THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TEACHING READING IN GRADE R CLASSES OF LESOTHO

by

ARONE CUMILLUS KOLOTI

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SUPERVISOR: Dr T. Jita

DECLARATION

I, Arone Camillus Koloti, student number 2006072751, declare that this dissertation, *THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF TEACHING READING IN GRADE R CLASSES OF LESOTHO,* is my own independent work and it is hereby submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the Free State for the qualification, Master's in Education (M Ed.) in Curriculum Studies. It is my own work and that all the sources that I have consulted and/or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete referencing. Also, I have not previously submitted this work to the University of Free State or to any other institution for the purpose of obtaining a qualification. I further affirm that I submitted this thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements.

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A. C. Koloti

Date: 05/03/2020

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved wife, Masechaba Marianna Koloti, whose support and words of encouragement made this academic journey successful. Above all, the sacrifices she made in my absence to keep the home environment alive while I was working on this dissertation, spurred me on to success. Also, dedication must go to my son, Sechaba, my daughter, Moliehi (who at some point read chapters 4 and 5 with me and made some corrections at her age of 13), my mother, brothers and sister for their patience, motivation, support, understanding and sacrifice throughout my study. Your prayers and words of encouragement contributed to who I am today.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ART	Area Resource Teacher(s)
CECE	Certificate in Early Childhood Education
DoE	Department of Education (RSA)
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EFA	Education for All
FAL	First Additional Language
GOL	Government of Lesotho
IECCD	Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development
LCE	Lesotho College of Education
LECDC	Lesotho Early Childhood Development Curriculum
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation(s)
NPIECCD	National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development
NTT	National Teacher Trainer(s)
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MKO	More Knowledgeable Other
SEO	Senior Education Officer
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNMDGs	The United Nations Millennium Development Goals
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

Many countries invest in early childhood education where learners begin to acquire different skills, including early literacy skills. Education departments develop curricula for preschools with the purpose of providing quality education. This study explored the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes. The major question that guided the study was: What are the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho? In order to answer the research question using the qualitative research method, this study investigated the availability of the guidelines for the teaching of reading, how teachers interpreted them, and how they enacted them in the classrooms. The data was collected through observation, semi-structured interviews and document analysis from three Grade R classrooms with three teachers at their respective schools. The study used the frameworks of Cognitive Theory and the Social Interaction Theory to investigate how teachers use these theories for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes. Thematic Content Analysis was adopted in this study. The findings discussed here are grounded on qualitative research conducted in Lesotho from September to November 2017. The major findings of the study revealed that although the policy documents for the teaching of reading were not provided for Grade R classes and the syllabus having insufficient guidance, the Grade R teachers worked collaboratively to prepare quarterly schemes of work and then taught learners basic reading skills daily. The Grade R classes were not provided with books and other teaching and learning materials; hence, the social learning interaction for reading activities was generally ineffective. It was also evident that there was inadequate general support from the parents and Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) in Grade R classrooms. This study recommends a review of the Grade R syllabus, that well-illustrated books be provided and read in Grade R classes, and teachers be provided with opportunities for professional development to enhance their knowledge and skills in terms of developing learners' early literacy skills.

Key words: early childhood education**,** reading, collaboration, professional development

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The majority of learners spend a significant period of time in early childhood education settings where they are provided with basic education in order to prepare them for academic success. This includes early literacy practices as reading problems can be prevented from as early as the preschool stage through appropriate and effective reading instruction and intervention. Riley (2006) argues that the provision of high quality education in the early years, especially acquisition of literacy skills, should be a critical area of concern. Literacy skills that include learning to read and write form the cornerstone of a successful educational system and thus learners should be taught to read as early as the preschool period. According to Wolf (2014), the main purpose of teaching reading is to enable learners to read independently and with understanding. Ali, et al. (2011) assert that learners who do not learn basic reading in their early years are unlikely to perform well academically as they grow up. Teachers and parents of young learners are thus encouraged to foster literacy skills in the early years through the "use of culturally rich texts and basic reading books, the promotion of leisure reading, reading aloud to learners, and teaching them to write" (Fox, 1996: 154). This shows that the acquisition of literacy skills during early learning is critical, and therefore, learners should be taught to read using relevant teaching and learning materials such as books in Lesotho.

In the past, the purpose of education for five year olds in preschools was to promote social, emotional and physical growth (Durkin, 1987; Nutbrown, 2011). Currently, the interest in early literacy development has led to syllabus and curriculum changes that guide classroom practice and teachers' interventions to help learners to achieve learning objectives successfully through active participation. However, inappropriate curricula, teachers' lack of readiness, and a dearth of resources may lead to deficiency in classroom instruction. Also, this may lead to people who have completed primary school education, and even tertiary education, but cannot read and understand texts.

Although there are studies that focus on the challenges facing classroom teaching in primary and secondary schools (Kewaza & Welch, 2013; Ntumi, 2016; Okoth, 2016), the researcher has not found a study that focused on the challenges that teachers have to face when teaching early literacy skills in Reception (Grade R) classrooms in Lesotho. Therefore, this study investigated the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho; specifically the challenges, implementation, and opportunities of teaching reading in such classes.

1.2 Background of the study

The education of different countries which include the United States of America (USA), England, Australia, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Lesotho has been alluded to in this study because it is connected to the review of existing literature and the current study.

Research has indicated that access to high quality education in the early years education forms a basis for a successful education of any country (Riley, 2006). According to Nutbrown (2011), until the 1970s, nursery education paid attention only to oral language and storytelling. Early literacy acquisition was ignored until the 1980s when new methods of teaching were developed, leading to researchers' and teachers' awareness of learners' unique ways of learning to read and write.

Many countries in the world have been, and are still determined to establish a universal preschool programme. However, they struggle to implement and/or achieve their goals. Some states in the USA such as Florida, Oklahoma, Columbia, Virginia and New York, have implemented universal programmes in the last decade but the enrolment at non-funded preschool programmes in these states has decreased (Barnett et al., 2014).

Preschool education in Lesotho has received significant attention in the second millennium following the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (UNMDGs) adoption by many nations in the year 2000. One of the seven UNMDGs was to overcome illiteracy by 2015 (MOET, 2013). Lesotho developed the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD Policy) to achieve the seven UNMDGs which include education goals. According to Sebatane and Lefoka (in

MOET, 2013), parents and caregivers hold positive attitudes regarding the importance of early childhood development that focuses on learners aged 0 to 8 years as they understand their role in helping their learners acquire basic education. However, Sebatane and Lefoka (in MOET, 2013) further report that parents in the rural areas rarely engage their learners in book reading activities. Therefore, the issue of quality in the teaching of early literacy, especially the teaching of reading in preschools, is the area of concern.

UNESCO (2014) reports that there is a lack of basic reading skills in many countries globally, including Lesotho. Research indicates that many countries have difficulties correcting poor reading habits after the age of six (Riley, 2006). According to Riley (2006), countries such as Australia, England and USA are struggling to correct poor reading performance after Grade 3. Chelimo (2014) refers to a study carried out in Kenya in 2011 where it was revealed that some of the standard seven learners could not read Grade 2 readers. This is a concern that propelled this study to explore the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho.

In many countries, including Lesotho, learners go to preschool from birth to six years of age. However, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is established to promote holistic development from birth to the age eight (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; MOET, 2013) as that is when learners acquire a strong foundation for learning (MOET, 2011). Learners up to six years in many countries, as well as in Lesotho, are taught in different settings which include day-care, centre-based, home-based, and kindergarten or reception (Grade R) classes that make up provision for preschool education (Hickey & Mejia, 2014; MOET, 2011). These are referred to as play-based centres or child-centred settings (Hickey & Mejia, 2014).

Lesotho, which is the context of this study, through the MOET-ECCD Unit, makes provision for preschool education to learners under six years in three categories: centre-based, home-based and reception classes for a minimum duration of three years (MOET, 2013). Reception class, which is referred to as Grade R in this study, is for the learners who are prepared to transit to Grade 1 and it is offered in one year.

Most of the preschools are privately owned and there are no specific requirements for

people who work in the early childhood services in Lesotho. However, many preschool education caregivers enrol with the Lesotho College of Education (LCE) for a Certificate in Early Childhood Education (CECE) structured by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) for preschool caregivers who are already working in preschools. This two year part-time course which is still offered at the LCE started in 2007 (MOET, 2011). Teacher training forms part of successful teaching and learning processes and this background was important to help me (as the researcher) to understand the challenges and opportunities Grade R teachers experience when they teach learners to read.

In preschool settings, learning should be interactive; for example, phonemic awareness instruction that improves reading (Stahl & Murray, 1994) is more effective when learners are taught in small groups where they are able to help each other and the teacher manages the group, than when learners are taught individually or in a whole-class settings (Wilson & Colmar, 2008). Learners acquire reading skills effectively through play and peer interaction since play is the most important activity of early childhood. This study explores the challenges and opportunities for the teaching of reading effectively using appropriate activities because UNESCO (2014) and UNICEF (2016) report that learners do not have adequate basic reading skills by Grade 4 in Lesotho.

For instructional practice, teachers need to understand the level of learners' learning abilities to understand phenomena by themselves. Vygotsky referred to this as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP) which is the level where learners need help from other people with more knowledge than they have, who were identified by Vygotsky as the More Knowledgeable Others [MKO] (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011; Whitehead, 2010). Teachers should facilitate learning which involves social reading activities to improve social skills and promote emergent literacy as learners learn to read in a group, as according to Vygotsky's Cognitive Development and Social Development Theory, learners work and learn better in groups (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011; Whitehead, 2010).

In centre-based and home-based preschools, learners are assisted to develop fully in all aspects which include physical, cognitive, moral, social and emotional development

(MOET, 2011). In Grade R classes, learners are provided with emergent (early) literacy knowledge and skills which include learning to read and write. The Lesotho Grade R class integrated syllabus is divided into three main learning areas: Life Orientation, Literacy, and Numeracy. Chimbi and Jita (2019) and Mueller et al. (2019 assert that teachers often have limited knowledge of curriculum implementation; hence, a limited knowledge of implementing the integrated curriculum or syllabus. One of the findings of Chimbi and Jita (2019) was that of teachers who are willing to implement curriculum but lack professional development and therefore lack knowledge on the interpretation and implementation of the new curriculum. In consideration of the Grade R integrated syllabus, this study was based on the literacy learning area, especially on teaching learners to read.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Teaching learners to acquire reading skills is a challenge in Lesotho because many Grade 4 learners are not able to read, as is indicated in *Education for All (*EFA*) Global Monitoring Report of 2013/4* by UNESCO (2014). UNICEF (2016) also reports that the provision of quality education in primary and Early Childhood Care and Development settings in Lesotho is a challenge as levels of literacy and numeracy are poor. The report by UNESCO indicates that about sixty-five percent (65%) of the Grade 4 learners in Lesotho lack basic reading skills. UNESCO (2014:3) notes in the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4* that:

> [G]lobally, 250 million children of primary school age are not learning the basics in reading and mathematics, whether they are in school or not. In sub-Saharan Africa, over half of [the number] of children are not learning the basics in reading; a quarter of [the number] of primary school age children reach grade four but still did not learn the basics, and over a third did not reach grade four.

It further reports that Lesotho, like other countries, has developed policies on education that are aimed at improving learning in schools, but there is a concern relating to the provision of quality education and its actual implementation. It seems that there are challenges facing the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase classes as evident in the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* that states that there are high numbers of learners with poor reading skills up to Grade 4. This indicates an

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underperforming reading situation in the Foundation Phase, including Grade R, and that teachers encounter challenges in providing reading instructions that can give learners adequate reading basics; hence the justification of this study.

It was important to understand reading instruction in Grade R classrooms in Lesotho in order to explore the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading. Stahl and Murray (1994) and Wolfe (2013) suggests that learners should be introduced to reading skills such as phonemic awareness so that they may be able to read. By the same token, Chelimo (2014:27) highlights that early reading skills that learners must imbibe must include "… narrative and vocabulary skills, print awareness, letter knowledge, phonological awareness and print motivation" to help preschool learners learn how to read and to prevent poor performance in later grades. Learners should demonstrate an understanding of sounds, phonics and decoding processes, be able to read fluently, have a sufficient vocabulary base, and the ability to understand text. Connelly et al. (2009) and Wilson and Colmar (2008) also emphasise that when readers know phonics, they are able to recognise words and read without difficulty. Instruction in phonics is a way of teaching letter-sound- relationships and the ability to use letter-sound correspondence in reading and spelling (Ali et al., 2011). Learners who have poor phonological awareness delay in attaining letter-sound relationship necessary for reading.

Lesotho planned to attach Reception (Grade R) classes to all primary schools by the year 2015 (MOET, 2011). However, for a long time there were no standard guidelines to indicate the type of content to be taught in Grade R classes until 2011 when a Grade R class syllabus became accessible to teachers. Until then, teachers or caregivers were forced to teach the primary school Grade 1 curriculum content. Currently, the Grade R class guidelines and the IECCD policy are available to help teachers to teach learners relevant content, including the basics in reading.

Since the guidelines for teaching reading in Grade R have been developed in Lesotho, there is little known about the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes prior to and after the design of regulatory guidelines and policy for teaching in Lesotho. This was the identified gap. Therefore, this study sought to explore the challenges and opportunities Grade R teachers experience in the teaching

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of reading in addition to investigating how they implement the curriculum guidelines.

1.4 Research question(s)

The main research question and the sub-questions were designed to elicit a deep understanding of teachers' early literacy practices when teaching Grade R learners basic reading skills, and to explore the challenges and opportunities when they have to implement curriculum guidelines in the classroom.

1.4.1 Main Research Question

What are the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho?

1.4.1.1   Sub-questions

- What are the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho?
- How do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?
- How do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R?
- What lessons can be learnt from the study of the challenges and opportunities for teaching reading in Grade R?

1.5 The aim of this study

The primary aim of this study was to explore the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho. The study aimed to highlight factors affecting the implementation of Grade R reading guidelines.

1.6 The objectives of the study

- Identify the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho;
- Investigate how teachers makes sense of the guidelines provided for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho;

- Examine how Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R; and
- Suggest lessons that can be learnt from the study of the challenges and opportunities for teaching reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study investigates practical situations affecting the quality of ECE in the classroom so that the all role-players will benefit from it. The recommendations made in the study are expected to raise awareness about the challenges and opportunities that teachers meet in the teaching of basic reading skills in the Grade R classroom. More significantly, the study is expected to raise the awareness of the Lesotho Government Education Departments, specifically the curriculum developers, curriculum implementers, and teachers about the implications of the absence or vagueness of teaching guidelines. Also, the intention of this study was to highlight the importance of investing in ECE.

Since the guidelines for the teaching of reading suggest that teachers should teach learners to "recognise letters of the alphabet" (MOET, 2011: 7), especially the initial letters in naming words, the study provides guidance on how to teach learners to learn to read effectively, to understand (meaning-making) what they have read and to relate letters to sounds, thereby raising their phonological awareness of the basics of reading. This correspond to Stahl and Murray (1994) assertion that phoneme awareness is necessary for learners who begin to learn to read. I, as the researcher in this study, did not come across any study that explores the teaching of basic reading skills in Grade R in Lesotho. Therefore, this study is intended to fill this gap.

Teachers will be encouraged by the discussions in this study to rethink their teaching styles and understand that they are not the only ones who can facilitate learners' learning in the classroom in an effective manner. They will learn that there are learners who have more knowledge than others, and through social learning or group activities, the slow performers will learn from their peers. This will help teachers who use traditional methods of teaching, such as the telling method, to engage learners in

interactive activities. Galton et al. (2009) encourages teachers to use different methods of teaching. The study presents suggestions to address the challenges and opportunities of social interaction in group activities and whole-class activities.

In addition, the study intended to encourage curriculum developers, institutions of higher learning (such as LCE), as well as teachers, to identify different reading instructional approaches which will facilitate teacher-flexibility when teaching learners to read.

1.8 Overview of the theoretical framework

This study was guided by two related theories of language development and learning: Piaget's Cognitive Theory, and Vygotsky's Social Interaction Theory. The psychologist, Lev Vygotsky's early work was inspired by Piaget's demonstrations of how a child's thinking, learning and language develop when considering social and cultural foundations (Whitehead, 2010). According to Piaget, "the ability to learn any cognitive content is always related to the stage of intellectual development. Learners who are at a certain stage cannot be taught the concepts of a higher stage" (Ginn, 1995: 2). Activities must be congruent to the cognitive level of the learners. A person's cognitive functioning is a way of interacting with the environment, and Piaget mentions that learners construct their knowledge, but emphasises the importance of adult support in the cognitive development of a child (Bormanaki & Khoshhal, 2017; Riley, 2006). According to Piaget's theory, the child's egocentricity reduces and then dies as the child matures, before the age of seven or eight and develops the ability to take other perspectives into consideration, and this leads to relevant socialised speech (Hanfmann et al., 2012; Whitehead, 2010). This means that the child's social contacts widen when egocentricity is reduced. Grade R teachers who implement the Piaget's Cognitive Theory must start from learners' known activities to unknown in order to understand and explain their thought.

Vygotsky also believed that the development of a child is connected to his or her social and cultural context, indicating that social interaction plays a significant role in cognitive development. Vygotsky claimed that thinking is social, and that social experiences in early childhood form the basis of the development of a child's thought

and emphasise that societal, group and/or cultural factors play an integral part in cognitive development (Hanfmann et al., 2012; Whitehead, 2010). The environment of learners influence their thinking, how they think and what they think about. For example, words that a child thinks about or uses ("thinking symbols"), originate from social relationships.

When learners enter preschool, they already have background knowledge that cognitive psychologists, such as Kant, Rumelhart and Anderson (in Zhao & Zhu, 2012) called "Schemas". The Cognitive Theory and the Social Interaction Theory formed the theoretical framework of this study because they take into consideration the language experience that the child brings to the reading activity. Learners gain language experience from their environment which includes communication with all the people in their society. According to the Cognitive Theory, verbal abilities precede reading instruction and thus teachers should discuss text before the actual reading activity in order to find out learners' background knowledge, and to put together old and new information (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Teachers need to be conscientised that learners learn to read when they get affirmation through motivation and support from experienced people; and, according to Mason and Sinha (1992) and Riley (2006), this is one of the basic tenets of the Cognitive Approach.

Riley (2006) maintains that, according to Vygotsky, learners use symbols which help them to think and provide meaning to their experiences; for example, pictures help learners to imagine what words mean when they read them. This indicates the relationship between the two theories in the teaching of reading. Zhao and Zhu (2012) also contend that the background knowledge from pictures, for example, helps learners to predict meaning during the reading process. Vygotsky's ideas formed the basis for this study because learners in Grade R classes learn language long before they go to school. They learn naming words before they manipulate print materials. When they begin to read, they bring their oral background knowledge to their reading activity sessions, and are able to identify initial letters and words. As a result, they tend to contribute more information during reading.

Learners need proper guidance because they do not always store proper schema, or the reading text may not have enough information to activate their schema (Bormanaki

& Khoshhal, 2017). In situations like these, teachers can help students activate relevant schema or construct them through pre-reading activities which include question-and-answer sessions, brainstorming, pre-teaching, pre-texting and pre-discussing (Zhao & Zhu, 2012:115).

Vygotsky maintained that a child can independently execute in the future what was learned in teamwork sessions (Whitehead, 2010). This means that a child learns best when working together with others (shared collaboration) where they acquire new skills from more skilled persons (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mason & Sinha, 1992; Shabani, et al., 2010). Therefore, this study utilised the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories to explore the interaction between a teacher and a learner, and between a learner and a learner in the reading lesson or activity, including how the background knowledge is linked to new knowledge.

Based on these presumptions, these two related theories propelled me to choose a research method that was suitable to yield in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho. They were chosen to provide guidance when the interviews and classroom observations were conducted, and when the documents were analysed. Therefore, these theories guided me to dissect how an individual teacher interpreted and enacted the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in the Grade R classrooms.

1.9 Overview of the research methodology

This section outlines the study's research paradigm, research design, and methods used to collect data that was collected for investigating and answering the research question (as connected to the problem statement). Accordingly, this is explained broadly in chapter three.

This study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm to explain what was implemented in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes. Additionally, it explored the teachers' experiences regarding the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading. Nolan et al. (2013) maintain that one of the characteristics of the qualitative research approach is that the sample size of the study is small, and it gives the researcher the opportunity to comprehend the meaning the participants give to

experiences. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that the research in this paradigm relies on the views of the participants which is connected to the Social Constructivism approach to research; and this was regarded as an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Accordingly, the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories were used to understand the challenges and opportunities for teaching reading when teachers and learners interact in the classroom. In order to do this, the researcher visited three schools and explored the three Grade R teachers' teaching practices during reading instruction.

According to Yin (2014), a case study design assists the researcher to explore and get an in-depth understanding of a particular case in its context. This was the reason that three Grade R classes were chosen to be studied in their real context. This case study design followed a purposive sampling technique in order to collect rich data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Three data tools were utilised to generate data: observation, interviews and document analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). For this study, documents which include Grade R reading guidelines, teachers' schemes of work, and lesson plans were collected; and all activities pertaining to reading lessons were analysed through observation. Permission was obtained from the participants for access to these documents (signed consent).

Data was analysed qualitatively using the inductive method which ensured that research findings of this study were collected and reduced into patterns, categories or themes, and later interpreted (Cohen et al., 2011).

1.10 Ethical considerations

It was possible that the researcher could "hurt" the participants during data collection, especially when observations were made in the classrooms, and when interviews were on a one-on-one basis. Daniel (2016) indicate that the researcher must ensure that the research participants are not harmed in any way. Similarly, Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that ethical issues should be seriously considered and executed. Bordens and Abbott (2011) also state that ethical issues should be considered even before the research commences. Therefore, in this study, it was explained to all participants at the very outset that their well-being, dignity, security, and human rights

will be protected.

The researcher of this study understood that permission from the university was necessary before the study was conducted. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate, researchers have to apply to the Review Committee to have the research plan reviewed. An application for the title of the study to be registered is also mandatory, in addition to applying for the acceptance letter that gives the researcher permission to conduct the study.

The education authorities, as well as participating teachers, were consulted and permission was sought to collect data in schools. Daniel (2016) notes that participants should be informed that they have rights that should be respected; therefore, the Grade R class teachers were informed that they had the right to refuse to participate before and during the research process – participation was purely voluntary and a signed consent form meant a willingness to participate without any coercion. They were further informed about the full details of the study, and that they had the right to terminate their participation at any time during the research process without being disadvantaged in any way.

This study was grounded in the principle of integrity, thus the researcher's intention was to maintain reliability during data collection because ethics is about honesty (Daniel, 2016). Nieuwenhuis (2007b) indicates that one of the most important ethical aspects in a study is confidentiality of the results and the findings. Hence, the identity of the participants was protected by not using their real names, and the names of their schools were not indicated in any manner – pseudonyms and codes were used for anonymity. The researcher projected the principles of truthfulness, transparency, professionalism, and confidentiality with the participants. The findings of the study were recorded but the names of the schools and participants were not disclosed. Therefore, there was mutual respect and honesty between the researcher and the participants.

1.11 Delimitations of the study

The qualitative data was collected from three Grade R classrooms in two lowland districts (Mafeteng and Maseru) of Lesotho. In this way, information was obtained from

teachers from different backgrounds, and from different places with varying socio-economic levels. It would have been ideal to collect data from at least one school in the rural areas, but with time restrictions, it was difficult to get to such schools. All the teachers participating in the study were qualified with preschool teachers' certificates from LCE. The learners in Grade R classes are 5-6 years old and they were not direct participants in this study. Although data was not collected from many districts of Lesotho, the sample schools had sufficient enrolment for data collection standards.

Since the teachers, the learners and the schools were in different districts, the study findings could not be generalised, but they could be used to improve on the teaching of basic reading skills in Grade R.

1.12   Limitations of the study

The language barrier may have affected the collection of data for this qualitative research. There are two official languages in the country: Sesotho as the home language, and the second language (SL) being English. It is possible that teachers misunderstood some of the questions because of inadequate proficiency in English which is not spoken often in their environments. The qualitative interview research questions were administered to Grade R class teachers in English, but they were allowed to express themselves in both languages. The researcher's interpretation may have not been as accurate as was anticipated as I had to translate their Sesotho expressions into English. However, they were contacted to allow them the opportunity check whether I had written precisely what they had communicated to me.

Time constraints had a negative influence on the findings because the nine-week duration of the study in the three schools was inadequate to generalise the conclusions of the study countrywide. This limitation suggests that another study should be conducted with data collection being done over a longer period of time. Such a study should be carried out in at least one school in each of the ten districts of the country, and in different learning areas.

1.13   Definitions of terms

Curriculum is broad and concerned with how education programmes are made

(Peyvandi et al., 2020). It refers to the collection of planned content, activities, and materials with teaching procedures and it is also regarded as lived experiences in the teaching and learning process (Mueller et al., 2019).

Curriculum implementation is the act of teaching lessons that are suggested in the curriculum and/ or syllabus in a school environment.

Early Childhood Education refers to the education given to learners before entering primary schools. In the context of the study, it is used as the education that is taught to preschool learners who are zero to eight years of age, but in this study the focus is on the classes of Grade R learners who are from five to six years of age (MOET, 2013)

Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development: This indicates that the Government of Lesotho (GOL), in collaboration with stakeholders, plays a fundamental role in the growth and development of every child in Lesotho (MOET, 2013).

Grade R is well known as a reception class, exclusively for the 5 year age group, in Lesotho. In other countries such as USA it is known as Kindergarten (Wolfe, 2014).

A learner is someone who is enrolled in school and who is learning about a concept and/ or how to do something. It is someone who is studying or being taught to gain knowledge or skill (Merriam-Webster, 2019). In this study it is used to describe Grade R learners.

Reading is the ability to decode print and the comprehension of the text that are independent and the process involves the ability to associate the sounds with print that later facilitates the understanding of the text (Riley, 2006; Wolf, 2014). In this study it is used to refer to basic reading skills that are suggested in the syllabus to be taught in Grade R classrooms.

Reception Class Guidelines: They are the curriculum documents guiding for Grade R classes in Lesotho. The standard document that has lessons or academic content taught in Grade R (Reception) classrooms is referred to as Reception Class Guidelines and they were developed after the attachment of Grade R classes into primary schools (MOET, 2011)

Syllabus is a plan of what is to be taught in the classroom and it is derived from the curriculum as it is the smaller part of it (Peyvandi et al., 2020).

Teacher is a person who teaches in order to help learners to learn or gain knowledge. In this study, I used caregiver and teacher alternatively because in schools where there is no trained or qualified person (teacher) people who take care of learners are referred to as caregivers (MOET, 2013).

1.14   Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1 presented above provides an overview of this study, including the background and the research problem. It also includes research questions, research context and concept clarification, overview of the limitations of the study as well as objectives of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature related to curriculum reform and the teaching of reading in early childhood education, especially in Grade R (Reception) classrooms.

Chapter 3 reports on the methodological discussion on the research design, methods of data collection, and the data analysis method.

Chapter 4 analyses data and presents the research findings from three case studies.

Chapter 5 summarises the findings (presented in Chapter 4) and provides recommendations and conclusions of the study in relation to research findings.

1.15   Summary of the chapter

This chapter provided the introduction and the background to the present study. It gives an overview of the study. The statement of the problem indicated the reasons that led to this study. The purpose, the research questions, and the significance of the study are also stated. This chapter also outlined the theoretical framework and research methodology, delimitations, limitations of the study, definition of terms, and the organisation of the research project in terms of chapter-division. Lastly, it laid the foundation for the next chapter (2) where the review of related literature is presented.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Attaining reading proficiency remains a challenge for many students. The learner needs to be able to read a minimum number of words per minute in order to be able to interpret and analyse a text (Kloos et al., 2019). Emergent literacy with early reading knowledge and skills have been found to increase the opportunities of learners to be able to reading skilfully in formal education (Rhyner et al., 2009). Therefore, Grade R teachers have to use appropriate pedagogical strategies that help learners to acquire basic reading skills.

This chapter (2) presents an overview of different ways of teaching reading at the initial stage of learning to read, especially in the Grade R. The overview covers the theories related to the teaching of reading, the Cognitive and Social Interaction Theories, preschool education in the context of study, the definition and explanation of reading, the challenges teachers face when implementing policy guidelines in the classroom when teaching reading, and the techniques of motivating young learners to learn to read in early childhood classrooms. Furthermore, this chapter emphasises engaging learners in early reading activities to create an ongoing interest in reading. It also gives information about effective reading instructional strategies such as identifying familiar words in print materials, providing systematic vocabulary instruction, rich language development, phonological awareness and alphabet recognition (Stahl & Murray, 1994). Lastly, the chapter presents the approaches to teaching early reading, and includes views of researchers on teachers' ability to teach reading according to the policy and/or the curriculum. This chapter begins with explaining the concepts of the theories that form the framework of the study.

2.2 Application of cognitive and social interaction theories

Numerous theories are related to the teaching of reading but they vary in their attempt to explain how reading and language can be acquired. They influence the way in which teachers approach the subject. The current study focuses on only two theories that

form its framework: Cognitive and Social Interaction Theories. Each of these theories (discussed below) will benefit teachers in their choice of teaching approaches in their reading classrooms.

2.2.1 Cognitive approach

In the Cognitive Approach, Riley (2006) argues that the learning of language takes place when a child receives motivation and support from more experienced people. According to Piaget, a child explores what takes place in the world through sensory motor activities. Riley et al. (2009) similarly maintain that learners develop their thinking capacity through the senses and that their sensory-input is essential for interacting with the environment and in learning processes. This means that a child uses senses to acquire language in his/her mental structures, which Piaget calls "schemas or primitive thought networks" (Riley, 2006:15). The quantity and quality of language input imbibed by learners influence the speed/rate of their vocabulary-acquisition (Riley et al., 2009). Therefore, teachers who use the cognitive approach immerse the learners into rich conversation with others before and during reading activities as the Cognitive Theory encourages teachers to engage learners in hands-on learning (Blake & Pope, 2008). Ginn (1995), in line with Piaget, states that learners must be active and act on objects in order to construct knowledge of it. Teachers engage learners in classroom reading discussions and build on their background knowledge, starting from the known to the unknown, in addition to helping the learners construct their own knowledge by interacting with other individuals (Blake & Pope, 2008).

Bormanaki and Khoshhal (2017), Riley et al. (2009) and Zhao and Zhu (2012) emphasise that cognitive psychologists use schemas, and that schema theory involves an individual's experience. As a result, schemas, which are representations that the learners have or create, stimulates learners' reading and increases their reading speed. Riley et al. (2009) support Piaget's belief that knowledge is held in schemas and that the schemas are like mental files where people store information. When learners encounter an experience they are familiar with, they add it to an existing "mental file". Where they cannot assimilate new information into an existing file, they create a new file which is the new schema. Piaget called this process

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"accommodation" (Riley et al., 2009). Accordingly, teachers help learners to accommodate new information in the process of teaching them to learn to read.

Research indicates that according to Piaget's theory of schemas, unless learners have an idea of something (schemas) already in their minds, they cannot visualise things the way adults do (Riley et al., 2009; Zhao & Zhu, 2012). When learners in Grade R get the opportunity to indulge in activities repeatedly in a meaningful context, their schemas are enhanced. For example, when they recite rhymes more than once, they get opportunities to immerse their existing knowledge into the rhymes. This is why they are taught to recite rhymes about what is in their real-life context. The idea of a schema does not mean that learners should be taught only what they already know, but teachers should also extend them by introducing more challenging reading activities that are age-appropriate (Riley et al., 2009).

Just like Piaget, Vygotsky believed that learners build their knowledge in the course of interaction with their existing beliefs and skills (Bormanaki & Khoshhal, 2017; Riley et al., 2009). The background knowledge of learners helps them to gain and assimilate new knowledge into their minds. However, where Piaget acknowledged processes in the internal (within) child, Vygotsky identified two aspects of cognitive development that reside in the world in which the child grows. In early childhood, learners gain knowledge from their interaction with the community (Nulden & Scheepers, 2020. Teachers use people with skills in their area of expertise; for example, to help learners to learn drama, telling stories, songs and reciting rhymes. Experts such as poets are called in to assist.

Research indicates that the teacher is able to pre-determine learners' thoughts when he/she observes what learners are doing, either reading or writing. This resonates with Vygotsky's idea that symbolic systems aid thinking (Riley, 2006). What preschool learners see as symbols (pictures, for example) helps them to predict what the words mean, and then they read them. According to Zhao and Zhu (2012), such background knowledge assists learners to predict meaning in the reading process. The Grade R reading curriculum guidelines that advocate the use of pictures, under the topic of reading and viewing, enhance schemas of learners. As such, pictures help learners to make informed guesses so that they are able to read meaningfully.

2.2.2 Social Interaction Theory

The Social Interaction Theory was chosen to guide this study because it recognises and advocates the idea that more experienced language users have a role to play in the acquisition of learners' spoken language (Hanfmann et al., 2012; Riley et al., 2009; Whitehead, 2010). Here, Vygotsky proposed that development occurs when learners engage in social relationships; that learners' levels of development do not only occur in what they already know, but it is also possible when learners interact with others. Vygotsky identified that the processes that help in a child's cognitive development include "the Zone of Proximal Development (ZDP), mentors, scaffolding, intersubjectivity, and private speech" (Riley et al., 2009:164). In this study, these process paved a way to study teachers on how they organize learning to read tasks and environment in order to make it possible for Grade R learners to try out their reading strategies in practical situations.

Regarding the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as defined by Vygotsky, Shabani et al. (2010: 238) state that:

> Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZDP as the actual development level, as determined by independent problem-solving, and the potential development, as determined through problem-solving, under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

The actual level of development of a learner, as described by Vygotsky, is what a learner is capable of doing currently. The next level of potential is achieved through the learner's interaction with cultural and/or environmental tools and through the facilitation or mediation of more capable adults or peers (Nulden & Scheepers, 2020). According to Riley et al. (2009), Vygotsky proposed that the child's development is close to what the child already knows or can do, and that development occurs in the social context. Grade R teachers holding Vygotskian perspectives should present learners with meaningful reading activities that are slightly difficult or challenging so that learners can learn new concepts from others. The individual Grade R learner will be expected to accomplish a reading activity that may be completed jointly with more capable peers or with a teacher (Shabani et al., 2010; Silalahi, 2019). This means that early childhood teachers help learners to learn to read words that are in their ZPD until

they are able to function independently. They provide learners with the necessary reading skills and teach them strategies that they will use in future. More challenging reading materials raise the ZDP of the learners even though the activities should fall within the learners' ZDP. The reading activities should not be very simple, nor too difficult to be completed by the learner (Shabani et al., 2010).

Another process that is helpful in the learning of Grade R learners is scaffolding. Parents and caregivers intuitively scaffold the child's language development through enjoyable interaction with him/her and through giving him/her adequate support (Riley, 2006). An adult and/or a Grade R teacher can help the learner to improve an innate ability to learn language and reading as the child grows up in a social environment which helps him/her to learn language and reading. Riley et al. (2009) assert that learners deprived of the acquisition of language in the early stages are disadvantaged as this has lasting negative effects in their academic lives. A child with adequate language learns to read meaningfully with ease. Teachers have to ensure that they talk about (pre-reading) what learners will read in class.

To summarise the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky that guided this study, Piaget asserts that learners go to preschools with experience (schemas) of vocabulary that was gained at home. An individual learner constructs knowledge that is gleaned from interaction with the environment. While Vygotsky also acknowledged the role of experience as part of the development in learners, he further believed that parents and teachers should understand that development is what learners can potentially improve on other than what they already know or have learned. Learners construct knowledge from the sociocultural context, and teachers should focus on what learners "bring to the table" in preschools, thus increasing what they as active participants in their learning are capable of achieving in reading lessons (Whitehead, 2010; Riley et al., 2009; Riley, 2006).

In the following section, the study deals with curriculum implementation and the challenges and opportunities that teachers often encounter when they teach Grade learners to read.

2.3 Early childhood curriculum implementation

Policy and legislation are planned with the purpose of improving learning outcomes in Lesotho but there are challenges in real practice. When reception classes were attached to primary schools, there was initially no qualified teachers to provide quality education in these classes until LCE began to offer the Certificate in Early Childhood Education (CECE) in 2007 which it continues to offer up to date (MOET, 2011). There were no guidelines and this situation meant that caregivers experienced challenges to teach Grade R learners to read because they did not have sufficient training and guidance.

Evidence from research explains that there is no learning when there is no learner; and emphasises that while teachers are informed about classroom practice, learners hold the key to what is to be included in the curriculum (Ntumi, 2016). Curriculum developers use materials that are appropriate and relevant to the educational level of the learners, while teachers implement the curriculum (Kewaza & Welch, 2013; Ntumi, 2016; Okoth, 2016). In the theories that guide the teaching of reading, teachers are expected to expand the knowledge of learners from what they already know, and then guide them through the ZDP and scaffolding processes. This emphasises the necessary role of the teacher in the teaching of appropriate reading skills in Grade R classes (Riley et al., 2009; Whitehead, 2010).

A well-developed curriculum, especially for young learners, guides teachers who use Piaget's theory to align their teaching strategies with students' cognitive levels (Blake & Pope, 2008), encourages effective teacher-learner and peer interaction, advocates learning which is interactive in nature, and helps learners to get to their ZPD (Nutbrown, 2011). Parkes and Harris (2002) contend that a well-designed syllabus maintains positive attitudes of teachers and helps them to be effective in their classrooms. Learning should be play-based in preschools as play dominates in the thinking of learners up to the age of eight (Hanfmann et al., 2012); however, a well-developed curriculum will facilitate a variety of activities to be implemented in the classrooms, in addition to suggesting various meaningful and appropriate performance assessment methods (Bulut, 2007). Assessment strategies that the teachers can use include checklists, portfolios, assignments and tests. Grade R

teachers are therefore expected to be able to assess the ability of learners to read. Koc et al. (2007) and Mueller et al. (2019) assert that when a new curriculum is developed, it will still have these characteristics, even if the content is revised. Learning will still be expected to be interactive and child-centred.

2.3.1 Instructional Methods and Classroom Interaction

The early childhood curriculum is either teacher-centred or learner-centred. The Cognitive Theory of Piaget and the Social Interaction Theory of Vygotsky note that the goal of teachers who use these theories is to help learners to construct their knowledge (Blake & Pope, 2008). These theories maintain that a child needs adult guidance in order to perform maximally and to achieve educational goals. Langeloo, et al. (2019) note that learners' high-quality interactions with their teacher motivate them to participate effectively in the interaction, hence teachers should build good rapport with learners in their classrooms and take their academic and emotional needs into consideration.

Studies which focused on classroom social interaction in the past found that the Initiation, Response, and Feedback/Evaluation (IRF/E) pattern of teacher-learner interaction dominated the classroom interaction and that the learners had limited opportunities to contribute to classroom activities (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002). In this pattern of interaction the teacher controls the structure and content of classroom interaction in order to initiate the discussion while the learners respond to the question, after which the teacher closes the discussion by giving feedback (Kumpulainen & Wray, 2002).

Schweinhart and Weitkart (1998) suggest three models of curriculum in ECE: Direct Instruction, High/Scope, and the Traditional Nursery School curriculum. In Direct Instruction, classroom activities are teacher-directed where the teacher presents and learners respond; in the High/Scope curriculum, teacher and child plan and initiate activities together where the teacher and/or the learner works as a supporter/facilitator of such activities; and the Traditional Nursery School curriculum is a child-centred approach where learners initiate activities and the teacher responds to them, in addition to the teacher creating themes while learners are engaged in free play

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(Schweinhart & Weitkart, 1998:58). While how teachers implement regulatory guidelines to teach the Grade R learners to read is relevant, their challenges and opportunities to teach is the area of concern in this study.

2.3.2 Factors Influencing Curriculum Implementation

Factors that influence curriculum implementation include resources, teacher-competence, planning for teaching, and the teaching approach.

2.3.2.1   Resources

According to Ntumi (2016), factors that influence curriculum implementation include the teacher, the learner, resource materials and facilities, and interest groups. Koc et al. (2007) and Ntumi (2016) indicate that the provision of meaningful teaching and learning services requires adequate resources for the curriculum to be implemented successfully. There should be adequate resources in the Grade R classrooms. However, Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) maintain that if teachers do not implement the curriculum because there is lack of appropriate textbooks or teaching and learning materials, this may exacerbate Grade R teachers' challenges that they encounter when they teach learners to acquire essential reading skills.

2.3.2.2   Teacher-competency

Most of the factors affecting the provision of quality instruction are related to classroom management. Learners perform well when taught by well-educated and qualified teachers (Bantwini, 2010; Dzimiri & Marimo, 2015). However, Chimbi and Jita (2019) and Makunja (2016) note that a lack of teachers' understanding on how to interpret and use the curriculum has a negative impact on the effective implementation of the curriculum. Teachers face challenges in the implementation of curriculum because they are not involved in its compilation (Alsubaie, 2016). They are also not able to implement curriculum effectively even when they accept it and are willing to do so because they are not adequately trained to implement it (Chimbi & Jita, 2019). Most often, they are not involved because they are not qualified to participate in the curriculum development process. Avalos (2011) posits that the professional development of teachers improves their curricular knowledge and understanding.

Teachers who are poorly trained in teaching methods, mainly in managing classroom activities effectively and developing literacy skills, can have a negative impact on learners' progress in the early years of schooling.

Research also indicates that curriculum implementation is influenced by the experiences of teachers (Bongco & David, 2020). Teachers bring their experiences into the classrooms during the implementation of the curriculum (Ntumi, 2016) and planned learning opportunities. The home backgrounds and different experiences can influence teachers' selection of learning and classroom practices (Ntumi, 2016). Kini and Podolsky (2016) indicate that novice teachers can learn to implement the curriculum effectively by collaborating with experienced teachers. Klassen and Chiu (2010) also agree that the self-efficacy of teachers is influenced by the years of teaching experience, but that it declines in the long term as teachers with such experience tend to reject the new curriculum (Bantwini, 2010). A good support system is therefore key in the implementation of the curriculum.

2.3.2.3   Planning for teaching

Poor planning for the reading lesson also affects the implementation of the curriculum. Papa-Gusho and Biçaku-Çekrezi (2015) assert that effective learning and curriculum implementation require teachers who plan carefully, indicating that teachers' management of classrooms begins when they plan by using the curriculum before learners come to class. Similarly, by Akinrotimi and Olowe, (2016) in Nigeria and Rusznyak and Walton (2011) also indicate that effective lesson-planning helps the teachers to cope with unexpected issues or situations; and that teachers who do not thoroughly prepare lesson plans, teach without direction. Seidel et al. (2005) add that lesson objectives that are clear and make sense, foster effective cognition in learning activities and help teachers to be logical when they teach learners. Hill (2008) highlights that having well-planned classroom schedules help teachers to be consistent with classroom routine and therefore manage classes effectively and efficiently. Also, the allocation of sufficient time for instruction is crucial in delivering effective reading lessons as teachers plan lessons keeping to curriculum demands which may have time-constraints.

Studies carried out recently by Okoth (2016) and Ntumi (2016) have cited challenges that the teachers face in the implementation of the curriculum. They established that a lack of teacher professional development programmes or training, content overload, knowledge and its complexity, inadequate direction in implementation, and inadequate parental involvement and negative parental attitudes are the sources of problems relating to curriculum implementation (Okoth, 2016; Ntumi, 2016).

In addition to the list of challenges, Kewaza and Welch (2013) mention that class size is one of the challenges stifling effective classroom practices or curriculum implementation. They note that teaching methods (and planning) depend on the number of learners that are to be taught in a single classroom. Hill (2008) holds that large class sizes negatively impact on educational quality. When a class size is large, a teacher is not able to meet the learning needs of all the learners in the classroom.

2.3.2.4   Teaching approach

In most instances, teachers believe that it is their sole duty to implement the curriculum successfully and that no one else has a role to play (Ntumi, 2016). As a result, they select and decide what to teach during lesson preparation with the aid of the curriculum. In a preschool classroom, teachers are expected to ensure that there is effective teacher-learner and learner-learner (peer) interaction, and to promote and implement early childhood programmes and/or curricula effectively (Avalos, 2011; Durkin, 1987; Makunja, 2016; Nutbrown, 2011). It is possible to achieve quality education with teachers who have these qualities and who are devoted to their work (Nutbrown, 2011). However, there is a concern that many teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to provide high-quality education to preschool learners, especially in teaching them to read (Ali et al., 2011).

The traditional teacher-centred classroom reduces the scaffolding opportunities that are within the ZPD of learners, and the degree of engagement in classroom activities (Wiley, 1999). Teacher-centred classroom activities are teacher-directed and the teacher takes centre-stage in choosing which learners to participate in activities (Wright, 2011). In opposition to the teacher-centred instructional approach, teachers employing learner-centred approaches involve learners in classroom activities and

transfer responsibilities for learning from them (teachers) to the learners. Teachers, when providing help pertaining to the ZPD, guide learners in acquiring new knowledge by providing adequate assistance needed for tasks (Schweinfurth, 2011; Wiley, 1999). However, many teachers' garrulousness in the classrooms deny their learners opportunities to reflect appropriately on the given input.

2.3.2.5   Support for teaching

The proactive involvement of senior management and colleagues is important to get support from role-players within the school, especially from heads of departments in order to implement the curriculum effectively. However, some teachers do not adapt with ease to the requirements of the new curriculum and may require assistance from seniors (Chimbi & Jita, 2019; Drake & Reid, 2018). Curriculum implementation or reform that is occurring is often seen as a threat to teachers and most often principals fail to do their duty to support such teachers because they themselves do not have adequate knowledge about the new curriculum (Samson & Charles, 2018). Alsubaie (2016) argues that teachers lack knowledge about curriculum implementation because they are not adequately trained, and experts should be called in to assist.

2.3.3 Teachers as Curriculum Implementers

Research indicates that people around the world have reached consensus that learners must have a general degree of reading proficiency even though there are challenges that the teachers face in the classrooms; and that the world's current education reform programmes emphasise that it is the teacher's responsibility to provide young learners with language-related experience so that they can learn to read effectively (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011; Kloos et al., 2019).

Wolfe (2013) states that some researchers encourage a prescriptive method of teaching; but others understand that teachers should be flexible and make wise informed professional decisions about teaching-learning situations. Regrettably, curriculum designers and education officers often prescribe how teachers should teach. Teachers are obliged to adopt the proposed curriculum model; for example, Davis (2012) states that institutions of higher education in England train and prescribe teachers to use the synthetic phonics approach to teach reading in the early years. On

the other hand, Galton et al. (2009) declare that teachers should apply different methods of teaching learners to read, depending on the type of reading activity. Therefore, teachers have to understand the basics of the curriculum in order to plan lessons to teach using flexible approaches.

Although the policy has now changed in England, synthetic phonics remains the key method of teaching reading in the early years. However, although the Department of Education has stopped instructing teachers on how to teach, and has withdrawn from the prescriptive Literacy and Numeracy strategies, it still encourages teachers to use the synthetic phonics approach to teach reading – this goes against research advice that synthetic phonics should only be encouraged during the initial period of teaching reading, arguing that language does not only consist of discrete sound units which lead to word-formation and sentences (Davis, 2012). Connelly et al. (2009) point out that learners who are taught through phonics instruction learn to read better and faster than learners who are taught in a programme other than systematic phonics. In the context of Reception classes in Lesotho, teachers are expected to teach according to the prescribed guidelines, but they may teach reading by using different approaches, but are still limited to policy and guidelines.

Some researchers such as Davis (2012) and Durkin (1987) believe that, even though synthetic phonics is important, it should not be used in isolation from other methods to teach reading for meaning. Davis (2012) states that when teachers are not allowed to teach according to their ability, they feel abused, undermined and insulted. They should be given more freedom of choice to use teaching methods that they feel are relevant to their respective classes.

Davis (2012) states that there is no empirical research that supports the idea that synthetic phonics should be used independently from other methods that encourage reading for meaning. Wolfe (2013) agrees that when all the teachers are expected to follow the systematic synthetic phonics model of instruction, it denies them the opportunity to include any other method (e.g. Whole Word or Word Analysing methods) of teaching which embraces aspects such onset and rime, phonemic awareness and phoneme blending, or spelling patterns of early reading. Being prescriptive would limit teaching to one mundane method even if teachers are capable

of using different or eclectic methods which may be best for certain reading activities.

2.4 Language of teaching in preschool

In a multilingual country like Lesotho, MOET (2013) is of the opinion that early childhood services must be provided in the native language in order to give families the opportunity to participate in those services and understand educational materials. Although there are other languages in Lesotho, the Lesotho Constitution of 1993 and IECCD policy indicate that there are two official languages - Sesotho and English - and suggest that learners be taught to read in their mother-tongue up to the fourth grade (GOL, 2010; MOET, 2013). However, the constitution does not speak specifically about Grade R and/ or preschool education, especially the language that has to be used to teach learners to read because the constitution is a mother body of the laws and policies of the country (Merriam-Webster, 2019). The MOET recognises and observes that Sesotho is the language of teaching up to Grade 4 even though there are other minority languages in the country (MOET, 2013). In South Africa, According to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement [CAPS] (DoE, 2011), learners in Grade R are also taught in the home language. This study sought to explore the challenges and opportunities teachers experience when they implement the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R classrooms in Lesotho. Therefore the language of teaching reading in Grade R classes is crucial because Grade R learners have to be taught in the language that they understand.

Prior (2013) argues that despite the fact that it is crucial that learners need to read in the English language, working jointly with families and the community is essential to achieve better outcomes in indigenous education. Furthermore, Fox (1996) notes that the native language of learners has an influence on their learning of first additional language (FAL) and that learners will probably transfer their home language alphabetic letters to the FAL. By the same token, Anyiendah (2017) states that using an unknown (or foreign) language affects the learning process of learners. This might be a challenge to Grade R teachers who were taught in English to teach learners early reading skills; but it is comfortable for those who are not competent to teach in English. In almost all nations, there are languages other than the official languages - the question remains whether the national curriculum of ECCD centres in each country

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caters for all the mother-tongue languages.

Teachers should receive high-quality training by experts in the field on teaching methods related to the science of reading so that they can competently face classroom challenges (Ntumi, 2016; Prior, 2013). This would enable them to provide effective reading instruction, and implement policies for teaching reading (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). It is important now to look at how basic reading skills should be taught in Grade R or in ECD centres.

2.5 Importance of early reading

Research acknowledges the advantages of preschool education on academic aspects of education. Researchers such as Riley et al. (2009) propose that the first few years of life are most important for intellectual development. Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) affirm that people around the world agree that learners should be able to read. Fox (1996) states that a reader is one who is able to automatically recognise words that he/she commonly comes across when reading and should, more importantly, focus on comprehension. Therefore, it is obvious that early childhood care and education teachers should make this period of intellectual development successful, and plan reading activities which focus on reading for comprehension in class. The Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories maintain that learners should be taught for comprehension so that they will be able to read independently and make sense (meaning-making) of what they learned to read with guidance from peers and teachers.

Research also shows that learners who are read to, are able to read, thus they develop an interest in reading. In addition, learners who read more often develop their reading skills quickly and sharply (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011) points out that learners should be engaged in basic reading as early as possible in order to avoid academic barriers and other difficulties later in life.

2.6 Acquisition of emergent literacy knowledge and skills

Learning to read begins with informal learning before children attend schools when they acquire and use oral language skills to communicate with people around them

(Mason & Sinha, 1992; Rhyner et al., 2009). Therefore, emergent literacy plays an important role in preparing children and/ or learners to learn to read and write because it is the beginning of literacy development for future academic achievement (Rhyner et al., 2009). Preschool teachers, including Grade R play a key role in the early development of learners and their acquisition of literacy skills through interactive reading activities in shared and guided book reading (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mason & Sinha, 1992). In these reading activities learners become active participants because they have opportunity to engage in discussion and question and answer with the teacher. It was well-intentioned in this study to explore how Grade R teachers engage learners in emergent literacy activities such as reading from pictures, turning the pages of the books, manipulating concrete letter names and letter sounds materials, providing classroom environment which is rich in literacy teaching and learning resources and to use words to describe what they read (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Rhyner et al., 2009). Burnett (2007) acknowledges that learners should be taught via the spoken language in their early years as this will help them develop reading skills because they will be familiar with words that are used in their context.

2.7 Strategies/methods of teaching reading

Blake and Pope (2008) are of the opinion that teachers who align their teaching strategies of reading with the Cognitive Theory of Piaget in education, capacitate learners in making predictions, and associating ideas in the text with existing knowledge. They also maintain that by employing Vygotsky's theory of Social Interaction, teachers should engage learners in "scaffolding, cooperative learning, group problem-solving, cross-age tutoring, assisted learning, and/or alternative assessment" (Blake & Pope, 2008:63)

Teachers should include the five components of teaching reading: phonemic awareness, word recognition (sight words and phonics), comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency (Joubert et al., 2008; Stahl & Murray, 1994). Strategies and principles related to the teaching of reading and effective teaching include: a language experience approach, a whole-language approach, a phonics approach, a linguistic approach, a sight-word or look-say approach, and a basal reader approach (Joubert et al., 2008). These are commonly grouped into two main methods: the bottom-up and

the top-down methods.

Some of the theorists view reading as a bottom-up process which Zhao and Zhu (2012) suggest is a traditional method of teaching reading. According to traditionalists, reading is a passive decoding process (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). In the bottom-up process, learners are taught to recognise letters and words and then find meaning in them. When they have knowledge of the smallest units of text, they can be taught larger parts which include phrases and sentences. Ling (2012) agrees that reading is passive in the traditionalist approach; but the Whole Language Theory supporters argue that learners who are taught in the traditional vocabulary decoding process do not develop reading skills effectively. In the Whole Language teaching approach, learners read a passage as a whole and get the meaning through contributing to activities such as discussions. In preschools, the whole passage is read to learners during story time. They become engaged in a story through questions.

On the other hand, Fox argues that whether a teacher is a supporter of any teaching approach (whole language approach, literature-based, basal or skills instruction), he/she explores the alphabetic writing system with learners of English (Fox, 1996:9). This means that in both bottom-up and top-down methods of teaching, learners will explore the alphabetic writing system. One of the reasons for exploring the alphabetic writing system is that learners who have knowledge of phonics automatically recognise words and pay attention to the meaning of the message because they do not focus on identifying the words (Connelly et al., 2009; Fox, 1996). Likewise, Zhao and Zhu (2012) note that the bottom-up method of teaching enables learners to memorise new words and phrases in reading, and declare that this method provides a good foundation for learners to learn to read. Preschool education is crucial for providing learners with basic reading skills and/or word identification strategies such as the application of the alphabet and phonics knowledge.

According to Zhao & Zhu (2012), in the bottom-up method, learners should be able to manipulate letter-by-letter and word-by-word in order to extract meaning from the print-text. Learners are able to read when they have begun to acquire the smallest units, letters and words; this is the bottom-up method. Then they can proceed to the top, which is the learning of large units, phrases and sentences. Like Fox (1996), Wolf

(2014) also highlights that learners' decoding process should first be automatic so that they are able to understand the text. Most often, Grade R teachers start here when they teach learners to read. They have to teach learners the letters of the alphabet and the letter-sound-relationship, and then teach them words, and from words follow sentences. However, they should be taught words and sentences using context-meaning techniques because learners have the knowledge of whole words that abound in their homes (Kewaza & Welch, 2013).

Another teaching model that some theorists support is the top-down method of teaching reading. In this model, background knowledge is important and assists in reading for comprehension. Teachers should elicit experiences of learners and teach this as background knowledge in order to assist them to be able to guess the meaning in context (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Their prior experience of reading, just as the Cognitive Theory indicates (Riley, 2006), may help them to predict what the print-text and its meaning are when they encounter it. This means that Grade R class teachers can engage learners in a discussion about the text, and can ask questions that may help them to make informed guesses during reading activities.

Although the top-down model is recognised, Zhao and Zhu (2012) indicate that it has to be improved because learners' predictions may be too far from what the text is about. It is common with Grade R class learners to make imprecise predictions because when one child misunderstands and makes the most extraneous guess, other learners may follow that guess. This is where the Social Interaction Theory of Vygotsky with its processes such as the ZDP, mentoring, and scaffolding is needed to provide appropriate guidance to the reading aspect of learners' reading (Riley et al., 2009).

The Whole Language Theory, as the name suggests, regards language as a holistic phenomenon which does not encourage the teaching of language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing in isolation; it is different from the traditional method of teaching language which emphasises the teaching of pronunciation and vocabulary, and is grammatically-orientated (Ling, 2012). The Whole-Word method of teaching focuses on the direct identification of the entire word, and words taught can later be used to illustrate letter-sound-relationships for phonics instruction (Davis, 2012; Durkin, 1987). Reading instructional practice which follows the Whole-Word

methodology, also uses the Sight-Word method and the Look-and-Say method as Marima et al. (2016) observed in Kenya. Learners will shout out the word as soon as it is flashed-carded at them, or they look at it without having to dissect it into syllables. Phonics instruction deals with words composed of more than one sound. The Grade R curriculum that suggests that the four language skills should be taught separately advocates the traditional method of teaching language reading activities. However, The *National Curriculum Statement Grade R-12* (DoE, 2011) suggests that the language structure and its use should be integrated using all four language skills. This is similar to the integrated curriculum in Lesotho.

Ling (2012) follows the Social Interaction Theory which proposes that language is not passive; instead learners learn it (a language) through engaging in communication and exchanging ideas with others (Ling, 2012; Whitehead, 2010; Riley et al., 2009). In the Whole Language theory, learners discover and learn language rules (e.g. plurals) as they exchange ideas with others. The rules are not taught separately from reading for comprehension. The learners learn new words which are connected to what they already know according to their contextual meaning. The first observation that babies make when entering the world is to listen to the immediate family members speaking. Later on, as they grow up, they acquire language as they communicate with the family; thus the Whole-Word method deals with what is familiar (Durkin, 1987). The same happens with preschool learners. This is why the teaching of reading skills should not be done with more emphasis on the acquisition of language rules, as all the language skills develop simultaneously and subconsciously (Ling, 2012).

While researchers and authors such as Wolfe (2013) and Fox (1996) acknowledge the importance of reading for meaning from the earliest stage of instruction, and state that one should have analytical skills in order to be able to read, Burnett (2007) claims that learners should start with phonics as early as the age of five. It becomes apparent from these views that people have a difference of opinion on aspects of teaching reading.

Learners should learn to read for the purpose of understanding what they are reading because the main aim of reading is comprehension of the whole text (Ling, 2012). This is congruent to the reading for comprehension aspect in the Rose Report (Riley, 2006)

and Wolf (2014) because it supports the idea that learners should understand (and make meaning of) what they read, thus rejecting the misconception that in preschool learners should only learn about the alphabet and letter sounds without making sense of what they read. Fox (1996) argues that unless a reader recognises the words, the ability to grasp meaning is limited. This means that learners should be able to work out text, read words and make sense of what they read. They should learn to read for understanding and not just to have knowledge or building a bank of new words (vocabulary). They have to understand the meaning in the letters and/or words; if not, they will not be reading meaningfully.

Some studies indicate that the preschool curriculum acknowledges that teaching reading involves pre-reading skills (Chelimo, 2014; Wolfe, 2013). Both Chelimo (2014) and Fox (1996) as well as Stahl and Murray (1994) claim that learners are able to read when they have been introduced to reading skills such as phonemic awareness where they are able to demonstrate an understanding of the sounds, phonics and decoding processes, read fluently, acquire many words and have the ability to understand text. Fox (1996) argues further that reading instruction should be modelled to enable learners to break visual codes, understand sounds, read for meaning, and make sense of print. Concrete materials should be used by teachers to help Grade R learners to relate letters and words to reading materials.

Research demonstrates that learners' ability to read is dependent on the development of several skills and cognitive processes that unfold as they grow up and use language to achieve their goals (Wolfe, 2013). Researchers believe that although there are many approaches to acquiring reading proficiency, it is a process of perceiving, interpreting and evaluating printed materials (Fox, 1996).

Reading can be developed if it is practised and refined continuously. In order for learners to be able to read, they should be taught to read daily and teachers and caregivers should adapt teaching styles that correspond well with the needs of learners (Durkin, 1987; Nutbrown, 2011). Furthermore, Durkin (1987) asserts that teachers, parents and caregivers should teach reading alongside writing, and engage in positive reinforcement and motivating activities.

According to Snell et al. (2015), learners who acquire many words before they are six years of age perform well later in their schoolwork as they will have useful vocabulary and reading comprehension by the age of nine. Ling (2012) emphasises that when teaching reading, teachers should emphasise comprehension. Zhao and Zhu (2012) also acknowledge the importance of reading for meaning from the earliest stage of instruction, and state that one should develop analytical and critical-reading skills in order to be able to read proficiently. Burnett (2007) adds that learners should make a good start of phonic use as early as five years old. Teachers in the Grade R classes are expected to help learners to understand and use letters and letter-sound-relationships appropriately, and are not expected to teach letters in isolation. They should use concrete materials such as objects and pictures to teach phonics in context for meaning.

The teaching of phonics is dominant, if not the only method of teaching in many countries. Wolfe (2013) and Whitehead (2010) state that some governments in the USA and in England require the teaching of early reading that introduces learners to systematic synthetic phonics. In some countries, learners are taught phonemic awareness before they can be taught to read text. The education policy in states such as USA requires that all learners be taught pre-reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, before they can be taught to read text. When learners are five years old they should be able to hear and recognise sounds in words, link sounds to letters, and name and sound the letters of the alphabet. However, Wolfe (2013) advocates phonics instruction in a rich language curriculum and emphasises that the initial teaching of systematic synthetic phonics should be done without contextual cues while the teacher who teaches early reading has to demonstrate a clear knowledge of systematic synthetic phonics.

Stahl and Murray (1994), Wilson and Colmar (2008) and Wolf (2014) argue that learners demonstrate phonological awareness when they are able to break words into small units, such as dealing with rimes and onsets. As indicated, some researchers regard this teaching approach as a bottom-up traditional method of teaching (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). In contrast, Fox (1996) and Stahl and Murray (1994) argue that all beginner-readers learn to read in phonics. When learners are engaged in activities

dealing with segmenting, blending, syllabification and onsets and rimes, they will be able to manage sounds before engaging in print materials. The Schema Theory notes that when learners learn pre-reading skills, they already have experience that needs to be integrated into new knowledge in a meaningful context.

The debate about whether one teaches phonics separately from the reading text (that challenges learners' comprehension or teaches both at the same time) indicates that a lot depends on the teachers' understanding of the policy on the teaching of early reading.

2.8 Motivating young learners to read

Related to the challenges of teaching learners to read, Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) explain that teacher-training institutions should have effective teacher-education programmes that capacitates pre-service teachers to stimulate young learners' interest in reading. Currently there is an in-service programme only for preschool teachers in Lesotho. The reading programmes should enable student teachers to gain knowledge and skills on how to increase the curiosity of learners to read, and also to provide teachers with guidance to teach reading effectively. Likewise, Ling (2012) also emphasises that teachers should take learners' interests into consideration when they teach according to the Whole Language Theory. They should also arouse learners' interest by planning well, giving learners adequate demonstrations, and ensuring that they use language actively and appropriately.

Teachers should be able to engage young learners in rich language experiences, provide positive instructional practice, and explore opportunities to develop their reading curiosity, despite the fact that there may be a lack of direction from educational authorities on how to teach reading-content (Okoth, 2016). Teachers should fuel learners' reading interest by creating a classroom environment that is rich in language (Ling, 2012). This is in line with the Schema Theory, where Zhao and Zhu (2012) suggest that learners' experiences enable them to connect background knowledge with new learning. This motivates learners to read and predict meaning in the reading process when the environment is rich in language. Grade R learners come to school already familiar with print knowledge; for example, they see the name of the village

shop with its labels and signs (Kewaza & Welch, 2013). It is the teacher's responsibility to build on what learners already know.

It can be inferred that learners should not only learn to read, but they should also have a profound interest in reading. It is the teacher's responsibility to ignite their reading interest (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). Besides the fact that learners are the key contributors to the curriculum implementation, Ntumi (2016) and Burnett (2007) are also of the opinion that learners are naturally interested in reading, and that if they are introduced to spoken words early in their school experience, they will be interested in words, and hence grow into adulthood with a positive attitude towards reading which cascades into many other salient aspects of academic life. (Riley 2006). This is expressed in the Cognitive Theory, as indicated by Vygotsky and social interactionists such as Brunner, who posit that learners learn language and develop reading skills as they interact with more experienced people who use language.

Researchers such as Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011), Ntumi (2016) and Okoth (2016) emphasise that if learners have a negative attitude towards reading, they are unlikely to read well or to take the initiative to read. If learners find reading boring and dislike it, they will not improve their reading (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). This is because attitude has an impact on improving learners' reading. The more they are motivated to read, the more and longer they will engage in reading. Grade R learners will contribute to class activities that they find interesting. If the activities are boring, learners will then respond negatively towards the lesson; thus reading activities should be interactive and interesting in order to stimulate interest.

Even though there is limited research on the improvement of learners' reading ability and interest, the findings of one study showed that teachers who wanted to provide five-year-old learners with effective reading instructions engaged them in an environment that was rich in oral language to improve their vocabulary and comprehension (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). A resourceful language environment can generate opportunities for learners to access a wealth of vocabulary. Ling (2012) argues that according to the Whole Language Theory, speaking ability does not have to be fully developed before comprehension, but reading and writing abilities can develop. Oral language activities give learners confidence and this leads to positive

language experiences of language in the reception class.

Contrary to Ling, Al-Barakat and Bataineh, (2011) explain that some reports indicate that learners' attitudes towards reading has little to do with low achievement, but that attitude affects literacy acquisition while interest in reading declines when learners go to intermediate grades. However, learners can get actively involved in activities such as asking and answering questions, and by engaging in discussions which improves their reading skills.

Another proposal to promote learners' positive attitude towards reading is to adopt the Whole Language teaching approach because it is child-centred, and leads to learners selecting books they like to read (Ling, 2012). Kewaza & Welch (2013) criticise teachers who believe that they "own" the class and adopt teacher-centred approaches, while ignoring the aspect of learner involvement in learning to read. Hence, Grade R learners who have negative reading attitudes will not be interested in choosing books to read (Ling, 2012).

Teachers who use the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories should be explaining modelling and using guided practice when teaching basic reading skills so that they stimulate learners' interest to become interactively involved in reading activities as Grade R learners are naturally energetic and learn best by doing. (Blake & Pope, 2008). When they are engaged in interesting reading activities (as the Cognitive Theory of Piaget suggests), learners learn through activating all their senses.

2.9 Activities to capacitate and inspire learners to read

Teachers should create opportunities for learners to talk about what they read (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011) so that they will interact and learn from those who have a better understanding of the text. Learners should read different types of literature and talk about them in formal or informal situations. In this regard, teachers are responsible for providing opportunities for learners to read individually and in groups.

Educational literature shows that learners' reading material should give them opportunities to ask questions about what they read and to answer their own

questions. In the early stages of development, learners are curious to learn new things and they like finding answers to their own questions. Reading activities should be learner-centred, hence Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011) acknowledge that when learners discuss what they read, they become active participants and develop an ever-increasing interest in reading.

Burnett (2007) explores Steiner Waldford's philosophy of teaching literacy to young learners, and indicates that instructions in reading and writing should be in art forms. Teachers should engage play in reading and writing instruction and these include drawing, painting, walking or running on the letters, singing and making rhymes, which makes learners to become energetically engaged (Hanfmann et al., 2012). Blake and Pope (2008) are of the opinion that these activities have to be taught repeatedly in order to ingrain learners to make meaning of what they read. They suggest that learners who are in their ZPD need active teaching. In clear terms, "It's a waste of time to teach kids what they already know and what they cannot do even with assistance" (Black & Pope, 2008). Teachers must avoid routine teaching and risk boring the learners and suppressing their learning spirit; instead they should vary lessons by engaging the learners in art and creative interactive activities.

2.10 Identifying classroom reading materials

Learners' learning environment should be rich in print materials in order to motivate them to read. Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) indicate that a classroom should have a mini-library or a book corner to encourage learners to read. Classroom library books should support the curriculum so that learners become interested in what they read. Snell et al. (2015) state that book-reading enables learners to learn new words, especially those who are below six years of age who read books with short simple sentences such that they become encouraged to read.

Books should be of high quality and well written in simple language to encourage learners to read, thus providing them with advanced language skills and a variety of vocabulary (Snell et al., 2015). Teachers should provide learners with reading materials that are well illustrated (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011). Burnett (2007) points out that Steiner Waldorf's approach to teaching literacy in the early 19th century

emphasised the use of pictures to teach learners to read and write - pictures enable learners to recognise and comprehend letters, sounds and whole words. Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) further suggest that pictures improve learners' intellectual capacity, especially learners who have low reading ability levels.

Graphics and illustrations should be colourful so that they attract learners' attention to read. Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011) note that colourful and well-illustrated reading materials help learners to better understand the text. Learners in the reception class spend a lot of time on activities if teaching materials are colourful; and books with bright colours motivate them to read.

According to Burnett (2007), Steiner Waldorf acknowledged that learners begin to acquire literacy through drawing, painting and writing letter forms. These observations suggest that teachers should allow learners to use pictures in order to identify the initial letters of words. Furthermore, Burnett (2007) observed that when learners are initially taught letters of the alphabet without pictures, these letters are foreign to them. Teachers should consider learners' initial experience and help them to make connections with the assistance of pictures (Burnett, 2007).

Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) advise that teachers should design reading materials that supplement learners' literature when there is a need to do so. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that reading materials meet learners' particular needs, interests and levels. Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) assert that materials that are creatively developed by teachers enhance classroom instruction and stimulate reading interest in learners, especially those who struggle to learn to read.

Riley (2006) submits that print awareness encourages the teaching of the alphabet through the phonics system that includes "letter-land", games, rhymes and alphabet books. Learners should be able to "recognize and identify the upper case and the lower case letters of the alphabet" by the end of the reception year (Riley, 2006).

2.10.1 The importance of Book Reading

Snell et al. (2015) suggest that book reading helps learners to acquire new words in a meaningful context as it allows learners to interact meaningfully with the teacher and

other learners. During book reading, the teacher has the opportunity to explain new words, and this helps the learners to acquire a larger bank of vocabulary. Snell et al. (2015) state that teachers should introduce new words visually and encourage learners to use them regularly in context.

2.10.1.1 Shared reading

Shared reading is a situation where an adult, a parent, or a teacher gives support to learners during the reading activity. Doyle and Bramwell (2006) and Mason and Sinha (1992) assert that shared book reading as a social oral-reading activity where More Knowledgeable peers and/ or adult interact with learners promotes emergent literacy. Here, the teacher and learners work together on a text, with the teacher facilitating through introducing, demonstrating, modelling, encouraging, and boosting reading behaviours and skills (Riley, 2006). In this way, learners learn to read text that they could not read before, as now they have the support of teachers or peers. Shared reading is a very important emergent literacy concept that this study observes because it generates chances for applying social interaction reading instruction in shared literacy activities (Mason & Sinha, 1992).

Riley (2006) states that in this approach, the whole class engages in an interactive reading activity through enlarged texts in big books, on whiteboards, or with software such as overhead projectors or computers. Campbell (1995) acknowledges that big books are predictable, and develop reading when they are shared; they have repeated patterns and rhyming words that learners find enjoyable to read, and they have pictures that help learners to read and find meaning in words. In the lower grades, learners do picture-reading and are guided by pictures to understand the words and their meaning.

Accordingly, teachers should carefully select appropriate texts that the majority of the learners can read independently; in addition, some texts should be selected which are one level beyond their ability to read, but the teacher should gradually introduce such texts through pre-reading activities. Shared reading offers the teacher the opportunity to model the reading and highlight text, words and individual letters (Mason & Sinha, 1992; Riley, 2006). Initially, the teacher reads the text aloud while learners listen, and

then the teacher encourages learners to join in gradually (e.g. choral reading) when they are able to do so.

2.10.1.2 Guided reading

The mission of schools is to guide learners to be well educated. Guided reading closes the gap between shared reading and independent reading, because in this approach, the teacher places learners in a small group of similar literacy level (Riley, 2006). The main goal of guided reading is to help beginner-readers in lower grades, including Grade R, to learn to use efficient literacy and reading strategies independently and creatively. The teacher guides each group of learners of similar ability to read multiple copies of the same book simultaneously. They read the books at their reading ability level while the teacher monitors their literacy development. This approach gives the teacher the opportunity to follow the text and allows the learners to check their reading strategies and then return to reading. Critical strategies that learners learn in guided reading include detecting and correcting reading errors, learning unknown words, and making predictions (Antonacci, 2000; Riley, 2006). This approach offers readers the opportunity to discuss aspects of text(s) during the reading process (Riley, 2006).

Teachers often group learners for specific purposes - sometimes learners are grouped according to their abilities to perform certain activities. They are taught to read in high, middle and low ability groups, and sometimes in random groups. In guided reading instructional activities, learners are grouped according to their literacy and/or reading skill levels. Because their needs change at different rates and stages, the grouping procedure in guided reading is dynamic and is directed by the changes in the child's development (Antonacci, 2000). Teachers are encouraged to take into consideration the learners' literacy development when they plan their instructional activities, and to teach them to read within their ZPD (Antonacci, 2000; Silalahi, 2019). They should know the level of development of the learners and provide reading instructions that are slightly beyond the capacity of the learners. Teachers should also ensure that learners' reading texts are appropriate to their learning ability. They should introduce books to learners and then listen to learners read; and then provide help when there is a need.

2.10.1.3 Independent reading

At this stage, the readers are confident that they are able to read fluently and independently because they are coached to do so (Riley, 2006). The reception class learners like to try out new things. When learners are provided with strategies to read by themselves, they pick up reading materials and read to peers and adults. Before learners read a book independently, the facilitator has to provide guidance, especially during the introduction in order to help limit problems when they read by themselves (Antonacci, 2000).

2.11 Importance of involving stakeholders in education

Teamwork is very important in the workplace because it improves the condition of work (Avalos, 2011). Parents are the first stakeholders to be involved in the education of learners as they are the first educators of their learners (Rapp & Duncan, 2012). Parental involvement improves the achievement of learners in the classrooms (MOET, 2013). However, there are parents who support their learners but do not want to be involved in school activities (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Ntumi (2016) acknowledges the importance of parents and indicates that when parents do not take part in the education of their learners, this affects their learners' academic life.

The implication here is that Grade R teachers should accept accountability to implement the curriculum successfully, especially when they are teaching reading as reading plays an essential role in the education of the learner and dictates later academic achievement (Kewaza & Welch, 2013; Ntumi, 2016). These views imply that there has to be a collaborative relationship where Government ministries, school-supply units, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), school principals, teachers, parents and learners work harmoniously (Hallam et al., 2015; Ntumi, 2016; Samson & Charles, 2018). In this networking process, every department should take charge that learners are taught to read effectively. For example, Government has to provide physical facilities for teaching, and failure to meet these requirements exacerbates teacher challenges in the classrooms, especially in the teaching of basic reading skills in Grade R classrooms (Baloyi-Mothibeli, 2018).

2.12 Summary of the chapter

This chapter (2) indicates that there are different ways of teaching reading at the initial stage of learning to read; and it shows that professionals have different views on how to introduce reading. There are two components of reading: decoding and comprehension processes, and professionals fall into one of the two categories - those who view reading as a decoding process, and others who stress comprehension which is reading for meaning (Riley, 2006). The theories that are related to reading and which guided this study are the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories. The teaching approaches that are discussed in this chapter are, among others, phonemic awareness, letters of the alphabet, phonics, sight-word-recognition, and the whole-word approach. Furthermore, teachers should be aware that learners are potentially interested in reading, and that they (teachers) should provide a good selection of reading materials that can help learners engage in fun-filled meaning-orientated reading activities. The books should be well illustrated, colourful, picture-laden and well written. This chapter does not encourage a certain teaching method over other methods, but provides an overview of different approaches to teaching reading. This chapter emphasises the significance of engaging learners in early reading activities to sustain the interest in reading. Lastly, it outlines methods that are relevant to the teaching of early reading, and it includes suggestions of researchers on sharpening teachers' ability to teach reading.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research methodology adopted in this study explored the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho is discussed in this chapter. This chapter informs the purpose of the study, the research questions, research design and methods used to collect data, rationale for the study, the geographical setting, the population and sample, the sampling criteria, and the role of the researcher. In addition, the data collection instruments, the data collection procedure, aspects of the reliability and validity of the study, as well as ethical issues during the data collection stage, are explained. The latter sections of this chapter explain the way in which data was analysed, outlines the limitations of the study, and ends with the summary.

3.2 Research questions

What are the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho? This research question was intended to generate data that would uncover the challenges and opportunities teachers have when they teach Grade R learners to read. It sought the reasons for learners in the Foundation Phase classes, especially Grade R learners, lacking adequate reading skills relevant to their age and/or class level as evidenced in some studies. The sub-questions were developed in order to elicit rich data for the main research question, and the problem was studied in the real context of the research participants. The participants had close contact with the researcher when generating data in terms of answering the research questions.

The secondary research questions are related to the main research question which assisted in generating data for it were as follows:

i.   What are the Lesotho regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

The reason for asking this secondary question was that there are Grade R guidelines

which were developed for the purpose of guiding Grade R teachers to teach learners. With regard to the research problem in this study – that learners reach Grade 4 lacking basic reading skills – the researcher wanted to know whether the guidelines were helping teachers to plan lessons and implement activities to teach reading effectively in Lesotho. This research question searched for data regarding the accessibility and use of the guidelines in Grade R classes since they were developed after the Government of Lesotho began to include Grade R classes into the primary school system.

ii.   How do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

This research question was asked to investigate the background knowledge of the research participants, their views and perceptions in relation to the guidelines for the teaching of reading. Rich data for this question could best be obtained through close contact with the participants.

iii.   How do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R?

The question sought information on the challenges and opportunities when Grade R teachers implement the guidelines in the actual classroom context.

iv.   What lessons can be learnt from the study of the challenges and opportunities for teaching reading in Grade R?

This secondary research question was asked so that recommendations can be made that will add value to the literature on this subject. This study was intended to bring new knowledge regarding the challenges and opportunities teachers encounter when they implement guidelines and policies for teaching reading and/or any other content or theme in Grade R classes, not only in Lesotho but also in other parts of the world.

3.3 Research paradigm

A paradigm is a set of assumptions about a phenomenon and how it works (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The way we interpret our world and seek to broaden our knowledge

about it is subject to various theoretical paradigms: positivism or post-positivism, interpretivism, constructivism, transformativeness, emancipatory, post-structuralism, critical, deconstructivism, and pragmatism (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). A paradigm involves a common understanding of reality. The meanings that various scholars' attachment to paradigms assisted me in choosing the most appropriate paradigm for this study.

This study was underpinned by the interpretive paradigm because it gave me the opportunity to study the problem in-depth and in its context (Mukherji & Albon, 2015; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The interpretive paradigm assisted me to study phenomena as they exist naturally in the classrooms (Gay et al. 2011; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This methodological approach or paradigm was followed in order to understand the experiences of the research participants and to discover reality through their views. Also considered as being crucial to this study was the observation of practical activities that take place in their real classroom contexts (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The research problem of this study was considered in this real-setting context in order to generate rich data. The study sought to explore the shared experiences of teachers who provide early literacy instruction in Grade R classrooms. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm was chosen to guide this study in order to promote the analysis of the problem, understand and interpret it in a real setting, avoid making hypotheses before collecting data in schools, properly discover a set of teachers' practices and experiences, and to unpack the challenges and opportunities teachers have in providing effective early reading instruction (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a).

The interpretive paradigm was further chosen because it allowed me to interpret the world and/or reality through the perceptions and experiences of the research participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). In this study, the perceptions and experiences of the research participants regarding the challenges and opportunities, were projected to provide data that would give me an understanding of the problem under study. I intended to construct my understanding from reality which was via data gathered from individual participants.

According to Cohen et al. (2011) and Nieuwenhuis (2007a), the interpretive paradigm maintains that there are multiple and subjective realities, and rejects the idea that there

is only one objective reality. It rejects the standard method of Natural Science in collecting data and adopts those used in collecting Social Sciences data where the researcher examines the practice of research (Cohen et al., 2011). During the research process, Grade R teachers experienced the challenges and opportunities of providing early literacy activities which include teaching learners basic reading skills in their particular classroom contexts. Therefore, the research problem was studied in a real context because multiple realities were expected to be gleaned from teachers' practices and responses, views and background experiences.

The interpretive paradigm promoted the generation of data by asking and probing via open-ended questions in order to reveal deeper meanings and intensive understanding of teachers' practices, as well to interpret data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). This paradigm served the purpose of this study which was to expose challenges and opportunities of classroom practice through asking open-ended questions during interviews and through classroom observations. The Interpretive paradigm in this study was informed by the need to interpret and understand participants' actions when they provide classroom instruction and accomplish curriculum guidelines. I wanted to observe participants' real subjective experiences in order to collect authentic data.

Creswell & Creswell (2018) state that research in the interpretive paradigm depends on the views of the participants and further suggests that the interpretive paradigm is connected to the Social Constructivism. This paradigm is related to the Social Interaction Theory which was chosen to guide this study. It is believed that knowledge should be socially constructed in the classrooms where I sought to explore how reading skills were developed socially when teachers and Grade R learners interacted, in addition to how scaffolding was done in a reading classroom by observing the ZDP principle at work (Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011). Further, the challenges and opportunities that presented themselves when learners tried to acquire basic reading skills when working as a team with capable members of a class or group, were also recorded.

It is commonly believed that an interpretivist researcher is most likely to use qualitative data collection research methods and analysis, or a mixed research method which

combines both qualitative and quantitative research (Thanh & Thanh, 2015); in this research I chose the qualitative approach.

3.4 Research approach

In this study, the qualitative research approach was used because the interpretivist paradigm interconnects harmoniously with qualitative methods (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). This qualitative research sought rich data in order to assist me to understand the context of the study and the research problem fully regarding the challenges and opportunities of teaching young learners to learn to read.

Qualitative research facilitated the investigation of teachers' early literacy reading practices by collecting, analysing, and interpreting their comprehensive stories and the visual data to gain insights into the research problem (Gay et al., 2011). I used this research method because I had no intention to control the research context (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Gay et al., 2011). I used it to obtain first-hand information from the research participants in their natural setting (classrooms) while observing how reality is socially constructed (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

The qualitative research approach stipulates that there is no stable or uniform world (Gay et al., 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). As the primary aim of this study was to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho, the qualitative research method uncovered multiple perspectives of research participants (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). As they interact with Grade R learners through early reading instruction, teachers have different teaching experiences and therefore interpret occurrences differently (Bongco & David, 2020; Creswell & Creswell, 2018); these were noted and recorded for analysis.

Additionally, the qualitative research approach was adopted because the nature of this study led us to dissect the open-ended question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b) which was recommended for this study in order to achieve the research objectives and to find answers to the research sub-questions which were broad in nature. These questions were typically qualitative because they smoothened the way for me to interact with the participants and observe them in their natural environment (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

Moreover, the qualitative research approach facilitated the incisive examination of the three Grade R teachers' experiences, including identifying aspects related to the implementation of policy guidelines for teaching the basics of reading (Cohen et al., 2011). The teaching experiences and views of Grade R teachers in the real classroom context of teaching reading were necessary to investigate in order to respond to the research question.

3.5 Research design

Since the choice of research design and methodology depends on the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), it was appropriate to use a case study research design using three classrooms in Lesotho. A case study design is one of the qualitative research methods (Thanh & Thanh, 2015) and it was adopted in order to explore different backgrounds and experiences of Grade R teachers when they had to provide early literacy instruction to Grade R learners in the classroom.

Yin (2014) states that in a case study research design, the researcher is able to study the phenomenon systematically and to understand it deeply in its context. This was the reason a case study design of the three Grade R classes was adopted. The observations and interviews took place in the classroom context in order to get in-depth meanings of the situations in Grade R reading lessons. Knowledge was generated through the interactions with the teachers (epistemology), as they were participants in this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The main purpose of early literacy lessons was to provide Grade R learners with basic reading skills; therefore, the study was successfully carried out in the presence of the teachers and learners in the classrooms in order to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching learners to read.

3.6 Research setting

The majority of countries had intended to meet the millennium goals by 2015. They wanted to have quality education in preschools. The Government of Lesotho had intended to attach Grade R classes to all primary schools by the year 2015 (MOET, 2011). However, not all primary schools have Grade R classes at present. The researcher's assumption was that because only a few primary schools have Grade R

classes, teachers and learners have both challenges and opportunities in classroom instruction and lack obligatory supervision and attention from the authorities (Gay et al., 2011). Therefore, this study was conducted in three different Grade R classes and at different schools which are located in the Lesotho districts of Mafeteng and Maseru. Two of the schools are in the district of Mafeteng while one is in Maseru.

In order to observe confidentiality, the names of the schools are not provided in this study. They were chosen as case study sites because they are close to public services and they can access services from education offices whenever there is a need. They were regarded as potential sources of data for this study. Furthermore, since some of the factors (time and costs) may limit the researcher from conducting the study in other parts of the country (Bordens & Abbott, 2011), access to the three schools came without much cost as they were easily accessible by road because they are both in the lowlands.

3.7 Study population and sample

It was important to identify and purposefully select the schools and the classrooms as research sites; and to purposefully select the participants for this qualitative study because I expected them to best help me as the researcher to understand the research problem and answer the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gay et al., 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Hence, I had to identify specific teachers of Grade R classes as participants who will be observed and interviewed to provide rich data.

3.7.1 The Population of the Study

A population for a study includes elements such as individuals, items and events (Gay et al., 2011). Specific needs of the research limit the subject population and the sample (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Although the population of this study consisted of qualified teachers of Grade R (Reception) classes of Lesotho who teach early literacy in the classroom, female teachers seemed to be easily accessible because they dominate ECE countrywide – and worldwide (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Petersen, 2014). The nature of this study required observing the teachers' practice, the challenges and opportunities facing the teaching of basic reading skills, in the presence of the researcher and the participants in the classroom context. This environment would

allow the researcher to capture first-hand information, to understand it from the perspective of the participants, and from the researcher's own perspective. This is the reason it would not be possible to conduct the study with a large population countrywide as it would have become unwieldy.

3.7.2 The Sample of the Study

The qualitative research approach normally has a small sample size (Nolan et al., 2013). A sample is a small sub-group selected from the larger population for research purposes (Bordens & Abbott, 2011; Gay et al., 2011). This study's sample size of three Grade R teachers and three Grade R classes was manageable and offered the researcher an opportunity to grasp the meaning that participants give to their experiences, and to understanding participants' behaviour (Daniel, 2016; Nolan et al., 2013; Gay et al., 2011). The researcher was able to spend ample time with each participant in the real context in order to get explicit details of the problem under study.

According to Mukherji and Albon (2015), the researcher identifies people who should participate in a study. Cohen et al. (2011) indicate that there should be a reason for selecting a certain population and sample for the study. The sample taken out of the large population for this study was selected because its contributions in the classroom context were expected to answer the study's research question. Three Grade R teachers were selected because they constituted a convenient sample size to study the research problem incisively. The selected teachers and the majority of the learners in the classrooms were Basotho. The target audience included teachers and learners who potential holders of data relevant to the present study because they were personally involved in the process of teaching and learning basic reading skills. The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading were observed during the reading instruction time.

3.7.3 The Sampling Criteria

Non-probability and purposive samples are relevant and used in this qualitative research study (Cohen et al., 2011). Non-probability sampling is used when the sample is not expected to represent a large group (Cohen et al., 2011). The intention of this study was not to generalise the results to represent the whole population.

Purposive sampling is the type of non-probability sampling that was used in order to access knowledge from the experiences of the participants as it provides greater depth to the study (Cohen et al., 2011). As the name suggests, in purposive sampling, I selected the participants who were potentially information-rich about the research problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

In this qualitative study, three Grade R teachers and the learners from their classes were the participants of the study because they were involved in reading activities almost every day. Since Grade R teachers were the main participants in this study, they had to meet specific criteria in order to be chosen to participate (Cohen et al., 2011) such as possessing a Certificate in Early Childhood Education (CECE) from LCE, they had to be practising teachers in Grade R classes, and have different durations of work-experience. Therefore, the participants that I had chosen were qualified ECD teachers with a minimum of teaching experience of five years.

3.8 The researcher's role

Since "qualitative research is interpretive research" (Creswell, 2014: 187), there are ethical and personal issues that have to be considered. Gay et al. (2011) suggest that the issues that need to be considered are technical and interpersonal. Therefore, I avoided and prevented uncertainty concerning research participants; while at the same time, ensuring that I did not influence the research results in any way.

The qualitative researcher must maintain good relations with the participants (Cohen et al., 2011). In this case, as a lecturer of students who are taught to be early childhood educators, I intended to find out whether early literacy, especially early reading practices in Grade R, needs to be improved. With the knowledge of instructional practice in the classroom, I also wanted to identify the challenges and opportunities that teachers have in real-life teaching. Although Grade R teachers are trained at the LCE where the researcher is employed, two of the participating Grade R teachers were not his former students. One of the three teachers was a former student but I did not directly teach her regarding a course related to the teaching of literacy activities in Grade R classes. This ensured that there was no bias towards any of the participants.

As one of the teachers was a former student, I had to explain to all the participants

that the study was not intended to judge or assess them as teachers, but that their contribution or participation in the study would help to make recommendations for the betterment of the teaching of early literacy, particularly the teaching of basic reading skills in the Grade R classrooms nationally - and even outside the borders of the country. My identity was revealed in writing and verbally to all the participants, and I was cautious that my position as a lecturer did not threaten and/or influence the participation of the teachers in the study even though I could not guarantee that they would not feel anxious or insecure. I acknowledged and respected the fact that any teacher had the right not to take part in the study, and I remained neutral towards all the teacher-participants (Cohen et al., 2011).

As a qualitative researcher, I ensured that I did not disturb or change the routine of the classroom activities (Cohen et al., 2011). I adapted to the class timetable and only observed the literacy lessons. I asked participants for a suitable time to observe the classroom practice and to notify me about changes (if any) to the timetables or any special arrangements that would affect the specific time scheduled for the study.

My teaching experience as a Foundation Phase teacher in the early grades for seventeen (17) years made me familiar with the support needed to help young learners to learn to read and write, in addition to offering teachers guidance to teach learners to read. I understood that I had to "handle management of marginality" (Cohen et al., 2011: 234). I informed the participants that I had experience in teaching Grades 1 - 3 learners, but had limited experience in teaching Grade R learners. I understood that I was in the classroom as a researcher and not part of the class, and thus ensured that my teaching experiences did not affect or influence the practice of teaching learners to learn to read during the process of research.

In order to prepare the participants for the process of collecting data, I informed them beforehand about the instruments to be used in the data collection process. For example, I shared the interview questions with them so that they had time to prepare for it such that they were able to give me a true picture of what they knew about the challenges and opportunities related to early or emerging reading instructional practice. I informed the participants that they were free to ask me to clarify any ambiguities or misunderstandings regarding the interpretation of the questions.

Gay et al. (2011) and Cohen et al. (2011) are of the opinion that negotiations undertaken for permission to enter the research site should be described. Therefore, in order to obtain entry into schools, I contacted the gatekeepers for permission to interact with the participants. I gave them a brief proposal of what I intended to do. It comprised topics that gave reasons for the choice of the schools as research sites, the criteria for reporting of the results, and how disruption will be avoided (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2011). The gatekeepers included the Senior Education Officers (SEOs) in the District, the IECCD inspector in MOET (ECCD unit), National Teacher Trainers (NTTs), the principals of the school sites, and the human resources (HR) officer of LCE. I filled in a request form in the HR's office to get permission to carry out the study. It was the responsibility of the SEOs to inform the IECCD inspector and NTTs about the request to conduct a study in preschools, therefore the (HR officer) wrote a letter informing the SEOs only.

3.9 Data collection

Many countries in the world regard education as the key to the achievement of their aims. For example, in the attempt to heal the past, the Government of South Africa has been developing and revising the National Curriculum for several years. In 1997, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) introduced the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) with the purpose of overcoming the divisions of the past (DoE, 2011) and the challenges in curriculum implementation. The curriculum was regularly revised in 2000, 2002 and 2009; and in 2011 the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grade R -12: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement [CAPS] was developed (DoE, 2011).

Lesotho had a curriculum that was used in preschools which are known as ECCD Centres, before Grade R became part of the primary school system. The Government of Lesotho developed guidelines some years after the Grade R classes were attached to primary schools (MOET, 2013). Although the focus of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching early reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho, the ultimate goal is to enhance teaching and learning for Grade R learners and for higher grades as well. In the light of the education guidelines and advancement in South Africa and in Lesotho, there are still challenges and opportunities in relation to

classroom implementation and instructional practice.

This part of Chapter 3 describes the data collection process that was guided by the principles of qualitative research; and as a qualitative researcher I describe specific techniques and tools that were used in the fieldwork (Gay et al., 2011) including the data collection plan and the instruments used to collect data.

The following steps were used to conduct this study: I identified a gap in the early literacy instruction in Grade R classes, and I developed and submitted a research proposal to the Committee for Title Registration (CTR) at the University of the Free State where I was enrolled. In order to design a well-developed proposal, I commenced with a literature review. The main purpose of examining literature was to get relevant information related to teachers' early literacy practices, especially concerning teaching Grade R learners to read and its related challenges and opportunities. Accordingly, research questions were structured to guide the study in answering the research problem. The framework of the study and the research method which guided data collection processes were identified; after which the application for ethical clearance received approval.

The qualitative research approach was appropriately selected because the study utilised different qualitative data collection methods; specifically interviews, observations and document analysis. These also included the use of videotapes and audio- recordings to collect, store and transcribe data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data collection began with a pilot study to test the data collection instruments. The pilot study was carried out in two schools in the Mafeteng District in Lesotho. These two schools were not identified in the main study. After the approval of the study title, data was collected for the main study in 2017 during the months of September, October and November. In both the pilot and the main study, Grade R teachers were observed in the literacy lessons while providing early reading instruction. They were then interviewed about the challenges and opportunities they may encounter (or may have encountered) when teaching daily early literacy lessons. Concurrently, teachers' lesson plans were used for document analysis.

3.9.1 Pilot Study

A pilot study or survey can be done via questionnaires or through formal interviews (Nolan et al., 2013). Formal interviews were carried out because of the qualitative research approach used in this study. There were steps to be followed in order to conduct a pilot study in schools. I wrote to Senior Education Officers (SEOs) and to the principals of the schools for permission to conduct a pilot study. I also wrote to the Grade R class teachers inviting them to participate in the study, and to sign consent forms upon their agreement. These letters were hand-delivered. The Grade R teachers were made aware in writing and verbally that participation was voluntary, (with signed consent) and that their dignity and confidentiality would be respected. Each of the teachers was observed and interviewed only once because the main purpose was to test the validity of the research instruments (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Nolan et al., 2013).

The pilot study acknowledged the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection instruments (Nolan et al., 2013). It improved observation and interviewing skills and revised the questions that were prepared for the interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During this process, some questions were excluded and others were restructured. This refined procedures which were later used in the formal study, but the data collected in the pilot study was not used in the main research (Yin, 2014). It was important to ensure that the questions were clear and simple so that the participants were able to provide honest and meaningful answers that were relevant to the research problem before they were used in a formal study (Nolan et al., 2013). The next section discusses the data collection procedure for the formal study.

3.9.2 Data collection procedure

As the heading suggests, this part of the research study involves the steps followed when gathering data in order to answer the research questions. According to Creswell (2014):

> [T]he data collecting steps include setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through unstructured or structured observations and interviews, documents, and visual materials, as well as establishing the protocol for recording

information.

In the process of data collection, I decided purposefully on the research site and/or individuals for the study. Participants had to meet certain criteria for selection which included being a qualified and experienced Grade R teacher who could provide rich data concerning the subject under study. Research sites were chosen based on the data collection instruments used to generate data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.9.3 Data Collection Instruments

The idea was to select instruments purposefully to gather substantive data in order to be able to understand the problem and answer the research questions. The research instruments used in this study included document analysis, observation, interviews and visual materials (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.9.3.1   Document analysis

The challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in literacy lessons in Grade R classrooms may be related to documents that teachers consult (and rely upon) that are supposed to provide effective reading instruction guidelines (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These documents, as sources of data, refer to "a range of written, visual and physical materials pertinent to the research project" (Nolan et al., 2013:96). In this study, documents such as policy guidelines, lesson plans, schemes of work and concrete teaching and learning materials, were sources of data that provided answers to the following questions: what are the regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching Grade R Learners to learn to read; and how do teachers implement the guidelines and policies for teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho? However, documents may be factual, deceptive, ambiguous or inaccurate (Cohen et al., 2011; Creswell, 2014). In order to avoid this, teachers were asked questions about the documents such as the way they were written, their value, the applicability of the policy/curriculum guidelines, and about their lesson planning and its implementation in the classroom.

When documents were used to generate data for the research questions, ethical issues were observed as was the case in the observation and in the interviewing processes. The documents were used to "verify, contextualise and to clarify the data

collected from interviews and observations" (Nolan et al., 2013: 96). Grade R teachers were given a choice - whether to provide or withhold documents that I requested (Nolan et al., 2013). Data from the specified documents provided information in relation to the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in literacy lessons.

As a researcher, I began by studying the syllabus in order to be familiar with the guidelines for teaching Grade R learners to read. I requested lesson plans, then observed teachers delivering the lessons in the classrooms. The lesson plans were later used when transcribing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). When I had analysed the documents, I observed how guidelines were implemented in the classrooms to teach learners to read.

3.9.3.2   Observation

Although observation is a qualitative research instrument, Mukherji and Albon (2015) and Leedy and Ormrod (2013) argue that it is not exclusively pertinent to qualitative research. Mukherji and Albon (2015) indicate that a narrative observation in qualitative research involves rich description.

A qualitative observation takes place when the researcher takes field notes of the behaviours of the participants, events or objects and transcribes the notes in a semi-structured way in the context of the activity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cohen et al. (2011) argue that, while semi-structured observation will have an agenda which is less systematic, unstructured observations are less clear on what is going to be observed and one does not decide beforehand what is likely to be observed. Semi-structured observation was adopted in this study because it is data or hypothesis-generating and does not test a hypothesis (Cohen et al., 2011). I used an observation instrument to guide me while studying teachers and learners in the classroom.

Observations allowed me to interact with the participants in a social context (Cohen et al., 2011). Leedy and Ormrod (2013) add that in unstructured and free-flow observations, the researcher shifts focus from teacher to learners, and from one learner to another, depending on the problem studied. In the classroom, I was able to understand   the   challenges   and   opportunities   teachers   encountered   during

instructional practice. I observed how teachers and learners interacted, how learner-to-learner interaction took place and how learners interacted with learning materials.

There are various types of observation and each type has advantages and limitations. The researcher may engage in varying types of observation, from the non-participant to the complete participant or observer (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011). According to Nolan et al. (2013), observation techniques include naturalistic observation where the researcher relies on personal data collection and does not need measuring tools; formal observation that is systematic work under test conditions; and participant observation involves the researcher as a member of the group under study (Nolan et al., 2013). In this study, I played the role of the complete observer (naturalistic observation) in order to obtain substantial data. Video and audio-recordings were also used (Cohen et al., 2011) in a natural setting of classroom practices in literacy lessons.

While Nolan et al. (2013) assert that observation is what people do as they collect data. Cohen et al. (2011) argue that it is not just a mere looking, but involves looking and noting systematically and the researcher observes people, events, settings, and routines, among others. Because this research was conducted to improve the teaching and learning of basic reading skills in Grade R classes, the qualitative classroom observation instrument (Appendix B) was used to identify the challenges and opportunities that teachers and learners encounter in instructional practice; and to answer the research sub-question: how do teachers enact the guidelines and policies for teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho? In order to achieve this goal, I designed classroom observation instruments for systematic observation and recording of essential data related to the research problem.

An advantage of adopting qualitative observation as a means of collecting data in this study was that it gives the researcher the opportunity to check and record non-verbal expressions of the participant (Cohen et al., 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Cohen et al. (2011) add that a distinctive feature of qualitative observation is that it gives the researcher the opportunity to get first-hand information in a natural setting. I went into the classroom before the lessons began and left immediately after they ended.

Nieuwenhuis (2007b) points out that the researcher is able to record behaviour

patterns of the participants without necessarily having to engage in conversation. Cohen et al. (2011) agree that qualitative observation yields authentic data because it does not rely on inferential methods. I recorded aspects that the participants overlooked and regarded as unimportant; for example, how Grade R teachers asked questions, how they gave learners the opportunity to discuss their views, and how teachers prompted answers. Other examples that went unnoticed by the teachers were that some learners turned their books upside down or opened to the wrong page in print-awareness lessons.

Observation allows the researcher to be aware of interactions. For example, in the present study, I observed teachers' interactions with the learners. Nieuwenhuis (2007b) points out that observation gives the researcher the opportunity to see and hear what is happening to get a deeper insight of the phenomenon being studied. As a data gathering technique, observation helped me to understand the challenges and opportunities related to how teachers communicated with learners, and how the learners interacted with each other during reading sessions.

According to Cohen et al. (2011) and Nieuwenhuis (2007b), observational data enables the researcher to be open-minded and inductive, and discover aspects that participants would not feel free to talk about during interviews. Nolan et al. (2013) note that qualitative observation provides deeper insights of events. Observation allowed the researcher to collect information that was not covered in an interview and which participants did not feel free to talk about. It allowed verifying the information provided during the interview.

Although qualitative observation yields data needed for the problem under study, it has drawbacks. A novice researcher may not know what to capture as the most important data for the study and may waste time observing and recording unnecessary information (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). I ensured that I was guided by the research questions and the observation instrument.

Since the researcher may not have the full control of the class when making an observation in a natural setting (Cohen et al., 2011), I made arrangements with the principals that there should be no disturbance caused by teachers and learners from

other grades during class observation sessions. I asked the principals to inform all the teachers in the school that there would be a research study being conducted in the Grade R classroom and they were not to interrupt the class during this time.

A disadvantage of employing a qualitative classroom observation as a data collection tool is that the researcher may influence what the participants do or say (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Creswell, 2014). In order to circumvent this, I shared the purpose of the research with the participants prior to the day of data collection. I made an appointment for the observation in the classrooms to take place on a particular date and prepared every participant psychologically, socially and emotionally. Before the observation, I also introduced myself to the learners.

Writing down information during the observation was difficult. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) report that a researcher may miss things in the observation process therefore written notes may lack sufficient data. To counteract this, I used video and audio-recordings in order to gain the richness of the events that took place during the reading lessons.

Video and audio-recordings can also disturb the class (Cohen et al., 2011). I asked for permission (signed consent) to use the recorders and explained that learners would not see them. The pilot study showed that the video and audio-recordings should be set up prior to the actual classroom observation; and with the help of the teachers, an area was chosen where they were hidden from the class. Only the lens and the speakers of the recorders remained uncovered. Since learners are accustomed to using cell phones, I used a cell phone holding it in such a way that learners were unaware of that it was recording the lessons.

A drawback regarding the use of an audio-recorder was that only the conversation can be heard from the audiotape, and it needed to be very close to the participants. Not all that was said in the classroom was relevant to the research problem. Videotapes can only capture footage in a small area (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013) and they also record unnecessary background noise. In an attempt to avoid disturbing the class, I was unable to capture all the areas of the room because I could not move around the classroom to reposition the video-recorder. However, I was able to move my hand to

capture all the events using cell phone recording application. After each lesson presentation, the teachers were interviewed regarding the challenges and opportunities they experienced when they provided reading instruction to promote social reading activities.

3.9.3.3 Interviews

Mukherji and Albon (2015) define an interview as a method of generating data by asking individuals or a group of people questions with the purpose of getting answers to a particular question, or increasing the understanding of a topic. It is a method of collecting data where the interviewer asks interviewees questions (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). I used interview questions (Appendix C) which were part of ethical clearance application and had been approved.

There were three participants who were each interviewed six times at their respective schools. Each participant was interviewed three times before they presented the reading lessons (pre-observation conference) at the interval of two weeks. After every reading lesson delivery, each participant was also interviewed (post-observation conference).

The first pre-observation conference for each participant was related to their biographical data and to their personal experience about the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes. The second and the third interviews that were conducted during pre-observation conference were related to the lesson preparations, lessons that were prepared for a day. The purpose of these pre-observation conference interviews was for the researcher to have a common understanding of what the participating teachers had intended to do during reading instruction. These interviews were also related to the lessons that were previously presented when the researcher was conducting research in their classrooms. They were conducted in order to request the participants to clarify points that were not clear to the researcher at the early transcribing of data and analysis stage.

Three post-observation interviews for each participant were also conducted. The focus of all these interviews was on the reading lessons presented. Teachers were asked to narrate on the issues that arose during teaching reading. For instance, literacy lessons

where teaching reading is done were expected to take 30 minutes but all the reading lessons observed in each class lasted about an hour. The participants were asked to explain why things happened that way. Each interview took between 45 and 60 minutes.

The participants were allowed to use both English and Sesotho to express themselves. I did not want them to feel uncomfortable speaking English, their first additional language, especially when they were not able to express themselves in English. However, three of them spoke both Sesotho and English when answering questions.

Classroom visits and interview arrangements were organised telephonically. Two participants had cell phones while the third participant did not have one, but researcher contacted that teacher on a cell phone belonging to another teacher working at the same school.

The interview questions generated data for all the research questions, and most importantly, for the following two subsidiary research questions for which the observation alone was inadequate: what are the regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho, and how do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

The interview process is an important qualitative research data collection tool as there is communication between the researcher and the participants (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; Maree, 2009; Nolan et al., 2013). Therefore, interviews were adopted in this study because the information needed was based on the experiences of the participants. Although reading instruction involved the learners, only the Grade R teachers were interviewed. It was anticipated that the study would be too broad and would lose focus if the learners were also interviewed or engaged as participants. The learners were also considered to be too young to answer interview questions meaningfully. Only the observations were used to yield data about them during instructional practice.

Daniel (2016) and Maree (2009) state that in-depth interviews include audio and/or video-recordings. In this study, interviews were used to collect qualitative data from three Grade R class teachers. Audio-recordings were done to obtain "inaudible" data

during interviews and teaching that was possibly missed by the researcher who was taking notes.

Face-to-face interviews enabled the researcher to talk to each participating Grade R teacher directly (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Bordens and Abbott (2011) note that a face-to-face interview can be done at the participant's workplace or at any other suitable place. The interviews for this study were conducted at the schools - the workplace of the participants - at a time that was convenient for each of them, as long as they did not intrude on teaching time. They took place either in the morning before classes began or after learners had gone home. Most Grade R learners left the classrooms earlier than the rest of the school learners, but some waited for their siblings and occasionally disturbed the interviews.

A face-to-face interview is useful when participants cannot be observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, Nolan et al. (2013) argue that an interview can provide information that was not captured during qualitative observation. Face-to-face and one-on-one interviews gave each participating Grade R teacher the freedom to share information about the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) that would not normally be divulged in a group (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). As participants are not equally articulate and insightful in a group situation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), they may not give information as freely as they would in a face-to-face interview. In this study, teachers were informed in advance about the face-to-face interview in order to prepare for it. The interview questions yielded information on the participants' challenges and opportunities when teaching Grade R learners to learn to read and on how teachers make sense of the curriculum guidelines for teaching Grade R learners to learn basic reading skills in an early literacy lesson.

Additionally, a face-to-face interview has drawbacks because the interviewees may provide indirect information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Bordens and Abbott (2011) maintain that the presence of the researcher may influence participants' responses. The researcher therefore encouraged the participants to ask for clarification of any interview question they did not understand. Although the face-to-face interviews have drawbacks, they allowed the researcher to solicit deeper levels of information.

One way of dealing with the disadvantages of employing qualitative interview research was to decide on the type of interview that would generate data. A researcher can decide to use a structured or an unstructured face-to-face interview (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Nolan et al. (2013) suggest that the formal structured and the less structured interviews generate data in different ways. Formal structured interviews are often linked to quantitative research because they are known as standardised interviews where responses are fixed (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). This type of information would be limited and would not achieve the purpose of the study.

Both unstructured and semi-structured interviews were employed in this study because of their different advantages. Unstructured interviews are inductive in nature because the researcher engages in an in-depth interview in order to study complex behaviour (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). In this type of interview, the researcher does not decide beforehand what the responses are likely to be. In this study, unstructured interviews were intended to give the participants the opportunity to raise any topic or idea that they felt was relevant to their teaching of reading.

Nolan et al. (2013) and Nieuwenhuis (2007b) believe that an unstructured interview gives the researcher the opportunity to explore the views and ideas of the participants by asking open-ended questions and allowing them to talk freely. Unstructured interviews were conducted after the lesson presentation when it was felt that there was valuable information to share in relation to the research questions. Some of the questions were even raised telephonically as a follow-up to seek clarity and to do member checking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were also adopted for the present study. According to Mukherji and Albon (2015), and Nieuwenhuis (2007b), semi-structured interviews give the researcher the opportunity to probe for clarification of answers. These interviews made it possible for the researcher to ask the teachers to explain some of the information that had been misunderstood. Nolan et al. (2013) affirm that semi-structured interviews are conversational and that they allow the researcher and participants to interact more freely. A set of questions was predetermined to give direction to continuous conversation concerning a face-to-face interview.

3.10   Reliability and validity

According to Nieuwenhuis (2007b), post-positivist qualitative researchers search for evidence that is valid and reliable. Validity and reliability in qualitative research denotes a research that is credible and trustworthy (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

3.10.1 Reliability

According to Cohen et al. (2011), Reliability means dependability, consistency and replicability, and is concerned with accuracy. They argue that reliability exclusively positivist and that, it is applicable in qualitative research even though it may not be positivist. Reliability ensures that there is coherence between what was recorded as data, and what actually happened in the natural setting where there research was conducted (Cohen et al., 2011).

In order to demonstrate reliability in this study, all the participants were contacted by telephone and asked to take part in this study. Later there was a formal meeting with each of the Grade R teachers (with the permission of the school principals). The teachers were informed that they had a choice to participate in the study or not and that they could withdraw their participation (at any stage) with no queries or questions being asked. I informed them about the significance of the study and about their voluntary participation in it.

Furthermore, the participants were assured that their names would not be used in any manner. The information gathered from the documents was not labelled by the name of the school or of the participants – pseudonyms and codes were used. The participants were assured that the findings would be reported in such a manner that the schools' and the participants' identities were protected. As such, the participants were given the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

The participants were made aware that if someone were to conduct a similar study and come up with different results, they would not be held liable for the inconsistency. They were told that it is normal for research studies to generate different results even if the setting is the same. Each researcher has his/her own way of studying the phenomena and interpreting the results and therefore the findings of another study

would be different (Cohen et al. 2011; Creswell, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

3.10.2 Validity

In order to ensure that there was validity in this research, I made sure that the research gathering tools were reviewed by other people (Cohen et al., 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). The sharing of information ensured the validity of the study. According to Creswell & Creswell, (2018) and Cohen et al. (2011), involving peers to review qualitative research findings is called "member checking" or "respondent validation". Member checking was done with the research participants during data collection to ensure that the researcher understood the information provided. Peer involvement (peer debriefing) helps to determine or enhance the accuracy of research findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In order to ensure validity of the results, research participants were given the opportunity to check the findings of the study and to give confirmation of the results. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018) and Cohen et al. (2011), involving the participants makes the results more realistic and more valid. The researcher also shared observations on each teacher's classroom experiences during data collection with the teacher concerned.

For the purpose of validity in this study, the research questions were reviewed by the ECCD specialist who is a lecturer at the university and has been in teams that were involved in IECCD policy development and implementation as well as in other ECCD activities. The research instruments were also given to two other knowledgeable people in ECCD activities who are members of the IECCD multi-sectorial committee. Following the review, changes were effected where it was necessary to do so.

The results of each class were concealed from other teachers and gatekeepers, maintaining the principle of confidentiality. This was done to prove to the participants that the researcher was honest when reporting what was researched in their respective classrooms (Cohen et al., 2011).

Multiple methods of data collection were utilised in order to ensure triangulation of results in this research (Cohen et al., 2011) and enhance trustworthiness (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). The purpose of triangulation in this qualitative research study was to exhibit concurrent validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Cohen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, adopting more than one data collection method ensured avoidance of bias. In order to ensure that the results of this study are reliable and valid as well as to inform the findings of the research, the data from observations, interviews, video recordings and document analyses were integrated.

3.11 Ethical issues

Researchers gather information from people, and about people (Creswell, 2014). It was therefore expected things to unearth some "strange facts" in this study. The researcher anticipated this occurrence and thus included it in the confidentiality clause of the ethical issues (Creswell, 2014).

Bordens and Abbott (2011) believe that ethical issues should be considered even before the research is conducted. The researcher visited the schools prior to research data collection in order to introduce himself to the research participants and to explain the purpose of the study, even though the main purpose was explained in the invitation letters.

In keeping with morals and ethical codes, it was indicated from the beginning that the safety, well-being, dignity, confidentiality, and rights of participants were protected (Bordens & Abbott, 2011). Therefore, teachers and learners were accorded the respect that they deserved, especially in terms of anonymity.

Researchers must obtain permission from their respective institutions before they could begin to conduct their research studies, and thus need to apply to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to approve their research plan (Creswell, 2014). In the present study, the researcher developed the research plan, which included the mentioning of data collection instruments, and submitted it to the University of the Free State (UFS) to be reviewed by the Ethical Clearance Board. Permission was granted to conduct this study (Appendix A), the title of the study was registered, an approval letter was received after review, and ethical clearance was granted before conducting the study. The approval letter from the university was presented to the participants as proof that the researcher was a university student researcher.

Data was collected from schools whose leadership ensured a smooth passage in

terms of collecting information, and this was appreciated by the researcher. The Grade R teachers and the gatekeepers were consulted to ask for permission to collect data for the study (Appendix D). Grade R class teachers were asked to sign consent forms (Appendix E) in order to show their willingness to participate in the study. They were informed that they had rights, and that their participation was purely voluntary in this research study.

The researcher informed the participants that he would be honest and transparent in the process of research by reporting the findings, amongst others (Daniel, 2016), in addition to guaranteeing the participants' and participating schools' anonymity. The most important ethical aspect in this study was confidentiality of the results and the findings (Yin, 2014; Nolan et al., 2013; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b). Daniel (2016) indicate that the researcher must ensure the safety and security of the participants – the researcher adhered to all aspects of safety and security by ensuring that all records were password-secure and/or locked in safety vaults only accessible to the researcher.

Observations were made in the classrooms while interviews were one-on-one and face-to-face; here a good rapport coupled with the principles of truthfulness, reliability and confidentiality was maintained (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The findings of the study were recorded but the names of the schools and participants were not disclosed for their protection.

3.11.1 People and Institutions Contacted

Departments and people who were contacted by letter included the ECCD inspector in the ECCD unit of the MOET, the District Senior Education Officer/Manager (SEO) and the school boards through the school principals. The SEO and principals were requested to give the researcher permission to collect data from Grade R classrooms and to allow the Grade R teacher to participate in the study. The principals represented school boards and they were asked to provide the researcher with a letter of approval showing that they gave permission for research to be conducted in their schools. The letters are not attached as appendices for confidentiality reasons because the stamps used have the name of the school. The District Senior Education Officer (SEO) was

contacted as a representative of the MOET. The SEO was asked to give the researcher a letter of approval ([Appendix F](#)) indicating permission to conduct research in schools, and to introduce the researcher to the school principals. The gatekeepers' approval letters did not imply compulsion on the part of participants to take part in this study, as their decision remained purely voluntary with the option to opt out at any stage of the research process.

The ECCD specialists were asked to review the documents and list of questions during the data collection process. As an employee of the LCE, the researcher asked for permission to collect data in the three schools during working hours. This was communicated to the LCE Human Resource (HR) verbally to request leave or block release days when he had to be away from the workplace. All the gatekeepers mentioned above were informed about the purpose of the study prior to conducting the actual research. Participants were given questions prior to the data collection process in order to prepare them in advance for the interviews.

3.12   Data analysis

Qualitative researchers observe and identify the social context or experience of participants in different dimensions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Consequently, explanations are based on the interpretation of the researcher. Qualitative data was recorded and interpreted on an ongoing basis, starting from the first visit to the classroom and ending in the last visit. Since data analysis is a continuous process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007c), after the data collection (which ended in November 2017), the researcher continued analysing data for the following two months. This was done to make sense of the information that teachers brought to class via literacy lessons when they taught Grade R learners basic reading skills, in addition to dialogues and interviews. The research participants and the researcher worked collaboratively to construct a meaningful reality of what took place in the classrooms and during the interviews. In some cases, it was necessary to return to the teachers to verify and clarify information (collected data).

The instrument of Qualitative Content Analysis was utilised in this study because it facilitated the dissecting of texts and responses of people who were interviewed

(Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). This method was therefore appropriate because Grade R teachers and learners were observed, and the participating teachers were asked open-ended questions during the interviews. Thereafter, data was interpreted to be well understood. The researcher did not interact with Grade R learners directly because the study was basically on how teachers provide reading instruction.

3.13   Research barriers and limitations

An obstacle concerning data collection in this study related to the researcher's employment status. He collected data during working hours which required many hours of travelling, and then he had to complete his daily duties at his workplace after collecting data.

Another possible limitation of the study was related to the interview questions. Even though the questions were submitted to the Research Committee at UFS for ethical clearance, they were also given to other academics for refining; it could be possible that some of the questions were above the level of interpretation of the participants (not clear enough) to yield substantial data. However, the questions were explained.

This formal study was done with participants other than those who were in the pilot study. The researcher encouraged participants to ask him clarifying questions and to speak in their home language when they wanted to, or if they were not able to express themselves properly in English. This could have affected the validity of data because of the translations to English, but the researcher communicated with the participants to make sure that the translations reflected their words and experiences correctly.

It could be possible that the Grade R teacher was "manipulative" when preparing lessons such that he/she would present "model lessons" to please the researcher when he visited the class. He appealed to the participants to be as honest as possible and to follow the curriculum, and to allow him to check if there was a link between the schemes of work and the lesson plans. The curriculum for Grade R classes is integrated using three areas: Life Skills, Literacy and Numeracy. The participants might have been confused as the title of the study was related to reading only but the researcher explained prior to the research that literacy involves both reading and writing, and therefore the study was relevant in a Grade R class. He explained that he

was not there to change or influence how they teach learners by using the curriculum guidelines.

Since I, the researcher, was not a participant observer, I did not interact directly with the learners. The reason for not interacting with the learners was that there would be too much data to work with. The problem would also be exacerbated by time-constraints which meant spending many more days of collecting and analysing data.

A further limitation was that there was very little information found on this topic in the electronic database. Finally, the small sample size of the research participants prevented the generalisation of the results of this study to all the schools. A research that may be conducted in other schools may have different data and research findings as is common with qualitative research studies (Creswell, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011).

3.14   Summary of the chapter

This study was based on the interpretive paradigm to elicit an insightful understanding of the research problem. Since there are very few studies that focus on the reading of Grade R learners in Lesotho, qualitative research tools were used to gather in-depth information. The observations, interviews and document analyses provided adequate data for this research. The next chapter (4) will focus on the analysis of the data collected which was touched on in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents data, its analysis, as well as the findings of the study. The study sought to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho schools. It employed a qualitative approach with a multiple case study (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The participants included three Grade R teachers selected from three different schools. All three of them were female, because historically Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been dominated by female teachers (Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2011; Petersen, 2014), possibly because child care is culturally seen as the woman's domain. There were no male teachers in the places which could be easily accessed for this research. However, preschool teachers' gender was not a variable of interest for this study.

The first research question addressed the regulatory guidelines and policy for teaching the learners to read, and the availability of these guidelines in the classrooms. The second research question was intended to determine whether and how the teachers interpret the guidelines and the content of what they teach, as well as how they prepare the lessons. It was further intended to explore the teachers' attitudes towards the guidelines, their understanding of the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPIECCD/IECCD), and the kind of guidance that the syllabus provides. The third research question addresses the challenges and opportunities that teachers have when they implement the guidelines for teaching of reading. The questions sought to inform the researcher on whether the guidelines were implemented as intended by the policymakers. The fourth research question focused on the challenges and opportunities for the teaching of reading in Grade R and the lessons learnt from them.

Content analysis was the preferred method for data analysis (Cohen et al., 2011; Nieuwenhuis, 2007c). Data presentation involved the use of the extracts taken from the

coded data to substantiate research findings. The chapter starts with the presentation and analysis of the regulatory content in guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Lesotho Grade R classes. Thereafter, it provides the presentation and interpretation of data case-by-case. The analysis of the approaches to teaching basic reading skills, and generated themes related to availability, access and utilisation of the guidelines and policy, the teachers' understanding of the regulatory guideline and policy, the basic reading skills taught in class, the recognition of the learners' background knowledge to construct new reading knowledge, classroom social interaction, availability and utilisation of the resources, and the availability of support structures. The presentation of case studies follows the order: "the story of Mrs Makabelo", then "the story of Mrs Mahopolang, and lastly "the story of Mrs Matebello" (pseudonyms were used in all the cases).

Categories were used to extract data on the teachers' opportunities and challenges, based on the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories for teaching the learners to read.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of the regulatory guidelines and policies

The presentation this section identifies and interprets the regulatory frameworks that guide teaching in Grade R with the intention of answering the first research question which reads:

What are the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho?

The documents which the discussion focuses on are the *Lesotho Constitution of 1993*, the *Education Act 2010*, the *Education Sector Plan*, the *National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPECCD/ECCD),* the *Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECCD)* strategic plan 2013/14 – 2017/18, which now extends to 2023, the Lesotho *Early Childhood Development Curriculum 1998* and the Reception (Grade R) class syllabus 2011 (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1: Data extracted from relevant documents for teaching in preschools

Document	General data emerging from documents	Key principles related to preschools	Expectations form teachers in preschools	Framework/theories	Changes to classroom practice in preschools
Lesotho's Constitution 1993: Section 28	**Provision of education:** Lesotho shall endeavour to make education available to all and shall adopt policies aimed at securing that primary education is compulsory and available to all;	___	___	___	___
Education Act 2010	Purpose and objectives of the Act: (C) make provision for education for all in accordance with the provisions of section 28 of the Constitution	(3) The Minister shall register schools according to the following: (a) pre-school, which provides up to four years of early childhood education; (b) junior school, which provides pre-school and primary school education;	___	___	___
The Education sector plan 2016 -2026	**Objective**: to review and revise current preschool curricula and educational materials and methods.	**Goal**: Improved quality of IECCD learning programmes.	___	___	___
The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPECCD/ECCD)	**Objective**: Develop and improve the quality of preschool curricula to encourage the use of culturally, linguistically and age-appropriate educational materials and active teaching methods to stimulate child development. (MOET, 2013:63)	**Population by ethnicity and language:** Sesotho and English are the two official languages of Lesotho, although it is recognised that early childhood services must be provided in the mother tongue to ensure families shall participate fully in them and shall understand educational materials (MOET, 2013:27).	to use culturally, linguistically and age-appropriate educational materials to use active teaching methods to stimulate child development.	___	___
The IECCD Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2017/18 which now extents to 2023	**Strategy 4:** Improve and expand preschool services (including home-based and reception year services) for children 3 to 5 years, and improve transition from home and preschool to primary school	**Objective:** Reinforce existing education policies for preschool education to provide a strong foundation for learning through offering high-quality preschool education throughout Lesotho.	___	Conceptual approach to IECCD: All IECCD services will be child-centred, focusing on the individual needs of each child	___
Lesotho Early Childhood Development Curriculum 1998	Section 2: The major policy articulated by Government with respect to early childhood education is that all children between the ages of two and six should have access to such education by the year 2000.	One of the broad objectives of the curriculum: to develop the knowledge and skills of both the ECD teachers and other stakeholders to plan, design, implement and evaluate a child-based curriculum within the context of the educational aims and goals of Lesotho.	A teacher is the key actor to ensure that appropriate learning takes place.	The curriculum is based on a child-centred approach. Play based learning	Child-centred teaching and learning approach
Reception (Grade R) class syllabus 2011	**Purpose:** In the absence of such guidelines, many Reception class caregivers continually find themselves forced to teach content taught in the standard 1 (Grade 1) class of primary school level.	One broad objective of the reception class children should be able to apply language skills in communicating effectively.	Model reading skills	Learn as you play. Play is children's work	The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines on the teaching content relevant to Reception classes.

4.2.1 Analysis of Data extracted from Regulatory Guidelines and Policies for Teaching

The themes discussed below relate to the data shown in Table 4.1.

4.2.1.1 General data emerging from legal frameworks and policy documents

a) Lesotho's Constitution 1993: Section 28 and Education Act 2010

The analysis of the general data from the legal frameworks that appear in Table 4.1 shows that *Lesotho's Constitution 1993 (Section 28)* and the Education Act 2010 stipulate the explicit goal of the Government of Lesotho (GOL) to make education accessible to all the children (GOL, 1998; GOL, 2010). Therefore, information concerning preschools is enshrined in the *Constitution* underpinning fundamental principles on education (Merriam-Webster, 2019). However, these legal frameworks show that although Lesotho endeavours to make education available to all, it seems that its main focus is on the education system starting from the primary school level. The policy frameworks, especially the *Constitution,* indicate that primary education is compulsory and shall be available to all (GOL, 2010). However, compulsory education does not always mean quality education. It may mean that the fact that learners are at school is adequate and satisfactory. This is why the present study was intended to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R.

It is evident from Table 4.1 that only Grade R classes which are attached to primary schools enjoy the benefit of free education as the Education Act of 2010 indicates that junior schools provide preschool and primary school education. The Education Act of 2010 shows only such preschools will be registered formally. The *Constitution* does not speak specifically about preschool because it incorporates other policy documents, as Merriam-Webster (2019) states that the *Constitution* lays the foundation upon which the laws of the state are made. It is not surprising that we do not have key principles that are related to preschool specifically because the *Constitution* is the umbrella of all the laws and procedures of the nation, and it gives general guidance on the laws of a nation that determine powers and duties of the Government (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

b) The education sector plan 2016 – 2026, the National Policy for Early Childhood Care and Development, and the IECCD Strategic Plan 2023

Table 4.1 also shows that Lesotho's education sector plan 2016 – 2026, IECCD policy and the IECCD strategic plan 2023, are additional tools developed with the intention to improve the quality of preschool education. These documents seek to ensure that teachers provide quality education in preschools. The IECCD policy elaborates that the curricula should recognise the use of contextual educational materials and the language that is appropriate to the age of the learners. It also encourages teachers to use interactive and innovative teaching methods. As shown in table 4.1, the Lesotho Early Childhood Development (ECD) Curriculum (1998) encourages access to education of children between the ages of two and six. This means that learners in this age group are expected to attend preschools. This aligns with the *Constitution* and the Education Act 2010, both of which prescribe that education should be accessible to all at this level of education. Whether this happens in practice, is subject for debate and research. Table 4.1 further shows that, in the same way, the Grade R syllabus is envisioned to guide the teachers to teach the appropriate content.

Table 4.1 indicates that the IECCD policy recognises that the medium of instruction in the Early Childhood Centres, which includes the Grade R class, should be the learners' mother-tongue. The two official languages are Sesotho and English. Although there is the existence of languages such as IsiXhosa, Sephuthi and IsiZulu that are spoken by the minority groups, Sesotho is regarded as the home language that is used in all IECCD services (MOET, 2013:52). According to the policy, the home language (Sesotho) should be used to present the educational materials because it is the language that parents most likely understand (MOET, 2013:52). In this regard, the policy recognises that parental involvement in the learners' education is necessary (MOET, 2013). The IECCD policy states that "over 99% of the population is Basotho, with a few [other] ethnic groups such as the Xhosa, Baphuthi and Ndebele, [yet] the spoken languages of Lesotho are Sesotho and isiXhosa" (MOET, 2013:26). Therefore, the two languages that are regarded as official languages, especially Sesotho, tend to dominate the minority languages. Learners from the minority groups in the country often do not learn to read in their mother-tongue. This is also likely to be a challenge to the teachers because they are also not taught to read and to teach in these

languages. The objective of the Grade R syllabus is to ensure that learners use their language skills to communicate effectively. It is against this background therefore that the present study also sought to understand the challenges and opportunities for teaching reading in Grade R.

The key principle in the Lesotho Early Childhood Development Curriculum 1998 is that ECE needs to be child-centred (MOET, 1998). This document stipulates that ECD teachers and other stakeholders should have the necessary knowledge to participate in the designing, implementation and evaluation of a child-based curriculum. How professional development of ECD teachers is structured to enable them to implement these policy prescriptions, becomes interesting to explore.

4.2.1.2   Policy expectations from teachers in preschools (Grade R)

Table 4.1 shows that the IECCD Policy encourages Grade R teachers to use "culturally, linguistically and age-appropriate educational materials" (MOET, 63). This means that educational materials such as books should be written in the language that is accessible to the learners. For this reason, the literature also encourages the use of culturally available materials for the teaching of reading in ECE (Fox, 1996). To what extent does this policy expectation shape the classroom practices of Grade R teachers in Lesotho? This question will be explored later through the case studies of the three teachers in this study.

Table 4.1 further indicates that the IECCD policy encourages Grade R teachers to employ "active teaching methods [in their classrooms] to stimulate child development" (MOET, 63), even though the teaching methods are not presented in the document. Likewise, ECD Curriculum 1998 suggests that ECD teachers are responsible for ensuring that proper learning takes place in the classrooms. They are the key actors in the successful implementation of the policy guidelines in the classrooms.

In summary, policy seems to expect that teachers at Grade R level shall provide for culturally sensitive, linguistically and age-appropriate active instructional approaches to learning. The teachers' interpretation of these policy prescripts is discussed later.

4.2.1.3 Grade R syllabus

According to table 4.2, the current Grade R syllabus suggests the classroom activities that model reading skills through scaffolding are encouraging. The IECCD Strategic Plan and the ECD Curriculum 1998 are also developed on the basis of the learner-centred teaching approach (MOET, 1998, 2013). These policy documents imply that the learner should take centre stage and not depend on the teacher to learn to read or any other learning skill. Learners are expected to build relations with others and rely on more knowledgeable peers (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mason & Sinha, 1992). Teachers are thus expected to provide guidance and support while the learners engage to gain knowledge from the various learning materials and activities. The traditional teaching methods in which teachers tell the learners what to say or do are discouraged, as one of the IECCD policy prime objective is encouraging active teaching methods (MOET, 2013:63). The role of the teacher is to facilitate learning. The Learner-centred pedagogical approach on which the regulatory guidelines and policy appear to be framed, recommends the teaching of the learners where knowledge is based on the context of the learners (Schweinfurth, 2011; Wiley, 1999).

Both the ECD curriculum and the Grade R syllabus regulatory guidelines encourage play-based learning in the preschool classrooms because this is written on the pages starting from the cover pages (MOET, 1998, 2011). This means that learners learn best when they play. It may further mean that Grade R learners are responsible for their own learning when they are actively involved in play-based activities (Hanfmann et al., 2012). As a result, they construct their own knowledge. The strategic plan and these regulatory guidelines are thus aligned to recommending play-based learning. By learning through play and engaging in learner-centred activities, the learners are expected to be interactive with one another in addition to incorporating their background knowledge in their learning. The ECD curriculum and Grade R syllabus seem to suggest a pedagogic shift from the traditional teacher-centred methods of teaching where teachers are the only ones who decide what to teach and how the learners should learn, to the learner-centred teaching approaches where the focus is on the learners who can adopt various learning styles (MOET, 1998, 2011).

Table 4.2: The sub-themes and content copied from the Grade R syllabus

Theme	Sub-theme	Suggested activities	Skills Expected	Suggested materials	assessment
Reading and viewing	Recognizing pictures	• Children tell what the pictures represent.	Speaking Recognizing	Pictures	Observation Checklist
	Holding books Paging from right to left	• Teacher provides small books for children to hold and demonstrates how they should hold them. • Children imitate. • Teacher demonstrates how to page books.	Manipulating Differentiating	Readers Magazines	Observation Checklist
	Letters of the alphabet	• Children should each recognize letters beginning their names.	Reading	Flash cards	Observation Checklist

Table 4.2 is an outline from the Lesotho's Reception (Grade R) class syllabus, with recommendations on the learners' basic reading skills acquisition. It illustrates the four sub-themes: picture recognition, holding books, paging from right to left, and the letters of the alphabet which are learning activities of emergent literacy (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Rhyner et al., 2009). The syllabus also presents the suggested classroom activities, the skills to be developed by the learners, the suggested materials and the assessment method. The sub-themes are prioritised in such a way that the Grade R learners are taught to recognise the pictures before reading the letters of the alphabet. That is, they start from the semi-concrete to the abstract.

While many of the policy documents provide valuable guidance as regulatory frameworks and policy for teaching in Grade R, they however, do not speak specifically to the teaching of reading. The exception is the syllabus which shows the specifics of teaching reading and concentrates on teaching the learners the reading basics (emergent literacy knowledge and skills), as indicated in table 4.2.

In the next section, I present the information on the research questions and the corresponding themes, sub-themes and categories derived from the data. Thereafter, the individual cases of teachers are presented.

Table 4.3: Summary of themes, sub-themes and categories

Research question	Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
How do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?	Sense-making of the guidelines	Interpretation of curriculum	Integrated curriculum
			Syllabus content and instruction
		Interpretation of policies	IECCD policy content
			Medium of instruction
		Planning for the teaching of reading	Quarterly planning
			Daily classroom programme
			Lesson-plan management
How do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R?	Implementation of the guidelines and policies	Classroom practice	Arousing learners' interest
			Reading lesson presentations
			Teacher-learner interaction
			Learner-centred approach
		Teaching and learning materials	Availability of materials
			Utilisation of materials
		Stakeholders' support	Support within the school
			MOET support

Table 4.3 presents the three research questions, the themes, sub-themes and the categories used to make sense of the data. The information related to the first two questions was obtained mainly through interviews, observation, and document analysis.

A summary on the backgrounds of three participants is presented in table 4.4. The biographical data includes the participants' pseudonyms, age, gender, educational qualification level, length of teaching service in Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) centre, teaching service in Grade R classes and the number of learners that were taught by each teacher.

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Table 4.4: Background data on the three participants

Description	Mrs Makabelo	Mrs Mahopolang	Mrs Matebello
School	A	B	C
Age	40 years	51 years	29 years
Gender	F	F	F
Qualification	Certificate in Early Childhood Education Part-time Diploma in Education programme in progress at UFS	Certificate in Early Childhood Education Part-time Diploma in Education programme in progress at UFS	Certificate in Early Childhood Education
Teaching service in ECCD centres in number of years	5 years	18 years	4 years
Teaching service in Reception (Grade R) classes in number of years	10 year	8 years and 9 months	2 years
Mode of transport to school	Bus and walking for a long distance	Unreliable taxi transport and a very short walking distance	Reliable workers' taxi transport to school gate
Number of learners in the participant's Grade R class	30	30	34

Data was collected from three participants (all females) at their respective schools. There is a distinct gap between the ages of the participants and their years of teaching experience. Table 4.4 points out that all three of them hold Certificates in Early Childhood Education (CECE), and that two of them are continuing with their studies; Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang were in the final year of a diploma in education programme offered by the University of the Free State (UFS) at the time of data collection for this study. The details in table 4.4 are unpacked further during the discussion of each case. For example, it is also possible that their educational experiences and age have a bearing on how they approached the teaching of learners to read; it indicates their different ways of teaching (Dzimiri & Marimo, 2015).

The next section presents each of the three cases: Mrs Makabelo, Mrs Mahopolang and Mrs Matebello in relation to their teaching of preschool learners.

4.3 THE STORY OF MRS MAKABELO

Mrs Makabelo is 40 years of age. She has had a long teaching career that, as Kini and Podolsky (2016) say, may be useful as a mentor to novice teachers. Table 4.4 shows that apart from the Certificate in Early Childhood Education that was used as one of the variables for purposive sampling in this study, Mrs Makabelo is studying towards

a National Professional Diploma in Education Grade R and Foundation Phase - a part-time programme that is offered by the UFS in neighbouring country, South Africa. She has 15 years of teaching experience.

4.3.1 Sense-making of the guidelines and policies

The interpretation of the guidelines and policies is a theme that addresses the second research question: How do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

The guidelines and policies refer collectively to the curriculum, the syllabus, the IECCD policy and preparation for the classroom teaching. Therefore the cases show how the teachers interpret the curriculum, the syllabus, the IECCD Policy and their own preparation to teach reading. The data was obtained from each teacher's scheme of work and lesson preparation book through the document analysis method and interviews.

Mrs Makabelo spoke about the integrated curriculum and about the syllabus that she used for lesson-planning. She attached different meanings to them. During the interview with Mrs Makabelo about what guided the plan for her classroom work, she said:

> I use the integrated curriculum. Our syllabus is integrated. It is thematic. When
> I plan my work I know that I teach one theme and sub-theme the whole day in
> Life Skills, Numeracy and Literacy.

This comment came up during the discussion about her schemes of work and lesson plan which were different. Mrs Makabelo used the words curriculum and syllabus interchangeably. This suggests that she probably did not differentiate between them. However, she seemed to understand that the Lesotho's Grade R syllabus is integrated and thematic even though this information is not written explicitly in the syllabus. Figure 4.1 shows what she meant about the integrated syllabus. Mrs Makabelo's understanding of the Grade R syllabus is that it is integrated and thematic; it makes a connection of what she teaches throughout the day. When asked whether the syllabus stipulates this connection she said, "Leha e sa ngoloa (even if it is not written), I know

that it is integrated and thematic. All the teachers will tell you this and the other curriculum is written …"

Life Skills

Numeracy   Literacy
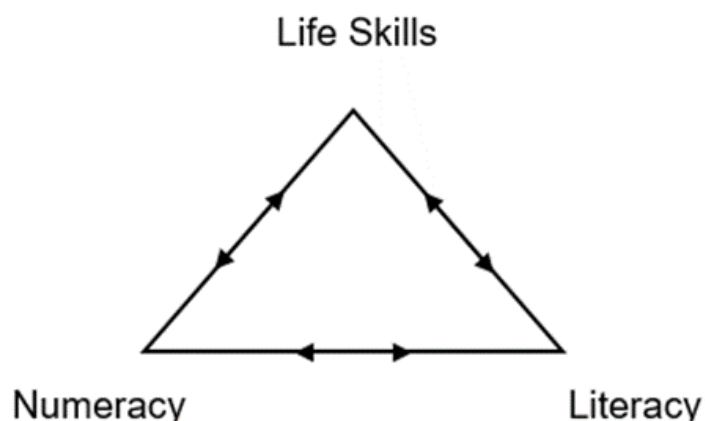
Figure 4.1: Integrated and thematic Grade R syllabus as described by Mrs Makabelo

She revealed that all the learning areas had to be connected to each other. Figure 4.1 indicates the relationship among the three learning areas around a common theme. The analysis of the Grade R syllabus indicates this relationship.

Furthermore, when asked to indicate the documents that guide her to teach the learners to read, Mrs Makabelo stated:

> I use the syllabus and the schemes of work to guide me in teaching the learners
> to read. There is no way I can teach without them. Otherwise, I can do whatever
> I like. They are important because I know what I must teach every day because
> they suggest the themes that I have to teach.

Mrs Makabelo indicated that the syllabus and the schemes of work provided her with the opportunities to teach the learners to read as it is the expectation of teachers that a well-designed syllabus provide them with appropriate teaching guidance (Bulut, 2007). The two documents guided her teaching, otherwise she would not be focused. The syllabus and schemes of work provided her with the themes to teach daily topics in her classroom. Here is her elaboration:

> It (Grade R syllabus) gives me the topics … we say themes not topics, but they
> are the same; so the syllabus gives me themes and activities to teach and
> suggest materials that I should use in the classroom. Yes … other things are

not in the syllabus.

From this extract Makabelo indicates that she relies on the syllabus for the themes, activities and materials to use in her classroom. However, she seemed to regard the words 'topics' and 'themes' as being synonymous. However, her narrative indicates that she identifies and recognises the inadequacy of the Grade R syllabus. She added that:

> There is also the ECCD curriculum. I heard that *kaofela li fanoe ke* (they were all provided by) NTT (The National Teacher Trainer). Normally I don't use the ECCD curriculum even though it looks good compared to the current Grade R syllabus. *U ka khotsofala le uena ha u ka e sheba u li k'homphera* (You can also be satisfied if you can look at them and compare them). The ECD curriculum is good.

Mrs Makabelo infers that she has both documents (The ECD curriculum and the Grade R syllabus) in her classroom, although she only uses the Grade R syllabus to guide her content-wise for the teaching of reading. The latter document is provided by MOET to guide every Grade R teacher. However, Mrs Makabelo is familiar with the contents of the two "guidelines" documents and is able to compare them. She explained that:

> I can still use important ideas that are in the IECCD curriculum *leha li tšoana* (even though they are similar) about teaching learners to read. The IECCD curriculum is good even though the sub-themes to teach reading are the same. That is why I use the reception (Grade R) class syllabus.

The extract shows that even though Mrs Makabelo earlier suggested that there was lack of guidance in the Grade R syllabus in terms of teaching the learners to read, she still used the two documents for guidance. Her story suggests that even during curriculum reform, there will still be important ideas that teacher can and will draw from the old curriculum; as was the case with the present ECD curriculum. Her story further suggests that she draws ideas from the old curriculum because she is not resistant to change and reform or because she undermines the current Grade R syllabus but because the suggested ideas and activities that are in the old curriculum are still important to help Grade R learners to learn basic reading skills (Chimbi & Jita, 2019).

4.3.1.1 Interpretation of policies

Mrs Makabelo appears to be aware that the *National Policy for the Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD Policy)* was designed for preschools, as she added it to the list of the documents that she uses for her teaching of reading.

About the IECCD policy Mrs Makabelo said:

> I heard about the IECCD policy. I am not sure whether it is still for Grade R class. At first, I thought it is for the Home Based and Community Based Centres. We were work-shopped about the policy. *Ka utloisisa hore* (I understood that) I was invited because the reception class is still preschool like other centres. I don't have it.

She reported that she does not have IECCD policy document per se but has heard about it. In this extract it also appears that Mrs Makabelo does not know whether the IECCD policy was designed to include Grade R classes or not. This extract also indicates that she attended training through workshops and that training made her believe that the reception class and preschool fall into same category. As a result, she thought that the IECCD policy is necessary for her Grade R class, and she could use it to guide her teaching of reading as well. From her story, she seems to regard the Grade R syllabus as being covered by the IECCD policy. Her interpretation of the policy document seems to be correct because while the "Policy Strategy 4" focuses on maintaining provision of services for learners from 0 to 3 years, it calls for the educational systems that also aim to enhance quality preschool education for learners from 3 to 5 years old (MOET, 2013:19).

Evidently from the extracts, the IECCD policy was disseminated verbally to the teachers in addition to policy-briefing through workshops. However, the impact of the workshop remains in doubt for some teachers as they have not seen the policy itself, and are still confused about certain aspects of it.

4.3.1.1.1 Rock-solid decision on medium of instruction

Mrs Makabelo's story shows that her understanding and interpretation of the IECCD policy about teaching and learning are influenced by the context of the school. She said:

All the learners in this school speak English … *u utloile ha u kena mona bana ba ka ba bua sekhooa* (You heard when you entered here that my children speak English). They don't have a problem… That's why *motsoali e mong le e mong le ba hole ba tlisang bana ba bona. Ba rata bana ba buang sekhooa* (parents, even from far send their children to this school. They like children to speak English).

From the extract above it seems that Mrs Makabelo and her school have made a decision to teach learners in English. They see this as a good way of attracting parents to send their learners to her school, as their analysis suggests that local parents like their learners to speak English. When asked why she did not teach in the home language of Sesotho, she commented:

Policy is a policy *empa* (but) it is me who have to do good work in the classroom. I don't think it is a must that I have to teach in the home language (Sesotho) in the reception (Grade R) class as it was suggested at the workshops that pre-school learners are supposed to be taught in Sesotho. We were just advised to teach in Sesotho. For example, I can still use important ideas that are in the ECD curriculum … It's my choice.

She holds a strong belief that she needs to contextualise whatever she was taught at the workshops. Mrs Makabelo's perception of the IECCD policy was that the suggested teaching idea in the policy was not cast in stone; as long as she was teaching effectively. She understood that she had a choice to use either (or both) language as the medium of instruction in the same way as she could teach reading according to the ECD curriculum and/ or Grade R syllabus alongside each other. She continued with her story:

I don't think policy stops me from teaching in English and that it will not be simple to stop teachers to teach in English because most of the schools teach in English, even in ECCD (Early Childhood Care and Development) Centres. Children are young, *bo* (even) 3 years old. I taught them in English and they understood. Policy should allow us to teach in both languages *molemong of bokamoso ba thuto e ntle ea bana* (for the children's future educational benefit).

The emphasis from this story that Mrs Makabelo tells is that although the IECCD policy recognised the home language as the medium of instruction in Grade R, it does not stop her to choose to teach in English. She clearly had no intention to stop teaching the learners in English, as she indicated that most of the schools teach in English. According to her, the IECCD policy is not prescriptive to stop other teachers to teach in English. Her beliefs seems to be that when learners are taught in English from an early age (three), they are able to understand what is taught in class in that language. In other words, she seems to argue that even second language speakers are able to acquire First Language (FL) competence with early exposure and consistent reinforcement and practice. Her firm understanding is that the IECCD policy should give her and other teachers the flexibility to teach in both languages in order to prepare young learners for the best academic achievement in the higher grades. However, I was able to observe that she spoke both Sesotho and English (mostly English), sometimes code-switching during lessons even though she claimed that English is her medium of instruction. As an experienced teacher of young learners, it could be that Makabelo was consciously code-switching to allow all the learners, even those lagging behind in language development, to be included in her lessons. The next section shows how Mrs Makabelo used the policy guidelines to prepare for teaching.

4.3.1.2   Preparation for teaching reading

The categories of the teaching guidelines include the quarterly schemes of work, the daily classroom programme and the daily lesson plans. The analysis of Mrs Makabelo's documents helped me to understand how she uses them and to explore (through the interviews and lesson observation) how she applies the guidelines for teaching the learners to read and to explore the challenges and opportunities involved.

4.3.1.2.1 Quarterly preparation

Mrs Makabelo indicated that she prepares a scheme of work for every quarter of the academic year.

WEEKS	THEMES	SUBTHEMES	CONTENT	MATERIALS	EVALUATION
09/10/2017	My Self	• My self • Parts of the body • Care of the body • My face • Locomotion	Recognise Identify Awareness Appreciate Demonstrating	Paste, flash, water, Clay soil, mirror, Comb, Vaseline, face-towel, soap, seeds	• Check learner's ability to appreciate the body • Check learner's ability to identify recognise body parts. • Check learner's ability to demonstrate care of the body. • Check the learner's ability to state the uses of the nose, eyes, hands
23/10/2017 16/10/2017	SENSES	• Hearing • Sight • Smell • Taste • Touch	Guess Identify Compare Experimenting Awareness	Poster, Drum, Onion Perfume, sugar, Salt, Spice	• Check learner's ability to guess different sounds. • Check learner's ability to experience • Check learner's ability to compare different smell • Check learner's ability to differenciate tastes. • Check learner's ability to discover whats in their hands
23/10/2017	ENVIRONMENT	• My Family • Surroundings Duties of • Caring My family • Teachers and their Duties Grand parents • Things that belong together	Identify Name Identify Matching	Poster, clothes, Shoes, Clay soil	• Check learner's ability to name the family members. • Check learner's ability to identify duties and responsibilities of family members. • Check learner's ability to name their grand parents • Check learner's ability to match things that belong together.
30/10/2017	ENVIRONMENT	• My school • Surroundings • Caring • Teachers and their duties	Identify Observation Awareness	Poster Dust bin	• Check learner's ability to identify their school • Check learner's ability to observe their surroundings • Check learner's ability to take care of their surroundings • Check learner's ability to name teachers' duties
06/11/2017	NUMBER CONCEPTS	• Counting • Number recognition • Modelling • Counting game (Washing line)	Sequence	Counters, Flash Cards Clay soil, Line, Pegs Clothes	• Check learner's ability to count in sequence • Check learner's ability to recognise numbers from 1-5 • Check learner's ability to numbers

Figure 4.2: Mrs Makabelo's quarterly scheme of work

The analysis of Mrs Makabelo's two documents, the Grade R syllabus (Table 4.2) and the scheme of work (Figure 4.2) indicates that she does not prepare a separate scheme for the teaching of Literacy, and a separate one for the teaching of Life Skills, as the syllabus suggests.

Figure 4.2 shows her quarterly scheme of work which indicates what has to be taught each week for the whole quarter. Her scheme of work further shows the themes and

sub-themes that will be covered in the Life Skills and Numeracy classes. She makes use of the prescribed syllabus as follows:

> ... I use the syllabus. We start by writing the scheme of work at the beginning of each quarter, with the reception class teachers. We meet at one school and use the syllabus. It gives me the topics that I write in the scheme of work.

Mrs Makabelo's response shows that that the development of the scheme of work is a collaborative process with other teachers in and outside her school. She teams up with the Grade R teachers from the neighbouring schools to prepare the scheme of work and to have the opportunity to learn from the members of the group - the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). She writes in the scheme of work the actual content that is suggested in the syllabus. I asked her to explain why the Literacy content is not written in the quarterly scheme of work. She responded:

> Literacy is from Life Skills. I teach learners what we did in the morning. I use the integrated curriculum. All the subjects are together and I use themes. In literacy, I teach what I taught in the morning in Life skills but this time I teach children to read, and on another day I teach them how to write.

This extract suggests that Mrs Makabelo derives the literacy class content from the Life Skills (Life Orientation) learning area. She explained that she teaches reading, even though her scheme of work does not show evidence of her intention to teach reading. She seems to understand integration as the connection and grouping of the subjects to form one learning area. The extract further shows that Mrs Makabelo teaches one theme and/or sub-theme across all learning areas to be covered for the day. Reading has scheme of work but the reader might miss this integration of reading into Life Skills and Numeracy. It would be taken that reading is not taught in her class, unless one observed her class.

4.3.1.2.2 Daily classroom programme

Mrs Makabelo's daily classroom programme was displayed on the window in the classroom where everybody could see it. Figure 4.3 shows what it looked like (it has been reconstructed because it was difficult to read from a picture).
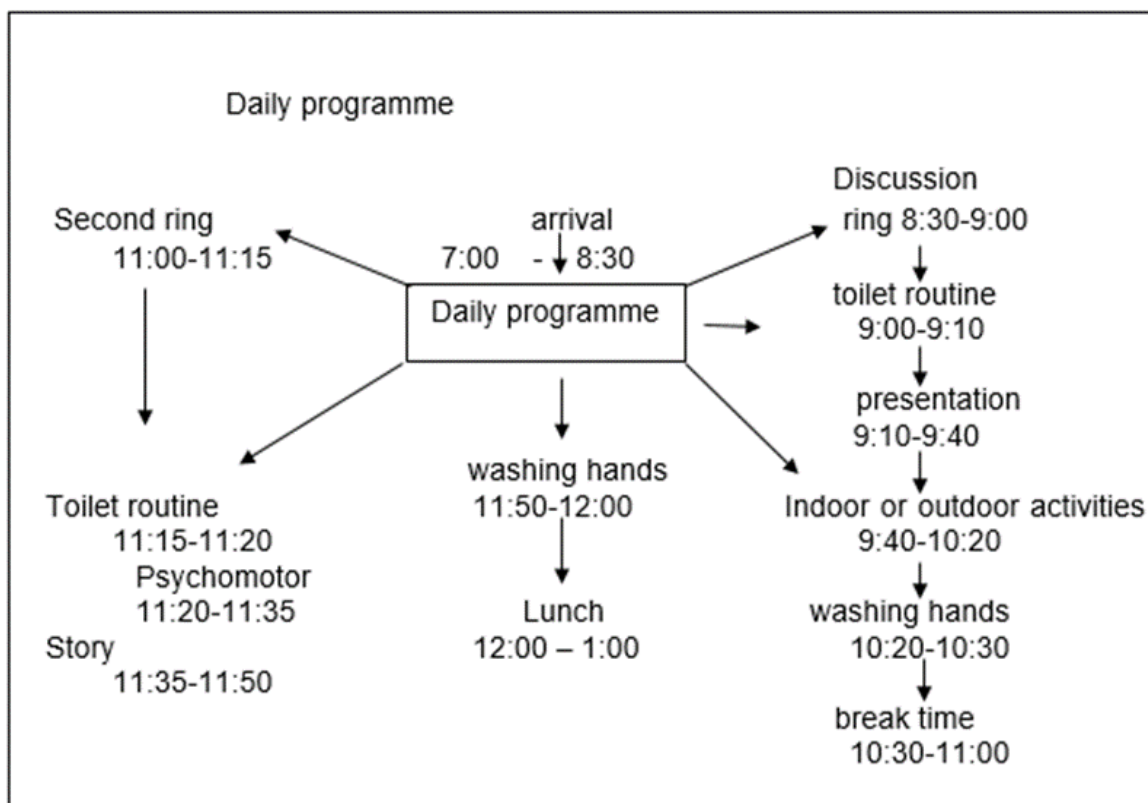
Figure 4.3: Mrs Makabelo's Grade R daily class programme (Reconstructed daily programme)

Figure 4.3 shows the arrival time at schools and in class as 07:00 and that everybody, teachers and learners, were expected to be in the classroom at 08:30 at the first ring (the period of time between activities) followed by discussion. Figure 4.3 shows that the daily programme is divided into two rings; the first ring starts at 08:30 and the second ring at 11:30. It is not clear what the learners do between 11:00 and 11:15 when the second ring starts, but when she was asked to clarify, Mrs Makabelo said:

> In second ring they (learners) go to the corners. It is their time to work in groups
> on the theme of the day. We start with a song. Reading is done during literacy
> time in the first ring between 8.30 and 9.40, 30 minutes Life Skills, 30 minutes
> Numeracy and 30 minutes Literacy when I teach the learners to read.

Although the daily class programme does not show clearly when Mrs Makabelo teaches the learners to read, she knows the schedule for the daily activities. The extract above indicates that she teaches reading for 30 minutes although the daily

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programme does not show how long the literacy class lasts. It is also evident from the extract that the learners have the opportunity to learn from each other when they work in groups.

4.3.1.2.3 Lesson-plan management

When asked to explain when she prepares her lesson plans, as well as the teaching and learning materials, she said:

> I have enough time to prepare for the next day because my classes end about an hour before other classes. I am organised every time when I get into the classroom and teach the learners how to read. It is still challenging because after school I have to rush for the bus because I stay very far … once in a while I take the preparation books … home.

It is evident from this extract that Mrs Makabelo is organised and knows what to do when she gets to her class because she has the time to write her daily lesson plans. Like most teachers, she occasionally has to complete her lesson plans at home. Sometime she also has a challenge when preparing the lessons for the next day because she has to rush to finish within an hour. Her story suggests that travelling long distances to and from school sometimes has a negative impact on her teaching. The perusal of Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan and preparation book showed that she has a collection of these daily lesson plans. This is evidence that she prepares her lesson plans almost on a daily basis.

Figure 4.4 shows the components of the lesson plan that Mrs Makabelo prepared for the reading lesson that I observed. The plan showed the sub-theme, class/grade, number of learners, date, age of the learners, objectives, teaching and learning materials, teaching methods, introduction and presentation which included teacher's instructional activities and learners' activities. There are three main aspects to be taken into consideration in Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan: formulation of objective, alignment of objectives with activities, and social interactive reading activities.
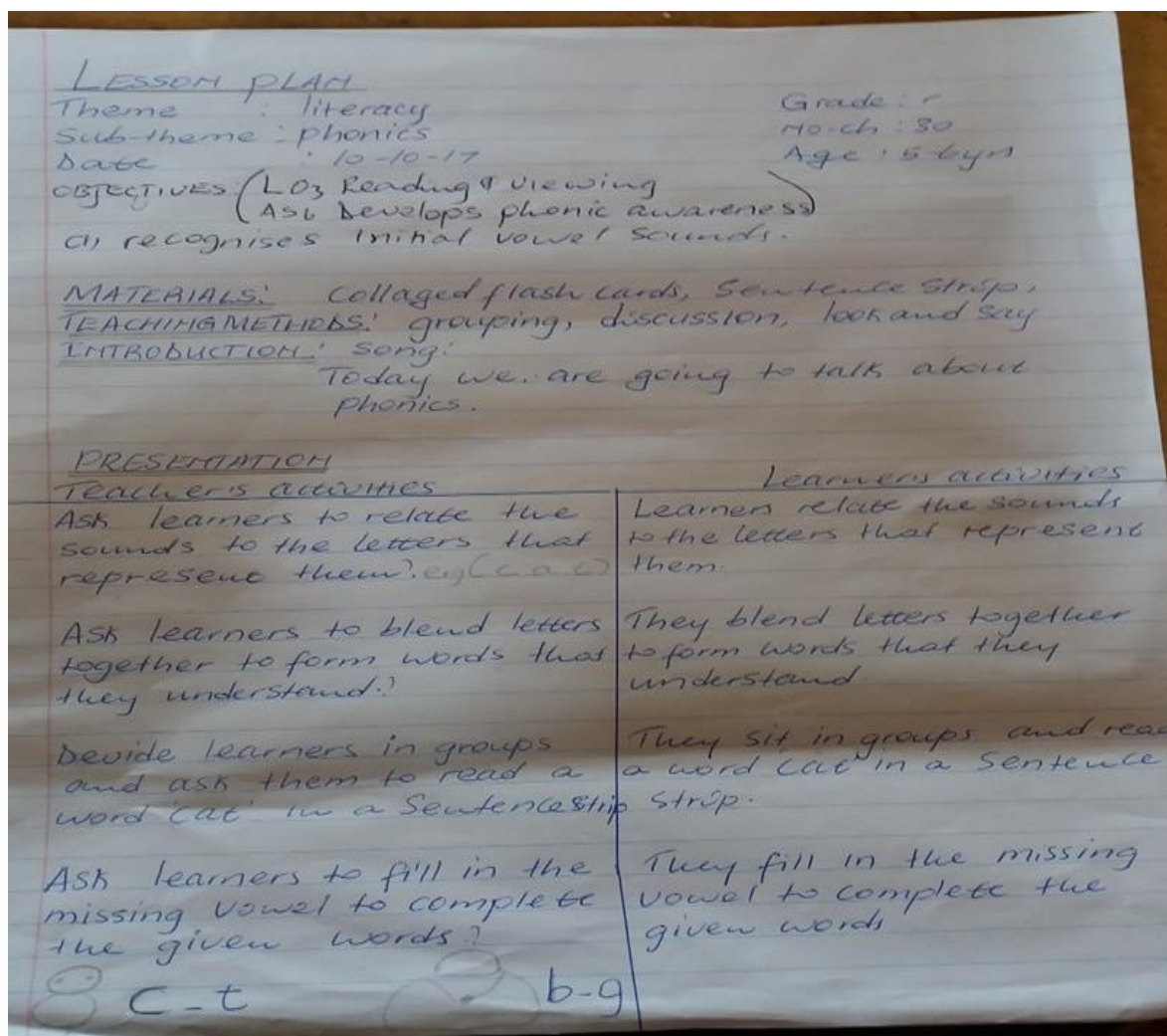
Figure 4.4: Mrs Makabelo sample structure of a lesson plan

Figure 4.4 shows how Mrs Makabelo intended to present the reading lesson. I analysed it according to the stated objectives and the intended learning activities.

(a) Formulation of objectives

Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan (figure 4.4) shows reading, viewing, and developing phonics awareness. The latter is written under the lesson objectives and this somewhat creates confusion. Furthermore, her lesson plan shows that reading and viewing are both Learning Outcomes (LOs) 3, while development of phonic awareness is Assessment Standard (AS) 6 which was not referred to as such in the syllabus, as indicated in table 4.2. Literacy appears as a learning area in the syllabus, and reading and viewing as themes. Her lesson plan showed the first objective; it seems like the only objective to be achieved in the reading lesson. In my analysis, there is a bit of a

discrepancy between Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan objectives and the syllabus. When asked to explain this apparent disjuncture, she said:

> Although I said our syllabus is helping me with themes, sub-themes and suggested activities it is not enough. It lies with the individual to find out what to do, to decide the objective, or LO (Learning outcome) and assessment and to decide whether what is written in there is an activity or not ... Our curriculum is not clear. We still have to do a lot of research, *ho iphumanela tse ka re thusang* (to find out what can help us).

The implication in Mrs Makabelo's statement was that, even though the Grade R syllabus was intended to help the teachers to teach the learners to read, parts of it still need further elaboration to be helpful to teachers. Some parts, for example, do not indicate clearly what the teachers are expected to do. For example, objectives are not stipulated for some topics. Therefore, she had to look for the theme to understand the syllabus clearly, and then develop appropriate objectives on her own.

(b) Alignment of objectives with activities

Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan in figure 4.4 shows the first objective as "recognise initial vowel sounds", but the lesson activities do not align with this objective. Her lesson plan indicates that in the second activity the learners would read or form whole words. Thirdly, the activity indicates that learners were supposed to read the word "*cat*" from a sentence strip. Therefore, there seems to be no clear alignment between the lesson objective and the lesson activities. When I asked her to explain why some of the activities seemed not related to the lesson objective, she replied, "We began with the *'a'* sound. I also wanted the learners to use it [the *'a'* sound] in the word *'cat'* so that I can see *hore* (that) they know it". It becomes evident that she believes that there is nothing wrong in her lesson plan. She also wanted the learners to recognise the vowel sound in words in order to ensure that they learn to read with understanding.

(c) Social-interaction activities

Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan shows her intention to use semi-concrete materials in order to teach the learners how to read because the lesson activities show that there were flash cards and sentence strips. In our conversation, she said:

I choose what the learners will read and plan the lessons; but most of the work is done by the children, the learners. Every learner has the right to talk and answer my questions and the group members' questions.

Additionally, figure 4.4 shows the intention to engage the learners in group-reading activities and discussions as she clearly planned the lesson to be learner-centred. I was able to observe this as the first lesson-presentation segment.

4.3.2 Implementation of the guidelines and policies

This section responds to the third research question: how do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and polices for reading in Grade R?

In order to gather the data, the documents were analysed, and Mrs Makabelo was interviewed and observed when she helped the learners to construct their knowledge while teaching them to read.

4.3.2.1 Classroom practice

In the context of this study, classroom practice refers to how Mrs Makabelo taught the learners how to read through incorporating the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories in the classroom. That is, the researcher observed whether and how she implemented the guidelines and policies as discussed earlier. Table 4.1 shows some of what was expected from her through policies and guidelines. The following section presents one example of what she typically did in the classroom from the beginning of the lesson to the end.

4.3.2.1.1 Arousing interest in lesson introduction

In the first reading lesson, Mrs Makabelo began by asking the learners some questions. Most of the time, the learners answered the questions in a chorus. She stood in front of the class with her left hand in the pocket while she used the other hand as a pointer.

Lesson one

Teacher: Stand up. We are going to sing the alphabet song. Listen. *Re tlil'o bina kaofela. Rea e tseba pina ena eo re tlil'o e bina*. (We are all going to sing. We all know this song that we are going to sing).

Teacher: Ants on apples a-a-a and we call it (pause) A.

Learners: (Joining in the song). Ants on apples a-a-a and we call it (pause) A. (Doing actions)

Teacher: (While learners sang, the teacher walked towards the corners where a chart which had letter A was displayed and then sang). Ants on apples a-a-a and we call it A (letter name). Stop. Sing again.

Learners: (Singing) Ants on apples a-a-a and we call it A (Doing actions and some not aware what the teacher was pointing at).

Teacher: Sit down.

Learners: (Sat down and began to sing) Beautiful butterfly b-b-b.

Teacher: Ok! Thank you. *Le binne ha monate he bakhotsi* (You have sang nicely my friends). Clap hands for yourselves. Today we are going to learn about the letter-sounds.

Learners: (Clap hands)

Teacher: Today we are going to talk about the phonics. We are going to learn about phonics.

Learner: (Completing teacher's sentence when she repeated it) Phonics.

Teacher: You are right.

Mrs Makabelo's lesson introduction seemed to attract all the learners and seemed exciting because they sang with her. Performing actions while singing showed that the learners were actively involved in their learning, indicating that the lesson was mainly learner-centred, rather than being passive. She engaged the learners in a song and emphasised the letter and letter-sound that were going to be taught through repetition of the song. The sentences were also articulated more than once. It was common in her introductions to tell the learners what they were going to learn about. When I asked her to explain the reason for telling learners what they thought they were going to learn about she said, "Sometimes I do that in order to find out what they know or understand". This quote and the segments of introduction indicated that Mrs Makabelo used songs to connect their background knowledge to the new lessons. It suggests that she made the learners transit from the known to the unknown.

The Grade R Syllabus in table 4.2 and Mrs Makabelo's lesson plan in figure 4.4 suggest that the lesson introductions were relevant to the basic reading skills taught

to the Grade R learners. All the figures, except Mrs Makabelo's scheme of work in figure 4.2, have phonics as the sub-theme. As shown above, she explained that she extracted the themes and sub-themes from the syllabus. The literacy section, suggested in the syllabus, was however missing from her scheme of work. When the lesson had been introduced, Mrs Makabelo and the learners moved on to the main body of the lesson, as indicated below.

4.3.2.1.2 Reading lesson presentations

There were similarities and differences in the lessons that Mrs Makabelo presented.

  ➤ The first reading lesson presentation:

Lesson segment:

Teacher: Now I want Tlhako (Learner's pseudonym) to stand up. Stand up Tlhako.
Learner 1 (Tlhako): (Stood up)
Teacher: (Walked to the table at the corner taking a pointer) I want you Tlhako to read all the alphabets and the sounds here on the chart (Giving Tlhako a pointer).
Learner 1Tlhako: Read and stopped at /**N**/

Picture 4.1: Tlhako reading letter-sounds during the lesson presentation

Teacher: *Ha re mothuseng* (Let's help her)
Learners (in chorus): Nn (Saying the letter-sound)
Learner 1 (Tlhako): Nn (saying the letter-sound)
Teacher: *(K)hele! Tlhako o balile hantle. Ha re mo opeleng matsoho* (Tlhako is well read. Let's clap hands for her) *Joale madam o tla le bontsa mona* (Now madam will show you here: holding up a flash card) *e be uena oa bolela hore na tlhaku ena molumo oa eona ke ofe* (Then you will say what the sound of the letter is). *Le phahamise letsoho* (Raise your hand).
Learner 2 *(Kheleke):* /**c**/ letter sound.
Teacher: (Asking the whole class) *O re o boneng?* (What does she say she saw?)

Mrs Makabelo continued with the lesson as she had all the letters that formed the word **cat** in her hand. As the learners enunciated the letter-sound, she wrote all the letters on the chalkboard as **c-a-t** and then pointed at the individual letters and asked a few learners to read the letter-sounds and then to read the word. She told the learners that they had learned a new word **cat**.

Lesson focused or not focused

Apparently, Mrs Makabelo continued to teach the learners to read the letters of the alphabet during the presentation of the main lesson yet the first objective does not say anything about the letters of the alphabet. The lesson was still not focused, as she also taught the whole word.

At the beginning of the lesson, Mrs Makabelo was using the teacher-centred teaching approach. She stood in front of the class and chose one learner at a time to read and articulate letter-sounds. The teacher-centred approach is described as deciding activities and choosing the learners to do the activity (Wright, 2011). The chart that she used for teaching was still on the wall. This made it difficult for the other learners to see it when a learner read the letters and pronounced the letter-sounds.

Mrs Makabelo engaged the learners to help a learner who did not know a letter-sound, using Vygotsky's principle of MKO (Riley et al., 2009; Shabani et al., 2010). Figure 4.5 shows a classroom activity during the lesson presentation. The seating arrangement did not allow the other learners to contribute optimally to the reading activity. This was a challenge to engage all the members of the class in the reading activity. She later engaged the learners in a group activity. The instructions were as follows:

Teacher: *Re tlil'o ikarola ka likurupu tse tharo. A ke reng?* (We are going to divide ourselves in three groups, aren't we?)
Learners: Yes, madam.
Teacher: *Ha re se re ikarotse likurupu tse tharo, kurupu e ngoe le e ngoe e tlil'o ba le mosebetsi oa eona* (When we have divided ourselves into three groups, each group will have its work). *Ke fa batho litaelo pele* (I give people instructions first).

The lesson continued with the teacher taking a sentence strip and reading from it with the help of the learners. The sentence read, "I see the cat". Mrs Makabelo asked that

one learner should point at a word that he/she knew on the sentence strip that she held up as indicated in picture 4.2.

Picture 4.2: A learner reading a word she knows on the sentence strip

Picture 4.2 shows Mrs Makabelo holding up a sentence strip and a learner pointing at the sentence and identifying a word that she knows on the sentence strip. It further indicates that Mrs Makabelo engages the learners in discussions, as her lesson plan indicated that she would use this teaching method to teach the learners how to read. A lesson segment and picture 4.2 justify that she worked hard to ensure that learners understand the instructions before going to do their individual group reading activity. After that she divided the learners into three groups. The first five learners in the first row formed the members of the first group.

➢ The second reading lesson presentation

The lesson presentation had similarities to the first one. The following lesson segment indicates:

Lesson presentation segment from introduction to lesson presentation:

Teacher: We are going to sing the alphabet song. Let's sing it.
Learners: Sang with the teacher A-Z
Teacher: (Writes the vowel /a/ on the chalkboard) I want you to raise your hands and say the sound of the letter that is on the chalkboard. Tšepe (Calling a learners by name).
Learner: /**a**/ (letter-sound)
Teacher: (Wrote /**j**/ before /**a**/) *Rea linyalisa* (We are marrying them and read /**ja**/). Mention words with /**ja**/.

The lesson continued with the learners pronouncing the words. One of the learners referred to the sound chart to learn to identify what the sound was to correctly

pronounce the words. Then Mrs Makabelo asked the learners to underline the words which had /ja/.

4.3.2.1.3 **Basic reading skills**

Mrs Makabelo's reading lessons seems to have focused on phonics only, perhaps at the expense of other basic reading skills suggested in the syllabus. She explained:

> I have seen that it is better to teach the learners phonics. ... I take a week teaching them one sound until I finish all the sounds that are given to me ... it is suggested in the syllabus that I have to teach the learners phonics. ... The next day we build a word with this letter sound. Another day the learners read the word that they had built the previous day … *Ke ikhethela* (I choose) activities. Those are just suggested activities.

It is evident from the extract that Mrs Makabelo had to teach the learners the letter-sound relationship and the same vocabulary repeatedly in order to help the learners to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge. The extract indicates that the Grade R syllabus prescribed that she had to teach the learners phonics. During the lesson presentation, she gave different activities to help the learners to identify a single letter of the alphabet and the letter-sound relationship. Her story suggests that she believed that the learners understand better when the activities are taught repeatedly. She further said, "I have already told you that sometimes we read books that are in the store. I teach them how to use books". Although I did not witness Mrs Makabelo use any books to teach the learners how to read and to handle any books, her statement indicates that she taught the learners print awareness (Snell et al., 2015). The analysis of the syllabus, as shown in table 4.2, shows that Mrs Makabelo taught what was suggested in the syllabus.

Any answer is correct

During the lesson observation I learned that Mrs Makabelo did not stick to the instructions or to the questions that she asked the learners. Sometimes she accepted the letter name and vice-versa even if the learners' answers were inaccurate. She said:

> *Ka nako e ngoe bana ba o khannela mono* (Sometimes the learners drive you
> there). I am aware now when you say it. I mix instructions. Sometimes I ask for
> the initial letter-sound in a word. When the learners name the same letter in the
> middle of a word, I accept it because the letter is there, and I can see that they
> know it. This shows that I teach well because the learners can read.

This extract shows that Mrs Makabelo focused more on the learners' comprehension
of the basic reading skills. It further shows that she was flexible and allowed the
learners to take control of the class as long as they were within the lesson goals.
However, I noticed that Mrs Makabelo took long to complete her reading lessons.

4.3.2.1.4 **Time-lesson relationship**

All Mrs Makabelo's lessons lasted about an hour. She explained the reasons for that.

> Grade R learners have to do a lot of repetition as I have been doing. They
> understand when we do things again and again. It is time-consuming. *Hantle*
> (actually) learner-centred teaching is time-consuming; 30 minutes is not always
> enough, especially when I teach the learners to read because I have to help all
> the learners or all the groups to read. That is why I did not give each and every
> child an alphabet chart, flash cards, or sentences strips to read.

This extract shows that Mrs Makabelo was aware that she taught the learners to read
beyond the scheduled lesson time. Her reasons for teaching beyond time scheduled
for Literacy lesson suggests that she was challenged by the need to implement a
learner-centred teaching approach. Wright (2011), asserts that using a learner-centred
approach was a challenge for both novice and experienced teachers.

When asked to explain how she could address the issue of time management Mrs
Makabelo explained:

> Groups help me; they make my work simple because I attend to a group and
> help them as a group. They also help each other. *Feela ke bona hore* (But I am
> aware that) I give them many activities. When I give them flash cards it should
> be flash cards only, give them instructions only and let them read in their group
> while I facilitate. I have to avoid talking too much and allowing long discussions
> before the children go to the groups.

It is evident from this extract that Mrs Makabelo understood that although group-work activities are time-consuming, she had intended to use them as a means to also address time-management challenges. She used group-work as a teaching strategy because she was able to interact with almost all the learners in the class and help them learn to read. The learners are also able to help each other. It was observed that only the eloquent learners shared ideas and Mrs Makabelo substantiated this observation in the earlier excerpts.

Distractions also occurred during Mrs Makabelo's reading lessons. She pointed out: "Sometimes my lessons are distracted because this is not a proper classroom; you see, it is an office - the classroom that was given to us was for grade sevens who are using it". This statement indicates that there was free movement in her classroom where people could move in and out and distract the flow of the lesson. This suggests that with such disturbances, time was not always spent on effective lesson activities.

(i)   The level of competence to implement guidelines

Mrs Makabelo was confident that she taught the learners very well. She even stated that, in most cases, she assists Grade 1 teachers to teach the learners to read. She said:

> This was because teachers in Grade 1 did not know what they could do to reach learners who … were not able (struggling learners) to read such that I was able to help them to manage the learners and show them how to teach according to the curriculum, showing and telling them what to do. I told them that all the learners would proceed to Grade 2.

This extract demonstrates that she is knowledgeable about what she had to teach and that she was able to help struggling learners in her classroom. It also shows that she understood the curriculum and/or syllabus as being important guiding documents to teach the learners. She tried to gain the attention of all the learners and helped each one of them to take part in classroom activities. Her confidence with her own knowledge and skills is evident in her willingness and ability to even assist other teachers (grade 1).

4.3.2.2 Classroom participation

The second lesson segment, like the first one, shows that Mrs Makabelo began her lesson presentation by actively involving the learners in the "alphabet song" which draw the attention of the learners to her instantly. Then the lesson became teacher-centred, with Mrs Makabelo writing the letter of the alphabet and words on the chalkboard and telling the learners to read them. Her lessons were mainly characterised by step-by-step teaching approach. The challenges and opportunities encountered in teaching the Grade R learners to read are indicated in the next section.

4.3.2.2.1 Teacher-learner interaction

Mrs Makabelo considered her lessons to be successful because she interacted well with the learners; she explained:

> I introduced the reading lessons with songs to make them interesting for the learners. The learners took part in the songs. Songs made the lessons successful because we sang the letter-sound that we were going to learn about, *e leng* (which was) /**a**/ as in **c-a-t**. *Hape* (Again) I helped the learners to understand the letter-sounds and words because I used flash cards and sentence strips. I guided the learners to read.

The extract shows that Mrs Makabelo engages the learners in the activities and motivates them to learn to read through songs and actions. It also suggests that she made an effort to ensure that learners participated actively in the reading activities. Furthermore, the extract suggests that she works as a facilitator in the class as her contribution to the lesson was only to provide guidance in order to help the learners to understand what they were learning. The lesson segments and figures 4.5 and 4.6 provide evidence of what goes on in Mrs Makabelo's classes. She continually gave the learners some reading instructions and they followed them. She chose one learner at a time to perform an activity.

4.3.2.2.2 Learner-centred pedagogy

Mrs Makabelo indicated that she used a learner-centred teaching approach because she engaged the learners in group reading activities.

Our syllabus indicates that play is good for the children's learning … That is why I sing with the children. I also use the learner-centred approach *joalokaha u bone* (as you have seen) that I used group-work. I decided to use groupings because I wanted the learners to help each other when reading the word that I wanted them to read out in the sentence…*Hantle ke rata bana ba iphumanelang ka bo bona ba thusana ha ke ba rutile li-sounds* (Actually I want children to discover/learn by themselves, by helping each other after I have taught them the sounds)

This extract indicates that Mrs Makabelo taught the learners actively to read because this was what the syllabus suggested, and she was also comfortable with that suggestion. The Grade R syllabus, as illustrated in table 4.2, indicates: "Learn as you play" and "Play is children's work" (MOET, 2011). She seemed to know the syllabus from cover-to-cover, which made it simple for her to implement in a flexible way.

Mrs Makabelo's story further suggests that she encouraged and employed peer-reading where the learners helped each other (Nulden & Scheepers, 2020). The analyses of the syllabus and the lesson plans, the lesson observations, and the interviews corroborated the finding that Mrs Makabelo practised the learner-centred pedagogy. In one of the lesson plans, as indicated in figure 4.4, she wrote the learners' activities as, "They sit in groups and read a word …" She further explained:

The size of the class allows me to use groups, and to help slow learners. You can see that the children work together to read those letters in words. I am able to teach the learners because there are thirty in the class. Government said that we should not take more than 30 learners. There are parents who want to bring their children to my class but there is nothing I can do because the maximum number is thirty. It is unwieldy to help each learner if there are too many.

The above indicates that Mrs Makabelo was satisfied with the number of the learners in her class because she was able to facilitate group reading even though she had a challenge. However, not all the 16 learners participated effectively in the group or in shared reading activities. Table 4.4 shows that she had a total number of thirty learners in her class, but there were sixteen learners present on the day of observation.

Therefore, it was not possible to observe whether it was a challenge for her to help each learner in a big class. She continued with her story:

> Some of … (pause) some of my learners were not taking part in the group activity while others were doing the work. I see that the learners learn differently because some of them were keeping quiet while those who are talkative talked too much in the group. It was challenging to get all of them involved when I was walking from group to group, but they were all learning from each other.

Mrs Makabelo's story was supported by the observation that some learners talked too much and prevented others from being involved in group-work. This shows that although Mrs Makabelo wished to engage all the learners in guided group reading activities which help learners who are beginning to read to use effective literacy and reading strategies, it was not always feasible (Mason & Sinha, 1992; Riley, 2006). However, she walked from group to group asking the learners some questions and offering guidance where it was needed. She acknowledged that learners learn differently in the classroom and provided the necessary scaffolding.

Asked to narrate why she only used flash cards and sentence strips as teaching materials in her lesson presentation, and she replied:

> My lesson was well prepared … The bad thing I did today is that I forgot to introduce the (pause) my pictures and to match the pictures with the words … they learn when they have pictures. I was going to use the picture during the group activity because the learners were going to fill in the missing vowel … when they see the picture to help them to be familiar with the word.

This extract tells that Mrs Makabelo had planned to use pictures in her reading lesson presentation. Pictures are useful to improve reading comprehension (Burnett, 2007; Campbell, 1995). When asked how the absence of the pictures and other learning materials affected her lesson, she said, "Maybe it would keep all the learners working, but *ha ea nketsa hampe haholo* (it did not do much damage) because they were familiar with the letter-sound". This suggests that she did indeed teach phonics as expected.

4.3.2.3 Support from outside the classroom

In the conversation with Mrs Makabelo about the teaching materials that she used in the classroom to teach reading, she described the kind of support that she got- and expected to get from the various stakeholders. She talked about the support within her school and Government support through MOET.

4.3.2.3.1 Support within the school

Some challenges and opportunities were influenced by the school environment. Mrs Makabelo explained:

> Even though the schools help me, *tlhokahalo ea* (the scarcity of) learning materials is still a problem … I don't teach in the way I want to teach, *ke itlhalose ka Sesotho. Bosieo ba lisebelisoa bo etsa hore mosebetsi o be thata empa* (let me express myself in Sesotho. The absence of materials makes teaching difficult but I try teaching with the charts … but there are old books in the store. I use them …

It was evident from Mrs Makabelo's comment that some teaching and learning materials were provided by the school which were used to teach the learners to read. The classroom display showed that some of the materials such as charts, colouring materials and paste, were used in the classroom. However, the limited resources in her classroom seem to negatively affect her reading instruction. She said that she used the old books that were kept in the school storeroom to teach learners to read. However, she did not explain how she used them. When asked to explain further about the scarcity of materials, she said that "Those books were supplied by the Government for upper grades and not for this class. We use them because … there is nothing we can do". However, there was no evidence of such books or their use because they were never used in the short period of my observations.

4.3.2.3.2 MOET support

Mrs Makabelo's opinion was that the Government does not do enough to help her to teach the Grade R learners to read. She commented:

> The Government is not helping me. You can see my classroom. There are

charts, flash cards everywhere and I have written letters and words … There was a Takalani Kit that the Government gave us. I don't know where it was coming from but I heard that it was brought here by the Education Office …

Mrs Makabelo was aware that she needed more help from the Government so that she could implement the reading instruction effectively in her Grade R class. She pointed out that the Government provided a Takalani Sesame Kit (Takalani Sesame Educational Outreach Kit: A kit that has learners' programmes that promotes Early Childhood Education.) only, and nothing else to help her to teach the learners how to read. She could not explain further what it is and where it comes from, except to say, "It is a kit with one big book reader, some charts and flash cards, and teaching aids for numeracy and literacy". She does not use the kit because the materials are inadequate for the number of the learners that are in her classroom. It was evident from her story that the Government did not supply her Grade R class with books. She complained:

> My challenges are when I design materials. Sometimes I don't have money to buy things such as paint. Grade R teaching and learning materials have to be colourful in order to attract the learners, *hore ba tlil'o a sheba ba bale* (so that they can see and then come to read …)

This extract indicates that Mrs Makabelo sometimes improvises and creates her own materials for teaching. However, she seemed disappointed by the fact that sometimes she does not have funds as she uses her own money to buy materials. This narrative suggests that she makes an effort to help the learners to learn to read, using materials that are attractive and inviting to the learners, although she sometimes has challenges that constrain her work.

4.3.3 Summary of Mrs Makabelo's story

The story of Mrs Makabelo shows a number of opportunities and challenges for the teaching of reading in her class. As opportunities, Lesotho's Grade R regulatory guidelines and policies (which refer to the syllabus and the IECCD policy) provide her with the required guidance to teach the learners basic reading skills; or sub-themes that the Grade R syllabus suggests. These include phonics, knowledge of the names of the letters of the alphabet, letter-sound relationship, word-building, blending of

sounds, and using books appropriately. However, her opinion was that important information such as specific objectives for each sub-theme is not available in the syllabus. The analysis of the syllabus confirmed her story. Furthermore, the analysis of her documents (the syllabus and the schemes of work) show some opportunities and challenges that she had to deal with in the teaching of reading.

Her story reveals that MOET through the ECCD Unit, holds workshops to disseminate information about the new policy guidelines. However, she was challenged in implementing the policies as intended by designers because of the influence of the school context, especially the policy on the medium of instruction. The social context includes the parents and the neighbouring schools.

Mrs Makabelo shares ideas about planning for teaching. However, the analysis of her documents such as syllabus and schemes of work reveal that she is not able to write the scheme of work that has three learning areas that she described, as shown in figure 4.2. She also failed to align her lesson objectives with the activities, as shown in figure 4.4.

Further discussion with Mrs Makabelo showed that she regards the teacher-learner ratio proposed by the MOET as being practical and realistic to implement the guidelines effectively. She states that she arouses the interest of all the learners and assist them to construct their knowledge individually, and in groups, through scaffolding. However, she still has a challenge to distribute adequate learning materials to each learner. As a result, she resorts to group-work activities which, she believes, work well and have only a few challenges.

The analysis of the lesson plans, the interviews, and the lesson observations, reveal that learner-engagement is important to Mrs Makabelo. It could also be understood that the two syllabi helped her to glean important information. They guided her to teach at the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) level of learners. Lastly, it is also evident that group-work activities are challenging and needed her experience and skills to facilitate effective learning.

4.4 THE STORY OF MRS MAHOPOLANG

A summary of Mrs Mahopolang's background is shown in table 4.4. She is the most experienced teacher in the sample. Her age (51) and long teaching experience have implications for how she makes sense of and approaches what the policy or regulatory guidelines say about teaching her learners. At the time of study, she was also in her final year of study pursuing a part-time National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) Grade R and Foundation Phase programme at the UFS. She has worked as a pre-school teacher for twenty-seven years. She travelled to and from school by taxi. She states that sometimes she waited long for a taxi at the taxi-stop in the morning, sometimes getting late for her class. The next section discusses to how Mrs Mahopolang interprets the regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching the learners to read, especially in Grade R classes.

4.4.1 Sense-making of the Guidelines and Policies

4.4.1.1 Interpretation of the curriculum

Table 4.2 shows that the syllabus is one of the appropriate documents for teaching in preschools in Lesotho. Data was collected on Mrs Mahopolang through an interview to find out how she interprets the Grade R syllabus. Her documents were also analysed, and her classroom practice of the guidelines was observed.

Mrs Mahopolang explained how she was directed by the Lesotho's Reception Class Guidelines in planning her lessons to teach Grade R learners to read. She stated: "I use the reception class curriculum as it tells me what to teach in Grade R". She referred to reception class guidelines as the curriculum. She explained that the curriculum guided her lessons on what was required to teach the learners. Therefore, her narrative suggests that she frequently drew on the GOL's regulatory guidelines for teaching.

Mrs Mahopolang explained what the syllabus communicated to her about teaching the learners to read:

> The syllabus is helpful but it has to be looked at again. It shows me the activities and materials. First, I look at the themes and sub-themes, and then the

activities. It (the syllabus) is lacking. It does not help me about how to assess the learners when they read ... It is different from the old ECCD curriculum. That one was better.

Mrs Mahopolang described how the syllabus provided her with the themes, sub-themes, and the activities she needed for teaching. The suggested teaching and learning materials also made her reading lessons meaningful. It is apparent, however, from the extract, that she had a preference for the old preschool syllabus because of the gaps in the new syllabus document. However, an analysis of the Grade R syllabus and the lesson plans, revealed that Mrs Mahopolang does most often use the current Grade R syllabus to prepare lessons to teach the learners to read.

Mrs Mahopolang further says: "Sir, the syllabus, I use the syllabus (laughing) tells me what to teach in Grade R". These comments suggest that Mrs Mahopolang was confident that she knew what the syllabus expected her to teach in the classroom even though sometimes she uses old syllabus to prepare lessons. She understood that she has to make sense of the new Grade R syllabus (Chimbi and Jita, 2019).

4.4.1.2 Diverse responses about the guidance of the syllabus

Although Mrs Mahopolang asserted that Lesotho's Grade R syllabus was helpful, she made her concerns known by stating that it had inadequate information when it comes to assessing the learners who are learning to read. She lamented further:

> Our curriculum should be improved to help us with how to teach reading because sometimes we add techniques when we see that one does not work since I have only taught a child to build a word… *Syllabus ena e hloka ho ntlafatsoa, haholo ka ho asesa* (This syllabus needs to be reviewed/improved, especially around assessment).

This suggests that Mrs Mahopolang believed that the syllabus had to be revised and improved. From this extract, it is evident that the syllabus had limited guidance capability, and did not guide her adequately to assess the achievements of the learners. She also indicated what she taught the learners; for instance, to build words. She further commented:

There should be a difference between a preschool child and a reception class learner. They should not only be learning sounds. They should permit us to teach words. Do simple sentence construction. Sometimes I can say this curriculum is helpful because it is relevant to the age of the children it is meant for. In the end, they will grasp the knowledge as they continue schooling.

In this extract we are privy to the inner struggle of Mrs Mahopolang's about the new Grade R syllabus. She believes that teaching the Grade R learners only the letter-sound relationship is not challenging enough considering the learners' ZPD. The reading assignment that learners can perform with the assistance of a more proficient partner is at their ZPD (Kloos et al., 2019; Riley et al., 2009; Shabani et al., 2010). However, Mrs Mahopolang's agrees that the curriculum (The Grade R syllabus) was perhaps age- appropriate. Her sense-making of the syllabus is thus illustrative of the interpretative challenges in educational documents/policies.

4.4.1.3   Interpretation of policies

Table 4.1 shows excerpts from the IECCD policy that all the preschool teachers are expected to draw on while teaching the learners in the classrooms. Mrs Mahopolang mentioned this policy as one of her guiding documents for teaching.

Mrs Mahopolang mentioned that the IECCD policy is one of the teaching guidelines that she understands and implements in the classroom. However, she is often challenged in its implementation. This how she described her situation:

I just know that there is a policy, but I have never seen it. I used a hand-out that summarised policy at … LCE. I was lucky that I was a student at the college, *nka be ke sa tsebe letho ka policy* (I would not know anything about the policy).

It is evident that Mrs Mahopolang had the opportunity to learn about the policy at the Teacher Training College, as table 4.4 shows. She indicates that she only knew that which was taught at the College. It could be that she did not have an in-depth knowledge of the policy as she did not have a copy of the IECCD policy document herself. A tertiary education institution introduced her to the IECCD policy. When asked to explain what the policy says about teaching she said, "I am not sure but *ke hore ke rute bana ho bala le ho ngola* (I teach children to read and write)". This

statement suggests that she did not have adequate knowledge about the IECCD policy. However, she knew that she has to teach learners early literacy skills, learning to read and write, as a way of implementing the policy.

4.4.1.3.1 *Medium of instruction: respecting expectations from the real world*

About using both Sesotho and English in the classroom, Mrs Mahopolang said:

> The principal wants me to teach in English. *Sekhooa e se e le sona hohle mona. O bona batho bohle ba se nketse holimo* (English is key everywhere. As you may be aware, all the people seem to hold it in high regard). Even the syllabus does not say I should teach in Sesotho or in English, but I know I have to teach in the home language, *ke hore* (that is to say) in Sesotho. Look sir, letters of the alphabet is not Sesotho...

This extract indicates that Mrs Mahopolang understood that although the IECCD policy recognises Sesotho as the medium of instruction in Grade R classes, she had to respect and take into consideration the views of the community and the principal (Hallam et al., 2015). It suggests that she had to align herself with the goals or policies of the school as well. She had to make choices that would benefit her learners, the community and the school.

Moreover, it is evident from the above excerpt that Mrs Mahopolang did not come across any section in the syllabus that suggested a language that she had to use to teach the Grade R learners to read. She knows that the policy may require her to teach in the home language but she made her point strongly when she referred to the letters of the alphabet, suggesting that these are not taught in Sesotho. Table 4.2 shows that she had to teach the sounds of the letters of the alphabet; for her, that is suggestive of the English preference. She had reasons for teaching in both Sesotho and English. She said, many learners who come from the rural areas, *hae, hae* (deep rural) give us problems because they struggle to grasp what is taught in class" This reveals that Mrs Mahopolang understood that she had a challenge to accommodate all the learners in in English instruction. Therefore, she decided to code-switch between both languages to meet the learners' needs in the classroom.

4.4.1.4　Planning for the teaching of reading

Below is part of Mrs Mahopolang's scheme of work for the last quarter of the year (October to December)

Figure 4.5: Mrs Mahopolang's quarterly scheme of work

Figure 4.5, Mrs Mahopolang's quarterly scheme of work, indicated the week, date, themes, sub-themes, content, materials and evaluation. Furthermore, it showed that her scheme of work covered the Life Orientation (LO) learning area only; it further showed skills as content. This was the only scheme of work that she used.

4.4.1.4.1　Meaning of thematic lesson plan

Asked to explain why she did not have the Literacy scheme of work, yet the syllabus had three learning areas, Mrs Mahopolang said: "I use a thematic lesson plan. There is a time when we write Literacy themes – sometimes I look at the syllabus, check the literacy theme and write the lesson plan". About her reference to the pronoun "we" she explained that there was someone helping her or discussing the scheme of work with her. She said:

Preschool class teachers work as a team sir … Sorry, reception class teachers meet every quarter and plan together. We help each other with the themes and discuss how we should teach them. I benefit from teamwork because I ask them to explain aspects that I don't understand.

Mrs Mahopolang's narrative shows that she had some opportunities to share teaching ideas with other Grade R teachers from the neighbouring schools. It was also evident that her scheme of work did not have the literacy section. She chose which themes to teach from the three learning areas. It was also clear that sometimes she just checked the syllabus without writing the scheme of work to compile the literacy lesson plan. When asked what the term 'scheme of work' meant, Mrs Mahopolang replied, "Scheme of work is a plan that guides me *kotara kaofela* (throughout the quarter). It is a summary of the suggested content and activities that I will teach". It is evident that Mrs Mahopolang understood the purpose of writing the scheme of work even though the execution thereof appeared inadequate. The next section shows her daily class programme.

4.4.1.4.2 *Daily classroom programme: fictitious claims*

When I walked into Mrs Mahopolang's classroom, I saw a daily programme on the wall, and we began to talk about it.

Daily programme / timetable		
08:00 – 08:30 Receiving children	08:30 – 09:30 First ring 09:30 – 09:40 Toilet routine	09:40 – 10:20 Indoor activities 10:20 – 10:45 Free play
10:45 – 11:00 Preparing for lunch 11:00 – 12:00 Lunch		12:30 – 12:50 Third ring 12:50 – 1:00 Preparation to home
12:00 – 12:30 Second ring		1:00 Departure

Figure 4.6: A daily time-table of Mrs Mahopolang's class (Reconstructed daily programme)

Figure 4.6 shows class activities in Mrs Mahopolang's classroom. However, it does not map the slots for Life Orientation, Numeracy and Literacy to indicate that they were being taught. Her scheme of work clearly omitted other learning areas. In the interview she highlighted that:

> I teach them to read from morning until the end of the school day. In the second ring the learners go to different corners after I have taught them to read during the literacy time. One of the five corners is for reading. There is a book corner. One group goes to that corner and I help them to read while I go and see what the groups are doing. There is a time when groups rotate so that all the groups have the chance to read and go to the different corners.

The above tells that in Mrs Mahopolang's opinion, the learners should learn to read throughout the day. However, there were specific times when the learners learn to read, but this was not indicated in the daily programme.

She also stated that she provided guidance when the learners worked in groups and ensured that all the groups had the opportunity to learn to read at the book corner. Although this is what she claimed to practise in her class, there was no evidence of this happening during all the lessons I observed. Groups did not rotate so that each group could go to the book corner.

4.4.1.4.3 Lesson-plan management

The daily lesson plans were also analysed in order to find out how Mrs Mahopolang interpreted the guidelines for the teaching of reading. A daily lesson plan is a detailed guide that described fully how learning is expected to take place. Below is one example of her lesson plans.
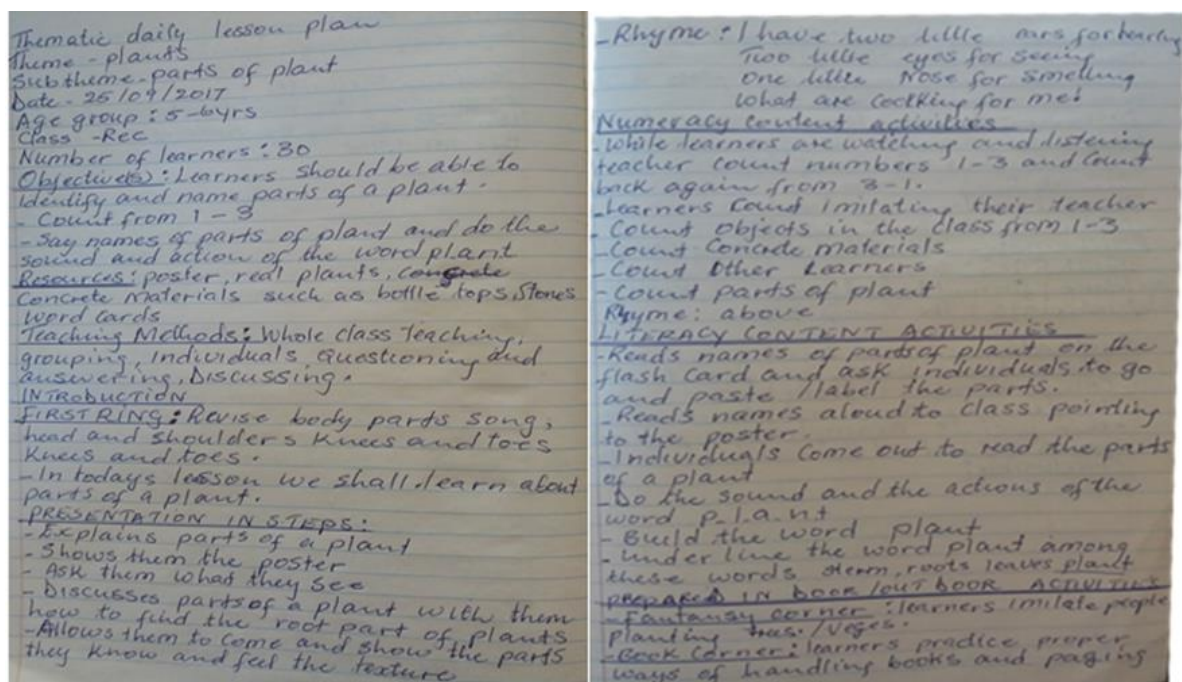
Figure 4.7: Mrs Mahopolang's lesson plan

Figure 4.7 shows that Mrs Mahopolang's lesson plan had three learning areas: Life Skills, Numeracy, and Literacy as these also appear in the syllabus. Each one of them represents a separate learning area. Each lesson plan shows Mrs Mahopolang's interpretation of the syllabus. All her three lesson plans prepared at the time of study, were detailed as the one shown in figure 4.9; and it had one more component, the teaching methods which were not reflected in the scheme of work. The lesson plans constituted the major part of her teaching and her teaching methods as shown in figure 4.7 which showed that lesson interaction is reflected to be both teacher-learner and learner-learner centred. The lesson plan in figure 4.7 shows that it aligns with the syllabus, which indicated that the Grade R learners learn as they play. Mrs Mahopolang's lesson objectives and activities showed that she wanted the learners to learn the words and letter-sounds by doing certain actions. The intention was that the learners would be engaged in effective interactive reading activities.

Although her lesson plan seemed to correspond well with the syllabus, there was no teaching method column. She explained the writing of the teaching methods in the lesson plan as follows:

> This is the lesson format *eo ke ithutileng eona* (that I learnt) at the college and
> it is good sir because I have to know which activity comes after another and

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how we are going to do each activity. I told you that our syllabus is lacking. You see! There are no teaching methods.

This excerpt indicates that Mrs Mahopolang's tertiary education benefited her somehow to prepare a resourceful lesson plan, and that her planning and lesson stages were logical. The lesson plan had all the learning areas. The next section presents what was observed in the classroom as she attempted to implement the guidelines.

4.4.2 Implementation of the Guidelines and Policies

As the implementation of the regulatory guidelines and policies is influenced by the challenges and opportunities for teaching, Mrs Mahopolang's lesson presentation substantiated what she said about the guidelines during the interviews. This part responds to all the research questions, but it mostly presents the data for the third research question.

4.4.2.1   Classroom practice

Below is what really happened in Mrs Mahopolang's Grade R classroom when she taught the learners how to read. There are challenges and opportunities in the incorporation of the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories in her lesson presentations.

(i)   Arousing interest in lesson introduction

Mrs Mahopolang began with introductions in order to lead the learners to the presentation phase of the reading lesson. Below is one of her lesson introductions.

Teacher: What did we learn about yesterday?
Learners: Yesterday we learned about … (silence)
Teacher: Yes. Yesterday we learned about plants. *A ke re* (Isn't that so?)
Learners: Yes, teacher
Teacher: Today we are going to learn about the parts of a plant…

In the lesson introduction, the teacher reminded the learners what they did on the previous day. Then she chose a few learners randomly and went outside the

classroom with them to collect some tree-branches. Clearly Mrs Mahopolang had not brought along any teaching materials in class before the lesson started and therefore wasted time collecting samples at the beginning of the lesson rather than spending it on effective class activities.

Although the lesson segment showed that Mrs Mahopolang tended to answer her own questions, the implementation of the lesson plan does establish that she helped the learners to connect and apply their previous learning experience to the concept being studied. However, it is evident from the lesson segment that Mrs Mahopolang dominated the classroom discussion and that the objective of the introduction of the lesson was not entirely successful because she asked the learners a question and then answered it herself. She commented after the lesson:

> Sometimes I collect materials and use them to introduce the lesson because the learners remember what we talked about the previous day and think about what they are going to learn about when they see them… sometimes materials are not available. We discuss what is written on the materials and the children understand quickly because they see and touch them …

This quote shows that she tried to use the teaching and learning materials to help the learners link their background knowledge with new knowledge, as described earlier. However, she had the challenge of not having adequate materials. Although she stated that she uses teaching and learning materials so that the learners could see and touch them, only a few learners in the class were instructed to touch the reading materials.

This is how the lesson proceeded:

Teacher: *Hela o 'mamele* (Listen to me). *Ke ngola lentsoe* (I write a word) stem. (Writing it on the chalkboard and sounding out each letter, **s-t-e-m**)
Learners: (Completing teacher's sentence) **stem**.
Teacher: *Ae. Lona lea thola. Ke 'na ea lengollang* (No. You have to keep quiet. I am the one writing for you).
 Learner: S-t
Teacher: No. Listen to me, **s-t-e-m**. *Joale le tlil'o nketsisa, le ntšala morao* (Now you are going to imitate me, follow me) … let us say the letter-sound and do the actions…

The lesson continued where Mrs Mahopolang guided the learners to enunciate the letter-sound of each letter forming the word **stem**. Then she chose the learners one at the time to articulate the letter-sounds. The first learner gave the letter name instead. Mrs Mahopolang turned to me and said:

> Oa e utloa confusion eo ke neng ke ntse ke u bolella ka eona (Do hear the confusion that I was telling you about)? Ha o ba ruta letters of the alphabet e bile o ntso ba ruta letter-sound, e baka (When you teach them letters of the alphabet while you are also teaching them letter-sounds, it causes confusion). It is the same as differentiating between other letters and their sounds like /**a**/ and /**e**/ in /**cat**/ and /**bed**/ …

She continued with the lesson and guided the chosen learner to articulate the correct letter-sound, and then perform the actions. Then she gave the chosen learner a pointer to search for letters in the classroom and point at it. She took a flash card and guided learners to blend letter-sounds and read the word **stem**.

In the lesson segment, Mrs Mahopolang modelled the activity by demonstrating how to pronounce letter-sounds and then let the learners imitate her until they were able to master and internalise the correct letter-sound. She seemed to work as MKO and an adult who took the responsibility to assist the learners to learn the reading skill; she seemed to believe that learning took place when she interacted with the learners. However, she tended to dominate the classroom discussion which turned her teaching into a "teacher-talk-presentation" or traditional teaching as it is commonly described (Ling, 2012).

(ii)   Diversity in letters and sounds of languages during teacher's interaction with learners

During the interview, Mrs Mahopolang responded to the question about the challenges that she encountered while teaching the learners to read. She said:

> I noticed that some learners did not understand the difference between the letter-sounds and the letters, especially when, when it comes to pronunciation. They, they are confused by some English words. The letters, they do not understand some of the letter sounds.

The previous two extracts show that Mrs Mahopolang's challenge was to guide the learners adequately to identify the difference between the letter-name and the letter-sound. This suggests that she had to find ways of presenting the concepts effectively to achieve the lesson objective. It is also clear that she had to teach learners in their mother tongue as per the IECCD policy in order to avoid the confusion caused by English words.

(iii)   Deliberate lesson planning

The second lesson needed more explanations from her, as the lesson plan and the lesson presentation below were not clear and needed a further interview.
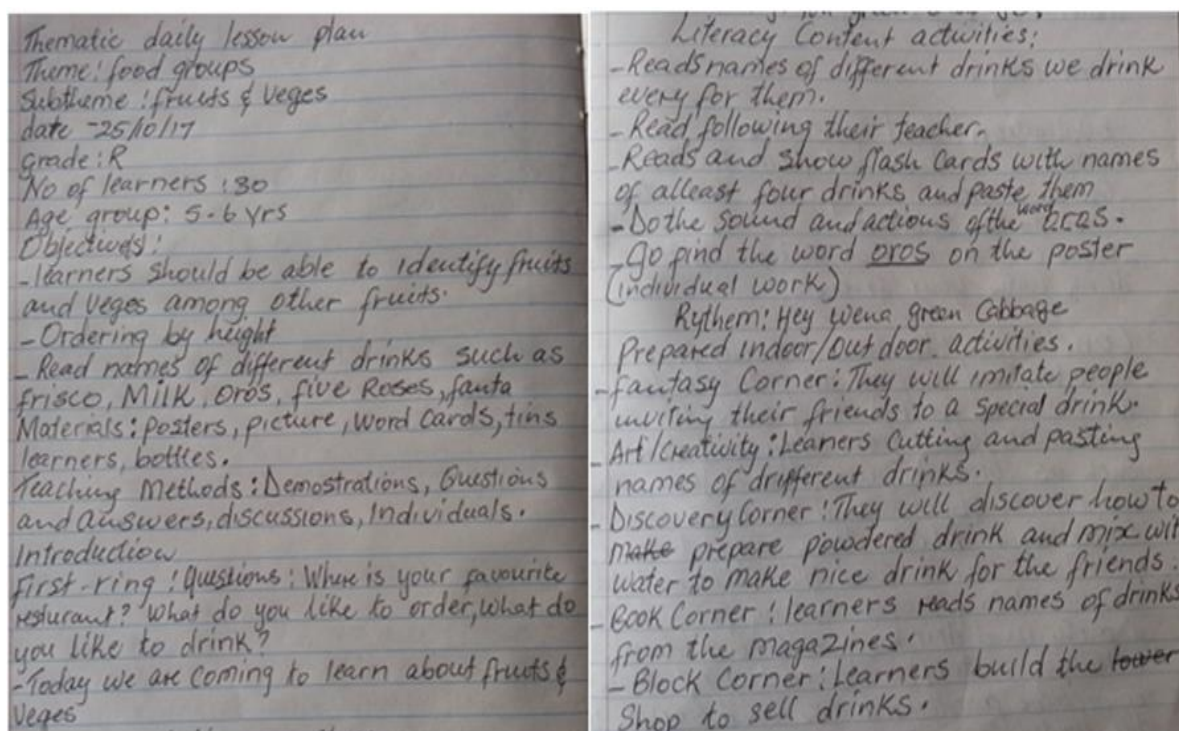
Figure 4.8: Mrs Mahopolang's second lesson plan

Figure 4.8 shows Mrs Mahopolang's plan for teaching the learners to read the names of different drinks as indicated in the objective, but the sub-theme and lesson introduction indicated something different. It did not show the specific aspect that the learners had to learn. This means that it outlined the plan for different lessons. However, the objective and the lesson activities were parallel and they were presented as planned, as the lesson segment indicates. When asked to explain what exactly she had intended to teach because the sub-theme and objective were different, she

replied, "They are not different, sir, because drinks are made from fruits and vegetables. *Ke polenne ka morero ke utloisisa hantle.* (I planned purposefully and with understanding)". This showed that Mrs Mahopolang deliberately planned her lesson the way she did. She knew her lesson plan and understood how she intended to execute the lesson, even though to the observer, it appeared to be disjointed.

Lesson segment

Teacher: *Ha u qeta ho ja ntlong ea li jo u otara drink efe* (After eating at the fast foods eating place/restaurant which drink do you order)?
The lesson continued with the learners mentioning the drinks that they like.

Main presentation

Teacher: *E mong o itse* (One said) I would like to drink **oros**. I am going to write the word oros (writing the name of drink on the chalkboard), sound it out. *Oa e bona* (Can you see?) This is the word **oros**. Write the word **oros** on the floor. *Ngola ka monoana* (write with your finger)
Learners: (Writing)
Teacher: Stop. Look at me when I write it. *Ha re bueng* (Let us say) letter-sounds.
Learners: O-r-o-s (Sound out the letters). Sing a song with the word **oros**.
Teacher: *Ha le sheba moo tafoleng ea ka le bonang* (When looking at my table what do you see)?
Learners: (Each learner shouting what he/she sees) '*Na ke bona* (I see) …
Teacher: (Holding up containers that people can drink from one-by-one) *Hoo ke eng* (What is this)?
Learners: (Naming containers) Coke, Co-ee, tee (tea), drink, *lebese* (milk) …
Teacher: Milk. I write the word milk. *Ha re le peleteng* (Let us spell it) **m-i-l-k**.

4.4.2.1.1 Reading instructional method in a lesson

Then Mrs Mahopolang continued with the lesson. She wrote the names of the cool drinks on the chalkboard. Then she took flash cards of selected items and guided the learners to read the names of drinks and those that were written on the chalkboard. After that she asked the learners to volunteer to find and read out the names on the poster.

This lesson segment showed that Mrs Mahopolang began the lesson with the whole class discussion where she involved the learners in interactive reading through asking questions. It shows that she taught the learners reading and writing simultaneously. It also shows that there was a balance of whole-word and phonics reading instruction as Marima et al. (2016) observes in Kenya that Whole-Word methodology also uses different methods such as Sight-Word and Look-and-Say methods. She used materials that learners already know about in order to teach them how to read because they were collected from within the context of the learners. By using materials that were from the environment of the learners Mrs Mahopolang demonstrated to understand the importance of emergent literacy and that learners acquire emergent literacy knowledge and skills from their environment even before they go to formal school (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mason & Sinha, 1992; Rhyner et al., 2009). The challenge was giving the learners instructions. She told the learners that they were going to spell the word "milk" but they did letter-sound relationships. I asked her to explain the reasons for that during interview. She said:

> Sometimes you are not aware you have said that. *Lintho tsena* (These things) are confusing). *O ka nahana hore na ho joang ho bana empa he hangata ba khona ho li hlalohanya* (You can imagine how it is to the children but more often they are able to identify them)

This extract says that Mrs Mahopolang admitted that sometimes she had challenges sticking to her instructions. It also indicates that sometimes her learners could not differentiate between the letter names and the letter-sounds. Mrs Mahopolang seemed to ignore incorrect answers and reading habits. In the interview she explained, "Sometimes I am not aware but I don't want to embarrass children. They will be shy and next time they will not try. I hate embarrassing children". This statement indicates that Mrs Mahopolang had a challenge giving the learners prompt and constructive feedback about the letter-sounds and the words that the learners read.

4.4.2.1.2 Presentation of reading lesson three

The lesson began with the introduction as the previous one did, as presented in the lesson plan and the lesson segment below.
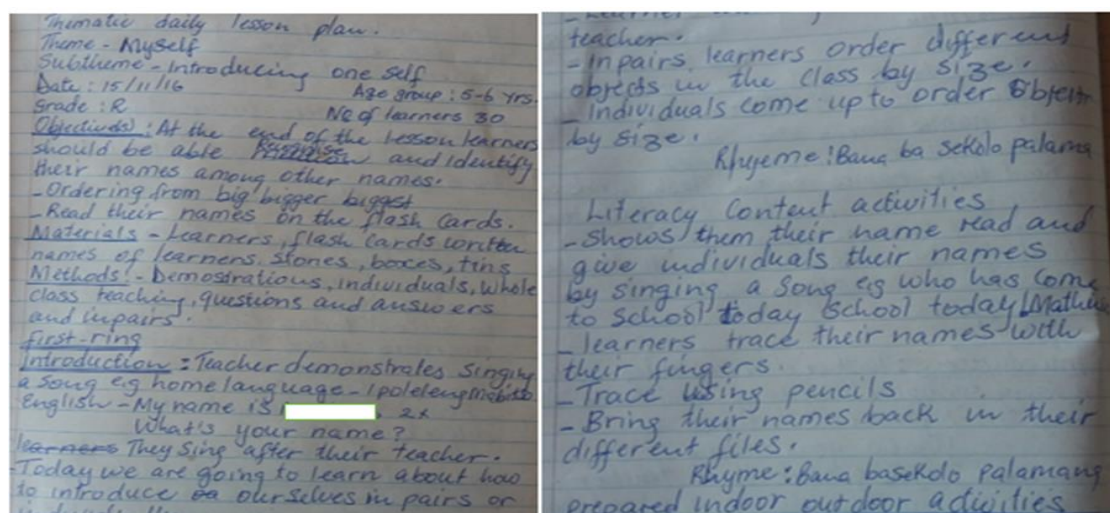
Figure 4.9: Mrs Mahopolang's third lesson plan for the third observed lesson

Figure 4.9 shows the links throughout Mrs Mahopolang's lesson plan which involves the theme, the sub-theme, the third objective, the introduction and the Literacy part. Her objective was in accordance with the syllabus presented in table 4.2 even though the syllabus emphasises the learning of the initial letter of the learners' names. Figure 4.9 further validates (in the lesson introduction) that Mrs Mahopolang taught the Grade R learners in English and in Sesotho, as she explained earlier that she taught in both languages. However, almost all the sample words in the extracts were English words.

Lesson segment from introduction to whole lesson presentation

Teacher: (Stood up) *Ke tlil'o le binela pina e monate* (I am going to sing you a nice song). Song; *Ipoleleng mabitso. Uena o mang?* (Say your names. Who are you?)
Learners: (Joining in singing) *Ipoleleng Mabitso.*
Teacher: *Oh! Lea e tseba? Binang le 'na* (Oh! Do you know it? Sing with me). *Le ntse le lutse. Ke tla le joetsa ha ke re le eme* (Sit down, I will tell you when to stand up).
Learners: (Singing)

The lesson continued with the teacher introducing herself and then asking two learners at the time to volunteer to go to the front of the class to role-play the activity. Then they sang the song in English. Mrs Mahopolang explained that they were going to learn to read their names and that they should be able to identify them everywhere they see them. Then she took the flash cards with the names and guided the learners to learn to read the names.

Teacher: *Ke tlil'o nka* (I am going to take) flash cards, show you the names and we will read them. *E mong le e mong o tlil'o nka flash card a ithute ho bala la hae* (everyone is to take a flash card and read his/her name). Do you understand?
Learners: Yes, madam.

Although Mrs Mahopolang decided on and led all the activities, figure 4.9 and the lesson segments show that she had intended to engage all the learners in activities through songs and the use of flash cards. She had planned to model the activities and guide the learners to do them, as her teaching methods indicated. She engaged the learners in active learning through role-play which is the strategy of the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories (Blake & Pope, 2008) and the Grade R syllabus, Table 4.1, indicates that learners also learn through play (MOET, 2011).

4.4.2.1.3 Basic reading skills

In all the observed lessons, Mrs Mahopolang taught the learners words, letters of the alphabet, and letter-sound relationships (in this order). This was evident when she said:

> When we come to letters and letter sounds, sometimes I give them the word **roots**, **stem** *re le bale ke le ngotse letlapeng e be flash card e be ke batataisa ho ithuta melumo* (We read from the chalkboard where I have written it and on the flash card and then guide them to learn its letter-sounds). We reach a word maybe for a week *ho fihlela li sound tsa lentsoe li felletse* (until all the letter-sounds of a word are completed/taught) … like last week we were doing **leaf.**

It is evident from this statement that Mrs Mahopolang taught the learners to read words and letter-sounds, and helped them to blend these sounds to form words. It also indicates that she guided the learners until they could understand the words and letter-sounds. Asked why she often used the chalkboard she explained: "Sir we have no materials. I get only two charts *ka selemo* (per year) from the principal. I teach other skills at the class corners". This statement says that Mrs Mahopolang had a challenge with teaching materials to facilitate the learner-centred approach in the teaching of reading. I also asked her to explain what the syllabus suggests in terms of basic reading skills that she should teach the learners. She said, *"Ke tseo ke seng ke u bolelletse tsona feela joale ha re na libuka. Ke re ba kope magazines hae* (It is what I

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have already told you, but I don't have books. I tell learners to bring magazines from home). A few parents help me". This statement indicates that she did not teach all the reading basics that were suggested in the syllabus such as holding and paging books that are shown in table 4.2 but she gave the learners texts to read at the learning corners. She said:

> Pre-reading skills can be….. (long pause)…, I use pictures, when they turn the pages. prereading happens at the reading corner. They take magazines, turn the pages. They will be talking about the pictures that they see. I supply them with reading materials such as magazines, books and pictures. But when they are introduced to the sight words, the new words that I am teaching, they are reading because I start with the words that they already know.

From the above excerpt it is evident that Mrs Mahopolang was aware of the basic reading skills that she had to teach but she seems to be restricted by the lack of teaching materials such as books and magazines. This is why she teaches the print awareness (which involves the use of books) only at the learning corners.

Mrs Mahopolang also taught the whole name (or word) and then emphasised the initial letter. Then she incorporated reading into writing, but she emphasised reading as the learners had to read and trace their names. She said, "When you are writing you are also reading. *O nno bale ha o nts'o ngola lebitso la hao* (Read as you are writing your name)". She identified the opportunities in the lesson as follows:

> *Ke bone ba utloisisa ba bala mabitso a bona hobane re qalile ka pina me* (I saw that they know how to read their names because we began with a song therefore) they already know their names. *Ho neng ho saletse ke hore ba tsebe ho a bala. Leha ba ka a bala hangata ba ithuta melumo le ho a bala* (What was left was to read them. Even if they can read more often, they learn sounds to read better). Mine is to change activities *ba seke ba boreha* (so that they do not get bored)

This tells that Mrs Mahopolang took into consideration the background knowledge of the learners and used as an opportunity to teach the learners how to read what was new to them, as the Cognitive Theory advocates (Blake & Pope, 2008; Zhao & Zhu, 2012). She continued:

Parents should help the learners to learn to read. When I have given learners pencils and materials once in the first semester, we get the again in the second session. When they are lost because parents do not buy their children materials, it becomes a problem in the classroom like you saw some did not have pencils. Some of them are taken away by parents or given to their siblings.

The above excerpt suggests that Mrs Mahopolang had a challenge related to learning materials. She gives the learners materials to use in the classroom but some of the learners go to class without such materials. However, the learners who do not have pencils trace their names with their fingers. The first activity was to trace with the finger and then with a pencil; but those who did not have pencils continued tracing with their fingers.

4.4.2.1.4 Time-lesson relationship

All the reading lessons that I observed in Mrs Mahopolang class took close to an hour. I asked her to explain how much time she had to spend on Literacy as I could not understand her daily programme which is presented in figure 4.6. She said:

> *E kanna ea ba ke etsa* (Maybe I plan) too many activities because I want you to see how I teach but *leha u le sieo* (even when you are not here) it is challenging to help thirty learners to read. *Oa utloa ke tla ba bora ha ke etsa activity tse nyane* (do you understand that I will bore them if I can plan to do only a few activities?) Thirty minutes is not enough for these learners. *Ha ba na ho utloisisa* (They will not understand)

This extract indicates that Mrs Mahopolang had a challenge planning adequate learners' activities for a reading period. She also had a challenge to meet the learning needs of all the thirty learners in her class. This might mean that the class was too big for her. I asked her if the class size was too big to teach the learners to read within the time schedule. She replied:

> You see sir, it is not bad but to help all the learners is a challenge. There are, *ke ho na le li slow learners ba sokolang ho hlalohanya melumo me le bona ke ntse ke lokela hoba thusa ka hara* 30 minutes (There are slow learners who are struggling to identify the letter-sounds and I have to help them too within the thirty minutes). Many times I do, but it is challenge.

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Although Mrs Mahopolang did not say it directly, this extract suggests that teaching thirty learners to read within thirty minutes is a challenge for her. There are too many learners for one teacher.

4.4.2.2   Classroom participation

Mrs Mahopolang believed that she was able to do her work well when she said:

> I am effective. I am really active... my learners know how to read. They build the words. They know the letter sounds that we drill, and they spell the words correctly.

During interview Mrs Mahopolang explained that her role as a teacher was to help learners to read. This was her story:

> *Ke arrangile* (I have arranged) class in the way I am able to see all the learners. My work is to make sure that all the learners learn to read ho *seng joalo batsoali ba ka se khotsofale* (otherwise parents won't be satisfied). I am a teacher. I have to walk around when I have said underline word **stem** and say sound, ke *ba thuse leha e ka ja nako joang kappa joang* (help them even if it can be time-consuming). *Ke* (I am a) helper, facilitator sir … I start guiding them how to read words and sounds and they imitate me.

This narrative says that Mrs Mahopolang worked as a facilitator who helped all the learners to read in the classroom. It also says that she took into consideration the learning needs of all the learners and ensured that she helped all of them. She demonstrated reading behaviours for the learners to read appropriately. Her lesson plan, teaching methods, and classroom activities (in figures 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9) and the lesson segments, correspond with this story. However, she seemed not to be able to go to every individual learners to see what they were doing. Furthermore, not all the learners were given the opportunity to read the words, to articulate the letter-sounds, and to respond to the questions, except when they responded in a chorus. I understood that it could be time-consuming. It would not be possible to give all the learners the opportunity to read words because there were too many for a 30-minute activity. The next session shows how activities were done in class.

Picture 4.3: Mrs Mahopolang's classroom arrangement and interaction (Seating arrangement, chalkboard reading and crowded at the poster)

Picture 4.3 shows the seating arrangement in Mrs Mahopolang's classroom and the type of floor that they were instructed to write on during the lessons. The researcher's observation was that the learners were just following instruction but could not identify the letters. This shows that Mrs Mahopolang had been largely using the chalkboard and flash cards to write words that the learners read. When asked whether she was aware that some of the learners were not close to the chalkboard and could not see what others were reading, she said, "That is why we start at the chalkboard where everybody can see". Picture 4.3 and this response indicate that her teaching was dominated by the traditional method of teaching, as she was seen teaching from the front of the class and standing at the chalkboard (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Various lesson segments show that most of the work was done by Mrs Mahopolang, and she herself demonstrated the use of concrete materials more the learners did.

4.4.2.2.1 Learner-centred pedagogy: Using learning centres to teach learners to read

Mrs Mahopolang understood that the learners could be able to help each other when they work in groups (Mason & Sinha, 1992). However, she did not engage them in group-work or shared reading activities even though she claimed to be a believer in this approach. She stated:

> The learners read in groups at the reading corner. I arrange reading corners and make sure that it includes what I teach for the day. While they read, I go around in order to see whether they are talking about words that they have learned.

It is obvious that Mrs Mahopolang believed that she may only use group-work activities only when the learners are sent to the learning centres/corners. However, only one group of five learners was seen engaged in reading activities. This also suggests that

Mrs Mahopolang understood that learning corners could be used to reinforce what the learners had already learned. The learning corners give her opportunities to work with small groups of learners to guide the reading activity.

Although there were only a few reading materials in Mrs Mahopolang's classroom, she pointed out that she arranges literacy centres in such a way that the learners are motivated to read. In one of the lessons, labelled containers were used to teach basic reading skills. She said:

> Grouping, grouping sometimes; grouping because the children go to the book corner in groups. There must be a group of five learners. They sit there looking for what they have learned in relation to our topic and then they discuss in groups ... In the books, I ensure that those words are available. They tell each other what they see and that is how they learn to read: 'Look, here it is. Here is the word that the teacher taught us. Here is the **stem**, **plant**.' It is when they learn to read.

It is evident from the extract that Mrs Mahopolang understood that when the learning centres are well-arranged and have adequate and relevant learning materials, they would promote the acquisition of reading skills through social interaction. Although she explained well how she used group or shared reading and how she used to involve learners in them, it was not clear that she valued group and/ or shared reading activities which according to Doyle and Bramwell (2006); Mason and Sinha (1992) and Rhyner et al. (2009) promote emergent literacy. In one such reading corner, the learners searched for the pictures of plants from the books of different grades, but they did not look for the words, as Mrs Mahopolang had indicated. The sentence: "Look here it is, here is the word that the teacher taught us" (learners' words); and the phrase ... children go to the book corner in groups" suggests that Mrs Mahopolang valued activities that are related to early literacy development and that the learners acquire reading skills through peer support with more capable learners helping each other.

4.4.2.3   Stakeholders' support

Mrs Mahopolang raised concerns about the scarcity of teaching and learning materials that affected the implementation of the guidelines. She stated the challenges and opportunities that various stakeholders present:

4.4.2.3.1 Support within the school

Mrs Mahopolang had support from the principal and she indicated that she benefits from the principal's supervision and guidance. She commented:

> Lesson planning kills me but I do it every day because the principal checks the plans every week. It is also an advantage to me because I learn to improve my work. If the principal does not understand, we sit down and I explain *e be oa nthusa* (and then he helps me). Even other teachers help me. They give me some pieces of charts that they do not use.

The extract shows that Mrs Mahopolang valued the principal's contribution to her work. Although the analysis of the lesson preparation book showed that she prepares her lessons almost every day, this extract suggests that she does not enjoy writing the lesson plans. This extract gives the impression that she does not write the lesson plans to the best of her ability to achieve quality reading instruction. She stated that she gets help from the principal and other teachers who even supply her class with teaching and learning materials. Clearly, she does appear to be challenged, especially with her lesson plans as per the new guidelines.

Parental involvement and their support

Despite the fact that Mrs Mahopolang mentioned minimal involvement or contribution of the learners' parents to supply her class with some learning materials, she also talked about their contribution to support their learners in their effort to learn to read. She said:

> Some of the learners say that they read with their parents or brothers and sisters at home, and I see that it is true because they understand faster than others. *Empa* (but) sometimes they teach them wrong sounds *because ba e bitsa Sesotho feela tjena (*they just pronounce them in Sesotho) … *ba bang ha ba kena likolo tsa likonyana* (some of the children did not go to ECCD centres) because parents pay there *so ba mpha bothata* (they give me problems).

The responses from Mrs Mahopolang suggest that one of the factors that affect her reading instruction is the differences in the learners' ability to read. This is influenced by the parents' limited participation in the education of their learners. Mrs Mahopolang

stated that some of the learners who receive parental help demonstrate the ability to read and understand faster than those whose families do not take part in their reading and other school activities. Data from Mrs Mahopolang case show that the home language letter-sound relationship affects her reading instruction because learners transfer the letter-sounds that they learned at home to the English letter-sounds. This extract shows that Mrs Mahopolang did not understand that parents can guide their learners in their home language, especially when the IECCD policy recognises it as a medium of instruction in preschools. Furthermore, parents or guardians could possibly guide the learners differently from Mrs Mahopolang because their letter-sound articulations differed from hers. Some authors such as Fox (1996) and Prior (2013) (see section 2.2), assert that it is first important for learners to understand their home language, because they will be better able to transfer that knowledge to the acquisition of the additional language.

4.4.2.3.2 MOET's support

An analysis of the Lesotho's *Constitution* and Education Act 2010 revealed that education is free and compulsory in primary schools. I asked Mrs Mahopolang to explain how the Government supports her class for the teaching of reading when she stated that she was supplied with some chart paper by other teachers. She explained:

> The Government! Nothing sir. It doesn't help. Yes, the parents don't pay school fees… the NTT holds workshops for us, *e seng ha ngata* (not often). We design materials and nothing else … we do not learn about teaching … I am paid well by the Government and I get my salary from the bank.

This extract indicates that Mrs Mahopolang feels that she does not get adequate support from the Government. Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018) argues that in South Africa, as in Lesotho, teachers also do not receive adequate support from the different levels of Management. However, in Lesotho the NTT, as a Government representative, gives teachers (Mrs Mahopolang) support through materials-development workshops. It is evident that she expects to attend seminars about syllabus implementation as well but has not had such an opportunity.

4.4.3 Summary of Mrs Mahopolang's story

Mrs Mahopolang's story revealed a number of challenges and opportunities facing the teaching of reading in her Grade R classroom. Looking at the opportunities to make sense of the regulatory guidelines, Mrs Mahopolang had the syllabus which guided her with content to teach learners to read. Such content included sub-themes, materials and activities. Although she had a Grade R syllabus to use for teaching, she stated that it was an opportunity to also have the ECD curriculum for additional information. Her teacher-training experience further afforded her the opportunity to learn to make sense of the IECCD policy.

Her opportunities relating to planning for teaching were that she had colleagues from the neighbouring schools to collaborate with, share teaching ideas, and write the schemes of work together. Therefore, she had ample opportunities to learn about the regulatory guidelines and how to implement them from more capable colleagues. She had time at her school to make daily lesson plans for the teaching of reading before leaving school at the end of the school day.

Mrs Mahopolang's opportunities that related to the implementation of regulatory guidelines and policy were that she was able to collect teaching and learning materials from the environment, and use flash cards to teach the learners to read. In one of the lessons she used cool-drink containers, and taught the learners to read their names and letter-sounds, by forming the name of a drink.

There were a number of challenges that Mrs Mahopolang encountered concerning the teaching of reading. Although she was able to mention the contents of the syllabus, she still had a concern that some information was missing from it. As a result, the syllabus did not seem to provide adequate guidance to her, especially on assessing the learners' understanding. She also seems to have limited knowledge of the IECCD Policy, and she does not even have the policy document.

Although Mrs Mahopolang was aware of the relevance of teaching in Sesotho as a medium of instruction, she used both official languages for teaching, Sesotho and English. She had to implement the guidelines and the policy as they were intended to be used, while also considering the interests of the society, the school policy, and

recommendation of the principal. She appeared to understand the real motivation and benefit of teaching the learners to read in both Sesotho and English which was to keep the standard of education at the benchmark-level of neighbouring schools. She did not come across any section in the syllabus that suggested or restricted her choice of the medium of instruction.

Mrs Mahopolang was also challenged in planning for the teaching of reading. Her scheme of work did not correspond to the lesson plan. It was surprising that her scheme of work did not have all the learning areas while the lesson plan had separate lesson objectives and activities for the three different learning areas: Life Skills, Numeracy and Literacy. Sometimes she taught aspects that were not in the scheme of work but that were taken directly from the syllabus. Although she seemed to prepare her lesson plans daily, she had limited time to complete it while at school because she stayed far and travelled daily by taxi.

I observed that sometimes Mrs Mahopolang had the habit of asking questions and then answering them herself in the classroom. The introduction segments showed that she was challenged in probing to get answers while teaching the learners to read. On occasions, she ignored incorrect answers or reading of the letter-sounds. It was clear from the extracts that she had a challenge in meeting the learning needs of all the learners, especially learners whose parents were not supportive and did not read with the learners. Sometimes she could not guide the learners enough for them to understand and follow the reading instructions. For example, she mentioned that the learners got confused when she asked them to articulate the letter-sound - they would give the letter name instead. However, I saw that she relied on model-reading and asked the learners to imitate her. She also dominated the classroom discussion because she was often prompting the learners what to say.

She used the whole-class teaching method and did not use group activities effectively as she could not assist the learners at the learning centres/corner due to time-constraints and the lack of teaching-learning materials. Lastly, she could not arrange the classroom in such a way that all the learners could see the activity being performed by other learners, or the teacher.

4.5 THE STORY OF MRS MATEBELLO

As shown in table 4.1, Mrs Matebello is 29 years old. Her school is given the pseudonym School C in the table. She holds a CECE from the LCE. She had recently graduated at the time of study. Her teaching experience shows that she has six years of teaching experience in pre-school and is still a novice in the teaching of a Grade R class, with a teaching experience of two years. She had four years of teaching in an ECCD centre prior to joining the Kutung Primary School (pseudonym). She travels to school every morning via reliable public transport.

Her class had more than thirty learners during my observation. This number was higher than that of the other two teachers in this study. Asked how it is that she had a high number of learners and how it shaped her teaching of reading she said, "Class *ena e ne e ntse e le ECCD e ka har'a primary. E thehiloe ke principal ea nako e fetileng* (This class had been ECCD centre within the primary school. It was established by the former principal). It takes different ages and any number". It is evident from this answer that Mrs Matebello's class had just been recently recognised by the MOET and that the old practice of accommodating more than thirty learners in a class was still in place. After the introductory session, I interviewed Mrs Matebello to find out how she interpreted the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading.

4.5.1 Sense-making of the guidelines and policies

Mrs Matebello talked about the syllabus, the IECCD policy, the scheme of work and lesson plan as key documents that influence her teaching in the Grade R class.

Table 4.1 shows the Grade R syllabus that Mrs Matebello relied on, to plan and teach the learners how to read. I asked her to explain how it helps her to teach and what the advantages and/ or the challenges were in using the syllabus document. This was her response:

> The syllabus is my guide. I use it when I draw up the scheme of work for the quarter… There are topics and activities in the syllabus. The syllabus also tells us which teaching materials I can use. The sub-themes and activities are clear … The teaching and learning materials are suggested but we don't have them.

Mrs Matebello seems to have clear knowledge of the Grade R syllabus and is aware of the content that she has to teach. She uses the syllabus for planning and that she plans for her teaching in advance. She knows the suggested themes, sub-themes, activities and teaching/learning materials. She mentioned that the sub-themes and classroom activities are clear to her. This begins to suggest that she understands the syllabus fairly well.

It was also evident from her story that she does not have all the teaching and learning materials that are suggested in the syllabus. Looking at her classroom physical environment, one could see some teacher-made and improvised charts displayed on the wall as picture 4.4 shows. What she does is supported by literature as Al-Barakat and Bataineh (2011) acknowledge that teachers should design reading materials that supplement learners' literature when there is a need to do so, and design reading materials that meet learners' particular needs and interests. Therefore, Mrs Matebello had to design reading materials in order to teach learners to read.

Picture 4.4: Teacher-made charts displayed in Mrs Matebello's classroom

Although Mrs Matebello designs her own teaching and learning materials, they are mostly letters of the alphabet and words without pictures that may help learners to make connection and read (Burnett, 2007). There is lack of consistency when she writes letters of the alphabet on the charts and flash cards. Sometimes she starts with the capital letter but starts with small case on the flash cards. Furthermore, she also does not "have any newspapers, magazines and books" in the class. Concerning the challenges and/or opportunities of the IECCD policy for teaching purposes, she explained:

> The Area Resource Teachers (ARTs) tell us what the policy needs from us, especially when we open a new preschool. There was also a course that taught us about the IECCD policy at the college.

This extract suggests that Mrs Matebello had some opportunities to consult the ARTs about the policy and the guidance needed for its implementation. She appears to have also gained knowledge about policy from the Teacher Training College when she was a student. The professional development that she got from the ARTs and tuition from the college places her in a better position to implement the policy in the classroom. Mrs Matebello's instruction was mainly in Sesotho but the list of words used and read was a mixture of English and Sesotho. Most of the books that she gave the learners to 'read' in one lesson were written in English. Her opinion about the IECCD policy was as follows:

> Sir, *boholo ba lintho* (most of the things/materials) are written in English … I teach in Sesotho and sometimes in English because *likolo tse haufi* (the nearby schools) teach children to read English … *ha ke batle ho sala ke le mong batsoali batla ntsa bana* (I don't want to be left alone as parents will take their children out of this school) … *Re rutuoe hore* (We have been taught that) the policy says we should teach in Sesotho.

It is evident that Mrs Matebello was exposed to the policy and she understood that she should teach the learners to read Sesotho but her biggest challenge was that she does not have adequate teaching and learning materials to adhere to the policy. Most of the materials that she had access to are written in English. In one lesson, she engaged learners in the reading of English books. Fox (1996) encourages teachers to use culturally available materials to teach the learners how to read. Her story captures the constant struggle to grasp the new policy. She tried her best to teach in her home language even though her classroom instruction was also influenced by the community and by what went on in the nearby schools.

4.5.1.1 Planning for the teaching of reading

Mrs Matebello's preparation and planning was done for a quarter as evident in the scheme of work and daily lesson plans.

4.5.1.1.1 Quarterly planning

Mrs Matebello compiled the scheme of work. In explaining her approach to planning and preparing the quarterly scheme of work, she said:

> We use the syllabus when we write the scheme of work. Sometime I have to check the old curriculum, *ena e lekoko le lesehla* (the one with yellow cover). Sometimes I have to read the Grade 1 syllabus so that I do not teach what is taught in that class and to prepare the learners for that class.

This extract indicates that although Mrs Matebello used the Grade R syllabus extensively, she also read other syllabi in order to plan and teach what was relevant to the ZPD of the learners. She was particular about meeting the learners' needs in her class. Figure 4.10 shows her Literacy class scheme of work.

Date	Theme	Sub-theme	Objectives	Content	Material	Assessment	Remarks
09-10-2017	Listening and speaking	Letters of the alphabet	Learners should be able to sing letters of the alphabet	Listening Speaking Singing	Alphabet chart Flash card	Check the ability whether are able to sing letters of the alphabet	Lesson was not successful because of the weather conditions
16-10-2017	Reading and revising	Recognizing pictures	Learners should be able to identify the different pictures and tell what the picture represent.	Speaking Recognizing	Pictures Pencil Crayons	Check the ability whether are able to identify the different pictures	
23-10-2017	Reading and revising	Holding a book and paging from right to left	Learners should be able to hold the book and Page them from right to left	Differentiating	Book and magazine	Check the ability whether are able to hold the book and Page them from right to left	
30-10-2017	Listening and speaking	Letters of the alphabet	Learners should be able to recognize letters starting with their names	Speaking Recognizing	Alphabet chart Flash cards	Check the ability whether are able to recognize letters starting with their names	
06-11-2017	Listening and speaking	Seasons of the year	Learners should be able to identify four seasons of the year	Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring	Weather charts, pictures of sun and moon	Check the ability whether are able to identify four seasons of the year	
13-11-2017	Listening and speaking	Letter sounds	Learners should be able to identify letter sound	Listening, speaking and showing	Flash card	Check the ability whether are able to identify letter sound	

Figure 4.10: Mrs Matebello's scheme of work

Figure 4.10 shows that Mrs Matebello wrote Literacy class scheme of work separately from other learning areas as presented in the syllabus. Her scheme of work shows the date, the theme, the sub-theme, the objectives, the teaching/learning materials, assessment and the remarks. It also shows that she had intended to develop the three language skills; namely, listening, speaking and reading. She used actual books and magazines as her teaching and learning materials. Asked why the books were miscellaneous. She said:

> There are books here and teachers help me with what I want. The principal *oa nako e fetileng o na batlela class ena material* (The former principal sought funds to supply this class with materials). I make other materials.

It was evident from this extract that books were of diverse genres because they were largely donated. Mrs Matebello's colleagues and the principal supplied her class with books and therefore she was able to plan to use them to implement the Grade R syllabus as intended. In the context of this study, the extracts, such as "I make other materials", suggest that sometimes she goes the extra mile and spends her own money to make teaching and learning materials for her reading classes, especially when there are no funds in the school. Data reveals that the lack of appropriate materials affects the classroom practice, especially for teaching the Grade R learners to read (Ali et al., 2011; Dzimiri & Marimo, 2015). Teachers who are not able to improvise by making materials, often have to buy them.

4.5.1.1.2 Daily classroom programme

The classroom observation of Mrs Matebello revealed that she did not display the daily programme anywhere in the classroom. During the interview, she pointed out that her single lesson period is thirty minutes long, but her reading lessons took beyond the time allocated to teach the literacy skills. I asked her whether a daily programme was available. She said, "I don't have the daily programme on the wall but this doesn't give me any problem because I know what I should do. I used to have it on the wall". The analysis of Mrs Matebello's preparation book showed that her daily programme was indeed planned. This is probably why she knew what she had to do within the time allocation. A daily programme helps teachers to be consistent in class routines and also guides the learners according to the schedule (Hill, 2008)**.**

Mrs Matebello's preparation book showed that she wrote out her daily lesson plans. The samples of her lesson plans are presented below.
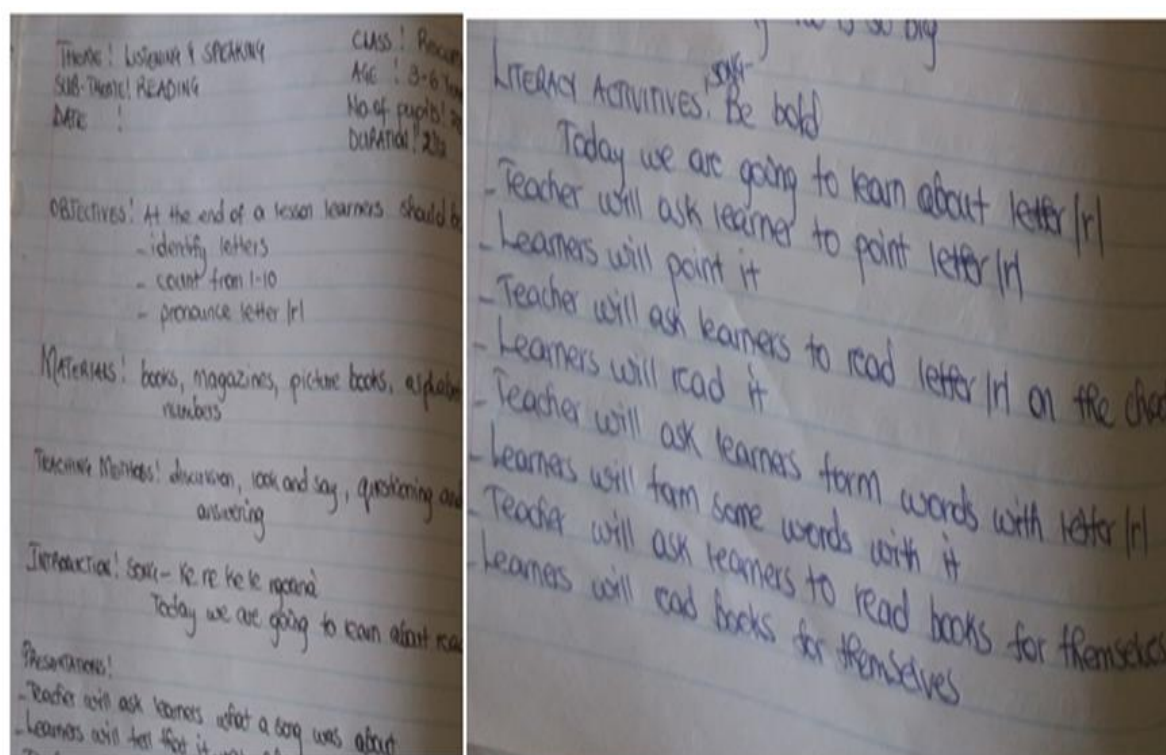
Figure 4.11: Mrs Matebello's lesson plan

Figure 4.11 shows the plan for Mrs Matebello's literacy section – one out of the three sections of the lesson. The other two sections included Life Skills and Numeracy. The lesson theme was listening and speaking, sub-theme was reading, three objectives of which two were Literacy objectives because they included identifying letters, and pronouncing letter /r/. The use of materials, teaching methods, and the introductory session are mentioned in the lesson plan. Literacy activities in the lesson plan have instructions which the learners were expected to carry out or perform. Aspects I observed were the theme, the sub-theme, incongruity in the teaching approach, as well as she felt obligated to write lesson plans.

A. Theme and sub-theme incongruity

Figure 4.11 shows that Mrs Matebello had written the theme as listening and speaking, and the sub-theme as reading. These are three different language skills. According to the objectives and lesson activities, she had intended to teach the learners how to

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pronounce the letter /r/. This aligns with the sub-theme and not the lesson theme. Therefore there was a bit of discrepancies in her planning between the theme and the sub-theme, as well as between the objectives and the activities.

When asked whether the theme and sub-themes were taken from the syllabus or not, she said, "Yes they are from the syllabus, *but leha e ka ke entse phoso* (even though it looks like I have made a mistake) when we read, the learners listen and speak". This statement indicates that Mrs Matebello wrote the theme as listening and speaking, and sub-theme as reading; this may be deliberate as she did not see anything wrong with her plan and saw the three skills as all being integrated.

B. Planning and teaching approach

The statement that Mrs Matebello used to support her planning further suggests that she read to the learners. This may mean that her reading lesson was often teacher-centred while the learners were passive listeners.

Figure 4.11 does not indicate clearly what Mrs Matebello's role will be when the learners begin to read the books. This may suggest that they would read the books independently. Mrs Matebello explained her usual approach to lesson preparation for the teaching of reading as follows:

> I arrive in the morning and start my work. Lesson planning is too much. I check my lesson plans by latest 7:30 before the assembly. *Ke fihla hoseng hobane ke tla ka likoloi tsa basebetsi ho tloha …* (I arrive early because I use the workers' transport …). Sometimes I arrive here before seven *hobane batsoali ba bang ba siea bana ha ba ea mosebetsing* (because parents who go to work early, leave their children at school). Sometimes I get time to finish my lesson preparations.

The above tells that although Mrs Matebello's preparation book provided evidence that she wrote her daily lesson plans, she did not enjoy writing them out. She found writing lesson plans to be burdensome, although she understands that it is mandatory and that she should go to the classroom well-prepared to teach learners to read.
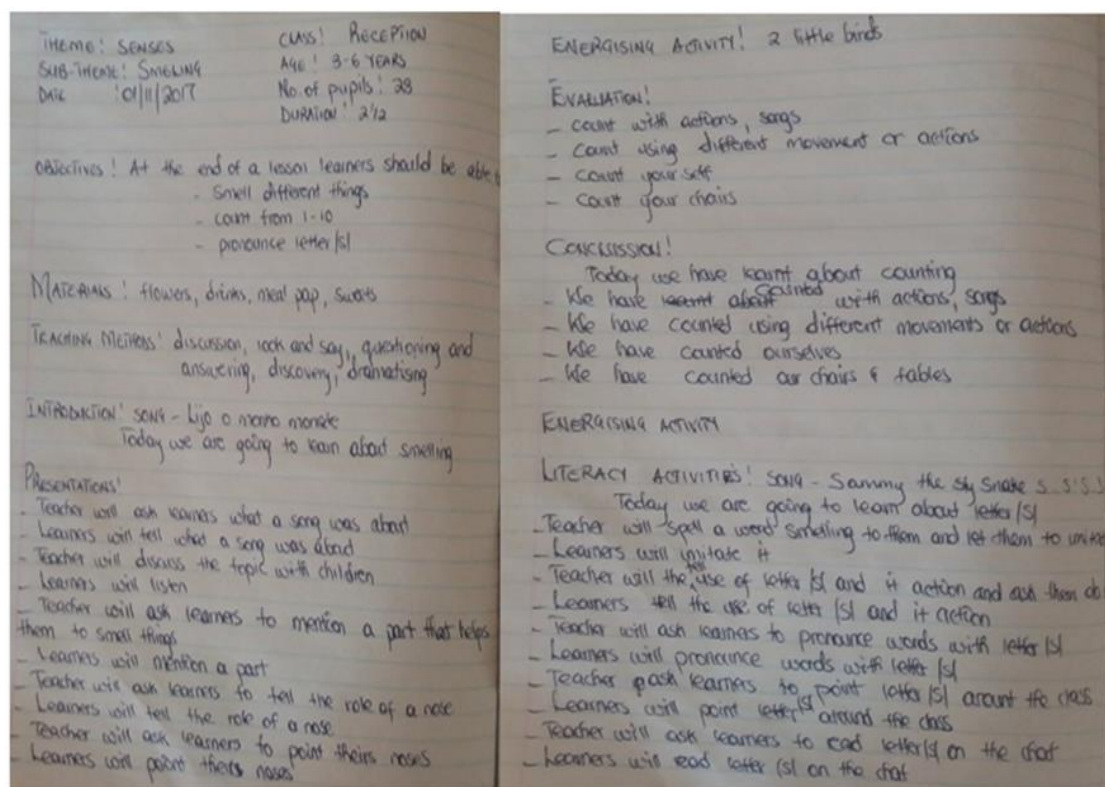
Figure 4.12: Mrs Matebello's improved lesson plan

Although figure 4.11 shows some discrepancies in her lesson plan, she does have time to organise her teaching strategies so that she may be able to remind herself of what she intends to do in order to achieve her teaching and learning goals (Akinrotimi & Olowe, 2016; Papa-Gusho & Biçaku-Çekrezi, 2015). Figure 4.12 shows another lesson plan where Mrs Matebello's theme and sub-theme correspond. It also shows that her suggested teaching methods include a discussion. The literacy activities however show that Mrs Matebello's teaching approach was mostly based on her telling the learners what to say and showing them what to do while they imitate. Mrs Matebello had planned one activity where the learners were supposed to do certain actions as they pronounced the letter-sound /s/. This shows that she had also intended to actively involve the learners in learning to read. Asked to rate her lesson plan from average to very good, her opinion was that she had a good lesson plan and that she had learned to prepare good lesson plans from the college. She said:

> The LCE education prepared me enough … I did not even know how to make
> a lesson plan and I did not have teaching skill. I taught like any woman who
> teaches in ECCD. (Laughing) … I said in literacy we were just reading without

understanding or knowing what we were doing and there was no order. We did not have any guidance to help the learners to construct the words, using the letters of the alphabet before I went to the college … I ask for help from other teachers. We prepared the scheme of work together …

It is evident from the above excerpt that sometimes Mrs Matebello plans her lessons well because she attended a tertiary institution where she learnt to prepare good lesson plans. Even though figure 4.11 shows the incongruence between theme and sub-theme, the objectives and activities are aligned. Her classroom teaching is discussed in the next section.

4.5.2 Implementation of the guidelines and policies

This section explains how Mrs Matebello taught learners to read according to the regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching. Data was presented and interpreted in order to respond mainly to the third research question: how do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R?

4.5.2.1 Classroom practice:

Figures 4.11 and 4.12 show that Mrs Matebello had intended to arouse the learners' interest and attention through engaging them in songs. The segment below describes what actually happened in the classroom.

Teacher: Let us stand up and sing the alphabet song.
Learners: (Singing) A B C D E …
Teacher: *Ha re luleng fatse he* (Let's sit down). *Kajeno re tlil'o ithuta ho bala. Lea utloa he?* (Today we are going to learn to read. Do you understand?)
Learners: Yes, madam
Teacher: *Ho bala hoo hoa rona, re tlile ho ithuta ho bala* (our reading, we are going to learn to read) letter /**r**/. *Ke re ke letter mang? Ke re ke letter* … (I am saying which letter is it? I am saying it is letter … waiting for learners to complete the sentence)
Learners: /r/
Teacher: *Lea e tseba letter /r/, lea e tseba* (Do you know letter /**r**/, do you know it)
Learners: (Different answers) Yes madam, no madam.

Teacher: *Ba bang ba e tseba, ba bang ha ba e tsebe. Ke mang ea ka mpontsang eona ka classeng ka moo* (Some of you know it, others don't know it. Can someone show me where it is in this classroom)?

This lesson segment indicates specifically that the activities implemented in the classroom align with the lesson plan, which is shown in figure 4.11. However, the alphabet song that was sung in the introduction was different from the planned song, *"Ke ne ke le ngoana* (I was once a child)", that was prepared to introduce the lesson. When I asked Mrs Matebello during the interview to explain why she introduced the lesson with a different song, she replied, *"Pina eo re e binneng e ne e lumellana le seo re tlil'o se etsa ha re ithuta ho bala ka nako ea Literacy* (The song we sang corresponded with what we were going to do when we learn to read during the Literacy hour)". Mrs Matebello referred to the flexibility to do what was relevant to introduce the lesson and to link the introduction to the new learning or the new knowledge that the learners' were going to engage with. The second lesson plan also shows that Mrs Matebello had intended to introduce the Literacy activities with a song, *"Sammy the shy snake S. S. S. S"* that was relevant to the objective and to the new learning. All the lessons observed were introduced with a song. This was typical of this teacher as she sought to engage all learners, and to arouse their interest.

In each of the lessons Mrs Matebello taught different sub-themes and concepts. She seemed to teach all the sub-themes suggested in the syllabus. In the first lesson she taught the learners to read the letters of the alphabet which was also the first activity in all the lessons taught. During the other lessons she gave the learners books to learn to read. In each of the lessons there were challenges and opportunities as shown in the lesson segments below.

> ➤ *A topsy-turvy (confused) lesson presentation:*

The lesson shown in figure 4.11 continued with the learners raising their hands to answer Mrs Matebello's question.

Lesson segment:
Teacher: Who can show me **r** here in the classroom? (Choosing one at a time to point at the letter /**r**/ wherever it was displayed in the classroom). *O nepile* (Is she correct)?
Learners: Yes teacher (Most of them not even looking at the letter pointed at).

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Teacher: Yes, *ke* letter /**r**/. *E emetse* reading (Yes, It is letter /**r**/. It stands for reading)… *Ke mang ea ka ilo re ballang mola? Ea ka ea re ballang chateng ea rona ea li-alphabet?* (Who can read there? Who can read our alphabet chart? Who?

Learners: Me madam, me madam … (One taking a pointer from the teacher, leads the class in reading and articulating the letter-sound and words) **a, a, apple, b, b, ball …**

Picture 4.5: Seating arrangement during reading in Mrs Matebello's classroom
(A learner reading the letters of the alphabet and the other learner reading the seasons of the year)

Teacher: *Ha re mo opeleng. Ke mang hape ea ka re ballang* (Let's clap hands for her. Who else can read us) seasons of the year?

Learners: Seasons of the year. Seasons of the year (reciting while one learner took the pointer to go to read)

Teacher: *Ke batla motho ea tla tla a mpalla lipalo tsena* (I want a person who will come to read these numbers)

Then Mrs Matebello asked the learners to mention the words which have /**r**/. The last activity proceeded, as shown on figure 4.11 where Mrs Matebello gave the learners some books to read.

Teacher: *Ke tlil'o fa e mong le e mong buka. U bale. U tlil'o mpolella hore na u balile eng. U phetle. U tsoare buka hantle* (I am going to give everyone a book. Read. You are going to tell me what you have read. Turn the pages. Hold the book properly.)

Figure 4.11 shows that the lesson objective was that the learners should be able to pronounce the letter /r/." However, too many concepts, including Numeracy, were taught in that single lesson. The lesson segment shows a lot of confusion because many activities were no longer relevant to the objective. It gave me the impression that Mrs Matebello did not follow her lesson plan when teaching the learners how to read. During the interview, I asked her to explain why she taught the learners to do the activities that were not in the lesson plan, including Numeracy activities. She

explained, *"Ke hobane ke lintho tseo re li etsang ka mehla. Ba tlameha ho tseba ho bala lintho tse ngata empa re ne re etsa activity tse ngata tsa /r/* (It is because there are things that we do daily. They have to learn to read many things, but we did many activities about /r/"). This response implies that Mrs Matebelo includes daily routine activities to connect with the presentation of new knowledge.

From picture 4.5, it can be seen in part that because of the seating arrangement in Mrs Matebello's class, other learners could not see the reading activity that was carried out by the chosen learner; and some of the learners did not even look at the one learner who read from the chart. When asked whether she was aware that some of the learners did not contribute to the reading activities and most of them did not sit comfortably enough to see the activities, she responded: *"bana bana ha ba mamele. Ke ba rutile ho ema lehlakoreng ha ba bala. Ba bang ha ba shebe se etsuoang, ba etsisa ba bang* (These learners don't listen. I taught them to stand on the side when they read. Some of them do not look at what is being done; they imitate others). This suggests that Mrs Matebello was aware that she could not maintain the whole class' attention, but still did nothing about it during the lesson.

While we were talking about how Mrs Matebello facilitated the learners to read to each other, our conversation uncovered that she indeed taught the learners many reading skills that the guidelines suggest should be taught in Grade R. I asked her to talk more about what she taught the learners including the challenges and opportunities fo. Here is how she responded:

> I give learners books to read and I also read books for them. Sometimes a child does not understand and just says, 'this pig pushes bottles'. I help them and explain the reasons why it pushes the bottles; they give the reasons. I also teach them the alphabet and the sounds of the letters because they help them to read on their own.

Mrs Matebello's confirms that she has books in the classroom. However, when she assisted learners to read, she told them her views about the story instead of probing and helping them to give more of their own answers. She further said:

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I encourage the learners to think about what they are reading. Even though I did not do it today, I encourage the learners to tell each other in a group what they have read in the books and to ask each other questions. I saw that we did not have enough time… Sometimes they stand in front of the class, turn the pages and show and tell the class the stories from the books.

The excerpt above reveals that Mrs Matebello sought to teach learners to read with understanding. It also suggests that she gives the learners the opportunity to interact through asking questions and through dialogue. She continued:

There were pictures in the books that helped the learners to understand … *hantle ba sheba litšoantšo e be ba ipopela mantsoe le lipolelo* (Actually they look at the pictures and formulate words and sentences). They ask each other … We have the gifted, the middle, the slow learners and those who don't care. I read with the slow learners, helping them until they understand and even with those who don't care as well.

This description of how Mrs Matebello taught the learners how to read suggests that sometimes she gives learners the opportunities to learn from others in the group. It also suggests that she facilitates the reading lesson such that the learners can read with purpose or for meaning by asking them questions about what they have read. Moreover, her response indicates that she used books to implement basic reading skills that are suggested in the syllabus. She continued to explain:

When they link the pictures to the sentences and think what the sentences are, I know that they are able to use their brains and they can understand what the books are about. We go step-by-step to learn to use books. *U tsebe* (Know) sir *that ba thusana ho utloisisa* (they help each other to understand) when they show each other their books. *U tla utloa ba entse likhang* (You will hear them arguing) about the message of the book. Sometimes they talk about similarities and differences in their books.

Evidently, Mrs Matebello engages the learners in social interaction reading activities where they share their views about the books that they read. She ensures that the learners get the books that have pictures in order to help them understand what they

read. However, as I observed two of the lessons where she gave the learners some books to read, as shown in picture 4.6.
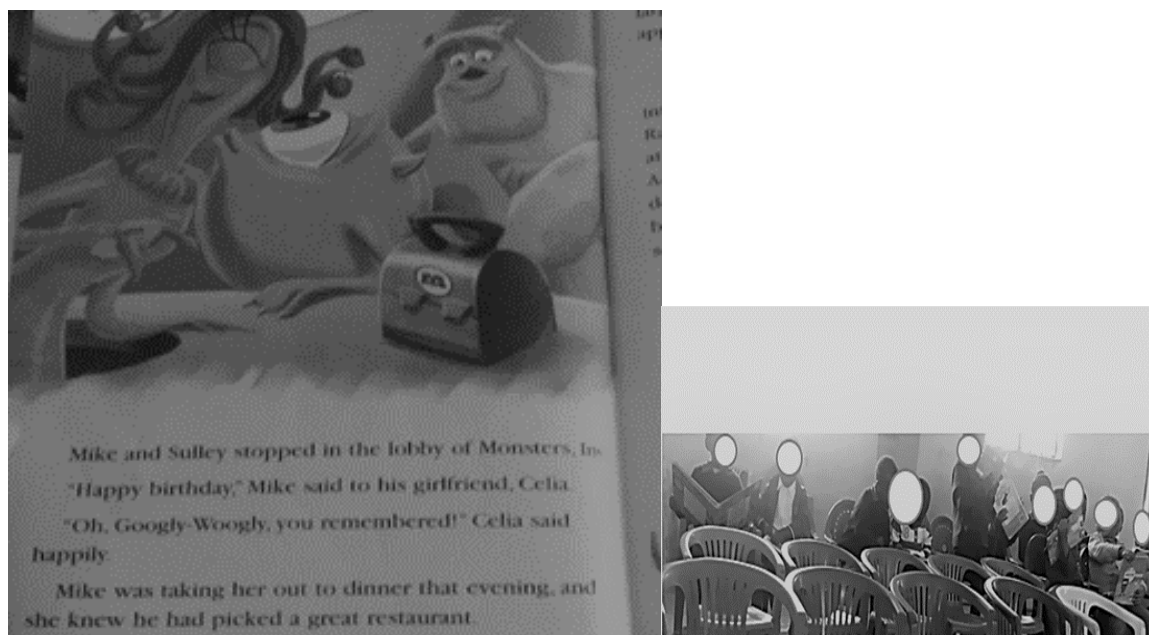
Picture 4.6: Book reading in Mrs Matebello's classroom (Types of books read and learners reading books)

Although Mrs Matebello stated that she gave the learners some books with pictures to help them to understand what they read and that they discuss and help each other to understand, the type of books selected seemed challenging to the Grade R learners. Furthermore, almost every learner read independently. Even when the seating arrangement changed to groups in another lesson, the learners still read individually. When I asked her to explain the challenges and opportunities when using such books she said, "At least they are here sir. The learners use them. *Ha ba ntse ba phetla ba ntse ba ithuta* (When they are paging through the books, they are also learning)". This shows that Mrs Matebello used the available books to implement Grade R syllabus, as she was aware that some were not age-appropriate. She was happy that the learners got a chance to learn to turn the pages of the books at least. When I asked her whether the books were provided by the MOET she replied:

> There are books here and teachers help me with what I want. *The principal oa nako e fetileng o na batlela class ena material* (The former principal sought funds to supply this class with materials). I design the other materials.

This extract indicates that the books that I saw the learners using in the classroom were mostly from donations. This may be the reason they were not age-appropriate.

4.5.2.1.1 *Time-lesson relationship*

During observation of her teaching, I noticed that Mrs Matebello did not manage her time well. When asked why her lessons took almost an hour she said:

> Maybe it is because I teach many activities. *E etsahala hangata* (It happens more often). *Ha nka sheba nako* (If I can check time) I will not be able to assist all the learners to learn to read the letter-sounds and books. But *ke fete hanyane* (exit in minimal time) because other activities will suffer.

Mrs Mateballo suggested that she is challenged to teach all required number of activities in a lesson. The lesson segments confirm this as she clearly taught activities that were not in the lesson plan. She taught for more than the thirty minutes allocated for literacy activities in her plan. She argued that she went above the allocated time because she had to make sure that all the learners read. This challenge of time management was observed in all the classes I visited. Even the participants who displayed the daily programme seem to go above the time allocated for literacy activities.

4.5.2.2 Classroom participation: A not know-it-all teacher

Mrs Matebello's opinion is that she works well with the learners and that she asks for help from colleagues when she does not understand something. She commented:

> I think I am teaching well. Sometimes I invite someone such as the Grade 1 teacher to observe me teaching. I may think that I am teaching well yet I am not. *Ke thusoa ke ho prephera* (Making preparation helps me). I work well with the learners and I help them to understand what they read.

In this extract Mrs Matebello admits that she is not a know-it-all teacher and she works with colleagues to improve her teaching of reading. The excerpt also suggests that she feels competent in doing her lesson plans. She further stated that:

> I teach them to read the letter-sound. I change and give them books… I was taught that phonemic awareness and phonics are important and the syllabus

says that we should teach the letters of the alphabet that begin with the names of the children only. The learners find it a problem to blend the sounds into words.

It is evident that Mrs Matebello varied her teaching strategies when teaching reading skills. She followed the Grade R syllabus. Although she modified the instructional approaches to meet the learning needs of the learners as Galton et al. (2009) encourages teachers to do so, the extract also shows that she had a challenge assisting the learners to blend the letter-sounds and read the words.

4.5.2.2.1 The role of Mrs Matebello

Mrs Matebello's reading instruction was mostly teacher-centred. She said, "My work was to make sure that *bana ba bala se nepahetseng* (read what is correct). When they are wrong, I help them. *Ke bona ba etsang mosebetsi, ba ithutang ho bala* (They are the ones doing activities; who learn to read)". Mrs Matebello however sees her role as that of guiding learners while they read on their own. However, my observation was that during the lesson she often went closer to the learners and told them what to say rather than to leave them to figure things out themselves.

Mrs Matebello explained how she encouraged the learners to learn from members of the class:

> I ask them to correct each other when they read. *Hangata bana bana ba bapala, ba bua ka lintho tse ka thoko ho ntho eo ke ba rutang eona empa u bone ke ila ka ba neha libuka ba ipalla ka bo bona* (These children often play, talk about things that are irrelevant from what I taught them. You saw that I gave them books to read on their own). Then I read for the class".

This excerpt indicates that Mrs Matebello often used the whole-class teaching approach that was teacher-talk-centred. The learners could only learn to read from one another when they corrected one other. It also shows that she taught learners to read independently of each other although her lesson plan indicated that she would employ discussion as a teaching method.

4.5.3 Stakeholders' support

While we were talking about the challenges and opportunities that Mrs Matebello encounters to teach learners to read, she talked about how she got some support from outside the classroom.

Interactions with Mrs Matebello proved that she expected the NTT from the Education Department to visit her school more often to give her support in relation to teaching. Sadly, the NTT very seldom visited her classroom. She said:

> *Class ea ka e sa tsoa etsoa* (My class has just been turned into) a reception. It was ECCD before. The *NTT ke hore o ne a e tla* sir (used to come) when it was ECCD. She read the lesson plans and left … The Government pays me. *Ha ke tsebe hore na ke reng sir hobane ke ee ke utloe ho thoe ke pataloa ka chelate ea mofani* (I don't know what to say, sir, because I have been told that I am paid with the money from a donor) … Sometimes I don't get paid for many months, 3, 4, 6 months …

I could deduce at this point in our discussion that Mrs Matebello wanted to discuss her complaints which she seemed unable to raise with the NTT when they visited her class. It was clear to me that she needed more guidance in order to provide effective reading instruction and longed for NTT to come in to observe her reading lessons. She expected better guidance on the implementation of the guidelines. Furthermore, Mrs Matebello was clearly not satisfied with the salary that she gets for the service that she provides. As her class was supported through funding from an NGO, she is paid from donations on a monthly basis. Sometimes the payment was irregular and not guaranteed. I could only imagine what these challenges and uncertainties do to her morale and desire to implement the policy guidelines as intended

4.5.4 Summary of Mrs Matebello's story

The story of Mrs Matebello uncovered the challenges and opportunities that she had in the teaching of reading in her classroom. She was able to explain the contents of the Grade R syllabus which demonstrated her familiarity with the syllabus. She also had the opportunity to consult the ATRs as persons with more knowledge about the policy implementation. She was also fortunate to have colleagues and the principal

who supported and interacted with her in various ways to implement the guidelines and the policy effectively. Furthermore, Mrs Matebello had the opportunity to access and to use the Grade R syllabus to plan both the schemes of work and the lesson plan appropriately. She had multiple opportunities to teach all the reading content that was suggested in the syllabus even though she had a concern about the lack of appropriate teaching and learning materials.

Her narrative indicates that she is sometimes challenged in implementing the regulatory guidelines and the policy more effectively because of inadequate aids such as newspapers, magazines and age-appropriate books. One of her Literacy/reading lessons showed that she had an assortment of books even though most of them seemed to be above the educational level of the Grade R learners and therefore beyond their ZPD. Although the lesson preparation demonstrated that Mrs Matebello was aware that the syllabus required her to implement a learner-centred teaching approach, she could not implement it effectively, especially in times when she gave the learners some books to read.

There was some inconsistency in Mrs Matebello's daily lesson planning which showed non-alignment of themes to sub-themes, the disjuncture between objectives and activities. This could perhaps suggest that she did not fully comprehend the guidelines, especially the implementation of the syllabus. Most of the planned activities also showed that her reading Literacy lessons were mostly teacher-centred. There were few activities where the learners would be engaged in. The real lesson presentations showed some positive signs of learner engagement in the activities. Sometimes Mrs Matebello was unable to plan the lesson introduction that linked the learners' background knowledge to the new knowledge, especially in the songs that were sung.

I concluded that sometimes Mrs Matebello had a muddled lesson presentation because of aspects not being properly linked. Very often she taught a number of activities that were not in the lesson plan even while her story indicates that she practised routine teaching where she taught different concepts in a single lesson. Although Mrs Matebello tends to lead almost all the activities, her teaching style was a mixture of teacher-centred and learner-centred approaches.

4.6 Preliminary findings

Data gathered and presented in this study sought to answer the main research question that says:

What are the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho?

Research on curriculum implementation shows that teachers are held responsible to implement the curriculum successfully (Ntumi, 2016). However, the research further indicates that the implementation process needs all the stakeholders which include government ministries, non-government organisations, teachers, parents and learners to work jointly for quality education (Hallam et al., 2015; Samson &Charles, 2018). The key finding of this study suggest that teachers encounter exhausting challenges in the classrooms, especially in the teaching of reading in Grade R because some of the stakeholders in the networking process fail to play their role. All the three teachers gave the impression that they meet challenges in the classrooms because Government fails to provide them with resources required for successful implementation of regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching basic reading skills.

4.6.1 Guidelines for teaching reading in Lesotho

This study which explored the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho has shown that there are regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching learners to read as shown in Table 4.1. All the three teachers in the present study indicated that the regulatory guidelines are the Grade R syllabus and the IECCD policy. They mentioned to have opportunities to assess Grade R syllabus in the classroom and that they do not have IECCD policy which is also necessary for the teaching of reading. Mrs Makabelo indicated that she uses the syllabus and the scheme of work to teach learners to read. She also mentioned that although she was work-shopped about the IECCD policy, she does not have a copy of it in the classroom.

Likewise, Mrs Mahopolang described how the Grade R syllabus provided her with guidance needed for teaching. Just like Mrs Makabelo, Mrs Mahopolang stated that

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although she heard about the IECCD policy she has never seen a document. Mrs Matebello as well described how she uses Grade R syllabus and stated that she uses it when she writes a scheme of work. She has shown to have clear knowledge of the syllabus when she explained the content that she has to teach. Although all the teachers in this study did not have policy document, they had the opportunity to do a course related to the IECCD policy at the Teacher Training College. Therefore, this study finds that Grade R teachers do not always provide quality reading instruction because they do not always have all the required regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching in the classrooms and this finding correspond with the finding by Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018) and Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) that teachers in South Africa have challenges to teach learners because they do not get adequate support from the Government. Teachers are not provided with materials required for teaching basic reading skills and thus aggravate their challenges in the classrooms.

4.6.2   Teachers' sense-making of the guidelines

Alsubaie (2016) and Chimbi and Jita (2019) argue that teachers lack knowledge of the curriculum they are implementing because they are not adequately trained to implement the curriculum successfully and sometimes they do not feel accustomed with the requirements of the new curriculum. They are also not involved in its compilation (Alsubaie, 2016). Samson & Charles (2018) assert that sometimes a new curriculum come as a thread to teachers. All the three teachers seemed to know the content of the Grade R syllabus even though they are not knowledgeable about the IECCD policy because MOET has never given them copies of the policy.

Mrs Makabelo stated, "I use the integrated syllabus … so the syllabus gives me themes and activities to teach and suggest materials … other things are not in the syllabus … I can still use important ideas that are in the IECCD curriculum …" Mrs Mahopolang said, "The syllabus is helpful … I look at the themes and subthemes, and then the activities … it is lacking … it is different from the old ECCD curriculum." These comments tells that they knew what the syllabus required them to teach learners even though they still have preference of preschool syllabus (IECCD curriculum). Mrs Matebello said, "… There are topics and activities in the syllabus … sometimes I have check the old curriculum … sometimes I have to read the Grade 1 syllabus so that I

do not teach what is taught in that class and to prepare the learners for that class."
They suggested that the syllabus provide them with insufficient guidance which
sometimes force them to draw ideas from the old curriculum not because they are
resistant to change but because it has important ideas for teaching learners to read.
Therefore, these points suggest that teachers need assistance from experts and
support from IECCD stakeholders in order to make full sense of the Grade R syllabus.

4.6.3   Planning for teaching

Research has shown that effective lesson-planning helps teachers to implement
curriculum, cope with unexpected issues and teach with focus (Rusznyak & Walton,
2011). For teachers to implement curriculum effectively they have to plan effectively
(Papa-Gusho and Biçaku-Çekrezi, 2015) and for this to happen lesson objectives have
to be clear (Seidel et al., 2005). Although all the three teachers appeared to know the
content (basic reading skills) that they should teach in Grade R and rely on the syllabus
for planning, they have challenges to plan effectively. Mrs Makabelo and Mrs
Mahopolang's schemes of work did not have the details of the literacy quarterly plans
even though their lesson plans had literacy prepared for the reading instruction. From
their responses, it can be concluded that their understanding of a thematic lesson plan
that the Grade R syllabus encourages was that they had to teach the learners how to
read what is taught in Life Orientation. This is also a sign of teachers who do not fully
make sense of the Grade R syllabus. As a result, they do not teach reading skills
effectively because they do not plan adequately. Mrs Matebello's scheme of work
matched up the lesson plan because they both had literacy plans. Reading instruction
is affected by inadequate and/ or poor long-term planning in the scheme of work and
poor preparation of lessons.

Self-efficacy of teachers is influenced by the number of years of teaching experience,
but it drops in the long run and teachers have a habit of rejecting the new curriculum
(Bantwini, 2010). Bongco and David (2020) assert that teaching experience of
teachers influence curriculum implementation. However, Kini and Podolsky (2016)
argues that new teachers learn to implement curriculum effectively from more
experienced teachers. The data presented here has shown that Mrs Makabelo and
Mrs Mahopolang had long teaching experience, but Mrs Matebello who had recently

completed her study had clear quarterly preparation and lesson plans for teaching. This means that there is a need for professional development even for teachers with many years' experience.

4.6.4 Reading instruction

The Lesotho's Grade R syllabus suggests that teachers should teach learners emergent literacy skills which include recognizing pictures, holding books and paging from right to left and letters of the alphabet, but teachers in this study do not teach all these basic reading skills. Although all the three teachers focused on phonics, they also taught other reading skills that are not suggested in the syllabus. Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang taught words that form sentences and used whole-word teaching approach. Only Mrs Matebello taught all the basic reading skills that are suggested in the syllabus and rarely used whole-word approach. However, all the teachers emphasised knowledge of letter names which Stahl and Murray (1994) state that it is a good for emergent readers. The reasons teachers do not teach all the basic reading skills are that there is scarcity of materials in the classrooms. Provision of adequate resources is good for meaningful teaching and learning and teachers fail to implement curriculum effectively because there is lack of appropriate textbooks (Dzimiri and Marimo, 2015; Koc et al., 2007).

The finding of this study is that all the teachers mixed the two official languages, Sesotho and English, to teach Grade R learners to acquire reading skills in order to impress the community and principals of the schools even when they know what is right. It is therefore worthwhile to involve community in the making of educational policies, especially policies for teaching.

It can be concluded that there are different ways of teaching reading as it has been explicit in the reading instruction of three teachers. Mrs Makabelo and Matebello began their teaching using bottom-up teaching approach where they start with single letter-sound while Mrs Mahopolang implemented top-down teaching approach where she began from whole word to single letter-sound (Zhao & Zhu, 2012).

CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS, SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS,
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter of this study provides a summary which indicates how the study was conducted and then provides reinstatement of the gap, recap of the theoretical framework and its application and a cross-case analysis of the three cases presented in chapter 4. The themes that emerged from the narratives of the three teachers are aligned to the research questions and the theoretical framework of the study. The discussion of the findings, conclusions and recommendations are also provided in this chapter.

5.2 Summary of the study

This study explored the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in the Grade R classes of Lesotho. It was intended to investigate how the teachers interpret the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes, and how they enacted them in the classrooms. Chapter 1 presented the background of the study, the problem and objectives that the study sought to address, and the framework of the study. Chapter 2 presented the literature related to the challenges and opportunities of teaching the Grade R learners how to read. Chapter 3 focused on how data was collected. The substantive data for the study was collected through the interviews with the selected teachers through an analysis of the regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes, as well as through document analysis and classroom observation of the teachers' performance in order to find out how the teachers interpreted and enacted these guidelines. Chapter 4 provided a detailed presentation and interpretation of data. This final chapter (5) provides a cross-case analysis, a summary of the findings, and the conclusions in relation to the last research question. It was evident that not all the teachers had the classroom copies of the relevant guidelines and policies. Teachers also identified the gaps in the syllabus. The social environment of the school imposes the medium of instruction in the Grade R reading classes. There was also a one-size-fits-all type of

reading instruction exacerbated by the lack of support from stakeholders. Teachers have these challenges but their resilience ensures that teaching and learning continues unabated and successfully.

5.3 Restatement of the gap

The present study is not a replication of any study, but it closes the gap related to the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in the Lesotho Grade R classes. UNESCO (2014) and UNICEF (2016) indicate that the provision of quality education in Early Childhood Care and Development in Lesotho has challenges and that many learners get to the fourth grade without knowing how to read. However, the literature has not expanded on the specific challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in the Lesotho Grade R classes since the guidelines, the syllabus and the IECCD policy were introduced. As a result, there is little known about them and how they shape the teaching of reading in Grade R classes in the country.

5.4 Recap of the theoretical framework and its application

The Cognitive Theory of Piaget and the Social Interaction Theory of Vygotsky were used as the microscopic lens that provided a clear guidance on how the teachers should implement the regulatory guidelines and policy to teach Grade R learners to read. Both theories were found relevant to the present study because the analyses of the syllabus and the regulatory guidelines showed that the learners learn through play. The relevance of the guidelines and policy, especially the syllabus, meant that when learners learn through play they construct their knowledge and practise the principles of these theories (Hanfmann et al., 2012). The Cognitive Theory of Piaget and the developmental theory of learning, emphasise that:

- Learning for each learner is dependent on mental activities;
- Learners get to know their real world and/or to develop intellectually from the interaction of innate and ecological factors;
- Individual learners apply background knowledge and interact with their own environment to construct, assimilate and accommodate new knowledge;
- Learners gradually emancipate egocentricity and learn to interact with each other in order to learn actively and construct their own knowledge of reading

the basics individually and/or through peer support. Learning to read happens when the learners participate in their learning (Blake & Pope, 2008; Riley et al., 2009; Whitehead, 2010);

- Learners have to act on objects and/or reality in order to construct knowledge, for they do not have empty minds to be filled with facts (Ginn, 1995);

- Learners' social interaction plays an important role in their cognitive development (Social Interaction Theory);

- Learners learn to read through scaffolding in order to reach their ZPD;

- Learners learn to read when they interact with the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) and/or the more capable peers (Blake & Pope, 2008; Shabani et al., 2010; Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011).

This study focused on how the collected data related to the knowledge of reading and how teachers assisted the Grade R learners to understand reading the basics linked their real world. The findings of the study showed that teaching the learners how to read is a social interaction process. There is much interaction in the classroom. Therefore, the data collected from the documents that were used by the teachers to direct their work in the classrooms (i.e. to teach the learners to read) were relevant to these theories in many ways; and these are indicated in the cross-case analysis.

5.5 Cross-case analysis, discussion and summary of key findings

The key findings of this study provided the answers to the research questions which guided the study. They answer the main question: What are the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho?

This chapter (5) presents the similarities and variations in the challenges and opportunities of enacting the policy guidelines for the teaching of reading in the Lesotho Grade R classes.

5.5.1 Opportunities Related to the Regulatory Guidelines and Policy

Data presented in Table 4.1 (chapter 4) suggests that the regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching include a number of key documents:

- Lesotho's *Constitution* 1993;

- Education Act of 2010;

- Education Sector Plan 2016-2026;

- The National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (NPECCD/ECCD);

- the Strategic Plan 2013/14 – 2017/18, which now extends to 2023;

- Lesotho Early Childhood Development Curriculum 1998; and

- Reception (Grade R) class syllabus of 2011.

The aim of the *Constitution of Lesotho* is to make education available to all including Grade R learners. This study established that Lesotho's legal framework, especially the *Constitution* and the Education Act of 2010, focused mainly on making education accessible to all by extending primary school education to include Grade R. The MOET has through the ECCD Unit developed guidelines to support Grade R teachers in introducing education to learners at this level. However, the participants knew of the existence of such policies/guidelines but did not have possession of them in their classrooms. The bulk of the regulatory guidelines that they used for their lesson preparation and teaching, were derived from the Grade R syllabus.

5.5.1.1   Syllabus

The first significant finding of this study was that the ECCD unit of the MOET through the NTTs, has been successful in ensuring that Grade R teachers receive copies of the syllabus [The Reception Class Guidelines] (MOET, 2011) and the ECD Curriculum, both of which provide extensive guidelines for teaching reading. Many of the teachers in Grade R seem to have the opportunity to access the guidelines and to refer to the content thereof for teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho. However, this study also established that teachers do not have copies of the IECCD policy. In situation where teachers are not provided with guideline for teaching they teach without direction and have decision to teach whatever they think it is necessary and relevant for the Grade R learners.

In each learning area, the syllabus is structured to have one broad objective, theme, sub-theme, suggested activities, skills expected, suggested teaching and learning materials, and assessment (MOET, 2011). The data provided sufficient evidence that

the teachers are familiar with the content of the Lesotho's Grade R syllabus. They interpret and use it for their quarterly planning. It did seem like a useful guide. As Nutbrown (2011), Bulut (2007) and Parkes and Harris (2002) assert that a clear and well-developed syllabus helps teachers feel positive to become more effective in the various areas of teaching-learning.

5.5.1.2   Basic reading skills suggested in the syllabus

The Grade R syllabus also provided the teachers with details of the scope and/or relevant content for basic reading skills to be taught in the Grade R classroom. All three participants demonstrated similar and different ways of making sense of the syllabus content. For Mrs Makabelo, basic reading skills that the syllabus suggested included phonics, knowledge of names of letters of the alphabet, letter-sound relationships, word-building and blending of sounds, and using books appropriately. These activities helps learners to be aware of sounds in words as they are phonological awareness activities (Stahl & Murray, 1994). However, an analysis of the syllabus showed that some of the sub-themes such as word-building and the blending of sounds were omitted.

In Mrs Mahopolang class, words read were used in a meaningful context where she labelled a picture of a plant that she drew on the chalkboard, and some words were from containers of cool-drinks which were linked to learners' schemas and experiences. Mrs Mahopolang's reading instruction resonates with Vygotsky's idea that symbolic systems (pictures, for example) assist thinking (Riley, 2006; Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011) as well as that enjoyable and well-illustrated reading materials motivate learners to read and understand texts.

Mrs Matebello stated that she gives learners books to read and turn the pages. They tell stories from what they read. She began each lesson by teaching learners to read letters of the alphabet and articulate letter-sound relationship.

The study found that Mrs Matebello followed the syllabus carefully and taught only the basic reading skills that were suggested in the syllabus. She was observed teaching learners recommended reading skills in the lesson she taught. The letter-sound relationship approach was dominant; she used it in every reading lesson. She began

each lesson with phonics instruction and sometimes also reinforced it by recapping at the end of the lesson. Her teaching approach supported Fox's (1996) argument that teachers should always explore the alphabet writing system when teaching the learners to read.

Although the instructional approaches of the teachers in this study differed, the phonics instruction was common to all of them. The teachers covered the letter-sound relationship. This is the approach followed in some of the schools in countries such as the USA and England which require the teaching of phonics in early reading (Whitehead, 2010; Wolfe, 2013). Learners learn the phonics and the alphabet before they read whole words. They begin each lesson with phonics instruction, as the Grade R syllabus suggests; and as Connelly, et al. (2009) and Fox (1996) propose that the learners who have the knowledge of phonics automatically recognise words and pay attention to the meaning of the message. Wolf (2014) states that the learners' decoding process should be automatic so that they can understand texts. Stahl and Murray (1994) assert that learners should have adequate level of letter recognition which help them to understand onsets and rimes. However, some teachers use the whole-language theory and the whole-word method of teaching (Ling, 2012). These features were dominant in Mrs Mahopolang's classroom. She taught words and then the sounds that form the words. The emphasis is on single letters (especially the initial letters) and the letter-sound relationships. The learners are first made to understand the whole words and then the sounds. The teachers (such as Mahopolang) who use this method did not fully agree with the syllabus as the road- map meant to provide them with a measurable plan for education in the Grade R classes. Lesotho's Grade R syllabus requires teaching of the initial letters of the names of the learners only. However, teachers taught letter-sounds within the whole word, and letters of the alphabet. They made a decision not to fully implement the syllabus based on their knowledge and experience.

In short, while the three teachers were guided by the Grade R syllabus to plan lessons and to teach reading, they however, used their own discretion at times and did not always follow the syllabus.

5.5.1.3   Scheme of work and networking opportunities

The Cognitive Theory argues that learning occurs as a result of a person's interaction with intrinsic and ecological factors (Blake & Pope, 2008) and The Social Interaction Theory holds that learning occurs when peers interact with more knowledgeable others (Blake & Pope, 2008; Shabani, et al., 2010; Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011) – these two theories appeared to guide the teachers when writing out lesson plans. The Lesotho Grade R teachers in this study confirmed that they collaborate and work in teams when they write their quarterly scheme of work. This provides them with opportunities to share ideas and to learn from others. The main aim of working together as a team was to share ideas and help each other to interpret the syllabus as well as to build relationships and partnerships with other teachers so that they could lay the foundation for effective planning and the teaching of reading together.

The study found some differences in the teachers' experiences and interpretations of the guidelines, as reflected in the participants' scheme of work and the lesson plans. These differences may be ascribed to the teachers' experience in teaching early literacy. For example, Bongco and David (2020) and Kini and Podolsky (2016) contend that teachers need experience to become highly effective curriculum implementers. Klassen and Chiu (2010) also hold that the self-efficacy of teachers is influenced by their years of teaching experience and indicate that this declines with long-term experience. In this study there is evidence that the recently qualified teacher's schemes of work and lesson plans differed from those of more experienced teachers. Mrs Matebello attended to all the learning areas and taught the basic reading skills as suggested in the syllabus. On the other hand, the scheme of work prepared by more experienced teachers (Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang) did not indicate the three separate learning areas for Life Orientation, Numeracy and Literacy although the lesson plans were written separately. The learning objectives for each lesson plan were taken from the scheme of work. The learning objectives for the reading lessons reinforced the other areas such as the Life Orientation lessons. The letter sounds are taught in relation to the words that were taught in another lesson from another area, such as the parts of a plant. Therefore, teaching experience plays a big role on how teachers interpret and enact their lessons regarding the teaching of reading in Grade R.

5.5.1.4 Lesson plan opportunities for teaching the learners to read

The study shows similarities as well as differences in the way the regulatory guidelines and policy are interpreted by the teacher. These are obvious in the way the teachers write out the lesson plans, especially the activities for teaching the learners to read. Although their writing of the scheme of work is different, their lesson plans reflect the three learning areas, Life Orientation, Numeracy and Literacy, written in separate sections within a single lesson plan. Teachers take time to write their lesson plans at the end of every school day. They prepare for the next Literacy lesson. This practice supports the observation by Akinrotimi and Olowe (2016) in a study that they carried out in Nigeria and Rusznyak and Walton (2011) that teachers who prepare their lessons daily have direction when delivering lessons because they conduct "research" and decide in advance on what is to be taught.

Some teachers have the opportunity to interact with colleagues at work in order to get ideas from them about teaching the learners a certain word or concept that might seem complex. Some principals check the lesson plans at least once every week while others don't.

5.5.2 Opportunities for Dynamic Interaction in Cognitive Development

Lively interactions were observed when the teachers facilitated reading lessons. The literature indicates that the role of the teacher is to provide learner support and to help learners based on their ZPD level (Nulden & Scheepers, 2020; Riley et al., 2009; Riley, 2006; Silalahi, 2019). In this study, the Grade R teachers stated that they strove to support each learner to excel in reading. They provided guidance (scaffolding) to assist learners to reach their ZPD in acquiring the reading basics. All three teachers modelled the reading and interacted with the learners throughout the lessons. They gave the learners examples on how to read by enunciating the letter-sounds; and the learners imitated them. This observation shows the teachers' opportunities to provide proper scaffolding in the reading instruction where the basic reading skills are sequenced from simple to complex. When they provided adequate guidance (scaffolding reading instruction) in learning to read the basics such as the letter-sounds, the learners became independent readers. For instance, during the lesson one learner referred to the chart that had a certain letter-sound in order to remember

what the sound /ja/ was, after being given the reading instruction. In this way the learners easily completed the sentence. Scaffolding instruction was also observed in the reading lesson where songs were imitated until they were able to sing letter-sounds without assistance from the teachers.

The teachers in this study motivated the learners to read by accepting their responses and praising them for their efforts to read; they consciously avoided embarrassing the learners. They did not tell the learners that they have made mistakes when they gave incorrect answers. Instead, they applied the principle of the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) by engaging them to help each other. The next section focuses on the contribution of the classroom (physical environment) to facilitate the learning process.

5.5.2.1   Classroom learning opportunities for teaching reading

The participants created the physical learning environment that stimulates the learners to learn to read and to expand their knowledge. According to Piaget's Cognitive Theory, physical environment plays an important role (Hanfmann et al., 2012). Learning occurs when the learners adapt to their environment through assimilation and the accommodation processes (Blake & Pope, 2008; Bormanaki & Khoshhal, 2017). They become active in constructing their own knowledge and making sense of the writing in everyday surroundings (Mason & Sinha, 1992; Rhyner et al., 2009). The findings related to the classroom setting show that the physical environment supports the reading instruction as it encourages the learners to learn to read. The study, however, uncovered various patterns in the Lesotho Grade R classrooms where learners sit in rows, in semi-circles or in groups, even when they read independently which might somehow be disturbing patterns.

The Lesotho Grade R Classrooms in this study did have print resources even though these were rather scanty. The teachers created opportunities to design print-rich classrooms in order to enhance opportunities for the learners to acquire basic reading skills.

A few posters, many flash cards and strip cards were used to promote reading in the classrooms. For instance, I observed the learners who waited for their brothers and sisters after school read the colourful posters in Mrs Makabelo's classroom. The

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posters and flash cards were used to teach reading basics only during reading lessons when teachers interact with the learners in other Grade R classrooms. Al-Barakat & Bataineh (2011), Ling (2012) and Okoth (2016) affirm that learners' learning environment should be rich in print in order to motivate learners to read. However, old and torn posters do not motivate the learners to read. Charts that have been displayed for a long time, as those in some of the classrooms, lose value and are also not attractive to the learners.

5.5.2.2   Opportunities for engagement of the *More Knowledgeable Other*

Is teaching active or passive in the classrooms? From three models of curriculum (Direct Instruction, The High/Scope curriculum and The Traditional Nursery School) in early childhood education that Schweinhart and Weikart (1998) describe, direct instruction is evident in the three Grade R classrooms. Participation of the learners was evident in socially-facilitated reading activities where the teachers initiated activities and then worked with the learners during whole-class reading activities. According to Kumpulainen & Wray (2002), this type of classroom interaction is characterised by the Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation (IRF/E) sequence. Effective learning happened when the learners interacted with the teachers, and when the learners who could not complete tasks (such as identifying letter-sounds) were assisted by the teacher or by peers..

The teachers created the opportunities to act as MKOs and to engage peers as MKOs in whole-class teaching. They engaged the learners who had a better understanding of the alphabet and the letter-sound relationship to assist their counterparts. The use of social interaction with MKOs as a teaching approach, is advocated by the researchers as an effective way of assisting the learners to acquire knowledge (Blake & Pope, 2008; Langeloo, et al., 2019; Shabani et al., 2010). This study makes similar conclusions; for instance, the teachers demonstrated the activities while learners imitated them. The lesson segments and the observation indicated that this study aligns with the literature.

5.5.3 Challenges Related to the Teaching of Reading in Grade R

The literature (see 2.4) suggests that there are often challenges that undesirably affect

the implementation of the syllabus by the teachers in their classrooms.

5.5.3.1 Challenges to access the guidelines and policy document for teaching

IECCD Policy:

The study shows that the Grade R teachers struggled to access the IECCD policy and relied on informal and verbal information. The MOET has never given the teachers the copies of the policy document. The information that they have about the IECCD policy was obtained mostly through the dissemination workshops and earlier when the participants were at the teacher-training college. The study found that the policy is an important document that has to be available in the Grade R classrooms in order to provide teachers with guidance. A similar observation is made by Ali et al. (2011); Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) and Mueller et al. (2019) that teachers do not implement the curriculum effectively in part because they are not provided with the relevant resources. It is evident from the document analysis and from the three teachers that the language policy was one such instance of the guidelines written in the IECCD policy. However, the teachers continued to mix the languages, Sesotho and English, when they taught the learners to read partly because they were not clear on the policy, but also because the context made implementation difficult, if not impossible.

Grade R syllabus:

Although this study found that the Grade R teachers had different interpretations of the syllabus, the unexpected observation of this study was that they shared a similar opinion that the Grade R syllabus has some important gaps. Considering the responses of all the participants and the analysis of the Grade R syllabus, it is concluded that the syllabus is not appropriately designed. Some of the important information that was available in the syllabi that the participants used prior to the incorporation of Grade R classes into primary schools and the design of the current Grade R syllabus, no longer exists. Two of the participants' comments were common: each teacher writes her own specific objectives and decides how to assess each learner's achievement level. Secondly, the syllabus does not provide adequate guidance for assessing the learners' ability to read. They look for additional information from the ECE curriculum and the Grade 1 syllabus.

One of the study's finding was that there was no categorisation of the general objectives to specific objectives which are to be achieved for each sub-theme. There is a single objective for the whole literacy learning area. There were no suggested assessment methods and assessment criteria. The teachers write similar objectives when they work cooperatively and plan for a quarter together. It is obvious from the study that when there are no specified objectives, teachers are free to write their own objectives. As a result, the reading instruction fails to achieve the outcome desired by the Department of Education.

Because the syllabus does not give the teachers adequate direction, studies by Ntumi (2016), Makunja (2016) and Okoth (2016) indicate that teachers have challenges when planning to teach the learners. The study's finding was that the Grade R teachers are negatively affected when the syllabus does not provide adequate guidance to teach the learners effectively. For example, the content of the lesson and the activities are not appropriate according to the Grade R syllabus. In some cases, in Mrs Makabelo's classroom, the learners were asked to identify and to read words on sentence strips before they were ready for such activities. This study concluded that teachers get confused when the Grade R syllabus does not provide enough guidance. On the other hand, Davis (2012) and Wolfe (2013) argue that teachers become stereotyped and restricted if they are denied the opportunity to use their knowledge to teach the learners.

Bantwini (2010) finds that teachers often do not accept the new curriculum because they do not understand the curriculum reform so they rely on their many years of work experience to plan lessons. The present study's findings confirm those of Bantwini (2010), Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) and Okoth (2016). The participants in this study compared the Grade R syllabus to the previous syllabus because they have had teaching experience where they used other syllabi before teaching the Grade R classes. However, the difference in the findings of this study was that despite the fact that they identified a gap in the syllabus, they accepted it with its lack of comprehensive guidance as a standard document for guiding the teaching of reading. Teachers accepted the syllabus as an ideal mechanism for teaching the learners how to read because it was the first and the only guide for teaching since the Grade R classes were established in the country.

5.5.3.2 Mismatch of the scheme of work and lesson plan

The study found that the participants prepared their lessons daily. They understood that it was important to get into the classroom early and start the lesson in an organised manner ready to teach the learners how to read. This is a positive practice for effective teaching. When the teachers failed to prepare the lesson plans for teaching, they had no direction and used inappropriate teaching strategies (Rusznyak & Walton, 2011). In this study, the participants knew the section on basic reading skills should be well-prepared for teaching a lesson because this gave direction on what they wanted to teach. However, sometimes they had challenges, especially regarding the flow of the lesson plan.

The schemes of work of Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang did not have the details of the literacy quarterly plans, although the lesson plans were prepared for the reading instruction. From their responses, it meant that their understanding of the integration of the subjects and a thematic lesson plan was that teachers have to teach Life Orientation and then derive the reading content from it in order to teach the learners how to read. This finding aligned with the finding by Drake and Reid (2018) that teachers consider integration as taking the learning outcomes from the curriculum and grouping them in the scheme of work. These teachers, Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang, realised that the content for reading, as suggested in the syllabus, is similar to the one used in the Life Orientation learning area. They did not understand the fact that the themes and sub-themes for literacy had to be planned or written separately in the scheme of work as they are written separately in the syllabus. The meaning of integration was confusing to them and the challenge is that integration was neither written nor explained in the syllabus. Therefore, they did not differentiate between the scheme of work and the lesson plan in terms of an integrated syllabus

5.5.3.3 Challenges to write explicit lesson plans

Although all the participants wrote lesson plans daily because they wanted to get in the classrooms prepared to teach the learners to read, they had challenges to write explicit lesson plans that could help the Grade R learners to construct their reading knowledge. All the participants emphasised that lesson planning was essential to teaching the learners to read because it leads to successful reading instruction. Papa-

Gusho and Bicaku-Cekrezi (2015) are of the opinion that careful planning is crucial for effective implementation of teaching instruction. Adding to this, Seidel et al. (2005) assert that the clarity and coherence of the objectives foster cognitive learning activities and help the teacher to be logical when they teach the learners. The finding of this study is that the teachers had a challenge to write the objectives that align to literacy class activities. Formulation of clear objectives is a problem to some teachers.

The study finds some lack of consistency in the lesson plans of the three teachers. For instance, among the three lesson plans that Mrs Mahopolang wrote, it was only in the first lesson plan where the objective of the lesson was not specific. It was sometimes not clear what she wanted the learners to achieve at the end of the lesson. The theme and sub-theme did not always align in the lesson plans of other teachers. The presentation of the lesson plan sometimes showed something different from the planned activities.

Achievement of the letter-sound relationship was a common objective for all the lessons, but the activities were prepared to help the learners to read whole words and to use books. For teachers to implement the lesson plans effectively they should have effective planning skills (Papa-Gusho & Bicaku-Cekrezi, 2015). This seemed a challenge for teachers in this study and resulted in them failing to manage time because they had too many activities planned, some of which did not address the lesson objectives.

5.5.4 Challenges Related to Enactment of Guidelines in Teaching of Reading

This research study provided various challenges that related to the effective implementation of curriculum. Although the challenges of this study have already been shown above for triangulation purpose, the challenges relating specifically to implementation of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho are indicated in the sections that follow.

5.5.4.1 Challenges to align teaching strategies with the cognitive level of learners

According to Piaget's Cognitive developmental theory, learners perform activities that are age-appropriate successfully, and according to Vygotsky's Social Interaction

theory learners perform successfully activities that are at their ZPD through social interaction (Blake & Pope, 2008). Although the three teachers used teaching strategies such as model-reading, phonics, letter-sound relationships, and to read whole words, sometimes a teacher (Mrs Makabelo) would go as far as instructing the learners to work on the sentences. This went against the syllabus guidelines which did not suggest that they should teach the learners to read words but to recognise the pictures, to hold books, and to recognise letters.

5.5.4.2 How the language of instruction influences reading and challenges the teachers and learners to name the letters and sound them out.

The unexpected finding of this study is that the participants mixed the two official languages, Sesotho and English, to teach the Grade R learners to acquire reading skills. The parents and the community influenced the syllabus implementation for the teaching of reading at a young age, especially as the teachers were expected to be knowledgeable and to implement good classroom practices. The participants indicated that they mixed the languages because the parents want their learners to be taught in English, because if they did not do so, they would transfer their learners to other schools which teach the learners to speak and read in English. Sometimes the teachers understood that it was not mandatory to teach in the home language.

Teachers use both Sesotho and English when teaching the learners to read in order to satisfy the principal who wants them to teach the learners in English and to satisfy the parents, despite the fact that the IECCD policy prescribes Sesotho as the medium of instruction in the Grade R classrooms. This finding confirms what Samson & Charles (2018) observe that the principals' inappropriate response to curriculum reform and supervision of curriculum implementation are due to the lack of information and training. The principals want the teachers to teach in English (in addition to the home language) because the neighbouring schools teach in English. A further reason, for Mrs Matebello, was that most materials are written in English.

The Grade R learners needed to be taught in their native language as researchers recommended (MOET, 2013). The findings of this study unveiled that three teachers and their learners had a challenge to articulate letter-sound relationships because of

the influence of the two languages, Sesotho and English. However, this finding was seen as constructive learning (Fox, 1996) when learners transfer their home language alphabet to the additional language. Arguably, switching from one language to another in a reading lesson seemed challenging in ways such as giving and responding to instructions. This observation corroborates the findings of studies carried out in Zimbabwe and Kenya (Anyiendah, 2017) that using an unknown language to teach the learners impedes effective learning. This study revealed that the participants needed support and training to teach the basic reading skills in a second (additional) language, especially the letter-sound relationship because the pronunciation is different.

5.5.4.3 Challenges impeding independent and social interaction reading activities

Despite the fact that the Grade R syllabus advocates the learner-centred approach to teaching, the findings of the study reveal that teachers do not use it fully but they often use the teacher-centred approach. They indicated that they are frustrated by the lack of resources for teaching the learners how to read although they are willing to engage the learners in child-centred activities. The study confirmed the findings of Chimbi and Jita (2019) that most often teachers bank on teachers-centred method and use few learner-centred methods of teaching that are suggested in the syllabus. However, in this study there was progress when the teachers taught phonics and the letter-sound relationship, especially in the whole-class discussion, because they led the discussion and learners were instructed to identify the letters of the alphabet on the classroom displays. Teachers mostly told learners what to do, and this meant that direct instruction was the most common method of teaching where teachers read phonics and then assist the learners to engage in the activities.

Although all the participants taught the learners the letter-sound relationship daily and did their best to help the learners to acquire the basic reading skills, the study found that, from the social interaction perspective, there were weaknesses in their teaching methodology. Some teachers used collaborative group-work reading (although they were not very successful) while Mrs Mahopolang did not use it. Although they stressed the point of helping the learners to reach to their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

through proper teaching, that is, through the scaffolding process, teachers faced some challenges. Teachers, such as Mrs Makabelo, who walk from group to group checking what the learners are doing do not facilitate the lesson successfully enough to help all the learners to participate in the group activities. The focus was on the more responsive learners while other members of the group became spectators.

Some teachers did not use collaborative learning effectively. They claimed that the learners worked as teams in their groups. For example, Mrs Matebello arranged the learners to sit in groups and she claimed that she used group-work so that the learners might help each other. However, it was found that the learners read independently. Mrs Matebello seemed to lack understanding on how group-work is used effectively in the classroom. The learners in her class engaged in discussions only when they read with the teachers.

5.5.4.4   Lack of resources, facilities and teaching-learning materials

The Grade R classes which were recently incorporated into the primary schools for the purpose of achieving the objectives of *Education for All* by the Government of Lesotho, are not supplied with the required resources and essential teaching and learning materials, such as books. Learners learn to read by interpreting and evaluating printed materials (Fox, 1996). One may expect that the Grade R classes are provided with teaching and learning materials, as is the case with the primary school classes. The Grade R classrooms have limited facilities such as chairs and tables for the learners.

This indicates the scarcity of the essential teaching and learning materials for the teaching of reading in Lesotho Grade R classes. This affected teaching as the teachers used their own money to buy the required teaching and learning materials. The study confirmed the findings of Ali et al. (2011), Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018) and Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) that teachers who do not have the necessary teaching and learning materials are unable to implement the syllabus successfully. Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018) asserts that the learners, especially Grade R learners, learn best when they manipulate concrete learning materials. The unavailability of books in the classrooms, hinders the effective syllabus implementation because the Grade R syllabus suggested that teachers should teach the learners print-awareness, and holding and

paging books (MOET, 2011).

Another observation is that NGOs in Lesotho are currently helping the Government of Lesotho (GOL) with supplies of materials needed for education. The Government of Lesotho has not yet invested adequately in Early Childhood Education (ECE). Studies carried out in South Africa, such as the one by Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018) and Bantwini (2010), indicate that the implementation of the curriculum by teachers is not only affected by the lack of teaching and learning resources, but also by the high teacher-learner ratio.

Further, literature indicates that the Grade R learners learn to read through the use of pictures (Al-Barakat & Bataineh, 2011; Burnett, 2007). The Grade R syllabus suggests that pictures be used as teaching and learning materials, among other materials. This study found that the letter-sound relationship is taught in isolation from being linked to the pictures, and most of the classroom display was characterised by the letters of the alphabet, without pictures. The charts and flash cards were not illustrated. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges was to comply and to implement some of the activities suggested in the syllabus, as the learners memorised the letter names and the letter-sounds.

5.5.4.5   Challenges to meet learning needs of all the learners in the classroom

Although some teachers are satisfied with the teacher-student ratio of 1:30, teaching and learning materials such as flash cards that were made by teachers were not adequate for all the learners to read. The lack of relevant teaching materials impedes effective implementation of the curriculum. This confirms the findings of Ali et al. (2011) and Dzimiri and Marimo (2015) that it becomes a serious situation in circumstances where there are many learners in the classroom. It was observed that the participants were not able to keep all the learners attentive, thus they engaged in the prepared reading activities throughout the literacy lesson due to the lack of teaching materials. It was in Mrs Matebello's class only where individual learners were given books. These books were donor-funded and assorted, but they addressed the learners' sub-themes such as holding the book, and turning the pages. It was evident that when there is a scarcity of teaching and learning materials for learners, the quality of interaction between the participants (teachers) and the learners (as well as among the learners

themselves) decreases. Teachers are challenged to keep all the learners engaged in effective learning activities.

The class size of 30 learners in Mrs Makabelo and Mrs Mahopolang's classrooms mostly matched the Government recommendation. A higher number of 34 learners in Mrs Matebello's classroom was a too big for a Grade R class. Ntumi (2016) finds that big classes prevent effective curriculum implementation. Teachers have to prepare many teaching and learning materials for the learners to acquire reading skills. Limited resources affect the teaching of reading in both whole-class discussions and in group reading activities.

5.5.4.6   The impact of absenteeism on learning to read

The education of some of the pre-schoolers, as in Mrs Matebello's Grade R class, is obstructed by absenteeism. The learners are often absent from school because they have to look after younger siblings; in this way some parents and guardians of Grade R learners do not support the teachers, hence the poor school attendance of their learners. Mrs Matebello explained: *"Ha ngata bana ba* (most often children are) absent from school … when I ask [about] their brothers and sisters, they often tell me that they are taking care of siblings." To Mrs Matebello, absence from school affects acquisition of reading skills negatively because some reading skills were taught while learners were not at school. The challenge of absenteeism was expressed by Mrs Matebello whose class had on the average a 33% daily attendance rate, and this was exacerbated by inclement weather conditions which sometimes prevailed and caused a further drop in attendance.

5.5.5 Summary of the findings

<u>Regulatory guidelines and policy for the teaching reading</u>

The first research question was:

What are the Lesotho regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

This study concluded that there are legal frameworks that show the focus of education

in Lesotho, starting from the primary school level. These are included in Lesotho's *Constitution* of 1993 and the Education Act 2010. They indicated that the goal of the Government is to make education accessible to all and to provide free primary education. The Act speaks only about the registration of pre-schools. The list of documents and guidelines that speak directly about preschool and/or Grade R classes are mentioned in section 5.4.1. The study concluded that teachers have access only to the syllabus and use it for planning lessons. The IECCD policy which speaks about the language of classroom instruction is disseminated orally to the participants.

Interpretation of the guidelines

The second research question was:

How do Lesotho teachers make sense of the guidelines for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes?

Teachers are aware of the syllabus for the Grade R classes. They were able to state the reading skills although their reading instruction was in a state of non-alignment.

The findings of this study were that teachers demonstrated the knowledge of the reading basics that the syllabus suggested to be taught in Grade R classes. The documentary evidence revealed that the reading basics included recognising pictures, holding books, paging books from the right to the left, and knowing the letters of the alphabet. The teachers teach the letters of the alphabet and the letter-sound relationship (phonics) every day. They give the learners some books so that they may learn the reading basics suggested in the syllabus.

Implementation, challenges and opportunities

The third research question was:

How do Lesotho teachers enact the guidelines and policies for reading in Grade R?

- The first finding was that participants considered what the learners already knew and linked this to new knowledge. They built on the learners' contextual knowledge. They taught reading through songs and actions, as the Grade R syllabus suggested that learners learn through play.

- The second finding was that teachers act as MKOs. They demonstrated how to read the letters of the alphabet and then let the learners identify and read them from the classroom displays in order to enable them to construct knowledge and move from their actual level of reading to the ZPD. They also engaged other learners to help the ones who were not coping.

- The third finding was that teachers from the neighbouring schools interacted and learnt from each other. They planned quarterly schemes of work together and wrote them out in order to have a common direction for teaching the basics of reading (Makunja, 2016; Okoth, 2016; Rusznyak & Walton, 2011).

- The fourth finding was that the effective implementation of the syllabus was influenced by the context of the schools. Although the Grade R teachers were aware that the IECCD policy advocates that the medium of instruction in the Grade R classes is the learner's mother-tongue, they switch between Sesotho and English languages.

- Another finding was that the syllabus, the schemes of work and the lesson plans did not match. Lesotho's Grade R syllabus has three learning areas: Life Orientation, Literacy and Numeracy. However, the teachers' schemes of work focuses on some areas and ignores others.

- The teachers did not engage the learners in effective group-work activities as they did not give the learners the opportunity for independent learning. The study found that teachers had challenges in ensuring that the learners follow the teachers' reading instructions.

- The Grade R syllabus suggested that learners should be taught how to use books. The study concluded that the lack of relevant reading materials failed to enhance the acquisition of skills in independent learning; and this did little to raise the ZPD of the learners (Okoth, 2016; Ntumi, 2016).

- Although all the teachers in this study taught learners phonics (letter names and letter-sound relationship), most often they said that they were challenged to help learners with the correct letter-sound relationship because of mixed language usage. They needed better training to face many classroom challenges (Al-Barakat

& Bataineh, 2011; Ntumi, 2016; Prior, 2013). However, literature indicates that it is not wrong when novices in language learning borrow the letter-sound from their home language (Fox, 1996; Prior, 2013).

- Another finding was that teachers ignored the learners' inaccurate responses. For example, when the learners incorrectly pronounced a letter name or letter-sound, the errors were ignored. The assumption was that the learners will learn the accurate responses from their peers. A further peculiar finding was that teachers are quick to answer their own questions. They did not give the learners adequate time to give the answers.

- The final finding was that class sizes were sometimes larger than the prescribed number of learners. This factor contributed to the extended period for the teaching of reading skills.

5.6 Contribution of the study

The final research question says: What lessons can be learnt from the study of the challenges and opportunities for the teaching reading in Grade R classes? The study concluded that the Grade R classes have opportunities for the teaching of reading but many studies did not focus on this; they concentrated mainly on the challenges facing the teaching reading. However, some earlier studies focused on this area but not in Lesotho – they focused on the application of the theories relevant for the teaching of reading in Grade R classes.

Teachers had the opportunity to access the syllabus which provided teaching guidelines to implement reading lessons using the themes and sub-themes. Although the teachers were familiar with the content of the syllabus, there were some aspects that were not written into the lesson plan such as specific objectives, assessment method, and criteria for reading. The document analysis revealed that the aims of the syllabus and expectations from Grade R teachers were not in sync with the regulatory guidelines and policy.

The findings obtained from the documents of the participants, from the interviews, and from the lesson observation notes, demonstrated that even with a well-designed syllabus, the participants in their respective classrooms were the sole decision-makers

in syllabus planning and implementation because this study showed that teachers adapt the content of the Grade R syllabus to suit socio-environmental factors; for example, in addition to the language choice, whole-word and sentence understanding are not suggested in the syllabus. This confirms the finding of Chimbi and Jita (2019) that teachers interpret curriculum according to the knowledge they have (possess) and the context of the school. This implied that they should become involved as active participants in the creation of the syllabus because the goal of education will be difficult to achieve when they do not buy-in or make sense of it.

This study revealed that teachers continue to alternate the languages when they teach the Grade R learners to read. This challenge might be even deeper to facilitate learning where the learners construct meanings independently and socially. This means that this study differs from Fox's (1996) contention that learners learn to read in the second language by bringing the letter-sound from the home language to the new language. The content of the syllabus that directs teachers to teach the reading basics in the home language need to be clear, notwithstanding the fact that being taught in English will enhance future academic and employment prospects in a highly competitive global market.

The study also indicated that the teachers had the opportunity to consult and learn from colleagues. Social interaction does not start in the classrooms with the learners but it is also with teachers learning from each other. However, this study recommends that the teachers need to be careful of what they and their learners learn from peers.

5.7 Recommendations

The recommendations are presented in relation to the research findings which suggest what can be done to address the challenges facing the teaching of reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho, and elsewhere.

5.7.1 Review of the Syllabus

Because the document analysis and the information from the research study participants demonstrate some gaps in the Grade R syllabus, it is recommended that the syllabus be reviewed and that the teachers and the parents should be involved in

this review process. The literature stipulates that insufficient direction of the syllabus and/or the curriculum affects the work of teachers negatively (Makunja, 2016; Okoth, 2016). It is unrealistic to expect the Grade R teachers (or any teacher) to provide quality education without clear legal frameworks, regulatory guidelines and policies for teaching.

The study uncovered that the IECCD policy is disseminated orally to the teachers and that they therefore do not have the physical policy document in the classrooms. There is a need for the workshops in order to familiarise the Grade R teachers with the policy (MOET, 2013) and to provide them with hard and soft copies of the policy documents. It has to be clarified whether it is mandatory that the Grade R learners should be taught in the mother-tongue or not.

5.7.2 Opportunities for Professional Development

This study recommends that the Grade R teachers should be trained to effectively teach the reading basics that are suggested in the syllabus. The MOET should establish a pre-service (full-time) preschool teacher programme in the relevant teacher training institution(s) in order to train the Grade R teachers. It became evident that the CECE part time programme did not adequately equip teachers to align the objectives with the classroom activities, and the syllabus with the scheme of work. Professional development will probably improve curricular knowledge and understanding (Avalos, 2011). The Grade R teachers should be graduates or at least have a relevant diploma qualification in education to provide them with the educational as well as the social tools. Baloyi-Mothibeli (2018), Dzimiri and Marimo, (2015) and Okoth (2016) are of the opinion that the teachers need ongoing training in order to implement the curriculum effectively.

The MOET, through the ECCD Unit, the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) in collaboration with LCE and any other stakeholders interested in ECE should provide professional development for the Grade R teachers through the workshops and seminars. They should organise regular centre or area visits in the schools to monitor the implementation of the syllabus and policy guidelines. Although the NTTs already hold workshops for the teachers to make teaching and learning materials, as indicated by the participants, the study suggests that they should also

hold frequent workshops which are intended to improve the quality of instruction, and to complement training efforts of what other stakeholders sometimes attempt.

5.7.3 Need for a Format: Scheme of Work and Lesson Plan

There is a need for the MOET to provide a format of the scheme of work and lesson plan in the schools in order for consistency and to make the teachers aware of the components and contents of the scheme of work and lesson plan so that planning is done thoroughly. For instance, the objectives, teaching methods, materials, introduction, teacher's activities and learners' activities, assessments methods and criteria are explicitly indicated in each teacher's planning.

5.7.4 Provision of Materials for the Teaching of Reading

The study recommends the use of age-appropriate books and other reading materials that are beneficial for the Grade R class. It further suggests that, when a new curriculum is designed, the MOET should ensure that instructional materials align with the needs of the new curriculum as suggested by Koc et al. (2007). This study recommends that the teachers should read stories to and with the learners almost every day in order to demonstrate correct print-awareness, how to hold books upright and how to turn the pages as Fox (1996) and the Grade R syllabus suggest. The books should be culturally-rich, as literature suggests that cultural texts teach the learners quicker how to read (Fox, 1996, MOET, 2013). As such, learners should be taught using real-life cultural contexts in order to make meaning, and to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge (Blake & Pope, 2008).

5.7.5 Engaging Learners in Social Reading Activities

Social reading activities are good for emergent literacy development of learners who are in preschool because they learn to read from shared reading with More Knowledgeable Others (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Mason & Sinha, 1992; Pishghadam & Ghardiri, 2011; Rhyner et al., 2009). It is recommended that teachers give due consideration to the various aspects, such as grouping the learners according to their ability, and also changing the groups from time-to-time according to the types of teaching/learning activities, resources and assessment. The participants found

teaching in mixed ability groups harder than teaching in classes where the learners are more or less same in ability. They should also vary their teaching approaches when they teach the learners to read (Galton et al., 2009; Snell et al., 2015). Based on the Cognitive and the Social Interaction Theories, the study recommends that the Grade R teachers should allow the learners to learn to read in a free but structured environment, where they can engage in shared reading activities during the lesson. Free-structured environment means that they create opportunities for emergent literacy in both independent reading and shared reading activities thereby implementing Piaget's Cognitive Theory and Vygotsky's Social Interaction Theory of teaching and learning frameworks (Mason & Sinha, 1992).

5.8 Limitations of the study

Although this study yielded quality data, it could have given the views of many participants had it been conducted using more than three participants; in addition to the possibility of adopting a mixed method, qualitative and quantitative methods of collecting data in order to give a more expansive output. It could also have adopted Action Research (AR) where the researcher could have been a participant-observer in order to incorporate the Cognitive and the Social Interaction theories in intervention strategies for a better quality of findings. The time restriction affected the decision to opt for this type of research method. Also, it would be inappropriate to generalise the findings of this study because only three participants were selected. The researcher is aware that a comprehensive research on how the participants assess the performance of Grade R learners on acquisition of basic reading skills needed to be carried out. It can also focus on how best the assessment is used to improve reading skills in learners.

There is a need to conduct a study in which the learners are participants in order to find rich data from them about their opportunities and challenges to learn to read in the social learning environment using a child-centred teaching approach.

5.9 Conclusion

Research has shown that early childhood education has received significant attention in many countries in recent years. In the 1970s, nursery education paid attention to

oral language acquisition and storytelling, while in recent years there is a shift to the acquisition of early literacy skills like learning to read and write (Nutbrown, 2011). Early childhood education in Lesotho received attention at the beginning of the second millennium. However, teachers did not have the syllabus for the Grade R classes until 2011. In recent years, there are regulatory guidelines to help them to teach the learners. Research has shown that the learners still lack the basic reading skills up to Grade 4 in Lesotho (UNESCO, 2014; UNICEF, 2016). The main research question was asked because there was a gap identified in the teaching of reading skills. The conclusion is made in response to the research sub-questions.

This study adds to the existing conclusions from the previous studies that the community should also be involved in the design or the reform of the curriculum because the findings of this study were that the parents influence the teachers to teach the learners how to read in the additional language (English) even when the teachers know what the policy guidelines expect from them. The previous studies such as the one by Avalos (2011) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011) indicate the importance of involving the parents to support their learners academically and in the school activities.

Moreover, the confusion of the specifics of content to be extracted for the Grade R teaching of reading was evident. This study concluded that it is necessary for the teachers to have an understanding of the type of the curriculum that they have to implement (Chimbi & Jita, 2019; Drake & Reid, 2018). This includes the understanding of the integration of the subjects or learning areas which include Life Orientation, Numeracy and Literacy in Grade R syllabus.

Poor lesson-planning affects the success of a reading lesson, hence hindering the effective implementation of syllabus (Papa-Gusho & Biçaku-Çekrezi, 2015; Rusznyak & Walton, 2011). Although teachers have the opportunity to write the daily lesson plans, they find it difficult to align the lesson objectives to the classroom activities. In addition, some of the classroom activities are irrelevant to the area of teaching reading skills, and thus do not help the teachers to achieve the lesson objectives. This is why their reading lessons take longer than expected.

This study concluded that Basotho want their learners to attend the English medium Grade R classes. This influences the teachers' choice of the medium of instruction,

contrary to the national policy.

According to the Cognitive Theory of Piaget and the Social Interaction Theory of Vygotsky, learners learn to construct knowledge when they get motivation and support from experienced people (Blake & Pope, 2008; Riley, 2006; Zhao & Zhu, 2012). The teachers who follow these theories motivate, explain, model, and guide the learners to perform the teaching and learning activities in a successful manner (Blake & Pope, 2008). This study also concluded that the teachers guide the learners through learning phonics as a precursor to word-recognition and sentence-building. It was evident that teacher-directed instruction in a whole-class setting arrangement pervaded most class teaching. Blake and Pope (2008: 63) write:

> Vygotsky's model of teaching and learning has significantly influenced "early-literacy" program, such as Reading Recovery and Guided Reading. Yet this theory is in contradiction to what is happening in schools today. Too many schools have teacher-centered classrooms.

Therefore, the findings of this study confirmed that teachers taught learners to read, where knowledge was passed on from teachers to learners in a form of teacher-telling instruction. The implication of the teacher-centred teaching approach is that the learners become passive bystanders and fail to improve their reading skills as they become bored. Thus teachers are encouraged to practise the child-centred teaching approach in the teaching of reading. It was noted that there are positive signs that the teachers are moving towards the child-centred instruction. However, limited resources and large classes have a negative impact, and this forces teachers to adopt a teacher-centred approach.

Although Ntumi (2016) and Kini and Podolsky (2016) indicate that novice teachers learn from more experienced teachers, it seems that this is not always the case, as it was not applicable in this study where the newly-qualified teacher wrote better lesson plans, compared to the two teachers who have long teaching experiences. This study is silent on the correct or appropriate type of guidance that can be given by experienced members to novice teachers in teaching reading to Grade R learners as it was not part of the study's objective; but future research may fill in this gap.

Another finding of the study that was critical revealed that there is a gap in the Grade R syllabus, and the study suggests that it has to be filled. The Grade R syllabus provides insufficient guidance to help teachers to teach the learners to read. It revealed that there was only one broad objective for the literacy learning area and that there was no specific content for all the suggested themes and sub-themes. A checklist should be prescribed to help assess sub-themes. However, Davis (2012) and Wolfe (2013) assert that it would be a form of stereotyping if teachers were told everything they should do in the class. Hence, teachers should read the suggested activities and then structure lesson objectives accordingly.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Faculty of Education

21-Aug-2017

Dear **Mr Arone Koloti**

Ethics Clearance: **The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho**

Principal Investigator: **Mr Arone Koloti**

Department: **School of Education Studies (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to you application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/0967**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours faithfully

Prof. MM Mokhele
Chairperson: Ethics Committee

Education Ethics Committee
Office of the Dean: Education
T: +27 (0)51 401 9683| F: +27 (0)86 546 1113 | E: NkoaneMM@ufs.ac.za
Winkie Direko Building | P.O. Box/Posbus 339 | Bloemfontein 9300 | South Africa
www.ufs.ac.za

APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Classroom reading instruction observation schedule

Name of school: _____   Date: _____

Name of a teacher: _____   Class: _____

Main research question

What are the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of reading in Grade R classes in Lesotho?

Review section	Description/comment
Lesson plan presentation Explore the lesson implementation as per the lesson plan. Pick points from the lesson presentation for example, examine teachers talk about issues that are from the lesson plan versus lesson presentation. Identify regulatory guidelines and policies for the teaching of reading	
Presentation of reading activities Explore the challenges and opportunities to enact basic pre-reading skills in class. Study how the teacher presents the essential components of reading in class: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension	

Interaction (Knowledge construction) Observe the way in which the teacher facilitates when providing reading instruction to Grade R learners. The challenges and opportunities regarding teacher-learner interaction, peer interaction, learner-reading material interaction, motivating strategies	
Teaching/reading methods or approaches Observe the challenges and opportunities the teacher encounter when he/she uses reading methods or activities used to teach learners to read. Top-down, bottom-up, Whole class/oral reading, independent/silent reading (e.g. print awareness activities), share reading and guided reading (schema – symbolic system and social interaction – ZDP, scaffolding and mentoring). The alphabet, the phonics, the look-and-say, the eclectic method, the language experience, and the balanced teaching approaches.	
Teaching/learning materials Explore the challenges and opportunities teachers have when they use teaching and learning materials. Examine availability and effectiveness of reading materials, newspapers, flash cards, objects, classroom display, fiction and non-fiction, illustrations in reading materials used	
Reading resources Classroom setup/organization Study if sitting arrangement allow for peer and teacher interaction, class size, facilities such as chairs and tables, source of light and ventilation. Reading area/corner, classroom library	

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

I will introduce myself to the participant and explain the purpose of my study. Then I will make agreement of how we are going to work during interview, for example, agreement on audio recording and on the personal information.

SECTION A (If participant agrees)

This will give information about the challenges and opportunities teachers have to implement the guidelines in Grade R class.

Questions related to participant personal data as warm up. You have a right to answer all or some of these questions.

1. How long (number of years/months) have you taught in preschools and how long (number of years/months) have you taught in Reception class (Grade R)? Tell me about your experience of teaching Grade R learners to learn to read.

2. What qualifications/ certificates do you have and in which institution(s) did you obtain them starting with the highest qualification.

3. How the education you acquired in tertiary benefit or does not benefit you in the teaching of literacy in Grade R class, especially teaching them to learn to read? Did the education you acquired prepare you enough to teach Grade R learners to learn to read? Please explain.

4. How were you performing on language subjects during your school and tertiary career and how does your performance relate to/influence the way you teach learners to learn to read?

5. Which teaching strategies/methods do you use to teach learners to read and why?

6. What challenges and opportunities do you have when you have to effectively use the group work activities?

7. Which documents help you to prepare for reading instruction and what challenges and opportunities do you have when you use them, for example Reception Class Guidelines?

SECTION B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview protocol for Grade R reading instruction following lesson observations and it will be done at the time convenient to the teacher.

I have observed you teaching Grade R learners to learn to read. I would like to interview you in order to get insightful knowledge of the real classroom practice and regarding the challenges and opportunities to the teaching of reading in Grade R class.

This interview session will last for **less than an hour**. You may choose to answer all or some of the questions that I will ask you. Thank you. We may start:

1. Issues from the lesson plan: Ask a teacher to talk about issues that will arise from the lesson plan versus lesson presentation. "You have planned to do that but I saw you doing 1, 2, …. Please explain Why?"

    Please explain things that went well when you were teaching learners to learn to read.

2. Please tell me things that influenced you (were challenges) the way you have presented your lesson.

If you were to begin the reading lesson you have just taught in my presence what changes would you make? Why? Make specific reference to the things that challenged you.

3. Describe how you give effective reading instruction to Grade R learners in your classroom. (I am expecting a Grade R teacher to give information on things such as: interaction in the classroom, teaching approaches, how they integrate background knowledge of learners into new lessons/knowledge, assimilation and accommodation, whether they allow learners opportunity to ask questions or not, how they use concrete teaching and learning material for reading instruction.)

4. Probing. How do you deal with learners' differences in reading/ learning styles of learners? And how do you help them to use their background knowledge to read? Is there a time when they use materials (books) on their own?

5. What do you do to help learners to learn from more knowledgeable other/peers? Please explain.

6. What are the challenges for the teaching of reading in Grade R classroom? Explain

the challenges in detail.

Probing

Tell me about the challenges related to curriculum guidelines and implementation, the challenges to use guidelines in class.

Tell me about the challenges from the colleagues. Tell me about the challenges related to parents and guardians.

7. What are the opportunities for the teaching of reading in Grade R classroom? Explain opportunities in detail.

8. Please explain the challenges and opportunities you have when implementing policy/curriculum guidelines for reading instruction in Grade R? How applicable, helpful or not helpful are they?

9. Which reading basics do you teach Grade R learners? How and/ or why? (Mention pre reading skills (basic reading skills), teaching methods)

10. How do you motivate them to learn to read?

11. Do you consider yourself partially active, active or very active in the implementation of reading instruction? Why? (Probing questions will guide teachers to talk about their knowledge/experiences)

12. How do you assess the achievement and the progress of learners in reading?

13. In general what could improve reading instruction in Grade R? Please explain if you know something else that I should have asked you and I did not? What can you say about it?

Thank you for sharing your teaching experiences with me. Let us talk about what will happen next (e.g. a follow up interview).

APPENDIX D: LETTERS TO THE GATE KEEPERS

Letter of permission to the Senior Education Officer (SEO) to carry out research in schools

P.O. Box 904

Mafeteng 900

Lesotho

11September 2017

Senior Education Officer (SEO)

_____

_____

_____

Dear Sir/madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN GRADE R CLASSES

I hereby ask for permission to conduct a research in Reception Classes (Grade R) of Lesotho. I am Arone Camillus Koloti, a Master of Education degree student in curriculum studies at the University of The Free State in the Republic of South Africa. The title of my study is: **The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho**. This study is intended to benefit all the teachers, particularly Grade R teachers, education departments and curriculum developers. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities teachers encounter when implementing curriculum guidelines for teaching Grade R learners to learn to read.

My study requires me to do reading lesson observations, carry out interviews and do document analysis (curriculum guidelines and lesson plan). Audio and video recording will be done upon participant's permission. My plan is to conduct three reading lesson

observations and six interview sessions (one main and the follow up interviews) per class and with each participant in the months of September, October and November in this year 2017.

The interviews will follow these sequence: three interviews gathering data for document analysis which will take place before lesson presentation at the time convenient to the participants before classes begin and three interview sessions (the main which includes personal data collection and the follow up interviews) after I have observed the participants teaching a reading lesson. I am intending to avoid to cause any commotion during lessons. For example, I will not interact with the learners during reading lessons or move around in the class.

The time allocated for lesson observation is 30 minutes (a Grade R lesson period) per period for three periods. Each interview session will last for an hour.

Please note that I will abide by the principles of confidentiality. The name of the teacher and the name of the school will not appear in the reports of this study. All participants will be asked to participate voluntarily in the study and they may withdraw at any time should they so wish and no grudge will be held against anyone of them.

The departments of education including your office will be given a copy of my study should the department wish to have it.

Please provide me with declaration letter if my request is accepted.Thank you for your remarkable consideration of my request.

For more information please to contact me at +26658059379/ ackoloti@gmail.com or my supervisor Dr. Thuthukile Jita at JitaT@ufs.ac.za / (0027) 051 4017441.

Yours sincerely

_____

Arone Camillus Koloti

Letter of permission to the principal to carry out research in school

<div align="right">

P.O. Box 904

Mafeteng 900

Lesotho

17 September 2017

</div>

The Principal

_____

_____

_____

Dear Sir/madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL

I hereby ask for permission to conduct a research in a Reception Class (Grade R) in your school. I am Arone Camillus Koloti, a Master of Education degree student in curriculum studies at the University of The Free State in the Republic of South Africa. The title of my study is: **The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho**. This study is intended to benefit all the teachers, particularly Grade R teachers, to improve teaching, education departments and curriculum developers because I will work with the Grade R teacher to explore the challenges and opportunities teachers encounter when implementing curriculum guidelines in relation to teaching Grade R learners to learn to read.

My research study requires me to do observation during the teaching of reading, carry

out interview and do document analysis (curriculum guidelines and lesson plan). Audio and video recording will be done upon participant's permission. My plan is to conduct three reading lesson observations and six interview sessions (one main and the follow up interviews) in the months of September, October and November in this year 2017.

The interviews will follow these sequence: three interviews gathering data for document analysis which will take place before lesson presentation at the time convenient to the participants before classes begin and three interview sessions (the main which includes personal data collection and the follow up interviews) after I have observed the participants teaching a reading lesson. I am intending to avoid to cause any lesson commotion. For example, I will not interact with the learners during reading lessons or move around in the class.

The time allocated for lesson observation is 30 minutes (a Grade R lesson period) per period for three periods. Each interview session will last for an hour.

Please note that I will abide by the principles of confidentiality. The name of the teacher and the name of the school will not appear in the reports of this study. Grade R teachers have a choice to or not to participate in my research. They can withdraw any time they wish so and no grudge will be held against anyone of them.

Please write your declaration letter to acknowledge that I am given a permission to conduct a study in school if so. Thank you in advance for your kind consideration of my request.

For more information please contact me at +26658059379/ ackoloti@gmail.com or my supervisor Dr. Thuthukile Jita at JitaT@ufs.ac.za / (0027) 051 4017441.

Yours sincerely

_____

Arone Camillus Koloti

APPENDIX E: INVITATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

<div align="right">

P.O. Box 904

Mafeteng 900

Lesotho

_____

</div>

Grade R class teacher

_____

_____

RE: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

I hereby invite you to participate in my research. I am Arone Camillus Koloti, a Master of Education degree student in curriculum studies at the University of The Free State in South Africa. The title of my study is: **The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho**. This study is intended to benefit all the teachers, particularly Grade R teachers, education departments and curriculum developers. This is because the purpose of my study is to explore the challenges and opportunities teachers encounter when implementing curriculum guidelines in relation to teaching Grade R learners to learn to read.

My study requires me to do observation during the teaching of reading, carry out interview and do document analysis (examine curriculum guidelines and lesson plan). I ask to do video and audio recordings for information gathering during observation and interview. You have a right to or not to allow me to use any of these research instruments. **My plan is to conduct three reading lesson observations and six interview sessions (one main and the follow up interviews) in the months of September, October and November in this year 2017.**

The interviews will follow these sequence: three interviews gathering data for document analysis which will take place before lesson presentation at the time convenient to you before classes begin and three interview sessions (the main which includes personal data collection and the follow up interviews) after I have observed you teaching a reading lesson. I am intending to avoid to cause any commotion during lessons. For example, I will not interact with the learners during reading lessons or move around in the class.

If you agree to participate in this study you are asked to:

1. Provide the researcher with the curriculum guide for teaching Grade R learners to read, copies of timetable, and three lesson plans for the reading lessons that you will teach.

2. Be interviewed for an hour on the lesson you will prepare for reading (interview based on documents). Interview will be before you teach. There will be three interviews. This will be done on every three visits to your class.

3. Be observed for 30 minutes (30 minutes per class observation per period). This means you will be observed three times when you are teaching Grade R learners to read.

4. Be interviewed for about an hour at your convenient time after teaching a reading lesson (for example at lunch or after school) for the three visits. The visits in your class will be expected to start from September and to end in November 30, 2017.

I will abide by the principles of confidentiality. Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the reports of this study. **Please fill in the consent form attached** to acknowledge that you have accepted my invitation to participate in my study. You are welcome to make a decision to or not to participate. You will not have any problem with the decision you make and no grudge will be held against you.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration of my request.

For more information please contact me at +26658059379/ ackoloti@gmail.com or my supervisor Dr. Thuthukile Jita at JitaT@ufs.ac.za / (0027) 051 4017441.

Yours sincerely

_____

Arone Camillus Koloti

Participant consent form

Please feel free to sign this consent form in order to show that you agree to participate in the research study entitled:

The challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho

It does not mean that because you have signed this form you cannot withdraw from participating in this study whenever you want to do so. Thank you for the decision that you make.

Please complete this consent form

I agree to participate in Mr. Arone Koloti's research study in my Grade R classroom. I have received a letter that invited me to participate in his research in my Grade R class. I understand that the purpose of the research is to explore the challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes as it is written in the letter. I am aware that I have a right to or not to accept Mr. Koloti's request to conduct a study in my class. I accept the researcher's invitation and give him permission to make use of all the resources such as audio and video recorders that will help him to collect information for research purposes only.

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date

APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER FROM SEO/EDUCATION MANAGER

THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
MASERU DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICE
P.O. BOX 47.   MASERU 100.
28810000/1 / 22 322 755

05/09/2017

The Principal

_____

Maseru 100

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: RESEARCH

The Challenges and opportunities of teaching reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho

Mr. Arone Camillus Koloti is a student who is conducting a research on the above stated topic. He therefore wishes to carry out a research at your school.

You are kindly requested to provide him with the information that he may require.

Thanking you in advance for your usual support.

Yours Faithfully

MASERU DISTRICT
EDUCATION OFFICE

0 6 SEP 2017

P.O. BOX 47, MASERU - LESOTHO
TEL.: 22322755/22313709

LEPEKOLA RALIBAKHA (MR)
DISTIRCT EDUCATION MANAGER - MASERU

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING - MAFETENG

P.O.BOX 13 , MAFETENG 900   TEL:22700213   FAX:22701 534

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that Mr. Arone Koloti is the M.Ed student at the University of Free State conducting a research on the topic: **The Challenges and Opportunities of teaching Reading in Grade R classes of Lesotho.**

He would therefore like to conduct a research in your school. Please give him support.

Best Regards!

Manthabeleng Lenake

District Education Manager

Email: manthabeleng.lenake@yahoo.com

Contacts: +266 59507705 or +266 62507705

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
DISTRICT EDUCATION MANAGER

1 9 SEP 2017

MAFETENG
TEL: 227 00213 / FAX: 227 01534

PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE EDITING SERVICES

598 Miami Road
Hibberdene
KZN
4220
Cell: 0842648401
brian.naidoo25@gmail

Brian Naidoo (BA Hons English; BA Hons TESOL; BEd Hons.
BA- English major; Univ. Dip. in Ed.[English special];UCT Cert.in
Legal and Business Writing; UCT Cert. in Copy-Editing; Research Prog. UFS.

SPECIALISING IN THE LANGUAGE EDITING OF THESES, DISSERTATIONS, JOURNAL ARTICLES, PROPOSALS, POLICIES AND PUBLICATIONS.

CERTIFICATE FOR LANGUAGE EDITING: MASTER'S DISSERTATION

ARONE CAMILLUS KOLOTI

University of the Free State

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certificate confirms that the above-mentioned student submitted his draft master's dissertation to me for language-editing, which included correcting in-text citations and the mistakes in the list of references. This was duly edited by me and sent back to the student for revisions as per suggestions from me. I make no claim as to the accuracy of the research content. The text, as edited by me, is grammatically correct. After completion of my language editing, the student has the option to accept or reject suggestions/changes prior to re-submission to the supervisor who will check the content and instances of plagiarism, if any (Turnitin).

B. Naidoo   ID: 5806255134081   DATE: 30/01/2020

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Brian Naidoo
Associate Member

Membership number: NAI001
Membership year: March 2019 to February 2020

0842648401
brian.naidoo25@gmail.com

www.editors.org.za

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