TYPES AND CAUSE OF READING DIFFICULTIES AFFECTING THE READING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A CASE OF GRADE 4 LEARNERS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN OGONG CIRCUIT OF NAMIBIA

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APPROVAL PAGE

This research has been examined and is approved as meeting the required standards for partial fulfilment of the requirement of the degree of Master of Education.

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DECRALATION

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DEDICATIONS

This paper is dedicated to my daughter, Kerlo Mekeliwa, who was born while I was studying. She did not receive the love she deserved as a baby.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify the causes of reading difficulties affecting reading English among Grade four (4) learners in the Ogongo circuit in Namibia. It followed a mixed research design approach. To obtain a representative sample of the population of primary schools, purposeful sampling was used, selecting three teachers and 92 learners from three schools of the 14 schools in the circuit. Both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained from lesson observations and from reading tests, and findings revealed that, inadequate English reading materials, improper teaching methodology and insufficient English language development were causes of reading difficulties in the circuit. Lack of English language development was a result of insufficient teacher-learner interactions during the English lessons. The results from the tests indicated that decoding, phonemic awareness, word recognition skill and comprehension might hamper reading proficiency in Grade 4 and although a section of learners proved the abilities to read fluently they could not satisfactorily answer the questions based on the text read. The results revealed that 69.6% were unable to read the texts beyond the frustration level, and only 30.4% at the instruction level. The research recommends that schools should make resources available to buy supplementary reading materials for use by learners, and that teachers encourage learners to borrow books from libraries to practice reading independently. Teachers should study English through the English Language Proficiency Programme run jointly by the Ministry of Education and the University of Namibia.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

At the dawn of Namibia' independence in 1990, English was chosen as the official language, as well as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in schools. As a requisite skill for all academic achievement, learners should be grounded in reading in their early years of schooling. According to the language policy outlined by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC, 2005a), learners in the Lower Primary Phase (Grades 1 to 3) are to be taught through the mother tongue or a predominant local language, after which Grade 4 is a transitional stage from the lower to Upper Primary Phase, and from learning to read to reading to learn (MBESC, 2003). Despite, or in spite of English having been made the medium of instruction and assessment from Grades 5 to 12 in all public schools, most children in Northern Namibia start school having only one primary language, their mother tongue, alongside which they are then progressively introduced to reading, writing and speaking English, for skills transfer.

The Omusati education region was ranked low in the Junior Secondary Certificate examination results for 2008/2009, by the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2009b), so to ensure change in learners' level of performance, the region adopted a Regional Performance Improvement Strategy (RPIS) (MoE, 2009a), aimed at improving the perceived critical subjects such as English and Mathematics. Thus, with the support of the Basic Education Support Project Phase 3, a Learners' Performance Assessment Instrument (LPAI) was developed in English and Mathematics and piloted in various circuits in the region (MoE, 2009a). In English, the focus was on establishing the level of reading among Grade 4 learners, however, among the pilot tested circuits Ogongo was identified as a low performer, with 64% of the learners unable to read at the expected level, followed by Otamazi (35%) and Anamulenge (30%) (MoE, 2009a). In 2012 a report based on an English diagnostic test conducted for all Grade 4 learners in the region revealed that the

Ogongo circuit was among the poorest performers. However, the report concluded that overall there was poor performance in English as a second language across the region (Omusati region, Directorate of Education, 2012).

A learner who misses a chance of learning to read in the first three years of schooling is likely to be poor in reading throughout school (Lerner, 2000). Hartney (2011) found difficulties in reading English among Grade 3 learners for whom it was not the first language in the Khomas education region, while Junias (2009) reported a similar problem in the Oshana education region. Similarly, Hengari (2007) noted reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Erongo education region. Nyathi (1999) observed that many learners at the secondary school level of education in Namibia lacked adequate reading skills because of an improper foundation in learning and reading. From these findings the question arises as to whether the education system was failing to teach learners relevant reading skills at lower grades of education in Namibia. The Lower Primary curriculum (Grades 1 to 4) stipulates that by Grade 4, the end of the phase, learners must be able to:

- read fluently prepared and unprepared factual and fictional texts of about 150 words;

- correctly answer comprehension questions on the text, and talk freely about them;

- find basic information from factual texts;

- demonstrate good reading habits through eagerness to read;

- discuss the use of the Internet (MBESC, 2005b, p.7).

However, as Makuwa (2004) acknowledges, many primary school children in Namibia do not reach the expected mastery of reading skills in English, with only 4.4% of the learners in the Omusati region reaching the minimum level of English reading proficiency, and 0.2% the desirable level of reading mastery. By comparison, in the Kavango region, 7.5% of the learners reach the minimum level of English reading proficiency and 0.5%, the desirable level of reading mastery. In the Khomas region 63% of learners reach the minimum reading level and 35% the

desirable reading level (MBESC, 2004). These findings illustrate relatively slow progress in English reading mastery at the primary level of education in the Omusati education region. Although these studies identified learners' lack of reading skills in the education system in Namibia, they do not explicitly explore the causes. Thus, the researcher found it necessary to explore how learners read, and identify causes of reading difficulties, focusing on Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, Omusati education region.

1.2   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The extent to which individuals learn to read is primarily demonstrated by cognitive theories, one of which, relevant to this study, is the constructivist theory of Vygotsky (1978), which posits that learners enter school with a sense of self-efficacy for learning based on previous experience and personal qualities (Schunk & Dale 2006, p.236). This implies that the meaning individuals give to the text depends on their language(s), culture, personal experience, and the particular social context in which the reading occurs. If materials intended for learners' reading are not based on their culture and environment they may contribute to reading difficulties.

Furthermore, constructivist theory shares with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) an assumption that a person's behaviour and environment interact in a reciprocal fashion. The view underpinning social cognitive theory is that learning to read is linked to one's social environment. For instance, some learners learn well when they are in groups, which is in line with the Namibian education system's adoption of a learner-centred approach through interaction (MBESC, 2003). Cummins (1976, in Baker, 2006) found that learning to read in a second language (L2) requires certain competencies already achieved in the first language (L1). Reading development in L1 helps the transfer of reading skills to L2, but this is attained over a time as a result of maturation (Baker, 2006).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite expectations of the MBESC (2005b) that by Grade 4 the learners will have acquired basic skills in reading, very few have (Leech, 2010). Hartney (2011) reported a lack of reading proficiency among the Grade 3 learners in the Khomas region, while Junias (2009) also found difficulties in reading English among the Grade 3 learners in the Oshana region. Without adequate reading skills in English, the LOLT in all public schools, learners will encounter difficulties with other subjects in the curriculum. To ensure improvement in reading performance the causes of the problem should be identified and addressed.

The researcher, therefore, sought to find out the types and causes of reading difficulties experienced by Grade 4 learners in the reading of English language in the Ogongo circuit, in Omusati education region. This study forms a basis for proposing a framework for interventions to address the identified causes.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to understand the causes of reading difficulties experienced by the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, this study addressed the following questions.

(1) What reading difficulties in English are experienced by Grade 4 learners in Ogongo circuit?

(2) What are possible causes of these reading difficulties?

(3) What intervention framework would help learners acquire relevant English reading skills?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of this study are intended to serve as a guide for teachers and parents wishing to see the introduction of more appropriate teaching strategies to help learners and their children, respectively, become proficient in reading English. The

result might also serve as a tool for teachers to locate children with reading difficulties in the English language, and the type of support that might be required. Knowledge of the causes of reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners should also help the teachers, parents and community, at large, in the Omusati Education Region, to provide necessary support for the improvement of learners' reading skills.

1.6   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

According to the MBESC (2005a), the teacher-learner ratio for the Primary Phase is 1:35. The research expected a sample of 105 Grade 4 learners, or more, but only 92 from three primary schools in the Ogongo circuit participated in this study. This sample was relatively small and thus not representative of the entire Grade 4 population in the circuit.

The presence of the researcher in the classroom during the lesson observations could have affected the performance of learners and teachers. For instance, during tests the learners might have been uneasy with the presence of a stranger, and this could have affected the study results. However, both teachers and learners were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the conduct of this study.

1.7   DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study was confined to three selected Grade 4 primary classes, one from each of three primary schools in one circuit. In total, three teachers, one from each of the schools, and 92 learners participated. The scope was limited to reading skills in English. Selecting only three schools made it easier and quicker for the researcher to collect the data, because the sample was small and manageable. Furthermore, during the reading tests learners showed willingness to participate.

1.8   DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section gives the meanings of the terms used in this study.

Reading is defined as the gaining of meaning from and bringing it to the written page (Wong, 1998). Grade 4 learners need to process information from the reading text and the knowledge they possess acts to produce meaning.

Medium of instruction refers to the language teachers use to teach learners. It is a mean of conveying information to learners, such as the official language of the country or the native mother tongue of the learners (MBESC, 2003).

Literacy refers to the ability to read and write (Baker, 2006).

Diagnostic reading is the act of identifying reading difficulties and strengths by looking at signs identifiable as a learner reads. This involves the analysis of the causes or nature of the difficulties (Rubin, 1991).

English as a Second Language refers to the use of English by speakers of different native languages. It is a language other than ones' mother tongue, used for the purpose of communication in public institutions, for example, education or government (MBESC, 2003).

Reading proficiency has been achieved when a reader is skilful, expert and competent in reading (*Cambridge Learners' Dictionary*, 2010).

Lower Primary Education in the Namibian context refers to Grades 1 to 4 (MBESC, 2005).

In this study the terms **cause** and **factor** are used interchangeably. The *Oxford advance Learner's Dictionary* (2007) defines **cause** as "the thing that makes something happen" while **factor** is "one of the several things that cause or influence something."

1.9   SUMMARY

This chapter presented the background of the study on the causes of reading difficulties among Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, Omusati Education Region, in which recent studies conducted on the level of reading proficiency have indicated reading difficulties. As a result the region attempted to ensure the development of reading proficiency among Primary Phase learners. This study, however, focused on identifying the causes of reading difficulties in order to suggest an intervention strategy. The chapter also highlighted the significance of this study to teachers, learners, parents and other stakeholders in education. In the next chapter the researcher presents a review of literature relevant to this study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher reviews relevant literature on literacy learning and the difficulties that might affect reading in English. The review emphasises the cognitive literacy that requires an individual to use specific skills and knowledge about how the written language operates in processing the texts. Cognitive literacy is essential in examining factors, such as the position of English as an L2 in the national curriculum in Namibia and possible causes of reading difficulties affecting learners whose L1 is not English.

2.2   ENGLISH IN THE NAMIBIAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In 1990, Namibia decided to have a new language policy for schools, the goal of which was a seven-year primary education phase that would enable learners to acquire reasonable competencies in English and be prepared for English as a medium of instruction throughout the Secondary Phase and beyond (MBESC, 2003). Thus, the MBESC (2003) adopted a language policy that would guide how the language issues would be handled in education in Namibia. The benchmarks set by the language policy are that:

- "Grade 1-3 will be taught in the mother tongue or the predominant language. If parents or the school wish to use English as the medium of instruction in the Lower Primary Phase, permission must be obtained from the Ministry.

- Grade 4 will be the transitional year when the change to English as a medium of instruction must take place.

- Grade 5-7 English will be the medium of instruction. In the Upper Primary Phase the mother tongue may only be used in a supportive role and continues to be taught as a subject.

- Grade 8-12 will be taught through the medium of English, and the mother tongue will continue to be taught as a subject.

- Examinations: grade 7, 10 and 12 national examinations will be taken through the medium of English, except the mother tongue will continue to be taught as a subject.

- English is a compulsory subject starting from grade 1 and continuing throughout the school system.

- All learners must study two languages as subjects at grade 1 onward, and one must be English (p.5)".

From the rationale of the language policy the researcher assumed that by Grade 4 the learners would have acquired a good command of English use and be able to read and retell what they have read. According to the MBESC (2003, p.4), the national Language Policy for Schools is specifically concerned with language transition throughout the Lower Primary grades. The policy recommends the use of mother tongue from grades 1-3 in order to lay a strong foundation for skills transfer.

While learners in Grade 3 are entitled to be taught in the mother tongue, when English is offered as a subject, in Grade 4 the transition has to be completed for them to face activities through the medium of English throughout the Upper Primary Phase

.

2.3   CAUSES OF READING DIFFICULTIES

Lerner (2000, p.389) reports that "children who get off to a poor start in reading rarely catch up; poor first grade readers are likely to continue to be poor readers." This research's concern was that most, if not all, learners in the Ogongo circuit

might have gone through various sequential reading stages which have the potential to develop inaccuracy in reading habits among learners.

2.3.1 Stages of reading development

A number of studies in the area of reading, for example, those conducted by Chall (1987), Dickinson and Neuman (2006), and Lerner (2000) point out difficulties learning to read in English when not a first language. Although these were conducted outside Namibia they have a direct bearing on the teaching and learning to read English. Chall (1987) identified six stages of reading development, from pre-reading, an early stage known as 'logographic reading', which is the earliest stage in which young children begin to recognise limited vocabulary of whole words, using incidental cues such as a logo, a picture, a colour or a shape, through early literacy to mature fluent reading. The instructional method the teachers use should be compatible with the emerging competence of the reader. The Institute of Reading Development (2011) presents the following four stages.

Stage 1: Learning to read

This stage begins when children are four to five years old and beginning to learn letters. The central focus is on decoding meaning, learning the alphabet and the sounds that letters make, learning to distinguish sounds in speech, and learning to sound out words. At this stage children establish a foundation for a lifelong relationship with books, however, researchers such as Lerner (2000), and Dickinson and Neuman (2006), maintain that children who are exposed to books in their early years learn to read more easily. This exposure may be lacking to the majority of Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, due to different economic backgrounds and this consequently results in poor reading habits.

Stage 2: Developing independent reading

This stage begins when children achieve fluency in beginners' reader books, usually during Grade 2. The focus during this stage is on a large amount of reading in books at the appropriate level of difficulty. Moat (1994) argued that

children need knowledge of sound-symbol associations and abundant practice to contribute to fluency in word recognition. At this stage, reading practice and skill development are both primarily focused on fluency development as learners start to decode words of three or more syllables.

Stage 3: Reading with absorption

This stage begins when children achieve fluency in children's novels, usually in Grades 3 or 4 (Chall, 1987). The focus is on reading development about reading of children's novels at gradually increasing levels of difficulty. This process enables them to develop a certain level of fluency and comprehension, and automaticity in reading as a basis for more than just the habit of reading for pleasure. When children gain fluency, it lays the basis for all subsequent reading development.

Stage 4: Critical reading

At this stage, children undergo transformation, physical, emotional, and cognitive changes starting in middle school and continuing throughout high school and into adulthood. These changes bring, in their wake, a new cognitive capability that first appears in the middle school and continues to grow throughout the secondary and post-secondary years. According to Wixon and Lipson (1997), when a child who has achieved the goal of Stage 3 of reading development enters Stage 4, the opportunity exists for a much more effective reading process to develop. A child with a strong reading background who reads with a solid level of fluency and comprehension will experience relatively automatic and accurate fluency of understanding while reading. However, training is required for critical reading to become most useful: "Students become cognised of what they read and have developed: the ability to recognise how material is organised, the ability to monitor comprehension and adjust reading rate or reread when necessary" (Moat, 1994, p.56).

2.3.2 English Language problems and reading difficulties

Pang, Muaka, Benhard and Michael (2003, p.273) observe that real progress in reading depends on oral language development, an observation that suggests that children learn to read by associating the written form with speech. For children to know how to read they must learn the vocabulary, grammar and sound system of the oral language in which the reading takes place. Dickinson and Neuman (2006, p.75) see a connection between oral language and early reading, therefore, prior oral knowledge of English language might be one factor contributing to the reading difficulties experienced by learners in the Ogongo circuit.

Reading, as a language-based activity (Lyon, 2000), does not develop naturally, and for many children, decoding, word recognition, and reading comprehension skills must be taught directly and systematically. If a child's knowledge of English is poor the reading skill as well as reading comprehension will also be poor (Baker, 2006). Having raised the question of whether the problem with reading "is a reading problem or language problem," Carter and Nunan (2002, p.22) concluded that it involved both.

Cummins (2000) postulated the "developmental interdependence hypothesis (p.135)", suggesting that a child's L2 competencies are partly dependent on the level of competence already achieved in the L1. This is because bilingual students draw some knowledge when performing reading (Baker, 2006, p.174). Cummins further asserts that once the reading ability has been acquired in the L1, it is available for use in the L2. If the L1 is poor, it will prove difficult for skills to be transferred to L2. Similarly, Ellis's (2000) Nativist theory confirms that learners' inputs conform to their own internalised view of what constitutes the L2 system. They simplify the learning task by forming a hypothesis based on the knowledge process of their L1.

The majority of the children in the Ogonngo circuit speak Oshimbalanu, Oshikwaaludhi or Oshingandjera as their primary languages. However, when they start school they are taught Oshindonga as the L1 and subsequently English as a second language. Although these languages share similar lexical features with Oshindonga, they are quite different in numerous linguistic terms, and this would

suggest poor transfer of reading skills. In view of this, Cummins (2000) posits "the thresholds theory", which suggests a linguistic level for a child to reach in the prime language and so avoid the negative consequences of the L2. The question is whether at the Grade 4 level, learners in Ogongo circuit have acquired relevant skills in reading Oshindonga, which is not their L1, to scaffold reading in English.

In the same vein, Lerner (2000) argues that when a person attempts to speak a language in which s/he has not yet become automated, s/he will necessarily have to divide attention between the content of the message and the language itself. This also applies to reading and if the skill in reading is automated it will not be disrupted by concurrent processing of the language because this does not take up the attention resources. She stresses that a person in whom the language is not automated will read with great difficulty, being forced to pay all the attention to word recognition and none to decoding the written word, thus impeding comprehension.

Rumelhalt's (1980) schema theory highlights the limited amount of cognitive energy available for use in processing information. If a reader's cognitive energy is focused on decoding and combining the meaning of the word, then comprehension will suffer. For Scott (2001), schema theory is vital in helping learners use their mental store during learning, whilst Brewer's (2000) schemata theory helps learners to determine how to interpret the task to be learned, how to understand the information and what knowledge the learner acquires.

In contrast to language, Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) introduced types of risk factors that contribute to low levels of academic achievement among L2 learners. In their study conducted among Hispanics in the USA, they identified factors of risk to language development, including socio-economic status (poverty conditions), cultural differences between school and home (regarding education values and expectations), socio-political factors (including past and continuing discrimination, and low perceived opportunity for schooling) and school quality. The factors identified could be the source for poor reading habits displayed by Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, since English to them is also an L2.

It is therefore imperative that teachers detect the learners' reading problem, earlier in order to avoid other problems in future, or before it becomes a central concern to reading development. Snow et al. (1998) concluded that low English proficiency among the learners for whom it is not an L1 is a strong indication that the child is at risk of reading difficulty. Carter and Nunan (2003) point out that reading achievement is a widespread problem when learners are instructed or tested in their home languages. However, they further indicate that linguistic differences are not solely responsible for the high degree of reading difficulties faced by children, but that there are a host of other factors.

2.3.3 Language policy for primary schools in Namibia

The threshold hypothesis suggests that a child's L2 competence is partly dependent on the competence already achieved in the L1 (Baker, 2006). With regard to academic language requirements, Baker (2006) notes the distinction between the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), a face-to-face context embedded situation that provides non-verbal support to secure understanding, and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which appears in context-reduced academic situations. This helps explain the relative failure in the education system of many L2 children (Baker, 2006, p.176). Baker stresses that if the transition from the home language to the L2 is not well monitored it may result in many learners being in classrooms in which the cognitively demanding language is beyond their grasp.

In the Namibian context, BICS may be applicable to Grades 1-3, when instruction take place in the mother tongue and English is taught as a subject. This means that in these grades, simple English language that provides non-verbal support is used to facilitate understanding. On the other hand, CALP would be associated with Grade 4 and upward, where English is used as the medium of instruction. This implies that in line with the requirement of the Grade 4 syllabus, learners are expected to be sufficiently proficient in English as a medium of instruction to face the academic demands in the Upper Primary and beyond. However, according to Lerner (2000), the maturation view of development applied to reading suggests a

stage of development before the child acquires reading skills. Thus, proponents of the maturation view stress that forcing younger children to perform academic tasks for which they are not ready, such as reading, should constitute a form of child abuse (Lerner, 2000). The researcher does not know whether or not this could be the case with learners in Ogongo circuit, but finding is out is one goal of this study.

For Gonzarez, Minaya-Rowe and Yawkey (2006), pre-literacy and literacy skills emerge when ESL students achieve oral language maturity. They emphasise that ESL learners need to achieve maturation in oral language proficiency as a pre-requisite for developing literacy skills, such as: knowledge of print; ability to discriminate letters; phonemic awareness; acquisition of phoneme-grapheme knowledge; and reading comprehension (2006, p.142).

Gass and Selinker (2001) report on the monitor model posited by Krashen (1982), which highlights an acquisition-learning hypothesis, according to which L2 learners have two dependent means of developing knowledge of the L2, either through acquisition or through learning. Acquisition equates to the way children develop the ability to acquire their L1, subconsciously. On the other hand, learning refers to the conscious knowledge of L2, knowing the rules, being aware of them, and being able to talk about them.

Murray and Johnson (1996) argue that age is a great determinant of language development, and that the younger a person the easier it is to learn or acquire the language. Hakuta et al. (2000, in Baker, 2006) conceded that age is significant with regard to language acquisition. The younger an individual the faster s/he acquires the language. Gass and Selinker (2001) agree that children under ten acquire an L2 easily, with the turning point in language acquisition ability seeming to occur at or about puberty. Gonzarez et al. (2006) agree with Gass and Selinker (2001) that age is a powerful determinant of success in language acquisition, and that puberty is the turning point when individuals begin to acquire the language more slowly. These research findings regarding the effect of age on language learning are especially important when education policy decisions are made concerning the grade level at which learners are offered L2 instruction. The age

factor could be a determinant for learners' language acquisition in Ogongo circuit, but finding out is another aim of the study.

2.3.4 The learner's role in communication in the second language

Studies conducted by Gass and Selinker (2001), and Dulay and Hewings (1982) have identified three types of communication in which learners participate:

- **One-way communication**. According to Gass and Selinker (2001), a learner listens to or reads the target language but does not respond. The communication is one-way *towards* a learner, but not *from* the learner. This type of communication is a typical example of most primary school learners in rural areas when first introduced to English as a subject. At this stage, (Grades 1-2), the teaching provides simple, basic communication to facilitate understanding. Learners do understand the simplified instructions but cannot respond.

- **Restricted two-way communication**. Here the learner responds orally to someone, but does not use the target language. The response might be in the learner's L1 or even non-verbal (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p.143).

- **Full two-way Communication**. For Dulay and Hewings (1982), the transition is made and the learner may respond in the target language, acting as both recipient and sender of the verbal messages. The studies by Gass and Selinker (2001) and Dulay and Hewings (1982) emphasise the benefits of allowing one-way communication and restricted two-way communication during the early parts of the learning process, and waiting until the learner is ready to produce the target language before engaging in full two-way communication.

With regard to Namibia's education system, full two-way communication is a requirement of Grade 4 and upward, but, of significance is whether learners at this stage have acquired adequate English language proficiency.

2.3.5 Reading slowly in the mother tongue

According to Murray and Johnson (1996):

> …if you have done your schooling through the medium of English, you may never have learned to read in your home language. But, if you do not read fast in your home language you will be even worse in English where you probably also have to struggle to understand the meaning (p.79).

Nutall (1982) noted that students from some educational traditions may not read efficiently even in their L1, this being a hindrance for the development of reading in the L2.

Dickinson and Neuman (2006) confirm that there is a strong transfer of reading habits from one language to another. According to Alderson (2000), reading in L1 must be better than L2, and fluency in L1 readers should bring the speed of their L2 up to that of their L1. Meanwhile, Cummins (2000) presents a linguistic interdependence hypothesis, in which bilingual students draw knowledge when performing school reading tasks, with reading ability has been acquired in L1 and available for use in L2. Nutall (1982) concurs that if L1 is not ready, and bad habits develop in L1, attention to L1 reading may be useful before developing better reading in L2. According to the MBESC (2003), Grades 1 to 3 must be taught through the medium of mother tongue to facilitate the transfer of skills in English. However, if the reading skills are not well developed in the mother tongue, as Nutall (1982) claims, this will be a hindrance for reading in English. Determining whether or not this is the case in Ogongo circuit is another goal of this study.

2.3.6 Ineffective decoding of the written word

According to McGuiness (2005), decoding words is a very important aspect of the reading act, without which reading comprehension is impossible. This explains why some children in Namibian schools can read but not understand what they

are reading (Nyathi, 1999). Decoding is a pre-requisite skill to reading, and the lack of it presents L2 learners with difficulties when reading in English. Murray and Johnson (1996) caution teachers against using long sentences with beginners, asserting that when reading letter-by-letter and word-by-word s/he might not be able to hold all the information in short memory long enough to understand the sentence as a whole (p.337). This would imply that if one decodes letter-by-letter one would not find out what the word is.

People can read a text aloud without actually understanding what it means, as Leech (2010) observed in Namibian schools. Thus, the researcher sought to find out the causes of reading difficulties in Ogongo circuit. Dickinson and Neuman (2006) attribute ineffective decoding to weak visual processing, faulty recognition and naming, poor phonological awareness, memory dysfunction as well as limited access to word meaning. Dickinson and Neuman (2006) maintain that decoding problems are often aggravated by lack of practice, however, they caution teachers against trying to detect exactly where and how the breakdown in decoding occurs and act appropriately. On the other hand, Buzan (2010) noted that ineffective decoding is a result of poor phoneme-grapheme awareness, and that some children lack sufficient awareness of sound units in words. He emphasises that this makes it hard to learn to read (p.165).

If learners are struggling to understand what they read because of difficult words, concepts, or sentence structure, they will not be able to read quickly. Many learners and students studying through the medium of a second language spend much of their time struggling to read books which are above their level of language proficiency (Lerner, 2000, p.399).

2.4   GOOD READERS OF ENGLISH

According to Lyon (2000), good readers are phonemically aware, understand the alphabetic principle, apply these skills in a rapid and fluent manner, possess strong vocabularies and syntactical and grammatical skills, and relate reading to their own experiences. Meanwhile, Murray and Johnson (1996) argue that a good

reader is one who concentrates not on individual letters, sounds or words but on meaning. They also assert that a good reader is constantly trying to extract meaning from words on a page. In substantiating their claims, they qualify a good reader as one who:

- is able to decode the symbol;

- is able to understand the language in which it is written;

- is familiar with the form of certain types of writing;

- is familiar with certain conventions of writing; and

- has certain kinds of knowledge about the world (p.173).

Goodman (1990) believes that a good reader does not read every word in a text, but rather uses his/her knowledge to guess or predict, then reads just enough to find out whether s/he has guessed correctly. Goodman described reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (p.215).

Buzan (2010) maintains that:

> ...a good reader is one who is able to read fast. A good reader does not read aloud to himself or make movements with lips when reading. A good reader does not have to look back often or follow a print with a finger. The speed at which s/he reads does not impair his/her comprehension, in fact, she/he understands better because s/he is able to take longer stretches of meaning a time (p.127).

2.5 CAUSES OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

According to Lerner (2000), children who have a good start in reading read more and become better readers, in contrast to those who have a poor start in reading and so do not engage in wide reading but fall further behind. Similarly, Lyon (2000) notes that learning to read begins long before children enter formal

schooling, and that those who have stimulating literacy experiences from birth have an edge in vocabulary development, understanding the goal of reading, and developing an awareness of print and literacy concepts. Lyon (2000) concludes that "the children who are most at risk for reading failure enter kindergarten and the elementary grades without these early experiences" (p.14).

In agreement with Lyon, Lerner (2000) argues that children come to school without the literacy experiences (reading, writing and numeracy skills), and some struggle because they have received poor or inadequate reading instruction. Dickinson and Neuman (2006) point out that the socio-economic and the domestic environment of a child have an impact on learning to read. Dickinson and Neuman (2006) stress that children raised in poverty, those with limited proficiency in English, those from homes in which the parents' reading levels and practices are low, and those with speech, language and hearing difficulties, are at increased risk of reading failure because often they are not exposed to literacy practice. Determining whether or not this is the case in Ogongo circuit formed part of this research.

2.6   PRACTISING READING FAST WITH COMPREHENSION

According to McGuiness (2005):

> …when young children read, they move their index finger along the line of words, pointing to each word, and saying the words by themselves quietly. When they are older they make no sound, but their lips form the sound. Later, the learner may not move his lips at all, but he is still saying the word himself. These habits are called 'vocalisation or sub-vocalisation (p. 124).

To McGuiness that habit slows down the act of reading, which means a learner who does this cannot read faster while silently as s/he reads aloud. It may also mean that a learner reads one word a time, which is not good in English. Learners with this habit should return to sub-vocalisation to help them link words with sound, and sound with meaning. In contrast, Murray and Johnson (1996) assert

that finger pointing does not slow down reading, but that learners can be trained to move their fingers at a faster rate to improve their reading speed. McGuiness (2005) concurs with Murray and Johnson (1996) that learners should be given training to put the finger across the page ahead of their eyes, to follow it as they move their finger so that the eyes will keep pace.

It is important that learners work towards a stage at which they are responding directly to the visual image of the word, understanding and giving it meaning without needing to sound it out. To Lerner (2000), learners need to read easy interesting books to build their reading speed and proficiency. This has motivated the researcher to explore ways to intervene the reading difficulties experienced by Grade 4 learners in Ogongo circuit.

2.7 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

In this section the researcher explores the views of Hall, Burns, and Edward (2011) on learners' pace of learning to read, and their focus on learners with persistent difficulties comprehending the text and learning academic subject matter, referred to as 'struggling' or 'marginalised'. The classroom environment can either reinforce or change learners' positions as struggling, but properly designed it will enable them to take on a leadership role with their peers. Hall et al. (2011) argue that it is particularly important when working with marginalised readers and helping them gain full access to classroom reading practice. Learners perceived as struggling readers are often treated as if they have little or nothing to offer in school. The learners are then likely to believe that their participation will not be valued and as a result minimise their involvement in reading. Similarly, Moats and Foorman (2003) write that if the struggling readers believe their ideas about text are heard and respected, they are more likely to participate. On the basis of these findings it is required that teachers treat all learners similarly in order to boost their interest and participation in class activities.

In order to avoid such a situation in classes, Murray and Johnson (1996) advise teachers to study their classroom 'climate', and their assumption about both struggling and good readers: "the language we use with our students, the book we select, and how we invite participation all send a message about who should participate, how often, and what the result should look like" (p 324). Therefore, the classroom environment has the potential to build up struggling learners or to reinforce their status.

Creating a positive classroom environment for struggling readers means appreciating their diverse social and cultural backgrounds and how these might usefully contribute to their self-identification as readers (Hall et al., 2011, p.31). Thus, it is the duty of the teachers to help struggling readers feel more secure in participating in the classroom practice. Hall et al. (2011) add that students who engage or attempt to engage with the texts in the same ways valued in a classroom often receive a positive response, while those who do not are marginalised. Teachers should be cautioned that the language used in the classroom communicates to students not only what one believes they need to do in order to succeed but also what they need to do in order to achieve high social status in the class. An aim of this study is to establish if these aspects are being followed in Ogongo circuit.

2.8   THE ROLE OF TEACHING AND INSTRUCTION WITH REGARD TO LEARNERS READING DIFFICULTIES

Good reading instruction is required for beginners to learn to read, however, it is not easy to accomplish this task. Lyon (2000) stresses that many children in Grades 1 and 2 or beyond will require explicit instruction to develop the necessary phoneme awareness, phonics, spelling and reading comprehension. Lyon further suggests that young children with difficulties in learning to read should be taught the foundational skills to ensure a sufficient level of fluency, automaticity, and understanding.

Teaching of reading and language has been compared to 'rocket science' (Moat, 1994), with reading seen as a process which requires various inputs. Drummond and Marshall (2005) point out that although there are different reading components it can be difficult for teachers to diagnose learners' reading difficulties and find appropriate techniques to remediate them, a dilemma that has a diverse effect on learners' future reading. To be successful, the teachers require a strong and deep understanding of reading theories and practice. An understanding of theories shall then be used as the basis for improving the techniques of teaching reading. However, children are individuals, learn differently, and have their own learning style and pace. This suggests that teaching to read is not a uniform process but rather a matter of trying different approaches. This study was undertaken as a way of establishing, inter alia, the existence or non-existence of such a dilemma in Ogongo circuit.

2.9 DIFFERENT TEACHING METHODS

There are a number of different teaching methods from which teachers can choose. However, the question of which is the most effective continues to concern teachers. According to Gonzarez et al. (2006), all methods have shown some success, a number of which are summarised below.

2.9.1 Phonics

Phonics is a method whereby "the speech is broken into individual sounds and represented letters" (Alderson, 2000, p.132). It teaches the correspondence between letters and the sounds they represent. Children are taught to look at individual letters or groups of letters, recognise the sounds and blend letters to form a fluent sound. For example, in the word /cat/, children are taught that the sound represented by the word "cat" are k which is a glottal sound, then a /ei/ and t which constitutes k-a-t.

According to Lerner (2000), there are two approaches to teaching phonics. In the first, *analytical phonics*, learners are taught to look initially at the whole word and then break it down to compare parts for the letter-sound relationships they came across previously. In *synthetic phonics* they are taught to link an individual letter or letter combination with its appropriate sound then blend the sound to form words. They are systematically taught letters of the alphabet and the combination of letters used to represent each sound, for example the combination of letters f-a-t-h-e-r gives the word "father."

2.9.2 The look and say or whole-word method of reading

According to Levine (1994), 'look and say' or whole-word method of reading method teaches children to read through pattern recognition rather than decoding the word into letters. Flashcards with words and an accompanying picture are often used with this method, until they memorise the pattern of letters, words or sentences as help in building up high-frequency sight vocabulary. For example, a picture of a ball is given to learners without the accompanying letter representing it. Learners are asked to say what they see, and name it, after which the teacher places the letters string (b-a-l-l) beneath the picture. The activities can be extended to other objects begin with the same letter sound, and even to sentences.

2.9.3 The whole language method of reading

According to Lerner (2000), underlying whole-language are the unity and interrelationship of oral language, reading and writing. Unlike the phonic method, which puts the focus on letter-sound relationships, it emphasises that active expression in writing and oral language improves reading skills. Lerner (2000) adds that the whole language method is based on the belief that all children will learn to read naturally, as they learn to talk and walk. Goodman (1990) initiated the whole language method based on a belief that an emerging reader needs little

direction to decode the letters, creating sentences representing pictures and sounds of language.

The whole language approach to reading focuses on meanings, not on correspondence between sound and symbols, so that children start reading stories immediately without resorting to phonics. The whole language method posits that children be immersed in good books for them to become fluent readers, with interesting and fun books to excite them so that and through play they memorise the many words they see in them.

2.9.4 Combining phonics and whole-language in teaching reading

Proponents of combining the phonics and whole-language approaches, Reutzel and Cooter (2010); Stanovich (1980); Rumelhart (1977), suggest that phonics be taught separately, directly, and systematically to learners, and not in the context of reading literature. Reutzel and Cooter (2010) believe that learning to read is accomplished by placing the emphasis on mastering the three skill areas of decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension, assumed to lead to competent understanding, and consequently enable skilled and independent reading. Rumerhalt (1977) claims that while processing features of letters, and spelling patterns, at the same time a reader is also attending to general context, syntax, and the semantic and syntactic environment in which the words occur. However, Stanovich posits that for learners to master reading skills they need daily exposure to good literature through reading aloud, discussing stories, and being introduced to new knowledge and vocabulary. Phonics should be taught first, followed by regular reading practice so that learners become skilled readers.

2.9.5 Choosing appropriate methods of teaching reading in English

Experts in reading agree that there is no best method to teaching reading (Lerner, 2000; Snow et al., 1998, Goodman, (1990). Goodman (1990) opposes the phonics method, believing it to be less engaging, with endless sounds to learn and simple

books to read using regular words. They state that children like to read books by themselves. In line with the assertion above, it is vital that beginner learners should be exposed to variety of reading materials to practise reading on their own. Goodman (1990) supports the whole language method to reading, believing it can produce learners who understand the meaning of the words they are reading and so tackle more interesting books early on. However, Lerner (2000) and Snow et al. (1998) criticise it for leaving learners guessing when faced with an unfamiliar word, and for the limited number of words they can memorise.

While it is evident that teacher training institutions prepare student teachers in all these approaches, methods and techniques outlined in this chapter, it has been observed in some studies (Hartney, 2011; Junias, 2009;) that once these student teachers graduate and are in the field they hardly follow them and in the case of reading teaching reading skills, particular attention is needed in preparing learners to acquire them so that numerous reading difficulties are avoided. It is not known whether teachers in the Ogongo circuit apply all these approaches, methods and techniques in their reading lesson delivery to establish possible causes of reading difficulties which learners face. This study has identified this as one aspect which needs investigation, so as to identify the causes of reading difficulties learners face and which could be sources for poor reading habits experienced by many learners.

2.10   THEORIES OF READING

Understanding theories which explain the nature of learning to read could be used as the basis for improving the techniques of teaching reading to learners for whom English is not their L1.

2.10.1 Traditional bottom-up view of reading

According to Nunan (2005), the traditional bottom-up theory is skill-driven in that it stresses the code used in a written language to represent the spoken words. The emphasis is on letter and word recognition as a key to reading. Mercer, Swann

and Major (2007) regarded this as developing the reading process from perception of letters, spelling patterns, and words, to sentence and paragraph meaning. Gough (1981) stresses that letter recognition skill must be accomplished by means of alphabetic books before teaching fluency. However, the challenge arises when the decoding and converting of letter characters into phonemes are not explicitly presented to learners. Gough also argues that the phonic method teaches not grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules, but rather heuristics for locating words through auditory means.

To Lerner (2000), the phonic method requires the learner to match letter with sound in a defined sequence. In the traditional bottom-up of reading, Nunan (2005) argues that readers decode texts word-by-word, linking words into phrases and then sentences. Purcell-Gates (2005) calls the bottom-up method of reading 'linear', in that letters must be recognised firstly feature-by-feature by a visual system then transferred to a sound until the next letter is processed.

Purcell-Gates (2005) further states that words are recognised and then held in working memory until they are processed for meaning and finally understood as sentence or even as a text. She refers to this reading process as 'letter-by-letter in additive fashion (p.40).' Mercer et al. (2007) stress automaticity in word recognition as a requirement for reading. They state that word recognition is a basis for later works of comprehension and that the essence of this theory is that comprehension is only possible when the reading became automatic, because readers no longer have to expend much of their cognitive attention on the recognition of letters and words. Purcell-Gates (2005) also stresses that decoding takes selective attention when it is not familiar, and comprehension requires attention. The essence of this theory, and which this study suggests to Grade 4 teachers in Ogongo circuit, is that teachers should teach reading in English using the phonic method so that learners could gain automaticity in decoding that ultimately enhances comprehension.

2.10.2 The cognitive theory or top-down view of reading

The cognitive or top-down view of reading is a comprehension-driven theory which opposes the view that decoding is a basis to comprehension. According to Nunan (2005), reading represents an innate capacity for learning which explains how humans acquire their first language. Goodman (1990) argues that reading under this theory is a "psycholinguistic guessing game" (p.240), and that reading is a process whereby a reader samples the text, makes the hypothesis, then confirms or rejects it. This theory puts the reader at the centre of the reading process, a premise of which is that s/he brings all her or his experiences and background knowledge to the reading task.

Perded (n.d.) establishes that readers begin the act of reading by recognising that they are reading, sampling and selecting from the visual array based on their prediction of what they expect to find. Predictions come from inferences about the meaning supported by syntax and the letter-sound units. As readers read they confirm and disconfirm their predictions by using their knowledge of the language cue system to find out when comprehension breaks down. When the breakdown occurs they return to correct, again using the different language cue system.

According to Goodman (1990), reading is cyclical as it puts in play the visual perceptual, syntactic and semantic cycles depending on and enabling one another. As opposed to the traditional theory of reading the cognitive theory stresses that reading is goal-oriented, with the goal being the meaning. However, for the meaning to be accomplished readers should use their predictions and inferences based on knowledge of the language. Comprehension depends not on linear, accurate, automatic decoding and letter recognition but on what readers bring to the text.

The schemata theory (Rumelhart, 1980) asserts that meaning does not lie solely in the print itself but in the cognitive schema already present in the reader's mind. When reading, schemata can be generalised to allow the reader to learn and make sense of a wide array of information. Schema can be equated to Piagetician concepts of assimilation and accommodation, (Schunk & Dale, 2006), by which new knowledge is integrated into pre-existing knowledge base. If teachers in

Ogongo circuit are to guide and direct learners to know how to read they must know the reading needs of learners, and which approach is likely to be the most appropriate.

2.10.3 The balanced theory or interactive model of reading

According to Mercer et al. (2007), one of the influential publications in support of an interactive model of reading was written by Stanovich (1980), who argued that fluent reading is an interactive process in which information is used from several knowledge sources simultaneously (letter recognition, letter-sound relationship, vocabulary, knowledge of syntax and meaning) (Mercer et al., 2007, p.112). Purcell-Gates (2005) argues that various component sub-skills of reading compensate for deficiency in lower level process: the reader with poor word recognition skills may rely on contextual cues. In contrast to the top-down, Purcell-Gates shows that good readers do not use context cues more often than do poor readers. Under this theory, learners need both to focus on meaning with real, authentic texts and to work on skills. It places stress on the reciprocal influences of that knowledge of the reader that differs from that of both features of letters to semantic knowledge. The knowledge of both features interacts during the process of reading.

The balanced theory posits that readers read by focusing on comprehension and on letter features at the same time (Stanovich, 1980). To Mercer et al. (2007), Stanovich's interactive theory differs from the bottom-up and cognitive theories in that it sees the reader as processing all the different letters and words, but acknowledges that the meaning and syntax of the context influence the perception and recognition of them. This study suggests teachers in Ogongo circuit to use this model as it trains learners to read with comprehension.

2.11   IMPLICATIONS OF THE THEORIES FOR INSTRUCTION

This section examines implications of the above theories for teaching reading.

2.11.1 The traditional view or bottom-up model of reading

To Carter and Nunan (2003), the bottom-up approach views the reading process as developing from the perception of letters, spelling patterns and words, to sentence and paragraph meaning. This model opposes the views held by the proponents of the top-down model (Goodman, 1990), in which language and meaning are central to word recognition. To Mercer et al. (2007), teachers who espouse the skill-driven theory wish to focus their teaching on skills and abilities that are required to accurately and automatically recognise letters and words. Lerner (2000) writes that teachers who believe in the traditional view of reading often teach their children the sub-skills first. They begin instruction by introducing letter names and letter sounds, progress to pronouncing the whole word, then show learners ways of connecting word meanings to comprehension texts. This theory sees phonetic as primary and to be mastered before comprehension takes place. Learners are taught how to discriminate and recognise individual letters first, then to discriminate and assign individual letter or letter combination to individual sound. However, the researcher argues that teaching to discriminate only the individual letter or sound has the potential to create a habit of word-by-word reading in learners.

Mercer et al. (2007) argue that learners taught under this theory are likely to experience comprehension difficulties in reading English. Under this model, learners who cannot read or cannot read well are viewed as having decoding problems. Purcell-Gates (2005) writes that the importance of this bottom-up process is on teaching drill and practise in decoding skills, as well as phonic awareness and not on meaning. To Perded (n.d.), the theory often requires learners to read aloud so that teachers detect accuracy of word reading.

2.11.2 The cognitive view

Under cognitive theory the focus is on comprehension rather on accuracy, hence the language cue system is the basis for comprehension. Teachers using it engage learners with whole texts which are read for authentic purposes. According to Gough (1981), the challenge is that learners are not required to break down the reading process into isolated pieces for the purpose of practice. Gough also criticises the perception of guessing and predicting, claiming that readers do not know when or how to assess the accuracy of their guesses.

The logic underlying cognitive theory is that learners are trained to read texts that they want to read for self-chosen purposes. To Mercer et al. (2007), the top-down model stresses the importance of language and meaning for reading comprehension as well as for word recognition. It advocates translating the text to the degree that it makes personal sense to the reader. For Mercer et al. (2007), with this model the focus of reading is not to check accuracy but rather for comprehension. The teaching of letter recognition is also ignored.

Unlike the tenets of bottom-up theory, reading aloud is advised as a strategy to develop reading accuracy. This may be practised only to gain insight into the way learners coordinate appropriate strategies to get to the meaning. Comprehension is the focus, with the teacher engaging learners with questions for different activities, a response journal, book sharing, or book discussion. The emphasis is placed on leading beginners to engage with whole texts that are created for the purpose of teaching reading. On of the study's aims is to find out whether or not Grade 4 teachers in the Ogongo circuit use this theory to teach their learners reading in English.

2.11.3 The balanced view or the interactive model of reading

Drawing from Stanovich's (1980) interactive model reported by Mercer et al. (2007), fluent reading is an interactive process in which information is used from several knowledge sources simultaneously, for instance letter recognition, letter-sound relationships, vocabulary, knowledge of syntax and meaning. To Nunan (2005), the teaching of various sub-skills of reading can be compensatory,

integrating the traditional and cognitive theories. Teaching reading begins with the sub-skills requisite for reading for comprehension. This theory emphasises comprehension as the ultimate purpose for reading.

Purcell-Gates (2005) refers to this process of the reading act as whole-part-whole instruction in which teachers involve learners in purposeful reading first, then pull out some skills ranging from decoding to text structure and comprehension. Teaching requires the social context of the language use. Exposure to language in which teaching reading takes place is of vital importance. The essence underpinned by these theorists is to use the most suitable reading method that enables learners to become good readers. Teachers in Ogongo circuit must use the knowledge obtained from their teacher training to apply the appropriate theory when teaching reading in their classes.

2.12 SUMMARY

With the basic understanding of the theoretical basis of the traditional, cognitive and the balanced theories, it is imperative that teachers apply these theories regarding teaching reading in English. However, it is a daunting task for teachers to decide on the most suitable approach that benefits all learners in the class, because relying on one theory might cause problems.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research design, population, and the sample of this study. It also describes the data collection and data analysis methods, as well as ethical considerations before and during the data collection process.

3.2   RESEARCH DESIGN

As propounded by Schinder (2003, p. 354):

> …a research design is a plan and structure for investigations to obtain answers to research questions and may be compared to a blueprint for collection, measurement and analysis of data. In addition, the research design includes all the procedures selected to answer a particular question.

Schinder (2003, p.355) views the research design as "a mental plan of the research that highlights basic strategies applied to obtain relevant data to the research". To Gay, Mills and Airasian (2009) a research design is a detailed description of a study proposed to investigate a given problem.

This study adopted both the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. According to Christenson and Johnson (2008), the *qualitative* research approach relies on the collection of non-numerical data, while for Gay et al. (2009) it is the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. Best and Khan (2006) describe the *quantitative* approach as the collection and analysis of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest.

The interpretive qualitative research approach was regarded as most suitable to realise the aim of this study, that is, to investigate the causes of reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners. It seeks to produce descriptive analysis that emphasises deep understanding of social phenomena (Crewell & Plan-Clark 2007). The qualitative method of observation was used to gain insight into the English teaching and general environment of Grade 4 classrooms at selected primary schools, while a positivist quantitative approach (Christenson & Johnson, 2008) was used for gathering quantitative data. The combination of research designs for collecting and analysing data allowed the researcher to gain a more comprehensive insight into the problem under study.

3.3   POPULATION

A target population is a group of people in whom the researcher has an interest. Such a group should share a given set of characteristics about which the researcher wishes to draw conclusions (Cardwell, Clark, & Meldrum, 2004, p.642). In this study, the population comprised all the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, in the Omusati Region, with 14 schools accommodating Grade 4 learners.

3.4   THE RESEARCH SITES

Three schools participated in this study, two of which were combined schools (Grades 1-10), and one was a primary school only (Grades 1-4). All three schools were located in remote rural villages of northern Namibia. There was only one Grade 4 class at all three participating schools. The teacher-learner ratio at the Primary phase in Namibia was 1:35, whereas at the Junior Secondary phase it was 1:30 (MBESC, 2005-2006). The medium of instruction at the lower primary level (Grade 1-3) is the L1 or common language of the majority of the learners attending the school. According to the MBESC (2003), Grade 4 is the transitional grade in which a switch to English medium of instruction is made. In this case, the medium of instruction of all learners in this study was English. Oshindonga is

offered as a subject; however, the prime languages of the learners are the various Oshiwambo dialects, other than Oshindonga, which was their first language taught at school. In line with the Grade 4 syllabus, the allocation for teaching English was nine periods a week, 40 minutes each. According to the MoE's (2007) regional annual pass rate statistics, these three schools' performances varied from 'poor' to 'average'.

3.5   SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

Sampling is the process of selecting units from a population of interest so that by studying them one may fairly generalise the results back to the population from which they were chosen (Williams, 2006, p.11). Usually, the population will be too large for the researcher to attempt to study all its members, so a small but carefully chosen sample can be used to represent it and reflect the characteristics of those from which it is drawn (StatPac, 2009, p.11).

The purposeful sampling technique was employed to select the three Grade 4 classes, based on a revelation by the Omusati education region's report on reading difficulties (MoE, 2009a). The identification of lack of English reading skills was based on the findings of the RPIS conducted by the region to identify the level of English reading proficiency among the Grade 4 learners. Therefore, the participants were the Grade 4 learners from the three schools that participated in the LPAI. Six schools in the Ogongo circuit participated in the RPIS (MoE, 2009a).

The researcher selected particular schools from the population that would be informative about the topic of this study (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2001), namely the last three poor performing schools out of six, based on the RPIS's circuit ranking, with a view to locating the problems in reading among the Grade 4 learners. The selection was made in order for the researcher to obtain a more accurate picture of reading difficulties experienced by the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. In total, 92 Grade 4 learners from the selected three schools participated in this study. According to Gay et al. (2009), a large number of

elements are required to be included in the sample for the findings of the study to maintain reliability.

3.6   DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

This section presents the way in which data was collected. For the purpose of finding out the causes of reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, the researcher used the observation and reading tests as data collection instruments. According to Williams (2004, p.270) data collection is a "process of capturing facts, information and figures based on the characteristic and the nature of the research problem." In this study, data was collected using both the observation and achievement test methods.

3.6.1 Observation

Kumar (2005, p.118, cited in Junias, 2009) viewed observation as one way to collect primary data, and as "…purposeful, systematic and a selective way of watching and listening to interactions of a phenomenon as it takes place". Observation is the most appropriate way of collecting data, for example, to learn about interaction or for verification purposes in order to obtain accurate information.

Creswell (2008) identified two types of observation, namely, *participant* and *non-participant*. Creswell and Plan-Clark (2007, p.45) refer to non-participant observation as "observation from the distance", while for Best and Khan (2006) it is the researcher's long distance observation of activities related to the topic of interest and spectator-based. For the purpose of this study, it was used in that the researcher did not become involved in the activities of the group, but as a passive observer who watched and listened to the group activities in order to collect data from the observations.

During observations the researcher observed both the physical and psychosocial environments, while observing the availability of resources as well as the manner in which the teaching-learning process took place (Williams, 2006). During observations the researcher focused more on the type of classroom reading activity, the teaching methods, the classroom organisation and proficiency in the medium of instruction by both the teachers and learners. Observations were vital for the researcher to answer question 1 of this study.

3.6.2 Reading achievement test

An achievement test measures an individual's current proficiency in a given area, such as knowledge or skill (Gay et al., 2009). For MacMillan and Schumacher (2001, p.24), "an achievement test is designed to assess how much knowledge a person has in a certain area or set of areas." In schools, achievement tests are used to place students into appropriate grade levels and skill groupings and to assess the teachers' efficiency (Gay et al., 2009, p.149). The main goal of any achievement test is to ascertain what sort of information the test taker knows, making it different from aptitude or abilities tests, both of which are designed to gauge how much potential a person has for learning. Goulandris and Snowling (1995) note that looking only at the achievement test can give the administrator a good idea of where the test-taker is at the present, in terms of knowledge of a specific topic or subject area. For the purpose of this study, the achievement tests (Appendix 2) were conducted in order to identify the types and causes of reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. The tests were conducted in a pre-arranged venue in which learners were called in one-by-one to read.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests comprised three tests: irregular words, pseudo-words and reading passages (Rubin, 1991), administered to all participating learners. A scoring key for different reading behaviour was developed. While a child was reading a passage the researcher observed the signs and symptoms of reading difficulties, such as inability to decode, read fluently, or to answer comprehension questions. The researcher carefully observed the strategies and techniques a child used to read, for instance word

attack skills, and the types of errors made. Together with related behaviour the researcher determined the types and cause of reading difficulties a child experienced.

3.7   PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a small-scale trial-run of all the aspects planned for use in the main research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2008), the objective of which in this study was to determine whether the research instruments were clear and could not lead to misunderstanding. It was executed in the same way as expected for the main study, so that problems found during it would help the researcher to rectify them (Mitchell & Jolley, 2001, in Williams, 2006). The pilot study was conducted at a primary school in the Ogongo circuit in which the main study was also conducted.

3.8   DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the Director of the Omusati Education Region (Appendix 3), and made known to the Ogongo circuit inspector who informed all the participating school principals. The data were collected during the observation of the learning activities, and the physical environment in which the teaching-learning took place (Gay et al., 2009, p.409). The researcher used the observation guide to observe aspects of the classroom environment, the participants and other behaviours.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, administered to measure an individual's current proficiency in given areas of knowledge or skill (Gay et al., 2006, p.149), was considered suitable in that it could be used to focus on achievement in a single subject, for instance, reading. Thus, this achievement reading assessment was used primarily to identify the types and causes of reading difficulties in the Grade 4 learners' reading.

The test also enabled the researcher to detect and record data about the learners' general reading behaviour, that is, word recognition abilities, types of errors, techniques of attacking unknown words and overall understanding of the materials read. The researcher observed signs, such as facial expressions, finger pointing while reading, omissions of letters, hesitation, and/or reversal of words. Learners were required to read at least sight words, and pseudo-words to tap on their decoding skills. Comprehension texts of varying degrees of difficulty were used to ascertain learners' comprehension skills (Appendix 3).

The researcher prepared a Grade 4 level reading text prepared in collaboration with the Omusati regional Lower Primary Advisory Service. A score card (Appendix 4) was kept for the individual learner during achievement reading assessment tests. Observations were conducted during the English lesson, whereas the reading tests were conducted in a separate pre-arranged room. Learners were called in one-by-one in alphabetical order and encouraged to feel at ease during the reading tests. Before the reading act began they were informed that they would be asked questions based on the reading texts.

3.9   DATA ANALYSIS

The following methods of data analysis were employed.

3.9.1 Observations

Qualitative data obtained from observations were subjected to content analysis, a method which involves comparing, contrasting and categorising data in order to draw meaning from it (Gall et al., 2007). The researcher grouped data according to the predetermined themes and looked for consistencies and differences to make comparisons and contrasts. This was to organise ideas that emerged from the data to make a well-informed assessment of the causes of reading difficulties observable in Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit.

3.9.2 Achievement tests

The quantitative data obtained from the achievement tests were analysed using the descriptive statistics, and included mathematical or graphical techniques, to organise or summarise numerical data (Gay et al., 2009). The researcher arranged the quantitative data into tables, and percentages to indicate key findings of this study. An achievement reading test was divided into three different levels of reading; independent reading, instructional reading, and frustration reading (Rubin, 1991).

3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Educational researchers respect the right, privacy, dignity and sensitivity of their populations, and also the integrity of the institutions within which the research occurs. Gay et al. (2009, p.23) point out that researchers require the necessary permission from relevant authorities before a study begins. In this study, the researcher wrote a letter to the Omusati education director seeking permission to conduct the research, stating its purpose and significance. Another letter was sent to the inspector of the selected schools to ask him to inform the principals of the selected schools about the study. The researcher made a follow-up with the principals of the participating schools to ascertain whether or not they had received the information about the study. During the visit the researcher talked to the Grade 4 teachers and learners about the study, informing both the teachers and learners that the purpose of the study was entirely for educational purposes and that information obtained would not be used to tarnish their reputation.

The researcher followed up to ascertain whether the letter had reached the intended principals. The researcher delivered the letter of permission to the principals of the three selected schools, taking this opportunity to establish rapport with the Grade 4 teachers and explain to them the purpose and significance of the study. The teachers were also assured that their identities would be protected.

To Gay et al. (2009, p.23), ethical considerations include the coding of the data to protect the participants' identity, their privacy and confidentiality. This study guaranteed anonymity of all participating schools by coding them as 'X', 'Y', and 'Z'.

3.11   SUMMARY

In this study only schools that participated in the RPIS were included, and tests were administered to determine learners' reading abilities. Observations were conducted on the physical and psychosocial environment in which the teaching-learning process took place. An achievement reading test comprising three tests was given to determine the learners' reading abilities. The tests were administered in a separate venue whereby learners were called in one-by-one in alphabetical order. Reading tests began with sight words and ended with reading passage two. Data were analysed using the descriptive statistics, coded, and placed in themes. Tables and graphs were used to present the different levels of reading.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter discussed the methodology and research techniques used in collecting and analysing the data in order to realise the purpose of this study. This chapter presents the results, analysis and their interpretation in accordance with the research questions. The information collected from the observations is presented first, followed by the information from the reading tests. Thereafter, possible interventions emanating from this study are suggested to remedy reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit.

4.2 FINDINGS FROM OBSERVATIONS

Observation was used in this study in order to obtain data by observing the participants and understanding their natural environment without altering or manipulating it (Gay et al., 2009). In order to gather more information about the causes of reading difficulties, the researcher focused on the following classroom factors: classroom physical-environment; classroom psychosocial-environment; approaches and techniques of teaching reading in English; and the teacher-learners' oral interactions during the lesson. Teachers' preparation to make use of reading materials, reading modelling and the general classroom environment were also observed. No classroom overcrowding was noted in any of the three participating schools, however, the researcher observed that there were insufficient English reading materials in all of the schools in this study.

4.2.1 Classroom physical environment

The following aspects characterised the physical environment of the classrooms.

4.2.1.1 Classroom Composition

The classes in this study consisted of mixed ability learners of both genders. The classroom arrangements were in line with a learner-centred paradigm (Ministry of Basic Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2003). At School Z, learners were seated in pairs, while at schools X and Y they were seated in small groups of three or four. School Z had 28 Grade 4 learners (17 girls and 11 boys); School Y had 33 (20 girls and 13 boys); while School X had 31 Grade 4 learners (17 girls and 14 boys). In total, 92 Grade 4 learners participated in this study. There were enough chairs and tables for learners at all the three schools. The general classroom environments at Schools Y and Z were not appealing. At School X there were teacher-made posters of sight-words on display to encourage English reading, but not at Schools Y and Z.

According to Cameron (2002), the classroom media play a crucial role in promoting learning, and colourful posters that contain text can be of continual interest to beginners and help them recognise words. At School Z, the classroom environment was empty, with only a list of names and a few pictures on display. According to the Grade 4 syllabus a Lower Primary classroom should be a print-rich environment that appeals and captures the interest of learners and encourage them to learn more (MBESC, 2005b).

4.2.1.2 The reading corner

In all three schools (X, Y, Z) no reading corners were found. According to Cameron (2002), every reading-ready classroom should provide a quiet and comfortable place for students to read independently or with a partner or group. This reading area should include comfortable seats. Lerner (2000) advises teachers to provide students with reading opportunities and make them aware of the variety of books available, while relating their independent reading to their real

life. A classroom without a reading corner does not encourage learners to read more or acquire reading skills in English as expected. The absence of reading corners in the three schools seems to have deprived learners of an opportunity to practise independent reading. According to de Debat (2008), reading corners are of utmost importance in developing English reading skills in learners, as they tell them the school values and encourages independent reading. Reading corners are established with the prime purpose of boosting learners' interest in reading (de Debat, 2008, p.78), and without them it was observed in the Ogongo circuit that learners only had reading chances offered by the teachers during the lesson.

Schools X and Z also lacked reading materials, notably readers. English readers were shared between two or three learners when reading. In School Y all Grade 4 learners had English reading books, but they were kept by the teacher. In none of the three schools were the learners allowed to take books home, which denied them an opportunity to practise reading after school hours.

Depriving learners access to books and/or sharing them in groups of two or three was observed as a possible cause of reading difficulties in Grade 4 in the Ogongo circuit. The researcher also observed that the Grade 4 "*English for all for Namibia*" was the only textbook used by all schools in this study. Lack of reading skills in English observed might be caused by the schools not having ordered a variety of textbooks to be used by learners, or the budget allocation for schools being insufficient to buy an additional set of books. To Lerner (2000), reading is a continuous skill, and one that constantly improves with practice, so without practice reading skill in the Ogongo circuit would not improve, i.e., not enough reading material and then only used in the class. Learners require exposure to a variety of English reading materials in order to avoid rote reading and boredom with the one English reading title in use.

4.2.1.3 Teacher-learner ratio

The official teacher-learner ratio of the MoE for the Lower Primary level is 1:35 learners per class. The enrolment numbers of Grade 4 classrooms in this study were lower, at 31 learners at School X, 33 learners at School Y, and 28 learners at School Z. The researcher also observed lack of learner participation in the three classrooms. For example, at Schools X and Y only a few learners were engaged with the teacher, and their attention to the lesson was minimal.

The learners in School Z were on-task most of the time during the observations, and the teacher at School Z engaged the learners during the English lesson, which might have helped in the development of their abilities to read English. It was observed in Schools X and Y that the teachers tended to spend more teaching time on class control, thus reducing the time available for instruction. The researcher also observed that in these classes learners' individual reading needs were not often addressed, resulting in poor development of reading in English.

4.2.2 Classroom psychosocial-environment

Patrick, Ryan and Kaplan (2007) define psychosocial environment as the relationship among learners with each other, the teacher and how this translates into learning. Classroom rules that learners were expected to follow were found in Grade 4 class in School Z. To Patrick et al. (2007), classroom rules and procedures should be introduced early in the school year and the consequences should be enforced consistently. Throughout the lesson in School Z, the teacher reminded learners to stick to the set rules. For example, during the lesson learners had to answer questions in an orderly manner, not shouting. The teacher exercised her power to ensure discipline and orderly behaviour in the class. After learners read a text the teacher asked: "*Who was given a wedding present?*", to which a section of learners shouted the answer. The teacher insisted: "*Is that the way we answer the questions?*" Learners realised that they were expected to be given chances to respond to questions: "*Yes Tuli! Would you give us the correct answer?*" A second learner was given a chance and gave a correct answer.

"*Thank you! That is good*", the teacher commended. The response of the teacher created a strong positive relationship with learners, and they were socially supported. According to Schunk and Dale (2006), positive remarks were important in promoting confidence and self-esteem in learners during reading.

In School Y, learners sat in rows one in front of the other. In this school talking amongst them was typically less in the Grade 4 classroom and the seating arrangement discouraged them from working together during the lesson. However, in Schools X and Z, learners were in small groups of three to four. In these two classrooms, interactions and teamwork were much easier during the lessons. Teachers in these two schools were not stationed in one place, but moved around attending to individual learners' reading needs. At School Y the teacher sat in front of the class as learners read the text aloud. However, all the learners were treated similarly, irrespective of their abilities.

4.2.2.1 Approaches to teaching reading English in a Grade 4 classroom

The three Grade 4 teachers observed were all Basic Education Teachers Diploma (BETD) graduates, specialised in the lower primary school phase. In all three classrooms the prescribed book*, English for all for Namibia* was used. The main methods used to teach reading English were phonics and sentence and word method. Less attention was placed on the use of the whole-language approach. All three teachers used the same strategy of teaching reading English, based on decoding and comprehension questions. According to Moats and Foorman (2003), teaching strategies have great significance on learning to read, thus, teachers in the Ogongo circuit should be encouraged to use a teaching approach that is best for their learners to develop reading skills. In this case, learners with reading difficulties should be taught using a systematic teaching of phonics. This is an approach by which a teacher directs his/her teaching from synthetic to analytical phonics. With synthetic phonic (part-to-whole), learners are taught to sound and blend the sequential letter sounds. The sounds are learned in isolation and blended together. In analytic (whole-to-part), a phonic element is identified from a set of words in which each word contains the particular sound to be studied.

According to the Grade 4 syllabus, learners must be able to read fluently prepared and unprepared factual and fiction texts (MBESC, 2005b). Reading fluency can be developed if learners are explicitly taught the decoding skills. Levine (1994) argues that learners should be helped to map the letter-sound code from the onset, but in Schools X and Y the phonic method was used to teach English reading, with decoding as the main emphasis. In School Z the teacher made an extra effort by integrating the phonic and sentence and word method. This teacher used words from the text read to form jumbled sentences as a means of developing vocabulary. On language development, the teacher in School Z emphasised grammar use, using multiple tasks to teach English reading skills and helping learners to develop appropriate grammar. During the question and answer session, the teacher at School Z asked learners questions based on the text read and insisted that they reply in full sentences.

Teacher: *What did Mrs Block and Renate wanted to buy for David?*

1st Learner: *A present.*

Teacher: *Answer in full. What did Mrs Block and Renate wanted to buy for David?*

2nd Learner: *A wedding present.*

Teacher: *A wedding present, thank you my girl. But put it in a full sentence.*

3rd Learner: *They wanted to buy a wedding present for him.*

Teacher: *Very good! They wanted to buy a wedding present for him.*

According to Stanovich (1980), the whole-language approach encourages learners to use language frequently, by retelling or dramatizing what they have read. Teaching through the whole-language approach helps learners develop both English language and reading skills. Lerner (2000) noted that a more natural way to learn sight words is through language experience stories. In Schools X and Y, the lessons observed were based on the phonic method rather than the whole-language method in which learners would be exposed to use sight words orally. For example, teachers in the two schools gave the texts for learners to read aloud.

When learners were reading the texts the teachers focused on decoding and pronunciation, rather than on vocabulary and language use. However, it was observed that learners in all three schools were able to read the texts at different levels (independent, instruction and frustration), but could not answer the comprehension questions well. Placed learners' reading was accomplished by identifying a number of reading miscues a child uttered in a given reading test (Appendix 6). According to the Grade 4 syllabus, reading in such a way is not appropriate (MBESC, 2005b). Learners at this stage should focus on meaning and not on sound symbols correspondence.

Another significant observation was the teachers' language use and overall pronunciation of English words. Pronunciation was affected by mother tongue interference, with problems occurring mainly in sounding letters such as /d/,which some pronounced as /nd/ and /b/ as /mb/. Learners at Grade 4 stage were still depending upon good reading models to emulate. A teacher at School Y asked learners who were making noise at the back of the class what the problem was: "*Hey! You mboys at the mback. What is the promblem there?*"

4.2.2.2 Teacher-learners interactions

Classroom interactions are important in that they enhance the development of the language skill of speaking and listening among the learners (Hall et al., 2011). Classroom interactions help the learners to become competent in thinking critically and share views with peers. The teacher should know how to stimulate learners' involvement in the classroom, by motivating them to see relevance in learning to read, thus increasing classroom participation.

It was observed that in all schools the teachers failed to explore the prior knowledge of learners at the beginning of their lessons. They all employed the reading aloud strategy to teach reading English. Noticeably, in Schools X and Y, while learners were reading the focus of the teacher was on diagnosing their reading difficulties in word identification and word recognition. The teacher at School Z exemplified this by giving jumbled words from which learners could form

sentences, but this was not followed by teachers at Schools X and Y. In all classrooms, English was used as the main language of instruction, however teachers code-switched frequently. In School Y a teacher code-switched more often for control purposes, for example, */ayii/, /*O *anditii/* translated as *"Let me say."* These occurred if the teacher was not satisfied with the learners' behaviour in class.

The researcher also noted that in all three schools the classroom environment was conducive for learning, with learners not shouting but rather waiting for their chance to contribute to the lessons. It was observed that the teachers referred to learners by their names, which Winkler (2009) maintains gives them a sense of being recognised and so motivates them to do better, in this case to read better.

4.2.2.3 Classroom interaction and learners' gender

Classroom interactions were derived by observing learners' engagement and the participation levels. The researcher noted that the participation level of girls and boys differed. At all three schools the researcher noted that girls participated more than boys and girls were more willing to raise their hands and contribute to the lesson than were the boys.

In Schools X and Y more girls than boys participated in reading, but not in answering comprehension questions. The teacher in School Z tried to point to learners at random, whether raising their hand or not but the participation level between girls and boys was not the same. In School X, boys responded more often if the teacher's attention was directed at them, and less often if there was no effective management in the classroom. The boys' attention in the lessons in Schools X and Y were characterised by an on- and off-task behaviour, wasting more valuable time expected of learners to engage the reading materials. Such a situation, in which learners are not fully engaged in the classroom activities, might exacerbate the difficulties of reading in English.

In School X the girls more frequently participated in the lesson by responding to the teachers' questions, while the boys were more likely to participate as a means of obtaining attention or being noticed by the teacher.

4.3 THE READING TESTS

The achievement test, consisting of three tests, was administered to assess the reading difficulties in English among the Grade 4 learners in the three schools in the Ogongo circuit. The purpose was mainly to find out learners' reading mastery, and establish their reading abilities, find out the type of reading difficulties in English and the causes thereof. Three reading tests, of sight word, pseudo-words and reading passages, were administered. The findings are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Reading tests results

Reading Level	Sight words	Pseudo words	Reading passage1	Reading passage 2
Good (Independent)	54 (58.7%)	20 (22%)	6 (6.5%)	6 (6.5%)
Average(Instructional)	30 (33%)	33 (35.9%)	26 (28.3%)	22 (26.6%)
Poor (Frustration)	8 (8.7%)	39 (42%)	70 (76.1%)	46 (59.7%)
Not read	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (3.9%)
Total	**92 (100%)**	**92 (100%)**	**92 (100%)**	**77 (100%)**

Table 4.1 shows the levels of reading of the Grade 4 learners who participated in this study. During the reading test, different levels of reading in English were identified, namely, independent, instruction and frustration reading.

According to Rubin (1991):

> ...at the independent level, a child can read successfully on his/her own without any assistance. At this level a child is able to achieve a minimum

comprehension score on literal and interpretive questions of at least 90%. A child should be free from observable evidence as tension such as frowning, movement of feet and hands, finger pointing. A child can pay attention to the punctuations, and has accurate pronunciation up to 99%.

At the instructional level, Rubin states that a child should not find the reading materials too easy or too boring. There should be a minimum comprehension score of at least 75% of oral reading in literal and interpretive questions, whilst in oral reading there should be accurate pronunciation of at least 95%. At the frustration level, Rubin notes that a child has difficulties attaining meanings and is unfamiliar with the points presented in the text. Frustration is shown when a child is frowning, blinking, or displaying faulty breathing. The child may be unwilling to read and he/she may cry. The child's reading is characterised of substitution, insertion, repetition, reversal, and omission of words. The possible cause of these reading miscues is lack of decoding and word attack skill, resulting in reading the text at the frustration level.

In this study learners placed in the above mentioned levels of reading used the reading scoring-keys (Appendices 4, 5 & 6). The reading assessment was conducted in order, as follows:

> First, sight words: These are words that are recognised instantly without hesitation or further analysis. Appendix 5 shows 50 sight words that learners were asked to read as fast as they could. Sight words were used to find out the Grade 4 learners' word recognition abilities.

> Second, pseudo or non-word reading test (Appendix 4): These were meaningless words conforming to English orthography or letter strings which resemble English words. These words were administered to find out Grade 4 learners' decoding skills.

> Third, two reading passages were administered, varying in the degree of difficulty. Passage 1 was considered easier while passage 2 was challenging. The passages were used to find the level at which the Grade 4 learners could read independently with comprehension.

With sight words and pseudo-words a tick was used to indicate learners' correct pronunciation. If a learner mispronounced a word a miscue version of what s/he said was written on top of that word. With the reading passages an asterisk (*) was written on top of the word a learner was unable to read and a version of the mispronunciation was put on top of the specific word. The letter (c) was used to indicate self-correction when a learner read a word incorrectly and realised it and corrected him/herself (Appendix 6).

From Table 4.1 (above), it was evident that 84 learners (91.7%) read the **sight words** well. They displayed the ability to recognise individual words, and were observed to have possessed good word-attack skills. They read the sight words with fluency. In particular, the 54 learners (58.7%) at the independent reading level read at least 47 of 50 words with fluency and with little or no excessive effort to decode individual words during reading. Thirty learners (33%) at the instructional reading level were able to read 25 to 47 sight words at average pace (scoring a number of words correctly per minute). These learners were unable to read all the words without help from the teacher. It was also observed that most hesitated to read the sight words at good speed, and often sounded out words into letters audibly before blending them. This was an indication of poor word attack skill, as learners tried hard to put letters together to form a meaningful sound. For example, a few learners at instructional reading level committed errors such as reversed words, /tow/ for /two/, /how/ for /who/; and substituted words /these/ for /those/, /way/ for /why/.

To the researcher, the reading miscues observed during sight words reading were regarded as minor incidents as they did not hinder the reading progress. Lerner (2000) points out that this problem is often aggravated by lack of practice; however, the researcher noted that the learners had acquired decoding skills but had not been sufficiently automated. A total of 8 learners (8.7%) read the sight words poorly, and could read only fewer than 25 at the frustration reading level. It was observed that some at the frustration reading level had problems matching the letters with their sounds. Their reading was characterised by long pauses before deconstructing the word into its sound units, with finger pointing and some lip movement that affected fluent reading being observed. They read the words

slowly and laboriously, which reflected lack of automaticity in decoding. It was observed that the learners experienced difficulties in understanding and using the alphabetic principles effectively. They experience difficulties on how to combine letters of the alphabet to constitute meaningful sounds of words.

Also observed were faulty word recognition and naming, poor phonological awareness, word recognition and naming, such as /two/ as /too/; /they/ for /their/. Words ending with the /d/ sound, such as /had/, /word/, /made/, were sounded with /nd/ at the end, for example, /hand/ for /had/, /wornd/ for /word/, /mand/ for /made/. Noticeably, the /nd/ sounds at the end of English words reflected the transfer of literacy from the mother tongue. Another problem was the vowel sounds that were often caused by an unpredictable written form of English, such as the use of letter [i] in words such as /I/, /will/; [a] in words like /take/, /was/ and [o] in words like /out/ and /other/. A total of 20 (18%) learners overgeneralised these sounds, as in the word [took] pronunciation /tuk/ read /tok/.

Pseudo-words were meant to assess how learners deconstruct the meaningless, non-words that resembled English words. A total of 53 learners (57.6%) read these words above the frustration level, and were able to read from seven to nine out of 10 words correctly. Of the 92 learners, 59% could deconstruct the words into letters and sounds, and vice versa to pronounce them. Many (57.6%) had developed a sufficiently strong awareness of how words were composed in constituent sound units. For example, they broke down words into their individual sound components, such as in /me-lo-n/, /p-loo-d/, /hau-sag-e/.

Of the 92 learners, 37 (40.2%) were at the frustration level as they were unable to read more than five out of 10 words well. They had difficulties segmenting and re-blending the component sounds in the words correctly. Lerner (2000) maintains that English is an alphabetic language, and the code in it involves a system of mapping the letters-sound correspondence which can be generalised when reading. The possible cause of such reading displayed by these learners can be attributed to lack of phonic training, which in turn gave rise to poor decoding and word recognition strategy.

The purpose of the **reading texts** was to assess the reading skills and comprehension abilities among Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. According to the MBESC (2005b), learners at Grade 4 level should be able to read the grade level texts fluently and with understanding.

The researcher administered the reading test from the easy to the challenging. Passage 1 comprised 70 words and Passage 2 comprised 150 words. Five comprehension questions were set, based on each of these texts. Reading was discontinued if a learner committed more than 10 errors in each of the passages. Learners were told to discontinue the reading because too many errors impede fluency (Lerner, 2000) and ultimately compromise comprehension.

Passage 1 was expected to be easier for Grade 4 learners, however, only six (6.5%) of the learners read the passage well. A total of 26 (28.3%) read the text satisfactorily, while 60 (65%) did not. In total, 15 (16.3%) out of 60 learners stumbled and lost place when reading aloud. These learners read the passage at a slow pace (word-by-word), moved their lips (sub-vocalisation) and without expression. To Cameron (2002), sub-vocalisation is often caused by the way learners have been taught to read, usually by a phonic or look-and-say method. However, 32 learners read the reading passage at speed and were able to change the reading tone when appropriate. This was an indication that good word attack skill and word recognition strategy had been developed. It was also observed that these 32 learners used word-recognition clues such as phonics, sight word and structural analysis when an unknown word stopped the reading process. These learners portrayed self-correction when they made an error, noticed it, and returned to correct the error themselves. This indicated that learners were monitoring their reading process.

Passage 2 was challenging. Only 77 (83.7%) of the learners were able to proceed reading passage 2. These 77 learners read passage 1 below the frustration level and were immediately dropped. However, in reading passage 2 only six learners (6.5%) out of 77 read fluently. They were able to do so with accuracy, monitor their understanding, and adjust their reading rates. It was observed that 22 learners (28.6%) managed to read the passage at the instructional level.

A total of 46 (59.7%) learners struggled to read the passage at expected Grade 4 level, with poor decoding skills and slow and imprecise word recognition. Three learners (3.9%) were unable to finish reading the passage as it became more challenging. In addition, 36.4% of the learners managed to read the two passages fluently, though they were unable to answer the comprehension questions correctly based on the two passages. Learners answered the comprehension questions by reading any line from the texts or giving irrelevant answers. These learners had insufficient vocabulary and structural knowledge, thus inhibiting understanding of the text. Levine (1994) noted that failure to answer the questions after the reading process is an indication that the reading act has not been successfully achieved. Lack of comprehension came into effect as a result of improper teaching methods.

Passage fluency

It was found that although learners lacked the comprehension abilities to answer the questions based on the passage read, 6.5% of them read them fluently. It was also noted that 32 (34.8%) out of 92 learners demonstrated a good ability to read passage 1, and 28 (36.4%) out of 77 learners read passage 2 beyond the frustration level. Fluency was determined by scoring a number of words per passage correctly. The six (6.5%) learners on the independent level read the two passages, and only self-corrected not less than two words. According to Lerner (2000), fluency is the ability to read the text accurately, quickly and with expression. Fluent readers usually do this because they do not have problems with word recognition. A possible cause of poor word recognition by Grade 4 learners in Ogongo circuit is lack of reading practice. In the absence of a reading corner in the Grade 4 classrooms, compounded by general lack of English reading materials in the schools in this study phase, it was impossible for learners to practise reading frequently.

4.4   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study was prompted by the many learners in the Omusati region, Ogongo circuit in particular, who have experienced difficulties in reading English (MoE, 2009a). Baker (2006) acknowledges that the reading process is a function of the individual's ecological system, including cognitive, linguistic and cultural background. In line with this, teachers should appreciate the child's linguistic and cultural background in order to make potential contributions aimed at improving learners' reading. According to Dickinson and Neuman (2006), reading difficulties are major problems that may have a negative bearing on learners throughout school. Lerner (2000) cautions that the causes of reading difficulties are stemmed from a variety of issues, of which some are not easily diagnosed or understood by teachers. However, she suggests that effective instructions to remediate reading difficulties where they persisted should be given (p.354). Reading difficulties, such as lack of comprehension, can be easily identified in learners, but often teachers ignore its development. Instead, teachers will pay more attention to fluency.

As expounded by Almasi (2003), adequate initial instructions require that children use reading to obtain meaning from print; have frequent opportunity to read and exposure to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships; learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system; and understand the structure of the spoken words. Almasi (2003) concludes that disruption of these developments increases the opportunity that reading will be delayed. This was the case for the 15 (16.3%) learners who stumbled to read the texts. In the Ogongo circuit learners are not exposed to a variety of English reading books as schools do not have libraries. *English for All for Namibia* was the only book available for reading by Grade 4 learners in all schools in this study, which made reading practice very difficult.

In spite of the above findings the researcher also identified persistent obstacles to reading among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. First, learners experienced difficulties in understanding and using the alphabetical principle that affected decoding. This stemmed from unsound teaching methods applied by teachers. The researcher suggests that a systematic teaching of phonics would have the most impact on learners in this study. Second, an overriding obstacle

was the lack of knowledge that English writing represents spoken words, that is, learners' inability to transfer the comprehension skill of reading to spoken language.

These above findings are supported by those of Dickinson and Neuman (2006), who suggest many factors that may contribute to reading difficulties among L2 learners, including understanding how sounds are represented alphabetically, sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency, and background knowledge and vocabulary needed to render written texts comprehensible.

The reading difficulties identified during the observation sessions and the reading tests in this study were decoding and lack of word recognition abilities, reversal of words, substitution, insertion, omission, English language problems, teacher factors, school environment, and lack of comprehension of materials read by the learners. The research observed that one of the causes of reading difficulties can be attributed to lack of reading practice among learners, due to shortage of reading materials in schools.

The findings of this study are in stark contrast with the basic competencies contained in the Grade 4 syllabus, meaning that many learners are fallen behind in the Grade 4 basic competencies (MBESC, 2005b).

4.4.1. Factors affecting reading proficiency of Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit

Factors affecting reading proficiency of Grade 4 learners of the Ogongo circuit which were observed during the reading test including the following.

4.4.1.1 Decoding and word recognition abilities

It was observed that 79.9%, made up of 15 (16.3%) learners had reached the frustration level in reading passage 1 and were dropped, whilst 49 (63.6%) had reached the frustration level in reading passage 2, and those who could not read

had decoding problems. During the reading process it was noted that these learners failed to blend letters to sound out words or to recognise words in the sentences, and confused letters and the sound they represented. For example, instead of reading *feet* they read *foot*, and read word-by-word, ignoring the punctuation. For example, "*He could hear his sister in the kitchen making supper*". Learners tended to read this sentence as /He co,uld hee his-his sistaa, in, thee, chiken, marking supa/(commas indicate learners' pauses).

By analysing the English reading skill of most learners in this study it was found that lack of word decoding ability stemmed from faulty recognition and naming of letters of the alphabet. It was also observed that the phonic method was not explicitly presented to these learners as they failed to decode letters to sound the words out. Evident in the example above is that, reading in such a way, learners could not deconstruct words in their sound units. These learners were reading letters in words, rather than the sounds representing the letters. Decoding problems are at the root of most reading difficulties. According to Lerner (2000), decoding creates the foundation on which all other reading skills are built, so the absence of decoding skills in learners, as in this study, impedes word recognition and word attack skills. Levine (1994) writes that the ability to recognise words easily is fundamental to reading with comprehension, and once readers develop fluency in word recognition they can concentrate on the meaning of the text.

The researcher observed that poor decoding skills emanated from wrong teaching methods applied to teaching reading in English. During the observations, teachers did not demonstrate to learners how to break words into unit sounds. Teachers' attention was on correcting the reading miscues committed by learners. To Alderson (2000), the phonic method requires that learners first learn to recognise the letters and the identification of sounds with which they correspond before they can read words, phrases and sentences. Poor word decoding was aggravated by difficulties in segmenting and re-blending component sounds in a word.

Generally, there was lack of awareness of how words were composed in sound units, making it difficult for the Grade 4 learners to break down words in sound component when reading. According to Lerner (2000), decoding of words requires

sound teaching methods that help a child to store information in the long-term memory. If the process of teaching reading is well structured then the word configuration can easily be stored in the child's memory and recalled during the reading act.

To remember previous information is largely dependent on how the information had initially been presented (Winkler, 2009, p.84). Children should be given the opportunity to familiarise themselves with letter shapes from the early grades. It was evident from the reading tests that phonic instructions, sight words and context clues had not been explicitly demonstrated to learners in the early grades. That 79% of learners read the texts at the frustration level and below seems to suggest that reading skills in English were not inculcate in learners well enough in the early years of schooling. This poor practice of decoding skills over the years might have caused delay in the Grade 4 learners reading of English. The researcher observed during the test that the majority of learners hesitated to read fluently the reading passages, although most words in the selection were sight words.

All the three teachers observed used the phonic approach to teach reading. During reading, they aimed at involving recognition of words, and much questioning, however, it was observed that the phonic method was partially practiced by learners as the teacher would concentrated on correcting pronunciation when they were reading aloud.

In this study, it was found that only 33% of the Grade 4 learners read the texts at their level. A total of 79.9% learners did not read the passages well during the reading test, an indication that basic competencies pertaining to the Grade 4 syllabus were not achieved (MBESC, 2009b). The root cause of poor reading habits was decoding, which stemmed from lack of reading practice. It was observed that most learners did not have an opportunity to read aloud during reading lessons.

4.4.1.2 Reading miscues analysis

Alderson (2000) defines reading miscues as the violation of speech communication by means of texts. During the reading process the researcher used the following marks to record the reading miscues: [-] for substitution, [^] for insertion and having recorded the word, circling for the omitted words, and underlining for repeated words. The pattern of responses noted during the reading process included the following; reversal, omission, insertion, self-correction, and refusal. These are explained further below.

Reversal is the tendency to reverse letters or words that are different only in direction, such as /b/ for /d/, /no/ for /on/; or words such as: /how/ for /who/, /was/ for /saw/. This is similar to substitution. During the reading passage one reversal occurred, for example, in the following sentence: "Jimmy got under the table in the <u>kitchen</u>." Some 15% of learners read the same sentence as: "Jimmy got under the table in the <u>chicken</u>." In that sentence *kitchen* was substituted to *chicken*, completely altering the meaning of the sentence. Substitution also occurred in a way similar to reversal, with 10% of learners substituting words, as in the use of "<u>locked up</u>" instead of "<u>looked up</u>." Another example was "Mother <u>who</u> gets a surprise" being read as "Mother <u>how</u> gets a surprise." It happened that in cases such as these sentences, reversal and substitution altered the meaning of the sentence and made the reading act difficult to follow. To Freck and Meier (2005), many reversals occur with young readers with high-frequency words, for example, <u>of</u> for <u>for.</u> However, reversal errors in this study might have occurred due to a lack of reading practice. This was evident during observations that learners only practise reading during the lessons, and nothing from school encouraged independent reading.

Omission: A total of 12 (13%) learners in this study omitted words. It was noted that during the reading test some were trying to read fast, but they actually could not, thus resulting in omission of words. The researcher also noted that the learners' sight vocabulary was weaker. For example, a sentence in reading passage 1, reads: *All the children took the balloons and run into the room.* Learners omitted the word "the" in the sentence, and it was read as "*All children*

took balloons and run into room." Although the meaning of the sentence was not greatly affected, it was altered, and this reading practice is not commendable at the Grade 4 stage. According to Lerner (2000), omission is regarded as a normal practice as the reader focuses on the key words in the text for meaning, but for beginners omission is an error.

It was observed, in this study, that many learners have no word-attack skill as a result of poor word recognition. Poor word recognition is caused by lack of reading practice since learners are not able to access a store of words or visual patterns when reading, hence, they opted to omit words they had not encountered before. Automatic recognition of words in the text helps learners to improve fluency.

Insertion: Insertions noted during the reading test were, for example, in "Samson kicked the sand under his bare feet", which eight (8.9%) of the learners changed to read "Samson <u>was</u> kicked the sand under his bare feet." This type of miscue affected the meaning of the sentence. According to Almasi (2003), this occurs when a learner inserts a word or two in the text which was, or were not, there. If the insertion does not distract from the meaning it may only mean the reader is making sense but also inserts it. Almasi concludes that if insertion is one such as using <u>finished</u> for <u>finish</u> this should be addressed

A common insertion occurred with the indefinite and definite articles, /a/ or /the/. Learners invariably inserted these articles, replacing "*the*" with "*a*", or adding *an* article where there was none. For example, in "Samson come for supper!" 5 (5.4%) learners inserted "the", so the sentence would read "Samson come for <u>the</u> supper." The insertion violated the context of the sentence. Snow et al. (2010) observe that insertion occurs when a reader reads too fast or when sight vocabulary is poorly developed.

Self-correction is an act of reading in which a learner realises s/he has made an error and re-reads the word without prompting. In this study, self-correction was observed with 6 (6.5%) learners who read the passages at the independent level. These learners read the word wrongly, realised the error and self-corrected it. About 7 (7.6%) self-corrected on many occasions and this affected comprehension. Self-correction came in force as a result of poor word attacking

skill and word recognition strategy. It was observed that too many self-corrections affected the act of reading. Another observation was that too much repetition of words resulted in inaccuracy correction.

Refusal also occurred during the reading test, when learners were unable to respond to the reading process. In this study, three learners (3.9%) completely failed to read the passage. According to Almasi (2003), refusals are often produced by learners who have no phonic skills at their disposal to help them recode an unfamiliar word. The researcher noted that learners who refused to read lacked decoding skills. Reading at the Grade 4 level requires more decoding skills, unlike in the early grades when beginners rely primarily on visual word recognition supported by pictorial and semantic cues.

Carter and Nunan (2003) regard reading miscues, such as reversal, omission and insertion, as signs of dyslexia. However, Levine (1994) refutes this, maintaining that reversal, omission and mispronunciation cannot be associated with dyslexia, but rather occur commonly in children when they begin to read. In concurrence, Lerner (2000) acknowledges that reversals are a common tendency with beginner readers, which usually indicates lack of experience with letters and words. Although reversal is common, teachers must establish whether reversal is developmental or indicates disabilities interfering with reading progress. Levine (1994) found that these reading problems could be prevented, provided proper intervention strategies were put in place before it became a problem.

4.4.1.3 Reading fluency

According to Alderson (2000), fluency is defined as the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and proper expression, and children who do not read with fluency read awkwardly. Murray and Johnson (1996) observe that learners who do not read with expression have difficulty with decoding skills. As the Grade 4 learners in this study head into the upper primary grades, fluency becomes increasingly important. The demands of reading required in the upper primary increase dramatically. Thus, learners whose reading in Grade 4 is slow or laboured face

trouble meeting the reading demand of the upper grades. In total, 79 (77%) out of 92 learners in this study read the reading passage badly.

A total of 70 of the learners lacked reading fluency as a result of poor decoding skill. Fluency was aggravated by their lack of distinguishing the characteristics of the individual letter or whole word (word attacking skill), and sounding them well. It was noted that most learners did not form the congruency between particular letters and the English sound language, for example, the letter /o/ in the following words [mother], [*home]*. Learners became confused when reading [mother] /mather/, as the sound /o/ is not the same as in [home] /houm/. English language has unpredictable sounds that are not similar to what learners, in this study, had initially been introduced to in their mother tongue.

Lacking in the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit was Phonological awareness, which refers to the ability to detect or manipulate the sound structure of oral language (Dickinson & Neuman, 2006, p.56). Regular and irregular sounds in English do not always sound similar to those of Oshiwambo, for example the letter /a/, which has different sounds in different words of English, such as /mat/, /cake/, /lack/; but in Oshiwambo the sound is consistent, for example, a similar sound appears in words like /kala/,/pata/, kakele. Phonological awareness affected decoding of English words, as learners transfer reading skills from Oshiwambo.

4.4.1.4 Reading comprehension

Gall, Gall and Borg (2001) suggest that comprehension of the texts requires readers to actively engage the text to construct meanings. To develop this in children, all reading instructions should provide for the development of reading comprehension abilities. The lack of comprehension skills among the Grade 4 learners resulted in poor decoding skills, word identification, lack of vocabulary in English and recognition abilities in this. According to Pang et al. (2003), comprehension is the process of deriving meaning from connected text. The chief objective of reading is to understand, which ultimately depends upon one's ability

to decode and master sight words. When word recognition is automatic readers are able to concentrate on the meaning of whole sentences and paragraphs

A total of 70 (76.1%) of the 92 learners read passage 1 at the instructional level, but could not answer correctly any of the five questions based on the text. It was noted during the reading tests that learners with insufficient skills in word recognition were unable to concentrate on the meaning of the text.

From the reading tests it was observed that learners had insufficient background knowledge or vocabulary to support the written texts. It was found in this study that learners did not answer the questions correctly because they could not differentiate the "WH" questions; that is the Why, Who, Which, Where, What. For example, *Why did aunt Hilma tell the children to hide?* To this question, a total of 17(18.5%) learners responded merely by reading the sentence in which the word *hide* appeared. Their answer was: "*Hurry up and hide*". Their responses to the questions posed after reading passages were not appropriate. They gave irrelevant answers or simply quoted any line from the text read as the answer. The way learners responded to the questions indicated a lack of exposure to both language and reading.

Automatisation, the ability to recall words from memory, was also observed during the tests. A total of 25 (27.2%) of the learners expended much effort decoding words in the text read. Most of the words used in the reading texts given to the learners during the test were sight words, these being words that can be recognised by sight. Learners who struggled to read the passage fluently seemed to show a lack of automated reading. Grade 4 learners expended too much effort on decoding words and as a result less effort was left for comprehension.

None of the three schools had reading corners in their Grade 4 classrooms, or sufficient reading materials. In the absence of these there was minimal motivation for them to read for a variety of purposes. This study was conducted in remote schools and, as Lerner (2000) observed, many learners in remote rural areas lack exposure to literacy in the form of print. These learners had no resources to transfer the comprehension skills of the English spoken language to reading, and this compromised textual understanding.

4.4.1.5 English oral Language

Learning to read differs from oral skill in that it involves a symbolic system that represents speech. Pang et al. (2003) argue that before children begin to learn to associate the written form with speech they need to learn the vocabulary, grammar and sound system of the oral language. Dickinson and Neuman (2006) also emphasise the link between oral vocabulary and the development of reading skills.

Language is a component of reading with understanding. All learners in this study were from the Oshiwambo-speaking families, and English to them was not a first language. Although the home languages were Oshingandjera, Oshimbalanu or Oshikwaluudhi, at school they were taught Oshindonga as L1 and English as L2. According to Barker (2006), the threshold hypothesis posits a level to reach in a language before introduction of the skills of another language. The threshold hypothesis might have affected memorising the English words, had they not been part of the language normally used at home.

According to Levine (1994), reading difficulties may be the result of cultural, peer, and family factors. Levine further suggests that if there is no identifiable reader role model in a child's life the act of reading may fail to offer any potential attraction. As a teacher teaching in the environment in which this study was conducted, the researcher concurs with the above assertions by Levine (1994).

Learners in the Ogongo circuit struggle with English, and most of them experience one or more of the following multiple risk factors that inhibit reading mastery, namely poorly educated parents, low-income family and community background, and attendance at low-achieving schools. With these multiple risk factors affecting these learners without explicit English reading instruction, a large number will continue to experience reading difficulties. It should be pointed out that learners in the Ogongo circuit come to school with no proficiency in English from home but speak local languages, therefore it is vital that they be taught the basics of reading

in their first language while acquiring oral proficiency in English. Then, the reading skills acquired in the first language might facilitate transfer to English reading.

Contrary to the arrangement at the lower primary phase, which aims at scaffolding learners' English language proficiency at Grades 1-3, insufficient instruction is likely given in this phase. In the Ogongo circuit, print materials were lacking and are needed to support the development of English language skills. Further, oral language proficiency in English should be encouraged in order to attain an acceptable level before learners are introduced to formal reading instruction. Once oral proficiency has been achieved, learners will be aware of the sound of words, in the form of phonemic awareness. This awareness will eventually raise the appreciation of how words are spelled.

The transition from oral to formal reading instruction requires models worth emulating by the learners. The mother tongue interference in many Oshiwambo dialects, for example, is a concern. An Oshiwambo teacher who points to the "d" sound in the word /dog/ as /ndog/ is not an appropriate model for learners to emulate. The researcher is not claiming that teachers at this level in the Ogongo circuit must sound like native English speakers, but they should model sounding relatively close to Standard English.

4.4.1.6 Teacher factors

It was observed that teachers often began the reading instruction without tapping on the learners' prior knowledge to connect previous learning to the new skills. Teachers in this study should have introduced the topic to learners first, before the actual reading commenced. Instead, these teachers introduced the pages where the reading texts were, read the topic sentence and let learners read. An introduction to reading materials at the Grade 4 level requires teachers to discussion vocabulary words so that learners hear how these are read and their meanings.

Preparation of the reading materials is of utmost importance, and as Lerner (2000) writes, learners should be prepared to read with understanding by identifying the main ideas, details, and sequence, and be able to organise patterns. During observations in all three schools, teachers concentrated much on decoding and correct pronunciations, but no attention was given to identifying main ideas or details, or to developing comprehension skills. The researcher expected the teachers to pre-read the stories and discuss the purpose of the lesson and the topic of the story that was to be read, so that they would model reading the story to the learners and thereafter discuss the story information using organised questions as a guide. To develop language use, the teacher should prompt learners to identify the theme for the story, so that they would practise applying the generalisation of the theme to their real life experiences. Reading is an extension of oral communication and builds upon listening and speaking skills, hence it requires ample time, a good model (Lerner, 2000) and input from teachers for the learners. If a wrong teaching approach is used with the beginners it discourages their willingness to learn to read in future. Although the responsibility for imparting effective teaching to read lies with the teachers, Moats and Foorman (2003) believe that some teachers lack the capacity to handle all the required reading skills and have not been taught them during their training.

4.4.2 Possible intervention strategy

Early identification of reading difficulties is of utmost importance so that the intervention can take place as early as possible. The intervention strategy suggested in this study is directed at teachers and parents who work with learners with reading difficulties on a daily basis. It includes tips for intervention and remediation. The focus of this intervention strategy is to enhance reading skills and language instructions for Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, who have been identified as having difficulties in reading English. The areas identified as the causes of reading difficulties in the Ogongo circuit, and that are considered for this intervention are word recognition skills, decoding, comprehension, English language development and teaching methods.

Learners with reading difficulties in the Ogongo circuit need to be empowered by their teachers, and this intervention strategy should be a joint responsibility of school and parents. The role of parents is to monitor reading progress at home and pass on their recommendations to teachers for implementation. For a successful implementation all teachers at the school should be involved in the intervention for the school to produce learners who can excel academically.

4.4.2.1 Words decoding skill and word recognition strategy

Before beginning the intervention, teachers must assess learners' reading skill, strengths and weaknesses then develop a plan for remediation with the following steps:

- Organise the class in such a way that all learners have access to the books and writing materials so that they can read on their own;

- focus on phonemic awareness and phonics methods in explicit ways, using effective approaches to build decoding fluency;

- engage learners in reading and writing activities that apply phonics to information taught;

- let learners learn the letters and sounds of the alphabet; and

- emphasise the irregular words that learners often see when reading, as these words do not follow the usual letter-sound rules, for example the /a/ in *said*, *are* and *was.*

At home*,* parents should create an atmosphere that encourages reading, so that children from a young age can appreciate it. Children need to see family members reading and enjoying it. Therefore, they should:

- discuss what was read with the child during spare times;

- provide magazines to facilitate reading;

- let children read the story they know and have enjoyed in the past;

- let young children read with a parent;

- label objects around the home;

- encourage children to read newspapers and magazines, and let them share stories with the rest of the family.

Learning to read is a continuous process, one that develops in the home environment. Therefore, parents should inculcate a love of reading in their children. Teachers should identify the reading needs of their learners as earlier as possible in order to prevent future reading problems.

4.4.2.2 Teachers' approaches to teaching reading

For effective reading intervention in the Ogongo circuit, the Grade 4 teachers should provide more reading practice with speed and smoothness to learners, so that they meet the reading demands of their Grade. Teachers therefore should do the following:

- First, assess learners to determine the cause(s) of their reading difficulties; if word recognition or word decoding is the source of the problem this should be addressed in addition to reading speed and phrasing.

- Let identified learners with reading difficulties practice reading the same list of words, phrase, or short sentences several times.

- Provide another English reading book rather than *English for All for Namibia*, and give the learner that independent level text to practice reading. Time the learner and calculate words-correct-per minute frequently. Encourage learners to improve their word-per-minute in regular intervals.

- Grade 4 teachers should also practice joint reading so that the learner matches his/her sound to that of the teacher. Slow down to check his/her reading fluency or speed up to scaffold his/her reading speed.

- Share reading of short texts. First read it to the learner and later let the learner read it back.

- Have the learner practice reading with emotion, such as sadness or excitement, to emphasise expression and intonation.

- To emphasis the use of punctuation, Grade 4 teachers should remind the learner to pause between sentences or phrases.

The ineffective reading strategies surfaced in this study as contributory factors to reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners. They can only be prevented if teachers use appropriate teaching approaches that respond to learners' reading needs.

4.4.2.3 Language development

In the absence of English language exposure outside school, such as in the Ogongo circuit, teachers should be encouraged to make use of the classroom opportunity to develop English oral language in their learners by implementing the following strategies:

- Expose learners to the language-experience method of teaching reading in English. Grade 4 teachers should discuss text characters with their learners, but not simply focus on fluency.

- Let learners write and illustrate language-experience stories that access prior knowledge. Grade 4 learners should write and read their stories aloud in front of the class.

- Let Grade 4 learners visit the library and read their favourite stories to reinforce vocabulary and language patterns.

- Grade 4 teachers in the Ogongo circuit should develop learners' language through asking questions to promote interactions during story reading.

In conclusion, for any goal to be attained in teaching reading English, learners should be exposed to English language use while at school, as such is often not available at home and in their communities. To develop such exposure, teachers should encourage learners to read stories and discuss them in front of peers in the class.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter presented and discussed the results of this study. In this chapter the summary, conclusion and recommendations are provided.

5.2   SUMMARY

This study was conducted in order to investigate the causes of reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit, in the Omusati region. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What reading difficulties are experienced by Grade 4 learners in Ogongo circuit?

2. What are the possible causes of these reading difficulties?

3. What intervention framework would help learners acquire relevant English reading skills?

This study employed a mixed research approach. A sample of 92 learners and three teachers from three schools participated in this study. The sample of three schools was purposefully selected. Triangulation was achieved by lesson observations and administered tests to collect the data. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, and graphs.

The findings from the observations were that learners' reading difficulties in English could be attributed to lack of reading materials in schools. Other possible causes of reading difficulties in the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit were lack of language development, and inappropriate teaching methods used by the teachers. The findings from the test revealed that decoding skills and word

recognition abilities, phonemic awareness and lack of comprehension skills were some of the types of the reading difficulties among the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. In total, 69.6% of the learners were identified as unable to read at the Grade 4 level. These learners expended too much effort in decoding words, and read word-by-word.

5.3   CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to identify the types and causes of reading difficulties displayed by the Grade 4 learners in the Ogongo circuit. The researcher found that the causes of reading difficulties were lack of English language development in learners, lack of English reading materials, insufficient word recognition strategy and lack of comprehension skills. The reason that learners failed to acquire decoding skills was that the teachers lacked the competencies in teaching reading English explicitly. The teachers must possess the requisite specialisation required to teach English as a subject, and reading in particular. It was noted that in all three schools the theoretical approach in teaching reading in English was used. There should be a wider exposure of learners to a variety of reading materials for them to acquire fluency.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings of the research, the following recommendations are made:

1. All schools should have sufficient English reading materials to cater for the reading needs of the learners. The school should continuously provide the necessary teaching materials, such as newly updated books and supplementary reading books.

2. Continuous training for teachers should be encouraged to enhance their knowledge and skills in both oral and reading to make them effective teachers on whom learners can model.

3. Teachers should be motivated to improve their English through the English Language Proficiency Program by the MoE and UNAM.

4. Teachers should encourage independent reading by learners.

5. Teachers should set up a library in an area of the classroom to which learners frequently have access during the class time. They should display as many books as possible with visible illustrations that attract learners' attention.

6. In order to develop vocabulary among the Grade 4 learners, reference books such as dictionaries should be included in their selections. It is also advisable for schools to involve parents in their endeavour to teach learners to read in English.

7. Classroom interactions are a vital tool that triggers language development, and ultimately reading skills, therefore teachers should know how to stimulate their learners' involvement in the classrooms. This includes ideas on how to fuel learners' motivation, how to help learners see the relevance of the topic, and how the techniques used to develop reading skills can increase classroom participation.

8. The government should consider reducing the teacher-learner ratio to 1:30 or less, since two schools observed with the teacher-learners ratio beyond 1:30 experienced discipline problems.

In terms of the findings and discussion on the types and causes of reading difficulties identified in this study, the following recommendations for further research can be made:

1. That further research be conducted to investigate the effect of poor reading on the academic performance of learners at end of the primary phase, and

That a replication of this study be conducted to evaluate the teaching methods applied by to teach the Grade 4 learners reading in English.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE DIRECTOR

P O Box 2036

0shakati

18 October 2012

The Director

Omusati Education Region

Private Bag 529

Outapi

Dear Sir/Madam

<u>Request to carry a research in the region</u>

I am Kleopas Mule, a master student at the University of Namibia (Med. Literacy and Learning), herby request your office to grant me the permission to carry out a study in the Ogongo circuit. The envisage study will be carried out at Eendombe combined school, Eyakulo Primary school and Ongolo combined school. The study is under the topic: **TYPES AND CAUSES OF READING DIFFICULTIES AFFECTING READING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A CASE OF GRADE 4 LEARNERS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN OGONGO CIRCUIT OF NAMIBIA.**

Reading is a requisite skill for all academic achievement and should have a grounding support in the early years of schooling. It was found that many learners in our schools reach Grade 10 unable to read well and this possesses challenges for them to excel well, academically. The proposed study will seek to establish the causes and type of reading difficulties experienced by Grade 4 learners in order to suggest an intervention framework to arrest the situation. Grade 4 is a transitional stage from the lower to the upper primary phase of education where the switch is made from learning to read to reading to learn, hence the importance of the study at this phase.

The outcome of this study will be made available to teachers, parents and the community at large in the Omusati Education Region in order to provide necessary support for the improvement of learner's reading skills in English.

Thank you for considering my request.

Faithfully yours

Kleopas Mule

APPENDIX 2: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY IN THE REGION

APPENDIX 3: OBSERVATION-GUIDE

1. Classroom physical-environment

(i)   What is the Grade 4 teacher-learners' ratio?

(ii)   Are there enough chairs and tables in the Grade 4 classroom?

(iii)   Does the classroom environment promote reading? Are there reading materials on display?

(iv)   How is the classroom arranged?

(v)   Are there enough English reading books?

2. Classroom psycho-social environment

(i)   What is the teacher-learners' relation? Are they communicating in a friendly manner?

(ii)   Do all learners feel at ease during the lesson?

(iii)   Can learners express themselves freely during the lesson?

(vi)   How do learners assist one another to learn to read English?

(v)   Does the teacher motivate learners to read more?

3. Teacher lesson conduct

(i)   What reading method does the teacher use?

(ii)   Does the teacher model good reading skill to learners?

(iii)   How is the teacher's pronunciation?

(iv)   Is the teacher suitably qualified to teach at the Lower Primary phase?

(v)   What is the level of difficulty of the reading activities given to Grade 4 learners?

APPENDIX 4: SINGLE WORD OR NON-WORD SCORING KEY

If 2 words wrong	1 (independent level)
If 3 or 4 words wrong	2 (instructional level)
If more than 4 words wrong	3 (frustration level)

APPENDIX 5: READING ASSESSMENT ONE

Task 1

Name ....

Sex..

Reading assessment task one: Single word reading.

Non-word (one and two syllable words)

The primary aim of this activity was to assess the Grade 4 learners' decoding and word-recognition abilities.

plood

fign

paunt

 tlos

milf

patch

argon

andlis

gsin

hausage

If 2 words wrong	1 independent level
If 3 or 4 words wrong	2 instructional level
If more than 4 words wrong	3 frustration level

APPENDIX 6: READING ASSESSMENT ONE

Task 2

Regular words or sight words (one or two syllable words

Name...

Sex..

Sight words

the	have	how	look	down
from	how	low	they	and
their	more	did	awake	had
write	get	fight	had	will
come	in	build	speed	see
words	other	number	may	you
about	no	part	that	not
way	send	what	many	could
teach	all	then	people	person
them	write	for	speak	these
think	when	first	make	your
water	dream	can	her	been
said	would	called	they	ground

Scoring key:

At least 35 of these words correct	1 independent level
Between 25 and 34 words correct	2 instruction level
Fewer than 25 words correct	3 frustration level

Comment...

....

APPENDIX 7: READING PASSAGE SCORING KEY FOR ASSESSMENT TWO

The following details were captured during the reading process and learners were supposed to answer 5 questions based on the passages. Passages were arranged progressively according to which would be more challenging.

- If the learner could not say a word, after several seconds it was said for him/her, and marked with (*) every time help was provided.
- To mark the miscue or error, what the learner said was written above the word.
- If a learner omitted a word a text word was encircled.
- If a learner added a word it was written above where she/he said it and marked with ^.
- If the learner made a self-correction, what she/he said was written first and a tiny "c" inserted to show that it had been self-collected.
- After a comprehension question, what a learner said was written down.
- Learners were asked to read both passages, unless there were too many errors. If a learner made too many errors the second reading passage was discontinued.

APPENDIX 8: READING ASSESSMENT TWO

Task: 1

Name...

Sex ....

Level 1 Say: This short story is about a mother who got a surprise. Read it aloud as you can. I will ask you some questions about it at the end.

Mother got a surprise

Aunt Hilma said, "Shush, she's coming. Hurry up and hide."

All the children took the balloons and ran into the rooms.

Fabian hides in the closet. Ruana hides under the bed.

Jimmy got under the table in the kitchen.

They held on to the balloons. Mom walked into the house.

Everyone ran to her and let the balloons fly.

"Surprise", they cried.

Questions:

Why did aunt Hilma tell the children to hide?

Where did Rauna hide?

What did they have with them in their hiding places?

Who got the surprise?

APPENDIX 9: READING ASSESSMENT TWO

Task: 2

Name...

Sex...

Level 2 say: the following text is about the boy who is bored. Read it aloud and then I will ask you questions about it.

Samson kicked the sand under his bare feet. He could hear his sisters in the kitchen making supper. He has nothing to do until supper, and he felt so bored.

Just then Samson looked up at the tree in the yard. One of the old weaver nests on the tree was moving! That was odd because the weaver bird had not been there for a long time. It couldn't be a snake that high up the tree. Just then Samson the yellow weaver sticks his beak out. He had a grass in his beak, and he flew with it to another nest and put it in. The weaver was singing a happy song as he went for another piece of grass. Then another bird, one that wasn't quite so yellow, looked out. The weaver had a mate!

The birds didn't mind Samson. He watched them for a long time. He wasn't bored any more. Suddenly, he was surprised to hear, "Samson, come for supper."

Questions

How was Samson feeling at the beginning of the story?

What did he see in the tree?

Why was he surprised to see the birds?

Why was he no longer bored?