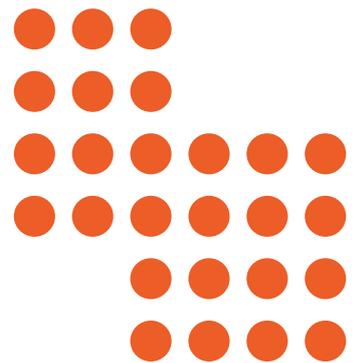


HRDC: TASK TEAM 1

SOCIAL COMPACT APPROACH



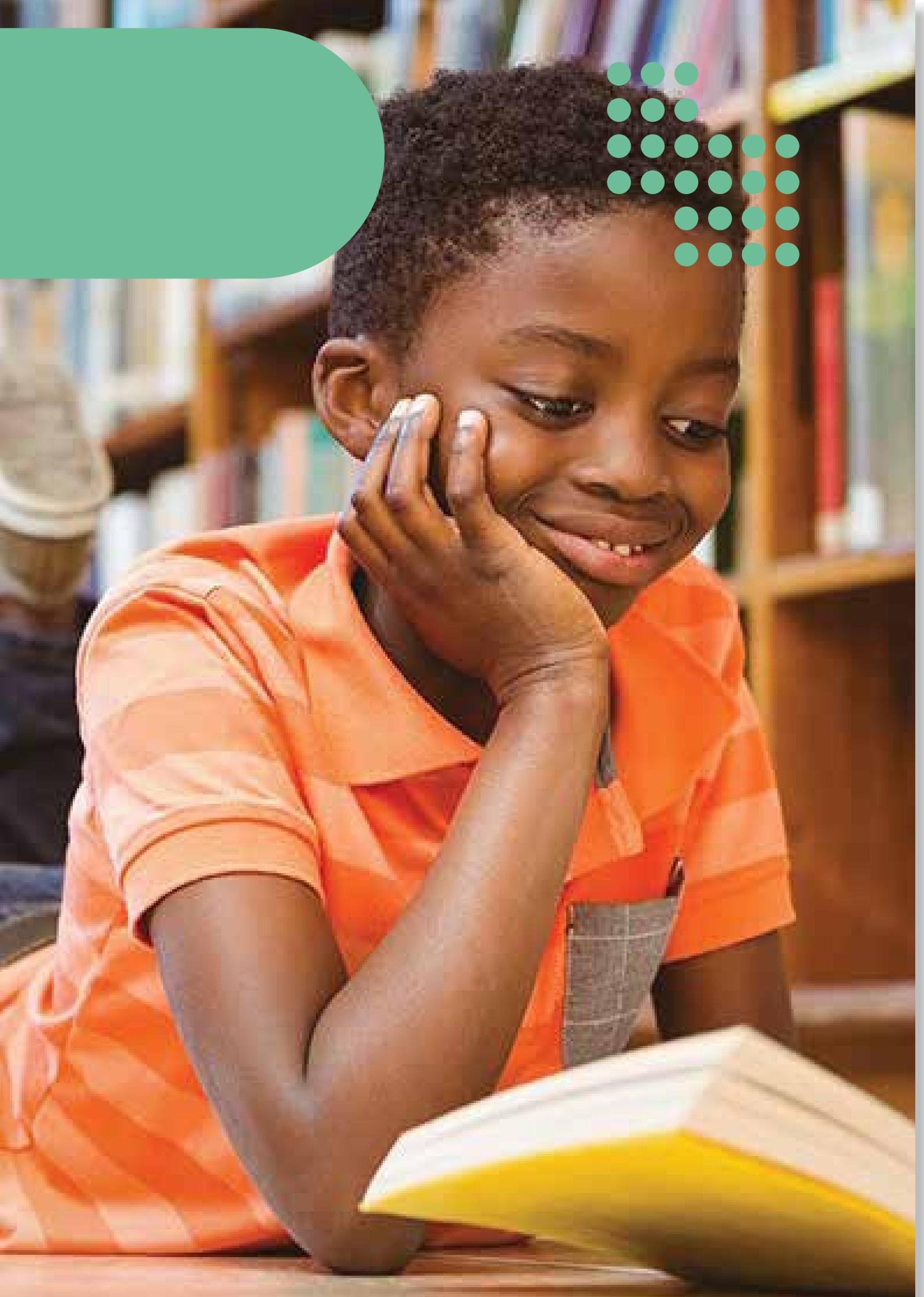
BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A
TRANSFORMED ECONOMY AND
SOCIETY



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READING

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2. READING

DOCTOR

LORRAINE MARNEWECK

IMPROVING READING AND WRITING THROUGH IMPROVING CAPACITY

... BECOMING A SKILLED AND ADAPTABLE READER ENHANCES THE CHANCES OF SUCCESS AT SCHOOL AND BEYOND. READING IS NOT JUST FOR SCHOOL, IT IS FOR LIFE (ELINOR SISULU, 2004)

Dr Marneweck taught in several primary schools in Johannesburg, Cape Town and London, where she gained invaluable experience in curriculum development issues. In particular, she was a member of the Sacred Heart College development team who pioneered one of the first non-racial integrated curricula to be taught in South African schools.

She has also been a part-time lecturer and researcher at both the University of Cape Town, the University of the Witwatersrand and St Augustine's University. During these times she developed a thorough understanding of the education policy framework and co-authored four school textbooks. From January 1997 to June 2005 she was the programme manager for several large development projects for Sacred Heart Research and Development.

Her responsibilities included: the conceptualization of programmatic contents and solutions for projects in the Limpopo Province and the Free State Province; liaison with the provincial Departments' of Education; liaison with international donors (Flemish Department of External Affairs; Flemish Department of Education); development of an accredited course for school managers; and the implementation of the national South African curriculum in rural schools.

Dr Marneweck's PhD thesis (2005), *The Challenges of Curriculum Change Facing Rural Primary School Educators in the Limpopo Province*, was the culmination of her vast range of experience gained from 15 years of classroom practice to programme managing large educator development and district development projects in Limpopo Province.

Since July 2005 Dr Marneweck has been an Executive Director at Class Act Educational Services. Dr Marneweck works contractually with the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) to provide strategic inputs to the National Reading Coalition (NRC) and the Structured Learning Programmes (SLPs). Currently she provides technical assistance to the SLP interventions developed by the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) on behalf of the DBE.

The development trajectory of these learning programmes includes work done in the Gauteng Primary Language and Maths Strategy (GPLMS) and the Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) where she worked as programme manager on behalf of Class Act. Dr Marneweck is deeply committed to the goals and objectives of the National Reading Coalition (NRC) as she sees reading as the central element of all teaching and learning. She has also worked with international funders like USAID and UNICEF on several projects relevant to South Africa's educational needs.



INTRODUCTION



THIS PAPER LINKS

**READING IMPROVEMENTS TO
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

AS THE MORE SKILLED OUR
UNIVERSITY **LECTURES, TEACHERS**
AND **SUBJECT ADVISORS ARE.**

, the better positioned they would be to address the national reading and writing challenges in schools and in classrooms. The paper poses the question, to what extent are reading and writing initiatives across the country contributing to South Africa's human resource requirements and by so doing, improving reading and writing? It responds to this question in four sections, firstly by setting out the background to the reading challenges the nation faces and the negative social and economic impact these challenges have on South Africa and on its people. Secondly, by explicitly setting out the current state of successful reading and writing improvement initiatives across the country that directly address human capacity development.

Thirdly, by extracting systemic and strategic challenges that could potentially inhibit the progress of fast-tracked skills development initiatives in the areas of reading and writing. And finally, by proposing a set of recommendations to address the strategic challenges highlighted.

BACKGROUND



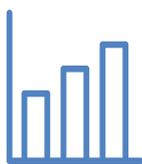
It Is Universally Acknowledged

It is universally acknowledged that reading and writing are critically important skills to acquire as they help the mind to grow and develop through exposure to, and creation of, new ideas.

Reading, when coupled with writing, boosts creativity and is the foundation of a good education. Without reading and writing, one cannot understand the economy, access information, or fully develop emotionally and socially. Reading and writing opens one's mind to a whole world of new possibilities, they reinforce our sense of individuality and our ability to achieve.

But the world is facing a global reading and writing crisis as many countries have challenges with children, youth and adults who are unable to read with comprehension or go beyond mere letter formation in writing. South Africa, while being no exception, has the additional challenges of resource poor communities, often associated with low levels of parental literacy and insufficient exposure to quality books or to reading and writing as a part of daily life. Consensus is that these issues impact negatively on later success at school when children enter the system with gaps already existing in their early literacy. And rather than the gaps being reduced at school, they simply widen, impacting negatively on school success, retention and later life outcomes.

- Research shows that the majority of South African children cannot read for meaning by the age of 10 – even in their home language; and almost a third are still functionally illiterate in English by the age of 12.
- This loss compromises the ability of children to reach their full potential throughout their lives. There is also an economic and social loss for South Africa in that the financial costs associated with low literacy levels are high.



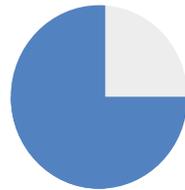
R550
BILLION PER YEAR
SOUTH AFRICA FACES A
GDP LOSS

For example, it is estimated that South Africa faces a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) loss of R550-billion per year due to these reading and writing challenges. Being a reading nation would benefit the country through boosting the economy by 23% to 30%.

Currently South Africa's children are amongst some of the poorest performers in international reading assessments.

For example, the 2016 'Progress in International Reading Literacy Study' (PIRLS) tested Grade 4 and Grade 5 reading in approximately 50 participating countries, including South Africa

**PIRLS TESTED GRADE
5 LEARNERS IN
ISIZULU, ENGLISH
AND AFRIKAANS**



AND FOUND THAT

51%

**OF CHILDREN WERE
READING AT THE**

**LOWEST
BENCHMARK OF
BELOW 400 OUT**

of a possible 1000 points; while this did decrease to 22% when Grade 4 children were tested in their home languages.

- The results also indicated that learners in South African rural public schools performed worse than their urban counterparts in languages. Overall, the performance of South African learners in this international benchmarking assessment remained at the bottom of the study rankings.
- It was also found that 78% of learners cannot read with understanding, even in their home languages by age 10.

These findings are supported by the 'Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring education Quality' (SACMEQ IV, 2016) study which assessed the conditions of schooling and the quality of education in African countries, including South Africa. SACMEQ IV data revealed that 15.8% of Grade 6 learners are reading at level 3 (basic reading), while only 7.1% of Grade 6 learners are reading at level 8 (critical reading).

Under-performance in reading and writing has consequences way beyond primary schooling. Learners who cannot read fall behind and therefore struggle with writing in the early grades and never catch up academically to successfully complete their education or to find jobs. They drop out of school or complete Grade 12 without having access to higher education.

This has social and economic consequences that are exacerbated in rural areas. Reading and writing improvement in primary schools must be addressed as a matter of urgency. This has been confirmed in the priority accorded to reading in the 2019 State of the Nation Address (SONA) by the State President.

While writing specifically of Nigeria, Olasehinde's (et al. ,2015) argument holds for South Africa when they said that the economic, social and political health of a nation depends on building literate citizens who are able to read widely and apply this practically for development; essentially, the development of a country depends on the quality of its human resources.

- It should be acknowledged that the background described in this section is set within the dominant paradigm of learning to read. This paradigm views reading as a skill with a standardised method of teaching, for example, through letter sequencing and phonics.
- This decision was consciously made to better understand reading challenges from the perspective of curriculum policy namely, CAPS, and of the standardised measures that are used to measure reading, namely PIRLS and SACMEQ. Further work needs to be done to consider reading and its challenges from within a more culturally sensitive view of literacy as practice , and the implications this has for policy and practice.
- But this is out of the scope of this piece of work that focuses on human resource development from an official perspective.



STATE OF AFFAIRS

This section focuses on several key initiatives that demonstrate successful actions already taking place to improve reading and writing through the development of human resources like lecturers, academics, teachers, departmental heads and subject advisors. The initiatives are also beneficial to learners as they gain crucial technical and critical reading and writing skills from more accomplished teachers; and these skills enable learners to access more upwardly mobile social, academic and economic processes and practices.

1 CAMPAIGNS AND COALITIONS

Based on the challenges detailed above, and on an analysis of the reading landscape in South Africa undertaken by the Department of Education (DBE) and the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) , it became clear that a nationally coordinated and collaborative strategy was required to address the reading and writing challenges and to coordinate successful activities currently taking place.

- Such collaboration drew on and followed through on the existing national 'Read to Lead' campaign that was launched by government in 2015 to ensure that all children were able to read at an age appropriate level by 2019.
- A number of initiatives have been undertaken under this Read to Lead banner including Drop All and Read, Spelling Bee Competitions, A Reading Nation is a Winning Nation, the 1000 Libraries Campaign, and the Reading Champions initiative.



THE NATIONAL READING COALITION (NRC)
WAS LAUNCHED IN
FEBRUARY 2019 TO ADD IMPETUS
TO THE READ TO LEAD CAMPAIGN
TO INCREASE ITS MOMENTUM
REACH AND SUCCESS

The National Reading Coalition (NRC) was launched in February 2019 to add impetus to the Read to Lead campaign, to increase its momentum, reach and success. The NRC brought all reading stakeholders together, so they were empowered to act in a targeted systematic manner. The NRC capitalises on the under-tapped energy and enthusiasm of civil society, and in the same vein it amplifies government's response to the reading challenge. The NRC was established to mobilise stakeholders in the language and literacy sector to respond to the national reading challenge.

As a coalition of the willing, the NRC is a network of initiatives, organisations and individuals that have a shared interest, potential and commitment to improving reading and writing, particularly among learners. Thus, the coalition is a loose confederation of organisations that retain their integrity, approach and autonomy, while at the same time work willingly and openly together towards the common goal of reading and writing improvement that enhances human development.



The NRC advocates a national focus around six leverage points for reading and writing improvement,

- Initial teacher education
- Continuing professional teacher development
- Access to age and language relevant materials
- Community support
- Policy
- As well as research
- Monitoring and evaluation as illustrated in the figure below.



Figure 1: NRC Value Chain

The NRC's change theory is that if coordinated actions take place across all value chain areas through collaborative consultative processes, then reading and writing improvement will take place across all levels of South African society. For example:

- **Initial teacher preparation:**

Research has demonstrated that the more skilled a person is in his / her home language, the more able he / she is to acquire additional languages. In a multilingual society like South Africa where many people speak African languages as home language, it is crucially important that we provide excellent teaching of reading and writing in these languages



IN ORDER TO DO THIS,

In order to do this, providing an increase in the number and quality of skilled African language teachers needs to be an important element in the value chain. It is for this reason that initial teacher preparation is crucially important in addressing the national reading and writing challenges.

- **Access to reading resources:**

It is very important to increase the supply of, and access to, quality reading materials in indigenous South African languages. A concerted effort is being made within the value chain to consolidate a national catalogue of existing reading materials, to identify supply gaps and to develop new and exciting reading materials. This is with the view to provide access to reading materials, both in print and digital, in indigenous South African languages.

- **Continuing Professional Teacher Development:**

A very important step to create a nation of readers and writers is to attend to the continuing professional development of our teachers. This value element includes developing teachers who are skilled at teaching in all South African languages; teachers who effectively interpret and use policies like CAPS and the African Language Framework to improve on teaching methods in reading and writing classrooms. More population-wide coverage of reading and writing initiatives is being ensured as is the targeting of areas with deepest need for continuing professional development activities.

- **Community Support:**

The value chain includes activities that support the Read to Lead campaign to mobilise and consolidate the national reading and writing programmes in communities. This campaign extends and strengthens reading for enjoyment and empowerment for at-risk children and young people. Many community-based activities are already established in this area, for example reading clubs, reading hubs and reading champions, through the work of organisations like Nal’ibali.

- **Policy:**

Including policy issues in the value chain serves to provide the statutory framework within which the NRC is situated. It sets the tone and scope of all interrelated activities within the value chain.

1996 (ACT)

Several policies inform language and literacy practices in **South Africa, for example Section 6 in the School’s Act (1996)** that sets out the norms and standards for language policy, and the determination of the language policy of an individual school by that school’s governing body.



1997 (ACT)

The Language in Education Policy (1997) specifically recognises diversity beyond language and was published together with the norms and standards regarding language policy, which emphasise diversity, in line with the Constitution.



And more recently, the Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools (2013) aims to give specific protection to African languages, for learners who speak an African language at home and for learners who do not. The Language in Education Policy (1997) specifically recognises diversity beyond language and was published together with the norms and standards regarding language policy, which emphasise diversity, in line with the Constitution.

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- And the National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) which is a single, comprehensive, and concise policy document introduced by the Department of Basic Education for all the subjects listed for Grades R - 12. CAPS provides detailed guidance for teachers on what they should teach and how they should assess. It is this latter policy that sets out reading more as a skill than as a social practice.

- **Research:**

Much research has already been done in the area of reading, both internationally and in South Africa. Special mention needs to be made of NECT's evaluation findings and those of the Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) carried out in both home language and English first additional language in South Africa. But more research is still required in promising practices in African language teaching and learning.

Both the Read to Lead Campaign and the National Reading Coalition are well placed structures within which fast-tracked skills development initiatives can take place. The rest of this section presents the current picture of NRC initiatives with a focus on the development of human capacity within lecture halls, classrooms and within society more broadly. The examples chosen in this section serve to demonstrate the points made and are no way intended to be exclusive of other equally successful and innovative reading and writing initiatives.

2 TEACHER EDUCATION

Strengthening the skills of teachers is perhaps one of the most important considerations in an overall strategy designed to improve reading and writing in schools and to enhance human capacity across the country. It is necessary, therefore, that from the outset, all teachers are able to teach reading and writing to motivate children to read and write. In this respect, teacher education needs to be highlighted as a critical skills development area in the reading and writing improvement agenda.



TEACHER EDUCATION

REFERS TO THE INITIAL PREPARATION THAT
STUDENT TEACHERS UNDERGO
AT UNIVERSITIES BEFORE ENTERING THE



For this type of skills acquisition process to be successful, accomplished lecturers and academics in reading, writing, language and literacy is a prerequisite.

Two current examples are provided that can lead to the development and support of university lecturers and academics as well as providing interesting and meaningful career paths for the academics and researchers of the future.

PRIMARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROJECT (PRINTED)

The Primary Teacher Education Project (PrimTEd) is supported by the European Union and is implemented by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). PrimTEd's origins lie in the concern that the country's teacher training institutions – the universities – were not teaching prospective primary school teachers how to teach reading and writing adequately. Further, new teachers were not proficient in teaching English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) – given that from Grade 4 onwards English was the predominant medium of instruction in schools.

- Aim

PrimTEd is aimed at strengthening the quality of Bachelor of Education (BEd) programmes with a focus on numeracy and literacy. This aim is important as preliminary observations show that many of the lecturers in a sample of 10 universities who are tasked with teaching reading and writing in African languages, are not adequately equipped to do so.

Outputs

The PrimTEd Project has produced two audits, firstly, an audit of the knowledge and practices of lecturers teaching reading, and secondly, an audit report on the teaching of reading curricula at 10 universities. It has also developed an annotated list of readings on literacy teachers' competences and standards as well as an annotated bibliography and literature review of early reading development in African languages. The development of knowledge and practice standards for literacy in EFAL and African languages has also been completed. All of these documents and processes are aimed at developing staff at universities tasked with the important responsibility of teaching students how to teach reading and writing.

CENTRE FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHING (CALT)

The University of Johannesburg (UJ), with support from DHET, has established a Centre for African Language Teaching (CALT) focusing on Sesotho and isiZulu development. DHET is also currently planning the establishment of CALTS at a range of other universities which are located in regions that service the remaining seven African languages. Currently the department is supporting the initial establishment of the Centre for African Languages teaching at the University of the Western Cape. This CALT will, amongst other strategic activities, implement a project to strengthen the teaching of reading and writing in isiXhosa in initial teacher education programmes.

- Aim

The overall aim of the CALT model is to enable practice-based research and research-based practice in the education and development of teachers who teach African languages in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases of schooling, and who teach through the medium of African languages in the Foundation Phase. In addition, the CALTs research their own work in teaching and development. They host masters and doctoral students to conduct much needed research in African languages teaching.

- Outputs

Current achievements in the CALT at UP include the implementation of the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP), with the overall aim of strengthening the reading and writing components of Sesotho and isiZulu curricula in initial teacher education. Funded by Ned-bank, the UJ CALT also contributes to the development of a pipeline of potential academics in the field of education, specialising in the teaching of African languages.

3 TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Continuing professional teacher development seeks to upskill practising teachers in teaching reading and writing so that there could be accelerated improvement in the reading and writing abilities of learners. An intensive effort towards the professional development of teachers has been undertaken so that teachers can quickly develop and practice their skills in teaching reading, and that these skills are quickly extended to all teachers across the education system.

Two current initiatives are highlighted here as they illustrate strategies developed to enhance teachers and subject advisors' skills in teaching reading in English First Additional Language (EFAL) and in African home languages.

PRIMARY SCHOOL READING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (PSRIP)

The Primary School Reading Improvement Programme (PSRIP) incorporates all the required elements for developing skills in teachers to teach English reading and writing in the First Additional Language (EFAL) curriculum. The PSRIP is a multi-phase collaborative reading programme (funded by the ETDP-SETA) and implemented by NECT in partnership with the DBE. The PSRIP is currently implemented nationally across all nine provinces but has not yet reached all teachers in all schools as it began by targeting schools with the greatest need.



SUBJECT ADVISORS THEN CASCADE THE CLEARLY DEFINED TRAINING TO TEACHERS AT DISTRICT AND CIRCUIT LEVELS.



The PSRIP programme recognises the fundamental importance of reading and writing to enhance performance in all subjects, and it promotes the teaching of reading and writing as core competencies for all teachers in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases. Prior to COVID-19, the PSRIP had an unprecedented positive impact for a fast-paced project aimed to facilitate immediate results at classroom level. It provided a snapshot view of what could be achieved in a short period of time when stakeholders work together in a coordinated manner.

- **Aim**

The PSRIP aims to improve reading and writing outcomes from Grades 1-6 through providing teachers with high quality teaching and learning materials. It also trains teachers on how to use these materials in their classrooms. Teachers are provided with the tools needed to manage the practise of the teaching of reading and writing in their classrooms, namely structured learning programmes.

- **Methodology**

The PSRIP works directly with subject advisors who receive high-level training and support twice a year from reading and writing master trainers. Subject advisors then cascade the clearly defined training to teachers at district and circuit levels. The programme also provides support to subject advisors in the form of pre-training dry runs and a supportive Monitoring and Quality Assurance (MQA) team that follows up with in-school visits.

- **Results**

Initial external evaluations of PSRIP (Grades 1 to 6) undertaken before the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged education noted that learners demonstrated improvement in understanding letters sounds, in recognising familiar words and in oral reading comprehension. There was also a reduction in the number of non-readers in programme schools with a reduction of 19.2% in Grade 2 learners in PSRIP schools versus only a 9.7% reduction in control schools in the same grade.



However, more recent evaluation work demonstrated that the proportion of non-readers increased, while the proportion of fluent readers reduced considerably. The evaluation found that no known contextual, system or programme-related factors predating COVID-19 could easily account fully for these areas of short-term change noted at the end of 2020. However, lost teaching and learning times in 2020 surely has had a short-term negative impact on results.

EARLY GRADE READING STUDY (EGRS)

- Aim

The Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) aim to realise the Department of Basic Education's vision and mission by focussing on Goal 1 and 16 in the Sector Action Plan 'Action Plan to 2019: Towards the realisation of Schooling 2030', namely: Goal 1: Increase the number of learners in Grade 3 who, by the end of the year, have mastered the minimum language and numeracy competencies for Grade 3; and Goal 16: Improve the professionalism, teaching skills, subject knowledge and computer literacy of teachers throughout their entire careers.

- Methodology

The Early Grade Reading Studies are designed around Randomised Control Trials (RCT) that test learner gains across different interventions through comparisons with control groups of schools. These studies include a Foundation Phase Setswana Home Language intervention in North West, EFAL intervention in Mpumalanga, and most currently, a combination of both interventions in North West.

Results

EGRS 1 (Setswana Home Language)

After two years of the Home Language intervention, a sample groups of learners across all interventions (teacher training; teacher training plus teacher coaching; parent support) and the control schools were orally tested. The main findings demonstrated that the interventions showed positive gains as compared to those achieved in the control group, with gains being 13% (parent only intervention), 19% (teacher training only intervention) and 40% (teacher training plus teacher coaching).

EGRS 2 (English First Additional Language)

After one year of EFAL interventions (face-to-face coaching; virtual coaching), the language abilities of 20 learners in each school were tested at the start and end of each grade. After three years of implementation, the on-site coaching intervention improved English oral language proficiency (0.31 standard deviations) and English reading proficiency (0.31 standard deviations), in contrast to the virtual coaching intervention which improved English oral language proficiency (0.12 standard deviations). The virtual coaching was far less effective than on-site coaching and had no statistically significant impact on English reading and writing proficiency.

At the time of writing this paper the results from the combination of studies were not yet available.



EXTRA-CURRICULAR INTERVENTIONS

The overriding principles of resource provision are that each and every learner and teacher needs access to a range of quality resources that are age appropriate, current and relevant, and which inculcate a love of reading and writing to encourage the enquiring mind. Furthermore, the resources, including digital resources, should be accessible throughout the school day and after school through the actions of a knowledgeable person like a teacher or school librarian.

- The Department of Basic Education (DBE) supports teacher resourcing through the school library and information services which provides learners and teachers with access to a wide variety of curricular support resources, exposing learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions. The service instils a culture of reading and writing, promotes respect for intellectual property and supports the acquisition of information literacy skills to access, process and use information resources in various formats, including digital formats, where accessible and appropriate.
- School library and information services also provides a broader base of provision, including an information service to the youth, the building of community and social capital, reflecting the culture and values of the school and broader community, and embracing the principles of diversity and democracy. Thus, while the DBE strategy includes the concept of a centralised school library, it also provides a flexible, incremental approach that includes other models for example: mobile libraries; cluster libraries; classroom libraries; centralised school libraries; and school community libraries.

The main non-governmental players in this space that support the DBE in realising its resourcing strategy are Room to Read and READ Educational Trust. Both organisations also engage in teacher development and in reading promotion activities alongside book and library provisioning.

Working in the domain of school libraries calls into question the provision of books, and while this is not directly related to human capacity development it is an important component to consider. Reading promotion cannot happen without sufficient quality books – sufficient to allow choice; sufficient in a language that is familiar. It is also acknowledged that we have not yet achieved a critical mass in African languages as there is a severe shortage of appropriate books for early reading in African languages.

There is often no reading material in children’s home languages and reading material in English (or other language of wider communication) is mostly scarce and unfamiliar. As a result, in reading lessons children do little more than recite the alphabet and read individual sentences from the chalkboard or repeat memorised words from the few books that are available. In some instances, reading lessons are on the school timetable but are never actually implemented due to lack of quality reading materials.



Two main organisations that have experimented with digital ways of developing and distributing books for early reading in South Africa are Saide’s African Story-book initiative and Book Dash.

Room to Read is also starting to produce openly licensed storybooks for early reading after having been awarded a grant from REACH for Reading (World Bank) to work with local publishers to produce 100 early reading titles in five languages for distribution in Limpopo and Mpumalanga.

The African Storybook Project convincingly demonstrated that it is mainly through digitally enabled translation facilitated by an open licence, that the exponential increase in the availability of books in under-served languages can be achieved. International platforms such as SIL International's Bloom Library and the Global Digital Library are following suit. The African Storybook and its sister initiative in India, Story-Weaver, have shown that good, openly licensed content has the potential to 'go viral' on the web, multiplying the returns on the initial investment.

- The Zenex Foundation is funding and providing thought leadership for the Ulwazi Lwethu: African Language Reading Materials Project. This project is developing African language reading books and teacher reading support resources targeted at teaching learners in the Foundation Phase to read in their home language.

BLOCKAGES AND GAPS

Several challenges have emerged from the initiatives foregrounded in the previous section. These could potentially interfere with the human resource components embedded in each activity. These challenges are described below.



TEACHER EDUCATION

The audit of knowledge and practices in universities has revealed weaknesses in the teaching of reading and writing in African languages. The problem is that in the field of African language teaching, there is lack of shared knowledge derived from conveying research evidence in the fields of reading and writing. This results in a lack of clarity on what should be taught to student teachers and on the specific skills required by university lecturers tasked with this responsibility.



TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

Effort must be made to optimise the potential for success in teacher development programmes, to build on them and to communicate their effectiveness. Additional teacher development initiatives also need to be undertaken to broaden the range of teacher competencies in the teaching of reading.

- There is a robust policy framework to govern reading and writing, for example, Language in Education policy (14 July 1997), CAPS policy (2011), the National Language Plan (2003), the Incremental Introduction of African Languages Policy (2017), the National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in African Languages in the Foundation Phase (2019), and other work on decolonisation and translanguaging. But this robust policy framework does not find expression in the day-to-day lives in schools and their surrounding communities

. Many schools have language policies, but do not observe or live these policies. Complexities of transitioning from Home Language to English or Afrikaans as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in Grade 4 is not a clear-cut policy issue, though it is a reality for most South African children.

Until a comprehensive and widely endorsed set of policy guidelines is constructed and promoted through deliberate and active means across civil society, learners will remain disadvantaged due to weak policy understanding and ill-advised implementation.

Research is another teacher development issue that requires attention. There is still a wide range of un-researched issues related to reading and writing in South Africa, especially given the multiple and diverse language contexts within which children learn to read and write. Despite the plethora of research spread out across various sectors, research initiatives do not cohere in a manner which is sufficiently organised and properly presented to drive systematic and sustainable change in reading and writing improvement. Many research projects are conceived from a deficit perspective which tends to suffer from confirmation bias with an over concentration on under-performing and marginalised schools

- Most research studies are conducted on a small scale to pursue individual research interests instead of contributing to the priorities in a national agenda for reading improvement. There is a lack of expertise in the field of literacy research as evidenced by the scarcity of highly qualified lecturers in the faculties or schools of education.

Research generated knowledge is generally not systematically applied in the practice of language and literacy teaching by teachers. While the DBE and the DHET often undertake work together on research initiatives (e.g. PrimTEd), this collaboration has weak links to initiatives undertaken by other departments and non-governmental organisations.

3

EXTRA-CURRICULAR INTERVENTIONS

There is a shortage of appropriate and engaging quality books for early reading in African languages both in print and digitally. Well stocked classroom libraries are also required in the Foundation Phase and Early Childhood Development centres (ECD) to enhance reading for pleasure opportunities for learners.

African language storybook writers are not incentivised to write stories, especially in languages with small markets. There is also an undersupply of skilled editors in African languages. Particularly severe is the shortage of non-fiction books in indigenous languages. This affects attachment to reading, particularly of boys, who often prefer non-fiction. It also impacts on how knowledge is applied to using reading to learn.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Several recommendations are made to promote reading improvement and fast-tracked skills development programmes across the country.



ESTABLISH A STRUCTURED NATIONAL READING AGENDA

We need to prepare a comprehensive list of priorities for improvement in the landscape of literacy research and in the improvement in reading and writing, and how to teach them. The purpose of this list would be to develop and foreground a national agenda of research initiatives which could add value to the effort being made to improve the practice of teaching reading and to improve reading and writing in the primary school.

- It is anticipated that stakeholders in the sector would collaborate on the common research agenda and share their resources and ideas in distributing their efforts over a wide range of commonly agreed upon research initiatives. This strategy could add the most value to the practice of teaching reading and writing to eventually improve the reading and writing abilities of learners. Some ideas include basic and action research initiatives, monitoring and evaluation of performance, instrument development and the formulation of dependable measures, the use and application of research and the development and management of targets. If research must generate knowledge to inform policy and practice, then research must be relevant and responsive to current needs and circumstances, and there must be systems and measures in place to ensure that research findings are applied in reading and writing improvement. There are gaps in the current body of literacy research which compromise relevance and responsiveness; and there are fissures in the linkage between knowledge creation through research and improvement in performance through the application of the knowledge generated

The focus of research initiatives needs to be threefold. The first focus is to establish a comprehensive and widely agreed upon research agenda noting the gaps in literacy research over the last 25 years. The DBE has already started this process. The second focus is to build capacity in research, and thereby broaden the field of researchers in language and literacy to include lecturers and teachers of African languages, who historically have been excluded from the research community because of their lack of research capacity. The third, and most important focus, is target setting and the establishment of a monitoring and evaluation framework to track and monitor reading progress.



ADVANCE AFRICAN LANGUAGE TEACHING AT UNIVERSITIES

It is recommended that the DHET model of developing and strengthening the teaching of African languages as a component of teacher education programmes at universities and private higher education institutions be advanced. An initiative is required that will endorse and widely adopt the CALT model for

programme development and then apply these key components in each African language. An initial focus on Sesotho, isiZulu and isiXhosa is already underway at UJ and the University of the Western Cape respectively. But strategies are also needed for the remaining African languages.



3

EXTEND THE PSRIP OFFERING

The PSRIP is already a sector reading programme and one that has made significant strides in enhancing skills in practicing teachers to teach reading and writing, thus advancing the system. Many teachers are now more skilled in the teaching of EFAL and many subject advisors are better placed to train and support teachers in the teaching of reading

- This momentum should be built on for future language programmes planned for a national rollout.

It is recommended that the PSRIP be extended to cover all remaining Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase teachers and schools who have not as yet benefited from the programme. In addition, it is recommended that African home languages also be brought under the PSRIP umbrella so that the development of teachers and subject advisors is holistically implemented.

However, there are other areas of capacity building that are also necessary for practicing teachers to become fully capable to teach and promote reading and writing in schools, and to foster and build positive reading and writing cultures in schools, classrooms and communities.

Hence, after the base of teachers who are skilled in teaching reading has been developed and expanded through the PSRIP, additional teacher development initiatives need to be undertaken to broaden the range of teacher competencies in the teaching of reading and writing. In this regard, additional content areas for teacher development include pre-literacy language across the curriculum for all teachers; training of primary school teachers to inculcate a culture of reading for pleasure; developing the writing skills of teachers for use in producing grassroots reading resources; and, supporting primary school principals and departmental heads to more effectively utilise existing reading and writing resources located in schools and classrooms.

While the focus of the PSRIP on the practices of teachers is central to reading improvement, there are other technical initiatives which are also necessary in order to build a strong and viable infrastructure for reading improvement in schools. The NRC could provide reading coordination in districts and provinces to provide support to the PSRIP in deepening its initiatives. The value added to the PSRIP would ensure proper integration of reading and writing initiatives, increased access to and proper distribution of resources, and the availability of support to teachers to effectively use the materials provided.



4

DEVELOP AND PRIORITISE READING RESEARCH AREAS

We need to prepare a comprehensive list of priorities for improvement in the landscape of literacy research and in the improvement in reading and how to teach it. The purpose of this list would be to develop and foreground a national agenda of research initiatives which could add value to the effort being made to improve the practice of teaching reading and to improve reading in the primary school.

- Many PhD graduates find themselves mismatched in terms of the knowledge and skills they require to make effective contributions to the education sector. They often face an 'experience gap' when entering the workplace as the research they conducted while students is not totally aligned to the educational needs and priorities of the country. While still at the candidate stage, these young people need support and guidance in order to help them define – and then develop – the skills and attributes needed for different career options in the education sector.

Doing this successfully would have three interrelated benefits: firstly, the capacity of the DBE to deliver on its research priorities would be enhanced; secondly, attractive opportunities would be created in the DBE for PhD graduates who, in turn, would provide additional skilled capacity for the department to deliver on its mandate; and thirdly, PhD candidates would develop their talents and skills to a point where they would be able to access fulfilling educational careers after graduation.

- The focus of research initiatives needs to be threefold. The first focus is to establish a comprehensive and widely agreed upon research agenda noting the gaps in literacy research over the last 25 years.

The second focus is to build capacity in research, and thereby broaden the field of researchers in language and literacy to include lecturers and teachers of African languages, who historically have been excluded from the research community because of their lack of research capacity. The third, and most important focus, is target setting and the establishment of a model monitoring and evaluation framework to track and monitor reading progress. These focus areas are recommended because they are the most immediate to reading improvement.

5

CAPITALISE ON NECT'S CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

A consistent criticism of educational reform is that much of the agenda is based on what some call a 'deficit mindset'. That is, reformers see individuals, institutions, and communities as broken and in need of fixing, not as individuals, institutions, and communities with culture, history, and potential that could be cultivated and built upon.



So even through a recommendation is made to focus on rural schools it is not from this deficit perspective, but rather to consider how the system can support rural schools located in communities that are often home to deep wells of social capital, tradition, and values, but who also experience complex challenges like: poor parental input in education; insufficient funding from the state; a lack of infrastructure and resources; underqualified teachers; and multi-grade classrooms.

Thus, a focus is needed on developing human capacity in rural schools to address their unique circumstances. This could include, among other things, assisting schools to ringfence money for buying books, setting realistic targets for the learners' reading and writing, and providing support on how schools can access funding for infrastructure development, to name but a few.

