



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY AND PLAN 2024-2030







basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY AND PLAN: 2024-2030

DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

31 August 2023



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction and Rationale	4

Chapter 1 A Case for Change..... 5

Chapter 2 Vision and the Elements of Reading Literacy 8

2.1 Literacy vision	9
2.2 Reading Wars, but No One Size Fits All	9
2.3 Morphological Awareness for African Languages Literacies	11
2.4 Incorporating Morphological Awareness in the Science of Reading	12
Conclusion	12

Chapter 3 New Literacy Strategy: A Holistic and Inclusive Approach 13

Pillar 1: Literacy Policy	15
Pillar 2: Highly Skilled and Agile Teachers	17
Pillar 3: Age appropriate and culturally relevant Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSMs)	18
Pillar 4: Involved Parents and Communities	18
Conclusion	18

Chapter 4 Implementation Plan 19

4.1 Literacy policy	20
4.2 Age-appropriate and culturally sensitive LTMS and Resources	21
4.3 Teacher development: agile and highly skilled teachers	22
4.4 Involved parents, communities, and advocacy and partnerships	23
4.5 Research, monitoring and evaluation	24
Conclusion	26
Selected Bibliography	27

List of Tables

Table 1: Literacy Policy Plans	20
Table 2: Age-appropriate and culturally sensitive LTMS Plans	21
Table 3: Agile and Skilled Teacher Development Plans	22
Table 4: Involved parents, community involvement and advocacy	23
Table 5: Research Plans	24

List of Figures

Figure 1: The deep inequities that impact learners in South Africa 1	6
Figure 2: New literacy framework	14



Executive Summary

The development of a reading strategy to ensure that South Africa's early readers are able to read for meaning by the age of 10 has become a matter of urgency. With the new progress in international reading literacy (PIRLS) study showing that 81% of South African learners in Grade 4 cannot read for meaning in any language, there is a need for an innovative and holistic approach to reading literacy as a national priority. A reiterative review of the current practices shows a linear literacy bias that has residually neglected the logic of African languages as the basis for meaning induction in the early grades. In this document, we explore significant issues raised as challenges faced in South Africa: language bias (neglect of African languages logic for literacy development) and uncoordinated policy framework, which in turn results in a lack of access to quality reading materials, insufficient teacher training and support, and limited engagement with parents and communities. The document also highlights the need for a new framework to address these challenges, which includes the logic of African languages incorporated through four interdependent pillars: Reading Policy, Skilled and Agile Teachers, Culturally Relevant LTSM (Learning and Teaching Support Materials), and Involved Parents and Communities.

The key interventions presented in the document include:

- Developing a national reading strategy and policy that positions African languages as the basis for reading literacy development in South Africa.
- Increasing funding for school libraries and promoting the availability of books in African languages.
- Providing professional development opportunities, mentoring programmes, and teacher recognition initiatives to produce highly skilled and agile reading literacy teachers.
- Developing and distributing culturally relevant learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) that reflect the cultural diversity of South Africa.
- Engaging parents and communities through community outreach programs, parent education initiatives, and partnerships with local organisations.

These interventions are designed to address the challenges identified in the document, including a lack of access to quality reading materials, insufficient teacher training and support, and limited engagement with parents and communities. By implementing these interventions, South Africa can work towards ensuring that all learners have access to quality reading materials, teachers are equipped with the skills and resources they need to promote reading literacy, and parents and communities are engaged in supporting children's reading development.



Introduction and Rationale

The need to advance reading literacy levels in South Africa to improve learning outcomes has reached a sense of urgency. This need has soared even higher due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that created unprecedented learning and reading losses, increasing dropouts and failure rates among young learners (Ardington, Wills and Koetzee, 2021). Since reading is a reliable indicator of how well a nation is doing educationally, it is the single most important practice upon which achievement of sustainable development goals is guaranteed. South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030, the African Union 2063 agenda: The Africa We Want, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), all converge on quality education as a key enabler for development, employment and eradication of poverty. Concomitantly, there is a need for innovations and reading advancement strategies underpinned by coherent policies and guidelines for the programmatic scaling of successful practices for system-wide changes in the education sector.

It has become folklore that the ability to read for meaning by age 10 is a key driver for success in education and beyond, yet many learners in South Africa are struggling to achieve this milestone. The recent PIRLS confirms research findings that 81% of Grade 4 readers cannot read for meaning in any language (PIRLS 2023) and that a third are still functionally illiterate in English by the age of 12. The age of 10 offers reliable data to reflect and project reading literacy development for programmatic scaling of good practices. In association with this, Grade 4 is an important year in South Africa, as it is the transition period where the majority of African language-speaking young learners are expected to read with meaning and understand content-based texts through the medium of English, which is not their mother tongue. Known as the 'Grade 4 slump', many learners fail to make this transition, which requires increased levels of engagement with the material read. More than 100 years of research shows that learners who experience the slump often fail to recover in the later stages of academic development; they can only get worse and worse over time.

Apart from the PIRLS results, there are also several systemic evaluations and independent empirical research that have historically shown that the majority of South African primary school readers are at least 3-4 years below their expected age-level reading proficiencies (e.g., Annual National Assessment 2011; Currin & Pretorius 2010; Makalela & Fakude 2014; Naidoo, et al., 2014). Worth noting is that these studies converge on the fact that South African primary school readers trail behind most of their counterparts in developing countries (Howie 2003; Mullis et al. 2012; Marais and Wessels, 2020). Among other reading challenges observed, these readers are not taught how to learn to read and read to learn (reading for meaning and knowing) simultaneously, and their classroom literacy activities largely exhibit a basal level of 'barking' at texts (Makalela 2014; Makalela and Fakude 2014; Moore and Hart 2007). It is also well-known that this literacy gap has its genesis in the first three years of schooling, where reading, cognition and self-perception are at their prime stage of development (Hofmeyer, 2021; Passos 2009; Martinez and Murphy 2011).

In addition to systemic challenges affecting mainly readers with an African language background, there are epistemic issues that relate to ways of knowing predicated on types of language. The differences between reading in Germanic languages such as English and Afrikaans and African languages of Bantu origin are often overlooked due to versions of both materials and curriculum configurations. Versions of materials, methodology and logic from English to African languages often show epistemic clashes. It is in this connection that literacy practices of African languages, materials, teaching, learning and the logic through which they are presented become severely compromised (Nkadimeng and Makalela, 2023). There is, therefore, a need to attend to reading literacy comprehensively, inclusively and holistically before the age of 10.

In order to address the gaps in literacy instruction, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) sought to review the current practices and the national sector plan that has been in place since 2019. There were consultative forums, which led to a recommendation to redesign a new framework for reading literacy improvement, informed by the gaps identified in the guiding documents. This document was subsequently drafted in consultation with a stakeholder base to develop a turnaround strategy to accelerate improvement, bringing the country closer to the developmental goals as set out in the NDP 2030.



Chapter 1

A Case for Change

It is conventional knowledge that South Africa remains one of the countries in the world with deep inequalities that affect children's opportunities to access knowledge. These inequalities manifest in low physical growth and brain development, low productivity growth, a small skills base, a high unemployment rate, poor educational outcomes, and, more poignantly, learners being unable to learn in school (see Figure 1 below).

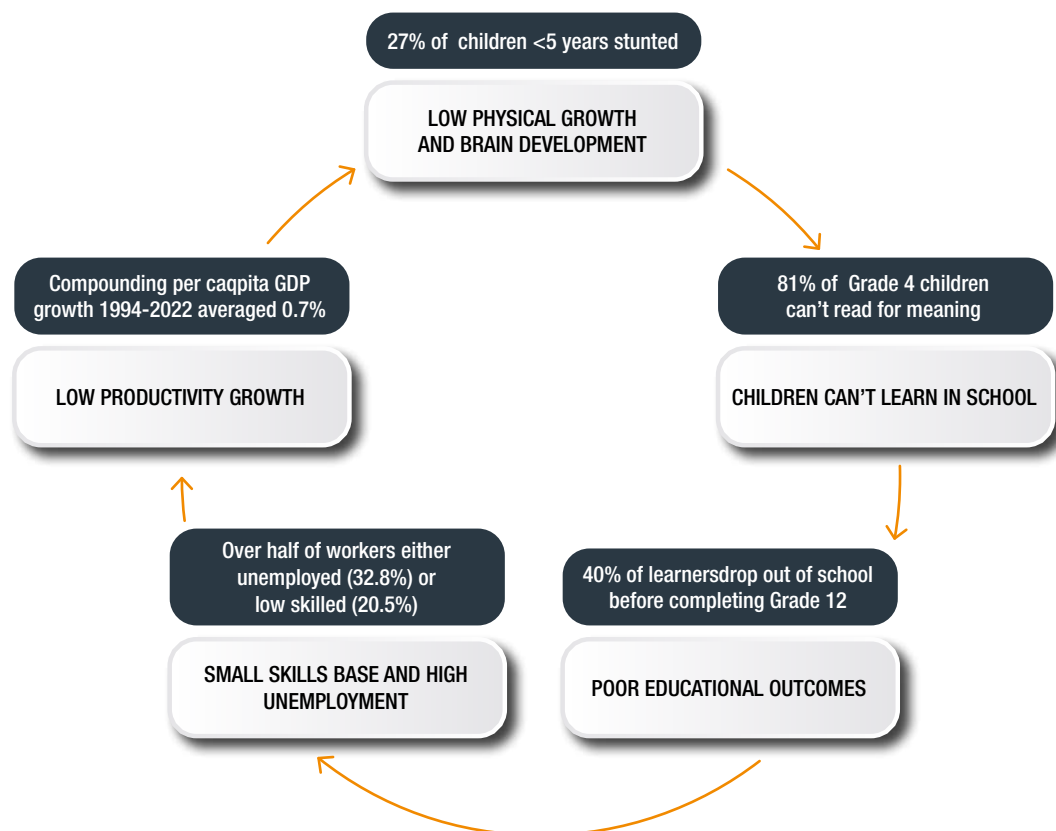


Fig 1: The deep inequities that impact learners in South Africa ¹

The latest PIRLS results have stirred reflective dialogues, where 81% of the learners are reported to be unable to read for meaning in any language. As the statistics show, the obvious outcome is poor education, with 40% of the learners dropping out of school. Both factors further result in a shortage of skills and an increased unemployment rate. Consequently, there is low productivity, which causes poverty. What is clear is that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between reading for meaning and quality education, as well as its rippling effect on socio-economic development. A closer look at the 81% from the PIRLS results shows that learners from African home languages are ranked the lowest compared to Afrikaans and English home languages. This revelation suggests that something is fundamentally amiss regarding the practices and principles of literacy instruction in indigenous African languages. Notwithstanding the reasons for misalignment between African languages literacy types and the readers, one very clear outcome is that Grade 4 readers who are not able to read for meaning will likely proceed in their academic track

through a literacy phenomenon known as the Matthew Effect. At a Grade 4 level, the term “Matthew Effect” can be understood as “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer,” but in the context of reading, it means that learners who start off as good readers will likely become even better readers, while those who start off as poor readers might struggle more and more as they get older. Here are some of the outcomes of this condition:

- Learners who cannot read for meaning often feel left out and less confident.
- They might not want to participate in class or share their thoughts because they are worried about making mistakes or not understanding the material.
- As they move up in grades, they have to read to learn.
- If a Grade 4 student in South Africa struggles to understand what they are reading, it might be difficult for them to learn about history, science, or other subjects.

¹ Harrison, D. 2023. Harrison, D. 2023. Filling the Food Gap: A Discounted Basket of Ten Highly Nutritious Basic Foods. Presentation Slide Deck.

- As these learners move to higher grades, the reading gets harder.
- If they are already struggling in Grade 4, by the time they get to Grade 5 or 6, the gap between them and their peers might become even bigger.

In brief, the Matthew Effect functions like a snowball. If a learner starts off with a small reading problem, it can become bigger and bigger as they get older, especially in a diverse and challenging environment like South Africa. Developing readers' skills in their familiar language becomes one way to "arrest" this degenerative process in reading and learning beyond Grade 4.

As shown in Fig. 1, it is useful to stress that reading for meaning is not just an educational priority but also a developmental imperative. Both South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the African Union's (AU) 2063 vision, "The Africa We Want," emphasise the critical role of education and skills development in achieving their respective visions for the continent and the country.

Below are some of the reasons why reading for meaning by early-grade readers is so vital in relation to these development plans:

a. Laying the foundations for future learning

The National Development Plan (NDP 2030) underscores the importance of improving the quality of education, with particular emphasis on the foundation phase. A child who can read with understanding by the end of Grade 3 is better positioned to succeed in subsequent years. AU's 2063 vision, on the other hand, aspires to a well-educated citizenry underpinned by an education and skills revolution. It stresses fundamental literacy skills, which include reading for meaning, as the catalyst for this revolution.

b. Building human capital

Human capital investment is a core tenet of the NDP, and the ability to read for meaning in the early grades translates to more knowledgeable and competent future workers capable of driving innovation and economic growth in South Africa. The AU charges that a prosperous Africa is one that invests in its most valuable asset: its people. Therefore, reading proficiency ensures a populace that is not only informed but also capable of critical thinking and decision-making.

c. Socio-economic transformation

The NDP 2030 recognises that socioeconomic disparities in South Africa are, in part, rooted in uneven access to quality education. Equipping early-grade readers with strong literacy skills can help break the cycle of poverty and inequality. The AU's 2063 Vision, in addition, seeks an Africa characterised by inclusive growth and sustainable development. In other words, a literate population, beginning with foundational reading skills, is essential to achieve this, enabling individuals to better participate in, benefit from, and contribute to economic activities.

In essence, for South Africa and the broader African continent to realise their developmental aspirations as outlined in the NDP 2030 and the AU's 2063 vision, it is important to prioritise foundational literacy. Put differently, reading for meaning in the early grades is not just an educational goal but a strategic lever to propel the nation and the continent towards a more prosperous, equitable, and united future.

In driving the national agenda for a highly literate society, the Department of Basic Education has embarked on various strategies for literacy improvement, most notably the 2008 Literacy Strategy and the 2019 National Reading Improvement Plan. Notwithstanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the level at which the South African early-grade readers have not improved from the previous PIRLS results. A cursory review of current research shows that these early readers are, on average, 3-4 years below their expected reading levels and that the majority are engaged in a basal and meaningless letter and syllable-chasing phenomenon metaphorically named "barking at texts" (Makalela and Fakude, 2014). Necessarily, the 2030 target seems far from reach as aspired in the following extract:

By 2030, South Africans should have **access** to education and training of the **highest quality**, leading to **significantly** improved learning **outcomes**. The performance of South African learners in **international** standardised tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from countries at a **similar** level of development and with similar levels of access. (NPD 2030)

The illustrative point about how far South African learners have developed is obvious from the recent PIRLS results that show a regressive pattern. There is, therefore, a compelling case for a shift in strategy and changing the literacy outcomes in South Africa. This change in strategy implicates revising current programmes to stress the meaning component of reading literacy.



Chapter 2

Vision and the Elements of Reading Literacy

2.1 LITERACY VISION

Based on the consultative process that was undertaken with a wider spectrum of stakeholders in 2023, it emerged that South Africa aspires to advance to the highest levels of literacy for all learners through holistic, comprehensive, and relevant reading literacy practices in schools. In particular, there is a recognition that the country has historically followed a literacy logic that overlooked the differences between English and African languages, where the reading logic of English is versioned into reading packages for African languages. Dependence of African language literacies on the English value systems and linguistic structures manifested in monolingual and epistemic biases that had negative effects on reading literacy achievements for learners whose home language is one or more of the African languages. When framed in this light, a mother tongue or home language-based reading literacy approach is the preferred approach to allow for differentiated African language literacy packages. To achieve an inclusive, holistic, comprehensive and linguistically sensitive literacy programme. The following principles remain important:

- Recognising the linguistic diversity and the unique position of South Africa as a multilingual society
- Valorising the duality of reading literacy as both a skill and a social practice at the same time
- Understanding African languages as typologically different languages with unique literacy predictions that are different from English and other Germanic languages
- Encouraging intersections between English, Afrikaans and Indigenous African languages literacy is vital for cross-literacy transfer (multilingual orientation)

It is in this vision of an inclusive, holistic and comprehensive literacy approach that all South African learners read for meaning by Grade 4 - an aspiration that translates into the NDP 2030 goal:

The performance of South African learners in **international** standardised tests should be **comparable** to the performance of learners from countries at a similar level of development and with **similar** levels of access. (NDP 2030)

2.2 READING WARS, BUT NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

The starting point in shifting strategies is a review of the literacy approaches and models known in the field of reading literacy. Research shows that one of the common challenges in developing reading literacy programmes is the

competing frameworks that lead to different interventions that often clash with each other if there is no central coordination and guidelines for coherence in approach. Below are some of the perspectives on reading literacy:

2.2.1 PHONICS-BASED APPROACH

The phonics-based approach is a well-established model of literacy instruction that focuses on the relationship between sounds and their corresponding symbols (letters or letter combinations). In this approach, early readers learn to decode words by sounding out each letter or group of letters. Phonics is typically taught at the beginning stages of literacy development. Examples of this approach include synthetic phonics and analytic phonics. The synthetic method teaches learners to build or synthesise words from their individual sounds. Learners learn to associate letters or letter combinations with their corresponding sounds. Once these associations are learned, learners are then taught to blend these sounds together to pronounce and read whole words. On the other hand, the analytic method teaches learners to recognise whole words or chunks of words based on their similarity to already-known words. In essence, this method places a greater emphasis on the analysis of the phonograms (word families) and larger parts of words.

While it is the most common approach used in South African schools, as the case may be in the UK and the USA, it is worth noting that phonics may not be the best major strategy for teaching reading in African languages. It has successfully been used elsewhere on English language conventions that do not translate accurately to many African languages. Here are some of the reasons for phonics mismatch in African languages of Bantu origin:

- **Phonemic and orthographic differences:** Phonics involves the relationship between written symbols (letters) and sounds in a language. This can be more complicated in African languages, many of which have different phonemic and orthographic systems compared to English. For example, some African languages use tonal sounds, which phonics-based English instruction would not account for.
- **Syllabic structure:** Many African languages from the Bantu family are primarily syllabic. This means that words are built from syllables rather than individual letters. A syllabic approach rather than a phonics one, which focuses on individual sounds, could be more effective. Here, mono-syllabic words in these languages do not have meaning compared to English, where words with one syllable are fully meaningful (e.g., cat).

2.2.2 WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH

The second well-known approach for literacy instruction is the whole language. The whole language is an approach to teaching reading that emphasises the meaning and function of words within a larger language context, such as sentences, stories, or discussions. It contrasts with phonics-based methods that focus on decoding individual words through their phonetic components. The relevance of the whole language approach can vary based on the language's structure and orthography. Research shows that there are still challenges in using this approach in teaching English literacy, especially in the US. *It is instructive that the whole language approach was never tested empirically in African languages, nor was it included in past and current curriculum configurations.* This is because literacy packages in these languages are guided by principles adopted in developed countries where the structure of Germanic languages dictates approaches for literacy preferences that work well. A deeper analysis of the whole language approach tenets provides some reasons why it may not have worked effectively for English yet become relevant for some African languages:

- English has a deep orthography where there's often not a straightforward relationship between how a word is spelt and how it is pronounced. The same letter or combination of letters can be pronounced differently in different words (e.g., "read" vs. "read" or "lead" vs. "lead"). This inconsistency can make the whole language approach challenging for English learners, as they cannot rely solely on phonetic cues to decode unfamiliar words.
- African languages of Bantu origin have transparent orthographies, which allow for a consistent relationship between letters and their pronunciations. In such languages, once a learner understands the basic phonetic rules, they can read any new word they encounter. In this context, the whole language approach may be more relevant because words can be easily decoded based on their appearance, making it more feasible to emphasise comprehension and context over individual word decoding.
- Most African languages are agglutinative, meaning they use a lot of prefixes, suffixes, or infixes to convey grammatical relations and meanings. In these languages, understanding the structure and function of larger linguistic units can be crucial. Whole language approaches, emphasising meaning and context, may be beneficial in these contexts.

- Many African cultures have rich oral traditions, where stories, history, and knowledge are passed down verbally. A whole language approach, which emphasises comprehension, fluency, and the joy of reading, might resonate more with learners from these backgrounds than a strictly phonetic method.

Based on the explanations of these two main approaches to reading literacy, there is a challenge of generalisations. It appears that English benefits more from the phonics approach due to its opaque transparency. On the other hand, African languages of Bantu origin may have a whole language approach due to their transparent orthographies and agglutinating character. It is important to distinguish linguistic typologies and align these with matching approaches. As a result of these divergent typological predictions, it behoves the curriculum to pronounce differentiated literacy approaches based on language types, underscoring the linguistic parameters of a multilingual country.

2.2.3 BALANCED LITERACY APPROACH

A balanced approach combines elements of both phonics-based and whole-language approaches. Learners learn phonics skills while also developing comprehension strategies. This approach tries to balance between the phonics and the whole-language approaches. It includes methods from both and aims to address the limitations of each. Balanced literacy might involve phonics instruction during certain times, whole-language learning during others, and more integration between the two within the same language package. Additionally, the approach may be pitched at a curriculum level where preference for phonics is emphasised in English as an additional language, while whole language becomes preferred for African languages (for example, an 80/20 split).

2.2.4 EMERGENT LITERACY APPROACH (ECD)

The South African education system has incorporated Early Childhood Development as part of its basic education provision structure. Consequently, there is a need for literacy instruction that allows for transition in Grade 1. Research shows that the emergent literacy approach focuses on developing early literacy skills through play-based activities such as storytelling, singing, and drawing. Within the vision of a holistic and inclusive literacy approach, the literacy package for ECDs should include activities in African languages selected at the centres: home language or mother-tongue-based emergent literacy.

2.2.5 SCAFFOLDED READING EXPERIENCE

Scaffolded reading experience, which may be integrated with any of the approaches above, involves providing supportive guidance for learners during reading, using pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading activities. The goal is to gradually release responsibility to the learner.

2.3 MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS FOR AFRICAN LANGUAGES LITERACIES

The foregoing description suggests that there is no one approach that is relevant for all languages all the time. As a result, there should be sensitivities where differentiated programmes are designed to match the literacy predictors according to language types in broad terms, such as Germanic and Bantu. Two things stand out in shifting reading literacy focus towards holistic and inclusive programmes:

- A balanced approach is considered a model to be used in linguistically diverse populations.
- Inserting morphological awareness in the African languages literacy curriculum package and decreasing the volume of phonics and phonemic awareness.

With regard to the latter, there are some notable advantages to incorporating morphological awareness within the balanced literacy model when teaching reading in African languages:

- a) **Rich morphology:** many African languages have rich morphological systems, often more so than languages like English. For instance, Bantu languages often use affixes (prefixes, infixes, and suffixes) to denote grammatical features such as tense, aspect, mood, and negation. Teaching learners to recognise and understand these morphemes can greatly aid in literacy.
- b) **Word formation:** Recognising root words and how they can be modified with prefixes and suffixes can help learners guess the meaning of new words and improve their reading comprehension.
- c) **Transferable skills:** Morphological awareness is not just about literacy; it also contributes to vocabulary expansion, spelling, and grammar understanding. This can help learners become more proficient in the language overall, not just in reading.
- d) **Multilingual advantage:** Given the multilingual context in many African countries, developing morphological awareness can be a valuable cross-linguistic skill, helping learners understand how different languages they speak are structured and relate to each other.

Taken together, the new strategy for improving literacy development and ensuring that all children are able to read for meaning includes foundational steps that leverage on the structural properties of African languages as detailed. It also means revising and contextualising what is generally known as the science of reading as discussed below.

2.4 INCORPORATING MORPHOLOGICAL AWARENESS IN THE SCIENCE OF READING

The Science of Reading is a body of research spanning several decades and disciplines that include thousands of studies from all over the world. It provides evidence for using systematic and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. It is important to note that it emerged and was adopted for the first time by a National Reading Panel in the US in 2000. Largely, it is influenced by the Phonics Approach and it has worked very well for languages such as English for the reasons provided above. One of the adaptations that the Science of Reading includes is morphological awareness and a balanced approach in order to meet the linguistic typological structure of African languages. Morphological awareness can be an important addition to this framework in the teaching of African languages literacy, as explained above. Below are some of the well-researched options for inclusion:

Morphological analysis: Encourage learners to break down unfamiliar words into their morphemes to infer their meanings. This could be a powerful tool for expanding vocabulary and improving reading comprehension, as well as for helping learners understand the grammar of their language.

Word formation exercises: Provide exercises that allow learners to practice forming words from root words and affixes. This can help solidify their understanding of the morphological rules and patterns they've learned.

Integration with other components: Morphological awareness should be integrated with other components of reading instruction. For example, morphological instruction could be combined with phonics instruction to teach about how letters and sounds correspond to morphemes. It could also be integrated with vocabulary instruction to help learners understand the meanings of morphemes and how they combine to form word meanings.

Cross-linguistic awareness: For learners who speak multiple languages, morphological awareness could be used to help them understand how the languages they speak are similar and different. This could help them transfer knowledge and skills across languages and improve their overall literacy.

Culturally relevant instruction: As with all instruction, morphological awareness teaching should be culturally relevant. This means using examples and materials that relate to the learners' experiences and contexts and teaching in a way that respects and values the learners' cultures and languages.

By incorporating morphological awareness into the Science of Reading, teachers can provide learners with a more comprehensive understanding of how words work. This can improve their reading literacy, especially in languages with rich morphological systems like many African languages.

CONCLUSION

The need to have a holistic and inclusive approach to reading literacy development becomes a defining principle for the new strategy envisaged. First, the exclusive focus on either reading literacy approach deprives a full range of developmental opportunities that balance both the skills and social/meaning practices of literacy teaching. Although English and Afrikaans may be geared more towards the phonics approach as Germanic languages, there is a need to create a platform for reading for meaning and pleasure at the same time. On the other hand, the nature of African languages shows a preponderance towards the whole language approach, but basic sound-letter correspondence is initially required. As one can see, it is the extent of focus that should vary between these two structurally distant languages. Additionally, morphological awareness is a primary structure that predicts learning to read with meaning in African languages, but it does not work well with English and Afrikaans as the basis for literacy instruction. In the teaching of African language literacies, incorporating morphological awareness within the generics of the science of reading is the strategic intent for improving reading and learning outcomes. It follows that mother tongue/home language-based literacy is a principle that allows for differentiated packages, including the Emergent Literacy Programme in the ECD, where a familiar language or home language is a necessary condition for literacy development.



Chapter 3

New Literacy Strategy: A Holistic and Inclusive Approach

Recognising the diversity of languages and different typologies they predict for reading development, a comprehensive reading strategy that focuses on variation between African languages (Bantu languages) and English (Germanic language) defines the literacy strategy for South Africa.

African languages will have a differentiated structured reading programme based on the language structures. There are more common practices in these languages, so a common underlying programme will be used with minor variations per language. The English and Afrikaans programme, on the other hand, will focus on a balanced approach integrating the Science of Reading and whole language tenets, such as the inclusion of rich texts (incidental reading) in the early years.

To summarise:

- A balanced literacy approach that integrates phonics and whole language for the Foundation Phase in all languages;
- Mother tongue or home language-based Emergent Literacy approach for ECD to ease the transition in Grade 1; and
- Insertion of morphological awareness for African languages of Bantu origin into the Science of Reading.

In order to enact this strategy, there are four key strategic levers that went various reiterations in stakeholder engagements: a) direct policy statement to give life to the strategy, (b) aligned materials that are culturally and age appropriate, (c) highly skilled teachers to carry out reading development programme and (d) involved parents and communities. These are in Figure 2 below:

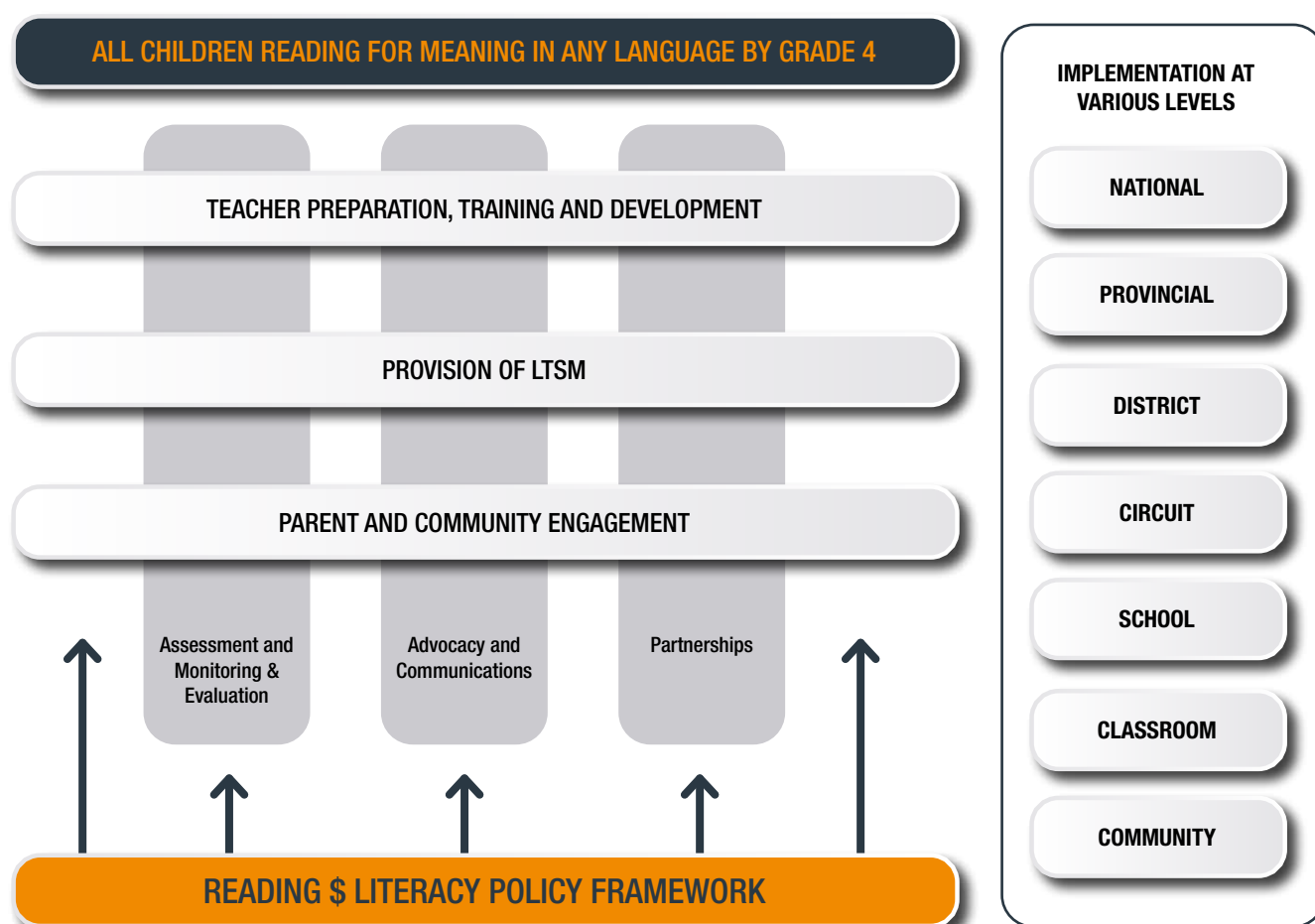


Figure 2: New literacy framework

PILLAR 1: LITERACY POLICY

One of the challenges experienced in the reading literacy ecosystem is the lack of coherence between activities among various stakeholders, including NGO's and initial teacher education programmes. The current policy framework can be gleaned from these various documents:

- Constitution
- National Education Policy Act
- South African Schools Act
- ECD Policy
- LIEP
- National Policy on programme and promotion requirements
- National Reading Strategy (2008)
- National Sector Plan
- CAPS

Each of these is reviewed briefly below to provide context for literacy framework:

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Section 29 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) enshrines a broad scope for the right to basic education. This right obliges the state to make further education available and accessible, which includes elimination of any barriers. It specifically decrees the right of everyone to education in the language of their choice as well as the right of everyone to use their languages:

Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable.

By implication, the right to education in any official language of one's choice offers a solid ground for reading literacy development in more than one language.

THE NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY ACT

The next policy is the National Education Policy Act. Act 27 of 1996 provides an environment for the Minister to develop national policies and projects that are related to literacy. This Act draws from the Constitution and makes directives about the rights that include the following:

- every person's right to basic education and equal access to education institutions;
- *every student is to be instructed in the language of his or her choice where this is reasonably practicable; and*

- every person has the right to use the language and participate in the cultural life of his or her choice within an 'educational' institution.

This Act does not only empower the Minister to develop a national policy of reading and literacy, but it also allows for a multilingual policy that implicates reading in more than one language.

SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) was developed in order to provide a uniform system for the organisation, governance, evaluation and monitoring of schools in the country. It is in this Act that the setting of uniform norms and standards is decreed (Preamble, sections 6 and 34). The Act makes explicit the provision of education of progressively high quality for all learners. For example, Chapter 2 specifically expresses a desire for the protection and advancement of diversity of cultures, languages and upholding the rights of every learner.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT POLICY (1996)

The government recognised Early Childhood Development (ECD) as the key foundation for lifelong learning. The policy explicitly makes reading literacy a central component for the development of the child (Department of Education, 1996:3). In addition, the ECD curriculum guidelines provide opportunities for the development of learning through listening, speaking, reading, and writing and the requirement to assist the learners in their emergent literacy and respect for their mother tongue.

LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION POLICY (DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION 1997)

As part of the national language plan for South Africa, the Department of Education developed a Language in Education Policy, which draws on the values of the Constitution's emphasis on cultural and linguistic diversity as a national asset. The policy makes provision for the promotion of multilingualism and supports the development of all the official languages and respect for all languages in the country. This policy is very explicit about the following:

- All learners should have at least one language as a school subject in Grades 1 and 2.
- All learners are offered their LOLT and at least one additional language as a subject from Grade 3 onwards.
- All languages as subjects should be treated equitably and made resourceful.
- To make promotion requirements apply to language subjects

The specific norms and standards in the Policy include:

- Protection, promotion and extension of language rights as a means of communication.
- Facilitation of natural and interactive commitment to bi-multilingualism.
- Redressing the imbalances created by neglect of historically disadvantaged languages in the schools.

The LiEP further endorses these critical aspects in education:

- Multilingualism
- An **additive approach** to language in education, giving individuals the right to choose the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at their school if it is practicable for the school to accommodate the choice of LoLT; and
- The promotion of the use of **learners' home language** and, at the same time, to provide access to other languages.

Key enablers to the norms are found in this Clause:

Subject to any law dealing with language in education and the Constitutional rights of learners, in determining the language policy of the school, the governing body must stipulate how the school will promote multilingualism through **using more than one language of learning and teaching**, and/or by offering additional languages as fully-fledged subjects, and/or applying special immersion or language maintenance programmes, or through other means approved by the head of the provincial education department.

Here, the policy is explicit about the option to use more than one language to learn and teach any approved school subject.

THE NATIONAL POLICY ON PROGRAMME AND PROMOTION REQUIREMENTS

The National Policy on Programme and Promotion Requirements offers some glimpse on the continued transition from three years of mother tongue education to transition in Grade 4. This is found in the definition of First Additional Language level:

“First Additional Language level” – means the language proficiency level that reflects the basic intercultural and interpersonal communication skills needed in social situations and the cognitive academic skills essential for learning across the curriculum. The First Additional Language level **can** be used as the language of teaching and learning from the Intermediate Phase onwards (pages viii-ix)

THE NATIONAL READING STRATEGY (2008)

Undergirded by the UNESCO Literacy Decade (2002-2013) and the UN Millennium Sustainable Goals, which place literacy at the centre of development, South Africa developed a National Reading Strategy in 2008 to combat illiteracy and promote life-long learners and life-long readers. It sought to develop a common approach to promote reading and support the principle that all learners must be able to read basic texts by the end of Grade 3. Its introductory diagnosis of reading challenges goes beyond primary schools and connects early reading literacy failure to poor matric results and weak academic literacy at universities. It identifies challenges as follows:

- Teacher competencies where most of the early literacy teachers are either unqualified or underqualified;
- Only 7% of the schools in the country have library space stacked with books;
- Teaching conditions such as large classes make reading development difficult;
- Poor print environment;
- Language used in reading development is not mother-tongue; and
- Inadequate language policies to support reading in African languages specifically.

The Strategy draws from the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy, which seeks to ensure that every South African is able to read, write, count and think- something that subsequently gave rise to the National Curriculum Statement. To this end, the National Reading Strategy sought to improve reading for all learners, including learners with barriers to learning and those who are in special schools. Worth noting, however, is that this Strategy takes a more deficit approach to literacy and considers it a reified autonomous skill outside of social practice. Using the environmental opportunity hypothesis, the Strategy is geared more towards filling in the gaps by providing more materials and resources. It is silent on the HOW of reading except for reiterating the five pillars of reading development: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension as isolated skills - an approach that is derived from a monolingual strategy developed in the US under the Dynamics Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), which was translated with minor modifications into Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) measures.

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) offers the most direct reference to reading literacy via the descriptors of the Learning Outcomes. The learning outcome (LO) directly refers to reading and viewing as a necessary literacy outcome in the general goals to develop a confident, independent learner who is literate, numerate and multi-skilled. The learners are expected to be participatory, critical and active citizens. It specifically states:

The learners will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment and respond critically to the aesthetics, cultural and emotional values in text.

Clearly, this outcome assumes that reading for meaning and deeper levels of comprehension would have taken place through methods resonating with the ways of being, knowing and acting that were cultivated throughout the classroom interactions. However, beyond this statement, the suggested activities focus on drilling and skilling rather than the social practice view of reading as a prop for actual social activity representing information exchange where feelings, values and ways of making sense all merge in the event of meaning-making. Similarly, the CAPS does not give additional guidelines on methods for reading development.

Taken together, it is possible to get baseline information on the strategic direction for reading literacy development from these frameworks, but the information is scattered and remains largely unconsolidated and is subject to interpretations in isolation. In the absence of a policy document, a reading plan is almost set out for failure since there are various ministries and NGO's that would, inevitably, pull in different directions with different interpretations for best practices. When framed in this light, there is a need for a national reading policy to bring about cohesion and concentrate efforts towards a common goal.

The Department of Higher Education, the Department of Arts, Sports and Culture and the Department of Basic Education can leverage the policy framework to bring together efforts that show coherence. The Reading Policy aims to heighten the importance of reading literacy as a national priority and a reliable indicator of how a country performs educationally. The policy will draw attention to explicit strategic statements that will supersede all other isolated documents or references to literacy in the current legislative framework. It brings about coherence in the reading ecosystem and provides guidelines on accountability measures. The policy framework provides an enabling environment for:

- It allows for inter-ministerial collaboration (DHET, DASC) on initial teacher training and African languages LTMS standardisation;

- Inclusion of ECD into GET necessitates a broadened scope of reading directives and addresses transitional literacy issues around reading to learn post the Foundation Phase.
- It will provide a broadened strategy with reference to African language linguistic structures - where, for example, **morphemic awareness** becomes a central organising principle for African languages reading literacy.

PILLAR 2: HIGHLY SKILLED AND AGILE TEACHERS

The success of reading development for learners to read for meaning is dependent on the production of teachers who are highly skilled in reading literacy and who possess attributes that render them agile enough to respond to the immediate needs of their learners without heavy reliance on external experts or DBE officials. This pillar focuses on developing skilled and agile teachers who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to promote reading literacy among their learners.

Policy statements under this pillar include providing professional development opportunities, mentoring programmes, teacher recognition initiatives, and support for initial teacher education institutions.

A teacher education/development policy environment that allows for:

- Implementation of educator training programme; i.e., literacy experts and in-service programmes targeting specialised teachers and general educators for literacy across the curriculum;
- Revision of Initial Teacher Education induction programmes such as Teaching Experience;
- Multilingual teaching methodologies enabling teachers of African languages literacies to learn through the medium of these languages;
- High-intensity short course programmes stretching over months for teacher reading champions' development;
- Pedagogically thinking teachers who flexibly apply the science of reading and meaning-based approaches (meaning as the starting point, e.g., look and say for African languages instead of segmentation);
- Advocacy and communication strengthened; and
- Teacher practices monitored and evaluated on a continuous basis.

PILLAR 3: AGE APPROPRIATE AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT LEARNING AND TEACHING SUPPORT MATERIALS (LTSMs)

One of the glaring issues with reading materials is that most of these materials are versions of English, often written in a different culture. In the early years of reading, it is important that learners get exposed to familiar texts so they can concretely connect what they read with the immediate environment they are in. Therefore, the diversity of materials according to the cultural knowledge and environment in which learners find themselves. This pillar focuses on developing culturally relevant learning and teaching support materials (LTSM) that reflect the cultural diversity of South Africa.

Policy statements under this pillar include developing LTSM in African languages, blended texts in both English and selected African languages, promoting access to quality books in school libraries, and guiding publishers to produce high-quality LTSM. For example, non-fiction materials in African languages and graded reading generally are obvious gaps in the system.

- Reading outside of school as a candidate for reading for meaning and fun (reading to know).
- NGO work and community libraries and platforms such as reading clubs standardised and tailor-made for specific needs (needs analysis conducted regularly).
- Monitoring and evaluation of social performances of literacy, as well as needs analysis, are carried out on an ongoing basis.
- Allows for socio-cultural effects of reading and ways of knowing commensurate with IKS notions such as place-based learning (reading). Reading, in this case, involves the activation of oral traditions, which are a prerequisite for innovative reading.
- Advocacy and communication approaches are localised according to the social and cultural innuendos.
- Communities as both subjects and partners.

To support these four pillars, three cross-cutting pillars are vital. These are **communication and advocacy; research, monitoring and evaluation; and partnerships** with organised labour, civil society, NGOs, and the corporate sector, among other sectors.

PILLAR 4: INVOLVED PARENTS AND COMMUNITIES

The success of any reading programme needs to connect the learners' homes and schools. The availability of more and varied materials in African languages is a gateway to involving more parents to help with reading homework and reading for fun. Community reading programmes such as book club initiatives become critical avenues for involving community members in reading development initiatives. This pillar specifically focuses on engaging parents and communities in supporting children's reading development. Policy statements under this pillar include community outreach programs, parent education initiatives, partnerships with local organisations, and promoting access to books outside of school hours. This strategic pillar allows for:

- A framework guiding community-based interventions - using among others, community engagement (communities and practitioners involved in the joint identification of challenges and opportunities as well as the joint construction of solutions).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the pillars discussed above were designed with the aim to address the challenges facing South Africa in terms of reading literacy. Their intersectionality provides comprehensive framework that addresses all aspects of the reading ecosystem. By implementing the strategies underpinned by these pillars, South Africa can work towards a language-typology-sensitive literacy pathway; ensure that all learners have access to quality reading materials; and ensure teachers are equipped with the skills they need to promote reading literacy effectively; age and culturally relevant LTSMs are available for all learners, and parents and communities are engaged in supporting children's reading development.



Chapter 4

Implementation Plan

4.1 LITERACY POLICY

The literacy policy provides a platform for dialogues around the statutory framework within which the national response to reading literacy is situated.

RATIONALE

Policies on reading are very important as they:

- Guide and govern actions to meet the goals of reading improvement.
- Are a common reference point in developing strategies for reading improvement.
- Assist in focussing reading improvement initiatives towards the desired outcome – a reading nation.

- Provide schools with clear guidelines for language and literacy practices.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The anticipated outcomes are:

- To identify and remediate policy gaps in language, literacy and reading improvement.
- To develop the capacity of education officials at all levels, including the schools, to understand and apply policy in improving reading.

HIGH LEVEL PLANS

The table below summarises the details in the plan.

Table 1: Literacy Policy Plans

Activity 1: Identification of broader policy aims on Literacy as a national priority.		
Targets	Linkages to other pillars/sectors	Resources Required
An unambiguous policy statement setting out a national literacy strategy and mechanisms for strategy implementation.	LTMS, Community involvement, and teacher development programmes guided by this policy.	Literacy specialists and policy experts.
Activity 2: Identification of reading literacy elements- adapted Science of Reading to include African languages literacy logic- and guidelines.		
A set of priority policy guidelines prepared in 2024 for schools to properly advance reading improvement initiatives being currently implemented. A comprehensive and holistic set of literacy improvement policy will be promulgated in 2024.	LTMS, Teacher development and community involvement, advocacy.	Consultants and experts on literacy policy.
Activity 3: The provision of training and support to school-level staff in the implementation of policy guidelines related to specific aspects of literacy programmes in schools.		
Primary school SMT members trained per year on the application of policy guidelines for reading improvement in their schools. Subject Advisors trained annually to support schools in implementing reading improvement policies.	This training and support will ensure that school officials understand policy requirements and that they are able to apply and manage these requirements in their schools. Subject Advisors will be trained to provide site-based support.	Trained subject advisors and training materials and logistics.

4.2 AGE-APPROPRIATE AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE LTMS AND RESOURCES

Access to reading resources aims to increase the supply of, and access to, reading materials in indigenous South African languages.

RATIONALE

Learners across the grades and stages of their development and learning should have access to good-quality books that are culturally sensitive and available in their home languages. Studies suggest three factors that are key to reading achievement, namely, access to many good, high-quality books, book ownership, and choice in selection. This highlights the importance of reading resources and implies that we must increase the supply of, and access to, reading materials in indigenous South African languages.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Here are the anticipated outcomes:

- To provide engaging African language fiction and non-fiction reading resources, both print and digital, that are available to schools and homes, and that are affordable in terms of cost;
- To provide materials that correspond with the holistic approach to literacy: graded and rich texts that are culturally relevant;
- To provide materials that include induction to writing as a key aspect of literacy development;
- Provision of LTSM including readers and library books to encourage reading at home;
- Development of core resource packs for reading in the ECD and Foundation Phase;
- Establishment of classroom libraries; and
- Initiatives to encourage reading for enjoyment at school and out of school.

The table below summarises the details in the plan.

Table 2: Age-appropriate and culturally sensitive LTMS Plans

Activity 1: Increase the production of reading materials in African languages (fiction and non-fiction).		
Targets	Linkages to other pillars/sectors	Resources Required
ECD classrooms with learners in the reception years have 20 picture home language storybooks (fiction and non-fiction) with content and illustrations likely to engage young learners. Foundation Phase classrooms in primary schools have: • 20 age appropriate home language titles for emergent literacy and reading for enjoyment per class. • 40 age appropriate home language titles for independent reading and reading for enjoyment. • Eight graded reading home language anthologies (basal readers) per class for learning to read for Grades 1 to 3.	Early-grade classrooms in both primary schools and in ECD centres will receive the minimum requirement of reading resources. This will assist the DBE with the development of core reading resource packs.	Material developers and publishers. National catalogue.
Activity 2: Develop and implement a plan that takes advantage of technology in increasing access to reading materials.		
All primary schools and ECD centres have at least one laptop computer and digital projector so that digital books can be projected as big books for shared reading.	Digital reading resources	Budget for tech acquisition and IT assistants/consultants
Activity 3: Revise the national reading catalogue to incorporate the new strategy into the norms for materials developers (0-10 years readers in different languages).		
The new catalogue is updated with materials showing a balance of genres and locally developed readers displaying: • Age appropriateness. • Cultural relevance. • ECD materials in African languages (e.g., wordless and one work picture books).	Literacy Policy	Materials developers in all languages Quality assurers

4.3 TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: AGILE AND HIGHLY SKILLED TEACHERS

Teacher development serves to enhance teachers' abilities in the teaching of reading; it also benefits the learners as they receive reading instruction from more skilled, agile, and empathetic teachers. Aligned with the key strategy of placing African languages in literacy, the teachers need to be well-versed in the specific language-based literacy.

RATIONALE

One of the critical requirements is to streamline and extend professional development efforts so that all teachers and schools have access to high-quality professional development opportunities.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- To ensure that Subject Advisors and teachers across the national landscape have the knowledge and skills to teach reading, which is supported by relevant teaching materials, training and support in both home languages and EFAL.
- To ensure that teachers and schools are also able to work on the screening and support of learners in order to identify and address physical and psychological problems that impede their ability to read.
- To mobilise partnerships to aid schools in screening learners and providing them with the support they need to overcome the problems which impede their reading.

The table below summarises the details in the plan.

Table 3: Agile and Skilled Teacher Development Plans

Activity 1: Enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills to teach reading as an integral part of the curriculum.		
Targets	Linkages to other pillars/sectors	Resources Required
Roll out the PSRIP programme to all primary school teachers (Grades 0-3) currently not reached by the national programme through: • Providing national training on reading methodologies. • Developing and revising Foundation Phase Home Language learning programmes, aligned to CAPS. • Train ECD practitioners and/or teachers on pre-literacy.	LTSM. Research, monitoring and evaluation.	Skilled trainers.
Activity 2: Build the capacity of principals and departmental heads so that they can effectively manage and support teachers in reading improvement.		
Support primary school principals and departmental heads to more effectively utilise existing reading resources. Subject advisors monitor the use of all reading resources in schools as a general practice.	LTSM. Research, monitoring and evaluation.	Skilled teachers and training resources. Skilled subject advisors.
Activity 3: Assessing the prevalence of sight, hearing and other disabilities which may impede the capacity of learners to read or write.		
Screening for inclusive literacy, with a specific attention to inclusive schools.		Technical and medical professionals.

4.4 INVOLVED PARENTS, COMMUNITIES, AND ADVOCACY AND PARTNERSHIPS

Community support focuses on mobilising and consolidating the national reading response in communities. *For implementation purposes, this pillar incorporates partnerships as well as advocacy and communication strategies.*

RATIONALE

Communities have many places and spaces where reading can be supported, like schools, homes, churches, clinics, etc. To nurture a culture of reading it is important to support these spaces, but it requires communities to be organised, equipped, and connected for collective action.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

- To cultivate and empower community role players to act, inspire, create change and have a sense of ownership of literacy development in their communities.
- To mobilise the necessary resources, disseminate information, generate support and facilitate cooperation across business and civil society sectors.

High-level plans

There is high-level support for these plans in the DBE's sector vision as the DBE prioritises the following:

- The development and implementation of a communication and advocacy strategy on reading (advocacy and communication).
- The implementation of literacy campaign in all schools.
- The implementation of a three-year roll-out plan to set up reading hubs.
- That reading-for-meaning campaigns are supported by communities, businesses, professional bodies and publishers (partnerships).
- Involved School Governing Bodies structures on skilling and mobilising reading and writing practices at home.

The table below summarises the details in the plan.

Table 4: Involved parents, community involvement and advocacy

Activity 1: Build a network of coordinating structures to help develop a culture of reading, collaboration and support for reading initiatives and activities.		
Targets	Linkages to other pillars/sectors	Resources Required
Establish reading and writing communities.	Partnerships and research, monitoring and evaluation.	Community champions and School governing bodies.
Establish School governing bodies structures to promote reading at home and in the feeder communities	Advocacy and Communications.	Literacy champions.
Activity 2: Provide ongoing mobilisation, capacity building and dissemination of information.		
Development of a printed and electronic resource toolkit to support the mobilisation of community support. It will address the following areas: • An interactive rewards, recognition and community management system. • Training on how to mobilise community support for reading provided.	Linked to all LTSM and partnerships. Research, Monitoring and evaluation.	Skilled community trainers.

4.5 RESEARCH, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Research, monitoring and evaluation promote promising practices in literacy teaching and the effectiveness of the overall implementation plan.

RATIONALE

Research, monitoring and evaluation are important to improve reading literacy because they:

- Generate knowledge about reading, literacy development and best practices in improving reading.
- Contribute to the assessment and monitoring of reading performance and improvement.
- Audit and review reading and literacy programmes to ensure that quality is assessed.
- Inform and guide language and literacy teaching in schools.

- Involve teachers both as consumers and producers of good literacy practices through action research.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The anticipated outcomes under this pillar are:

- To identify research gaps for enabling reading improvement to build research capacity in language and literacy among lecturers and teachers of various languages, especially in African languages.
- To establish standardised approaches for monitoring and evaluating progress in reading improvement in African languages, Afrikaans and English.
- To improve the development and implementation of the national research strategy on reading and to optimise its utilisation.

The table below summarises the details in the plan.

Table 5: Research Plans

Activity 1: To identify gaps in reading and literacy research in order to improve literacy implementation plan.		
Targets	Linkages to other pillars/ sectors	Resources Required
A report on gaps in reading and literacy research is produced. A national agenda for reading and literacy research that is enforced by the sector is produced. Annual research conference to report on the attainment of objectives on the National Research Agenda.	All other pillars: policy, teacher development and LTMS, communication and advocacy; community and parental engagement.	Skilled researchers. Dedicated unit on monitoring, evaluation and assessment.
Activity 2: To use pilot studies in critical areas of research such as the logic of African languages literacy and the balanced literacy approach.		
Selection of pilot studies to address priority areas for reading improvement. Sharing of research findings in communities of practice.	All pillars.	Skilled researchers.
Activity 3: To develop a standardised monitoring and evaluation strategy for tracking reading improvement at the school and district levels.		
A set of critical areas and targets for reading improvement tracking. Annual reports on reading improvement in respect of these factors (impact evaluation). Reading benchmarks established for all languages of literacy.	Linked to all pillars.	Researchers. Literacy quality assurers.

Activity 4: To develop feasibility studies across all the pillars using mixed methods and hybrid designs to improve practice

Develop experimental projects testing new grounds on the intersections of skills and meaning.

Use both qualitative and quantitative measures to broaden knowledge on effectiveness of the strategy on all the pillars:

- Policy review.
- LTM.
- Parents and communities.
- Teacher professional development.
- Advocacy and communication.
- Effectiveness of partnerships and setting of parameters.

Linked to all pillars

Researchers.

Literacy quality assurers.

Impact surveys.



Conclusion

The foregoing discussion points to the need to have South African children read for meaning in all languages by age 10. To attain this developmental goal and ensure quality of education for sustainable development, there is a need to gravitate from monolingual literacy practices that are imposed on African languages, which are typologically distant from Germanic languages such as English and Afrikaans. A point worth restating here is that African language literacies are best predicated on the core meaning-driven linguistic property: morphological awareness. Re-organising the science of reading by incorporating morphological awareness is a preferred literacy direction for improving learning outcomes. In the teaching of English and Afrikaans as home languages or additional languages, linear approaches that focus on one skill at a time often miss the multidimensional nature of literacy. It is for this reason that both the phonics approach and whole language approaches merge under a balanced approach, which is an ideal candidate for multilingual

literacy development. It is equally for this reason and others above that the new literacy direction requires reviewing the science for reading at two levels: first, assuring that skills and social practices of literacy are treated simultaneously in all languages and second, by explicitly incorporating the morphological awareness and limiting phonemic awareness in African languages. When framed in this light, South Africa will have adopted a holistic and inclusive literacy approach to address the current challenge where learners are not able to read for meaning and instead regress through defaulting to basal skills defined as “barking at text”.

To operate this strategy, a lean implementation plan seeks to have an overarching literacy policy statement, involved parents and communities, age-appropriate and culturally relevant materials, and agile and highly skilled teachers who apply the strategies envisaged. These pillars are supported cross-cuttingly by constant research, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy and communication, as well as dedicated partnerships beyond the remit of the Department of Basic Education.



Selected Bibliography

Agenda 2063: *The Africa we want*. African Union

Ardington, C., Wills, G., & Kotze, J. (2021). COVID-19 learning losses: early grade reading in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 86, 102480.

Hofmeyr, H. (2021). Perseverance, passion and poverty: Examining the association between grit and reading achievement in high-poverty schools in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 83, 102376.

Marais, A-M. & Wessels, E., 2020, 'Investigating the interpretation and implementation of policies that guide the teaching of reading in the Foundation Phase', *Reading & Writing* 11(1), a277.

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996)

Department of Education. (1997). *Language in Education Policy*. Pretoria: Department of Education

Department of Education (2008). *National Reading Strategy*. Pretoria: Department of Education.

Department of Basic Education (2011). *National Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.

Makalela, L., & Fakude, P. (2014). 'Barking' at texts in Sepedi oral reading fluency: Implications for edumetric interventions in African languages. *South African Journal of African Languages*, 34(sup1), 71-78.

Moore, J. M., & Hart, M. (2007). Access to literacy: scaffolded reading strategies in the South African context. *Journal for Language Teaching= Ijenali Yekufundzisa Lulwimi= Tydskrif vir Taalonderrig*, 41(1), 15-30.

Naidoo, U., Reddy, K., & Dorasamy, N. (2014). Reading literacy in primary schools in South Africa: Educator perspectives on factors affecting reading literacy and strategies for improvement. *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 7(1), 155-167.

National Planning Commission. (2013). National development plan vision 2030.

National Education Policy Act (Act 27 of 1996)

National Reading Strategy (2008).

South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996)

United Nations (2015). Sustainable Development Goals. United Nations.





DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION

222 Struben Street
Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001

Telephone: 012 357 3000

Fax: 012 323 0601

ISBN: 978-1-4315-4004-4

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BasicEd

X: www.x.com/dbe_sa

www.education.gov.za