

Early Grade Reading Program Evaluation

Case Study Report 2021

Prepared by Social Surveys Africa for the Zenex Foundation
Contact: Tendayi Zhou, tendayi@socialsurveys.co.za
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Acronyms and Acronyms

ATP	Annual Teaching Plan
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Head
EFAL	English First Additional Language
EGRP	Early Grade Reading Programme
EGRS	Early Grade Reading Study
HL	Home Language
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
SSA	Social Surveys Africa
SMT	School Management Team
GEMS Africa	An entity that offers educational advice to public and private sector clients
SA-SAMS	SA School Administration and Management System
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
IQMS	Integrated Quality Management System
PLC	Professional Learning Community

1 Executive Summary

Social Surveys Africa (SSA) was commissioned by the Zenex Foundation to conduct a case study to create a baseline of qualitative data from a sample of six schools in the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District in North West Province in South Africa. The case study was conducted in the first year of the project implementation (2021) of the Early Grade Reading Programme (EGRP). The project is being implemented for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) from 2021 to 2023 by a South African language and early grade literacy non-profit organisation, Molteno Institute for Languages and Literacies. The EGRP intervention uses an experimental design to investigate if supported foundation phase Department Heads (DHs) in sampled primary schools can act as effective coaches to their foundation phase colleagues. The EGRP is the latest in an ongoing series of Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRSs) exploring cost-effective ways of improving learner performance in early grade reading.

The objective of this case study is to profile six schools that would provide valuable evidence about the adoption, or the lack of it, of the DH coaching model whose efficacy is being tested in the EGRP. The research team has anticipated that – as the EGRP obtains data about the results of a range of different models of implementation – an understanding of which models are more successful than others will emerge. Therefore, the selection of the schools for this case study was based on a sample frame that aimed at selecting schools that were likely to implement the innovation. The data-gathering process collected information on a wide range of aspects of each school to capture as many factors as possible that might be associated with the adoption and adaptation of the DH coaching model, as well as with changes in both the teaching of early grade reading and the instructional core. School attributes of interest included school management, the current role of the DH, attitudes of colleagues towards the DH, and the environment & atmosphere of the school. When the same schools are again case studied in 2023, we should be able to identify the impact of some of the factors observed in 2021 against the adoption and even adaptation of the DH coaching model in specific schools.

A team of two experienced researchers, under the guidance of the lead researcher in the early stages of the case study, spent a full day in each of the six schools in the sample. When the team was visiting a school a phenomenological research approach was used to provide rich naturalistic data. In each school, the team observed several lessons, interviewed the teachers whose lessons they had observed and a range of other stakeholders, reviewed the school's environment, and received a school datasheet returned to them by the school upon completion. Each evening after a team visit to a school, the team drafted a case study monograph. The draft monographs on each school generated the themes and trends that shaped the findings from the case study. Differing views were explored and, where possible, triangulated with observations.

The findings indicate that the six schools represent a reasonable cross-section of rural and peri-urban primary schools in the school district as they provide a sample of a range of enrolment sizes, a range of parallel early grade classes, and differentiated engagement with Molteno's coaches, and of responses to the EGRP. However, all six schools were largely in agreement in their scepticism about the efficacy of the DH coaching model within their schools and the possibility of their DH being able to play this crucial role. In four of the schools, a significant factor behind this concern was that their DH is nearing retirement age or has already retired. Another primary concern was the time constraints the DH would face if they took this role.

While optimistic about the materials-rich phonics approach to reading at the centre of the EGRP, many teachers were not using the EGRP tablets when teaching reading in their classrooms. Most concerning was that many teachers' confidence in utilising the EGRP material had been compromised by late uploading to the tablets of the Term 2 lesson plans. Consequently, to address the gap in the timely provision of Term 2 lesson plans, several schools decided to 'borrow' lesson plans and content from earlier literacy implementations that they had participated in. Such use of lesson plans from other sources has the potential to contaminate both the systematic phonics approach that the EGRP is promoting and any later attribution to the EGRP of any improvements in learner reading scores.

The field researchers generally observed that lessons were teacher-centred and too long. Most of the teachers observed attempted to use the methods, lesson elements and timings contained in the lesson plans. Despite these efforts, compliance with COVID-19 regulations limited the extent to which they felt they could implement any method that involves learners working together. Except for one or two new young teachers, all the teachers seemed comfortable using a phonics approach to teaching reading. This familiarity could be attributable to previous government and project interventions to support early grade reading. The school principals in the six schools also supported the phonics-based approach, and all indicated through their expressions and decisions that they are prioritising the foundation phase.

Almost all the teachers expressed frustration at the 'tyranny' of the Annual Training Plans (ATPs) over them. They argued that it undermined their ability to introduce or utilise more innovative teaching methods. Some teachers recognised that the EGRP's lesson plans helped them manage their lesson times. In contrast, others – who were generally observed to be weaker teachers – argued that the EGRP lesson plans created even more time pressure than they had already been experiencing. This latter group of teachers were also teaching classes that had covered fewer pages in their work and exercise books than the more effective teachers' classes. They were teachers who were less likely – than other teachers – to have marked and corrected learners' written work and to have set regular assignments. The researchers observed that learners were not yet receiving guidance on writing sentences and stories in almost all schools, which is a clear gap in the schools' literacy teaching.

In conclusion, the sample of schools in this case study illustrates that teachers express positivity towards the EGRP. The researchers observed that half of the six schools are teaching early grade reading reasonably well. However, from this case study, questions have arisen about whether the selection of schools for the experimental group was made effectively and whether testing the DH coaching model in these schools will be effective. It was noted that while half the sampled schools' teachers are teaching effectively and that at least one of the schools could turn out to be a 'positive deviant' over the three years of the project, the key objective of teaching early grade reading effectively in the manner envisaged by the EGRP may not be achieved. If a school no longer has the experienced DH they had in 2021 (because they have retired) and has no reading champion, it will be difficult to test the efficacy of the EGRP's key proposition that a DH can indeed play the role of an effective coach of her colleagues.

The report makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for the EGRP implementing partner

- (i) The implementation partner should improve its project implementation processes and, where needed, communicate better with the schools by providing them with timeous information on changes that have been made to the implementation of the EGRP or about logistical deadlines (such as uploading of a term's lesson plans) that have been delayed or postponed;
- (ii) The implementation partner should assist teachers in navigating the impact of COVID-19 on early grade reading lessons and on how to be innovative in finding solutions to the challenges teachers are facing within the COVID-19 context; and
- (iii) The implementation partner develops/strengthens strategies and ways of working that limit changing coaches assigned to a school so that coaches and teachers can build a trusting relationship envisaged by the EGRP coaching Model and Theory of Change.

Recommendations for COVID 19 response

- (i) The North West Education Department and Molteno should strengthen guidance to teachers on how to cover the curriculum effectively when rotating learners within their classes. This should focus on using lesson time more productively and using time-saving teaching methods to intensify teachers' pedagogical approach.
- (ii) The North West Education Department should develop guidance on recovering teaching and learning losses experienced during the pandemic.
- (iii) The North West Education Department and Molteno should support teachers in how to operate a learner-centred classroom under present COVID restrictions and likely future constraints.
- (iv) The North West Education Department should strengthen support for teachers to establish reading corners with a carpet and books, which learners can attend independently to read in silence.

Systemic and programmatic level recommendations

- (i) The DBE and funders would benefit from reviewing the investments into coaching and training of the current older teacher cohort in the foundation phase to make trade-offs that will avert the loss of these investments when these teachers retire in a few years.
- (ii) The DBE and the North West Education Department needs to confirm that foundation phase DHs, whom they expect to be early grade reading coaches in the 40 experimental intervention (group 3 treatment) schools, are in place in those schools and that they will be remaining in place for the duration of the project. Where this is not the case, succession and transition planning need to be instituted in those schools, or alternative strategies will need to be implemented speedily early on in Year 2 in 2022
- (iii) The DBE and the Northwest Department of Basic Education should find systematic solutions for schools that still have Foundation Phase DHs who are not teaching in the foundation phase.
- (iv) The DBE should explore opening up dialogue with other education stakeholders at a policy level to effectively address the tension that the schools in this case study have been

experiencing between what is required from the project and what is required by the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) policies, processes, and systems. This tension, which is particularly acute in relation to policies on curriculum coverage and learner promotion, is exacerbated by the loss of teaching and learning time experienced during the pandemic.

- (v) The North West Education Department, Molteno, and DBE should strengthen the support offered to teachers in applying Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading, as most teachers continue to struggle with this aspect of the EGRP.



2 Introduction

Social Surveys Africa (SSA) was contracted in early 2021 by the Zenex Foundation to independently monitor the implementation of the third iteration of South Africa's Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) and evaluate its impact. A team of researchers undertook this case study of six schools in the EGRP to investigate the contextual factors that could either drive or limit the adoption of the EGRP, and specifically of the adoption of the DH coaching model by schools. The 2021 case studies will provide a qualitative baseline, with the same schools visited again in 2023 to identify the impact of some of the factors observed in 2021 against the adoption and even adaptation of the DH coaching model in specific schools.

The implementation of a series of EGRS interventions has aimed to provide evidence of which support elements help teachers improve their teaching of early grade reading and, consequently, improve the measurable reading skills of their learners. The EGRS is iteratively doing this, with each subsequent study repeating successful elements of previous studies while responding to further research questions as they emerge. Overall, these studies aim to systematically provide evidence of alternative models of teacher support for the teaching of reading which the DBE can then use to initiate reforms in the teaching of reading throughout the schooling system.

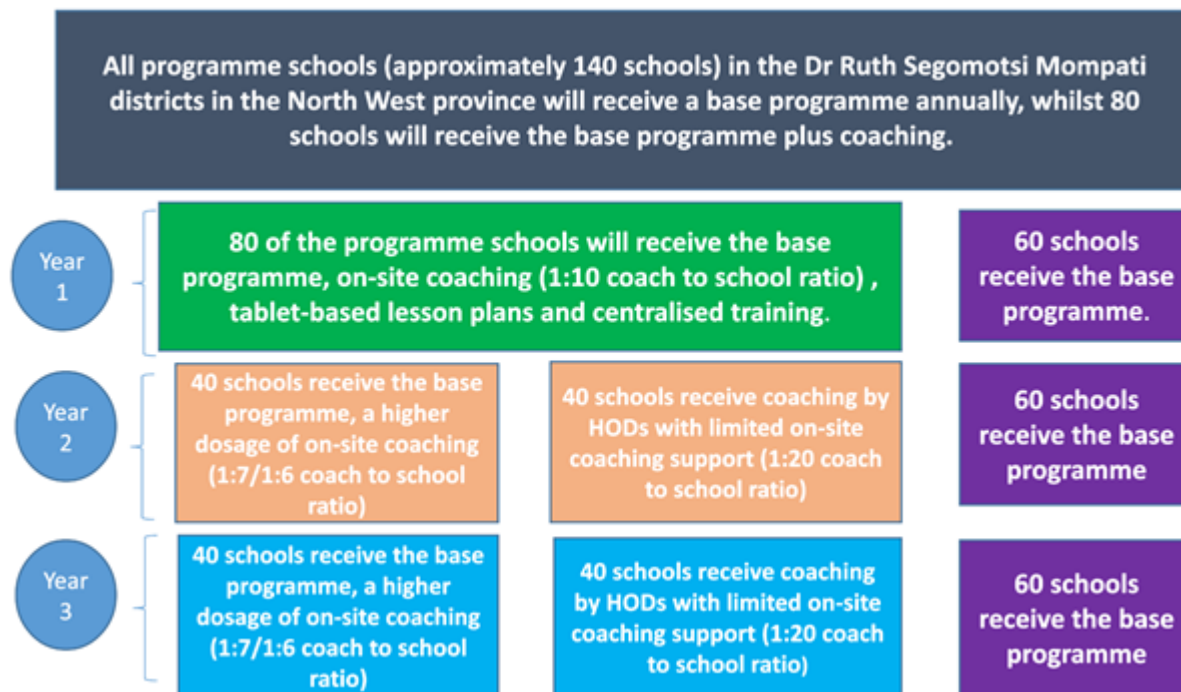
The EGRP is being implemented in the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District of the North West province for the DBE from 2021 to 2023 by a South African language and early grade literacy non-profit organisation, Molteno Institute for Languages and Literacies. The EGRP was designed as a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) implemented at 140 no-fee primary schools (that is schools which are in quintiles 1 – 3) in the district. The schools are divided into three groups - one control group and two treatment groups. Each receives a different combination of interventions

Group 1: 60 schools. Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) and Teacher Training only
Previous EGRS interventions indicated that this package improves the teaching of reading.

Group 2: 40 schools External Coaching (in-person and virtual), LTSM and Teacher Training
In the study, these are the comparator schools as any improvements in their learners' reading performance would be compared to learners' reading performance in the third group of schools.

Group 3: 40 schools. In 2021 (year 1), schools will receive the same intervention as Group 2 schools. However, in years 2 and 3 (2022 and 2023), teachers at these schools will receive coaching from their Departmental Head (DH), who will take on the role of in-person coach to their colleagues. Further details of these three groups are indicated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 EGRP control and intervention arms



3 Overview of the EGRP

The Early Grade Reading Programme (EGRP) is the most recent iteration in a series of Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS) interventions, which have since 2015 been building up a systematic, iterative evidence-base on the efficacy of different models of teacher support for the teaching of early grade reading. The current three-year intervention, from January 2021 to December 2023, uses the earlier findings from EGRS I and EGRS II. EGRS I found, for Setswana home language reading in North West province, that a basic package of teacher support through training, materials provision (reading and visual materials, big books and lesson plans), and coaching is effective in improving learner reading outcomes; EGRS II had the same findings for English First Additional Language (EFAL) reading in Mpumalanga.

After the two years of implementation of EGRS I and EGRS II, evaluations of the impact of these interventions revealed that a basic programme of lesson plans, integrated reading materials and teacher training had positive effects on reading outcomes. The largest positive impact on learners' reading performance was observed when support to teachers included on-site in-person coaching by external professional early grade reading coaches. Learners in the classes of teachers who had received two years of this type of coaching intervention were approximately 40% of a year ahead in their reading performances compared to the learners in the control schools whose teachers had not received on-site coaching.

However, while the professional coaching component has been shown to be especially impactful, it is the costliest component of the intervention since external expert service providers provide it. This creates a challenge in scaling up the implementation of the programme across all South African schools and sustaining it. To address this challenge by reducing the high-cost element of external coaches, EGRS II tested the impact of the provision of electronic lesson plans and virtual coaches to EFAL

teachers. The impact evaluation found that virtual coaching was less effective and ineffective than on-site in-person coaching.

The EGRP is focused on testing the efficacy of an alternative on-site in-person coaching model that can be embedded in the public schooling system using existing personnel. Such a model would be more cost-effective than external on-site coaching. The options for 'embedded' coaching would be on-site coaching by a DH. The EGRP examines the impact of coaching on-site by DHs by comparing the effectiveness of in-house coaching by DHs to that of external expert coaching. The EGRP intervention design has retained the effective core programme from both EGRS I and II (materials provision and teacher training) for all schools and adds a comparative design for the two coaching approaches (external coaching in contrast to DH coaching).

It is anticipated that the EGRP will help answer several questions that have emerged in the wake of EGRP I and EGRP II findings. These include:

- (i) How can the most important aspects of virtual coaching be combined with on-site support?
- (ii) How can the EGRP app be improved to include other video resources that are being developed?
- (iii) How can ingredients from virtual coaching be used to support a DH-led 'community of practice' at schools?
- (iv) What is the most appropriate ratio of coaches to teachers?
- (v) How many languages should be supported, and should they be supported over more than one year per grade?

In addition to these emerging design and implementation questions, in response to the EGRS findings and recommendations, the DBE has developed an improvement plan endorsed by South Africa's National Executive Authority (i.e., the Cabinet). The plan aims to institutionalise the successful aspects of the interventions in the previous EGRSs. Some of the critical items emerging from the improvement plan include:

- adopting a structured learning programme using daily lesson plans which incorporate key reading materials as a means of implementing the curriculum;
- developing guidelines for on-site coaching by specialised reading coaches and for institutional support for teachers and coaches;
- conducting further research to strengthen the programme, including implementing on a larger scale,
- developing reading norms for African languages, and
- evaluating the cost-effectiveness of using different support methods with teachers.

These efforts are all underway and are seen as necessary scaffolding for implementation at scale.

The EGRP has been co-developed in collaboration with these structures in the DBE: the Curriculum Policy, Support and Monitoring Directorate; Teachers, Human Resource and Institutional Development branches (Branches C and T); and the Research Coordination and Monitoring and Evaluation (RCME) Directorate.

Training of early grade teachers across the 140 schools in the EGRP has focused in year 1 (2021) on phonics-based teaching of home language (HL) reading and EFAL reading. Molteno conducted the training of the coaches, who in turn trained the teachers in using tablets provided by the EGRP. The

tablets contain lesson plans, videos, and other learning and teaching support materials (LSTM) designed to help teachers resource and innovate in their reading lessons. The material on tablets is supported by various reading and big books – for learners – in Setswana and EFAL.

The training sessions in the school district were conducted by eight EGRP coaches immediately following their own training by Molteno. Each of the eight coaches was allocated a group of teachers in dispersed sites for coaching. This is a cascade model, and its success is highly dependent on the quality of the coaches and the quality of their initial training by Molteno.

To assist the coaches in their roles, they were expected to complete and pass a comprehensive 12 module course on literacy coaching at the University of Johannesburg. Its modules are:

Module 1 Coaching (Setting the Scene)

Module 2 Classroom Culture (Laying the Groundwork for Learning)

Module 3 Literacy Knowledge & Pedagogy (An Introduction to Language and Literacy Teaching)

Module 4 Coaching (Shifting Practices)

Module 5 Classroom Culture (Making the Classroom Work for Learners)

Module 6 Literacy Knowledge & Pedagogy (A Deeper Understanding of Teaching Listening & Speaking and Phonemic Awareness & Phonics)

Module 7 Coaching (Internalising the Learning)

Module 8 Classroom Culture (Further Developing Learners)

Module 9 Literacy Knowledge & Pedagogy (A Deeper Understanding of Teaching Reading)

Module 10 Coaching (Sustaining the Change)

Module 11 Classroom Culture (Building a Culture of Excellence)

Module 12 Literacy Knowledge & Pedagogy (A Deeper Understanding of Teaching Handwriting, Writing and Language Structures in Context)

4 Purpose and Aim of the Case Study Research

As with any educational intervention of this nature, it is impossible to know in advance what factors may be important in the effective adoption of the innovation at both school and individual teacher levels. While post-intervention quantitative data will indicate which schools improved learner performance in reading and identify those schools and teachers who adopted the innovation, the data will only give minimal impressionistic data on why a particular school, rather than a neighbouring school, adopted the model.

However, for the model of DHs becoming reading coaches for their foundation phase colleagues to be replicated nationally, it is essential to know what pre-conditions lead to better adoption and which militate against adoption. Therefore, this baseline case study is intended to assist in providing such data. It is also anticipated that each of this baseline study's schools' case studies, with their 'before and after' analyses, will help provide more data to build on the theoretical case made by Alsofrom¹ for why some teachers adopted the EGRS II.

Therefore, the purpose of developing baseline qualitative case studies of six schools in the EGRP is to investigate the contextual factors that could either drive or limit the adoption of the EGRP, specifically the adoption of the DH coaching model by schools. The sampled schools are all 'high dosage' (see Figure 1 above) intervention schools where the DH coaching model will be implemented. They are all located in rural areas or peri-urban township settings. In addition, they have been selected purposively

based on the coaches' input on which schools they consider would be most likely to adopt the innovation based on a range of criteria.

All six schools were assigned an EGRP coach (employed by Molteno) in the program's first year (2021). In addition, the early grade teachers and their foundation phase DH in each of these schools received EGRP training as well as being provided with the literacy support materials (big book, readers, posters, flashcards, etc.) and an EGRP tablet (loaded with lesson plans and curriculum trackers).

In year two (2022) of the project, the foundation phase DH in each of these schools will be provided with limited external coaching support as they take on the role of reading coach for their foundation phase teaching colleagues. In year one (2021), they have been trained along with their early grade teaching colleagues on the basics of teaching reading, use of the support materials, use of the tablets and some aspects of classroom management. This is the standard package teachers and DHs from all 140 primary schools in the district receive.

The critical finding sought from this iteration of the early grade studies is how well DHs can coach their staff. As indicated above, the DBE is seeking a cost-effective way of supporting early grade literacy teachers to improve their teaching practices and improve their learners' outcomes. It is known from EGRS I, EGRS II, and other interventions that intensive one-on-one coaching by professional coaches in a teacher's classroom improves their ability to teach more effectively. However, this is an expensive model as it requires professionally trained coaches. The hypothesis being tested in the EGRP is that can DHs achieve the same impact at a fraction of the cost?. However, the study also assumes that some DHs will not be able to play this role effectively due to various factors being investigated, principal of which is time

In preparation for understanding why the DHs in some schools can play this role, and in other schools DHs may fail to play this role, it is necessary to undertake an early-implementation baseline study of a number of schools likely to produce different outcomes. This is the logic underpinning the case study

5 Literature review

5.1 Promoting Instructional Change in Early Grade Reading

The core of the EGRP is focused on improving the teaching of early grade reading. Recent decades have seen an increased emphasis on improving early grade reading as a cost-effective and high-reward focus for overall educational system improvement. There is widespread agreement that reading is key to all learning: in Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's words, it is "the foundation of learning"².

In the foundation phase's early grades, children learn to read and, then increasingly, from grade 4, read to learn. Based on the findings of the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results for South Africa, Howie et al.³ have estimated that over 78% of Grade 4s in South Africa read in their language of learning at a level that prevents them from "learning successfully across the curriculum"⁴. If learners fail to learn to read in their first three years in school, international research indicates that they are likely to drop out of school early and have earnings later in life that will be well below those of their peers who learned to read in the early grades. Even for children who learn to read haltingly (but fail to grasp the foundational skills of decoding, which underpin the ability to read fluently in their early years in school), the "Matthew Effect" comes into play: it becomes harder and harder for them to catch up with those who have acquired all of the required foundational skills and are reading fluently in Grade 4. In the "Matthew Effect", the performance gap between the two groups of peer learners grows greater each year.

Figure 2 The Matthew Effect in reading



Source: KE Stanovich (1986)

Evidence from across the globe has repeatedly and consistently shown that a child who learns to read in their 'mother tongue' will find it easier to learn to read in a second language and will develop deeper conceptual understanding than a child who first learns to read in an exogenous or foreign language⁵. This is because a child, who learns to read in a language which is not in frequent use in their home, is

learning two things at once: to read. and to learn a foreign or additional language. A child who learns to read in their 'mother tongue' is therefore only learning one thing: how to read. It is easier to learn one thing at a time and then to use the skill acquired first to learn further skills – such as reading in English as a First Additional Language (EFAL).

Researchers have also found that the earlier a child learns to read and understand what they are reading, the better: that skill will become more entrenched and a 'natural process' for them compared to a child who learns to read at an older age. Once a foundation in reading is laid, learning to read in a second or third language becomes much easier.

Not surprisingly, the focus of researchers and educational systems in the last 100 years has been on laying solid foundations for children learning to read – this has led to considerable research on how children decode letters and words during their early grades-

An important finding replicated globally is that every child can learn to read⁶. Reading is not a skill that some children cannot learn. Therefore, according to UNESCO, the question that needs urgent investigation in Africa is why previous research surveys have found that over 130 million school-going children are unable to read fluently enough to understand what they are reading. UNESCO has hypothesised that teachers have not received sufficient training in teaching reading and that too much time is spent on activities in early grade classrooms that do not sufficiently facilitate learning to read among all learners.

Educational research's evidence on reading has, in the last quarter-century, been confirmed by a large body of inter-disciplinary research which has reported new important findings on how the human brain works⁷. Earlier educational researchers and developmental psychologists had posited that learning to read was a 'natural process' like learning to talk in the 0 to 3 years of a child's life course. However, recent technological innovations, which have facilitated researchers' investigations of live brain activity, have resulted in neuroscientists' finding that learning to read is a complex and not a 'natural' process. The 'how' – of a child learning to read – also determines which side of the brain is used for reading going forward and how sustained and adaptable the skill is. There is now a consensus among most experts that the best way for a child to learn to read is by using the left side of the brain through learning to read via a systematic phonics approach rather than through a whole word approach. A phonics approach involves children learning what the letters in a word sound like and then using this knowledge to build reading of words, rather than learning to read whole words as a first learning step.

Unlike learning to talk, which is learned by exposure to conversations, learning to read cannot be learned by exposure to text. Reading any alphabetic language – such as Setswana and English – starts with an understanding that writing or texts represent a code. In learning to read, children discover and remember that combinations of letters predictably represent specific sounds. Teaching reading aims to facilitate and enable children to 'crack the code'. Once a child starts to read, a child is simultaneously decoding text and comprehending the message or meaning of the text (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3 From symbols to meaningful message



Children need to make a clear connection between the language they hear and say with what is read or deciphered on the page when learning to read. At this learning stage, children need to recognise that when they speak, they are uttering a series of sounds that have meaning; and then be able to connect these sounds to written letters and decipher written words. A child also requires a vast vocabulary so that the written word can be associated with a known spoken word. A limited vocabulary can slow a child's acquisition of foundational literacy: because, even when a new word has been deciphered, it may not be a familiar word whose meaning is known. Finally, once a child has become good at decoding text, they will get to the point where they can recognise most words automatically and read connected text fluently. At this point, new words can be decoded quickly and their meaning inferred from the rest of the known text.

As indicated above, educational research, experiments and analysis of brain activity have produced convincing evidence that children learn to read quickest through a systematic phonics approach. In a whole word approach to teaching reading, a child can, for example, learn the word 'girl' in English by learning the word as it is and being told that this word 'says' girl. In a phonetics approach to teaching reading, for the same word 'girl', a child can learn that the word is made up of three parts: the letter 'g', a blend of letters 'ir', which has a specific sound, and the letter 'l'. This involves connecting text to sound and then the sound to the meaning. Although the phonics approach to learning to read is more complex than whole word learning as it is a two-stage process, the brain allows a child to remember words better this way. A phonetically-acquired reading skill enables a child to decode new words more easily.

Today, in South Africa, the phonics approach to teaching foundational literacy is how most children are being taught to read texts in alphabetic languages. However, an early grade teacher needs to use the phonics approach with skill and in an incremental manner. If phonics are learned haphazardly, learning through phonics may confuse children and slow down their access to reading for meaning.

Hence, the preferred approach is to use a systematic phonics approach. This means that all the letters and blends in a language are organized logically based on their written and spoken language use. Generally, the easier and more commonly used letters are taught first before the less used letters and blends. Blends are also ranked, so the easier and more used ones are taught before the more complex blends. So, a logical progression of letter-sound correspondence is taught by the teacher, who models each of the letters or blends. Each phonic is then practised numerous times using various exercises, and then learners' reading acquisition of each sound or blend is evaluated by the teacher. Only once learners have shown mastery of a particular letter sound does the teacher move on to the following letter sound. In this way, a learner builds up a complete knowledge of all the letters and blends in the language.

This research and practice have informed the approach to reading that the EGRP is implementing: a highly structured systematic phonics approach.

5.2 Impacting Change at the Instructional Core

Change at the instructional core is essential to sustaining changes in how early grade literacy is taught in schools. Alsofrom (n.d)⁸ cites City et al. (2009) in arguing that changes in teaching practices, student engagement, and content are essential in attaining measurable improvements in learners' reading performances. Such changes in teaching practices in schools, in turn, require changes in teaching tasks, materials used, and changes in teachers' knowledge. It is this pedagogical theory that shaped planning for the EGRP.

The basic package, which all 140 schools receive through the EGRP, provides for changes in materials used and knowledge through the materials package and the training provided by the EGRP Implementation partner. In the control schools, these may lead to changes in teaching tasks, but this is not certain, as teachers are generally resistant to changes in tasks or teaching practice (i.e., what the teacher does in the classroom). It has been posited that this is not because teachers are innately resistant to change of any kind, but because they cannot implement what they do not know. As Alsofrom (n.d.), drawing from important work by Ben Piper and Medina Korda, points out: change in how teachers teach reading does not happen by making teachers more accountable. As we noted above, the issue is that teachers generally just do not know how to teach reading effectively so that all the learners in a classroom can learn to read fluently. The factor influencing the adoption or not of changed teaching practices is that nothing, in teachers' own schooling experience, teacher training, or teaching experience, has provided them with this knowledge. That is why new knowledge and resources have to be added to the mix. The findings of the previous EGRSs^{9,10} indicate that new teaching tasks, new materials, and new teaching practices take root when teachers have been coached in their use.

A critical aspect of successfully adopting the change in the instructional core is the effective processing of the emotional impact of such changes on those implementing it in their classrooms and schools. Researchers worldwide have written about the emotional journey that teachers need to embark on when changing their instructional core. School improvement theorists, such as Hopkins, Hargreaves and Fullan, found evidence for such findings as a response to more mechanistic school effectiveness advocates. They argued that an emotional toll is extracted from those involved in change at both the school and classroom levels, including those seeking to be more effective as teachers and school leaders¹¹.

The argument that City et al.¹² make, that teachers are working as best as they know how and that teaching is a complex process, whose complexity is often under-estimated, is the theoretical basis that has informed this case study's approach. The research team has aimed to investigate, at this early stage in the EGRP, what teachers in a sample of schools think is good practice for teaching reading. The six schools in the case study were informed well in advance of the researchers' visits to their schools and of this case study's requirement that our researchers observe some teachers in each school teaching lessons. This advance notice of the visits allowed the teachers in the six schools to prepare for the researchers' visit to their schools as best they could.

The case studies of the six schools were conducted at a stage in the EGRP's roll-out when the LTSMs and tablets had been distributed, and initial training had been undertaken but before the implementation

of on-site coaching. The researchers expected that teachers were likely to be teaching reading as per the usual teaching methodologies and may have added some phonics teaching as well as the lesson plans following the national CAPS.

The significance of the case studies about the methods that the teachers use in their classrooms will only emerge on later visits to the classrooms of these teachers when the research team will be able to see if the addition of on-site coaching support by their DH colleague provides the impetus these teachers need to change the way that they teach reading – that is, change at the instructional core.

5.3 Coaching

Coaching is a form of professional development for teachers and school leaders in which an experienced person, called a ‘coach’, supports a learner or client in achieving a specific personal or professional goal by providing training and guidance. The one being coached, or the learner, is termed the ‘coachee’. Coaching is differentiated from (and often confused with) mentoring in that the focus is on a specific skill, and a coach must be experienced in the skill being coached. It is also normally a time-bound process, ending once a coachee has learned a specific skill. Mentoring is more open-ended, driven by a mentee's concerns and interests, is usually broader than gaining a specific skill, and is rarely time-bound. While a mentor should be able to build a special relationship of trust with a mentee, this is not so critical for a coach, as a coach usually works within a system or structure which imposes the need to change on a coachee.

As Rico Patzer points out, coaching is considered the most effective form of continuous professional development (CPD) that teachers can access¹³. Coaching is particularly powerful when used in a school's teaching environment for several reasons:

- For most teachers, teaching is an isolating activity conducted with a classroom's door closed. As a result, teachers often lack confidence in what they are doing and require support;
- Every classroom is a different environment, so teachers generally struggle to transfer what they have learned in a workshop into their specific classroom and often resist adopting innovation on the basis that they may believe that it cannot work in their specific classroom;
- Teachers are often ‘set in their ways’ and thus need ample proof and support before they are prepared to abandon their traditional methods and adopt new ones;
- Teachers work within a system, so are usually compliant with instructions to make changes that are received from recognised authorities within a system.

An early grade reading coach requires a set of specific skills. They must already be competent teachers, have a sound knowledge of how to teach reading, and must be able to demonstrate good practices in any classroom. In addition, they must be able to be a critical friend to the teacher.

In the EGRP, coaching is conducted around the early grade teachers' lessons. The coach may co-plan the lesson with the teacher and then confer with the teacher afterwards. The latter process involves guiding the teacher to analyse her lesson through a structured set of questions the coach asks her: answering the questions helps the teacher acknowledge what went well and what could be improved. The debriefing or conferencing ends with the coach and teacher agreeing on what the teacher will do in her classroom over the following few lessons to rectify the weaknesses discussed. This is the most common form of coaching for teachers as part of CPD. In the context of the EGRP, the coaches train

and guide the early grade teachers in adopting the specific elements of the project, such as using the methodology, the tablets and the LTSMs effectively, thereby improving the teacher's ability to teach early grade reading.

In the EGRP, external coaching is time-bound. For the teachers in this case study's schools, direct coaching is limited to year 1 (2021). In years 2 and 3, the reduced intensity of coaching support will be via a focus on coaching the DH of each school. In turn, the DH will coach their teachers using a similar model of lesson co-planning, observation and providing feedback sessions.

The specific coaching model that Molteno is employing in the EGRP is 'instructional coaching'. Instructional coaching is where an expert teacher helps their less experienced classroom-based colleague to focus on one specific aspect of their teaching approach or technique that can be isolated and practised¹⁴. The EGRP coaches have been focusing on a specific aspect of how their coachee is currently teaching. So, for instance, the coach may agree with the coachee that s/he will focus on using the Big Book for group guided reading. The coach might agree with the coachee to demonstrate group-guided reading in the first lesson, and then the coachee will follow up with a group-guided reading in the subsequent lesson. The coach will decide when the coachee has mastered the use of the big book and the organisation of group-guided reading. Once that has been achieved, the coach and the coachee will agree on their next focus.

Instructional coaching is "probably the best-evidenced form of CPD currently known to humanity"¹⁵. This is because it is context-specific, personalised and practical and happens in a teacher's own classroom with her class of learners. This means that the teacher can see that the innovation can work with her learners, her level of resourcing, and her specific classroom. The coach will only move on to the next skill to be coached once the teacher has mastered the current skill. Overall, the aim of instructional coaching is for the coach and coachee to work closely together to improve the coachee's teaching skills through a self-reflective process involving professional conversations that develop and implement evidence-based teaching practices¹⁶ and so improve learner performance.

As indicated above, the critical question that the EGRP will be investigating is whether the school-based DH coaches can do this as effectively as the external EGRP coaches, with minimal levels of support to the DHs from an EGRP coach. This baseline case study aims to provide rich descriptive or qualitative evidence to support or supplement outcome-based quantitative data that will be available in 2023 at the end of the experiment.

6 Case Study Methods

6.1 The rationale for the use of a Case Study Methodology

A case study methodology was used as it serves the specific purpose that the research team wishes to investigate or illustrate: an understanding over time of why some schools adopt the innovation of foundation phase DH coaching of their foundation phase colleagues with more ease – than other schools – in adapting the innovation to work specifically within their schools. With its naturalistic, context-driven rich descriptions, a case study methodology will help us understand how schools interpreted and adopted the EGRP's innovation.

A case study was defined classically by Yin (Golby, 1994:11) as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

Yin ¹⁷ has more recently reiterated that case study research is useful when researching why or how something happened, as it is “the study of a phenomenon within its real-world context” based on the collection of data within “natural settings”; in this case, in schools.

The EGRP assumes that context is highly relevant to the uptake of innovation and how it is used in each school. It involves exploring a particular case using quantitative and qualitative methods¹⁸¹⁹. It is an organic approach to research²⁰ that uses ‘thick descriptions’ ²¹, which are essential for understanding the context and situation.

Wilson ²² adds the element of time-lapse when stating that a case study is a process “which tries to describe and analyse some entity in qualitative, complex and comprehensive terms not infrequently as it unfolds over time”. While not generalizable, the findings from a case study give validity and value by creating resonance in the reader's mind.

Finally, a researcher should play a partial role that adds rather than detracts from the value of the research. Lincoln and Guba²³ assert strongly that,

“the case study report must ... reflect the multiple realities constructed by the respondents in the inquiry ... and ... reflect the investigator's involvement in such a way as to make clear that objectivity, being unachievable in any event, is not an aim... A portion of the case [study] should be given over to considerations of conscious reflectivity. That is, some portion of the methodological treatment ought to comprise reflections on the investigator's own personal experience in the fieldwork”.

From reading of case study and qualitative research theorists of the late 20th century (such as Yin²⁴, Lincoln and Guba²⁵, Golby²⁶, Merriam²⁷, Miles and Huberman²⁸), it is clear that a case study is a study of a single or small number of real life events, which are complete stories in their own right and therefore resistant to generalisations. However, some theorists of case study methodology indicate that case studies could offer exemplars for implementing innovation and influence policy and practice²⁹. Golby ³⁰ carefully differentiates between ‘particularity’ and ‘uniqueness’. He points out that the value of a case

study is its particularity: while being individual, they can also be seen “as examples of general cases”. As Ernest (1994:26) clearly states, the aim is to “illuminate the general through the particular”.

This thinking informed SSA’s approach to undertaking a small number of case studies in schools, which will be revisited through the EGRP to understand what conditions in these schools led to adoption, adaption or rejection of the innovation.

6.2 Sampling and school selection

All six case study schools were drawn purposively from a larger set of all 140 schools involved in the EGRP. They are all from the subset of 40 schools which have been designated the DBE, as schools where in year 2 (2022) a school’s Foundation Phase DH will become the on-site early grade reading coach for their foundation phase teacher colleagues, with direct, but limited, coaching support to the DH from Molteno’s professional coaches. Once DBE defined this subset of 40 intervention schools, the research team used the following sample frame to identify the six schools.

Table 1 Case Study Sampling Rationale

Variable	Descriptor	Sampling Outcome
Socio-economic location or rurality	A mix of deep rural, rural and peri-urban or township schools A range of schools in isolated or sparsely populated areas, in rural areas closer to towns, and in townships	Five of the sample schools are located either in isolated rural areas or in rural areas closer to local economic nodes; the sixth school is a township school situated in a rural town
Size	The schools should vary in size with a mix of single classes and multiple classes per grade in the foundation phase	This was achieved with half of the schools having at least two parallel classes of Grade 1,2, and 3, with three schools having only one of what? of each grade
Served by different Molteno coaches in Year 1	Coaches were to be factored as a variable in the take-up of the innovation; therefore, researchers wanted to include schools which were served in Year 1 by as many coaches as possible in this very small sample of schools	These six schools have been served by at least 4 of the 8 Molteno coaches (we cannot be more exact as the allocated coaches were being changed regularly by Molteno)
Range of different DH profiles	As the DH is key to the success or otherwise of the innovation in each school, it was deemed essential to include DHs with a range of statuses based on appointment level, and a range of teaching experience	All the potential DH coaches are female (as indeed, the vast majority of foundation phase teachers are female); therefore, the research team endeavoured to include a mix of schools with permanent DHs and two with DHs (who are acting appointments to the posts). The DHs also have a range of lengths of periods as DHs.
Coaches’ views on likely take-up of the innovation	Researchers will be interested in seeing the conditions in the schools where teachers adopted the innovation and changed their teaching practices as a result, the case study requested coaches to advise the research team in identifying schools which they believed – at this early stage in the project –	The coaches identified schools they believed were more likely to adopt the innovation going forward. However, at such an early stage in the project, their insights were mainly intuitive and related to observed early receptivity rather than data-based evidence. However, researchers are conducting this study with an assumption that some of the

	would probably adopt the innovation	case study schools will probably adopt the innovation and a few will not adopt it: this should hopefully provide a mix of valuable data on adoption and causality behind adoption or non-adoption
SMT engagement with the foundation phase	As a school's management engagement – with the foundation phase curriculum and with foundation phase teachers – may be a critical factor in the adoption and especially adaption of the innovation, the research team sought to define various levels of engagement	In two of the six schools, the management team have assigned a deputy principal to oversee the foundation phase because early grade literacy and numeracy are seen as key to the success of each of those schools. The other four schools have stated that they prioritise the phase through preferential treatment in the procurement of LTSMs for the foundation phase and the appointment of strong DHs for their foundation phase departments
Proximity	The schools should be within one sub-district or in sub-districts which are close so that they are accessible to each other, serve comparable socio-economic communities, and are physically accessible to researchers	Five schools are in one sub-district (Greater Taung), and one is in an adjacent sub-district (Naledi) of the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati District. The six schools serve a range of communities within the district, but predominantly communities which are dependent on small-scale subsistence farming, pensions and labour remittances for household incomes

Once the six schools had been identified and a pilot school, they were informed of the decision to use them as case studies. None of the six schools objected to participation in this baseline case study. However, as the case study unfolded, one school was removed because it was closed for COVID -19 vaccination at short notice. Therefore, after due consideration, the pilot school was included as a case study school. As it was the largest of the schools with particular dynamics not seen in the other schools, it was seen as a useful addition to the case study's set of schools.

6.3 Instrument design

The research team identified a number of potential tools because they could provide important findings that would contribute to an understanding of how schools relate to and implement the DH coaching innovation. The selection of tools also took into consideration the time available to conduct the case study in each school because it was decided to limit the data collection time to one day per school to avoid too much or unnecessary disruption to the schools.

The final list of tools used included:

- A lesson observation protocol and schedule;
- A learner workbook and exercise book review instrument;
- Semi-structured interview tools;
- A school data tool; and
- a school environment scan document.

- a. These instruments (see [Annexure II](#)) were adapted from those used previously in school and lesson review projects conducted by the case study team of researchers or reviews during earlier iterations of the EGRSs.
- b. The lesson observation protocol laid down the process for setting up and conducting the lesson observation. In contrast, the lesson observation schedule was the tool that was used to record what went on in the lesson.
 - i. There was considerable debate within the case study research team and the project's funder, and the DBE over the form of the lesson observation instrument. In particular, the discussion was about what precisely to observe in a lesson, as Implementing Partner's lesson observation tools focuses on only one aspect of the lesson based on what the coach wants to specifically observe.
 - ii. The case study research team decided that the whole lesson should be reviewed in as much detail as possible. To that end Implementing Partner's format was used as a broad framework, but each section of the lesson observation protocol would be completed by the research team observer and not just one section as in the Implementation Partner's tool. The lesson descriptors were divided into five categories: teacher focus, instructional content, teacher actions, learner actions, and materials used.
 - iii. The document guides the observer to complete it with several observations about the planning and execution of the lesson. Each one of these categories was divided into several indicators, and the observer was to indicate which of these were relevant to each three-minute block of the lesson. The responses in the tool are largely binary – either the indicator or element is present or observed, or it is not. This has made the tool relatively easy for the researchers to fill in and has reduced the chance of observer bias, as it did not require them to make value judgements, as many other lesson observation tools require.
- c. The learner workbook review document was a simplified version of one developed by Eric Scholar for the research team for use in a previous school intervention evaluation project. This instrument looks at the amount of work covered in a lesson and also considers marking and whether the teacher has used the marking process to guide the learner. This case study decided to focus on the Grade 2 learner books as the Grade 1 learners do not write regularly, and Grade 3 is not a focus in year 1 of the project evaluation. The process involved a Grade 2 teacher in each school being asked to provide workbooks and exercise books for home language and EFAL from their four highest performing learners in their class who also attend school regularly. As with all other aspects of the project, the aim was to determine what the teacher believes and sees as good practice. It was assumed that the workbooks provided by a teacher for review enable the evaluation team to assess whether there was optimal curriculum coverage or not and what the marking approach of a teacher was.
- d. The school environment scan has been adapted from one developed by GEMS Africa for evaluating interventions in schools in Uganda. It provides a useful picture of the school environment, its resourcing levels, utilities and facilities, and the state of both the classrooms and the toilets.



- e. The school data tool has also been derived from earlier projects and will allow the team to verify data on the South African School Administration and Management System (SA-SAMS) and Education's Education Management Information systems (EMIS) of each school.

6.4 Research Methods

The proposed case study tools and field protocols were piloted in one large 'DH intervention' school on Friday, 17 June 2021. The pilot was conducted by a field manager and a senior field researcher under the guidance of SSA's research lead, an early grade reading specialist. The same team conducted the first case study school evaluation. The research lead observed both researchers observing lessons and conducting interviews to ensure consistency and adequate rigour were established. By the close of the visit to the second school (the pilot and the first sample school), the research lead was satisfied that the lesson observations were being conducted as per protocol and that the interviews were being conducted competently. He also modelled the generation of the case study monograph in evening meetings after the pilot school and the first sample school visits. So, the remaining four case studies were conducted, and the SSA's senior researchers wrote the monographs.

Following the piloting of the instruments, the research team undertook an analysis of changes that had been identified during the piloting process. There were no substantial changes to the instrument and methodology. To ensure a final sample of six case study schools, the research team in consultation with the DBE, replaced the COVID-19-affected school with the pilot school, which is now included as part of this report.

Communication about what the school should expect from the field team was sent to each school before the visit and a DBE letter. Principals were also communicated telephonically regarding the school visit dates, expectations and the team's arrival times. This is in line with DBE protocols and meant that the teachers who were to be observed had time to plan the lesson that would be observed. Therefore, a 'Hawthorne Effect' was anticipated. It was agreed that this was acceptable from a research viewpoint, as the aim of the case study schools was to see what the teachers considered good practice and the best they could do. It is assumed that this will change over the three-year project as teachers become more *au fait* with EGRP's methods and approaches and more competent in using them in their classrooms.

The school visits to conduct the case studies were undertaken over six school days during weeks 7 and 8 of the second term (from 18 June to 25 June 2021). A full day was spent by a team of two experienced researchers at each school. On the agreed day of a visit, the team arrived at the school as it opened in the morning. The team commenced the visit with a meeting with the principal. At this meeting, the messages conveyed by letter and telephone were confirmed, and the timing of the lesson observations was agreed. Then the principal (and teachers, when invited to join the meeting) were informed of the other activities the team would be undertaking during the visit.

In each school, the following activities were planned and generally conducted by the team:

- a. Lesson observations of four lessons: Grade 1 and 2 Home Language (HL) and Grade 1 and 2 English First Additional Language (EFAL)
- b. Examination of classroom and lesson documents (i.e. timetables, lesson plans)
- c. Review of Grade 2 learner workbooks, assessments and exercise books (HL and EFAL)

- d. In-depth interviews (with Grade 1 and 2 EFAL and HL teachers, the DH of Foundation Phase, and the Principal)
- e. A focus group discussion with Foundation Phase teachers (who had not been interviewed already in their roles as DH or after observing their lessons)
- f. A school walkabout to review the school and classroom environments and resourcing
- g. Completion of a school datasheet of basic school information.

In one school, the principal was absent; in two schools, one of the teachers to be observed was absent. In the first case, the deputy principal was interviewed, and in the second case, teachers in school were still observed, with observation (on request, informally) of a Grade 3 teacher in place of the absent Grade 1 teacher. The Grade 3 class observation was not included in the overall analysis.

Principals and teachers consented to photographs of the school and classrooms being taken. The team was careful not to include learners in these photographs as it was considered too complex and time-consuming a task to get permission from every learner to be photographed from their parents or guardians in advance. In addition, the aim of taking the photographs was to show the context of the school and the classrooms and samples from the Grade 2 learners' workbooks. This could be achieved reasonably well without including learners in the photographs.

At the end of each day, the research team met and brainstormed their impressions and insights about the school visited that day, lessons that had been observed and interviews that had been held. These reflections and evidence were recorded in note form by a team member assigned the writing up notes about the visit to that particular school. The notes from the interviews, lesson observations and learner book reviews were then handed to a team member assigned to develop a draft school profile during the evening of the school visit. This happened on the same day because completing the initial draft profile is important the same day before details and impressions are forgotten or merged. The profile used a template report with a set of headings which had been agreed upon and modified during the reporting on the pilot school. Before the case study schools were visited, the pilot school monograph had been written by the research lead: this was used by the research team alongside the template as a model. The template ensured that a mixed-method approach was used with the school case studies. It included both quantitative tables (of school statistics; learner workbook analysis; learner reading abilities) to be filled in and headings that elicited detailed description and basic qualitative data and analysis.

Reviews of workbooks were conducted using a tool designed to show a selection of learners' work, which would best reflect the amount of work the teacher had set over the year to date. For each of these learners, the teacher provided four books: the HL CAPS workbook and its exercise book; the EFAL CAPS workbook and its exercise book. They were also asked to provide any extra exercise books that the learners might be using for tests and assessment activities. The team then counted the pages covered in the workbooks and pages of free work and assessments.

For HL, a grand total was reached, then divided by four to get an average number of pages per learner. The same approach was used for the EFAL books. The quality of the teacher's engagement with the exercises was then reviewed to see if at least two exercises in each subject were set per week, that the work was marked, corrected, corrections done, and whether the teacher had provided guiding remarks where the learner had got something wrong. The team then analysed the books to see if regular assessment activities were given. Finally, the last pages in the workbooks were reviewed to see if the learners were up to date with the curriculum, that is, with the 7th or 8th week of the Term 2 curriculum.

All this data was entered into a table and analysed. The level of a teacher's engagement with the workbooks was colour coded on the table so that it is possible at a glance to see how compliant the teacher is at setting and marking work and setting assessments. These tables were then added to the school profiles.

Each of these profiles was then edited and fact-checked by the team into a monograph on each school. These monographs were then used as the basis for this report. The individual case study monographs are annexed to this report in Annexure I.

The Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) of the monographs for this report involved a basic content analysis using limited coding conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The analysis is built on identifying similarities and commonalities between teachers and schools around a set of themes and sub-themes using basic thematic analysis tools. In line with IPA, the focus was on the 'experiencer'; the person who was experiencing the phenomenon of the EGRP's innovations. Coding was limited as the aim was to maintain and foreground the richness of experiences as represented by the text and observations and not take a reductionist approach. So, a set of themes and sub-themes was identified, and the six case studies were analysed against these themes. Key points under each theme were noted and pinned up manually to a wall and then grouped with specific quotations from the school's profiles related to that theme.

Each theme was then considered in turn and written and described. These themes were finally analysed for the emergence of theories of causation, indicators of effective practice, and elements of positive deviance. This involved drawing on the QDA practice of Grounded Theory as the aim was to start identifying emerging theories of causality and teacher/DH action. The last process conducted was to informally rank individual schools on their likelihood of adopting the innovation based on evidence collected in this baseline research process – and in identifying any schools and individual teachers that could be analysed in future case study evaluations using positive deviance methods. This process would identify the teachers and schools which stood out in comparison to other teachers and schools in the case study sample.

7 Overall findings

7.1 Differences and Similarities across Schools

The six schools in the case study serve predominantly rural Setswana-speaking communities, with five in the same sub-district and one in a neighbouring sub-district. They are all lower quintile (Quintiles 2 and 3) schools, meaning that they are 'no-fee schools. Their quintile statuses impact their resourcing levels as they are dependent on the North West provincial department of education and its departmentally-sanctioned projects, such as the EGRP, for their resources. They are, therefore, all broadly comparable across their school profiles. Because there are shared specifics across the schools, this study hopes to investigate causation factors involved in and behind schools adapting, adopting or perhaps resisting the EGRP innovation.

The case study schools vary widely in the sizes of their foundation phase enrolments and, therefore, in the number of classes they have: a single class per foundation phase grade in the school; four classes in each of the foundation phase grades in the school; or two classes per each early grade. The enrolments in the foundation phase in the case study's schools ranged from 58 to 528 learners per school. The largest school was a 'full-service school' (in terms of the 2001 White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education³¹), and the others were ordinary schools.

All of the case study's schools claimed to be prioritising early grade reading through allocating one of the school's limited 'substantive promotion posts' to the leadership of their foundation phase department (which it must be noted was a very unusual practice in schools a decade ago). Alternatively, they did this by giving a deputy principal the responsibility for oversight of the foundation phase, and/or by ensuring that their early grade classes have competent teachers and adequate LTSMs. In the largest school in the case study, three 'substantive promotion posts' had been allocated to the foundation phase: two DHs and a deputy principal. In another school, the deputy principal and one of two 'substantive promotion posts' of DHs had been assigned to the foundation phase.

While all the school principals indicated confidence in and satisfaction with the progress of the school's early grade classes, a wide range of teaching competencies was observed in the case study. In three schools, teaching was conducted confidently, lessons were well structured and paced (with varied appropriate activities), and learners were engaged and excited. In these schools, the case study researchers anticipate that the learners will be found to be better readers (when the EGRP's quantitative data is analysed) than in the other three schools, whose teachers estimated that over half of their foundation phase learners could not read words. All the principals claimed to be inclusive in their management and leadership approach. However, when observed, just one – the only female principal – stood out as the most inclusive and engaged with her staff. Her school was one of the schools where teachers were observed to be more effective in teaching literacy.

The physical environmental infrastructure was observed to be adequate in all the case study schools: they have secure fencing, adequately built and roofed classes (except in one school which had temporary classrooms for the foundation phase), visible chalkboards, and, in all but one school, print-rich classrooms. In other aspects of the learning environment, it was observed that all the schools' classrooms contained EGRP LTSMs and all the teachers used some of these materials during their

lessons, especially the EGRP flashcards. Five schools had a dedicated principal's office and separate staff room, while the sixth school had one multi-functional space, which served as a storeroom, staff room and principal's office. All but two schools had neat school grounds, although a number had health and safety risks for learners, such as loose paving and large drops from the classrooms. Only one school had reading corners in its foundation phase classrooms: it seems that other schools had removed their reading corners because of their concerns about complying with the social distancing aspects of COVID-19 regulations.

There was a wide range of engagement with – and use of – the tablets Implementing Partner provided as a key element of the EGRP. The tablets are loaded with lesson plans, ATPs, videos and other LTSMs. In three schools, teachers reported that they download the lesson plans from the tablet the day before and then either print them as a hard copy or write them on paper for use in the lesson. This use of hard copy lesson plans may indicate a lack of confidence in using the tablets during class to view the lesson plan. In the other three schools, the teachers had the tablets in their classrooms and were using them in the way that Molteno had advised.

A general complaint repeated in all but one of the schools was that Molteno had not provided the term 2 lesson plans in time. As a teacher in one school complained,

“Can’t the tablets be loaded for the entire year, so we don’t have this back and forth? It makes us disorganised, and it affects the kids, and we are not able to be creative in the classroom because we spend time creating lesson plans that Molteno already has [but had not yet uploaded to the app].”

The delay by Molteno in loading the tablets with lesson plans particularly impacted the better-organised schools and teachers. In the school where the respondent quoted above teaches, the DH expects them to plan for the whole term during the holiday prior to the start of the following term. This is not easily facilitated if the EGRP lesson plans are uploaded late by Molteno. As another teacher explained,

“EGRP materials were received in both term 1 and 2, and they are very useful, but the delays in loading the material onto the tablets has been really frustrating. Imagine, our tablets were only taken on 26 May for the term 2 content to be loaded – we were well into term 2 already.”

And another teacher in the same school said,

“Tablets are a big problem [when] not returned [from uploading of more lesson plans] on time... they keep coming without information... it will be wiser if they can give us tablets on time and they should not give us the tablets after the term has started.”

As a result of this delay, trust in the project was being eroded; teachers in three of the schools indicated that they were sourcing lesson plans from other projects than the EGRP. Given what the literature says about systematic teaching of phonemes, this could potentially create confusion for the learners if other projects' lesson plans are not consistent with the EGRP's systematic progress in phonetics teaching.

A surprisingly large number of teachers indicated that they were adapting the EGRP methodology and melding it with what they believed were the better elements of earlier grade reading study projects. In a number of cases, when teachers had explained what they felt was missing in the EGRP approach as

they had experienced it thus far, their subject advisor had advised them to follow this practice of using lesson plans from earlier projects. This is important information and may be positive behaviour (notwithstanding the reservation expressed above concerning the undermining of the systematic nature of the Molteno course) for a number of reasons:

- (i) It may allow the EGRP to build on what teachers already know and avoid imposing a totally new language-teaching regime on them. Experience within the South African education system, from the implementation of Curriculum 2005 onwards, indicates that ignoring teachers' existing knowledge and practices is a 'recipe for disaster' and risks innovation rejection;
- (ii) It shows the confidence and agency of the teachers who have adapted to the situation in this way. If teachers feel confident enough to supplement the EGRP lessons with elements of earlier projects which they found worked for them, it is likely that the EGRP model is more likely to get adopted and sustained;
- (iii) It is one of the indicators of 'positive deviant' schools. This bodes well for the rollout of the project and the rest of the evaluation process. It is quite likely that one or two of these schools will turn out to be 'positive deviants' and so provide a wealth of data on the successful internalisation and application of the EGRP model.

However, if the methodology they are importing from earlier projects is not phonics-based but a 'whole word approach, this has the risk of creating tensions and confusion for these teachers' learners in acquiring literacy.

The most common elements lifted from earlier projects were teaching 20 words in Grade 1 so that learners can build sentences quickly, more substantial writing practice, and teaching appropriate 'grammar'. In one school, teachers explained that they were using material from other projects because they wanted to supplement the EGRP with grammar and writing practice to be consistently compliant with the CAPS as they understood it. When CAPS compliance was mentioned in other schools, teachers were satisfied that the EGRP is CAPS-compliant and did not feel motivated to use different materials.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the implementation of preventative regulations, were relatively standard across the six schools. All had COVID-19 screening stations at the entrances to their schools; they all ensured that visitors had their temperatures measured and recorded in a screening log. However, COVID-19 has led to the restructuring of physical spacing in classrooms in the six schools. An expression or indication of teachers' fear of contracting COVID-19 from learners was observed in all these schools. Such fear is indeed pertinent because most of the more senior early grade teachers are approaching retirement age and are part of the demographic group more at risk from severe Covid-infection than most younger cohorts. Consequently, the early grade teachers observed were strict in their observation of COVID-19 regulations. As a result of the regulations regarding class sizes, four of the schools were operating a rotation timetable where each class was divided in two: half of one class attended school on one day and then alternated with the other half of the class on the following day, and then repeated the timetable pattern. In the remaining two schools, one had such small classes that all learners could attend school each day, and the other school only rotated the timetable of Grade 2 classes, as the Grade 1 and 3 classes were small enough for no rotation timetable to be required for them. Rotation timetables ensure that the COVID-19 classroom limit of a maximum of 20 learners is not compromised.

All four schools operating a rotation system had followed the advice of their school's EGRP coaches and put all struggling learners into the same class sessions. Therefore, COVID-19 restrictions were viewed by teachers as providing an opportunity in these schools to give more focus to their struggling learners. When struggling learners are together in one session, it allows a teacher to work intensively with them on their reading and to not worry as much as they usually do about strict coverage of the curriculum. In the 'full-service school', an early grade teacher said that she had managed to reduce the size of her struggling learners class to 12 learners. However, while theoretically this was viewed as a useful approach, very few indications were observed that it was indeed improving the acquisition of literacy by struggling learners: as they were often still being taught in a fairly traditional teacher-centred way, with little opportunities given to the learners to practise their oral language skills. It was also observed that rotation timetabling had taken the place of any early- or late-afternoon extra lessons for struggling learners, which had been provided in a few of the schools prior to COVID-19.

7.2 The Breadth and Depth of Classroom Practice and Teacher Knowledge

Classroom practice was generally observed to be teacher-centred. However, we note that based on recent lesson observations undertaken by the lead researcher, the range of teaching methods used in the case study schools was broader than might have been expected before the implementation of year one of the EGRP. A number of the teachers were observed implementing the novel approaches to reading that the EGRP promotes and upon which they were trained by Molteno, including utilisation of group-guided reading and shared reading. This was, however, an expected observation given that the research team had informed the schools in advance of the days on which the team would be visiting them and that the researchers would be observing some early-grade language lessons. In most schools, these lessons went well, indicating that these learners are used to the implementation of such teaching methods and that these methods are now part of their teachers' 'repertoires'. However, in some instances, teachers struggled to do group guided reading effectively; for example, one teacher held the book up with the cover facing the learners, and another struggled to use a poster to elicit a learner discussion. This may have been because the latter teachers were conscious of what they thought the observing researcher would want to see but had not yet embedded the new methods into their 'repertoires'.

All classrooms had double sets of desks in rows, and in almost all instances, there was one learner seated per desk in line with provincial COVID-19 regulations. None of the schools or teachers were observed to have considered how to facilitate learners regularly working collaboratively with each other – or in teams - in a manner that maintained compliance with classroom COVID-19 regulations. A few teachers were observed facilitating arrangements of groups of learners for specific activities, for example, group guided reading while ensuring social distancing was maintained. Observations of most classes seemed to indicate that Covid-compliance in classrooms reinforced a methodological reliance on teacher-centred 'talk and chalk' methods. Overall, the researchers observed that the teachers talked more than is required in an effective literacy lesson – and, therefore, consequently, the learners spoke less and were less involved in discrete activities than the EGRP envisages. In lessons observed to be the most effective, teachers used a variety of approaches such as songs, dance, and word-based competitions and games as part of the lessons.

Teacher knowledge in the EGRP approaches was generally sound, with all teachers using a phonics approach. In most classes, it was clear to observers that the phonics approach that the EGRP promotes is in line with, and builds on, the previous experience and training of teachers in these schools. Even of

classes that were observed to be less functional, teachers were forthright in indicating their approval of a phonics approach to researchers. As one such teacher said,

“We use the EGRP phonetics approach to teach reading by breaking up sounds. This is a better way of teaching reading; more of my kids can read this year than before.”

Because the EGRP is building on a phonics approach that teachers were already aware of, the barriers to change at the instructional core may not be as rigid as would have been the case if teaching through phonics was a new concept for teachers. Indeed, teachers observed that the EGRP was so clearly in line with earlier interventions and training they had received; as seen above, many were borrowing elements from earlier projects to supplement this project. This occurred mainly when they felt that the EGRP was not emphasising an aspect of the learning to read that they felt was critical in teaching reading, as already discussed above.

Across the schools, there were a few teachers – generally younger – who were struggling to deliver the curriculum content, utilise the EGRP methods, and use the tablets. One of these teachers, who was teaching Grade 1 learners many words that were beyond their capacity in English, was also facing classroom discipline issues with her class which also affected her capacity to implement the Molteno methods effectively.

More interactive teaching approaches promoted by the EGRP were observed to have been compromised by the impact of COVID-19 on classroom spaces and teaching practices. Firstly, in most but not all of these schools, teachers struggle to complete the curriculum within the year. Teachers in one focused group discussion (FGD) indicated to the researchers that they only get through about four weeks of work in a term because of the rotation timetable system but do not disclose this to their subject advisers. In another school, the principal reported that he does not report curriculum coverage to the district office any longer; if he did, he would have to lie by concealing that the impact of COVID-19 had compromised it. Secondly, teachers complained to researchers that because of COVID-19 regulations, it was challenging to do group-guided reading by utilising the Big Book and providing shared reading activities.

Early grade teachers generally welcomed the EGRP’s tablets, and most teachers praised the project for its content. They particularly welcomed the detailed lesson plans that had been provided. The only reservations about the lesson plans, expressed in some schools, were about their detailed lesson element timing, which many teachers felt was too rigid and put them under too much time pressure. However, the more effective reading teachers were observed not to have expressed concern about this: they felt that the lesson plans were guides and would conduct their lessons at speed needed to ensure their learners achieved the lesson’s outcomes. As one DH said,

“The EGRP structure and timing of lessons works very well. It helps teachers cover all the items they need to cover in a lesson. We are doing it okay right now; we just needed to master it”.

In other, less functional classrooms, one lesson plan could result in more than one lesson period as teachers worked their way through the lesson plan across several lessons. Some observed lessons extended to well over an hour: this seems to indicate that those teachers were struggling with the timing of lessons. This was observed in three of the schools, the same schools where researchers observed that teaching of reading was weakest. In one school, in both Grade 1 and 2 lessons, literacy lessons

went on for well over an hour with no obvious break or linking of activities as the teachers tried to stick to the timing of the different elements in the lesson plan. As a result, their lessons seemed frenetic, and learners were clearly confused by the speed of transitioning from one activity to another with little apparent logic. As one of the teachers admitted,

“The learners are a bit slow, and they always lag behind, and periods always overlap. Time management is a great difficulty.”

There were very few mentions by teachers in the six schools of the videos and other materials on the tablets. It is anticipated that as teachers get used to navigating and manipulating the content available on the tablet that they will start accessing these resources.

7.3 Tensions related to Curriculum, Policy, Lesson Plans and Pacing

The key policies which relate to the EGRP are:

- CAPS for Foundation Phase, which determines that HL will be taught for a maximum of 8 hours per week and EFAL for a maximum of 3 hours per week in Grades 1 and 2.
- Amended Annual Teaching Plans (ATP), which determine what teachers should teach in each week in each grade and subject, modified due to the impact of COVID-19.
- National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R – 12 (Government Notices No. 1115 and 1116 in Government Gazette No. 36042 of 28 December 2012) as amended. This determines that no learner will be retained for more than one year extra in the foundation phase, however poorly they perform.

A constant refrain from the teachers was that they could not teach the way they would like to, or in a way that all their learners could access because of the pressures resulting from the pacing of lessons, which are driven by the amended ATPs. This frustration was compounded by how the EGRP lesson plans on the tablets divide lesson elements into chunks of a set number of minutes. While some of the better-performing teachers liked this, claiming it helped guide them with planning, other teachers felt that this was too prescriptive and unrealistic as it did not consider their learners' slow learning speeds. There is no doubt that the impact of COVID-19 on early grade learners, and their learning trajectory, has been great and has compounded the concerns teachers had about the pressure of the ATPs and EGRP lesson plans.

However, the situation is compounded by teachers themselves. The coverage of material in a single lesson was often minimal, and many of the teachers, using the flexibility that comes with being class teachers, extended the observed lessons well beyond the expected time limit for the lesson – and it seemed beyond the CAPS time allocation for the subject on that specific day. Their pace was often unnecessarily slow and, teacher-centred and involved very little learner participation. A worrying aspect of the way that reading is taught in the early grades – whether home language or EFAL – involves learners doing very little reading or even speaking the language during lessons. Most of the time during lessons is spent with the teacher talking and possibly one or two learners responding – often writing laboriously on the board – or through chorus responses. When the lesson ended with some written work, the team found that most learners could write very little in the time allocated. This was where teachers often decided to cut the time allocated. This concern was reinforced by reviewing the Grade 2 workbooks and exercise books. Most work involved copying from the board, filling in spaces, or single-word responses. There was little attempt to write sentences, let alone paragraphs and stories.

The amount of written work undertaken by Grade 2 learners across the schools varied hugely. The consolidated workbook and exercise book usage in Home Language and EFAL literacy teaching had a median range per Grade 2 class of 66 to 221 pages. The teachers of classes, which had completed fewer pages than other Grade 2 classes, were also less likely to have marked and corrected learners' work and set regular assignments. The only schools where teachers regularly guided learners with comments in their work and exercise books were schools whose learners had done over 170 pages of written work in Grade 2.

The teachers in some schools were very forthright – in discussions with the researchers – about the issue of automatic promotion of learners whom they felt should not have been promoted to the next grade. This is, as one teacher put it,

“...a mess, especially in Grade 3. My learners cannot read even one word in English or Setswana... Only five can read in EFAL, and about ten can read in their home language”,

This point came up mainly in response to a question that teachers were asked about how many of their early grade learners could read in their home language and in EFAL. Many of the teachers indicated that quite a number could not read in either language and largely put the blame for this on the national promotion policy rather than on their teaching. One teacher who blamed the policy stated,

“In my class, it's worse; only one can read in EFAL and about seven in Setswana.”

The relatively large number of learners who could not read in the early grades was one point on which the judgement of the teachers matched what the researchers saw in the classroom. In three of the five schools which reported on their learners' reading skills, the teachers said that under 50% of Grade 1s could read simple words, and in two schools, they said that the same was true in Grade 2. Only one school reported that over half of Grade 1 and 2 learners could read. The three schools where reading was being taught better also reported that more of their children could read. In some of the other schools, it was clear that teachers were over-positive about the reading skills of their learners. This is quite normal. It will be interesting to compare the early grade reading results in those schools with the teachers' assertions.

7.4 The Coaching Model

The EGRP coaches were well known in most of the case study schools and were generally respected by teachers in the schools. The research team found that the more the coach had visited and the more the coach had engaged with the teachers, the more positive were teachers' attitudes to their coach. Some teachers in one school where the coach had already visited three times, were effusive in their praise and stated they realised what impact a dedicated EGRP coach could have. The teachers in that school said,

“Our coach has made three visits to the school this year. The first visit was to see the school – the other two were on consecutive days where she was in classrooms, guiding on lesson preparation and offering support”,



“Our relationship with our EGRP coach is excellent. We also talk on WhatsApp. She is so helpful even if you send a ‘Please Call Me’ she responds”;

“We are very comfortable with the coaching; I want more classroom visits and feedback”.

This last point about classroom visits is important. There was no resistance in any of the schools to the research team observing teachers. Only in one school did one teacher indicate discomfort as she felt that the researchers had been sent to her lesson without her being made aware of their impending visit. However, her irritation was directed at the school’s management and not at the research team. Positive reactions to the EGRP coaches were, however, not universal: in half of the schools, negative statements were made about their coaches to the researchers. Teachers said this was because their coach had only visited once and conducted a cursory visit; or because, when the coach had resigned or been changed, there had been no communication received by the school or teachers on the reasons for the change.

The research team further explored the issue of regularity of changing of coaches by analysing coach school allocation lists sent to the research team by Molteno. This data indicated that since term 1 in 2021, there had been twenty cases where the coach allocated to a school was changed. These cases include situations where a school did not have a coach assigned to it and cases where the coaches were moved around. An additional ten cases involved schools that were moved across the three intervention arms. A further three cases involved schools that were moved from the study altogether. This trend can potentially interrupt or weaken a vital element of the coaching model and the EGRP Theory of Change which relates to building a trusting relationship between the coach and the teacher. This trust is essential to the coach being accepted as a critical but trusted friend whom teachers can feel free to open up to, take risks and feel supported.

As expected, all the teachers were aware of the EGRP, although half of the principals were either unaware of the project or unclear about what it aimed to achieve. As principals are vital to an innovation being lodged and sustained in schools, it is important that they are fully aware of the project, particularly of the EGRP’s phases and their implications for the school for when the school’s foundation phase DH will be coaching their colleagues. While they are aware of the project, when the researchers described the DH coaching model (which will be implemented in their schools from early 2022) to the teachers, the DH, and the principal during interviews in the six schools, almost all of them indicated that they were not aware of the planned DH coaching, although one DH indicated some knowledge. In most of the case study’s schools, researchers noted that the foundation phase Department Head is within two years of retirement age. A typical teacher comment on the model in these four schools was

“The Department Head model won’t work. The Department Head has her workload, books to monitor and learners to look after. She also doesn’t know much about EGRP. She is a bit old and was a part of too many programmes in the past – she will be confused. But she does provide good support”.

In one of the two schools where the teachers were broadly positive about the DH being a coach, the teachers pointed out that their DH is acting in the position and not appointed to it, which would give her even more work with no incentives added. As one teacher explained,

“Although we don't have an appointed DH, the (acting) DH already has too much work... monitoring, moderation, IQMS... this is already too much responsibility, but they could cope if the workload is not too steep since they already do IQMS observations.”

While another stated,

“Don't forget that the (acting) DH is also a class teacher. The learners will really suffer, and that's the only snag.”

There was also concern about role confusion with a focus group in one school agreeing with a teacher who stated about the DH,

“We have a problem that she will be coming with the Departmental Head mentality not with the coach approach...it will hamper the effect of the coaching, they will be player and referee at the same time”

Only in three of the schools was there anyone who could be considered as a possible early grade reading champion, and the other three schools had no one who stood out as a potential champion. The current early grade reading champions were found in the three schools that managed early grade reading more effectively than the other schools in the case study. However, in two of these schools, the potential champion is a DH who is nearing retirement and is said to be already overloaded with work and responsibilities – and in another case, the DH is acting in the position. In the third effective school, the deputy principal would make a suitable champion for early grade reading.



8 Conclusion and recommendations

The EGRP has been established in all six schools and there is general appreciation of the project, the LTSMs and the training that have been provided. Tablets loaded with the EGRP lesson plans are particularly valued; hence, deep frustration was expressed by teachers at getting the term 2 lesson plans uploaded to the tablets very late into the second term. This logistical delay, along with experiences of varied engagement by coaches within their school and a dislike of undergoing training during school holidays, were the main reasons teachers criticised the project. In addition, there was a concern among some of the teachers observed by the research team to be more competent at literacy teaching than others that the EGRP approach does not include all of the elements they have previously found to be part of a good early grade reading programme.

Overall, the researchers considered teachers in half of the schools to be teaching reading effectively. These same schools were the schools where the teachers showed the greatest ownership of the implementation of the EGRP. The teachers in these schools also demonstrated agency when they blended elements of the EGRP project with what they knew works in their classes with learners (which they had learned from the implementation of earlier literacy projects). One school, in particular, stood out as a potential 'positive deviant' school. Teachers in this school were enthusiastic about teaching early grade reading, demonstrated competency in doing so and were led by a management team committed and determined only to take up innovations that benefited the learners' achievements. Such critical engagement with innovations and mediation of such projects when they are brought to a school is a feature of 'positive deviant' schools. In these three schools, the learners seemed more engaged than in the other schools in the case study, and estimates of learner reading ability were noticeably higher than in the other three schools. These schools also demonstrated more 'time on task' with significantly more work done in learner workbooks and exercise books than in the other three schools. Two of these three schools were the only schools where teachers gave guiding comments when learners got work incorrect and made sure corrections were done. These two schools were also confident that the DH would be able to be a good coach, but, as in two of the other schools, these designated DHs are about to retire. In one of these two schools, it was suggested that the proposed coach be the deputy principal.

These factors, revealed in the case study's schools, signal a serious vulnerability in the premise underpinning the DH coaching model that needs to be explored further. In none of the six schools was there agreement from school management or early grade teachers that they believed the DH model would be workable in their schools. The reasons they gave are significant:

- In four schools, the present foundation phase DH or acting DH is approaching the end of her career when she reaches retirement age. In most of these schools, teachers also commented that the DH is a teacher of one of the early grade classes and is already overworked;
- In one of the other schools, there is concern about who would be selected as that school's DH coach as the school has already appointed two DHs and a deputy principal to manage the foundation phase department; however, teachers indicated that they would find it difficult to accept one of these staff members taking on the role of DH coach because they perceive that she lacks a professional background in the foundation phase;

- A sixth school has had no foundation phase DH since 2020 and, therefore, the deputy principal is acting in that role, but lacks a background in teaching foundation phase classes.

In terms of such an important design feature of the ERGP, it may have been preferable for the case study to have selected schools with foundation phase DHs in place that would be able to sustain the implementation and not schools where the DHs are close to retirement age. This is important because it is unlikely that the EGRP's phased implementation will achieve the outcomes it seeks if it is implemented without DHs who are competent and trusted by their colleagues to be their coaches, or without early grade reading champions in schools. Two schools lack 'substantive promotion posts' for foundation phase DH. Only one school has younger DHs – two of them – but staff in the school raised concerns about how a choice would be made between them about who would play the DH coach role, and they expressed serious reservations about one of them being the DH coach. If these perceived obstacles are combined with a lack of a reading culture in at least two schools, then the way forward in this sample of experimental schools seems complex. The DBE and provincial department will need to engage with the schools whose foundation phase DHs will soon retire to ensure adequate succession planning and that new DHs are appointed without delay. Even then, it is not a given that a new DH would be able to quickly build sufficient trust among her colleagues, which would be essential for her to play the coaching role effectively.

Apart from this serious concern, these six case study schools should provide a valuable baseline for the project. These schools are already engaging with the project and its various design features and elements in a range of different ways, which they are likely to continue doing. These schools should, therefore, continue to provide exemplars of adaption, adoption and possibly partial rejection of – or at least neutral engagement with – the intervention. The research team anticipates that at least one of the schools may possibly develop as a 'positive deviant' school.

The report makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Molteno

- (i) Molteno should improve its project implementation processes and, where needed, communicate better with the schools by providing them with timeous information on changes that have been made to the implementation of the EGRP or about logistical deadlines (such as uploading of a term's lesson plans) that have been delayed or postponed;
- (ii) Molteno should assist teachers in navigating the impact of COVID-19 on early grade reading lessons and on how to be innovative in finding solutions to the challenges teachers are facing within the COVID-19 context; and
- (iii) Molteno develops/strengthens strategies and ways of working that limit the changing of coaches assigned to a school so that coaches and teachers can build a trusting relationship envisaged by the EGRP coaching Model and Theory of Change.

Recommendations for COVID 19 response

- (i) The North West Education Department and Molteno should strengthen guidance to teachers on how to cover the curriculum effectively when rotating learners within their classes. This should focus on using lesson time more productively and using time-saving teaching methods to intensify teachers' pedagogical approach.



- (ii) The North West Education Department should develop guidance on recovering teaching and learning losses experienced during the pandemic.
- (iii) The North West Education Department and Molteno should support teachers in how to operate a learner-centred classroom under present COVID restrictions and likely future constraints.
- (iv) The North West Education Department should strengthen support for teachers to establish reading corners with a carpet and books, which learners can attend independently to read in silence.

Systemic and programmatic level recommendations

- (i) The DBE and funders would benefit from reviewing the investments into coaching and training of the current older teacher cohort in the foundation phase to make trade-offs that will avert the loss of these investments when these teachers retire in a few years.
- (ii) The DBE and the North West Education Department need to confirm that foundation phase DHs, whom they expect to be early grade reading coaches in the 40 experimental intervention (group 3 treatment) schools, are in place in those schools and that they will be remaining in place for the duration of the project. Where this is not the case, succession and transition planning need to be instituted in those schools, or alternative strategies will need to be implemented speedily early on in Year 2 in 2022
- (iii) The DBE and the Northwest Department of Basic Education should find systematic solutions for schools that still have Foundation Phase DHs who are not teaching in the foundation phase.
- (iv) The DBE should explore opening up dialogue with other education stakeholders at a policy level to effectively address the tension that the schools in this case study have been experiencing between what is required from the project and what is required by the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) policies, processes, and systems. This tension, which is particularly acute in relation to policies on curriculum coverage and learner promotion, is exacerbated by the loss of teaching and learning time experienced during the pandemic.
- (v) The North West Education Department, Molteno, and DBE should strengthen the support offered to teachers in applying Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading, as most teachers continue to struggle with this aspect of the EGRP.



9 Annexure I: Case Study Monographs

The case study monographs are presented in the chronological order they were visited in. and the findings per school are presented across eight thematic areas, which include:

- 1 School context
- 2 Early grade teaching and learning
- 3 Awareness of the EGRP and its requirements
- 4 School management and leadership
- 5 EGRP support provided
- 6 Impact of COVID-19
- 7 Learner workbook analysis
- 8 Community engagements

9.1 School 1 – Thursday, 17 June 2021

Summary of key points

- There is a lack of understanding of the coaching model and how it is meant to work and overall very little knowledge of the programme.
- The teachers are struggling with the timing of reading elements to create enough time for real learning.
- The school takes early literacy very seriously with considerable management deployment.
- Internal management stresses mean that selection of the EGRP coach is likely to be contested.
-

Respondents

- One Grade 1 English First Additional Language teacher
- One Grade 1 Home Language Teacher
- One Grade 2 English First Additional Language teacher
- One Grade 2 Home Language teacher
- One Foundation Phase Department Head
- Eight other Foundation Phase teachers in a focus group discussion
 - Two Grade 1 teachers
 - Two Grade 2 teachers
 - Four Grade 3 teachers, including the Deputy Head: Foundation Phase
- One Principal

School context

This section provides an overview of the general conditions of the school and community, as well as the classrooms.

Table 1: School 1 school-level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Learner enrolment	171	173	184	208	528
No. of classrooms	4	4	4	4	12
No. of teachers	4	4	4	4	12
No. of qualified FP teachers	4	4	4		12
No. of DHs	2			1	2
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 43	1 : 43	1 : 46		

The school is a quintile 3, full-service school with 40 teachers located in an urban area (historic township). The school management team is made up of two deputy principals, one of whom manages the foundation phase and the other the Intersen phase, as well as two heads of department in the foundation phase.

The roads leading to the school are well-maintained and the school infrastructure is also well built with brick walls and asbestos roofing and looks functional. Only two classrooms are temporary structures. Several walkways in the school are not safe for learners and teachers. The school's periphery is entirely fenced, and there is a single secure entry point to the school. There is also a shaded parking area at the school, and quite a number of teachers drive to the school. The school has no designated playground or sports fields but an abandoned tennis court. The grounds around the school are very sandy. The Grade R classes are secluded from the rest of the school and are fenced off with children's play facilities.

Classrooms are generally well-maintained: there are no broken windows, and all the tables and chairs in the school are functional and adequately cared for. All broken tables are stacked behind the school buildings, away from the learners. The Grade 2 classrooms are very disorganised, but posters and learning aids are visible to the learners. In contrast, Grade 1 classrooms are well-organised as real 'talking' print-rich environments, and Grade 1 teachers displayed Molteno's Vula Bula readers.

The school has been experiencing issues with its water system, and there are areas within the school grounds that are flooded. The toilets used by Intersen phase boys also had issues with the sewerage system and were dirty on the day of the visit, while the girls' toilets were cleaner and more functional.

While some of the classes had a carpet in a designated corner, the corner did not have books on display and did not function as a reading corner. The school also does not seem to be cultivating a strong reading culture. All classrooms had functional chalkboards, and the teachers whose classes were observed used the chalkboards as boards for holding up teaching aids using magnets.

On the day of the school visit, the general climate within the school was relaxed, and it did not feel like an environment where learners and teachers were prepared to learn and teach. This can be attributed to the Youth Day celebrations planned for the second half of the school day. Despite this, the school still had a structured way of managing learners both within the classroom and at the assembly, and learners were still engaged in the classroom. There were also no signs of corporal punishment or sticks in plain sight.

All learners, teachers and school visitors were screened for COVID-19 before entering the school and were required to complete a form as part of the school entry protocol. All classrooms were also set up in a COVID-19 compliant manner, with tables set out in rows and classes were also divided into two groups which alternate on school attendance days.

Early Grade Teaching and Learning

Foundation Phase teaching at the school is structured in a way that allows for subject specialisation, where teachers who are more proficient in teaching Setswana only offer Setswana classes while the others offer the other classes to learners.

All the lessons observed in Grade 1 and 2 were teacher-centred, and there was very little interaction between learners, though some teachers attempted to use more interactive methods. In the Grade 1 Setswana class, the teacher had the learners discuss what they saw on a poster and what they thought was happening – some debating happened between learners on what they saw. However, the teacher guided the conversation to maintain order in the classroom. In the Grade 2 class, the teacher initiated a competition between boys and girls having them write words on the board and judge each other on whether the words were relevant. Generally, the learners were very passive and did not seem excited by the classes, although they were well-behaved. This was reinforced by the teachers constantly reminding the learners to behave because they had “visitors in the class”.

Teachers rarely affirmed learners, although Grade 1 teachers were more proactive in affirming learners and correcting them gently when they were wrong than those teaching Grade 2.

During each lesson, at least two people walked into the classroom wanting one thing or the other. It should be noted that this was possibly due to preparations for the celebration later in the day.

All teachers taught appropriate content and had lesson plans that they followed. Two of the four teachers used the RSP lesson planner, while one used a printed EGRP planner.

Most teachers complained that they struggled to stick to the times allocated for each function or element in the lesson (e.g. introducing phonics, writing etc.). Most of these have an allocation of 5 – 10 minutes, which the teachers asserted is unrealistic. As a result, individual reading lessons dragged on for over an hour with no clear end-point. This is made possible by timetabling blocks of HL and EFAL reading lessons. In these long lessons, what was often lost, in teachers becoming stressed about the time they were taking, were the sections of the lessons where learners practice the new phoneme. This means that real learning was limited. The teachers reported using the EGRP lesson plans and trackers on the tablet to prepare their lessons from home while stating that they did not feel comfortable teaching while referring to the tablet.

The reading culture in the school is poor, and learners cannot read, and the problem worsens at higher grades. All the educators acknowledged this, including the principal and department heads interviewed. The problem is exacerbated by the pressure from the district and parents to progress learners to the next grade. During the focus group discussion, the teachers stated that,

“It is a mess, especially in Grade 3. My learners cannot read even one word in English or Setswana... Only five can read in EFAL, and about ten can read in their home language.”

“In my class, it’s worse; only one can read in EFAL and about seven in Setswana.”



Teachers who have taught Grade 1 in one year will teach Grade 2 the following year; this is designed to ensure that they take responsibility for learner performance and cannot develop a culture of blaming Grade 1 teachers for learning problems. However, the learners are randomly allocated to classes to ensure learners are not at risk of being trapped with one teacher two years in a row, should that teacher be non-performing.

Teachers in both grades reported that their Group Guided Reading and Shared Reading practice had improved since coaching started – although there was very little evidence of this in the observed lessons. In addition, all teachers reported using the phonics approach to teaching learners to read, and this was observed in all the classes.

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

All the educators interviewed (including the principal) were aware of the programme and Molteno. However, there was some confusion about who the subject advisor was against the assigned EGRP coach. It should be noted that all the people interviewed were unaware of the DH coaching model that would be introduced to the school. Following the explanation of the model, all those interviewed were strongly opposed to making the department head the coach within the school due to the low levels of trust, and poor relationship between her and the educators she manages, with some feeling that there are differentiated levels of access to her. One teacher stated that

“... the DH has a close relationship with other teachers, and we don't have free access to her because some will do favours for the DH.”

During the focus group discussion, the teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the allocation of classes to be observed as some of the teachers were not adequately prepared as they were not notified

“We were put in the spotlight to fail!”

Seeing that the school has more than one foundation phase DH, one of the DHs recommended that the allocation of the coach be done through a vote, as the assignment may be contentious within the school, particularly as one of the DHs is new to the Foundation Phase.

“The DH is someone who's understanding, but sometimes she will come make corrections and not understand how we work in Grade 2.”

“We are happy with our DH but not happy that she will be our coach... How would you understand how we work and operate if you have never taught the foundation phase?”

Department Head as Coach Model: It came across strongly that respondents would not be comfortable having the DH as their coach due to the existing dynamics of their relationship; there was also a strong feeling that the DH would be incapable of fulfilling the coaching role within the school.

“We have a problem that she will be coming with the DH mentality, not with the coach approach...it will hamper the effect of the coaching, they will be player and referee at the same time.”



“Sometimes the DH will expect things to happen how they want.”

Teachers were also worried about the sharing of information within the school if the DH is to be the one to be trained and also wanted to be trained directly, saying:

“It is better when we and the DH receive the same information so that we don’t rely on the DH relaying of information.”

The teachers were generally positive about the EGRP its innovations, lauding it for making the teaching practice easier to manage (through structured lesson plans) whilst encouraging learners to read. Teachers, however, stressed they could not work with the restrictive timed lesson structure as it is not realistic or considerate of what happens within the classroom, particularly with differentiated learning rates.

“The learners don’t understand a lot of concepts, the time is not enough.”

“Learners being absent also affects us not to move forward and hard to finish the curriculum.”

“It’s frustrating not finish a lesson because of time, and when you come back, you start from scratch, not where you left off.”

Those who were aware of the coach positively received the coach’s contributions.

“Our relationship is very good. In the first term, they have already come three times at the school and the coach observed all the teachers, gave us good feedback, and taught us about time management.”

“He is encouraging and will correct you. Being observed is very useful.”

Most teachers did not understand the coaching approach. Most argued that they would prefer to receive dates when the coach would be visiting ahead of time and if they were given one month to implement what they were taught before the coach’s visit.

“They should tell us at least one month before the coach comes.”

“The observation should not be frequent because it causes class disturbance.”

“... it should happen when the learners are not in class.”

This seems to indicate a lack of understanding of the coach's role: that the coach is there to assist the teacher in introducing the new concepts and approaches presented in the workshops. Instead, they assume the coach, like the subject adviser, is there to assess and ensure implementation compliance. Teachers saw value in the EGRP and firmly believed that the programme could improve reading outcomes. Some teachers even highlighted that the programme could benefit from being introduced even earlier than Grade 1 to ensure the foundations are built early on.

“This programme is good. In fact, it should be started early in Grade R so that in Grade 1 learners don’t struggle.”

Technology: Educators felt that the tablets were intuitive and simple to use and used them for lesson planning from home.

“The tablets are easy. When we struggle, other teachers in the school can always assist”

Resources: The classrooms indicated access to an extensive range of LTSM, including reading books, learner Rainbow workbooks, commercial posters and flashcards, and homemade posters and flashcards. All the learners in all the classes had their own exercise books, which were used in all lessons. The teachers distributed pencils in their classes whenever needed. The Grade 1 classes were particularly well equipped with writing resources.

There was relatively little use of the Rainbow workbooks in all classes compared to other schools. The focus seems to be on learners’ using their exercise books.

In the lessons, several of the teachers used flashcards that they had made themselves, as well as commercial posters. One Grade 1 teacher used the Big Book to do shared reading. As the class is half its normal size due to COVID-19 restrictions, she was able to do this activity with the whole class grouped around the book.

Key features of the school’s management and leadership

The principal is a middle-aged man who sees himself as a democratic leader. The teachers were more ambivalent in their view of his leadership. This was driven by concern that he has favourites and he manages through them, or as one teacher put it in the focus group discussion to general agreement, there is “no leadership and lack of communications”. There was discomfort over the selection and appointment of one of the department heads in the foundation phase. He generally seems to have reasonably good relations with his teachers, although some teachers complained that their opinions and views are not being heard or heeded. Nevertheless, the school seemed to have a reasonable degree of functionality under his leadership.

The principal claimed to know about the programme, but on probing further, he confused it with a literacy and numeracy programme. This indicates that he is not the school’s primary curriculum leader. This is not surprising given the size of the school and the relatively large number of staff. This phase is already heavily managed with a deputy head and two department heads in the foundation phase. His most important contribution seemed to be taking the foundation phase very seriously as the “foundation of all learning in the school”. This was illustrated by focusing management on that phase and the provisioning appearing to favour that phase with LTSM. In discussion, the principal emphasised that the teachers in the foundation phase are his best teachers and that his problems lie in the Intersens phases, where there is underperformance and lower levels of commitment. To emphasise his point, he mentioned that before COVID-19, the Grade 3 teachers regularly held struggling learners back at the end of the school day to give them an extra hour of focused tuition. Given the high failure rates in the foundation phase to teach learners to read, as noted in the previous section, he blamed the Intersens teachers for squandering the reading skills that the learners arrive with from Grade 3. He could not give the researchers an idea of what proportion of learners in Grade 3 could read fluently, stating, “I have not tested their reading skills”.

The principal's main approach to curriculum management – and the approach he inculcated in his management team – was one of checking paperwork and compliance. This led to accusations that the deputy head for the foundation phase “makes things hard and enforces the rules without engagement.”

“(With the) DH, we are good we give her 10 out of 10, but the Deputy Principal 5 out of 10. They force certain things and don't attend workshops ... There are a lot of favours that are done at school.”

“We are told to use Molteno and ATP - we are pulled from different sides, and this causes friction.”

Support Provided

DH Support: As already stated, the foundation phase, which has 12 classes, has a strong management team of one deputy head and two DHs. The DHs are reported to check the teachers' records of work and also observe their lessons. The EGRP coach also observes their lessons. They seem to particularly value his observations and feel that he affirms them. The teachers also reported that as a result of EGRP they now understand how to do group guided reading (although with some reservations about what to do with the rest of the class while doing reading with one group) and shared reading practice.

The teachers were clear that the relevant subject advisers do not assist them and provide no support. Instead, they report that the subject advisers monitor the curriculum coverage by inspecting the ATP and do not visit their lessons. They also said that they get no support from parents or the SGB. One teacher complained that the SGB members never visit their lessons – this implies a lack of understanding of the role of the SGB in the school.

Professional Learning Communities: While unfamiliar with the term Professional Learning Community or PLC, once the researchers had explained what this was, the teachers asserted that they meet regularly (fortnightly, was mentioned) as grade committees. Each grade of 4 teachers and their DH meet and discuss teaching issues. This meeting is the basis for co-planning as each teacher plans one subject for the whole grade. One of the Grade 1 teachers plans all the HL lessons and another all the EFAL lessons. This practice may create some challenges for the implementation of the project as it means three of the teachers are not using their tablets to plan their HL or EFAL lessons. In these meetings, they also discuss challenges they face in teaching certain topics and often teach specific topics to each other's classes if one of them is confident in that topic, if the class teacher is not. All the teachers assert that they attend and value these meetings and find them practical and valuable. There are no broader Foundation Phase meetings. The teachers were positive about the long-term DH as coach, saying,

“We are okay with our DH and she's well informed, we get support from leadership.”

“We are okay with DH observing our classes.”

“Our DH has experience when submitting things will be easy.”

“Our DH is encouraging, supportive and understanding.”



“We are allowed to discuss and come to a positive response.”

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage and teaching

The teachers report that COVID-19 is having a large impact on their teaching and the learning for the children they teach. This is mainly because of the rotation system, which means that each learner comes one day and is off the next. This ensures that the classes are of the correct size to socially distance in the classroom. Each learner sits at a separate double desk alone. However, this means that the teachers must teach the same class twice, as it is divided into two. A few of the teachers had seen an advantage in this and split their class by reading skill, so that the first group could move forward with reading skills, while they could focus on the other group's reading skills. One teacher commented that this arrangement, with only about 12 learners coming in the second group, meant that she could work more intensively with individual learners in a way she had never been able to. At the same time, COVID-19 has ended another system that had the teachers, particularly of Grade 3 classes, hold back the struggling learners for an hour at the end of the school day to coach them in reading. This was working, except the learners were often very tired during the school day. However, most teachers bemoaned that they only cover about 4 weeks of work in a term. The learner workbooks indicated that they start the next term with six other weeks of the first term still to be taught. This is detrimental to gaining literacy and numeracy skills as these skills are built up through a sequence of activities and content. If one misses half of the sequence, it is hard to build the skills. To disguise this fact, the teachers in the focus group reported candidly that they fake the amount of curriculum they report having covered as the subject advisers insist that the effect of COVID-19 must not impact curriculum coverage. They argued that the district office does not understand the real impact of COVID-19. In addition, the teachers argued that many learners are not attending school at all or are coming in for only one day a week. This makes any form of continuity and reading skills development complicated.

Workbook Analysis

The review of Grade 2 learner exercise books showed poor and irregular coverage of both EFAL and HL content. Only one-fourth of the work covered by other sample schools was covered. Teachers also struggled to locate workbooks and exercise books, resulting in only one of two books being analysed per learner. The books assessed showed very little to no evidence of workbook and HL exercise book correction as well as inconsistent marking. EFAL exercise books were, however, moderated, and corrections were offered. Formal assessments were only seen in HL, while the EFAL assessment books were not available on the day of the visit.

Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	18	18
Average no. of exercise book pages used	14	16
Workbooks up to date	No	No
Workbook correction	No	No
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	No	Somewhat
Exercises marked	Somewhat	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	No	Yes
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	No

Table 3: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	13	10	12	18	15	14	32
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	18					18	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	15		18	15	15	16	34
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	15	21				18	

Community Engagement

All the educators agreed that the relationship with the surrounding community, a township, is weak. There were complaints that parents put pressure on the teachers (in concert with the department) to automatically progress their children from one grade to the next even when they fail. The focus group of teachers also complained that the management of the school deflects parental complaints and “issues” away from itself and “dumps” them on the teachers. The teachers clearly felt this was unfair and exposed them. They felt that it is part of the management’s responsibility to protect them from disgruntled parents. The teachers observed that the learners who can read have the most engaged parents.

Summary of the reading situation in school

Overall while the school emphasises the foundation phase and the principal feels that this phase is the most effective in the school, the reality is that the teaching of reading is relatively weak, indicated by the small numbers of learners who are reading fluently by the middle of Grade 3.

The teachers seemed committed (providing extra lessons and seeing advantages even in the COVID-19 situation). They indicated they are keen to learn the new methodology and implement the phonics approach better. Even the teacher, who is three years off retirement, was indicating how excited she was by the Molteno workshops. In addition, the foundation phase is relatively well-resourced, and the teachers have a good team spirit, so it would seem well-placed to adopt the innovations that EGRP is introducing. They were already beginning to take some ownership of the project in small ways, developing their own flashcards and trying some of the methodologies EGRP is promoting.

To successfully adopt the project, the school's support structures need to be strengthened. There are enough management figures in the foundation phase, and the school prioritises the phase, so with proper guidance, the teachers should get the support they need. However, evidence of favouritism in appointments and resentment towards some in the management team means that selection of the coach from among the deputy head and two DHs may be contested and complex. This will be compounded by the apparent disrespect the teachers showed for one of the DHs and her limited capacity to fulfil that role based on her limitations as a teacher. In other words, there is little evidence of the potential coaches having the potential to lead the other teachers. As a result, there is very little evidence of reading champions within the school.

9.2 School 2 – Friday, 18 June 2021

Summary of key points

- The community is rural, and most learners live with their grandparents, as a result, there is little support for the children at home, and there is no reading culture in the community or school.
- Teachers were sceptical about their Department Head (DH) being their coach due to her age and possible lack of flexibility.
- Teachers are struggling with curriculum coverage, keeping learners engaged, using new methods, managing the timing and structure of their HL and EFAL lessons, and providing time for real learning.
- The school leadership understands the importance of early literacy but is over-reliant on the DH to manage the phase.

Respondents

- One Grade 1 teacher (HL and EFAL)
- One Grade 2 teacher (HL and EFAL)
- One Principal

The DH for Foundation Phase (who also teaches the Grade 3 class) was at a meeting, so was not available for an interview.

School context

The school is a quintile 3 school with 7 teachers, one per grade. The school is relatively small with a total enrolment of 272.

Table 1: School 2 school level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Enrolment	39	31	27	38	97
Classrooms	1	1	1	1	3
Teachers	1	1	1		3
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1	1	1		3
No. of DHs	1			1	1
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 39	1 : 31	1 : 27		

The school is small and is located in a farming community, houses around it are spaced out with large yards or plots. An uneven gravel road serves the community, giving way to very deeply rutted earth tracks leading to the community and the school. Thick bushes surround the relatively small isolated community.

The school's infrastructure was well-built, with brick with asbestos roofing. The main classroom blocks are over 60 years old. The school was also recently repaired, and new ceilings were installed, and the roof was upgraded. Flooring in the school still requires more maintenance. The Grade R classes are in a new brick block that was built in the last 20 years and is fenced with a play area. It has toilets and storage areas, which are well secured.

The school has an administration block with a large staff room, which the Intersen teachers mainly use, and a large administration office with the principal's office. The school has electricity and a complex water reticulation system that relies on a borehole and a network of linked water tanks. There was no sign of a computer in the principal's office, but the administration office had a computer, and there was a non-functional computer in the staff room. The teachers have laptops that they can access for capturing learners' grades and preparing classroom material.

The classrooms were generally well-maintained and clean, with no broken windows. All classrooms had functional chairs and tables. Broken tables were stacked away in a classroom used as a storeroom. However, books were stored poorly stacked in a classroom that is being used as a storeroom with huge amounts of boxed paper that the school had ordered two years earlier, when it grabbed the opportunity. In the Grade 2 classroom, the books were not kept in an orderly fashion.

The team arrived at the school just after 8h00 as per the principal's request and found the school very quiet with the learners having been screened for COVID-19 and in their classrooms. The COVID-19 screening process was run by two young community members hired under contract by the department. These screeners are hired on a temporary basis which keeps being extended. They also assist the school with other tasks as college graduates.

The walkways in front of the class were old and were not safe for children, having large drops, few steps and had been polished so they were very slippery. Apart from the Grade R playground, the school had no play area for the learners.

The school was secured with a fence around the entire school, with a secure gate. There was a second inner fence around the administration block and the Grade 1-7 classes. The toilets and school gardens lay between the two layers of fencing.

The school had multiple flush toilets for children to use. The most recent learner toilets, built in 2019, are individual concrete-built toilets units with separate basins outside each toilet. Teachers use a set of older toilets that are locked. This toilet block includes some which are dirty and in a bad state of repair, and learners still use them.

COVID-19 protocols are observed well with sign-in, sanitisation and temperature check at the gate. Outside each classroom is a mini-water tank (tippy taps) with soap for the learners. Multiple posters around the school remind learners to wash their hands and wear masks. Generally, the learners wore their masks properly both in class and on school grounds. None of the classrooms was particularly print-rich. Grade 1 classes were somewhat better than other grades, but none of the classrooms looked attractive. There were no reading corners in classrooms, and carpets in classrooms were used for decorative purposes.

The chalkboards were old and small. They were mainly made of metal and so, with magnets, doubled as boards for posters and other teaching aids. Writing on these boards is difficult as the chalk needs to be wet and takes about a minute before it emerges from the board.

The general climate within the school was orderly; learners were well behaved even in cases where the teachers were not at class. Learners were mostly back in class between lessons.

Early Grade Teaching and Learning

In class, learners were quiet and appeared to be listening, but there was little or no learner engagement – learners were mostly required to repeat phrases or words said by the teacher in all classes in Grade 1 and Grade 2. Learners were very passive, and teachers offered very little affirmation of learners. In fact, in Grade 1 the teacher was struggling to discipline the learners and like her colleague in Grade 2 was impatient and harsh with learners in the classroom at times.

“The grade two teacher sometimes she has a bit of temper against the learners, and she is not really a patient person, but I think she is getting better”.

The teachers were generally more comfortable and confident teaching Setswana lessons. Learners have very little understanding and knowledge of English. The teachers were not confident in their delivery of the EFAL lessons, and they further acknowledged that they needed further support in their delivery of EFAL lessons and the implementation of reading strategies.

The school does not have an active reading culture – books that could have been in the classrooms were piled untidily in a storeroom, and there were no reading corners or library. In an illustration of the low regard books are held, one of the educators mentioned that the EGRP materials were delivered at the school, but the readers weren't given to the learners or teachers and were stored only to be found weeks later with some pages having matted together. This is surprising in such a small school.

The principal believed that the foundation phase is well run and managed as he said, “subject advisors always say our foundation phase is fine”.

The teachers reported that they like the EGRP approach but are struggling with implementation. The Grade 1 teacher introduced complicated vocabulary in English and refrained from code-switching despite learners being confused. Other strategies for encouraging phonemic awareness were also not utilised in the lesson. She introduced complex words phonetically (phoneme isolation); however, the phonemes were not then blended. The words introduced include ‘favourite’, ‘watermelon’, and ‘pawpaw’.

One teacher said,

“We use the EGRP phonetics approach to teach reading by breaking up sounds. This is a better way of teaching reading; more of my kids can read this year than before.”

The adoption of the EGRP methodology was complicated by a subject adviser, who, after being told by the teachers that they were struggling with aspects of the EGRP approach, suggested they revert to the NECT approach. Such mixed messages create further confusion in the minds of the teachers.

Both teachers, but particularly the Grade 1 teacher, were too fixed on the timing of the lessons and rushed the lessons, although the learners clearly did not understand the content being introduced to them and failed to do more than write the date when writing an exercise before she told them that they had run out of time and needed to move on. Learners will realise quickly that they can avoid doing anything as the teacher does not respect the work she is setting.

The Grade 2 teacher used an EFAL flashcard during a Setswana lesson, which was confusing for learners, as some began to write in English as opposed to Setswana.

Both Grade 1 and Grade 2 lessons ran for over 60 minutes with no apparent break between activities. The teachers tried to stick to the timing of different elements in the lesson as required by the DBE and EGRP but struggled to finish each activity in the requisite time. As a result, their lessons seemed frenetic, and learners were clearly confused by the speed of transitioning from one activity to another with little apparent logic.

“The learners are a bit slow, they always lag behind, and periods always overlap. Time management is a great difficulty.”

“Some of my learners are not ready for Grade 1, and I do not know how to manage such a class.”

The school respects teaching time and was very orderly; children from other classes or teachers had minimal interruption of classes.

Only 16 of 31 children were said to be able to read in Grade 2 in their home language and English. Of the Grade 1 learners, only seventeen can read in Setswana, while eight can read in English. From the observations in class, these are certainly over-estimates. In both grades, it seemed that only a few learners were fluent in either language. The teacher reported that results in term 1 were very poor because of a poor culture of study at home and learners not doing their homework.

The principal reported that the district office expects the school to report weekly on curriculum coverage, which the school cannot do.

“We do not report curriculum coverage when we are told to because we can’t – unless we lie. So, we don’t report.”

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

There is a great sense of frustration at the number of programmes the teachers are expected to introduce in the school. This was worsened by the confusion introduced by their subject advisor on what they should be implementing. When teachers were struggling with implementing EFAL teaching as prescribed by EGRP, the subject advisor advised that they revert to NECT, while the coach insisted they keep to EGRP. Teachers reverted to NECT because the subject advisor is from the district office and has more positional power. However, one teacher, who implied that she disagreed with this decision, stated,

“Molteno (EGRP) would be good if we could use it freely ... (it is) similar to other programmes just has more reading focus and approach to teaching reading is better... before we did not do shared reading ... Molteno (EGRP) Programme makes our lives easier”.

Teachers stressed that they could not work with the structure Molteno gave them. They like the structure of using set time for certain things, but they asserted that the strict time is unrealistic because so much happens in the classroom, and their learners are slow to understand. The teachers were well aware of the programme and Molteno, whereas the principal had a vague idea.

Departmental Head as Coach Model: The teachers were unaware that the DH would be the coach within the school at some point. All the people interviewed perceived the DH as being fully competent and supportive. However, one teacher noted that because the DH is old (at over 60) and has been exposed to far too many programmes in the past, it may be difficult for her to fully understand the requirements and execute this programme as required. As she said,

“The DH model won’t work. The DH has her own workload, books to monitor and learners to look after. She also doesn’t know much about EGRP. She is a bit old and was a part of too many programmes in the past – she will be confused. But she does provide good support.”

However, the principal stated,

“She is a good fit and will be able to coach her colleagues. We are very confident she can do this – amongst her teachers, she can play the mother role. She is always concerned about what is going on, and she goes the extra mile. And always encourages the teachers and has the experience needed. She is Mother Theresa...She is honest and calls a spade a spade...She pushes me to help with what needs to be done in the Foundation Phase”.

Technology: The tablets are only used for lesson planning from home; they are not used in the classroom. Planning notes are taken from the tablet and used in the classroom to guide the lesson.

The teachers complained that the term 2 lesson plans and other material were not loaded on the tablets or made available to teachers on time, which led to using tools from other studies or printing material from other projects, such as NECT. As one teacher said,

“Tablets are not loaded at the right time, we reprinted all the information”.

The teachers thought the tablets were simple to use, none of them struggled with using them. The principal pointed out that the Grade 1 teacher had been the school’s administrator and is competent at using technology. In addition, a new Intersen teacher has an IT background and assists where other teachers are struggling with IT.

The teachers reported that the coach had set up a WhatsApp group with all the teachers from the schools that she coaches. The WhatsApp group is mainly for discussing classroom issues and sharing solutions that other teachers might have implemented. The teachers indicated appreciation of this initiative.

Resources: Learning materials were delivered in the first and second term and were reported to be very useful. However, as already stated, when they first arrived, things were a bit chaotic with not knowing whether materials were delivered, so the materials sat in a storeroom for some weeks unopened.

In the lessons observed posters and flashcards were used. Both teachers used the Big Book for guided reading. The classes were small due to COVID 19 rotational system; the teachers used them with the whole class. However, it was clear that the teachers had not used them before and had only a limited understanding of their use methodology. One teacher asked the observer how she should use the book, as it would not adhere to the board with magnets, and the other teacher read the Big Book with the cover facing the learners instead of sharing the pictures and writing with the learners.

In all classes, the learner Rainbow workbooks were being used and had much more pages used to date than in the first school. This may reflect the failure to get the EGRP materials on time and the pressure from the subject adviser to use the workbooks in line with DBE policy and NECT practice. Exercise books were also being used in all lessons observed.

All the learners in the school had their own workbooks, exercise books and writing material (pencils and colouring pencils).

Key features of the school's management and leadership

The principal viewed himself as a democratic leader and seemed to be very hands-on, monitoring the work done by the senior teachers. However, in cases where the teachers are not in agreement, he makes executive decisions on behalf of the school. He indicated that he is prepared to stick his neck out to get things done and has been on a crusade to improve the roads in the area. He has already ensured that the school has the facilities it requires to be effective. The teachers indicated strong respect for him and his experience.

The principal is not a foundation phase curriculum leader and relies heavily on the foundation phase DH to lead on the curriculum front. He only had a very vague idea of the EGRP Programme. The principal, who is nearing retirement, appears to trust the teachers in the school and allows the foundation phase DH a high level of autonomy regarding curriculum coverage – and protects her and the teachers against district office requirements. As he said,

“The teachers are highly skilled and can assist each other... My staff must think for themselves”.

The principal places high value on the foundation phase teaching and learning, stating,

“The foundation phase needs to be strong. It's like a house that needs to have a strong foundation, and that is how it will be able to stand.”

Seeing that the school is understaffed (two additional teachers are needed), the principal teaches two subjects at grade 7 level.

Support Provided

EGRP Coach Support: The EGRP coach was reported to have visited the school only once and organised a meeting with all the teachers from the school cluster. The Grade 2 teacher said she found it very useful.

Departmental Head Support: Internally, the foundation phase DH monitors the work of her teachers. The principal stressed that she moderates 10% of all learner scripts from tests and ensures that required standards are met.

Professional Learning Communities: She also organises meetings with the phase teachers individually and offers support where needed. More formally, the foundation phase teachers meet with the DH quarterly and when the need arises. These meetings aim to address the needs and performance of the learners, share information about lessons, and encourage each other. As the principal pointed out,

“They want to produce good results in their learners”.

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage and teaching

All classrooms were set up in a Covid 19 compliant manner, with tables set out in rows with one learner per desk. The learners were all wearing masks in the lesson and in the schoolyard.

The principal was particularly proud of the way that the school has managed COVID-19. He is very knowledgeable about COVID-19 and has pushed the district office to access all the resources he needs to make the school safe and compliant. The school has had no COVID-19 cases,

“Our school has never had a COVID-19 case, and we have managed it very well”.

The SMT Committee members planned a learner rotation schedule, and they decided to have classes be split into two based on ability. However, the teachers expressed their inability to keep up with the curriculum due to the learner rotation system, which means that they only see each learner every second day. To make up for this, the teachers have grouped the learners by their learning capabilities

“We group our learners by ability”.

This is a sensible response and should allow the teachers to focus on the slower learners (who were in school on the day of the visit) and give them intensive support. There was no sign that they were achieving this, and the teachers were still struggling.

“With our learners, we cannot keep pace with the curriculum as our learners are slow.”

The school adheres to all COVID-19 protocols, learners wash their hands, and there is screening of all visitors and learners. The school was well-provided with sanitiser liquid, which was being used. However, the principal stated,

“I don’t trust sanitisers; washing hands is the best method. That is why we have those hand washing stations in front of every class”.

The principal was sceptical of the feasibility of the department's decision to have all learners return to school full-time at the end of June 2021. He expressed exasperation that the department insisted on a total return to school with social distancing but could not tell how to do this with small classroom sizes and a limited number of teachers. All will have a more significant workload if their classes are split. This will result in teachers being unable to cover the curriculum. As the principal said,

“COVID-19 has exposed the issues in the school”.

Workbook Analysis

The review of Grade 2 learner exercise books shows regular and appropriate HL and EFAL content coverage. The teacher did not moderate Grade 2 DBE workbooks, and there were also no corrections written by learners either. Exercise books were moderated either by learners or teachers but no evidence of corrections of the incorrect answers was seen in the books. In term 1 there were four formal assessments in HL and EFAL, respectively, but no formal assessments were filed for term 2.

Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	66	41
Average no. of exercise book pages used	29	18
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	No	No
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	No
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	No	No
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Somewhat	Somewhat

Table 3: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	31	24	30	29	30	29	94
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	73	49	60	76	70	66	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	18	20	20	15	19	18	59
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	36	49	35	45	39	41	

Community Engagement

Everyone agreed that as most of the children stay with grandparents, their guardians and parents are not engaged in their children's education or school affairs. As one educator said,

"Parents are not supportive or working with us."

The principal summarised the situation by saying,

"Most of our children are being raised by their grandparents as their parents are working away from the village. The grandparents have no access to technology, so there is no way of knowing how they can help us. The school now communicates with them via SMS."

Not surprisingly, it was also pointed out that the community does not have a strong reading or learning culture. However, it was pointed out that where the community can assist, it does. At the community level, it is supportive, works together with the school and shares resources. The community also plays an important role in ensuring that school resources are protected from potential theft. The school had a break in which IT equipment was lost.

Summary of the reading situation in school

The teaching of reading is very weak, and the teachers are not confident teaching either HL and EFAL, but particularly EFAL. The teachers prefer teaching literacy using the phonics approach EGRP is promoting; however, the execution is very weak.

The teachers have received EGRP training and materials but have shown that they are not using key elements of it regularly or comfortably. This was particularly apparent in both teachers' struggle in using the big book.

Support structures exist but could be strengthened. There were mixed emotions about the news that the DH would become their coach. The teachers welcomed her having this role at a personal level but were sceptical that she could master the elements of the EGRP. On the positive side the principal recognises the importance of early grade reading and has allocated resources to the early grade.

There was very little evidence of reading champions within the school amongst the teachers, although the researchers did not meet the DH as she was out of school.

9.3 School 3 – Monday, 21 June 2021

Summary of key points

- The school uses EGRP material alongside other information from other programmes.
- They question the interventions taken up by their school critically and adopt only elements they feel are beneficial to their classroom practice and their learners' development.
- Great sense of comradery between staff members and high levels of trust exist both amongst the teachers and the school management.
- Older teachers are perceived to be more proactive and passionate about their work
- The school cultivates a strong reading culture and ensures that they have resources to enable this culture (i.e. set up a library, every class has books stacked up for learners to read)
- Although the relationship with the community is not centred directly on learning, there is generally a good relationship where assistance is offered from both ends

Respondents

- One Principal
- One Grade 1 educator (Setswana and EFAL)
- One Grade 2 educator (Setswana and EFAL)
- Grade 3 teacher (assumes some DH roles)

School context

The school is a small quintile 3 school with only seven educators, of which three are in the foundation phase. The school does not enrol any learners with disabilities. The school management comprises the principal, one head of department in the intermediate phase who is appointed by the district, and one teacher who acts as a head of the department in the foundation phase but is not officially appointed.

The school is located on the periphery of a deeply rural community which mostly senior citizens as presidents. The municipality minimally services the community - roads leading up to the school are uneven gravel roads, and most source their water from boreholes. However, there is a reliable supply of electricity throughout the village. The school itself is built with brick and asbestos roofing, has no mobile classrooms, and has numerous water tanks to ensure a continuous water supply. School grounds appeared to be very well-maintained (swept pavements, no litter or broken windows), although a bit of bush started to grow behind the classrooms. The school has an officially appointed general assistant who is responsible for school maintenance.

The school is entirely fenced with barbed wire and has a single-entry point. All school walls are built of bricks, and the roofing is asbestos. The school does not have a designated playground or sports field for learners, but the grade R learners have their own play area with jungle gyms, slides and swings (this play area was not utilised on the day of the visit. All classroom tables and chairs are adequately cared for and functional; however, the foundation phase girls' toilets had a water leakage problem on the day of the visit resulting in the boys' toilets being used for both girls and boys.

Table 1: School 3 school level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Enrolment	17	20	21	20	58
Classrooms	1	1	1	1	3
Teachers	1	1	1		3
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1	1	1		3
No. of DHs	0			1	0
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 17	1 : 20	1 : 21		

Although not well resourced, the school has a library and encourages learners to read from home. And most classes have a designated table with reading books.

The COVID-19 protocol at the school was taken very seriously. Learners, teachers and visitors were screened before entering and exiting the school, and all classrooms and the admin block had handwashing stations outside each door. The admin block holds the admin office, principal's office, sick room, staff room, staff kitchen, and a waiting area for parents and other visitors.

Early grade teaching and learning

All the foundation phase teachers are elderly women who are close to retirement age; all are passionate about teaching and building a good foundation for learners in their community. Although also elderly, the Grade 2 educator had the least amount of teaching experience (5 years) compared to her foundation phase colleagues with over 30 years of experience. Before taking up teaching as a profession, she had worked with the department of health for many years but was always passionate about teaching, so she went on to pursue a teaching qualification.

"Teaching is my calling... I want my learners to be able to read for themselves"

The teachers at the school, including the principal, spoke passionately about early grade teaching and learning. An example of this can be seen in what the Grade 1 teacher said when asked about her teaching background,

"I started teaching in 1989, teaching grade 4 learners, but in 1991 I was moved to a different school where I started teaching in the foundation phase, teaching Grade 1, I fell in love with Grade 1 then and I have been teaching Grade 1 until this day."

Despite the foundation phase teachers' advanced ages, all mentioned that they had no difficulties using the tablets and mostly use them for lesson planning. The Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers use the EGRP tablets during class and refer to them while preparing their lessons at home. All foundation phase teachers highlighted that they had received the EGRP LTSM, but the Grade 1 and 2 teachers experienced difficulties accessing Term 2 content on the tablet. Only on the day of the visit (21 June 2021), the coach was to receive the tablets for re-loading content. However, the head of the department's tablet contained Grade 1 term 2 content which she printed out for the grade one teacher and she used during her lessons. Grade 2 content printouts were received from a neighbouring school. The teachers were not too frustrated with the situation with their tablets as they were able to source content elsewhere,

"Tablets were not up-to-date with term 2 information. We received hardcopies from other schools."

All classes observed were appropriate for the grades. The teachers followed the EGRP planner for both Setswana and EFAL despite mentioning that they supplement the EGRP material with material from other programmes. The Grade 1 teacher deviated slightly from the lesson plan due to her inability to locate the relevant Big Book for the lesson; she decided to demonstrate how that lesson would have gone by using a different Big Book (Washing Hands). The teacher explained that she has had to adapt her shared reading protocols for her own safety and that of the learner; instead of having the learners sit in a circle, she has them stay at their seats to maintain social distancing and walks around with the Big Book facing them to ensure that they can all see the images and engage with the story she is reading them. The teacher was asked to say a bit about her learning-aid heavy approach to teaching young learners, to which she responded,

"...if you teach kids with what they can see, they tend to grasp faster and associate the picture with the word."

All the learners seemed very relaxed and comfortable with their teacher. They appeared to enjoy the teacher's singing and dancing activities before each lesson and the games/ competitions introduced during the lesson. Both Grade 1 and 2 teachers worked with the learners to distribute the needed classroom materials while the rest continued to listen to the teacher. Teachers ensured that learners sanitised their hands before touching shared tools and had their masks on properly for classroom activities that required learners to share writing materials or pointing sticks.

In Grade 1, the teacher felt that only half the class could read. Grade 2 teacher felt that no learners could read properly in her class; however, fifteen of twenty could read single words. Twelve out of twenty-one grade 3 learners can read, but all can read standalone words. Commenting on their learners' reading abilities, the DH said,

"In grade 3 my entire class can read words because they understand phonics. I am also very satisfied with how the other teachers are teaching reading, and the grade two teacher is also learning very quickly. The foundation phase teachers are older but are not lazy, and they are more energetic than the younger ones."

While the Grade 1 teacher said,

"eight of sixteen learners in my class can read. The children differ: some are good with numbers and some with words. Those who are good in numbers are bad in home language. Only one is failing he's really struggling his concentration is low...I prefer the phonics approach because it works for me, and the learners can read using that."

And the Grade 2 teacher admitted,

"For the first time this year I'm struggling with the class, I have to start from the beginning and teach them how to read."

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

Teachers generally understood the programme's main objectives, the focus on early grade reading, and how the coaching model is intended to work. They were keen to have a coach sit through their class and offer guidance on improving lessons. The Grade 1 and 2 teachers felt they were not being observed as frequently as they would prefer. The teachers preferred the EGRP lesson planners and perceived them as a tool that made their work easier, stating that:

"Molteno (EGRP) is bringing skills to teachers so they can give to learners."

"We have no challenges at the moment Molteno tells you what to do."

"Molteno (EGRP) lesson plans were made to make our jobs easy"

All of the foundation phase teachers criticised the programme on the limited focus on grammar – not all grade-appropriate language rules are introduced when they should be. The teachers referred to other programmes,

"Grammar on EGRP is a bit lacking it is based more on oral, listening, speaking and reading. There's a shortage of writing and grammar, so we supplement with other materials to make up for this. For example, in my class today, you saw that we were doing the sound 'g' this sound is not on EGRP so I infused the Alkanino Game that Molteno taught us"

"I use many references, especially NECT. It is much broader. English sounds are also broader there, so I infuse DBE and NECT with EGRP."

"EGRP emphasises reading. In my opinion, it does not have much grammar. ATP has more grammar information and helps teachers cover work for the term better. The policy is very clear on what each child should know, and EGRP doesn't fulfil this in some cases"

"I don't think drawing will do us good in Term 3. They need to compose a sentence and know what sentence structure looks like. I still believe in the 20 words threshold. The 20 words are my plan. By the end of the year the children will be able to write sentences with those 20 words."

On average, the teachers have attended three EGRP training sessions. However, there appears to be gaps in knowledge and know-how, particularly with the less experienced teacher, whereas the other teachers leverage their experience from other programmes. The teacher was also very aware of the areas where she struggles most (shared and group-guided reading), and seeks support from her colleagues within the school but would also appreciate some support from a coach on these elements.

Department Head as Coach Model: Educators and the principal were unaware of the DH model that would come into effect later in the programme. The DH had a vague idea of the coaching model and knew she would be expected to take on the coaching role with some support. All respondents strongly felt this would not work in their school because the DH is not incentivised for the role and has a heavy workload. However, there is no doubt that there is a trusting relationship between the acting DH and her colleagues, and she also plays a supportive role. Within the foundation phase she would be the ideal EGRP champion along with the other experienced teachers in the foundation phase.



"She (DH) will manage being a coach but I don't know moving forward will be a lot and she will need to go an extra mile."

"The DH has a lot of work, and she's a teacher too; without incentives, the school can only encourage her with words. She's very much trying."

"I am a DH who is not in a DH rank. I'm just helping the Intersen DH, he knows nothing about the foundation phase. I don't want to coach because the grade 3s have too much work to do - even attending to teachers to help them with IQMS is a struggle ... we, as the foundation phase teachers, really work well together and help each other. We all take ownership of our work. Now when all the work is directed at me, it won't work."

"She will have to do extra work outside school hours."

Resources: All the learners in the school had their own workbooks, exercise books and writing material (pencils and colouring pencils). The teachers received their term 2 materials which were used appropriately in lessons; however, tablets were not loaded with term 2 content.

"Children learn by seeing and touching phonic materials and flashcards were very useful. We can do with more flashcards and phonics materials at the moment we still create some of those ourselves. But the ones from Molteno are also good"

"I make my own materials and flashcards."

Technology: As highlighted above, all the teachers mentioned that they used the tablets during their lessons in term 1 but were obligated to use paper-based lesson planners when their tablets were not loaded with term 2 content.

"In our foundation phase, we have slightly older teachers, who are not computer literate. But they were shown how to use the tablets and are not struggling."

"In term 1, I used the tablet in my class but in term 2, other schools sent us the content on WhatsApp because our tablets were not loaded."

Key features of school's management and learning

The principal viewed herself as a democratic leader and this was corroborated by her colleagues, stipulating that she is very inclusive and welcoming to ideas and cares for everyone as though they were her own sisters or children. Speaking of the willingness to take up new programmes, one of the teachers mentioned the SMT views all programmes that are introduced to the school from a developmental lens, so learners stand to benefit from this programme, and if so, the management team would certainly implement the programme,

"It is very easy to introduce new programmes to our school, especially if they are beneficial to our learners and their teachers. However, if this is not the case our school will not take the programme you are introducing"



The principal herself reinforced this and indicated the filtering approach she uses,

“Any innovations that comes from outside of the school I will need to check first if it is aligned with the policy, is it beneficial to the school, does it improve the quality of our teaching... is it positive - does it also bring positive development in our school.”

The principal is very engaged in what happens in the school and tries cultivating a school reading culture. She is not a curriculum leader for the foundation phase; her focus is mainly on the senior phase. It came across strongly that there are high levels of trust and collaboration between all the educators within the school. The principal trusts the acting DH to deliver curriculum coverage and classroom practice alongside the other educators as they have done in the past.

“The head of department monitors and moderates the scope of the work and tasks; she also makes sure that policy is put in place and implemented in the foundation phase.”

Support provided

Professional Learning Community: Due to COVID-19, phase meetings have been discontinued as the school premises are deep cleaned after each day to ensure that all surfaces are disinfected. But the teachers still work very closely together and collaborate actively to ensure that they are all delivering to the prescribed standard. There is no friction between the teachers but a great sense of comradery propels their working relationship.

Department Head Support: The acting DH's role is mainly linked to the IQMS and assessments. She also ensures that she does internal monitoring of teachers, where she performs classroom visits to observe lessons while checking books and files.

EGRP Coach Support: There was a clear understanding of who the EGRP coach is and who the subject advisor is. However, the roles of the two were not clearly delineated. There were also comments made about the subject advisor encouraging the integration of EGRP with other programmes. As the DH stated,

“Our specialist gives us a format on what to do or not to do. They know about the plans. I really encourage using the DBE because that is where assessment tasks come from. If the learners have gone through the DBE, they will not struggle with the department assessments. The DBE is aligned perfectly with the ATP. We told the specialist that we can't always be speaking, the children also need to know paragraphs and sentences.”

The teachers made the following comments,

“Our coach came once to our school. She didn't do much; she just wanted to observe and go through materials with us. We later found out that she had resigned... then we met our new coach in term 2. She said she will come back to workshop us and also visit our classes and observe - we are still waiting for that.”

“Our subject advisor frequently visits us. And the subject advisor encourages us to mix EGRP with other materials because Molteno is good on phonics but weak on writing, so we use CAPS for writing. That is very helpful for me.”

“EGRP, SBA... you mix them! Some concepts are foreign to our students, like swimming pools, but they know trees and animals, so you mix to find things that you know make sense to your learner.”

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage

The foundation phase teaching was largely unaffected by COVID-19 due to the small enrolment number at the school. The Grade 1 and 2 classes were big enough for the teachers to maintain social distancing within the classroom. However, for the rest of the school, the management of COVID-19 was problematic. The teachers explained that some of the classes had to be moved to bigger rooms for social distancing purposes, particularly the grade seven class moved to the school hall, and the grade three class moved to the computer lab. The higher enrolment in the intermediate and senior phase required that rotations be implemented on which learners come to school.

Curriculum and ATP coverage is mainly on track in the foundation phase due to the teaching programme not being disrupted by COVID-19.

“In terms of curriculum coverage, we are right on track.”

The Grade 2 teacher stated that in,

“Term 1 and term 2 I fell behind with the curriculum, and no one took over my classes. They controlled the learners but did not teach.”

The foundation phase teachers explained that there is a shortage of teachers in the intermediate and senior phases, and because of the difficulties the teachers have with covering their curricula, they are required to assist with ensuring that classes without a teacher are kept orderly, and disciplined during normal schooling time.

“COVID-19 management has been problematic for the school, we had to learn and adapt quickly.”

“We managed, and we never had a case at the school because of the cleaning, and it is done thoroughly. Protocol is observed, monitoring and screening is done. There is also limited meetings and cleaning every area that that people use.”

Workbook Analysis



The review of Grade 2 learner exercise books shows regular and appropriate HL and EFAL content coverage. Books were moderated by teachers with corrections written out either by a learner or the teacher.

Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	88	62
Average no. of exercise book pages used	33	38
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes	Yes
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes

Table 3: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	34	33	34	33	31	33	121
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	79	95	84	94	87	88	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	39	39	38	36	38	38	100
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	60	63	57	73	55	62	

Community Engagement

Generally, the school receives limited support from parents and guardians and does not expect learners to learn from home. The teachers indicated that the community is made up mainly of elderly citizens who are illiterate, and the unemployment rates within the community are also very high.

Despite older community members being unable to assist with reading and homework, they appear to be active within the school in other ways. An example was made of community members who volunteer at the school - over the past few years, older community members have been helping around the school. These volunteers, however, did not qualify for remuneration in the previous year when COVID-19 relief funds were released, allowing schools to pay some people for their services. The school was then forced to hire younger people. However, when the remuneration was stopped, these young people left

the school again, and the volunteers returned. When the school bought new water tanks, one was donated to the village's tribal council.

"Our learners are children of people who aren't working, and this is usually grandparents. I really do not like depending on parents or guardians, so when I do give homework, it is based on what they have learned in class. Parents don't read so they wouldn't understand the homework... the children also love playing too much, and the parents don't encourage them to do homework. So, when I'm walking through the community, parents will always tell me about their children who don't want to write their homework. Nowadays, parents also struggle to attend parent's meetings because of funerals in the community."

"The parents try to help the kids at home with writing and reading but unfortunately sometimes help does not come in the right manner – parents will let the older siblings to assist the younger ones and the older ones will just write the homework."

"I organised a classroom visit last term and seven out of 16 parents came to check learner's books. These were all grandparents. what I do is to make sure that my homework is based on classwork."

Summary of the reading situation in school

There is enough evidence that both the teachers and the headteacher take reading very seriously and try to cultivate a reading culture within the school. The school has also set up a library for learners who want to read from home. Although the classes did not have perfect reading corners, they had tables with readers that the learners could freely access.

The parents/ guardians of learners do not seem to play a significant role in their children's education.



9.4 School 4 – Tuesday, 22 June 2021

Summary of key points

- The school has only has one appointed department head, who is in the foundation phase head due to the school placing a value on foundation phase learning
- Only the Grade 2 class was observed, seeing that the Grade 1 teacher was attending a department workshop on the day of the visit
- There was evidence of the use of EGRP material in the classrooms visited as well as during the lessons observed
- There was an issue with loading content on teachers' tablets resulting in all 3 teachers having to share one device and the Grade 2 teacher using her NECT lesson plans for this cohort of learners for Term 2
- Approximately two-fifths of the foundation phase learners are believed to be able to read single words using the phonics approach in EFAL, while three fifths can read single words in HL

Respondents

The following individuals were interviewed:

- One Grade 2 educator
- One Department Head (grade 3 educator)
-

The principal was not at the school on the day of the visit due to a family emergency but was available on the phone and played a pivotal role in helping the team find its way to the school.

Lessons observed include:

- Grade 3 HL lesson
- Grade 2 HL lesson
- Grade 3 EFAL lesson
- Grade 2 EFAL lesson

** Note that the Grade 1 teacher was attending a department workshop on the day of the school visit*

School context

The school is a small quintile 2 school with only six educators, of which three are in the foundation phase. The school management comprises one principal, one district appointed head of department in the foundation phase who teaches grade 3, one Grade 1 teacher and one Grade 2 teacher.

Table 1: School 4 school level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Enrolment	17	35	20	24	72
Classrooms	1	1	1	1	3
Teachers	1	1	1	2	3
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	1	1	1		3
No. of DHs	1			0	1
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 17	1 : 35	1 : 20		

The school is located in a deeply rural community. The area being mountainous is very difficult to reach because of the poor gravel road condition, and navigation systems could not locate better roads as alternatives. The roads leading to the school are rocky, the main bridge spanning the river between two villages had collapsed, and cars had to drive through the river to get to the school's village. The primary water source at the school is a borehole, but the local municipality services two taps. The schools' grounds are adequately maintained (no litter or broken windows), but a number of hazardous walkways are found (i.e. entrance to Grade 1 class, quick fix for water puddles that build up at the door was setting a loose pavement by the door).

The school is entirely fenced with barbed wire and has a single-entry point. The main school building is bricks and has asbestos roofing, and there are three temporary classrooms, two of which are used for the foundation phase. The school does not have a designated administration block, staff room or sickbay. The principal's office is at the back of the Grade R class and also doubles as the administrator's office, where all the printers are kept. As teachers and other school staff navigate to the printers, the grade R class is disrupted.

Although there is a play area with jungle gyms, slides and swings, the equipment is not well maintained and cannot be used by young learners without teacher supervision. The school also has an abandoned netball court, which has now overgrown into a bush. There is no designated sport/ play area for the other learners, but they are encouraged not to play on the pavement due to the higher likelihood of hurting themselves while playing there.

All tables and chairs in classrooms are adequately cared for and functional. The toilets at the school are flush toilets for both teachers and learners which are connected to the school's borehole system. However, it was explained that there are issues with the water system connected to the toilets, resulting in leaking. As a result, the water supply was cut on the day of the visit and 20-litre buckets were placed outside each door for users to pour down water after using the toilet.

The COVID-19 protocols are followed, and buckets of handwashing water (with no soap) are placed at every door. Learners, teachers and visitors were screened and sanitised before entering the school.

Early grade teaching and learning

All the foundation phase teachers are elderly women who are close to retirement age; all are passionate about teaching and building a good foundation for learners. They were eager for their classes to be observed and sought feedback following the lessons. Seeing that the Grade 1 educator was not at the school, the grade 3 educator (also the foundation phase DH) requested that her class be observed informally alongside the Grade 2 teacher's class.

The Grade 2 and 3 teacher use the EGRP tablet as a lesson planning tool which they supplement using their knowledge gained from other programmes. The Grade 2 teacher found the tablet useful and easy to refer to while in class. She highlighted that they had received LTSM for term 1 and term 2 and have seen improvements in their learners.

Both teachers interviewed expressed that the introduction of letter sounds makes it easy for the learners to follow. The introduction was viewed as a means of introducing the concepts that the learners would have to grapple with during the lesson, and teaching aids made it easier for learners to follow. For

example, the grade 3 teacher taught the sound “tsw” and had the learners sing the wedding folk song “Tswang. Tswang. Tswang”. This primed the learners to the sound that would be explored and made it easier for them to identify words using the same blend (i.e. tswala, setswalo, tswang).

The teachers encouraged engagement from learners in both the grade 3 and 2 classes (beyond the teacher asking one word/ phrase answers), and there was some level of interaction and engagement between learners, especially when discussing what they saw on posters. The foundation phase teachers emphasise the phonics approach to teaching reading as they have seen that this yields the best outcomes. The Grade 2 teacher’s classroom was very print-rich compared to the Grade 1, and she believed this creates an encouraging learning environment as learners are constantly exposed to words they learned before, increasing their vocabulary. However, in the Grade 1 class, the teaching aids on the walls demonstrated an understanding of how the material ought to be used and was also at a level that learners could easily see (even when seated).

The Grade 2 class does not use EGRP material for Term 1 because they did not receive training on using it but had started in the second term. EGRP lesson plans were found to be useful for lesson planning purposes, where the teachers merely have to adapt the provided plan to suit their own teaching style and their group of learners. All the teachers use the phonics approach to teaching learners to read; they also use group guided reading and shared reading to strengthen reading capabilities. Those interviewed felt strongly that the EGRP programme would do well at improving learner reading outcomes due to the progress they are already seeing despite the short lead-time. The grade 3 teacher said,

“I have no doubt that the EGRP programme will be a success. It helps us a lot! I remember calling in the principal to see how well my learners are now doing.”

About 4 hours a week are allocated to EFAL teaching at the school and 7 hours a week to HL teaching. The classes observed were appropriate for the Grade 2 learners, and the teacher made use of a lesson planner and followed it. The teachers in the school do not have issues with how EGRP structures the lesson (timing).

“The EGRP structure and timing of lessons work very well. It helps teachers cover all the items they need to cover in a lesson. We are doing it okay right now, we just need to master it”

The analysis of Grade 2 books showed clear evidence of teachers monitoring learners work and providing corrections

“EGRP has really helped me and the learners really enjoy shared reading.”

Only two-fifths of the learners in the foundation phase are perceived as being able to read in EFAL and three-fifths in HL.

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL	No. of learners who can read in HL
1	17	7	12
2	35	14	18
3	20	10	15

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

The teachers interviewed clearly understood the EGRP requirements, and their lessons followed the structured lesson plans they had prepared for the day. The learning and teaching materials used were also relevant to the lessons offered. Both teachers explained that the entire foundation phase uses the phonics approach to teach learners how to read and do group-guided reading and shared reading in the classes while also building vocabulary by using discussion posters and flashcards. The teachers explained that even though they know that the EGRP is aligned with the ATP and CAPS, it is important for them to check both these policies themselves to ensure that they cover what the department expects and align with the programme of assessment and allocation of marks. The DH and Grade 2 teacher expressed appreciation for the EGRP as a programme as well as the proposed lesson structure,

“The EGRP structure and timing of lessons works very well. It helps teachers cover all the items they need to cover in a lesson. We are doing it okay right now, we just need to master it.”

“EGRP is more advanced than NECT. There is more materials, training, and support.”

“EGRP develops the reading skill of learners. This is so important because it builds the learner from all angles....and teachers no longer stress or worry over how to prepare their lessons. The learners have books and EGRP tells you exactly what to do in the classroom

“Molteno has integrated a method where learners can read and count in the same lesson... This programme helps learners by coordinating and integrating different concept in one lesson like vocabulary, numbers, colours and shape.”

Teachers expressed an appreciation of the training provided to them by Molteno and have been able to implement what they have learned during training in the classroom with the help of their EGRP coach, and has significantly assisted in planning their lessons.

Department Head as Coach Model: Teachers believed that the Department Head was capable of executing the tasks currently being implemented by the coach with guidance from the coach. However, the time constraints that the Department Head is already faced with came up as the main limitation to the successful implementation of the DH Model in the coming years. The DH mentioned that she already conducts classroom visits, monitors the teachers' books, and supports the teachers, which is aligned with the coach's role. There are already very high levels of trust and collaboration between the teachers in the foundation phase, which will significantly aid the successful implementation of the DH model within the school.

“I would love to coach but time is my main constraint. I have the same time as other teachers and also have to moderate them and support with IQMS. I have too many duties already that I

have to carry as the DH. If the time was there, I would be comfortable. I already visit the teachers' classes already, but I don't think I would cope with the workload."

Resources: All the learners in the school had their own workbooks, exercise books and writing material (pencils and colouring pencils). The term 2 EGRP LTSM was also available in the classrooms.

Technology: Tablets are used for lesson planning and make preparing for lessons less burdensome for the teachers. Only one of the three teachers' tablets were loaded for term 2. Due to this, all of them have been sharing a single tablet while the content on the others is being loaded, resulting in some teachers not having enough time to utilise the EGRP material and reverting to using NECT lesson planning tools.

Overall, the tablets are perceived to be very accessible even to those who are not technologically savvy.

"The tablets are very user friendly. I am not technologically inclined, but I am able to use it with ease. The other teachers' tablets are being loaded, so they use mine and write out what is on the tablet by hand. We regard the tablets the lesson plan – I prepare my own lessons and infuse EGRP."

Key features of the school's management and leadership

The principal's leadership style was described as being democratic, with the key characteristic defining his decisions being seeking to see the school progress. Although the principal was unavailable, the teachers' responses about the principal's leadership and management style showed that the principal gave autonomy to those who have greater expertise in foundation phase learning while he focused more on the Intersen phase.

Based on the DH and Grade 2 teacher interviews, it is apparent that the relationship between the DH and the teachers is a trusting one where clear efforts for improvement are made. From the interviews conducted, no obvious EGRP champion could be identified besides the DH; however, the DH intends to retire in the coming year.

Support provided

Professional Learning Community: The foundation phase teachers meet regularly to ensure that they have all the material they need in the classroom and share lessons they have learned from their peers from other schools. The school is not part of any external PLCs with other teachers from other schools.

Department Head Support: The DH conducts routine classroom visits where she supports and guides teachers and also monitors the work they have been doing. The school principal also conducts his own routine visits where he checks assessment plans and attends the phase meetings to understand the plans of the foundation phase.

EGRP Coach Support: The EGRP Literacy Coach had visited the school three times. Unfortunately, the school had no official record of how the coach had supported them beyond helping with shared reading and group guided reading and advising on how to approach learner rotations. However, it was evident that the teachers have a very open and trusting relationship with the coach, where teachers feel free to reach out to the coach for any form of support, even virtually. The teachers are also very comfortable



with having the coach observe their classes as this becomes an opportunity for them to improve their classroom practice.

“Our coach has made three visits to the school this year. The first visit was to see the school – the other two were on consecutive days where she was in classroom, guiding on lesson preparation and offering support”

“Our relationship with our EGRP coach is excellent. We also talk on WhatsApp. She is so helpful even if you send a ‘Please Call Me’ she responds.”

“We are very comfortable with the coaching; I actually want more classroom visits and more feedback.”

“When we didn’t have our material delivered, we engaged the subject advisor”

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage

Given that this is a very small school, the Grade 1 and 3 curriculum coverage was not affected by COVID-19. Only the Grade 2 class was affected; however, the effects were not as severe as they could have been owing to the EGRP coach encouraging that they group learners according to their reading aptitude for rotational classes.

“Our school is really trying to manage COVID-19 well, our classes are not really affected. Only Grade 2 is affected in terms of the curriculum. But COVID-19 is a real risk, some of our teachers are old. The learners have masks, but they sometimes forget them, and there aren’t any extras. We sanitise surfaces, so we feel safe as we are teaching.”

“Molteno helps by giving us strategies for ensuring that learners understand concepts so that by the fourth term learners can read and write.”

Workbook Analysis

The review of Grade 2 learner exercise books shows regular and appropriate HL and EFAL content coverage, and Learner books showed evidence of moderation and correction. Learners were also regularly assessed in HL, but the teacher could not provide any evidence of formal EFAL assessments. EFAL exercise books had regular quizzes which learners take on Fridays; these were moderated and corrected.



Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	63	59
Average no. of exercise book pages used	25	26
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Yes	Yes
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Somewhat
Exercises marked	Yes	Yes
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes	Yes
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	No

Table 3: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	20	22	29	27	26	25	88
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	85	46	69	70	44	63	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	26	24	26	26	29	26	85
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	53	66	51	51	74	59	

Community Engagement

In the past, the school used to work very closely with other schools. However, now with the collapse of the bridge, it has become very difficult to navigate from the area where the school is located to any other village since there is only one main route leading into the village.

The relationship with the community is strained because most believe in remuneration before handling anything on behalf of the school or at the school. All the food handlers and general administrators are community members who are very helpful and diligently do their work. The department has appointed two COVID-19 screeners; due to staff constraints, one of the screeners has been assisting with the Grade R class.

Most parents in the community are not working and are predominantly reliant on grants, working as EPWP workers or farmers. Most parents leave for work on lorries and buses, and when these return, the school programme gets disrupted with learners getting out of hand and too excited to see their parents.

Very few parents respond positively to homework assigned by teachers, and most tend to have elder siblings write the homework of younger ones.

Summary of the reading situation in school

The school has a relatively small enrolment and only has six educators. The school emphasises foundation phase learning and teaching, with the only officially appointed department head being the foundation phase department head. The school principal is perceived as a progressive and involved leader even in the foundation phase. The teachers at the school are elderly women who have been involved in other programmes previously and are very confident teaching both EFAL and HL. During the lessons observed, teachers used the EGRP LTSM and followed their lesson plans and introduced the sounds to be explored in the lesson through songs and other activities.

The school has a functional and trusting relationship with the EGRP literacy coach, who has helped them resolve classroom management issues. The teacher moderates Grade 2 books and there is evidence of completion of the term 1 and 2 work in the DBE workbook.

The foundation phase teachers use the phonics approach to teaching reading at the school and also do shared reading and group guided reading as well as poster discussions to build the vocabulary of learners both in EFAL and HL. The tablets are used mainly for lesson planning purposes, but teachers do not use them in the classroom and prefer to use them as resources for preparing their own lessons. There were difficulties with the tablets being loaded for the school, resulting in the Grade 2 educator using NECT lesson plans instead of those provided by EGRP.

9.5 School 5 – Thursday, 24 June 2021

Summary of key points

- The school makes a considerable effort to make the outside of the school look good; however, the classrooms and the school library are very cluttered and disorganised due to the lack of space.
- Evidence was seen in all the foundation phase classes of the use of EGRP materials. The teachers observed implemented their lessons as required and also occupied learners during shared reading with tasks.
- Teachers made use of EGRP LTSM and also created their own materials to supplement and aid their lessons.
- The educators observed were very confident in how they ran their lessons and followed their lesson preparation.

Respondents

- Principal
- One Grade 1 educator
- One Grade 2 educator

The school visit was conducted when the local clinic was conducting health checks on grade R and Grade 1 learners, and half of the foundation phase teachers were getting vaccinated.

School context

The school is situated in a deep rural community, and the gravel roads leading to the school are not well maintained. However, the school itself is well maintained and there are clear efforts at keeping the school clean and aesthetically pleasing. The school is a quintile 2 school with a relatively high enrolment and a limited number of classrooms. The school's water supply is derived predominantly from its borehole system, which is functional. All the buildings in the school also have a reliable supply of electricity.

The school does not have a designated administration block. The administration block is a single office, which doubles as a staff room and office for administrators, a portion of one fifth of the office is divided off using a brick wall to create an office for the principal, while a secured storage facility takes up another fifth.

The school has a functional library that lends books to learners to take home or read at school. However, due to space limitations, the library also serves as the staff room and storage room for learning material and printing paper.

The school has had different sponsors providing sporting equipment and funding the building of sports infrastructure (i.e. a netball court) and has a large amount of land allocated to the learners' playing field; on this field, there are goalpost frames with no nets, which the learners use to play football during the school day. There is also a designated play area for grade R learners.

The school does not have a landline or fixed internet connection. They had bought a cell phone for school-related communications and the hot spotting of computers and devices for internet access; however that device was stolen some weeks before the visit and has not been replaced.

The school was generally organised with learners being in class when required; however, the schedule was significantly disrupted for classroom observation purposes, mainly because the Grade 1 teacher felt lightheaded after having her COVID-19 jab the previous day.

The teachers at the school were very enthusiastic about their work and seemed to enjoy working with young learners. The Grade 1 teacher, in particular, began her career as an administrative assistant at a different primary school, where she realised that she was passionate about working with children and went on to pursue her National Professional Diploma in Education. As she said,

"I've always known that I had an interest in teaching kids. I really have the stamina for working with young people."

"Learners really require a lot of patience. If you don't have that patience, you won't cope in the classroom."

Table 1: School 5 school level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Enrolment	105	84	81	106	270
Classrooms	2	2	2	1	6
Teachers	2	2	2	6	6
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	Not sure	Not sure	Not sure		0
No. of DHs	0			0	0
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 53	1 : 42	1 : 41		

Early grade teaching and learning

The foundation phase teachers interviewed were aware of the objectives of the EGRP programme and implemented the programme well, as shown by the arrangement and use of flashcards in the classrooms and the implementation of shared reading. Some learning materials on the walls (in particular the discussion posters) were from the previous term. The teacher explained that she was still using those posters because she did not cover all the term 1 work in the term.

The teachers interviewed explained that they struggle with teaching learners EFAL because they just do not understand. During the classes observed the teachers code-switched to ensure that learners understood; however, when the teacher asked questions, learners would continue to use Setswana terms in their responses. As the teachers explained,

"We try to teach the children English but it's very difficult. We use Setswana to explain."

"We are doing the sounds now before we used to do 21 words, I want to go back and use that again so that learners can start reading simple sentences."

"I like demonstrating so that learners understand. I act out verbs and even get things from the kitchen in order to demonstrate like potatoes and apples so that they can see it and the lesson is more tangible."

The teachers were competent and confident enough to adapt and use the EGRP alongside previous materials and approaches. As they explained,

"We asked the trainer if we should stick to NECT or not, but we were told that NECT is the main one and we should mix the two. The stories we use are mostly from EGRP, but some things are similar - both have sight words, flashcards and phonic friezes".

"I am mixing DBE with EGRP at the moment for home language. I really want my kids to understand, so I use what I think will help them."

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

Although teachers acknowledged the programme's effectiveness, they stated that it was very difficult for them to attend training sessions on the holiday as this was time they reserved for family and resting – this is particularly important for them given the stress of the pandemic has brought. As they said,

"I attended two training sessions so far; holidays are very tricky for me because I usually have my commitments for holidays. But again, work is work, what can we say."

"We also need to rest. I really don't want to miss workshops or information, but holiday time is when I attend family gatherings."

Teachers expressed initial discomfort when implementing the programme, especially with the timing of classes where they felt lessons were longer than necessary and created additional work for them but have a growing appreciation of how lessons are structured now that they see the results and are starting to adjust. As one teacher said,

"With how EGRP is structured, the lessons are longer. I didn't like it at first because it was a lot of work but now that I'm adjusting, I'm seeing that it actually works"

In the classroom, the teachers taught learners letter sounds and the blended letters and have them sound out syllables first to read the entire word. This was seen during the classroom lesson observations and, as the Grade 1 teacher observed, the,

"EGRP really wants the children to learn how to read so we teach them phonics. It will really help learners learn how to read and gain interest in languages."

Department Head as Coach Model: All the respondents strongly felt the DH model would not work if the DH coach role extended beyond their current mandate without some integration with their current role. The teachers explained that the department head is also the deputy head and a class teacher. That is already a full-time job in its own right, which does not allow for much flexibility for supporting teachers to the expected extent. As the teachers explained,

“Although we don’t have an appointed DH, the (acting) DHs already have too much work... monitoring, moderation, IQMS... this is already too much responsibility, but they could cope if the workload is not too steep since they already do IQMS observations.”

“Don’t forget that the DH is also a class teacher. The learners will really suffer - that’s the only snag.”

Resourcing: The school is well resourced in terms of learning materials (LTSM, pencils, workbooks, etc.) and the teachers use them as required, however, there are space limitations in the classrooms, and the teachers do not know how to organise the learning material in their classrooms. Pigeonholes for storing books are not available in the class, leading to books being stacked in one corner in the classroom. However, the teachers navigate the disorder in the classroom with ease and the appointed learners who assist the teacher with distributing books know where to find the relevant books.

None of the foundation phase classrooms had an actual reading corner but teachers stored reading books on tables at the back of the classroom in the same way they do workbooks and exercise books. There was no evidence of any learners getting books to read individually or in groups during break times or as an occupational task.

Teachers interviewed also highlighted that the EGRP flashcards were limited in terms of the vocabulary they wanted to teach, and so they had to develop their own teaching aids to supplement the EGRP material. They also highlighted that,

“We received all the material but our classes are really small. You can’t even organise the books properly - there’s just no space”

“The flashcards I received are very limited, so I make my own flashcards if there are things that I don’t have.”

“Our chalk boards have no lines on them, so the learners really get confused when I write there and I think this is part of the reason why we are struggling with foundation phase writing.”

Technology: Teachers use the tablet for preparing their daily and weekly lesson plans and none of the teachers in the foundation phase struggle with using the tablet. Other resources found on the tablet are also utilised within the school.

One of the teachers had difficulties with her tablet in Term 2, which has led to her using the EGRP material, which she accesses through her colleague’s tablet, alongside NECT lesson preparation material. As the teachers observed,

“I use the tablet a lot especially for reading stories to the learners. The tablet has some stories that are not on the Big Books so I read from it in class sometimes.”

“Most teachers are technologically acquainted.”

“I follow the lesson plan perfectly for Setswana, but I make changes to it at times when there are things I know my learners won’t understand.”



“The term 2 content won't open on my tablet, I am using the grade two teacher's tablet at the moment alongside the NECT daily preparation.”

Key features of school's management and learning

The principal was candid in stating that his leadership style was not entirely democratic in that he allowed educators to voice their views, but he ultimately makes the final decision – he described his leadership style as being a fusion of democratic and autocratic.

The foundation phase DH retired in December 2020 and an appointment has not yet been made. At the moment, the deputy principal is responsible for the oversight of the foundation phase. Two weeks before the visit, the deputy principal had conducted classroom observations of Numeracy and English First Additional Language and was impressed to see the learners attempting to speak in English.

The school's management team places great value on reading and creating a reading culture. This is seen in the school's allocation of the deputy principal to support foundation phase teachers and the allocation of space for a school library despite the shortage of classrooms. However, innovations and programmes introduced to the school were perceived as a burden as they introduced additional stress and confusion to teachers when they first started implementing the new programme, which interrupted the pace of learning and teaching. The SMT expressed that at times innovations are merely taken on board because they are a directive from the district, and it is expected that all schools take them up, and because of this, the school itself is not at liberty to decide whether this will be good for their learners or not from a place of understanding the context in which they operate.

The principal is not a curriculum leader to the foundation phase but had only a vague idea of EGRP being a programme for developing learners' reading and developing concepts in language to eventually read with fluency and write well.

Support provided

Professional Learning Community: When teachers struggle with teaching certain concepts, the relationships with schools within the same cluster are leveraged, where teachers from other schools assist. As one teacher said,

“We have a good relationship with the schools in the surrounding area. We can request information from them and share with the rest of the school.”

When this is not an option, the SMT member in charge of the relationship with the training organisation is requested to ask for retraining or demonstrations so that educators understand what they ought to be doing. In addition to this, there are regular phase meetings where teachers in the foundation phase tackle issues pertaining to failure rates and where teachers also share lessons on what they have tried in their classes. One teacher related that,

“The relationship we have internally as teachers in the school is also very good. I was being coached by my fellow teachers here and those from other schools. They help me with things like preparing for lessons and things related to classroom practice.”



EGRP Coach support: All the people interviewed expressed a great appreciation for the support the EGRP coach has provided to the foundation phase teachers.

Being relatively new to the teaching field, the Grade 1 teacher requested that the coach visit her classroom to assist with some issues she was having with helping learners differentiate between different letter sounds, and the strategies suggested by the coach have helped her learners as most are now able to differentiate. As she recalled,

“I asked the coach to come observe my class in term 1. The coach came and advised on the issue my learners had with spotting the difference between p, b, and a. The coach got me to write the letters in dots and allow the learners to do more of that writing from home.”

“I really don't mind being observed or coached it will help me.”

Department Head Support: All the teachers had a clear understanding of what the role of the DH is meant to be which is to monitor with the aim of developing and guiding – monitoring documentation against reality. The foundation phase DH is expected to do routine class visits and observations where they check teaching and learners' books, among other things. Although the school does not have an appointed foundation phase department head, these duties were fulfilled by their deputy principal. As the principal stated,

“Reports from the DH to teachers are usually very satisfactory.”

And a teacher reported that,

“We currently don't have a department head - she retired last year in December. That responsibility has been falling on our deputy principal, who calls phase meetings to share information between different grades. Two weeks ago, he observed my numeracy and English first additional language class. He was really impressed that my learners were trying to speak in English.”

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage

Due to COVID-19, the teachers decided how they wanted their classes to be split but were encouraged by their coach to do the rotations according to their ability levels. Rotation has affected the learners severely, and the teachers have not been able to cover the curriculum as expected and have had to spend the beginning of each term catching up on work from the previous term.

One of the teachers observed that she had just received her COVID-19 vaccination the day before the visit and was experiencing some side effects but insisted on continuing with her planned lesson. She cited that the group at school on the day of the visit was learners who required additional assistance and were already struggling.

The following quotes summarise the teachers' comment on the impact of COVID-19,

“Covering the curriculum has been extremely difficult because of COVID-19 only half of the class is attending at the moment, and I have to teach the same lesson twice – it's really tiring.”



“We fell behind on the curriculum, there are sounds that we did not do in the previous term and had to catch up with this term. We also had to start with the grade one baseline because learners could not hold their pencils. We are currently on week seven of term 2 at the moment so we’re about one week behind.”

Workbook Analysis

The review of Grade 2 learner HL and EFAL exercise and workbooks was not up to date, and the teacher focused more on the moderation and correction of HL workbooks and exercise books, EFAL books were moderated by teachers, but teachers hardly offered corrections to learners.

Table 1: Learner exercise and continual assessment and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	58	34
Average no. of exercise book pages used	33	16
Workbooks up to date	Somewhat	No
Workbook correction	Yes	Somewhat
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Somewhat
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Yes	No
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes

Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	38	32	32	33	31	33	91
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	58	57	59	56	58	58	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	17	17	17	15	16	16	50
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	37	62	49	13	8	34	

Community Engagement

The school does not have much of a relationship with the neighbouring community or the parents of learners. Most parents who send their children to the school are reliant on social grants and those who do have jobs work over 20km from the school and are employed as domestic workers or just do not

earn much. It was highlighted that most learners live with their grandparents and do not get much exposure to books at home which is why the idea of having a library at the school came about, so learners can take books home. Some of the challenges that the teachers reported are summarised in these quotes,

“Parents write their children's homework. I used to give my learners their workbooks to work from home but what I realised is that the learners are not the ones writing in their own books”

“I'm sorry to say this... parents idle and are not interested in their children's schoolwork - they really don't care about their kids' future. The parents are very irresponsible and don't send their children to school at times.”

“During the hard (COVID-19) lockdown last year, I tried communicating with parents using WhatsApp groups as our principal had advised, but most parents do not have WhatsApp so now I use letters to communicate with them.”

“Parents are just parents... for them to be involved, we need to make sure they sign the books.”

Summary of the reading situation in school

The principal is not a curriculum leader in relation to the foundation phase but has appointed the deputy principal to assist in the interim as the school recruits a head of the department. The school management team places great emphasis on reading within the school and tries to instil a reading culture in the learners.

The foundation phase teachers are very proactive and enthusiastic about the EGRP and make use of the materials provided to them. The teachers also use the phonics approach to teaching reading and conduct shared reading and group guided reading with learners.

The teachers receive little or no support from parents but have a strong support structure through schools within their cluster. The coach is also viewed as a great support for teachers in the school



9.6 School 6 – Friday, 25 June 2021

Summary of key points

- The community is rural and most learners live with their grandparents, as a result, there is little support for the children at home and there is no reading culture in the community
- Lessons were engaging and the teachers used innovative teaching methods
- Keeping to the proposed lesson timing and structure of their HL and EFAL lessons posed difficulties for teachers
- Teachers are struggling with curriculum coverage and the late loading of lessons in tablets
- Teachers were supportive of their DH being their coach because they already work as a team and with the advantage of having the coach based at the school
- The school leadership understands the importance of early literacy but relies a lot on the DH (who will be retiring in 2022/3) to monitor and manage the foundation phase.
- The staff show some ownership of their space and the ability to make sure that innovations are modified to meet the needs of the learners, teachers and school.

Respondents

The following people were interviewed

- One principal
- One Department Head (also Grade 1 educator)
- Two Grade 2 educators

Classroom observations were also undertaken for the following lessons:

- Grade 2 HL lesson
- Grade 1 HL lesson
- Grade 2 EFAL lesson
- Grade 1 EFAL lesson

Note: only one Grade 1 teacher was observed, the other was not at school on the day of the visit.

School context

The school has the largest enrolment in the area. Although under resourced with poor services and based in an impoverished, rural community, the school is classified as a quintile 3 school. The school makes a considerable effort to ensure that the school grounds, classrooms and the other spaces used by teachers and learners are clean. However, the school is underfunded and cannot afford to maintain some of its infrastructure (i.e. broken windows covered with plastic), and the buildings need to be repainted.

“I don’t know why they say we are quintile 3 because the school next to us is quintile 1 and we are in the same community, maybe it is because we have classes built with bricks”.

The school’s periphery is entirely fenced, and there are two entrances to the school. However, due to COVID 19, only one gate is used to properly manage the learners and ensure they are screened before entering the school. The school has screeners stationed at the main gate who ensure that all the people entering the premises are correctly screened for COVID-19 and sanitised. The learners also follow a strict social distancing routine for fetching food from the feeding scheme station.

Most learners at the school are taken care of by their grandparents, who rely on social grants, mainly because the parents had to move to different cities to find work opportunities. Due to unemployment in the area, some learners who have finished matric volunteer at the school as teaching assistants – the Grade 1 teacher, in particular, is mentoring a young lady who intends to attend teaching college but has not been able to secure the funds to do so. She assists with monitoring the class as the teacher gives individual learners attention or handing out the books required for the lesson.

The school has a principal, deputy principal, foundation phase department head and intersen department head. The deputy principal used to be a foundation phase teacher until she was appointed to her current role but is still very passionate about foundation phase teaching. Her role is structured so that she has time to support both the admin team and department heads, teaching only Creative Arts and Social Science to ensure that there is time to support teachers and department heads. On the other hand, the foundation phase DH began her career as a grade 4 teacher in 1981 but soon realised she was more passionate about ensuring that learners are prepared for grade 4, leading to her teaching Grade 1 from 1992 to date.

Although the school is not a full-service school, they constantly struggle with referring learners to schools for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities, forcing the teachers to try and learn to accommodate children with special learning needs in their mainstream classes. This is also partly due to guardians not wanting their children to have to travel long distances to get to the nearest special needs school.

Table 1: School 6 school level statistics

Item	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Total (FP)
Enrolment	83	64	87	87	234
Classrooms	2	2	2	1	6
Teachers	2	2	2	6	6
Qualified Foundation Phase Teachers	2	2	2		6
No. of DHs	1			1	1
Teacher to learner ratio	1 : 42	1 : 32	1 : 44		

Early grade teaching and learning

The school principal, deputy principal and foundation phase head are enthusiastic about teaching young learners and were excited to have the evaluation team observing the 'excellent work' by their foundation phase team. The foundation phase team is made up by an equal number of older and younger teachers. The older teachers are already of retirement age. The DH intends to resign in the coming year officially

The teachers observed also took great pride in their work and had organised classrooms. The teachers expressed that it was difficult for them to put up posters because of the paint of the walls which does not hold Prestik well.

The teachers used phonics to teach learners how to read, breaking words into syllables and letters in EFAL and Setswana. They also used the discussion posters provided to them by EGRP and other material and flashcards. The school has received support from the previous coach they were assigned

with shared and group guided reading but had also been exposed through RSP. Teachers could articulate the main objectives of EGRP and were positive about the outcomes the programme can yield. They expressed ownership of the EGRP mandate, and as teachers want to see their learners' reading potential blossom as a result of their teaching. As one teacher explained,

"I use the phonics (letters and syllables) and the one-word approach methods because I have seen that if I use words familiar to the learners, they even finish the words by themselves, allowing them to read very early on... I have seen these methods work successfully in the past when teaching learners how to read."

Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners could quickly identify and combine letter sounds to make up whole words during the observed lessons. The lessons offered by both teachers were very interactive and inclusive, allowing every learner to demonstrate their capabilities. In the Grade 1 class, the teacher incorporated multiple 'games' into her lessons where learners would compete against each other by identifying and reading letters written on the chalkboard; the corrections would then be done by the rest of the class, who would indicate why the learner was either right or not. The incorporation of play made the lessons very engaging for young learners, and from the interaction in the class, they understood the concepts.

The school cultivates a strong reading culture, where the Grade 2 learners could read by themselves. The teacher had the learners stand in a row and read a sentence; all the learners in attendance were very engaged and were able to read and pronounce words with very little or no help from the teachers, which indicates that this is something that they are used to and that they can read already.

Both Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners were very comfortable with their educators and felt free to walk around the class during their individual task to look at various learning aids on the walls and even add excitedly to what the teacher might be saying before she finished speaking.

During the Grade 1 lesson observation, there were several disruptions, the teacher was quick to tell her visitors she was teaching but later explained that those are learners she taught in Grade 1 who regularly come to the school to find out how they can help her or thank her for having taught them and inspiring their love of school when they were heading off to college or university.

The DH explained that throughout her career, she had been exposed to numerous programmes for teaching learners how to read and see for herself what works and what does not. Even when introducing a new programme, she does not advise her teachers to stray away from what they already know works for their learners. The programmes brought in should improve their classroom practices and teaching instead of causing a decline in learner outcomes. She did, however, strongly felt that EGRP fulfilled that mandate. The DH further elaborated that PSRIP was introduced to the school by the EFAL specialist just before EGRP and the materials are similar, they merely determine what they want the learners to learn and incorporate that into their lessons. The teachers explained this borrowing from various programmes,

"I can't say I use EGRP alone, I mix it with the ATP and DBE. I don't only rely on them because they have let us down before but their material is amazing" (the teacher mentioned this in the context of the late loading of tablets)

"When I started teaching, learners were a bit older when they started school – they were developed enough to understand these concepts. But I still use the same methods I did in the



past. I still use Primary Education Upgrading Programme [PEUP] in some cases, the approach to teaching reading is really the same using phonics, so that learners can sound out letters and recognise them then start to introduce multiple phonics. I use some things I learnt through PEUP to this day alongside EGRP – I still want my learners to know words and write simple sentences by the end of the year.”

“Our EFAL specialist introduced PSRIP to us through a training session either this year or late last year. What I am noticing is that PSRIP material is very similar to EGRP from Molteno. I usually just compare the sounds on each to see what I want to teach, so I use them together.”

The department head provided estimates of the number of learners who can read in each grade. From her observations of the classes, monitoring of learner performance in the Foundation Phase, and conversations with teachers, the number of learners who can read sentences EFAL in all grades was significantly lower than those who could read singular words and reading aptitude in HL (both words and single words). She, however, could not provide an estimate for Grade 2 classes.

Table 1: DH perception of the number of learners who can read per grade

Grade	Total No. of learners	No. of learners who can read in EFAL (singular word)	No. of learners who can read in HL (singular word)
1	83	20	30
2	64	25	35
3	87	40	50

Awareness of EGRP and requirements

The teachers were well aware of the objectives of EGRP and how it was intended these objectives would be met. They were also able to link these to other programmes. They found the material to be beneficial and the content on the tablets to simplify their lesson planning task saving them lots of time. However, the foundation phase teachers were very vocal about their frustration related to materials not being delivered, struggles with loading tablets and the lack of communication on who their new coach will be and the reasons for changing their coach.

The teachers had to be innovative and develop strategies to ensure that they continue teaching even without the EGRP material, which normally entailed using material from other programmes before the delivery of the EGRP materials and planning using other sources of information and support.

“Teaching reading in EFAL now is so easy, the sounds that are introduced are the same one’s learners have learnt in HL so there is some continuity and the learners are also less confused.”

“We really love using EGRP material and it’s so helpful, but the delays are affecting how we use it. I don’t want to seem like I’m not doing my job. Can they just load the content on-time because we prepare for an entire term before it starts?”

“We really need to prepare for classes well in advance and the lesson plans on the tablets are really useful but we never get them when we need them. They come so late and we still need to acclimatise and get used to using the tools on the tablet. The delays aren’t helping. I usually

prefer preparing for the entire term during the holiday, so when these things aren't delivered, I can't use them."

Despite teachers not being asked about the training, they highlighted that they found it very useful. However, the fact that these training sessions happened during the school holidays posed challenges for the teachers, who often made plans with their families for the holidays. The teachers stated that,

"Oh, the holiday workshops... they are so inconvenient. They are unfair. We work so much during the term and spend evenings marking and lesson planning, our time to rest and be with family is disturbed."

Department Head as Coach Model: The Department Head at the school is trusted by her colleagues and already offers support similar to that offered by the coach. However, if her role extends beyond what she is doing she would not cope because her workload is already too much. The DH stated that,

"I am already not coping with my workload. I try to monitor classes but never finish. Don't forget I'm also a class teacher, so unless the coach work is minimal or there are educator assistants made available, I don't see how this DH model will work."

The other teachers expressed confidence in the DHs ability to support teachers in the way the coach is expected to. Mentioning that 'her experience is well suited for the coach role'. Her leadership potential and relationship with the rest of the department was also highlighted as traits that would assist her in the role. Like the DH, the teachers flagged that the DH already has a heavy workload, stating:

"The challenge is that she has work too in her classes, she will need have an assistant teacher or she will need to stay behind after school with teachers for coaching"

Although not a teacher in the foundation phase, the Deputy Principal is tasked with the oversight of early grade learning and is a curriculum leader in the phase. She could serve as the EGRP champion in the school alongside the current DH. Although the DH expressed frustration with the administration of the EGRP she was confident of its potential to yield results and the teachers at the school also trust and respect her. However, she does intend on retiring in the coming year.

Resourcing: All the learners in the school had their own workbooks, exercise books and writing material (pencils and colouring pencils). The term 2 EGRP LTSM was also available in the classrooms. Although some EGRP LTSM were visible on classroom walls, most learning aids used (discussion posters, flashcards) were commercial ones (especially in the Grade 2 class). The grade one teacher also made use of a number of handmade visual aids.

Technology: The school experienced severe delays in loading their tablets with materials in terms one and two. This was a great source of frustration as this was the tool most wanted to use for planning on using the material provided to them. No alternative ways of accessing the material were given to the school; in turn, they had to develop their own tools. Those interviewed stated that,

"EGRP materials were received in both term 1 and 2, and they are very useful but the delays in loading the material onto the tablets has been really frustrating. Imagine, our tablets were only taken on 26 May for the term 2 content to be loaded – we were well into term 2 already."

“Tablets are a big problem not returned on time... they keep coming without information... it will be wiser if they can give us tablets on time and they should not give us the tablets after the term has started.”

The DH explained that she encourages the teachers to plan for the entire term and, during the term, only use their time to plan specific lessons. The delays in receiving the tablets inconvenienced the school to the point where the subject advisor encouraged them to use PRSIP content to prepare and then amend later. A recommendation was made for content to be loaded in advance to enable planning before the start of the term:

“Can’t the tablets be loaded for the entire year, so we don’t have this back and forth, it makes us disorganised and it affects the kids, and we are not able to be creative in the classroom because we spend time to create lesson plans that EGRP already has.”

One older teacher explained that they found the tablets useful, but they mostly use them to prepare from home because they do not feel comfortable using them in the classroom. However, the young and older teachers could access information on the tablets.

“I prepare using the tablet from home then find resources related to the content... if I were to use the tablet in class, I would take forever pressing trying to find things. I have been struggling with the tablet, but the younger teachers assist with it”

“I have a mix of old and new teachers and they are computer literate, they will have a way around the tablet”

Key features of the school management

The school principal considers himself a democratic leader, this view was supported by the deputy principal (who we spoke to informally), DH and the teachers interviewed. Although the principal is not a curriculum leader in the foundation phase, he has deployed the deputy principal, an early grade enthusiast, as a resource to ensure that early learning and teaching are happening as they should. The deputy principal plays an integral role in managing the DH, building teacher capacity and monitoring teachers and is perceived as a great resource and support to the DHs.

To an extent, the school's deputy principal already serves as an EGRP champion and coach to the teachers encouraging the use of the materials provided and providing guidance on how materials should be used practically in the classroom. The deputy principal mentioned that it is challenging to encourage the use of the materials as intended because their department does most of its planning before the term starts, resulting in EGRP lesson plans being used as supplementary tools instead of the core element of their lesson preparation.

Support provided

Professional Learning Community: The school has phase meetings where teachers support each other and share information. The most pertinent issue discussed is how to support learners with barriers. Teachers said,

“We have phase meetings, we check up on each other and share information related to the subject policies, syllabus coverage and peer monitoring. There are many things we do. We used to meet twice a month but now we meet when issues arise.”

“We work as a team in foundation phase. We have meetings and plan our programme. We give each other responsibilities in the team, and we all attend and participate and discuss learners who can’t read and write. We also discuss HL and EFAL lessons and exchange learners to see if the learners will perform better”.

In addition to this, the school has a good relationship with neighbouring primary schools. The schools share information on the programme of assessment and annual teaching plans.

“We work alongside local primary schools mostly around a programme of assessment and ATP. We really share information; they are so very friendly and cooperative.”

Department Head Support. The teachers mentioned that they already receive support from their DH and have a good relationship with her. They attend meetings with her, and she observes their classes, gives feedback regarding learner progress and has discussions with the teachers on how they can improve their teaching approach.

EGRP Coach support: The school last had an EGRP coach in the first term and had only seen him once (excluding training) when he visited the school. During that visit, no concrete support was offered to any of the teachers – the coach merely introduced himself, asked about the material, and later notified them that a new coach would be allocated. All the teachers interviewed mentioned that they would appreciate having a coach visit the school because they currently do what they think should be done based on the training but would like practical guidance on how to implement lessons and use the material. One teacher said,

“Our teachers really want to be observed. We want that so much and haven’t received that at all. Right now we are doing what we think is right, but without feedback we’re just going in circles: practice makes perfect when you’re supported.”

Impact of COVID-19 on early grade curriculum coverage

The teachers and principal mentioned their difficulties with ensuring curriculum coverage due to the time constraints and disruptions to the normal teaching schedule due to COVID-19. Due to the large class sizes, all grades in the foundation phase had to implement learner rotations. It was also inconvenient for the teachers because they have to repeat the same thing twice and were not allowed the time to make sure learners understood. The trade-off to learners understanding is the curriculum not being covered. It appears that the teachers were more inclined to ensure that learners understood concepts before moving on, and if in the previous term they did not cover the curriculum, they spent the first few weeks of the new term catching up. As the teachers stated,

“I would say we are 60% up to date with the curriculum”

“My class is only one week behind on the curriculum but I know other teacher are really lagging behind, we’re all trying to catch up”



“The curriculum coverage is a challenge and what we normally cover in 5 days we now do it in 10 days - it’s tiring to teach the same lesson twice”

“COVID-19 is really ruining education and learners are not coping with the workload we are giving them. We have to introduce more letters in a week – we’ve mostly been introducing complementary phonics so that the learners don’t get confused, and we still keep up with curriculum coverage.”

“Time is our issue because of COVID-19”

With all learners anticipated to attend in the coming term, teachers were worried that some of them are in their 60s, and there is already a shortage of classrooms and overpopulation at the school. This issue was communicated with the department, which promised to donate two mobile classrooms to the schools to aid with the challenge of classroom shortages.

Workbook Analysis

The Grade 2 learner exercise book review shows regular and appropriate coverage of Home Language content. EFAL workbooks and exercise books showed evidence of moderation and correction, but HL workbooks and exercise books were only moderated by teachers but were not regularly corrected by either in the classroom or by the teachers. Learners were regularly assessed in both term 1 and term 2 for EFAL and HL

Table 2: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review summary

Item	Setswana (Home Language)	English (First Additional Language)
Average no. of workbook pages used	71	48
Average no. of exercise book pages used	44	28
Workbooks up to date	Yes	Yes
Workbook correction	Yes	No
Regular and appropriate exercises (2 exercises per week)	Yes	Yes
Exercises marked	Yes	Somewhat
Correction of exercises with guide comments	Somewhat	Somewhat
Evidence of regular assessment tasks set and marked	Yes	Yes

Table 3: Learner exercise and continual assessment, and workbook review by learner

Language and Book	Learner 1	Learner 2	Learner 3	Learner 4	Learner 5	Average Number of Pages	Average Number of Pages
HL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	48	46	46	43	37	44	115
HL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	40	75	77	71	92	71	
EFAL exercise book pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	24	30	30	24	30	28	76
EFAL workbook pages used in Term 1 and Term 2	62	46	36	50	48	48	

Community Engagement

The school used to have a very symbiotic relationship with the community where community members would assist with certain things at the school. In turn, the community could use the school grounds for various events. Due to COVID-19, this has stopped to ensure that community members, learners and teachers are not exposed to risk.

There appears to be a very strained relationship between the school and the guardians of learners with learning difficulties that require a special needs school. These parents insist on staying at the school despite numerous attempts by the teachers to explain that the school is not able to provide appropriate support. One frustrated teacher with two learners with special needs stated,

“Grand-parents bring learners with obvious disabilities to the school. And these kids really struggle, and parents are just in denial. I have a learner in my class who cannot see but he is so smart I honestly don’t know how to help him because his parents don’t care.”

A culture of assisting learners with their homework also does not exist, making it important for teachers to explain the homework thoroughly in class and explain the concepts so that learners can work independently of their parents. Despite these attempts, less than a third of learners still do their homework. The DH explained that this is a great barrier to teaching and learning in the school, especially due to the learner rotations – homework is needed to ensure that learners are not idle while at home and do not forget concepts learned the last time they were at school. One teacher explained saying,

“Only 30% of learners do their homework. We had called a meeting with parents at the end of term 1 to explain why it’s important not to introduce difficult concepts to children. Now we teach them sounds that have already been introduced in class.”

Summary of the reading situation in school

The school cultivates reading capacities as witnessed in the classes observed, where learners were free to make mistakes and were corrected gently and guided by their peers. All the teachers interviewed were confident that their approach is bearing positive results.

Even though the teachers received the EGRP LTSMs after the term began and had not had their tablets loaded, they were proactive and flexible and used other materials to close that gap allowing learners to continue learning despite these glitches. Although under pressure to cover the curriculum, the teachers still inspire a reading culture in their learners and use methods that allow the learners to learn in a fun and engaging manner.

The EGRP material used in the class was used to aid teaching and was used as expected, with slight adjustments made to shared reading to accommodate the inability to have learners in close contact to one another.

The Deputy Principal and DH have great potential to be the EGRP champions within the school. Both are experienced foundation phase teachers who are trusted and respected by their colleagues, including the school principal.

10 Annexure II: Data collection instruments



Case Study interview
tools final.docx



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