy principles such as decoding text is inadequate, it hampers academic mastery when transferring to learning in a second language too early. For this reason, a later transition to learning in a second language, when foundational cognitive as well as language skills in the mother tongue have been well established, could result in better academic achievement (Vygotsky, 1986).

(Vygotsky's theory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.)

Another theory supporting Vygotsky, is that of Cummins (1991), stating that a learner must first develop cognitively, (the mental process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience and senses) in his/her mother tongue in order to gain the skills necessary for ESL acquisition and proficiency (Cummins, 1991). This is substantiated by Hakuta, Butler and Witt (2000) and Brock-Utne (2007), postulating that a transition to ESL learning in Grade 5 onward, is more advantageous, given that learners' struggle to cope with ESL as LoLT at an earlier age.

Ideally, as stipulated by Cummins (1991), the learner in a late-exit transition programme should have been taught proficiently in the mother tongue, while the second language is introduced more and more every year, until the transition to second language as LoLT is smoother and the learner is more capable to cope with the change.

2.2.5.6 Transition versus transfer

It is important to note the difference between transition and transfer in the early and late exit/transition models. Transition refers to the LoLT changing from mother tongue to the second language as LoLT, but there is no cognitive process involved with transition. The implications of early transition, is that learners are exposed to second language learning and teaching before they have reached academic competence in the mother

tongue. This results in poor or inadequate transfer of knowledge from mother tongue to the second language.

Transfer, on the other hand, involves a cognitive process, i.e. knowledge of academic concepts and language is transferred from mother tongue to the second language. Transfer occurs in additive bilingualism models (*cf.* 2.2.5.2).

In order to gain a better understanding of the importance of language proficiency the next section will address this.

2.3 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Language proficiency is generally defined as the ability to speak, read, write and comprehend a language. Academic language proficiency refers to the ability to speak, read, write and comprehend academic language, which entails content specific vocabulary related to subject area knowledge and terminology, interpretation and analysis of academic data or text, and using and applying complex sentence structures (August & Shanahan, 2006; Jordaan, 2015).

Cummins (2008) describes language proficiency in the following way: BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) refers to the ability to speak a language for conversational purposes and requires language fluency. CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) includes listening, speaking, reading and writing about subject area content material and provides learners with conceptual knowledge to classify, compare and identify, write and interpret critically for academic learning (Cummins, 2008). One can thus say that BICS is verbal communication used for conversational purposes, while CALP refers to written and verbal communication used for academic success (Cummins, 2008). Cummins (2008) postulates that mastering academic proficiency (CALP) in a second language takes at least five years, but usually five to seven years, whereas BICS in the second language could develop within six months to two years. Research by Thomas and Collier (2002) emphasises the importance of mother tongue proficiency for ESL learners, claiming that if the mother tongue is not established prior formal schooling, it could take between seven to ten years for these learners to be on par with their English First Language peers in ESL proficiency.

It is also important for educators to understand that a learner will struggle to learn in a language when he/she is only able to use the language socially (i.e. BICS), and that skills in both BICS and CALP are imperative to progress academically. While BICS is in general important to converse with peers and educators in and outside of the classroom, especially when asking and answering questions (Nel & Theron, 2008), learners are expected at the same time to learn subject content and skills, analyse information, write and edit information, which requires CALP competence (Aukerman, 2007; Gordon, 2007).

Insufficient language proficiency could have detrimental effects on academic performance as discussed in the paragraph below.

2.3.1 Limited Language Proficiency

Second language development in a learner is influenced by contextual and instructional factors (August & Shanahan, 2008). The stages below are based on learners who have English as LoLT and are exposed to English in the classroom most of the day. Relating to this study, one can understand the lack of English proficiency of English FAL learners in Grade 4, if it takes five to seven years to develop English second language proficiency when English is LoLT. No matter the extent of exposure, developing a second language occurs in stages (Haynes, 2005). Firstly, learners trying to learn English as a second language commence by parroting everything the educator says in English. This is known as the pre-production stage and learners may understand and duplicate gestures to show comprehension. Learners learning English as a second language should listen attentively during English lessons and educators should focus on comprehension and vocabulary building activities.

Secondly, learners try to speak using one or two word phrases that have been memorised. These phrases may not always be used or pronounced correctly. This is known as the early production stage. Learners then progress to the third stage, known as the speech emergence stage, where they communicate with simple phrases and sentences. Frequently these sentences are grammatically incorrect, but they are more confident to speak with or in front of classmates in English. Intermediate fluency is the fourth stage, where learners should begin to make more complex sentences in speaking and writing and feel comfortable to share thoughts and opinions in English. Stage five is

advanced fluency meaning learners are striving to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency in English (Haynes, 2005).

Oral proficiency in a second language plays an active role in acquiring skills imperative for reading (August & Shanahan, 2008). Reading and writing are tools not only essential for learning but for developing vocabulary and communicating knowledge. Reading instruction should promote phonological awareness skills, letter knowledge, phoneme grapheme relationships, spelling rules and fluency, together with activities to develop vocabulary, word knowledge, discourse structure and comprehension (August & Shanahan, 2008).

If learners cannot demonstrate a certain degree of academic language proficiency, they struggle to meet the cognitive demands required to perform academically (Fleish, 2008; Jordaan, 2015). Although only one in ten South African learners speak English as their mother tongue, a large percentage either start their schooling in Grade 1 with this language or switch over from mother tongue to English as LoLT from Grade 4 onward (Nel, Nel, & Lebeoane, 2014) (*cf.* 2.2.5). National assessment tests have shown that learners' language proficiency in especially English is inadequate (DBE, 2010a). Annual National Assessments (ANA) written by Grade 1 learners in 2011 and 2012 (DBE, 2012) showed that Grade 1 learners performed poorly in literacy assessments conducted in English. There also appears to be a gap between English Second Language learners and mother tongue learners. Evidence of the gap between mother tongue and ESL learning is depicted in a national benchmarking project, which is a project designed by the Department of Basic Education (2010a) which is used as a standard, to assess and compare South African learners' literacy performance in English literacy skills across the country. It was affirmed that South African primary school learners showed poor performance in English literacy skills predominantly due to learning it as a second language (DBE, 2010a). A large gap exists between the literacy performances of learners where the LoLT is the learners' mother tongue compared to those where the LoLT is their second language (Heigh & Prinsloo, 2013). Where the LoLT was the second language, learners often experienced anxiety and lacked confidence to express themselves and their feelings, Heugh and Prinsloo (2013).

When English as LoLT is seen as intimidating and threatening to learners who lack proficiency in the command of English, academic performance and results are usually

low and these learners under achieve (Donald, Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2005). Another consequence of learners learning in a second language, in which they are not proficient, is a high percentage of school dropout rates because of their poor academic performance (Sarinjeive, 1999; Bosman, 2000; Ovando 2000; Roseberry-McKibbin & Brice, 2000; Foley, 2004; Bell, 2006; Iyamu & Ogiegbaen, 2007). It is consequently essential, that English as a second language in the FAL Foundation Phase curriculum is well taught and developed in order to ensure that ESL learners do not struggle academically from Grade 4 onwards.

2.4 EXTERNAL BARRIERS TO ADEQUATE ESL LEARNING

2.4.1 Limited Learning Material

Limited availability of learning material expounds the difficult learning situation of ESL learners. Learning material is important for learning as learners are provided with support material to assist with their understanding of English vocabulary and concepts taught (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). Learners find it easier to relate to information provided when learning material accompanies a lesson given by the educator. Access to learning material helps them to gather, process and present information to the class (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). Ball (2010) asserts that to ensure optimal learning for ESL learners, learners must have adequate learning material to enhance their literacy skills in both the mother tongue and the LoLT. However, the shortage of learning material in the eleven official languages at all levels of the education system, and the lack of resources to fund the development of learning materials in the eleven official languages, have entrenched English as the main language of learning across the curriculum (Heugh & Prinsloo, 2013). Naki (2010) and Murtin (2013) believe that this has resulted in poor literacy results and consequently a high failure rate in South Africa. Many rural schools (as in the sample of this study) are poorly resourced with regard to textbooks, desks and computers from the Department of Basic Education. This puts a damper on the quality of education at these schools and aggravates the problem of school dropouts in the country. It has been found that learners in rural areas may take longer to reach academic proficiency in ESL, as no or very little English reading material (including fiction or non-fiction books, newspapers and magazines) is available for them. They also have limited access to television, which could have assisted in stimulating ESL acquisition (Murtin, 2013).

Alongside a lack of learning materials, the quality of education for learners is influenced by socio-economic circumstances.

2.4.2 Socio-economic circumstances

The choice of the LoLT is many times influenced by the socio-economic status of the learner. Learners from very poor households often reside in rural areas or townships far away from the school offering education in the language of the learner's or the parent's choice (Prinsloo, 2007). Since parents cannot always afford transport to schools offering their mother tongue as LoLT, learners either do not attend school, or they are forced to learn in another official language at a school nearer to their homes (Prinsloo, 2007).

Under-privileged learners often enter the education system already at a disadvantage, as they have not been exposed to any form of formal education, stimulation or school related activities. This means, these learners have not being exposed to letters and sounds of the alphabet, basic counting with objects, age appropriate literacy and mathematics worksheets, flashcards and stories to enrich their vocabulary and comprehension. This implies that these learners could have missed out on the development of important perceptual and pre-literacy skills needed for adequate reading, writing, listening and mathematical abilities. Furthermore, if these learners are to enter formal learning in their second language, their academic success can be jeopardised (Prinsloo, 2007).

Another influence on ESL education is the role of ESL educators.

2.4.3 ESL Educators

Research has shown that educators' acquisition of competent teaching skills in English is instrumental in effecting the development of language competency in learners (Howie, 2007; De Jager & Evans, 2013; Ebersohn, Joubert, Prinsloo & Kriegler, 2014). Ebersohn, Joubert, Prinsloo, and Kriegler (2014), claim that when educators themselves are second language users in the language they teach, they have difficulty explaining new concepts to learners as well as providing the necessary support due to their own limited language proficiency. As a result of this, misunderstandings and poor communication often emanate between educator and learner and this may result in poor academic performances.

A study by Nel and Muller (2010) showed that phonological errors by learners occurred when English second language educators taught sound, intonation and pronunciation, and language usage incorrectly. Their study found that incorrect spelling modelled by ESL educators, was copied and learnt by the learners. There is also evidence of the effect of inadequate language proficiency of ESL educators on reading ability of learners (Howie, 2007). Besides teaching, educators need to assess, among other things, learners' knowledge of sounds, letters and letter combinations. If educators lack language proficiency in English, their learner assessments could be unreliable (Howie, 2007).

Often, when ESL educators lack confidence, they resort to the mother tongue to teach unclear concepts (Probyn, 2009). This is known as code switching.

2.4.4 Code Switching (CS)

Code switching (CS) can be defined as the use of one or more languages in the same conversation. Switches between languages may be made at different stages of the conversation albeit a word, phrase or sentence (Probyn, 2009).

In many South African classrooms an array of mother tongue languages can be found (Nel & Theron, 2005). As a result many educators, especially African educators, use CS a large part of the teaching day (Brock-Utne, 2005; Arthur & Martin, 2006; Probyn, 2009). Researchers such as Brock-Utne (2005), Arthur and Martin (2006) and Probyn (2009) found that educators either use plenty of short switches between languages, meaning they switch briefly to the mother tongue of the learners and then back into English (as is the case in this study), or the educators fully switch over to the mother tongue to explain a concept in order to increase comprehension. Educators often employ code switching when they lack fluency in English, when their own vocabulary is limited, or when they are unsure of the correct usage of grammar (Probyn, 2009).

There are contrasting points of view regarding CS. These arguments will briefly be discussed below.

2.4.4.1 Arguments supporting the use of code-switching in the classroom

CS can be considered a useful tool to promote classroom communication and discussion between learners and educators when the language being taught is a second language. Studies done by Setati (2007) and Ferguson (2009), found that educators who used CS in their classrooms, got learners to express themselves more effectively and to engage in problem solving with more understanding. CS can thus have a positive influence when educators need to explain new concepts, as it generates understanding via informal discussion. Active participation in the classroom is also increased, as learners are generally more relaxed and can relate to new information more easily (Setati, 2007; Ferguson, 2009).

CS allows learners to process information because it provides the opportunity for them to form associations between the mother tongue and the language being taught, which in turn increases linguistic awareness. It appears that learners experience less anxiety when CS is allowed, consequently increasing their self-confidence and diminishing negative associations and experiences toward the language (i.e. English) (Shin, 2012). Therefore learners' achievement in school may be enhanced by code switching (Brock-Utne, 2005; 2013; Benson & Kosonen, 2013).

However, some researchers argue against the benefits of code switching in the classroom.

2.4.4.2 Arguments against code switching in the classroom

Many researchers maintain that the frequent use of code switching is not always effective for academic learning (Hugo & Nieman, 2010; Nel & Muller, 2010). According to Fleish (2008) code switching opens the door to academic failure and seldom provides learners with the language knowledge needed for learning and assessment. When educators rely on code switching, they tend to use language limited to lower cognitive levels and encourage chorus answers as well as simply copying from the chalkboard. Rubagumya (2003) and Fleish (2008) refer to this as 'safe talk'. CS also results in less teaching time because educators have to repeat words, phrases or explanations in the mother tongue as well as the second language (namely, English). This impedes learning and prohibits vocabulary extension and general knowledge of the English language (Cummins, 2005, 2008; Evans, 2013). CS in the classroom situation is

considered unacceptable and inappropriate by Cummins (2008), who claims that the two languages in a learning environment should be kept strictly separate. This statement is supported and explained by Littlewood and Yu (2009), as well as Ellis and Shintani (2013), who affirm that CS will impede the quantity and quality of the English language. Littlewood and Yu (2009) postulate that learners resort too easily to their mother tongue as soon as they can limiting opportunities to initiate communication in English.

Many black learners have very little, if any, exposure to English; in many situations, the educator is the only source of English input and exposure (Murtin, 2013). When CS is used, learners as well as educators can become too comfortable with this tool, which could result in further limited development of CALP in the language. In other words, Carless (2007) and Cummins (2008) recommend separating the two languages could prevent cross-contamination, allowing a new linguistic system to be acquired. When second language learners are immersed in the second language classroom, they should have minimal reference to their mother tongue. This prevents any interference from the mother tongue, which is believed to inhibit the language learning process (Carless, 2007; Cummins, 2008).

2.4.5 Parent proficiency and involvement

It is easier for parents to support their children in a language they themselves are proficient in (Benson, 2001; O'Connor & Geiger, 2009; Pflapson, 2011). This additional supportive environment is important to help an ESL learner to enhance their second language proficiency (Singh, 2009). However, in most instances ESL learners come from home environments where the parents/guardians, due to their own limited English proficiency cannot stimulate or support their children with the language.

2.5 CONCLUSION

The language scenario in South African Education will be summarised below.

It seems evident that although the Constitution of South Africa grants citizens the right to use the language of their choice as well as the right to receive education in their mother tongue or their language of choice, this right is not yet being fully exercised.

Formal language policies in South Africa exist, prompting additive multilingualism, but are not fully implemented in areas like education. Legal structures and instruments as well as policy provisions are available to support the development of especially indigenous languages, but the practical implementation thereof is still extremely problematic (Cook, 2013).

English and Afrikaans remain the dominant languages in South African education, and English is dominant in both business and government sector. Consequently learners continue to associate English with social, educational and employment opportunities. It is therefore understandable that many black parents encourage their children to learn in English.

For learners to read and learn adequately in English, sound phonological awareness skills are imperative. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework within which phonological awareness will be grounded. Grant and Osanloo (2014) define the theoretical framework as the 'blueprint' for a study as it serves as a guide according to which the study is built and supported. The theoretical framework is therefore the selected theory that serves as a structure to guide research and underpins how the researcher understands and plans to research the topic (Lovitts, 2005).

In addition, phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics will be defined. The teaching, assessment and support of phonological awareness, the influence thereof on reading, and phonological awareness controversies will be discussed. In addition to this, the impact of learning in a second language will be focused on.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For the purpose of this study a social constructivism theoretical framework was regarded as appropriate. A social constructivism perspective is a view that sees knowledge as actively constructed by individuals, groups and society and not just simply being transferred (Vygotsky, 1978). One key concept, crucial in social constructivism, is the notion of mediation. This essentially means that learning and development take place through interaction, (Vygotsky, 1978). The theoretical framework arises from this process of mediation, especially the key concepts of zone of proximal development (ZPD), which will be discussed later (*cf.* 3.2.2).

Vygotsky's theory relates to the teaching of phonological awareness in the following ways. The educator needs to consider herself engaged in an active partnership with learners in constructing their learning. An appropriate context should therefore be set up by the educator in which learners will become engaged in activities that interest and encourage them and thus facilitate learning. In the context of this study where the focus is on an ESL classroom, logical thought must be expressed through language practices

as part of classroom activities. Learners must therefore be encouraged to ask questions and explore all relevant topics (Vygotsky, 1978).

There are four key concepts derived from Vygotsky's theory that apply to this study, (Monteith, 2006).

- A Social Context;
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD);
- Scaffolding; and
- Cognitive apprenticeship

3.2.1 A Social Context

Vygotsky (1978) stated that children are able to learn much more in collaboration with others than they will be able to achieve on their own. Observations by Vygotsky revealed how higher mental functions developed individually through social interactions with significant people in a child's life, particularly parents, but other adults as well. He claims that via social interactions, a child comes to learn the habits of his/her culture, speech patterns, written language and other symbolic knowledge through which the child derives meaning and which affects a child's construction of her/his knowledge. Based on this theory, it can therefore be assumed that ESL learners should achieve phonological awareness skills more efficiently through social interaction with the educator as well as among peers in the classroom. Learning ought therefore not to be an isolated unassisted effort of the learner (Turuk, 2008). Furthermore, when learning takes place in the ESL classroom, there are no single points of development. In other words, development occurs within a range of activities, and learning in a social context takes place in zones of proximal development (Goldhaber, 2000).

3.2.2 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is described by Vygotsky (1978:86) as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers". That is to say, ZPD is the range of tasks too difficult for the child to master alone, but that can be

learnt with guidance and assistance of more skilled peers or adults. It is the difference or gap that exists between what a child can do on his/her own and what the child can do with help. According to Vygotsky there is a level of independent performance (what the learner can do alone), and then the level of assisted performance (what the learner can do with support). The independent level is the actual level of development. At this level the child can work independently and has mastered the concept taught. The level of assisted performance is the potential level of development. The child does not yet have the ability to achieve on this level of development without the assistance of an instructor, or as is the case in this study, the educator. Vygotsky therefore compared children's actual developmental level, meaning what they are currently capable of doing, with their mental developmental level, which is the level the children can achieve with help. Furthermore, Vygotskian theory claims what children can achieve with help is more indicative of their mental developmental level, and the mental developmental level is an indication of their true potential and what they are actually capable of doing (Vygotsky, 1978).

In the classroom situation, the ZPD captures the learners' cognitive skills that are maturing, and this can only be accomplished with the assistance of a more-skilled person, namely the educator. Learners should be supported in the ZPD through dialogue and talking, meaning language usage is crucial in the classroom for the learning process. To relate to this study, according to Vygotsky (1978), development of cognitive processes occur within social situations, e.g. structured play in the classroom. Structured play can provide the perfect setting for an educator to guide learners through various stages of phonological awareness skills such as orally breaking up words into syllables or identifying words that rhyme aurally, to more challenging tasks such as phoneme identification and manipulation. Educators should therefore create opportunities in the classroom to allow learners to become aware and involved with concepts of letter sounds and words to prepare them for future reading proficiency.

ZPD is also closely related to scaffolding.

3.2.3 Scaffolding

Within scaffolding, at first the educator who is interacting with the learner assumes most of the responsibility in the classroom for guiding and problem solving. Eventually, the

responsibility is transferred to the child (Schunk, 2008). Scaffolding can therefore be described as adjusting the level of support given to the learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Ukrainetz, 2006; Schunk, 2008).

Schunk (2008) asserts that the scaffold allows learners to acquire skills they would unlikely be able to acquire without assistance. This means that learners are supported during the learning process through scaffolds, meaning assistance which is provided and supplied by the educator.

Various levels of scaffolding that relate to the teaching of phonological awareness are described by McGee and Ukrainetz (2009). Learners with limited knowledge of sounds will not respond if an educator asks the learner “What sound does the word nose start with?” The educator will need to give scaffolds, which are comments or instructions to provide more guidance to enable the learners to answer the question correctly. For instance, the educator first isolates and emphasises the beginning sound without distorting the correct sound and pronunciation. The educator will say the sound and ask the learners to watch the educator’s mouth as she says the sound. “The first sound in nose is /n/. What is the first sound in nose?” Learners reply “/n/” and repeat the /n/ sound a few times, /n/, /n/, /n/. The educator therefore models the correct sound and pronunciation for the learners to follow.

When learners require less support, moderate scaffolding is required. Using the same example as above, the educator asks “What is the first sound in the word nose?” but merely elongates the first sound without distorting the sound and pronunciation thereof. Alternatively, the educator may repeat the first sound before completing the rest of the word, in other words /n/, /n/ nose. The educator may once again ask learners to watch her mouth, but the correct response is not provided to the learners with as intense scaffolding as before.

In minimum scaffolding, the educator merely stresses the first sound while saying the word. “What is the first sound in **n**ose?” Learners now use minimum information and support provided to them and reply /n/. Once learners are successful at isolating and pronouncing the first phoneme with minimum support, the educator continues to ask the learners to accomplish the task without scaffolding. Educators say the word normally

and ask, “What is the first sound in nose?” without any emphasis or clues, and the learners reply /n/.

Over the course of a lesson, and in subsequent lessons, as a learner begins to succeed at tasks with one level of scaffolding, educators reduce the amount of support they provide from intense to moderate to minimal scaffolding until each learner can perform isolated tasks without scaffolding (McGee & Ukrainetz 2009). This is demonstrated in the following diagram:

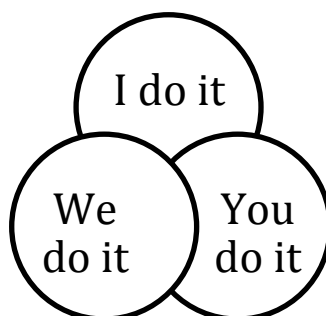


Figure 3.1: The process of Scaffolding (Roe & Wink, 2012)

3.2.4 Cognitive Apprenticeship

The process through which a learner gradually masters a new skill by watching and learning from a more skilled adult or more skilled peer is known as cognitive apprenticeship (Watson, 2002). Vygotsky claims that the child is an apprentice who actively learns by interacting with an adult mentor, who provides knowledge and cognitive tools to the child (Watson, 2002).

Cognitive apprenticeship therefore involves cognitive modelling strategies, with educators and learners serving as role models. Certain actions should be explained and demonstrated while modelling puts their thoughts and reasons into words. Schunk (2008) asserts that if this is not done, learners will not be able to monitor their thinking process. Think aloud strategies allow the learners to build a conceptual model and acquire cognitive and metacognitive skills that are integrated through the process of observation. Learners acquire and learn cognitive processes in realistic contexts so that their thoughts may be processed accordingly in actual situations (Schunk, 2008). To relate this to my study, learners can acquire an understanding of the spoken language through listening to stories or rhymes. This is achieved when the educator reads and re-

reads a story or rhyme to the learners, using the correct pronunciation and modelling appropriate actions. Learners can be asked to recite various parts of the story or rhyme, as well as to act out the story or rhyme. This method not only teaches the learners about the correct sounds of the English language, but in conjunction to this they also learn how to listen and remember the sounds of the language. Learners will consequently be guided to the realization that spoken words are made up of sounds, known as phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness will now be explained and discussed in detail.

3.3 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Phonological awareness originates from the study of language and can be defined as the awareness of knowing that spoken words are made up of sounds (Siegel, 2004). It is a broad term that refers to the ability to focus on the sounds of speech and the several ways sounds function in words, (Manning & Kato, 2006). Schuele and Boudreau (2008) describe phonological awareness as the ability to analyse, make judgments about or manipulate sounds in spoken words. It can be further defined as a person's awareness of the phonological structure of his or her own language. Phonological awareness is more auditory as it focuses on the learner's awareness of the sounds that letters make as well as the sound that they hear in the words (Siegel, 2008).

Ambiguity exists in literature on the overall definition of phonological awareness, which creates challenges to the articulation of a theoretical framework (Morais, 2003). To mention one end of the spectrum, focus is on the ability of an individual to manipulate the smallest individual segments, that is, at the phonemic level. An example of this could be to ask a learner to say which sounds he/she hears in the word "man", based on that, each grapheme corresponds to an individual phoneme, and only the ability to manipulate these individual segments can further the learner's understanding that phonemes can also be represented in an abstract way, by way of graphemes (Geudens, 2010). Other definitions of phonological awareness include the ability to be able to manipulate, segment, blend, delete and change the order of larger speech-sound units (Morais, 2003).

In addition to the debate over definitions, some researchers suggest replacing the term "phonological awareness" with the following terminology: "implicit awareness" and

“explicit awareness”, in order to distinguish between levels of recognition and levels of identification (Goswami & East, 2000; Hulme, Hatcher, Nation, Brown, & Stuart, 2002). Further reasoning behind this terminology is that awareness involves consciousness whereas the term implicit refers to an unconscious level. Implicit awareness therefore refers to tasks that do not require intentional breaking up of the speech stream, whereas explicit awareness on the other hand refers to tasks that require the ability to break up the continuous speech stream and intentionally identify as well as isolate phonological units (Goswami, & East, 2000; Hulme, *et al.*, 2002).

Stanovich (2000) asserts that phonological awareness should be separated from the idea of consciousness, and the term sensitivity should be utilised instead, representing a continuum from shallow sensitivity (large phonological units) to deep sensitivity (small phonological units).

Controversy also exists regarding the sequence of phonological awareness development (Konza, 2011). Phonological awareness skills gradually develop as an infant matures and is exposed to spoken and written language and more opportunities to experiment with language. Phonological awareness has different levels of sound structure, such as syllables, onsets and rimes and phonemes, which involves a variety of skills on a broad continuum (Konza, 2011). To simplify the understanding of the continuum of phonological awareness, it can be described as when a person not only understands that sentences are made up of words and words are made up of small sound units called phonemes, but also understands that words can be segmented into sound “chunks” known as syllables. Each syllable begins with a sound known as the onset and each syllable ends with a sound known as the rime. Syllable-structure awareness involves the following tasks (Konza, 2011):

- Syllable segmentation: e.g. “How many syllables (or parts) are in the word ‘water’?”
- Syllable completion: e.g. “Here is a picture of a rabbit. I’ll say the first part of the word. Can you finish the word? Ra___?”
- Syllable identity: e.g. “Which part of *complete* and *compare* sound the same?”
- Syllable deletion: e.g. “Say peanut. Now say it again without the pea.”

Syllabification preceding onset rime is a heated debate (Ziegler & Goswami, 2005). The most accepted and agreed upon sequence of development is that the development of phonological awareness parallels the onset-rime view of the syllable. This means that spoken syllables are not strings of individual consonants and vowels but rather grouped into the onset and rime.

Syllable → onset- rime → phonemes

Irrespective of arguments concerning the sequence of syllabification and onset rime, a learner with good phonological awareness can apply several different skills, such as recognise the use of rhyming words, break words up into syllables, blend phonemes into syllables and words, identify the beginning and ending sounds in syllables and words and see smaller words within larger words, e.g. “ham” in “hamster” (Geudens, 2003; Konza, 2011).

The skill of hearing syllables, separating them and then blending them is vital to the process of learning to read (Gillon, 2004). Syllabification teaches learners to break up words into syllable units, which they then recognise later in print. This ability of syllabification enhances reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension (Lane, Pullen, Eisele, & Jordan, 2002). Oral syllabification provides learners with the correct pronunciation of the word as learners hear emphasis on certain parts of words and in turn read it correctly in text. When learners skip oral syllabification, they tend to pronounce and read words incorrectly by not knowing where the accent or emphasis on words should fall (Lane *et al.*, 2002). Syllabification can be a daunting task for ESL learners, as English vowel sound knowledge is imperative with syllabification because long or short vowel sounds are determined by the positioning of consonants and other vowels around it in the onset and rime unit (Lane *et al.*, 2002).

Table 3.1: Phonological awareness skills from most basic to most advanced
(Adapted from Moats & Tolman, 2009)

Phonological Skill	Description
Word awareness	Counting the words in sentences
Syllable awareness	Counting, tapping, blending or segmenting a word into syllables.
Responsiveness to rhyme and alliteration during word play	Enjoying and reciting learnt rhyming words or alliterative phrases in familiar stories or nursery rhymes.
Onset and rime	The ability to produce a rhyming word depends on understanding that rhyming words have the same rime. Recognizing a rhyme is much easier than producing a rhyme.

Phoneme awareness	Identify and match the initial sounds in words, then the final and middle sounds (e.g. "Which picture begins with /m/?" "Find another picture that ends in /r/"). Segment and produce the initial sound, then the final and middle sounds (e.g. "What sound does zoo start with?" "Say the last sound in milk"; "Say the vowel sound in rope"). Blend sounds into words (e.g. "Listen: /f/ /ē/ /t/. Say it fast"). Segment the phonemes in two- or three-sound words, moving to four- and five- sound words as the student becomes proficient (e.g. "The word is eyes. Stretch and say the sounds: /ī/ /z/"). Manipulate phonemes by removing, adding, or substituting sounds (e.g. "Say smoke without the /m/").
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Although phonological awareness tasks vary, an operation of identifying, comparing, separating, combining or generating is a basic requirement needed to be performed on the sounds. Learners need to have an awareness of the units of sounds in order to perform these operations (Geudens, 2003; Geudens, Sandra, & Martensen, 2005; Geudens, 2010).

Phonological awareness is often confused with phonemic awareness and phonics and it is therefore important to define these concepts.

3.3.1 Phonemic awareness and phonics

Phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics are often used in discussions about reading, and these terms are often misunderstood or used synonymously. This section will provide definitions of these terms.

Phonemic awareness is a sub-skill of phonological awareness. It is the ability to focus on the separate, individual sounds in words called phonemes (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2003).

Phonemes are defined as “the smallest unit of sound that makes a difference to a word’s meaning” (Armbruster *et al.*, 2003:2). I will illustrate this in the following example; if you change the first phoneme in the word *cap* from /c/ to /m/, you change the word from “cap” to “map”, therefore changing the meaning of the word. Phonemic awareness is a prerequisite for the development of reading and spelling (Armbruster *et al.*, 2003). If learners cannot hear the separate sounds in words, they cannot relate these sounds to the letters of the alphabet and in turn cannot use decoding skills to analyse unknown words (Carroll, Snowling, Hulme, & Stevenson, 2003). Phonemic awareness in itself is not sufficient for literacy acquisition, but alphabet recognition is another essential component thereof. Alphabet recognition involves letter shape recognition, letter-name knowledge, letter-sound knowledge and rapid-letter naming (Manning & Kato, 2006).

A simpler way of explaining phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of a spoken language work together to make words. In other words, when you hear a word, you divide it into the smallest parts (Manning & Kato, 2006). It is thus the learner’s understanding of the minutest sound units in words (Shaywitz, 2003). A learner with strong phonemic awareness will have the ability to hear the repetition of the same consonant sound at the beginning of several different words used in a sentence (alliteration), hear rhyme, and blend and segment phonemes (Kurtz, 2010). While phonological awareness involves a learner’s ability to recognise many ways sounds function in words, phonemic awareness is only the understanding of tiny sound units in words (Gillon, 2004). Phonics will now be defined.

Phonics refers to the relationship between individual sounds (phonemes) and the letters that represent them (graphemes). A phoneme is often represented by a single letter, but can be represented by two letters such as ‘th’, ‘ck’, ‘sh’ or three letters ‘igh’ in the word “high”, and even four letters /ough/ in the word “dough”. The teaching of letter-sound relationships is frequently used to define phonics (Konza, 2011). With phonics, the learner is required to know and match letter or letter patterns with sounds. Learners need to decode words, which involves the art of reading, and encode words, which involves writing (Gillon, 2004).

Manning and Kato (2006) explain phonics as looking at a word and then making a sound-symbol correspondence. It teaches learners to use the relationship between letters of a written language and the individual sounds of spoken language to read and write words.

A report from the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) affirms that knowing that there is a relationship between written letters and spoken sounds will help learners recognise familiar words accurately and decode unfamiliar words, which will contribute greatly to the learner's ability to read words both in isolation and in text.

It is consequently clear that there is a link between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness.

3.3.2 The link between phonemic awareness and phonological awareness

Fundamentally, speech is made up of a sequence of irregular waves of acoustic energy (Tiwari, 2012). The next level of speech is phones, also known as speech sounds. Although the distinction is not generally detected in normal, everyday speech, technically the /p/ in pen and the /p/ in stop are different (Tiwari, 2012). One step removed from this however, lies the distinction between the /s/ and the /p/ in stop – these are known as phonemes. A phoneme in any particular language can be made up of a group of speech sounds that the speakers of that particular language deem to be variations of the same sound (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987; Tiwari, 2012). Phonemes, the smallest units of sound, make a difference in communicating meaning (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). This means, it is a phoneme that determines the difference between e.g. house and mouse, or between lock and lick (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Another example is cited in 3.3.1.

Individuals with phonemic awareness can notice and manipulate these smallest parts of speech (Yopp & Yopp, 2000; Holliman, Wood, & Sheehy, 2008; Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010). There are mainly three tasks that signify phonemic awareness, namely phonemic segmentation, blending and deletion. Segmentation refers to the ability to break words up into phonemes, blending refers to the capacity to link different phonemes together in order to achieve the usual pronunciation of words and deletion is the ability to leave out one or more phonemes when uttering a word. Spoonerism is a fun phonemic awareness activity enjoyed by most learners whereby the first sound in the

first word is swopped with the first sound in the second word, e.g. “felt made” becomes “melt fade” (Troia, 2004).

Phonological awareness is often used interchangeably with phonemic awareness, but phonological awareness actually refers to a person’s ability to notice any size unit of speech. Counting syllables, to think of rhyming words, to separate the beginning of a word from its end, and to segment a word into phonemes all indicate phonological awareness (Yopp & Yopp, 2000; Gillon, 2004; Troia, 2004). Thus, phonemic awareness is a sub-set of phonological awareness. Snider (1997:203) explains: “Phonological and phonemic awareness forms a bridge that enables naïve readers to translate the squiggles on the page into the spoken language they already know.”

Table 3.2: The difference between phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics (Adapted from Konza, 2011; Siegel, 2008; Manning & Kato, 2006; Siegel, 2004; Gillon 2004; Armbruster *et al.*, 2003).

Phonological Awareness	Phonemic Awareness	Phonics
• Is the awareness of knowing that spoken words are made up of sounds. • It involves sound and not print. • Teaching is verbal and aural. • Understanding many ways sounds function in words.	• Is a sub-skill of phonological awareness. • The auditory ability to focus on, individual sounds and differentiate between sounds in words called phonemes. • To manipulate, delete and substitute sounds • Understanding tiny sound units in words.	• The ability to relate individual sounds in spoken words with unique letters of the alphabet. • Letter and sound knowledge and relationship. • Sounds are converted to print in reading and writing.

Phonological Awareness	Phonemic Awareness	Phonics
Example: If a child is phonologically aware, he/she will be aware of: • rhyme • syllables and • display awareness of onset (beginning sound of words.)	Example: This means that if you change the first phoneme in the word ‘cap’ from /c/ to /m/, you change the word from “cap” to “map”, subsequently changing the meaning of the word.	Example: When a child understands that the sounds /c/a/t/ in the word ‘cat’ are represented by the letters ‘c’ ‘a’ ‘t’.

Phonological awareness is acquired through phonological processing which will be subsequently addressed.

3.4 PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSING

Phonological processing is an auditory skill used to process speech (Brady, 1997). As far back as 1987, Wagner and Torgesen identified three phonological processing abilities that are interrelated (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987). These abilities are phonological awareness, phonological memory and retrieval of phonological representations from the lexicon, also known as rapid naming (Wagner & Torgesen, 1987; Troia, 2004). Although these three skills are all correlated, they are distinct kinds of phonological processing abilities. These three abilities appear to be essential to mastery of reading skills in learners and adults (Troia, 2004).

These abilities will be discussed below in order to highlight their influence on reading ability.

- Phonological awareness as discussed earlier in this chapter, refers to the knowledge of many ways sounds function in words, knowledge of rhyme, onset-rime, and syllables (Baddeley, 2003).
- Phonological memory refers to coding information in a system representing sound, for temporary storage. This is also known as short-term memory (Baddeley, 2003). Baddeley, agreeing with Torgesen (1995) states that the part of the memory most

involved in storing phonological information is called the phonological loop. This loop consists of two parts, which work together to provide brief storage of auditory information. The first part is known as a phonological store and retains the most recent two seconds' worth of auditory information. The second part is an articulatory control process. This process firstly provides input to the phonological loop and can retrieve and refresh information currently in the loop to enable it to be stored for longer than two seconds (Torgesen, 1995).

- Rapid naming, also spoken of as RAN, involves efficient retrieval of phonological information from long-term memory. Rapid naming is a process requiring speed and processing of not only phonological information but visual information as well (Anthony, Williams, Mc Donald & Francis, 2007). Rapid naming relates to reading in the following way: When learners read, they should retrieve phonemes associated with letters; they then retrieve information to pronounce these sound segments and finally retrieve the pronunciation of whole words (Baddeley, 2003). A study conducted by Bowers and Wolf in the nineties, concluded that learners with poor performance in rapid naming tasks, experience difficulties with reading fluently, and learners with difficulties in both rapid naming and phonological awareness, appear to experience difficulties with learning to read (Bowers & Wolf, 1993). A substantial amount of evidence from studies by Wagner, Torgesen and Rashotte (1994), Compton (2003), Schatschneider, Fletcher, Francis, Carlson and Foorman (2004), Clarke, Hulme and Snowling (2005) as well as Simpson and Everatt (2005) have confirmed the relation between phonological awareness, phonological processing and reading performance. One can therefore accept that learners with well-developed phonological awareness and efficient phonological processing skills learn to read more easily than learners with poorly developed skills (Wagner & Torgesen Rashotte, 1994; Clarke, Hulme & Snowling, 2005; Simpson & Everatt, 2005).

Phonological delays adversely affect reading ability.

3.4.1 Phonological delays

Phonological delays tend to affect a very young child's speech, making their speech either unclear or difficult to follow. Children with a phonological delay generally present speech more typical of a younger child (Passy, 2007). This is often because the child

with a phonological delay's sound system has been affected either by otitis media or other ear infections, which cause the sound system to develop slower than required, but still normally. The phonological process is imperative for phonological awareness (*cf.* 3.4). Learners with phonological awareness delays have inconsistent use of phonological processing needed for the desired and anticipated pattern of phonological development. These learners need more time to process information to produce desired responses (Gillon, 2006). Phonological delays therefore often occur as a result of delays in phonological awareness, retrieval of phonological codes from long-term memory (rapid automatic naming) and verbal short-term memory (*cf.* 3.4), and not because of cognitive factors (Wagner, Torgesen & Rashotte, 1994; Sodoro, Allinder & Rankin-Erickson, 2002).

According to Carrol and Snowling (2003), learners with phonological delays, struggle with recognition of rhyme, discriminating between sounds, onset and rime, blending and segmenting sounds, producing sound clusters (also known as consonant blends, such as /sn/ or /st/), and syllabification, due to their inability to hold several sounds in their short-term memory (Carrol & Snowling 2003; Anthony *et al.*, 2007). Intervention for learners with phonological delays will be discussed next.

3.4.2 Intervention for phonological delay

A speech and language therapist should assess a learner displaying delays with phonological awareness in order to identify any physical difficulties with hearing itself (Passy, 2007). Johnson and Roseman (2003), Siegel (2004), Gillon (2006) and Shuele and Boudreau (2008) recommend a relevant approach to assist the learner with identifying sounds, such as visual approaches together with sounds when teaching phonological awareness.

Assessing phonological awareness to indicate a phonological delay, involves a variety of tasks.

3.4.3 Assessing phonological awareness

McBride-Chang (1995), Morais (2003) and Geudens (2010), emphasise the variety of tasks needed to assess phonological awareness. These researchers claim that the tasks differ in terms of what the learner is required to achieve. An example of this is

blending sounds versus isolating sounds. In other words, the educator asks the learner to blend /c/ /a/ /t/ to produce the word cat, or asks the learner to identify the medial sound in the word 'cat' which will be /a/. Another example is identifying rhyming words opposed to identifying the unit of sound that is identical in the rhyming words. Learners may be required to recognise words that rhyme, e.g. cat, sat and mat, or learners may be required to identify the 'at' which is identical in the three rhyming words, 'cat, sat and mat.'

In addition to this example, each phonological awareness skill being assessed involves sub-tasks requiring different skills such as listening, holding in memory, performing an operation, and communicating the results of the operation. To illustrate this, different skills are used when asking a learner to identify rhyming words in 'cat, sat and mat' compared to asking a learner to orally present the three sounds in the word 'cat'.

Further controversy involves aspects of the assessment of phonological awareness (Geudens, 2003; Geudens *et al.*, 2005). Perhaps this is because assessment tasks are differentiated in terms of what they require the respondent to do, e.g. blending, segmenting or isolating sounds. They also differ in the level of consciousness required e.g. recognition versus identification of sound units and the level of representation, meaning the syllable versus phonemic level. Geudens *et al.* (2005) consequently asserts that phonological assessment tasks should focus on a range of activities which require a combination of skills such as listening to a prompt, holding it in memory, performing the required operation and communicating the results of the operation.

Although, according to Geudens (2010), there is as yet no clearly articulated theoretical framework for phonological awareness assessment, several assessment tests are available to assess a learner's phonological awareness. However, it is essential that the objective for any educator assessing a learner's phonological awareness skill should be to use clear descriptions to avoid misleading interpretations (Geudens, 2010). Therefore, choosing the most appropriate and well-suited assessment for learners is imperative. To assist with selecting the correct assessment test, the assessor needs to consider the following:

- The degree of difficulty of the test for the learner they will assess.

- Is the test reliable, in other words, does the test provide consistent assessment of a given construct?
- Is the test valid, meaning does it measure what it is meant to measure? (Torgesen & Mathes, 2002; Gillon, 2004; 2006).

Two widely used standardised phonological awareness assessment tests are

- **The Phonological Awareness Test (PAT)**

In 1995, Robertson and Salter designed the PAT, which contains three measures of phonological awareness. They are measures of word, syllable segmentation, and a measure of sensitivity to rhyme. In addition, it contains three additional subtests that measure knowledge of letter-sound correspondences, phonemic decoding as well as invented spelling. The PAT is a comprehensive test and is used on learners ranging from ages five to ten years old (Robertson & Salter, 1995).

- **Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation**

This is a brief test that tests a learner's ability to isolate and pronounce the individual phonemes in words. The test comprises 22 items and has an impressive validity data, based on a seven year longitudinal study, where the same learners who were administered the phoneme segmentation test in pre-school were followed through until the sixth grade (Yopp, 1995).

Educators often use their own assessment tests to assess phonological awareness. An informal but popular assessment test is the Phonological Awareness Skills Test (PAST). This test is an individually administered assessment tool to help educators determine the point of instruction for the learner, and to then monitor progress made from doing selected activities. There is flexibility in the administration of this test, as it is not a standardised test. Educators may first reteach as necessary or add their own words for the learner to blend, segment or delete (Gillon, 2004).

Most phonological awareness assessment tests are grouped into three broad categories: sound comparison, phoneme segmentation and phoneme blending.

3.4.3.1 Sound comparison

With this assessment, learners are required to make comparisons between sounds in different words. An example of this would be to ask a learner to indicate which word begins or ends with the same sound as the word you are showing them, called the target word. Example, “Which word begins with the same first sound, bat, cake, fan or boy?”. Tasks in this category increase with difficulty, as they are age related. Learners may also be required to generate their own words with the beginning sound of the target word (Torgesen & Mathes, 2002). In many tests, rhyme is included, which under this section means, the learner needs to generate a word that rhymes with a word given e.g. “Can you think of a word that rhymes with cat?”

3.4.3.2 Phoneme segmentation

Phoneme segmentation involves counting phonemes, deleting, adding and even reversing phonemes in words together with the pronunciation thereof (Gillon, 2006). This involves a comprehensive level of phonemic awareness. An example of this will be to ask a learner to say all the sounds in the word ‘cat’. Furthermore, the educator as assessor can ask the learner to say e.g. “bark” without the /k/. Syllabification can be included here, meaning breaking up words into chunks. Each syllable begins with a sound known as the onset and each syllable ends with a sound known as the rime, e.g. f – un with /f/ being the onset and -un being the rime (Passy, 2007) (cf.3.3).

3.4.3.3 Phoneme blending

With phoneme blending, the educator or assessor pronounces a series of phonemes in isolation, and asks the learner to blend the sounds to form a word and pronounce the word. An example of this is to ask the child “What word will the following sounds make /s/ /i/ /t/?” (Torgesen & Mathes, 2002).

The influence of phonological awareness on reading will now be discussed.

3.5 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND READING

“Reading does not occur naturally but is rather a process that requires careful instruction,” according to Lerner (2003: 397). A generally accepted definition of reading by Manzo and Manzo (1995:10) is: “Reading is comprehending, interpreting, and

applying textual material.” In 2011, South Africa participated in pre PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), which is a shorter and easier test at a lower level of cognitive demand compared to the actual PIRLS. The pre PIRLS serves as a bridge for developing countries to eventual participation in the more demanding PIRLS. In spite of the test being simplified, South African Grade 4 learners still performed at a lower level overall in comparison to their international counterparts (Howie, Van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman, 2012). Literacy levels in South Africa thus remain a challenge. The roots of the low literacy performance in these Grade 4 learners, according to Zimmerman and Smit (2014) can be said to be ineffective teaching of reading in schools.

The National Reading Panel (2002) claimed that if phonics and phonological awareness teaching is introduced early in a learner’s education, it is deemed more effective for learning to read if introduced before the first grade. Phonological awareness teaching should, however, not be ignored after the first grade. Emphasis here is simply on the advantage of early exposure to phonological awareness teaching on better reading skill acquisition.

Phonological awareness is shown to be the most important precursor in developing reading ability and is important for the transfer from spoken language to written language (Gillon, 2004). Research has shown that focus on intensifying and establishing phonological awareness skills at an early age, leads to better reading performance (Snowling, 2001; Bryant, 2002; Hatcher, Hulme & Snowling, 2004; Hogan, Catts & Little, 2005; Wood, 2006; Menzies, Mahdavi, & Lewis, 2008; Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010; De Sousa & Broom, 2011). Reading depends mostly on phonological decoding, making phonological awareness imperative. As learners grow older, decoding speed and rapid automatic naming becomes a more important predictor of reading ability (Van den Bos, Zijlstra & Spelberg, 2002). It is important to note that a learner’s reading accuracy is more related to phonological awareness skills, while reading speed is associated with rapid automatic naming (Baddeley, 2003; Savage & Frederickson, 2005). This is because, when learners read, they should retrieve phonemes associated with letters. They then retrieve information to pronounce these sound segments, and finally retrieve the pronunciation of whole words (*cf.* 3.4). In other words, the faster the

retrieval of phonemes associated with letters, the faster the reading speed (Baddeley, 2003; Savage & Frederickson, 2005).

According to Torgesen, Alexander, Wagner, Rashotte, Voeller and Conway (2001), the teaching of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics instils an awareness of word structure in learners by allowing them to generalise the rules they have mastered with phonological awareness teaching, and then applying it to reading new words. When learners practise the writing of letters, which represent the sounds, it allows them to recognise that their spoken words can be segmented into smaller parts and visually represented in written form (*cf.* 3.5.1.2).

Once learners are equipped with this knowledge, they realise for themselves that reading requires a multitude of sound correspondences; this means that learners realise there is a relationship between the sound and the written words.

Studies by various researchers (Torgesen *et al.*, 2001, Griffiths & Snowling, 2002; Hulme, Snowling, Caravolas & Carrol, 2005) have found that when phonological awareness and phonetic decoding skills are taught systematically and explicitly, learners who are weak readers show stronger reading growth compared to weak readers who are not taught phonological awareness and phonetic decoding skills explicitly. One can therefore say that there seems to be growing consensus among researchers that phonological awareness, in particular the understanding that spoken words are structured and comprise individual sounds and the combinations of sounds, influences learning to read (Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004).

Whether onset-rime awareness is a better predictor of learning to read than phonemic awareness is another controversial debate. Geudens (2003; 2010) emphasises the importance of onset-rime, which parallels syllable structure. In the word 'drank', the onset /dr/ is the initial consonant or consonant group that exists before the vowel and the rime is the rest of the word /ank/. Geudens (2003) postulates that onset rime awareness is significantly related to measures of phonemic awareness, i.e. blending, segmenting and deleting sounds, and early signs of reading (Hulme, *et al.*, 2002, Geudens, 2003). Once learners can recognise onset and rime, syllables and rhyming words, they develop phonemic awareness through learning to read. An example to illustrate onset-rime ability versus phonemic awareness is that beginner readers

generally find it easier to segment the word 'cat' into onset-rime units (c –at) than into phoneme size units (/c/ /a/ /t/). Anthony *et al.* (2004) argue that the cognitive tasks involved in the above two skills vary. They emphasise the importance of onset-rime awareness and claim phonemic awareness will develop partly as a consequence of learning to read.

The literature indicates more controversy over whether rhyme is a predictor of learning to read or not. Adams (1990) and Hulme *et al.* (2002) propose that rhyme detection tasks involve a phonological ability, which is a precursor to reading. In other words, proficient rhyming skills lead to better reading. Anthony *et al.* (2004), however, argue that their research proves that phonemic awareness is a stronger predictor to reading than rhyme; they consequently claim that rhyme is not an important precursor to reading.

According to Shanahan (2015), the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP), (2008) analysed the influence of rhyme on reading skill. The NELP asserted that rhyming ability is predictive of reading achievement later on in a learner's development, but rhyme has the weakest correlation to reading achievement of all the other phonological and phonemic awareness skills. Shanahan (2015) concludes that many phonological awareness intervention programmes use rhyming activities, but not as the primary teaching approach. It appears then that there are researchers who believe that the teaching of sounds and letters seems to have a significantly positive impact on learning as opposed to rhyme. McNorgan, Awati, Desroches and Booth (2014) suggest that, the rhyming skills of learners improve as they learn to read and improve their reading, instead of better rhyming leading to better reading. If a learner struggles with rhyme, educators should pay attention to it, but not use rhyme as a screening programme to identify potential reading difficulties (Shanahan, 2015).

Phonological awareness and reading are reciprocal, according to Lerkannen, Rasku-Puttonen, Aunola and Nurmi (2004) who studied 85 Grade 1 learners in Finland, and found that initial reading performance predicted phonological and phonemic awareness in the beginning of Grade 1, while the development of phonological and phonemic awareness predicted reading performance at the end of Grade 1. Therefore, it is obvious that phonological awareness and reading go hand in hand.

3.5.1 Educator knowledge about phonological awareness

3.5.1.1 Educator training

Research indicates that many educators do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to teach phonological awareness effectively (McCutchen *et al.*, 2002; Chessman *et al.*, 2009). Several international studies have been conducted to explore if the training of educators on phonological awareness actually had an impact on their learners' phonological awareness skills.

McCutchen *et al.* (2002) assessed and measured Grade 1 and Pre-school educators' knowledge of phonological and phonemic awareness, and found that educators overall lacked knowledge and skills regarding phonological awareness and confused phonological awareness with phonics. After many of these educators had been sent for intensive in-service training regarding phonological awareness and the teaching thereof, McCutchen *et al.* (2002) found that their phonological awareness knowledge improved significantly, and that they were more able to select appropriate materials and teaching aids to teach phonological awareness. One year later, the phonological awareness and basic reading skills of the learners whom these educators taught, had improved significantly.

Spear-Swerling, Brucker and Alfano (2005) found that, after selected educators with inadequate phonological awareness knowledge had attended six hours of classroom teaching and instruction on phonological awareness, decoding and word structure, the reading and spelling skills of the learners in these educators' classrooms improved remarkably over a period of time.

In 2009, Chessman *et al.* (2009) did a similar study and assessed 223 first year educators' knowledge of phonological awareness in special education, pre-school and primary school education. Results indicated that a significant number of educators were inadequately prepared and skilled regarding phonological awareness knowledge and teaching thereof. Chessman *et al.* (2009) found that educators confused phonological awareness with phonics and could not select task appropriate activities for phonological awareness. It was suggested by this research study that pre-service educator education programmes need to improve in order to capacitate educators with better knowledge

and skills regarding phonological awareness. According to this research, this will improve general reading skills of learners (Chessman *et al.*, 2009).

The above mentioned studies emphasise that educators need to be more specifically trained on phonological awareness, making the importance of this study even more critical.

3.5.1.2 Teaching phonological awareness

As phonological awareness involves sound and not print, Siegel (2004) suggests teaching of these skills should therefore be more verbal and aural. Konza (2006) asserts that phonological awareness should be taught by using a literacy programme which includes language development and comprehension activities. To reiterate the benefits of combining phonological awareness using a literacy programme, Bobrick (2007) explains that spoken language naturally develops before written language, and when language is incomprehensible to the ear, it makes even less sense when learners are required to read the language. The more learners hear new words, use them and manipulate them, the more likely they are to retain new vocabulary and recognise the words when they see them in print (Bobrick, 2007). A lack of comprehension is due to a lack of prior knowledge or experience with the words used in the language. Educators should therefore encourage oral conversations with the learners after reading stories or rhymes to enhance their language development (Stempleski, 2007). Wallace Nilsson (2011) asserts young learners display curiosity for sounds, rhymes and words in a second language and educators should utilise this to promote and encourage proficient pronunciation at the earliest stage of second language acquisition. Encouragement of correct pronunciation of English sounds at the earliest stages of English language acquisition according to Wallace Nilsson (2011) is needed in order for learners to underpin the phonetical and phonological structures of the English language. Fossilizing incorrect pronunciation and language patterns in ESL learners must be avoided and a solid foundation on which learners build their language skills should be provided in order for them to develop as proficient ESL speakers (Wallace Nilsson, 2011).

Siegel (2004) emphasises that the use of visual approaches with illustrating pictures representing a sound or shared sounds, have proven to be extremely effective in teaching phonological awareness, because learners learn to identify sounds much

quicker and easier. Other researchers (Johnson & Roseman, 2003; Gillon, 2004; Siegel, 2004; Konza, 2006; C.L. Brown, 2007; Schuele & Boudreau, 2008) affirm that word recognition and letter knowledge and decoding have proven to develop faster as a result of illustrated pictures together with corresponding print.

Passy (2007) asserts that phonological awareness teaching should provide a sound foundation for reading skills, and as every learner is a unique individual, educators need to incorporate multisensory activities when teaching phonological awareness, including the following:

- Visual: Illustrating pictures representing a sound or shared sounds.
- Auditory: Asking learners to identify the rhyming words in a story or rhyme.
- Tactile: Educators can ask learners to make objects in clay, starting with the sound /c/, e.g. carrot and cat. Touching objects such as wooden alphabet cards or words made with play dough also form part of tactile activities.
- Kinaesthetic: Should involve the use of body movements e.g. roll up and pretend you are the letter 'o' (Passy, 2007).

Every step of phonological awareness needs effective planning and teaching. Part of the planning includes meeting the language needs of second language learners (the focus of this study) by providing enough visual aids and input to assist learners with identifying vocabulary to assist them with clarifying meaning and names of words. Johnson and Roseman (2003) as well as Passy (2007) recommend that, when teaching phonological awareness, groups of words containing the same pattern should be taught, such as cvc (consonant – vowel-consonant) words: /pen/, /hen/, /den/ as well as words with the same consonant blend pattern ccvc (consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant) such as blend, block, black, etc.

There appears to be dissimilarity in the literature with regard to the sequence of phonological awareness teaching. Adams (1990) identifies five levels when teaching phonological awareness. The first level of difficulty is regarded as the ability to remember rhyming words. This is followed by the ability to identify and manipulate patterns of rhyme and alliteration in words. At the third level, the learner should develop knowledge that syllables must be divided into phonemes and show understanding with

sounds of isolated phonemes. Full segmentation and blending is the fourth level of difficulty while the fifth level requires the most difficult tasks such as adding, deleting or moving phonemes around. This is also known as phoneme manipulation (Adams, 1990).

Johnson and Roseman (2003) argue that learners are first exposed to the structure of speech when hearing words in sentences. When teaching phonological awareness to young learners and ESL learners, sentences should first be broken up into single words to demonstrate the characteristics of a sentence. Thereafter, words are broken up into syllables, followed by recognising rhyme, and then alliteration. Onset-rime is then taught, and thereafter identifying first and final sounds in words. Finally, segmenting, blending, manipulating sounds by deleting and adding phonemes are taught (Johnson & Roseman, 2003).

Shuele and Boudreau (2008, as cited in Wessels, 2011) introduced and developed a ladder specifically for phonological awareness instruction and intervention in sequence, which differs from the five levels of Adams, but coincides with Johnson and Roseman (2003). This is illustrated in the following diagram:

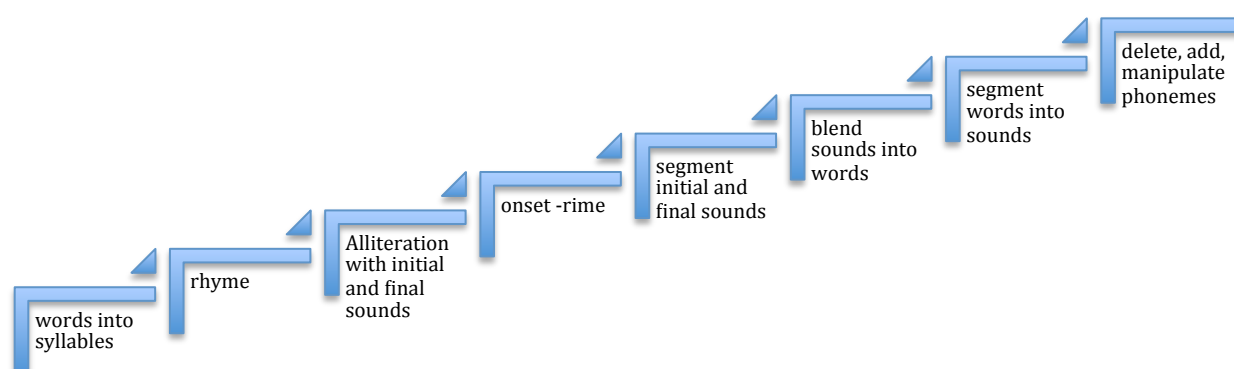


Figure 3.2: Ladder of phonological awareness instruction and intervention
(Shuele & Boudreau, 2008 as cited in Wessels, 2011)

Another controversy is the belief that learners can develop onset-rime awareness before the start of reading whereas phonemic awareness develops as a result of

learning to read. The argument is that learners' onset and rime awareness is usually explored in rhyme activities, whereas phonemic awareness is mostly explored in more difficult tasks involving blending, segmenting and deletion of sounds (Guedens *et al.*, 2005). Duncan, Seymour and Hill (1997), as well as Goswami and East (2000) claim that phonemic awareness emerge prior to onset-rime awareness. They argue that phonemes are more easily identified than larger rime units and that there is progression from phonemes (small units of sound) to larger units as reading development proceeds.

However, Snow, Griffin and Burns (2005) maintain that besides the sequence, phonological awareness instruction requires educators to understand the implications thereof on reading. Educators consequently need to have competent skills regarding comprehensive, intensive and supportive instruction of phonological awareness, which is imperative for learners to progress not only with reading *per se* but with academic work overall, as reading is imperative for all subjects (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004; Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005).

The Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2011a) emphasises that educators need to keep in mind that phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics instruction should not only be rote learning which involves a drill and repeat exercise, but should rather be short, fun and regular exercises throughout the Foundation Phase. Through verbal interaction and engagement in oral activities such as storytelling, songs, rhymes and games, children learn sounds, vocabulary and linguistic structures, all of which aid language development (DBE, 2011a; Nel & Nel, 2012).

3.6 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Attention will be given to the language development stages relevant to phonological awareness.

3.6.1 Emerging language stage (12 – 18 months) (Nel & Nel, 2012)

Although children make only single word utterances during this stage, by age three, children have acquired the following phonemes: /m/, /b/, /n/, /w/, /d/, /p/, /h/. They are also able to utter understandable words.

3.6.2 Developing language stage (27 months – 46 months) (Nel & Nel, 2012)

During this stage most of the basic language structures are acquired, as well as conversation and narrative discourse. Most of the phonemes are acquired during this stage, and after the age of three, children are able to string consonants together.

3.6.3 Language for learning stage (Nel & Nel, 2012)

By school going age, learners enter a phase of more formal language learning which includes aspects of literacy like reading, writing, the use of figurative language and abstract discourse. At this stage learners' phonological system is almost on par with that of an adult.

Overall language development is closely linked to the development of phonological awareness since the extent of learners' vocabulary, as well as their knowledge and use of receptive and expressive semantics, syntax and morphology predict phonological awareness skills.

A brief description of the structure of language and its relevance to phonological awareness will be given below.

3.7 STRUCTURE OF LANGUAGE

The structure of language is divided into spoken language (listening and speaking) and written language (reading and writing). Language is therefore also classified as receptive (listening and reading) and expressive (speaking and writing). Spoken and written language, each comprises five basic components namely: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics (Berko Gleason, 2005).

In this study the focus is not on the structure of language, however phonological awareness involves aural and oral language (listening and speaking), that develops prior to written language (Gillon, 2004). Cain and Oakhill (2007) proclaim that from an early age phonological awareness together with the correct usage of the five components of language must be developed before focusing on print based concepts such as sound-symbol correspondence (*cf.* 3.3). The reason for this, in relation to this study, is to equip learners with proficient oral and aural language skills (phonological

awareness) leading to phonemic awareness (*cf.* 3.3.1), and eventually phonics (*cf.* 3.3.1) that involves the written language skill for reading and writing (Cain & Oakhill, 2007).

A short definition of each language component and how it develops from phonological awareness to phonics is tabulated below.

Table 3.3: Language components

	Spoken Language	Spoken Language	Written Language	Written Language
5 Language Domains	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Phonology (ASHA, 2010; Carr & Honeybone, 2007; Snow <i>et al.</i> , 2005).	Phonology is the knowledge of sound and speech structure meaning the ability to identify and distinguish between sounds while listening i.e. phonological awareness.	Involves the appropriate use of phonological patterns while speaking.	Understanding of letter sound associations while reading i.e. phonics	Accurate spelling of words while writing
Morphology (ASHA, 2010; Hale & Reiss, 2008; Snow <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	Understanding morphemes when listening. Morphology involves the study of the smallest units of meaning, namely morphemes. These include to include base words e.g. “love”, and affixes such as “un” and “re”, as well as the	Using morphemes correctly when speaking.	Understanding grammar while reading.	Understanding and using appropriate grammar when writing.

	plural “s” or “es” and the past tense “ed”.			
Syntax (ASHA, 2010)	Understanding the sentence structure i.e. correct word order, when listening. Knowledge of syntax allows us to recognise incorrect usage of the language, e.g. to the school we are going (instead of) we are going to the school.	Understanding and using the correct sentence structure when speaking.	Understanding the sentence structure while reading.	Using the correct sentence structure when writing.
Semantics (Carr & Honeybone 2007)	Figurative language and rich descriptive language which is cultural dependent and adds colour to our communication, e.g. someone who is ‘green with envy’ has not changed colour.			
Pragmatics (ASHA, 2010; Snow <i>et al.</i> , 2005)	Understanding the social aspects of spoken language	Understanding the social use of a spoken language	Understanding the conversational style being read.	Writing with the applicable conversational style

Various perceptual skills are vital to acquire phonological awareness. These skills will now be discussed.

3.8 PERCEPTUAL SKILLS

Perception, as described and defined by Winkler (2005), is the ability to use the five senses namely, hearing, seeing, touching, smelling and tasting in order to become aware of information.

3.8.1 Auditory Perception

In relation to this study, general listening skills are essential for phonological awareness instruction, as the learner is required to listen and distinguish between sounds of speech making auditory perception essential for learning. A generally accepted definition of auditory perception is the ability to interpret data received via the ears (Hugo, 2014). Individuals with auditory perception difficulties do not experience difficulties with actual hearing, but rather difficulties with interpreting sounds heard (Hugo, 2014).

3.8.1.1 The Role of central auditory processing (CAP) and phonological awareness

CAP is a part of our everyday existence, meaning that our brains need to take in auditory information, process it, interpret it and then respond appropriately. Our brains analyse the sound that enters it and we then make sense of it. We therefore use auditory information to communicate and learn (Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010).

Phonological awareness difficulties and disorders may be closely linked to auditory processing disorders, also known as (APD), as hearing is the main route for language acquisition. With APD, information enters the auditory pathway, but the information cannot travel past the eighth auditory nerve through the brainstem into the brain. Information that has been heard is therefore not interpreted correctly. This directly affects a learner's phonological awareness skills, as there are limitations with the ongoing analysis, organisation, transformation, storage and retrieval of sounds (Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010).

According to ASHA (2010) and Hugo (2014), Central Auditory Processing relating to phonological awareness involves the following auditory tasks:

- Auditory discrimination: the ability to identify and distinguish one sound from another. This skill is also used in phonological awareness where learners have to distinguish between phonemes such as /p/ from /d/.
- Auditory synthesis: the ability to blend and join sounds to form words. The learner realises that long words can be broken up into smaller parts such as but-ter-fly is butterfly.
- Auditory analysis: the ability to break up words into their individual sound constituents such as butterfly is but-ter-fly.
- Auditory blending: the ability to synthesise the phonemes (smallest sound units) if the phonemes are produced with separation between them. Example, if the word cat is pronounced /c/ /a/ /t/, the listener will have to blend it to form the word “cat”.
- Auditory closure: the skills we use when we have not heard a part of a message. In order for the brain to interpret the message, one has to rely on auditory skills to bridge the gap between what one has heard to determine what one has not heard. An example of this is when one only hears “please come and ... your food” (eat is not heard).
- Auditory memory: the ability to retain information received via the auditory channel both immediately and after a delay. This skill is imperative in the classroom for the development of literacy skills, as learners need to process and recall what has been heard in order to carry out instructions.
- Auditory figure-ground: the ability to hear sounds against background noise and be able to identify the sound heard correctly. Learners will struggle to concentrate when there is a background noise if they have difficulties with figure-ground skills.

To provide a synopsis of the above, problems with auditory processing is undoubtedly recognised as a significant part of learning difficulties when learning to read. This is because auditory components of reading and phonological awareness such as discriminating between sounds, and blending and segmenting sounds heard, are fundamental skills needed when learning to read (Zhang & McBride, 2010).

Auditory processing precedes speech perception.

3.8.2 Speech Perception

Speech perception is defined as the visual process by which the sounds of a language are interpreted and understood (Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010), and is closely linked to the study of phonology (*cf.* 3.7). Speech perception difficulties could disrupt the normal development of phonological awareness skills and lead to reading and spelling difficulties (Mayo, Scobbie, Hewlett & Waters, 2003; Warrier, Johnson, Hayes, Nicol, & Kraus, 2004).

Reading also requires the skill of visual perception.

3.8.3 Visual Perception

Visual perception is the skill and ability of receiving and interpreting visual information received through the eyes. It is imperative to understand that experiencing difficulties with visual perception does not mean vision related difficulties, but rather the inability to gain, interpret and organise the correct meaning from visuals such as pictures, written words and objects (Hugo, 2014).

Studies by Hood and Conlon (2004) confirm that visual processing is related to orthographic ability. Phonological awareness, orthographic ability and verbal short-term memory are unique predictors of literacy development in learners. Hood and Conlon (2004) conclude that phonological awareness, as well as auditory and visual temporal processing, relates to different precursors of reading. Research by Boets, Wouters, Van Wieringen, De Smedt and Ghesquie're (2007) found that reasons for literacy difficulties in literacy impaired learners in their study, showed eighty per cent (80%) phonological awareness difficulties as opposed to forty per cent (40%) who showed auditory, visual and speech perception difficulties. This study alone emphasises the significance of phonological awareness.

Since the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) outlines the curriculum requirements, it forms a backdrop against which all classroom activities occur. CAPS also delineates the parameters within which the educator feels that he or she can implement new classroom practices or new support programmes. It is therefore important to discuss curriculum requirements since these have a significant influence on the compilation of the support programme for this study.

3.9 CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS

According to the CAPS (DBE, 2011a) schools can choose whether to focus relatively more or less time to the First Additional Language, depending on the needs of the learners. CAPS offer a minimum time and a maximum time for teaching EFAL. Schools with learners having no English background and who receive little to no English support at home will need to utilise the maximum amount of time required for EFAL to teach and reinforce English, as this is their only exposure to the English language.

Although the DBE does not prescribe how to allocate a certain period of time per language component, the following suggestions for the minimum and maximum time per component for the First Additional Language are tabulated below (DBE, 2011a).

In this study, the focus is on English FAL. According to the education policy, the LoLT is allowed to be on a FAL level if it is the second language of the learners. Regarding the two schools participating in this study, Setswana is predominantly the home language of most learners and their LoLT is Setswana, which they therefore do on home language level.

Table 3.4: Minimum time given to First Additional Language

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Listening & Speaking	1 hour 30 minutes	45 minutes	1 hour
Reading & phonics	30 minutes	45 minutes	1 hour
Writing		30 minutes	30 minutes
Language Use			30 minutes
	2 hours per week	2 hours per week	3 hours per week

Table 3.5: Maximum time given to First Additional Language

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Listening & Speaking	1hour 30 minutes	1 hours	1 hour

Reading & Phonics	1hour 15 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes
Writing	15 minutes	30 minutes	1 hour
Language Use			30 minutes
	3 hours per week	3 hours per week	4 hours per week

Additionally, CAPS guides educators on what learners are expected to learn and achieve by the end of each Grade. The reason for this is to instil the goals in the curriculum that learners should have developed the ability to express themselves clearly in English FAL by the time they reach Grade 4 where the LoLT is English only (DBE, 2011a).

This is however problematic as learners have different learning skills and learning needs and cannot all be expected to achieve the goals set out in CAPS if educators have not been adequately trained in differentiating the curriculum to address various learning needs (Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart, & Lyner-Cleophas, 2012). According to Engelbrecht (2006) and Chataika *et al.* (2012), frameworks need to be set in place to equip educators with adequate skills to teach learners with various learning needs and cater for their individual learning requirements. It seems that educator training in South Africa provides insufficient training to educators on how to cope and teach in a classroom of learners with diverse needs, thus creating stressful situations for educators and restricted progress of learners (Engelbrecht, 2006; Chataika *et al.*, 2012).

To accelerate the process of attaining this goal, phonological awareness can be integrated and reinforced in various language components prescribed by CAPS (DBE, 2011a). Integration is possible as activities for phonological awareness are brief, aural and fun (Armbruster *et al.*, 2003). Research (Gunning, 2001; Armbruster *et al.*, 2003; Gillon, 2004; Konza, 2006) as well as the DBE (2011a) suggests that ten to fifteen minutes per day should be spent on deliberately teaching phonological awareness.

A synopsis will now be given of the components according to CAPS (DBE, 2011a) as well as examples of integrating phonological awareness in these components; namely, listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and language use.

3.9.1 Listening and Speaking

In the Foundation Phase, learners need to be exposed to a substantial amount of oral language, and listening and speaking activities in the First Additional Language (English in the case of this study). This can be done in the form of telling stories to the learners and by giving classroom instructions, e.g. “Please come here, Lerato.” The educator provides positive feedback if the learner understands or repeats the instruction, emphasising gestures more strongly, should the learner not understand. Stories, action rhymes and songs combined with physical activities support the learning of oral vocabulary, understanding of the English Language as well as memory of the language (DBE, 2011a). In addition to this, the educator can use a sentence from a story and ask the learners to listen to the number of words in the sentence. Learners can then clap the number of words they have heard. Educators can point out rhyming words in stories, songs and rhymes. To help the learner focus on the different sounds of the word, the educator can, emphasise the initial sound of the word aurally by selecting certain words from the stories or rhymes. Example, the educator says: “Listen to the word bag, /b/ ag,” and asks the learners “What is the first sound you hear in /b/ ag?” Additionally, if a story or rhyme is used, it places the words into context and meaning is added to the words. Scaffolding can be applied to adapt to and gradually increase the level of the learners (*cf.* 3.2.3).

Gillon (2004) reiterates that the understanding of sounds precedes understanding of the written word, making phonological awareness the most important precursor in developing reading ability, and it is important for the transfer from spoken language to written language (*cf.* 3.5). Phonological awareness instruction and literacy instruction therefore must go hand in hand, since literacy instruction improves phonological awareness skills and phonological awareness instruction improves reading skills (Engen & Høien, 2002).

3.9.2 Reading

Phonological awareness can be integrated into all reading activities. Example learners can identify initial, medial and final sounds in selected words from the story, their reading books or labelled objects used for incidental reading. For incidental reading educators can bring familiar advertisements of brand names to class and see if the

learners recognise brand names. Educators can also label objects in the classroom in both the Home Language and FAL. Words taken from these activities can be used for phonological awareness activities. Once again, it is important that educators should employ the correct level of scaffolding (*cf.* 3.2.3).

3.9.2.1 From phonological awareness to phonics in CAPS

The following discussion will explain the development from phonological awareness to phonics in the Foundation Phase as prescribed in CAPS.

Requirements for English First Additional language in Grade 1 stipulate that learners need to segment oral sentences into individual words by clapping on each word. It is suggested that educators can either select a sentence from a story or invent their own sentence. Furthermore, learners need to clap out syllables in familiar words, identify rhyming words, and also begin to identify different initial sounds in words, e.g. /j/ in jump. Learners are also required to aurally recognise plurals ('s' and 'es').

In Grades 2 and 3, learners are required to combine phonemic awareness together with phonics. Educators are instructed to revise single letter sounds, beginning with letter-sound relationships that are the same in the home language and which are important in English. Learners are required to build short familiar words orally and/or in writing, using sounds they already know in Setswana, which correspond with English. This is known as cross-language transference.

Researchers (Cummins, 2000; Parran & Williams, 2007) assert that learners learning in their mother tongue are more likely to succeed in phonological awareness and reading skills than learners taught in a language they encounter for the first time when they go to school (Cummins, 2000; Parran & Williams, 2007). They accept the benefits of cross-language transference of letter and sound knowledge for the development of phonological awareness and reading skills easier when learning a second language. Transference will be more effective if the learners are fluent first language (mother tongue) speakers, since they will be better able to relate to the units of sound in the first language and transfer the knowledge to the second language (Cummins, 2000).

Furthermore, learners in Grade 2 and 3 are required to recognise and group words orally and/or written into word families, e.g. p-ig, f-ig, w-ig (onset and rime). Thereafter

isolate and build sounds known as blending and segmenting, e.g. /d/ /o/ /g/ - dog (phonemic awareness) and recognise words in text with comprehension (phonics) (DBE, 2011a).

CAPS often refer to aural and oral assessment activities in the document as “phonics” (DBE, 2011a: 51). However, the correct terminology as suggested by Manning and Kato (2006) is phonological and phonemic awareness activities if it is aural and oral, and phonics if it involves writing. Definitions between phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics should be explicitly explained in CAPS for educators to distinguish between the three components (*cf.* 3.3.1).

Phonics is defined by Manning and Kato (2006) as looking at a word and then making a sound-symbol correspondence. It teaches learners to use the relationship between letters of a written language and the individual sounds of spoken language to read and write words (*cf.* 3.3.1).

3.9.3 CAPS incorporate phonics with writing.

Learners learn the skill of handwriting and letter formation in their Home Language first and then apply this knowledge to the FAL. Writing activities in Grade 1 are very simple and only commence in the FAL in term 3. In Grades 2 and 3, writing in FAL becomes more focused and challenging where learners are expected to write short simple sentences, instructions and a simple story (DBE, 2011a).

Regarding phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics, CAPS stipulates that learners can identify rhyming words and initial sounds in words, blend and segment words, as well as build their own words orally or in writing. Educators are therefore encouraged to perform the oral and aural activities and integrate the sound in a grade appropriate writing activity (DBE, 2011a).

3.9.4 Curriculum Language Structure and Use

In Grade 1, grammar and vocabulary in the FAL are learnt incidentally through exposure to language in stories, songs and poems, listening and speaking, all conducive to phonological awareness as it involves aural activities. In Grades 2 and 3, learners

acquire more grammar and vocabulary not only through listening to English but also via reading English (DBE, 2011a).

Since learning a second language is usually a challenge for most learners (Kaweera, 2013), it is essential that all language activities should occur in a warm, accommodating, accepting and relaxed environment for the learners. Teaching should be stimulating and fun to ensure active participation and interaction (*cf.* 3.2.1). Adjacent to this, educators need to understand possible barriers to learning learners could experience, pertaining to phonological awareness when learning a second language.

3.10 PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Second language learners face two types of language difficulties. These difficulties are inter-lingual learning problems, caused by mother tongue interference, and intra-lingual learning problems, caused by the structure of the second language (Kaweera, 2013). To explain this, according to Selinker (1972:214) whose definition is the most widely accepted, inter-lingual language interference refers to “the set of utterances for most learners of a second language is not identical to the hypothesised corresponding set of utterances which would have been produced by a native speaker of a target language had he attempted to express the same meaning as the learner.”

An example of inter-lingual interference in a Setswana learner would be: ‘I read buka’ instead of ‘I read a book’. Intra-lingual interference refers to errors made by the learner as a result of faulty or partial learning of the English language rather than from language transfer (Gass & Selinker, 2008; H.D. Brown, 2007).

In other words, if learners do not perceive the differences between the rules of the mother tongue and that of the second language, he/she will continuously apply the language rules of the mother tongue to the second language. Cummins (2000) regards this as transferring what you already know about performing one task to performing another or a similar task.

If a learner’s language proficiency is poorly developed and not at an age appropriate level, the phonological awareness skills will probably be delayed, considering these form a pivotal component of language development. Delays with language development

therefore disrupt normal development of phonological awareness skills, thus impacting negatively on other skills such as speaking, reading, spelling and comprehension (Roth & Baden, 2001; Warrier *et al.*, 2004; Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010; Moats & Hancock, 2012).

Moats and Hancock (2012) explain difficulties experienced by ESL learners in more depth. ESL learners do not only experience difficulties with word recognition as a result of insufficient phonological awareness skills, but language comprehension is also hampered, as they don't understand the meaning of the words they hear. This could be as a result of difficulties when distinguishing between sounds and/or discriminating between similar sounds, due to the English language having an irregular system of letter and sound correspondence, such as the sound /f/ is represented by /ph/.

Nel and Nel (2012) further explain that ESL learners struggle with fluency of speech as the ability to decode words in a second language is often hampered. Although phonological awareness skills can be transferred from mother tongue to a second or third language (*cf.* 3.9.2.1), Noble (2002) believes that it could pose challenges such as the orthography of a particular language having an impact on phonological development. Learning to read a transparent orthography is simpler, because there is a stronger relationship between each letter and its corresponding sound than in a more opaque orthography. Some linguistic units are more important in some languages than others. Example, in Setswana the last syllable of all verbs in the present tense end in the vowel /a/, whilst in English verbs in the present tense could end in almost any of the vowels or consonants of the language.

Broom (2004) and Le Roux (2005) found that the influence of a different grammatical, morphological and semantic structure of an African Language may cause ESL learners to have lower language proficiency levels in English, resulting in learners' poor application of skills required for reading (including phonological awareness). The sequence of development of phonological awareness in English is different compared to an African Language. Research conducted by Noble (2002) confirms that the development of phonological awareness in Zulu learners differed from the development of phonological awareness in English learners. In Zulu, learners' alliteration skills developed before rhyme where English learners' rhyme skills developed before alliteration. To indicate another difference between an African language and English; in

spoken Setswana, a syllable consists of only one consonant followed by a vowel (cv), or a syllable could be a vowel alone (v), whereas in English a syllable can be a consonant vowel (cv) or consonant, double vowel consonant (cvvc) as in di-no-saur (Palai & O'Hanlon, 2004). Consonants in Tswana are considered rich and complex, as several consonants are spelled with more than one letter, e.g. 't' can be spelled 'ts' or 'tsw'. Setswana has seven vowels a, e, ê, i, o, ô, u as opposed to English having five vowels. Although English only has five vowels, phoneme-grapheme correspondence is notoriously irregular. English consists of 26 letters that map more than 36 phonemes (Geva & Siegel, 2000).

Setswana can be described as being fairly transparent in comparison with English, as there is a close correspondence between the letter names in Setswana and the sounds they make. Despite cross language transference (*cf.* 3.9.2.1) there is potential for confusion for Setswana learners learning English (Lekgoko & Winskel, 2008). To illustrate possibilities for potential confusion, Setswana First Language learners need to learn that sound-spelling relationships are different in their home language compared to English FAL. An example of this is the 'th' in English which represents two different sounds, e.g. "that" and "thank you" but in Setswana, a word like "thatha" is pronounced "tata". In addition to this, learning the vowels in English is an extremely challenging task for Setswana learners. This is because the Setswana language also revolves around vowels, but the pronunciation of the vowels is totally different. In Setswana, /a/ is pronounced as the /u/ sound in English but in English it is /a/ as in c/a/t. The /u/ in Setswana is pronounced /oo/ as in f/oo/d but in English it is /u/ for umbrella. One can therefore understand the confusion when teaching Setswana learners English. To add to the confusion, English vowels can be spelled in a variety of ways yet all variations produce the same sound. An example as depicted in DBE (2011a), is the sound /ee/ which can be spelled in the following ways:

- 'ea' in the word 'sea'
- 'e' in the word 'me'
- 'ey' in the word 'key'
- 'ee' in the word 'tree'.

The cross transference from mother tongue to ESL can therefore not only be confusing when identifying sounds and letter-sound correspondence, but can also have an impact on ESL learning in general.

3.11 CONCLUSION

Although it is evident from the discussion in this chapter that phonological awareness is a fundamental skill for a learner to become a proficient reader, there are some controversies that need to be highlighted.

Table 3.6: Phonological awareness controversies

A. Ambiguity in defining phonological awareness	1. Regarding the size of the unit	a) Conscious manipulation of the smallest individual sound segments in a word.
		b) Conscious isolation of sound units at multiple linguistic levels including sound units larger than the phoneme
	2. The term 'phonological awareness'	c) Includes all levels of access to multiple linguistic units. E.g. a child can recognise that words rhyme even if the child cannot say what the rhyming sound is. a) Implicit awareness b) Explicit awareness c) phonological sensitivity (<i>cf.</i> 3.3)
	3. Tasks used to assess phonological awareness	a) The operation required to execute the task, e.g. isolating
B. Assessment of phonological		

awareness	vary greatly in the following ways:	versus blending of sounds. b) The level of conscious effort required, e.g. recognizing sound units requires much less conscious effort than having to explicitly identify them. c) The level of representation, e.g. at the level of the syllable versus at the level of the phoneme. d) The level of complexity, e.g. cvc versus ccvccvc words. d) Skills required to perform sub tasks of which the task consists, e.g. listening, holding what is heard in memory, performing a required operation and giving feedback on the result of the operation. (cf. 3.4.3)
C. Phonological development regarding the sequence in which phonological skills develop	1. Onset rime view	a) Syllables are not strings of individual consonants and vowels but are grouped into two parts: The onset, which is the initial consonant or consonant string before the vowel and the vowel followed by the rest, is the rime. b) Development of phonological awareness parallels the onset-rime view of the syllable, e.g. syllable → onset-rime →

		phonemes (<i>cf.</i> 3.3)
	2. Phonemic awareness develops prior to onset rime awareness	a) It is easier for learners to identify smaller linguistic units, such as phonemes, than rimes and they progress from small to larger units as development proceeds b) Phonemic awareness develops as a result of learning to read. (<i>cf.</i> 3.3)
	3. Awareness of larger subsyllabic units arise spontaneously, however, this does not include onset rime.	a) Segmenting at the phonemic level is practiced more often than segmenting the rime. b) Learners find it easier to isolate larger subsyllabic units than smaller ones. (<i>cf.</i> 3.3)
	4. The nature of the orthography	a) Since learning to read increases phonemic awareness, the orthography of a particular language could have an impact on phonological development. Learning to read a transparent orthography is simpler because there is a stronger relationship between each letter and its corresponding sound than in a more opaque orthography. b) Phonological awareness

		predicts success in learning to read irrespective of the transparent or opaqueness of the orthography. c) Some linguistic units are more important in some languages than others, e.g., in Setswana the last syllable of all verbs in the present tense end in the vowel 'a', whilst in English verbs in the present tense could end in almost any of the vowels or consonants of the language. (<i>cf.</i> 3.10)
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Adapted from Goswami and East (2000); Stanovich (2000); Geudens and Sandra (2002); Hulme *et al.* (2002); Geudens, (2003), Morais (2003); Geudens *et al.* (2005); Ziegler and Goswami (2005).

In spite of the controversies regarding ambiguity in defining phonological awareness, the assessment thereof, the orthography of language as well as the sequence of phonological awareness development, consensus has been reached among researchers that phonological awareness is not only a precursor to reading, but that most difficulties in learning to read stem from a failure in acquiring phonological awareness (Vellutino *et al.*, 2004).

The following chapter will consist of research methodology and data analysis formulated from various forms of data gathering methods in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research design and methodology selected for this study will be discussed in depth. A rationale is provided to clarify choices I made, as well as a description of my role as researcher. As validity and ethics are crucial features of research (Merriam, 2009), attention will be given to this as well. Selected sampling procedures, techniques and methods of data collection, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analyses are discussed. Thereafter, the data analysis is discussed in depth.

A qualitative approach is the selected research method, together with a multiple case study conducted within the interpretative paradigm.

An overview of choosing a suitable approach will be given next.

4.2 CHOOSING A SUITABLE APPROACH

According to Cresswell (2009), the research aims and questions depict the way the research is approached and in turn influences the decisions made and taken during the research. The chosen approach therefore determines strategies for inquiry, methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation (Cresswell, 2009).

Qualitative research is situated within the interpretative paradigm and is utilised to gain meaning and understanding of the studied phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). In this study, qualitative research was utilised together with a multiple case study. A case study was selected to explore and interpret the Foundation Phase English Second Language Educator's perceptions, knowledge and skills regarding phonological awareness.

Data were collected through questionnaires, conducting interviews, observing participants in their classrooms during the teaching of phonological awareness, and during training, and analysing documents.

4.2.1 Interpretative Paradigm

This study is mainly situated within the interpretative paradigm. This paradigm is concerned with understanding events through a mental process of interpretation, which is influenced by interactions within a social context. Human interaction constructs meaning and realities within interpretivism (Vygotsky, 1978; Trafford & Leshem, 2011).

Interpretative research, according to Taylor (2013) is used to reach an understanding of some phenomenon that is not yet fully understood, to provide a rich description of the phenomenon and possibly an explanation for it. The best way to understand a phenomenon, according to interpretative research is to study it in a natural setting such as classrooms (Taylor, 2013). By placing people in natural settings, there is greater opportunity to understand the perceptions they have of their own context and activities (Willis, 2007; Taylor, 2013).

This research links with the above paradigm as the perceptions, knowledge and skills of participants regarding phonological awareness are explored and interpreted.

4.2.2 Qualitative research

Creswell (2009) describes qualitative research as a form of interpretative research whereby researchers make an interpretation of what they have seen, heard and understood. It is based on the assumption that reality is changed and constructed by individuals within their social worlds (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2009:5) describes qualitative research as “researchers being interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences.” She presents four characteristics as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). I will relate these characteristics to this study.

- **Focus is on the process of creating meaning and understanding:** The key concern is to understand the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, and not the perspectives of the researcher. This is regularly referred to as the *emic* or insider’s perspective and not the *etic*, which is the outsider’s perspective. I tried to understand the perspectives of the participants without allowing an outsider’s perspective to influence this.

- **Researcher as primary instrument:** I was the primary instrument, for data collection and analysis. I personally handed out the questionnaires and conducted the interviews, as well as personally trained and supported every educator.
- **Inductive Process of data analysis:** A qualitative researcher gathers data in order to build concepts, hypotheses or theories. Qualitative researchers build towards theory from combining and ordering information from interviews, observations from being in the field, or documents utilised. Findings from an inductive data analysis are typically in the form of themes and categories (*cf.* 4.7).
- **Rich Description:** The final product of qualitative inquiry is a rich description of words and pictures opposed to numbers. Within this study, I described the context, the participants involved and the activities surrounding the teaching and assessment of phonological awareness. Quotes from the questionnaires, interviews and observations are included to support the findings of this study.

4.2.3 Multiple case study

A case study, as defined by Merriam (2009), is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Yin (2013:18) describes a case study in terms of the process of research, stating “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.” A case study can be further defined as particularistic, meaning that it focuses on a particular situation, event, programme or phenomenon. It is also descriptive in that the end product of a case study is a rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009).

A multiple case study method was adopted in this research. When using multiple case studies, each case is treated as a single case. The conclusions from each case is then used as information contributing to the study as a whole, referring to the purpose of the study as well as the research questions posed (Yin, 2013).

I opted for a multiple case study as multiple cases do not only focus on one issue or concern, but add to the strength of the study and convey an issue or concern in that multiple sources of data are gathered such as questionnaires, interviews, documentation review, and observations which serve as multiple pieces of evidence (Creswell, 2009).

As researcher, I was interested in exploring Foundation Phase educators' knowledge and perception of phonological awareness as well as the educators' skills to teach and assess phonological awareness in the second language (namely English), as well as their opinions of support provided by the DBE regarding this topic. This was the purpose of my study and was progressively explored using a multiple case study in five different classes with five participants from two different schools: two Foundation Phase educators from the one school and three Foundation Phase educators from the other school.

I aimed to find valid ways to address my research questions as directly as possible and a multiple case study seemed to be the most appropriate choice for me. It is imperative to remember the purpose of a case study is not to generalise, but instead provide a thick and rich description (Merriam, 2009). As this case study involves real-life situations, insight and awareness can be constructed to encourage and structure further research.

4.3 SAMPLE

A purposeful sample was used for this study. A purposeful sample is a sample from which the most can be learnt (Merriam, 2009).

4.3.1 Selection of sample

The participants were all the Foundation Phase educators at two rural primary schools in the Hartbeespoort area, North-West Province in South Africa. One of the schools employed multi-grade teaching in one class, where the Grade 2 and 3 learners were in one class (*cf.* 4.2.3). Setswana is the mother tongue (first language) of most of the learners, and is used as the LoLT in the Foundation Phase. As required by the DBE, English is the First Additional Language in this phase. However, from Grade 4 English is the LoLT. They are both departmental schools and situated in underprivileged areas, categorizing them as quintile 1 schools. I chose these schools because the participants I spoke to were eager if not desperate to participate. Their willingness to learn and improve their own phonological awareness, and that of their English Second Language learners made an impression and motivated me to assist them. Having said that, I knew the selected participants would give me first-hand information pertaining to their

knowledge, perception and skills regarding phonological awareness and the teaching thereof making them key informants in this study.

The number of educators participating in the study totalled five. This is because there were only two Foundation Phase educators at the one rural school, with grades 2 and 3 in one classroom, and three Foundation Phase educators at the other participating rural school.

The participants in this study are ESL Foundation Phase educators. The following features applied:

- Two Grade 1 educators, one Grade 2 and 3 multi-grade educator and two Grade 3 educators.
- Educators at government schools in the Hartbeespoort area in the North West Province.
- English must be the second language of the educators and the learners.
- All educators must be qualified educators.

Additionally, during Phase 1, I issued a pilot questionnaire to five participants who were not participants in this study but whom I selected to read through the questionnaire to determine any possible ambiguity regarding the questioning, or language errors. The persons selected comprised a speech therapist, an educational psychologist, two educators at a private English school and one language editor. These participants were selected as they all have a professional interest in education and are qualified and experienced in their field of work as well as in phonological awareness. I regarded their opinions and advice as professional.

4.3.2 Contexts of sampled schools

The blue school is quintile 1, meaning an underprivileged school, and relies predominantly on donations and sponsors from surrounding private schools. I was impressed with the neatness of the school and the playground. The educators and learners at the school are very friendly.

Foundation Phase classrooms at the blue school are spacious but neither participant A or B has carpets in the classroom. Their two classrooms are separated by one door,

which cannot close properly, making noise absorption minimal, especially when learners in the classrooms are rowdy. Participant B teaches Grade 2 and Grade 3 learners in one classroom. The school is classified by the DBE as a multi-grade school.

Each class has a green board, mounted on the wall, with white and coloured chalk placed on the top part of the board. There are no chalk rests. Participants put in a concerted effort to create a learning environment in their classrooms. I noticed this, as participants have learning and teaching support material mounted on the walls, which according to the participants, were mostly constructed by themselves. These materials comprise alphabet charts and short English words accompanied by a picture representing a letter of the alphabet, e.g. 'Aa', the word apple and a picture of an apple. Numbers are on the walls with the Setswana number word written beneath the number. Both classes have weather charts where the day of the week and the name of the day, month of the year, and the current season are indicated. Several posters depicting words with pictures, in English and Setswana, are on the walls. Charts depicting various Setswana sounds are also clearly visible. Each participant has a timetable on the classroom door indicating the five school days of the week and all the subjects and periods per subject, breaks and time allocation for that particular grade. Neither of the classrooms has a storeroom. Reading books and several piles of new and old workbooks are stacked on the sides and at the back of the classrooms. The school has no staff room but the staff members meet in one of the larger classrooms for meetings.

Focus will now shift to the learners. Learners are all seated in groups. According to the participants, there is no particular reason for the groups, except that in participant B's classroom, because the Grade 2's and 3's are taught together in one class, the Grade 3's are seated in their own separate group, but next to the Grade 2's. Learners are seated two at a table and each learner has his or her own chair. The chairs and tables are the correct height for the learners. Each learner's name is neatly written out and placed at the top of the table in front of the respective learner. Each participant has a large table and chair with a coffee tin on her table, filled with short, blunt lead pencils for the learners to write with. Learners do not have their own stationery bags. A feeding scheme supplies a meal to each learner every day at 10: 00 am.

A description of the red school will now be given.

The red school is quintile 1, meaning a disadvantaged school. It is a very neat and tidy school with friendly educators and learners. The three Foundation Phase classrooms at the red school are overcrowded, with 54 learners in the Grade 1 class alone. There is one educator per class. All three classes have green boards with white and coloured chalk on the chalk rests. Each participant has one large table and one large chair in her classroom. There are no carpets in any of the classrooms. Learning and teaching support material is displayed on the walls in all three classrooms, comprising several posters depicting words with pictures in English and Setswana. Various sounds and word family groups in Setswana and English are clearly visible in all three classrooms. Both classes have weather charts where the day of the week and the name of the day, month of the year, and the current season are indicated. Numbers are on the walls with the Setswana word for it written beneath the number.

Each participant has a timetable up on the door, indicating the five school days of the week and all the subjects and periods per subject, breaks and time allocation for that particular grade. None of the classrooms have storerooms, but each participant has a lock-up cupboard in her classroom, filled with books and readers.

The school has a staffroom with large tables and chairs for the staff members. Tea and coffee is freely available. The staffroom is spacious and clean.

In the Grade 1 class, learners are seated two at a table in long rows from the front to the back of the classroom. Chairs and tables are the correct size for the learners in all three grades. The Grade 2 and 3 learners are seated two at a table, but in groups according to ability level regarding scholastic requirements. Each learner's name is neatly written out and placed at the top of the table in front of the respective learner. A feeding scheme supplies a meal to each learner every day at 10: 00 am.

More detailed information emanating from the observations regarding activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors and researcher behaviour will be mentioned in Chapter 5.

4.4 THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

The researcher plays a crucial role in qualitative research and is key in collecting data and should therefore clarify any existing bias from the outset of the study (Creswell,

2009). Past experiences, biases and prejudices should be commented on as this could shape the interpretation of the study (Creswell, 2009). Therefore it is important for the researcher to state her experiences and beliefs beforehand:

I strongly believe that, if educators are adequately trained to teach phonological awareness and consequently have adequate knowledge and skills thereof, quality teaching will ensure that important foundations for reading ability will be instilled. This could prevent reading difficulties for learners from Grade 4 onward. If skills in phonological awareness are not mastered properly, it will lead to various difficulties later on in the learner's life. Difficulties such as insufficient reading comprehension and spelling skills are a few obstacles that could be experienced by learners, should teaching not be effective (McCutchen *et al.*, 2002; Chessman *et al.*, 2009).

During this research study, I faced particular challenges.

4.4.1 Challenges faced by the researcher

I never had previous contact or professional relationships with the participants of the study and I therefore had to build professional and trustworthy relationships with all participants. However, the participants understood the benefits of this research to them as educators and the Foundation Phase in general, and it was consequently undemanding to establish a professional relationship.

I faced several practical challenges during the course of this study. Rescheduling of appointments was the biggest frustration. Transport issues were taxing. On numerous occasions, when I arrived at the schools in order to observe, the participants informed me that there were no learners at the school due to taxi drivers striking or transport in general being unavailable for learners to attend school. In agreement with the participants, I then had to regularly reschedule observations. On one particular occasion, I waited more than an hour for the participant in her classroom, as the participant's taxi broke down and she had to walk to school. When the participant arrived at school, I thought it best to reschedule the lesson observation, as the participant seemed stressed and exhausted.

Three of the five classrooms were overcrowded, with one educator and no assistant. Learners were repeatedly rowdy and restless, making it difficult for me to hear the

participant present her lesson. At times, participants struggled to control learners' behaviour and noise levels in the classrooms were prominent.

I noticed when observation times were scheduled early in the morning, the response and participation from the learners seemed less enthusiastic, and limited, as many of these learners receive their only meal for the day at school during first break which is at 10h00 am. To observe a lesson when hungry learners are waiting in anticipation of a balanced meal seemed disadvantageous and unfair to the participants and the learners as far as I was concerned. I then made alternative arrangements with the participants to visit the classrooms after first break when learners were less distracted.

Two of the Foundation Phase participants at the blue school, due to the principal hardly ever attending school, were required to regularly manage the school. Often whilst I was observing a lesson, the participant was called out of her classroom to attend to parents or visitors at the school. Lessons were regularly rescheduled as a result of these disruptions. Due to a burglary at the red school where food provided by the feeding scheme was stolen, the day was disrupted due to police investigations and appointments had to be rescheduled again.

Some DBE decisions seemed challenging, which negatively influenced the morale of the participants. Example, for some months, no salaries from the DBE were paid to several educators forcing some of the participants to not attend school until their salary was paid. In the time I worked at the two schools, the Grade 2 learners at the red school had three different educators and the Grade 3 learners at the same school had three different educators. As a result I had to re-explain the purpose of the study to the new participants and receive their consent to work with them. Questionnaires and Interviews had to be re-scheduled and redone with the new participants.

At one stage, the Grade 3 learners at the red school had no educator for a period of three months, and the Head of Department of the Senior Phase gave the FAL classes to them when he had a free period. I observed his lessons as no one knew for sure what the DBE would opt to do regarding educators' salaries and educator appointments for these specific grades. Despite this, I took ethical responsibilities seriously and tried at all times to comfort and reassure participants that their needs and concerns are priority to me.

In all research studies, ethical responsibilities toward the research participants are clearly outlined. These will be discussed next.

4.4.2 Ethical responsibilities

Within certain disciplines, such as education, where human beings participating in research may experience physical or psychological distress, ethical implications of what the researcher is planning to do must be considered carefully (Creswell, 2009).

Ethical practices in this research were closely followed according to the four categories set out by Creswell (2009). These categories are:

- Protection from harm;
- Informed consent;
- Right to privacy; and
- Honesty and trust with professional colleagues.

The ethics committee of the North-West University approved the project, NWU-00033-10-A2. After receiving NWU approval, I approached the Madibeng Area Office. The purpose of my research was explicitly explained to the Head of Inclusion who willingly signed the Institution Consent of Participation form. Thereafter, I made appointments with the principals and participants at the schools participating in this research. Murphy and Dingwall (2001) postulate that ethical research is more than protecting a participant's rights, it requires that the researcher does what they she says she is going to do. Agreeing with Murphy and Dingwall (2001), I was honest about who I was, what I wanted to research and why. I explained to the participants why I had selected their schools and informed them explicitly on the various activities that would take place during the research. I assured them that no disruption of learning and teaching would occur during my visits and observations at the school. Thereafter, I explained the purpose and content of the consent forms to the participants. I explained that the word "consent" is an agreement to do something and does not mean participating under duress (Creswell, 2007). Participants unconditionally understood they had the right to withdraw from this study at any time. However, the participants were aware of the benefits that might accrue to them as a result of participating in this research, such as the support programme they were given (*cf.* Chapter 6).

Appending this, participants felt comfortable to make suggestions to me, without fear of negative consequences, e.g. rescheduling interviews and classroom observation appointments were done via comfortable and relaxed discussions.

Feedback of my findings of the study was shared with the participants in an informal group discussion to rule out any bias on my part and to confirm that my findings were honest and accurate.

All participants took part in the research project voluntarily, the privacy of the individual and the school privacy was respected, meaning confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at all times during the study. This was accomplished by coding all the participants ranging from participant A to E, as well as the schools, the blue and red school (*cf.* 4.7). I made copies of the raw data such as questionnaires, transcribed all interviews verbatim and made copies of all observation notes pertaining to each participant. These raw data were locked away in my cupboard and only copies without any personal identifiers (nothing but codes A – E) were used in this study (*cf.* 4.8).

Qualitative researchers collect data, examine documents, interview participants and personally observe behaviour themselves (Creswell, 2007). I collected all data and departmental documents personally from the participants, and I interviewed the participants myself, no other individuals were present during these interviews. With regard to classroom observations, the participant, myself and learners were the only human beings present in the classroom during observations. Participants were never intimidated or threatened by any other party (Ryen, 2004).

The design of this research study and how it progressed are discussed next.

4.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Creswell (2009) state that sources of data in qualitative research should be triangulated to ensure credibility. This is to rule out the influence of sheer opinion in qualitative research.

Triangulation is utilised in this study to ensure credibility. Deriving data from different sources such as questionnaires, interviews, observations as well as document analyses ensures credibility (Creswell, 2009).

The following data collection methods utilised in this study will consequently be discussed.

4.5.1 Questionnaires

Open-ended questions refer to those questions whereby the participant answers in his or her own words, and possible answers are not suggested to the participants by the researcher. According to Evans and Rooney (2008), participants provide answers to open questions in their own manner that reflects their own perceptions.

Information gathered from the literature review was used to develop and design a questionnaire with open-ended questions, to gather information regarding FP educators' knowledge and perception of phonological awareness, the teaching and assessment thereof, together with their opinion about the support they receive from the DBE. This questionnaire was first piloted and given to five experts who were not participants in this study but who willingly agreed to scrutinise the questionnaire for any ambiguity or language errors (*cf.* 4.3.1).

When the pilot questionnaire was returned without errors, I administered the questionnaire personally and individually to each participant (Appendix B). Since the participants are all ESL speakers it was important to establish that they understood the language used in the questionnaires. Without providing answers, I clarified some uncertainties as requested by the participants. The data from this questionnaire made me aware of the current knowledge and perception of participants concerning phonological awareness, the teaching and assessment thereof, what teaching in a second language entails and their opinion concerning support received by the DBE. This information added to the choice of content relevant to the support programme (*cf.* 4.3.1).

4.5.2 Interviews

Interviewing is a necessary procedure when behaviour cannot be observed, such as people's perceptions and interpretations of the world around them (Merriam, 2009). Interviews are commonly used to corroborate data emerging from other sources (Nieuwenhuis, 2010). In this study, individual as well as focus group interviews were utilised.

4.5.2.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

A semi-structured interview requires specific information from the participant. It is therefore essential that the interview needs to have structure. This structure is attained by a list of questions that will guide the interview. Merriam (2009) states that this type of interview allows the researcher to respond to a situation at hand and allows the views of the participant to emerge and shed light on any new ideas related to the topic.

Interactive semi-structured individual interviews with open-ended questions were utilised as this allowed me to probe and explore in order to gain data in more depth. Individual interviews were conducted two months after the questionnaire had been administered. At first, I analysed the questionnaires in order to clarify uncertainties, and thought it beneficial to conduct individual interviews to gather more in depth information from the participants, pertaining to their knowledge, perceptions and skills based around the research question. The interview therefore utilised the same questions as used in the open questionnaire, but also employing probing questions to further explore the answers given in the questionnaire. (Please see interview schedule in Appendix C1).

The interview process was thoroughly explained to the participants before-hand. They were also informed afterwards of my interpretation of their answers to rule out any misunderstandings or misinterpretation.

The individual interviews were conducted after the participants had completed the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted in uncomplicated English, making the questions easily understandable to the participants. I audio-recorded all the interviews.

4.5.2.2 Group interview

Kruger and Case (2009) describe a group interview as an interview with a group of people on a topic they all have some knowledge about.

After training the participants and observing them implement the support programme, a group interview was conducted (Appendix C2). The purpose of the group interview was to create an opportunity for the participants to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the support programme. I wanted to determine loopholes in the programme, experienced and noted by the participants, and also to provide participants with an

opportunity to express their thoughts. Moreover, the focus group interview intended to stimulate the thoughts of the participants regarding their current knowledge and perception of phonological awareness after the training (*cf.* 4.6). In order to ensure that the discussion process ran smoothly and remained topic related, an interview schedule was compiled. All participants had the opportunity in a relaxed environment to freely and openly discuss, in detail, problems and successes encountered with the programme during implementation in the classroom.

The focus group interview was audio-recorded and I made a few observational notes with regard to specific challenges experienced by the participants during particular stages of phonological awareness teaching. An example of one of these challenging stages was confusion regarding the pronunciation of the vowels. As a reminder, I noted these comments down of possible limitations when teaching a particular stage of phonological awareness.

4.5.3 Document analyses

All support documents from the DBE relevant to this study were studied to ensure that the support programme adheres to the specifications of the Department of Basic Education. Merriam (2009) claims that the purpose of generating documents is to learn more about the situation, person or event being investigated.

For the purpose of this study, eight support documents issued to the participants by the Department of Basic Education were studied.

- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), for Literacy in Grades 1, 2 and 3 (DBE, 2011a). CAPS provides a framework for teaching phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics in English First Additional Language, Grades 1, 2 and 3 (Appendix E1 and E2).
- Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DBE, 2010b)
- Grade 1 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 1 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4
- Grade 2 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 2 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4

- Grade 3 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 3 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4

The CAPS document, Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning, as well as the Grade 1, 2 and 3 English First Additional Language books provided to the schools by the DBE were scrutinised by myself, which allowed me to make suggestions when guiding the participants on what to use in the documents and how.

The content of the following five documents were studied to guide me in developing a support programme for educator support in teaching and assessing phonological awareness:

- K-1 Student Centre Activities: Phonological Awareness (The Florida Center for Reading Research, 2008).
- Phonological Awareness Activities for the Classroom (McCandlish, 2006).
- Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
- Teacher knowledge and implementation of phonological awareness in Grade R (Wessels, 2011).
- The Gillon Phonological Awareness Training Programme (Gillon, 2008).

4.5.4 Observations

I followed the observation procedure according to suggestions by Merriam (2009), who states that the participants need to be informed of the researcher's activities and the role of the researcher as information gatherer. I tried at all times to remain detached from the participants, and used a matrix (Appendix D2) to observe and analyse in detail the participants' teaching and assessment of phonological awareness.

Observations were utilised as a research tool to gather first-hand information from the participants pertaining to their knowledge, perceptions and teaching skills regarding phonological awareness, which would aid me in answering the research question. Another reason why I opted for observations is that observations would triangulate my emerging findings, used in conjunction with the questionnaires, interviewing and document analysis (Merriam, 2009).

In the pre-design phase of this study, I arranged with the principal and educators at the two selected schools to observe the set-up at the school and in the classrooms for approximately an hour on the date arranged. This was an informal observation as at this point of the study, I merely wanted to see the potential schools I would be working with.

The following observation occurred in the form of classroom observations after I analysed the questionnaires and interviews from the same participants. Classroom observations lasted for twenty minutes in each participant's classroom, four days a week for six consecutive weeks.

Additionally, I made observation notes in a notebook during the participant training workshop regarding the phonological awareness support programme. I felt the need to make observation notes when participants experienced various stages of the phonological awareness programme as challenging, e.g. breaking up of English words into syllables, and pronunciation of the English vowels. These notes would serve as a reminder of what I specifically needed to observe during class observations when the participants implemented the programme to determine if any confusion remained or if any triggers adding to confusion were still evident, relating to these stages (*cf.* 4.6).

After the training workshop, classroom observations were utilised once a week during the six weeks of programme implementation. Class visits were unannounced as I wanted to make sure educators were in fact prepared for their EFAL lessons. However, I accommodated the participants, as participants continually informed me of other activities occurring at the school during the week, and then I made other arrangements. The blue school requested classroom observations any time from ten o' clock in the morning and the red school requested classroom visits any time from half past eleven in the morning. I arrived at the school in the stipulated time span, but at different times every day. At times a participant would ask me to return to their classrooms after ten minutes when the current period was over and a new period to teach EFAL would commence. I agreed to this arrangement, as I had promised that my research study would not be disruptive in any way. The arrangement worked very well for the participants and for me. I visited each participant individually for twenty minutes and observed the EFAL lesson.

The following recommended observation checklist of Merriam (2009) was used by me as researcher.

- **The physical setting:** What is the context? How is space allocated? What objects, resources, technologies are in the setting? (*cf.* 4.3.2)
- **The participants:** What are the characteristics of the participants relevant to the study? How do the people in the setting organise themselves?
- **Activities and interactions:** Is the sequence of activities defined: Meaning, how long does each activity last? How do people interact with the activity and how do the people interact with one another? What rules and norms give structure to the activities and interactions?
- **Conversation:** This refers to the content of the conversation in the setting. Who speaks to whom? Silences and nonverbal behaviour should be noted to add meaning to the exchange during conversation. Conversations need to be quoted verbatim.
- **Subtle factors:** Observe any unplanned activities.
- **Your own behaviour:** Be conscious of your role as researcher. What you are thinking and how you behave affects the setting you are observing (Merriam, 2009).

4.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

All data in this study were collected in two phases as indicated in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Phases of data collection

Phase 1	• Pilot Questionnaire • Questionnaire on phonological awareness • Individual interviews with participants • Document Analysis • Classroom observation
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Phase 2	• Compiled programme based on data collected in Phase 1 • Participant training based on the findings from Phase 1. • Observations during participant training • Implementation of Support Programme for 6 weeks • Classroom observations • Focus Group Interview
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Phase 1: During Phase 1, a pilot questionnaire was issued by me to five participants, namely a speech therapist, an educational psychologist, two educators and a language editor who are not participants in this study (*cf.* 4.3.1; 4.5.1).

Hereafter, I individually issued the open-ended questionnaire to the participants. The participants completed the questionnaire individually on their own time, but on the same day.

After I had analysed the individual questionnaires, interactive semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with the same participants to further explore their answers from the questionnaire in more depth. The individual interviews were conducted in a safe and secure environment and I attempted to conduct it in such a manner as to ensure openness and confidentiality. The responses from the individual interviews were transcribed verbatim and afterwards I verified the responses with the participants.

Document analyses was done of support documents from the DBE, such as CAPS English First Additional Language Foundation Phase and DBE books supplied to both schools for learners and educators in the Foundation Phase. The book I predominantly scrutinised was called English First Additional Language Revised and CAPS aligned (*cf.* 4.5.3). I scrutinised international programmes and documents (*cf.* 4.5.3) as well as information from a detailed literature review before the first classroom observations, with the intention of equipping myself with adequate knowledge of documents and resources available to educators and then observing if, what and how these are utilised by the participants in the classroom.

In their respective classrooms, I observed each participant's teaching activities during the allocated EFAL periods on the timetable. Observations took place four times a week, unless otherwise arranged and requested by the participants. As a guide, I utilised a coded system specifically for phonological awareness stages and the sequence thereof, when observational data were recorded. The reason for the coded guide was for me to see when, where and how phonological awareness was taught or assessed by the participants (*cf.* Appendix D2).

Phase 2: After all the data had been collected through the various above mentioned data collection methods, they were analysed in an integrated manner (*cf.* Chapter 5). Thereafter a support programme was compiled to address the weaknesses as well as to reinforce the strengths of the participants with regard to the knowledge, teaching skills and assessment of phonological awareness. The support programme will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

In order to ensure the participants appropriately implemented the programme, I arranged and presented a workshop to train the participants. The workshop was held for one full school day in the staff room of the one school. The principal arranged the chosen day as he informed me that learners would not attend school that day, due to a long weekend approaching the day after the scheduled day for training.

Participants participated spontaneously in the workshop and were keen to try some of the activities in the support programme. I systematically explained to the participants each stage of phonological awareness. Time was provided during the workshop for activities, questions and explanations of anything unclear to the participants. Participants were assured that I would regard any questions as important. Giving the participants time to reflect on each stage of phonological awareness reassured me that they adequately understood a particular stage dealt with, and how it should be taught before moving on to the next stage.

During training, I felt the need to make observation notes regarding stages of the programme the participants found challenging, e.g. breaking up of English words into syllables, and pronunciation of the English vowels. These notes served as a reminder of what I would specifically monitor during classroom observations when the participants

implemented the programme, in order to determine if any confusion remained or if triggers adding to confusion were still evident (*cf.* 4.5.4).

The participants implemented the programme for six weeks to determine how they experienced the programme. The timeframe was discussed with my promoters and we agreed that six weeks would suffice, and participants should be able to give a justifiable opinion of the programme and its practicality. I visited participants' classrooms regularly once a week for twenty minutes per participant. Classroom visits followed the timetable at the schools allocated for EFAL teaching and did not disrupt learning.

Certain participants struggled with various stages of phonological awareness, after which I offered to assist them when it was convenient for them. This means that at times I stayed in one class for an hour, assisting the participant with, e.g. breaking up words into syllables, as that was what she required at the time. I made notes of the difficulties experienced by the participants when teaching phonological awareness. These notes forced me to revise certain sections of my programme, and determined if I needed to add more examples. However, the existing activities in the programme seemed to be sufficient.

A group interview was conducted after the six weeks of programme implementation. The data collected during Phase 1 were compared with the data collected from Phase 2, including the focus group interview to establish whether the training workshop as well as the support programme had an effect on the participants' knowledge, perceptions, and preparedness to teach and assess phonological awareness.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The diagram depicts the process of how I analysed the data that will be explained in depth below.

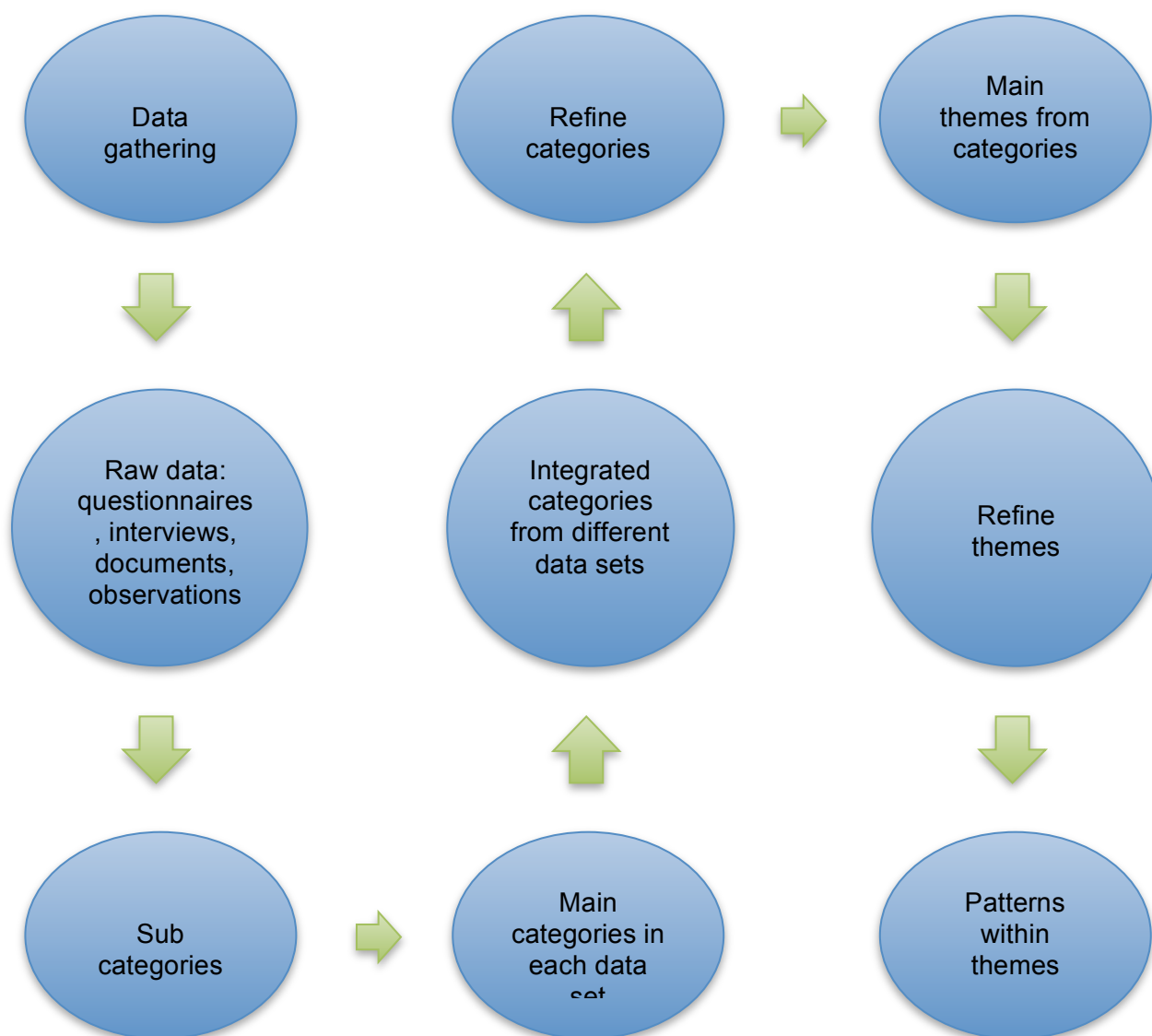


Figure 4.1: Inductive Analysis process as conceptualised by Henning (2011).

In this study, inductive and comparative data analysis was employed.

I planned to organise the data in a way that I regarded manageable. Data analysis involves organizing, analysing and interpreting data gathered by the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Once the first data set, which was the open ended participant questionnaires, was collected and received by me personally, I coded the two schools: one as the red school and one as the blue school, and the participants were assigned a letter of the alphabet from A to E. This enabled participants and information I gathered from them to remain anonymous and confidential (Ryen, 2004). Thereafter, I made copies of all the questionnaires and locked the originals away in the cupboard. Only copies as suggested by Lewins (2005) were used from here on (*cf.* 4.8). I took the

template for the questionnaire and typed in all the participants' answers in conjunction with their assigned code under every question asked. In the end, I had everyone's answers per question arranged from A to E.

When this was done, I assigned codes to the answers throughout the entire questionnaire, using a different sticker for each new code. In total, I had 28 codes for this data set. Coding, according to Merriam (2009), is a process of assigning some designation to various aspects of the data potentially relevant for answering the research question in order to easily retrieve specific pieces of the data as needed.

Thereafter, I tried to group the codes that appeared to go together, and highlighted the main groups. This process of grouping codes is called axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, in Merriam, 2009). I made a separate list of the coded groups, also known as sub categories (Henning, 2011) to clarify the codes that merged.

For the second data set, i.e. the individual interviews with the participants, I transcribed the interviews verbatim and included line numbers. This procedure allows the researcher to return to the original field notes or transcript to review at any time (Merriam, 2009). Once again the same procedure was followed with the interviews by grouping all the answers A–E beneath the respective question. The list of grouped codes from the first data set was used to see if these codes were also present in the second data set. A separate list of codes emerged from the second data set. I grouped the new codes from the second data set and added these to the list of grouped codes from data set one. Main themes were highlighted in this data set as well.

At this stage of the inductive analysis process, both data sets reflected recurring patterns in this study.

It was now time for me to utilise document analyses, the third data set. Specific documents, relevant to this study were selected, as there was a possibility they would contain information relevant to the research question. I also attended to reasons each document was written, as well as the context in which it was written (Merriam, 2009).

I analysed eight support documents supplied to the participants by the DBE to identify possible limitations in the documents. (*cf.* 4.5.3). Notes were made in the margins of these documents, where I indicated strengths and weaknesses in the documents

pertaining to phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics. References were made to the themes that emerged from data set one and two.

The fourth data set comprises observations that occurred for six weeks prior to the training workshop (*cf.* 4.5.4). I applied the same procedure as in data set one and two. Once again, new codes emerged from the observations and were grouped appropriately. Main groups were highlighted and I added these groups to the list of themes derived from data set one and two.

Observations that occurred during the training workshop are data set five. The same procedure was applied, and no new codes emerged from this data set.

During implementation of the support programme, observations occurred for six weeks again. These notes were grouped into the themes that emerged from data set one, two, four and five and from data set six. New codes from this data set were once again grouped where appropriate, and added to the list of themes.

The seventh data set was the one focus group interview. I wanted participants to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the support programme, and discuss loopholes in the programme experienced or noted by the participants. This group interview also intended to gather further information regarding participants' current knowledge and perception of phonological awareness, the teaching and assessment thereof. Data gathered from this data set were integrated into the themes from the previous data sets.

Integration from the various data sets gave me several themes. These themes were then organised into more meaningful subthemes by identifying patterns in the themes. Patterns of data should be organised into more meaningful themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Constantly referring back to the research questions, I further refined these themes into five main themes and twelve subthemes by working back and forth, comparing data sets and identifying patterns within the themes. Merriam (2009) describes this constant comparative data analysis as a constant and continuous comparison of all the data sources.

The initial list of themes had to be refined and parts of data had to be regrouped to form new connections between the themes.

An inductive process means working back and forth between themes until the researcher has established a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2009). I, according to external and internal factors influencing the participant in relation to the research question, grouped initial themes in this study as follows:

1. Theme 1: Basic knowledge of phonological awareness
2. Theme 2: Skills in teaching phonological awareness
3. Theme 3: Perceptions on phonological awareness
4. Theme 4: Time management
5. Theme 5: DBE support

Clarified themes and subthemes will be discussed in depth in Chapter 5.

4.8 DATA MANAGEMENT, STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL

Before data collection actually commences, the researcher should have a system for storing data, and for the retrieval thereof. Lewins (2005) suggests that researchers keep an open mind when faced with an amount of data and organise them in a systematic manner. I followed the suggestions of Lewins (2005) as set out below.

- All questionnaires, interviews, observations and content analyses of relevant documents were stored electronically, and are password protected.
- Several copies were made of original data as data may represent two or more themes (*cf.* 4.7).
- Manual records of these data were kept and carefully labelled, making referring back to data a smooth and easy process.

4.9 RESEARCH TRUSTWORTHINESS

To ensure trustworthiness, Creswell (2009), together with Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest strategies to avoid qualitative research being a matter of opinion. I applied these strategies to this study:

- **Extensive time in the field:** Several months were spent studying the phenomena, namely the knowledge, perception and teaching skills of educators regarding phonological awareness.
- **Clarification of bias:** from the start of this study, I clarified all existing bias.
- **Building trust with participants;** feedback from participants was gained, before data analysis, to clarify any misinterpretations in the questionnaire or interviews. I checked all data.
- **Participant validation:** Data were taken back to participants after analyses, interpretations and conclusions. This was done to verify the accuracy and credibility of my findings, and a written copy of the findings was submitted to all participants. To ensure my honesty, an educational psychologist, remedial therapist and speech therapist working in Hartbeespoort were asked for their opinions to determine whether they agreed or disagreed with my interpretations and conclusions from the data.
- **Triangulation:** This involved a process of corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2009). In this study, four methods of data collection were used namely: questionnaires, interviews (individual and focus group), observations and document analysis.
- **Thick description:** Every situation was described in rich detail to enable readers to draw their own conclusions from data presented.
- **Coded observation:** Observations were coded to focus and guide me.

To ensure the generation of rich data, I utilised various prompts during the interviews to encourage the participants to provide more detail. However, I continuously guided the participants to remain focused on the relevant topic. I also ensured that the English vocabulary used when interviewing the participants was not intimidating. Without providing answers, questions were restructured to ensure that the participants understood the focal point of the questions. Participants were encouraged to describe their answers in full, with the understanding that there are no correct and incorrect answers.

4.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter justified the methodological framework deemed to be the most suitable for this study. Furthermore, aspects of case study research were looked at, followed by an explanation of how the participants were selected. Data collection methods such as questionnaires, interviews, data analyses and observations were discussed, and how I analysed the data was reviewed.

The following chapter focuses on the presentation and discussion of the results.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS



5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the selected methodology most suitable for this study as well as the methods used to gather, interpret and analyse the data. This chapter presents and analyses the findings of the case studies by elucidating patterns and themes emanating from the various data sets.

5.1.1 Overview of data collection and analysis

The schools were coded as the blue school and the red school and participants were coded from A to E to remain anonymous and ensure information provided is confidential (*cf.* 4.4.2).

The themes of this study emerged from an analysis I conducted of all data sets. These themes are supplemented with direct quotations from individual interviews and placed in the context of the literature reviews (see Chapters 2 and 3).

Data were collected in two phases (*cf.* 1.6.5):

Phase 1 involved collecting data from the questionnaires, individual interviews and observations that occurred before the training workshop took place. Data collected focused specifically on Foundation Phase educators' knowledge, perceptions and teaching skills regarding phonological awareness, as well as their opinion of support received by the DBE. The participants struggled to complete the open questionnaire and some of the answers given were not related to the questions. Possible reasons for this could be that, because the educators themselves are ESL speakers and have a limited proficiency in English, the concepts and terminology used in the questionnaire are unfamiliar to them. It appeared as if they grappled to interpret the questions correctly. It was consequently important to have used the interviews and observations to probe the participants' knowledge and understanding thoroughly.

After the data had been gathered in Phase 1, a support programme on how to teach phonological awareness to ESL learners was compiled. The programme was designed in such a manner as to address the specific needs and contexts of the FP educators who took part in this study, as determined in Phase 1. Additionally, curriculum policy requirements as well as previous empirical research findings and discussions in the literature review were incorporated. Thereafter the programme was given to the same specialists who took part in the pilot phase of the questionnaire (*cf.* 4.3.1) to gain their expert opinion. These specialists also recommended that three FP educators from one school in the same area, with whom they had been working closely in supporting ESL learners and have expert knowledge about the teaching of phonological awareness, scrutinise the programme and suggest adaptations if needed. My promoter and co-promoter also added their inputs. These advisors made recommendations with regard to some technical issues as well as suggestions to change certain vocabulary, making it more relevant to the learners' context. However, in general they were satisfied and commended the programme. I considered the suggestions to change some vocabulary in the programme, since I had the same concern. However, the programme is built on the CAPS and the learning material provided by the DBE that the schools are using.

After consultation with the participants my promoters and I decided to rather keep the vocabulary as requested by the participants in the learning material programme.

Phase 2 was the implementation phase. It involved training the educators during a workshop on the concept of phonological awareness and the teaching thereof, and how to use the programme in doing this. After the training I did classroom observations to observe whether the training assisted and enhanced educators' knowledge, perceptions and teaching skills regarding phonological awareness. Moreover, I wanted to provide support to the educators during programme implementation where they felt uncertain or confused. In-service training therefore continued in the classrooms during the implementation of the programme by employing the principles of mediation (*cf.* 3.2) re-explaining and modelling certain stages of phonological awareness, specifically alliteration and syllabification, to a few of the educators who still struggled with these concepts.

After six weeks of the educators implementing the programme, I conducted a focus group interview with the five educators to determine their opinion on the usefulness and applicability of the programme with regard to their knowledge, perceptions and teaching skills of phonological awareness.

Participant profiles will now be given.

5.1.2 Profile of participants

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants who took part in this study it is important to provide a profile of them.

The table below depicts a profile of the five educators who participated in this study. It provides information about their qualifications, home language, years of teaching experience and the grade taught at the time of the study.

Table 5.1: Participants' profile

Participant	Highest teaching qualification	Teaching experience in years	Age	Home Language	Grade currently taught
A	Advanced Certificate in Education	5 – 10	40-45	Setswana	1
B	Bachelor of Education Honours	15 - 20	50-55	Setswana	2 and 3
C	Professional Teacher Certificate in Education	30 - 35	50-55	Setswana	1
D	National Professional Diploma in Education	15 - 20	50-55	Setswana	2
E	Bachelor of Arts - Education	15 - 20	45-50	Afrikaans	3

All the participants in this study were professionally qualified educators and had more than five years of teaching experience in the FP. The Grade 1 educator from the red school had thirty five years of teaching experience, three educators had between fifteen and twenty years of experience while only one educator had between five and ten years' experience. This indicates that they were not novice educators and should have a good understanding of teaching in the FP.

The contexts of these two schools were described in detail in Chapter 4 (*cf.* 4.3.2). The profile of the educators as well as the schools' context was kept in mind throughout the collection of the data as well as during the compilation of the support programme.

In the next section, the themes and sub-themes are presented.

5.1.2.1 Relating data to research questions

In order to make sure that the data addresses the research questions exploring the empirical phase of the research, continuous reference to the research questions are made during the analysis of the various data sets. The table below indicates how the questions from the questionnaire, the two interview sets (individual and group), as well as the three sets of observations, correlate with the research questions.

Table 5.2: Data sets in relation to research questions

Data Source	What is phonological awareness ?	Why is phonological awareness important for learning to read?	How equipped are educators to teach phonological awareness ?	How equipped are educators to assess phonological awareness ?	What is needed to improve phonological awareness teaching and learning in ESL?
Data set 1 Educator questionnaire Appendix A	Questions 5, 6	Questions 7, 12	Questions 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 19, 20	Questions 10, 11	Questions 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20
Data set 2 Individual Interviews Appendix B	Questions 1, 2, 3	Questions 3, 8	Questions 4, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16	Questions 6, 7, 11, 12	Questions 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16
Data set 3 Document analyses: Review of Literature, Support documents from DBE, Documents	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

aiding the design of the support programme					
Data set 4 Observation prior to training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data set 5 Observation during training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data set 6 Observation during programme implementation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Data set 7 Focus Group interviews	Questions 1, 3,	Questions 8	Questions 2, 4, 10, 11, 12, 13	Questions 5, 6	Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

5.2 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

In this section the themes and sub-themes as deduced from the coding of the data are presented (*cf.* Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Tabulated main themes and sub-themes.

Main Themes	Sub-themes
1. Educator knowledge of phonological awareness and assessment thereof	• Basic Terminology
2. Educator skills in teaching and assessing phonological awareness	• Teaching strategies • Assessment strategies • Phonological skills needed for reading • Supporting strategies • Teaching and learning support material
3. Educator perceptions around phonological awareness	• Reasons for ESL learners struggling with phonological awareness

	• Training and Support
4. Time management	• CAPS requirements • Time spent on ESL teaching
5. Support from Department of Education	• Training and support received • Quality of training

These themes and sub-themes are applicable to both phases of data collection. The findings will first be discussed as analysed in Phase 1. Thereafter the same themes and sub-themes will be addressed as analysed in Phase 2. This will indicate if the FP educators' knowledge, skills and perceptions of phonological awareness improved after the training and implementation of the support programme.

The data analysis will now be presented under the five main themes in the following manner:

During the presentation of data analysis, answers on questionnaires and responses to individual interviews are given verbatim and are used to substantiate the themes. I will use the following procedure when illustrating answers given.

The 'P' will be utilised to indicate the participant whose questionnaire answer or interview quote was utilised. The 'S' will represent the school blue or red (B or R), 'Q' for questionnaire, 'I' for individual interview and 'F' for focus group interview.

Example:

SB PA Q: refers to the blue school; participant A; questionnaire.

SR PD I: refers to the red school, participant D, individual interview.

SB PB F: refers to the blue school, participant B, focus group interview.

Educator knowledge of phonological awareness will be discussed next.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Knowledge about phonological awareness

This theme is derived from the open questionnaires as well as the individual interviews and observations in Phase 1. The purpose was to determine what knowledge the educators have about the concept phonological awareness as well as all the

terminology linked to this concept, including: phoneme isolation, identity, blending, segmentation, deletion, addition and substitution. Therefore only one sub-theme resulted from the main theme.

5.2.1.1 Sub-theme: Basic terminology

Phase 1:

None of the definitions given in the questionnaire of the concept phonological awareness by the participants were correct as described in the literature (*cf.* 3.3). Example, phonological awareness can be defined as the awareness of knowing that spoken words are made up of sounds (Siegel, 2004) and refers to the ability to focus on the sounds of speech and the several ways sounds function in words (Manning & Kato, 2006). All five participants defined phonological awareness as phonics in some sort of way:

SB PA Q: *The study of phonic words.*

SB PB Q: *Phonics*

SR PC Q: *Talking about phoenix* (this is a direct transcription).

SR PD Q: *Teaching phonics*

SR PE Q: *Learners must be able to recognise certain letter.*

Furthermore, in the questionnaires three of the participants reflected only rudimentary knowledge on terminology linked to phonological awareness including phoneme isolation, identity, blending, segmentation, deletion, addition and substitution. At times, some participants acknowledged not knowing the answer to the questions on terminology.

Phoneme isolation:

SB PA Q: *No idea.*

SB PB Q: *Separating the phoneme sounds.*

SR PC Q: *To recognise letters.*

SR PD Q: *Letter of alphabets.*

SR PB Q: *Don't know.*

Phoneme identity:

SB PA Q: *Identifies phoneme.*

SB PB Q: *Identification of sounds.*

SR PC Q: *To show how letters are written*

SR PD Q: *Letter of alphabets*

SR PE Q: *Don't know*

Phoneme blending:

SB PA Q: *Variability of phoneme.*

SB PB Q: *Adding two or more blending.*

SR PC Q: *To show how to put them together.*

SR PD Q: *Forming a word.*

SR PE Q: *Pairing of certain letters to create a sound.*

Phoneme segmentation:

SB PA Q: *Breaking into segment of phoneme.*

SB PB Q: *Breaking down the phonemes.*

SR PC Q: *To divide phonics into pieces.*

SR PD Q: *Breaking letter formation.*

SR PE Q: *Don't know.*

Phoneme deletion:

SB PA Q: *Take out or delete.*

SB PB Q: *Leaving out phonemes.*

SR PC Q: *To remove the phoenix.*

SR PD Q: *Forming a word using consonants.*

SR PE Q: *Not sure.*

Phoneme addition:

SB PA Q: *To add on what you have.*

SB PB Q: *Add with the phonemes to complete a word.*

SR PC Q: *To add the letters.*

SR PD Q: *Forming short sentences.*

SR PE Q: *Not sure.*

Phoneme substitution.

SB PA Q: *To substitute with another.*

SB PB Q: *Don't know.*

SR PC Q: *To replace the letter.*

SR PD Q: *Forming a paragraph using sentences.*

SR PE Q: *Don't know.*

During the individual interviews, when participants were asked once again to describe their understanding of the meaning of phonological awareness, their limited knowledge was confirmed. E.g.

SB PC I: *"I think phonological awareness means teaching English."*

The other four participants referred to phonological awareness as phonics. E.g.

SR PD I: *"It's like phonic. When you teach, phonic."*

It was unclear to me if participants who did not refer to "sounds" in their definitions of terminology linked to phonological awareness, were simply defining the meaning of the words 'identify, blending, segmentation, deletion, addition, and substitution with limited or any comprehension of what phonemes itself means. I needed to explore their answers in the individual interviews more in depth but found the same outcome of limited knowledge.

SB PA I: *"It means to substitute."*

SB PB I: *"Um, I don't know."*

SR PC I: *"To replace the letter."*

SR PD I: *"I don't know."*

SR PE I: *"I'm not sure."*

Subsequently, I asked the participants to define 'phonics' in order to gain clarity on whether the participants believe that phonological awareness is the same as phonics or if they had a different definition of phonics and were perhaps confusing the two definitions.

SB PA I: *"Phonics is vowels."*

SB PB I: *"Phonics is grouping letters. Grouping the letters to make sounds to the new words."*

SR PC I: *"The building of words."*

SR PD I: *"It's the same."*

Interviewer: *"The same as phonological awareness?"*

SR PD I: *"Yes, it's the same as phonological awareness."*

SR PE I: *“I think phonics is like ‘shop’, they must know the /o/ in shop. That’s what I think it is, I’m not sure.”*

Limited knowledge of the concept phonological awareness as well as the terminology linked to it was also reflected in their teaching. During the classroom observations, teaching in phonological awareness periods revolved mainly around phonics instruction such as instructing learners to fill in the missing letter or copy words from the board into their books. No emphasis was placed on English sounds.

Phase 2:

During this phase, observations during training, classroom observations and a group interview were employed to collect data. During the training workshop, by using the support programme, I explicitly explained the meaning of phonological awareness to the participants. The difference between phonics and phonological awareness was highlighted and reinforced by giving clear definitions of the concepts. Participants seemed to understand the difference between concepts as I asked them to orally define them for me and they could indicate the differences between concepts.

Each participant received a support programme pertaining to the grade they teach. Concepts linked to phonological awareness such as phoneme isolation, addition, substitution, and others were explained during training together with activities from the support programme that could be utilised to teach all stages of phonological awareness to the participants. After the training, during observations, it was noted that the participants’ phonological awareness lessons focused more on sounds of the English language and less emphasis was placed on phonics activities. Participants therefore appeared to have a clearer understanding of the difference between teaching phonics and teaching phonological awareness.

During the focus group interview, when participants were asked if they now have a better understanding of phonological awareness, participants indicated that their knowledge and understanding of the difference between phonological awareness and phonics improved.

SB PA F: *“We understand it much better.”*

SB PB F: *“Yes. Much better. We were very unsure in the beginning but now we know what to do. We feel better.”*

To confirm their understanding I randomly asked the participants in the group interview to define the concept phonological awareness and phonics again. This time they answered correctly.

SR PC F: *“Phonological awareness is knowing the sounds of speech.”*

SB PB F: *“It’s when words are made up of sounds.”*

SR PD F: *“Phonological awareness is not writing. It’s listening and saying the sounds.”*

SB PA F: *“Phonics is the letter written for the sound.”*

SB PB F: *“It’s the relationship between sounds and the letters.”*

5.2.1.2 Discussion of findings

Participants appeared to have a limited English language proficiency and this could possibly have had an impact on their understanding of terminology pertaining to phonological awareness. English is their second language and one should bear in mind that different or more informative answers could have been given if the same questions in the questionnaire and interview were asked in the participants’ mother tongue.

Participants demonstrated a definitive confusion between phonological awareness and phonics prior to training, and revealed little knowledge of terminology linked to phonological awareness. Most participants described phonological awareness as phonics opposed to sounds of speech (*cf.* 3.3; 5.2.1.1) Nevertheless, the general limited or inadequate knowledge of phonological awareness illustrated by the participants, is confirmed by other international studies such as Chessman *et al.* (2009) who also found that many educators do not have the necessary knowledge or skills to teach phonological awareness effectively (*cf.* 3.5.1.1). Other studies conducted by McCutchen *et al.* (2002) as well as Spear-Swerling *et al.* (2005) discovered that after selected educators with inadequate phonological awareness knowledge had attended teaching and instruction on phonological awareness, the reading and spelling skills of the learners in these educators’ classrooms improved remarkably (*cf.* 3.5.1.1). The

implication of a limited knowledge of phonological awareness means that educators cannot select suitable phonological awareness activities and implement them accordingly in order to ensure that an appropriate foundation is laid for the development of reading and spelling skills (McCutchen *et al.*, 2002; Spear-Swerling *et al.*, 2005).

The participants of this study unpretentiously acknowledged that they had a limited knowledge of phonological awareness and were enthusiastic to learn more about phonological awareness and terminologies linked to the concept. Their positive attitude and willingness to learn was inspiring to me. Consequently they actively took part in the training workshop, and their gain in knowledge was portrayed in their lessons during the observations after training. This confirms that with appropriate training phonological awareness can be understood and aptly taught, as has also been shown by studies of McCutchen *et al.* (2002) as well as Spear-Swerling *et al.* (2005).

The second main theme namely skills in teaching phonological awareness will now be discussed.

5.2.2 Theme: Skills in teaching phonological awareness

The subthemes include teaching strategies, assessment strategies, phonological skills needed for reading, supporting strategies and teaching and learning support material.

Theme:	Skills in teaching phonological awareness
Subthemes:	Teaching strategies
	Assessment strategies
	Phonological skills needed for reading
	Supporting strategies
	Teaching and learning support material.

5.2.2.1 Subtheme: Teaching strategies

In the questionnaires and during the individual interviews two of the participants seemed to have an understanding of relevant teaching strategies for phonological awareness.

Phase 1:

SB PA Q: *For the small children to understand better I normally start with a song to sing out loudly the alphabet, months of the year etc. Also the games, words that start with a, b, c etc. Teaching become enjoyable and memorable for them.*

SB PB Q: *Storytelling with the phonic sound. Words and pictures with the sounds.*

The remaining three participants referred to strategies for phonics instruction combined with phonological awareness.

SR PC Q: *They first sing all the sounds of the alphabet.*

Then the teacher write some few letters on the board. The learners read them one by one on the board. The teacher read them first then the learners read after the teacher. There after they write sentences. They look at the pictures. They point out phonics from the picture.

SR PD Q: *Teach them the phonic you have prepared eg: ea read the sound and they follow you. They try to say other word with the same sounds they know; write them on the board, read it for them.*

Use flash cards or pictures and ask them to say the name of the picture – read it for them from the flash card.

SR PE Q: *I only started in Gr 3 class now. I'm planning to make word cards with picture to put up in the class. Also word card or flip cards to show the learners to read out in groups.*

During the interviews the participants particularly made reference to singing songs and dancing to the songs. However, all participants mentioned that they don't always have an appropriate music compact disk (cd) available.

SB PA I: *"We don't have access to that CD for movement and dancing."*

SB PB I: *"We sing but we don't have resources like CDs. We sing the poems or the song that you are teaching that day. You know our children like to sing and dance; when we give them a song they memorise it."*

SR PE 1: *“I make use of music and movement when I started and they enjoyed it but we don’t have equipment.”*

In the course of the observations, learners were given several worksheets by the educators to complete, but no emphasis was placed on English speech sounds and no knowledge of the sequence of teaching phonological awareness according to developmental stages was displayed. Although the focus of this study is not on incorrect pronunciation or code switching, these factors were prevalent in all the lessons during observation. Since this could have an impact on phonological awareness I noted this (cf. 2.4.3; 2.4.4).

Incorrect pronunciation of short vowels in English by educators was observed regularly. Example, the sound /a/ was articulated /ah/ as you would pronounce it in the word ‘bark’ or pronounced /ei/ as you would pronounce the word ‘pay’. Words given to associate the sound with a word were also incorrect, e.g.

“a is for alaphant and e is for epple.”

“oo is for umbrella.”

Furthermore, the words below were frequently modelled incorrectly by participants and copied by learners:

“ We have a good friendsheep.”

“This is my muda and my seesta.”

CS (code switching) was prevalent during lessons, e.g. when stories were read to the learners, the participant would read one sentence and then repeat it in Setswana. At times, every word was repeated in Setswana before the participant continued to read. Rote learning occurred predominantly when participants were trying to reinforce the pronunciation of a particular sound. Example, participants pointed to letters of the alphabet and instructed learners to repeat after them. It was a repetition of /a/, /a/, /a/, /b/, b/, /b/, etcetera, paired with incorrect pronunciation. Educators would also over-articulate certain sounds, e.g. /bu/ for /b/. Further examples of rote learning are:

Participant: *“This is /bu/ for ball, say this is /bu/ for ball.”*

Learners: "This is /bu/ for ball."

Participant: "Again, this is /bu/ for ball."

Learners: "This is /bu/ for ball."

Phase 2:

Participants were trained during the workshop on how to use different teaching strategies for the teaching of phonological skills, such as employing rhymes and songs and how to actively involve learners. Example, learners can stomp their feet or clap their hands when they hear words that rhyme. Clapping of hands on every syllable in names or words, and stretching out of the arms if a word is segmented were also demonstrated to them as other effective tools to enhance learning. The value of storytelling was emphasised, and this tool was a favourite among the participants. I furthermore spent a lot of time reinforcing correct pronunciation of English short vowels as I noticed during training that participants struggled with this. Eventually as a team, we decided to associate the vowels with an easy word clearly representing the correct short vowel sound. We agreed on a - ant, e – egg, i – in, o – on, u – up. Participants suggested writing these words on a cardboard with the corresponding vowel below and pasting it on the one side of the chalkboard. I made a note to observe this specifically, to determine whether this initiative would come into fruition. During the first week of observation after training, I made another personal note: "I have goose bumps." I was impressed at the way the learners were pronouncing the short vowels correctly. The singing of songs was used appropriately as well as in an entertaining manner. The learners also loved the movements and active participation whilst singing. Singing songs as a teaching strategy was utilised more frequently than rhymes, but the emphasis on various English sounds was evident. Phonological awareness activities according to the stage of development were clearly differentiated between Grade 1, 2 and 3. I noticed this as the degree of difficulty in activities increased from grade to grade. As observation comprised six weeks and not a full school term, I decided to ask participants in the group interview to describe all the teaching strategies they used to teach phonological awareness.

SB PB F: *"We used a lot of story telling."*

SB PB F: *"I gave them turns to retell the story."*

SB PA F: *"Yes, and we use lots of pictures with the stories."*

SR PD F: *"We did a lot sounds with songs in the programme. The children like to sing and dance."*

SR PE F: *"Ya, they love it."*

5.2.2.2 Subtheme: Assessment strategies

Not only information on participants' teaching strategies was important, but also how they assessed learners' phonological awareness. Findings set out below were derived from the questionnaire, individual interviews and observations in Phase 1 as well as observations in Phase 2 together with the focus group interview.

Phase 1:

Participants gave the following description of the assessment strategies they use to assess phonological awareness in the questionnaire.

SB PA Q: *Pictures – pick up some phonic words from pictures then use words on making sentences. They draw pictures relevant to the phonics drilled and write caption for the picture.*

SB PB Q: *Fill in the letters. Writing about the phonics sounds/missing. Talking about different phonics and meaning.*

SB PC Q: *Learners read the phoenix [a verbatim transcription] in their book. Then the teacher assess them by using the rubric. The teacher see if learner can read the words and can be able to make sentences with those words.*

SB PD Q: *Informal assessment – ask them to read words from the flash cards. Match those words to the picture. Read them. Ask them to write those words in their own. Write sentences using words.*

SB PE Q: *I don't know. I only started using CAPS now today. Assessment as a concept was understood by participants but time constraints regarding implementing assessment activities was their main area of concern.*

Uncertainty regarding what and how to assess phonological awareness was expressed during the individual interviews.

SB PA I: *“Ya assessment um is a big problem. It is difficult for me. Especially where the assessment of English or phono or what?”*

SB PB I: *“For assessment I give them letters to fill.”*

SR PC I: *“Ooh I don’t know how to assess. I don’t know what to say.”*

SR PD I: *“I don’t know how to describe it. Let me say nê, when I give them a task nê, and then when I ask I will see if the child must answer me and I will see if he must or she must know.”*

SR PE I: *“I haven’t started with assessment in Foundation Phase yet so I wouldn’t know.”*

When I asked the participants how they recorded their assessment, they all revealed having an assessment rubric they utilise to record their assessments.

SB PA I: *“We have rubrics that are helping us to record.”*

SB PB I: *“When there is time I use a rubric. To be honest with you I never used it. Perhaps if you see it you can help us to use it.”*

SR PC I: *“There is no time.”*

Interviewer: *“What do you use when you do have time?”*

SR PD I: *“I use a rubric.”*

SR PE I: *“When I taught in the intermediate phase, I had rubrics, I will use that one when I record.”*

Although the participants explained how and what they assessed, it seemed that none of them had yet actually done any assessment during the data collection period. No assessment was done either during observation and no assessment rubrics could be made available for me to observe when I asked for them. Participants said that they would have to look for them.

Phase 2:

During the training workshop, I explained to the participants the importance of assessment and applying assessment appropriately. I then demonstrated assessment strategies they could utilise in order to assess learners' phonological awareness. These assessment strategies were taken from the support programme. Example, to assess whether a learner can delete a phoneme and say the rest of the word, ask a learner to say 'mouse' but without the /m/.

I selected the P.A.S.T (Phonological Awareness Skills Test) assessment tool (Wright, 2005) to demonstrate how phonological awareness can be assessed. I chose this tool, as it is an instrument used to assess every stage of phonological awareness. The instrument provides the educator with guidelines to mark an assessment activity (Wright, 2005; Gillon, 2004). This tool formed part of the support programme issued to participants. However, during the observation following training, the educators did no phonological awareness assessment of learners using the P.A.S.T. tool. Assessment activities comprised more of worksheets. When I asked the participants about this in the group interview, they told me they opted for worksheets due to time constraints.

SR PE F: *"I gave them a worksheet and asked them to write the name of the picture shown on the worksheet. There is very little time."*

SR PB C: *"They had to fill in the missing letter."*

SB PB F: *"The problem is the children can't speak English, so they don't understand all the sounds. It's their second or third language so it's difficult to assess things with sounds. They get confused and we don't have time. "*

SR PB F: *"Ya, English is very difficult."*

Phonological skills needed for reading is the third subtheme that will be discussed below.

5.2.2.3 Subtheme: Phonological skills needed for reading

According to Gillon (2004) effective phonological awareness teaching has a significant impact on developing reading ability and plays an important role for the transfer from

spoken language to written language (*cf.* 3.5). This theme was derived from the questionnaire, individual interviews and observations in Phase 1, as well as the observation and focus group interview in Phase 2.

Phase 1:

Three participants seemed to display adequate knowledge about phonological skills needed for reading.

SB PA Q: *Listening skills very important for them to be able to memorise some words. Drilling a lot sounds – once they have sounds they will be able to read easily.*

SB PB Q: *They need to hear more. Listening skills and memory skills.*

SR PC Q: *By using most of the time pictures and tell them what is in the picture. The learners discuss the picture with the teacher.*

The remaining two participants displayed little to no knowledge of phonological skills needed for reading and gave answers irrelevant to the question asked.

SR PD Q: *We need enough teaching material, resources like overhead projector.*

SR PE Q: *They should start to recognise words on billboard and ads. They should also start to read.*

Answers provided by two participants during interviews were confusing and language proficiency of the educators played a role, e.g.

SR PC I: *“Imitate.”*

Interviewer: *“Must they imitate you?”*

SR PC I: *“Yes, when I read, they must imitate.”*

SR PD I: *“Hey must remember and hearing.”*

Interviewer: *“They must remember what they have heard?”*

SR PD I: *“Ya. They must repeat repeat repeat what they are hearing.”*

The remaining three participants displayed elementary knowledge of phonological skills needed for reading.

SB PA I: *“They must hear a sound and when they heard a word, they must hear all the sounds like berd, they must hear the bu – er – du.”*

SB PB I: *“They must be able to discriminate whether it’s a sound they have heard or a different sound from what you have heard.”*

SR PE I: *“They must spell out the word they hear.”*

Phonological skills needed for reading, such as rhymes, songs, alliteration or breaking up words into syllables orally were not covered often in participants’ lessons during the observations. Participants at times read a story to the children but no activities were implemented after story telling.

During some lessons, there was a lot of focus on the alphabet sounds and educators requested learners to repeat the alphabet sounds after them, e.g. /a/, /a/ ,/a/, /b/, /b/, /b/.

Phase 2:

The importance of phonological awareness skills for the development of reading ability was explained and emphasised during training. I made a note, during training, of difficulties experienced by participants when practising the activities such as breaking up words orally into syllables. Extra time was spent on alliteration and oral syllabification, since they appeared to struggle with these. One participant in particular frequently confused the concept of alliteration with syllabification. I re-explained this to her by giving her more examples of alliteration until the concepts were understood.

During observations, the participants displayed frequent confusion with oral syllabification. This was an indication to me that they needed further in-service training on oral syllabification as they continued to find this concept challenging. I therefore provided further support to them during the observation sessions on how to break words up into syllables orally.

During the group interview, when participants were asked if they now understand phonological awareness, two participants mentioned that syllabification remained a challenge.

SR PA F: *"We understand it much better now but when we have to break the werds into syllables, it's very confusing."*

SB PD F: *"Yes. Very difficult."*

5.2.2.4 Subtheme: Supporting strategies

This subtheme was derived from both the questionnaire, individual interviews observations in Phase 1 and 2 as well as the focus group interview in Phase 2. Three participants described the type of support they extend to learners who struggle with phonological awareness whilst the remaining two claimed there was no time and therefore did not offer any support to their learners as yet.

Phase 1:

SB PA Q: *Drilling of sounds and vowels. Lots of picutres and sounds. Pictures and letters. Picture and a werds.*

SB PB Q: *We give them more pictures to connect to the sounds – not enough though.*

SR PC Q: *By using most of the time the picture and write the name of the picture. Then after the teacher tell them the phoenix that are found in the word.*

SR PD Q: *There is not enough time.*

SR PE Q: *I haven't done any support.*

Participants gave similar answers in the individual interview to that of the questionnaire, therefore no new data was gathered, e.g.

SB PA I: *"We give them lots of pictures, with words."*

SR PD I: *"There is no time."*

No support to any learners was noted during observation.

Phase 2:

The support programme I designed for the participants was compiled in such a way that it could be utilised as a teaching, assessment and support strategy. I explained to the participants how activities in the programme could be employed to re-teach or reinforce a phonological awareness skill. However, no support to learners was noticed during observation. I have added this personal note I made during observation “they’ve explained support but I haven’t seen any.” I noticed a few learners who needed support. One learner walked right out of the classroom during the lesson and several others were playing at their desks speaking Setswana to each other all the time. I asked participants about this during the focus group interview and they answered the following:

SR PC F: “I never even noticed the learner. Our classes are so big.”

SR PD F: “There is no time for support.”

SB PA F: “We don’t get time.”

5.2.2.5 Subtheme: Teaching and learning support material

To clarify what teaching and learning support material participants’ utilise for phonological awareness, I asked them to list the materials in the questionnaire as well as in the individual interviews.

Phase 1:

SB PA Q: Departmental books. Own charts to understand the sounds and letters.

SB PB Q: Phonics books with pictures.

SR PC Q: Rainbow book. Big book. Reader. Learner books. Charts.

SR PD Q: Rainbow books. Oxford success.

SR PE Q: Flashcards.

SB PA I: “We make our own charts with pictures, we use the learners’ workbook and some of the readers.”

SB PB I: “We make flashcards, uh, uh, the Big Book and we just improvise.”

Participants C, D and E gave similar answers in the interviews as to those in the questionnaire.

A note I made during observation was “there are a lot of books piled up in this class.” However, the participants utilised none of these books whilst I was there. I browsed through the books one afternoon after school and found they were filled with activities that could be used in all four components of EFAL teaching (*cf.* 3.9).

Phase 2:

The support programme for Grade 1, 2 and 3 were discussed during training, as learning support material that could be utilised for teaching and learning phonological awareness. Thereafter during observations, it was obvious that the participants were positive about utilising the support programme as teaching and support material. This was mentioned in the focus group interview.

SR PD F: *“This programme helps us a lot. I am just going to use this programme.”*

SR PC F: *Nodding head.*

SB PA F: *“Yes it is a very good programme. It gives us everything.”*

In addition to this, I found during observation and in the group interviews that the participants predominantly selected to employ the stories as well as the songs and rhymes in the programme as teaching and learning material. They asserted during the group interview that the learners enjoyed listening to the stories and looking at the pictures accompanying them. The participants felt that the stories helped the learners to learn the English sounds as well as to gain and understand new vocabulary. Participants claimed the other activities in general were easy and fun activities but they admitted not utilising them as often as the stories.

SB PA F: *“We use the stories a lot.”*

SR PE F: *“The stories are very good.”*

5.2.2.6 Discussion and findings

At first, although participants used teaching strategies that could be employed for phonological awareness they applied it for the teaching of phonics, believing that they were teaching phonological awareness. It resulted in these strategies not being correctly utilised to enhance the learning of phonological awareness. During the observations in Phase 1, I requested the participants to look at their lesson plans to determine which activities they selected to teach phonological awareness. All their lesson plans indicated activities pertaining to phonics instruction. One lesson plan is attached as an example (See Appendix F). This confirms the findings by Chessman *et al.* (2009) that educators confuse phonological awareness with phonics and therefore struggle to select task appropriate activities for teaching phonological awareness. During Phase 1 of the research, it was noted that participants often employed stories, but the learners were not actively involved in the story lessons with activities such as dramatizing or retelling the story. There was also little to no singing of songs or reciting of rhymes. An implication of not teaching songs and nursery rhymes restricts learners' exposure to English sounds as well as their understanding of vocabulary. This is confirmed by Gillon (2004) who asserts not only do songs and rhymes expose learners to the English sounds, but assist with understanding the meanings of the words for learners who have limited English vocabulary (*cf.* 3.5.1.2).

As learners repeated what the educators were saying it resulted in the learners repeating and learning incorrect pronunciation as modelled by participants (*cf.* 2.4.3; 2.4.4). A reason for incorrect pronunciation by the participants could be because they are not English mother tongue speakers. The impact of this on phonological awareness is that when educators model incorrect pronunciation to young learners, they learn the incorrect phonetical and phonological structure of the English language (Wallace Nilsson, 2011) (*cf.* 3.5.1.2). A study by Nel and Muller (2010) showed that phonological errors by learners occurred when English second language educators taught sound, intonation and pronunciation, and language usage erroneously. Their study found that faulty spelling modelled by ESL educators was copied and learnt by the learners (*cf.* 2.4.3). The findings of this study concur with that of Nel and Muller (2010).

Code switching (CS) was also used regularly in the ESL classrooms of this study and can be defined as the use of one or more languages in the same conversation.

Switches between languages can be made at different stages of the conversation albeit a word, phrase or sentence (Probyn, 2009). Educators use code switching due to their English language proficiency being limited. Probyn (2009) postulates educators often employ code switching when they lack fluency in English, or when their own vocabulary is limited, or when they are unsure of the correct usage of grammar (*cf.* 2.4.4). According to Cummins (2005) and Carless (2007) CS has negative effects on English language learning. When learners are in the English second language classroom, they should have minimal reference to their mother tongue. This prevents any interference from the mother tongue, which is believed to inhibit the language learning process (Cummins, 2005; Carless, 2007). CS could have a negative impact on phonological awareness as CS impedes the quantity and quality of the English language as learners and educators resort too easily to their mother tongue, limiting opportunities to initiate communication in English (Littlewood & Yu, 2009) (*cf.* 2.4.4.2). Fleish (2008) concurs that CS opens the door to academic failure and seldom provides learners with the language knowledge needed for learning and assessment.

To result in effective teaching for phonological awareness, it is consequently essential that educators need to be capacitated with better knowledge and skills to ensure a solid foundation for literacy development (*cf.* 3.5.1.1) (Chessman *et al.*, 2009). Gillon (2004) declared that a literacy programme typically begins with early phonological awareness instruction involving the use of songs, rhymes and stories. However, it is critical that different activities must be implemented to make learners observant of the sounds of the English language in different contexts. This has been attempted with the support programme. All activities were presented in a structured manner in the support programme, according to the stages of phonological awareness to make it uncomplicated to understand and apply. After the training the participants were able to design their lessons around the activities from the support programme. Participants appropriately employed songs and rhymes, and learners enjoyed doing the actions and participating in lessons. There was a noted improvement in learners' knowledge of English sounds as well as the pronunciation thereof meaning their phonological awareness skills showed improvement.

The participants also took the initiative to create their own tunes for some of the rhymes and this added to bettering their pronunciation of the short vowels and other sounds of

the alphabet. This improvement can be illustrated with the following example. Instead of participants and learners pronouncing /a/ as /ah/ or /o/ as /oo/, these short vowels were pronounced and recognised correctly by learners.

This affirms that if educators are trained properly and have relevant resources, they are able to teach phonological awareness effectively, despite themselves struggling with language proficiency. It can therefore be asserted that if educators acquire competent teaching skills in English, it will result in the development of language competency in learners (Ebersohn *et al.*, 2014; De Jager & Evans, 2013; Howie *et al.*, 2008).

Participants' knowledge of "what" and "how" to assess phonological awareness emerged as inadequate in Phase 1. They were inclined to only give learners spelling tests or ask them to fill in the missing letters on worksheets during the phonological awareness lessons (See appendix H1). The reason for this could be that, due to the large numbers of learners in their classrooms as well as the pressure from the department to have written assessments done, spelling tests and worksheets are the easiest strategy to follow. Auditory assessments can also be noisy, and in an overcrowded classroom, educators tend to rather do more written work. Lumadi (2013) claims that educators experience major challenges with assessment planning, implementation of assessment methods, the use of a variety of strategies in assessment as well as limited time for assessment. This could be due to difficulties experienced by educators to understand and interpret assessment policies (including the CAPS) and what exactly is expected to be taught (Lumadi, 2013). Relating to this study, participants possibly felt uncertain of what and how to assess regarding phonological awareness and therefore avoided assessment thereof. Assessing phonics seemed to be an easier form of assessment, even after training, as learners were given worksheets to complete instead of phonological awareness activities. As assessment allows educators to identify delays in phonological awareness and what to reteach (Gillon, 2004), (*cf.* 3.4.3), using appropriate assessment strategies is crucial. Educators therefore need to understand the benefits of adequate assessment (Gillon, 2004). This aspect, however, seems to continue being a challenge for educators. Even after they had been given examples of tools and trained on how to employ suitable assessment strategies, they could not show evidence of appropriate assessment during Phase 2.

Phonological awareness skills are needed to develop reading ability. Participants displayed adequate knowledge and understanding in the questionnaire and individual interview with regard to this issue. However, no phonological skills such as rhyming words, alliteration and syllabification were observed being taught in Phase 1 of observations. This was a cause for concern, because when learners establish phonological awareness skills at an early age, it leads to better reading performance (De Sousa & Broom, 2011; Zhang & McBride-Chang, 2010) (*cf.* 3.5). After the training, the participants seemed better skilled and used rhyming words and alliteration in lessons more successfully. Yet, teaching syllabification remained challenging for participants. Words were written on the board and learners were expected to break up words into syllables in written form instead of orally. A reason for this could be that participants are in a habit of utilising worksheets and writing on the chalkboard and possibly forgot that phonological skills are aural and oral activities. The importance of oral syllabification is that learners learn to break up words into syllable units, which they then recognise easier later in print. This ability of syllabification enhances reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension (Lane *et al.*, 2002). Oral syllabification provides learners with the correct pronunciation of the word as learners hear emphasis on certain parts of words, and in turn read them correctly in text. When learners skip oral syllabification, they tend to pronounce and read words incorrectly, not knowing where the accent or emphasis on words should fall (Lane *et al.*, 2002) (*cf.* 3.3). The skill of hearing syllables, separating them and then blending them is vital to the process of learning to read (Gillon, 2004) (*cf.* 3.3).

Participants struggled with syllabification due to differences in orthography of the languages English and Setswana. Some linguistic units are more important in Setswana. Example, the last syllable of all verbs in the present tense end in the vowel 'a', while in English verbs in the present tense could end in almost any of the vowels or consonants of the language (*cf.* 3.10). I assisted participants with oral syllabification one day after school hours again and participants found it difficult to understand that a syllable always consists of one vowel sound, and that several vowels in English can form one sound, e.g. beau- ti- ful. I explained to participants that three vowels /eau/ make one vowel sound, and emphasised that English vowel sound knowledge is imperative with syllabification as long or short vowel sounds are determined by the positioning of consonants and other vowels around it in the onset and rime unit (Lane,

et al., 2002) (*cf.* 3.3). Participants often lacked knowledge of long vowel sounds and sounds of vowel combinations. Lessons on syllabification after additional training did appear to improve as participants requested learners to break up words into syllables orally and clap on each syllable.

Support strategies for learners who struggle with phonological awareness were described in the questionnaires and individual interviews as a combination of drilling sounds and vowels, as well as using lots of pictures and words (*cf.* 5.2.2.4). During the observations in Phase 1, I requested the participants to look at their lesson plans to determine which activities they selected to teach phonological awareness. All lesson plans indicated activities pertaining to phonics instruction, and no reference was made to support strategies. One lesson plan is attached as an example (See Appendix H). No support, as described by participants in the questionnaire and individual interviews, was provided to learners during observations in Phase 1 or Phase 2. When I asked participants about this issue, they claimed that there was no time to provide support (*cf.* 5.2.2.4). According to Carrol and Snowling (2003), learners with phonological difficulties struggle with recognition of rhyme, discriminating between sounds, onset and rime, blending and segmenting and syllabification, due to their inability to hold several sounds in their short-term memory (Anthony *et al.*, 2007; Carrol & Snowling 2003) (*cf.* 3.4.1). Providing support to learners is therefore imperative when phonological difficulties are detected to prevent reading disorders.

Teaching and learning material used by the participants in the classroom comprised learner workbooks for EFAL provided by the DBE, and on occasion, worksheets participants photocopied from either their personal books or other random books in their classrooms. Participants all mentioned having the “*Big Book*” from the DBE (*cf.* 5.2.2.5) but I never observed any lessons where the Big Book was utilised for story telling or any other component of EFAL. Participants also made no use of flash cards they claimed to have made either (*cf.* 5.2.2.5). After the training, the participants preferred to combine activities from the DBE learners’ workbook with activities from the support programme. Participants acknowledged employing the stories with the pictures in the programme the most often from all the activities. Siegel (2004) emphasises that the use of visual approaches with illustrating pictures representing a sound or shared sounds, have proven to be extremely effective in teaching phonological awareness, because learners

learn to identify sounds much quicker and easier (*cf.* 3.5.1.2). Participants at the blue school utilised the sand outside as a form of teaching and support material during one of their lessons where they requested learners to draw the letter 'a' outside in the sand. Passy (2007) asserts that phonological awareness teaching should involve multisensory activities including the following:

- Visual: Illustrating pictures representing a sound or shared sounds.
- Auditory: Asking learners to identify the rhyming words in a story or rhyme.
- Tactile: Educators can ask learners to make letters in the sand, (as clay and wooden blocks are not available at these schools) e.g. /c/, for carrot and cat.
- Kinaesthetic: Should involve the use of body movements, e.g. roll up and pretend you are the letter 'o' (Passy, 2007).

Furthermore, participants claimed they found the programme to be a helpful and beneficial tool for phonological awareness teaching and support as they felt the programme provided them with everything they need (*cf.* 5.2.2.5).

Educator perceptions as third main theme will be discussed next.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Educator perceptions of phonological awareness

5.2.3.1 Subtheme: Reasons for ESL learners struggling with phonological awareness

5.2.3.2 Phase 1:

Firstly, in the questionnaire participants were asked why they think ESL learners struggle with phonological awareness skills. The reason given by the participants was that the English language is a barrier to learning due to learners' lack of exposure to English and being the second or third language of most learners.

SB PA Q: *Language barrier. Most of our learners are from different cultures Tsonga, Tswana, Zulu and Xhosa. Because of language they struggle to understand the language because it is done together with their mother tongue language.*

SB PB Q: *It is not their first/home language. Parents are mostly illiterate and can't support them - Most do not have access to the media newspapers, magazines and radios – only listens to music.*

SR PC Q: *Sometime the language is the problem.*

SR PD Q: *They don't hear it at home. Their parents don't even know or go to school.*

SR PE Q: *I think it is all the languages they speak. They know different languages and then English is maybe their third language and then they get confused.*

To make sure I correctly interpreted the questionnaire in that participants perceived a limited proficiency in the English language as the only reason ESL learners struggle with phonological awareness, I asked this question again in the individual interview. The participants confirmed their answers of the questionnaire:

SR PE I: *"It's the English. They don't hear enough English. If the children do have a tv they will tell you they watch Scandal and nothing with proper English."*

One participant mentioned the irrelevance of the teaching and learning material as a reason why ESL learners struggle with phonological awareness.

SB PB I: *"The books we have are not relevant. You want for Grade 1s. For Grade 2 you want for Grade 2s, for Grade 3, Grade 3."*

During the observations, I noticed learners' limited proficiency in the English language and I added a personal note I made saying: "These children don't understand one word."

Phase 2:

During the training, I discussed the importance of sequential and effective phonological awareness teaching. I explained that neglecting one or more of these stages could be a reason for ESL learners struggling with phonological awareness. Vygotsky's theory (1978) was referred to when I explained to participants about scaffolding and cognitive apprenticeship (*cf.* 3.2.3) and that phonological awareness has several stages of development, and mastery of one stage is imperative before proceeding to the next stage.

After the training, participants presented phonological awareness lessons according to the learners' current stage of phonological awareness development. The lessons observed over the few weeks followed the correct sequence of phonological awareness development. Participants claimed that they believe they can now teach phonological awareness in a more structured and practical manner. Yet, when asked in the focus group interview what they now perceive as reasons for learners still struggling with phonological awareness, they once again stated limited exposure to English.

SB PB F: *"They don't hear enough English at home."*

SB PA F: *"Mmmm, not enough and their parents can't speak it."*

SB PC F: *"Most of them don't even have a tv."*

5.2.3.3 Sub-theme: Training and support needs of educators

Phase 1:

Referring to one of my research sub-questions namely: what is needed to improve ESL teaching of phonological awareness? I asked participants in the questionnaire to indicate what they felt their training and support needs are to support ESL learners who struggle with phonological awareness skills.

Four participants in this study indicated a need for further training and support in order to support learners who struggle with phonological awareness effectively. Their answers are given below.

SB PA Q: *We need training. We need exactly material that can help us to make easy for them.*

SB PB Q: *Extra training and assistance in dealing with it.*

SR PD Q: *Teachers need more training.*

SR PE Q: *I will have to get additional training and support.*

One participant gave a peculiar answer and possibly misunderstood the question as she gave the following answer.

SR PC Q: *Many charts for many children. By using them in radio.*

To rule out ambiguous understanding of the question (as participant C focused on teaching materials as training and support needs), I asked this question again in the individual interviews. The participants did not indicate in the questionnaire either what training they needed or what support, to assist learners who struggle with phonological awareness. Their need for additional training was reiterated during interviews again but this time they were more specific.

SB PA I: *“Actually, support starting from the very beginning. Like right now if I have to do teaching and support, what do I do and teach and support, the different steps they need to do for so the children can learn quicker.”*

SB PB I: *“I would like for a person to - to help me more how, where specifically to start. Where to start, how to to to help me with the songs, the poem, little bit of reading, knowing the letters, how to fit them to make own sentence.”*

SR PC I: *“I would like someone to help me because once the children know their sounds, they can make sentences on their own, they can read instruction during test.”*

SR PD I: *“I think I want to know how to teach them this.”*

Interviewer: *“Phonological awareness?”*

SR PD I: *“Ya, so I can just know how to teach them so that they can remember it quickly because sometimes they forget. I would like to know more especially actions.”*

Interviewer: *“Using actions to support learners who struggle with phonological awareness?”*

SR PD I: *“Yes.”*

SR PE I: *“I think you are going to help me a lot with teaching and support.”*

During the observations it was confirmed that participants needed specific training and support on phonological awareness teaching, since their knowledge and skills seemed limited with regard to the teaching thereof (cf. 5.2.1; 5.2.2).

Phase 2:

The support programme was specifically designed to address the participants' needs with regard to the teaching and support of phonological awareness within their contexts (*cf.* 6.3.3). In conversations during the focus group interview, participants perceived the support programme as a tool that assisted them in becoming better educators to positively affect the teaching and support of phonological awareness skills.

SR PC F: *"We understand everything now."*

SR PE F: *"Ya, we know what to do."*

SB PB F: *"You really helped us a lot."*

SB PA F: *"Yes, a lot." All participants nodded their heads."*

5.2.3.4 Discussion of findings

The participants in general believed that their learners are struggling with phonological awareness because of their limited exposure and proficiency in English. A majority of learners are from disadvantaged environments and therefore have no computer or television available at home where they can hear and see English. Since the learners' home language is mainly Setswana or another African language it can be assumed that the parents do not converse with them in English. According to Pflapson (2011) as well as O'Connor and Gieger (2009), it is easier for parents to support their children in a language they themselves are proficient in (*cf.* 2.4.5). Singh (2009) asserts that exposure to a language at home, and not only at school, will improve the proficiency in that language.

However, during the data collection I noted that the participants themselves are ESL speakers and display a limited proficiency in English (*cf.* 5.2.3.1). This could of course also impact on their not having adequate knowledge and skills to teach phonological awareness or understand the difficulties learners experience. Howie (2007) claims that explaining new concepts to learners as well as providing the necessary support can be a challenging task for ESL educators due to their own limited language proficiency. Howie (2007) also declares that educators need to assess learners' knowledge of sounds, letters and letter combinations, and inadequate language proficiency of

educators in English could cause these assessments to be unreliable (2.4.3). According to research studies, educators' acquisition of competent teaching skills in English is instrumental in effecting the development of language competency in learners (Ebersohn *et al.*, 2014; De Jager & Evans, 2013; Howie, 2007) (*cf.* 2.4.3).

Not one participant mentioned that ineffective teaching strategies and their not understanding what phonological awareness entails could also contribute to learners struggling with phonological awareness. In Phase 2, during training, I referred to the Vygotskyian theory of building on prior knowledge and removing a scaffold once learners are capable of completing a task independently (*cf.* 3.2.3; 5.2.3.1). Schunk (2008) asserts that scaffolding allows learners to acquire skills they would unlikely to be able to acquire without assistance. This means that learners are supported during the learning process through scaffolds provided and supplied by the educator (*cf.* 3.2.3). Stages of phonological awareness, as well as the importance of teaching the stage effectively, were discussed with participants during training. I reiterated that educators should be careful that teaching in itself does not become a barrier for learners to acquire sufficient phonological awareness skills. Their teaching strategies should therefore be appropriate, and every stage of phonological awareness according to Passy (2007) needs effective planning and teaching (*cf.* 3.5.1.2).

It also seemed that the participants did not perceive that, when learners struggle with recognition of rhyme, discriminating between sounds, onset and rime, blending and segmenting sounds, producing sound clusters (also known as consonant blends, such as /sn/ or /st/ and syllabification), it indicates problems with phonological awareness (Carrol & Snowling, 2003) (*cf.* 3.4.1).

It is consequently evident that these participants need to be trained not only on what phonological awareness entails, but also on what the possible causes are if their phonological awareness skills are not well developed, as well as the barriers to learning learners can experience as result. The need for further educator training and support was expressed throughout the data collection. The positive reaction from the participants and their subsequent successful implementation of the support programme reiterate that they need more training and support.

Theme four will be discussed next.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Time management

5.2.4.1 Sub-theme: CAPS requirements

Phase 1:

The participants were all in possession of the CAPS policy document and most of them displayed sufficient knowledge of the time requirements for the literacy aspect where phonological awareness is supposed to be addressed.

SB PA Q: *3 hours per week for grade 1.*

SB PB Q: *3h30 for grade three*

SR PC Q: *2h15 minutes grade 1*

SR PD Q: *15 minutes daily grade 2*

SR PE Q: *Not sure.*

Only one participant was unsure of the time requirements for teaching EFAL. As the focus of my study is on phonological awareness, I asked participants during the individual interview what CAPS requirements are for teaching specifically phonological awareness in EFAL.

SB PA I: *“They said one hour thirty minutes for Grade 3. Including reading.”*

Interviewer: *“One hour thirty minutes on phonological awareness and reading.”*

SB PA I: *“Ya.”*

SB PB I: *“I am not sure about it.”*

SR PC I: *“I don’t know.”*

SR PD I: *“I’m not sure.”*

SR PE I: *“I really don’t know. I will have a look.”*

I noticed during the observations that participants displayed timetables with times allocated for teaching EFAL, and that lessons were divided into the four components of

listening and speaking, reading and phonics (not phonological awareness), writing and language use. Yet, the lesson plans of the participants consisted of no phonological awareness or phonemic awareness activities, only phonics lessons (Appendix F). Participants showed me a separate booklet of specific weekly requirements for teaching phonological and phonemic awareness given to them by the DBE for Grades 1, 2 and 3 (Appendix E2). Despite this, participants showed ignorance regarding lesson planning, and the activities selected for phonological awareness were all phonics related.

Phase 2:

In the training workshop a discussion of the CAPS requirements for phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics occurred together with an illustration of how the support programme meets CAPS phonological awareness teaching and assessment requirements. Observations after the training revealed how participants combined activities from the CAPS EFAL learner workbooks with activities from the support programme. Teaching time for EFAL phonological awareness exceeded fifteen minutes of teaching time (as suggested in CAPS). However, participants integrated the phonological awareness lessons with different components of English literacy such as reading, listening and speaking (*cf.* 5.2.4.2), making the extra time spent on EFAL lessons acceptable.

During the focus group interview, consensus was reached among participants that guidelines in the EFAL CAPS document for teaching phonological awareness were confusing as the policy document refers to phonics but describes activities pertaining to phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Participants also experienced the sequence of activities in the policy document to be confusing. When participants were asked if they found the guidelines in CAPS policy for EFAL teaching and learning requirements useful, they answered the following:

SB PB F: *"Their work doesn't flow."*

SB PA F: *"No, not at all."*

SR PC F: *"The sequence, it doesn't make sense."*

SR PB F: *"The work is all over the place."*

5.2.4.2 Subtheme: Time spent on ESL teaching

Phase 1:

Time requirements for various literacy components for EFAL teaching are illustrated below (DBE, 2011), (*cf.* 3.9).

Table 5.4: CAPS requirement for First Additional Language: Minimum time.

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Listening & Speaking	1 hour 30 minutes	45 minutes	1 hour
Reading & phonics	30 minutes	45 minutes	1 hour
Writing		30 minutes	30 minutes
Language Use			30 minutes
	2 hours per week	2 hours per week	3 hours per week

Table 5.5: CAPS requirements for First Additional Language: Maximum time

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3
Listening & Speaking	1h30 minutes	1 hours	1 hour
Reading & Phonics	1h 15 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes	1 hour 30 minutes
Writing	15 minutes	30 minutes	1 hour
Language Use			30 minutes
	3 hours per week	3 hours per week	4 hours per week

I wanted to know from participants, how much time they spent on ESL teaching in reality.

SB PA Q: *2 hours per week (grade one).*

SB PB Q: *Not daily – more of less two hours to three hours per week. Sometimes we do FAL literacy all day when we are behind with work (grade two and three).*

SR PC Q: *35 minutes (grade one).*

SR PD Q: *30 minutes (grade two).*

SR PE Q: *One hour per day (grade three).*

Based on this information, I proceeded to ask participants how they felt about the amount of time they are spending on teaching EFAL.

SB PA I: *“There is not enough time. Not enough. You have to attend Setswana and attend Setswana. After Setswana you have to attend English First Additional so it’s no time. We are doing two languages and you must do both and you must do Setswana every single day. Because, all the learning areas, we do them in Tswana. It’s just an introduction of First Additional. There is no time.”*

SB PB I: *“There isn’t enough time. Especially with double classes you have to make use of groups.”*

Interviewer: *“One group for Grade 1 and one group for Grade 2?”*

SB PB I: *“Ya. So in order for you to get to that you have to use very little time so the time is not enough with group work.”*

SR PC I: *“Ai, I don’t know the reason but there is no time.”*

SR PD I: *“I don’t know why. There is not enough time in the classroom.”*

SR PE I: *“To be honest with you, I don’t agree that there is not enough time. When we do EFAL date during the day after 12:30pm, the children are fast asleep or tired. They get up very early some of them to get the first taxis for school or the bus that’s doing two routes and the last children sometimes only arrive home again at about 6 o’clock which is very late.”*

I also asked them about possible suggestions to rectify the limited time spent on English second language learning.

SB PA I: *"Ya, I think if that one time would be sorted out. I think if we will be looking at one grade, it's just 15 minutes on this and 15 minutes on that. It's not really practical."*

Interviewer: *"Do you feel the time allocated for teaching various things in EFAL should be longer?"*

SB PA I: *"Yes."*

SB PB I: *"Um , mmm, I think our, our officials must come up with strategy. Strategy of how to fit in. For me I cannot do this so if they come and realise that I'm doing work over. I don't attend to the timetable."*

SR PC I: *"Extra lessons."*

Interviewer: *"Extra lessons for English First Additional Language?"*

SR PC I: *"Yes."*

Interviewer: *"When do you think the extra lessons should be offered?"*

SR PC I: *"After school. In the afternoon after school."*

SR PD I: *"I don't know how to rectify it."*

SR PE I: *"I think I should move the three most important subjects to the beginning of the day. Home language, maths and then English First Additional Language. Then after that Life Skills at the end of the day which is more relaxed."*

During the observations, lessons were always between thirty to forty minutes. This was due to time that was frequently wasted, as participants were on occasion unprepared for their lessons. During one lesson the participant spent over ten minutes writing the letter 'a' in the learners' books. Time was also lost on reprimanding learners due to the noise in the overcrowded classes. At that point I made a personal note "Learners are frustrated and easily distracted. They are not listening - classes are too big."

Phase 2:

The amount of time stipulated in CAPS for teaching phonological awareness specifically, is fifteen minutes per day. This was discussed with participants during the training workshop. In the focus group interview, I again asked participants to discuss the actual time they spend on teaching phonological awareness and if they think time spent on phonological awareness teaching is sufficient.

SB PA F: *“English is second and even third language. Learners get confused with English. There is not enough time.”*

SR PC F: *“Time is too short.”*

SB PB F: (Nodding head.)

SB PD F: *“The classes are too big. No time.”*

SB PE F: *“Ya.”*

SB PA F: *“The time is not working out.”*

The two participants from the blue school suggested phonological awareness teaching in EFAL would be more effective if half a day per week was allocated for EFAL instead of fifteen minutes per day.

SB PB F: *“If we can say spend half a day per week, um um on teaching first additional, it will be better.”*

SB PA F: *“Ya, 15 minutes is not working.”*

SR PC F: *“Yes.”*

The remaining two participants nodded their heads but gave no comment.

5.2.4.3 Discussion of findings

Most participants had a clear understanding of the CAPS time requirements for EFAL. CAPS suggests minimum and maximum times for each component of literacy (*cf.* 3.9) (DBE, 2011a). Armbruster, *et al.* (2003), Gillon (2004), Gunning, (2001) as well as the

DBE (2011a) suggest that ten to fifteen minutes per day should be spent on deliberately teaching phonological awareness (*cf.* 3.9). Although participants displayed timetables on their classroom doors with times allocated for each component of literacy, (phonological awareness was indicated as phonics), they were unaware of the amount of time stipulated in CAPS for teaching phonological awareness *per se*.

Moreover, the CAPS EFAL document, guides educators on what learners are expected to learn and achieve by the end of each Grade. The reason for this is to instil the goals in the curriculum that learners should have developed the ability to express themselves clearly in English FAL by the time they reach Grade 4 where the LoLT is English only (DBE, 2011a) (*cf.* 3.9). Educators however, failed to plan their lessons according to separate guidelines (not in CAPS) given to them by the DBE of weekly requirements for phonological awareness and phonemic awareness teaching for Grades 1, 2, and 3 (Appendix E2). Their lesson plans consisted of phonics related activities such as worksheets and spelling activities. Participants focused less on phonological awareness, teaching guidelines and more on the learners' workbook for EFAL.

After the training workshop, phonological awareness activities were integrated with other components of literacy as participants found this a more beneficial method of utilising time for teaching. Example, they would read a story which covers the literacy component listening and speaking, and emphasise a certain sound or rhyming words from the story, which forms part of phonological awareness teaching. According to Konza (2006) and DBE (2011a), phonological awareness can be integrated and reinforced in various language components. Integration is therefore possible as activities for phonological awareness are brief, aural and fun (*cf.* 3.9) (Armbruster, *et al.*, 2003).

5.2.5 Theme 5: DBE Support

5.2.5.1 Training and support received

Phase 1:

In order to determine the extent of training and support participants received from the DBE, I asked participants in the questionnaire how much training and support they have received from the DBE. I realised when analysing their answers in the questionnaire

that my question was not specific enough as I did not ask them what training they received from the DBE regarding phonological awareness.

SB PA Q: *We had workshops.*

SB PB Q: *We received training on few occasions but without follow-up sessions.*

SR PC Q: *4 days*

SR PD Q: *4 days*

SR PE Q: *I did Intermediate and Senior training twice. It was 5 day training.*

I asked the same question in the individual interviews to clarify the extent and type of support participants received from the DBE.

SB PA I: *"We had workshops for four days."*

Interviewer: "What was the workshop for?"

SB PA I: *"It was for literacy. English First Additional."*

Interviewer: "Did they explain phonological awareness to you?"

SB PA I: *"No. Only reading and phonics."*

SB PB I: *"We received some training for four days but nothing after that."*

Interviewer: "What was the workshop about?"

SB PB I: *"It was about English First Additional?"*

Interviewer: "Did they talk to you about phonological awareness or explain phonological awareness to you?"

SB PB I: *"No, it was more about shared reading."*

SR PC I: *"We went on workshop, four days."*

Interviewer: "Was the workshop for English First Additional Language?"

SR PC I: *“Ya, English First Additional, but nothing on phonological awareness, only reading.”*

SR PD I: *“It was a four day workshop.”*

Interviewer: *“Did they explain phonological awareness to you and how to teach it?”*

SR PD I: *“No, not really. I don’t remember anything about that.”*

SR PE I: *“I attended the Senior one. I haven’t been to any Foundation Phase workshops.”*

Phase 2:

I witnessed visits from the DBE during my observations in Phase 1 and Phase 2, and noticed that participants never received specific guidance regarding teaching and assessment in EFAL. I asked about this during the focus group interview to gain information on what the visits from the DBE mainly comprised. The participants described support received from the DBE, in the group interview, as more of a scrutiny of files and learners’ books than actually supporting and guiding the participants with teaching and assessment.

SB PB F: *“When they come they want to see the books. There is no guidance.”*

SR PC F: *“No, no guidance.”*

SR PA F: *“Shaking head from side to side.”*

5.2.5.2 Quality of training

Phase 1:

Participants were asked to express their opinion regarding the quality of workshops provided by the DBE regarding CAPS for EFAL, in both the questionnaire and individual interview. This question was asked as participants informed me that they attended workshops where literacy and the components of literacy were dealt with. Participants claimed a lot of emphasis was on reading and shared reading, but phonological awareness was only mentioned and not explained or discussed in depth. The participants gave the following comments on the quality of the workshops:

SB PA Q: *Not good.*

SB PB Q: *Poor quality.*

SR PC Q: *Not good.*

SR PD Q: *Too little.*

SR PE Q: *Good.*

The interview provided reasons why four of the five participants felt the quality of the training and workshop was inadequate.

SB PA I: *"It was not enough".*

SB PB I: *"It was very rushed – poor quality".*

SR PC I: *"It confuses us worse. Especially with recording".*

Interviewer: *"Do you mean assessment of phonological awareness when you say recording?"*

SR PC I: *"Yes, assessment."*

SR PD I: *"Not enough, need enough time to understand and do it practically."*

SR PE I: *"The workshop in Madibeng was very good. The second year's workshop was just a repetition of the first year's workshop and training."*

Phase 2:

No training or workshops were offered by the DBE during Phase 2 of this study, therefore participants were not questioned on the quality of DBE workshops during the focus group interview, meaning no new data on this theme were generated.

5.2.5.3 Discussion of findings

The DBE workshops for FP educators on teaching literacy in EFAL seemed to be problematic as four out of five participants expressed unhappiness regarding the quality of the workshops. They found the workshops to be rushed, providing them with

insufficient training. One participant claimed she felt more confused after attending the workshop (*cf.* 5.2.5.2). The overall quality of these workshops and training received was therefore regarded as poor (*cf.* 5.2.5.2). DBE workshops explicitly explaining phonological awareness, teaching and assessment, seem to be lacking. Furthermore, participants considered visits from the DBE as a scrutiny of learners' books and work opposed as to providing them with support (*cf.* 5.2.5.1).

5.2.5.4 Document analyses

Participants were all in possession of the CAPS policy document and learners' workbooks for EFAL (*cf.* 5.2.4.1). I analysed the following documents to identify strengths and limitations in the documentation (*cf.* 4.5.3).

- Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), for EFAL Literacy in Grades 1, 2 and 3 (DBE, 2011a).
- Guidelines for Inclusive Teaching and Learning (DBE, 2010)
- Grade 1 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 1 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4
- Grade 2 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 2 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4
- Grade 3 English First Additional Language book 1: Term 1-2
- Grade 3 English First Additional Language book 2: Term 3-4

CAPS provides a basic framework for teaching phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics in English First Additional Language, Grades 1, 2 and 3 (DBE, 2011a). The policy suggests educators utilise brief and fun activities such as poems and songs to teach phonemic awareness and reinforce sounds in Grade 1. Furthermore, the policy advises educators to proceed to teaching phonics according to a Grade 2 and 3 programme provided in the CAPS EFAL, which builds on what learners have already learnt in their home language. Educators are encouraged in the policy document to integrate phonics teaching into listening and speaking and reading activities.

Limitations which have been identified in the CAPS EFAL policy document are that it appears as if phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics are not

explicitly defined and explained as three distinct concepts. No definition is given of phonological awareness anywhere in the document, only for phonemic awareness and phonics. Moreover, the EFAL CAPS policy document displays a basic guideline for teaching phonics in Grade 1, but the activities indicated are phonological awareness activities such as breaking up sentences into individual words and clapping on each word (Appendix E1). The guideline then continues to state 'develop phonemic awareness through rhymes and songs.' These three concepts are used interchangeably and could possibly be the reason for the confusion of the three concepts among educators. Furthermore, examples of assessment strategies and activities for phonological awareness are not explained in the EFAL policy, and that could result in educators avoiding assessment entirely. Stages or sequence of phonological awareness activities is not indicated in the policy or in the learners' EFAL workbooks.

This affirmed that FP educators need to be provided with and trained on an appropriate phonological awareness programme to ensure that the foundation for adequate literacy proficiency is established in English. This is critical, since learners transfer to English as LoLT in the Intermediate Phase.

5.3 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I presented the findings of my study, followed by a discussion. In the next chapter I will discuss the implications of the findings of my study for the DBE, educator training institutions and schools. The contribution of this study will be defined and the limitations thereof discussed. Recommendations are provided for educators, schools and the DBE for enhancing educators' knowledge and skills to teach and assess phonological awareness optimally, and suggestions for future research are made as well.