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Leadership for Literacy:

Exploring leadership practices in township and rural primary schools serving poor communities in South Africa

Final Report on the Case Study Schools

Nick Taylor and Ursula Hoadley

Keywords: school leadership and management, student achievement, South Africa, challenging contexts, qualitative research



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Leadership for Literacy

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Final Report on the Case Study Schools

9 April 2018



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List of Acronyms

ANA: Annual National Assessments
ATP: Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements
CPD: Continuing professional development
CVT: Curriculum Verification Tool
DBE: Department of Basic Education
DP: Deputy Principal
EFAL: English as a First Additional Language
FDE: Further Diploma in Education
FP: Foundation Phase
GDE: Gauteng Department of Education
GGR: group guided reading
GPLMS: Gauteng Provincial Literacy and Mathematics Strategy
HL: home language
HODs: Heads of department
HR: Human Resources
ICT: Information and Communication Technology
IP: Intermediate Phase
IQMS: Integrated Strategic Management System
ITE: Initial teacher education
KIP: Kip McGrath Centre
LOLT: Language of learning and teaching
LTSM: Learning and Teaching Support Materials?
NECT: National Education Collaboration Trust
NSC: National Senior Certificate
ORF: Oral reading fluency
PCK: pedagogical content knowledge
PLCs: Professional Learning Communities
PrimTEd: Primary Teacher Education Project
SA-SAMs: South African School Administration and Management System
SBST: School-Based Support Teams
SES: Socio-economic status
SGB: School Governing Body
SMT: School Management Team
SP: Senior Phase

1. Background

The performance of South African primary schools in reading is disappointing, with some 78% of Grade 4 learners failing to reach the low international benchmark in the 2016 iteration of the Progress in Reading Study (PIRLS) (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Hooper, 2017). Furthermore, the country's scores in both reading and mathematics are lower than many much poorer countries in the sub-Saharan Africa (Spaull and Taylor, 2015).

Efforts directed towards improving reading performance revolve around three questions. The first concerns teachers currently in the system: how can reading pedagogy be improved among practising primary school teachers? Although the case is far from proved, promising results are emerging from intervention programmes designed in response to this question, using a combination of lesson plans, reading materials, training and in-school support from outside coaches, both in South Africa (Piper, 2009; Fleisch, 2016; Fleisch, Schöer, Roberts & Thornton, 2016; Taylor, Cilliers, Prinsloo, Fleisch, & Reddy, 2017) and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Piper, Zuilkowski & Mugenda, 2014; Nabacwa, Brunette & Piper, 2018).

While the first question is about raising the impact of in-service training (continuing professional development or CPD), the second is directed towards the initial teacher education (ITE) sector: how can new teachers be better prepared to meet the needs of primary school learners in the field of literacy instruction? It is surprising that this question has not received far greater attention from the research community, since in-service programmes are doomed to continue in perpetuity unless this question is satisfactorily resolved. Nevertheless, some progress is being made in this direction in South Africa. The Primary Teacher Education Project (PrimTEd), which involves all 26 universities which offer ITE, is in the process of developing standards for educating new teachers in the fields of literacy and mathematics (DHET, 2016).

The third question involves school leadership: how should school leaders develop and deploy resources in order to optimise reading instruction across the school? This question concerns the strategies available to school leaders to make the most of whatever capacity teachers, both those currently in service and those entering schools for the first time, may possess. It is obvious that the effects of teacher education programmes, ITE and CPD alike, will be frustrated without the coordination of teacher activities within a school ecology which promotes effective reading pedagogy. This is the terrain in which the *Leadership for Literacy* research project is located.

The objective of the study is to understand exceptional leadership practices in schools serving poor children. South Africa's schools are classified into five quintiles based on the socio-economic status (SES) of their feeder communities, and the population for present the study are schools serving the poorest three quintiles. These are no-fee schools situated in townships and rural areas across the country.

2. Research design and method

Design

The overall research design of this multi-faceted project is summarised in Figure 1.

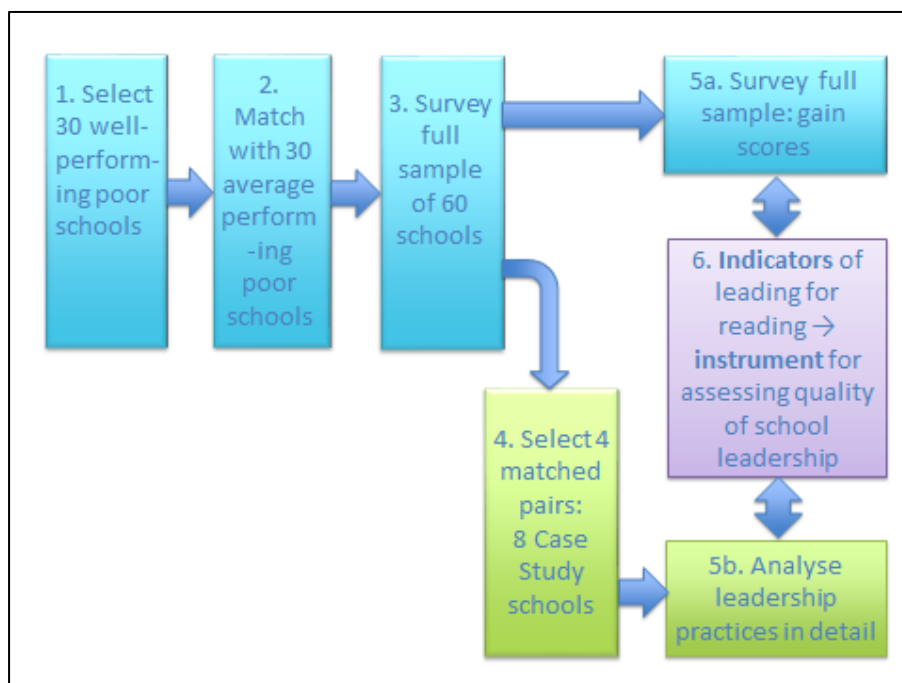


Figure 1 Leading for Reading Research Design

The matched pairs design assumes that, given a similar geographical position, each school pair should have the same socioeconomic characteristics, and be influenced by similar cultural/political/local factors. Then, in making comparisons of leadership practices between each high-performing and low-performing school, those practices responsible for school-wide² better performance may be identified. The mixed-methods design assumes that the leadership practices which are most effective in promoting reading across the school, derived through an analysis of the case study data in Step 5b, will be manifest in schools exhibiting the greatest level and gain scores on the reading tests over the year, as revealed in the data produced during Step 5a. The final objective of the study is to construct an instrument by means of which good leadership practices may be identified.

The present report describes the processes and findings of Step 5b: the eight case studies conducted in four matched pairs of schools distributed across three of South Africa's nine provinces.

² As distinct from idiosyncratic differences because of individual teachers.

Sampling

Selection of the schools was a three-stage process, as indicated in Steps 1, 2 and 4 of Figure 1. The procedures are described in detail in Wills (2017) and only a summary is provided here. The results of the Annual National Assessment (ANA) tests³ were used to identify top-performing Quintile 1-3 primary schools in three provinces: Gauteng, the most urbanised province and one of the best-performing provinces; KwaZulu-Natal, which contains a mix of urban and deep rural schools and exhibits mixed performance; and Limpopo, which is largely rural and performs poorly.

Given reliability concerns of the ANA testing system, a dataset of 500 recommendations on well-performing no-fee schools was collected from a variety of sources (district officials, school principals and administrative clerks, education-related NGOs, unions, other stakeholders, secondary schools performing well in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations), and this data was used to supplement the ANA scores in selecting the high-performing schools. Furthermore, given the low number of potential outlier no-fee schools, a handful of quintile 4 (low-fee schools) were included in the outlier sample.

Outlier schools were mapped geographically to identify a matched school pair that was the closest possible school to the outlier but was relatively underperforming in ANA, and had the same language of instruction and quintile ranking (Step 2 in Figure 1).

Selection of the case study schools was done after the survey of the full sample of 60 schools and the administration of various reading tests (Step 3). The first stage in this process was to select the four best performers in terms of:

- Median class performance in grade 6 literacy scores on written comprehension and vocabulary
- Median of Grade 3 oral reading fluency (ORF) scores in African language for a 10-15 learner sample
- Performance in Grade 3 ORF scores in English language for a 10-15 learner sample.

These high-performing case study schools were then matched with four low-performing schools in terms of:

- Relatively poor performance in Grade 6 literacy and at least one Grade 3 area (English or African language)
- Sufficient overlap in the SES of the Grade 6 class tested across the better- and worse-performing pair. This factor trumped all others including similar language of learning and teaching (LOLT) or district positioning.

³ These are population-wide tests in maths and languages conducted in Grades 1-6 and 9 between 2012 and 2014. They were discontinued in 2014, due to union opposition.

Due to school access challenges during fieldwork we surveyed only 29 pairs rather than 30 as initially intended (10 in Gauteng, 10 in KwaZulu-Natal, 9 in Limpopo).

3. Theoretical framework

The project commenced with a review of the research literature on school leadership practices which promote the teaching of reading (Hoadley, 2018).

From this review a framework was produced which recognised four categories of resources which require mobilisation, guidance, development and integration in the interests of promoting effective reading pedagogy throughout the school: knowledge, human, strategic and material. The main research question guiding the study is:

To what extent do school leaders develop and deploy resources (knowledge, human, strategic and material) to best advantage in promoting the teaching and learning of reading throughout the school?

Ten specific questions probing the extent to which these resources are present and utilised in the case study schools were derived as reflected in Table 1.

Table 1: Research questions derived from the literature review

Resource	Indicators	Research questions
Knowledge resources	Extent to which school leaders, as a collective, understand the value and technology of teaching reading. The extent to which this is shared with teachers across the school.	Q1: Are school leaders knowledgeable about teaching reading? Q2: Is this knowledge shared with teachers?
Human resources	The extent to which expertise in reading instruction is used to recruit and promote educators. The extent to which existing expertise is recognised and utilised across the school. The extent to which expertise is developed.	Q3: Is the recruitment, management and deployment of staff in the school related to the promotion of reading instruction? Q4: To what extent is expertise in teaching reading recognised in individual teachers and used advantageously throughout the school? Q5: Are educators provided opportunities to collaborate and share expertise in the interests of improving reading instruction?
Strategic resources	The extent to which there are programmes and practices in the school that are geared towards the improvement of reading instruction and outcomes.	Q6: Are there programmes and practices in the school that are geared towards the improvement of reading instruction and outcomes?
Material resources	The extent which time is used effectively for reading instruction. The extent to which textual resources are procured, deployed and utilised for effective reading instruction.	Q7: Does the school prioritise the acquisition of high quality textual resources to support a programme of reading? Q8: Are the texts utilized optimally?

Fieldwork

Full Sample

Fieldwork was conducted for one day in each of the 61 schools between 6 February-March 2017, and again in October of the same year by a team of three fieldworkers (steps 3 and 5a in Figure 1). The following data was collected:

- 10-15 Grade 3 students in African and English language were administered an ORF and word recognition test. Students were sampled from one class by i) the teacher selecting his/her two best students and the remainder were randomly selected from the class list by selecting each '7th' student down the list. This was a one-on-one test, with information captured electronically in tablets.
- At Grade 6 level three kinds of tests were administered:
 - Written literacy comprehension and vocabulary tests to an entire class.
 - 10-15 students from the same class were engaged in one-on-one reading and comprehension test.
 - The same vocabulary test was given to the teacher of the class tested.
- All members of the Grade 6 class tested in the previous step were given a questionnaire to complete which asked them to list the assets in their homes. The results were used to compute the relative socio-economic status of their families and of the class as a whole; the latter was assumed to reflect the SES of the school (see Table 2).
- A number of instruments were used to capture school characteristics, school climate, school functionality, teacher perceptions and leadership and management practices. These included interviews with school leaders and teachers of Grade 3 and Grade 6 classes and an anonymous self-administered educator survey to gauge perceptions, and learner book observations.

The object of gathering the test data twice in the same year was to compute learner gain scores on the various literacy tests, and to link these to the features of good school leadership with respect to promoting literacy instruction in the school, as established through the qualitative findings (see below).

Case Study Schools

The eight case study schools were visited for three days each in June 2017 (step 5b in Figure 1). During this visit the following activities were undertaken:

- Interviews with the principal (P), deputy principal (DP), heads of department⁴ (HODs) for the intermediate phase⁵ (IP) and foundation phase⁶ (FP), and two Grade 3 (G3) and two Grade 6 (G6) teachers
- Inspection of the books in the classes of the teachers interviewed
- Inspection of the DBE workbooks and exercise books in maths and English of the Grade 6 teachers interviewed
- Inspection of the DBE workbooks and exercise books in maths and isiZulu of the Grade 3 teachers interviewed
- Inspection of the school library

Analysis of the Case Study Data

Selection of both the full sample and case study schools according to the matched-pairs approach described above are examples of what Flyvberg (2011) has called information-oriented sampling. This is a common approach to case studies: since an average, or typical case is often not the richest in information on a particular topic, it is more useful to select subjects that offer an interesting, unusual or particularly revealing set of circumstances. Thus, the high-performing case study schools are more likely to reveal good leadership practices than their low-performing counterparts, and these exceptional leadership practices are likely to be thrown into sharp relief when compared to practices in their matched schools.

The purposes of the case studies in our *Leadership for Literacy* study is both theory-testing, in that we commence with a theory derived from the literature, and theory-building or exploratory, in that no theory is ever complete or immune from falsification (Stake, 1994; 1995; Thomas, 2011) and the research analyst needs to be constantly on the alert for counterintuitive findings. In addition, whereas large-scale quantitative designs are best for establishing whether or not one population is significantly different from another, the case-study method is best for exploring the factors underlying these differences (Yin, 2009).

In their classic discussions of qualitative methods, Lincoln and Guba (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Lincoln, 1995) highlighted the need to ensure the trustworthiness of such approaches. Here trustworthiness, or credibility, is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative studies; it is about how congruent the findings are with reality. Shenton (2004), building on the work of Lincoln and Guba, discusses a number of techniques aimed at strengthening the trustworthiness of qualitative analyses. These include the triangulation of data gathered from different sources or by different research workers, and iterative questioning – or probing – to get beneath what Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews (2010) have called isomorphic mimicry, a response which, either by design or wishful thinking,

⁴ HODs are mid-level school managers responsible for curriculum leaders in a subject or school phase.

⁵ Grades 4-6

⁶ Grades 1-3

gives the impression of being consistent with known best practice or conforming to policy, but which in effect hides behaviour which is quite different. We used both triangulation and probing techniques extensively during the interviews conducted in the case study schools.

Another key concept in qualitative research is the notion of confirmability, which is the equivalent of objectivity in quantitative studies (Patton, 1990). This refers to the need to ensure that the research findings reflect the behaviour and perceptions of the subjects of the study rather than the predispositions of the research analyst. Key to this quest is the building of an audit trail (Shenton, 2004) which allows the reader to trace the course of the research, from hypotheses, through data collection and analysis, to the conclusions of the study. This is not an easy procedure, since the analysis of qualitative data generally involves the condensation of large quantities of information into succinct and digestible forms, a process referred to in the literature as recursive abstraction (Polkinghorne & Arnold, 2014; Ohun & Back, 2014).

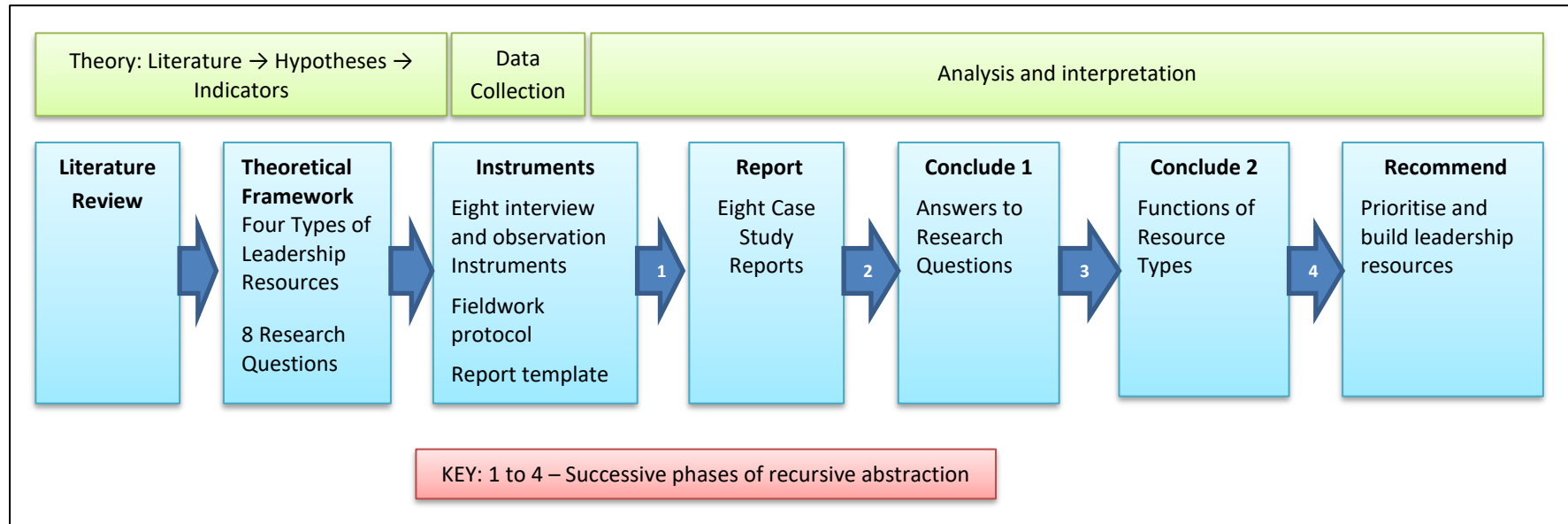
The data on which the findings which constitute the bulk of this report are based is a case in point. The eight instruments used to collect the data in each of the eight schools make up a total of 60 pages of semi-structured interviews and observations. Consolidating this volume of information into a coherent case study report involved a great deal of collation, condensation and interpretation. How does the research analyst ensure that the product reflects a faithful interpretation of the situation without being overly distorted by the predispositions of the analyst? The situation is made doubly difficult by the necessity to make inferences at all stages of the process. Four distinct stages of abstraction are amenable to such distortion, labelled 1-4 in Figure 2. We addressed this problem as follows:

1. Fieldworkers were instructed to record in the instruments as fully as is appropriate the actual words of respondents, and relatively full descriptions of their observations.
2. Case study reports were written to support interpretations with key quotes from correspondents and descriptions of the various practices and resources observed.
3. The present report was then written using the same procedure described in the previous point. The research findings which follow are consolidated under each of the eight Research Questions. The information illuminating each question is supported by key quotes from respondents and descriptions from the case study reports. These quotes and descriptions constitute the audit trail of evidence under each of the research questions.
4. Where necessary, the writer referred to the instruments to supplement information contained in the case study reports.
5. The Discussion section at the end of each of the Research Questions further consolidates the evidence pertaining to the respective question.
6. The conclusions consolidate the findings regarding the four Resource Types described in the Theoretical Framework.

7. The Recommendations weight the relative importance of the four Resource Types and make suggestions about how they may be strengthened.
8. Each pair of case study schools was visited by a different team of fieldworkers, while the present report was written by a single analyst, ensuring comparability across the case study schools.
9. The report was then reviewed by the fieldwork teams who collected the data and wrote the case study reports, and adjustments made where warranted. This is the peer scrutiny technique referred to by Shenton (2004).

The inclusion of the audit trail, described under point 3, makes the report lengthy and difficult to read. It is recommended that, for each of the Research Questions below, a first reading skips directly to the Discussion section, and refers to the audit trail only when more information is required.

Figure 2: Collection and analysis of case study data



The Case Study schools

Socio-economic status

The relatively close fit of the two schools in each pair with respect to socio-economic status is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Relative poverty of learners attending case study schools

School Code	Average G6 comprehension score (%)	SES ranking at 50th percentile ⁷	SES ranking at 10th percentile ⁸	SES ranking at 90th percentile ⁹
A(H)	30.0	11	7	23
A(L)	21.1	17	20	16
B(H)	36.7	5	4	7
B(L)	22.0	13	17	22
C(H)	38.3	12	10	5
C(L)	22.7	25	18	27
D(H)	49.8	4	5	7
D(L)	50.7	2	2	1

Performance

The relative performances on the literacy tests between the two schools in each pair is revealed in Table 3.

⁷ 1 indicates that this school has the wealthiest typical student in class. 61 has poorest typical student in class.

⁸ 1 indicates that this school has the wealthiest 10th percentile student in class. 61 has poorest 10th percentile student in class.

⁹ 1 indicates that this school has the wealthiest 90th percentile student in class. 61 has poorest 90th percentile student in class.

Table 3: Learner performance on reading tests

School Code	Grade 6			Grade 3			
	English			African		English	
	Written comprehension 1 (%)	Written comprehension 2 (%)	Vocabulary (Max = 72)	Oral reading fluency (WCPM)	Oral comprehension (Max = 5)	Oral reading fluency (WCPM)	Oral comprehension (Max = 5)
A(H)	36	24	10.7	20,83	2,33	30,09	1,45
A(L)	26	17	4.2	12,08	1,08	13,36	0,45
B(H)	42	32	11.8	31,40	3,00	50,30	2,80
B(L)	23	21	4.1	22.40	2.90	28.50	2.10
C(H)	41	36	9.3	11,50	1,25	43,29	2,43
C(L)	26	19	4.2	20,70	2,60	18,30	0,80
D(H)	62	38	16.8	11,00	1,73	50,80	3,20
D(L)	59	43	13.0	38,67	2,20	29,33	1,47
All 61 schools	28	21	5.1	26,58	2,39	22,20	0,90

With two exceptions (C(H) and D(H)) the high-performing member of each pair outscored the low-performing member on all 7 measures shown in Table 3. In pair C, C(H) outscored its pair on all the Grade 6 measures and on the English Grade 3 measures, but the results were reversed for the Grade 3 African language scores. Similarly, D(H) outscored D(L) on most measures (with the Grade 6 results being somewhat mixed), but for Grade the results were reversed, with D(L) doing better on the African language scores and D(H) doing better in English. The reason for these reversals with respect to the African language is most likely due to the language policy of the school, which is to commence with English in Grade 1, even though the home language of the children is an African language (see Table 4).

This decision, made according to the wishes of parents, has two consequences. First, the African language studied in the Foundation Phase (FP) by the children in the higher-performing schools is at a significantly lower level¹⁰ than that studied by their counterparts in the paired schools. Second, since only the FP teachers in these two schools (C(H) and D(H)) are African language speakers, with the rest being first language English speakers, school leaders are unable to provide much support to their FP colleagues.

¹⁰ The LOLT is taken at home language (HL) level, while the subsidiary language is studied at First Additional Language (FAL) level. While the availability of books in African languages is by no means satisfactory at HL level, it is considerably worse at FAL level.

Language

The learner population at all eight case study schools is overwhelmingly African, and pupils speak an African language at home. The language policy of the country is that learners should be schooled in their mother tongue for the first three grades (FP), after which the LOLT becomes English, except where the majority of learners are Afrikaans speaking, in which case the LOLT continues to be Afrikaans. School governing bodies of majority African schools have the right to choose English LOLT in the FP. In reality, the latter option is discouraged by provincial authorities but a few schools, including three of the case study schools, insist on English from Grade 1. Another of the case study schools changes the LOLT to English in Grade 2. A further two schools wish to change the LOLT in FP.

Table 4: Language practices in case study schools

School code	LOLT FP ¹¹	LOLT IP ¹²	MT Ls	MT Ts	Comment
A(H)	isiZulu	English	Mixed	Mixed	
A(L)	isiZulu	English	Mixed	Mixed	Move to change LOLT to Xitsonga, but opposition from some parents
B(H)	G1: isiZulu G2-3: English	English	Mixed	Mixed	Change to English LOLT in G2. Many teachers and parents in favour of having English from G1
B(L)	isiZulu	English	Mixed	Mixed	
C(H)	English	English	isiZulu	IsiZulu: Zulu Other: English	The fact that the LOLT is English from G1 is a factor that draws learners to the school.
C(L)	isiZulu	English	isiZulu	isiZulu	Many teachers and parents in favour of English from G1, particularly for mathematics.
D(H)	English	English	isiZulu	English	Makes an effort to hire home-language English speakers
D(L)	Two streams, one English; one Sepedi	English	Mixed	FP: Sepedi: Other: English	

The desire by school governing bodies to adopt English as LOLT in FP is strong in many schools, driven by two main considerations. First, the language of the workplace is predominantly English and parents feel that learning the language from Grade 1 gives their children an economic advantage. Second, most schools attended by African learners in and around the towns and cities, and even in a number of rural areas, are linguistically heterogeneous, with children speaking a wide variety of languages at home (NEEDU, 2013). This situation renders the choice of LOLT somewhat arbitrary, with many learners ending up being schooled in a language they don't speak at home.

¹¹ Language of learning and teaching, Foundation Phase (G1-3)

¹² Language of learning and teaching, Intermediate Phase (G4-6)

As indicated in a number of schools above, the inclination to using English as LOLT in FP is supported by many teachers, who cite an additional reason for doing so. Counting and calculating, even for African language speakers, is predominantly done in English, whatever language they are speaking at the time. Furthermore, mathematical terms, including those denoting numbers, are unfamiliar to most African speakers and in many cases terms such as 'rhombus', 'parallelogram', etc., have had to be developed for use in schools. In contrast, the English terms are well-known to teachers who would prefer to use them.

Knowledge resources

Moats (2009) emphasises that all teachers, not only reading specialists, need to understand best practices of reading instruction. Prevention and amelioration of reading problems further needs to be viewed as a whole-school responsibility involving teamwork and a coordinated approach between teachers and other role players in a school. This necessitates a common knowledge base between all teachers who must collaborate to the benefit of learners.

We discuss Q1 and Q2 together.

Q1: Are school leaders knowledgeable about teaching reading?

Q2: Is this knowledge shared with teachers?

A question that was taken from PIRLS survey and included in all the interview schedules probed the knowledge of teachers, heads of department (HODs) and deputy principals (DPs) concerning certain reading skills listed in the curriculum. Twelve skills were listed (knowing letter-sound relationships, reading words, reading isolated sentences, etc.) and respondents were to state at which grade level each of this should first be introduced. The assumption underlying this question is that, in a school in which there is close agreement on how reading should be taught, not only would respondents know the answer specified by the curriculum, but there would be a high degree of agreement in the responses of interviewees within the school. One of the questions, when learners should be introduced to recognising the main idea in a story, was taken as a key indicator, and responses to the interviewees within each school compared. The rationale behind this choice is that this question is indicative of the degree to which a school prioritises comprehension as the central element of learning to read. It is commonly found in the kinds of schools studied by the Leadership for Literacy project that, while learners may begin to learn decoding skills, even though this is also generally done very inefficiently, comprehension competences are badly neglected. The results of this exercise are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses to the question ‘When should learners first be introduced to recognising the main idea in a story?’

Educator	Correct answer according to the curriculum	AH		AL		BH		BL		CH		CL		DH		DL	
TG3(1)	1	1	2	3	1	1	3	1	2								
TG3(2)	1	2	2	2	2-3	4		1	2								
TG6	1	2	4	6	1	3	3	3-4	6								
TG62	1	4	4	2-3	3	3-4											
FP HOD	1	3	R	3	2	1	3	2	3								
IP HOD	1	2	5			DK	3		6								
DP	1	4	3	2	2-3		1	4	3								
Range		4	6	5	4	4	3	4	6								
Deviation (%)		88	100	100	75	70	83	67	100								

Key: DK – Does not know

The Range indicates the number of grade levels offered as response by the interviewees within the school, while the Deviation refers to the percentage of respondents within the school who offered the incorrect answer.

The responses reflect generally very low expectations of learners’ comprehensive abilities, poor knowledge of the curriculum among teachers and their curriculum leaders alike, and very little coordination within schools regarding this critically important element of reading pedagogy.

A second question illuminated the extent to which educators in the school understand what reading entails: interviewees were asked about the differences between teaching reading and teaching mathematics. The assumption behind this question is that, in explaining their answer, respondents would reveal how they understand the specificity of teaching reading. While there remains a debate between those advocating the ‘whole language’ approach and those who insist that learning to read, for most children, requires the deployment of specific pedagogic strategies and techniques, the South African curriculum equivocally reflects the latter view. Hence, the appropriate response to this question will involve some explanation of the strategies explicated in the curriculum. The responses of the case study schools to this question are summarised below.

School A(H)

When asked about the issue of expertise via the question of whether ‘anyone could teach reading/mathematics effectively’, most teachers responded ‘yes’ to the question – thus not differentiating between the subjects. In her response to this question one teacher exhibited what is a common perspective among many educators interviewed in all eight schools,

which is to consider learning how to read as a natural developmental process which emerges without any particular pedagogical technology being applied:

Reading starts in the Foundation Phase. They grow with it. It is an everyday thing. We do it normally. Reading must be done. It must be learnt from Grade 1 ... Everyone can teach reading. Reading is not a problem.

Some respondents relate proficiency in teaching reading with proficiency in the spoken language, as in the example above. Most explicit in this regard, one teacher described this as follows:

In reading everyone can read in Zulu and the mother tongue. Most teachers learnt Zulu here. Some Sotho, but they are teaching English and that is a problem.

School A(L)

Very different accounts of what reading entails and how they teach it were given by the various respondents. One teacher seemed to have a rudimentary grasp of the technology of reading pedagogy:

I teach phonic sounds (single sounds), basic knowledge of grade 2. If they have mastered single sounds, we go to double sounds, then we can progress to grade 3.

However, this was limited to one or two isolated strategies, but even this was rare in the school, with the majority of teachers seeming to think that reading arises naturally from learners simply being exposed to books, having words pointed out to them and then drilling the class on chorus.

School B(H)

In response to the question of whether there is any difference between teaching maths and reading, all respondents said that all teachers can teach reading. Teaching reading appears to be understood as something that anyone who is a language speaker can do. It also assumed that because there is reading across the curriculum anyone can teach reading. There was no sense that specialized skills are needed for teaching reading.

School B(L)

In response to the question of whether there is any difference between teaching mathematics and reading, three out of eight respondents exhibited some understanding that specialized strategies are needed for teaching reading. DP2 described, for example, what was needed for teaching the basics of reading:

You need to know where to start and how to organize phonics, which letters of the alphabet should be emphasized first. We don't teach b, d, p, q, c and x first. We teach them last after learners have mastered the others.

For the rest of the respondents teaching reading is understood as something that comes 'naturally' from knowing how to read yourself. This is captured by G3T2:

You don't need to be trained for languages. As long as you can read yourself, strategies just come naturally. Reading is the same in every language. There is only one way of introducing reading even in English and the same in isiZulu. Everything starts with phonics (a,e,i,o,u) then blending. The different strategies are only affected by differentiation and class size.

In contrast, this teacher seemed to understand why teaching mathematics required specialist skills: she indicated that general teachers can teach mathematics in grade 1 but that in grade 3, learners to grasp concepts and problem-solving strategies that required higher skilled training.

School C(H)

None of the teachers or HODs thought that there is, in principle, a difference in teaching reading and mathematics. One teacher mentioned a difference in content, but is under the impression that there is no fundamental difference in pedagogy:

Reading is basically sight words, stories; maths is dealing with numbers, word problem. It's about the same.

The same idea was expressed this way by another teacher:

... if a child knows how to read and understand, they should be able to manage the maths as well; it's correlated.

Throughout the interviews there was a common thread and methodology described by teachers in how reading is taught, and this was not limited to English alone. There was a consistency across teachers in the methodology described to teach reading regardless of whether this was right or wrong. There was a strong emphasis on going back to phonics (sounding of letters and vowels or consonants) and "drilling" words. Vocabulary is also a very common element of the teaching programme across teachers and emphasized considerably with lists of words prepared for learners each week which are tested each Friday.

In light of the above, one may be tempted to conclude that there is an understanding across the school of the specificity of reading instruction. However, this is a very superficial conception of reading: the process of drilling learners about letters, phonemes and words is at odds with the challenge they face in promoting reading with understanding. The teachers consistently acknowledge that learners are struggling to move beyond reading to comprehending. As the Grade 3 teacher describes:

The challenge we have is that they are able to read but they can't comprehend. They recognize the words, because I am drilling it, but they don't understand the story.

School C(L)

On the question concerning the differences between teaching reading and teaching mathematics, four of the five respondents said that teaching mathematics requires specialist training whereas no such specialisation is required for teaching reading. As the IPHOD explained:

Maths needs someone who specializes in it and loves it. Reading you focus on drilling spelling, etc., but maths needs understanding.

This quote reflects the view that learning to read is driven by habit and taught by stimulus/response; it lacks a cognitive dimension. Mathematics on the other hand is viewed as a discipline requiring explicit education and 'understanding'. Four of the five respondents at this school said that anyone can teach reading, as expressed by G6T:

Reading is language, something that we do when we wake up, so even if the person is not good, he can speak, and teaching reading is like speaking.

School D(H)

All respondents at the school, both leaders and teachers answered in the negative when asked whether any teacher is capable of teaching reading, reflecting one or other form of the view that reading requires specialist knowledge. A G6 teacher thinks that learning to teach reading is not a natural process but is learnt through experience, indicating that she considers reading pedagogy to be a form of craft knowledge that is learnt on the job.

I do think it's easier to teach reading (than maths) but I think you must have experience. There have been many mistakes I've made selecting texts, forcing the issue. Find something different for a child.

One of the G3 teachers reflects a similar view, saying that she only learnt how to teach reading when she came to this school:

I've been to another school and the previous school didn't ever do what we are doing here. They didn't show signs of how to teach reading. It's a lack of knowledge and not being taught how. We were coming straight from university and we didn't learn how to teach reading and teach phonics. We went for teaching pracs. in June and January is when it's in full-force but we did not learn much.

School D(L)

One of the G6 teachers did reveal some understanding for the specificity of teaching reading but felt that this is not adequately conveyed to teachers during their initial teacher education or continuing professional development. All the other educators responded that, while anyone can teach reading, it requires specialised skill to teach maths. The Deputy Principal qualified this, saying that all teachers could teach reading in the home language but not necessarily in English as a First Additional Language (EFAL).

Discussion

The findings shown in Table 5 illuminate the extent to which school leaders possess symbolic knowledge with respect to an important aspect of reading instruction (Table 6) and the extent to which this knowledge is shared within the school (Table 7).

Table 6: Do school leaders exhibit accurate knowledge regarding the introduction of comprehension strategies?

School code	Score
A(H)	1
A(L)	1
B(H)	1
B(L)	1
C(H)	3
C(L)	1
D(H)	2
D(L)	1

Key
 1 – No leaders show any knowledge of when to introduce elementary comprehension strategies
 2 – At least the FP HOD shows signs of understanding, but this is incomplete
 3 – At least the FP HOD and Intermediate Phase IP HOD exhibit a partial understanding, or the FP HOD exhibits an unambiguous understanding
 4 – All school leaders exhibit an unambiguous understanding

Table 7: Do educators exhibit a shared understanding of when first to introduce comprehension strategies?

School code	Score
A(H)	1
A(L)	1
B(H)	1
B(L)	1
C(H)	3 (E) 1 (Z)*
C(L)	1
D(H)	3
D(L)	1

Key
 1 – No convergence among educators
 2 – Convergence but this is confined to individual teachers and is not shared by leaders
 3 – Convergence among teachers and leaders within a grade or phase, or some convergence across the school, but this is incomplete
 4 – Good convergence across the school
 * There is good convergence for English, but poor convergence for isiZulu

At only one school, D(H), was there agreement on the correct answer between the two FP teachers interviewed on when to introduce the identification of the main idea in a story; the FP HOD differed from them by only grade level in terms of when this should be done (Table

5). Nevertheless, two-thirds of interviewees at the school gave an inappropriate response, and no one more so than the DP, who thought that this skill should only be introduced in Grade 4. These patterns reflect a situation in which, although there is a significant degree of symbolic capital within the school regarding the teaching of reading, there is little attempt to forge a common understanding on this issue, reflecting a *laissez faire* attitude on the part of school leadership.

A second school which is distinguished from the others in terms of the two indicators reflected in Table 7 and

Table 8 is C(H), although the shared understanding concerning comprehension strategies occurs only with respect to English and not to isiZulu, a point noted in the discussion on the data summarised in Table 4 above. However, even here, where a common reading pedagogy is applied across the school, this is characterised by a drill-and-practice approach and low expectations, features which are not conducive to reading with comprehension. This effect – the presence of decoding skills without understanding – was readily conceded by the G3 teacher in the quote given above, but the association between poor comprehension and the drill-and-practice approach predominantly followed at the school seemed to escape her.

D(H) is the only school in which there was a widespread understanding of the specificity of teaching reading (Table 8). The failure to learn this skill during their initial training, together with the fact that they learnt it at this school, has inculcated a craft view of reading pedagogy among teachers at this school. At the other seven case study schools the overwhelmingly dominant view is that reading is a natural process and therefore requires no specialised knowledge for teaching. This view was best expressed as follows by one of the respondents at C(L):

Reading is language, something that we do when we wake up, so even if the person is not good, he can speak, and teaching reading is like speaking.

Table 8: To what extent is there an understanding of the specificity of reading pedagogy in terms of CAPS?

School code	Score	Description
A(H)	1	<i>Reading starts in the Foundation Phase. They grow with it. It is an everyday thing.</i>
A(L)	2	<i>I teach phonic sounds (single sounds), basic knowledge of grade 2. If they have mastered single sounds, we go to double sounds, then we can progress to grade 3.</i>
B(H)	1	<i>GGR develops reading and writing. As they read they recognize words for writing. They also pick up punctuation, like capital letters and fullstops. They then learn reading itself and as they practice they develop understanding</i>
B(L)	2	<i>You don't need to be trained for languages. As long as you can read yourself, strategies just come naturally. Reading is the same in every language.</i>
C(H)	2	<i>Every teacher is a language teacher. They may not have the skills to teach, but they have the basic concepts. Don't do justice to it.</i>
C(L)	2	<i>Maths needs someone who specializes in it and loves it. Reading you focus on drilling spelling, etc, but maths needs understanding. Reading is language, something that we do when we wake up, so even if the person is not good, he can speak, and teaching reading is like speaking.</i>
D(H)	4	<i>I've been to another school and the previous school didn't ever do what we are doing here. They didn't show signs of how to teach reading. It's a lack of knowledge and not being taught how.</i>
D(L)	2	
Key 1 – No understanding of the specificity of reading pedagogy on the part of any educator 2 – Some understanding by one or more educators but very superficial 3 – Good understanding, shared by two or more educators in a grade or phase 4 – Good understanding shared across the school		

Human Resources

Q3: Is the recruitment, management and deployment of staff in the school related to the promotion of reading instruction?

Depending on the size of the school no, one or two DPs and between two and four HODs are appointed. DPs assume overall responsibility for overseeing curriculum and/or administration issues, while HODs exercise curriculum leadership over subject areas (languages, mathematics) or school phases. One would therefore expect that school leaders who possess a plan for improving the teaching and learning of literacy would pay particular attention to the selection of the DP for curriculum matters and the HODs for Languages, or the foundation (Grades 1-3) and intermediate (Grades 4-6) phases. In addition, teachers should be recruited with a view to matching their qualifications and experience with the skills required to fill vacant posts in the school. This was therefore one of the issues the research team probed in the case study schools.

School A(H)

The DP responsible for curriculum and books said that new teachers were not allowed to teach across a grade (for example, English to all Grade 6s) until they had proven themselves:

They teach across different grades otherwise they could wreck the whole grade. Once we see that they are good for sure they can teach the whole grade. Also, if there are different teachers teaching the grade they can check each other out more than if only one teacher per grade.

The phrase 'check each other' denotes a monitoring or policing function, rather than the kind of pedagogical collaboration which would characterise a school in which expertise is developed and shared (see Q5 below). The DP also said that he allocates duties to teachers by looking at their expertise, as revealed in the performance of their learners on provincial tests. However, in the light of the many difficulties that such an approach would encounter (such as prior performance and other differences between learners and classes), the lack of detail provided by the DP concerning the application of this approach and the absence of corroborating evidence from other interviewees, it is not clear to what extent this was another 'socially acceptable' answer and to what extent it reflected actual practices in the school.

HODs do not appear at the school to be recruited or deployed based on expertise. The principal explained why there may not be subject-based expertise at the FP level:

When we advertise for Foundation Phase HOD posts the person has to have had Foundation Phase experience. And Foundation Phase teachers are generalists, so it is hard to look for specialists.

In this context the term 'generalist' refers to the qualifications and responsibilities (teaching all subjects to her class), rather than the expertise in reading pedagogy exhibited by individuals. In the same vein, the term 'experience', as used here, refers to time spent in a phase rather than the proficiency of any particular teacher.

School A(L)

The management and structuring of staff in the school is not related to the promotion of reading instruction. The DP appears to be (relatively) well-versed in reading instruction, but neither of the two HODs revealed any expertise in this area. One is a mathematics specialist, while the other showed a very facile understanding of reading, whom the DP admitted required assistance in this regard.

Across the board, educators at the school had no shortage of qualifications. Many of the respondents had further qualifications (certificates and diplomas in school management and leadership), although reported qualifications did not reveal any specific training in reading instruction. The teachers are overall more highly qualified than those holding management positions: three of the four teachers interviewed have bachelor's degrees and one has an Honours degree, whereas only one of the School Management Team (SMT) members interviewed is degreed, with the others all having Diplomas. It is likely that the teachers are

all far less experienced than their leaders and hence not deserving of promotion yet, although another possible explanation is that promotion occurs largely based on seniority and not expertise.

School B(H)

The principal outlined the process of appointment that involves a selection panel appointed by the SGB and must include parents and the principal. The selection panel agrees on the criteria, a process which involves one or more union representative on the panel. Interview questions are drawn up in a workshop with unions present. Although the unions are, by law, entitled only to be observers, the principal expressed severe reservations about their role:

The unions are selling posts¹³. How do they do it if not part of the panel? The union gives candidates the criteria to answer questions and that is how they get the people in. For example, a candidate repeats keywords on the memo, which makes you suspicious.

Under these circumstances, educators are obviously not recruited for their expertise. It is not clear whether, once appointed, educators are then deployed according to their strengths. The appointment of HODs seem to be based more on experience and ability to carry out administrative functions, rather than specialized curriculum areas.

School B(L)

According to the principal, HODs are appointed through posts advertised in the government gazette. The department does shortlisting, and the school governing body does the interviews and holds all the power for final appointments. The principal sits on the interview panel and provides questions and advice but does not score candidates.

According to the principal, her role is to ensure a fair process. The principal said, that if it were up to her, she would only have appointed four out of the current seven senior posts (DPs and HODs).

The school has two DPs, one for curriculum matters and the other for administration. While the latter seems well-organised and on top of her job, the DP for curriculum provides evidence of being particularly ill-suited to this key leadership position. He has been teaching for 20 years and described himself as the 'messenger' from the department for all policy circulars relating to curriculum issues, such as learner achievement, promotion of learners, learner progress reports. Although he described his job as '*being sure there is synergy and common language amongst us*', he showed no understanding of what this would entail. For example, he claimed to work directly with teachers in choosing readers and the correct

¹³ In 2015 the Minister of Basic Education appointed a Task Team to probe widespread perceptions that recruitment and promotion procedures were being subverted in a 'Jobs for Cash' scandal, aided and abetted by the largest teacher union. The report of the Task Team confirmed these perceptions, asserting that six of the provincial educational administrations are dominated by the union (DBE, 2016).

textbooks, but when asked about what reading series was used in the school for grade 3 he could not give a title and could also not describe any phonics programme in the school, deferring the question to the English department. When asked to identify the best teacher of reading in the FP, he identified Mrs M, because she once gave him books for an assignment he was doing for his own studies on teaching reading.

Another criterion, other than seniority, is obviously at work in the case of appointing the HOD for the IP at the same school. It was clear from the interviews and examining her classroom that one of the grade 6 teachers has some expertise in teaching reading and has 20 years of experience in this role. However, a very young and inexperienced teacher was appointed as HOD, despite not demonstrating any insights into curriculum or teaching practices, and seemed quite out of touch with what teachers were doing in their classes.

Comparing the qualifications and teaching responsibilities of some members of staff suggest that there is some matching of qualifications with expertise in managing reading instruction. One of the DPs has a BEd (Hons) degree in Special Needs Education and is regarded as the remedial education specialist in the school, and she teaches a remedial class. Similarly, the FP HOD has a BA (specializing in learners with learning barriers) and also takes G2 and G3 learners for remedial education. The IP HOD has a BEd in Languages and teaches G5 English. However, the principle of matching teacher qualifications with responsibilities is not applied consistently. Thus, although G6T1 has a BEd in technical subjects, he teaches isiZulu, while G6T2 has a Further Diploma in Education (FDE) in Commerce, but teaches English.

School C(H)

When asked how much autonomy is exercised by the school in recruitment of teachers, the principal was quite candid in admitting that the dominant teacher union has a decisive influence over who is appointed, to the extent that it overrides school governing body (SGB) recommendations: "... *it's jobs for pals, money changes hands.*" The irony, however, is that he has been treasurer of the local branch of this union for 15 years, and in this respect it is likely that he is able to exert some influence over the recruitment of staff. Whether this is true or not, it has to be asked how the teachers of isiZulu are recruited, given that none of the SMT members is able to speak the language, a fact which would seriously undermine their ability to discern the quality of isiZulu teacher appointments.

School C(L)

The principal started by providing a rational 'socially acceptable' response to the question, but on being probed a very different reality emerged. In her initial response the principal insisted that rigorous procedures are employed to recruit or promote educators who exhibit leadership qualities and curriculum expertise:

It's a good system because we select the best candidate, unlike other schools where excess teachers are deployed to schools. We are really working here, there is no time to waste and other teachers find it difficult to adjust when they come from schools which are not hard working like us.

Questioned about the role of the unions on selection committees, ostensibly as observing but frequently seen to be manipulating the process, the principal said that, while the views of union representatives are respected, the school selects educators according to merit:

We tell the union that we, the interviewing committee, will decide. [The] union is there to observe, not to select. We can take your opinion, but we make the decision. You must have a strong interviewing committee; you have to select people who are good, are educated and know the laws. We even select our teachers like this.

However, the principal soon conceded that in reality these procedures are not followed entirely, if at all:

The department does try to deploy excess teachers and I have to take them. I'm not happy with that system: they come with a letter to say they must start at your school, so you don't have a choice. They deployed a high school teacher to a post in Grade 1. I have now put her in Grade 3, and I'm complaining to the Circuit Manager.

The last example quoted by the principal starkly illustrates the damage inflicted on a system in which there are closed-shop agreements between the administration and union leaders. Thus, even if school leaders had the ability to identify and promote talent and pedagogical expertise, their best intentions are subverted by systemic issues and forces beyond their control.

School D(H)

This is the only school among the eight in the sample which both claimed to select and deploy teachers according to their expertise and which provided evidence that this practice was in fact applied. The strongest evidence in this regard was the claim that the school hires only teachers who speak English at home. Although some 80% of learners come from poor homes and speak isiZulu at home, the policy of the school is to use English as the language of teaching and learning from Grade 1, and the selection of teachers fluent in English is obviously aimed at supporting this policy.

Most teachers that were interviewed mentioned that they knew someone at the school when they applied. The IP HOD explained that recruiting staff using personal networks was an effective way of ensuring that staff were pedagogically proficient and bought into the values of the school. The strong public reputation of the school was supported by the fact that one G6 English teacher indicated that he had chosen the school specifically because he wanted to be mentored, especially for assessment.

According to the principal, teachers are allocated to positions that best utilise their skills and qualifications, although it is not always possible. She claimed that two teachers lasted less than two months at the school because they perceived the school to be too demanding.

School D(L)

Keeping the school staffed is a constant battle for the principal. This is the wealthiest school in the sample and charges R2800 per year. However, the school spends only 1% (R40,000) of the budget on staff development and rather uses income to hire additional teachers, infrastructure or books than spend it on professional development. The principal explains that this is because her applications for additional staff are ignored by the department:

How can I address reading if there are 90 in a class? That is why I need to address mobile classrooms first. Then they have no books. I must make sure there are books. And then there is no money for workshops to sharpen my educators. I must apply for ad hoc teachers every year and usually don't get them.

Under these circumstances of staff instability finding teachers with the right skills for the vacancies which occur every must be a difficult job. Even so, neither the principal nor any other leader in the school mentioned the use of expertise in sourcing educators.

Discussion

Our conclusion with regard to Question 3 is that there seems to be little attempt by school leaders to prioritise expertise in subject matter or pedagogy in the selection of staff to fill vacancies in the school, and promotions are generally done according to seniority rather than the particular skills and aptitudes of educators. However, in a number of cases the rationale behind the promotion of individuals to positions of curriculum leadership could not be explained in terms of seniority, and some other factor – such as nepotism – is likely to be involved.

In addition, two system-level factors prohibit school leaders from hiring and promoting staff according to their expertise. First, the department in at least one province insists that schools accept teachers puts forward by the department, rather than recruiting someone selected by the school. This practice derives from a closed-shop agreement with one or more of the unions¹⁴.

A second factor inhibiting school leaders from recruiting and deploying teachers according to their competence is interference on the part of the major teacher union in filling vacancies in schools. It seems that in some schools elaborate strategies are deployed to ensure that certain candidates are favoured. Thus, for example, the selection panel, on which the union is represented, decides on criteria for selecting a candidate and agrees on a limited number

¹⁴ Three teacher unions are most prominent in the South African schools: the SA Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers' Organisation of SA (NAPTOSA) and the SA Teachers' Union (SAOU). The first is by far the dominant in terms of membership.

of questions to be asked in interviews. Behind the scenes, the favoured candidate is then coached in responding to these questions. During the interview no probing of the permitted questions is allowed. To further secure the case, prior to the meeting, individual members of the panel may be persuaded, bribed or coerced to vote for the favoured candidate.

Practices in relation to the hiring and promotion of staff are summarised Table 9:

Table 9: Expertise is used as a criterion in the recruitment, promotion and deployment of staff

School code	Score	
A(H)	2	Expertise confused with experience
A(L)	1	
B(H)	3	Direct interference of the union
B(L)	2	Good practices mixed with bad
C(H)	3	Direct interference of the union
C(L)	3	Government policy reflects closed shop agreement
D(H)	4	Relentless focus on expertise accompanied by lack of diversity
D(L)	1	Not supplied with full complement of teachers by department
Key		
1 – School appears not to have considered this course of action		
2 – School indicates that it knows this should be done but fails to carry it out		
3 – School indicates that it wants to do this, but is constrained by factors beyond its control		
4 – Expertise rigorously and consistently matched to responsibilities		

In two of the matched pairs the high-performing schools are rated more highly on this indicator than their low-performing counterparts. However, the pattern is not pronounced enough across the sample to support the hypothesis that the high-performing schools significantly outperform their low-performing counterparts with regard to the extent to which expertise is used as an essential criterion in selecting and deploying educators.

In contrast, behaviour in this indicator in the two members of the last matched pair does provide strong support for the hypothesis. Thus, it was clear from both of our school visits that despite the similarity in reading outcomes between D(L) and D(H), D(H) had poorer students and therefore had to do better to get the same outcomes. As noted above, their teachers seemed to have higher levels of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) and English proficiency, as well as a stronger work ethos, and a more collaborative culture. These features were reflected in the principal's explicit strategy of focusing on expertise when recruiting or promoting educators; in contrast the principal at school D(L) gave no attention to this consideration.

The bigger issue, which allows for a variety of haphazard and/or corrupt practices to flourish is widespread lack of understanding on the part of school leaders of the kind of expertise required to teach reading, which in turn exists because the leaders themselves do not possess this competence. The need for school leadership, as a collective, to possess a

range of subject-specific pedagogical competences, is the strongest argument in favour of distributed leadership.

The paucity of educational know-how among school leaders is revealed, among others, by mistaking the monitoring/policing of curriculum delivery in schools for professional collaboration, by the conflation of experience and expertise, and by the confusion between qualifications and competence.

Teaching reading, the most important task in the primary school, is complex and requires high levels of competence to achieve success. In order to bring to bear the optimal combination of educator skills to the task, it is, in the first instance, necessary to eliminate artificial constraints on the use of expertise to recruit and deploy educators. Thus, the interference of all vested interests, including teacher unions, should be prohibited. This probably means that unions should be excluded from having anything to do with selection panels or the specification of criteria used to select candidates for posts, while a district official, steeped in HR policy and practices, could serve as neutral chair in panels.

Second, school leaders should be trained and equipped to select and promote educators according to the skills required for the positions to which they are being deployed.

Q4: To what extent is expertise in teaching reading recognised in individual teachers and used advantageously throughout the school?

Interviewees were asked if they could identify anyone who was “the best” at teaching reading and, if such a teacher was recognised, to what extent the school made systematic use of this expertise.

School A(H)

Most respondents resisted the idea that some teachers were better than others at teaching reading: “*Everyone is the best. You take your child to any teacher and there won’t be a problem.*” The emphasis from most teachers was on working together. Two teachers did identify someone: One indicated that a particular teacher was good, because she was good at English and because “*when she is out the class her learners are still busy reading*”. The FP HOD identified a teacher who had been working with READ¹⁵, who were in the school in 2014. She said that this teacher had:

... developed other teachers, how to deal with learners who are struggling with reading. For example, she showed how to cut up words – ambulance. You break up the letters, break up the words.

Currently, however, there is not a particular person who is identified consistently as being particularly good at teaching reading.

School A(L)

None of the teachers identified a reading specialist or someone with particular expertise in the area. They all emphasized that they were ‘the same’. One G6 Teacher made an interesting point around expertise given the teaching context:

No one stands out. Practically we try our best. If I have 45/50 out of 60 [able to read] or so, I’m doing OK. Practically you can’t reach all of them. The other 15 – that’s a struggle. Truth be told, our classes are ridiculous. [My one] class is 61, the other is 54.

The DP identified four different teachers as being good at teaching reading, but the reasons given are around confidence and enthusiasm rather than specific competences. The DP also claimed herself to be a reading specialist, but this was not confirmed by other interviewees. Similarly, the IP HOD claims expertise based on her 29 years of experience, but no teachers supported this claim:

I, myself, teach reading very well. I know what the problem is for learners, now they’re fine, I gave them alphabets.

The management and structuring of staff in the school is not related to the promotion of reading instruction. Even though the DP appears to be (relatively) well-versed in reading instruction - she was selected as a facilitator for one of the main district-wide training

¹⁵ READ is an NGO which offers teacher development programmes in reading.

programmes for reading instruction – she does not exercise a function of reading specialist in her current role.

The IP HOD, who in theory oversees reading, is actually a mathematics specialist. He became HOD of language because of promotion practices having nothing to do with expertise, and indeed showed a very facile understanding of reading. The DP knows this, claiming that this HOD comes to her for support in reading. The other IP HOD does appear to have some language expertise but is HOD for social sciences.

School B(H)

The DP identified a paucity of human resources as obstacles to achieving acceptable reading outcomes, saying the main thing that needs to be done to improve reading outcomes is *... people who can train us to help learners to read, especially those who have difficulty reading.*

In contrast, the FP HOD conflated speaking and reading when said that all teachers can teach reading because:

... all teachers have isiZulu as HL and the LOLT is Zulu, so they can teach, but training at school level is also needed'.

This HOD's lack of understanding of reading is emphasised by her claim that isiZulu and English sounds are the same¹⁶, with minor exceptions, so they can be taught together. She explained:

... you can relate the phonics in isiZulu and English – use sounds from words, break down words and build up words with flash cards.

The IP HOD believed all teachers can teach language and reading, because:

... reading intertwines with other subjects too, so they do reading in all those subjects. Reading is everywhere'.

From the interviews with these two HODs it appears that they fulfil mainly administrative functions such as IQMS¹⁷ observations, maintaining the book retrieval system, and ensuring that teachers cover the curriculum.

There is no reading specialist in the school that emerges from the interviews. Different people mention different kinds of 'expertise' or support they can provide (see table of responses), but effectively they all mention all the teachers in a phase. The DP said

¹⁶ isiZulu and English have very widely differing orthographies and phonic structures (Spaull, Pretorius and Moholhwane, 2017) and, while there is evidence that learning to reading on one's mother tongue greatly facilitates reading English, the two skills are very different (Abadzi, 2008)

¹⁷ The Integrated Strategic Management System (IQMS) is a performance management system through which the performance of teachers is assessed by school managers.

emphatically: *"We don't have specialists, we help each other."* The FP HOD mentioned Ms N., but commented that

although she is recognized as good, we don't use her to help, we don't have time and will only disturb her.

School B(L)

Despite the fact that, as a Full-Service School all teachers are supposedly expert at recognising a variety of physical and learning disabilities, teachers are surprisingly ignorant of the reading abilities of their learners.

When asked who was best at teaching reading in the school, there was convergence around the names of one G3 teacher (mentioned by three respondents), and one G6 teacher (mentioned by four respondents). However, when dealing with learners struggling to read, most respondents did not mention these teachers, but mentioned the referral system set up at the school, where learners are referred to the School-Based Service Team, co-ordinated by one of the DPs, and then referred to one of the educators (known as LSE teachers) trained to deal with particular disabilities. There appears to be general confidence in this system to help learners struggling, not only with reading, but other learning barriers as well. Interestingly, no one mentioned the names of the LSE teachers when asked who was the best at teaching reading.

School C(H)

One sign that expertise is recognised in the school is the fact that the staff jointly decided to alter their teaching allocation loads to ensure that the self-appointed librarian, an educator in the school, could have a reduced teaching load to support library development and its use and to manage the composition and retrieval of block loans to classrooms for the reading periods.

No teacher was singled out as a reading specialist in the school. There is a very strong emphasis on having "seasoned teachers" with a shared methodology for dealing with reading problems. This belief system that all teachers are 'experienced' and seasoned potentially limits a culture of staff development, particularly in reading. For example, the G3 teacher interviewed said:

We are all seasoned teachers in the foundation phase and we know how to teach reading. We use the old methods a lot, together with the new methods. Oh yes, we used to get a lot of advice and I used to trouble our HOD. But now we are so clued up!

School C(L)

Two of the three educators asked about the best reading teacher in the FP agreed that it is Mrs M. According to the DP:

They are all good, but the one who is able to work with slow learners is Mrs M she has a talent for it. She helps the others; they take their weak readers to her and after a week they are able to do something. I don't know what it is that she does, maybe it's her approach.

The FP HOD agreed, adding that Mrs M is quick to identify reading problems, although how she developed this skill is a mystery to the HOD.

All three educators (DP, IP HOD, G6T) who were asked who the best teacher at teaching reading in isiZulu in the IP is agreed that Mrs B is the school expert. From the explanation given by G6T it is clear not only that Mrs B is the undisputed expert, but that her peers also understand Mrs B's method:

... she is very good at identifying the problems weak learners have. She starts with the sounds they learn in earlier grades, and two-syllable words. It would be good to have someone who could do that fulltime. There is a period for them to come to her, and she tries to be early in the morning and gives extra classes.

This is Mrs B's 33rd year of teaching, having taught every grade in the primary school except Grade 1. She started at school C(L) in 2011:

I found a lot lacking in reading isiZulu: in G6 I found half the class not reading. I started with those struggling, using the G1 book, I started with the first sounds; when they got to G7 the teachers were so happy. After management saw that this had made a difference, they asked me to do the isiZulu reading in the other grades.

According to Mrs B at the beginning of the year there were 13 Grade 6 learners who could not read any isiZulu, so she gave them special attention. Currently she is still providing remedial reading exercises to seven pupils, seemingly having given up on the other 6:

I try this intervention, but some still don't learn. I ask the parents, but they can't help. But there are those who go hand in hand with me.

The second point of interest arising from Mrs B's remedial work is that her method is clearly based on a phonemic approach which was practiced in the past but is now discredited. Regarding the struggling learners who are making progress, she describes this method as follows:

I took them aside and [gave] them the G1 book, working through each sound in turn. Now when I dictate the words containing the sound and they get them, then we move on, one sound at a time. I even make up my own words with the sounds.

Every Friday she gives her learners a short test, dictating 10 words learnt during the week, which learners are required to write down. After sufficient progress has been made with sounds and words, she starts building sentences with them. One exercise in this regard is a cloze task, where a list of words is provided, from which learners are required to choose the correct word to fit into a blank space in a short sentence.

The third and perhaps most important point to emerge from an analysis of Mrs B's case is how she acquired her skills in reading instruction. When asked about this, she was clear that she had not learnt them at either the College, where she did a Primary Teachers Certificate on leaving school (in the early-eighties) or at the other College, where she studied part-time for a Senior Primary Teachers Diploma:

[I] can't remember what they taught us about reading there. [I] started teaching in 1984 and found the Masihambisane book. There was a time when they told us not to use Masihambisane, but I always kept mine, and make copies for my learners. I can see that it helps a lot.

I can't say [where I learnt these skills], I was just concerned. I taught many years in the FP and I could see that if I do this, maybe they will understand.

It seems that Mrs B's pedagogy stems from her own primary schooling combined with classroom trial and error, honed through three decades of teaching experience. And while both the teacher education she received and the 'support' provided by her instructional leaders outside the school have tried but failed to undermine this method in her case, she has never been offered any alternative.

School D(H)

Ms S, a Gr3 teacher who has been there for five years, told us that she was taught nothing about how to teach reading at Edgewood College¹⁸ where she did her teacher training. In her words:

Edgewood was OK if you want this book of psychology or this book of English literature but not if you want to know what to do practically in the classroom. That's not what that university is for.

When she arrived at school D(H) she was overwhelmed by the challenge of large classes and L2 learners:

I cried every day. I was waiting to use Piaget and Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner. None of those help you here. I was not taught phonics at [the university]. They don't teach you the real-life practical skills but rather the theory which does not help you. They don't teach you this is how you teach reading, how you go about it. Everything I know Mrs F taught me at this school.

However, the collaborative environment of the school meant that there were a few senior colleagues who could give advice during breaks. Ms S indicated that she had learned 80% of what she knew about reading from Mrs F. Interestingly Ms S then mentored a new African colleague (Ms X) who herself was overwhelmed when given responsibility for FP classes because she was not a FP-trained teacher.

¹⁸ The component of the university responsible for initial teacher education.

School D(L)

All the teachers pointed to the same teacher as the person to speak to when having a problem with teaching reading. One of the G6 teachers interviewed referred to her colleague, also responsible for G6 who has psychology training, and who she would speak to about learning barriers. However, there was no indication that school leaders systematically organised the sharing of this expertise across the school.

A number of respondents mentioned that the teacher training colleges were better than universities at training teachers on the main competencies of teaching reading in the classroom (phonics, using readers etc.).

Discussion

Only one school – C(L) – stands out in terms of reading expertise being recognised, not only at school leadership level but also by other teachers, and systematically utilised to address reading difficulties across the school (Table 10). At three other schools such expertise was recognised, but any sharing that was done occurred through the initiative of individual teachers rather than through a concerted exercise directed by school leaders.

Table 10: Extent to which expertise in teaching reading is recognised and utilised in the school

School code	Score
A(H)	1
A(L)	1
B(H)	1
B(L)	2
C(H)	1
C(L)	3
D(H)	2
D(L)	2

Key
1: No recognition of special expertise in any teacher
2: Expertise is recognised by other educators in the school, who may seek help from that educator, but the expertise is not utilised on a school-wide basis.
3: Expertise of the best teacher is recognised and the school organises for poor readers to go to her for remedial help.
4: The school actively identifies expertise and structures opportunities for this to be shared, or brought in from outside, not just in the form of a one-off event, but as a systematic learning experience for all relevant teachers

In two of the pairs (B and C), one school exhibited stronger practices on this indicator, but in both cases, it was the lower-performing school which emerged as better in this regard.

Q5: Are educators provided opportunities to collaborate and share expertise in the interests of improving reading instruction

Q5 is motivated by a prominent strand in the research literature on continuing professional development (CPD), and the role of school leadership in CPD, which emphasises the importance of collaborative practices between educators within the school (Murphy, 2002;

Elmore, 2008). There is considerable agreement that it is possible to improve teacher quality and instruction by focusing on instructional leadership that builds professional communities of educators (Burch, 2007). This requires that principals support change and encourage teachers to improve instruction (Leithwood, Tomlinson & Genges, 1996; Sebring & Bryk, 2000) by changing school-wide norms and providing teachers with the resources and opportunities to learn and implement new ideas and practices (Finnigan, 2010). Key to pursuing these ideals is the promotion by school leaders of collaboration and communication – on matters of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – within the school.

A number of authors emphasise the point that collaboration should not be an activity for its own sake, but should take the form of in-school professional development, by means of which school leaders facilitate knowledge sharing among teachers and create internal structures that promote collaboration (e.g. Youngs & King, 2002), in an environment of trust between school management and teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Parise and Spillane conclude that collaborative discussion that is closely tied to teachers' daily work and that focuses on specific content is likely to facilitate learning and change. Taylor et al (2000b) argue that reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaborative efforts enhance shared understandings and strengthen relationships within a school.

The national Department of Basic Education (DBE) recognises some of the trends evident in the literature: current policy is to promote collaborative practices among teachers, but this is generally perceived to be between educators in neighbouring schools, rather than within schools. Thus, clusters of schools are encouraged to form Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (DBE, 2016).

Several items in the interview and observation schedules of our Leadership for Literacy study assess the extent to which these practices were manifest in the case study schools. These include questions about observing a colleague teaching a reading lesson, being observed and critiqued by colleagues including the HOD; if such observations take place whether this is followed by constructive discussion; and the nature and extent of formal in-service training on reading instruction, either in- or out of school. We also used indirect evidence to infer the degree of collaboration between teachers and the extent to which school leaders provide guidance, such as the ways in which teachers described their instructional practices and a comparison of learner writing between two classes in the same grade.

School A(H)

The most recent in-service training teachers participated in was for teaching English as a First Additional Language, which included some discussion on reading. This was in 2015. It was based on a British Council programme¹⁹ adopted by the provincial department.

¹⁹ CIPELT and CISELT, which have been approved by the DBE to the extent that subject advisors in all provinces have been trained on one of the two.

Teachers also mentioned training by GPLMS²⁰ and the NGO READ, but none of them could remember precisely what the focus of any of this training was, or remember particularly effective aspects. They did describe some of the topics covered (shared reading, paired reading, individual reading), but no details were given, nor did any teachers mention how effective they thought this training had been. One of the G3 teachers mentioned training by a literacy NPO²¹ in 2016. The teacher recalled a particular strategy taught – using posters to generate keywords and then getting learners to create their own sentences and stories.

From the teachers' accounts, since the GPLMS they have not undergone any sustained training on reading in the last three years. It was clear from the subject advisors' visit that at the grade 6 level, subject advisors conduct their monitoring through learner books and don't go into classrooms. The same occurs at the grade 3 level. Thus, professional development and support for reading from the district does not appear to happen in the school.

There is very little sharing of practice between teachers. This was evident in the different use of readers in the case of the two grade 3 classes, and also the very different content and amount of coverage in the learner books and workbooks across different classes, and very different marking practices between the two teachers.

There were many inconsistencies across the interviews regarding the specifics of how often reading was taught, and what formats were used. For example, the FP HOD said that teachers teach group guided reading (GGR) three times per week, while one of her teachers said that, although she teaches reading twice a week, she did not do GGR at all: "*... it is a little bit difficult. They take time to read everything.*"

None of the teachers interviewed had observed other teachers reading. The FP HOD had not observed the FP teachers as she claimed she had no time. The IP HOD observed one of the IP teachers teaching comprehension. This was part of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS)²² and no feedback was given. In general, classroom observations, or watching one another teach is not part of the culture of reading in the school. Aside from IQMS, there is no internal monitoring of reading, and external (district) monitoring relies on learner exercise books

The literal tick-box approach to the curriculum support offered by school and district officials to teachers is starkly illustrated in Figure 3. Curriculum pacing is set by the Annual

²⁰ The Gauteng Provincial Literacy and Mathematics Strategy was piloted and then implemented across the province in the years 2011 – 2014. A change in leadership in the province in 2014 effectively ended the programme, although its spirit, and many of its design features have been incorporated into the Early Grade Reading Study currently being piloted in two provinces by DBE and Wits University.

²¹ Another reading NGO, which developed (under the partial sponsorship of GPLMS) the first set of graded readers which originated in these languages themselves, rather than being developed English and then translated.

²² The IQMS is the national performance management system which teachers must be subjected to annually, included lesson observation by the HOD.

Teaching Plan (ATP) issued by the province, which sets out in detail, by subject and grade, which topics are to be addressed each week. The ATP is monitored using a Curriculum Verification Tool (CVT). The ATP and CVT provide very clear stipulations regarding expected use of time. The CVT is completed using learners' workbooks. The problem regarding this monitoring process is that learner workbooks cannot capture many of the reading activities that take up (or should take up) a fair proportion of classroom time – such as independent reading and GGR. The perfunctory, policing approach to curriculum leadership is illustrated by the way in which the ATP and CVT are applied.

Figure 3: Curriculum Verification Tool – Gauteng District English Grade 4 FAL term 1 (2017) curriculum coverage tool

SUBJECT ADVISOR Curriculum Verification Tool				
Educator A		Teacher C		
Educator B		Teacher B		
		CONTENT	Expected %	Teacher %
WEEK 1&2 Date: 16-27/01	L&S	Listens to a short story	0.5	✓
		Gives a simple personal recount	0.5	✓
	R&V	Reads a short story	0.833	✓
		Does comprehension activity on the text (oral or written)	0.833	✓
		Reflects on texts read during independent/pair reading	0.833	✓
	W&P	Writes about the story	0.5	✓
		Writes a simple personal recount using a frame	0.5	✓
	LANGUAGE STRUCTURES	Punctuates correctly: full stop, capital and small letters	0.0833	✓
		Understands and uses countable nouns (e.g. book – books)	0.0833	✓
		Understands and uses uncountable nouns (e.g. chalk)	0.0833	✓
		Begins to use determiners such as one, two, etc. and first, second, last.	0.0833	✓
		Builds on understanding and use of simple past / present	0.0833	✓
		Synonyms (words that are similar in meaning, e.g. soft/gentle)	0.0833	✓
	ACTUAL COVERAGE			5%
Date: 30/01 - 10/02	L&S	Listens to information text, e.g. a factual recount/simple news report	0.333	✓
		Gives a factual recount of a news event based on personal experience	0.333	✓
		Listens to and responds to simple oral directions	0.333	✓
	R&V	Reads information text, e.g. factual recount/news report	0.625	✓
		Does comprehension activity on the text	0.625	✓
		Reads a simple map	0.625	✓
		Reflects on texts read during independent/ pair reading	0.625	✓
	W&P	Writes a factual recount/writes about a news event based on personal experience	0.5	✓
		Writes a simple map	0.5	✓
		Writes a simple news report	0.5	✓

The verification tool is also remarkable for the way in which it divides up the time to be spent on various activities. So, for example, in the figure above, for week 1 and 2 'Reads a short story' should be allocated 0.833% of syllabus coverage. It is difficult to see how breaking the curriculum down into such atomisation of teaching and learning activity would assist a teacher in weighting curriculum areas appropriately, nor how meaningful judgements are made in the verification process (undertaken by HODs and Subject Advisors from the district).

There seems to be no diagnosis of teacher problems, and certainly little attempt to address known problems at this school. But the most important issue is that certain elements of

reading are not measurable in this way (i.e. through learner books) and thus the ATP and CVT may contribute to them not being taught. When the Subject Advisor who was at the school conducting the verification was asked whether this way of monitoring might not contribute to teachers not teaching reading (such as GGR, for example) she replied:

We know that the teachers aren't teaching reading. They just don't want to. I don't know why. They just won't.

So, it would seem that there is tacit acknowledgement from the district that their tool doesn't measure certain forms of reading, but there is nothing currently available to address the issue. When asked how teachers are encouraged to do reading, i.e. GGR or reading for pleasure, the Subject Advisor replied that there was Drop All and Read and Nali'Bali. No evidence for the existence of either of these programmes was seen in this school and the Subject Advisor did not know how many schools in her district were part of these programmes.

School A(L)

Across the respondents, very different accounts of reading pedagogy emerged, indicating an 'every woman for herself' approach to reading instruction. The HODs' claims around what is done are very different to the teachers'. There is mention of a shortage of time for reading, and across respondents, time appeared to be a limiting factor, given that the ATP combines reading and language, limiting the amount of time teachers are permitted to spend on reading.

Reading instructional time is monitored only to the extent that the district curriculum coverage monitoring tool successfully captures time spent reading. At best, it traces a few practices that are related to reading, and reviews assessments that the teachers must have completed that directly have to do with reading (mostly comprehension assessments). The latter seem to be the most effective tools for monitoring time spent reading, but even those are very rough proxies.

The last training attended by grade 3 teachers was the CIEPELT intervention commissioned by the GDE that focused on teaching English First Additional Language (EFAL), which included reading instruction. Responses to the training were mixed. Some say it was hugely informative, others that they already knew everything addressed in the training and didn't learn anything new. One teacher said that the training was focused on breaking down the ATP and describing techniques for teaching English. She was positive about the effects on teaching reading:

It has affected my teaching – I can now take a reader and develop a lesson from the story from listening and speaking to reading and viewing, to comprehension.

Another teacher attributed her sequential understanding of reading to this training:

I learnt that reading must start with pictures first; then simple words; then sentences; then you can give them a paragraph.

The other training received was from GPLMS, three years previously. There were mixed reactions to this. One teacher felt that there were “*too many activities. Too many concepts. It created confusion.*”

The FP HOD said that although she would like to, she had never watched the grade 3 teachers teaching. This is confirmed by the grade 3 teachers, one commenting that:

There is a lot of work, and not enough time to observe. Yes, we like to share strategies for teaching. But nobody came to watch me even when I first started.

Neither G3 teachers nor their G6 counterparts have ever observed their colleagues teaching, although one of the grade 6 teachers had the HOD observe her for 20 minutes at the beginning of the year:

The first term of this year she came to watch teaching (+- 20 minutes). She gave comments, told me where I need to improve for example when reading a text to learners, try to go slower because my pace might be too fast for learners.

School B(H)

According to the FP HOD she and the DP select learners from a class to read to them, rather than observing classes. They identify struggling learners this way and advise teachers accordingly. Sometimes they will check spelling in a class. Classroom observations are largely only done for IQMS purposes: this was confirmed by both school leaders and teachers, one of the latter commenting that she had received feedback from this observation which commented on learner participation and the use of books, but did not mention reading specifically.

The IP HOD said she does classroom observations of three teachers regularly over a five-week cycle, not specifically for reading activities. She provides feedback on learner participation and listening in class. Some of this is part of IQMS but is also about monitoring the curriculum.

Professional development focusing specifically on reading instruction has mainly taken place in workshops run by intervention programmes like READ and Mathew Goniwe²³, and in the past from GPLMS. G3T2 commented on one such training with Mathew Goniwe for example:

²³ The Mathew Goniwe School for Leadership and Governance (MGSLG) is a semi-government agency responsible for the professional development of educators in the province.

At the previous training they handed out materials: curriculum tracker, graph, sight words. We watched video demonstrations of the methods and they demonstrated shared reading. The training has really changed my practice. I start learners now from the alphabet, not what they should know in G3.

The DP and G3T1 also mentioned twice monthly workshops on Saturdays or afterschool by the district office for all language, mathematics and FP teachers. This was not mentioned by the other G3 teacher, but the FP HOD mentioned isiZulu workshops. She confirmed that FP teachers have all been involved in training organised by Mathew Goniwe and provided by subject advisors.

There are frequent references to teachers working in 'teams', but these seem limited to making sure all are covering the same things, or checking question papers, rather than any collaborations around teaching. No teachers had observed each other teaching reading. Feedback from school leaders following these observations was limited to coverage and learner participation. For example, G3T2, described the feedback she got after an HOD visit the previous term:

She was happy that learner books show remediation but she was not happy that some learner exercise books were torn and dirty. She also noted that the work for the term was not completed. We agreed that I will teach the required content first and use 10 minutes a lesson to catch up on important work from the previous term.

In one of the teacher interviews, there were references to 'helping each other', but there were no reports of teachers collaborating on pedagogical matters, and no teachers reported observing other teachers teach reading.

Support for teaching reading seemed very limited in the school. No reading expert is recognized, HODs provide support to teachers of a largely policing character, and there is no reference to referral of students to the SBST²⁴, without much elaboration of what support they can provide. It seems they then simply refer learners to the district. There is little elaboration or detail from any teacher about remediation practices, other than 'starting with phonics' or the alphabet.

School B(L)

Both G3 teachers interviewed referred to district workshops they had attended on how to teach reading. But it seems that training received from GPLMS coaches and READ facilitators had a much greater influence. According G3T2, the GPLMS coach:

... modelled lessons, did workshops on how to conduct group guided reading, how to introduce phonics, how to use and deliver lesson plans and strategies.

G3T1 described training she has received, from GDE and Read as learning:

²⁴ The establishment of School-Based Support Teams (SBST), to which teachers may refer learners exhibiting learning difficulties, are mandatory for all schools in the province.

... how to teach reading, where to start, how to ask questions and test learners' understanding, how to relate reading and teaching language structure.

There seemed to be a lot of sharing of practices between the two G3 teachers, who have an arrangement where G3T2 teaches phonics lessons for G3T1, and in turn, G3T1 teaches maths in G3T2's class. This arrangement arose on the initiative of the two teachers, rather than through school-level instructional leadership.

G3T1 has only been teaching for four years, and she describes being observed by a third teacher as part of her induction, and G3T2 also reports having observed G3T1. G3T1 explains:

Mrs M would model lessons for me. I would also come to her class and observe her weekly. Week 1 would be Mrs M modelling, then Week 2 will be me delivering and receiving critique. This was done weekly in 2013 and 2014. It was very useful.

G3T2 described observing G3T1 and giving her feedback:

... we discuss how lesson went, was every child reached, were all learners involved, questioning techniques, concentration of learners, teaching tools like pictures.

G3T2 said she is also observed 3 or 4 times a term by a teacher, the HOD and one of the DPs. She said they give her positive comments and advice on how to present lessons and she had learnt to improve her own teaching practice through this process. However, in contrast to the descriptions of classroom observations by the two teachers, the FP HOD said she only observed teachers for IQMS and this was not often.

The IP HOD claims to have observed lots of teachers, especially new teachers, for IQMS, but does regularly observe the 'best teacher'. He says:

IQMS is the most productive way to do this when the teacher says they have a problem. He prefers to observe before providing feedback.

During this procedure, he looks at lesson presentation, whether the teacher facilitates reading by reading together first, then looks at how learners respond and whether the material is suitable for learners. He identified G6T2 as the 'best teacher' for reading, but G6T2 said that he had never observed her teaching. In fact, G6T2 claims that it is she who has trained and supported teachers rather than the HOD.

It seems that all teachers make extensive use of the SBST to refer learners who are struggling with reading or other 'barriers to learning'. There are also teachers who only teach remedial education, including the principal, DP2 and the FP HOD. It is not clear though to what extent the learning support given in these remedial classes is shared amongst teachers. While the KIP centre has specific programmes to support reading in English, it is not known to what extent all teachers have engaged with these programmes, other than the ones who support learners in the centre.

While collaborative practices among teachers and the provision of classroom-focused support by school leaders are inconsistently applied, there is evidence that these practices do feature in the school. In this respect, school B(L) is like its matched school B(H), and both stand out from the other case study schools, apart from D(H).

School C(H)

The G6 T for English said that she receives classroom support from her HOD:

Our HOD comes to us in the morning reading period. There is a lot of emphasis on reading. He doesn't tell us when he is coming but comes just to make sure we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. He sits and observes what type of reading we are doing, whether it's group/paired/individual. It's not for record (i.e. IQMS) purposes. He is coming to check our methods. He gives feedback and comments and identifies problems, and with our files as well. I don't mind it, it's a learning process for us as well. I find the feedback useful.

The G3 English teacher said that she does cooperate with other teachers:

We get ideas, we are always talking. If my colleague knows something she will share. If I know something I will tell here. We are always sharing information with each other.

Regarding the extent to which her HOD visits her class, she confirmed what the G6T for English had said:

... my HOD will come to my class, in the mornings and ask anyone of my learners to read. That first period in the morning is a big thing. The child is able to absorb. ... the HOD walks all the time and checks things and comes into class. She is not spying, she knows what is happening.

When asked how helpful these practices were and whether the HOD provided advice on teaching methods, she responded:

Yes, it is. She will say, like look that child is not paying attention. ... she goes to workshop and gets feedback and gives us advice on what she would like in the classroom.

When asked about in-house staff development in the school with respect to reading the responses indicated that this was very limited. In one of the monthly staff development sessions scheduled for the year, the librarian, who also teaches, discussed reading but this was not more than a 30-minute session as the staff development meetings are scheduled during the one-hour monthly staff meeting. It would not be unrealistic to assume that *at most* the teachers have received 30 minutes of input on reading instruction in the past two years, and for some it is possible that they have never received any formal in-service instruction on teaching reading throughout their teaching careers. Instead, the emphasis within the school is on teachers being “seasoned”, implying they don't need to be monitored, guided or developed.

The impetus given to the importance of reading in recent years had been spurred by the department when they asked schools to start the day with a free reading period, but this has

not been accompanied by in-service training on reading instruction from the department. Respondents consistently perceived district training workshops as being about following policy, maintaining files and assessment, rather than about matters relating to knowledge or pedagogy.

When asked about support from Subject Advisors, the G6T for English responded:

Yes, but there is so much to cover in the workshop they can't discuss everything. But there are workshops on reading, which I have not attended, but reading is mixed with other things like policy. But there is not much you can do in an 8am to 3pm time period. And the English workshop only happens once a year.

All the above applies to the teaching of English, which is by far the major priority for the school and, according to the school leaders interviewed, for the parents and learners. IsiZulu is treated with inferiority compared to other subjects. For a start, only two members of staff – the two isiZulu teachers – have any knowledge of the language. Under these circumstances, school leaders are unable to engage with teachers of the subject, let alone provide them with curriculum support.

School C(L)

The school has a DP and three HODs, one for each phase. According to the principal their function is to monitor and mentor teachers, and to check the work of both teachers and learners. They hold phase meetings with teachers, where the work for the year is planned, including excursions for learners. HODs visit teachers in class according to a schedule during the first and second terms, but in the third term visits are unannounced. Several other interviewees corroborated this description. Following these classroom visits HODs discuss the lesson with the teacher concerned and make recommendations for improvement, including assistance in the form of a workshop or assistance from another teacher. The principal asserted that teachers approve of the system:

They are ok with it, it's for development, we don't criticize.

She said that she also does class visits, selecting one teacher per grade per term, where she checks that HODs are doing their work. Class visits are in addition to the IQMS system, when the visits are done in a more structured manner and the HOD is accompanied by a peer of the teacher's choosing. This description was confirmed by the FP HOD who said that, apart from her routine schedule of class visits, when she suspects that a teacher is having a problem she goes and sits in the class and carries on with her work while she observes the teacher:

I find out what the problem is, and I direct her to someone who is good, like Mrs M.

The G3T interviewed confirmed the value of these visits:

It's scheduled once a term. It happens in all the grades, in the term plan. Yes, it was really developing. ... IsiZulu is a bit hectic; I used to take it for granted because they speak it. I didn't realise that you have to learn how to write it.

The IP HOD also pointed to the fact that the department used to have a policy of special remedial classes for reading, which were conducted by specially appointed remedial teachers, but this was discontinued in 2007. She thinks that it was a big mistake to end this practice and recommends that it be brought back.

While it is clear that members of the SMT have a structured approach to assessing the work of teachers and assisting them where necessary, cooperation between teachers is more varied. The G6T, for example, feels isolated:

It's better for two teachers in the same grade to do this [work together]. But I am all by myself in Grade 6 isiZulu [she has two classes, with 60 in each class]. It's very difficult and there is no more corporal punishment. I scream, they scream.

Nevertheless, the G6T does feel supported by the subject committees which span phases:

We try to have them every term: they give you good ideas for class.

Regarding professional development from outside the school, there is wide agreement that, aside from providing books, the Jika Mfundo²⁵ project is very helpful in assisting teachers to translate CAPS into classroom activities, to pace their lessons and to formulate appropriate assessment tasks.

The G3T has a clear recollection of the last Jika Mfundo she attended which gave her ideas about how to do group guided reading and news reading, as well as to establish a reading corner in her classroom. The IP HOD confirms the value of Jika Mfundo interventions, but wishes that they went further in providing assistance in dealing with slow learners:

It is helpful, but doesn't cater for learners with learning barriers. The way they structure the activities, the assessment and it also helps when you are away, the substitute teacher knows where to start.

In addition, the district office provides workshops for SMT members and teachers, although these are often of a general or administrative nature and not specifically addressed to the teaching of reading. Occasionally NGOs and publishers present workshops at the school.

When asked whether they had any knowledge of national programmes such the National Reading Strategy and the like, the FP HOD said she had heard of the 100 Books per Class project and Teaching Reading in the Early Grades, but didn't how they worked. She added that:

²⁵ A province-wide intervention programme working with HODs.

One document for reading came last year, which said we should practice reading every day for at least an hour, can't remember the title. From national. Even have a competition for the district.

School D(H)

There is a strong sense of community among the staff interviewed, well captured by the FP HOD, when she said:

In FP we can laugh and tell each other off. We work very well together. If one person has an idea we bring it and share it. We are very accommodating.... We work so well together. Some people just come into teaching for financial reasons. I wouldn't want to leave [DH)]. We are like a unit. Like a family. That is what I love about [DH)]. You want to come to school, you've got the support of your management staff. When you have something worrying you, there will be one or two teachers that you can tell your problems to and work together. Or just praying for each other.

These thoughts were echoed by the DP, who emphasised that “a certain ethos or way of life” is central to the school’s success. This makes educators feel part of a family, and as a result the school has a low staff turnover.

In contrast, all teachers expressed negative sentiments towards the district workshops, explaining that the facilitator was less competent than they were and that they were wasting their time going to these events. All the many professional development activities mentioned during the interviews were initiated from within the school, such as a new teacher asking a more experienced teacher to provide guidance on specific reading methodologies.

Interestingly, one of the ways that the institutional memory of how to teach reading is passed on over time is through the reciprocal and supportive culture rather than through any formal system of mentorship. An older teacher supported a new young teacher, and five years later when a third teacher joined the school, the second teacher took it upon herself to help the new teacher because she knew what it feels like to be “dropped in the deep end.”

One point of criticism was raised by one of the FP teachers:

There is no attempt by the FP HOD to ensure that the different grades and classes in FP share and use similar reading practices, which would be a benefit for the learners.

School D(L)

We have already mentioned, in response to Q3 above, that school D(H) does not prioritise CPD for its teachers, since the province does not supply the school with its full educator complement, and the schools is thus obliged to spend the bulk of the money generated through fees on hiring teachers, maintaining infrastructure and buying books. Little remains for CPD.

In addition, there was no mention of district-led CPD opportunities for teachers that were targeted specifically at reading. District workshops typically focussed on topics such as

“L2”, “Language” or generic topics like “Teaching practices.” These were typically one-hour workshops. One teacher development intervention that was mentioned favourably was the use of NECT²⁶ lesson-plans for the Sepedi Foundation Phase. Fieldworkers saw the lesson-plan files and at least one teacher spoke highly of this initiative.

There is no evidence of teachers observing each other as a systematic practice. They watch each other during IQMS. Occasionally they seek advice from expert teachers on how to help individual learners who are struggling with reading. In these instances, it would seem that the assumption is that the problem lies with the student, rather than with the pedagogical approach of the teacher.

Teachers at school D(L) are operating in silos with idiosyncratic practices and not sharing what seems to be working well in some areas or badly in others. The sense one gets is one of teacher-generated requests for help rather than HOD-generated advice for improvement.

Discussion

Collaborative practices among educators on matters pertaining to curriculum, pedagogy and the assessment of reading are evidenced in only four of the eight case study schools (Table 11). In two of these – C(H) and C(L) – collaborative practices among teachers were actively promoted by school leaders. In the other two schools, leaders did promote cooperation, but this was inconsistent. Importantly, those teachers who did describe discussing strategies for teaching reading with one of their peers found the experience invaluable in informing their classroom routines, while those who said they were observed in class by their HODs found the feedback useful.

²⁶ The National Education Collaboration Trust, partnership between government and the private sector which is adopting a whole-school development approach and working in a number of schools across the country.

Table 11: Collaborative practices in reading instruction among educators

School code	score
A(H)	1
A(L)	1
B(H)	1
B(L)	3
C(H)	4
C(L)	4
D(H)	3
D(L)	1

Key
 1 – No collaborative practices on reading instruction are evident within the school
 2 – Some teachers collaborate, but this depends on the initiative of individual teachers
 3 – Some collaborative practices, led by the SMT members, are evident but inconsistently applied
 4 – SMT members consistently lead collaborative practices among teachers across the school

Regarding in-service training provided by external agencies, all the case study schools were participating in one or other programme, or had done so in the recent past, but in no school was this activity initiated by school leaders (Table 12).

Table 12: In-service training provided by external agencies

School code	Score
A(H)	2
A(L)	2
B(H)	2
B(L)	2
C(H)	2
C(L)	2
D(H)	2
D(L)	2

Key
 1 – No in-service training provided by outside agencies
 2 – Some in-service training provided by outside agencies, but this is driven entirely from outside the school
 3 – Some in-service training provided by outside agencies, partly at the initiative of the school
 4 – In-service training provided by outside agencies, recruited by the school as part of a systematic capacity building programme

Strategic resources

The quality of the strategic resources held by school leaders may be manifest in a range of activities, but central to the present study is the extent to which a systematic programme aimed at improving reading instruction across the school is in place.

Q6: Are there programmes and practices in the school that are geared towards the improvement of reading instruction and outcomes?

School A(H)

Reading as an important area is not sufficiently marked out in the school to make it amenable to serious intervention. One of the reasons for this is that reading forms part of Language more generally in the curriculum and in assessments. Consequently, there is very little strategic leadership in relation to target-setting or interventions in reading specifically.

Similarly, there is little strategic leadership by HODs. The HODs themselves expressed the lack of time for activities like classroom observation. It is not clear how their role differs from that of other teachers in an *instructional* sense. The grade 3 HOD says that she looks at learner books to monitor coverage of teachers. When asked what she thought teachers expected of her, she replied: *“That they are not short of resources. And help with challenging learners”*.

No priority is given to reading instruction specifically in the school, and there are no dedicated programmes for reading. In short, there is no effective programme for reading instruction, not at the level of resourcing, strategy or culture. School leaders tend to blame teachers for this situation: For example, the deputy principal pointed out the problem as being one of a weak pool of teachers:

The best students can become whatever they want. The worst become teachers. It is most important that we find first language English teachers, but it is not easy. In our era it is difficult to do this. The university is not recruiting the cream to become teachers.

Drop All and Read has been discussed at district level, but not implemented in the school. In the past the school has had programmes running by GPLMS and READ. Both have left tracks in the school in relation to a stock of books (readers) in the classrooms.

Assessment includes external assessments developed by the district. According to the DP the school makes every effort to maintain the confidentiality of these tests so that they may be used to monitor teachers. Although there are comprehension and language elements in these assessments, they are not currently used specifically to address issues of reading in the school. Oral reading assessments are conducted by the teachers using rubrics provided by the district. These rubrics are designed by the GPLMS. The rubrics are very basic, general assessment tools (data on the school includes the grade 6 reading rubric representing a very

restricted outline of reading levels). They are found pasted into learners' exercise books to indicate to the district that reading has been done in line with the ATP.

School A(L)

It is not evident that there is particular focus on reading in the school, nor that the principal or DP are doing anything to promote or support reading instruction. When asked about their leadership practices, they focus on meeting bureaucratic curriculum demands, especially the ATP. As indicated above, reading has a diminished presence in these specifications, given that it is difficult to monitor 'coverage' of much reading methodology in these kinds of plans.

HODs do not appear to execute any leadership functions around curriculum and pedagogy. Although they form part of the SMT, this body does not feature in discussions around results, targets or remediation, or in relation to particular programmes in the school.

Drop All and Read is being discussed at various levels in the school, getting approval from various bodies, informing teachers and asking for objections, etc. The plan is to implement it in the near future. No other current programmes were mentioned. Aspects of the GPLMS which was run in the school from 2011 to 2014 are still used, but it is no longer a formal or systematic programme.

There is no systematic or standardized reading assessment in the school (aside from provincial papers, which according to the DP are not marked reliably or accurately by the teachers). Some teachers mentioned using GPLMS rubrics in their assessments of learners.

Teachers report having struggling learners stay after school for further support, and in exceptional cases if they're really struggling they sometimes even refer them to the district. However, it isn't clear that this is based on assessments particularly, as opposed to some general sense teachers have from class that learners cannot read.

School B(H)

The school emphasises efficient management, but this is not geared specifically towards improving reading outcomes. Nonetheless, the drive for efficiency at management level appears to filter down to performance of teachers and learners. Inherent in the efficiency drive seems to be accountability for teachers – whether it is for LTSM or results of learners. The school appears to rely on individual teachers to drive reading performance. There is no recognized reading specialist in the school.

The school's budget allocations also reflect strategic thinking of management, with clear allocations for staff development and workshops. The DP and FP HOD confirmed that READ has been running for more than 10 years, but now has been replaced by a staff development programme led by Mathew Goniwe. The DP and FP HOD also referred to the past involvement in GPLMS from 2012-2014. Both HODs mentioned past use of Drop All

and Read in 2009-2010: they used to read for one period before school on a Tuesday, but this has stopped.

According to the DP, every term there are three assessment tasks for reading in groups and reading independently. Assessments test punctuation, fluency, recognition of letters and sounds. Both the DP and HOD moderate marks at the end of each term by looking at scripts and selecting three random learners per ability to read, one from each grade. According to the FP HOD, they participate in provincial common assessments for mathematics and home language every term. These are recorded separately in record books. There are two assessment tasks for reading done in class every term – this includes listening, comprehension and speaking. All the grades use the same rubric for reading assessment in FP.

Other than references to having access to results, and using them to select learners for moderation, there is no indication that results are used to guide specific interventions with teachers or learners. Management does not talk frequently about using results to inform interventions – there seems to be a very bureaucratic attitude to the moderation process, making sure rubrics are used and results are recorded.

An important strategic decision taken by school leadership was to make English the medium of instruction for mathematics and life skills from grade 1, thus exposing learners to English instruction early on, and improving familiarity with EFAL. There seems to be diligence from the principal in setting selection criteria for appointments of teachers and HODs, even if experience and ability primarily drive these to be administrators and bureaucrats.

School B(L)

As a 'full service'²⁷ school catering for learners with special needs, the school takes care to identify such learners and identify what their barriers to learning are, and at the same time identifying teachers who can provide remedial support. Diagnosis of learning difficulties in English and mathematics is done at the Kip McGrath Centre (KIP), a computer-based system housed in a well-appointed room at a cost of R15 000 per month. Despite this focus on remedial education in the school, and the fact that they have a 'pull out system' where learners leave classes to go to remedial classes, there are also efforts to get learners sufficiently up to speed, especially in terms of reading ability, to be integrated back into mainstream classes. The roll out of 'learner profile' assessments at the beginning of the year, using the KM programme²⁸ assessments, is also a way of getting all teachers to focus on assessing learners' reading ability, and identifying the support they need.

²⁷ Providing a full range of services for learners with special needs; such learners are 'mainstreamed' in that they are accommodated in a school which provides standard programmes for all learners.

²⁸ A computer-based diagnostic system

One of the G3 teachers spoke about getting applications on their phones that would allow them to access these learners' profiles at any time, and track learner progress. The principal and DP2 seem to have an overall picture of how many learners at which grades are getting support through remedial classes. The reading programme therefore mostly involves remedial support, especially for reading in English and isiZulu. Yet, despite this impressive-sounding system, one response from the FP HOD did give cause for doubt concerning the level of understanding among staff of how their learners are actually doing with respect to reading: when she was presented with the scores from the *Leadership for Literacy* learner tests, she expressed surprise at the poor results, saying that she expected only around 20% of learners to be performing poorly. In fact, the large majority of learners scored very poorly at both grade 3 and grade 6 levels.

When asked about a reading programme at the school, respondents mentioned *Drop All and Read*, which is implemented every morning after breakfast from 7.45-8.00. References to past programmes included READ that ran for two years (2008-2009) and GPLMS for three years. Both of these were provincial departmental initiatives.

Results and assessments are routinely used for placing learners in remedial classes. The 'learner profiler' for English assessment is used to track learner progress and identify those that need remedial support. DP2 commented, for example, that in G3, there are 18 learners who can't read, but they want to see the rest of the class being able to read. The remedial 'pull out system' seems to be widely used at every grade for mathematics, HL and EFAL. The DP2 explained that, in addition to the 'learner profiler', they also analyse the quarterly learner schedule of results. From the results they compile a list of learners who received support and were identified for remediation. Then they discuss these results with teachers and ask them to justify what support was given and if not, why not.

School C(H)

The principal is a talented administrator and external networker who is energetic in establishing an enabling environment for school functionality. His administration systems are in good shape: files are in order; LTSM inventory is monitored; documents are submitted, yearly planning is executed, daily routine monitoring plans are drawn up for staff, cleaners and security, and daily business is tackled in accordance with 'requirements'. His administrative role however certainly trumps his instructional leadership role. In his own words:

The most important thing about any organisation is that the records are in order... if management is right, it filters to the bottom.

He is also diligent about ensuring that each class has adequate LTSM resources for learners (although Zulu and the HL/FAL issue remain a major concern).

The principal has conceptualised his role in response to state requirements as opposed to instructional aspects. There is no doubt that this school has achieved an adequate level of

functionality – the necessary but not sufficient condition from which excellence can emerge. The school is operating on time, using and managing the resources they have been given effectively; teachers are in the classroom and are teaching.

Unfortunately, chants of chorusing in language and mathematics can be heard throughout the school, signs that are consistent with the messages on ‘drilling’. Inputs into staff development, particularly with respect to pedagogy and more diversified LTSM resources (including a bigger library) would place this school on a new learning trajectory. The lack of priority and attention given to Zulu instruction needs to be addressed, with efforts to reduce negative stigmas attached to this language in this school. This could perhaps shift with the appointment of an instructional leader who is competent in isiZulu in a DP role as none of the current school management team are mother tongue isiZulu speakers.

There is an organized approach to assessment, in line with CAPS, in this school. A detailed assessment plan with subjects, topics and specified dates is displayed in the staff room. Included in this assessment plan are scheduled oral, reading, language, comprehension and writing assessments with allocated dates.

Interviews with HODs and teachers indicate that there is a strong emphasis on the assessment of oral reading, comprehension and written assessments. They also indicated that their assessments include questions designed to match the cognitive skill levels in CAPS. With regards to reading aloud, teachers have clear rubrics to assign marks to the child with respect to three areas: preparation, reading technique and understanding. This was evident in a grade 5 document they presented to us – a one-page guide on how to award marks for one-on-one reading and comprehension. Teachers also analyse the cognitive skill levels of the comprehension test questions for each test. Most of the discussion around teacher collaboration and peer learning in this school was with respect to getting advice on the cognitive levels.

The CAPS and the SASAMs reporting structure by their very nature standardize assessment processes across the school, including in reading. SA-SAMS is used effectively in this school for recording assessment marks. Assessment tasks in SA-SAMS (with assessment inputs for all students) include language structures, listening and speaking, reading comprehension, reading aloud, writing, writing a poem. The IP HOD has a very good grasp on the SA-SAMS. System: She was skilled at recording assessment marks, knowledgeable about the weighting system across the different assessments, and could easily retrieve marks for a specific grade and teacher at our request.

There is some indication that the repetitive nature of assessment, in English, provides teachers with a signal to ‘remediate’. The grade 6 teacher speaks about re-teaching of an area if an assessment reveals poor results. She may also send the poorly performing learner to the FP teachers to reengage with foundational phonics - as she calls it, “back to basics”.

It does not appear that the principal is engaged much with tracking reading performance or setting targets. He is concerned with CAPS planning, getting documents in order, networking and finding funding. When asked whether the timetable reading period has made a difference he refers to the improvements of a few who read aloud in the morning assembly, not reading marks.

School C(L)

Asked whether the school has programmes and practices geared towards improving reading instruction, the DP responded that each teacher has targets:

... we look where learners are lacking: reading, writing. And we develop those aspects that are weak: we have programmes like reading in assembly. They use a book for each level and when the learners achieve that they move to the next level.

It has to be said that inviting individuals to read to the school occasionally in assembly hardly constitutes a systematic programme for improving reading.

The G6T corroborates her DP's description of target setting – for example percentage pass rate -, emphasising the collaborative nature of the process:

Every year teachers must give us the targets for each term. At the end of the term we look at how we are going to reach the targets for the term if we did not reach it. We are working to 80% in every subject.

On the question as to whether the school uses standardized formal assessments tools to test the reading ability of all students, the IP HOD said that the district office issued common tests in maths and English at G3 and G6 levels in September, which schools can choose to write. School C(L) administers these tests after the September exams, because they arrive late. These are marked internally, and the quality is highly variable:

... sometimes they are very easy, sometimes very difficult; sometimes they just set the test without reading CAPS.

HODs moderate internal tests and exams. This consists of two steps. First, pre-moderation occurs before the papers are written in order to determine whether they are at the appropriate standards specified by CAPS. According to the SP (Senior Phase) HOD (the librarian) this is an elaborate process which entails checking that the requisite proportion of items which test all seven levels of cognitive demand are present:

Paperwork! It takes a lot of time!

Post-moderation is then done using a sample of learner scripts to check the marking and assess the achievement of learners. The FP HOD adds that subject advisors go through the same post-moderation process.

A variety of answers were received in response to the question: *What is the one thing that could improve reading at the school?* Many of the responses placed the responsibility elsewhere, rather the school, such as parents.

The IP HOD said:

First train the parents: they need to have time for reading at home. Some are trying to help their children, but others are not interested.

School D(H)

We did not get the impression that the new school principal (who has been there for 17 years) had a vision for reading at the school or interventions that might improve reading. He did not feel it was important to mobilise the school around the importance of reading in the FP. The only 'reading programme' at the school was *Drop Everything and Read (DEAR)*²⁹ which the school implemented for a period of less than a year, after which time the programme "fizzled out" because there was too much to cover in CAPS and once DEAR was no longer pushed by the provincial department it faded away. This is despite all teachers recognising that it was a good initiative and should come back (note no SMT member had agency to implement it themselves).

Assessment of reading is in compliance with the CAPS rubric, but some teachers supplement it with their own rubrics. Assessment is teacher-specific with little or no cross-classroom moderation. Some teachers analyse their results and try to adjust their teaching accordingly.

Teachers and the SMT mentioned *Jika Mfundo* as a program for the SMT to support teachers. Most mentioned that it is too time-consuming with lots of paperwork and is heavily compliance-driven. The principal commented as follows:

Jika Mfundo – it's very good and streamlines/assists with CAPS. But it means lots of paperwork. So much paperwork. It trebles everything. It's very useful. Lots of templates to follow. It's a lot of work. If [you are] not computer literate, you will struggle. Some principals embrace it, but others completely ignore it. I think it's because they aren't computer literate.

The response of the IP HOD was interesting as she indicated the school's approach to what is normally referred to as 'monitoring', i.e. tracking curriculum delivery by means of filling in forms:

Jika Mfundo has also done, on the negative side of things. Schools and teachers who have good files doesn't make a good school. You can have the best files, but nothing is going on in the classroom. The focus is on the file not the classroom. If it's done properly and everything is in order. All they monitor

²⁹ This could not be called a reading programme at all, but rather an activity advocated by the national Department of Basic Education, whereby a period is set aside each day, preferably first thing in the morning, for learners to pursue free reading.

is the files to see if that's in place. But what is happening in the classroom – that is not looked at. Education is still about what happens in the classroom at the end of the day.

There is no attempt by the SMT to give targets which might improve the reading results. Assessment is left largely to the discretion of teachers, but they collaborate in the assessment process. For example, the assessment rubric used by one teacher had been developed by another, who had been there for 40 years.

School D(L)

There was no indication that the principal or DP were leading reading practices among teachers and HODs. They realised that reading is one of the most important skills in primary school, but they were not involved in supporting reading, allocating additional resources to improving reading or finding a reading programme.

The school implements the *Drop Everything and Read* Campaign where learners read for 15 minutes every day, irrespective of what subject is scheduled during that time.

Teachers claim to identify struggling learners who need additional support, but this seems to be confined to providing these learners with more practice, rather than providing a targeted intervention to address areas of diagnosed weakness.

There are no reading-specific targets in the school. When asked about reading assessment, most teachers mention a CAPS-compliant rubric, although the usefulness of some criteria in the rubric is questionable. For example, one item for assessing reading is Posture.

Discussion

Four schools exhibit a degree of school-wide coordination with respect to curriculum matters (Table 13). In three cases – B(H), B(L) and C(H) – these practices take a rather mechanistic approach to improving class performance instead of focusing on individual learners: common tests are administered, averages computed, and targets set. In these schools there does not seem to be a focus on diagnosing the specific learning difficulties experienced by learners. Improvement programmes, at best, are restricted to giving learners more practice, or providing incentives or competitions for a few talented learners.

When asked whether the school has a programme for improving reading instruction, two types of responses were common. First, the *Drop All and Read* initiative was mentioned in a number of schools. This is an activity, mandated by the DBE in 2008 and seems to have stuck in many schools across the country. Essentially it consists of providing a free reading period for all children, generally first thing in the morning. A second common response by teachers and school leaders when asked about a reading programme was to mention competitions, such as spelling bees, or public events, such as requesting good readers to read to the school at assembly. Neither of these kinds of activity can in any way be construed as a systematic attempt to improve reading for all learners.

The exception is B(L), which is a 'full service' school offering programmes for learners with special needs. The KIP system enables the school to diagnose a variety of learning difficulties, and these are addressed by referring struggling learners to specific teachers for remediation. However, while this has the appearance of a well-rounded reading programme dealing with issues of inclusive education, it is focused more on structured remedial assistance than wider issues of inclusive education.

Table 13: Strategic leadership provided by SMT on reading instruction

School code	Score
A(H)	1
A(L)	1
B(H)	3
B(L)	3
C(H)	3
C(L)	3
D(H)	2
D(L)	1

Key
1 – No strategic leadership exerted by SMT members
2 – Some structured activities, but these are largely directed at individual learners
3 – Some evidence of a structured programme, led by one or more SMT members, within a grade of phase, but this does not extend over the whole school; or there is a school-wide programme, but this is of a bureaucratic nature, rather than focussed in specific curriculum issues
4 – There is a school-wide coherent programme for teaching reading, led by the SMT

Without exception, school leaders had a very restricted view of what constitutes a reading programme, viewing it as a set of unstructured activities, such as *Drop All and Read*, or competitions for selected learners (Readathon, reading in assembly, Spelling Bees). There are a number of agencies, both government and non-government, which offer comprehensive and structured teacher development programmes in the field of reading, but none of the schools visited would request interventions by such programmes following an assessment of their own needs. They are passive in this regard, accepting programmes that are sent from the district or province, but never being proactive in seeking assistance. These attitudes, together with the emphasis on administrative rather than instructional leadership, are reflective of educators who have a limited understanding of the nature of reading and the complexity of reading instruction.

Material resources

Since good reading materials are essential for the maintenance of an effective programme of reading instruction in the school, two questions were taken to signal the degree to which the school makes adequate material provision for reading.

Q7: Does the school prioritise the acquisition of high quality textual resources to support a programme of reading?

Fieldworkers looked in detail at books stored in classrooms and the school library. One feature of the findings is the great variety in terms of volume and accessibility of these materials between schools, and between grades and even classes within the same grade. This variation within schools is indicative of weak leadership practices. However, estimating the size and appropriateness of these collections and assessing the extent to which they are adequate proved to be an impossible task. It was therefore decided to measure the extent to which books are prioritised in the school budget as a proxy for the extent to which the school values these resources.

All schools are allocated a subsidy per child from the relevant provincial department of education. The subsidy favours poorer schools, thus Quintile 1-3 schools receive more per child than Quintile 4 schools, while those in Quintile 5 receive the least. Schools in the latter two categories charge considerable fees, which they use for a range of purposes; generally, the largest proportion goes to hire additional teachers.

The departmental allocation comes with the specification that 60% is spent on learning and teaching support materials (LTSM), of which 40% is for printed books, 30% for stationery and 30% for 'other LTSM'. However, schools concede that the department is lenient in allowing for diversion of funds. One must make an application, but it is almost certain it will be granted.

School A(H)

There is no indication from budget expenditure that indicates a strategic focus on reading and reading instruction. While the biggest portion of the budget is spent on LTSM, closer analysis indicates that the biggest spend for both 2016 and 2017 is not textbooks or books, but stationery (which includes small office furniture). In violation of policy described above, the school spends only two-thirds of what it should on LTSM, and one-third of what it should on textbooks.

The budget is revealing in relation to the school's needs. While there appears to be sufficient textbooks in the school, there are no functioning classroom libraries, and very little appropriate fiction in the library. The actual stock of readers is likely unknown given their state of organization. Thus, a clear estimation of book needs (especially fiction) does not appear to have been made, and consequently addressed. The budget is not reading-oriented.

The school goes through the motions of following government policy, but practices regarding the procurement, storage and use of books indicates that these motions are largely devoid of content. These practices serve little purpose other than to distract school leaders into imagining that they are doing something useful about one of the most important resources for teaching and learning. In reality all these practices do is occupy time which could be spent far more productively.

None of the classrooms have classroom libraries as envisioned by the curriculum. Where readers exist, they are generally unused and disorganized. In the case of grade 6 they are wholly inadequate. It appears that for reasons of priority, recognition of importance, perceptions of learner use (or misuse) and *actual knowledge of what is already in circulation*, books (other than textbooks) are not a priority in terms of procurement.

School A(L)

The school spends 100% of what it should on LTSM, according to policy, and nearly 90% of what it should on printed materials. The balance of the printed book allocation goes to the library (apparently spent on beanbags for the library), ICT materials and “other materials”. Thus, in purely monetary terms, the school scores highly on this indicator (Table 14). This appears to be another case of blind adherence to policy without necessarily fulfilling its intentions: the selection of books is determined by the way they are packaged by the distributor, which makes for ease of storage and deployment in the school, rather than by any particular strategy or framework for reading instruction.

School B(H)

Although LTSM is the largest item on the budget, consuming 41% of total budget, this is only 70% of what should be spent according to policy. The school spent R416 082 on books, which is only 58% of what policy dictates.

The second largest expenditure is building and grounds maintenance (22%, or R445 907). In addition, 6% of budget is spent on ‘Human Resource Development’ (R112 785) that includes SGB training, staff workshops and an educator development fund.

School B(L)

The school spends 58% of what it should on LTSM, which is in accordance with policy, and a meagre 24% of what it should on printed materials. The library is allocated 5% of the LTSM budget. Total expenditure on LTSM is R773 670, the largest budget item. This is followed by Municipality services, which amounts to R352 793.

The school is planning a big fundraiser in September and hoping for corporate sponsorship to help them raise a targeted R1 million. Last year, the school raised R121 600. The principal said the funds raised will be used for classrooms: *“four new classrooms were donated, but we need to augment with funds to complete them.”* DP2 said the funds will be used to build a library, kitchen and staffroom, and also to pay license for KM centre.

School C(H)

The school spends 100% of what it should on LTSM, but only 75% of what it should on books. The largest budget item is salaries of cleaning, security and gardening staff. The second-largest budget item is learner stationery.

As is the case with C(H)'s administrative functions, the school is very efficient in procuring and managing its books. It has been proactive in taking over book procurement from the provincial department, to ensure reliability of textbook delivery. The principal has also formed partnerships with suppliers to get discounts. In his words:

The Department tells us exactly what to spend money on, but we buy our own books, get them cheaper and delivery is on time. We form a partnership with the supplier, get a discount. I have a good financial background; I'm a treasurer of many societies.

School C(L)

The school does not receive its state allocation for LTSM from the provincial department: The department spends this on behalf of the school, and presumably the full allocations for both total LTSM and printed materials are spent.

While the school chooses which books to buy and what top-ups are needed each year, the department procures all LTSM. The principal is not satisfied with this situation and would prefer to go back to direct procurement, which used to be the case in the past:

We are not happy with the stationery, because they only bring a few exercise books; when they gave us the allocation we could buy more. And we included teachers' resources, but we don't get that now. They just bring one pack for each learner, and when extra children come during the year they don't get.

A considerable sum is spent on photocopying (R60 000 for ink, paper and cartridges and R3 000 for copying services), particularly in the FP, where full sets of workbooks in all subjects are available for grades 1-3. By contrast, in GR6 there are no workbooks, and assessment tasks also require photocopying.

In addition to the departmental grant, the school undertakes a number of fundraising activities to pay for items like the salary of a security guard, since the department does not pay for security. According to the principal around R1700 is raised every Friday when children contribute R3 for the privilege of wearing 'civvies'. Selling food is another regular fundraising activity, although the amounts brought in vary from a high of R400 on Monday, diminishing over the week as learners' money runs out. Other activities include a dance competition, a Miss "School C(L)" pageant and another beauty pageant event, which is an opportunity for learners to display their cultural dress and habits.

School D(H)

It would seem school D(H)'s budget has no scope for unexpected expenses (contingency funds). For example, emergency infrastructure maintenance crowds out any resources for reading: the school had recently spent a large part of its budget repairing a roof that had fallen in. Resources for reading did not seem to be the object of fund-raising initiatives.

The school's total budget is R1,3million of which R383,000 went to SGB staff (two grade R teachers, one care-taker and a clerk). These were the largest items. The allocation from the department was only R42,000 for the school. R552,000 of the budget was raised from school fees. The remainder of the income comes from various fund-raising initiatives (sponsored walk, uniform sales, civvies day etc.).

Of the budget available, R36,000 (2,8%) is spent on textbooks, which is woefully short of the norm. There are 40-line items in the budget; apart from textbooks there is no indication that money is spent on library books or readers or any other textual resource. Management is clearly not privileging reading resources. The principal explained this as follows:

At the moment we don't have an operational library as the roof of the old library collapsed and rain damaged the books. So, we decided to dispatch one shelf with books in each classroom. [We] plan to reopen the library when budget permits it.

School D(L)

None of the R4,4 million budget is spent on library books. Although the norms and standards funding is only R584,000, the department does not allocate the school its due complement of teachers. This forces the school to spend a large portion of the budget on teacher salaries. Consequently, the school spends only R796,000 on LTSM, which is only 30% of the norm, but nevertheless considerably more in absolute terms than six of the seven other schools in the sample.

Discussion

While this indicator may appear to be more objectively verifiable than any of the others discussed above, it would seem that, for a number of reasons, it actually enjoys a relatively low validity. One of the reasons for this is that government stipulates how much of the budget is to be spent on LTSM (60%) and, of that, how much is to be spent on printed books (40% of total LTSM). Thus, schools scoring high on this indicator may be doing so merely to conform to government policy without understanding the importance of books to the academic programme. In one case the school does not even receive the money allocated for books, which is paid directly by the department to suppliers³⁰.

³⁰ This is the case for all schools which have not received the so-called Section 21 status, which provides the school with a certain degree of autonomy over specified functions, including book procurement.

Table 14: To what extent does the school prioritise spending on books?

School code	Score
A(H)	2
A(L)	4
B(H)	3
B(L)	2
C(H)	4
C(L)	4
D(H)	1
D(L)	1

Key
 1 – School spends less than half of what it should on both total LSTM* and on printed books
 2 – School spends 50-74% of what it should on LSTM, but less than half on books
 3 – School spends 50-74% of what it should on both LSTM and books
 4 – School spends at least 75% of full allocation on both LSTM and books
 * Total LSTM = stationery + printed books, and may also include items such as library furniture

In procuring books, most school leaders interviewed could recite the policy regarding the procedures to be followed. Contradictory statements by teachers on the same issue indicated that these procedures were sometimes not followed. But even where they were, schools seemed to be going through the motions of observing the procedures but undermining their intent through ignorance. For example, one school orders its books because of how they are packaged rather than according to curriculum considerations. In contrast, school C(H) takes procurement very seriously, subjecting it to the same very rigorous administrative regime as all other procedures in the school, and the principal claims to secure significant efficiency benefits as a result, including lower prices for LSTM.

Two schools are classified as quintile 4 (D(L)) and quintile 5 (D(H)) and charge fees, although these are very low. Both score low on the indicator shown in Table 14 which, rather than reflecting low priority accorded by the schools to the procurement of books, indicates more pressing needs. In the case of D(L) these needs are teacher salaries, because the department systematically fails to provide the school with its due complement of teachers. In the case of D(H) the school is unable to spend much on either books or staff development because of pressing infrastructure needs; in particular, part of the roof of the school had collapsed, causing some damage to the library, and the school had prioritised roof repair as an urgent budget item.

Interestingly, all eight schools secure significant monies through fund-raising events. These are generally a thinly disguised form of fees, raised through learners at the school paying for and participating in activities such as 'civvies day', and the like.

Q8: Are the texts utilized optimally?

Use of reading materials present in the school was even more difficult to determine than their adequacy for supporting reading. It was therefore decided to use the nature and use of

the school library as a proxy for the extent to which the school uses reading materials to promote reading.

School A(H)

The school has a library which has approximately 4500 books, with a range from some excellent reference material to a small range of teen fiction. None of the books are, however, used. The library has been transformed into a grade R classroom, and prior to this, it is clear it functioned more as a store room than a library.

The books are not organized on shelves in any recognizable categorization. There is no labelling of the shelves or books. Very few reference books appear, except for learner dictionaries which account for 60% of the reference books (and about 80% of the total number of non-fiction books). Most reference books comprise textbooks or learner workbooks that are unused, with approximately 10 copies per book.

In amongst the shelves there are random university textbooks (for example, Advanced Engineering Mathematics; Crime and Criminology; American Government), accounting for about 10% of the non-fiction books. Many of these books would appear to have been donated and placed indiscriminately in the library regardless of their relevance or use-value to students or staff at the school.

Around one-third of the books are fiction. The vast majority of these are readers and most of the readers are for young learners. There are very few novels for younger learners (about 250) and very few young adult novels. Right at the back of the library on a bottom shelf, severely damaged by water, is a small shelf of teen novels, difficult to access and unlikely to be used. Of the total number of books in the library, the vast majority of books are in English, with about 400 isiZulu books. There is an insufficient amount of fiction, especially in IsiZulu, to define the library as a feasible resource for the support of reading and the development of a reading culture in the school.

The library proved to be closed for any student activity during the day and had been all year. No process for taking out books was evident. Nor were classroom library boxes in evidence nor the availability of an organized set of graded readers.

School A(L)

The school has a spacious and neat library with well-constructed shelves (Figure 4). It contains about 3000 books, almost all of which are English. Most of the books are readers and textbooks. The small number of isiZulu books are mostly old textbooks.

Figure 4: School library at A(L)



Most books in the library appear unused. These are generally brand new with uncracked spines. The only books that look used are those that appear to have been donated. The books are not organized according to any recognizable categorizing system but appear to be unsystematically placed on shelves. Many of the book spines face the wrong way so that the book titles cannot be seen. Books with the same titles are grouped together.

There is no dedicated librarian. There is a teacher roster on the wall however. A file on the librarian desk indicated that books were borrowed on 23 May 2017 and 5 May 2017. There was no other evidence of books being borrowed. Use of library books, in short, appears to be negligible.

Several teachers commented on how useful the department-run mobile library is for their students. It seems that rather than send them to the library, which seems to be completely unused despite being relatively well-stocked and well-maintained, they have their learners take books from this mobile library that visits the school each term.

School B(H)

The staffroom has two walls of bookshelves filled with books, which look very impressive. A closer look at these books reveals a host of old law textbooks and encyclopaedias mixed with old and new unread English texts, fiction and non-fiction. It turns out most of the English books were donated to the school from England for the school library. One shelf also has a few books in isiZulu, but this space is not used as a library. At most, teachers may take books from these shelves, but they look largely untouched.

There is no longer a school library because they have no librarian. Library books are now in the staff room. But the principal indicated 'other LTSM' in the budget used to be allocated to library books. Now they buy books for the classroom. The principal says that she went to

London on a READ-sponsored trip to promote reading, and was given R2000 to buy books, but these are now old, and housed in the staff room, where no-one seems to use them. For the past three years no new library books were purchased. The 'Other LTSM' budget had been used to buy laptops for the SMT.

Commenting on the classroom libraries, the DP mentioned the 'library boxes' in classrooms with books that learners can take home, but said that:

... there are not enough books. We can't afford to buy more books.

In contrast, the FP HOD thought that there were sufficient readers for both isiZulu and English in all the classes.

School B(L)

Since the school does not have a library, they have used the library budget to purchase additional readers, which are placed in classrooms. Readers, textbooks and learner books were very visible in the grade 3 classrooms, but organization of books on bookshelves and in cupboards varied across the classrooms. However, the school could afford to have a very good library if it did not choose to prioritise paying the license fees to the KM diagnostic centre.

School C(H)

There are enough resources to support the development of a reading programme in English for most learners. However, there is a serious neglect of isiZulu instruction in this school, particularly the development of reading and writing skills in this language. Associated with this there are not nearly enough LTSM resources to support isiZulu instruction; there are no readers for grade 3 isiZulu, and no DBE workbooks for isiZulu because isiZulu HL DBE workbooks are too difficult for teaching at the FAL level. Although there are some isiZulu books in the library, these are not used very much, partly because the teacher identifies that the children only want to learn and/or read in English. According to the teacher, "*if they go to the library, they don't go there to get Zulu books*". The neglect of the HL of the learners at the school is a function of many factors including a serious apathy towards the subject, the complete lack of monitoring of the quality of isiZulu instruction and isiZulu teachers struggling to find appropriate isiZulu material.

This school has the only functioning library among the eight sample schools. It was crowded with learners during both breaks and library periods are timetabled for all classes (Figure 4). In addition, library books are loaned to classes for the daily reading periods. While school leadership is fully supportive of the library it was established entirely at the initiative of a young teacher, who had himself been a learner at the school. He requested school leadership to provide him with a reduced teaching load and a classroom so that he could establish and maintain a library. The entire staff supported the request, even though it entailed them taking on additional classes. He is very active in procuring books, generally by means of

donations, and the room is crowded with shelves that house a very wide variety of magazines, books and other materials. The one factor limiting the extent of its use is the size of the library, which cannot accommodate more than about 20 learners at any one time. Reading in English is valued throughout the school. This is evidenced in how all staff members have accepted and embraced the newly introduced morning reading period, the development and use of the library and adjusting their teaching allocations to make this happen.

School C(L)

A classroom has been allocated to function as a library, and a teacher designated to run it. She has attended library training courses, offered by the NGO ELET, on three occasions, in 2004, 2007 and 2017. This training included how to run a school library, how to display books, and how to select and classify them. However, this teacher has a full teaching load and has little time for the library. In addition, the library is extremely poorly equipped with furniture and hardly has any books (Figure 5).

Figure 5: School library at C(L)



Apart from the fact that the library is currently extremely poorly equipped, because of the librarians' teaching load, other teachers and learners are unable to access this facility except by special arrangement. According to one teacher a volunteer, through the church, used to assist in the years 2007-12 with classifying books, and showing teachers how to use books for story reading and silent reading.

School D(H)

The school has a library, but it is not currently in use and there is no indication that money is spent on library books or readers or any other textual resource. Part of the reason for the

dysfunctionality of the library is that a number of books were damaged because of the collapsed roof. The school intends to reopen the library once funds are secured.

School D(L)

The school does not have a functional library. The “library” is currently used to store LTSM. The ‘library’ had 1400 copies of the same Sepedi book (‘Dikanegelo Tšeo Di Bolelago’).

Discussion

Only one of the eight case study schools have no library at all (Table 15).

Table 15: Strategic leadership provided by SMT on a school library

School Code	Score
A(H)	2
A(L)	2
B(H)	2
B(L)	1
C(H)	3
C(L)	2
D(H)	2
D(L)	2

Key

- 1 – The school has no library
- 2 – The school has a library, but it is not used
- 3 – The school has a well-functioning library, but its establishment and/or maintenance depends on the initiative of one or more individual teachers
- 4 – There is a library and its use is integrated into the academic programme and coordinated by the SMT

Of the seven schools that do have libraries, only one is functional. The dysfunctional state of five of the libraries ostensibly derives from the fact that there is no librarian at the school, but it seems that larger reason is that no one at the school understands the value that a library has in supporting a culture of reading at the school, which in turn finds its roots in the poor levels of knowledge resources seen in the schools.

The library at school C(H) is well-supported by school leadership and other teachers, and integrated into the academic programme, indicating a coordinated approach at the school which rests on high levels of symbolic knowledge. However, the initiation of the library together with the energy required to keep it going, are due entirely to the initiative of one teacher.

In contrast, the library at C(L) is perhaps the poorest in terms of resourcing and use. Although the school has allocated a room for use exclusively as a library and has sent a senior educator on library training courses a number of times over more than a decade, the library is almost entirely devoid of books and consequently cannot be used. On this surface,

this situation appears to derive from a lack of finances on the part of the school, and indeed it is the poorest school in the sample. However, in terms of untapped potential C(L) has almost unlimited resources situated in its own grounds. This takes the form of the Catholic Church, which started the school in 1918, and continues to support an active congregation. Although the school has been taken over by the provincial department, it maintains a religious ethos, with the principal insisting that prayers be held every morning, even though this is not government policy. However, while the school maintains spiritual links with the church, the principal is oblivious to the material benefits that could be derived from its close historical and physical association with the church. For example, resourcing and staffing the school library would be a heaven-sent opportunity for members of the congregation to adopt as a project. Yet, the school appears not to have considered this possibility.

Conclusion

The theory framing the investigation of leadership practices in the case study schools identifies four categories of resources essential for guiding, promoting and supporting good reading instruction: knowledge, human, strategic and material. This theoretical framework proved to be robust in providing plausible explanations for the *Leadership for Literacy* systems observed in the present study. The findings reveal generally weak practices in all four categories across all eight schools (Table 16). In addition, where they do exist, these activities are inconsistent. Thus, where relatively good practices on one type of resource may be discerned, there may be weaknesses in one or more of the other resource categories. As a result, within each pair, the two schools are not strongly distinguished from each other. This is particularly the case for pairs A and B.

The only indicator to distinguish schools A(H) and A(L) is the proportion of the budget allocated to books, where the low-performing school outscores its relatively high-performing counterpart. But this appears to be a case of the school fulfilling the letter of policy dictates without understanding their intention: for example, in explaining how books are selected, one of the respondents indicated that this is done on grounds of convenience (the way the distributor packs the selected books facilitates distribution within the school) rather than according to curriculum considerations. The point is emphasized by the fact that A(L) has, arguably, the second most impressive library of all eight schools (Figure 4), yet the facility stands entirely unused throughout the year.

Another school with a very impressive facility is B(L) which boasts a KM diagnostic centre at considerable cost, and which by all accounts is integrated into a 'pull-out' programme through which learning problems are diagnosed and remediated by teachers specifically designated for this purpose. The mechanics of the programme were recited by one respondent after the next, and the school was allocated a score of 4 on this indicator. Yet the FP HOD was most surprised to hear that the large majority of learners are struggling to read. Furthermore, the school has no library, spends a fraction of what it is supposed to on

printed material and battles to raise the license fee for the KM centre. It seems that this is another case of going through the motions of a programme without understanding its substance and consequent lack of effect.

The weak and inconsistent leadership exhibited by these four schools provides for teacher effects to predominate. In other words, because leadership is weak, there is no coherent effort to improve reading instruction across the school, and learner scores in any particular class at any given time depend largely on the skills and efforts of individual teachers, and therefore may go up or down depending on which teacher is teaching that class at that time. In all probability this is the factor which explains the differences in performance between the two matched schools in pairs A and B. Since we did not test all learners in these schools, but focused on one class in both grade 3 and grade 6, the differences between classes could not be determined, and thus the opportunity to identify teacher effects was not available.

Table 16: Summary of scores on four categories of leadership for reading

School	Knowledge			Human				Strategic	Material		Total
	Introduce comprehension (know)	Introduce comprehension (share)	Understand reading	Recruit staff	Expertise recognised	Collaboration	External in-service training	Reading programme	Book spend	Library	
A(H)	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	14
A(L)	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	4	2	16
B(H)	1	1	1	3	1	1	2	3	3	2	18
B(L)	1	1	2	2	2	3	2	4	2	1	20
C(H)	3	3/1*	2	3	1	4	2	3	4	3	28
C(L)	1	1	2	3	3	4	2	3	4	2	25
D(H)	2	3	4	4	2	3	2	2	1	2	25
D(L)	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	14

* Relatively strong with respect to English; weak with respect to isiZulu

The variables shown in Table 16 are categorical and hence the totals shown in the last column have no statistical meaning, beyond a very crude indication of the distribution of high and low scores on the full range of indicators for each school. From this perspective it is apparent that in only one of the pairs (D) is one school strongly distinguished from its counterpart. Although this is labelled as the high-performing school, the test scores of the two schools are not markedly different (Table 3). In this regard, the final conclusion of the field workers on leaving these schools, well before the analysis shown in this report was completed, is telling:

It was clear from both of our school visits that despite the similarity in reading outcomes between D(L) and D(H), D(H) had poorer students and therefore had to do better to get the same outcomes. Their

teachers seemed to have higher levels of content-knowledge, PCK, and English proficiency, as well as a stronger work ethos, and a more collaborative culture.

The one area that stands out as being of predominant importance is that of knowledge resources: it seems self-evident that if school leaders do not themselves have a full grasp of the importance of reading and how it should best be taught, they cannot exert good leadership in any of the other three resource categories. The point is best illustrated through a comparison of C(H) and C(L).

Table 3 shows the superiority of C(H) in reading in English at both grade 3 and grade 6 levels; the inverse situation for grade 3 isiZulu reading has been discussed. How do we explain the superior scores in English for C(H) when, according to the leadership indicators show in Table 16, the strength of leadership in the two schools, on average, looks very similar? The answer lies in the strength of knowledge resources exhibited by C(H), where leaders demonstrate a better understanding of when to introduce elementary comprehension strategies, and share this understanding more widely across the school. While it is true that the expertise in teaching reading of one grade 6 teacher at C(L) is recognized and used to assist struggling learners across the grade, this became known through the efforts of the teacher herself, and leadership makes no effort to use this expertise to build the capacity of other teachers.

But the superior knowledge resources present at C(H) are most starkly illustrated by comparing the state and use of the libraries at the two schools (Figure 4 and Figure 5). The situation at C(L) is an obvious case of isomorphic mimicry: the leaders know that the school should have a library and that a librarian needs to be trained, but they have no idea how to go about resourcing and using the facility, even though they have a golden opportunity to do so, in the form of an active church congregation right on their doorstep. In contrast, the very well-stocked library at C(H) is frequently used by individual learners and well-integrated into the academic programme of all classes: this is symbolic capital in action. The fact that the initiative to set up and drive use of the library at C(H) was the brainchild of one teacher shows that the school management team has a long way to go in exerting leadership in curriculum matters, but there is no doubt that knowledge resources exist at the school and are recognized by the leaders and other educators alike.

If the knowledge and understanding of reading, provides the compass which enables school leaders to deploy the other resources at their disposal towards school-wide, effective reading instruction, then the most important vehicle for implementing this enterprise is the educator cohort at the school. Without willing and skilled teachers, the best books, libraries and reading programmes may create the illusion of good practice but lack the substantive engagement with young minds necessary to promote learning. It follows that school leaders should expend considerable effort in selecting, promoting and deploying educators who exhibit the highest levels of motivation and expertise in reading pedagogy. And while *de jure* government policy pays lip service to this ideal, the reality is very different. In four of the eight case study schools evidence for direct union interference in recruitment practices, or closed shop arrangements, was detected and may be happening in others where such evidence was not uncovered. In one case the school started off parroting the official policy but probing soon revealed that the principal had almost no authority in making staff appointments. In another case, the principal was quite blunt about corrupt practices dictating appointments, when he said: "... [the union] always has the final word; money changes hands." Perhaps the most egregious example of the effects of these practices was when the district sent a high school teacher to fill a FP vacancy at the school C(L).

Finally, the question of language was revealed as another area in which policy may frustrate learning. At the two best-performing case study schools, English has been adopted as the LOLT from Grade 1, even though all learners speak an African language at home. As a consequence, the African language is taught at the significantly lower FAL level, for which very few books are available, and school leaders – all of whom are English first language speakers without knowledge of the African language – are unable to provide support in to FP teachers in this language. Poor test scores in the African language, in contrast to strong performance in English, provide stark evidence for the disastrous effects of this situation.

Recommendations

- (i) Make expertise in matters of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy an essential criterion in the promotion of educators into school leadership positions
- (ii) This won't necessarily change much initially, since this aspect has been neglected to date. But it will send a strong message for educators to develop their capacity in these areas as a prerequisite for promotion, and over time this will begin to reorient the system away from a focus on seniority towards the expertise required for effective instruction.
- (iii) Remove all constraints to the selection and promotion of educators according to expertise:
 - Remove unions from all processes of staff selection and promotion
 - Do away with closed-shop agreements
 - Where necessary, provide HR support to the school in the selection and promotion of staff.
- (iv) Build the capacity of schools' leaders in terms of expertise in these areas, and in selecting and promoting staff according to their competence.
- (v) In the case of schools serving a majority of African learners who opt for straight-for-English, insist that the African language be taken at HL level, and that at least one educator in the school management team is expert on that African language.

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