

An Investigation into the Impact of an Extensive Reading Programme on the  
Reading Proficiency and Reading Motivation of a Class of Grade 9 Learners

By

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## DECLARATION

I declare that *An Investigation into the Impact of an Extensive Reading Programme on the Reading Proficiency and Reading Motivation of a Class of Grade 9 Learners* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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Date: 13 September 2016

Signed:



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my husband Leon and daughter Zoë for their support and encouragement throughout my research. Their encouragement and love enabled me to complete this thesis.

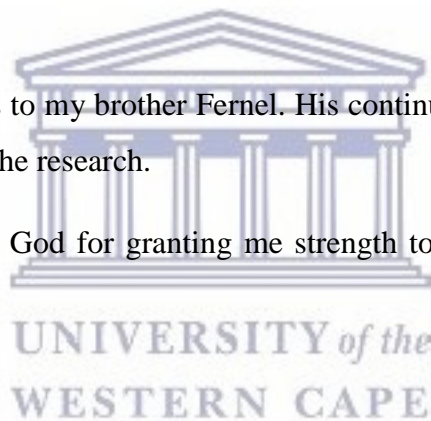
Secondly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Mrs Margaret Probyn, for her guidance, excellent feedback and patience throughout the research. I am eternally grateful to her.

Thirdly, I would like to thank the School Governing Body and Management of the school where the study was conducted. A special thanks to the grade nine learners who participated in the study.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Although more than twenty years have passed since South Africa became a democracy and one education department was established, learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds still do not achieve good results in their matric examination. Despite the fact that educational opportunities should be equal for all learners, previously disadvantaged learners perform extremely poorly in national and international reading assessments. And because reading is a gateway skill, poor reading proficiency impacts negatively on learning across the curriculum. This contributes to major dropout rates and reinforces social problems such as unemployment.

The literature on reading proficiency and reading motivation suggests that extensive reading programmes are successful both in developing and improving learners' reading proficiency and in motivating learners to adopt regular reading as a habit. Regular reading could also incidentally improve learners writing and verbal skills.

Reading theories suggest that reading is both a skill and a social practice. Emergent literacy is the first phase in children's literacy development. During this phase children should be exposed to books – read to at home and raised in a print rich environment. The decoding phase should occur during the foundation years of school. Thereafter the learners are to become text participants, users and analysts. For learners to access higher order reading skills the lower order skills have to be firmly embedded. Learners who cannot read by the end of Grade 3 struggle with comprehension later in their school career. They never catch up and eventually become unsuccessful.

This research aims to investigate the impact of a reading intervention based on extensive reading, on the reading proficiency and reading motivation of a Grade 9 class over the course of one year. The research approach was that of action research. This is a method by which the teacher/researcher investigates her/his own practice in cycles of action and reflection, and as such it falls within the qualitative paradigm. In order to strengthen the research, the findings were compared to that of a 'control class' where no intervention was introduced during the year in question. This approach falls within a positivist research paradigm and so overall the research approach was one of mixed methods.

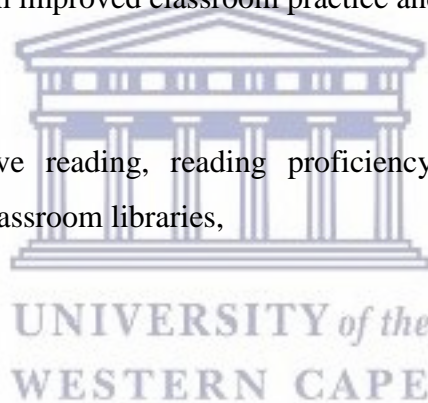
Data collection methods included a questionnaire issued to the classes at the start of the intervention to ascertain the reading habits and attitudes of the learners. This was followed by

a baseline assessment of the reading proficiency of both the intervention and control classes and was conducted by the researcher. The reading programme was introduced as an intervention and modified as the need arose through reflection and action. In September a post-test was administered in both classes. This was to ascertain whether exposure to the intervention improved the reading proficiency of the learners. A focus group comprising learners of both the intervention and control groups was interviewed afterwards to determine whether their attitude towards regular reading had changed.

The research showed that the reading proficiency of learners who were exposed to Extensive Reading on a regular basis, improved; whereas over the same period the reading proficiency of the control group did not improve. However the research indicated that it takes longer to change attitudes and to inculcate a sustainable love of reading.

The research investigated an important problem area in education. It is hoped that the findings may be used to inform improved classroom practice and learning outcomes.

**KEY WORDS:** Extensive reading, reading proficiency, reading attitudes, reading motivation, action research, classroom libraries,



## Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM .....	1
1.2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR LITERACY.....	3
1.2.1. FACTORS AT HOME.....	4
1.2.2. PUBLIC LIBRARIES .....	4
1.2.3. RESOURCES AT SCHOOL .....	5
1.2.4. LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING.....	5
1.3. THE PROBLEMS FACED BY SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS IN GENERAL...	8
1.3.1. PIRLS REPORT .....	8
1.3.2. THE SACMEQ REPORT.....	9
1.3.3. SYSTEMIC EVALUATIONS .....	9
1.3.4. INTERVENTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT SINCE 2006 .....	10
1.3.5. SYSTEMIC TESTING.....	11
1.4. RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA .....	11
1.5. RESEARCH AIM .....	13
1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	13
1.7. A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE.....	13
1.7.1. SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY .....	15
1.8. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY .....	15
1.9. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	16
1.10. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS.....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>18</b>
2.1. INTRODUCTION.....	18
2.2. DEFINITION OF READING .....	18
2.3. READING THEORIES.....	19

<b>2.4. WHAT IS EXTENSIVE READING?</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>2.4.1. BACKGROUND TO EXTENSIVE READING</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>2.5. BENEFITS OF EXTENSIVE READING</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>2.5.1. WHAT OTHER WRITERS SAY ABOUT EXTENSIVE READING</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>2.5.2. COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT HYPOTHESIS</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>2.6. EXTENSIVE READING AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO LOW LITERACY LEVELS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>2.7. WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME?</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>2.7.1. PLANNING</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>2.7.2. FUNDING</b> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>2.7.3. ACCESSIBILITY</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>2.8. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMMES FROM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>2.8.1. SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>2.9. SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA .</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.9.1. THE READING ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.9.2. THE WORDWORKS EARLY LITERACY PROJECT</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.9.3. READING IN A DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>2.9.4. READING IS FUNDamental</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>2.9.5. LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>2.10. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>35</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.1. RESEARCH AIM</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.2. THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS GUIDED THE RESEARCH</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>3.3.1. RESEARCH METHOD</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>3.3.2. THE RESEARCH SITE</b> .....	<b>40</b>

3.3.3.	RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS .....	43
3.3.4.	WHY A CONTROL GROUP?.....	44
3.4.	RESEARCH DESIGN .....	45
3.4.1.	DATA COLLECTION METHODS .....	45
3.4.2.	STATEMENT OF RESEARCH ETHICS .....	48
3.5.	EXTENSIVE READING INTERVENTION AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS .....	51
3.6.	DATA ANALYSIS .....	53
3.7.	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	55
3.8.	VALIDITY.....	55
3.8.1.	GENERALISABILITY .....	57
3.9.	CONCLUSION.....	57
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>		<b>58</b>
4.1.	ATTITUDES OF PRINCIPAL AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS TOWARDS EXTENSIVE READING.....	58
4.2.	BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF INTERVENTION AND CONTROL GROUPS	62
4.2.1.	BASELINE ASSESSMENT .....	63
4.3.	POST INTERVENTION TESTS RESULTS .....	63
4.4.	QUESTIONNAIRES TO DETERMINE LEARNERS THEIR READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES.....	66
4.5.	LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TO EXTENSIVE READING AFTER THE INTERVENTION .....	76
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION.....</b>		<b>80</b>
5.1.	INTRODUCTION.....	80
5.2.	RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	80
5.3.	THE EFFECT OF AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME ON LEARNERS' READING PROFICIENCY .....	80
5.4.	THE EFFECTS OF AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME ON LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS READING .....	82



5.5.	<b>ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME ..</b>	<b>83</b>
5.6.	<b>REFLECTIONS ON ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS.....</b>	<b>84</b>
5.7.	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>85</b>
5.7.1.	<b>EXTENSIVE READING AS A WHOLE SCHOOL PROJECT .....</b>	<b>85</b>
5.7.2.	<b>SUPPORT FROM MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL .....</b>	<b>85</b>
5.7.3.	<b>CLASSROOM LIBRARIES SUPPORTED BY A CENTRAL LIBRARY ...</b>	<b>86</b>
5.7.4.	<b>SETTING UP AND MANAGING EXTENSIVE READING .....</b>	<b>87</b>
5.8.	<b>BENEFITS OF ACTION RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>88</b>
5.9.	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>88</b>
5.10.	<b>WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>89</b>



## List of Figures

<b>Figure</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Figure 4.1.</b>	<b>Result of Baseline Assessment</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Figure 4.2.</b>	<b>Representing the pre- and post-intervention test scores for the control and intervention groups</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 4.3.</b>	<b>Representing the pre-and post-scores of the individual learners who were part of the intervention group</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Figure 4.4.</b>	<b>Representing the pre-and post-scores of the individual learners who were part of the control group</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Figure 4.5.</b>	<b>Learners' leisure activities.</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Figure 4.6.</b>	<b>Percentages of learners who read for fun.</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Figure 4.7.</b>	<b>Results on how often learners read.</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Figure 4.8.</b>	<b>Learners' response as to who read to them as a child.</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 4.9.</b>	<b>Percentage result on fictional and non-fictional reading</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Figure 4.10.</b>	<b>The percentage of learners who belong to a public library.</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 4.11.</b>	<b>Learners' response on how often they visit the library.</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Figure 4.12.</b>	<b>Results of learners who received a book as a present.</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Figure 4.13.</b>	<b>Learners' response on what book they would buy if they receive one hundred rand.</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Figure 4.14.</b>	<b>Learners' response to the question whether regular reading could improve results.</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 4.15.</b>	<b>Results for whether learners enjoy listening to their teachers.</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Figure 4.16.</b>	<b>Learners' response to emotions they experience while listening to texts.</b>	<b>72</b>

<b>Figure 4.17. a.</b>	<b>Learners' response to the question whether a school library important.</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Figure 4.17.b.</b>	<b>Results of reasons given by the readers in figure 17 A.</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Figure 4.18.</b>	<b>The results of learners' opinion whether computers are more important than books.</b>	<b>74</b>



## Appendices

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Page number</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Letter to Western Cape Education Department (WCED)</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Information Sheet for WCED</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>Letter to School Governing Body</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>Information Sheet for School Governing Body</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b>	<b>Letter to School Principal</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Appendix 6</b>	<b>Information Sheet for School Principal</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>Appendix 7</b>	<b>Letter to Heads of Departments</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>Appendix 8</b>	<b>Information Sheet for Heads of Departments</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Appendix 9</b>	<b>Letter to Parents</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Appendix 10</b>	<b>Consent Form for Parents</b>	<b>106</b>
<b>Appendix 11</b>	<b>Permission Letter from Governing Body of School</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Appendix 12</b>	<b>Permission Letter from School Principal</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Appendix 13</b>	<b>Permission Letter from Head of Department for English</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Appendix 14a, b, c</b>	<b>Consent Letters from Parents</b>	<b>110-112</b>
<b>Appendix 15</b>	<b>Questionnaire for Learners</b>	<b>113-114</b>
<b>Appendix 16</b>	<b>Interview with Principal</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>Appendix 17</b>	<b>Interviews with Heads of Departments</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendix 18</b>	<b>Interview with Focus Groups</b>	<b>117</b>

<b>Appendix 19</b>	<b>Pre-intervention Test</b>	<b>118-122</b>
<b>Appendix 20</b>	<b>Post-intervention Test</b>	<b>123-125</b>
<b>Appendix 21</b>	<b>Extensive Reading Intervention</b>	<b>126-131</b>



# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study was prompted by an interest in investigating the low literacy levels amongst learners in previously disadvantaged schools. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to my research project, which aimed at investigating the effect of extensive reading on learners' literacy levels and on their attitudes towards reading. An extensive reading intervention was introduced as part of daily English lessons for a Grade 9 class. One class served as the intervention group while another class served as the control group.

In this chapter I contextualise my study within the field of extensive reading, describe the research problem, explain the motivation for the research, describe the research site, discuss the research goals and present an overview of the four remaining chapters.

## 1.1. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The dawn of a democratic dispensation in South Africa was expected to eradicate the injustices of the past. Hence, since democracy we have one education department and every matriculant in government high schools across South Africa writes the same final National Certificate Examination. Yet twenty years later matric results in high schools serving communities at risk, these communities were disenfranchised under Apartheid, are still not good enough to allow most learners access to higher education or high-end employment. In the achievement of good results, instead of the gap narrowing between the privileged and the underprivileged, it appears to be widening. Brahm Fleisch (2008) claims that we have two education systems as well as two economies in South Africa: one for the privileged and one for the previously disadvantaged.

In 2004 the Western Cape published results to show the discrepancy between the disadvantaged and advantaged learners. They tested grade 6 learners. The results were compared in relation to the former education departments. It was found that in former National Education Department schools almost four out of five children worked at Grade 6 levels. In former Education and Culture schools one in four children was at Grade 6 level. In former Department of Education and Training schools, only four children in a hundred were

reading at grade level. These results prove there are major discrepancies and serious interventions are needed (Fleisch, 2008).

At the start of the academic year results of the previous year are usually analysed by each school. For every subject offered in matric the school receives a comprehensive examiner's report. This serves as a diagnostic tool to ascertain what went wrong. At the institution where I work, the matriculants' pass rate was 46% at the end of the 2013 academic year. As the Department of Basic Education classifies a school that obtains a pass rate below 70% as an under-achieving school, interventions such as Saturday classes, external tutors, compulsory holiday programmes were instituted. Besides all such assistance, a mentoring system was also introduced. Each staff member was allocated four matric students to whom they had to offer pastoral care and over whose progress they had to keep close watch throughout the year. The most vulnerable learners were given to the two deputy-principals to mentor. A booklet called 'Tips for Success' was issued to each learner and teacher. This was meant to guide the learners when planning their year's study. Thus far this has not really brought about the desired effect. Learners still struggle to understand questions during examinations and lack the necessary vocabulary to answer proficiently. Oral activities become a battle because learners lack the confidence to present their speeches. Since only 10% of these matriculants qualified for university admission, many learners were neither able to further their education nor to find suitable employment. The daily lived experiences of our learners are single parent families, poverty, teenage pregnancies and crime.

The principal at this particular school expects answers from his middle managers and the educators responsible for teaching these learners. He wants to know why educators did not realise sooner that learners were struggling with respective subjects and why they did not attempt to remedy this.

Although education is accessible to all, there are variables at play which hinder learners' progress. Jordaan (2011) claims that language competence in educational achievement, is both the means and the end. Teachers at the school where I work contend that amongst other factors, in the language of instruction and learning learners' proficiency is below standard. In examinations this results in them being unable either to comprehend what is being asked or to apply their knowledge. Language becomes an obstacle to learning across the curriculum. The Department of Basic Education advises that the curriculum and learning materials schools use today helps learners to understand their country, Africa and the world; that these enable

learners to think critically in ways that are a far cry from the narrow memorisation required before 1994 (Department of Basic Education, 2010) .

These precepts are not borne out by the results achieved in most previously disadvantaged schools. In addition a study amongst university students shows that language proficiency is becoming a growing concern amongst academics when students are ill-equipped to deal with the demands of the tertiary curricula (Jordaan, 2011). This is not only applicable to children from previously disadvantaged communities. However, without the necessary support to assist these children to develop their language skills they would have an even slimmer chance of success, especially in cases where the language of instruction is learners' second language.

What motivated me to conduct this study is my passion for language teaching. I was concerned about the low attainment of our learners. I needed to find out what could be done to assist them to improve their reading proficiency. I wanted to dispel existing myths around our learners' ability to read. Comments such as "the learners cannot read" were often made by colleagues. As a language teacher my experience was different. My experience indicated that learners can decode but struggle to comprehend. This could be attributed to various factors.



## **1.2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO POOR LITERACY**

Graeme Bloch, professor at Wits University, stated that in South Africa more than half the learners who start school never write their Matric examinations (Medley, 2012). When learners reach Grade 4, the 'learning to read' phase ends and 'reading to learn' should start. If learners have not grade-mastered these reading skills they play catch up for the rest of their lives (Spaull, 2014). Education experts also claim poor literacy levels have created a cycle that has led to high drop-out rates as learners' prior learning and background knowledge contribute largely to their literacy development; and school drop-outs were not able to provide their own children with the necessary support, and so their children followed the same pattern (Medley, 2012).

Emergent literacy or early literacy exposure is often absent in the lives of the learners at the school where I teach. There are many reasons for this, as outlined in the sections that follow.



### 1.2.1. FACTORS AT HOME

Many parents themselves have dropped out of school early and therefore do not have the ability to assist their children with homework. At home learners are often exposed to mixed language only – where English and Afrikaans are used in the same sentence – and so they struggle to discern between a formal register and colloquial language. The result is that many learners have only the register of the language used in the community and lack the formal register needed for academic success. Many learners come from poor families where newspapers and magazines are luxury items. Money for reading material is often last on parents' list of requirements. They have few, if any books at home. The culture of reading that should be stimulated and modelled by parents is non-existent. The advent of tabloids such as, *The Voice* and *The Sun* have increased the problem because of the poor quality of language used. However these newspapers are often the only resources people can afford, and though the language and content are not of the best, these may serve as a springboard to better reading materials. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found the following: “Many South African households have on average few resources compared to many countries in PIRLS 2011 and learners from homes that are well-resourced in education terms, achieved higher reading achievement scores” (Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse and Zimmerman 2011, p. xvi).

### 1.2.2. PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The learners do not have internet access at home so they need to use the library for research. Yet library resources are limited: the two public libraries in the area where the learners reside offer inadequate support for the needs of the people they serve, which includes the learners of four high schools and six primary schools. If the first few learners borrow books on a particular topic, the rest of the learners cannot access the information. In addition, often learners vandalise the resources when they tear out the pages of the books and so prevent others from using the resources. The librarians are weary of the children and some have been disallowed from using the facilities. Rival gang members target learners walking to and from the libraries. It is therefore also too dangerous for learners to visit the libraries. Learners are thus disadvantaged.

### **1.2.3. RESOURCES AT SCHOOL**

At school we have neither a library nor enough textbooks or other reading materials. This results in hardly any exposure to print. The venue intended as a library was used as a computer laboratory. Thus the habit and love of reading on a regular basis could no longer be inculcated. Classroom libraries did not exist at the time.

In the past we experienced textbook shortages at school. A possible reason for this could be that the school did not have a fool proof retrieval system. Books were not returned at the end of the academic year. This resulted in the shortage. Why I perceive this to be significant is that textbooks offer a form of reading if teachers use them as part of their teaching aids. The language used in these books is Standard English so it helps with exposure to language. The implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education 2011) syllabus therefore brought a partial solution to the problem because it includes textbooks for each child as well as a compulsory reading list that each learner must hand in to teachers. The lack of a fool-proof retrieval system however still causes us to lose textbooks. Inadequate teacher knowledge of literacy teaching also contributes to insufficient reading proficiency.

This is not only a problem in the school where I teach but for many schools in general.

### **1.2.4. LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Teachers in our school face another challenge: while learners choose English as their language of learning and instruction, it is not the language they speak at home. This is manifested in learners' schoolwork and severely compromises their ability to do well in examinations. The school should see this challenge as good reason to implement an intervention programme to assist the learners. An important way in which these learners may be enabled to improve their language proficiency and their vocabulary is through daily exposure to good literature and other books. This is where the introduction of an extensive reading programme could alleviate the problem.

Howie et al.'s study (2006 as cited in Fleisch, 2008) contends that poverty alone does not determine scholastic achievement but fluency in English is also a necessary condition for academic success.

This suggests that if learners are not fluent in English then it would deter them from being successful at school. We as teachers need to expose them to an intervention that could remedy the situation. As noted earlier, factors such as the absence of a culture of reading at home and the lack of reading material at school are impediments to language acquisition.

CAPS recognises the need for exposure to a wide range of reading materials and a print-rich environment inside classrooms. It states that competence in reading and viewing are central to successful learning across the curriculum, and necessary for full participation in society and the world of work. Learners are required to develop proficiency in reading and viewing across a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, including visual texts (Department of Basic Education, 2011). As part of the language curriculum these feature in a core reader which includes four genres: poetry, short stories, plays and folk tales. These expose learners to a wider variety of texts. The stories chosen range from traditional to local to international authors. Emphasis is placed on the relevance of the content: learners must be able to relate to it. In addition compulsory reading lists have been stipulated in the Policy for Reading in Home and Additional Languages. In order to support this approach the Western Cape Education Department then introduced compulsory reading lists with effect from January 2007. The learners' reading lists were to include both fiction and non-fiction (Western Cape Education Department, 2007).

However, many young people in South Africa still have little or no access to books beyond the classroom. *The FunDza Literacy Trust* attempts to make local content affordable and available to young people countrywide (Reading Changes Lives, 2012). The fact that organisations see the need to expose children to books indicates that we have a backlog in South Africa insofar as exposure to good reading material is concerned. Language acquisition is the cornerstone of success at school. No subject can be taught successfully if the learners do not have a solid knowledge of the language.

The experience of many South African children is that they constantly struggle to understand words on a page, let alone the deeper meanings of language. The saddest part is that they are not responsible for this. "The brain is hardwired to acquire language and almost all children can learn to read in just a few years if provided with the right teaching, resources and encouragement" (Spaull, 2014 para. 4). Unfortunately many South African children do not attend schools when the necessary conditions exist. These conditions include aspects such as large class sizes and lack of infrastructure. The tragedy of this is that if children cannot read

and write clearly by Grade 4, they are constrained by this deficiency for the rest of their schooling.

Spaull goes on to explain the participation of South Africa in the 2011 international study called Pre-PIRLS (Howie et al., 2011). This study assesses the reading ability of Grade 4 children: The reason why they decided to assess Grade 4 is not arbitrary but rooted in an understanding of when and how children learn to read (Spaull, 2014). The first three years at school are regarded as the learning to read phase. In Grade 4 the reading to learn phase starts and learners need to start acquiring information through reading. If children cannot read properly by Grade 4, they struggle in the higher grades and as they approach matric they drop out. Fifty percent of learners drop out in Grades 10 and 11 (Spaull, 2014).

### **WHAT DOES SPAULL SUGGEST WE DO?**

To remedy the situation Spaull suggests the following:

We need to get the basics right in the Foundation Phase. He suggests a national reading campaign where all stakeholders rally behind this goal: by the end of Grade 3 every child must read and write. Spaull advises:

‘This is the very same goal that Brazil used as the core goal for primary schooling – with much success. If we do not get reading right in grades one to three any intervention later in life will have a small impact on learning and consequently (on) the life chances of the poor.’ (Spaull, 2014 para. 14)

The circumstance Spaull outlines is similar to the situation of the learners at the school where the study was done. Many learners had not mastered the skill of reading by the end of Grade 3, yet were promoted. Although Spaull argues that later interventions make a small impact, these may assist learners if implemented in Grade 8.

### **1.3. THE PROBLEMS FACED BY SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS IN GENERAL**

The problems of poor language proficiency and negative attitudes towards reading are not unique to the school where I teach. It is a problem faced by South African schools in general. There have been a number of international, national and provincial evaluations that show this.

#### **1.3.1. PIRLS REPORT**

The 2011 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is the second study for PIRLS in which South Africa participated. South Africa participated in the 2011 PIRLS studies in two categories: Grade 5 learners participated in PIRLS only in English and Afrikaans; and Grade 4 learners in the Pre-PIRLS, an easier test, in all eleven official languages. Both the PIRLS and Pre-PIRLS 2011 assessments focus on two purposes for reading, namely reading for literary experience and reading to acquire and use information. The South African learners' test results were compared with those of the other benchmarking participants. Benchmarking participants followed the same procedures and met the same standards as the countries participating in PIRLS (Howie et al., 2011). The South African learners obtained the lowest score of all the participating countries. Overall, 43% of the South African Grade 5 learners did not attain the Low International benchmark compared to 5% internationally. Almost 4% reached the Advanced International benchmark compared to 8% internationally. Overall, South African Grade 5 learners who participated in the PIRLS 2011 study lag behind most countries in the attainment of higher international benchmarks. In the Pre-PIRLS 29% did not reach the benchmark for language and 71% reached the low international benchmark for language. 341 schools in South Africa were used in the study as a national representative sample. These schools were split into the better performing half (169 schools) and the worst performing half (172 schools). In the top half of the schools 10% were illiterate. Spaul comments on this in the following statement:

That is to say they could not locate and retrieve an explicitly-stated detail in a short and simple text. "These children cannot read at all. In the bottom half a shocking 51% of learners were completely illiterate. These children who don't learn to read properly are then promoted to the next grade but never learn to keep their heads above water for the rest of their school days." (Spaul, 2014 para. 10)

Another contributing dimension involves classroom and teacher factors. It was ascertained that on average learners in the Foundation Phase spent about five hours per week on reading. Significantly, teaching of most reading skills and strategies has been introduced at a much later stage for South African learners than internationally (Howie et al., 2011). South Africa is also in the unique position of having many learners who are not instructed in their home language.

### **1.3.2. THE SACMEQ REPORT**

The third Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) report (Moloi & Chetty, 2010) investigated amongst other things, the reading and mathematics achievement levels of Grade 6 learners and their teachers. 15 countries' school systems were looked at. These were Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A benchmark was set by the SACMEQ commission to compare scores. The findings of the report showed that the South African reading achievement scores were below the SACMEQ average of 500. The overall mean score for learners in reading was 492 in 2000 and 495 in 2007.

### **1.3.3. SYSTEMIC EVALUATIONS**

The Department of Education conducted two national systemic evaluations to establish literacy and numeracy levels in primary schools. These were conducted in 2001 and 2004. The 2001 systemic evaluation was done with the Foundation Phase and the 2004 evaluation was done with the Intermediate Phase.

The results of the 2001 evaluation in the Foundation Phase were as follows: The participating learners achieved an average of 39% for the language competency section. For numeracy the participants scored an average of 30% (Department of Education, 2003).

The 2004 evaluation in the Intermediate Phase was a follow-up study to the systemic evaluation of the Foundation Phase that was carried in 2001 and its main aim was to provide systems-based information about the health of learner performance of the Intermediate Phase (Department of Education, 2005). The results were as follows: for language competence 63% of the participants fell below the required language competence for their age level; 23% were satisfactory or partly competent; and 14% of learners were outstanding. These tests showed shockingly low levels of reading ability across the country (Department of Education, 2008).



#### 1.3.4. INTERVENTIONS AND THEIR IMPACT SINCE 2006

South Africa's much-worse-than-predicted results from PIRLS 2006 prompted important changes to the education system, in particular to the focus on reading literacy (Howie et al., 2011). The Department of Education acknowledged that there was a problem as far as literacy levels of South African learners were concerned. Their response to this crisis was the introduction of a National Reading Strategy in primary schools. However it did not achieve the desired effect.

The Department of Education (DoE) (2008) posits possible reasons for this. One concern is poor teacher competencies: many teachers in South Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching reading and writing; and many teachers do not know how to stimulate reading inside and outside the classroom. Another reason is that many South African schools do not have libraries; this impacts negatively on teaching and learning in general, and on literacy in particular. An additional factor identified by the DoE applies to teaching conditions: crowded and dilapidated classrooms hamper the implementation of effective teaching and learning.

Compounding such conditions is a print-poor environment that children inhabit. The research found that 40% of the parents interviewed had not completed primary education. This also makes it difficult for these parents to assist their children with schoolwork. In addition, issues around the Language of Learning and Teaching are problematic: in South Africa the reality is that most learners are not instructed in their mother tongue and schools do not have language policies to address the needs of their learners. Learners' right to learn in their mother tongue throughout the Foundation Phase is not ensured by most schools. Teachers teaching in the Foundation Phase have not been taught to teach reading in African home languages (Department of Education, 2008). It might also be the case that the National Reading Strategy was not rolled out to all schools. For example, at the school where I teach the National Reading Strategy was not implemented.

Given the foregoing evidence it is clear that certain schools require intervention programmes to address problems of poor reading literacy. This is especially true for those in economically depressed areas such as the school where the study was conducted. My research aims and questions will shed light on what I would like to achieve by implementing an intervention

programme to promote extensive reading as a way of addressing poor reading literacy in the school where I teach.

### **1.3.5. SYSTEMIC TESTING**

The Western Cape Education Department introduced the Systemic Testing in 2010 to determine how the abilities of Grades 3, 6 and 9 learners reflect within a framework of international standards. This was done to establish where support was needed. In 2011 more than 239 000 Grades 3, 6 and 9 learners took part in the tests. This was the second consecutive year the test was administered. The systemic tests have a pass requirement of 50%.

Education head, Penny Vinjevold is of the view that the levels of literacy in Grades 3, 6, and 9 are still at unacceptable levels (WCED, 2011). 30,4% of grade 3 learners achieved 50% or more; 31,5 percent of grade 6 learners passed and the language pass rate for Grade 9 learners stood at 44, 2%. She says this indicates that learners are not reading an adequate number of complex texts with comprehension and were not writing sufficiently long paragraphs (WCED, 2011).

If we take the foregoing evidence into consideration, it is clear that we need to find a solution to the problem learners experience with their language proficiency. What follows is the explanation of a programme based on the principle of extensive reading which could be implemented in an effort to alleviate this problem.

## **1.4. RESEARCH EVIDENCE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A success story in South Africa is the programme launched by The Reading Association of South Africa in three previously disadvantaged schools in Atteridgeville a township north of Pretoria. The programme was called ‘Reading is FUNdamental.’ The whole community was involved. Classes were held after school. The emphasis was to make reading fun. As a result of this project a fully funded computerised library with over 5 000 books was established Bathokwa Primary School. The library at Patogeng Primary was officially opened in March 2008 with a collection of books in excess of 2500.



Pre-tests and post-tests were administered in March and November 2011. Two groups were used. One served as a control group and one as an intervention group. Reading comprehension levels were very low in both Northern Sotho and English at pre-test time in both schools. The control group showed a marginal increase in comprehension levels in N. Sotho and a decrease in English levels in the post-test. The intervention group showed a non-significant improvement in N. Sotho but a large and significant improvement in English comprehension in the post-test results. The study of Pretorius & Lephala (2011) indicates a strong relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension. To support this claim the robust statistical tool, The Product Pearson Moment correlation, was used. This was done within a class group and not via a control intervention research method.

Concern about low levels of literacy in the Western Cape led to the launch of a reinforced Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (Western Cape Education Department, 2007). As research by the Western Cape Department of Education showed, a key aspect of the strategy was that learners be encouraged to read. This was founded on the belief that a learner who reads twenty to thirty minutes a week at home increases his/her achievement by 10%. It is therefore apparent that a culture of reading has to be promoted in the province (Western Cape Education Department, 2007).

The Department of Education acknowledges the fact that literacy levels are below standard. However a large number of learners are not even exposed to texts such as books, magazines comic strips and newspapers. It is necessary to compensate for this with a daily reading programme in the language class. An extensive reading intervention should also assist in filling this gap. As Cummins points out: “Both common sense and research have shown evidence that students improve their reading by reading. Copious studies already exist in support of extensive reading” (Cummins, 2012, p. 198). While such research indicates the necessity that an extensive reading programme be implemented during the language lesson or during a reading period, equally it implies that such a programme be incorporated into the curriculum. It is noteworthy that an intervention of this nature has not been implemented at the school where I teach.

As the PIRLS report (Howie et al., 2011) indicates: In South Africa on average households have few resources compared to many other participants in the PIRLS study. It is therefore necessary for schools where these learners attend, to try and bridge this gap by offering supportive intervention programmes.

Thus it is important that teachers invest in a reading corner or classroom library. Classroom libraries did not exist at the time. This could provide the resources needed for daily reading.

## **1.5. RESEARCH AIM**

The research aims to investigate whether the introduction of an extensive reading programme will improve the reading motivation and reading literacy skills of learners in one Grade 9 class.

My research goals are as follows:

- to implement an extensive reading programme to determine whether it would improve the reading proficiency of learners exposed to it over the course of one school year and
- to ascertain whether an extensive reading programme would improve learners' attitudes to reading.

## **1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the language proficiency of Grade Nine learners exposed to it over the course of one school year?
- What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the Grade Nine learner's' attitude towards intensive reading?

## **1.7. A DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH SITE**

The high school in the study is situated in a historically disadvantaged community. Many of the learners come from poor, single parent families or live with their grandparents because their parents either abandoned them or are deceased. Unemployment is rife. The school has a feeding scheme which provides learners with a nutritional plate of food during first interval. Surrounding the school the different areas in which the learners live are ruled by rival gangs.

The area is in the grip of these gangs who constantly fight for territory. Often learners cannot attend school because of this violence. This overflows into sporadic violence on the school premises because the boys at school are associated with these rival gangs. Learners are often caught in the crossfire and get hurt. All school activities then have to be planned around the safety of our learners.

The Department of Basic Education categorised the school as a quintile four school. Thus it is a fee-paying school, but parents may ask for exemption of fees if they can indicate they are unemployed or that they receive a grant from the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA). However, the subsidy provided by the government only covers the day-to-day running expenses of the school. This includes the purchase of stationery, cleaning aids and the utility bills. If the school sees the need to employ extra teaching staff to alleviate the problem of big classes or to employ remedial teachers or teaching assistants to assist learners who need more time, these funds would not suffice to cover such expenses. As a lack of funds cripples the school financially and some fundraising efforts have had to be aborted for safety reasons, teachers have had to purchase additional teaching materials from their own pockets.

The school has forty-two teaching members of staff, six non-teaching staff and eight security guards. Two of the security guards form part of the ‘Bambanani Safety Project,’ instituted by the Western Cape Department of Safety and Security. The other six are employed by the school.

Most teachers hold a degree and a teacher’s diploma. The school is a technical high school and some staff members teach in the Senior Phase only. Grades 10 to 12 are highly specialised teaching areas. Trades such as Motor Mechanics, Construction, Heavy Current as well as Engineering and Graphic Design are taught in the Further Education and Training Phase. Thirty percent of the learners in the Further Education and Training Phase follow the Commerce stream. They do subjects such as Accounting, Economics and Business Studies.

The school library was sacrificed in favour of a computer laboratory. This occurred a few years ago when space was needed for a computer laboratory. The then principal decided that the room utilised as a library was most suitable. However no alternative room was identified for the library. This resulted in the learners being deprived of a space where they could read, do research or homework – of a space in which reading resources were stored. Ironically the fields of Computer Application Technology and Information Technology did not develop into

school subjects. While the school population consists of 1 300 learners, only nine do Information Technology and fifteen are enrolled for Computer Applications Technology. This is so despite the fact that we sacrificed the library for the computer laboratories.

### **1.7.1. SCHOOL LANGUAGE POLICY**

The South African School's Act of 1996 stipulates that the governance of a school is vested in the school governing body and it determines the language policy of the school. Parents have the right to choose their children's language of learning and instruction. So if the school offers English as a home language, parents are allowed to enrol their children in this stream. Many parents enrol their children in the English Home Language stream although they do not speak the language at home. English becomes their Language of Learning and Teaching. These parents are of the view that their children stand a better chance of success after matric if they adopt English as their language of instruction. These learners often have poor language proficiency because they speak English in the classroom only. I therefore decided to research modes of intervention that could be implemented to improve the language proficiency of the learners by exposing them to extensive reading in English on a daily basis.

## **1.8. THE SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

### ***Research method***

I used action research as a research method because my aim was to investigate whether an extensive reading programme could improve the language proficiency of learners and possibly change their attitudes towards reading. I hoped the findings would inform the existing literature on extensive reading programmes. Further, I hoped that these may serve as a guideline for educators in similar situations, or language teachers who would like to improve the language proficiency of their learners.

The school at which the study was done has a problem with poor language proficiency and this has an impact on the academic success rate of the learners in examinations. Up to the time of the study the school had not attempted any serious intervention programme based on research and tried by experts in the field of reading or language proficiency.

The research was conducted with two Grade 9 English Home Language classes. Two classes – of 26 and 21 learners respectively – participated in this study based on an intervention on the principle of extensive reading. It was started in February 2013 and was conducted throughout the academic year in one of the two classes. The other class functioned as the control group. The reason for having chosen Grade 9 classes was linked to the hope that earlier exposure to this method would improve their chances of deriving potentially positive long-term benefits. The control group served as the yardstick by which to comparatively assess whether any success had been achieved through the introduction of this method. The purpose of the control group therefore was to determine whether any changes were to be found in the reading proficiency and attitudes of the learners who participated in the intervention. Both classes resolutely continued to receive the normal teaching as prescribed by the curriculum and no-one was disadvantaged.

## **1.9. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study has the potential to benefit to the school where it was conducted. The school could use the knowledge gained through the research as a basis for implementing the intervention in language classes. The intervention could become part of the language department's policy on reading in line with the policy of the Department of Basic Education. This would also link in with the department's concern about the low levels of literacy expressed in their launching a reinvigorated Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. A key aspect of this strategy is that learners be encouraged to read (Western Cape Education Department, 2007).

In addition, the study could be significant to all language teachers who are struggling to improve their learners' reading abilities or to inspire in them more positive attitudes towards reading. It does not only have to be for those who teach in English; teachers of other languages could employ the same strategies.

## 1.10. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

The thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One introduces the study. In this chapter, I explain the context of my study and the rationale behind the study. I describe the research problem and the intervention I propose to introduce. Also, I outline the research site and I discuss the scope of the study as well as the significance of the study.

In Chapter Two I offer a theoretical framework. I discuss poor reading literacy amongst South African learners and possible reasons for this situation. I briefly examine international and national studies on reading abilities of learners and results pertaining to these. This is followed by a discussion on the effects of poor literacy levels on learners' performance. I offer definitions for reading and indicate the difference between intensive and extensive reading. This is coupled with a discussion on different theories of reading. I explore the background of extensive reading in conjunction with an assessment of the advantages of extensive reading programmes and what has been shown by research. I start with international trends and then hone in on programmes in South Africa, notably on those that focus on the role of reading fluency. With a focus on constructivism theory I identify ways in which attitudes influence reading proficiency. The chapter concludes with the view that the research demonstrates that an extensive reading programme could both improve learner attitudes towards reading as well as language proficiency.

In Chapter Three the methodology I used is discussed. The research questions, design and procedures are described as well as the ethical issues that need to be taken into consideration.

In Chapter Four I analyse the research I conducted to establish the efficacy of introducing an extensive reading programme during the daily English Lesson. I use tables and graphs to represent the data collected.

In Chapter Five I discuss the research findings based on the analysis in Chapter Four. I discuss the strength, limitations and challenges of this intervention. This is accompanied by suggestions on how the intervention may be used successfully by future researchers. Finally, I critically evaluate my own experience and my own learning.



## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a conceptual framework for the research through which I seek to investigate whether an intervention such as extensive reading as propagated by Stephen Krashen (2004) could positively alter learner attitudes towards reading and improve their reading proficiency. Thus I review theories about learning to read and the importance of extensive reading for the development of reading. I also consider research that has been done in this field.

The chapter unfolds in three key ways. Firstly, I look at the definition of reading. Secondly I discuss the theories of reading as a social practice. This involves an examination of the background to extensive reading, and international studies conducted to improve language proficiency. Thirdly, I use this chapter to explore South African extensive reading projects that have been successful and the relevance the literature holds for my study.

### 2.2 DEFINITION OF READING

“Reading is decoding of language and comprehending it” (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006, p.42). It is also defined as follows: “Reading is often the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print” (Urquhart & Weir, 1998, p.22). According to Grabe (2009) it is evident that a single statement cannot capture the complexity of reading, especially if we think of the different purposes for reading as well as the varying processes that are called into play.

A range of skills are employed and taught to prepare learners to read. For example, certain words are called sight words, and learners are expected to see these words repeatedly, to memorise them and later to recognise them. In the Foundation Phase, learners are taught phonics. These sounds are then associated with letters. So in the first three years of school learners learn to decode and from Grade 4 onwards they use reading in order to learn. However, Nic Spaul, an education researcher, argues that many South African children do not attend schools where the fundamentals of reading are properly taught (Spaul 2014).

## 2.3 READING THEORIES

“One of the central debates in the literature on reading is whether reading is a skill or a social practice” (Janks, 2010, p.28). According to Janks this is a false dichotomy, an unhelpful form of binary thinking. It is her view that there can be little doubt that reading requires cognitive skills such as recognition, association, blending and understanding. In Luke and Freebody’s 1991 study (as cited in Janks, 2010) they suggest that there are four components to literacy success and that successful readers need the resources to take on four related roles as they read: the roles of code breaker, text participant, text user, and text analyst. According to Luke and Freebody the following happens during reading: as a code breaker, a reader needs to be able to engage in the “technology” of written script that is, with the sound-symbol relationships, left to right directionality, and alphabet knowledge. As a text participant, the reader connects the text with his or her own background knowledge – including knowledge of the world, cultural knowledge and knowledge of the generic structure. As a text user, a reader is able to participate in the social activities in which written text plays a major part and to recognise what counts as successful reading in a range of social contexts. Lastly, as a text analyst, the reader reads a text as a crafted object – one that is written by an author who has a particular ideology or set of assumptions. An effective reader reads critically, recognising in the text what is assumed, not said, implied or unquestioned.

Hillary Janks (2010) suggests that the biggest problem with literacy learning in South African schools is that too frequently learners do not get past the decoding and basic comprehension phase which takes place during the Foundation Phase. Janks (2010) makes this claim when she compares the roles of the reader as explained by Luke and Freebody (1990 as cited in Janks, 2010), with the expectations of PIRLS.

Freebody and Luke’s 1990 study (as cited in Janks, 2010) has shown text decoders can ‘crack the code’ of the text they read: they can decipher the marks on the page. Text decoding includes phonic, phonemic, sight words, and reading aloud pedagogies. These work with lower order cognitive skills. Readers who can decode, without understanding, are able to read aloud; this is what Wardaugh’s study (as cited in Smith, 1978, in Janks, 2010) refers to as ‘barking at print’ (Janks, 2010, p.30). We often fail to teach our learners beyond this phase and they do not therefore become text users, participants or text analysts.



As text participants, learners need to revisit texts, discuss them and offer their own opinions about them. This role requires readers to understand what the text is saying as well as what the author is inferring (Janks, 2010). In the process readers also need to bring their own knowledge to the texts. For it is by being text participants that learners gain more information about the world. If this exposure to developing critical thinking skills is absent for any of several reasons such as: not progressing past the decoding phase or not being exposed to a print-rich environment, then learners might struggle to participate effectively in debates about the content of what they study.

A reading intervention programme such as extensive reading could improve learners' ability to become text participants. Once learners realise the value regular reading adds to their knowledge and understanding, reading may become a social practice. And once reading as a social practice becomes firmly inculcated in learners, they may feel empowered and hopefully the reading habit will be self-sustained. Learners will want to know more than they know. Drawing on the evidence above, I suggest to compensate for such problems, literacy learning could incorporate a reading intervention during language lessons at school. Such an intervention, performed on a daily basis could develop the learner's ability to see themselves as readers. Interacting with print on a regular basis might develop it as a social practice rather than an isolated exercise when learners only read for purposes of class work.

## **2.4. WHAT IS EXTENSIVE READING?**

Extensive reading is reading as much as possible for your own pleasure, at a difficulty level at which you can read fluently and quickly without looking up words. This is different from intensive reading which is based on a close reading of a text and reading comprehension exercises and is aimed at making sense of text and building analytical skills. Free Voluntary Reading is an example of an extensive reading programme as propagated by Stephen Krashen (2004). This is the specific programme used in my study. Another extensive reading programme is called Drop Everything and Read (DEAR). These intervention programmes have been tried out at certain times. Sustained Silent Reading is also an example of an extensive reading programme.

### 2.4.1. BACKGROUND TO EXTENSIVE READING

According to Fader and Shaevitz's 1966 study (as cited by Grabe, 2009) since the 1950s teachers and reading specialists have recommended filling classrooms with attractive and accessible books for students to read. However, it was only twenty years later in the late 1970s that research was published to indicate that extensive reading was beneficial in the improvement of reading. Eventually the worth of an intervention programme was recognised. "Until the late 1970s, relatively little effort was made to demonstrate that such programs would produce the learning outcomes often claimed of them" (Grabe, 2009, p.314). In a meta-analysis of ten studies of extensive reading programmes, Wiesendanger and Birlem's 1984 study (as cited by Grabe, 2009) found five studies that sustained reading for longer than six months. All had positive outcomes for reading improvement; but the opposite was found in studies where extensive reading was maintained for only five months or fewer. This indicates that a reading programme must be sustained for at least six months to show any benefits. Such early evidence underpins the rationale that an extensive reading programme must be sustained for a long period to reap the benefits thereof.

Extensive reading means reading what you would like to read. This implies the learner has the right to choose a book and can read it in his/ her own time. This approach is meant to develop a love for reading. At school this constitutes recreational reading. The more learners read it is hoped, the greater their chances of improving their vocabulary, spelling and language comprehension. It is therefore important that teachers allocate ten to twenty minutes of the daily language lesson to allow learners to read quietly. An important aspect of this type of reading is that no oral activities, book reports or any assignments be required. The emphasis is on reading. Learners do not have to finish their books; they are allowed to choose something else to read if they are not enjoying a book. Essential to extensive reading, according to Krashen (2006) is that teachers also read for pleasure. When learners see teachers modelling the practice this may convince them to read more frequently because teachers are often seen as role models.

## **2.5. BENEFITS OF EXTENSIVE READING**

Incidental learning takes place during extensive reading. Stephen Krashen (2004) propagates the principle of extensive reading implemented on a daily basis. Krashen and others have found that the implementation of an extensive reading programme could improve learners' reading ability if it becomes part of the daily timetable (Krashen, 2006). Krashen (2003) makes the claim that extensive reading could be the most powerful educational tool in language education. The following benefits are mentioned by Krashen (2006): extensive reading develops reading competence, vocabulary development, the ability to handle complex grammatical construction and superior literacy development.

### **2.5.1. WHAT OTHER WRITERS SAY ABOUT EXTENSIVE READING**

#### ***Vocabulary growth***

According to Stanovich (1986) learners who read a lot get into the positive feedback loop: the more they read, the wider their vocabulary; the more they comprehend and the greater their enjoyment of reading. These learners then spend more time reading. Waring and Nation (2004) point out the relationship between reading and vocabulary acquisition. In each text there are bound to be words that are unknown to the reader. However if he/she understands the meaning of most words, this knowledge will assist the reader to work out the meaning of the unknown words in context. For this to unfold as learners read for pleasure, at least 95% of the vocabulary should be known if they are to guess at unknown words successfully. It is said that comparison studies involving the benefits of extensive reading on vocabulary growth have also indicated that students learn 5-15% of new words from incidental exposure to these words while reading, and this percentage increases with increasing numbers of repeated exposure to words (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). In Laufer's 1999 study (as cited in Waring and Nation, 2004) suggests that a vocabulary of 3000 word families of general English is enough for a good understanding of an English text such as a novel. One important way in which it may be achieved is by extensive reading.

### ***Individual development***

Nation (1997) describes the benefits of extensive reading as follows: it is an individual activity; it allows readers to choose what they like to read and provides for learning to occur outside the classroom. Contributing to this insight, Cunningham and Stanovich (2003) assert that extensive reading is to the benefit of everyone, not only smart learners.

It develops learner autonomy because it is an individual activity. Learners can stop and start at will and read what they are comfortable with. Extensive reading is also the most available form of comprehensible input. If they choose reading material carefully, they encounter language conventions repeatedly. This consolidates and extends their existing knowledge. General linguistic competence is enhanced for example in writing, speaking and correct use of syntax. Many learners have limited experience and knowledge of the world they live in – both cognitively and affectively. Extensive reading opens a new world to learners. Vocabulary growth will only occur in context if learners are exposed to reading repeatedly. By relying on context while reading, learners are more easily able to deduce meaning in unknown texts as well. Reading and writing are connected. If we read often, we are able to write better as well Grabe (2009).

### ***Reading fluency***

Fluent readers automatically recognise a large number of words without having to think about them, sound them out or work out their meaning. The brain is freed from such activities to focus on comprehension and on improving the quality of their reading. Learners who read haltingly usually lose the thread halfway through the text. The amount of reading engaged in habitually distinguishes a fluent reader from a poor reader. Children who read often become fluent readers. This is where extensive reading can play a role. Such a programme entails reading on a daily basis. “Fluency development involves making the best use of what is already known” (Nation, 2009, p.2). Based on current research perspectives, a common definition for fluency in reading is “the ability to read rapidly with ease and accuracy, and to read with appropriate expression and phrasing” (Grabe, 2009, p.76). Grabe further argues:

Such a definition of fluency includes skills in rapid word recognition, rapid reading rate, extensive exposure to print accuracy in comprehension and incremental learning. Fluency builds automaticity and chunking. As a result, fluency promotes accuracy and accuracy is an indication of increasing language performance (Grabe, 2009, p.76).

A review of related research suggests that there is considerable and growing evidence for the impact of extensive reading on reading achievement. According to Grabe (2009) the research is persuasive that greater amounts of reading and extensive reading, when carried out consistently and appropriately over an extended period of instructional time, will significantly improve students' reading abilities. Extensive reading would thus improve reading fluency if it is sustained on a regular basis. It ensures that the act of reading becomes automated, leading to autonomy. Reading as a sustained practice improves reading fluency and as such FVR, a specific extensive reading programme, is an important and highly beneficial activity to improve reading fluency. It must be seen as vital to reading fluency. Another advantage of extensive reading is that it teaches and promotes the love of reading.

Thus the literature published by researchers has shown that extensive reading develops learners' reading proficiency in the following ways: it stimulates vocabulary growth, individual development and fluency.

### **2.5.2. COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT HYPOTHESIS**

The Comprehensible Input Hypothesis as proposed by Krashen (2003) states that we acquire language and develop literacy when we understand what we hear and what we read, when we receive "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 2003). According to Krashen (2003, p.1) "language acquisition is a subconscious process; while it is happening we are not aware that it is happening, and the competence developed this way is stored in the brain subconsciously." In both first and second language development, students who participate in classes that include in-school self-selected reading programmes (known as Sustained Silent Reading) typically outperform comparison students, especially when the duration of treatment is longer than an academic year (Krashen 2003, 2004,).

The point of the 'comprehensible input' hypothesis Krashen claims, is that what is needed for language acquisition and extensive reading provides learner access to comprehensible input. The comprehensible hypothesis states that the following conditions are needed for acquisition to take place:

- The input should be abundantly available.
- The input should be comprehensible.

- The input should be slightly above learners' current level of competence. (Renandya, 2007, p.135)

Extensive reading can provide learners with comprehensible input as learners read at their own level and pace.

## **2.6. EXTENSIVE READING AS A CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE**

According to Renandya (2007) an extensive reading programme must serve as a supplementary class library scheme, attached to an English course. This implies that pupils are only competing against themselves, and it is up to the teacher to provide the motivation and monitoring to ensure that the maximum number of books is read in the time available. extensive reading is different to intensive reading. Intensive reading involves short texts through which the teacher guides learners. Intensive and extensive reading should complement each other in a classroom (Renandya, 2007). Intensive reading will be of no benefit if learners do not comprehend what they read. This is where extensive reading could support intensive reading. If language acquisition is improved by extensive reading, learners might be able to understand what they read during intensive reading. According to Renandya (2007) when we consider these interactive dynamics it makes sense to implement an extensive reading programme at schools whose learners hail from low socio-economic backgrounds. The opportunity to read regularly, as offered by an intervention programme could fill the void created by poverty.

As stated in Chapter One, the learners at the school where the study was done are not exposed to a print-rich environment, do not have a comprehensive knowledge of what happens in the world and may have attended primary schools where the foundation was not laid. For them to be enabled to master intensive reading skills, they need to receive all the assistance they can get, as Renandya (2007) proposes. Cummins finds Guthrie's assertion helpful when the latter says:

Empirical evidence suggests that students whose family background was characterized by low income and low education, but who were highly engaged readers, substantially outscored students who come from higher income and higher education, but who themselves were less engaged readers (Guthrie, 2004, as cited by Cummins, 2012).



Introducing extensive reading as part of the language class does not mean Intensive Reading becomes less important. There should be a combination of the two as mentioned previously.

The reality is however that extensive reading is often not included in the planning of a language course. There are several reasons for this: it could be time consuming; teachers have a syllabus to complete or the education system is examination driven. Yet an equal reality is learners will always struggle to comprehend text material if they are not systematically exposed to extensive reading.

The results of the different tests answered by South African learners bear this out, underpinning the fact that interventions such as an extensive reading programme might improve capacity. The following section outlines some of these test results.

## **2.6. EXTENSIVE READING AS A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO LOW LITERACY LEVELS**

As discussed in Chapter One, the results of the Annual National Assessments, systemic testing as well as the findings of the Reading Strategy indicated that the learners at the school where I teach as well as the learners in many South African schools, score very low results when they participate in national tests to determine whether they are on par with what is expected of learners in a particular grade. Participation in pre-PIRLS, PIRLS and Southern and East Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) (Moloi & Chetty, 2010) studies all produced below average results.

These research studies show that South African learners definitely need serious interventions to improve their capacity in reading and comprehension. For instance, at the school where I teach two thirds of the learners registered for English as a home language did not achieve 50% for the language assessment. A possible solution may lie in the adoption of an intervention programme such as extensive reading.

Reading and viewing is seen as central to successful learning across the curriculum, and to full participation in society and the world of work (Department of Education, 2008).

However, the teaching of literacy is not easy because learners are at different levels of development. This circumstantial problem also applies in the school where I teach.

In schools a possible solution to the problem of poor literacy skills and its effect on results may be the implementation of the programme described earlier, called extensive reading. “Keeping students interested in reading and learning might make it possible for them to overcome what might otherwise be insuperable barriers to academic success” (Cummins, 2012, p. 15).

## **2.7. WHAT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME?**

Besides passion and enthusiasm, the success of an extensive reading programme requires meticulous planning. Factors to take into consideration are proposed by authors Renandya (2007) as well as Grabe (2009). These factors are outlined in the section that follows.

### **2.7.1. PLANNING**

The continuously poor results obtained by the learners who are enrolled for English Home language brought about the introduction of a reading intervention as a possible solution. The planning of a reading intervention must be done meticulously, preferably in the year prior to implementation. Teachers should familiarise themselves with the rationale behind extensive reading and its organisation. The English Department at the school should include the programme in their yearly planning. Resources such as suitable books must be sourced. They should read the material available in the classroom library before the time to know what these are all about. If it is not suitable books need to be found at libraries such as Edulis. Space inside the classroom should be demarcated and cleared to ensure enough room is available. Learners who belong to the local library could be asked to bring along their own books.

### **2.7.2. FUNDING**

Teachers could ask the headmaster to include in the school’s budget the funds for the purchase of books with which to stock the classroom libraries. Learners may be asked to make book donations, sponsors may be located, and teachers may draw on their own collection or ask colleagues for donations. Letters could be written to prospective donors. These could be non-profit organisations, local businesses where parents purchase their necessary supplies, local libraries could be asked for old books. A quarterly fundraiser at the



school could be earmarked for the purchase of books. The school could take out subscriptions for magazines such as *National Geographic and Popular Mechanics*.

### **2.7.3. ACCESSIBILITY**

According to Renandya (2007), a successful reading programme requires that certain factors be in place. Learners should read large amounts of material and have a choice as to what they would like to read. They should be able to comprehend what they read. Enough resources should be available and provision should be made for all learner preferences. “Book floods, recommended since the 1950s often involve stocking a library with 50-100 books and encouraging students to read these books independently” (Grabe, 2009, p.312).

In addition, for a successful programme, there should be time availed for extensive reading in class, a variety of texts types should be on offer both in class and in the broader environment, and there should be discussion with learners to establish their preferences and creativity in stimulating their interest in reading. Incentives could help to initiate learners’ into their reading practice. Learners could be encouraged to share and recommend reading material.

Also, Grabe (2009) claims that for extensive reading to be reasonably successful, a significant effort towards motivating learners is required in addition to supplying them with many interesting, attractive, and accessible texts.

## **2.8. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMMES FROM INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH**

Research by Elley and Mangubhai conducted in 1977 and published in 1979 (the follow up research was conducted in 1980 and the results published in 1981) demonstrated the tremendous advances in English language growth in an extensive reading intervention in Fiji. Pupils in sixteen rural primary schools followed a book flood programme in South-eastern Fiji in order to expose learners in rural areas to English. Learners had been struggling with language demands. Enough evidence served to indicate that a book-based approach intended to enrich children’s exposure led to a general improvement in learners’ learning proficiency.

Learners in fifteen schools were pre-tested and eight schools selected to participate in the extensive reading intervention. They were matched with four control groups in the area. Experimental classes were given 250 books each for a class library and teachers were trained to use the resources effectively. Class 4 and 5 teachers were used. Books were carefully selected. These books were highly interesting and illustrated storybooks. Pupils were encouraged to read every day; hence the extensive reading component. Half of the sixteen teachers followed a “Shared Book Experience”, method of reading, following a 3-day workshop and demonstration; the other half used an extensive reading approach. Pupils read between 20 and 30 minutes each day. When compared with control groups after eight-and-a-half months, significant changes were found to have occurred. The book flood group’s results in language acquisition were between 12-17% higher than that of the control group. In order to validate their previous findings, Elley and Mangubhai conducted a follow-up study in 1981 to ensure that the improvements in the first study were not the outcome of any artificial spurt due to novelty or over-stimulation (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981).

The impact of the intervention was significant, but it is important to note that the reading intervention had to be done every day since spasmodic application resulted in very little improvement. Eventually these results improved even more dramatically in the second year of the Book Flood despite the fact that no extra time was needed for language acquisition. Also, it seemed to be popular with learners.

In the first year of the book flood an improvement in writing skills was only marginal (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981). However, by the second year these skills had improved greatly as a result of the impact of the first reading intervention. In the end the Book Flood study also produced extensive improvement not only in reading, but also in writing skills. The Book Flood group’s results showed significant progress in their fluency, imagination, range of vocabulary and freedom from mechanical or grammatical faults (Elley & Mangubhai, 1981). These results indicate that the intervention to try to improve learners’ reading ability and to change their attitudes towards reading requires more than one year.

The Sweet Valley Studies (Cho & Krashen, 1994) constitute another relevant investigation on the subject. Four Korean women were asked to participate in a free reading programme over several months. They were asked to read for pleasure in English in their free time. The quantity of reading material and the time spent reading remained unspecified. These women were given books from the Sweet Valley High Series. The results showed that all the women

became enthusiastic readers, their vocabulary acquisition increased, their ability to speak and understand English improved and their grammatical accuracy improved (Cho & Krashen, 1994).

Greaney and Hegarty (1987 as cited in Grabe 2010) carried out research in Ireland on various factors that influence leisure-time reading. Greaney (1980 as cited in Grabe 2009) studied approximately 1,000 fifth-grade students who were asked to keep diaries of their out-of-school activities for a number of days. Greaney (1980 as cited in Grabe 2009) found a positive correlation between the amount of time spent on reading books, and reading comprehension. He concurs with Cummins (2012) who points out that students' level of reading engagement is a much better indicator of literacy performance than the socio-economic background from which the learner hails. If we interest the learners in regular reading it can help them overcome their home circumstances. Furthermore, Cummins (2012) claims that 15-year-olds who come from a low socio-economic background but are highly engaged readers outscored learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds who do not read regularly: "This finding suggests the stunning conclusion that engaged reading can overcome traditional barriers to reading achievement, including gender, parental education and income" (Cummins, 2012).

### **2.8.1. SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH**

Research published around the world about extensive reading, has shown positive results. The Fiji Book Flood showed enormous advantages to language growth. The Sweet Valley High Studies improved the participants' English acquisition. Greaney and Hegarty (1987 as cited in Grabe 2009) found that in Ireland, learners who spent much time reading improved their reading comprehension. Extensive reading can also overcome socio-economic barriers to literacy development. The reason for this is, a reading programme offers the resources that learners from poor areas would not have access to at home.

## **2.9. SUCCESSFUL EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMMES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

### **2.9.1. THE READING ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA**

The Reading Association of South Africa (RASA) has promoted reading since 2005 and is associated with the International Literacy Association. It provides a platform where researchers, experts and academics can share their experiences regarding the development of literacy in South Africa. Reading centres have been established at schools, community halls and libraries. The Reading Association of South Africa has run some successful courses for teachers and learners from disadvantaged communities (RASA, 2002). These constitute efforts to assist learners and teachers from print-poor backgrounds to start reading.

### **2.9.2. THE WORDWORKS EARLY LITERACY PROJECT**

Another successful project in South Africa is the Wordworks Early Literacy Programme. This programme trains and coordinates groups of volunteers to work in schools and libraries to provide early grade learners with the support they need to learn to read and write successfully. It was launched in 2005 (O'Carroll & Hickman, 2012). An example of one of the programmes is, "The Valley Development Project" in communities of Ocean View and Masiphumelele in the Western Cape. The Family Community Motivators Project is one of their early learning support programmes. It aims to increase the capacity of parents and caregivers of children not attending pre-school to support early learning at home (O'Carroll & Hickman, 2012).

### **2.9.3. READING IN A DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOL**

Evidence to support the claim that extensive reading may be an effective intervention for improving reading abilities arises from studies conducted by Pretorius and Ribbens (Pretorius & Ribbens, 2005). Central to their finding is that while many learners are able to decode, the necessary comprehension does not complement the level of decoding fluency. I think a

possible reason for this may be that learners do not read often enough to build their vocabulary and to comprehend what they read.

#### **2.9.4. READING IS FUNDamental**

As described in chapter one, the Reading is FUNDamental programme (Pretorius & Lephala, 2011) launched at three previously disadvantaged schools in Atteridgeville, Pretoria, is an example where an intervention strategy succeeded and improved learners' language proficiency. "Language is the vehicle through which and in which schooling is done, but in whatever language children do their schooling, reading needs to be a central school activity;" ( Pretorius & Lephala, 2011). *Reading is FUNDamental* was a 5 year literacy intervention. The project was multi levelled. Its aim was to improve the school performance of learners by building resources and capacity. An example of what was done is; a fully functional library was established at the schools. By establishing the library, learners were encouraged to read regularly.

#### **2.9.5. LITERACY AND NUMERACY STRATEGY**

The Western Cape Education Department has undertaken extensive research into literacy rates in the province. The research indicated that learners are not performing at the level expected of them. Subsequently a strengthened Literacy and Numeracy Strategy was introduced. It was reiterated that a learner who reads twenty to thirty minutes a week at home increases his/her achievement by 10%. It is therefore apparent that a culture of reading needs to be promoted in the province (Western Cape Education Department, 2007).

In addition to the foregoing, research by an expert on the subject of reading, Elizabeth Pretorius (as cited by Spaul, 2014) has identified four necessary criteria to ensure all children learn to read:

- Teachers need to understand when and how children acquire reading and comprehension skills, as well as how to teach reading.
- Children need easy access to interesting books in their own language and in English.

- Children constantly need to be motivated to read, and to be given a perception of reading as an activity pleasurable for students and teachers.
- Children need to be given plenty of opportunities to read in the classroom and beyond it (Spaull, 2014 para. 15-18).

## **2.10. HOW ATTITUDES INFLUENCE READING PROFICIENCY**

Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) claim students need two vital things if they are to develop into effective readers. They must possess the skill as well as the will to read. In this regard extensive reading has been shown to improve reading proficiency as well as reading motivation. Research has shown that reading *attitudes* play an important role in developing reading proficiency.

The Dictionary of Education defines attitude as “the predisposition or tendency to react specifically towards an object, situation or value; usually accompanied by feelings and emotions” (Briggs, 1987, p.202). Furthermore Briggs (1987) points out that a positive attitude produces a motivational stimulus that promotes and sustains learning.

Over the last fifteen years researchers have shown an increased interest in what motivates children to read. Since extensive reading is an exigent activity that often involves choice by the reader, motivation is crucial to reading engagement (Seitz, 2010). Motivation ignites behaviour. It is thus clear that motivation is important when developing learners’ reading proficiency and habits. The following suggests what may be achieved through habituation: “Cohen (1999) unobtrusively observed 120 eighth-grade students during Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) time over a two-week period. She noted that enthusiasm for Sustained Silent Reading was not high at the beginning of the school year, but increased after one or two months” (Krashen, 2003, p.24).

Since it is indicated by research that attitudes are absent at birth, it is necessary to try and inculcate a positive attitude towards reading at a young age. Children are not born with positive or negative attitudes, for attitudes are developed as children become involved with people and things in their environment. Therefore attitudes are developed during preschool years. Although modification is difficult, teachers can bring about change in children’s attitudes (Briggs, 1987, p.202).



If learners start to find extensive reading enjoyable it may improve their attitudes towards reading.

The PIRLS 2011 reported that each successive assessment has shown a strong positive relationship between learner attitudes towards reading and actual reading achievement. The type of reading activities in which they engage may encourage and strengthen positive reading attitudes (Howie et al., 2011, p.56). In the case of the Sweet Valley High Studies, the reader participants' enthusiasm increased relative to the time they were exposed to reading (Cho & Krashen, 1994).

Adding to such exploration, Day and Bamford (1998) draw on expectancy-value theories. According to these, the motivation to do different tasks depends on the expectancy of success in the specific task (de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok 2013). The more L2 learners, who do not speak English as a home language but receive instruction in it, realise the possibility of understanding a book and the value of reading the greater the possibility that they will read (de Burgh-Hirabe & Feryok 2013).

Further to this point, three similar studies probing motivation in extensive reading in English Foreign Language were conducted by Nishino (2007) in Japanese high school studies. The aim was to investigate motivational changes over two-and-a-half years of extensive reading. The study found that love for L1 transferred to L2 and the autonomy extensive reading brings to students motivated them. The importance of the first language (L1) is also emphasised by Judge. Judge (2011) looked at enthusiastic readers. Judge noted that love for L1 which transfers to L2, and also the appeal of autonomy were important motivating factors for learners. However, there is no clear pattern to dynamically change motivation for extensive reading.

According to Cummins (2012) access to print results in higher reading achievement. Similar studies that use rigorous research designs show that increasing children's access to print material generally does improve children's reading proficiency. For instance, Seitz (2010) claims that increasing children's access to print material appears to produce more positive attitudes toward reading, which in turn increases the amount of reading children do. Stanovich's study (1993, as cited in Murray, 2011), refers to the reciprocal effects of extensive reading as the 'Matthew effect': the rich get richer and the poor get poorer – a gap opens up between learners who enter the positive feedback loop and those who do not. A number of other studies have demonstrated that extensive reading is closely associated with



positive attitudes and motivation for reading. This is borne out by studies conducted by Guthrie and Cox (2001) who report strong relationships between motivation and the amount of reading. Similarly, Wang and Guthrie (2004) identify a strong path relationship between motivation and the amount of reading for enjoyment undertaken. Lightbrown, Halter, White & Horst (2002) report positive attitudes that evolved in a three-year reading and listening-while-reading programme. Positive attitudes toward extensive reading programmes were also reported by Elley (1991, 2000 as cited in Grabe, 2004), Mason and Krashen (1997), Rob and Susser (1989, 1997), and Taguchi, Takayasu-Maass and Gorsuch (2004). Under conditions reasonably predisposed to implementation, such as availability of materials and acceptance of an intervention, extensive reading provides a positive experience for students and produces positive motivation for reading Grabe (2004).

Parents stay the most important role models in children's lives. They can be one of the earlier significant influences in children's lives. Parents have an important role to play in the way they model reading behaviour. In particular, this is important for young children who are still forming their own reading habits and attitudes. Parents who promote reading as an important and valuable activity can motivate children to read (Howie et al., 2011).

The PIRLS 2011 survey indicates that of the South African parents who were asked whether they like reading, a mere 22% responded in the positive: Maley (2009) claims "As we read successfully in our second language, we are encouraged to read more. The effect reading your first book has on self-esteem is undeniable." Krashen calls it "a home run" book (Maley 2009, p.1). We need to ensure that we expose the learners to compelling reading material that will create the desire to read more (Maley 2009). An extensive reading programme as part of the English lesson may fulfil this if we ensure that we have the reading material to stimulate learners' interest and motivation.

## **2.10. CONCLUSION**

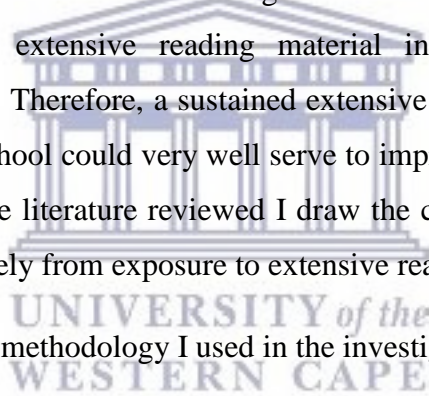
If learners struggle to read, it is important to intervene. Research conducted internationally and locally has confirmed the findings that in the case of learners who were exposed to extensive reading programmes such as Free Voluntary Reading and the Book Flood their

comprehension development increased (Elley & Mangubhai 1981). Reading and writing skills also improved as well as reading abilities (Grabe, 2009).

The literature reviewed in this chapter clearly demonstrates the important role extensive reading intervention programmes could perform in improving the language proficiency of learners, as well as the positive change it may engender in their attitudes towards reading. I discuss evidence from several large-scale studies about literacy levels in South Africa. I look at possible reasons for low literacy levels and then at the advantages of extensive reading. I also discuss the importance of the influence of attitudes on reading proficiency.

Empirical evidence indicates that students whose family background is characterized by low income and low education, but who themselves are highly-engaged readers, substantially outscored students who come from higher income and higher education, but who themselves were less engaged readers (Guthrie, 2004, as cited by Cummins, 2012). The ability of disadvantaged learners is often not the determining factor for reading proficiency but rather their continual exposure to extensive reading material including books, newspapers, magazines and cartoon strips. Therefore, a sustained extensive reading programme, initiated by language departments at school could very well serve to improve the language proficiency of these learners. Based on the literature reviewed I draw the conclusion that South African learners could benefit immensely from exposure to extensive reading.

In Chapter Three I discuss the methodology I used in the investigation.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1. RESEARCH AIM**

This research aimed to investigate whether the introduction of an extensive reading programme would improve the reading motivation and reading proficiency of a class of Grade Nine learners exposed to it over the course of one year.

### **3.2. THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS GUIDED THE RESEARCH**

3.2.1. What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the reading proficiency of Grade Nine learners exposed to it over the course of one school year?

3.2.2. What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the Grade Nine learners' attitude towards extensive reading?

This chapter describes the research approach, method and design; the research site and the participants in the study. It also gives an account of the process implemented to find answers to the research questions. It includes a statement of ethics, an outline of the limitations of the study, the method of data analysis together with comment on matters of validity and generalizability, and finally a brief conclusion.

### **3.3. RESEARCH APPROACH**

The study constitutes qualitative research, or exploratory research. It intends to uncover trends of thought and opinion – to dive deeper into the problem (Wyse, 2011). The quotation that follows offers another definition of qualitative research, that is:

Any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification and instead, the kind of research that produces findings arrived at from real-world settings where the 'phenomenon of interest' unfolds naturally (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600).

This study is located within the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is a philosophy that claims children learn best when they construct meaning themselves and find their own solutions to problems: “Constructivism’s central contention is that each of us can only learn by making sense of what happens to us, by actively constructing a world for ourselves” (Barnes, 1992, p.123). At the school where I teach I realized that learners encountered a problem with the acquisition of language. The learners had a limited view of the world and can only construct what they know. Many learners who have no previous knowledge will struggle to comprehend what is being taught. “Information that finds no place in our existing schemes is quickly forgotten. That is why some pupils seem so easily to forget from one lesson to the next” (Barnes, 1992, p.124).

The interaction between research and the ability to form ideas from it is very much rooted in the constructivist paradigm. While the research was being conducted the results obtained were to assist me in formulating ideas or “constructing” ideas about the sample of learners engaged with. These learners had never been exposed to reading on a daily basis. It was hoped that the research would promote an improvement in their language ability or at least, change their attitudes towards reading.

I decided to embark upon an intervention to try to improve the reading proficiency and to change learners’ attitudes to positive ones. This was done in accordance with action research – the approach which I used for the study. During the intervention I planned to create the conditions to encourage extensive reading. These conditions did not exist generally with students as emphasized in Chapter One. The social environment and exposure learners grow up with; influence their learning of the learners at the school where I teach. “Human learning pre-supposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” Vygotsky ( as cited by Edwards and Mercer in Barnes 1992, p.128).

### **3.3.1. RESEARCH METHOD**

Action research is an enquiry which is carried out in order to understand, to evaluate and then to change a situation. In this project it is driven by an interest in improving educational practice.

Cohen and Manion (1994, p.192) explain action research as essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. Action

research is a constructivist enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience. According to Kurt Lewin (1946 as cited in Rose, Spinks & Canhoto 2015) action research is a spiral process consisting of the following steps:

1. Planning
2. Taking action
3. Fact-finding about the results of the action
4. Reflection and further planning.

Educational researchers gained respect which gave rise to action research's development. This method aims to produce knowledge as well as improve the practice of teachers (Pring 2000).

Action research as defined by Peter Reason and Hillary Bradbury (2002, cited by Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire 2003, p. 10) is:

A participatory, democratic process with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.

Action research can be used for a variety of purposes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Two of these are:

- Replacing a traditional teaching method with a discovery method, and
- Integrating learning practice.

As noted earlier, the action research method seeks to bring together action and reflection. I needed to take cognizance of this throughout the research period. To this end I identified the problem: poor language and reading proficiency as well as a lack of motivation amongst learners. I reflected on my practice and realized I had not actively promoted reading at all. I decided to implement a reading intervention called extensive reading as part of the daily

English lesson. The learners were going to read for ten minutes at the end of every English lesson. The outcomes of the intervention would determine whether I was successful. Reflection would then be done by me in order to plan further interventions. Furthermore, “Action Research is a work in progress” (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003, p.11). This means that as the researcher I needed to evaluate my research procedure regularly and acknowledge when outcomes were not what I expected and make the necessary adjustments.

According to Cummins (2012) it is necessary for educators, both individually and collectively, to be agents of change in their own schools. To ensure that the intervention stays true to the action research approach, as stated earlier I reflected on the process on an on-going basis and recorded my reflections. The approach entails looking back in order to make progress. Hence one of the fundamental principles of action research is the primary responsibility for deciding on a course of action, which may lead to improvement, evaluation and the result of strategies tried out in practice (Osman, 2004, p. 47). Learners were free to choose a book and read it at their own pace (Krashen, 2004).

### **3.3.2. THE RESEARCH SITE**

The high school in which this research was done is situated in a previously disadvantaged area in the northern suburbs of the Cape Flats. The annual matric results remain below standard. The school is classified as an underperforming school. The pass rate for the 2013 matric examination was 57%. Equally low were the Annual National Assessment results for Grade 9, which fell below the average of the educational district of which the school forms part. The average percentage for the District North Circuit 6 was 50% for English Home Language, but the Grade 9 learners in our school scored 43%. Thus the school did not achieve the 50% benchmark required by the Department of Education. This resulted in the Grade 9 learners of the following year writing a common paper set by the circuit.

Support at home for emergent literacy or early literacy is often absent in the lives of learners. There are several possible reasons for this. Learners hail from an economically depressed area and there is a not always money for books. Some parents’ experience of school was not positive and so they shy away from exposing their children to books. While at school, learners fail to see education as a vehicle to a brighter future. This could be because they are struggling to stay abreast of the work. They may have a very poor grasp of the language. Some form of intervention seemed necessary, prompting me to embark on this study.



People live in low-cost housing as well as state-provided housing. There are many backyard dwellings where family members who cannot afford accommodation reside. There is also an informal settlement close to the school and ten percent of our learners live in this settlement.

There are no major industries that may have offered work close to the area and people need to travel great distances to work. As a result many of the learners come from poor, single-parent families. The school is categorized as a Quintile 4 school which means it is a fee-paying school. Parents need to pay R550.00 per annum but unemployed parents may apply for exemption of school fees and rebates are given to parents who have more than one learner enrolled at the school. However, school fees are often not paid. This is due to unemployment on the one hand, whereas on the other, it seems as if school fees are not a priority for parents. A case in point is that the school once withheld the progress reports of the learners who owed school fees (although by law it is not allowed) and R3200 was collected on the morning when reports were issued. There is also a history of parents paying when the learner is enrolled in Grade 8 and then again in Grade 12, to enable the learner to attend the matric ball.

The school is a technical school with 70% of the learners enrolled in the technical stream. They have to take Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy, Physical Science and one of the following trades: Mechanical, Civil or Electrical Technology. Compulsory subjects are Engineering and Graphic Design and English, Afrikaans and Life Orientation. The remaining 30% of the school population is enrolled in a Business and Accounting Stream. They do Accounting with Business Studies or Economics. They have a choice between Mathematics and Mathematical Literacy.

For the 2013 and 2014 academic years our school was placed on a list the Department of Basic Education refers to as “underperforming schools.” These are schools that achieve a pass rate of lower than 60% in the matric examination. Our pass rate was 46% in 2013 and 43, 6% in 2014. The examiner’s report for Economics in 2014 stated amongst others things, that language proficiency was a major contributor to the poor results obtained by learners.

The matriculants were subsequently encouraged to attend extra classes on Saturdays to assist them with the academic programme. Thus far this did not bring about a significant change to results as learners are reluctant to attend the Saturday classes. Equally poor are results of Grades 8-11. Major adjustments must be made to assist learners to progress to the next grade. The language proficiency of learners remains a major problem. Learners struggle to comprehend, interpret and answer questions correctly. Completing of assignments poses a



problem. In one instance matriculants had to be kept behind during the examination periods to get them to complete their assignments.

The Department's rule of permitting learners only one failure per phase has forced the school to promote undeserving learners to the next grade. This results in a poor work ethic because these learners reach the next grade without putting in real effort. This appears to be a more general problem as Spauld notes. According to Spauld, in the bottom half of schools who participated in the pre-PIRLS, 51% of the learners are illiterate: "These children, who do not have comprehension skills, are then promoted to the next grade, but never manage to get their heads above water for the rest of their school days" (Spauld, 2014 para.12).

Learner and educator absenteeism is another big challenge at our school. At times we have up to eight educators absent on a day as educators fall ill because they often become stressed out due to the poor work ethic of our learners. The Curriculum Advisers for respective subjects visit the school frequently. They expect planning and work to be completed, which is often not the case. Educators are then required to answer for the learners' poor performance. All these factors impact negatively on teachers' morale. This results in classes not being taught. To add to this, learners frequently stay absent as well. Detention is the punishment but it is not a deterrent at all as learners seldom turn up for detention; when they do, they see it as an extension of the school day. It does not stop them from transgressing again.

The learners at the school where the study was done are faced with really trying circumstances in their daily lives. Many social ills lower *their* morale, for example gangsterism, mugging, domestic violence, poverty and teenage pregnancies. They struggle to understand the concept that education could provide a better future. They are not exposed to books and magazines at home; neither do they travel outside of their immediate neighbourhood to experience something different. All the above factors make them despondent – reluctant to attend school or to work hard. These factors impact negatively on their academic progress. I had hoped that exposure to extensive reading on a daily basis might open up their world, expose them to print and possibly improve their language proficiency.

### 3.3.3. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Two classes of Grade 9 English Home Language learners participated in the study. The classes were divided randomly – ability, age or results were not taken into consideration when they were placed in their respective classes. At the beginning of the academic year there were 43 and 35 learners respectively. The learners dropped out very rapidly. This resulted in one class of 26 learners participated in the extensive reading programme and the other class of 21 learners acted as the control group. As stated earlier, the reason for a control group was to comparatively assess whether an intervention in one class improved reading proficiency and changed attitudes to positive ones; and whether the improvement was significant compared to the control group where the intervention was not introduced. I decided to choose one class as the intervention group purely because I perceived them to be the better behaved of the two classes.

The ages of the learners varied between fourteen and eighteen. Six learners of the intervention class and fourteen learners of the control class had repeated a lower grade.

The learners in the two classes were registered as home language speakers of English and the language of teaching and instruction was English. However, the learners seldom spoke English at home or outside the classroom; in fact they did not even speak English inside the English classroom unless they spoke to the teacher. English is actually only their language of reading and writing.

The classes had been taught English by the Head of Department in the previous year. I had an in-depth conversation with the HOD about their language proficiency. I felt it was necessary to inform myself of their ability. The high school where the study was done has the practice of providing teachers with information about the classes they will be teaching in any given year. Prior knowledge is necessary to understand the scholastic background of the learners. The HOD indicated that they struggled with the Home Language. They were reluctant to do Oral presentations and performed poorly in Comprehension. Many of them had actually failed English in the previous year but had nonetheless been promoted. Only a core group had a good grasp of English.

When learners performed written or oral tasks, they tended to translate directly from the Afrikaans expressions. The verb ‘did’ is used when learners speak or write in the past tense instead of the past tense form of the verb: “My mother did tell for me to dry the dishes,”

instead of “My mother told me ...” They do not know the English word ‘scold’; they use the Afrikaans word ‘skel’. They confuse words such as marks and points (‘punte’ in Afrikaans); they misspell ‘their,’ ‘there’ and ‘they’re’ – to list a few examples. Afrikaans is the learners’ home language. It is clear that they think in Afrikaans and if they cannot remember or do not know the meaning of a word, the Afrikaans equivalent is used. If learners’ vocabulary in their first language is developed, continuous exposure to their second language, by reading daily during the English lesson could possibly improve their English vocabulary and general proficiency. Initially 43 learners formed part of the intervention group and 35 part of the control group. At the end of the intervention there were only 26 learners left in the intervention group. In the control group, 21 learners remained. The difference in the number of learners who started and those who were still there at the end of the intervention demonstrates the reality of the dropout rate at the school where the study was done. As Spaul has pointed out, “A number of South African studies have revealed that children who cannot read and write properly by grade four, end up playing catch up for the rest of their school days” (Spaul, 2014). They struggle to negotiate language in their studies. They do not speak the language except when they speak to a teacher or when they do an oral presentation.

#### **3.3.4. WHY A CONTROL GROUP?**

The reason why I included a control group was because I wanted to draw a comparison between groups of learners who come from the same circumstances and educational and social conditions. The fundamental aim was to be in a position to assess whether the intervention might bring about greater results and improvements in reading proficiency and attitudes than would have occurred in a similar set of learners where these interventions were absent. This did raise questions of ethics and discrimination since part of the group would not receive, or would potentially not benefit from the intervention. However, as stated before, both groups covered the curriculum and no part of their routine programme was sacrificed.

## **3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **3.4.1. DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

According to Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004) the methods you use should be compatible and should aim to give the optimal data required for you to investigate the research question; therefore you need to select methods that complement each other.

According to Maxwell (2005) methods are the means to find answers to research questions. The selection of these methods also depends on the research situation and what would work most effectively to give you the data you need.

#### ***Questionnaire***

As I needed to determine reading habits and attitudes of learners prior to the intervention, questionnaires were most appropriate for eliciting a response from participants. I gave learners a questionnaire in order to determine their reading habits (see Appendix 15 pages 120-121). The questionnaire I used consists of 14 questions most of which are general in nature, designed to find out about reading habits and to determine learners' attitudes towards reading. Many answers required a yes or no response and this shed light on how learners felt about the importance of reading for fun and what the learners' attitudes were towards reading. Some questions required reasons for their answers, so as to provide broader insight into the behavior of the participants. "Common qualitative data-gathering techniques include interviews, focus groups...among others" (Qualitative Research Introduction, n. d.).

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

Following the intervention, I planned to have interviews with focus groups to determine whether participation in the intervention had changed learners' attitudes towards reading in positive ways. The focus groups involved learners who had been part of the research in Grade 9. I wanted to find out whether the learners had found the intervention helpful at all. In particular, I wanted to determine whether their attitude towards reading had changed positively. The control group was asked whether their reading habits had changed at all and whether they had changed their attitudes towards reading. They were asked whether they saw the value in reading regularly.

The instrument comprises an interview protocol which consists of a few questions and an observational protocol in which the researcher makes notes about the behaviour of participants (Creswell, 2003). The reason for the interview with focus groups only in the following academic year was to determine whether they adopted the regular reading and whether it became a habit.

### ***Interviews with school management***

In order to gain an understanding of how leading figures view the problem of literacy in the school, I interviewed the principal and language heads of departments to determine their attitudes towards the possible introduction of a daily extensive reading programme as an intervention during language lessons. I also interviewed the principal of the school to ask him about the absence of a school library and the impact this has on the learners' opportunities to engage in reading for pleasure and to do research for information. I asked what his intentions were with regard to facilities which would offer learners space in which to cultivate regular reading practice.

These interviews were recorded, transcribed and interpreted. Drawing on Creswell (2005) transcribed audio recordings form an important database composed of words. It forms an important data collection segment to establish whether the proposed intervention is a new or novel approach in the institution where the sample resides.

### ***Extensive reading intervention programme***

In this study my sample comprised 26 learners in the intervention group and 21 learners in the control group. In the weekly time table of 40 periods, 7 periods are dedicated to English as a Home Language. From Monday to Thursday the periods are 45 minutes long; on Friday they are 30 minutes long. Fifteen minutes of the daily English lesson was dedicated to extensive reading as proposed by Stephen Krashen (2004). I wanted to ascertain whether an extensive reading intervention conducted over a period of nine months might improve learners' reading proficiency. In the control group the normal academic programme was followed. After having being formally assessed the results of these two groups were compared in order to determine whether any progress had been made by the group who participated in the intervention. In the course of the intervention learners' behavior was observed and recorded.

### ***Reflective journal***

As educator/researcher I kept a reflective journal to enable me both to monitor successes and failure closely, and later, in analyzing results, to draw upon for possible answers. The field I used was the classroom itself. “A qualitative observation is when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site. In these field notes the researcher records in an unstructured or semi-structured way activities at the research site” (Creswell, 2014, p 239).

### ***Observation***

Observations were done and recorded during the intervention. According to Castellan (2010) qualitative research is interested in how participants perceive their world and so the researcher interacts with what is being researched: “Typically three kinds of data collection are utilized in qualitative research: interviews, observations and written documents. Most data comes from fieldwork ... (as) the researcher spends time in the field of study” (Patton, 1990, as cited in Castellan, 2010, p.7). In my study I used the kinds of data outlined in this section to ascertain habits and attitudes; and I spent time in the field of study, the classroom.

### ***Assessments***

Baseline assessments were conducted at the start of the intervention to determine the reading comprehension ability of learners. These results were recorded so that they could be compared to the results scored in tests written after the intervention. The intention of the study was to compare the results obtained by the learners who were part of the intervention with those of the control group. The Annual National Assessments of 2012 and 2013 were to be used for the pre-intervention and post-intervention tests. The reason for this is because these are national assessments annually conducted by the Department of Basic Education, and used to determine whether learners are on par with what the curriculum prescribes they should have mastered by Grade 9. As these tests are also standardized, the results before and after the intervention could be compared. The tests were completed in February and in September of 2013 and would determine whether the intervention group’s reading comprehension abilities had improved.



### 3.4.2. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH ETHICS

Babbie and Mouton (2001) conclude that The Webster New World Dictionary's definition of the word 'ethical' is to conform to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group. "Ethical issues arise in all aspects of research and are particularly salient when studying vulnerable members of the society" (Flewitt, 2005, p.1).

The following key ethical principles (Babbie and Mouton, 2001) that are common to research involving human subjects were observed throughout this project:

- Voluntary participation/informed consent
- No harm to participants
- Anonymity and confidentiality
- Trustworthiness of the data.

#### *Voluntary participation/ informed consent*

My employer, the Western Cape Education Department was requested to give permission for the study to be done at one of the high schools under their jurisdiction. A letter on the university letterhead explaining the purpose of the study was sent to the Department in August 2012. Permission to conduct the study was granted.

A letter explaining the entire research purposes and processes was then submitted to the School Governing Body of the high school where the study was to be done. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the principal and heads of departments. Besides the written permission, I did a short presentation explaining the intervention and its intended purpose. I proposed that the intervention serve as a pilot programme. I hoped that my explanation to the members of staff and would promote the idea that we introduce it as a method by which to improve our learners' language ability and academic success subsequently.

At the outset all participants' parents and guardians were informed of what the research entailed. Care was taken to ensure that they were fully aware of what would be expected of them before they committed themselves to anything. Information sheets were issued to everybody explaining aspects that might influence their willingness to participate. Appendix



2 was sent to the Western Cape Education Department. Appendix 4 was handed to the School Governing Body. Appendix 6 was given to the principal of the school.

Appendix 8 was given to the Heads of Department. In it the purpose and the duration of the research was outlined. Relevant contact details were supplied were they to have any queries concerning the research or researcher. Parents/guardians were requested to sign a consent form prior to the start of the research. In addition an information sheet explaining the study – its procedures risks and benefits in participating were also provided to ensure informed consent was given. At no stage were either participants or their parents under any misunderstanding about the study. It was necessary to explain that the research formed part of a university course. The names of the university and my supervisor together with contact details were provided. The results were used afterwards as data. Data is stored by the University for five years. No unauthorised person is allowed access to the data.

In these ways the study endeavored to guarantee that the rights and interests of every participant in the research remain completely confidential.

#### *No harm to participants*

Care was taken to ensure that no harm – physical or psychological – was inflicted upon any participant. Learners might have felt sensitive or embarrassed about the nature of the questions they had to answer in the questionnaire, or fearful of exposure of weaknesses during the intervention process. It was of utmost importance that they not suffer any setbacks. Because certain questions could have made the participants anxious or insecure, participants were reassured that they would not be judged at all.

#### *Anonymity and confidentiality*

The researcher, due to the nature of the research, knew the identity of the participants. This compromised the anonymity of the participants. Thus the confidentiality participants were assured of was that the information gathered would not be shared at any stage without their permission. When analyzing the data, numbers percentages as well as pseudonyms were used. The participants were informed of this.

### *Trustworthiness of data*

In order to establish the trustworthiness of the data, I kept a field journal (Krefting 1991) to record how the research was proceeding every day. I was the only researcher involved thus nobody could appraise the intervention and compare my notes with what happened during the intervention. I tried to be as objective as possible when I took notes. The motivation for me was the fact that I was developing my skills as a language teacher. Authentic reflection would only be to my benefit. Regular reflection indicated that it helps to fine-tune any intervention. As the intervention progressed it took shape because I adjusted my methods when needed.

Although the planning had been done and I thought I had ensured that everything was in place, unforeseen impediments crept in during the actual intervention. I discuss these in the section that follows.

The Western Cape Education Department agreed that the study could be conducted. The permission was given in the third term of 2012. Following the WCED's consent, the school's management gave permission. The parents all gave their consent and with the assistance of the intervention group's class teacher we collected all the consent forms within a week of handing them out.



### **3.5. EXTENSIVE READING INTERVENTION AND DATA COLLECTION PROCESS**

#### ***Preparation***

Preparation for the intervention started in term four of the 2012 academic year. When school reopened in January 2013, the final preparation was done.

#### ***Resources***

I needed to find suitable books and magazines for the classroom library. The school had three vacant classrooms where the discarded books from the previous library had been kept. There I found novelettes and picture story books I could use. Some previously prescribed books were also kept there. I could use some of these. Our school received batches of sports magazines every month. I took some of these magazines to the classroom. I had some *Seventeen* magazines I took from home. I found books in the cupboard of my classroom. The previous educator must have left them there.

#### ***Classroom library area***

I decided to use an extra desk that the school's caretaker could find for me in one of the unused classrooms. The window sills served as additional spaces in which I could display books. I placed the desk on the side of the window sill to give learners easy access to the display area. Learners could visit the displays row by row. The size of the class – 26 – made it not too difficult for everyone to reach the area.

#### ***Baseline assessments***

A baseline assessment, to determine what learners know against what they are supposed to know and to assist the teacher in planning the intervention, was done at the beginning of the school year. Reading comprehension skills were tested. In September the same skills were tested. The Annual National Assessment (ANA) Test of the previous year, 2012, was used. The timetable of the school was finalized by the end of January. Everything was in place by the beginning of February. After the baseline assessment in February, one Grade 9 class was exposed to the intervention whilst the other class received normal instruction. In September both classes wrote another test. The ANA tests of 2013 were used. I compared the results of

the two classes to determine whether the intervention had made any impact on the results at all.

### ***Other forms of data***

Besides the assessments I used the following method: firstly I handed the learners questionnaires. Secondly, I interviewed the principal and language heads of department. Thirdly, I kept a field journal to record learners' responses in class.

### ***The actual extensive reading intervention***

As stated earlier, the action research method seeks to bring together action and reflection. I needed to take cognizance of this throughout the research period. I identified the problem: poor language proficiency amongst learners. Then I decided to implement a reading intervention called extensive reading. The learners in the intervention group would read for fifteen minutes at the end of every English lesson. The intervention started in February 2013. It was done over four school terms and stopped when the examinations started for each term. The programme was sometimes interrupted by changes in the school's daily programme for example, irregular ringing of the school siren to signal end of lessons, shortening of lesson time and adjustments to the school's timetable due to of staff shortages or members of staff leaving the school.

### ***My reflective journal***

A reflective journal was kept by me as educator/researcher to record successes and failures closely. This journal was the basis of the reflective cycle which is how an action research intervention is structured. I recorded the daily reading sessions in the journal. I reflected on the problems I experienced and recorded my adjustments to the programme.

Over the course of the intervention unforeseen problems still arose. I waited to hear what management announced in the morning briefing session and then anticipated the day. These daily interruptions continued as the year progressed. We had many interruptions throughout the year. Many temporary teachers left because of ill-disciplined learners. This caused re-planning by management and re-issuing of time-tables. All this did not bode well for the continuity required for the success of the intervention. I decided to let learners take their books home and encouraged them to read at home. This was to compensate for the days on which I did not see them. Then management made another mistake by setting a date for the

control tests that was too early. Our learners stayed at home for the last four weeks of the third term and I could do nothing about this. These interruptions actually caused the reading time to be reduced.

The fourth term was the shortest: four weeks of instruction and then the final examination. It was by this time that the classes had reduced to 26 and 21 respectively. These learners participated from the start to the end of the intervention.

### **3.6. DATA ANALYSIS**

I used various methods by which to analyse the data. The questionnaires consisted of two types of questions. Some required a simple yes or no answer. For these kinds of questions I worked out the percentage of the class who gave the same answers. For each specific question, I grouped similar answers together and counted them. For example, *How often do you read for fun?* I split the answers into; never, weekly, daily. Many of the questions or subsections are simplified into group responses because it is impossible to incorporate such a broad range of responses. After the first protocol of data collected is established, the second step is to fracture the questions to establish a better understanding of the sample. Questions either had to be discarded or coded. Codes refer to “the most basic segment or element of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way recording the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Coding is the process whereby the data is bracketed in chunks and writing a word representing the category in the margin (Creswell 2014). (Tesch, 1990, as cited by Creswell 2014) suggests a list of eight steps when coding. Some of these are; Get a sense of the whole by reading the whole transcript. Choose one document, for example an interview, the most interesting or shortest one. Go through it and write notes in the margin.

The interview data obtained from the principal and the heads of department was analyzed. I transcribed the answers given by the three heads respectively and placed their answers in categories. This method, called coding, helped me to see how similarly or differently the three school managers felt about the introduction of an intervention. I also used it to determine the management’s attitudes towards extensive reading and towards the introduction of the extensive reading programme. This approach brought to light contextual difficulties at school as perceived by them.

The pre-and post-tests were marked and the marks recorded. I used the scores of the learners and worked out the average mark for each group. I compared the two test scores to determine whether the intervention group had made any progress after the intervention. I also compared the scores of both the control and intervention group to see whether the intervention group had achieved better results than the control group. These results are presented in the form of bar graphs.

I regularly recorded and reflected on the extensive reading programme in my journal. This gave me insight into how successfully I had implemented the intervention. Making notes in my journal, I observed the learners' reactions and behaviour over the course of the year and described how they had changed. I made adjustments as soon as I found any impediments to the smooth running of the intervention. An illustration of this is that I moved the reading time to the start of the lesson to ensure it happened. It also helped me to make recommendations for anyone who might embark on a similar study.

In the year following, 2014, I interviewed two focus groups. These groups were composed of learners who had been part of the Grade 9 control and intervention groups. Participation was voluntary and 10 of each class were willing to participate. Many of the learners had dropped out of school the previous year. Because the school where the study was done is a technical high school, many learners had left at the end of the year because they wanted to pursue career paths outside of the technical stream. This meant I was not able to speak to all the learners who had participated in the intervention. I was therefore unable to ascertain whether they had found the intervention had benefitted them as far as language acquisition is concerned or whether it had changed their attitudes.

Firstly, I interviewed ten learners who were part of the intervention group. Secondly, I interviewed ten learners from the control group. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. I then coded the transcripts to determine whether participation in the intervention had positively changed the attitudes of the learners who had been part of the intervention group and whether they still read on their own. I used the responses of the control group to determine their general attitude to the benefits of extensive reading and compared them to the attitudes of the learners who had participated in the intervention. My aim was to determine whether there is a difference in the attitudes between the two groups that could be ascribed to the completed intervention. Another important motivator for the focus groups was the fact that I did not teach them the following year. It was important to establish whether reading for



pleasure became a habit after being exposed to it on a daily basis or whether they only associated as only part of the grade nine English syllabus. Another reason I could not interview the learners at the end of the grade nine year was because they dispersed at the start of the final examination. I needed to invigilate in my own class. The learners were not willing to stay after school due to safety concerns.

### **3.7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The research was conducted at the school at which I teach, with the two Grade 9 Home Language classes for whom I was responsible. The research comprises an action research Case Study. This method combined the roles of researcher and teacher in that I was the only observer and could therefore not observe every detail. Also, as a participant myself I may not have been as objective as a non-participant might have been. To overcome such limitations, I used my reflective journal to assess the intervention and to decide upon measures I could implement to make it easier for the participants and to ensure the credibility of the study. I tried to be honest about my teaching method and to remain aware that I was a novice researcher who would encounter challenges. I realized constant reflection is necessary. I made the necessary adjustments to allow the programme to run smoothly. Another limitation was the fact that I could only interview two focus groups representing the participants the following academic year. Once the final examination started the learners dispersed and was unwilling to stay after school.

### **3.8. VALIDITY**

Monitoring techniques in the action research method could pose a possible challenge. To determine whether any social change has taken place it should accurately reflect in the results. The techniques employed in action research for identifying a problem, collecting information and acting upon it, should also allow for evidence that is unintended. Thus the difficulty of remaining objective during the study may potentially compromise its validity. To counter these issues I tried to be as objective as possible as researcher. According to Maxwell (2008, p. 240) “qualitative researchers rarely have the benefit of formal comparisons, sampling strategies, or statistical manipulations and must try to rule out

possible threats to validity only after research has begun.” I needed to remember that I was the teacher responsible for the two groups. My teaching methods would therefore, also be exposed. It could mean that I was not effective in what I taught. The realisation of this could lead to partiality. He identifies researcher bias as a possible threat (Maxwell, 2008), where “bias refers to ways in which data collection or analysis is distorted by the researcher’s theory, values or preconceptions” (Maxwell, 2008, p.243). A possible preconception could be that the learners were lazy or could not read rather than the fact that they needed exposure. Maxwell further advocates a validity checklist to counter the threats, two of which are illustrated in the points that follow.

1. “Rich” data: Both long-term involvement and intensive interviews enable you to collect “rich” data, data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on ( Becker, 1970, 51ff cited in Maxwell, 2008). “In interview studies, such data generally require verbatim transcripts of the interviews, not just notes on what you felt were significant.” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 244 )

The interviews conducted with the principal, heads of departments and focus groups were voice-recorded and transcribed verbatim. However, the questionnaires which were used were not verbatim transcripts and could be manipulated. Maxwell’s second point concerns:

2. “Triangulation – collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings – using a variety of methods. This strategy reduces the risk of chance association and of systematic biases due to a specific method and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations one develops.” (Maxwell, 2008, p.245)

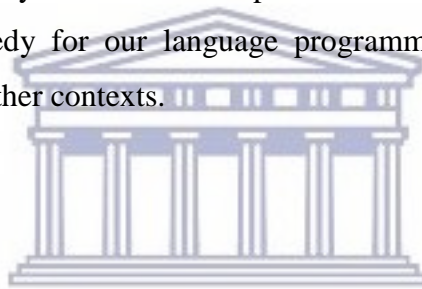
I used interviews, questionnaires and two assessments to collect data about language proficiency in addition to classroom observations. These techniques were intended to lessen the threat to validity in the study. A possible threat here could be that the individuals used in the study were not very diverse. The learners all hailed from the same socio-economic background, attended the same school and were all taught by me.

### **3.8.1. GENERALISABILITY**

As a qualitative researcher, I only did the study at the school where I teach and could only draw conclusions from what I found in my own study although it might manifest in other schools as well.

Qualitative researchers often study only a single setting or a small number of individuals or sites, using theoretical or purposeful rather than probability sampling and rarely make explicit claims about the generalisability of their accounts. (Maxwell, 2008, p. 245)

In simpler terms this would imply that researchers often accept that the small or smaller sample is representative of a much bigger population. The situation at the school as described by the study may be familiar to other institutions and educators or similar to what they experience. The programme may therefore be adopted and trialed by them. I am of the belief that we need to find a remedy for our language programme by trialing what has been indicated to be successful in other contexts.



### **3.9. CONCLUSION**

The research thus sought to establish whether an extensive reading programme instituted in one of my classes could possibly improve the reading proficiency of learners. I also wanted to find out whether their attitude towards reading might undergo change.

The aim of this chapter was to explain the methods I used to this end in the process of conducting this research. The research aims have therefore been described here. The data collection methods, the research process, the planning and implementation of the intervention and the data analysis have been presented. Ethical issues and limitations of the study have also been explored.

In the next chapter I present the findings of the research.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents an analysis of the results of the research undertaken with the two Grade 9 classes on a daily basis, during the English Home Language lesson. This analysis involves an evaluation of the following procedures and instruments:

- 4.1. interviews with the principal and heads of departments to determine their attitudes towards an extensive reading intervention
- 4.2. learners' reading proficiency from baseline tests before the intervention
- 4.3. post-intervention findings – test results
- 4.4. questionnaires distributed to the Grade 9 learners who participated in the study to determine their reading habits and attitudes before the intervention
- 4.5. learner attitudes emerging in focus group discussions.

### 4.1. ATTITUDES OF PRINCIPAL AND HEADS OF DEPARTMENTS TOWARDS EXTENSIVE READING

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an intervention such as extensive reading could improve the poor literacy levels of the learners at our school and to find out if such a programme might also improve learners' attitudes towards extensive reading. The support of the school management was important for the success of the intervention and so I interviewed the principal and heads of language departments to determine the attitudes of the school management towards extensive reading.

The principal and heads of departments for languages are at the helm of the school's efforts to promote languages; they have to drive the language policy of the school, as advocated in the National Reading Strategy:

Good management and leadership are essential for successful teaching and learning. The principal needs to show a relentless determination in pursuing the reading strategy .... Heads of Department within the school will support the principal in the

management and leadership of the reading campaign. (Department of Education, 2008, p.17)

I wanted to know why they had not looked at the possibility of an extensive reading intervention programme. I considered the similarities and differences in the responses of the three members of staff. This helped me to ascertain what their views are about the potential improvement of language proficiency at school through an extensive reading intervention. In line with the principle of action research, I could not assume anything about management's attitude until I have done the fact finding.

#### **4.1.1. Low literacy levels in the school**

The low achievement levels of our Grade 9 learners in the past Annual National Assessments was of major concern to both the principal and two heads of departments. The principal felt the early literacy foundation was lacking. He felt parents should expose their children to literature from an early age. The heads of departments expressed concern about how low literacy levels are although no in-depth study has been made to determine the root of the problem.

The Afrikaans HOD said, *"I think a major stumble block is the ineffective development of learning and teaching at an early childhood level. A mother who reads to her unborn child stimulates the child's ability to listen. Picture books also help to stimulate children's imagination."*

#### **4.1.2. The role of a library in the school**

The question about the re-establishment of a library at school was answered in the positive by the principal. In 2012 an unused classroom had been identified as a venue for the new library by a group of teachers, one being the English Head of Department. Both heads of departments had been excited about the plans to re-establish a library. They had cleaned the space and the principal received a donation for paint. They expressed the hope that by 2016 the library would have been re-established. The Cape Peninsula University of Technology had agreed to assist with collecting resources for the library.

*"The library should also be a place where learners could do their homework and also research,"* said the Afrikaans HOD. This indicates that the educator would like to see a library re-established. Doing homework and research is also a form of reading.

#### **4.1.3. Interventions to support literacy development**

The principal and heads of department were asked whether they had ever thought of introducing intervention strategies to assist learners who struggle with language acquisition.

The question about the possible introduction of a language intervention such as extensive reading, where learners read silently for ten minutes during every English lesson, as an attempt to improve the results was answered as outlined in the short paragraphs that follow.

Both the principal and HODs felt it should be a whole school attempt with all stakeholders coming on board. The English HOD said, *“We cannot only rely on the staff and the SMT. We need the parents to buy into it.”*

The question about the responsibility of the parents was reiterated by all three respondents. *“Let me start by saying at home it is the parents’ responsibility to ensure proper reading habits and to consolidate proper spelling.”*

It was clear that the principal and HODs wanted the parents to come on board in any attempt to improve language proficiency and ultimately the results of the school. The emphasis here is again the fact that choice is given to the learners about their reading preference. This is in line with what extensive reading propagates.

*“I think each learner could bring a magazine from home and exchange it for a magazine of their choice with a fellow learner.”*

#### **4.1.4. Previous efforts to introduce extensive reading**

The principal and heads of department were asked if they had encouraged extensive reading in the past – whether they had proposed the inclusion of a reading period as part of the school’s timetable.



Both HODs claimed they had asked for the inclusion of a reading period in the school's timetable. This had been met with excuses such as:

*"Yes we have, but we have always been told that there are no extra periods for reading."*

*"Previously we had the services of a remedial teacher who assisted children who struggled with reading."*

*"Contact time was always a problem."*

*"Our science and technology teachers felt it was the language teachers' responsibility to sort out the reading period."*

#### **4.1.5. Management's vision for the learners beyond school**

The two heads of department were asked whether they felt the school prepared the learners adequately for life after school. Both said that they felt the school needed to teach skills adequately in preparing our learners for the world of work. Even if they did not study after school, they needed to be proficient enough to fill in application forms, do interviews and liaise with people. Good language proficiency was needed for these purposes.

*"No I do not think so. ' I think that the crème de la crème of our society benefits from the system"* (English Head of Department).

*Business has no input in our syllabus, thus we do not prepare our learners for the world of work"* (Afrikaans Head of Department).

#### **4.1.6. The impact of the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement.**

Do you think the introduction of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) helped to improve learners' language proficiency?

The two HODs differed. The English HOD said, *"Yes in a way CAPS helps us. It allows more time for reading."*

The Afrikaans HOD contended that: *"Our new syllabus does not allow us to monitor reading."*

The principal and the two heads of department acknowledged that there was a problem at the school with the language proficiency of the learners and that this impacted negatively on

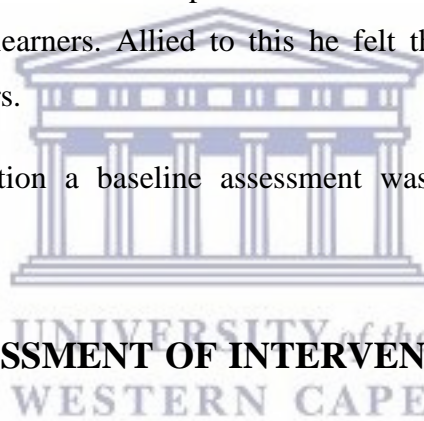
results across the curriculum. They agreed that our learners need to be exposed to reading more often.

However, the heads of department were a little disillusioned because past efforts to establish a reading period all fell flat eventually as the entire staff had not acted in support of the efforts. The principal and both heads were positive about the introduction of a reading intervention yet none of them fully explored the possibilities or read up on existing research about implementing a reading programme. The heads of department seemed inundated with the work they had to do and did not see their way clear to spearhead an intervention.

But the re-introduction of the school's discarded library is on the list of priorities of the principal and he is going to support the efforts launched by the group of teachers who started working on the restoration of the library.

The principal of the school added that the parents needed to be involved in the emergent literacy development of the learners. Allied to this he felt there was a need to introduce electronic books to our learners.

At the start of the intervention a baseline assessment was done to determine reading comprehension abilities.

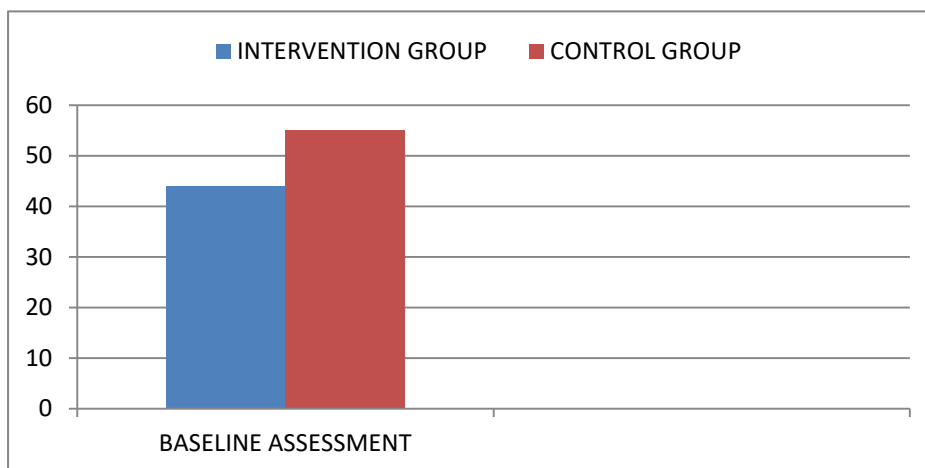


## **4.2. BASELINE ASSESSMENT OF INTERVENTION AND CONTROL GROUPS**

Two assessments were completed. A baseline assessment was done with both classes in February 2013 before the intervention started. The baseline assessment was necessary to determine whether there was any improvement in the language proficiency of the participants. The test consisted of a reading comprehension test. In September a similar assessment was given to the two groups after the intervention group had been exposed to the intervention for seven months.

#### 4.2.1. BASELINE ASSESSMENT

This test consisted of the reading comprehension taken from the 2012 ANA examination. As stated earlier, twenty-six learners participated in the intervention class and twenty-one learners participated in the control group. The results were as follows: the intervention group scored an average of 44% and the control group an average of 55%. The intervention group scored lower than the control group before they started the reading intervention. The post test scores would reveal whether the intervention group improved after being exposed to the extensive reading intervention. The table that follows shows the scores of the intervention and control groups after they had completed the baseline assessment.

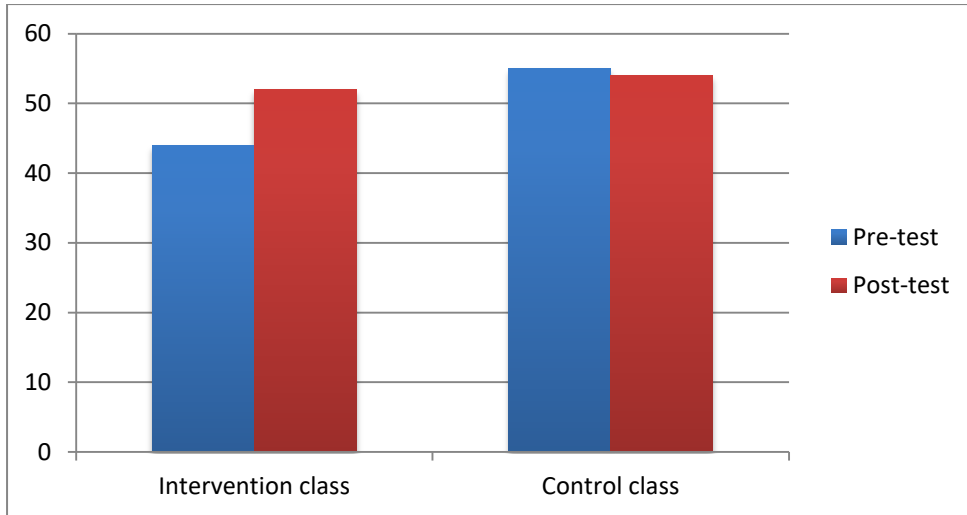


WESTERN CAPE

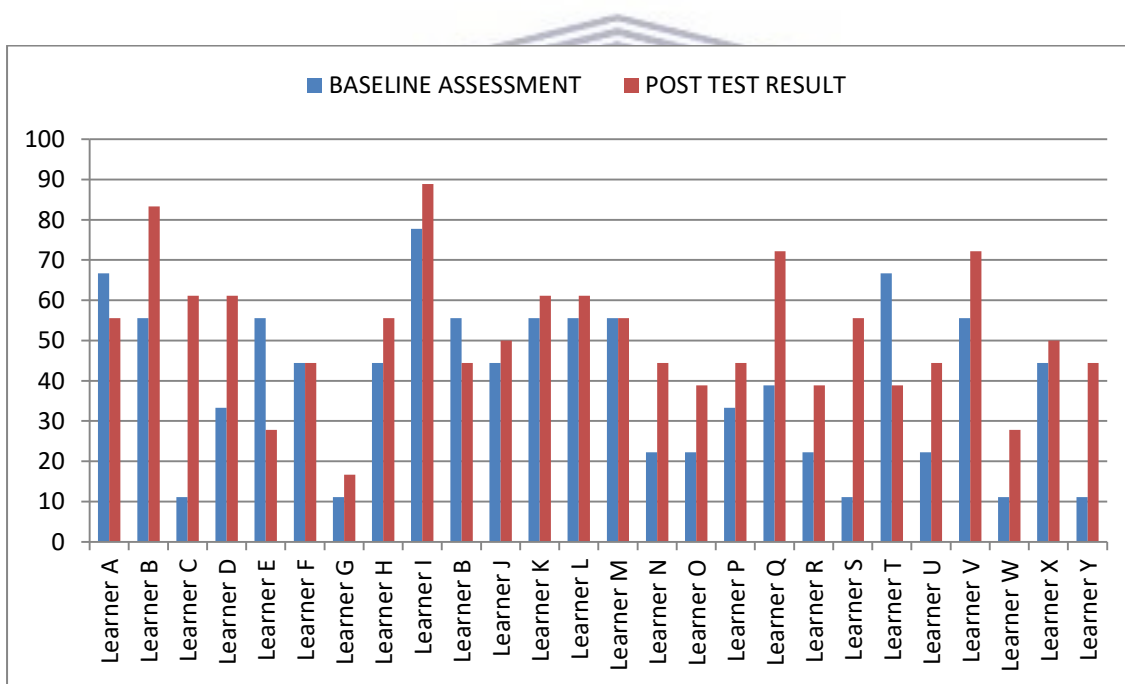
**Figure 4.1. Result of the Baseline Assessment**

#### 4.3. POST INTERVENTION TESTS RESULTS

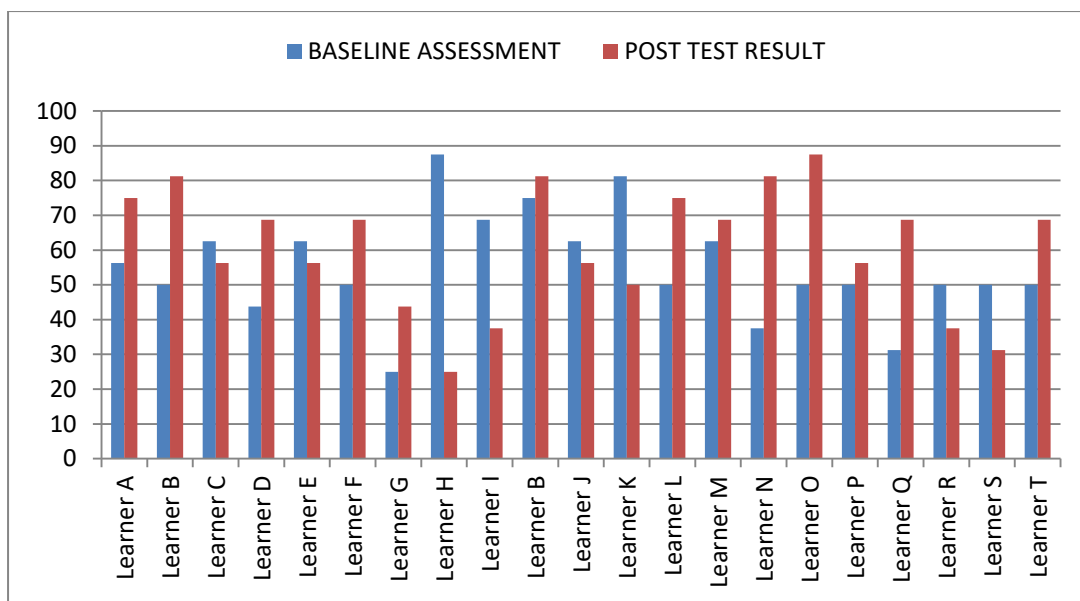
Figure 4.2. represents the scores for the intervention and the control groups after the intervention had taken place. The test consisted of a reading comprehension taken from the ANA test.



**Figure 4.2. Representing the pre- and post-intervention test scores for the control and intervention groups**



**Figure 4.3. Representing the pre-and post-scores of the individual learners who were part of the intervention group**



**Figure 4.4. Representing the pre- and post-scores of the individual learners who were part of the control group**

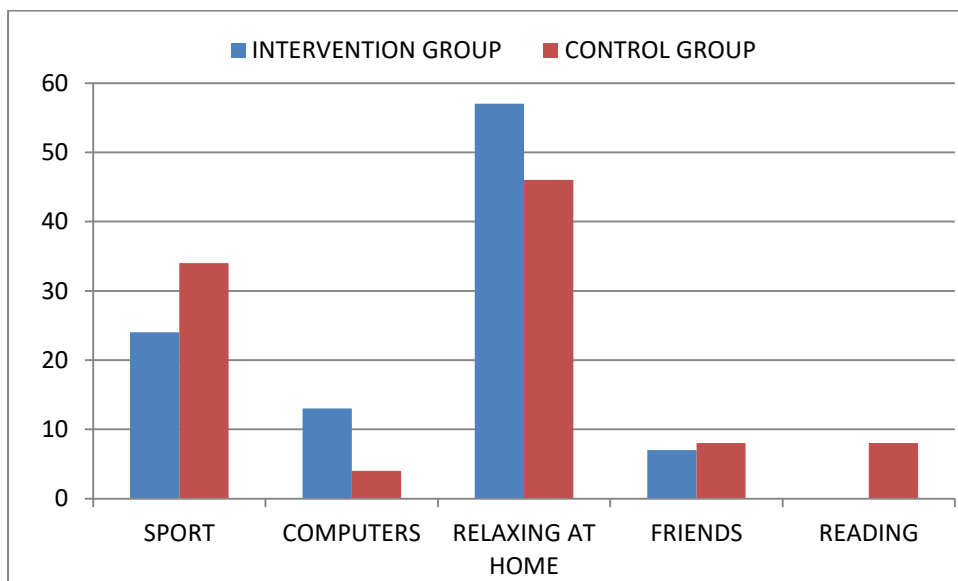
The average mark of the intervention group in the post-intervention test was 52% – an 8% improvement over their pre-intervention test average of 44%. The control group scored an average of 54% in the post-intervention test which was 1% lower than their average score of 55% in the pre-intervention test.

The control group scored higher averages than the intervention group in both the pre- and post-tests that were based on reading comprehension. The intervention group however showed an 8% increase in their average marks from the pre-intervention to the post intervention test, whereas the control group dropped their average by 1% in the post-intervention test.

It is important to note that the reading comprehension average of the intervention group improved significantly after the relatively short time they were exposed to regular extensive reading. The results of these tests seem to indicate that with the intervention of an extensive reading programme we can improve the reading proficiency of socially-deprived communities. Action research is used to understand, evaluate and then change a situation (Cohen and Manion, 1994).

#### 4.4. QUESTIONNAIRES TO DETERMINE LEARNERS THEIR READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES

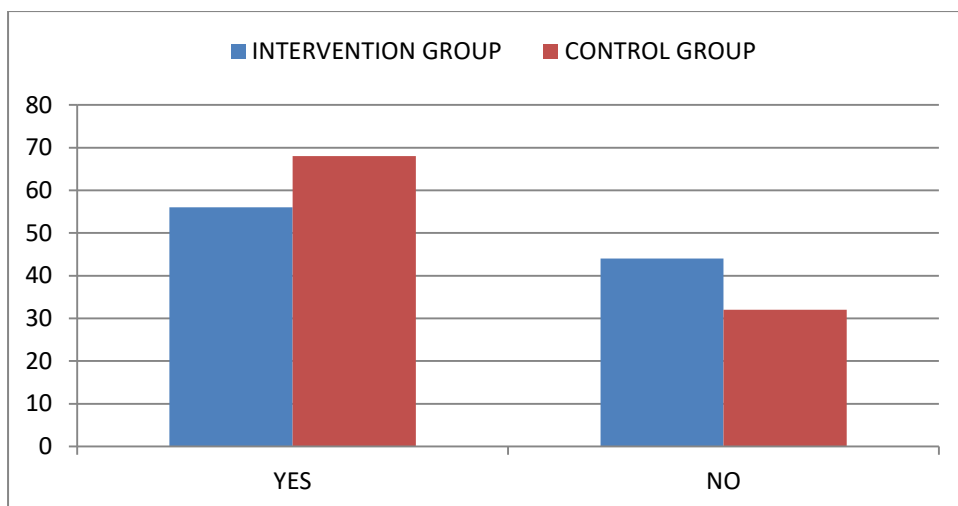
The table that follows shows the responses of the intervention and control groups after their completion of the questionnaire administered before the start of the intervention to determine how they feel about the value of reading in their lives. In the intervention group 43 learners participated and in the control group 35 learners participated. It is clear from their responses that from an early age they had not been exposed to a print-rich environment.



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**Figure 4.5. Learners' leisure activities**

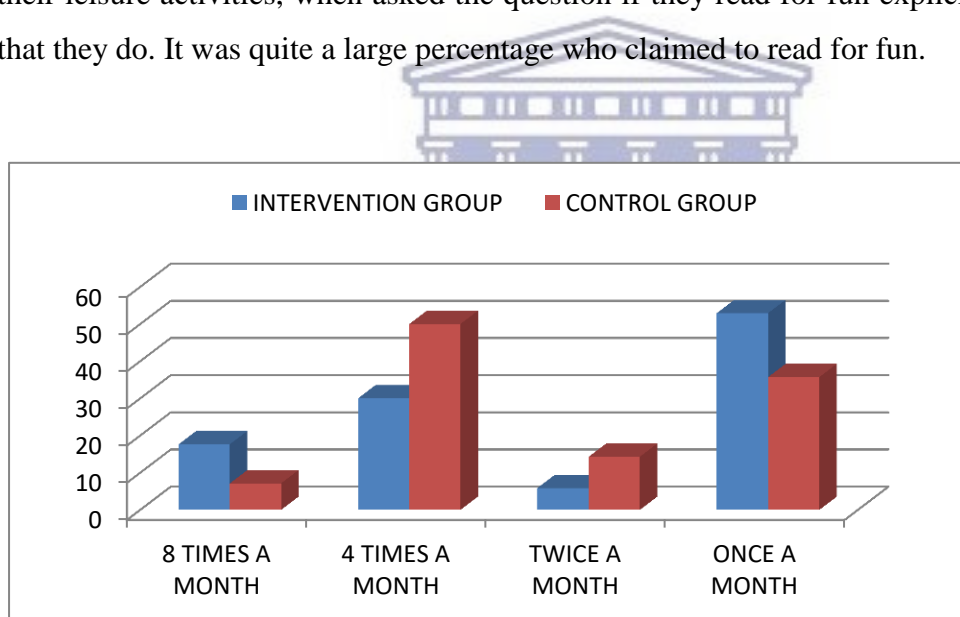
Most of the learners spend their free time relaxing at home. Playing sport is next on their list. This was especially true for the boys. Other leisure activities cover a variety of things. Watching television, listening to music, spending time with friends and playing games are popular activities. A few use the computer for research and go to the cinema. This might be because of financial constraints or limited access to computers. It is very obvious from the learners' answers that they do not read regularly. In the intervention group, nobody listed reading as an activity undertaken in their free time.





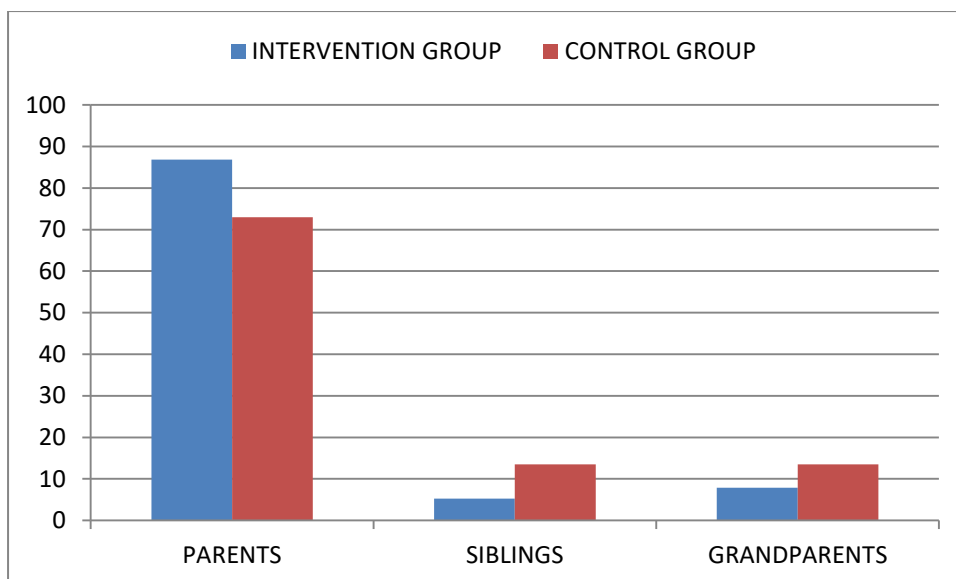
**Figure 4.6. Percentages of learners who claimed to read for fun.**

Although learners who were part of the intervention group did not include reading as one of their leisure activities, when asked the question if they read for fun explicitly, they indicated that they do. It was quite a large percentage who claimed to read for fun.



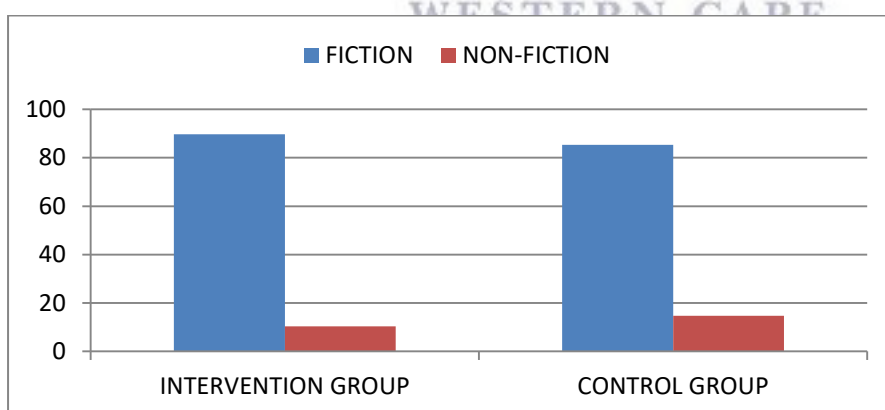
**Figure 4.7. Results on how often learners read.**

All the learners indicated that they read for fun. Yet their language proficiency was poor. This could be ascribed to the fact that they do not read enough. Or perhaps they read books they do not enjoy so much that they would feel compelled to want to read more often.



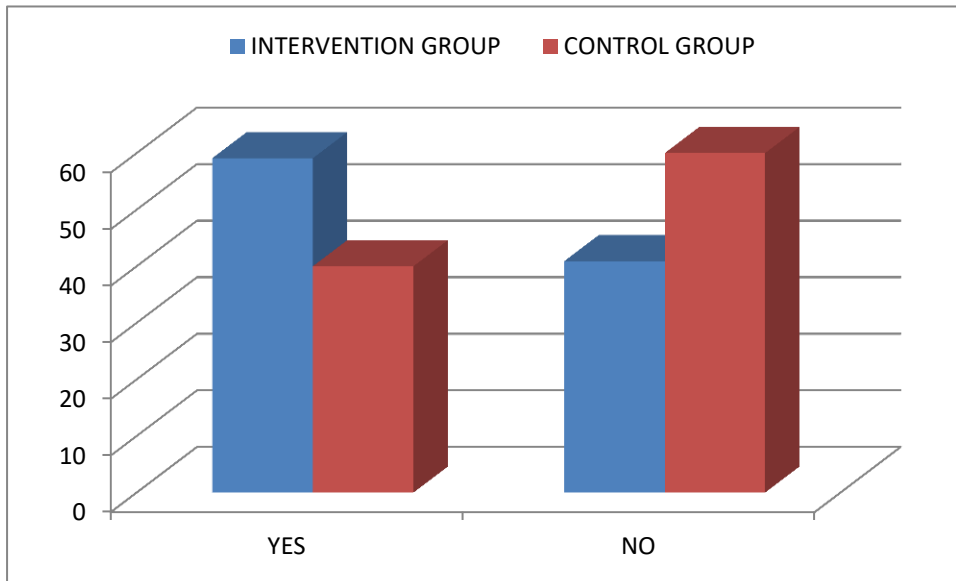
**Figure 4.8. Learners' response as to who read to them as children.**

Some support for emergent literacy was present in the lives of the learners. Parents, siblings and grandparents had exposed the learners to books. It is however difficult to determine how this early exposure impacted on the learners. If we use their language proficiency later in life as a measure, it would seem not to have made a great impact. Hence there is no definite proof for this. It could be that parents read to their children in Afrikaans. Unfortunately their language of learning and instruction is English, thus it does not reflect in their language acquisition.



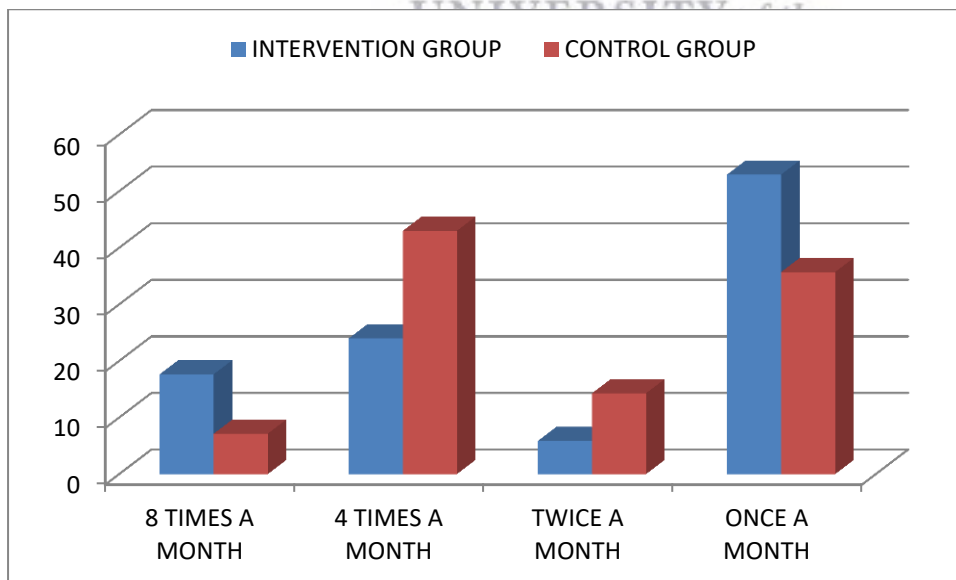
**Figure 4.9. Percentage result on fictional and non-fictional reading**

If you do not read a wide variety of books it will be difficult to write down a favourite title. Many learners chose the titles of prescribed books they had read. Some were Afrikaans titles, for example, *Vasientjie* and *Diekie van die Bo Kaap*. What is significant is that the learners listed books by local writers. Perhaps it is because they can relate to them.



**Figure 4.10. The percentage of learners who belong to a public library**

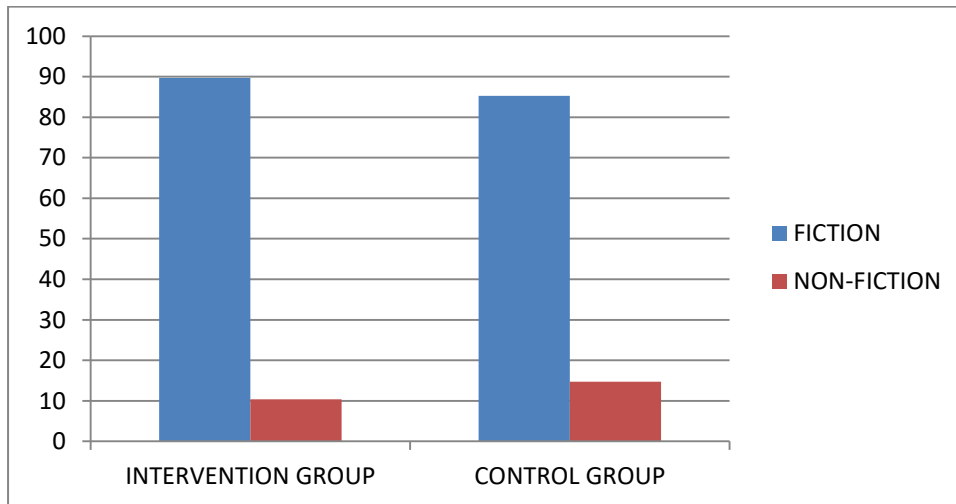
There are various factors that influence the possibility of belonging to a library. The public libraries in the area have become a hide out for gang members. Learners fear for their safety. Often they only visit the library when they need information for school assignments. Then they go in small groups. In some cases learners owe money for outstanding fines and they do not have the money to pay it.



**Figure 4.11. Learners' response on how often they visit the library**

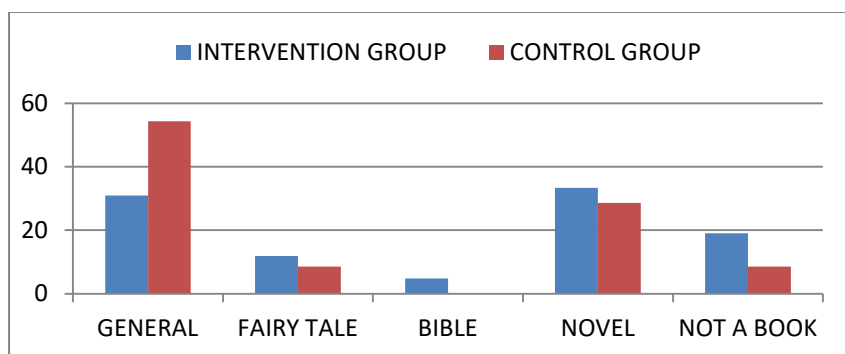
Visits to the library are influenced by different reasons as mentioned in the previous comment. It depends on the area in which the learners live. Some live in the heart of the

biggest gang-controlled areas and are under threat of being caught in the crossfire if fighting occurs. Stray bullets may hit them and they might be robbed of their belongings. Others are able to visit neighbouring libraries. The school does not offer the services of a library at present. Thus library habits are influenced by factors outside the control of the learners.



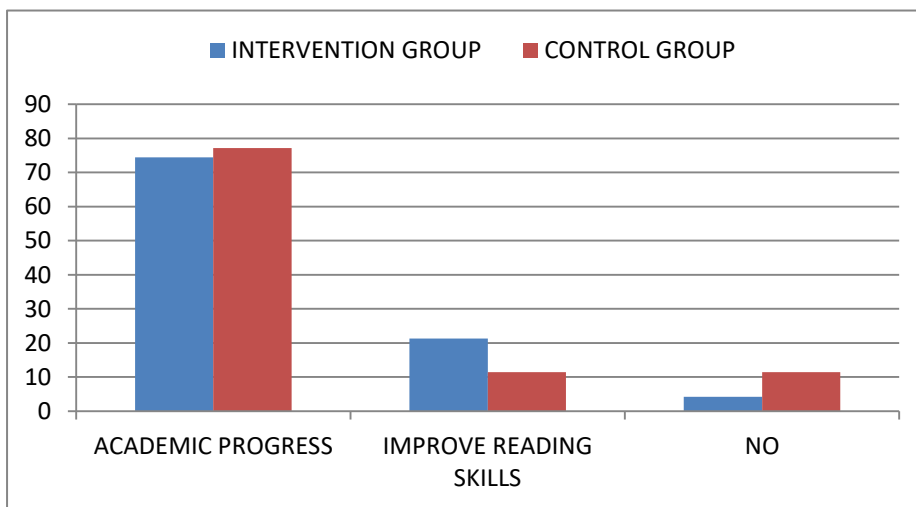
**Figure 4.12. Results of learners who received a book as a present.**

The table shows the learners who answered yes. It is split into fiction and non-fiction. The learners were in Grade 9 when the study was done. Most of the learners received books as presents when they were much younger. In many cases they indicated titles of Fairy Tales. To rekindle their love for reading by encouraging them to borrow books from the classroom library, I would have to ensure that there are novelettes that have about 50 pages and some illustrations. Local stories would also help. The learners could associate with it. After the reading habit is re-established, hopefully they would be able to progress to longer stories.



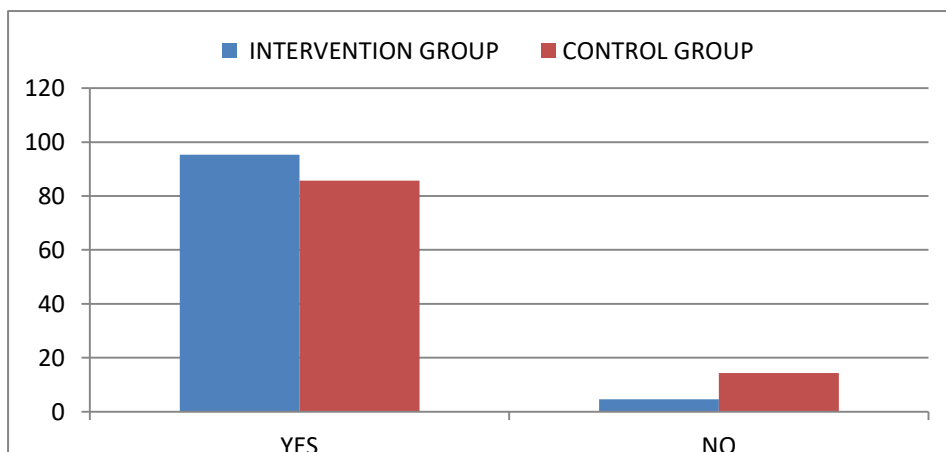
**Figure 4.13. Learners' response on what book they would buy if they receive one-hundred rand.**

The learners' answers varied between 'do it yourself' books, titles such as *Popular Mechanics*, and a book about wolves. As far as the novels were concerned, *Harry Potter* and *The Twilight Series* were firm favourites amongst the avid readers. Poverty is a real issue in the lives of the learners who participated in the study. A hundred rand for many of these learners is a luxury and it makes sense that they would not spend it on a book. Some learners would need assistance to know what genre they would like to buy. If the school introduces an incentive where book vouchers are given as rewards at ceremonies, this might encourage learners to visit bookstores.



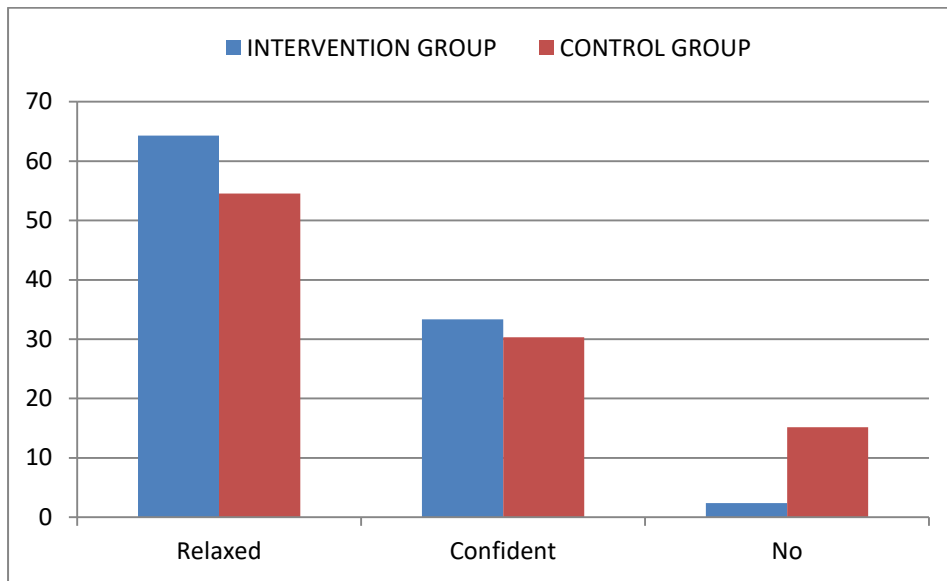
**Figure 4.14. Learners' response to the question whether regular reading could improve results**

It is strange that the majority of the learners admit that regular reading improves academic achievement, yet they do not practise it. This could be because they do not know how to engage with books other than as a language decoding activity.



**Figure 4.15. Results for whether learners enjoy listening to their teacher reading to them.**

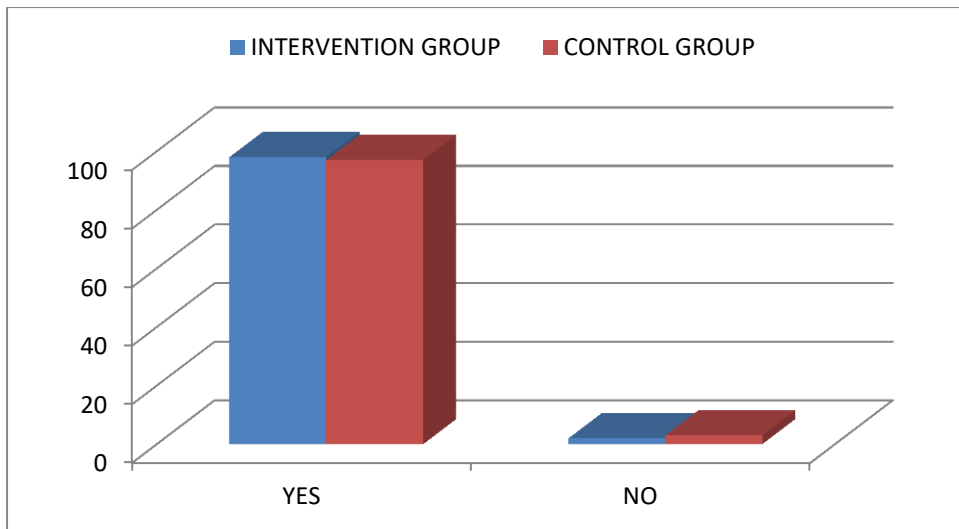
Certain learners said listening to the teacher, transported them back to their early childhood. Others said it relaxed them. In both groups the vast majority indicated this. In the cases where the learners answered no, they felt it was boring, it put them to sleep and they did not find the reading interesting.



**Figure 4.16. Learners' response to emotions they experience while listening to texts.**

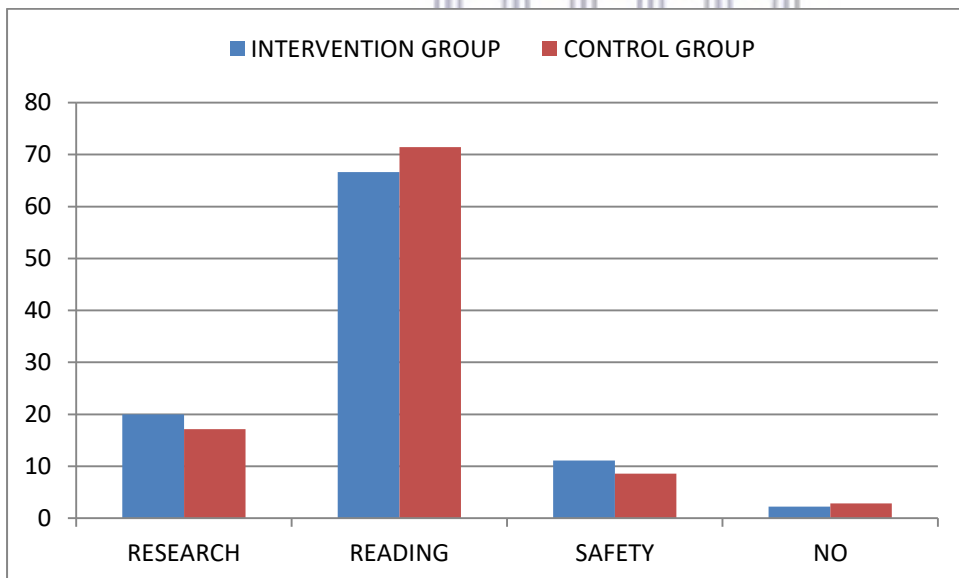
Even as teenagers the learners enjoy being read to. This could be because teachers usually read fluently. They read with intonation and use the punctuation for effect. It could be that they have not been exposed to adults reading to them in this manner. The learners come from poor homes. Many parents do not have time to read to their children.





**Figure 4.17.A. Learners' response to the question whether a school library is important.**

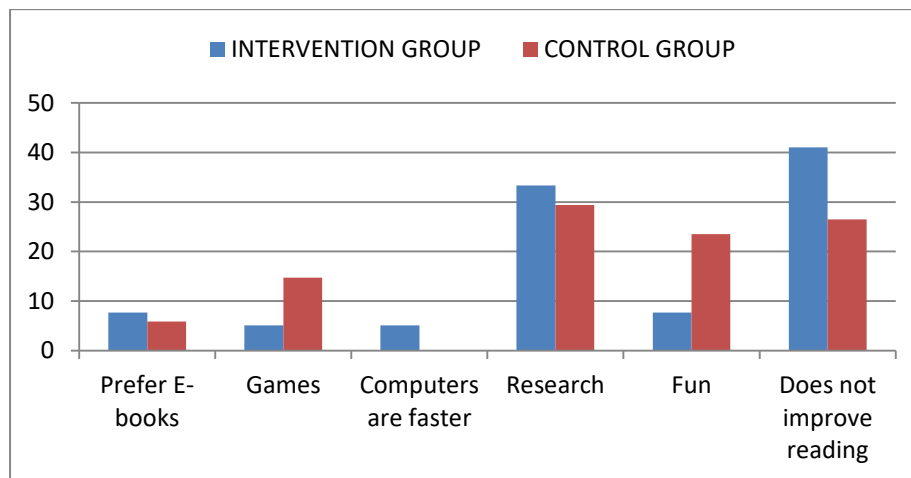
The positive response to this question was overwhelming for both the intervention and control groups. The public libraries are often not safe to visit. Therefore the learners would like to have a library at school.



**Figure 4.17. B. Results of reasons given by the readers in figure 15 A.**

The majority of the participants want a library for reading. This underlines the importance of a library at school. Visiting the school's library regularly could be the catalyst to get the learners reading regularly. The community libraries are situated in the middle of gang

strongholds. Many learners are too scared to visit the library. They would like the school to fulfil that role.



**Figure 4.18. The results of learners’ opinion whether computers are more important than books.**

The learners gave a variety of answers. It would have been good had they realised there is a place for both, for instance, that reading could be for fun, and computers good for research purposes and the completion of tasks.

#### SUMMARY

#### ACTIVITIES DURING SPARE TIME

In summary, the data indicates that the learners in the intervention group do not read during their spare time. Only 8% of the control group’s learners spend their free time reading. Learners were asked to list their leisure activities, they did not list reading as one, however when they were explicitly asked whether they read for fun, 55% of the learners in the intervention group responded positively and 43% in the control group read for fun and indicated that it helps them with their reading skills, spelling and vocabulary. The learners were asked how often they read per week. In the intervention group 15% of the learners and 7% of the control group read 8 times a month, and 50% of the intervention group and 42% of the control group read once a month. This indicates they do not read much.

When asked whether they remembered being read to as a child most learners responded to the question in the positive, so this indicates some form of support for emergent literacy was present. Both the participants in the control and intervention groups indicated that their

parents, grandparents and siblings had read to them. However I did not ask the learners how often this was done. I think the gap develops when learners have to start reading by themselves, after the decoding phase. Spaul (2014) refers to this (prior) period – the first three years of school – as the decoding phase. There could be numerous reasons for this, the library in the neighbourhood might not be adequate, or stimulation and encouragement at home may have been absent. It could also be that learners had attended primary schools where the necessary stimulation did not occur. Or as stated previously, maybe they were read to in Afrikaans.

### **Learners who received books as presents.**

The number of learners who received books as presents or who would consider buying a book as a present varied between the two groups. In both the intervention and in the control groups every learner had received books as presents. However, they did not indicate when this had occurred. Yet, receiving books as presents was not sufficient to motivate them to read. Many learners left certain sections of the questionnaire blank or gave vague answers.

Asked whether they thought reading could improve their results at school, forty learners in the control group claimed they believed it could assist them with their academic work. Most said it would help their vocabulary but did not say anything about how it would assist them to comprehend what they read. Thirty-two learners in the control group felt they would benefit by reading regularly. In both groups there is an awareness of the benefits of reading but it has not become a habit to read regularly.

The learners were asked whether they belong to a library and how often they borrowed books. Of the entire group eleven learners visited the library on a weekly basis. The rest only visited the library once every two weeks or once or twice a month. This indicated they were not keen borrowers of books. The reading habits of the learners were not good. Various reasons could be the cause of this. Distance, safety or merely a habit not inculcated from a young age.

When asked whether they would buy a book if they received R100.00, learners in both groups could not really provide titles of books they would like to buy. 18% of the intervention group and 8% of the control group would not spend their money on books.

Such responses suggest that they have been exposed to books but no-one impressed upon them the importance of sustaining the habit of reading. Both groups are fairly similar in their habits and attitudes.

Based on the responses of the learners, I conclude that they seem to have a positive attitude towards reading in general but this does not translate into regular reading habits. This was still encouraging because it presented a positive basis from which to work during the intervention in terms of learners' attitudes.

#### **4.5. LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TO EXTENSIVE READING AFTER THE INTERVENTION**

The new academic year commenced in 2014. The classes whom I taught in Grade 9 were not allocated to me for Grade 10. The classes were set differently. One class was the technical class and the other followed the commerce stream. I asked both classes if I could interview them to reflect on what the intervention in the previous year had meant to them and also to ascertain the attitude of the other learners who were part of the control group.

The learners were reluctant to participate in the focus groups. I assumed this was because they assumed that the intervention had been part of my teaching strategy and was not therefore relevant to their new academic year. However, ten learners of the intervention group and ten learners of the control group agreed to be part of a focus group whom I could interview afterwards. Because of subject choices the learners of the intervention group and the control group of Grade 9 were in the same Grade 10 class. I first interviewed the ten learners who had formed part of the intervention group and then I interviewed the ten learners who had been part of the control group.

I introduced the interview by asking the members who had been part of the intervention group whether they still read. Unfortunately they said they did not. Only one learner said she reads magazines. When I asked the control group if they read at all, they also replied in the negative. Despite these replies to the first question, when I enquired in the event of them deciding to read, what time of day they would find most suitable for reading, everyone said they would read at night. The intervention group admitted that regular reading helps with spelling, vocabulary growth and oral presentations but the extensive reading they were

exposed to in class had not become a habit. When I asked about the academic benefits of daily reading they agreed there are benefits; one learner said it improved her ability to deliver a speech. When asked what value they might get out of reading the learner said it helps with vocabulary building and the understanding of words. The control group was not part of the intervention. I asked both groups whether they could recommend a good book to read to a friend. One learner, who was part of the intervention group the previous year, suggested the *Harry Potter* series. The others could not suggest a book. Although the intervention group did not show a negative attitude towards reading it revealed that reading had not become a habit.

## **SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

It is clear from the educators' responses that they feel there is a need for learners to be exposed to regular reading. From the responses of the learners it is evident that they do not read regularly.

The principal and heads of department were not against the introduction of an intervention. They were also not overly enthusiastic about it. The principal said the re-introduction of the library was on the list of priorities of the school. He felt we should encourage learners to bring books from home but with our learners hailing from print-poor backgrounds this might not be possible. The two heads of department would like assistance with language proficiency but they are wary as past programmes have failed. They feel a reading programme should be a whole school activity not the responsibility of language teachers only. They identify this discrepancy as the reason for the failure of past programmes.

### **READING PROFICIENCY**

Before the intervention started a pre-test revealed that the intervention group's learners averaged 44%. The control group averaged 55%. Both groups achieved average and slightly below average marks for reading comprehension. This was a cause for concern. After the intervention the intervention group improved by an average of 8%. The control group had a minor 1% drop in their average. The intervention, although it was short, had a positive influence on participants' reading comprehension results. This is an important finding.

### **LEARNERS' ATTITUDES**

#### **ATTITUDES BEFORE THE INTERVENTION**

In analysing the responses it became clear to me that learners have a positive attitude towards reading and that they participated willingly.

### **ATTITUDES DURING THE INTERVENTION**

Observation of the learners during the reading sessions revealed their enjoyment of the intervention. They were keen to read. A new world opened up for them and as the intervention continued they became more and more settled. They realised reading could be fun; it is not only for books reports and oral preparation. They could find their preferred genre or range and read it. They realised the classroom can also provide a library on a minor scale. They realised choices play a big role in enjoyment.

### **ATTITUDES AFTER THE INTERVENTION**

The intervention did not continue beyond their Grade 9 year though, therefore reading did not become a habit with them. This outcome underscores the necessity of exposing learners to reading daily.

The responses of the focus groups made me conclude that a reading intervention should be sustained for longer than a year if we really hope to bring a change in attitudes of learners toward reading; however, there was an improvement in reading proficiency. It was a little disappointing to hear that reading did not become a habit for the learners. They admitted to having enjoyed the intervention though.

### **THE EXTENSIVE READING INTERVENTION**

The learners needed to get used to the intervention. They had not done extensive reading previously. After taking care of the problems as they arose, the learners settled into the intervention and as they learnt the routine, they settled quickly into reading. I dealt with factors such as changes in the school day as these came along. As the year progressed the intervention became part of the daily routine.

### **WHAT I HAVE LEARNT AS AN EDUCATOR**

I learnt that as an educator you need to evaluate your own practice if you discover a problem. You need to identify the problem, reflect on it and re-plan. This will in turn mean implementing your new plan and assessing whether the intervention has changed anything.



The extensive reading intervention improved the reading comprehension skills of the learners who participated in it. However if I really wanted to see more significant improvement, I needed to expose the learners to it over a longer period. Research indicates the longer the duration of the intervention, the better the chances of success.

In Chapter Five I discuss the findings of the research in relation to the two research questions. I discuss the attitudes of the learners towards reading before, during and after the intervention. I also comment on the reading proficiency of the participants before and after the intervention. The chapter closes with conclusions arrived at in relation to each of the research questions as well as recommendations for any future intervention.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I discuss the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the two research questions. I examine the reading proficiency of the participants before and after the intervention and discuss the attitudes of the learners before and after the intervention had taken place. Based on these elements in the study, I outline the conclusions I have drawn, and make recommendations for consideration in future studies. The relevant literature informs my discussion.

### **5.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guided the research:

- 5.2.1. What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the language proficiency of Grade Nine learners exposed to it over the course of one school year?
- 5.2.2. What is the effect of an extensive reading programme on the Grade Nine learners' attitudes towards extensive reading?

### **5.3. THE EFFECT OF AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME ON LEARNERS' READING PROFICIENCY**

After being exposed to an extensive reading programme from February to September of the 2013 school year, the participants scored a higher average percentage in the reading comprehension test post-intervention than what they had scored in the baseline assessment prior to the intervention. Although the intervention was implemented over a short period of time the gain was significant for the intervention group, whereas the control group showed a slight drop in their percentage in the post-test. The average percentage obtained by the intervention group improved by 8%. They scored an average of 44% in the pre-test and an average of 52% in the post test. The control group's results were slightly worse in the post-

test than in the pre-test. They scored 55% in the pre-test and dropped by 1% to 54% in the post-test. These results appear to indicate that daily exposure to extensive reading was beneficial to its participants. The improvement that occurred is supported by the literature about the advantages of exposure to a reading intervention. Jim Cummins (2012) claims that although the learners might not speak the language of instruction outside the classroom, reading on a daily basis can improve their language proficiency. Thus, if we expose learners to extensive reading on a daily basis during the English period, it could improve their proficiency.

Another case in point is the research conducted by Pretorius and Lephala (2011) who introduced a reading intervention in three previously disadvantaged schools in Atteridgeville, a township north of Pretoria. They also administered pre- and post-tests in March and November. Reading comprehension levels in N.Sotho and English were very low at pre-test time at both schools. In the post-test the control group scored a marginal increase in North Sotho and a decrease in English. The intervention group scored a non-significant increase in N.Sotho but a large and significant increase in English Comprehension (Pretorius & Lephala 2011). This reiterates the fact that learners who hail from print-poor backgrounds might improve their language proficiency when exposed to a reading intervention.

The results of the baseline assessments indicated that the reading comprehension skills of the learners were average and below average, with the intervention group scoring even lower results than the control group. As noted earlier this could be the consequence of a print-poor background or a lack of exposure to reading. Daily exposure to reading could bridge this gap as has been indicated in the results of this intervention. According to the Department of Basic Education (2008) the language competence of learners affects their performance in all subjects, in all grades. This underscores the fact that an extensive reading programme would assist learners with their schoolwork in general.

As referred to in the literature review, other researchers who claimed the benefits of extensive reading are amongst others, Stephen Krashen (2004), Elley and Mungubai (1981), Grabe (2004) and Renandya (2007). Krashen (2004) Stanovich (1986) and Waring and Nation (2004) who all claim regular reading improves vocabulary development. Grabe (2009) says regular reading helps with reading fluency. Nation (1997) claims with regular reading learning takes place outside the classroom. Renandya (2007) claims regular reading could bridge the gap poverty leaves in the lives of poor children.

#### **5.4. THE EFFECTS OF AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME ON LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS READING**

As noted in section 2.11, the Dictionary of Education defines attitudes as “the predisposition or tendency to react specifically towards an object, situation or value; usually accompanied by feelings and emotions” (Briggs, 1987, p.202). In addition to this, Briggs claims that a positive attitude is a motivational stimulus and it promotes and sustains learning. Sustained reading for pleasure could change attitudes positively.

Within the duration of the intervention I observed the learners to gauge their attitudes towards reading. Extensive reading was a totally new idea for the learners. They were curious and very enthusiastic about the intervention. After initial interruptions as detailed in Chapter Four, the learners did however settle into the reading activity. The fact that both I and the class were reading in silence created harmony in the classroom. Nobody was expected to read loudly and maybe be feeling embarrassed or shy. It is important for learners to know how their peers perceive them. The more the learners read, the more relaxed they became. Grabe (2004) claims that if implementation conditions are reasonable, extensive reading creates positive motivation for reading.

Learners were not averse to reading. However, it takes time to inculcate a love for reading and they were not exposed to reading on a daily basis for an adequately long period. Hence when I interviewed focus groups comprising ten learners from the intervention group and ten learners from the control group at the start of the 2014 academic year (the year following the action research), regrettably the learners had not continued to read on their own. Without the support of the organised in-class reading programme, I ascertained that they had not acquired the independent habit of reading for fun. Although this was disappointing, they admitted to having enjoyed the intervention.

The responses from the learners were consistent with what the literature says. For an extensive reading intervention to have a lasting effect on its participants, it needs to be sustained over a long period of time. What was difficult to sustain for the participants of my research study underscores the importance of Grabe's (2009) claim that there is enough evidence to demonstrate that reading extensively when done consistently over a long period of time leads to improved abilities in several language areas. Spaul's claim (2014) that

children must be motivated regularly to get to view reading as a pleasurable activity, reinforces this point. The book flood programme in south-eastern Fiji conducted by Elley& Mangubhai (1981) resulted in significant changes after an eight-and-a-half month period. Yet it was their follow-up study, conducted in 1981, whose results in the *second* year showed an even more dramatic improvement. No extra time was needed for language acquisition.

These results appear to indicate that an intervention needs to be maintained for at least two years in order for the learners to actually change their attitudes towards reading and to sustain the habit of reading.

## **5.5. ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR AN EXTENSIVE READING PROGRAMME**

Certain conditions need to be in place if an extensive reading programme is to have such a positive impact on learners' language proficiency that they undergo a change of attitude as well.

Valuable lessons were learnt during the intervention:

An extensive reading programme should complement the intensive reading programme. Every learner at the school must be exposed to extensive reading during their English lessons. For this to materialise, the intervention must be adopted by the school as a whole. It must become part of the language policy of the school and every teacher must buy into the programme. Research has indicated that for any intervention to have a serious impact, it needs to be continued over an extended period of time (Grabe 2009). If the learners are being taught by a different educator the following year, the intervention should continue. Janks (2011) suggests that extensive reading helps to develop reading habits and to encourage learners to read regularly.

Planning must be meticulously completed long before the start of the intervention. If you do not do this you might not have enough resources to satisfy all the reading preferences of the learners. Funding is necessary for a successful programme and a few options could be pursued. A budget could be handed in to the school's finance committee to request money to purchase books, or donations could be requested from sponsors. Teachers could ask the headmaster to include a book budget in the school's budget. Learners could be asked to

donate or to get sponsors (Renandya, 2007). There should be enough books for learners to choose from and there should be a wide variety of books. We need to flood our classrooms with books. “Book floods, recommended since the 1950s, often involve stocking a library with 50-100 books and encouraging students to read these books independently” (Grabe, 2009, p.312).

I should have allowed learners to share with classmates whatever they found interesting, whether it was bits of text, captions or pictures, instead of expecting them to read silently by themselves all the time. Learners can be empowered if allowed to share their favourite books with the class and to recommend books (Grabe, 2003). Policies are already in place to guide departments in terms of reading programmes. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2011) claims amongst other things, that language is a tool for thought and communication. We need to include extensive reading and intensive reading in our English curriculum. As noted earlier, Renandya (2007) claims that extensive reading must complement intensive reading in a language course.

## **5.6. REFLECTIONS ON ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS**

It is absolutely necessary for teachers to grow professionally and personally. Reflecting upon one's own practice and identifying a problem is absolutely vital for such growth. As educators we need to assess our practice regularly to ascertain whether we deliver the curriculum effectively. As a teacher researcher I realised there was a problem somewhere in our system, hence the poor results our learners obtain in examinations. A problem can be remedied by reflecting and changing methods. I chose the action research method. Planning took place beforehand when permission for the study was obtained and the necessary materials were collected. The intervention itself was the action I took. The questionnaires, pre- and post-test results and interviews with focus groups and management of the school constituted the fact-finding process. Any intervention embarked upon will have logistical problems. Therefore regular reflection was necessary and refining of the process was done continuously. This last step is very important for the planning of a future intervention in order to iron out possible problems. It is a particular benefit of the action research method that teacher researchers can develop and broaden their knowledge about reading theories, language acquisition and possibly how to change the attitudes of learners positively.



## **5.7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.7.1. EXTENSIVE READING AS A WHOLE SCHOOL PROJECT**

Drastic change is necessary at the school where the study was done if they hope to improve the results obtained by learners. A solution other than promoting learners to the following phase needs to be found. To undermine the negative effects Spaul (2014) warns of in the phase-determined promotion programme of the DoE, an intervention such as extensive reading could benefit learners.

The intervention that was done with the Grade 9 classes strongly indicates this. In the course of my study the reading comprehension skills as well as the attitudes of the learners who participated in the intervention improved. Thus extensive reading could assist learning across the curriculum. Learners would be able to understand the work in other subjects better if they have a better understanding of what they are studying. A further benefit is potential change in learner attitudes. The learners who participated in the study had not been exposed to reading for fun on a daily basis prior to this study, yet they enjoyed reading. This is a good indication that the rest of the school would also enjoy regular reading while improving their language acquisition at the same time. Both nationally and internationally intervention programmes have shown positive results in promoting linguistic ability. If the entire school promotes reading it could bring positive changes to the learners' success at school.

A major problem in the past related to the sustainability of interventions. Every language educator must buy into the programme and ensure that it is managed effectively. A single reading period is not enough to alleviate the problem. However, if that is the only time the school can afford to allocate to reading we need to ensure it is sustained throughout the academic year.

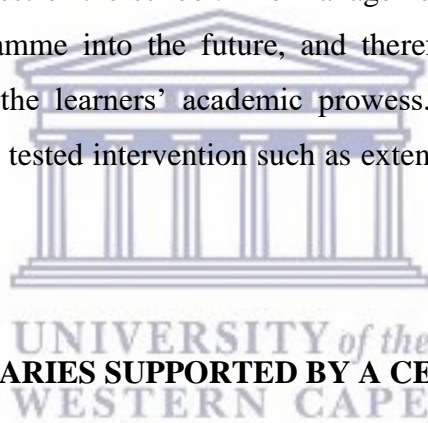
### **5.7.2. SUPPORT FROM MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL**

The principal and heads of departments for English and Afrikaans agreed that the language proficiency of the learners is poor at the school where the study was done. They also agreed that it affected the results of the school negatively. Management agreed that an intervention



could shed light on our problem of learner language proficiency and were interested to hear what the results were.

Management now has to accept that we need to introduce measures different from the ones the school has tried previously. They have to convince the staff that language is the cornerstone of success in all subject areas. They must promote both classroom libraries and a central school library. As an educational institution we must promote extensive reading. The leaders of the school should be at the helm of such a strategy. The successful implementation of a reading intervention could have a ripple effect and solve other problems management grapples with such as discipline and attendance. When the management do their strategic planning for the academic year the introduction of extensive reading as part of the literacy improvement plan should be discussed at length. Thereafter they need to roll it out to the staff. If they want to make it a pilot project, they could start with the Grade 8 classes and gradually introduce it to the rest of the school. The management is accountable for steering the school's academic programme into the future, and therefore they need to implement strategies that could benefit the learners' academic prowess. By advancing the learners' linguistic capacity, a tried and tested intervention such as extensive reading could benefit the school as a whole.



### **5.7.3. CLASSROOM LIBRARIES SUPPORTED BY A CENTRAL LIBRARY**

Classroom libraries are not established in all our language classes yet. We have reading corners but they are not adequately stocked. We need to engage our learners in extensive reading activities. We need to find enough resources that would stimulate the learners. These could be novelettes, picture books, comic books and magazines. But it is important to source books seen as “good reading” (Krashen, 2004, p. 416). This implies that the reading material should be of a nature that would sharpen learners' interest to the point where it compels them to want to read. It is important to ensure enough resources for everyone. There is consistent evidence that children read more when there is more available for them to read. (Morrow & Weinstein, 1982) Consistent with this research are current studies showing a positive relationship between the quality of school libraries and reading achievement (Elley, 1992; Krashen, 1995; Lance, Welborn, & Hamilton-Pennell, 1993; McQuillan, 1996b).

*Whitney's Kiss* was a favourite amongst the girls. If we do not have enough copies we need to find books similar to this theme. In this study such reactivity could have relieved the problem. It became evident that enough time to source reading material is needed. The central school library is in the process of being re-established at the school where the study was done. The central library should provide the resources for the classroom libraries.

Another possibility could be to borrow books from the educational library, Edulis, or approach other non-government organisations for assistance. Teachers can each borrow a set of books for their use and exchange it maybe at the start of each term. A central library without classroom libraries will not solve the problem of poor language proficiency and negative attitudes. All the learners might not visit the library or they may go whenever it suits them. The classroom library will be available during every language period and the teacher will be able to model the reading. Classroom libraries and print-rich classrooms must become the norm at our school.

#### **5.7.4. SETTING UP AND MANAGING EXTENSIVE READING**

It is important for the staff members to understand the rationale behind an extensive reading programme as part of the language curriculum. For this to occur, planning must be done in the previous academic year. The first term of the academic year is quite suitable for the introduction of a reading intervention. It is not an official examination term and there is enough time to establish the intervention at school. When departmental meetings are held with subject teams, heads of department should put on the agenda the progress of the intervention plan. Feedback and practical advice on how to achieve success may be shared amongst educators. The overall monitoring of the programme should be done by the principal who could do class visits while learners read. This will show interest on the part of the head of the organisation and focus attention on the importance of participating in a culture of reading; learners will thrive on positive comments and encouragement.

Also, sufficient reading material must be sourced and such reading matter should be compelling enough to entice learners to read for enjoyment. We need to dispel the myths about learners' attitudes towards reading. As Krashen says, "Often those 'who hate to read' simply do not have access to books" (Krashen, 2004, p.61). We need to ensure that the books we have in our classrooms are what the learners will find interesting, and that the space for the classroom libraries gives learners easy access to the material.

## **5.8. BENEFITS OF ACTION RESEARCH**

Cohen and Manion (1994), explain action research as essentially an on-the-spot procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem located in an immediate situation. Action research is a constructivist enquiry, during which the researcher constructs his or her knowledge of specific issues through planning, acting, evaluating, refining and learning from the experience

Action research has taught me as an educator that it is necessary to investigate my own practice in order to make changes in the best interest of the learners whom I teach. Yet whether we plan meticulously or not, problems may still arise when we implement a programme. Planning well in advance is a must to ensure smooth running. Regular reflection is another factor teachers must do. This could help to solve problems that arise.

## **5.9. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I presented a discussion of the research findings. I explored the improvements achieved by research which allows educators to reflect continuously on their practice. I did this by using the action research method to examine my own teaching methods. It enables teachers to identify and evaluate the problem, and to adjust the programme accordingly. Practical solutions for problems may also be suggested by colleagues. And in this way the principle of sharing best practice could emerge to the benefit of the learners' reading proficiency following their exposure to an extensive reading intervention.

In this thesis I explored whether within the course of the year the attitudes of learners underwent positive change after they participated in an extensive reading programme. I examined whether they were enabled to value reading for pleasure as time well spent. I also critically evaluated the merits of the extensive reading programme and the action research method used by me as teacher researcher. Finally I made certain recommendations that could be taken into consideration for further intervention programmes.

## 5.10. WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This research has shown that reading on a daily basis during the English lesson benefits learners and improves their reading proficiency which could have positive influence on their overall academic results.

It has also shown that attitudes and motivation to read regularly take long to inculcate but if we maintain the reading intervention it might change over time.

The introduction of extensive reading programmes in schools are a cost effective way to improve learners' literacy levels and learning across the curriculum.



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## Appendix 2

### Information sheet for Western Cape Education Department

Research title: An investigation into the impact of an extensive reading programme on the reading proficiency and reading motivation of a class of Grade 9 learners

I am Karen Hanslo, an English teacher at St Andrew's High School in Elsie's River. I am also registered as a Master's in Education student at the University of the Western Cape (student number: 8033276). As my research, I propose to investigate the effects of an extensive reading on the reading proficiency and reading motivation in one Grade 9 class that I teach. In addition I would like to involve a second Grade 9 class that I teach as a control group, so as to be better able to evaluate the effects of the extensive reading programme on the experimental group.

The intervention will last an entire academic year. The research approach will be that of action research, where I will be researching my own practice.

The results of the research will be published in a thesis. No personally identifiable details will be released. Confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. Assessments will take place every term to ascertain whether the strategy has had any impact on the participants.

A questionnaire will be handed to the participants to determine their attitudes towards reading. The results of these will be treated as highly confidential.

The research proposal for this study has been approved by the University of the Western Cape and the research methodology and instruments, including the questionnaire, this information sheet and the consent form, have been scrutinized and received ethical clearance from the UWC Higher Degrees Committee.

Once the study is complete, all the material will be put in safe storage at the University of the Western Cape for a period of five years and then destroyed.

Permission will be obtained from the principal of the school and the School Governing Body, to conduct the study.

If you have any further questions about any aspect of this study, I am contactable at karenhanslo@gmail.com.

Alternatively you could contact my supervisor, Ms Margie Probyn at the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535, or at mprobyn@uwc.ac.za

*Karen Hanslo*



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## Appendix 4

### Information Sheet/Letter of Introduction for School Governing Body

#### Extensive reading as an intervention strategy to improve literacy levels: information and request for permission for your child to participate

I am Karen Hanslo, a Master's in Education student at the University of the Western Cape. As part of my thesis project, I am conducting research regarding the benefits of daily reading of material of the learners' own choice. The aim is to improve their reading skills and change their attitudes towards reading to a positive one. The method I intend using is called extensive reading. It is based on the principle of reading for pleasure on a daily basis without any assessments at the end. Learners make their own choices and have the right to select a different book if the one they chose initially does not interest them.

I wish to ask for your permission for two grade nine classes to participate in this intervention strategy during their English lesson.

The results of the research will be published in a thesis. No personally identifiable details will be released. Confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. The intervention will last the entire academic year. Assessments will take place every term to ascertain whether the strategy has had any impact on the participants.

A questionnaire would be handed to the participants to determine their attitudes towards reading. The results of these would be treated as highly confidential.

The research proposal for this study has been approved by the University of the Western Cape and the research methodology and instruments, including the questionnaire, this information sheet and the consent form, have been scrutinized and received ethical clearance from the UWC Higher Degrees Committee.

Once the study is complete, all the material will be put in safe storage at the University of the Western Cape for a period of five years.

Permission has been obtained from the principal of the school and the parents of the participants to conduct the study.

If you have further questions or a complaint about any aspect of this study, you may contact me at the following telephone number. 021-9149584 or email: karenhanslo@yahoo.co.uk Alternatively you could contact my supervisor at the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape Private bag x17, Bellville 7535. She is Mrs M Probyn, Senior Lecturer in Language Education Studies, email: [mprobyn@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mprobyn@uwc.ac.za).

You may keep this information sheet for future reference.

*Karen Hanslo*



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## Appendix 8

### Information Sheet/Letter of Introduction for the Heads of Departments of English and Afrikaans

#### Extensive reading as an intervention strategy to improve literacy levels: information and request for permission for your child to participate

I am Karen Hanslo, a teacher in the English department of your school and a Master's in Education student at the University of the Western Cape. As part of my thesis project, I am conducting research regarding the benefits of daily reading of material of the learners' own choice. The aim is to improve their reading skills and change their attitudes towards reading to a positive one. The method I intend using is based on extensive reading. It is based on the principle of reading for pleasure on a daily basis without any assessments at the end. Learners make their own choices and have the right to select a different book if the one they chose initially does not interest them.

I wish to ask for your permission for two grade nine classes to participate in this intervention strategy during their English lesson on a daily basis.

The results of the research will be published in a thesis. No personally identifiable details will be released. Confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. The intervention will last the entire academic year. Assessments will take place every term to ascertain whether the strategy has had any impact on the participants.

A questionnaire would be handed to the participants to determine their attitudes towards reading. The results of these would be treated as highly confidential.

The research proposal for this study has been approved by the University of the Western Cape and the research methodology and instruments, including the questionnaire, this information sheet and the consent form, have been scrutinized and received ethical clearance from the UWC Higher Degrees Committee.

Once the study is complete, all the material will be put in safe storage at the University of the Western Cape for a period of five years.

Permission has been obtained from the principal of the school to conduct the study.

If you have further questions or a complaint about any aspect of this study, you may ask me any questions at a time which would suit us both. Alternatively you could contact my supervisor at the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape Private bag x17, Bellville 7535. She is Mrs M Probyn, Senior Lecturer in Language Education Studies, email: [mprobyn@uwc.ac.za](mailto:mprobyn@uwc.ac.za).

You may keep this information sheet for future reference.

*Karen Hanslo*



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## Appendix 10

### Informed consent form

#### I have read the information sheet about the extensive reading research intervention.

- ✓ I hereby give consent that my child may participate in research regarding the introduction of an intervention strategy to improve language ability.
- ✓ I understand that my child will not be harmed in any way nor will his/her identity be revealed to anybody.
- ✓ I understand that participation in this study will not affect my child negatively at all.
- ✓ The purpose of the study has been explained to me, and I understand the aim of it.
- ✓ I have received the contact detail (telephone numbers, email address and postal address) of a person to contact should I have any queries arising about the proposed intervention.
- ✓ I understand that my child's anonymity will be honoured and results will be kept confidential.
- ✓ I understand that the results of the study will be published as part of a research project.
- ✓ I indicate my consent to allow my child to participate in this intervention strategy by signing:

.....

Name and signature of parent/s

Date

#### ADDITIONAL CONSENT TO FILL OUT QUESTIONNAIRE

In addition to the above, I hereby agree that my child may answer the questionnaire to determine reading habits and attitudes. I understand that the responses will be kept securely and will be destroyed once analysis thereof is complete.

.....

Name and signature of parent/s

Date





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## Appendix 12

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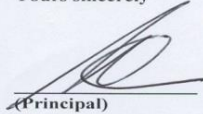
20 January 2014

To whom it may concern:

Dear Sir / Madam

I, Mr P. Oliver, Principal of the above-mentioned school, grants permission for Mrs. Karen Hanslo to conduct a reading intervention with the grade 9 English Home Language Learners.

Yours sincerely



(Principal)





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6 Write down the title/s of the book/s you enjoyed reading very much.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

7 Have you ever received a book as a present?

.....

8 Would you spend your pocket money on a book?

.....

9 Do you think reading for fun could improve your results at school?

.....  
.....  
.....

10 Do you enjoy listening to your teacher reading you stories in class?

.....

11 On a scale from one to five, how would you rate yourself when it comes to reading for pleasure - one being the lowest and five the highest?

.....

12 Do you think it is important for a school to have a library? Give reasons for your answer.

.....  
.....

13 Is time spent on the computer more important to you than reading a book? Supply a reason for your answer.

.....  
.....

## Appendix 16

### Interview questions for principal of a high school in Cape Town

- 1 The results obtained by our grade nine learners in the Annual National Assessments and systemic testing have been below average since their introduction. What would you describe as the biggest stumbling block for our learners in developing language skills?
- 2 The school does not have a library and the learners claim the resources at the municipal libraries are inadequately stocked to fulfil the needs of the community. Do you have the re-introduction of a library at school as part of your future plans?
- 3 Do you agree that the poor grasp of language of a large percentage of learners contributes to our below average results or not?
- 4 If we as a school embark on an intervention strategy to promote reading skills and try to change attitudes towards reading, do you think it should be a whole school project or a language project only?
- 5 Have you, as manager of your school, consulted expertise on the subject of reading strategies in an attempt to improve reading abilities?
- 6 If we could improve our learners' reading ability, do you think it could eventually impact positively on our school's results?
- 7 Until such time that the library could be re-established, what else do you think could be done to expose our learners to good reading material?
- 8 Is it ultimately the responsibility of the parents to expose their children to reading or should we as a school community be aware of the gap and try to fill the void?

## Appendix 17

### Interview questions for respective Head of Departments of English and Afrikaans

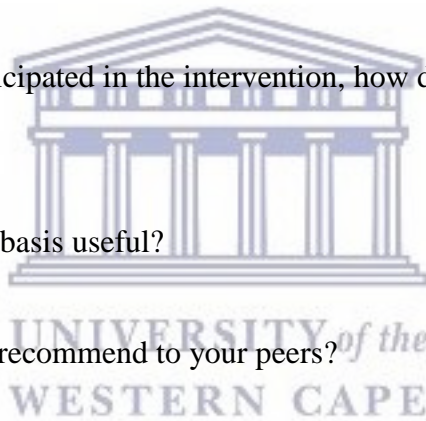
**The purpose of these interviews is to probe whether teachers see any value in an Extensive Reading programme.**

- 1 Has any in depth study been conducted to ascertain the reasons for low literacy levels?
- 2 Have you made any recommendation to the school's management to implement a reading period as part of the timetable?
- 3 Do we equip the learners adequately for life after school?
- 4 Do you monitor learners' reading at all?
- 5 Assuming the majority of the learners hail from a print poor background, are we doing enough to combat the disadvantage they have?
- 6 Would intervention strategies serve any purpose?
- 7 Do you encourage members of your department to introduce reading strategies?
- 8 Would you attribute the low levels of literacy to other learning barriers rather than non-exposure to reading materials?
- 9 Do you have any plan of action to try and improve the current situation at your school?
- 10 Could you elaborate on it?
- 11 How would the availability of a school library improve reading habits amongst the pupils?

## Appendix 18

### Interview questions for focus groups

1. You have been part of a reading intervention during your grade nine year. Do you read regularly now?
2. When you do read, what time of the day do you find most suitable to read?
3. Is there any particular reason why you prefer that specific time of the day?
4. Do you have a favourite genre? Why do you prefer that genre?
5. Those of you who participated in the intervention, how do you feel it benefitted you?
6. Is reading on a regular basis useful?
7. What book would you recommend to your peers?



## Appendix 19

### PRE-INTERVENTION TEST

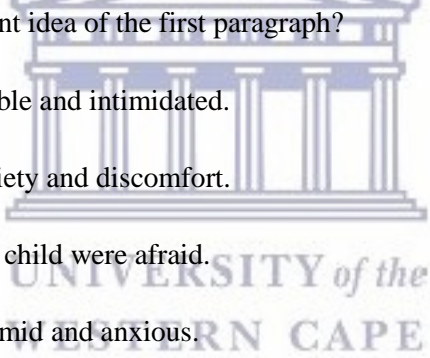
Study the following passage and answer the questions set on it.

- 1 He was startled to find the child looking at him with a full bold stare. There was something very unchildlike about it and it displeased him. His glance flickered back to the old woman. She was staring again and he even imagined that he saw a gleam in the sunken old eyes.
- 2 My God, he thought, what a pair of vultures they are.
- 3 Aloud he said, 'Is the room ready now, mother?'
4. She merely turned and pointed towards one of the huts. He stood up immediately, relieved to be rid of their unpleasant company. It seemed to be a storage shed. A large grain basket stood in one corner, and there were a number of earthenware pots encircling the room. A space had been cleared on the floor on which were placed wide square covers made of animal skins. He struck another match to take a better look at what he was to sleep on. The feel of it was like thick, soft velvet squares upon squares of the sewn-together skins of hundreds of wild animals. He only removed his shoes and overcoat. The overcoat he flung over the top for extra warmth. He bed seemed well worth ten shillings to him because it was very warm.
5. He lay on his back staring up at the dark, too tense to sleep. A good gulp of brandy would have knocked him out cold but he dared not touch it. He distrusted the old hag. She seemed to know too much about the border. What would prevent her from stepping down there and informing the police? There was good money in it, if she knew about that too. A cold sweat broke out on him as he imagined her at the fence shouting at the patrol van. And what about the child and her awful unchildlike stare? He listened alertly to their every movement. For a time there was a low murmured conversation, and then he heard the fire being scraped out. Then the door of the next hut was pushed open. The old hag coughed a bit. There was more murmured conversation and a brief silence. Then the door opened again and he could tell that it was the child that had gone out because the old hag was coughing inside.  
  
( A short while later...)
6. 'Here's the money,' he said fiercely. 'Now go away.'

7. Her eyes were wide and uncomprehending in the brief glare of the match, but she grasped the note and fled. From the hut next door she he heard the brief plaintive explanation of the child and the loud surprised chatter of the old woman.
8. ‘You mean he gave you money for nothing?’ she said, beside herself with excitement. ‘This is a miracle! I have not yet known a man who did not regard a woman as a gift from God! He must be mad! Let unlock the door to protect ourselves from that madman!’
9. What a loathsome woman, he thought, and yet how naïve she was in her evil. He had not seen many such evils in his lifetime. He thought they were created by poverty and oppression, and he had spent the last two years in jail in the belief that, in some way, a protest would help set the world right. It was the mentality of the old hag that ruined a whole continent- some sort of clinging, ancestral, tribal belief...

(From *Where Rainclouds Gather* by Bessie Head)

Circle the correct answer for questions 1-5

- 
1. What is the most important idea of the first paragraph?
    - A The man felt uncomfortable and intimidated.
    - B The child was full of anxiety and discomfort.
    - C The grandmother and the child were afraid.
    - D Both the females were timid and anxious. (1)
  
  - 2.1 What does the fact that the man thinks of the two women as ‘a pair of vultures’ tell you about the old woman and the child?
    - A They are definitely not very pretty.
    - B They only want to get something from the man.
    - C They want to give the man over to the patrol.
    - D Their body shape resembles that of vultures. (1)
  
  - 2.2 What does the ‘unchildlike’ stare of the child tell us about her?

- A She had lived through hardships.
- B She was forced to do grown-up things.
- C Her grandmother gave her a hard time.
- D She was not as young as she looked. (1)

3 What is the setting of the extract?

- A The hut of the old woman
- B The actual border area
- C The old woman's village
- D The storage shed (1)

4.1 What is the main idea in paragraph 5 concerned with?

- A The young man's irrational fear of the woman and the child
- B The young man's unflattering impression of the woman and child
- C The young man's fear of the woman telling the border police about him
- D The young man's belief that he had found warm, safe accommodation (1)

4.2 What is the theme of the extract?

- A The way the young man distrusts the woman and the child
- B The man's fear of the woman calling the border police
- C The haggard old woman not talking, just pointing at the young man
- D The disturbing adult manner in which the child looks at the young man (1)

5.1 Through whose eyes do we mainly experience the events in the excerpt?

- A The old woman's eyes
- B How the child sees the events



- C The man's view of the situation
- D Through the writer's eyes (1)

5.2 Why does the writer use this point of view for the story?

- A It is more objective and fair.
- B It gives insight into the man's mind.
- C It results in giving credibility to the events.
- D The reader can distance himself from the events. (1)

Answer questions 6 to 9

6. Why is the man fearful that the old woman would reveal his presence to the border police? (2)

7 In paragraph 3, the man does not reveal his true feelings (as expressed in paragraph 2). What would have happened if he had revealed his real feelings to the woman? (3)

8.1 Identify the figure of speech in the following quote and say if it is based on comparison or contrast. Motivate your answer.

'...what a pair of vultures they are.' (Paragraph 8) (3)

8.2 Why is the description of the old woman as 'an old hag' effective? (2)

9. In the third paragraph the man addressed the old woman as 'mother' as a term of respect. In what other way could he have addressed her? (2)

Total=20

## Appendix 20

### POST-INTERVENTION TEST

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

1. Like many teenagers, 15-year-old 'Grace' from Kwazulu-Natal, enjoyed meeting people on social networks. When one of her new 'friends' offered her money, independence and the chance of a better life, she agreed to meet this person, believing that this was really an opportunity. She did not come home from her appointment.
2. Grace was found on the streets a few weeks later, thanks to a campaign mounted by Missing Children SA (MCSA), an organisation that was launched in 2007 following the kidnapping and murder of Sheldean Human (7 years old) from Pretoria and Annestacia Wiese (12 years old) from Cape Town. MCSA assists the South African Police Service (SAPS) in creating national awareness of missing children and supports their traumatised families.
3. Since the introduction of official record-keeping in 1994, more than 900 children reported missing in South Africa have not been found.
4. Grace was one of the lucky ones: she had already been forced into prostitution but she was alive and could be counselled and reintegrated into her family.
5. According to figures released by the SAPS Missing Persons Bureau, 1 460 children are reported missing each year. Of the 300 or so cases that MCSA handles annually, about 87 percent are resolved within a week, says national coordinator, Judy Olivier. Roughly 30 percent of children go missing get lost: they may live in poor overcrowded conditions; they may have negligent or absent parents; they may be sent to the shops when they are too young to find their way, or they may get on the wrong taxi returning from school. These are the children who slip through the cracks because of poor socio-economic circumstances and inadequate support services.
6. Runaways account for another 30 percent-it is usually children who can't endure what is happening at home. They may be the victims of alcoholism, drug addiction, violence or abuse and see escape as the only solution. Taking these two categories together, there is a high proportion of children who would not go missing if they had a healthier and safer home environment.
7. But then there are the other categories, the main one being parental or family abduction. 'We are frequently faced with this reality,' says Olivier.' These parents are divorced or separated

and one of them takes the child or children and leaves the region without the necessary permission.'

8. 'Stranger abduction or kidnapping accounts for only two or three percent of our cases, which may not sound like much. But one missing child is one too many. Human trafficking is a reality. A little girl went missing in a Pretoria shopping centre. Her mother raised the alarm and security personnel immediately started a search. The child was found in the toilets, drugged, her hair shaved off and her clothes changed. She was reunited with her family, but without such quick action, things could have gone the other way.'
9. MCSA urges every adult in the country to embrace the idea that 'Your child is my child to protect.' 'If you know that a child is alone at home or in danger, you need to do something about it,' says Olivier. 'The only way we can ensure a safe environment for every child in South Africa is if we, adults, take responsibility for all children, not only our own.'

Grace is not her real name.

(Adapted from an article by Catherine Eden in *Clicks Magazine*, 2012)

- 1.1 Choose the correct answer. Write down only the letter of your choice.

Why did the writer write the article?

- A The writer wanted to show that many children go missing in South Africa.
- B The writer wanted to show that divorce affected children.
- C The writer wanted to focus on the Duties of the SAPS.
- D The write wanted to focus on the duties of security personnel in shopping centres.

(1)

- 1.2 Why is the word 'friends' (line two) written in inverted commas? (2)

- 1.3 Write down the letter of the correct answer.

Which punctuation mark has the writer used, in paragraph 1, to indicate that it was a shock that Grace did not come home?

- A Exclamation mark
- B Asterisk
- C Brackets

D Inverted commas (1)

1.4 Write down the letter of the correct answer

Why did Grace decide to leave home?

A She thought she would be starting a new life.

B She did not get along with her family

C She wanted to meet new people

D She did not have money (1)

1.5 Refer to paragraph 4.

Would you agree that 'Grace was one of the lucky ones?' (Line 14)

Give a reason for your answer. (2)

1.6 Write down the letter of your choice

What does the expression 'slip through the cracks' (line 23) mean in the context of this article?

A It means that the system failed to locate and protect the children.

B It means to escape deliberately.

C It means to avoid the authorities deliberately.

D It means to hide away. (1)

1.7 Write down the letter of your choice

What is the main idea of paragraph 5?

A MCSA is overworked and has to handle 300 cases a year.

B Judy Olivier is the national coordinator of MCSA.

C Children are at risk of going missing.

D MCSA is doing good work. (1)

1.8 Refer to paragraph 5

Do you think the statistics provided are reliable? Motivate your answer with information from the text. (2)

1.9 Refer to paragraph 6

Do you agree with the writer's statement that children 'would go missing if

they had a healthier and safer environment’?

Give a reason for your answer.

(3)

1.10 Write down the letter of your choice.

What does the expression, ‘Human trafficking’ (line 36) refer to?

- A It refers to people to transport drugs.
- B It refers to people who direct the traffic.
- C It refers to the kidnapping of little girls.
- D It refers to the trading and selling of people.

(1)

1.11 Combine the following sentences using the conjunction ‘but’.

Social networks can be an advantage. Social networks must be used responsibly. (2)

1.12 The writer states, ‘things could have gone the other way.’ (line 40)

Suggest what could have happened. Give two options.

(2)

1.13 We are told that the little girl’s hair had been shaved off (lines 38-40)

For what reason was her hair shaved off?

(1)

Total =20



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## Appendix 21

### THE ACTUAL INTERVENTION: EXTENSIVE READING

#### PLANNING

The Academic year started on 9 January 2013. During the first two weeks of school, timetables needed to be reshuffled due to logistical problems such as teacher shortages and timetable clashes. Teaching started at the beginning of February, and the two Grade 9 classes were allocated to me. In planning the intervention to make the programme viable before embarking on it, I followed the steps outlined here.

I explained the intervention programme to the learners. I explained the difference between extensive reading and intensive reading which they use when reading for comprehension in class. I carefully explained to them that there is nothing wrong with their ability to understand the language, but that they might not have been exposed to reading for pleasure on a daily basis. The focus would thus be on extensive reading on a daily basis which they were told might assist them in their academic work and which they might enjoy for pleasure. The learners had to understand that this type of reading would not be associated with any formal report or oral activity but rather would assist them in the long term with language proficiency.

#### PREPARING THE SPACE INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

I decided to allocate the last ten minutes of every English lesson to the reading intervention. I cleared a space which would serve as the reading corner where learners could select books of their choice. A desk and the window sills were earmarked for the reading corner. I used short story books I found in the discarded library, prescribed books not used any longer such as *Whitney's Kiss*, *17 Magazine* and *S A Rugby Magazine*. I had a few comic books such as *Supa Strikers* and other books *Sweet Valley High*, *Zinzi' Story*, and *The Eight Mile Adventure*. These books were found inside one of the classroom cupboards. They must have been left there by the previous educator. The reading corner was on the window side of the classroom. I had a desk which served as the place where books were exhibited.

The collection consisted of texts in the following categories: 70 fiction, 30 non-fiction books and 150 magazines.

## PROGRAMME OF ACTION

### TERM ONE Reflections

#### THE BORROWING SYSTEM

##### *What went well?*

During the Extensive Reading time learners could walk around the desk and make their selections. I allowed them to go row by row. Every row had a chance to be the first to collect their books. The learners felt this was a fair practice.

It took quite some time for the learners to make their choices. Learners chose books on a daily basis. It was a bit too time-consuming for them to choose new material every day. I reflected and found an alternative. A few learners who belonged to the local library brought their own books to school. I instructed them beforehand to select books from the teenage section. I would look at the title and read the blurb when they brought books to class. These few learners were avid readers who could manage reading their books.

A few boys were reluctant readers and I encouraged them to choose a sports magazine which they were willing to do. When everybody had their books I sat down to model the reading. The reading intervention, based on extensive reading, which I implemented, expects of the teacher to read with the learners. I also chose a magazine from the shelf and as soon as everyone had settled, I too sat down to read.

The participants were used to reading as part of their oral assignments and it took them some time to realize that I was not expecting any assignments from them other than that they read silently during every English lesson. They eventually accepted the explanation I gave about the purpose of the intervention.

##### *Challenges*

The method I used for borrowing books was problematic. It took too long for everybody to make their selection. In accordance with the principle of action research, I needed to assess the situation and find a practical solution. I decided learners could keep books for a few days instead of borrowing daily. I also allowed learners to swap books with learners around them because they could not all reach the reading corner and make their choices in time.



Added to this, when double periods were re-introduced, the continuity of the intervention was disrupted. Due to the introduction of double lessons, I did not see the class every day. The class would have two double lessons over the five-day cycle we followed. This resulted in me missing them one day. I decided to use the last ten minutes of the first of the double lesson and the first ten minutes of the second lesson. This made up for the days the learners could not read.

I initially perceived the double lessons to be a problem for the intervention, because it meant not seeing the learners on certain days but then I decided to use these lessons for the borrowing of books. Double lessons gave me a bit of extra time for learners to choose books. We timed things in such a way that when the rest of the school changed classrooms, the learners could select their books. The reason for this was because of the noise levels outside. Another reason for this was because I found it cumbersome to let learners borrow daily. It took too much time and sometimes the daily reading session was shorter than planned.

Another problem was the inconsistency of the bell ringing to signal the end of the lessons, which cut short the ten minutes allocated for Extensive Reading. The inconsistent length of lesson was a consequence of interruptions in the school programme, for example if the morning briefing lasted longer than the allocated time, a special assembly was held or break needed to be extended for a programme. To overcome such problems I moved the reading session to the start of the lesson. This meant that no matter what disruptions the day held, the learners could still read.

The learners showed a preference for the same books, for example, *Whitney's Kiss*, but there were not enough copies. It could be that the books I chose for example, *The Golden Mile Adventure* and *Zinzi's Story* were not popular at all. I realised that a very wide selection of books is necessary to really enable the learners to read what they prefer.

I needed to negotiate and say they could all get a chance to read *Whitney's Kiss* at some time.

The girls decided to choose the *Seventeen Magazines*, so having the magazines helped solve the problem.

## TERM TWO REFLECTIONS

### *What went well?*

By this stage learners were used to the intervention. They read in silence while I could model reading. Upon arrival in class they would remind me they must read. Learners who did not enjoy what they were reading swapped their books. As we read you could hear a pin drop.

### *Challenges*

Learners forgot their books at home sometimes.

### *Solution*

I allowed learners to choose a book from the selection I had in class. They finished that book first and then brought their book back to class to read.

## **PROBLEMS THAT OCCURRED OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM THAT IMPACTED ON THE INTERVENTION**

The same interruptions as experienced in the first term still disrupted the intervention such as: irregular ringing of the bell, lessons of varying length and learner absenteeism. In addition, four weeks of terms two and four are spent on examinations; normal teaching stops then. So the Extensive Reading intervention also stopped at the end of May. It resumed only when school reopened for term three.

### Changes

I decided to keep the books in different places in the class. We kept them on the window sills nearest to where the learners sat. The teething problems of the intervention were out of the way but other problems arose that could hamper the intervention.

### Challenges I faced as educator

I needed to plan my lesson to include the Extensive Reading without compromising teaching time as I was under pressure to complete the syllabus. Absenteeism poses a big problem and learners do not work at home. They need time in class to complete tasks. This impeded reading time. One or two of them sometimes needed to complete their work while the rest read. Also, when we had to do formal tasks in class, for example oral presentations or written work, we could not read.

Some learners had a very short concentration span – the boys in particular, struggled to stay focused. Sometimes they wanted to share their articles or pictures in magazines with their friends. It hampered my modelling of reading. I needed to stop and reprimand them and get them back on task. Then I realised that it was actually a positive thing because they wanted to share their articles or captions with friends. I decided to let it be and recorded it as a challenge that I could address as part of my recommendations. With hindsight I realised it was still a form of engaging with print when they read a caption about a sports hero, or an advertisement or a cartoon. Instead of this posing a challenge, I realised that sharing what you find fits in with reading as a social practice.

### TERM THREE

#### *What went well?*

The intervention was now firmly established at the start of the lesson. Learners were eager to read. I reflected again and wondered whether they really enjoy reading so much or whether it was just because it was an escape from work. I decided to give the learners the benefit of the doubt.

#### *Challenges*

However, certain days were better than others. There were days when the boys were unsettled. This had a lot to do with what had happened prior to their arriving at the lesson. At this time we had a substantial dropout rate. In the intervention group four learners out of the class of thirty dropped out; and in the control group, seven learners out of the class of twenty-eight dropped out. This, coupled with regular absenteeism, formed the biggest stumbling blocks. A core group of ten avid readers persisted though. Also, eleven learners regularly borrowed books from the library.

The control tests started early so as to accommodate the ANA tests. It was Week seven of term three. That was the end of teaching time. The learners never returned to school after the start of the test week. We lost four extra weeks of the term because of this.

### TERM FOUR

Term four is the shortest term of the year. There are only four weeks of teaching and then the final examination commences. Learners now knew exactly what the intervention was all about. They knew their preferences and did not swap books that much. They seemed to enjoy

the intervention. They were surprised about the fact that they could choose the books they wanted to read. In total, the learners spent 30 weeks reading during the intervention and they lost 10 weeks to tests and examinations.

### *Summary of findings*

The learners were quite excited about the reading intervention. I urged the learners to get to the classroom quickly and to settle down to make sure we have time for the reading session. The learners who borrowed at the local libraries helped to solve the problem with the book selection. The sports magazines offered a solution for the boys who were reluctant at first. They read about their heroes and favourite football clubs. The fact that the learners saw me reading as well encouraged them further. Double periods eventually helped to accommodate the borrowing of the books. Certain factors such as lesson times, the ringing of the bell, absenteeism and the rate at which learners dropped out, were beyond my control. Regular reflection helped me solve some of these problems. Interruptions such as tests and examinations were unavoidable. Therefore it became important to try to minimise other disruptions so as to get the maximum time to read.

