ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING LEARNERS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE OF AN ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING LEARNERS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE OF AN ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

MARGARETHA MARIA VAN DER MERWE	**DATE**

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my beloved husband and soul mate, Peet van der Merwe, for sharing our dreams and aspirations of thirty one years in our marriage.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to investigate the English Language Proficiency of non-English speaking learners in the Foundation Phases. An in-depth literature study was conducted to investigate this phenomenon. The historical background of language provision in South-African schools, the issue of language and cognition and different aspects of mother tongue education was touched on. The implicaitons of the current situation of the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) for teaching and learning in South Africa was also covered. A qualitative research design and methodology were deemed appropriate to explore the challenges and strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the English language proficiency of their learners. The research findings of the empirical investigation were presented in accordance with themes and categories that emerged from the data during the thematic analysis of the eight semi-structured individual interviews. The main concerns of the participants regarding the way to address challenges were presented. The complexity of this phenomenon pictured in my mind. The research findings lived up to my expectations and confirmed what was found in my literature study. Hence I came to realise that the experiences of the participating teachers were extremely important in reaching the conclusions of this research. The major research findings and meaningful issues came to light from the literature review and the empirical evidence. Finally recommendations are put forward for the consideration of Foundation Phase teachers, schools and the Department of Education (DoE) when dealing with the proficiency of their learners.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC: African National Congress

BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CAPS: The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement

CEPD: Centre for Education Policy Development

CUMSA: Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa

DBE: Department of Basic Education

DET: Department of Education and Training.

DoE: Department of Education

EAL: English Additional Language

EFL: English First Language

EMDC: Education Management and Development Centre

LiEP: Language in Education Policy

LoLT: Language of Learning and Teaching

NEPI: National Education Policy Investigation

PANSALB: The Pan South African Language Board

PRAESA: Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa

SABE: South African Black English

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND, FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The most significant issue for quality in education is "the all-pervasive and extremely powerful influence of language which is unambiguously implicated in learning ... and the need for pupils to have as good a grasp of the language of teaching and learning as possible" (Taylor, Müller & Vinjevold, 2003:65).

It is a widely acknowledged fact that language competence and proficiency are central to educational success (Bashir, Conte & Heerde, 1998; Hoff, 2005). In education language proficiency involves more than the ability to communicate in everyday conversation contexts, but is specifically related to the use of language for academic purposes. Cummins (2000:67) defines *academic language proficiency* as "... access to and command of the *oral and written* academic registers of schooling". Academic language proficiency is not acquired as naturally as basic interpersonal communication skills, but develops through exposure to formal education (Cummins, 2000; Hoff, 2005; Owens, 2008). This implies that educators should facilitate this development with explicit teaching strategies, addressing the language implicit in various learning areas.

There is evidence to suggest that teachers in South Africa are not fully aware of their responsibility to meet the language-related needs of the learners (Uys, Van der Walt, Van den Berg & Botha, 2007). Moreover, they also lack the methodological skills to promote the effective learning of academic language because they have not had the necessary training in this respect (Mroz, 2006; O'Connor & Geiger, 2009; Uys et al., 2007). However, the most convincing reason for investigating the academic language proficiency in the South African education system is that many learners have to accomplish this proficiency in a second/additional language. As a result of our political history and the socio-linguistic influences operating within South Africa, the second language is almost always English (Braam, 2004; De Klerk, 2002; De Wet, 2002; Ntshingila, 2006). EAL (English as Additional

Language) learners are effectively learning the language of instruction *through* the language of instruction (Cummins, 2000), which may have an impact on their academic development. Cummins (2000) suggested that EAL learners acquire basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) in about 2 years, while cognitive academic language (CALP) skills are acquired in a period of 4 to 9 years, depending on the instruction they receive. Research conducted internationally (as cited in Genesee, Paradis & Crago, 2004:168), as well as in South Africa (Heugh, 2009), provided strong evidence to suggest that learners develop academic language proficiency more effectively in their home language, or alternatively, in bilingual/multilingual education, where teaching occurs in both the first and second languages. Education policies in South Africa are in support of the use of home language and/or of bilingual instruction (e.g., the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), 1997), but in reality the implementation of these policies has been slow (Alexander, 2010; Beukes, 2008; Carstens, 2006; Kaniwendo, 2006.)

The right of all learners to receive education in the language of their choice in public educational institutions, where reasonably practicable, is acknowledged in the South African Constitution (RSA, 1996, Art. 29) and in the South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996, Art. 6; De Wet, 2002:119). The Language-in-Education Policy of the Department of Education (DoE, 1997:1-2), together with the Constitution of South Africa (1996) as well as the Working Group on Values in Education (James, 2000:8-10) have the objective of promoting multilingualism "and the development of official languages and to pursue that language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth of learners" (De Wet, 2002:119).

In the Foundation Phase the home language is the medium that is most appropriate for developing the reading and writing skills of the learners. In a study conducted in 2000, the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) revealed that 90% of the participants favoured home language education (De Wet, 2002:119). However, English seems to be the choice of the majority South Africans to be the LoLT (Language of Learning and Teaching) after the first four years of schooling (NEPI, 1992:13; Webb, 1999: 69-70). There are a variety of factors and a range of sectors in life that are influenced by the choice of the LoLT (De Wet, 2002:119). The majority of the South African parents, for example, believe that English is the language of empowerment, and aspire to have their children educated in

English (Gules, 2005; Kgosana, 2006), despite the fact that many learners entering English primary schools do not have the necessary background and English proficiency to succeed academically.

This raises an important question, namely:

How do non-English speaking Foundation Phase learners manage to acquire English for academic purposes?

1.2   THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problems experienced in South Africa as regards the language proficiency of the learners and teachers in the Foundation Phase, are quite evident (Uys et al., 2007:77-82). During the pre-school phase of the learner, the parents' language preference plays an influential role in the child's language development. In the majority of cases it becomes clear that the parents, with very limited knowledge and skills of English, educate their children at a sub-standard level. Their exposure to the English language at home is in most of the cases very limited (Gules, 2005). This view tallies with my observation as a Grade 3 Foundation Phase teacher. It is critical that listening and speaking, reading and phonics, as well as writing and handwriting skills be developed and enhanced at the Foundation Phase level. This cannot be exercised properly when the learners lack a satisfactory level of language proficiency skills in the LoLT.

In the light of the above discussion, the following research questions guided the study:

- What is the historical background with regard to the implementation of the current language policy in South African schools?
- What are the implications of the current Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and LoLT for the teaching and learning of EAL learners in the Foundation Phase?
- Which theoretical insights from the literature can assist Foundation Phase teachers to teach EAL learners in schools where English is the LoLT?

- Which strategies are implemented by the Foundation Phase teachers in the sample school to improve the English language proficiency of their learners?
- What are the needs of the learners and the teachers in terms of the proficiency in English as perceived by the Foundation Phase teachers in this case study?
- Which lessons can be learnt from the sample school that may assist other schools in similar situations to address the problems of the proficiency in English for academic purposes?

1.3 THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to explore the challenges posed by EAL learners' lack of English language proficiency in the Foundation Phase in an English medium school, and its implications for teaching and learning.

The specific objectives to be realised by the study were, namely to

- determine the historical background with regard to the implementation of the current LiEP in South African schools;
- verify the implications of the implementation of the current Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and the LoLT, for the teaching and learning of EAL learners in the Foundation Phase;
- identify the needs of learners and teachers as perceived by Foundation Phase teachers in this regard;
- identify the best practices which could assist Foundation Phase teachers from schools in similar settings to address the challenges faced by the lack of the English proficiency of their learners.

1.4 THE PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

A preliminary literature review to explore the English language proficiency of learners in the Foundation Phase set the scene for further reflective research investigation.

1.4.1   Legislation and policy issues

According to the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996, the School Governing Bodies have to determine the language of instruction of a particular school. In the Language in Education Policy in South Africa (LiEP, 1997), provision was made for additive bilingual education, where mother-tongue instruction also plays an important role. In the debate on mother-tongue education, a distinction was made between 'weak models' and 'strong models' of uni-lingualism and bilingualism, and the debate will continue to be a burning issue until such time that mother-tongue instruction, or dual-medium instruction, is realised.

Granville, Jancks, Joseph, Mphahlele, Ramoni, Reed and Watson (1997:270-272) came to the conclusion that a "language-as-subject" policy needs to be introduced to support the main languages of teaching and learning across the curriculum. In South Africa "all language rights are in a sense rights against English" (Granville et al., 1997:254) and the learners' rights are thus protected by the "language-in-education" proposal, where the role of African languages, including Afrikaans, is readdressed.

1.4.2   The implications of language training for subject teachers

It is evident that proficiency in the English language in the Foundation Phase has a major influence on education in general, and on the academic success of the learners, including subject teaching, in particular. As mentioned before, the greater part of the South African population is educated through the medium of English. Uys et al. (2007:69) believe that the learners are not adequately taught the language skills, and this ultimately leads to poor levels of academic achievement. In a study conducted in 2007, Uys et al. (2007) came to the conclusion that subject teachers have to be trained in order to obtain a qualification in "English as medium of instruction", to enhance their presentational and methodological skills. By issuing them with a "Language Proficiency Certificate" it will enable the teachers to operate in a more functional manner in the classroom setting (Uys et al., 2007:77). When

teachers in the Foundation Phase are more proficient in English, it will also have a bearing on their classroom teaching where the content of different subjects is taught.

Uys et al. (2007:77) also pointed out in their research that teachers themselves may not recognise their own language inabilities, or their lack of skills and knowledge. They believe that a Foundation Phase teacher who is proficient in English will be able to plan lessons strategically, and with self-confidence. According to Uys et al. (2007), it became apparent that when proficiency in the spoken and written language is lacking, the most important objective of education, namely teaching and learning, is sub-standard. The level of academic literacy will improve when effective training has improved (Harris, 2007:96). In my view, proficiency in the LoLT is the heartbeat that motivates learners to develop academic skills and to acquire positive values and attitudes.

In his research, Plüdderman (2002:61) pointed to the urgency of the improvement of quality in the teaching of English. His view was based on the outcomes of a departmentally-appointed "Working Group of Values in Education" (James, 2000:8-10), where it was suggested that English teachers should be exposed to pre-service and in-service training courses in dual-medium education, as compiled by EMDC's (Education Management and Development Centres) for teachers. However, there are time and cost implications attached to dual-medium education - textbooks, training manuals and other materials have to be printed in the indigenous languages to be used simultaneously with the sources in English.

If the failure rate amongst learners can be reduced, the country will also benefit economically. Until such time that African languages can successfully function as LoLTS, dual-medium education can be viewed as transitional, and English can be learnt as a subject only. Plüdderman is of the opinion that, if this approach could materialise, the best opportunities can be offered to most of the people in South Africa (Plüdderman, 2002:62). Likewise, in the case of dual-medium education, the teachers will also have to be proficient in English across the curriculum.

1.4.3   The requirements for effective teaching in English

Harris (2007:96-97) conducted a study to establish whether EAL learners were disadvantaged in respect of the oral discussions and reflective writing in their classes. She found that the learners' inability to articulate their thoughts was fragile, and thus it was difficult for them to establish their own identify and self-awareness. This implies, amongst others, that the learners' learning environment and developmental opportunities have to be supportive. In addition, the cultural identity of the learners should be taken into account. They should be afforded the opportunity to 'grow' whilst they are learning. However, communication problems, including behavioural problems, may impact negatively on teaching and learning, since social values may differ in a multicultural classroom environment (Harris, 2007:96).

Bilingual education for each child within a multilingual education system does not imply a choice between either English or an African language (including Afrikaans). The first language (mother-tongue) has to be developed first to ensure successful learning in a second language at school level (Krashen, 2007). Currently there are significant differences between language theory and practice in education in South Africa.

1.4.4   Classroom practice

Poor proficiency in English could result in the learners developing negative attitudes towards schoolwork with subsequent behaviour problems (see section 4.4.4). Myburgh, Poggenpoel and Van Rensburg, (2004) found that learners who do not understand English within the class-group setting, may distance themselves from other learners, and this may lead to further communication and language barriers. The above researchers (2004) emphasise that the teachers and the learners have to communicate and understand each other in class through face-to-face communication, and the learners should be encouraged to communicate in English. It follows that the teachers should be sensitive to the communication needs of the learners - their abilities and fluency in the LoLT. Learners with no insight in the instructional content feel "helpless", and ideally their mother-tongue should then be utilised (Myburgh et al., 2004:578). Snayers and Du Plessis (2006:51) are of

the opinion that "teachers should be trained to be aware of the special needs of the content subjects the children have to follow in later years, so that they can prepare the children to cope with the language demands which will be imposed on them. Teachers should also be trained to cope with the changes in the 'classroom culture', in which a more interactive teaching style will necessitate".

The fact that English is experienced as a 'status symbol' and is linked to the future economic and social welfare of the learners (Gules, 2005; Kgosana, 2006) creates the impression that learners who cannot speak English are viewed as "handicapped" by their peers. Regular absenteeism from school could be the result of rejection by their peers. Myburgh et al. (2004:580) claim that in the case of a lack of efficacy in the classroom, this could lead to "a sense of sadness" and "feeling left out". They also reveal that culturally-learned ways of communication that differ from those expected at school, can create discontinuity between the home and the school, and this ultimately inhibits the learners' ability to fully participate and learn from classroom events.

1.5   THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1   The research design

In this study a qualitative research design was followed to explore and understand the language proficiency of EAL learners in English in the Foundation Phase, and its implications for teaching and learning. In an attempt to address the research problem, data were collected in accordance with a specific design and methodology (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:18). The focus in qualitative research is on how people behave in their natural settings and how they describe their world in their own words (Cozby, 2006:109). The phenomenon investigated in this research design was from the perspective of the participants, namely the teachers at the sample school.

1.5.2   The research method

A phenomenological case study method was selected as the most suitable method to gain insight into the research problem. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:24) reveal that a case study examines a *bounded system*, or a case over time and in depth, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting (see section 3.3). De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005:70) purport that the meanings participants furnish about their everyday lives are often better described and understood in terms of its "essence" when phenomenological case studies are conducted. The method utilised in this study was based on primary and secondary sources to obtain the knowledge and understanding of the research problem. In accordance with Maree (2007:39), a selection of the concepts and aims were identified and analysed. The meanings of the experiences of the participants were investigated, and subsequently the analyses of the real-life experiences of the participants came to the fore.

1.5.3   The data-collection instruments and techniques

The instruments for collecting the data in this study included observations, as well as individual one-on-one interviews. The data obtained from the participants were transcribed, organised, coded and concluded by forming themes and categories to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. This process is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.5.3.1 Interviews

In addition to a pilot interview with a Foundation Phase teacher of a neighbouring school, eight open-ended individual interviews were conducted with Foundation Phase teachers of the sample school. Following Maree's advice, (2007:87), I examined the responses of the participants after each interview to verify the necessity of follow-up interviews. It was crucial for the participants to understand what the information was needed for, and what the aim of the interview was. Clear, neutral questions were asked in order for rich and descriptive data to be obtained.

1.5.3.2 Observations

Kumar (2005:98) holds the view that "observation is a purposeful and systematic way of watching and listening to an interaction or phenomenon as it takes place". According to Maree (2007), the behavioural patterns of the participants can clarify the insight and understanding of the phenomenon being observed. Relationships need to be established with the participants, and the researcher has to protect the integrity and autonomy of the participants. The researcher should, however, not become therapeutic during the observations (Maree, 2007: 45-46). In this study, I was a "participant as observer", and investigated the challenges and intervention strategies used by the participants to address the proficiency in English of their learners. The researcher employed an assistant interviewer to record field-notes as accurately as possible, including verbal and non-verbal cues. The strategy of member-checking afforded the opportunity to compare notes with the researcher in order to "crystalise" the observation information (Maree, 2007:86).

1.5.4   The selection of the participants

Kumar (2005:111) advocates that "the primary consideration in purposive sampling is the judgement of the researcher as to who can provide the best information to achieve the objectives of the study". In addition, McMillan and Schumacher (2010:354) explain that purposive sampling (sometimes also referred to as *judgement sampling*) takes place in special situations and should be verified beforehand by the researcher. In this study the researcher selected the following small distinct group of participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the research problem that would provide rich detail:

- three Grade 1 teachers;
- two Grade 2 teachers; and
- three Grade 3 teachers.

1.6   THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Investigating and addressing the problems related to language proficiency in the Foundation Phase have a major impact on the cognitive development of learners, and particularly on their academic achievement in the subsequent grades. It is therefore important to identify shortcomings as early as possible, and to devise strategies to effectively equip the learners for their lives in the world of work in a broader society, as embedded in a multicultural society in South Africa. This study was based on sound research conducted in the recent past, highlighting the shortcomings and language deficiencies experienced at the Foundation Phase level in South Africa.

1.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As this research focuses primarily on human beings (learners and teachers), I was ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the participants. I attempted to gain the trust and co-operation of all the participants, and gave them an undertaking that the information collected would be kept confidential. The participants were told from the outset that their participation was voluntary, and that the interviews would be conducted with the consent of the Department of Education and with the prior arrangement with the principal of the school.

In conducting this research, I ensured the privacy of the participants, respected the confidentiality of the data, made sure that the participants would not be harmed in any way, and respected the participants' right to anonymity (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009:438). In order to ensure anonymity, I took care that the participants could not be identified in print. All the names were coded (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:334). The data were not fabricated. The method of obtaining the data was described and adhered to (See chapter 3).

1.8   DELINEATION OF THE STUDY

This study focused on a sample school, including a pilot interview at a neighbouring school, in the Lejweleputswa District in the Free State Province. I am a teacher at the sample school, and this made the collection of the data and the interpretation of the information a

manageable task. Notwithstanding the fact that focusing on one case implies that the findings of the study may not be generalisable to other schools in similar settings, I believe that much can be learnt from the experiences of the participants in this study.

1.9 DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTS

The following concepts are defined for the purpose of this study:

(i) English language proficiency

According to De Wet (2007:119-121), proficiency in the English language enables learners to master strategies that significantly develop the meaningful acquisition of the English language as medium of communication. Ravitch (2007:131) explicates this definition further by pointing out that *language proficiency* or *linguistic proficiency* is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. The extent to which an individual has mastered language is thus measured by his/her language proficiency.

(ii) Foundation Phase

De Wet (2007:119) purports that Grades 1 to 3, i.e., the Foundation Phase, are viewed as the crucial period during which the learners will be formally exposed to their initial years of schooling.

(iii) English as an Additional Language (EAL)

The term *English as an additional language* acknowledges that learners are already competent speakers of at least one home language. (De Wet, 2007:120).

(iv) Teaching and learning

In the context of this study, *teaching and learning* refer to the actions of teachers and learners in a classroom setting with the aim of gaining knowledge and developing holistically as individuals. It (teaching and learning) creates a favourable environment in the school setting, and lays the foundation for nurturing and enhancing the development of, amongst others, the language skills of second language speakers of English (Plüdderman, 2002:51-54).

(v)   Bilingualism

Bilingualism involves the ability to speak two languages, a native and a secondary language, with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with an individual's needs.

(vi)   Bilingual education

It involves teaching the academic content in two languages, in the native and a secondary language, with varying amounts of each language used in accordance with the education programme (Kluger, 2013).

(vii)   Additive bilingualism

"The term, additive bilingualism, refers to the form of bilingualism that results when students add a second language to their intellectual toolkit, while continuing to develop conceptually and academically in their home language" (Cummins, 2009:26). He explains that in *additive bilingualism* the teachers incorporate a learner's first language (L1) into their instructional practices. Ideally, the learners learn the curriculum through their native language while simultaneously learning English. Described as *complementary,* additive bilingualism enables the learners to learn a second language, as is the case in the present study, English, while reinforcing their first language. In essence, learners are adding a language to their repertoire, thus the term "additive".

(viii) **Subtractive bilingualism**

Subtractive bilingualism contrasts to additive bilingualism in that the students learn a second language at the expense of their first language. Proponents of this method view the two languages as opposing forces, believing the target language should replace the native language, resulting in mono-lingualism, rather than bilingualism. Essentially, the learners lose an important facet of their cultural identity by negating the significance of their primary language (Cummins, 2009:26).

(ix) **Mother-tongue**

The term *mother-tongue* refers to the first language that the children acquire in their homes from their parents/caregivers, and is part of their personal, social and cultural identity. A child's mother-tongue brings about the reflection and learning of successful social patterns of understanding, acting, speaking and learning (De Bot & Lowie, 2007:7). The mother-tongue may also be referred to as the *primary* or *first* language. The term *mother-tongue* is commonly used in the general discourse on educational issues (UNESCO, 2010:7).

(x) **Mono-lingualism/Uni-linguilism**

Mono-lingualism or *uni-lingualism* is the condition of being able to speak only a single language, as compared to multi-lingualism. In a different context, *uni-lingualism* may refer to a language policy which enforces an official or national language over others (De Bot & Lowie, 2007:7).

(xi) **Multi-lingualism**

A multi-lingual person is someone who has "the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing. Different languages are used for different purposes, the competence in each varying according to such factors as register, occupation and education"(McArthur 1992, in Kemp, 2009:11). Multi-linguals may not have equal proficiency in or control over all the languages they know. According to Kaushanskaya

and Marian (2009:705), *multi-lingualism* is the act of using multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multi-lingual speakers outnumber mono-lingual speakers in the world's population. Multi-lingualism is becoming a social phenomenon governed by the needs of globalization and cultural openness. Owing to the ease of access to information facilitated by the Internet, individuals' exposure to multiple languages is becoming increasingly frequent, thereby promoting the need to acquire additional languages.

(xii)   Dual-medium teaching

Plüddemann, Braam, October and Wababa (2004:10-11) define *dual-medium education* as the systematic exposure to two languages of instruction. It implies that "both media are used alternately in teaching one subject or by teaching some subjects through the one medium and other subjects through the other medium to learners sitting together in the same class." The terminology in both languages is thus absorbed, although the learners take notes in their home language. Dual-medium classes are considered acceptable once the learners have reached a sufficiently high level of attainment in the second language to make it effective as an additional medium of instruction (Plüddemann et al., 2004:11).

1.10   THE CHAPTER DIVISION

Chapter 1 covered the introduction, as well as the problem statement, and the aim and objectives of the study.

In Chapter 2 a literature review provides evidence of the theoretical investigation of English language proficiency in the Foundation Phase, and its implications for teaching and learning. Legislative aspects, as well as the theoretical insights into language acquisition and learning are explored.

In Chapter 3 the researcher describes the research methodology, and how the empirical phase of the study was conducted.

Chapter 4 consists of the research findings, and provides a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the research results.

Chapter 5 focuses on the summary, conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study.

1.11   CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 oriented the reader to the challenges faced by Foundation Phase teachers in English medium schools who teach learners lacking adequate proficiency in English as the LoLT. The South African school landscape has been beset with language instruction dilemmas, in particular after the nation realised its democracy post-1994, when schools were permitted to enrol learners from varying backgrounds.

In the following chapter the theoretical background to the current language position in South Africa is offered in order to create a better understanding of the day-to-day realities faced by the teachers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE STUDY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"Language is a social phenomenon enmeshed in relations of power and processes of social change" (Anderson, 1989).

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In the process of exploring English language proficiency among non-English speaking learners, especially African learners who receive their tuition through the medium of English in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3), a literature framework is to be created to shed light on this phenomenon.

The five cornerstones of this framework constitute the following:

- the historical background, namely the origin of the issue of the implementation of the English language in South African schools and the current position with regard to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT);
- the link between language and cognition;
- the mother-tongue education debate;
- the implications and consequences of the current situation of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for teaching and learning.

2.2   THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this section the majority of sources are seminal works and, due to their historic nature, being recent was not a major consideration.

2.2.1 Introduction

According to Elphick (1977:7), and Elphick and Giliomee (1989:5), archaeological evidence indicates that the first people who settled in the Cape of Good Hope during the pre-colonial period, were the Khoi, or Khoikhoi (Hottentots). However, warfare, slavery and assimilation decimated the San approximately 40 000 years ago in Southern Africa (Lee, 1976:5). Likewise, Sifuna and Otiende (2006:35) believe that the indigenous people transmitted their cultures through generations, based on their efficient and effective environmental educational processes. The satisfaction of their basic needs (nutrition and security), and value acquisition of adult society, constituted the areas where learning mainly featured. Van Aswegen (1990:34) confirms that before 1652 South Africa was also inhabited by the Bantu-speaking people (Africans) from Cameroon and Eastern Nigeria who lived in villages and applied a variety of agricultural practices. They migrated from 2000 B.C. to 1000 A.D. and were part of the largest migrations in human history. Ehret (1989) reports that a form of "intermarriage" existed between the San women and the Bantu-speaking men.

It seems as if no education took place at this time due to the migration patterns during the pre-colonial period (Booyse, Le Roux, Seroto & Wolhuter, 2011:41). The valued traditional content and methods were passed on to the younger generations. The indigenous people did, however, not know how to read or write. The societies of the San, Khoi and Bantu-speaking people differed from one another, and consequently no form of "unified education" existed. Herskovits (1961:452-453) asserts that education was transmitted orally through the medium of the people's languages. The tales, proverbs and riddles, or 'folklore' constituted an important part of each culture's way of creative expression. The power and beauty of languages were appreciated, and during storytelling sessions the children learnt about values through folklore.

Then, during the period of early colonialisation, High Commissioner J.A. de Mist (1749-1823) prepared a memorandum on the provision of education (Du Toit, 1944:14-15). Secular schooling, with provision for mother-tongue instruction and professional teacher training was recommended, but there were no finances (Freund, 1972:148-151; Horrel, 1970:9.

According to Booyse et al. (2011:83), during the first 200 years formal schooling in South Africa was relatively non-existent.

With the onset of colonialisation, Dutch (later Afrikaans), English and the African languages became the main languages. Hartshorne (1992:187-188), summarises the language issue in African schooling as follows:

> "In South Africa, the history of the use of language in African schooling has revolved around the relative positions and status of English, Afrikaans and the African languages, were determined by the political and economic power of those using the various languages. The decisions have never been taken by those who use African languages in their everyday life, and ironically, when decisions were taken in favour of those languages they were taken without reference to their users, as well as for purposes far removed from any that had broad community support. The decisions were taken 'for' and not 'by' those most closely involved, which served to divide African communities and limited social mobility and access to higher education. The interests and wishes of the users (pupils, teachers and parents) were subordinated to the political and economic purposes and ideologies of various white groupings. The conflicts between these groupings also spilt over into black schooling, and in particular found expression in the language policies laid down from time to time."

2.2.2   South Africa's language policy from 1910 to 1948

Hartshorne (1992:191-195) describes *language in schooling* as *bilingualism*, that was enshrined in Article 137 of the 1910 Constitution, namely, "Both the English and Dutch languages shall be official languages of the Union and shall be treated on the footing of equality and possess and enjoy equal freedom, rights and privileges".

This was confirmed by another important finding, as reported by Hartshorne (1992:191), namely that Genl. J.C. Smuts favoured a dual-medium education policy, whilst a growing emphasis was placed on exclusive Afrikaans mother-tongue instruction in separate schools.

The creation of a powerful Afrikaner identity for acquiring political and economic power was emotionally-driven (Hartshorne, 1992:191).

Desai (2012:31-32) purports that English as the dominant language was firmly entrenched in black schooling. Until the 1930's there was a desire to use the African 'vernacular' in the then Transvaal and Natal. The Inter-departmental Committee on Native Education (Welsh Committee) was established in 1935. In Natal the learners' mother-tongue was to be used during the first six years, in the Cape and the Free State, during the first four years, and in the Transvaal, during the first two years. English was always used as the medium of instruction thereafter.

Soudien (2002:212-213) reports that through a series of commissions of enquiry (e.g., the Eiselen Commission) and through legislation (the Bantu Education Act of 1953), apartheid education was developed after the National Party came into power in 1948. The State controlled education at that point in time by means of the Bantu Education Act, and not the missionary institutions any longer. Mother-tongue instruction was recommended by the Welsh Committee beyond the fourth year of schooling. The Xhosa-Zulu and Sotho-Tswana languages were grouped in schools in multi-lingual 'native' areas, according to the balkanisation (in homelands) of parts of South Africa. Either Afrikaans or English was used as the medium of instruction, earlier than after the fourth year of schooling, when the latter was not practicable. Afrikaans became a compulsory subject (that had to be introduced in the fourth year) in African schools in 1938.

According to Hartshorne (1992:195), the struggle for Afrikaans (as a symbol of exclusiveness and separateness) was used to determine a rigid mother-tongue education policy that was followed within the ruling of South Africa. The language struggle, "taaltwis" between English and Afrikaans, played in on policy measures. The dual medium instruction policy in white schools was replaced after 1948, with single-medium schools (as it continues to this day) in Afrikaans and English.

2.2.3   South Africa's language policy from 1948 to 1991

After 1948 a policy was developed whereby the Christian and national principles were to be accepted in 'native' education (Hartshorne, 1992:146). In 'native' education the mother-tongue would be the primary medium of instruction, but the two official languages would be taught as subjects. The report, based on the findings of the Eiselen Commission (1951), formed the basis of the Bantu Education Act, Act no. 47 of 1953, and controlled Bantu Education. Bantu Education was transferred from the provincial level to the central government by the Department of Native Affairs. The pivotal role played by missionaries up to that point was ended by centralising African education. All financial assistance to the missions ceased when grants to missionary primary and secondary schools were progressively phased out in 1957. The Bantu Education Act became law in 1955, and subsidies paid to teacher training institutions by religious bodies ended in 1955. On an unsubsidised basis, the churches who wished to continue their role in education had to apply in order to register as private schools. Soudien, (2002:214) claims that, unless the schools were registered with the government, no new schools could be established.

Hartshorne (1992:196–197) summarises the outcomes of the Eiselen Report (1951:146-147) on language matters as follows:

(i)   For the first four years of schooling, education was to be conducted through the medium of the mother-tongue, and this principle should be extended on a year by year basis, up to the eighth year of primary schooling.

(ii)   Manuals had to be produced for teachers by terminology committees, and mother-tongue education should gradually be introduced in secondary schools.

(iii)   At the teacher training colleges, the mother-tongue medium of instruction was to be used for child psychology, school organisation and method, as well as for subjects taught through the mother-tongue in the primary school.

(iv)   In the second year of schooling, the language which was most generally used in the school setting and the neighbourhood was to be introduced as the first

official language. The second official language should not be introduced later than the fourth year of schooling.

(v)   With the same requirements that applied to the second language for white people, one of the official languages should be a compulsory subject in secondary education. In cases where the optional subject was the second official language, it should have the same status as the third language (German, French, etc.), due to the education of some white learners.

(vi)   Both the official languages were compulsory in teacher training colleges.

The main changes proposed in the recommendations by the Eiselen Commission, as outlined by Desai (2012:35) were that:

- the primary, secondary and tertiary education experience of learners and students was to be extended by means of the inclusion of mother-tongue education beyond the first four years of primary schooling;
- the first official language was to be introduced in the second year, and the second official language in the fourth year of schooling.

2.2.4   The language changes between 1956 and 1976

A regulation was issued by the Minister of Native Affairs in 1956, whereby all African children should be educated through their mother-tongue from their first year up to their eighth year of schooling (Soudien, 2002:115). The last year of primary schooling at that time, was the eighth year. Up to 1958 the learners could use a Bantu language, or an official language, when writing the school-leaving examination at the end of the eighth year. In instances where all the linguistic groups were mixed, the local 'vernacular', schools were phased out, and segregation along linguistic lines was implemented. In the first year of schooling the official language predominantly spoken in such areas was introduced as a subject as from 1956. African learners were taught three languages (their own, as well as the two official languages) within the first two years of schooling. The 'vernacular' was used at secondary school level in Physical Education and Music. Half of the remaining secondary

school subjects were taught in Afrikaans and the other half in English. Application could, however, be made by the schools not to use Afrikaans as the medium of instruction.

In the process of promoting Afrikaans throughout the school system, from 1968 to 1975, 50% of the subjects had to be taught in Afrikaans and 50% in English (referred to as the 50-50 approach), which implied that

- at the end of the sixth year of schooling (standard 4) mother-tongue instruction was terminated;
- the eighth year of schooling moved to the high school in 1972, and the last year of primary school was grade 7, to be in line with white schools;
- in the seventh year (standard 5) of schooling, both languages had to be used as medium of instruction;
- the use of both Afrikaans and English as medium of instruction (the 50-50 rule) was to be enforced from the seventh year of schooling;
- correcting steps towards the unequal use of the official languages in secondary schools were taken in 1974, in order to increase the use of Afrikaans;
- Maths/Arithmetic and Social Studies were to be taught in Afrikaans, and General Science and the practical subjects in English (Hartshorne, 1992: 202).

According to Desai (2012:37), Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was justified by the fact that Afrikaans and English were equal on constitutional grounds. African education in particular, was influenced by the latter. In only 26% of the African schools under the control of the Department, the equality principle was indeed applied by 1968. It is interesting to note that at that time many African parents, as well as the ANC opposed mother-tongue education and favoured the 50-50 approach, due to the fact that they thought their children would be ghettoised in the inferior Bantu education system (Desai, 1991:112). Language issues were debated in the "black press". Hirson (1981) purports that at that time the thinking of the ANC was not homogeneous. The editor of *Bantu World*, Dr. J M Nhlapo, and the ANC Youth League member in the 1950s, Peter Roboroa, opposed the use of African

languages in education. Dr. Nhlapo suggested that the Nguni and Sotho language groups in South Africa should be standardised to form two national languages. One aspect of the emancipation from white imperialism was through language, and Swahili was proposed as a common language in the whole of Africa. At that stage the language question was not further discussed in political groupings (Hirson, 1981:80, 219-237).

Desai (1991:112-122), the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI 1992), and Probyn (2008:207-223) mention that the Soweto uprising in June 1976 was the result of attempts by the State to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for 50% of the subjects in African high schools. The first casualty of the uprising was Hector Peterson, when a peaceful march by school learners in Soweto was met by police fire. In township schools throughout the country the uprising continued. The 50-50 policy was abandoned by the State, and English became the only medium of instruction for African children from the fifth year of schooling. This led to the Education and Training Act, Act no. 90 of 1979.

The NEPI (1992:81) structures the essence of the Education and Training Act of 1979 as follows, namely

- until the end of school year 4, there would be compulsory mother-tongue education;
- the medium of instruction could be chosen thereafter;
- the parents could now choose the medium of instruction, which was in contrast to the Education and Training Act of 1953.

2.2.5   The education period from 1991 to 1997

After the announcement by the then State President F.W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990 that the ANC, SACP, PAC and other organisations would be unbanned, and after Nelson Mandela was released, a new era of expectations was sensed in South Africa (Desai, 2012:39). The education domain henceforth received prominent attention. A strategy and programme for education renewal, The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS), that came into being in June

1990, did not particularly address the role of the different languages in education (Desai 2012:40). This strategy was addressed in a Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa (CUMSA). Hartshorne (1992:314) indicates that it focused on languages as subjects, but avoided the issue of the medium of instruction. The education of the people classified as African in South Africa was managed by the Department of Education and Training (DET). According to The Education and Training Act, Act no. 90 of 1979 (RSA, 1979), the medium of instruction could be independently determined by each school. Consultation should take place between the community and the Department of Education and Training (DET), and mother-tongue instruction could thus no longer be enforced. The schools were given three options in an information brochure that was sent to schools in 1992, as indicated below.

As for the first option, the arguments for using English as a medium of instruction from the first year were stipulated in *The Amended Language Medium Policy* (DET, 1992). In the second option, it was stipulated that up to any standard, the mother-tongue could be the medium of instruction, and could be followed by a switch-over to Afrikaans or English. In year 5 a sudden switch came about. As regards the third option, Afrikaans or English could be phased out over a period of two to three years.

In 1993 Heugh (2009) listed the choices of the parents regarding the medium of instruction as indicated in the table below.

Table 2.1: The choices of the parents

Straight for English	22%
Straight for Afrikaans	1,5%
Gradual transfer to English	54%
Gradual transfer to Afrikaans	,045%
Sudden transfer to English	13,4%
Retaining the *status quo*	7,5%

According to a survey that was commissioned by PanSALB (The Pan South-African Language Board), in 2001, most of the respondents (parents) opted for English, as well as for their mother-tongue (Desai, 2012:42-43). English only, as the first choice, was preferred by 7,6% of the respondents. English as the second or additional choice was opted for by 12% of the respondents. The PanSALB survey, nonetheless, was criticised for containing misleading and poorly-constructed categories.

A language curriculum was to be proposed by the government with regard to the CUMSA document (DoE, 1997b). The medium of instruction was not openly discussed. A compulsory study of three languages from year 5 to year 7 was recommended, but only when the home language was not a compulsory subject. The policy guidelines for a democratic South Africa, namely *Ready to Govern,* was published by the ANC in May 1992. They advocated that three languages be studied during years 2-4, with both English and Afrikaans as compulsory subjects (Desai, 2012:4-5).

Two types of policies were acknowledged by the NEPI Executive Committee in 1992, namely (NEPI, 1992:74-88) the following:

- for the teaching of all subjects, except languages, the home language of the learner should be used;
- for the entire school period, or for a part of the learners' schooling, a language that is not the learner's home language, could be used.

The options cited depended on the particular contexts in the schools, and were as follows:

- throughout the learners' schooling, the home language or the mother-tongue could serve as the medium of teaching;
- the second language could be taught throughout the learners' school career;
- education in the second language should follow onto the initial literacy and numeracy in the first language;
- throughout the learners' school career education could be bilingual.

Additionally, The Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD, 1993:4) made recommendations in respect of the following:

- the choice of language;
- in order to develop the necessary linguistic skills, the learners should have access to education;
- the languages of which the status were reduced under apartheid, should be reinstated via affirmative action.

Moreover, twelve key recommendations were made (CEPD, 1993:4), as follows:

(i)   From the first grade and throughout the period of compulsory school attendance, all South African children would learn not fewer than two South African languages, but preferably three.

(ii)   At least three languages, as spoken by the institutional community as institutional languages, would be required to be declared by the learning institution. These languages were to be used in all operational aspects of their duties.

(iii)   In consultation with the Ministry of Education, democratic community structures would take care of the selection of which language or languages should be used as the languages of learning to be taught as subjects.

(iv)   Additional South African languages to be learned would be strongly encouraged.

(v)   Languages that were not recognised as South African, may be used as languages of learning, or may be appropriately taught as subjects. Provision should, however, be made that two South African languages are indeed learnt.

(vi)   The recognition and acceptance of language varieties.

(vii)   During the early years of the period of compulsory school attendance, no child may be denied admission to the school on grounds of the non-proficiency in languages taught at the school.

(viii)   The past and present imbalances should be addressed, and bilingual competence has to be applied by means of resources provided by the State.

(ix)   By means of the active promotion of all South African languages, the ideal of multi-lingualism would be fostered.

(x)   To promote the creative and innovative teaching and learning of languages, the language examination system has to be overhauled.

(xi)   Pupils would be examined in any South African language of their choice.

(xii)   Within the Ministry, a Language in Education unit would be set up to implement a new Language in Education Policy for South Africa. The powers and responsibilities of this unit would be wide-ranging (CEPD, 1993:4).

Still, due to a lack of "sufficient focus" to implement the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), the second language remained a problem to learners (Desai, 2012:50).

The ANC's Policy Framework for Education and Training (ANC, 1994:62), as well as Heugh (2009), Probyn (2008), and Probyn, Murray, Botha, Both, Brooks and Westphal (2002) all made mention of a few lessons to be learnt from the past. Language in policy decisions of the schools should include the learners, the parents and the School Governing Bodies, according to the Department of Education's 1997 Language in Education Policy (LiEP). Language in Education Policies have been developed only in a very few instances since July 1997. The Soweto Uprising served as a catalyst for English as a medium of instruction. Afrikaans-speaking learners would have the opportunity to be taught through the medium of Afrikaans, whereas African learners who were not proficient in Afrikaans could be excluded from Afrikaans schools.

2.2.6   Language-education policy development since 1997

The provincial and national Education Departments did not succeed in implementing the 1997 Language in Education Policy appropriately (Alidou, 2004:329; Bamgbose, 2005:2). The mother-tongue education language policy beyond Grade 3 was implemented the closest to the policy in the Western Cape, and also, the possibility of extending mother-tongue education till the end of the sixth year of schooling. In the political and technical field, PRAESA and the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, applied pressure on government by means of a pilot scheme that was started in 15 Western Cape primary schools (Plùdderman et al., 2004).   This pilot scheme faded away because of a lack of "enough evidence to support it". The implementation of long-term plans was not given priority. In 2010 the Department of Basic Education introduced English in schools hosting African language speakers as a subject in Grade 1.

2.2.7   The current position in South African schools

In 2010 a report compiled by the Department of Basic Education (DBE, 2010:1) revealed the following regarding the position in South African schools:

Table 2.2: Home languages spoken by school children in South Africa

Home language	Percentage
isiZulu	25%
isiXhosa	20%
Afrikaans	10%
English	7%
Other	38%

Source: DBE, 2010:1

According to the report, 65% of the children in the school system in South Africa were taught through the medium of English, and 12 % through the medium of Afrikaans, as Languages of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) (DBE, 2010).

The provision of 11 languages as mediums of instruction is based on Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights in the National Constitution of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996) (Pasensie, 2012:1). It is stated that "children have the right to be taught in the language of their choice, wherever it is practical to do so". The principle to maintain the learners' home language as a LoLT in the classroom is enshrined in the Language in Education Policy (LiEP, 2007). During the early years of learning, the learners' home languages should be maintained, whilst access to an additional language is provided to stimulate additive bilingualism.

Desai (2012:57) expresses the view that language as an instruction medium and language as a subject, are the two main components of the Language in Education Policy in South Africa. The medium of instruction, or language of learning and teaching (LoLT), is only stipulated in one clause of the Language in Education Policy. Based on the condition that the LoLT has to be one of the eleven official languages, the LoLT of a school has to be decided on. It is not mentioned that the LoLT should be a language in which the learners should be proficient. Access to quality education and multi-lingualism issues have to be taken into account.

The following documents enlighten the language policies, and include mother-tongue education issues currently implemented:

- The Language in Education Policy (LiEP, 1997);
- The National Curriculum Statement (NCS, 2005);
- The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (2012).

The Language in Education Policy (LiEP, 1997) illustrates that an additive bilingual/multi-lingual approach to classroom teaching (see the next section) is promoted, and this is still the case. The maintenance of the home language or the mother-tongue of a learner is

maintained, whilst the use of other languages are also permitted. Provision is made for school communities to decide, on grounds of the LiEP which of the eleven languages is to be implemented as the LoLT. By means of the School Governing Body, the school community is empowered to determine the language policy of the school in accordance with the South African Schools Act (SASA, Section 6). The role-players involved in the choice of the LoLT of a particular school, are executed by the parents and the learners, according to the regulations contained in the LiEP and the Schools Act. State intervention does not feature in this exercise (South African Schools Act, 1996).

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was introduced from Grade R to Grade 3 in 2012, from Grades 4 to 6 in 2013, and in Grade 7 in 2014. A home language, as well as a first additional language, is allowed from Grade 1 in CAPS. For most of the learners with a home language other than English and Afrikaans, the first additional language would be English. A second additional language is not allowed in CAPS. As for the various grade levels, the number of hours that should be utilised for the teaching of the home language and the first additional language is clearly prescribed. Currently, no time allocations for a second additional language exist. Second additional languages offered at school should take place after school hours.

2.3 LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

2.3.1 Introduction

According to Ntshangase (2011:11), the contentious language issue in education, as stated in the South African Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996), is the desire for mother-tongue education and the need to use a language with international status, such as English. The Minister of Education is empowered to determine the national policy for education in the case of the latter. The language rights in all spheres of public life and the commitment to multi-lingualism are promoted. The multi-lingual nature of South Africa is neither reflected in the education sector, nor in the total linguistic situation in society.

Ntshangase (2011:11) contends that the syllabus of the English language should enable the learners to speak, write and conduct presentations in fluent English, as well as in subjects that are offered in English. Language barriers, however, may have emanated as a result of the ineffective use of the language. To ensure that English is not merely an elitist language, Hickman (2001: 105) believes that it must be accessible to South African learners as a resource. The learners should be afforded the opportunity to gain access to English and to acquire the command of the English language.

2.3.2   Language, cognition and metacognition

In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014:on-line) *language* is defined as the system of words or signs that people use to express their thoughts and their feelings to each other. It can also be described as a system of speech, and sounds, and it can be arbitrarily assigned to the objects, states and concepts to which they refer, and also used for human communication*. Cognition* is a term referring to the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension. These processes include, namely thinking, knowing, remembering, judging and problem-solving (Sternberg, 2003:167). These are higher-level functions of the brain, and encompass language, imagination, perception and planning. The ability to reflect on knowledge, as well as the description of happenings and feelings are included. Thinking about thinking is called *meta-cognition* (Anderson & Perlis, 2005:22). *Meta-cognition* is thus the awareness of the cognitive process, and results in healthy critical reflection and the evaluation of thought.   Specific changes in learning strategies can empower the learners towards conscious decision-making in the learning process.

According to Ntshangase (2011:13), the following five primary intervention components can be distinguished in meta-cognition, namely

- the preparation and planning for learning;
- the selection and use of strategies;
- the monitoring process, due to learning;
- orchestrating strategies; and
- the evaluation of learning.

These components are significant in first and second language learning (Ntshangase, 2011:14). English second language learners tend to vary structural patterns, as well as the communicative styles of English. In the case of non-English speaking learners, they transfer and borrow features from their first languages, and thus misunderstanding may occur. An African form of English (South African Black English (SABE)) is used by quite a number of second language speakers of English, and can influence the cognitive development.

2.3.3 The language-cognition relationship during the cognitive developmental stage

Piaget (1896-1980) explored the well-known and influential theory of cognitive development. He (1957) believes that before small children have acquired language, mental activity (thinking) exists. The learning process is expedited and made more efficient by language. The vital role of language in the early, as well as in the later development years of the learners is significant. According to Piaget (1957), four distinct universal stages signal the cognitive development in terms of sophisticated and abstract thinking levels. Each stage follows onto what was learned in the previous stage, and always manifests itself in the same order. Mmamwenda (2004:89) concurs that on their way to the level of adult intelligence, children pass through four developmental stages that increase in sophistication, namely

- stage 1 represents the sensori-motor stage, from birth to 18 or 24 months;
- the pre-operational stage is the second stage, from 2 to 6 or 7 years;
- stage 3 is the concrete-operational stage, from 6 years to 11 or 12 years;
- at 11 or 12 years the children reach the formal-operational stage.

The pre-operational and the concrete-operational stages are seen as relevant to this study, which focuses on the Foundation Phase learners' acquisition of the English language as a communication tool. The ages of the learners in the Foundation Phase ranges from five to six years, up to nine to ten years.

Trawick-Smith (2006:366) contends that the learners develop exceptional intellectual traits during the pre-operational stage, as regards their "unique level of analysis, internal organisation and understanding of environmental information and events". In a study conducted by Johnston and Nahmad-Williams (2009:115) they concluded that the children's development is not necessarily logical and ordered during the egocentric pre-operational stage. They experience the world from their own point of view (egocentric approach), and hence the logical mental actions (operations) commence. The logical process of reasoning, based on concrete evidence, is not yet developed in the pre-school stage. Language is, however, acquired rapidly (Mwamwenda, 2004:92). Bjorklund (1989:23-24) notes that there is a lack of 'operations' in the above-mentioned developmental stage. *Operations*, according to him, are stipulated as follows, namely

- •	the individuals act on their life world by means of indicative mental schemes;
- •	the use of symbols is required in mental constructs;
- •	in an organised system internalised actions exist;
- •	a system of rules is followed logically.

Serration, classification and conservation are the operations that are mastered during this stage. The stable physical world, where elements can retain authentic characteristics and thinking, can be reversed and recognised by the children. According to Bjorklund (1989:32), "children's thinking is limited to tangible facts and objects and not to hypothesis". On a basis of concrete evidence, children tend to make use of the logical reasoning processes (Mwamwenda, 2004:95).

Some cognitive characteristics of pre-schoolers are evident, but the cognitive limitations of the pre-operational stage are over and done with (Trawick-Smith, 2006:367.) The thinking of the children becomes more coordinated, rational and adult-like, and henceforth they manipulate objects that they are thinking of in logical processes (Johnston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009:115). Logical thinking, based on concrete objects, replaces a pre-logical thinking form, where retention takes place. The children's thinking is limited in the pre-operational stage, due to the fact that they rely on their own perceptions and perspectives in the thinking process (Lefrancois, 1997:83).

2.3.4   Language proficiency and cognition

Ravitch (2007:131) defines *language proficiency* or *linguistic proficiency* as the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language. The extent to which an individual has mastered a language is measured by his/her language proficiency.

Cummins (2000:60) indicates that, for optimal learner achievement in the school situation, integrated Basic Communicative skills (BICS) and academic or Cognitive Language Proficiency (CALP) are required. When the learners experience a lack of language proficiency, proficient   discourse at school and with the academic content will be difficult for them to manage. Educators often do not recognise the children's lack of CALP, due to the fact that language minority learners (in the case of the current study, non-English speaking learners receiving instruction in English as a first language) have acquired BICS. Language aspects, such as pronunciation, basic vocabulary and grammar, are 'visible' language aspects that assist the learners to become fluent in everyday situations which are undemanding. In this regard, Lemmer (2002:47) points out that an increased amount of CALP is needed for academic success. She postulates that learners must have the ability to use language to

- accomplish the knowledge of concepts;
- acquire relationships between sets of information and concepts;
- retrieve information that has to be analysed, synthesised and classified;
- articulate oral or written forms of information that is processed.

Cook and Basset (2011:122) indicate that the higher-order thinking of language minority learners are demonstrated by means of generalising, hypothesising and arguing in their first language, but the CALP to perform higher cognitive operations through the medium of English is lacking. Naahrkhalaji (2008:4) suggests that academic concepts, as well as the terminology, are abstract and difficult to understand by language minority learners. In social interaction, abstract ideas are difficult to understand. Language, and not the lack of intellectual ability, can contribute to the fact that the learners' abilities are not recognised by the teachers. Hickman (2001:106) further reports that the visible and qualifiable

language aspects, namely BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP *(cognitive* academic language proficiency), are connected to aspects that are less visible and not so easy to be measured. Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives was metaphorically combined by using the image of an iceberg to illustrate the BICS and CALP distinction (Cummins, 1979), as follows:

Level 1:   **Factual knowledge:** Recalling factual material.

Level 2:   **Comprehension**: The learners think more broadly, in-depth understanding is shown. Concepts are explained in the learners' own words.

Level 3:   **Application:** In new situations knowledge is applied by the learners or new products are developed.

Level 4:   **Analysis:** Pieces are examined and materials are taken apart.

Level 5:   **Synthesis:** The learners attempt to get beyond present knowledge.

Level 6:   **Evaluation:** Ideas are evaluated by the learners according to a set of reasons that are explicit and detailed.

A clear explanation of the judgement employed is applicable to this stage in Bloom's taxonomy. Cognition processing is linked to language skills by means of an Iceberg Model (Cummins, 1979):
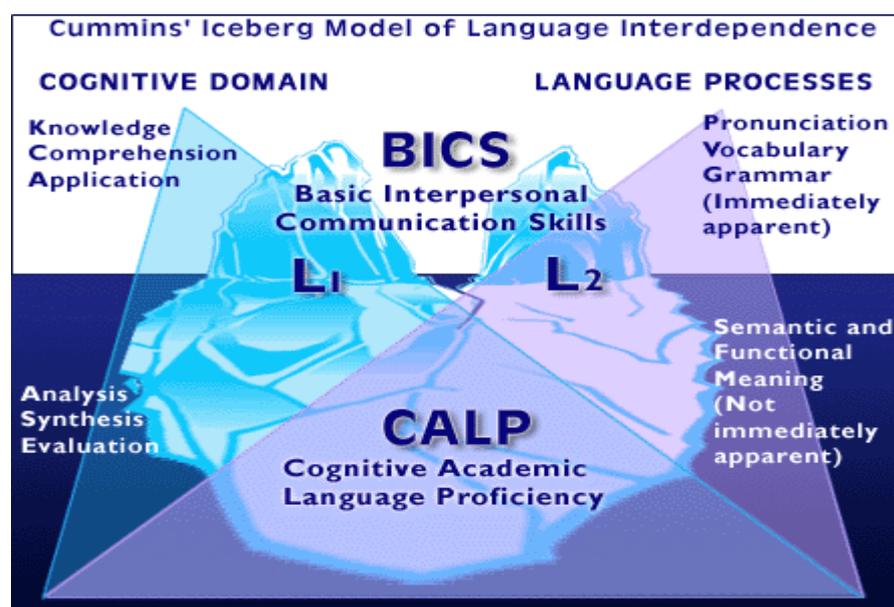
Figure 2.1: Cummins' Iceberg Model

The importance of BICS and CALP is discussed in more detail in section 3.3.3.

2.3.5 Learning, cognition and the acquisition of a second language

The main problem that is addressed in this study is the fact that second language learners of English receive their instruction in English as a first language or on mother-tongue level. The acquisition of a second language, therefore, also impacts on teaching and learning. Many seminal studies have been carried out between the 1950's and the 1990's to explain the language-cognition link.

A renowned linguist in the 1960's, Lenneberg (1967), indicated that the importance of a "critical period" for first language acquisition, as well as age, affect learning in the acquisition of a second language. Mayberry and Lock (2003:371) purport that only certain aspects of the acquisition of a second language may be affected by age. Robert (1959) and Lenneberg (1967) claim that learners are neurologically advantaged when languages are learnt. A turning point in ability correlates with puberty, since, after a certain age, the brain loses its plasticity. This implies that the ability for the adaptation, reorganisation and relearning of a language fades. Cook and Basset (2011:241) highlight the ability of children under the age of nine years to learn up to three languages, due to their brain reflexes that allow for language switches without confusion or translation into the first language. According to Lenneberg (1967), the acquisition of language becomes extremely difficult by the age of thirteen, since the cerebral hemispheres of the brain function separately and "become set".

In the biological approach, which asserts that language is learned through conditioning, the distinguished linguist, Steven Krashen affirmed the sentiment that the occurrence of cerebral specialisation is much earlier than what was calculated by Lenneberg. Skinner (1957), the father of the conditioning theory, observed that through environmental interaction, operant conditioning takes place. Second language learners eventually have the ability of self-expression in English.

Sentences that are voiced consist of original word combinations that were never voiced previously. From a limited vocabulary the brain has to contain the innate means of the creation of endless numbers of grammatical sentences (Hartzuiker, 2013: 377). This was confirmed through the Universal Grammar Theory, as investigated by Chomsky (1965). He theorised that a "language acquisition device" is built in when the language learners possess innate principles in the brain. Collected from the environment, a grammar of "raw input" is constructed.

Those learners who are exposed to sufficient language samples can learn several languages with active commitment simultaneously (Hartzuiker, 2013:738). Dodey (2010:7) notes that when reading and translating two languages, cerebral circuits are used to handle one language adapt for the efficient storage of two or more". The physical base of the first language is the temporal lobe, and the second language is stored "elsewhere", which might explain bilingual aphasia, where one language stays intact. The left temporal lobe is scarcely activated by any second language.

An "acquired system" and a "learned system" (Krashen, 2003:71) are described as two independent systems in second language performance. A subconscious process roots the "acquired system" that matches the process undergone by children when they acquire their first language. Natural communicative acts are meaningfully interacted in the target language. The conscious knowledge process (e.g., the knowledge of the grammar rules) is the "learned system", as a result of formal instruction. "Acquisition" is more important than "learning". After certain stages have been passed, second language learning and reasoning, all in an effort to give matured responses, become increasingly difficult. As a result of this, the learners find it difficult to attend to form when they focus on meaning, and when they focus on form, it is difficult for them to understand or to make themselves understood (Krashen, 2003:72).

Ntsangase (2011:32) claims that an extended time period is needed to process task-based language in meaning, form and function. How grammatical text forms are used, should be preceded by the processing of text meaning. It seems that school syllabi do not cater for this in the actual teaching and learning situation.

According to Adler, Slonimsky and Reed (2002:167), second language learners tend to experience communication difficulties with their peers and with teachers, since the language of instruction is not their main language, and thinking cannot always be articulated clearly. It is believed that second language learners drop out from school 1.5 times more than native learners.

Guvin and Islam (2013:17) mention that positive effects of second language learning are found when cognitive academic development occurs in the first language. Academic skills, the development of literacy, the formation of concepts, subject knowledge and strategy development, learnt in the first language, should be transferred to the second language. An interesting observation was made by Cummins (2009) when he found that non-native speakers who had no schooling in the first language, take seven years to reach age-level and grade-level norms. Immigrant learners who had three years of first language schooling (in home countries), take five to seven years to reach the latter levels. Doray (2009:11) asserts that learners with no or a limited first language cognitive development, find it difficult to keep up with the increased demands of the curriculum. Sustained academic achievement is experienced when learners spend four to seven years in quality bilingual education programmes. The importance of academic cognitive development is outlined by Cummins (2009) and Doray (2009:12), and demonstrates the impact of the latter on second language learning.

Dodey (2010:184) indicates that print-rich examples in both languages should enhance successful language acquisition in the classroom. The availability of a variety of reading and writing classroom opportunities are needed for the mastery of subject content through understanding and decoding. Hartzuiker (2014:739) reveals that the reading and writing of a second language is supported by first language reading and writing. Diversity and different language approaches should be followed in the schools (Dodey, 2010:186; Doray, 2009:12). The focus should be on the construction of meaning, and to a lesser extent on 'form' in the second language teaching process

Iluz-Cohen (2013:855) argues that the development of language should be focused on higher-order thinking skills that include meta-cognition and prior knowledge. They believe that the provision of "explicit and flexible instruction in English within a meaningful context" should be pursued in second language learning.

In order to have a better understanding of the link between cognition, learning and language acquisition, the debate on mother-tongue education and the critical role of proficiency in the mother-tongue (for acquiring proficiency in a second language) needs to be discussed.

2.4   PROFICIENCY IN THE MOTHER-TONGUE AND THE ACQUISITION OF A SECOND LANGUAGE

2.4.1   Introduction

For the purpose of this research, the concept *mother-tongue*, as well as the mother-tongue education debate is of significant importance in understanding the English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:106) sheds light on the different aspects pertaining to the concept of *mother-tongue,* as indicated below.

Table 2.3: The different aspects pertaining to the concept *mother-tongue*

Criterion	Definition
1. Origin	The language one knows first, i.e., the language one has established the first long-lasting verbal contact in.
2. Identification (a) Internal	(a) The language one identifies with as a native speaker.
(b) External	(b) The language one identifies with as a native speaker.
3. Competence	The language one knows best.
	The language one engages in most.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000:105-106) maintains that "defining a mother tongue is not only an academic exercise; it is also necessary for practical purposes, such as census, right to services, which are a given on the basis of mother tongue; assessment of linguistic qualifications for education, jobs, etc." Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas (2010:47) further point out that the terms *mother-tongue education*, as well as *multi-lingual education*, feature clearly in the mother-tongue education debate. Multi-lingual contexts prevail in developing countries, such as India and many of the sub-Saharan countries. In language struggles it has become axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is in his/her mother-tongue. Psychologically, mother-tongue is a system of meaningful sounds that work automatically in the child's mind to produce expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he/she belongs. Educationally, the child learns more quickly through the mother-tongue than by any unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO, 1953:11, as cited by Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2010:53).

Cummins (2009:3) stresses the need for theoretical constructs to be discussed in the debate on mother-tongue education. The learners should be facilitated to become proficient, preferably first in their mother-tongue, and subsequently in a language of international status, for extended communication purposes. The polarised mother-tongue education debate to promote the mother-tongue versus an international language, such as English, also exists in South Africa, and manifests in the tension between the promotion of African languages on the one hand, and English on the other (Desai, 2012:74)

The primary linguistic resources of the majority of South Africans are African (Desai, 2012:74). African languages languages, as well as English, were promoted by Trew and Desai at the ANC's Constitutional Committee in 1992. Reality confirms that English cannot be replaced by a *lingua franca* (Trew & Desai, 1992:2-3), although 49% of South Africans are not conversant in English (PANSALB, 2000; Desai 2012:75, 76).

2.4.2   Theoretical constructs

Apart from the mother-tongue of a speaker, the need for an international language for wider communication is evident. This is continuously emphasised by educationists and linguists. The following theoretical aspects are paramount in the study of language acquisition and language proficiency, namely

- additive bilingualism
- subtractive bilingualism;
- the threshold hypothesis;
- the developmental interdependence hypothesis;
- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS);
- Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

These need to be explored briefly.

2.4.2.1 Additive bilingualism

In additive bilingualism the teachers incorporate the learners' first language (L1) into their instructional practices. Ideally, the learners get to know the curriculum through their native language while simultaneously learning English. Described as complementary, additive bilingualism enables the learners to learn a second language, as is the case in the present study, English, while reinforcing their first language. In essence, the learners are adding a language to their repertoire, thus the term "additive".

Cummins (1979) asserts that where a second language is acquired without any loss of the first language, the construct *additive bilingualism* is used, as is illustrated in experiments conducted in the 1960's in Canada with the St. Lambert's immersion experiments (Cummins, 1979:229). In the middle-class suburb of Montreal, English-speaking parents voluntarily subjected their children to French as a primary language of instruction in order to improve their French (Cooper, 1989:55). It was found that there was an improvement in their home language as well as in their second language skills.

Cummins defines *additive bilingualism* as follows, "The term, additive bilingualism, refers to the form of bilingualism that results when students add a second language to their intellectual toolkit, while continuing to develop conceptually and academically in their home language" (Cummins, 2009:26).

Additive bilingualism is gained when

- the medium of instruction is the mother-tongue, as well as an additional language;
- the medium of instruction is the mother-tongue, and the additional language is taught as a subject;
- the mother-tongue is learned as a subject, and the medium of instruction is the second language.

If teachers are looking to promote well-rounded bilingual learners, additive bilingualism is the clear choice. In this case, May (2011:236) suggests that educators teach English that complements rather than competes with the learner's native language. To do this, the teachers have to provide a robust, holistic learning environment where the learners can actively practice both languages, preferably in a diverse group setting.

2.4.2.2 Subtractive bilingualism

Cummins (1979:229; 2009:26) indicates that when a more prestigious language gradually (or not gradually, in a number of cases) replaces the first language, subtractive bilingualism becomes appropriate. South Africa is an example of a country where the mother-tongue is rarely acknowledged, and more often than not, learners have to learn in a second language. Subtractive bilingualism contrasts to additive bilingualism in that the learners learn a second language at the expense of the first language. Proponents of this method view the two languages as opposing forces, believing that the target language should replace the native language, resulting in mono-lingualism, rather than bilingualism. Essentially, the learners lose an important facet of their cultural identity by negating the significance of their primary

language. Determining which approach to take will depend on the teachers' main objective (May, 2011:237).

Desai (2012:78) argues that the status of the mother-tongue and the societal relations regarding the power of speakers of different languages, teaching quality and available resources (reading material, in particular) influence the outcome of additive and subtractive bilingualism in education. According to Plüdderman (1997:20), in South Africa additive and subtractive bilingualism were conflated in cases of overcrowded circumstances and in under-resourced situations. This is still the case.

2.4.2.3 The threshold hypothesis

Toukemaa and Skutnab-Kangas (1977), and Cummins (1979) postulated the "threshold hypothesis", which holds that a child can be "inadequately competent in either language" as a result of the "negative consequences of bilingualism", or experience the benefits of bilingualism positively on a "required level" of minimum competence in the first and second languages. The level of mother-tongue competence already reached by the learner determines if he or she will experience cognitive deficits or benefits from schooling in the second language. This means that there has to be a certain 'threshold' in mother-tongue competence before the benefits of studying a second language can develop. This threshold level has usually not been reached in the case of learners who start schooling in the second language while their mother-tongue is not fully developed. Cummins (1979:222) further claims that there is a threshold for the second language as well, which must be attained in order to allow the potentially beneficial aspects of second language learning to influence a learner's cognitive and academic functioning. He differentiates between two thresholds. The attainment of a lower level of bilingual competence is thought to be sufficient to avoid any negative cognitive effects, e.g., effects on intelligence. This lower level is defined as the level where the student can follow instructions in the second language and participate in basic social communication. The attainment of a second, higher level of bilingual competence is hypothesised to lead to accelerated cognitive growth (Cummins, 1979:230).

The minimum competence in language proficiency varies due to the cognitive developmental stage of the child and the demands of the academic level that is required (Cummins, 2009:26). Deeper language-competence levels are required in the first and second languages, due to a more formal abstract operational thought-process based on more symbolic learning content. Crucial literacy skills thus need to be developed to meet the latter. Under certain conditions and in particular contexts, benefits are experienced in the field of bilingualism. The maintenance and development of a learner's mother-tongue, as well as the sources used in the mother-tongue, allow for the development of adequate literacy levels.

Based on an international research Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Cummins indicates that students' academic successes are the result of the active engagement of the students (OECD, 2004:8, as cited in Cummins, 2009: 30-31). Not much has been written and very little creative material is available on the African languages in South Africa, and this emphasises the significance of the aforementioned research (Desai, 2012: 80).

2.4.2.4 The developmental interdependence hypothesis

Cummins (1979:233) states that the development of competence in a second language that is a partial function of the type of confidence already developed in the first language is called *the developmental interdependence hypothesis*. The learner's developmental level in the first language consequently also influences the acquisition of the second language. The school language outcomes are influenced by the contributions of the learners' linguistic experiences gained prior to their education at school (Cummins, 1979:233). The concept was further developed by research done in the United States of America (August & Shanahan, 2006). More than merely linguistic transfer is involved in the interdependent hypothesis, since it also includes five other types of possible transfers, namely the transfer of:

- conceptual elements, i.e., regarding understanding the concept *photosynthesis;*

- meta-cognitive and meta-linguistic strategies, i.e., strategies of visualizing, the use of visuals or graphic organisers, mnemonic devices, acquisition strategies, etc.;
- the pragmatic aspects of language, i.e., the willingness to take risks in communication through the ability in the second language, to include paralinguistic features, such as gestures to aid communication, etc.;
- specific linguistic elements, e.g., knowledge of the meaning of 'photo' in photosynthesis;
- phonological awareness, i.e., the knowledge that words are composed of distinct sounds (Cummins, 2009:32).

Likewise, Desai (2012:83) believes that the learners should be encouraged explicitly to transfer knowledge and skills across languages.

2.4.2.5 Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)

The terms *conversational* and *academic language proficiency* are used interchangeably with the original terms, namely *basic interpersonal communication skills* (BICS) and *cognitive academic language proficiency* (CALP).

Cummins (2009:29) made a distinction between more cognitively-related language proficiency aspects and 'surface fluency' in second language learning. It is also important to realise that there is a distinction between *Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills* (BICS), or 'surface fluency' and *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* (CALP). Closely related to the development of literacy skills in the first and second languages, are the cognitive academic language proficiency skills which are needed to carry out specific academic tasks. Aspects such as accent, oral fluency and sociolinguistic competence skills in the first language of a pupil may be independent from his or her cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2009:32).

In a study conducted in 1984, Cummins (1984:4-9) revealed that it took five to seven years for immigrant pupils in Canada, older than six years of age, to improve on aspects of English proficiency. In a face-to-face communication situation of language minority pupils, it took about two years to reach the required level of English language proficiency. In the latter instance the educators distinguished between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency skills for pupils to 'survive' when teaching takes place in English only. Cummins (2009:33) explains that in bilingual classes, the cognitive academic language proficiency (of the pupils) should be measured in the language in which they are most capable of learning.

The distinction between BICS and CALP has only been spelt out more recently by Cummins (2009). The language abilities required for academic success are very different from those operating in an everyday conversational context. Vocabulary expansion, grammatical and discourse knowledge for social communication are required for sustainable language proficiency levels across grade levels (Cummins, 2009:22). Desai asserts that the sustainable language proficiency levels development is crucial in the mother-tongue and also in the second language (Desai, 2012: 84).

Any language learning could be applied, if a distinction is made between BICS and CALP in a bilingual educational context such as in South Africa. Along these two continuums, language proficiency can be conceptualized diagrammatically as follows, according to Cummins (1984:12-13):

Table 2.4: Cummins' framework of language proficiency

I Cognitively undemanding and context embedded	II Cognitively undemanding and context reduced
III Cognitively demanding and context embedded	IV Cognitively demanding and context reduced

The range of conceptual support that is available for the purpose of expressing or receiving meaning is found on the horizontal continuum. Context-imbedded communication (i.e., opportunities for negotiating meaning) and context-reduced communication (i.e., linguistic cues) areas are extremes of one another. During personal interaction, context-imbedded communication arises, while linguistic cues should be specific and clear in order to minimize misinterpretation, in the case of context-reduced communication. The two ends of the continuum would entail face-to-face conversation based on a personal level, and the writing of an academic article. The degree of active cognitive involvement in an activity refers to the vertical continuum. Not much cognitive development is required at the upper level of the continuum, in contrast to activities such as "writing an essay, or a complex theme" which are expected activities on the lower end of the continuum (Cummins, 1984:12-13).

Cummins (2009:19) believes that the "use of a language as a medium of instruction in state-funded school systems confers recognition and status on that language and his speakers." He (2009:20) reinforces the argument of the existence of "significant positive relationships" between first and second languages when academic skills are developed. Bilingual programmes are most successful when bilingualism and bi-literacy is developed. Desai

(2012: 127) confirms that the maintenance of the mother-tongue in education should at least be extended up to the end of primary education.

2.5 THE CONSEQUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING (LoTL) FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

According to Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2004:219), the current language scenario in South African schools implies that the majority of South African learners are forced to learn by means of a language that differs from their mother-tongue. The implications are that their first language has been replaced by a second language, commonly referred to as *subtractive bilingualism*. Although the language of Foundation Phase learners in this case differs from their home language, value is arguably added to their lives through quality education in an international language, as reflected in this case study.

2.5.1 The consequences for the learners

Brown 2004:2) stresses that quite a number of parents enrol their children as home language learners at English schools, but neither the parents nor their children are adequately prepared for the demands this poses. Second language learners who lack fluency in English, find it difficult to cope with the cultural environment which in turn results in possible reading and writing barriers (Brown, 2004:2). The role of the Foundation Phase teacher is to be sensitive to the cultural background, as well as the possible reading and writing problems of the learners. Lessing and Mahabeer (2007:147) point out that learners find it difficult to cope when their cultural environment is changed. This leads to difficulties experienced in reading and reading comprehension, as well as in writing (Lessing & Mahabeer, 2007:147). These researchers contend that, according to the literature, the ripple effect of poor learner performance delays their emotional development, and concomitted socio-environmental problems can be experienced. The learners often fear to respond to instructions that acquire reading and writing skills. The learners' proficiency in English, and the acquisition of reading and writing skills are not merely influenced by the training of the teachers or by bilingual or multilingual teaching.

Obanya (2004:16) expresses the view that when the learners do not learn in their mother-tongue, they are disadvantaged, to the point that they find it difficult to communicate. Academic barriers then become linguistic barriers (Wright, 2012:12). The cognitive development of the learners in their mother-tongue is not developed in instances where they need to think and conceptualise in their mother-tongue, and they are removed at a too early stage from their mother-tongue learning environment. The thinking aptitude of the second language is "masked" when they have only a limited understanding of the language (Gibbons, 2006:3). The teachers are obliged to accommodate the linguistic barriers and have to assist the learners to improve their cognitive processes, as well as their functioning abilities in English.

Sweetnam-Evans (2001:48) asserts that higher levels of English proficiency are not guaranteed with the use of English as a LoLT in South Africa. Barker (2006:77) states that less than 25% of the South African black population "has a reasonable competence in English". When academic language proficiency is developed in one language, according to the interdependence hypothesis, it can be translated into another language. Dalvit, Murray and Terzoli (2009:40) point out that, especially in rural areas, the learners' contact with English mostly features in the school environment where it can be practised, although code-switching also occurs in quite a number of cases.

2.5.2   The implications for teachers and teaching

Chetty (2012:5) voices a serious concern with regard to the low intake of Foundation Phase education teachers. He claims that these teachers are inadequately trained to provide mother-tongue instruction in the indigenous languages. Marked inequities in schools should be restricted, and intake of quality candidates for teacher training should be promoted. Within the complexities of teacher training and the needs that need to be addressed, the training of language teachers should be accentuated (Chetty, 2012:5).

Hugo and Nieman (2010:66) highlight the fact that despite several years of formal training in English, often the learners, teachers and student teachers remain deficient in the use of the language, due to the lack of thinking and reasoning abilities in English. In their study they

indicated that well-planned in-service and pre-service training need to focus on methodologies of teaching and learning in English as a second language. Furthermore, the teachers should also be educated to pronounce the English words properly when teaching (Hugo & Nieman, 2010:66). Learning and teaching methodologies, applied in the English language, will also improve the learners' competence. Only then will effective teaching and learning take place in the classroom.

Wright (2012:6) reinforces three essential inputs that are necessary for success in language education in a properly functioning school system, as follows

- the teachers should be well-educated and well-trained;
- the text books should have a "state-of-art" layout and appealing content;
- the school facilities should comprise of adequate stationary, neat classrooms, and libraries that are well-stocked.

He further reasons that language education affects other learning areas and when resources are in place, the learners will be in a position to excel. He (2012:12) foresees that, in order to link with the global world, English will be the future language of business and government. When deprivation and inequality can be eradicated, and good education in all official languages exists, multi-lingualism can become a reality in South Africa. When pedagogical skills and knowledge can be upgraded and language teachers can be re-educated, the social benefits of the country's Language in Education Policy (LiEP) will manifest.

Top-down language prescriptions have a tendency to fail when people's desires cannot be achieved in practise. Multi-lingualism will thrive when the language teachers are well-educated, and this in turn, will ensure a richer linguistic future in South Africa (Wright, 2012:12). People's desires should be met within the language education framework of every classroom, in order to gain the future benefits for teaching and learning.

Dalvit et al. (2009:4) firmly believe that English can and should be used by African speakers due to the instrumental and symbolic value within the educational context, where

hegemonic structures need to be deconstructed. New momentum is needed to promote bilingual education in South Africa to reflect its versatility and reality. When the aforementioned reality is reflected, teaching and learning will be in a position where the stakeholders, i.e., the educational system, the learners, the teachers and the parents are fully accommodated, whilst teaching and learning against this backdrop, will be in place (Dalvit et al., 2009:4).

2.6   CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the history of language education and the link between language acquisition and cognition. It furthermore explored the key aspects of the mother-tongue debate, and indicated how proficiency in the mother-tongue strengthens and enhances proficiency in a second language. The discussion concluded with a number of consequences of the current LiEP, and the implications for teaching and learning.

In the next chapter the researcher explains the research design and methodology followed in order to be able to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

The theoretical foundation for the purpose of exploring the proficiency of non-English speaking learners in English in the Foundation Phase of English medium schools was provided in Chapter 2.

In this chapter an account will be given of how the qualitative investigation was designed and conducted in the study by utilising the following information sources, namely:

- human reasoning as a basis for answering questions (common sense);
- the manner how the past behaviour of the learners is observed (tradition);
- Foundation Phase teachers who are experts in the field of teaching (authority) (Mertler, 2012:5).

3.2   THE RESEARCH DESIGN

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:22), the plan and investigation structure to obtain evidence in order to answer the research questions are vested in the research design. The procedures for conducting the study include when, from whom and under which conditions the data are obtained. The research set-up, what happened to the subjects and the data-collection methods used are all aspects indicated in the research design. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:22) believe that the purpose of the research design is to provide the most valid and accurate answers to the research questions.

In this study the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it would accurately provide the required information to achieve the aim of the research, namely to investigate the strategies used by the Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the proficiency of non-

English speaking learners in English. Shank (2002:5) defines *qualitative research* as "a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning". By *systematic* he means "planned, ordered and public", following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community. By *empirical*, he means that this type of inquiry is grounded in the world of experience. *Inquiry into meaning* means that researchers try to understand how others make sense of their experience.

 Researchers can use qualitative research approaches for a number of specific reasons, namely so as to:

- develop an initial understanding of an issue or problem;
- look for a range of ideas and feelings about something;
- understand different perspectives between groups and categories of people;
- uncover underlying motivations and factors that influence decision-making and opinions.

In this study the variables were not manipulated, and there was no simulation, or an extremely imposed structure on the situation (Du Plessis, 2005:148). In qualitative research, phenomena are typically observed in natural settings where interpretive, material practices transform the world into series of representations by means of specific data-collection methods (Cresswell, 2012:43). According to Johnson and Christensen (2012:34) the breadth and depth of phenomena is focused on through a wide angle and a deep-angle lens in a researcher's study to explore a "bottom-up" approach where data are collected during field-work. A situational, social, contextual, personal and unpredictable study of human thought and behaviour is conducted where varying standards, relativism and group-justification are evident, and observed in their natural settings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:34). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:247) point out that there is an element of constructivism in this research design. Real-world situations unfold naturally where the complex system of the whole phenomenon is more than the sum of the parts. In-depth inquiry and direct quotations capture the participants' personal perspectives and experiences.   The researcher's personal experiences and insights play dynamically in on the critical understanding of the phenomenon.   In addition, his/her personal experiences and

empathetic insights are part of the relevant data while a neutral, non-judgemental stance is taken toward content that may emerge. Understanding deepens and openness exists to adapt inquiry as the study emerges.

The case study method

The research method I used as a strategy of inquiry was the case study method. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:24) indicate that a case study examines a *bounded system,* or a case, over time in depth, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting. The case may be a programme, an event, an activity, or a set of individuals bounded in time and place. Gay, Mills and Arasian (2009:14) add that case study research is an all-encompassing method covering design, data-collection techniques, and specific approaches to data-analysis. The researcher should therefore choose the specific type of case study relevant to his particular research study.

Mark (in De Vos et al., 2005:273) refers to three types of case studies, all with different purposes:

- *The intrinsic case study* is solely focused on the aim of gaining a better understanding of the individual case. The purpose is not to understand a broad social issue, but merely to describe the case being studied.
- *The instrumental case study* is used to elaborate on a theory or to gain a better understanding of a social issue. The case study merely serves the purpose of facilitating the researcher's gaining of knowledge about the social issue.
- *The collective case study* furthers the understanding of the researcher about a social issue or the population being studied. The interest in the individual case is secondary to researcher's interest in a group of cases. Cases are chosen so that comparisons can be made between the cases and the concepts and so that theories can be extended and validated.

For the purpose of this study, I focused on the collective case study. Foundation Phase teachers from a primary school were involved to ascertain the strategies used to alleviate the lack of proficiency in English of their learners.

The most important question that a researcher may ask himself or herself is under which circumstances the case study method can be utilised. According to Yin (in: Baxter & Jack 2008:545), a case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context. This type of study is holistic and seen as a "whole unit" that exists in a real-life context where the researcher searches through similarities and differences by means of cross-case comparisons.

The following additional features define case studies (Creswell, 2013:98-99), and were applied in this study:

- A specific phenomenon (the proficiency in English of non-English mother-tongue speakers) was identified. I conducted a collective case study, which included the Foundation Phase teachers at a specific school in the Lejweleputswa district, where the proficiency of the learners in English were investigated, and where the teachers provided in-depth information on how they deal with their learners' lack of proficiency on a daily basis.
- These cases are illustrated while being described and detailed in this chapter.
- An in-depth understanding of each case was a good hallmark where interviews, observations and documents were collected.
- A description of the cases was done as an important key to understanding the analysis. Specific situations, themes or issues were identified.
- An overall understanding was derived from the cases by means of the conclusions.

3.2.1   The selection of the participants

Small samples of people nested in their context are studied in-depth in qualitative research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:354). To enable me to understand the research problem, a small, distinct group of participants were investigated. I applied judgemental sampling to select the informants. This was based on specific qualities of participants with the special knowledge that I valued.

Research participants may be selected on the basis of age, position in an organisation, or some other characteristics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:351).

In the case of this study I conducted eight individual semi-structured interviews (which included one pilot interview) with the following Foundation Phase teachers, as mentioned previously:

- three Grade 1 teachers;
- two Grade 2 teachers;
- three Grade 3 teachers.

The selection of the teachers was done on the basis that they are all currently teaching at the sample school. Their teaching experience ranges from twenty five to thirty years. This added considerable value to the data collected.

3.2.2   The context of the school

In order to clarify my role, background information about the school which was selected for the collective case study (and where I teach) was deemed necessary.

I have been teaching at the school for the past 21 years. For the first four years of my career at this school I was involved with the education of Learners with Special Education Needs. Currently I teach a Grade 3 class.

The school (a former model-C school) consists of 1 064 learners, 38 teachers, and a female principal. It is situated in a suburban area in the Lejweleputswa Education District. The mother-tongue of all the learners is different from the LoLT of the school, which is English. The school has been in existence since 1961.

The make-up of the classes is as follows:

- The Foundation Phase

    Twelve classes from Grade 1 to 3 which include four classes per grade, one class for learners with Special Education Needs and one support class.

- The Intermediate Phase

    Grades 4, 5 and 6 consist of twelve classes and there are four classes per grade, plus one class for Learners with Special Education Needs for Grades 4 and 5.

- The Senior Phase

    There are four classes in Grade 7.

The school achieved a Top Primary School Award as one of the top fifty primary schools in the Free State Province in 2006. In 2007 the school was also awarded a prize for the best performing primary school in the District. In 2008 it was, for a second time, awarded a prize of R100 000 as one of the hundred best performing schools in the Free State Province.

Teacher 3 in my study received an award from the Free State Department of Education in 2013 in the category Excellence in Primary School Teaching. The same teacher was the winner of the National Teaching Award in Excellence in Primary School Teaching in South Africa in 2009.

3.2.3   The role of the researcher

My role needs to be explained for clarity and role-identification purposes. I asked permission from the Free State Department of Education to conduct this research in the

sampled school. Arrangements and consultations were done with the principal of the school. All the research participants received a letter explaining the purpose and requirements for the open-ended semi-structured individual interviews (see Annexure B). This was confirmed orally. I obtained permission from a Head of Department in the Foundation Phase to use her office to conduct all the interviews. No forms were signed in this respect. This process where consent is given by not returning the consent form is defined as *passive consent* (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:112). It was my duty to appoint a research assistant to read the open-ended questions to the participants during the course of the interviews, while I organised the tape-recorder and jotted down observational notes.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) indicate that the nature of the research study, as well as the level of involvement of the participants have to be described in the letter of consent. According to the principle of accurate disclosure, a description was given of what the study was all about and what I would ask the participants in terms of the activities and their duration. I avoided at all costs deceiving the participants (Mertler, 2012:103).

De Vos et al. (2005:359) assert that in order to get clarity and for role-identification purposes, the role of the researcher is significant. Permission should be granted from the department officials and school principals in qualitative research, due to the fact that the researcher is directly involved in the setting and is an instrument. The Foundation Phase teachers gave their views on the language proficiency of the learners, which were documented. I collected and analysed the participants' responses. The field-notes recorded on the voice-recorder complemented the field-notes taken down during the observations. These notes were transcribed as accurately as possible.

I did not intend to impose any views from outside, but was only interested in the discussion of the subjects in the study in respect of their experiences and views (Walliman, 2001:96). In this manner, together with the practice of appointing a research assistant to conduct the interview while I was jotting down field notes, I managed to avoid conflict of interest, since I was fully aware of my role as both researcher and colleague of the respondents. Through the research process reliable and valid information were produced. Du Plessis (2005:154) indicates that the skills, competence and rigour of the person who does the field-work

maintain the validity in qualitative methods. In order to feel free to communicate their experiences, a good relationship between the participants and myself was established. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:12) hold the assumption that the researcher is expected to be competent, skilled and adequately prepared to undertake the investigation purposefully, in order for reliable and valid information to be produced. Du Plessis (2005:154) further stresses the fact that valid qualitative research methods hinge, to a great extent, on the skills, competence and rigour of the researcher.

According to Goddard and Melville (2001:144), the researcher should treat the subjects, as human beings, with the appropriate respect. In this study a relationship of reciprocal trust and rapport was built between the researcher and the research subjects. This enhanced the likelihood of them sharing their authentic knowledge. Leading questions, excessive guidance and other factors were avoided (Walliman, 2001:412) since this may cause distortion of the facts. In order to acquire the necessary information I collaborated with the participants in a professional manner. Hoberg (1999:83) advocates that the researcher learns from the participants as a curious learner, and should not go to the field as an expert or a figure of authority. I was confident and actively interacted with all the participants in order to solicit the information needed for the study.

3.2.4 Data-collection strategies

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:355) indicate that three features prevail in ethnographic interviews, as conducted in this study.

These include the following:

- A semi-structured individual pilot interview was held with a teacher at another primary school, and the seven other semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with Foundation Phase teachers at the sampled school.
- The participants were given the opportunity to describe and explain the most salient issues related to the language proficiency of their non-English speaking Foundation Phase learners during semi-structured individual interviews with them.

- To illustrate the findings I analysed the words and phrases from the interviews.

Creswell (2013:415 mentions that interviews and observations, as multiple data sources are approached by means of multiple methods when the data are organised "bottom up" inductively (back and forth) into increasingly more abstract information units by building patterns, categories and themes when complex reasoning is applied. The Foundation Phase teachers, as the participants, were interactively and collaboratively involved whilst the themes and abstractions were formulated (Creswell, 2012:45). Throughout the research process I made use of the inductive-deductive logic process qualitatively.

I, as participant observer, participated fully in the interviews of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010: 446-452.) During the interviewing process, as the most important data-collection technique, the questions were asked in the standardised semi-structured individual interviews.

I determined the wording and sequence of questions in advance, according to the requirements of interview behaviour stated below.

- The individuals were respected as human beings during the interviews.
- Appropriate rapport with the participants was developed. (*Rapport* implies getting along with each other, a harmony with, a conformity to, an affinity for one another) (Seidman, as quoted by Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010:454);
- The same questions were asked in different ways during the interviews.
- The interviewees were asked to repeat an answer or statement in order to reduce any doubt about the completeness of a remark.
- The control of the flow of the communication was varied, and the interviewees were allowed to ramble a bit in order to establish a sense of trust and cooperation.
- Leading questions to presume answers were avoided.
- Dichotomous questions (with yes-no answers) were minimised.

I achieved standardisation by presenting the same stimulus to all the participants, in that what was said to all the interviewees were the same or as similar as possible for comparable results (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:199). I asked each participant the open-ended questions in exactly the same way. I determined the sequence and exact wording of the questions in advance.

The fact that eight interviews (including the pilot interview) were conducted reduced interviewer effects and bias. People tend to change because they know that they are being observed, due to reactivity (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:209). No reactivity was sensed in this study, since all the participants collaborated very well.

The phases of the research unfolded as indicated in the table below.

Table 3.1: Data-collection and analysis

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3	PHASE 4	PHASE 5
Planning	Data-collection	Basic data-collection	Closing data-collection	Completion
Description of the site and seeking permission.	The establishment of rapport and the development of codes.	Looking at documents, observing situations and interviews.	Possible interpretations and verification of emergent findings.	Data-analysis and the construction of meaning.

Phase 1 : Planning

A qualitative approach was deemed suitable for this study.

The research objectives consisted of the following:

- The historical background. The origin regarding the implementation of the English language in South African schools, and the current position with regard to the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT);

- Language and cognition.

- The mother-tongue education debate.

- Implications of the current situation of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for teaching and learning.

Phase 2 : The beginning of the collection of the data

The individual research participants were respected, and a relationship of trust was established through reciprocal relations in order to establish rapport.

Phase 3 : Basic data-collection

I observed the verbal and non-verbal reactions of participants when the data were collected in the interviews.

Phase 4 : Conclusion of the data-collection

Attention was given to possible interpretations and verifications of the emergent findings with the key informants as well as by studying relevant documents. I came to the conclusion that further data collection would not yield any more data relevant to the research topic.

Phase 5 : Completion

I analysed the data and constructed meaningful ways to present it to gain a holistic sense of the totality.

3.2.4.1 The interview schedule

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:206) questions are devised to guide interviews and are called *interview schedules* or *guides.* De Vos et al. (2005:302) highlight the fact that the provision of a schedule of questions beforehand forces the researcher to

think explicitly about the information that he/she wants to collect in the individual interviews.   In this way the wording of the questions or any other difficulties that may be encountered were verified. The interview guide assisted me to reach the aims and objectives of the study.

3.2.4.2 The pilot study

The advantage of conducting a pilot study is that it tests whether the questions to be asked are clear and unambiguous (Johnson & Christensen, 2011:83). In a semi-structured individual interview a Foundation Phase teacher at a neighbouring school was asked the questions before the actual interviews were conducted.

The aim of the pilot study was to ascertain the following:

- Were the questions easy to follow?
- Were the research aims accomplished by the relevant questions that were asked?
- Did the questions flow effectively?
- How long did it take to answer the questions? (Johnson & Christensen, 2011:83).

3.2.4.3 Triangulation and member-checking

In accordance with Mertler's view (2012:13), I used multiple sources of data and data-collection methods to support the findings in this study. This is called *triangulation*. The audio-recorded transcribed interviews were returned to the participants to be checked. Confirmation was given that all the transcriptions were accurate and complete. Mertler (2012:131) believes that member-checking (in this case by sharing the interview transcripts, the observation of notes and comments with all the participants) assist analytic thoughts and ensure that the participants' ideas are represented accurately.

3.2.4.4 Field-notes

I kept field-notes (namely the recording of observations, and reflecting on them) throughout the empirical phase of the study. This was done during the pilot study and during the interviews. In the field-notes I described the interview process, as well as the way in which it unfolded, by means of the analysis and interpretation of the data. As the interviews continued my thoughts, insights and hunches were also included in the field-notes. The field-notes had the aim of being compared with the recorded information. I conducted tentative interpretations during the process of data-collection. The analysis-procedures were also indicated as field-notes (Creswell, 2012:217).

3.2.4.5 Open-ended questionnaires

The interview questions were entirely based on the list of open-ended questionnaires that were provided to the participants in advance and that were discussed in the safe environment of a Head of Department's office at the research site. Johnson and Christensen (2012:170) argue that, according to the principle of standardisation, exactly the same stimulus (list of questions) has to be provided to each research participant. I asked contingency questions by means of items that directed the participants to different follow-up questions, depending on their responses (Johnson & Christensen, 2012:170).

3.3   MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Some of the aspects discussed below have already been alluded to in the preceding discussion.

3.3.1   The participants' language

The interviews with all the participants were conducted in the language of teaching and learning at the school, namely English. All the participants were experienced teachers, and were willing to be interviewed in English. To ensure maximum cooperation and understanding between me and the participants, I used simple language. Johnson and Christensen (2012:36) observe that "people's thoughts are bound by their language". I experienced this during the interview process.

3.3.2   Field-research

I conducted all the semi-structured individual interviews with all the participants in a natural setting. The reality of their lived experiences was reflected.

3.3.3   The statement of subjectivity

According to Cresswell (2013:277), research may be shaped by the researcher's subjectivity. In order to gain entry into the participants' world, I was mindful of the fact that I should gain the empathy and understanding of the research participants.   The willingness of the participants to participate was evident, and their trust and confidence were gained. Mazibuko (2003:46) reinforces the fact that trust should be established before certain information is released. The participants' views should be expressed without any fear of judgement during the interview process. Their opinions were trusted and respected. To elicit elaboration on particular parts of information, guiding open-ended questions were asked. On my part, personal influence was avoided at all costs.

3.3.4   Verbatim accounts

In accordance with Johnson and Christensen's prescript (2011:267), the participants' exact words were provided in direct quotations by means of verbatim accounts as the lowest inference descriptors. The sense, intentions, feelings, tone and emotions of the participants were extracted in the process of giving verbatim accounts.

3.3.5   Low-inference descriptors

I employed the use of concrete, precise descriptions of the field-notes and interview elaborations. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:331 observe that it is very important to use participants' actual language, dialect and personal meanings. To this end, I used literal descriptors (low inference descriptors) as opposed to abstract language.   The above

researchers also recommend that accurate and relatively complete records of the conversations between the interviewer and interviewees be provided by making use of tape-recorders and other audio-visual equipment. In this study the researcher used a tape-recorder to record the proceedings.

3.4   THE PROCESSING OF THE DATA

3.4.1   Transcribing the data

Bazeley (2007:44) claims that *transcribing* involves the translation from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules. Original reality is not represented as copies when transcribed. *Transcripts* are interpretative constructions that are useful tools for given purposes. Due to the fact that words may lose some meaning as tone, volume, emotionality and accompanying facial, body gestures and disposition cannot be portrayed, recollection exists in the process of transcription (Bazeley, 2007:45).

All the interviews were audio-recorded by means of a tape-recorder. Immediately after the recordings the researcher transcribed the data in order to retain the form and style of the participants' expressions. The data-transcription ensured a pragmatic approach in that I attempted to deal with the data as truthfully as possible Separate notes were compiled to record the appearance of any body language accompanying the transcripts during and immediately after the interviews.

Bazeley (2007:45) makes a number of suggestions when the data are transcribed. These were borne in mind when the researcher did the transcriptions, and include the following:

- The fully transcribed data-presentations included all the "ums", "mms", repetitions and the like. Something about the thinking and emotions of interviewees are communicated when repetition occurs.
- I did not correct incomplete sentences or poor grammar. The form and the style of the participants' expressions were captured as accurately as possible.

- Events which created interruptions in the flow of the interviews were noted, e.g., the school-bell ringing. I tried to avoid interruptions as far as possible due to the fact that the interpretation of the text could be influenced.

- Non-verbal and emotional conversational elements, such as pauses and laughter were precisely recorded. I observed the importance to record the emotional tone and the use of rhetoric. If sarcasm is recorded verbatim, the opposite of the meaning intended may be conveyed.

- When non-intrusive affirmations of the participants are provided by the interviewer, these affirmations can simply be recorded by placing it in parenthesis or square brackets within the text flow, e.g. [Int:mmm]. To break the flow of the text by beginning a new paragraph was not considered necessary.

- I kept the controversial issue of digressions from the topic in mind in my study. It was my duty to decide whether digression should be included. I also decided whether there was any meaning in digression.

3.4.2   The analysis and interpretation of the data

I attempted to bring order, structure and meaning to the mass of the collected data. I searched for general statements about relationships among the categories of the data (De Vos et al., 2005:340-341). McMillan and Schumacher (2010:351) reinforce that *qualitative analysis* is a process of interim discovery, and aims at developing coded topics and categories. These topics and categories may initially come from the data or may be predetermined to seek a pattern for a plausible explanation. I read the transcripts and notes intensively to gain familiarity with them.

Cresswell (2012:444) maintains that the researcher is forced to become familiar with the data in intimate ways by means of reading, reading and reading. The accuracy of all the transcripts was confirmed by listening attentively to all the recordings.

I followed a phenomenological analysis and representational approach in my methods to gain clarity. Creswell (2012:193-194) makes mention of specific attributes which I adhered to:

- The significant statements of the participants were listed.
- These statements were grouped into larger information units or themes.
- The experiences of the participants with the phenomenon were described by including verbatim examples, and this is called a *textural description.*
- I reflected on the setting and context in which the phenomenon was experienced.
- The textual and structural descriptions of the phenomenon that were incorporated in culminating aspects cristalised.   I explained what the participants experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2012:193-194).

I searched through the data for regularities, patterns, topics, words and phrases to represent the topics and patterns. The data were continuously divided into manageable topics or categories. The emergent patterns or categories were colour-coded. Emic categories were emphasised and preferred when the data were collected. (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:244).

3.5   RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

The validity of qualitative research is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and thus defensible (Johnson & Christensen, 2011:264). The degree to which interpretations and concepts have mutual meaning for the participants whilst they should agree on the descriptions and meanings of different events, is referred to as *validity*. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:175) as well as Mazibuko (2003:44), indicate that regardless of the disciplines and methods, research validity and reliability are crucial in social research. The collected data have to represent the reality accurately and authentically.

Researchers want valid research, regardless of the form of the research or the end to which it is directed. Davies and Mosdell (2006:27) echo this sentiment when they observe that the

researcher has to make sure that the research findings are as reliable as can be, and that possible error sources are eliminated (internal validity).

3.5.1   Reliability

Creswell (2012:164) maintains that the use of a combination of data types increases the reliability and validity of a study (in this case interviews, field-notes and observations). The strength of one approach can compensate for the weakness of another. The consistency of my interactive style, data-recording and analysis, and the interpretation of the participants' meanings could be referred to as *reliable* qualitative research. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:177) as well as Denscombe (2003:273) indicate that the research process should be described completely - an independent researcher must be able to replicate the same procedure in comparable settings. The role of the researcher in the research setting should be clear. The conceptual research framework and a complete description of the methods of data-collection and analysis must be evident in the researcher's study. In pursuit of reliability I attempted to provide an explicit account of the research aim, as well as the basic premise. The way the research was undertaken and the reasoning behind the key decisions in relation to aspects such as sampling were clarified in the study.

I made use of tape-recordings, a research assistant and member-checking. The research assistant asked the open-ended questions while I handled the tape-recorder and jotted down notes during the interviews. To corroborate the findings for reliability, I applied a range of research techniques. Mechanically sophisticated methods or recording, transcribing and analysis were used. After the transcription of the interviews, member-checking was done - each participant read through the analysis, confirmed the content and returned it to me.

3.5.2   Validity

A memo was kept in an effort to avoid subjectivity and bias since this could result in selective observations and the selective recording of information, or personal views and perspectives. Bias could also affect the ways of data-interpretation and the manner in

which the research was conducted. The latter guided me and I was mindful of subjectivity during the data-analysis process. Whilst the interview proceedings took place and immediately thereafter, I made a note of the participants' emotions, gestures and levels of emphasis that were displayed.

3.6   ETHICAL MEASURES

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:15) explain that *ethnical guidelines* (which are legal and technical accessible considerations) include the following:

- informed consent;
- deception is avoided;
- confidentiality and anonymity;
- harm to subjects is avoided;
- the privacy of the participants is respected.

3.6.1   Informed consent

Before the case study commenced, permission was granted by the Department of Education of the Free State Province to conduct the research in the sampled school (See Annexure A), provided that it may not interfere with the smooth running of the school (Cresswell, 2012:231). A letter of consent was also given to all the research participants (the selected Foundation Phase teachers, including the pilot interview teacher) (See Annexure B) to discuss the problems encountered and the strategies implemented in dealing with the language proficiency of their learners. Confirmation was given that the interviews would not take longer than an hour. Confidence and anonymity were assured. The oral consent of every participating teacher was received. I informed the participants of the purpose of the research, the risks involved, the benefits, alternative procedures and the implementation measures to ensure confidentiality (Johnson & Christensen, 2011:107). A copy of the twelve open-ended questions was given to all the participating teachers for their approval. The

assurance was also given that all the interviews would be conducted with the strictest confidence and anonymity.

3.6.2   Voluntary participation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:118) claim that participants cannot be compelled to participate. I informed all the participants that their participation in this study was completely voluntary. They were further informed about their basic rights of freedom to participate or to withdraw from the research without penalty.

3.6.3   Anonymity and confidentiality

As mentioned before, the assurance was given to all the participants that all the provided information would be handled in strict confidence without any linkage between the data and the participants (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010:121). I allocated numbers, namely Teacher 1, 2, 3 etc. to all the research participants to protect their identities.

3.6.4   Permission to tape-record the interviews

I used a tape-recorder to capture all the information without missing any important aspects. Before the interviews commenced, all the participants were informed that their responses would be tape-recorded. They were granted the opportunity to withdraw from the study if they felt intimidated or uncomfortable because of the interview being tape-recorded. The participants gave their consent for the interviews to be conducted in English. Deception was thus avoided, and the highest level of professional integrity and objectivity was upheld.

3.7   SUMMARY

In this chapter the focus was on the research methodology and design. It covered the application of the qualitative research approach, and described the methods to be used to collect the data, such as semi-structured interviews and observation schedules. The aspects

of reliability and validity in qualitative research were explained. Ethical considerations and the researcher's role as research instrument were clearly articulated.

In the next chapter (chapter 4) the focus will be on the analysis and interpretation of the data collected by means of the interviews. The results and the findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

DATA-ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The research design and methodology conducted in this study were outlined in Chapter 3. Measures to ensure trustworthiness, as well as various ethical considerations were discussed. Eight individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with Foundation Phase teachers. In terms of the holistic findings of the case study, similarities and differences were analysed and cross-case comparisons were conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the data.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:367) claim that an inductive process of organising data into categories and identifying patterns among the categories, is primarily gained during the qualitative data-analysis process. The literature study, as reported on in chapter 2, guided the findings. The proficiency of non-English speaking Foundation Phase learners in English in a sample school, as well as of Grade 1 learners of a neighbouring school, was explored. The eight semi-structured individual interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. A detailed profile of the analysis of the data and the interpretation appears in the following section. The reason for including the pilot interview with the other seven semi-structured individual interviews is because it can contribute to the study, and thus forms an integral part of it. This encapsulates a control measure and provides an independent opinion.

4.2   THE PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In order to answer the research questions semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with seven female Foundation Phase teachers (the research participants). The research involved the participants' understanding of the aim of the study and provided a valid and accurate account of their perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2011:265-266).

A pilot interview with a teacher from a neighbouring school was conducted for the purpose of assessing the suitability and clarity of the questions. Valuable information was also gained in the process.

The profile of the sample school is discussed under the following headings, namely

- the characteristics of the school; and
- the teacher participants.

4.2.1 The characteristics of the school

The characteristics of the sample school are discussed according to the following aspects:

- the development plan of the school;
- the vision; and
- the mission.

4.2.1.1 The development plan

The development plan of the school has been drawn up in accordance with the prescriptions in the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) to include all the stakeholders, namely

- ❖ the School Governing Body;
- ❖ the management team;
- ❖ teachers; and
- ❖ learners.

4.2.1.2 The vision

The school is a multi-cultural school which adheres to the sentiments imbued in "*mens sana in corpore sano*", which is the Latin for, "a sound body in a sound mind', and implies striving to develop the learners through a sound, holistic approach into confident, well-balanced individuals. It further strives to lead its learners onto the road of individual excellence and personal discovery. By means of the motto "gateway to a responsible future", a sense of dignity and moral decency is fostered.

4.2.1.3 The mission

As a "*gateway to a responsible future*", the school endeavours to realise its vision for each of its learners in the following manner, namely by

❖ meeting their individual needs, both emotionally and educationally;

❖ providing a dynamic, well-balanced curriculum, together with well-trained, motivated teachers;

❖ fostering self-worth and respect for the rights of others, their race and their culture;

❖ providing a disciplined environment in which they can reach their full potential;

❖ teaching them to take responsibility for their actions and choices;

❖ providing them with the means to become productive, self-fulfilled citizens in the future.

4.2.2 The teacher-participants

The profiles of the teacher-participants are detailed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: The profiles of the teacher-participants

Teacher	Age	Race	Total number of years' experience as a teacher	Qualifications	Home language of the teachers	Total number of years' experience as a Foundation Phase teacher	Number of learners in the class	Grade
1 (pilot interview)	44	White	22	JPED GES of ACE (in English)	Afrikaans	22	32	1
2	53	White	30	JPTD	English	28	37	1
3	61	White	38	NTSD HDE	English	38	37	1
4	54	White	33	DE HDE	English	33	29	2
5	51	White	30	ACE (Pre-school and Foundation Phase)	Afrikaans	25	37	2
6	63	White	38	HED	Afrikaans	37	39	3
7	64	White	31	HED	Afrikaans	26	34	3
8	63	White	30	HPTC	Afrikaans/ English	20	41	3

JPED: Junior Primary Education Diploma

NTSD: National Teachers' Senior Diploma

HDE: Higher Diploma in Education

JPDT: Junior Primary Teachers' Diploma

DE: Diploma in Education

HDE: Higher Diploma in Education

HED: Higher Education Diploma

HPTC: Higher Primary Teachers' Certificate

ACE: Advanced Certificate in Education

NGES: National Graduate Education Certificate

As can be seen from the table, all the participants are experienced Foundation Phase teachers. At the time of the data-collection, only White teachers were employed in the Foundation Phase at the participating school.

4.3   IDENITIFICATION OF THE THEMES AND CATEGORIES

The interviews produced a large volume of raw data which were collected, analysed and interpreted. During the first scanning, the information gathered was carefully perused. In accordance with Brown's research study (2004:104), I identified "units of information" that served as the basis for establishing the themes and categories.

The following two characteristics were identified in a sentence or paragraph that served as a "unit of information":

- the researcher needs to have a clear understanding of the information; and
- the information unit is the smallest piece of information that can stand by itself. (Brown, 2004:104).

I then "carefully read and reread" the transcripts (Brown, 2004:104) and also listened to the tape-recordings repeatedly in order to gain a general sense of the data. The coding and categorising of the information commenced during the second scanning process (Creswell, 2012:247). The main themes were generated during the third scanning process (Cresswell, 2012:247). This process of categorising the information assisted the researcher in analysing and interpreting the content (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009:216).

The following seven main themes were identified from the interviews:

- The language proficiency of the Foundation Phase learners.
- The strategies implemented by the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners.
- The role and nature of the involvement of the parents.
- The impact of language proficiency on the behaviour of the learners and their scholastic achievement.
- The ways how the teachers accommodate the learners who are on different levels of language proficiency.

- The training of teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners.

- The needs of the learners and the teachers.

Table 4.2 outlines the main themes and categories which guided the findings and the analysis of the case study.

Table 4.2: The main themes and categories

Theme 1: The language proficiency of the Foundation Phase learners
Category 1: The speaking and understanding of the language.
Category 2: Common problems experienced by the learners in respect of teaching and learning.
Theme 2: The strategies implemented by the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners
Category 1: General strategies employed.
Category 2: Listening and speaking.
Category 3: Reading and phonics.
Category 4: Writing and handwriting.
Theme 3: The role and nature of the involvement of the parents
Category 1: Positive aspects
Category 2: Negative aspects
Theme 4: The impact of language proficiency on the behaviour of the learners and their scholastic achievement
Category 1: Behaviour
Category 2: Scholastic achievements
Theme 5: The ways the teachers accommodate the learners who are on different levels of language proficiency
Category 1: Group-work
Category 2: Assessment
Category 3: Intervention strategies
Theme 6: The training of the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners
Category 1: Formal training and experience
Category 2: Additional training
Theme 7: The needs of the learners and the teachers
Category 1: The learners
Category 2: The teachers

The focus, as indicated in table 4.2, was on the main themes that emerged from the reading of the verbatim transcripts. Gay et al. (2011:469) indicated that the task of interpreting data is to identify the *important* themes or meanings in the data, and not necessarily *every theme*.

A detailed discussion of the research results follows in the next section.

4.4   DISCUSSION OF THE DATA-ANALYSIS

The different themes and categories will now be discussed in detail to present the major findings of this study. Applicable verbatim quotes obtained from the raw data will additionally be utilised to confirm and justify important findings. It is important to note that errors in sentence construction of the verbatim quotes were NOT corrected. In some cases, unclear parts were indicated in brackets [….] to enhance the understanding.

4.4.1   Theme 1: The language proficiency of the Foundation Phase learners

The language proficiency of Foundation Phase learners, as defined in section 2.2.4, forms the backbone of this aspect. In short, a person's language proficiency measures the extent to which he/she has mastered a language (Wallace, 2014).

4.4.1.1 The speaking and understanding of the language

For effective instruction to take place, it is of critical importance that the learners are able to understand and speak the Language of Learning and Teaching. The reality is that, with the current language situation, many Foundation Phase learners in South Africa who receive their instruction through the medium of English, have not been adequately exposed to the language when they enter Grade 1. Such is the case in the sample school.   All the participants indicated that all the learners in their classes do not speak English, and that the majority of the Grade 1-learners do not understand English when they start their school career. As expected, the teachers firmly believed that it is important for each learner to

know and understand English sufficiently to achieve academically. The learners have to be able to ask questions and to communicate with their teachers.

Teacher 3: "*Learners should have basic English language proficiency when attending school. I feel children should be able to understand and speak the language. Later on this can develop into reading and writing*".

Teacher 6: "*I think it is absolutely necessary to understand each other, so that learning can take place. Without that, learning can't take place*".

Teacher 8: "*The children should understand what they are learning and they should be able to talk freely and openly with confidence in the class*".

Teacher 7, who has the weakest Grade 3-class, reported that "…*teachers have the obligation to assist learners in understanding and speaking the language as soon as possible.…most of them are children from Sesotho schools. It takes at least one term before we can really get started. The first few weeks nobody understands what is going on and you have to keep up with the rest of the group*".

When probed as to why she thinks this class was allocated to her, she explained that she was asked about four years ago to take the class with the learners who experience learning barriers. In 2013 she had 16 learners from Sesotho schools, of whom six were taking Ritalin, and had to be controlled constantly.

"*In the morning they start quite well, but as the day progresses, it just gets worse and worse. You can see that they can't concentrate at all … and they get wild, and it is quite a job to control them. … We try every day and the discipline is quite strict in class, because you can't allow them to do what they want. They just have to be controlled*".

4.4.1.2 Common problems experienced by the learners in respect of teaching and learning

The common problems experienced by the learners are very closely related to the previous category, and revolves mainly around their understanding of English. The participants expressed the view that a substantial number of learners in their classes live with their grandparents or other caregivers who are not proficient in English, and who use their mother-tongue to communicate with the children. The result is that effective communication is lacking, and this necessarily results in language barriers.

One major problem, as outlined by Teacher 2, is the negative influence of technology, which leads to "underdeveloped concentration" and listening skills. The learners become lazy, they are passive, and overly exposed to television.   Many of them are not willing to do colouring tasks, or to write assignments.

The most common learner problem indicated by Teacher 3 is the fact that the learners do not understand instructions, *"They can't follow and this can create a lot of problems, because it affects their work and their behaviour. Their lack of comprehension affects them negatively"*.

 Moreover, quite a number of the learners have not attended English preschools. She noted: "…*the first English they're hearing, is when they arrive at my door … and that's Grade 1 … and they can't even ask you anything basic, like "May I please go to the toilet?" It's a real problem for some of those children. It is as though they were dropped down from out of the sky in your class and their parents expect them to learn English in one day. So that is a problem."*

The learners are also unable to cope with the curriculum. Without the backing and involvement of their parents, Teacher 3 indicated, the learners with a backlog at the beginning of Grade 1 have "a long way to go". In her experience, it takes a learner at least three years to learn an additional language properly.   *"I really feel the parents who want their children to be educated in English, should make the effort and plan ahead and start*

speaking English to those children and make sure that they go to a good English preschool. It would make our job a lot easier. That I feel is a major problem".

When questioned on how many learners in her class attended a preschool, one teacher indicated that all the learners attended day care centres, but quite a number of these 'schools' are run from 'backyards' in the township and are not registered as accredited Early Childhood Development Centres at the Department of Education. No formal curriculum is followed and the focus is mostly on playground activities. All the registered preschools have to follow the CAPS (Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement) curriculum. A learner should have mastered the basics such as counting, colours and shapes at the beginning of the Grade 1 year.   *"…(T)hose who have just been playing in the backyard at a preschool, not following the system … Those children are immediately at a backlog. That's a real problem".*

Teacher 4 reinforced the problem of the attendance of preschools. The very weak learners that progressed to the Grade 2-class she was teaching…..*"They don't understand the language at all and I cannot understand them, for I don't speak Sotho. The biggest problem that we hit, is that we don't understand one another and we can't speak".*

According to Teacher 5, the teachers take it for granted that non-English speaking learners have the basic vocabulary. This is not the case, and in many instances the learners have the wrong perceptions of words. Concepts need to be explained by using practical objects, and these concepts have to be repeated continuously.   Teacher 6 experienced the same problem. This frustration was voiced by Teacher 8 as follows:

"The most common problem of learners is that they don't understand the questions that are asked. Listening skills lack and learners misunderstand the teacher…..as soon as you ask questions that need a little bit of insight, then they can't understand the concept and finer details of what you are trying to help them to understand … like comprehension. When you ask insight questions: "What are your feelings about something?", or "How do you think this happens?" they don't have the vocabulary and insight to answer the questions".

4.4.1.3 Discussion: Theme 1

Language is defined by Ntshangase (2011:14) as "a system of speech, sounds, arbitrary assigned to objects, states concepts to which they referred, used for human communication." The school community is empowered (by means of the School Governing Body) to determine the language policy of the school in accordance with the South African Schools Act, Act of 1996 (SASA, Section 6) and the Language in Education Policy (LiEP). The parents and the learners, as well as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) of the school, have an important role to play. The LoLT of the participant school in this case study is English, which implies that the learners are taught in a second language on a home language (mother-tongue) level. The concern that the learners who are incapable of speaking and understanding functional English was a common problem, as pointed out by all the participants. The latter finds its roots in the South African Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996), which encourages the use of a language of international status (namely English). This finding corroborates with the views of Ntsangase (2011:11), as outlined in section 2.2.1.

The participants were unanimous about their learners' struggle to understand English, and the resultant negative impact on the learning process. Language is an explanation and thinking tool, and impacts decisively on teaching and learning (Desai, 2012). The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) endeavours to enable the learners to speak, write and conduct presentations in fluent English (Ntshangase, 2011:11). The learners in the Foundation Phase are in the concrete-operational stage of their development, which is expedited and made more efficient by language (Piaget, 1957). According to the participants, quite a number of their learners find it difficult to incorporate the skills of speaking, understanding, reading and writing. Mmamwenda (2004:92) attributes this partly to the fact that language is acquired rapidly in the pre-school stage, but the logical process, based on concrete evidence, is not yet developed.

The Foundation Phase teachers have the obligation to assist the learners in the speaking and the understanding of the LoLT as soon as possible by adhering to the requirements as referred to in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS), and the Curriculum and Assessment

Policy (CAPS) document. Once these requirements are met, the learners should be able to speak with confidence, and progressively understand their work. This seems not to be the case in the sample school. From the interviews it is evident that the participants experience frustration in his regard.

Learners with language barriers have a limited understanding in the concrete-operational stage of their development. They rely on their own perceptions and perspectives to gain understanding (Lefrancois, 1997:83). It follows that these learners need constant attention and intervention for learning to take place effectively.

Quite a number of the learners live with their grandparents who do not know any English. The implications of this are cited by Donald et al. (2004:219) where they point out that the majority of South African learners are forced to learn through a language medium that differs from their mother-tongue. As discussed in section 2.3.1, Heugh and Skutnabb-Kanges (2010:47) believe that the best medium for teaching a child is his/her mother-tongue. However, multi-lingualism is promoted in South Africa to support the general conceptual growth of the learners (De Wet, 2002:119) (see section 1.1.2).

The fact that the Grade 1-learners in this school reportedly have underdeveloped concentration and listening skills, necessarily leads to a lack of understanding. Effective explanations, accompanied with practical objects (Teacher 5), should be used, since quite a number of the learners are only exposed to the language in the classroom (Ntsangase, 2011:11). (see section 2.2.4). Even in Grade 3 (Teachers 6, 7, 8) the learners lack the necessary vocabulary, and often misunderstand instructions. Naahekhalaji (2008:3) claims that an extended period of time is needed to process task-based language in meaning, form and function. Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives should be applied to accommodate the acquisition of insight and understanding (see section 2.2.4).

4.4.2 Theme 2: The strategies implemented by the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners

4.4.2.1 General strategies employed

Teacher 2 felt that it is very important to make use of a number of English sources when reading to her learners. This strategy is confirmed by Pretorius and Currin (2010), as well as Ford (2011). In this way the learners are continually motivated to improve their general understanding of English, and their vocabulary increases gradually. The parents are also encouraged to read English books, magazines and newspapers to their children at home. In the classrooms the learners are exposed to practical work, such as "sounds", accompanied by flannel board pictures. The learners seem to grasp three-letter words much quicker when the words and the illustrations/pictures feature alongside each other (Pretorius & Currin, 2010). Language accompanied by gestures seems to be a practical and effective mode of instruction.

When outlining the role of the homework class (where particular attention is paid to the development of language-proficiency), Teacher 3 indicated that the basics (reading, spelling and writing) are covered during these sessions. She did, however, raise a concern: "*The problem is that a lot of the children don't pitch …. that is a problem…..there are a few … who think: "So what if my mother pays"… and they don't come. I can see a difference in Grade 1, in those who are attending homework classes and those who are not. Because we are sitting… We are doing their sight words, we are doing their spelling. So I think the role of a homework class is very relevant.*" She also indicated, *"The main thing is to identify the children that really need help with their language. And then form a strategy … Either the child must come to intervention classes, or join homework classes, then at least something is being done. I don't say we can cover the curriculum there, but if it is part of the homework…..".*

Teacher 7 recommended strongly: "*In the first case in my class it's repeating, repeating, repeating, repeating and you keep on repeating. There is no progress without repeating the work*".

4.4.2.2 Listening and speaking

When discussing the listening and speaking skills of Foundation Phase learners, Teacher 2 noted that they do listen, but in quite a number of cases they do not have the ability to react to what they have heard. They struggle to follow instructions when doing written exercises. The teacher's Grade 2-class is smaller than the other classes with 30 learners, compared to 36 or 38 learners in the other Grade 2-classes. She explained that she usually calls on the ability of the stronger learners who are on the same level academically to assist the weaker ones. To accommodate the struggling learners, she focuses on both group-work and individual work in reading, phonics and Mathematics (including problem-solving). Because the learners lack the basic English vocabulary, assistance in basic reading is rendered once a week for a period by another teacher.

Teacher 3 mentioned that asking questions play a significant role in teaching the learners listening skills. *"So one of the things that I make them do is when I'm doing a sound, or a word, I make them close their eyes … and they must just use their ears to listen. I think that's very important. Without listening they will not be able to do any oral. They need to hear that sound. I feel we do not do enough listening and oral work in our curriculum. Once learners have listened to the teacher, they must be given the opportunity to speak back by means of an oral presentation. A lot of time should be spent on listening and speaking before reading, writing and creative writing commences."*

It seems that the learners know sounds of words in their mother-tongue, but not in English. *"……they have to relearn that listening skill and develop that. Now the sounds are a bit different. The language structure is different. So without listening and trying to reproduce, or give you some news in English … well structured …. That is a very important step in their development. Phonics forms an important part of listening and as far as initial sounds are concerned, learners… confuse let's say the "a" and the "e". . A lot of the children are … and you've got an "ee" and an "e". Those…. They mix them up. We always think they mix a "b" and a "p", and a "d". They do, but the sounds they really mix up are the vowels … and not the "a". The "a" is easy, but the "ee" and the "e" and the "a". You will see, most of the children whose ears are not finely tuned, will mix that up. If you are doing a phonics test,*

they will if you say "a", they will do an "e". If you say "ee", they will do an "e". It's a case of listening. So again, it's listening. If the teacher is pronouncing the sounds correctly, the children will pick it up. So that is a problem."

Teacher 4 employed the following strategy, *"…..(A)gain when they come into my class at the beginning of the year where everything is done orally, I have to start from the beginning of Grade 1 work and I also start with themselves, teaching them body parts, left and right and then we move on to what is around them, so they can start to learn the vocabulary of … the things that are in the classroom. I also teach them very basic phrases like "May I please go to the toilet? Can I please have a tissue? Open your book. Close your book. Put away your book". Very, very basic things, but they repeat what I am saying, so it is not that they are just hearing me. "Put away your book". I have to say "What are you doing?" "I put my book away"…so that they are verbalising exactly what I am doing".*

This strategy is also followed by Teacher 8. *"Their eyes must meet your eyes and their attention must not be wandering. I have forty one children in my class. They have to speak English all the time. They mustn't use their home language at school, because we are an English medium school. So we encourage them, even when they talk with their friends, they must do it in English. You ask their parents too, to teach them the basic stuff at home. "I want to go to the toilet". Those kinds of things. They must be able to say that in English and then we must do lots of oral, ask questions and encourage them to speak the language as much as possible".*

4.4.2.3 Reading and phonics

Reading and phonics are very important skills to master, and are major focus areas that features in the CAPS document. Teacher 2 follows a readiness programme with her learners, where they first learn single sounds by means of sight words. From the single sounds they learn to build words. From these 'look-and-say' words a more detailed reading programme is introduced. Her learners start reading from a book in the eighth week.

Teacher 3 elaborated further, "*Later on when we're doing our reading, our Shared Reading and our Guided Reading, I think the teacher has to reinforce these … sounds. Every day when you're reading, ask them to point out sounds. Ask them to find it on the page. Ask them to … uhm … uhm…. read the page with expression. You know, all of this is part of listening and part of reproducing of what they are doing. I think one of the best things they brought in, was Shared Reading. That is excellent. That is one of the very, very good strategies, because it's reading that you do all the time.. and I can see a big improvement in the children's reading, since we started Shared Readings. So, I think that was a very, very good move. And later when we do our Group Reading when we are together and with the Guided Reading… that is when the teacher can pick up little problems. Perhaps you haven't picked up when they were all doing Shared Reading. So I think that is a very good strategy*".

The learners are grouped according to their abilities and their language proficiency when group reading (which is guided reading) is done. The vocabulary (words) is tested on a regular basis for the strong, weaker and weakest reading groups in class. Teacher 3 noted, "*My groups change regularly, because … Look, your good readers will remain your good readers, but your average and your slow readers, they can turn like this*…[Turns right hand]. *So I test the words regularly and see if I can't move them up. … say for example, Mpho is in the slow group in Term1, does not mean that she's going to be in the slow group for the rest of her life. She's going to progress and the more proficient she becomes at English, the faster she will progress. So, I think that's important in that group reading too – constantly keep a check on those two groups – to see if you can't get them to move up.*"

Independent reading and paired reading also form a significant part of the reading programme. Independent reading is done once a week, usually on a Friday. The learners fetch their reading books from the reading corner in the classroom. They are allowed to read together or in pairs. Teacher 3 contended, "*Reading is very important. You're not getting anywhere in life if you don't read. The slower kids need extra practise. They must read every day. And your other two groups, I also try to fit in every day. Sometimes I have to cut into the time of other subjects, because I think reading is very important*".

Teacher 4 starts reading right from the beginning in Grade 1 with "Monkey tricks", where the teaching of the correct words are conducted, accompanied by pictures of the objects. Phonics is also started from the first week, beginning with the initial sounds, namely "a", "b" and "k". Blending commences when the learners know these sounds. First very basic pictures with three words are used when the construction of sentences are taught, e.g., "The dog is on the log".

Formal reading lessons are conducted every morning in Teacher 7's class. After sounding the words, formal reading is done in groups (mostly five in a group). Teacher 7 stressed, *"We have an intensive lesson on understanding the words and reading the lessons together … then they have it for homework"*. Reading is also done first in the afternoons just after school in her homework class. *"All of us read it together. We repeat it a few times in class. Now I present the lesson to the children themselves. I teach them the words in class. They must now sit down and they read aloud. They must read the lesson at least five times. During the afternoon classes each child comes back to me to read the lesson and if I feel the child is still struggling, I help them again. I send them out to go and read again and they have to read the lesson until they know it according to my standards. That's how we do formal reading."*

Teacher 8 found it helpful to start with phonics. *"The teacher should start with the vowels and with pictures illustrating for example, "a for apple", "b for ball". Learners got easily mixed up with the words due to the fact that they pronounce the words differently. She expressed the following view: "You will find when you ask spelling with a word "a", they spell it with an "e", that's why they say "epple". It is a round sound. An apple is round and fits with a round sound. Your mouth goes like "e" for "egg". Once they get the vowel sounds right, you go to your consonants also with pictures"*. The learners also draw pictures or find pictures in magazines that start with the beginning sounds. When the reading or spelling words are done, the learners have to sound the words by writing them in the air, then on the desk, and lastly in their books.

4.4.2.4 Writing and handwriting

The advantages of writing and handwriting were emphasised by Teacher 2. She starts with patterns in Grade 1… *"the tick tock, the bunny hop and the swing pattern with thick writing crayons."* From then onwards she introduces words. The formation of the letters is shown, and from there one word captions are written on the blackboard to introduce words. The learners follow it up by drawing pictures, and copying short sentences from the board. The learners are expected to form letters correctly when using letter formations.

For Teacher 3, phonics and writing are basically connected. When she teaches the learners to sound the "a" she also teaches them how to write the "a" sound. They do it in wet sand, or with clay, or any suitable substance In this way the learners' senses are reinforced. From then onwards, the learners' writing abilities are developed. Basic creative writing activities are started, where a very fine line is resemble between the parallel activities. In the beginning, writing entails only copying from the board, and later short sentences are written.

While explaining the importance of handwriting skills, Teacher 4 asserted that some learners who come from the township schools are not capable of writing between the lines on lined paper, and they sometimes write on half a line. The formation of letters was often taught incorrectly previously. According to her, it is a "mammoth" task to get the learners to write bigger, to touch the lines, and to write the correct letter size. The handwriting of very weak learners is, in quite a number of cases, very bad. Then "b's", "d's", "p's" and other letters have to be addressed.

Teacher 7 approached the teaching of writing and handwriting as follows: "*I do it on the board, step by step. We go up, down, a straight line … As I do it on the board the children repeat it with me. Then we practise it in the air, and the spelling as well. We do the sounding of the words in the air, with our fingers. After we have practised in the air, we start piece by piece in our books. Up and down, up and down. We write the whole letter and then the patterns. We combine letters*".

Teacher 8 believed that, "*You have to start with very simple basic sentences ... and then you first read a little story to them. They must read it a few times. You ask questions about it, and they must answer it … until they understand it. You take about five sentences out of that story and you leave out little words. They must fill in the missing words and it must make sense. Later on you ask them to write a little thing about themselves by themselves. "All about me", or something like that. Things that they know about … Hopefully by then they can write it. You take it step by step*".

4.4.2.5 Discussion: Theme 2

- General strategies employed

Reading English stories to the learners and encouraging the parents to do the same, as indicated by Teacher 1, seems to be helpful in fostering listening and speaking skills. The different skills are detailed in the NCS and CAPS (2012:10-12). This is consistent with the fact that brain reflexes allow language switches without translation into the first language in the case of learners under the age of nine years (Cook & Basset: 2011:241) (see section 2.2.5). Repetition was a common strategy applied by Teachers 2 and 7. The CAPS allows seven to ten hours per week for focusing on listening and speaking skills and the participants found this allocation to be sufficient.

Another intervention strategy that seems to be effective in the sample school is the homework class after school where the basics of reading, spelling and writing is covered, while the learners are assisted with their homework. Intervention strategies like these are outlined in the NCS and National Protocol for Assessment Grades R-12 (2012).

- Listening and speaking

The participants' frustrations with the learners who do listen but who often fail to act on instructions can, according to Granville, Janks, Joseph, Mphahlele, RomaniReed and Watson (1988:254-272), impact on their cognitive development. As discussed in section 2.2.4, Basic Integrated Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive and Academic Language Proficiency

(CALP), are required for the learners to manage in the classroom set-up. Pronunciation and vocabulary are two visible aspects that can assist the learners to become fluent in English in everyday situations (Cummins, 2000:60). Lemmer (2002:47) indicates that an increased amount of CALP is needed for academic success (see section 2.2.4). The identification of sounds, the building of words and the use of consonant blends are also pointed out in the NCS and CAPS (2012:25).

The listening and speaking skills applied by all the participants in their classes are in accordance with requirements as outlined in the NCS and CAPS (2012:10-11). The learners are constantly developing their listening and speaking skills, not only in the language components, but also in other subjects. The importance of this is emphasised by Granville et al. (1997:54) (see section 1.1.2).

- Reading and phonics

Most of the participants stressed the importance of reading that should be properly developed as a tool for learning (reading to learn), as well as phonics. Pretorius and Currin (2010:2) believe that this should always be applied in a print-rich environment. The requirements as indicated in the NCS and CAPS documents of the Department of Basic Education (2012:11-14) are met on a daily basis while the following reading strategies are being supported:

- shared reading (Big Books with different stories);
- group and guided reading (Beehive series);
- paired independent reading (reading corners);
- phonics (including phonemic awareness implemented in all the reading activities) (CAPS, 2012).
- Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) (Baecher, 2011:66);
- "Narrow reading" (Beehive Series: Group and guided reading) (Hadaway:2009).

A fully functional library is an available resource centre for the Foundation Phase teachers of the participant school.

To be able to apply reading and phonics skills successfully, the learners should have the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to achieve an increased amount of CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) to:

- accomplish knowledge concepts;
- recognise relationships;
- retrieve information to be analysed, synthesised and classified;
- articulate the oral and written forms of processed information (Lemmer, 2002:47) (see section 2.2.4).

The importance of simple, basic reading books was emphasised by most of the participants. Much attention is being given to reading comprehension by the Foundation Phase teachers. When the learners can decode, it cannot be assumed that they can comprehend reading (Mampuru, 2007).

The development of reading enables the learners to become increasingly confident to translate to higher levels of readers (Takase, 2009:461-462). Hence the development of reading in the sample school also occurs by means of a variety of English texts in an attempt to overcome language problems. The language skills mastered in the learners' mother-tongue support their cognitive and academic performance, and ideally this should be transferred to English (Guvan & Islam, 2013:17) (see section 2.2.2.5).

Reading and phonics also link with Krashen's well-accepted theory of second language acquisition where natural, meaningful interaction by means of natural communication when messages are conveyed and learners understand (Krashen, 2007:1). Early production (in reading and writing) is not forced when communicative and comprehensible input is supplied by the Foundation Phase teachers that form part of this study. The product is

"learning", when the knowledge of the grammar rules are applied in writing and handwriting activities (Krashen, 2007:2).

- Writing and handwriting

A great number of the participants elaborated on the strengths and weaknesses of writing and handwriting. This is especially the case with shared writing, where BICS and CALP play a significant role (NCS & CAPS, 2012:2; 12; 30). In accordance with the Iceberg Model (Fig 2.1, 2.2.4) and the Cummin's Framework of Language Proficiency (Figure 2.2, section 2.3.4), Bloom's taxonomy of six educational objectives are applied very rigorously in the Foundation Phase of the participating school. Creative writing, by means of a short story, is done in Grade 3 on a weekly basis to improve the writing skills of the learners.

Teacher 3 pointed out that learning opportunities are created while listening progresses to writing, phonics and handwriting. Writing and handwriting are two parallel activities. The above-mentioned activities are implemented all the time, but also at the same time. The mental processes involved in gaining knowledge by the application of these parallel strategies, is called *cognition*. The mental processes, such as thinking, knowing, remembering, judging and problem-solving, are included (Sternberg, 2003:167) (see section 2.2.2).

As outlined by Teacher 3, the reading and phonics strategies are integrated, and progress to writing and handwriting (NCS and CAPS, 2012:6). The learners eventually gain the ability to express themselves (in written activities) in English by being exposed to sufficient language samples simultaneously. This links with the views of Hartzuiker, (2013:738) as reported on in section 2.2.5.

4.4.3   Theme 3: The role and nature of the involvement of the parents

4.4.3.1 Positive aspects

Teacher 7, who manages a homework class for Grade 3-learners, contacts the parents during the term, and advises them to attend the parent evenings. At these meetings the parents come to realise the importance of the homework classes. These classes provide the learners with two extra periods per day to cover additional work not included in the homework assignments, and all learning areas are included. Effective reinforcing is done, such as oral assignments, which are repeated up to five times during the week.

Homework is given to the learners from Mondays to Thursdays. Teacher 8, "*We have a parent evening once a term. Usually after the exams have been written we want to give them some feedback. I find we get very fully involved parents that attend the parent evenings, sign the homework books and they give you their full cooperation. I find those parent's children are the ones that actually do very well in class. So, parent involvement is of the most extreme importance. Three people are involved: the parents, the teacher and the child*".

4.4.3.2 Negative aspects

A serious concern raised by all the participants is the general lack of parental involvement. Teacher 3 pointed out that the parents usually fail to realise the importance of assisting their children with their homework assignments at home. Since the learners' reading and phonics skills are used to practise their writing, she felt that many of them would indicate more progress with assistance from the parents. Unfortunately many of the parents shift this responsibility onto the siblings. The homework books are seldom signed. One participant remarked, "*I do believe that homework is very, very important. All new Grade 1 parents, as well as the parents of repeaters, are called in on an individual basis at the beginning of the year. Expectations are clarified…….I demonstrate to them how the homework should be done and ask them to sign homework books on a daily basis. Quite a*

lot of parents take it to heart…but others (sigh)…..they make promises but they did not stick to it."

This concern was echoed by Teacher 4 as follows, *"Yes, I think they don't know how to help them. You know … even this year … I mean we had this meeting at the beginning of the year with all our parents, so we could explain exactly how we do our work and how we want the homework to be done. All that, and yet, there were still parents who didn't know how to do it. Often parents also did not understand how to do the homework with their children. After detailed explanations to parents at the beginning of the year of what is expected of them when doing homework with their children, the majority still did not do it"*.

At the beginning of a following term, the parents of poor performers are called in. *"There is a constant involvement with the parents to try and educate them on how to help the child. I feel very sorry for the children … Like I have a little girl in my class… She lives with an aunt. The mother, e.g. I suspect, is dying of AIDS and this little girl has now been shifted from a granny to an aunty… and she's not going to pass. She's now started homework classes with me. But she is so far behind and the problem is that when she was with the granny, the granny can't read, the granny can't write. So who was there to help her? Nobody. She is a sweet little girl, but it is too far in the year for her to catch up with anything. So it's sad, but we do try to involve the parents as much as we can"*.

As pointed out in section 4.4.1.3, quite a number of the learners do not live with their parents, but with their grandparents or other family members. A general conception among the participants was that the parents often work far away, and children are 'dumped' on grandmothers or other family members. It was estimated that more than half of the Foundation Phase learners do not stay with their parents. These children are not necessarily ill-treated, but they miss out on a balanced family life.

Teacher 4 elaborated on the stakeholder role of the parents by emphasising the parents' responsibility to cooperate with the teachers to maximise the children's opportunity to achieve success. The following comment was made by the Deputy Chief Education Specialist (Early Childhood Development, Foundation Phase, Lejweleputswa District), *"Teach these*

children as if they do not have parents". Teacher 4 continued: "*I thought that is so true. We keep on blaming the parents, because they're not helping their child, they're not doing what they are supposed to do… uhm… Just teach and reinforce it … as if they're going home and there are no parents at home. Sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations, but teachers can also not perform miracles as far as learning is concerned. It takes hard work and dedication*".

Teacher 8 made an interesting observation regarding the parents' reasons for sending their children to English schools. "*I can understand why parents put their children in a school that's not their mother tongue. English is such a universal language that if they are speaking English fluently, they will get jobs overseas … anywhere. If they stick to their mother tongue they just can't always secure jobs. … Not many people understand their mother tongue. I think the best thing would be to become educated in your mother tongue. It is a decision to be made, or the solution to that problem, but I don't know what the answer is. You think in your mother tongue. You are more comfortable in that.*"

4.4.3.3 Discussion: Theme 3

- Parental involvement

In referring to the role and nature of parental involvement in relation to the language-proficiency of the learners, it was indicated that the teachers are constantly involved with the parents by sharing valuable information with them once a term during parent evenings. The latter are informed on how to assist their children in the completion of homework tasks. Some parents take it to heart, do the homework with their children at home, and regularly sign the homework books. Quite a number of the parents also send their children to the homework classes. The above-mentioned collaborate with the worldwide desires of parents to acquire the best possible education for their children (Heugh, 2009:183-184) (See section 1.1.2).

Field (2010:32-52) emphasises the importance of parental involvement in the lives of young children. Irrespective of ethnicity, the learners of involved parents (regardless of the

parents' gender or education level) perform well (Field, 2010:32-52). Hence, the way the learners acquire a second language, according to Krashen's input hypothesis underlines the involvement of the parents. When second language (English) "input" is received by the learners in a natural way, they improve and progress (Krashen, 2007:3).

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:39) also advocate that parental values and the aspirations modelled by the parents adjust and shape the achievement of the learners. How values are conceived and expressed are determined by the ethnic culture (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:39).

The learners, the teachers and the parents are all involved when attempts are made to improve the language proficiency of the learners. Additional teaching and effective reinforcement is implemented that do not include the homework assignments when the learners attend the homework classes (Teacher 7). The learners develop exceptional intellectual traits through the process of organisation and analysis whilst understanding the homework assignments (Trawick-Smith, 2000:366) (See section 2.2.3).

Unfortunately there are still parents who do not assist their children, possibly because they do not understand the explanations of the teachers at parent evenings. The fact that some parents leave their children's homework in the hands of siblings and not sign the homework books, show that they do not realise the importance of practising reading, phonics and writing skills when doing homework. This is consistent with what was said by the Deputy Chief Education specialist (Childhood Development Foundation Phase – Lejweleputswa District) when she advised that these children should be taught "as if they don't have parents".

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003:28) stress it very firmly that the highest need for parental involvement is when the child is very young. When it is suspected that the learners are not assisted by their parents, they, together with the parents of possible repeaters, are invited to another parent evening at the beginning of the following term. Some of the learners stay with grandparents or family members who may be illiterate. In line with the view of Brown, 2004) neither these parents nor the children are prepared for the educational system.

It is clear that the parents need to be actively involved in their children's education. The language proficiency of second language learners in English (as evident in the sample school) cannot improve if the parents do not cooperate with the teachers.

4.4.4   Theme 4: The impact of language proficiency on the behaviour of the learners and their scholastic achievement

4.4.4.1 Behaviour

A general observation by the participants was that learners who do not understand English well, tend to slide into the habit of daydreaming, or experience anxiety, and display behavioural problems. Teacher 2 approached the problem from another angle. According to her, these learners are out of their "comfort zone", and do not display a behaviour problem as such. It is a matter of feeling overwhelmed by what they are experiencing. Some keep quiet, others become talkative. When they are not able to cope with the work, they tend to be noisier, and to interfere with the other learners.

Teacher 3 said, "*It* [language proficiency] *does have an impact, for the simple reason that, if they can't understand what is going on, they have two options: they either become naughty, because they don't know what to do and they look for some mischief to get up to, or they can withdraw and feel emotionally insecure, because people around them can perhaps understand something and they can't*".

This was confirmed by Teacher 4, who pointed o to the fact that learners who lack understanding of the language may become fearful, upset, or withdrawn.

"*If the child does not always know what he/she is doing and know what he/she has to do … they just lose interest and behaviour is becoming a problem. Discipline and understanding … we have to repeat and help them to understand, otherwise the work is not up to standard. The children that can speak English….they start straight away and they carry on with their work. Those that are struggling are the ones that are naughty in class*". (Teacher 8).

Teacher 8 contended, *"It has a very big impact on their behaviour, because they do not always understand the questions you are asking. They talk about it amongst themselves, or they just talk because they don't know what to start writing. Instead of starting with their work and doing it, they talk a lot in class and we struggle to get their concentration".*

4.4.4.2 Scholastic achievements

According to teacher 1, it has been established that the learners who are at the cutting edge of language proficiency, quite clearly enjoy an advantage on the other learners who face English language barriers. The latter group tend to become bored and frustrated at times. Grade 1-learners, in particular, often struggle to follow the instructions given, and battle to complete the tasks assigned to them. Towards the end of the first term, or at the beginning of the second term there is usually a gradual improvement in their work.

Teacher 3 voiced her concern about the requirements for the informal and formal assessments stipulated in the National Protocol for the Assessment of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS, 2012: 3-23). Learners who lack language proficiency are particularly disadvantaged by these requirements. Teacher 4 shared this concern.

The children in Teacher 5's class struggle to do problem-solving in Mathematics – a clear consequence of language barriers. Teacher 6 also pointed out, *"It has a big influence on their scholastic achievements. Misinterpretation of questions, lack of interest and their poor reading skills all contribute to low achievements".*

 "Definitely, definitely. It is a big problem. It is a big setback for them, because they are not taught in their mother tongue. I try to improve their level of proficiency in English. I see the results" (Teacher 7.)

 "It does affect them and influence them … and they need time. By the end of the year … then they start working better. Now they understand what they have to do. They understand your questions. They know what it is like. Sometimes these children need

another year. You find if they're in the second year in the same grade, you wouldn't think they had a problem" (Teacher 8).

4.4.4.3 Theme 4: Discussion

- Behaviour

All the participants (except Teacher 2) agreed that learners who do not understand English display behavioural problems. These range from learners who feel withdrawn, fearful and emotionally insecure, to those who become talkative and get up to mischief.

- Scholastic achievements

In quite a number of cases, proficiency in English and the academic achievement of the learners in the participant school usually tend to improve towards the end of the first term of the Grade 1 year. The three different language proficiencies, as described by Cummins (2009:22-23), are concrete conversational fluency; discrete language skills; and academic language proficiency, but as Cummins points out, at least five years are needed before a child catches up with the requirements of a second language (see section 2.2.3). This view is reinforced in the mother-tongue debate, as discussed in Chapter 2. The learners' development of the mother-tongue must be firmly established before transfer can take place to a dominant language (Desai, 2012:93).

The teachers shared their concern about the impact of language-proficiency on the scholastic achievement of the learners. As a result of the inadequate proficiency in the language, quite a number of the learners lack the departmental requirements for informal and formal assessment as set out in the National Protocol for Assessment of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement - CAPS : 2011:3-23) (See section 4.4.2).

4.4.5 Theme 5: The ways the teachers accommodate the learners who are on different levels of language proficiency

4.4.5.1 Group-work

According to Teacher 3, group-work is especially functional during group and guided reading activities (see section 4.4.2.3). Learners on the same level of language-proficiency are grouped together, and they read together. A good, middle and slower reading group are formed, but these groups are changed on a regular basis as the learners' language-proficiency improves. When writing activities are done, Teacher 3 often turns a blind eye to the copying problem. According to her, sufficient opportunities exist to identify the problems when the learners are assessed individually. For certain activities the reading groups are mixed. "*I had a case for example of a child whom I battled and battled and battled with, to let her learn her sight words. One day I called one of my top readers and I gave her the sight words. I said 'Now Ok. I've tried. I want you every day to sit with her for ten minutes. Just there at the desk and just help her'. That child passed at the end of that year, because of the one had helped the other. I couldn't get it right. Every day, maybe I was getting frustrated. But this other child, who was very clever, had the patience to go and show her … helped her with her sight words. So, one must make use of what you can in class*". A "buddy-system" is thus successfully applied (Ford, 2011:2). Teacher 2 was also in support of 'supervised' copying and paired learning as effective strategies to improve the reading abilities of weaker learners.

Teacher 8 explained the benefits of group-work as follows, "*That's where group-work comes in. The children who are fast learners, are good readers and will be together in a little reading group. Your average ones will be in the middle group, busy with another book. The children that are struggling will have an easy little book that corresponds to their abilities. The readers who are struggling will read every day, trying to get them to do their phonics and their reading every single day. The other children can read every second day. That's how we try to accommodate them. You can also give the faster learners some more work to do, while you are working separately with these* [weaker] *children*".

4.4.5.2 Assessment

The participants follow a standard assessment programme. Informal assessment of both group- and individual work is done as soon as a section of the work has been completed. Learners are observed, as individuals or in groups, on how they master their work. Individual attention is then given to learners who do not perform satisfactorily. This strategy is followed in every section of the work (listening and speaking, reading and phonics, writing and handwriting).

Informal assessment is done every Friday, and the learners seem to enjoy it. During these activities they are usually noticeably relaxed and receptive. The progress of the learners is recorded on mark-sheets. In this way the under-performers can be identified and assisted.

Formal assessment is conducted once all the work has been completed and all the steps of the informal assessment programme have been followed. As a result of this, the learners are assisted throughout the completion of informal assessments, and this offers them an opportunity to improve their marks in the formal assessments. During the formal assessments much of the work covered during the informal assessment activities is assessed.

Formal reports are handed out at the beginning of the following term, and are based on work completed in the previous term. During parent evenings (once a term, after the reports have been handed out), the parents have the opportunity to discuss the reports with the teachers. Unfortunately the majority of the parents of the underperforming learners do not attend these parent evenings, despite numerous invitations (see section 4.4.3.2).

4.4.5.3 Intervention strategies

To accommodate learners who are on different levels of language-proficiency, certain intervention strategies are in place. According to Teacher 6, *"You get to know your learners very quickly and then you notice which learners need more attention. Then I will explain and*

repeat to them many times in order to accommodate them. The individual attention usually solves many problems. Intervention strategies will also help to improve the marks".

Formal intervention strategies are followed once a week in English (Home Language) for half an hour, and once a week in Mathematics for half an hour. These are the formal intervention strategies implemented in addition to the informal strategies that are followed during general daily instruction. Poor readers are accommodated throughout the year in an intervention programme called "The Reading Club". Underachieving learners at different levels of language-proficiency are identified, and receive formal intervention during the third and fourth term, once a week for half an hour after school. The intervention programme is monitored by each class teacher, who gives her input when decisions on promotion and progression to the next grade are made at the end of the (DBE, 2012:11-13, 17-19).

Special Language Needs also forms part of the intervention programme, and is done on a daily basis. At the beginning of the second term in Grade 1, the learners identified as lacking in English proficiency receive extra instruction on a small group basis for five periods per week. In Grade 2 the Special Needs teacher visits each class for two periods per day and provides intensive remedial instruction in reading, or where other immediate needs occur. In Grade 3 the learners with limited proficiency in English receive intensive remedial instruction by the Special Needs teacher for one period per day. The learners with more severe Special Educational Needs are also intensively assisted by the remedial teacher for two periods per day, in a separate classroom.

4.4.5.4 Discussion: Theme 5

- Group-work

In accordance with a strategy recommended by Ford (2011:1), the participants in this study differentiate their instruction strategies to meet the unique needs of their learners. A balance is created between the academic content and individual needs, where process, product and effect is included.

To ensure equal access to academic content, group-work is especially done during group and guided reading activities (NCS & CAPS, 2012:12, 28). The learners who are on the same level of language proficiency work together, using readers that match their language abilities. Based on their progress, the learners regularly change groups. Thus the grouping is flexible (Ford, 2011:2).The same key content is learnt in different ways when additional practise of essential elements are needed at different levels (group-work). According to Trujo (2004) this may assist every learner to achieve his or her learning goals. Learners who struggle with reading and phonics, daily read from a reader (during group and guided reading). The other reading groups read every second day.

In group-reading scaffolding techniques, as outlined by Baecher (2011:65), such as "think-pair-share" or "turn-and-talk", "I do-we-do-you-do" modelling, as well as summarising and reviewing are constantly applied in group-reading activities. The shared reading activities, where the texts are enlarged and which are also used by the teachers when the whole class reads aloud, are in accordance with the recommendations made by Drucker (2003). Furthermore, during these exercises, left-right directionality, word-banks, pronunciation and structures for paired reading are set. The value of these is emphasised by Baecher (2011:66).

- Assessment

The participants have a variety of research-based strategies and multiple types of assessments at hand when informal assessment - to guide instruction - and formal assessment is done. As advised by Ford (2011:2) the language-proficiency of individual learners are taken into consideration when they demonstrate their knowledge and skills. When formal assessment opportunities are given, extra time is allowed to finish difficult activities, and simplified language is often used. This is in line with the strategies proposed by Baecher (2011:64-67 sustainable language proficiency levels).

- Intervention strategies

The participants make use of various intervention strategies to accommodate the learners with different levels of proficiency in English. Formal and remedial intervention strategies are used as a first-phase process, according to a specified programme. The importance of such first-phase intervention is emphasised by Eschevarria and Short (2010) as well as by Baecher, (2011:65). Access to content-learning is created by the teachers through speech modification (oral work) to bring about a greater amount of "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 2007). Comprehensible oral language is thus provided daily in the classroom. This is done as follows:

- the learners have to face to the front when directions are given;
- instead of using a variety of expressions, the same words and phrases are used repeatedly;
- gestures and intonations are employed to convey key concepts or words;
- the learners' statements are paraphrased or restated;
- direct feedback is given when errors occur;
- the learners have the opportunity to express their ideas orally;
- 'dictionary books' are used to write high frequency academic words encountered across the curriculum in Grades 2 and 3.

According to Speer-Sweling and Sternberg (in: Pretorius & Currin, 2010:2), poor readers become more disadvantaged and good readers get better. This is evident in the present case study. The learners who are academically stronger seem to be better readers, while the learners who are struggling academically are usually weak readers.

4.4.6   Theme 6: The training of the teachers to improve the language proficiency of   the learners

4.4.6.1 Formal training and experience

Only one of the participants (Teacher 4) received formal training in dealing with language barriers. It is, however, clear that experience plays an important role in the teaching skills of all the participants. Teacher 2, who has 28 years' experience in teaching the Foundation Phase, was adamant that she knew how to teach effectively. She finds it easy to identify the stronger learners with the ability to assist weaker learners. Teacher 3 agreed. She pointed out that she has been able to gain different insights over the years through her own experience, and from other colleagues.

Teacher 4 received formal training at a teacher's college. She also underwent intensive training in Special Needs in her fourth year of study. "*My experience and having done this now for quite a few years, I sort of found out what works and what doesn't work. How to go about it and so … I feel I am adequate to teach children. There is no problem*".

Teacher 6 is an experienced educator with 38 years' experience as a Foundation Phase teacher. Her training was not focused on language barriers as such, but she studied Special Needs Education, and she believes that this has furnished her with the skills necessary to assist learners with barriers.   "*My years of experience have taught me many tricks of the trade. That's what I am applying*".

This was confirmed by both Teachers 7 and 8. "*With all my years of experience I worked out my own way of doing things. You get methods to help the kids*". (Teacher 7)

 "*Mostly I go on experience. I have many years of teaching experience*" (Teacher 8).

4.4.6.2 Additional training

From the interviews it transpired that curriculum training takes place during workshops and cluster meetings where the schools in a District meet on a quarterly basis. All the participants indicated that these sessions do not focus on language barriers. This was seen as a serious shortcoming. One participant (Teacher 4) did, however, acknowledge the excellent input from a previous Learning Facilitator (LF) regarding learners with Special Educational Needs.

Teacher 8 summarised the general view as follows, "*It is difficult to say that it was actually based on English language proficiency. Smaller general CAPS training and … so, no. I would say it was according to CAPS and not to English language proficiency. I find that they don't really have sympathy with us. They just expect us to produce these high results without taking into consideration that with these children … English is not their home language*".

4.4.6.3 Discussion: Theme 6

None of the interviewees received formal training on teaching strategies to improve the English proficiency of the learners. At the time of their formal training at higher education institutions (before 1994) language policy and the socio-political landscape were less complicated than is presently the case. All the participants indicated that, based on their vast experience as Foundation Phase teachers, they felt confident to deal with the specific challenges posed by the limited language proficiency of their learners. They did, however, admit that it was frustrating at times, despite their teaching experience ranging from 22 to 37 years.

As for the current situation, Gándora, Maxwell-Jolly and Discoll (2005:12) found that when teachers are formally well-prepared to teach in English, they have more confidence. The main problem in South Africa is the low intake of Foundation Phase student teachers and the fact that many teachers in the system are not adequately trained to deal with the current language realities in the classroom.

4.4.7   Theme 7: The needs of the learners and the teachers

In the previous discussion a clear picture emerged of the central problem explored in this study, namely non-English speaking learners receiving their instruction in English as a first (home) language. The needs of the learners and the teachers have been touched on in the findings reported so far, but what follows, highlights the most pertinent needs identified.

4.4.7.1 The learners

All the participants were in agreement about the dire need for learners to improve their language proficiency. The main shortcoming identified in this regard was the lack of assistance at home, and the role of parents/caregivers to achieve this outcome. The parents are expected to speak English at home (if they can) and to give their children simple instructions, such as "Empty the dustbin," or "Go and make me a cup of tea." In this way the learners hear and understand instructions, and learn to comply. To accommodate the limited understanding of the Grade 1-learners, their parents should read English stories to them. This would benefit learners considerably. Teacher 3 proposed that the parents should spend at least one hour per day speaking English to their children, and they should also insist that their children answer them in English. After watching English television programmes, questions about the programmes could be asked in English. In this way their children could be encouraged to construct proper sentences.

Teacher 5, "*I think they really need more exposure and more time using the English language. Some of their parents really try to help at home, but may be they are not proficient themselves*". She believed that the learners would benefit from speaking more English, reading more English, and having more concrete resources (learning and teaching materials), in order to improve their language-proficiency.

Teacher 6 criticised the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). She felt that it is too extensive for Grade 3-learners. Initially, more time could be allocated to language aspects, such as sample sentences, pictures, poems and stories. She explained, "*…a Grade 3*

learner is just not capable of absorbing all that knowledge. That's how I feel. I've seen it again in the quarterly tests. The tests are just beyond their capabilities".

Teacher 7 felt very strongly that "*…they need to repeat!*" She was in favour of extra comprehension tests to assist the learners with their reading and understanding of English.

Teacher 8, "*I think the learners have a great need. They need somebody that will explain to them, that will speak to them in English. They need some extra attention, even extra classes. I think their need is great. But we do the best that we can*".

4.4.7.2 The teachers

The need for assistant teachers was expressed by Teachers 2, 3, 4 and 8. Teacher 2 explained, "*…with thirty seven learners in Grade 1, I cannot always point when we start writing in a book to turn their books. They tend to write upside down, I must get them all to turn their books the right way, to start in the right place – from left to right. If I have somebody to help me, she could get to one half of the class where I cannot get to. I think it would make life a bit easier*". Teacher 3 would prefer an assistant who is proficient in English, who can pronounce the English words correctly, and who can spend time with the weaker learners by giving them extra assistance. According to her, it is impossible to pay extra attention to the weaker learners. An assistant who could help with reading and phonics would particularly benefit the Grade 1-classes. Teacher 8 expressed the need for assistance, primarily with disobedient learners, and with maintaining discipline in class.

Teacher 3 felt strongly about the class sizes. She was of the opinion that the National Department of Education needs to intervene and "*perhaps realise that we need fewer children in our classes.*" This was supported by Teacher 6, "*…the classes are too big. They must bring the numbers down to 32 tops in a Foundation Phase class. You can't handle forty children. They are just too many. You can't get to the needs of the children. You can't. They should really bring the numbers down.*"

The shortage of resources was indicated by Teachers 6, 7 and 8. In the words of Teacher 6, *"First of all readers, readers, readers. …(.laugh…) We are always asking and we are never getting it. I think more reader books, more pictures and word cards will help. I know I'm a bit old fashioned. I taught Afrikaans children to speak English. The way we did it in the past, was by putting up a big picture card and that serves as your sample sentences for the week. And from there you learn your tenses, you learn your vocabulary. They learn to write the sentences and I think that was a far better way of teaching a language, which is secondary to these children anyway. I had success with that and I wish they would go back to that. …. (Laugh)… I know they changed everything, but that really worked for me"*.

When probed about the necessity of professional assistance, such as assistance from occupational therapists, speech therapists or psychologists, Teacher 2 responded as follows, *"It would be nice if there was maybe an occupational therapist, because out of a class of thirty seven, there are more or less three or four that are behind in their development. They are actually six years old, but when you test them, they are four years old. For them to catch up to the level of their age, the assistance of an occupational therapist would benefit. They then don't have to go to a centre, or to pay for the occupational therapist. A lot of them don't have the money to pay. They haven't grown up in a society of using an occupational therapist. The majority of the parents don't understand what it is all about"*. Teacher 6 claims that there has been adequate assistance from the Education Support Centre in the past, but the current practice is to refer only a few learners with more serious Special Education Needs. In this regard, teacher 4 claimed, *"The people who are there are seemingly not all adequately trained. If they are coming to test the children for Special Class, I have to provide the test. To me it is totally wrong. They should have a standard test for Grade 2, Third Term. They should arrive with that test. They should not expect me to draw up a test, so that they can then test the child. I suggest that I test the child and give them the results"*.

4.4.7.3 Discussion: Theme 7

It is clear that more repetition is needed in the basic skills to improve the language-proficiency of the learners by following an integrated teaching approach. Thinking and

reasoning and language structure and use are integrated in all four the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (NCS & CAPS, 2012:8). The learners would benefit from more exposure to English in speaking more English, in reading more English stories, and being exposed to more concrete resources (Gándora et al., 2005:6-11). In addition, more sample sentences, pictures, poems and stories could be incorporated. From the participants' responses it was evident that there is a need for more graded reading material, books and big picture cards with sample sentences to teach grammar. As was pointed out, the CAPS curriculum is very comprehensive, and quite a number of learners are unable to cope with all its requirements. This is especially evident from the poor results in the quarterly tests. To remedy the situation, there is a need for more tuition time and a less packed curriculum.

The need for assistants in class was adhered to when an assistant teacher was allocated to each Grade in the Foundation Phase, on a rotating basis, at the beginning of 2014. Quite a number of the teachers' needs, as explained in this section, were addressed.

The fact that the participants felt that they do not possess the adequate knowledge to assist the learners who experience additional barriers to learning, emphasises the need for specialist assistance (like speech- and occupational therapists). Moreover, it would be to the benefit of all the stakeholders if the services of the Education Support Centre could be expanded.

4.5 SUMMARY OF THE THEMES AND RESPONSES

Theme	Responses
The language-proficiency of the Foundation Phase learners	• 100% African mother-tongue • The majority of the Grade 1's don't understand English when starting school • Many learners live with illiterate parents, grandparents or caregivers • The majority did not attend English preschools • They do not understand basic instructions
The strategies implemented by the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners	*General strategies employed:* • Encourage the parents and caregivers to read English books, magazines and newspapers with the learners • Daily compulsory homework classes • Stronger learners assist weaker learners *Listening and speaking:* • Ask questions continuously • Focus on oral work • Teach basic phrases and questions *Reading and phonics:* • Sounds with flannel-board pictures • Sounds ⟹ Sight words ⟹ build words ⟹ "look and say" • A, b, k ⟹ short words ⟹ short sentences • Reinforce sounds • Teaching words with objects and pictures • Group learners according to their abilities: strong readers, average readers, weak readers • Shared and guided reading; independent and paired reading *Writing and handwriting:* • Start off drawing pictures, and copying from blackboard • Use basic patterns

	- Pronounce ➤ copy in air ➤ write in wet sand ➤ exercise books - Up-down-up-down movements
The role and nature of the involvement of the parents	- Lack of interest and involvement - No assistance with homework - Illiterate parents and caregivers
The impact of language proficiency on the behaviour of the learners and their scholastic achievement	- Limited understanding leads to behaviour problems - Link between language-proficiency and scholastic achievement
The ways the teachers accommodate the learners who are on different levels of language proficiency	- Group learners according to levels of proficiency in English - Apply a 'buddy system' - Supervised copying and paired learning - Fun assessment activities - Individual attention - Formal and informal intervention strategies and programmes - LSEN teacher
The training of the teachers to improve the language proficiency of the learners	- The role of experience - The lack of additional training by DoE

The needs of the learners and the teachers	*The learners:* • Need for assistance at home • More exposure to English • Formal professional intervention *The teachers:* • Assistant teachers • Smaller class sizes • More resources • Extra instructional time • Streamlined curriculum

4.6   CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter I presented the findings of the empirical investigation. The chapter entailed an analysis of the research findings after in-depth interviews were conducted with eight Foundation Phase teachers in a sample school. The researcher indicated how the data from the interview transcripts were analysed by identifying the main themes and categories. In addition, the research findings, resulting from the emergent themes, were discussed, using the participants' verbatim accounts. Furthermore, appropriate theories, as well as relevant evidence from the literature study that was done were used to support the findings. For the researcher, conducting the interviews provided a very gratifying experience. It was quite informative to learn about the concerns of the participants and the strategies they employ to assist the learners with limited proficiency in English.

Chapter 5 concludes the research with an overview of this investigation, a synthesis of the significant findings and an outline of the limitations of the study. Recommendations will also be made, and the areas for further research will be demarcated.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The problem investigated in this study was the exploration of the proficiency of English language learners with home languages other than English in the Foundation Phase at English medium schools, and the implications for teaching and learning. This case study sought to achieve the following specific objectives as stated in 1.2, namely to

- determine the historical background with regard to the implementation of the current LiEP in South African schools;
- verify the implications of the implementation of the current Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and the Language Of Teaching and Learning (LoLT), for teaching and learning of EAL learners in the Foundation Phase.
- identify the needs of learners and teachers as perceived by the Foundation Phase teachers in this regard.
- identify the best practices which could assist the Foundation Phase teachers from schools in similar settings to address the challenges faced by the lack of the proficiency of their learners in English.

The study was conducted at a sample school with a specific profile, as set out in section 4.2.1. Chapter 1 outlined the background to the problem, and presented a brief preliminary survey of the relevant literature. An in-depth literature study was conducted, which was reported on in Chapter 2, in order to investigate the historical background of language provision in South African schools that led to the current position of the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT).

The issue of language and cognition in terms of the following constructs was furthermore touched on in chapter 2:

- language, cognition and metacognition;

- the language-cognition relationship during the cognitive developmental stages;

- language-proficiency and cognition (including Cummins' Iceberg Model);

- the link between learning and language acquisition;

- the cognitive challenges faced by EAL learners in the classroom.

The different aspects of mother-tongue education were also covered in Chapter 2, namely

- the different aspects pertaining to the concept *mother-tongue*;

- the theoretical constructs;

- Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

I also investigated the implications of the current situation of the Language of Teaching and Learning (LoLT) for teaching and learning. The role of the education system, as well as cognition and performance were discussed. The concern about the training of Foundation Phase teachers and the prerequisites for success in language education were outlined. The literature study played an important role in presenting suitable recommendations.

The research design and methodology were discussed Chapter 3. A case study within the qualitative paradigm was conducted from a phenomenological perspective. The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate, as it would accurately provide the required information to achieve the aim of the research, namely to investigate the strategies used by Foundation Phase teachers to enhance the proficiency of their learners in the English language.

The research findings of the empirical investigation done in accordance with the themes and categories that emerged from the data during the thematic analysis of the semi-structured individual interviews were indicated in Chapter 4. The participants' experiences of the English language-proficiency of their EAL learners were determined. Furthermore, the main concerns of the participants regarding the way to address the challenges were presented.

After conducting the literature study, I developed a clear picture in my mind of the complexity of the English language-proficiency of EAL Foundation Phase learners – a phenomenon that is well-documented worldwide. I became convinced that, in an attempt to find answers to the research questions, the Foundation Phase teachers were the best candidates to approach. They teach the learners, and are confronted with the complexities of the problem on a daily basis. I was pleasantly surprised by my research findings, as it lived up to my expectations and confirmed what I have found in the literature. I came to realise that the experiences of the participating teachers were of extreme importance in reaching the conclusions of my study.

In this chapter I highlight and summarise the major findings of the research, as well as the meaningful issues which came to light from the literature review and the empirical evidence. Recommendations are put forward for the consideration of Foundation Phase teachers and the DoE when dealing with the proficiency in English of their learners.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS AND THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The final summary and conclusions of the study are presented in accordance with the research questions which guided the study.

5.2.1   Research question 1

What is the historical background with regard to the implementation of the current language policy in South African schools?

The historical background of education dates back to pre-colonial times in South Africa (2.1.1.1). During migration patterns, no education took place. The indigenous people did not know how to read and write, but valued traditional content, and methods of learning were passed on to younger generations. The power and beauty of languages were appreciated by the creativity of tales, proverbs and riddles ('folklore'). Formal schooling in South Africa was relatively insignificant. After 1948 the status of Afrikaans, English and African languages was determined by the political and economic power of the language

speakers. Language policy changes occurred from 1956 to 1976 (see section 2.1.1.4).
Significant language policies were implemented to suit the needs of the South African
education system at the time (see sections 2.1.1.5 and 2.1.1.6). In the process of promoting
Afrikaans throughout the school system from 1968 to 1975, 50% of the subjects had to be
taught in Afrikaans and 50% in English (referred to as the 50-50 approach). Afrikaans as a
medium of instruction was justified by the fact that Afrikaans and English were equal on
constitutional grounds. African education in particular, was influenced by the latter. The
Soweto uprising in June 1976 was the result of attempts by the State to impose Afrikaans as
a medium of instruction in 50% of the subjects in African high schools. The 50-50 policy was
abandoned by the State, and English became the only medium of instruction for African
children from their fifth year of schooling, leading to the promulgation of Education and
Training Act, No 90 of 1979. Currently, the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)
(2012) is implemented in South African schools.

The participating Foundation Phase teachers in the school where my case study was done
voiced as the predominant concern the fact that the learners are taught in a language that
differs from their home languages. Despite many challenges, the quality of education
offered in this school adds value to the lives of the learners, and has positive implications for
teaching and learning. This conclusion is based on the fact that all the participants are well-
qualified, dedicated and experienced teachers.

5.2.2   Research question 2

*What are the implications of the current Language in Education Policy (LiEP) and
LoLT for the teaching and learning of EAL learners in the Foundation Phase?*

From the literature (see section 2.4) it emerged that the majority of South African learners
are forced to learn through a language (English) that differs from their mother-tongue.   A
substantial number of parents enrol their children as English home-language learners, but
often neither the parents nor their children are adequately prepared for the demands this
poses. Less than 25% of the South African black population has a reasonable competence in
English. The learners' proficiency in English and the acquisition of reading and writing skills

are not only influenced by the training of teachers, or bilingual or multilingual teaching. Academic barriers become linguistic barriers. The learners' cognitive development in the mother-tongue is not developed in instances where the learners need to think and conceptualise in their mother-tongue, and they are removed at a too early stage from the mother-tongue learning environment. The thinking aptitude of learners in respect of a second language is "masked" when they possess only a limited understanding of the language. The teachers are obliged to accommodate linguistic barriers, and have to render assistance to the learners to improve their cognitive processes, as well as their functioning abilities in English. From both the literature study and the interview data, serious concerns were raised with regard to the low intake of Foundation Phase student teachers at Higher Education Institutions. Despite several years of formal training in English, the learners, teachers and student teachers remain deficient in the use of the language, due to a lack of thinking and reasoning abilities.

5.2.3   Research question 3

Which theoretical insights from the literature can assist Foundation Phase teachers in teaching EAL learners in schools where English is the LoLT?

Piaget's construct of the relationship between language and cognition, as discussed in the literature study (see section 2.2.3), was evident in the responses of the participants. All admitted that mental activity (thinking) exists when their learners acquire language, and the these mental activities also pay off significantly in their language development in later years where sophisticated and abstract thinking levels are required.

The cognitive developmental level reached by learners in each grade provides the platform for what has to be learnt in the following grade. The participants pointed to the significance that the learners analyse and organise environmental information in unique ways in their attempts to understand English better in their classes. All the teachers who formed part of this study pertinently *show* the learners what they are teaching them by means of actions or other resource materials.

The learners in all the Foundation Phase classes in this study acquire Basic Communication Skills (BICS) when listening and speaking commences. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) is needed when skills such as reading and writing are at stake. This construct was discussed in detail in section 2.2.4. The participating teachers were convinced that pronunciation, basic vocabulary and English grammar are the visible aspects of learners becoming progressively fluent in the language. The teachers all go out of their way on a continuous basis (in the classes, in the homework classes, during intervention, and when special education is conducted) to improve their learners' proficiency in the language. Participants also realised that, when the first language (mother-tongue) of the EAL learners are developed, they (the learners) tend to perform higher cognitive operations through the medium of English. However, the teachers felt that in quite a number of cases the mother-tongue is not yet well developed, and for this reason many learners struggle to acquire proficiency in English. This is seen as a critical aspect.

All the participants shared the concern that poor proficiency in the LoLT impacts on learning in a significant way. In accordance with Krashen's theory on the 'learned' system and the 'acquired' system in language acquisition (see section 2.2.5), conscious knowledge processes (learned system) take place when the teachers make use of the continuous repetition of facts and information. There is also ample opportunity for 'natural communicative acts' by means of oral activities, listening and playing. This is in line with Krashen's notion of an 'acquired' system.

5.2.4   Research question 4

Which strategies are implemented by the Foundation Phase teachers in the sample school to improve the English language proficiency of their learners?

All the strategies implemented by the Foundation Phase teachers to improve the language-proficiency of their learners were discussed in detail in section 4.4.2. By way of a summary, the following was revealed, namely it emerged that the teachers continuously *read* to their learners to improve their English vocabulary. Practical work is done by *practising sounds, accompanied by flannel-board pictures*. Words are taught through *role-play and pictures*

and grammar teaching is accompanied by *gestures and role-play.* They all emphasised the role of *repetition.* Further assistance is also rendered by *compulsory intervention classes* conducted during the third and the fourth term (see section 5.2.6.3). The learners who need special support are also included in a *formal intervention programme* where support teaching is conducted (Special Needs classes).

As far as listening and speaking are concerned, *asking questions* plays a significant role in the first phase of the lessons. The learners are regularly exposed to opportunities to respond during *oral presentations*. The teachers focus on *group-work* as well as individual work (in reading, phonics and Mathematics, including problem-solving). This is done before general and creative writing commence. The teachers implement a system where the strong learners assist the weaker learners by creating a *'buddy system'.* All the participants focus strongly on *oral work* and *vocabulary*. In so doing, the learners verbalise what the teachers are doing by means of repetition when concepts of, e.g., "left", "right", "up" and "down" are explained. The teachers also encourage their learners to *speak English* during extra-mural activities.

As reading and phonics are major focus areas in the CAPS document and significant skills to be mastered by the EAL learners, all the participating teachers teach *single sounds*, followed by *'look and say'* words. In Grade 1 a *reading programme* is introduced from the eighth week. Sounds are reinforced, according to all the participating Grade 1-teachers. As discussed in detail in section 4.4.2.3, an intensive reading programme (which includes different kinds of reading - shared reading, group guided reading and independent and paired reading) are strictly implemented on a daily basis. The participants were all convinced that these reading strategies are an excellent way to improve the language-proficiency of the learners significantly. In the homework classes reading is also very important, and the teachers focus on the mastering of reading skills to meet the standards of the National Protocol for Assessment (2012).

All the participants follow the route from *patterns* to *one word captions* and then introduce words when the writing and handwriting strategies are applied. The learners *draw pictures* and *copy short sentences* that consist of the correct letter formations. The teachers also

combine phonics and writing in their teaching strategies. The Grade 3-teachers make sure that the learners understand the concept of sentences on a *step-by-step* basis when creative writing is done. A step-by-step approach is also continuously followed when handwriting is taught.

5.2.5   Research question 5

What are the needs of the learners and the teachers in terms of English proficiency as perceived by the Foundation Phase teachers in this case study?

All the participants agreed that the learners generally lack the assistance of their parents/caregivers when it comes to speaking English to them, reading English stories to them, or watching English television programmes with them. It was significant that quite a number of the parents are not proficient in English themselves (see section 5.2.2). The fact that the learners are in the pre-operational and the concrete-operational stages in the Foundation Phase (see section 2.2.3) highlights the need for more concrete resources in order to improve their proficiency in English.

The participants voiced a need for assistant teachers. One student assistant teacher was appointed at the beginning of 2014. She assists the Foundation Phase teachers on a rotating basis, according to a specified timetable. This arrangement also helps to support the reading activities and to accommodate the weaker learners in other activities.

The class sizes were another major concern (see section 4.2.2). The participants strongly felt that it is not possible to address the needs of all the children when the classes are overcrowded.

 In spite of the fact that the classes are all generally well-equipped at the school, the teachers still needed more resources in the form of additional readers and storybooks for the reading corners, and flannel boards with pictures and posters.

The participants furthermore indicated their need for professional assistance (occupational and speech therapists). The importance of the effective functioning of the Education Support Centre was stressed where the learners can be tested by specialists, and professional support can be rendered.

5.2.6   Research question 6

Which lessons can be learnt from the sample school that may assist other schools in similar situations to address the problems of proficiency in English for academic purposes?

The lessons to be learnt from the sample school are discussed according to the categories below, and comprise a general account of how the Foundation Phase operates. This example can serve as a general guideline for schools that are faced by similar challenges:

- In general.
- School management.
- Management of the Foundation Phase.
- Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS).
- Support teaching.
- The School-based Support Team.

What follows is a **Model of whole-school development in the Foundation Phase.** This model can be implemented at any Foundation Phase school that wishes to establish a culture of excellence, also in terms rendering assistance to learners with learning barriers.

Model of whole-school development in the Foundation Phase

HOD (Foundation Phase: general)

Foundation Phase: Support teaching and LSEN

- Support Teaching (Coordinator:Academic)
- SBST (Academic and Emotional)
- LSEN
- Specialist services (Education Support centre)

1. Quarterly subject planning meeting (First week)
- Dates for the control of work
- Term rosters/timetables

2. File and book control (quarterly)
- Planning file
- Teacher's file
- Discipline file
- Classwork and DBE Books

3. Assessment control (quarterly)
- Moderation of assessment task
- Assessment file
- Complete error analysis
- Draw up subject improvement plan (SIP)

4. IQMS
- Self-evaluation Round 1 (T 1)
- Self-evaluation Round 2 (T 2)
- The Teacher's Personal Growth Plan (PGP) (T3)
- Pre-evaluation profile checklist
- Class visits (T3)
- Pre-evaluation meetings (T1,2)
- Compiling IQMS booklet (T3)
- Post-evaluation meetings (T3)
- Complies score sheets (T3)
- Moderation (T3)

5. Draw up Phase Management Plan
- Mentoring
- Intervention
- In-service training and workshops

6. After Hours Continuous Intervention
- Homework classes (Mon-Thurs 14h00 – 16h00)
- Reading club (½ hour)
- Language intervention (½ hour)
- Mathematics intervention (½ hour)
  Book corners in class rooms

7. Parent Involvement
- Four parents evenings
- Circulars
- Service questionnaires
- Telephonic contact
- Mobile school website

Paired Reading

Problem Sounds and Letters

Reading Intervention

Reading Corner

Creative Classroom Environment

Listening and Speaking

The Model is discussed in more detail below.

5.2.6.1 In general

It was indeed a privilege to conduct this case study at a school which is respected as one of the top primary schools in the Free State Province (see section 3.7.2). As mentioned in chapter 3, one of the participants in this study received an award from the Free State Department of Education in the category, Excellence in Primary School Teaching. She was also the winner of the National Teaching Award in Excellence in Primary School Teaching in South Africa in celebrating the art of teaching.

The entire school is well-equipped with text books, with a 'state-of-the-art' layout and appealing content (see section 2.4.2). The school facilities comprise adequate stationary in 'state-of-the-art' classrooms. The library is well-stocked and functions effectively. The Foundation Phase teachers also have library books in the reading corners in their classrooms. The teachers are well-trained, well-qualified, fully bilingual and motivated, and the majority has many years of teaching experience. They attend as many workshops as possible and keep up-to-date by means of professional development.

The programme for support teaching and intervention is in place and functions effectively (see section 5.2.6.3).

5.2.6.2. Whole-school management

The school management system is inclusive and collaborative and all the stakeholders are maximally involved. The top management team consists of the Principal, two Deputy Principals, and two Heads of Department. Through structures such as the School Governing Body (SGB), the parents and the teachers have the opportunity to implement decisions based on innovative ideas and guidelines.

Various methods are applied to ensure that the needs of the learners, the teachers and the parents are addressed. These include:

- Implementing the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) rigorously.

- Questionnaires are sent to the parents on a regular basis to obtain feedback on a variety of issues. These questionnaires are valuable sources of information.

- Regular parent evenings.

- General staff and grade meetings.

- Workshops.

Although the principal is responsible for the management of all aspects of the school, a 'process-approach' is followed. The staff members are collaboratively responsible for the successful implementation of the 'whole-school development plan' (see section 5.2.6.3), and the monitoring of the learners and the teachers takes place on a regular basis throughout the year.

5.2.6.3 Management of the Foundation Phase

This case study focused on the Foundation Phase. For this reason the researcher find it appropriate to elaborate on the management activities of the Foundation Phase in the school.

- The HOD (general) of the Foundation Phase is responsible for the following:

    (i)   Subject meetings
            At the beginning of each term she arranges a subject meeting to discuss the planning and general matters for the term. Dates for control purposes and term rosters are handed out at this meeting.

    (ii)   File and book control
            During the last month of each term, the following files are monitored:

            o   the planning file, the teacher's file, the discipline file;

o the classwork books are also checked.

(iii)   Assessment control

   o Assessment tasks are handed in to be checked by the HOD and the principal, in accordance with the dates provided.

   o The dates for the deadlines for the assignments, recorded and moderated by the HOD, are provided.

   o After the final task an Error Analysis has to be completed and a SIP (Subject Improvement Plan) drawn up.

   o All the marks and assessment papers are also controlled by the HOD before being entered on SAMS (Computer programme).

- *IQMS (Internal Quality Management System)*

The HOD is responsible for class visits and for compiling the IQMS booklet. The pre-evaluation minutes, post-evaluation visits, composite score sheets and meetings are the responsibilities of the HOD. Throughout the year all the staff members are continuously monitored and evaluated according to the IQMS. The teachers are required to evaluate themselves, but they also have the opportunity to develop themselves through a personal growth plan (PGP). The School Improvement Plan (SIP) is based on the Personal Growth Plan of every individual teacher. Specific areas in the day-to-day running of the school are identified in order to assist the teachers to improve.

After the completion of the lesson observations, the SMT (School Management Team) identifies the specific needs in the school programme, and the members investigate ways to address these needs. A management plan is then drawn up, and weaknesses are targeted by means of mentoring, intervention, in-service training and workshops.

The IQMS process forms an integral part of the overall management of the school to ensure the development of the entire school.

A second HOD is responsible for Support Teaching and LSEN (Learners with Special Education Needs), as well as the School-based Support Team.

- *SBST (School-based Support Team)*

When a teacher identifies serious learner problems, the SBST is notified. The SBST consists of the Head of the Department of Support Teaching and the Support teacher. A meeting is set up between the SBST and the teacher, and suggestions are put forward to assist the learner. When the learner does not show any improvement after this meeting, his or her parents are called in, and the problem is discussed during a follow-up meeting. When there is still no improvement after a period of time, Occupational Therapy (OT) or Special Needs education (LSEN) is recommended. The parents of the learner are called in to sign a letter of permission to allow the District-based Support Team (DBST) to evaluate the learner. The District office sends a letter of acceptance to the school, and the learner is recommended to the formal LSEN (Learners with Special Education Needs) programme. This concludes the referral process.

- *Support teaching*

The Support teacher conducts the support programme, according to the timetable below.

Table 5.1: Support-teaching timetable

	1	2	3	4		5	6	7		8	9	10	11
Bell Times	7:30 8:00	8:00 8:35	8:35 9:05	9:05 9:35	9: 35 10 :0 0	10:00 10:30	10:30 11:00	11:00 11:30	11:30 11:45	11:45 12:15	12:15 12:45	12:45 13:15	13:15 13:45
Monday	Gr 3	LSEN	LSEN	Gr 2	B	IO	IF	IK	B	IG	2	Spelling 3	
Tuesday	3	LSEN	LSEN	2	R	IO	IF	IK	R	IG	2	3	
Wednesday	3	LSEN	LSEN	2	E	IO	IF	IK	E	IG	2	3	
Thursday	3	LSEN	LSEN	2	A	IO	IF	IK	A	IG	2	3	
Friday	3	LSEN	LSEN	2	K	IO	IF	IK	K	IG	2	3	
Bell times: Friday	7:30 8:00	8:00 8:30	8:30 9:00	9:00 9:30	9: 30 9: 45	9:45 10:15	10:15 10:45	10:45 11:15	11:15 11:30	11:30 12:00	12:00 12:30	12:30 13:00	13:00 13:30

The codes IO, IF, IK and IG merely indicate the class groups of the teachers whose learners who need support are accommodated in the allocated time slots.

Grade 1: 5 periods per week (2 ½ hours);

Grade 2: 10 periods per week (5 hours);

Grade 3: 10 periods per week (5 hours);

Grade 3 – Extra mural: 2 x 45 min (1 ½ hours);

LSEN: 10 periods per week (5 hours).

In addition, the following intervention activities take place:

- o Homework classes, from Mondays to Thursdays from 14h00-16h00 (optional for the learners; the parents have to pay).
- o The Reading Club: The learners with barriers to reading are identified and are required to attend the Reading Club for half an hour per week (compulsory).
- o Extra intervention (English): The learners with more severe language barriers are identified, and each Foundation Phase teacher is required to do language intervention for half an hour per week (compulsory).
- o Extra intervention (Mathematics): The learners with more severe barriers in Mathematics are identified, and each Foundation Phase teacher is required to do Maths intervention for half an hour per week (compulsory).

5.3   RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1   Recommendations for the teachers

According to the findings from the empirical research it is clear that EAL learners who receive their instruction in English as a home language find it difficult to understand and interpret English in the pre-operational phase (from 2 to 5 years) and in the concrete-operational stage (6 to 8 years). They have a general lack of proficiency in English, and

considering the fact that often neither the parents nor the learners are prepared for the education system, the teachers are faced with a myriad of challenges. Not only do they have to implement an extensive curriculum with its academic requirements, they also have to manage the curriculum with learners who, in many cases, do not understand the LoLT. This is a heavy load to carry. The role of the parents can therefore not be overemphasised. First, teachers should make sure that the parents fully understand what is expected from their children. Attending parent evenings, where the parents are informed about their role in the education of their children, is most important. The parents should be especially mindful when assisting their children with homework. This responsibility may not be passed on to older siblings. The homework books have to be signed daily, and the teachers should, if necessary, also write letters to the parents in the homework books, or contact them by any other means when problems occur. Thereby any problems can be addressed quickly and effectively.

Secondly, the teachers should endeavour to create a safe and inviting teaching-learning environment with educational resources, especially books and readers. Where there are no funds available, the teachers should engage in fund-raising campaigns to raise funds to equip their classrooms, or liaise with businesses and industries for sponsorships, or the 'adopt a school' initiative.

Thirdly, the management of fair but firm learner behaviour is essential. When effective class discipline is not in place, the learners tend to be busy with activities that distract them from their work, and this then lead to concentration problems. In such cases effective teaching and learning cannot take place.

Fourthly, proper time management is very important. The requirements of the CAPS curriculum (2012) are practically unattainable, and need careful planning. This asks much from the teachers who experience frustration and stress due to a 'packed' curriculum which leaves little time for individual learners. An intervention programme could assist in this regard.

Lastly, regular and differentiated assessments are necessary in order to detect learning problems. The School Based Support Team (SBST) should also play a significant role to support learners in need. When the teachers identify problems, they should discuss them with the HoD in charge of the SBST and the Support teacher, as well as with the Education Support Centre. In addition, teachers should adapt their teaching skills (differentiated teaching) to meet the needs of the learners, especially the needs of those learners who have a backlog due to a lack of proficiency in the LoLT.

5.3.2   Recommendations for the schools

The principals, in cooperation with their School Managements Teams (SMT's), and with the collaborative efforts from other staff members, should develop a whole-school plan in accordance with the departmental IQMS, and implement it rigorously. The four management skills underlying all management activities, namely planning, organising, directive leadership and control, imply action steps which have to be taken and implemented strictly. An effective management plan creates a sense of security for both the teachers and the learners. All the stakeholders have to be individually and collectively involved in the smooth running of the school to ensure that quality teaching and learning take place.

5.3.3   Recommendations for the Department of Education

As mentioned earlier, the Foundation Phase teachers are expected to do their duties at a very hectic pace to meet the requirements of the curriculum. They are under extreme pressure to prepare their learners adequately to meet the requirements of the National Protocol for Assessment, as well as for the Annual National Assessment (ANA) in English (Home Language) and Mathematics (ANA). A strong academic foundation can only be established when the curriculum is more flexible to accommodate all the learners lacking proficiency in English. With more time available, the teachers can adapt their teaching strategies (differentiated teaching and assessment) to assist all the learners. The DoE can also consult experienced Foundation Phase teachers when policies are drafted. Motivation, in the form of recognition for hard work (a recognition system) will be most encouraging.

Being a teacher takes considerable emotional energy, and the teachers need to feel appreciated in the stressful teaching environments where they operate on a day-to-day basis.

One of the important findings in this study relates to class sizes. The situation in many schools at present is such that it is impossible for the teachers to attend to the needs of all their learners (see section 4.4.7.2). I recommend that the National Department of Education should investigate the problem of large and overcrowded classes, and find a way to assist the Foundation Phase teachers in this regard. The appointment of teacher assistants will bring relief. The aim of laying a firm foundation for the rest of the learners' school career can then materialise more effectively.

From my findings it emerged that the current practice of the Education Support Centre is to focus on a few learners with more serious educational needs that need special intervention, to the exclusion of others with milder forms of learning barriers. It should be the task of qualified staff at the Education Support Centres to assess the learners, and this responsibility should not be handed down to the Foundation Phase teachers, as is presently the case. It would benefit the learners in need of support if the Department of Education could ensure them and their parents or caregivers of the services of Education Support Centres consisting of adequately qualified personnel. Fully-functioning Education Support Centres should be established in all the education Districts.

5.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The participant school where this case study was conducted is a former Model C, quintile 5 school. This means that on a scale of the Quintile 1-5, the sample school is on the lowest scale in terms of departmental funding, since it is regarded as financially fairly independent and privileged. It is also respected as one of the top primary schools in the Free State Province (see section 3.7.2). This may be viewed as a limitation. Due to a lack of resources and expertise, disadvantaged schools in township and rural areas may not be able to identify and deal with the educational implications of EAL learners' English language proficiency, as is the case in the sample school. Furthermore, only experienced, white

teachers participated in the study, and this can also be viewed as a limitation. In the light of the education history of South Africa, white teachers from the previous political dispensation are generally better qualified than their black colleagues. I still believe, however, that my findings and recommendations can make a significant difference when similar strategies are implemented in schools in disadvantaged communities.

5.5   THEMES FOR FURTHER STUDY

I enjoyed the unfolding of my study immensely, and recommend the following themes for further study:

- The following strategies, implemented by teachers to improve the English language proficiency of EAL learners, can be expanded in respect of

  o   listening and speaking;
  o   reading and phonics;
  o   writing and handwriting.

- The role of the parents in the English proficiency of their children.

- The impact of English language proficiency on the behaviour and scholastic achievements (in a broader sense) of EAL learners.

- Any of the following strategies that teachers use to accommodate EAL learners who are on different levels of proficiency in English can be explored, namely

  o   group-work;
  o   assessment;
  o   intervention;
  o   supportive assistance (special support).

- Any important aspects of formal training and experience, or additional language-proficiency training of the Foundation Phase student teacher, or the teachers who already teach EAL learners.

5.6   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges posed by the limited English language proficiency of EAL learners in the Foundation Phase at an English medium school, and strategies which may assist to alleviate the problem. An in-depth literature study was conducted to shed light on this phenomenon. The origin of the implementation of the language policy in South African schools and the current position with regard to the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) were investigated. Furthermore, the link between language and cognition, as well as the mother-tongue education debate were touched on. The final cornerstone of the literature review constituted the implications and consequences of the current situation of the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) for teaching and learning. I came to realise the importance and complexities of this phenomenon. In the empirical part of the study, verbatim accounts were transcribed from the salient issues explained by the participants in an attempt to answer the research questions during the data-collection process.

The gratifying and informative concerns of the participants, and the strategies they employ to support their learners, as well as the implications for teaching and learning, are significant. It emerged that EAL learners in the Foundation Phase of the sample school find it difficult to understand and interpret English, despite the continuous, dedicated and motivated efforts of experienced, well-trained and well-qualified teachers. The education environment is appealing for teaching, but the learners need considerable assistance in only limited time to meet the requirements of the CAPS curriculum. Enormous efforts are being made by means various strategies to meet the needs of the learners and to involve the parents in the teachers' desire to improve the English proficiency of the learners.

I am fully aware of the fact that the problem of the language proficiency of EAL learners is very complex, and that no "quick fix" is available. With the concerted efforts of all the stakeholders, there is, however, still the possibility of success.

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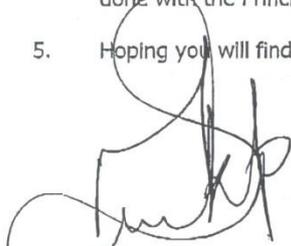**ANNEXURE A**

Enquiries : MS Mokgobo

Reference:

education
Department of
Education
FREE STATE PROVINCE

19 July 2013

The Principal
Aurora Primary School
P O Box 287
WELKOM
9460

Attention: MM van der Merwe

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT A SCHOOL

1. Your request regarding the above-mentioned is hereby acknowledged and has reference.

2. Permission is granted to conduct research in sampled school: Aurora Primary School.

3. However, permission is granted on condition that the activity will not interfere with the smooth running of the school.

4. It is also imperative that proper arrangements and consultations are done with the Principal of the School.

5. Hoping you will find this to be in order

MS MOKGOBO
District Director

Lejweleputswa District, Private Bag X30, Welkom, 9460
Anmercosa House, Cnr Stateway and Tulbach Street, Welkom
Tel: (057) 3532901 Fax: (057) 3575443

www.fsdoe.fs.gov.za

Received Time 22. Jul. 8:28

ANNEXURE B

Letter to teachers

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH/INTERVIEW FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

At present I am engaged in a research project towards my M.Ed (Masters in Foundation Phase teaching) degree at the Central University of Technology under the guidance of Dr J W Badenhorst. The research topic is: *English Language Proficiency of non-English speaking learners in the Foundation Phase of an English medium school: Challenges and Strategies*
For the purpose of the research, an interview will be conducted with you as a grade teacher at (name) Primary School. During the interviews we will discuss your problems encountered and strategies implemented in dealing with learners whose home language is not English. The interview should not take longer than an hour. All the observations from the above-mentioned interviews will be dealt with in the strictest confidence and your anonymity is assured.

I hereby request your permission to conduct the interview with you. A list of questions that will be asked is attached for your perusal.

Yours sincerely

Mrs M M Van der Merwe
0822022567

ANNEXURE C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RE: EXPLORING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING LEARNRS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE OF ENGLISH MEDIUMS CHOOLS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

1.   What is your understanding of the concept of English language proficiency in the classroom?

2.   What percentage of the learners in your class are non-English speaking?

3.   What are the most common problems that you encounter regarding teaching and learning as far as your learners are concerned?

4.   What strategies do you implement in order to improve the language proficiency of learners in your class?

5.   Would you say their English language proficiency has an impact on their behaviour? If so, to what extent?

6.   In what sense does the level of English language proficiency influence the scholastic achievements of learners?

7.   How do you accommodate non-English speaking learners with different levels of English language proficiency in your classroom?

8.   Did you receive training regarding the management of English language proficiency of you had training, would you regard your training as adequate?

9.   Did you receive additional training or attend workshops on English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners in the Foundation Phase? If so, briefly describe your training.

10.   Do you view yourself as adequately trained to manage the English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners in your classroom?

11.   How do you view the needs of the learners in your class regarding their English   language proficiency?

12.   What are your classroom needs as the teacher of these learners?

ANNEXURE D

INTERVIEW: TEACHER 3

TEACHER 3 – GRADE 1(O)

12 JUNE 2013 (12:15 – 13:15)

 I: INTERVIEWER; T: TEACHER

I: What is your understanding of the concept English language proficiency in the classroom?

T: I feel the children should be able to understand and speak the language when they first attend school. Later this can be developed to reading and writing. They should at least have some basis when they come to school.

I: What percentage of learners in your class do not have English as a home language?

T: A 100%. None of them could speak or understand English at the beginning of the year.

I: What are the most common problems that you encounter regarding teaching and learning?

T: I would say the most common problem is that they don't understand instructions. Because they don't understand what I am telling them, they … they can't follow and this can create a lot of problems, because it effects their work and their behaviour. They can't understand. They can't comprehend then it has a bad effect on them. Uhm… I would also say another problem is the lack of parent involvement. Because a lot of these children have not been to English preschools. So the first English they're hearing is when they arrive at my door … and that's Grade 1 … and they can't even ask you anything basic like "May I please go to the toilet?" It's … it's a real problem for some of those children. It is as though they were dropped down from

out of the sky in your class and their parents expect to learn English in a day. So that is a problem. Without the parents backing and involvement … uhm that child does not cope with the curriculum. It takes a child at least three years to learn a language properly. And if they are already at a backlog when they arrive at your doorstep, then they have a long way to go. I really feel the parents who want their children to be educated in English, should make the effort and plan ahead and start speaking English to those children and make sure that they go to a good English preschool. It would make our job a lot easier. That I feel is a major problem.

I: **Do you have any learners in you class this year that attended a preschool?**

T: Yes, they all attended a preschool but they were not all …um… good preschools. Some of them are in garages in backyards, some of them are not registered. Some of them……it was basically just playtime for them.   They did not follow the curriculum. And these days there is no excuse for that, because every preschool has … also follows the CAPS system. They have their own curriculum that they are supposed to do. So that when those children arrive in your classroom, they have already done counting, colours, shapes…….all the basic things that are necessary. And those who have just have been playing in the backyard at a preschool that is not following the system…… those children are immediately at a backlog. That's a real problem.

I: **What strategies do you implement to improve the language proficiency of your learners?**

T: Well the first strategy would of course be your listening and your speaking … Now to learn any language, whether you are a child or you're an adult, the first step is to listen and reproduce what you're hearing. So we actually are doing that. We are asking, we're teaching them the skill of listening. Because a lot of them have not learned how to actually listen. So one of the things that I make them do is when I'm doing a sound or a word I make them close their eyes … and they must just use their ears to listen. I think that's is very important. Without listening they will not be able

to do any oral. They need to hear that sound. I feel we do not do enough listening and oral work in our curriculum. Even though they give you enough time we … we tend to… There is so much to do, we take it for granted that a child can listen… and they don't. They don't all have that skill of listening, because they don't listen to their parents. They listen to TV, but they don't actually listening. So that is a very important skill … your listening and your speaking. Giving the child an opportunity, once they have listened to you to speak back to you. So your oral is very important. Those two I think we need to spend a lot of time on that before we later carry on to reading and then writing and creative writing. That … that bit in development is … they are at a backlog. I wouldn't say perhaps in their own language, but they know the sounds in their own language. But when they now learn English… uhm… that's a problem. They have to relearn that listening skill and develop that. Now the sounds are a bit different. The language structure is different. So without listening and trying to reproduce or give your some news in English … well structured …. That is a very important step in their development. Later on from that with your phonics which is also part of your listening, you need to make sure that they know those sounds very very well … those initial sounds … And unfortunately a lot of people … confuse let's say the "a" and the "e". . A lot of the children are … and you've got an "ee" and an "e". Those…. They mix them up. We always think they mix a "b" and a "p", and a "d". They do, but the sounds they really mix up are the vowels … and not the "a" … The "a" is easy, but the "ee" and the "e" and the "a". You will see, most of the children which ears are not finely tuned, will mix that up. If you are doing a phonics test, they will if you say "a" they will do an "e". If you say "e" they will do an "e". It's a case of listening. So again, it's listening. If the teacher is pronouncing the sounds correctly, the children will pick it up. So that is a problem. Later on when we're doing our reading, our Shared Reading and our Guided Reading I think the teacher has to reinforce this … sounds. Every day when you're reading, ask them to point out sounds. Ask them to find it on the page. Ask them to … uhm … uhm…. Read the page with expression. You know, all of this is part of listening and part of reproducing of what they are doing. I think one of the best things they brought in, was Shared Reading. That is excellent. That is one the very, very good strategies, because it's reading that you do all the time…. and I can see a big improvement in

the children's reading since we started Shared Readings. So, I think that was a very, very good move. And later when we do our Group Reading when we are together and with the Guided Reading… That is when the teacher can pick up little problems. Perhaps you haven't picked up when they were all doing Shared Reading. So I think that is a very good strategy that they have got. And then later on, once they have done all that, we progress to writing. Uhm… your Handwriting you start from the word "go" with the Grade ones. Some of them their muscle development is not quite correct … and you do a lot of exercises to improve their muscle control. But basically your phonics and your writing are connected. So, if you are teaching them the "a" sound you are teaching them how to write the "a" sound. And you are letting them do it in wet sand, or make it with clay, or whatever. The things that they use their senses with just to reinforce. From that your writing develops. But you can't wait all the time before you don't start with a little bit of … creative writing. Those two… It's a very fine line. You have to progress, and in the beginning Writing is purely copying a word from the board, later on copying a sentence from the board, later on two sentences… And all the time it's not one thing… it runs parallel. You're doing the one, progressing to the other … but you're doing both at the same time. You cannot stop handwriting without progressing to creative writing. So, the two go together. When you actually … I suppose it's because I have taught for so many years. When I am actually doing it, I don't think about it. I do it automatically. When thinking back it might be a problem to new teachers. They would think they have to teach all the handwriting first, how to form the letters before they could progress to writing a sentence. It actually… it goes hand in hand. Otherwise the children would not get to the end of the syllabus … the end of the curriculum by the end of Grade 1. The strategies would be starting with listening, then the speaking, then progressing to your reading, your phonics and your writing. They're all linked … they're all linked … all of them together … And you are implementing them all the time, even every day when you are telling your Bible story and asking them to tell or asking them questions and they are answering. That's also your listening also your oral. It runs into every subject actually… in your Maths … your story sums, your problem-solving.   It's comprehension, listening.

Everything goes together, and I think if you are following your curriculum, you are covering everything.

I: **Do you have a readiness programme at the beginning of the year?**

T: Yes, we do. We do have a readiness programme, and we have readiness book that we use and the children progress through that … purely for the fact because there are children that did not go to proper preschools. Again, it's not an isolated thing. We do readiness for about three weeks, pure readiness… and then we start slotting in with everything else. Because a lot of the the children find it a bit boring … when they been good Gr R classes and they passed that … and then you get the rest that haven't. You've got to actually help those also that are more advanced. Then keep on in your intervention line, carrying on with your readiness. Some children are too young and they're not ready until the middle of the year. And in actual fact you can carry on with readiness up till then too. I mean, the child develops and each child develops at a different stage. So, you cannot say to this child "Ok, you now must carry on and develop on your own. I cannot help you anymore. You should be on this page in this book". Children are children. By the end of Grade 1, then they should have completed all the readiness and be ready for Grade 2. Those that are not of cause are those that are going to have to repeat. They are not going to progress. You will find in the second year they will be a lot better. So I think readiness is very, very important.

I: **Do you use any "mother tongue" to assist the children in that way during your readiness programme or during any other time in Grade 1?**

T: I don't at all. I went to a very, very interesting workshop in Riebeeckstad years and years ago. It wasn't run by the Department. It was run by a publisher. And one thing stuck in my mind. She said the worst thing you can ever do, is saying something in English and then in Sesotho or whatever the other language is. So the child learns quicker if you just use the language that you are trying to teach with demonstration. "Sit down" … and you sit. "here is the wall". Let them repeat it.

Again, it's listening. She felt that it's better to … actually … the basic stuff. Let them do it. Instead of saying … uhm. "Sit down. Dula fatsi". You know, rather say "sit down" and show them what to do. Do all those basic things. "This is your nose". "This is your ears". Do all the basic things. Drill it in to them and not to use their own language. And strange enough. …. (Name) said that at one meeting too. The first time when I heard this lady in Riebeeckstad, she reckoned it was actually retarding the children more. They would learn quicker if they didn't have it. And then (name) mentioned it just out of the blue. Somebody asked a question and this came up. She said the same thing. So now, I don't use Sesotho words. If I really, really have a child that cannot understand what I'm saying I will ask one of the children whose English is a little bit better to explain to that child. Just so that they are not sitting there bewildered… Someone is showing … telling them what to do. But as a norm, they must listen and they must be helped by me if they don't understand. As I say, sometimes another child can translate. If it's really bad … I don't see the harm in that. But I personally don't speak Sesotho.

I: **Is it possible for you to please mention the different kinds of reading that you use during the course of a day and how much time do you spend more or less on reading?**

T: Right, with our Shared Reading we spend about … twenty minutes in a day, because we're reading all together. That I actually do every day. I do that daily, because I feel you are reinforcing all the time. And it is amazing what they learn. I have the Group Reading which is Guided Reading, that I have my groups. Uhm…I have then grouped according to their ability and to their language proficiency. Those that know those words are on that reader. And so we progress down to the weaker group who is on the weakest reader. But I test the words regularly. I often find that in the beginning there are children who are … I placed perhaps in a wrong group. They have been a bit slower at picking up the words and suddenly I don't know what happened. It's normally after a holiday. Suddenly those children are more mature, or they being helped by their parents in the holidays. My groups change regularly because … Look your good readers will remain your good readers, but your average

and your slow readers, they can turn like this. *Turn right hand*. So I test the words regularly and see if I can't move them up. Because, say for example. Mpho is in the slow group in Term1, does not mean that she's going to be in the slow group for the rest of her life. She's going to progress and the more proficient she becomes at English, the faster she will progress. So, I think that's important in that group reading too – constantly keep a check on those two groups – to see if you can't get them to move up.

Then I also have Independent Reading. That I only do once a week. I try and fit it in on a Friday. Where they can get their little reading book out of the reading corner and they can either read together, or the one can read to the other, and then that one can read to that one. So it's like Paired Reading and Independent Reading. So that I try and do on a Friday. With my group work … uhm… I also try to do that daily – the Group Reading daily. Reading is very important. You're not getting anywhere in life if you don't read. The slower kids need extra practise. They must read every day. And your other two, I try and fit also every day. Sometimes I have to cut in to other time of other subjects, but I think reading is very important.

I: **Do you give them homework to do and how do you view the importance of homework?**

T: I do think it is very important that they have homework. They have to learn to… uhm … The work that they have done in class… They need to sort of reinforce at home. Yes, they do get homework … uhm… They get Reading, they get Phonics, they get Writing. They practise their writing with their phonics. And then of course they also get Maths to do as well. So yes, homework is very important and unfortunately some of the children would make better progress if they have more help at home. There are parents who don't even do the homework books, they never sign; or they leave it in the hands of a brother or a sister who really could not be bothered. Or parents rush home from work. I understand that they are tired. "Bring me your homework book. Let me sign". But the homework is not really being done. They've signed the book, but they haven't done the homework. I think homework is very,

very important. But in the same respect, I feel that we must not overload the Grade 1's with too much homework because they're small. Their attention span is not very long. They have already had a long day at school. So, they do deserve to play a bit in the afternoon. The amount of homework we give because we've done it in class. Its revision that is going home … should not take that child more than fifteen minutes, sometimes twenty when they have a long page of reading. Grade 1….. I think twenty minutes tops … Their homework should be completed, but I think it's very important.

I: **Do you have parent evenings to educate the parents about how to do the homework with the learners? If so, how often?**

T: We do. At the beginning of January every year we get all the parents in, whether they are parents of repeats or new parents. Most of them are new. We call them in one on one in the classroom. We explain, we demonstrate how to do the homework… and how we expect it must be signed … and how we must do the flashcards. We go through everything again. A lot of them do take it to heart and carry on. A lot of the parents say Mmm, yes, we promise to do that" … but it's still not done. Now to accommodate that situation we have another parent evening in the second term. And now we personally call in just those parents who are not helping the kids at home. So the first term it's all the parents, the second term we identify the parents who are not helping the children. All the homework is signed, but we suspect they're not being helped … and we get those parents in. At the beginning of the next term we call in the parents of the children that we feel are going to repeat, because they have not been helped at home. There is a constant involvement with the parents to try and educate them on how to help the child. I feel very sorry for children … Like I have a little girl in my class… She lives with an aunt. The mother I suspect is dying of AIDS and this little girl has now been shifted form a granny to an aunty… and she's not going to pass. She's now started homework class with me. But she is so far behind and the problem is that when she was with the granny, the granny can't read, the granny can't write. So who was there to help her? Nobody. She is a sweet little girl, but it is too far in the year for

her to catch up with anything. So it's sad, but we do try to involve the parents as much as we can.

I: **To what extent are there learners that do not stay with their parents, but with grandparents or family members?**

T: There are very few normal families anymore. Really, sometimes the mother works in Jo'burg and the father works in Rustenburg and the child is dumped with the granny. If I look at the children in my class – I speak under correction – but I suspect…. say that more than a half of my 37 children are not staying with the mother and father. I don't say that they are ill-treated or anything, but they are just not in a normal family. Sad.

I: **How do you see the role of the homework class as far as language proficiency is developed?**

I am talking from my point of view. I've got the Grade ones and the Grade threes. The homework that they are given does cover the basics. Like the Grade 3's are getting their Spelling and they are getting their Writing and they are getting their Reading. All that is covered with the homework. The problem is that a lot of the children don't pitch … that is a problem. Not a lot of them, but there are a few … who think: "So what if my mother pays"… and they don't come. I can see a difference in Grade 1 in those who are coming to homework classes and those who are not. Because we are sitting… We are doing their sight words, we are doing their spelling. So I think the role of a homework class is very relevant. I also realise that there are some children who graps (????)… their homework has been done at home. They need extra work with their language. So there again they've got to rely on the parents. When they get up to Grade 4 … here now we've got extra English. The sad part there is that it's not the children that really need it that are going there. The main thing is to identify the children that really need help with their language. And then form a strategy … Either the child must come to intervention classes or join

homework classes, then at least something is done. I don't say we can cover the curriculum there, but if it is part of the homework, we will attend to that.

I: **Would you say that English language proficiency indeed has an impact on their behaviour? If so, to what extent?**

T: It does have an impact for the simple reason if they can't understand what is going on, they have two options: they either become naughty, because they don't know what to do and they look for some mischief to get up to; they can withdraw and feel emotionally insecure because people around them can perhaps understand something and they can't. So I think that can affect them in two ways. I always think for myself when I was put into a Sesotho school as a child and I was English, I would not have a clue of what was going on. Uhm… I think I would have been very emotionally affected, because I am a reserved person. But I think for somebody who's full of life and outgoing, it might have gone the other way. And they might have gone up to mischief. So, it does definitely have an effect. A lot of their problems disappear when they start to understand what's going on. Yes, I do feel it does affect them.

I: **In what sense does the level of English language proficiency influence the scholastic achievements of your learners?**

T: Well it is has very negative effect, because it definitely affects their assessment, because their marks obviously with the informal assessments we do now … If they are not understanding what's going on, they are not going to pass. Especially with the new pass rates they definitely … It does affect them in a negative way when their language proficiency is not good enough.

I: **Is it possible to elaborate a bit on informal and formal assessment?**

T: Ok, your informal is after you … uhm…. have done a section of your work. You test them as the word says – informally in the form of an oral assessment, or it could be a

worksheet … a written one …., but it is purely an informal assessment that you can observe that this child has not mastered what you have done …. What you have taught …. This child is not really ready for the next step. So you need to then work at those particular children who are not up to it at that stage. But you do that in every section of your work. For your Reading, for your Spelling, for your Phonics. I try every week to do a little test. Every Friday it's my little test day. And, ag the children quite enjoy it. You know, they don't find it very stressful. On a …. marksheet … class list I will now record for this he got 0/10 for his … phonics … next week it was 2/10. I can see that there is progress. And I do the same with my Maths. The counting I assess like that. I do the little sums like that. We are doing informal all the time. But by the time you have completed most of your work, you are going to do the formal assessment. And you cannot do that without going through all the steps of the informals. So the one is based on the other. Your formal assessment is what you actually use for the child's report. By then it is very important that you help the children along the way when they do not do well in the informals. You give them a formal to do better. Most of your work you are then going to do your formal assessment.

I: How often do your learners get reports during the year?

T: They get a formal report at the end of every term or at the beginning of the new term – that's four times a year.

I: To what extent do you have parents that comment on the report? What do you experience when you have parent evenings?

T: I find that the parents … Most of the parents will come the first term, but when they see that the child is coping nicely, some will come but the majority don't. Then the other thing is, those parents that you want to see … that do not because the children are not progressing very well … Some of them don't bother to come either … I don't know what more one can do. You don't always get the parents you've invited to come. And then you will get a granny that will come every term, even though the

child is getting nearly a 100%. So, it is a very kind of a mixed scenario. But I would say the parents are very grateful for what we do. Most of them appreciate what we are doing for their children. So I think it's more positive than negative.

I: **How do you accommodate non-English speaking learners with different levels of English language proficiencies in your classroom?**

T: Yes, as I said now in Grade one I do a lot of group work. So I try as I said with the Reading. Those who are on the same level in English will be in one group and those who are not coping so well, the middle group, and those who are not coping at all in the slower group. That's the only way I can do it in Grade 1. I have to work in groups. Certain things like your Shared Reading – altogether. Because I am also of the opinion that sometimes a slower child can learn from a child who is a bit faster. So … uhm… they learn from them. We always say "They're copying. They're copying". Sometimes I will turn a blind eye to that. Because sometimes sitting next to a child who is very good, he can actually learn a lot. But when it comes to the testing and separation you soon pick up who is not learning from them. There are definitely occasions where a child who's slower can learn from a faster child. So I think in some instances you should mix your groups a little bit for certain activities. And then for their Reading, rather let them be in their separate groups. Other times … I had a case for example of a child who I battled and battled and battled with to let her learn her sight words. One day I called one of my top readers and I gave her the sight words. I said "Now Ok. I've tried. I want you every day to sit with her for ten minutes. Just there in the desk and just help her". That child passed at the end of that year, because the one had helped the other. I couldn't get it right. Every day, maybe I was getting frustrated. But this other child who was very clever had the patience to go and show her … help her with her sight words. So, one must make use of what you can in class. Other than that, it's the only thing I can talk to you about the groups. I don't see how you can cope with all the levels and do everything at once. I know the classes are big. You've got to many kids and not enough space. But I do think one can make a plan. You have to. Even if you stay with the group

around your table. They're not sitting on the floor. But you need to be able to communicate within your groups.

I: **Did you receive training regarding the management of English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners in the Foundation Phase, during your years of formal training? In your opinion, would you regard your training as adequate?**

T: No, I didn't have training when I did my diploma because at that stage it was not a problem at all. The two official languages were English and Afrikaans and that problem just did not arise. I must say that I have gained a lot of experience over the years. I picked up tips along the years and got ideas form different teachers from other schools as well.

I: **Did you receive additional training or attend workshops regarding English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners in the Foundation Phase? Briefly describe your training.**

T: I did attend one workshop in Riebeeckstad many years ago that was not run by the Department. It was run by a publisher. But, yes I did get a few ideas there and one of the main ones that I have mentioned before was not to translate. What you are trying to teach them, show them. They are listening and repeating and learning by demonstration.

I: **Do you view yourself as adequately trained to manage the English language proficiency of non-English speaking learners in your classroom?**

T: Not formally trained, but yes, I think after thirty eight years of teaching the children especially and … over the last few years when we have learners that are not proficient in English. One had to learn hands on. It's not a case that it is formally being trained. I do think there is a need for the Department to run workshops where they can help the teachers to … perhaps who are new or who haven't been teaching for a long time. They must receive some kind of training on how to teach a language

because it is happening in the township schools as well. They have now switched and have an option where they can switch instead of teaching their home language from Grade 1, they can start teaching in English Home language from Grade 1 so that instead of just from Grade 4. So those teachers really also need guidance. They've never done it that way before. It is just a reversal. We are teaching English in place of Sesotho. They are now also going to teach also English in place of Sesotho. There is a need for more workshops in that area.

I: **How do you view the needs of the learners in your class, especially as regards their capability of English language proficiency?**

T: Well, I find they have a serious need for extra English to be spoken at home. The parents need to help. Unfortunately a lot of the parents themselves are not proficient in English. I always feel they should spend at least one hour a day where they only speak English to the children, and insist that the children answer them in English. They watch English television maybe, but perhaps after the child has watched a programme in English on the television, ask them questions. Just get them talking more English. The more they talk, the better it will become. That I think is one of the very serious needs in the Grades and in the school. They don't hear and speak enough English. They need extra help at home and they need to speak more.

I: **What are your classroom needs as the teacher of these learners?**

T: Ok, firstly … and I am sure everybody will say the same. We could do with an assistant. An assistant who is proficient in English as well. One who can pronounce the English words correctly … take time with weaker children to give them that extra bit of attention. Because of course unfortunately with the large numbers of children in the classroom we cannot get to those children as we should. I always feel very guilty about that, because they really need that extra attention. You cannot physically …. It's impossible to give them that attention. So it would be nice if we could have an assistant, especially to help with the reading and phonics and things

like that. Take that weaker group or the teacher can take the weaker group. Let her carry on with those who need an expert. I am not saying we shouldn't have an expert assistance … We have plenty of people who are not qualified teachers who could really come and assist and earn a small salary, perhaps to help them. I think that is one of the things that we all need.

Small classes. Yes, not when you sit with 37 – 40+ in a class. We can … one can address … our needs could also be for the Department to intervene and perhaps realise that we need fewer children in our classes. Employing more teachers and have fewer children in our class …then we could cope without an assistant. But I think the main problem lies with the National Education [DoE] because after all our district and our province fall under National. Until they decide to have less numbers in the classroom and employ more qualified teachers, I can't see that change is going to happen.