SOUTH AFRICAN SYSTEMIC EVALUATION 2022

Analysis of Factors Influencing Learning Outcomes

Edition: November 2024

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Centre for Evaluation & Assessment

Read to Lead
A Reading Nation is a Leading Nation

2030 NDP

30 YEARS OF FREEDOM

This report on the analysis of factors influencing learning outcomes was compiled by Dr Mark Chetty, Dr Nonhlanhla Shozi, and Prof. Anil Kanjee drawing from the three volumes of reports on the South African Systemic Evaluation study.

For any enquiries relating to the report and further use of *South African Systemic Evaluation* data, please contact Dr M. Chetty, Director of National Assessment at the Department of Basic Education.

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Foreword

Foreword

"What gets measured gets improved" Peter Drucker

Systemic evaluations aim to measure the effectiveness of existing education systems and identify areas for improvement and growth. The growth and maturity of an advancing system is its ability to "learn, unlearn and re-learn". Underscoring this focus is the need for robust, dynamic, and innovative evaluation models that generate credible and valuable evidence within a learning system. Within a young democracy, the measurement of learning will mirror the education margins of a developmental state: constrained success, recovery of learning, developmental opportunities, and green shoots. Systemic evaluations done with the right rigour, size, and measure become a complete and extensive account of enabling and constraining conditions of learning.

The 2022 South African Systemic Evaluation aims to ensure the measurement of education relevance and accountability, promote evidence-led decision-making in the sector, and prioritising important next steps for delivering quality education. By evaluating learners and schools holistically, the system can pinpoint weaknesses and establish targeted diagnostics on policy, teaching and learning, learning and teaching support materials, institutional development, and learning outcomes.

Against the backdrop of contested global standards and a willingness in the education sector to establish more localised standards, focusing more on homegrown designs, South Africa spent many years gathering key role players together to design and develop a national systemic evaluation model. The outcome was a congruence of innovative ideas between policymakers and labour. The model looks critically at an expansion of standards beyond learner achievement and looks at the whole system as the unit of analysis. The Department has phrased the intended outcome of the national systemic evaluation as: "evaluate aspects and components of the Basic Education eco-system to provide data on learning in the context of in-school and out-of-school factors".

Having concluded its baseline study in 2022, the Department is able to provide its most comprehensive account of local standards reached by learners and reduce an over-reliance on externally crafted standards of the global north. The current Systemic Evaluation model assesses learners at key stages: Grades 3, 6, and 9 in significant gateway domains of Mathematics and Reading Literacy. The results provide an analysis of targets outlined in the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) and the National Development Plan (NDP). It also examines the impact of school conditions and the level of support provided by district offices on learning. The diagnostics are packaged for maximum utility on performance levels, proficiency, and school effectiveness within frameworks that provide a handle on the complexity of interacting activity systems and the profiling of learners within developmental ecosystems.

The findings of this study revealed significant observations on learner performance, with learners adapting better the longer they stay in school. In both Mathematics and language, learners surpassed minimum proficiency thresholds, above 400 points in Grade 3 and above 500 points in Grade 6 and Grade 9.

The Systemic Evaluation study is comprehensively reported in three volumes, each focusing on distinct aspects of a learning diagnostic:

Volume 1 provides a detailed technical analysis of the systemic evaluation processes, outcomes, and findings. It includes key insights and recommendations on performance levels, background information about the system, and a thorough description of the research methodology. This report discusses the systemic evaluation's overall significance, guiding future decision-making and interventions.

Volume 2 focuses on the proficiency of learners in the South African education system, both nationally and provincially. It presents the results of reading literacy and mathematics assessments for Grades 3, 6, and 9, disaggregated by province, gender, school quintile, and language. The report also details findings on each content domain, a summary of key insights, and a proposed path forward on pedagogical support and remediation.

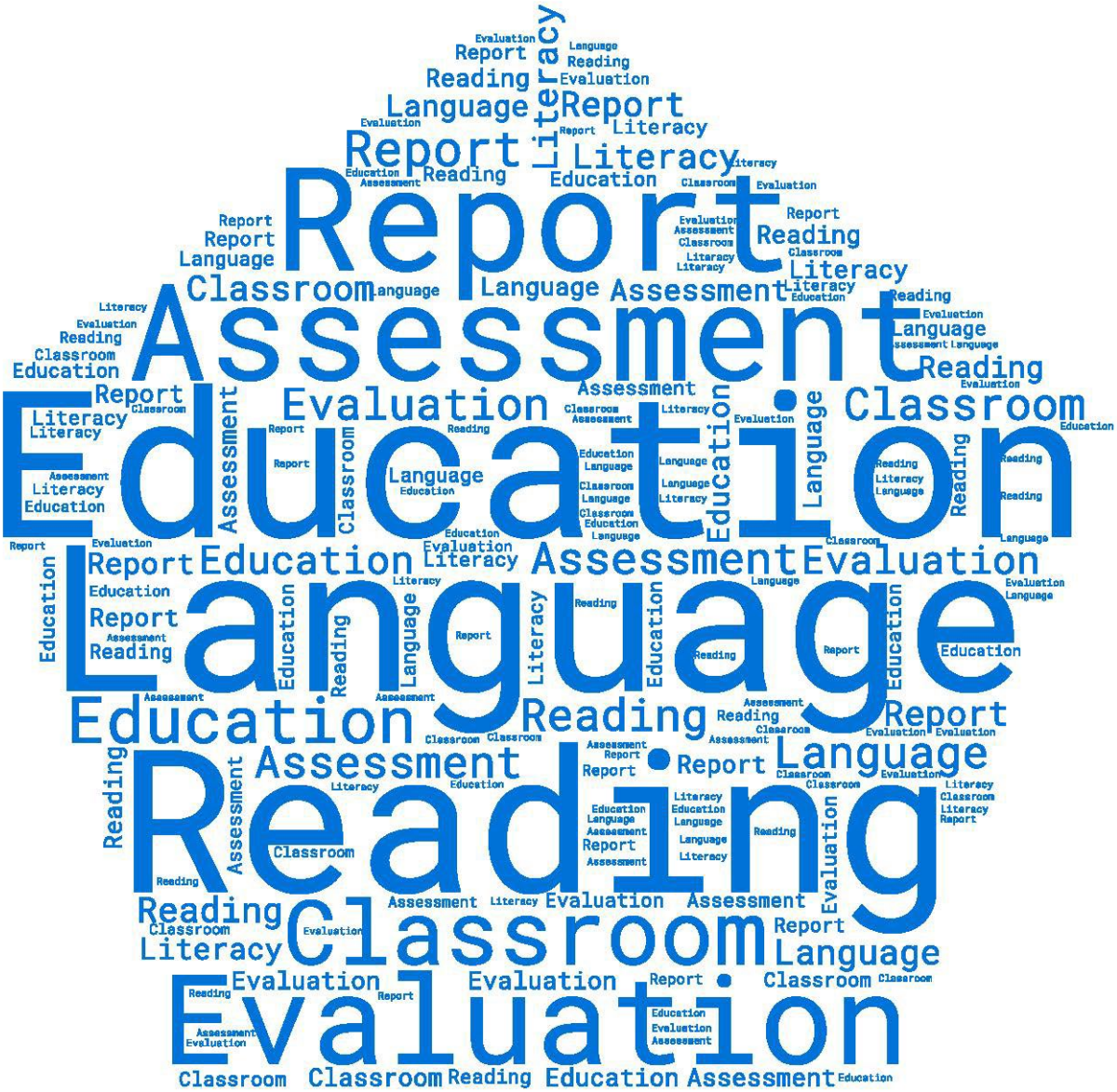
Volume 3 addresses the evaluation of schools through the Whole-School Evaluation methodology. It extends its analysis to include the evaluation of support provided at the district, as the first line of policy mediation to schools, offering a comprehensive view of the effectiveness of education support structures.

The three volumes of the Systemic Evaluation study provide a crucial diagnostic of learning outcomes for the South African public. It is with a proud sense of accomplishment that the baseline study results of the first South African Systemic Evaluation are released for public consumption and attention. Broader society is emboldened to join hands with the education sector to chart and realise anticipated growth and success of future cycles. I thank the parents, teachers, principals, teacher unions, communities, education officials, and specifically the thousands of learners who participated in the study. I, therefore, invite all education stakeholders and broader society to view the results with a sense of ownership and involvement and to support the projects, programmes, and efforts of the Department in its mission to deliver and assure quality basic education to all learners.

"Systemic evaluation is crucial for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of an education system. By assessing outcomes and processes, we can ensure that every child, regardless of background, receives the quality education they deserve." – Andreas Schleicher

Yours Sincerely

MS S GWARUBE, MP
Minister of Basic Education
Date: 18/11/2024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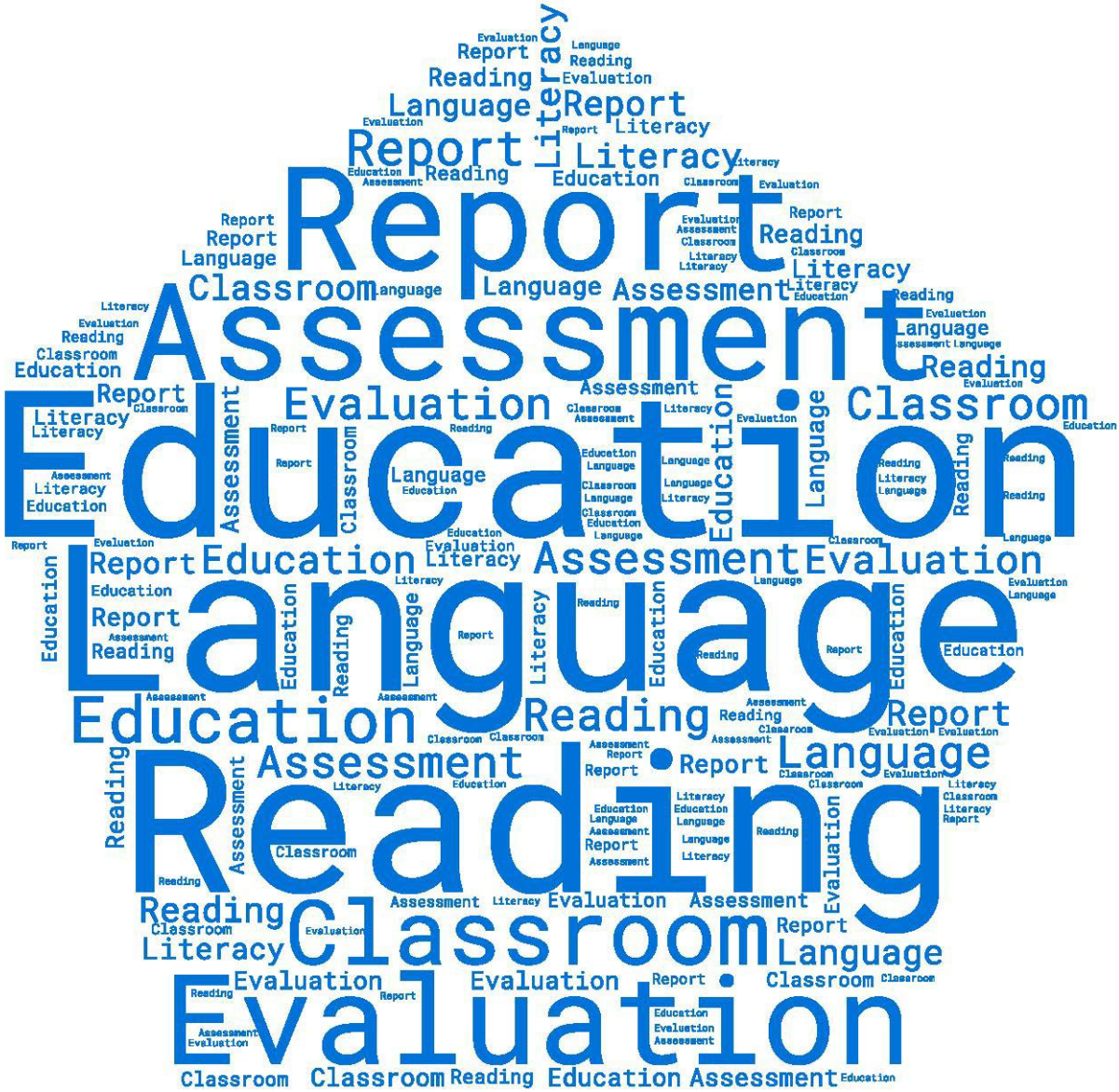
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

TIMSS	Trends in Mathematics and Science Study
DBE	Department of Basic Education
HL	Home Language
LoLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Material
SASE	South African Systemic Evaluation
SEACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SGB	School Governing Body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Introduction

1. Introduction

The Department of Basic Education conducted different studies in the past three years. The purpose of this report is to present a preliminary analysis of factors that influence learner performance. The analysis of learner performance draws on insights from the 2022 South African Systemic Evaluation (SASE) as the pivot or lead diagnostic. The SASE is a comprehensive representation of the South African educational context, with extensive sample size, and close curriculum match, making it highly relevant for understanding learning outcomes. This study offers comparative insights, providing a broader context to evaluate and understand trends and factors impacting learner performance in South Africa. The rich and comprehensive data sources enable a deep examination of the learner, school, classroom and home factors influencing learning outcomes.

The target population in the SASE study included all Grades 3, 6, and 9 learners, with minor exclusions based on small school size and specific learning barriers. From this target population, a nationally representative sample was drawn, and it was large enough to provide statistically robust estimates at the provincial level. A total of 49,880 Grade 3 learners, 52,099 Grade 6 learners, and 38,920 Grade 9 learners participated in the study.

The cognitive testing instruments and questionnaires administered in the study were quality assured by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) and have robustly checked that required standard operating procedures relating to the conduct of this large-scale national assessment study have been adhered to.

This report presents the overall learner performance in the SASE, a contextual framework underpinning the study, data analysis, and key recommendations drawn from the findings.

2. Overall Learner Performance

This section provides an overview of the learners' performance. The results from the systemic evaluation study are used as the main data source and are complemented by general findings of TIMSS 2023 and SEACMEQ V. This was possible due to the unique opportunity of having 3 data sources released in the same year. In further editions of the report, more extensive findings on TIMSS and SEACMEQ will be included. Further in the SASE study, the analysis covers Grades 3, 6, and 9 but the key focus is on Grade 3 literacy and numeracy, as this is where sharper interventions and focus is needed. It is also the area of priority for the seventh administration.

The scores from the SASE study are measured on a scale of 0-1000 with a 500-centre point. This is a similar scale used in TIMSS and SEACMEQ. However, each study have unique methodologies of generating benchmarks within this scale and their scores should not be viewed in direct comparison to each other. However some reference can be made to descriptions around the centre point. An example of this is illustrated in the figure below with the Mathematics scores reflected across all three studies.

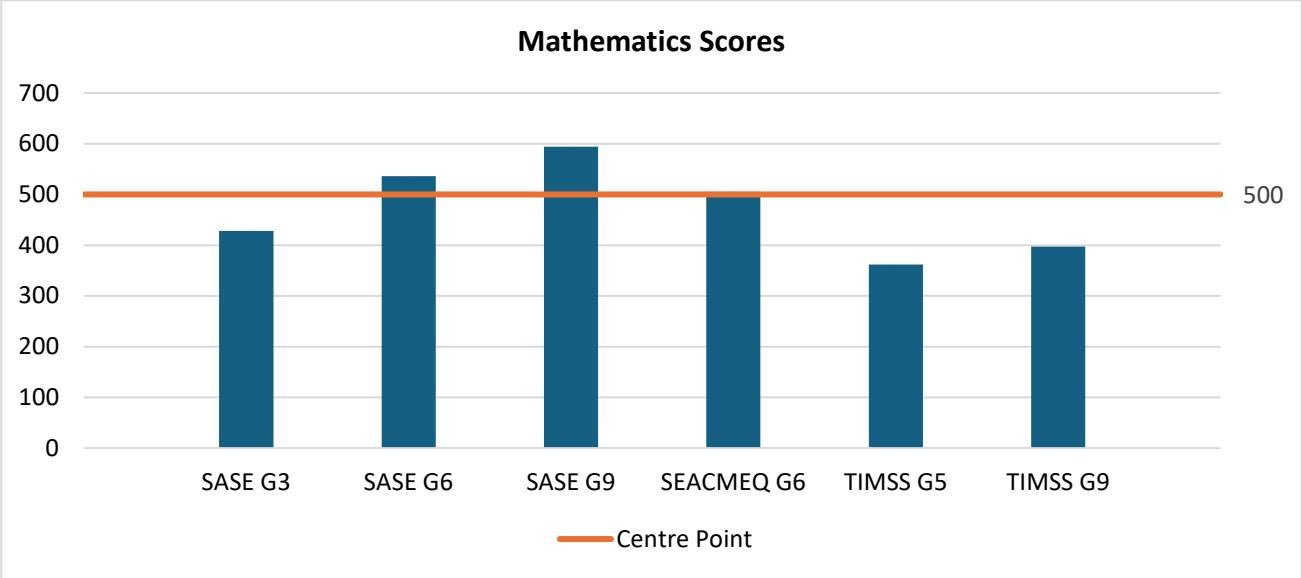
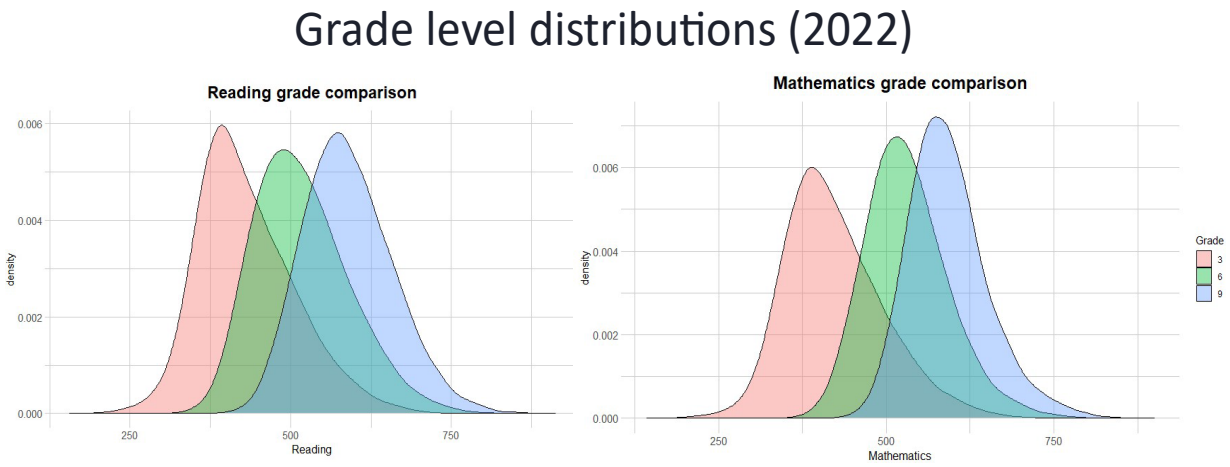


Figure 1: Mathematics Scores across three studies

The figure above shows the scores of each study in relation to the 500-centre point. These scores show that SASE mathematics performance at the Grade 3 level is below the 500-centre point but performance in Grades 6 and 9 is above the centre point. The results of SEACMEQ is slightly above the centre point and TIMSS scores are below the centre point. The scaling procedures of the SASE do allow for direct comparisons to be made on the scores of Grades 3, 6, and 9 learners in Reading Lietracy and Mathematics. The respective grade level distributions and overall mean scores are

illustrated in figure 2. SASE results show that in Reading Literacy, Grade 3 learners scored an average of 438 points; Grade 6 learners scored an average of 522; and Grade 9 learners scored an average of 592 points. In Mathematics, the average scores were 428 points for Grade 3; 536 for Grade 6; and 594 for Grade 9.



Reading

Grade	Mean	StdDev
3	438	79
6	522	78
9	592	72

Maths

Grade	Mean	StdDev
3	428	77
6	536	66
9	594	62

Figure 2: SASE overall performance levels

Contextual Framework

3. Contextual Framework

The contextual framework guiding the diagnostic report on learner performance by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) is grounded in two primary learning theories: Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of learning development and Engeström's third-generation Activity Theory (Figure 1). These theories were specifically chosen for their ability to: account for the numerous environmental factors that influence learning outcomes, clarify the interactions between these factors, and provide insights that are particularly relevant to the South African educational landscape.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Figure 3) emphasises that a child's attributes such as academic self-concept, home language, or nutritional status can influence their interactions with their surroundings. Within an educational context, this translates into how a learner's self-beliefs, family background, and overall health can shape their engagement and learning capacity in school. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner also highlights the influence of the environment, which could be represented in the classroom as the teacher, their teaching practices, and the language of teaching and learning.

These environmental components interact dynamically with the child's attributes, collectively affecting their motivation, readiness, and ability to succeed academically.

Engeström's Activity Theory (Figure 3) complements this perspective by focusing on the complex systems of relationships within educational settings, helping to identify how learners, educators, and educational practices intersect and influence one another.

The contextual framework for the SASE study was designed to merge essential components of both these theories forming an ecological model of factors influencing learning outcomes (Figure 4). Within this framework, the analysis could be presented at three levels: microsystem, macrosystem, and mesosystem. The microsystem includes the contexts where a child spends most of their time and as such can include several settings (the teacher, classroom, and school). The macrosystem describes the larger environmental forces impacting school culture and climate. The interrelations and complexity between these settings in the microsystem and macrosystem occur in the mesosystem.

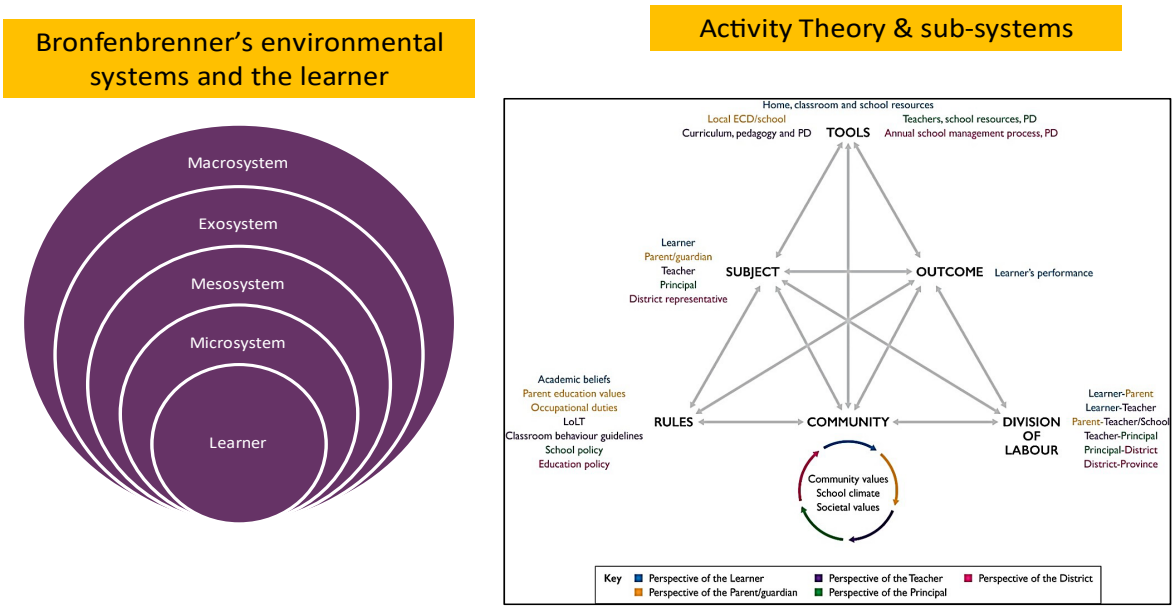


Figure 3: Bronfenbrenner's environmental systems & the learner and the Activity Theory & sub-systems

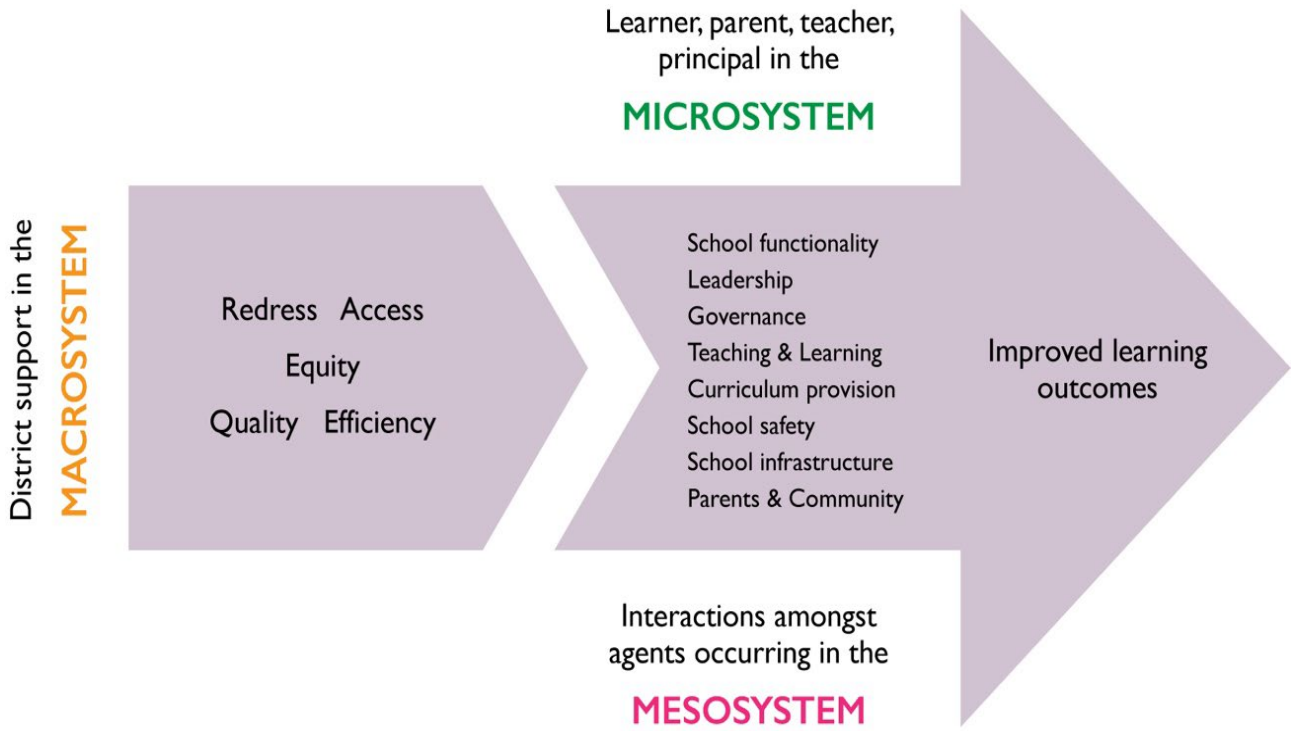


Figure 4: An ecological model of factors influencing learning outcomes

Figure 4 above shows a layered approach, incorporating three systems: macrosystem, microsystem, and mesosystem each contributing uniquely towards an understanding of factors influencing learning outcomes.

3.1. Factors at the Microsystem level

In the South African education context, the key settings within the microsystem are the learner, the classroom, the school, and the home. Within each of these, some important agents interact with and influence learner performance, namely, the parent or guardian, the teacher, and the principal.

At the classroom level, factors include teacher qualifications, experience, and professional development, as well as the methods they use in teaching, such as lesson planning, assessment practices, feedback, and the effective use of resources like workbooks. Additionally, the physical setup of the classroom such as the learner-to-teacher ratio and the availability of essential resources plays a role in shaping the learning environment.

At the school level, various elements influence the broader learning context. These include access to learning materials and infrastructure, the overall school environment (emphasising safety and discipline), and the relationship between the school, the surrounding community, parents, and the school governing body. School management's support for teaching and learning and the presence of co-curricular programs also contribute significantly to the school's learning atmosphere and learners' educational experience.

In the home context, several learner-specific characteristics impact learning outcomes. These include the resources available for learning at home, the student's academic aspirations and beliefs, and the values, expectations, and responsibilities held by parents, which may relate to their work obligations. Additionally, factors such as the learner's health, nutrition, and proximity to the school can affect both their readiness and ability to learn.

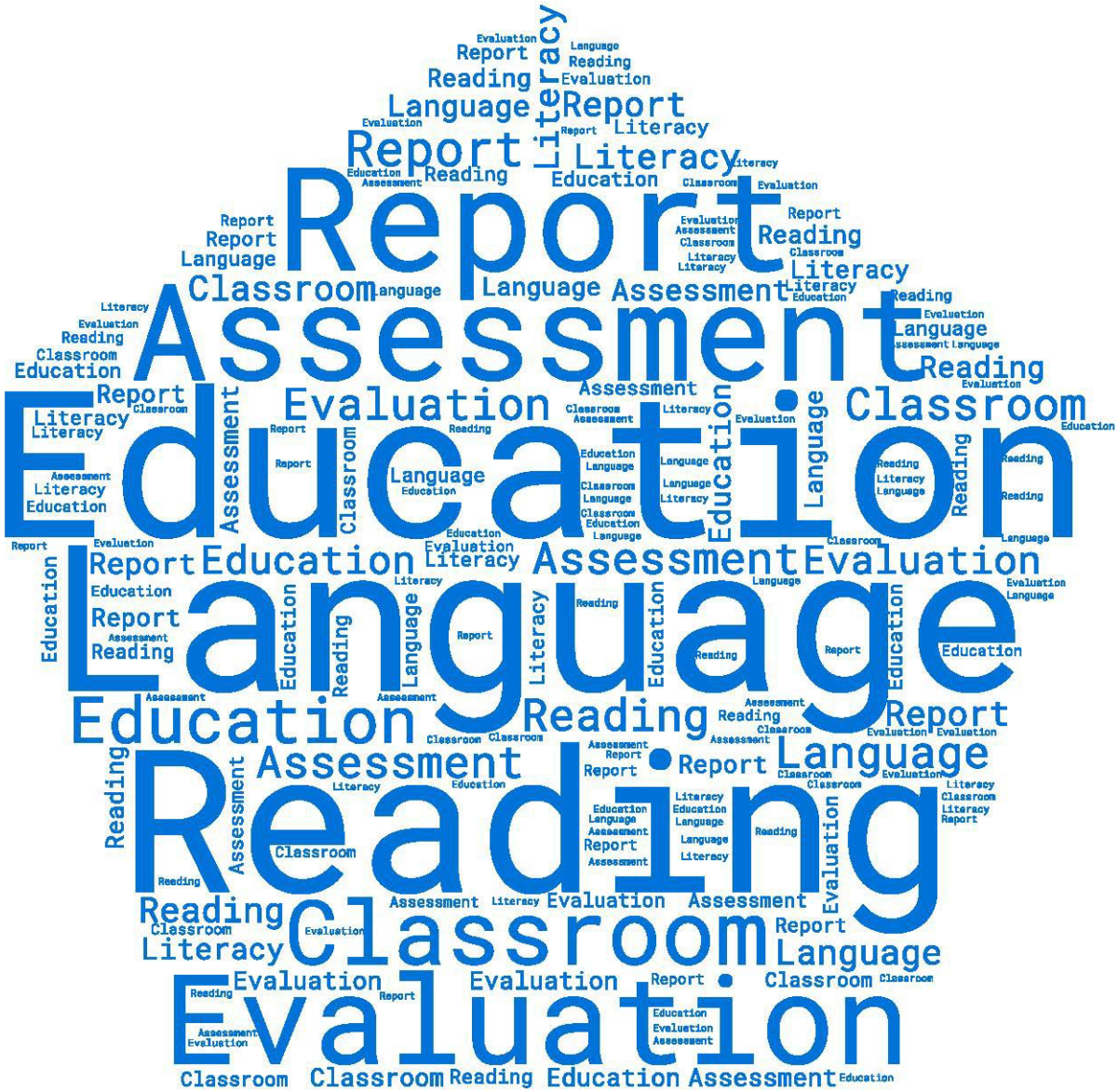
3.2. Factors at the Macrosystem level

In this framework, the macrosystem refers to the education system which exerts a top-level influence by providing support services to schools with a specific focus on enhancing teaching and learning. This includes guidance from the district and province in areas such as pedagogy for Mathematics and language instruction, as well as support for learners with special needs.

3.3. Factors at the Mesosystem level

The mesosystem reflects the interactions across all layers, particularly the relationships between teachers, principals, and parents, which are critical to learner performance. Support from the district, school management, and teacher development programs, aimed at improving pedagogy,

collectively contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and learning, as evidenced in studies conducted by the DBE.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Analysis

4. Analysis

As discussed in Section 3 above, the analysis in this section is presented in three levels. Each level focuses on factors that influence the learning outcomes. Key findings are highlighted for emphasis.

4.1. Microsystem Analysis

At the micro level, the analysis unpacks learner proficiency in Reading Literacy and Mathematics and factors contributing to the results. The SASE study employed seven questionnaires as its primary data collection instruments to gather contextual insights from learners, parents, teachers, principals, and district officials. For learners, three questionnaires were created, each tailored to Grades 3, 6, and 9. The Grade 3 questionnaire was available in 11 languages, while those for Grades 6 and 9 were in Afrikaans and English. These questionnaires explored various themes, including learner characteristics like gender and home language, academic beliefs, health and nutrition, learning resources at home, parental values, school infrastructure, teaching practices, and overall school environment.

A parent questionnaire, in 11 languages, examined characteristics of the parent or guardian, values and expectations, home learning resources, perceptions of school climate, and the relationship between school and community.

Teachers completed an English-only questionnaire covering themes such as classroom infrastructure, teaching practices, teacher qualifications, school support, and extracurricular programs. Principals also completed a questionnaire focusing on resources for learning, teacher qualifications, school management, community relations, and the school management team's support for teaching.

Finally, the district questionnaire gathered information on district-provided support services, district-school and district-province connections, responsibilities for teaching support, pedagogical support in Mathematics and Reading Literacy Literacy, and special needs support.

An analysis of these questionnaires provided an in-depth understanding of factors underpinning learner proficiency.

4.1.1. Learner Proficiency in Reading Literacy and Numeracy

Learner Proficiency results are reported using four performance levels: Emerging, Evolving, Enhancing, and Extending. At the Emerging level, learners are only beginning to develop Grade-level

foundational knowledge and skills, and they must collaborate with teachers and peers to construct new knowledge and skills. At the Evolving levels, learners are still constructing the required Grade-level knowledge and skills, and they are in the process of adapting their understanding and application of these new knowledge and skills. The Enhancing level represents the required skills and understanding for Reading Literacy or Mathematics. The Extending level indicates understanding and skills that go beyond the required level, as learners on this level exhibit advanced understanding and the ability to apply skills innovatively in complex contexts. The performance levels are indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Performance level names, definitions and implications for learners and teaching

Level Name	Level Definition	Implications for supporting learners	Implications for teaching
Emerging	**Learners at this level are:** • beginning to develop the grade-level foundational knowledge and skills • collaborating with teachers and peers to construct new knowledge and skills	**Learners may benefit from:** • extensive guidance • extensive support	**Activities and tasks should:** • focus on building foundational skills • provide scaffolded instruction and detailed feedback • offer ample opportunities to apply knowledge in real-world context
Evolving	**Learners at this level are:** • constructing the required grade-level knowledge and skills • adapting their understanding and application of knowledge and skills through interactions with teachers and peers	**Learners may benefit from:** • additional guidance • targeted support	**Activities and tasks should:** • build on existing knowledge and skills • are targeted to address specific areas of weakness • provide additional practice opportunities in applying knowledge to real-world context
Enhancing	**Learners at this level are:** • demonstrating understanding and skills required at the grade-level • applying their knowledge and skills in authentic contexts • moving towards independent learning	**Learners may benefit from:** • moderate guidance • targeted support	**Activities and tasks should:** • provide tasks that encourage critical thinking, and problem-solving • support the application of knowledge and skills in real-world contexts
Extending	**Learners at this level are:** • demonstrating advanced understanding of knowledge and skills • applying skills in innovative and creative ways in increasingly complex contexts • able to learn independently	**Learners may benefit from**: • limited guidance • limited support	**Activities and tasks should:** • be more challenging for independent exploration and self-assessment • focus on fostering creativity to apply knowledge and skills novel and challenging contexts

Using the four PLs indicated above, Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) were developed for each level across both Reading Literacy and Mathematics. These PLDs detail what learners are be able to

demonstrate at each of the PLs for Reading Literacy and Mathematics at a specific grade linked to the competencies of the South African national Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS). Table 3 and Table 4 below outline the PLDs for Grade 3 Reading Literacy and Grade 3 Mathematics. Similar tables were generated for Grades 6 and 9.

Table 2: Grade 3 Reading Performance Level Descriptors

EMERGING	EVOLVING	ENHANCING	EXTENDING
Learners at this level are able to	**Learners at this level are able to**	**Learners at this level are able to**	**Learners at this level are able to**
• Have knowledge of basic single sounds learnt so far. • Read a simple text with the teacher's help • Read a simple short story with the teacher's help.	• Read single and double sounds learnt so far. • Read a simple text independently. • Read and comment on a simple story and identify key details in a text.	• Read phonics learnt so far, including complex patterns of phonics. • Decode any unfamiliar word, e.g., two and three letter combinations. • Read and comment on a simple story, recognise the plot and identify key details. • Read a variety of complex texts independently. e.g., fiction and non-fiction. • Draw basic conclusions from texts read.	• Identify, find and use information from different sources in an appropriate way. • Analyse texts for socio-cultural values, attitudes and assumptions. • Draw advanced conclusions from texts read. • Read a variety of unfamiliar texts, using reading skills learnt. • Read a complex/ difficult text independently.

Table 3: Grade 3 Numeracy Performance Level Descriptors

EMERGING	EVOLVING	ENHANCING	EXTENDING
Learners at this level are able to	**Learners at this level are able to**	**Learners at this level are able to**	**Learners at this level are able to**
Represent numbers and their relationships, and to count, estimate, calculate and check with competence and confidence Complete simple patterns. Recognise, name and describe characteristics of two-dimensional objects in a variety of orientations and positions. Measure standard measures in a variety of contexts. Read and write time	**Represent** numbers and their relationships, and to count, estimate, calculate and check with competence and confidence in solving problems. **Extend and complete simple** patterns. **Recognise, name and describe** characteristics and relationships between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in a variety of orientations and positions. **Estimate and measure** standard measures in a variety of contexts. **Read and write** time and solve problems. **Sort, order and organise data** to answer questions.	**Recognise** numbers and their relationships, and to count, estimate, calculate and check with competence and confidence in solving problems. **Extend and complete** patterns. **Recognise, name, describe and compare** characteristics and relationships between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in a variety of orientations and positions. **Estimate, measure and compare** standard measures in a variety of contexts. **Calculate, read and write** time and check with competence and confidence in solving problems. **Interpret and analyse data** to answer questions.	**Describe** numbers and their relationships, and to count, estimate, calculate and check with competence and confidence in solving problems. **Extend and complete more advanced** patterns. **Describe and critically compare** characteristics and relationships between two-dimensional shapes and three-dimensional objects in a variety of orientations and positions. **Estimate, measure and critically compare** standard measures in a variety of contexts. **Calculate, read and write** time and check with competence and confidence in solving Advanced problems. **Critically analyse data** to draw conclusions and make predictions.

Using the 4 PLDs, the results are presented for Reading Literacy and Numeracy/Mathematics in Grades 3, 6, and 9. In each of these domains learners' performance levels are broken down by province and language of instruction.

a) Grade 3 Reading Literacy

The figure below shows that 17% of Grade 3 learners demonstrated the understanding and skills required for Grade 3 Reading Literacy (Enhancing level) and 3% reached the Extending level. Overall, 37% of learners could were at an emerging level of Reading Literacy. Western Cape had the highest number of learners on the required grade level (Enhancing and Extending levels). Gauteng also performed better than other provinces like the North West and Limpopo, which are primarily at the Emerging level.

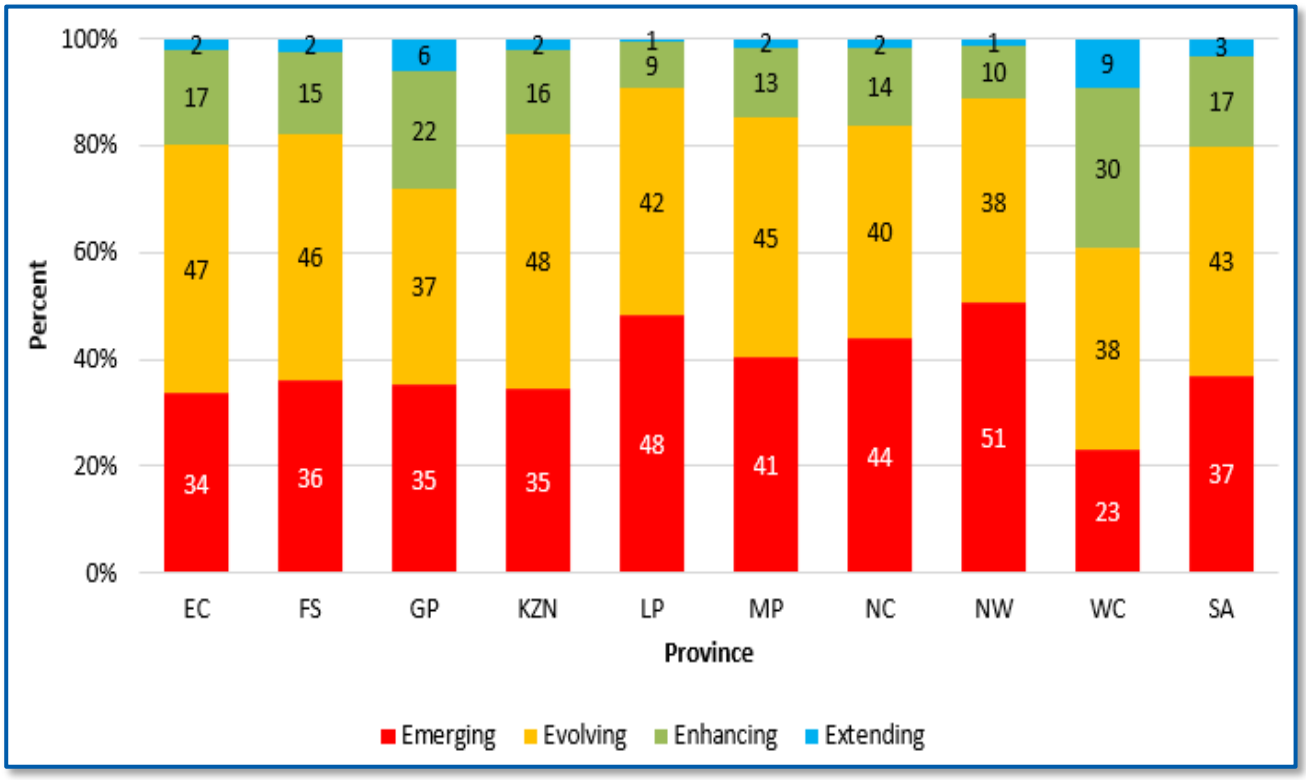


Figure 5: Percentage of Grade 3 learners functioning at reading performance level by province

The figure below shows that learners in English or Afrikaans Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) schools outperformed those in schools offering African languages. Learners whose home language was the same as the school's LoLT performed better than those whose home language was different.

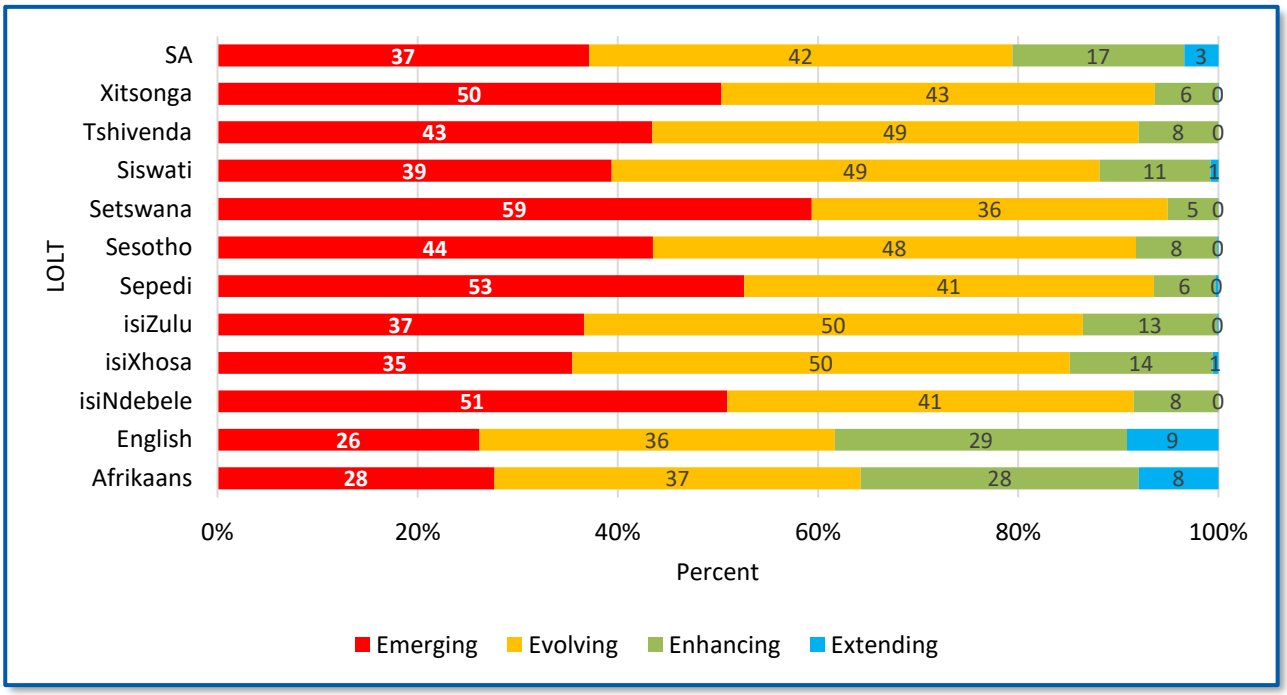


Figure 6: Percentage of Grade 3 learners functioning at each Reading Literacy performance level by LoLT

The findings in Figure 7 below reveal significant gender disparities in reading performance among Grade 3 learners in South Africa, with girls consistently outperforming boys across all school quintile categories and proficiency levels. Girls show higher proportions at the Evolving, Enhancing, and Extending levels, while boys are more likely to remain at the Emerging level, particularly in lower quintile schools serving the poorest communities. This gap is most pronounced in Quintile 1, where 33% of girls and 55% of boys are at the Emerging level, and persists, albeit narrowing, in more affluent Quintile 5 schools. Despite improvements in overall reading performance from lower to higher quintiles, the gender disparity remains consistent, highlighting the dual influence of socioeconomic and gender-specific factors on early-grade reading proficiency. The findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to support boys' reading development, particularly in disadvantaged schools, while addressing broader socioeconomic inequities.

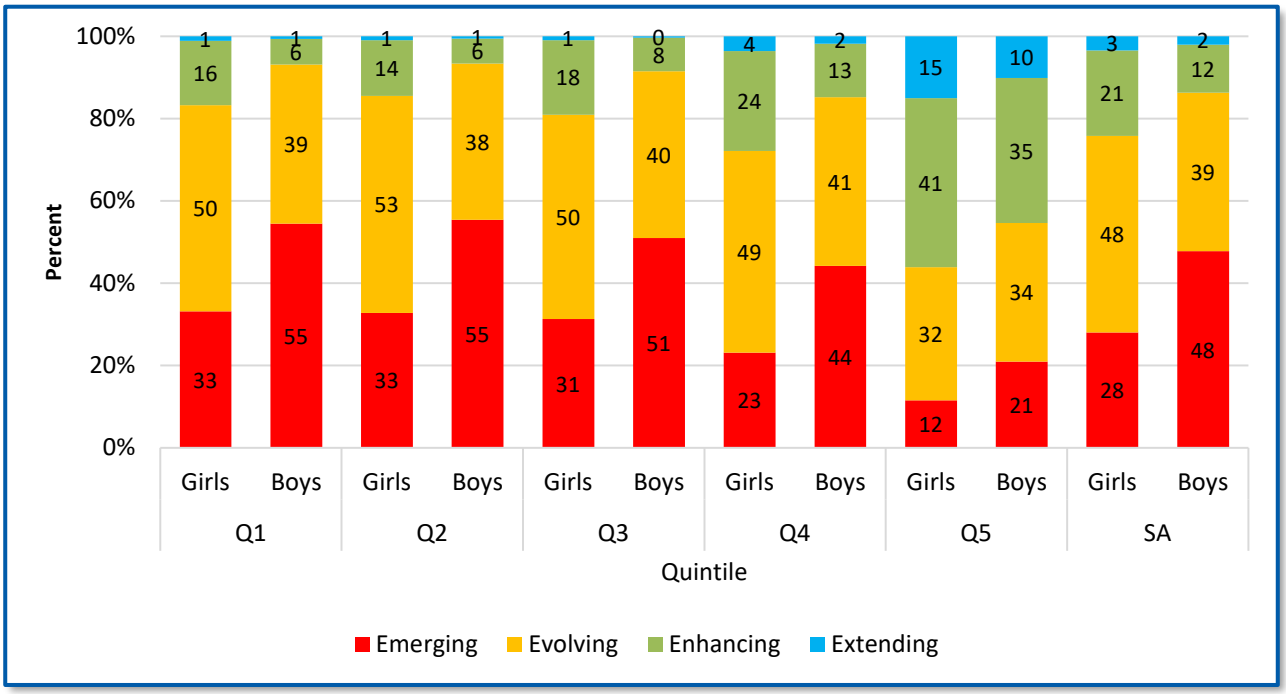


Figure 7: Percentage of Grade 3 learners functioning at each reading performance level by quintile category and gender

b) Grade 3 Numeracy

Most learners nationally functioned on the Evolving level, followed by the Emerging level. Only 27% demonstrated required Grade 3-level understanding at the Enhancing level, and only 7% was on the Extending level. Gauteng and the Western Cape outperformed the other provinces with Limpopo and North West facing significant challenges.

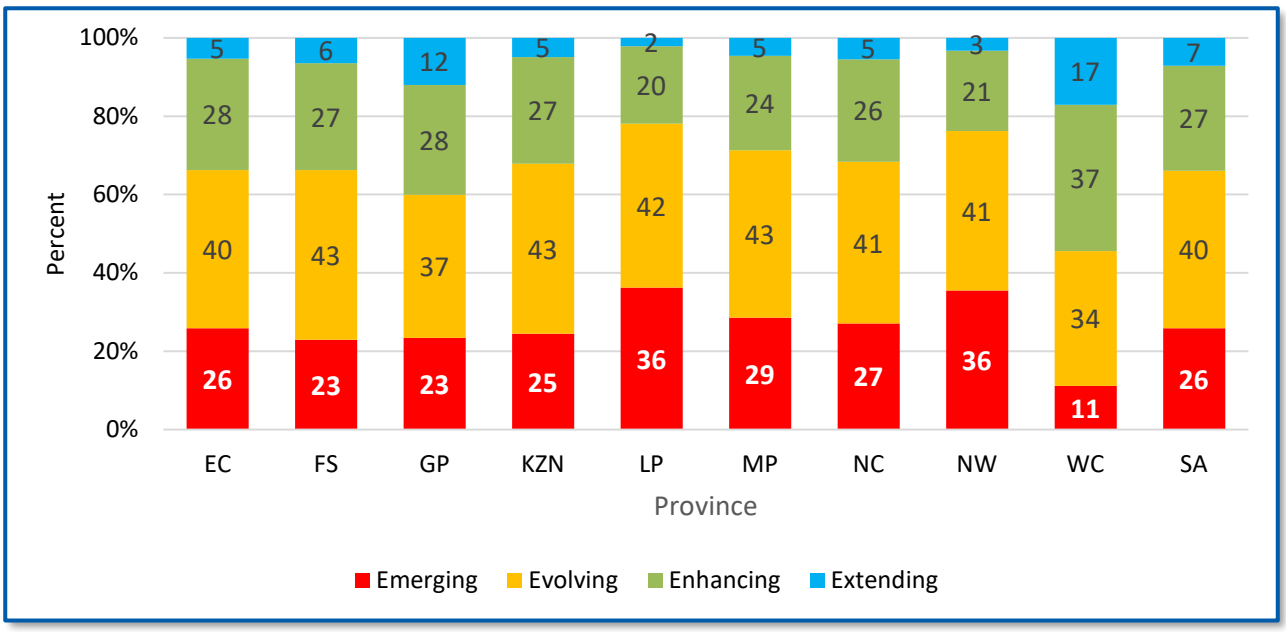


Figure 8: Grade 3 Provincial numeracy performance levels by province

The findings in Figure 9 below present Grade 3 mathematics performance in South Africa, broken down by quintile category and gender. The findings reveal consistent gender disparities, with girls generally outperforming boys across all quintiles. In Quintile 1 schools, serving the most disadvantaged communities, 40% of boys and 25% of girls are at the Emerging level, indicating that boys here face greater challenges in foundational math skills. This trend persists across quintiles, with girls showing higher percentages at the Enhancing level, particularly in Quintile 3, where 30% of girls versus 19% of boys demonstrate grade-level understanding. At the Extending level, where advanced problem-solving skills are evident, girls slightly outperform boys in the most affluent Quintile 5 schools (27% vs. 23%). The findings suggest that gender disparities in math proficiency persist across socioeconomic levels, with the nature of the gap shifting by quintile, underscoring the need for tailored interventions that address both gender-specific and socioeconomic factors in mathematics education.

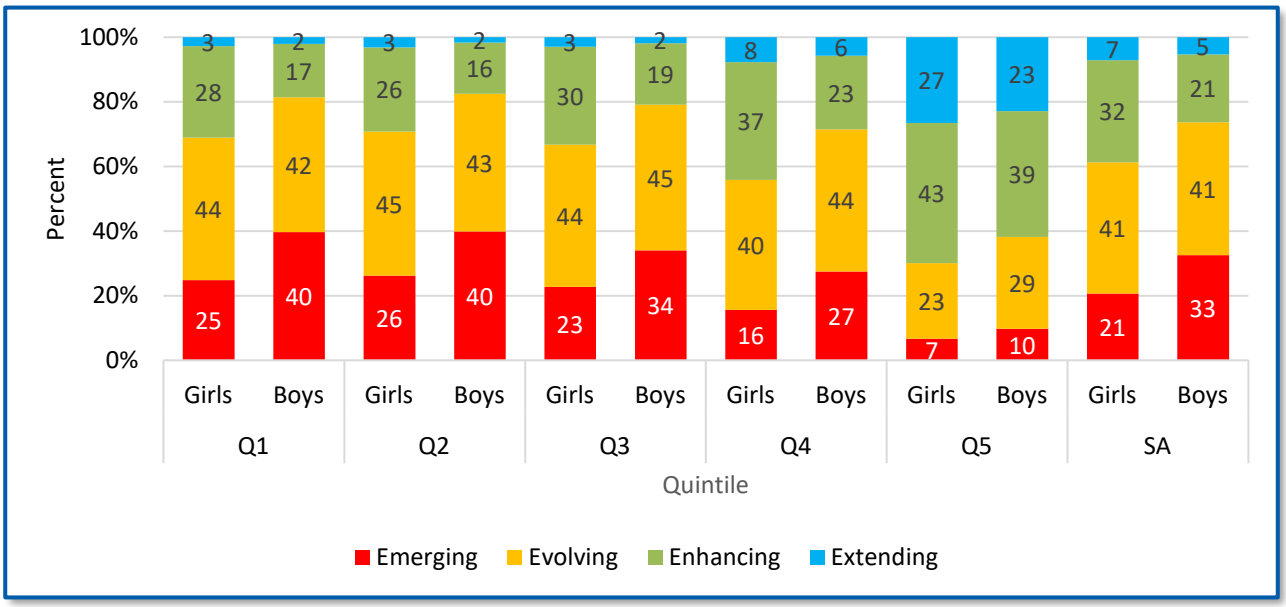


Figure 9: Percentage of Grade 3 learners functioning at each mathematics performance level by quintile category and gender

The findings in Figure 10 below indicate that Grade 3 learners with Afrikaans or English as their language of learning and teaching (LoLT) are more likely to achieve higher levels of mathematical proficiency compared to those learning in African languages. This trend is evident at all proficiency levels, with Afrikaans and English LoLT learners having lower percentages at the Emerging level and higher percentages at the Enhancing and Extending levels. These performance disparities may stem from factors such as socioeconomic status, school resources, and teacher quality. To ensure equitable support, targeted strategies should address the unique challenges faced by African language LoLT learners in building foundational math skills and advancing to higher proficiency levels.

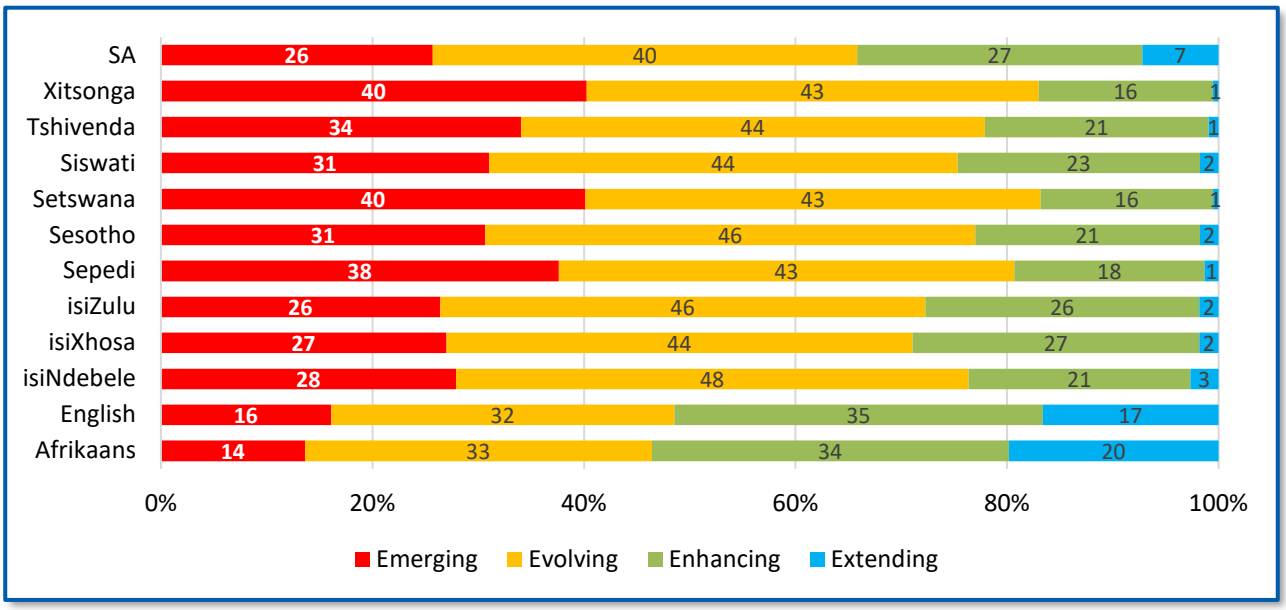


Figure 10: Percentage of Grade 3 learners functioning at each Numeracy performance level by LoLT

c) Grade 6 Reading Literacy

The figure below shows similar trends to that of Grade 3 Reading Literacy with 67% of learners functioning below the required level. Gauteng and the Western Cape performed the best. Limpopo and the Eastern Cape faced substantial challenges.

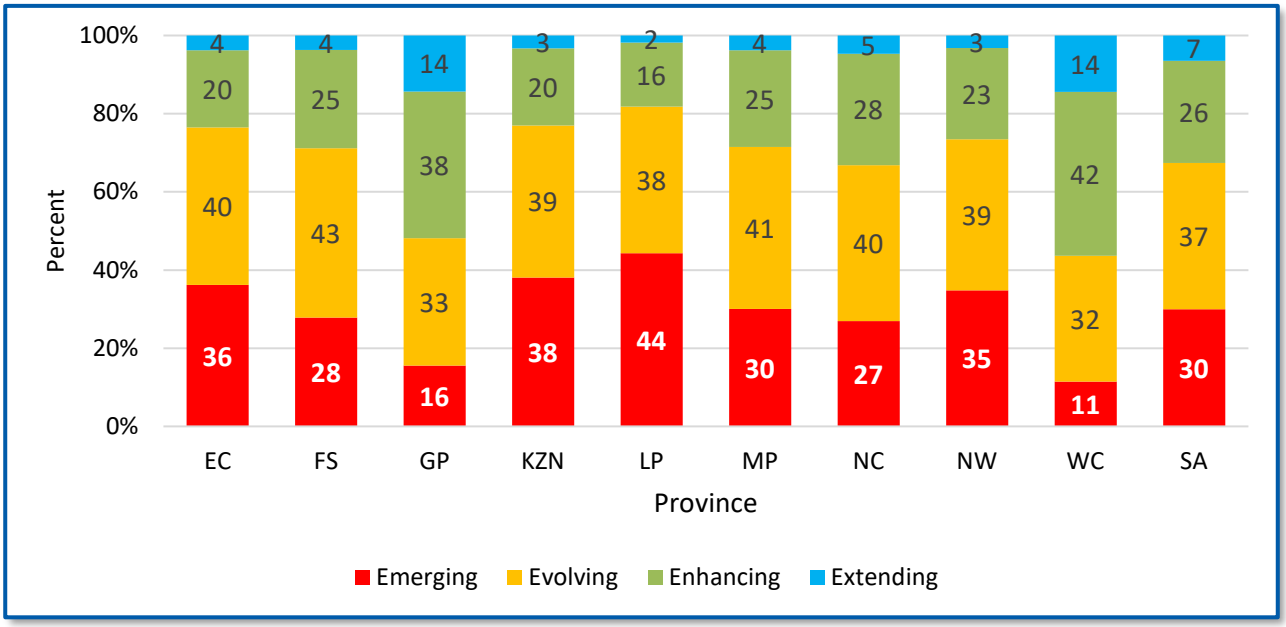


Figure 11: Percentage of Grade 6 learners functioning at each Reading Literacy performance level by province

The results in Figure 12 below reveal significant gender disparities in Grade 6 learner performance, with 22% of girls and 40% of boys at the Emerging level, while more girls outperform boys at the Enhancing (30% vs. 20%) and Extending (6% vs. 5%) levels, indicating better preparedness for higher

grades. At the Evolving level, girls generally outperform boys across quintiles, except in Quintile 4, where boys slightly exceed girls, highlighting the need for targeted support to address specific knowledge gaps. Boys consistently underperform at the Emerging level in all quintiles, emphasizing the need for extensive and sustained interventions to support their progression. Performance across Quintiles 1, 2, and 3 remains relatively low for both genders, requiring additional resources and strategies, while Quintiles 4 and 5 show stronger proficiency levels, with girls outperforming boys. These findings underscore the need for gender-specific and quintile-based interventions to improve overall learner outcomes and address gaps in foundational skills.

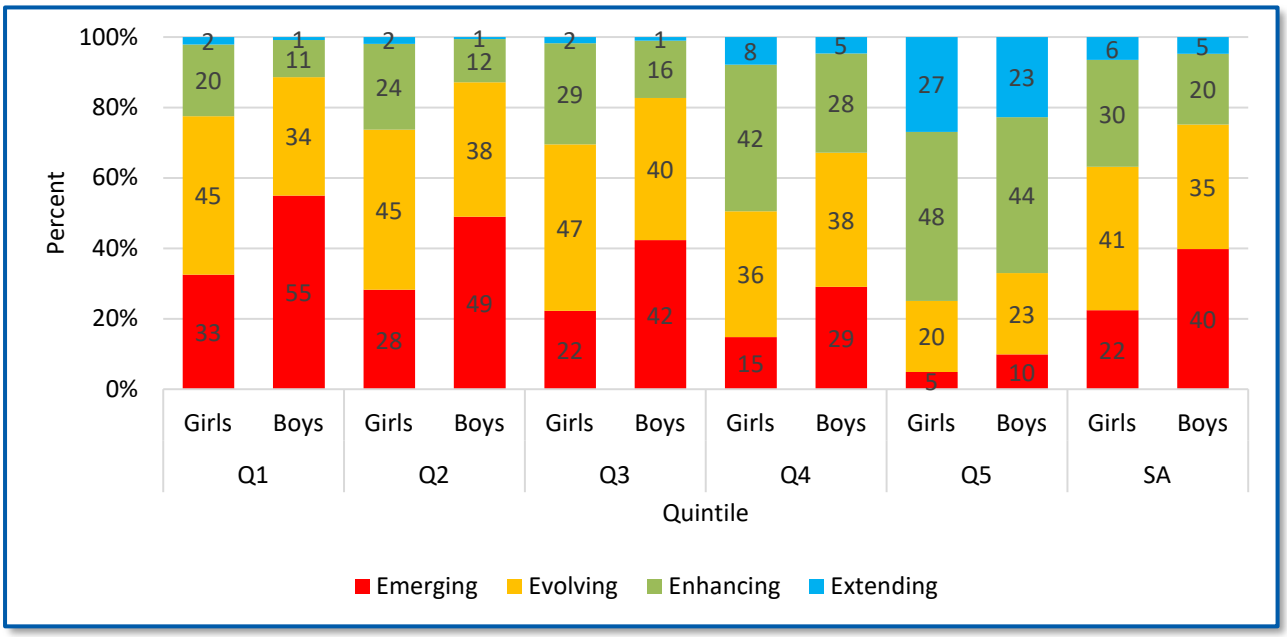


Figure 12: Percentage of grade 6 learners functioning at each reading performance level by quintile category and gender

The figure below shows that for both Afrikaans and English medium schools, learners whose LoLT matched their home language outperformed those whose home language differed from the LoLT across all performance levels.

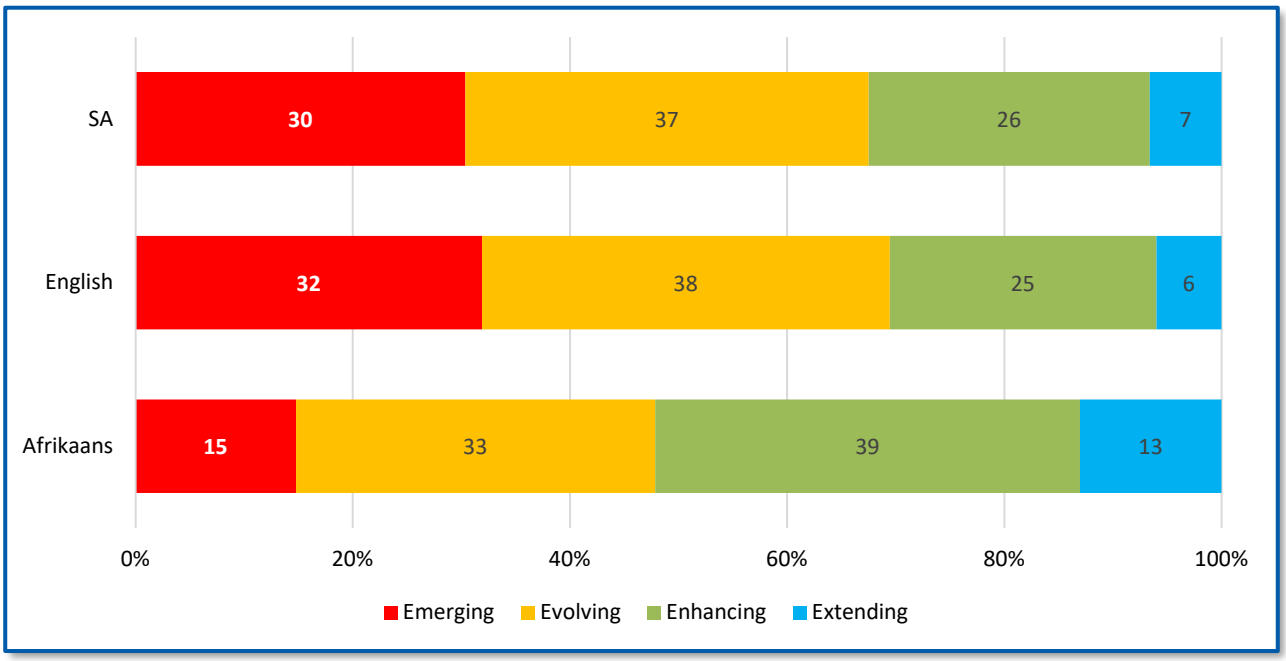


Figure 13: Percentage of Grade 6 learners functioning at each performance level by LoLT

d) Grade 6 Mathematics

The figure below shows that 64% percent of learners' Mathematics skills were below the required Enhancing level. Similar to Grade 3, the Western Cape and Gauteng outperformed other provinces. Limpopo and North West fared the worst. However, in other provinces, more learners were on the Evolving and Enhancing levels.

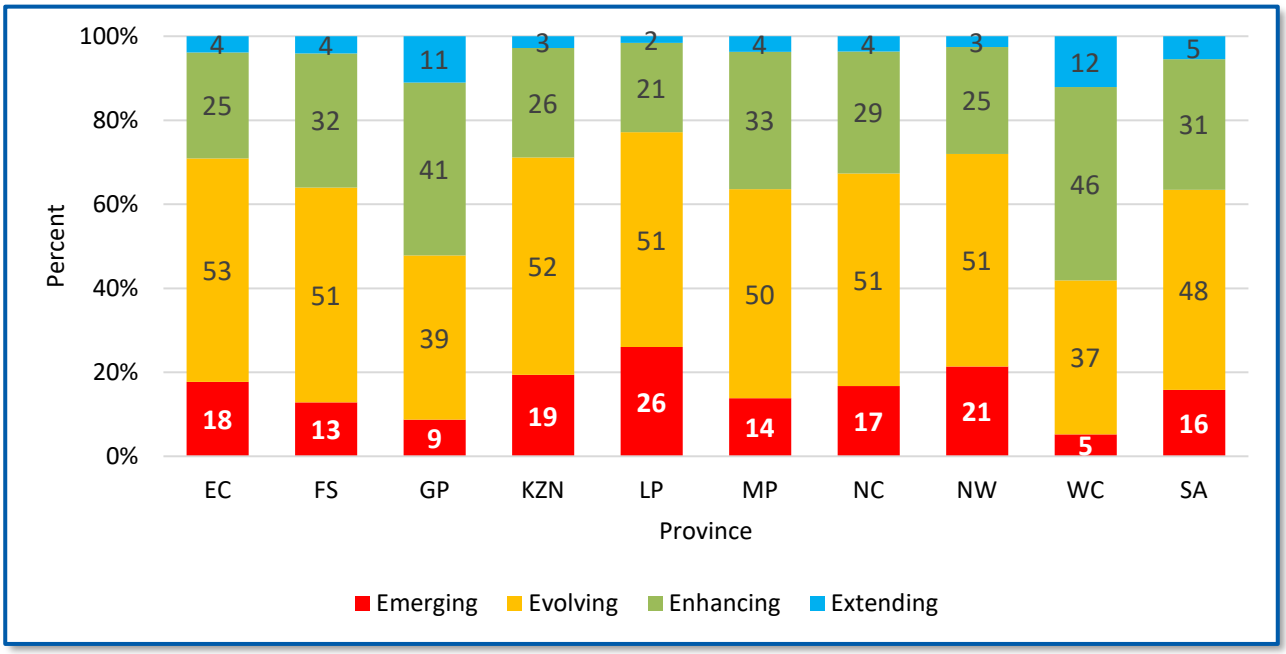


Figure 14: Percentage of Grade 6 learners functioning at Mathematics performance level by province

The findings in Figure 15 below reveal a persistent gender gap in mathematics performance across all quintiles, with boys more likely to perform at the Emerging level, particularly in economically disadvantaged Quintile 1 schools (28% boys vs. 19% girls). As quintile levels increase, the percentage of learners at the Emerging level decreases for both genders, but the gap remains, with only 4% of boys and 3% of girls at this level in affluent Quintile 5 schools. At the Evolving level, gender performance is generally consistent across quintiles, except in Quintile 4, where boys slightly outperform girls. At the Enhancing level, the proportion of learners increases with quintile levels, with girls consistently outperforming boys, particularly in Quintiles 4 and 5. At the Extending level, advanced proficiency remains low in Quintiles 1-3 but increases significantly in Quintile 5, where boys slightly outperform girls (23% vs. 20%). These trends highlight the interplay between gender and socioeconomic factors, emphasizing the need for targeted support in lower quintiles and gender-specific interventions across all levels.

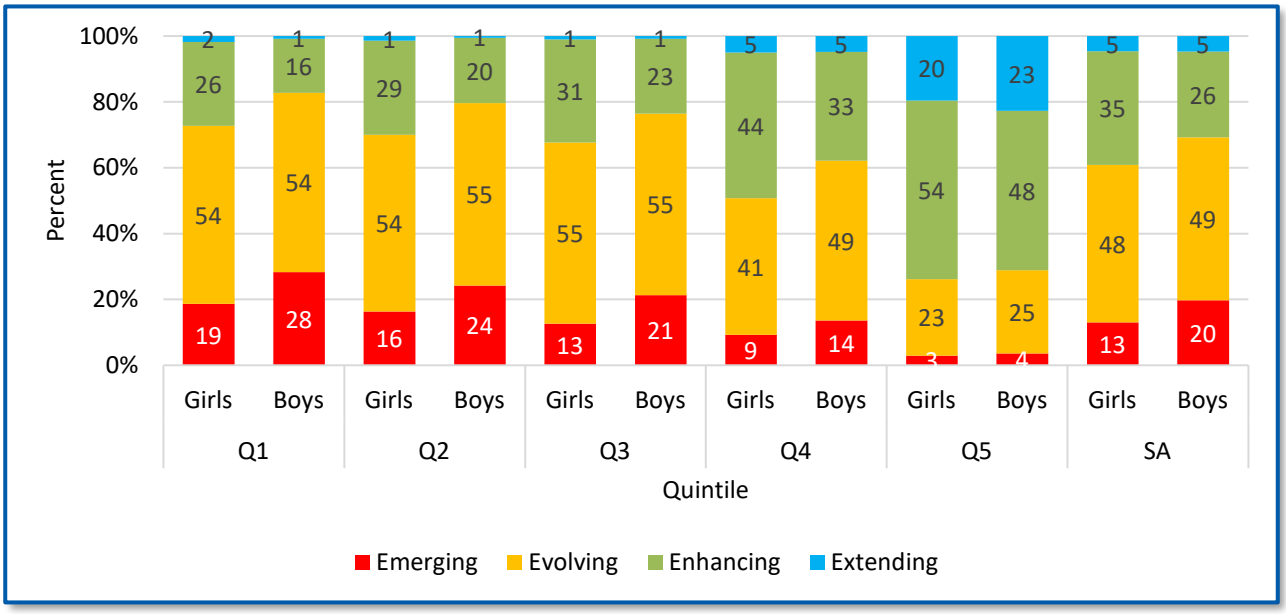


Figure 15: Percentage of grade 6 learners functioning at each mathematics performance level by quintile category and gender

The findings highlight differences in mathematics performance among Grade 6 learners based on their language of learning and teaching (LoLT), with trends consistent across all proficiency levels. Learners with Afrikaans as their LoLT perform better at higher proficiency levels, with only 8% at the Emerging level compared to 17% of English LoLT learners and the national average of 16%. At the Enhancing and Extending levels, Afrikaans-medium learners outperform their English-medium peers, with 39% versus 30% at the Enhancing level and 13% versus 5% at the Extending level. However, Afrikaans-medium learners are underrepresented at the Evolving level (40%) compared to

English-medium learners and the national average (48%). These trends suggest notable disparities linked to LoLT, emphasizing the need to explore contextual factors influencing performance.

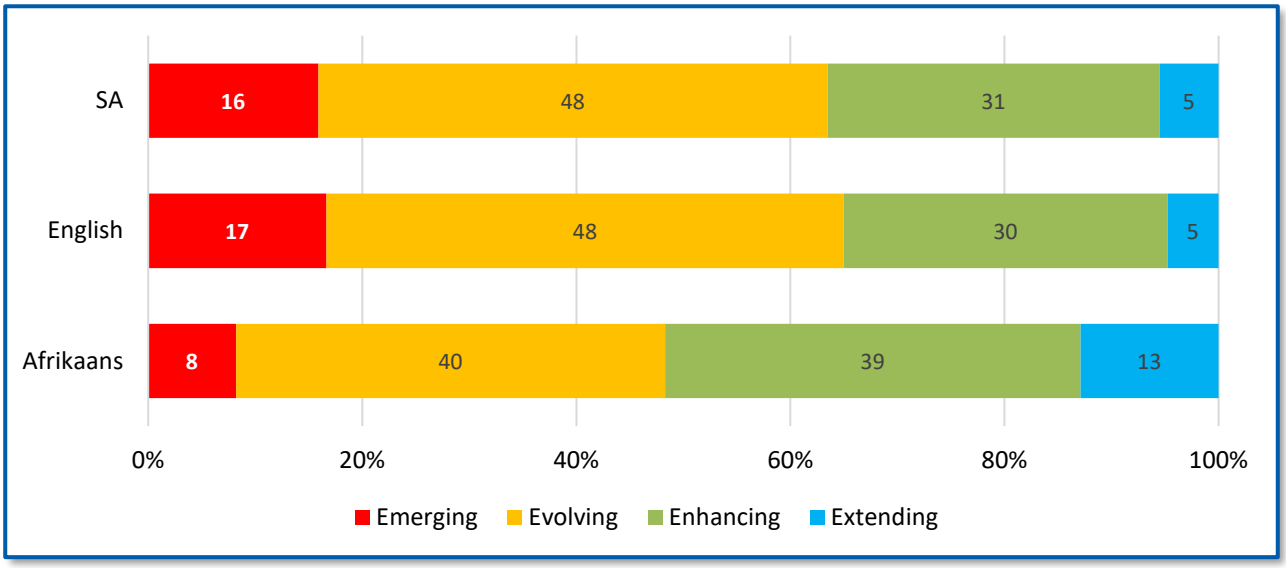


Figure 16: Percentage of Grade 6 learners functioning at each performance level by LoLT

e) Grade 9 Reading Literacy

The figure below shows that for Reading Literacy, only 13% of learners were at the Enhancing level, demonstrating sufficient understanding, and 7% at the Extending level. Western Cape and Gauteng performed the best. Most learners in Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Eastern Cape were on the Emerging Level. Most learners across all provinces functioned at the Evolving level.

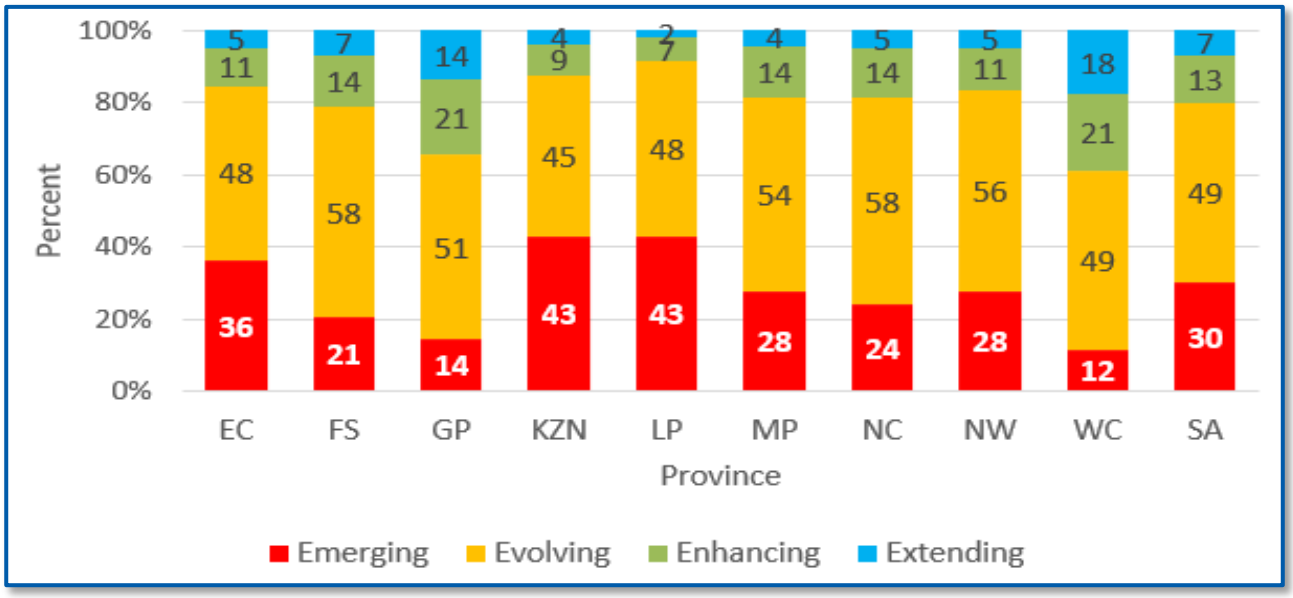


Figure 17: Percentage of Grade 9 learners functioning at Reading Literacy performance level by province

The data on Grade 9 reading performance in Figure 18 below reveals a consistent gender gap across all quintiles, with girls outperforming boys at higher proficiency levels. In the most economically

disadvantaged Quintile 1 schools, 27% of girls are at the Emerging level compared to 41% of boys, with the gap gradually narrowing in more affluent Quintiles, down to 7 percentage points in Quintile 5 (12% girls vs. 19% boys). This indicates that socioeconomic challenges impact both genders but more significantly affect boys in lower quintiles. At the Evolving level, gender differences are minimal, suggesting similar progress once reading skills begin to develop. However, at higher proficiency levels, gender disparities re-emerge in Quintile 5, 24% of girls reach the Enhancing level compared to 19% of boys, and at the Extending level, 17% of girls outperform 11% of boys. These trends highlight that gender gaps in advanced reading skills persist even in well-resourced schools.

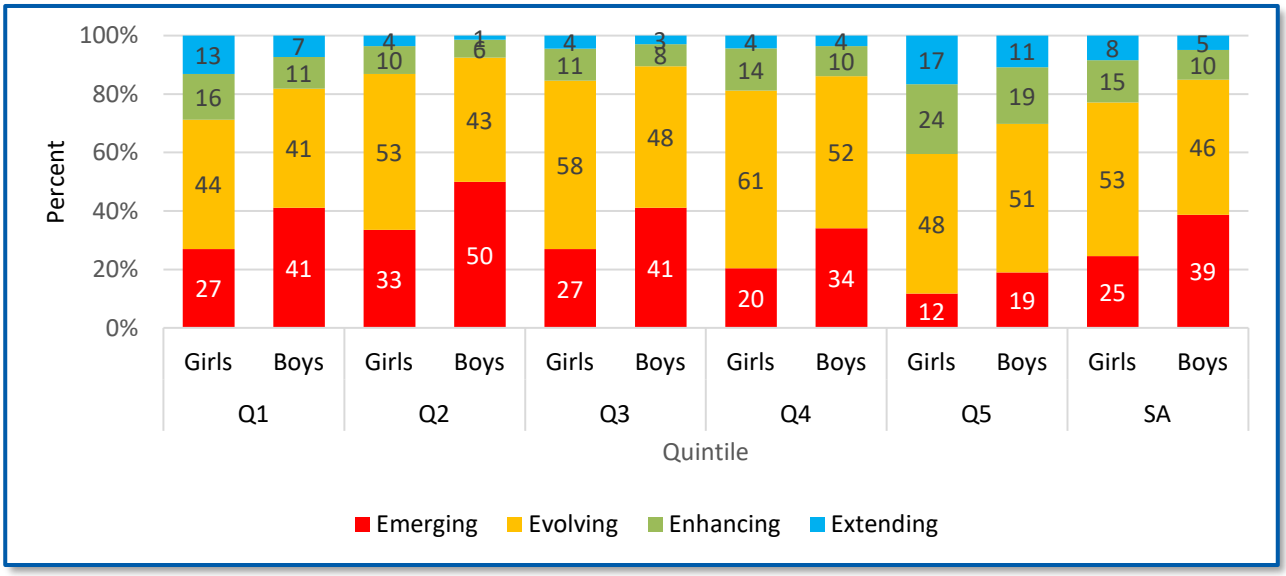


Figure 18: Percentage of Grade 9 learners functioning at each reading performance level by quintile category and gender

The figure below shows that learners whose home language matched the LoLT of the school consistently outperformed those whose home language differed from the LoLT.

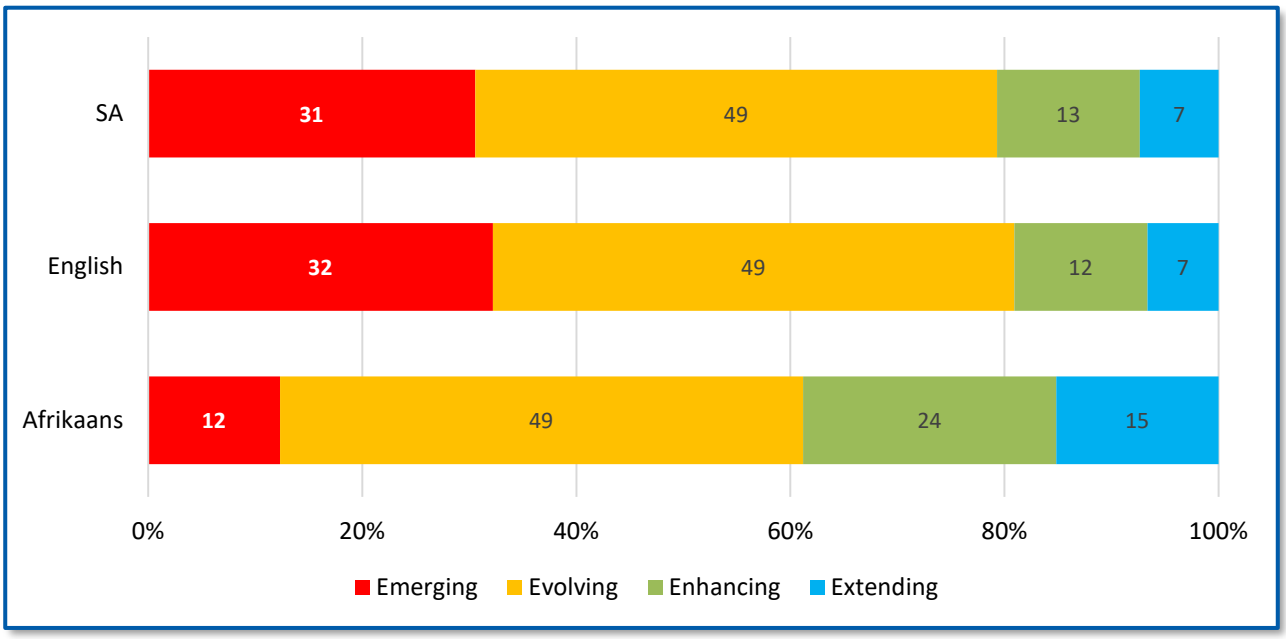


Figure 19: Percentage of Grade 9 learners functioning at each performance level by LoLT

f) Grade 9 Mathematics

The figure below shows that 30% of learners demonstrated a Grade-level understanding of Mathematics at the Enhancing level, and 10% on the Extending level. Western Cape and Gauteng performed the best, while learners in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo had the highest percentages at the Emerging level. Most learners across all provinces and quintiles functioned at the Evolving level.

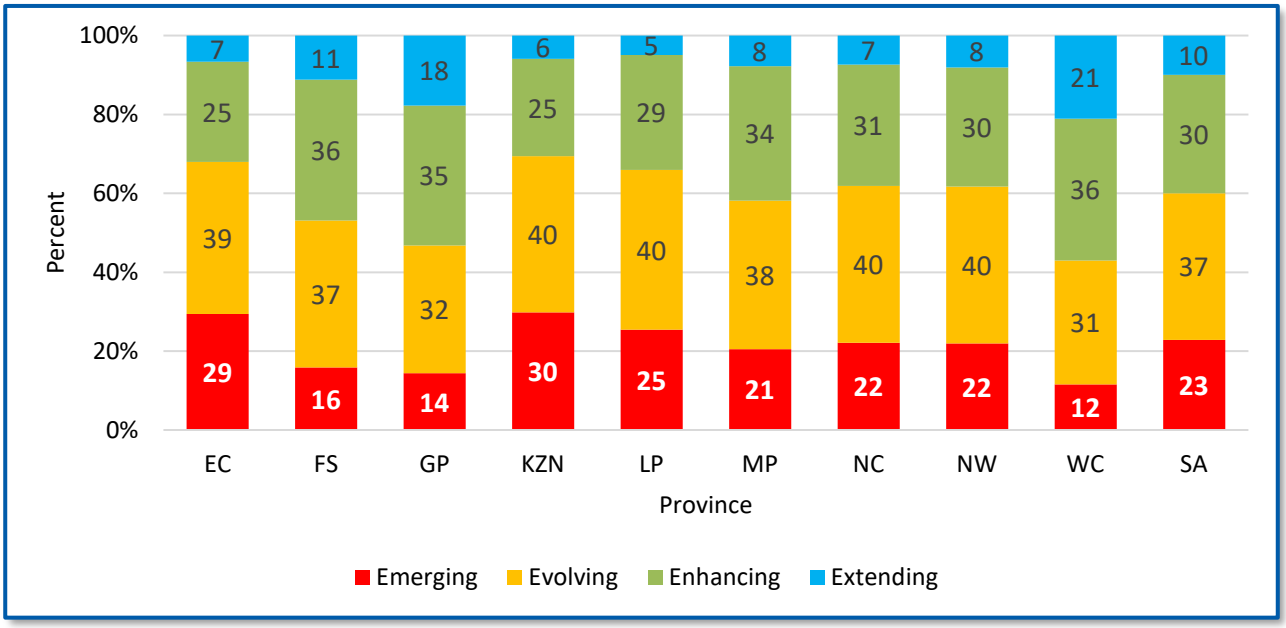


Figure 20: Percentage of Grade 9 functioning at each Mathematics performance level by province

The analysis of Grade 9 mathematics performance by quintile and gender in the figure below highlights significant disparities. Across all quintiles, girls consistently outperform boys, with fewer at the Emerging level and more at the Enhancing and Extending levels. Nationally, performance improves with socioeconomic status, as the percentage at the Emerging level decreases from 23% in Quintile 1 to 13% in Quintile 5, while those at the Extending level rise from 15% to 19%. In disadvantaged Quintile 1 schools, boys struggle more with foundational skills, with 28% at the Emerging level compared to 18% of girls, a trend persisting across quintiles with a gender gap of 6–10 percentage points. At the Evolving level, progress is similar between genders, but at the Enhancing level, girls have a clear advantage, particularly in Quintile 4, where 37% reach this level versus 28% of boys. At the Extending level, girls in Quintile 5 also outperform boys (21% vs. 17%). These findings underscore persistent gender gaps in mathematics proficiency influenced by socioeconomic factors, with girls generally achieving higher performance than boys.

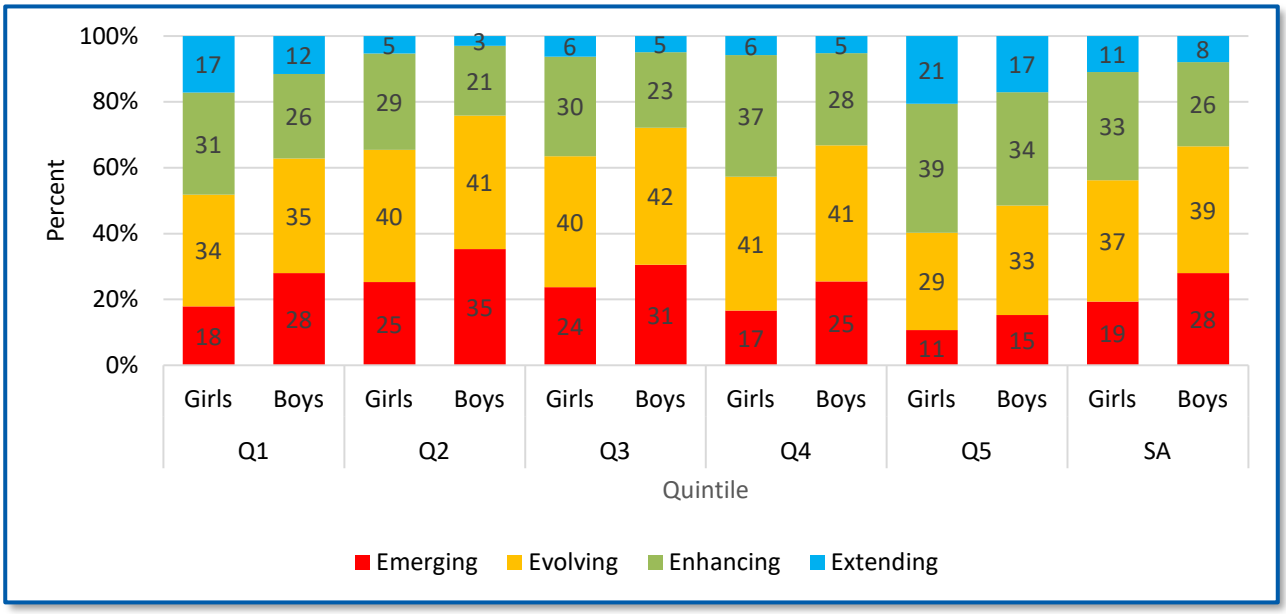


Figure 21: Percentage of grade 9 learners functioning at each reading performance level by quintile category and gender

The figure below shows that learners whose home language was the same as the LoLT consistently functioned at a higher performance level compared to those whose home language differed from the LoLT.

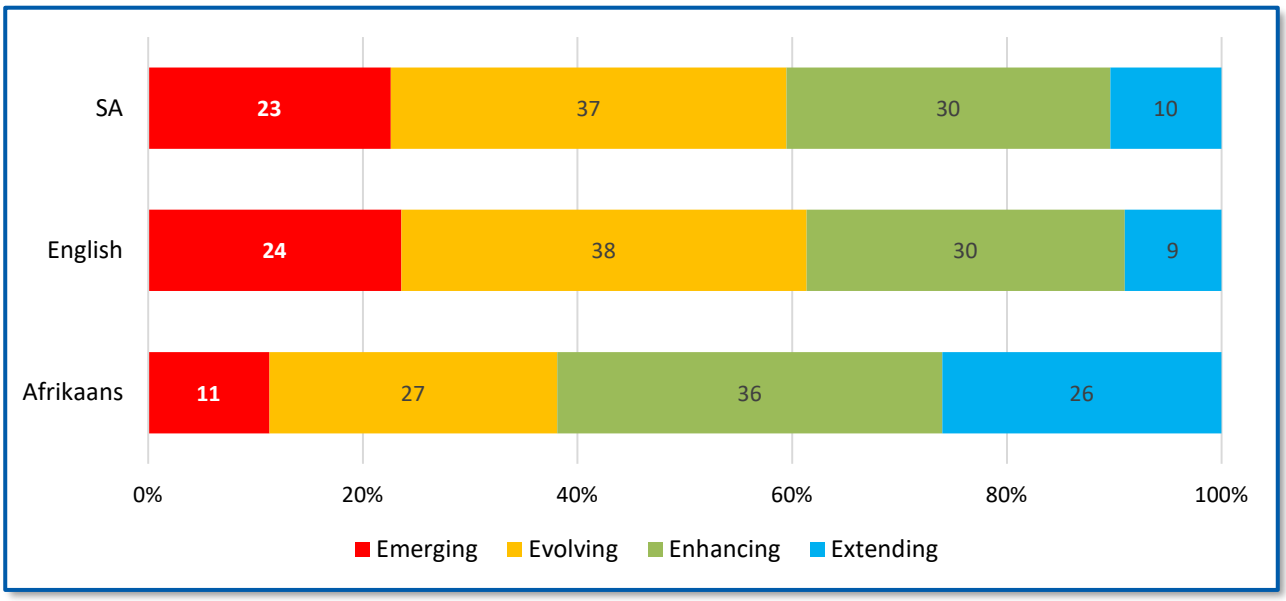


Figure 22: Percentage of Grade 9 learners functioning at each Mathematics performance level by LoLT

4.1.2. Classroom factors

This section examines classroom factors that influence learning outcomes by capturing learners' experiences during typical Language and Mathematics lessons. Learners were asked to reflect on how frequently certain actions occur in their classes, providing insight into the dynamics of teacher-learner interactions and classroom routines. These responses offer a window into the instructional practices and support mechanisms present in their learning environments shedding light on the factors that may impact learner engagement and comprehension.

Table 4: Language Classroom Practices Index: proportions of Grade 3 learners

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or missing
The teacher is in class	13.45	17.84	14.36	54.36	15.42
Lessons start on time	11.47	19.94	17.72	50.88	18.18
The teacher reads us a book	15.38	27.55	18.66	38.41	17.11
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	13.46	17.17	18.20	51.17	17.58
The teacher asks us questions	11.41	15.27	18.18	55.15	16.87
We repeat what the teacher says	16.62	23.56	18.79	41.02	18.66
We work in small groups	24.72	30.34	17.32	27.62	18.96
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
The teacher marks my language homework	12.00	14.69	17.15	56.16	17.86

Note: "The teacher helps me when I don't understand something" was missing from the Grade 3 learner questionnaire in error.

Table 5: Language Classroom Practices Index: Proportions of Grade 6 learners

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or missing
The teacher is in class	1.50	13.78	10.31	74.41	3.62
Lessons start on time	1.81	24.76	16.83	56.61	5.25
The teacher reads us a book	3.88	41.93	17.93	36.27	5.02
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	2.49	18.03	14.83	64.65	4.65
The teacher asks us questions	0.96	12.35	11.37	75.32	4.36
We repeat what the teacher says	12.13	43.81	16.40	27.65	5.15
We work in small groups	16.32	59.08	12.77	11.83	5.21
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	2.06	15.18	8.96	73.81	4.11
The teacher marks my language homework	3.54	22.82	14.26	59.39	4.30

Table 6: Language Classroom Practices Index: proportions of Grade 9 learners

	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or missing
The teacher is in class	1.50	13.78	10.31	74.41	3.62
Lessons start on time	1.81	24.76	16.83	56.61	5.25
The teacher reads us a book	3.88	41.93	17.93	36.27	5.02
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	2.49	18.03	14.83	64.65	4.65
The teacher asks us questions	0.96	12.35	11.37	75.32	4.36
We repeat what the teacher says	12.13	43.81	16.40	27.65	5.15
We work in small groups	16.32	59.08	12.77	11.83	5.21
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	2.06	15.18	8.96	73.81	4.11
The teacher marks my Language homework	3.54	22.82	14.26	59.39	4.30

Table 7: Mathematics classroom practices index: proportions of Grade 3 learners

Item label	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or Missing
The teacher is in class	11.42	16.54	15.42	56.61	14.28
Lessons start on time	9.82	18.74	18.43	53.02	17.35
The teacher reads us a book	12.28	19.41	20.70	47.61	17.69
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	10.85	15.33	18.92	54.90	18.12
The teacher asks us questions	10.42	15.72	19.09	54.77	17.39
We repeat what the teacher says	14.96	22.31	19.42	43.31	19.03
We work in small groups	23.58	27.70	18.48	30.24	19.61
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	10.03	14.79	17.82	57.36	19.90
The teacher marks my Mathematics homework	10.83	14.75	18.21	56.21	21.11

Table 8: Mathematics classroom practices index: proportions of Grade 6 learners

Item label	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or Missing
The teacher is in class	3.29	15.41	8.86	72.44	6.09
Lessons start on time	2.88	20.68	12.20	64.24	8.15
The teacher reads us a book	6.28	24.81	13.77	55.14	9.10
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	3.48	14.98	11.33	70.22	8.30
The teacher asks us questions	2.43	14.15	9.40	74.02	8.02
We repeat what the teacher says	11.20	35.85	14.44	38.52	9.22
We work in small groups	23.89	46.81	11.39	17.90	9.44
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	2.93	14.96	7.94	74.17	8.35
The teacher marks my Mathematics homework	4.23	17.93	9.28	68.57	7.68

Table 9: Mathematics Classroom Practices Index: proportions of Grade 9 learners

Item label	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always	Invalid or missing
The teacher is in class	1.35	10.46	7.71	80.49	3.43
Lessons start on time	1.54	17.07	11.28	70.10	4.94
The teacher reads us a book	10.21	24.40	16.00	49.39	8.08
We silently listen to the teacher when she/he reads to us	2.76	11.75	11.10	74.39	4.98
The teacher asks us questions	1.45	12.59	9.88	76.08	4.70
We repeat what the teacher says	11.12	36.99	16.35	35.54	5.73
We work in small groups	23.28	47.95	12.39	16.38	5.71
The teacher helps me when I don't understand something	2.28	14.10	8.16	75.47	4.69
The teacher marks my Mathematics homework	4.44	19.67	11.43	64.46	4.77

The figure below and the tables above show the effect sizes for the difference in Reading Literacy achievement by Language classroom practices and the effect sizes for the difference in Mathematics achievement by Mathematics classroom practices for each Grade level. The effect size for a teacher's everyday use of the listed Mathematics classroom practices (as reported by the learner) and their learners' performance in Mathematics, is negligible across all Grades. However, for Grades 6 and 9, there is a small negative relationship between a teacher's use of certain Language classroom practices and their Reading Literacy performance. This means that learners whose teachers used more of the classroom practices every day displayed lower performances in Reading Literacy.

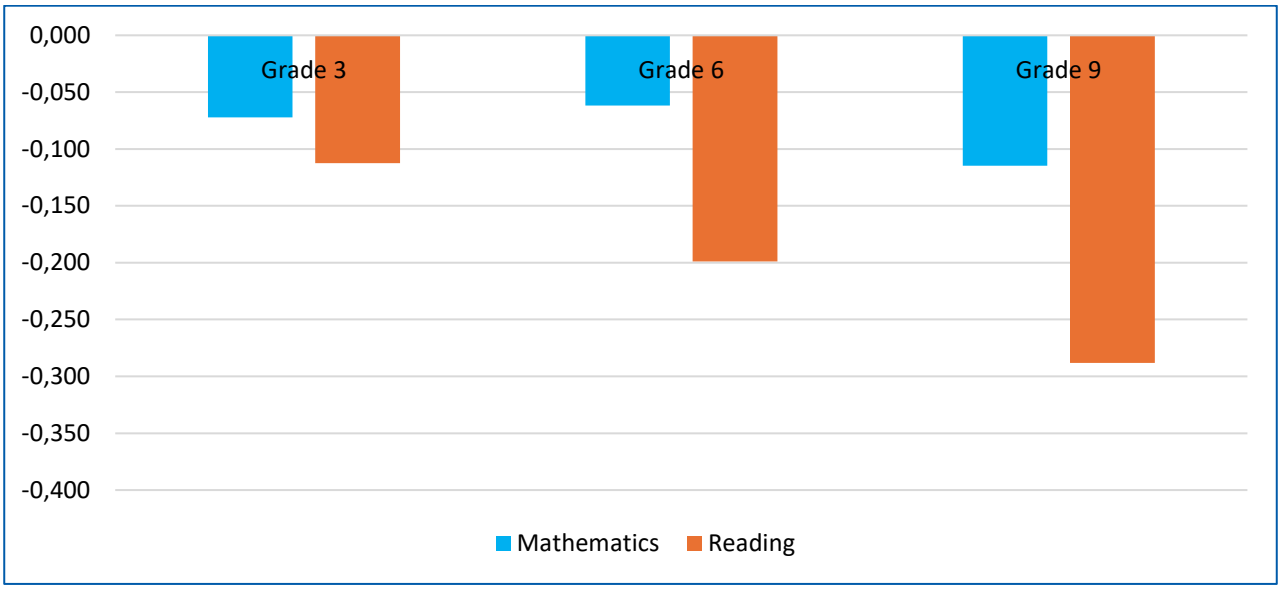


Figure 23: Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by classroom practices indices by Grade

Teachers' general classroom practice in Mathematics and Languages is not positively affecting learner performance

The figure below shows the effect sizes for the difference in Reading Literacy achievement by Language classroom practices and the effect sizes for the difference in Mathematics achievement by Mathematics classroom practices for each province. In general, effect sizes by province are negligible. Eastern Cape stands out as having medium effect sizes in Mathematics and small effect sizes in Reading Literacy. This means that in Eastern Cape, learners whose teachers performed certain tasks every day displayed higher performance in Reading Literacy and Mathematics. KwaZulu-Natal (Reading Literacy and Mathematics) and Western Cape (Reading Literacy only) also have small effect sizes, but they are negative, meaning that learners whose teachers performed certain tasks every day displayed lower learning outcomes.

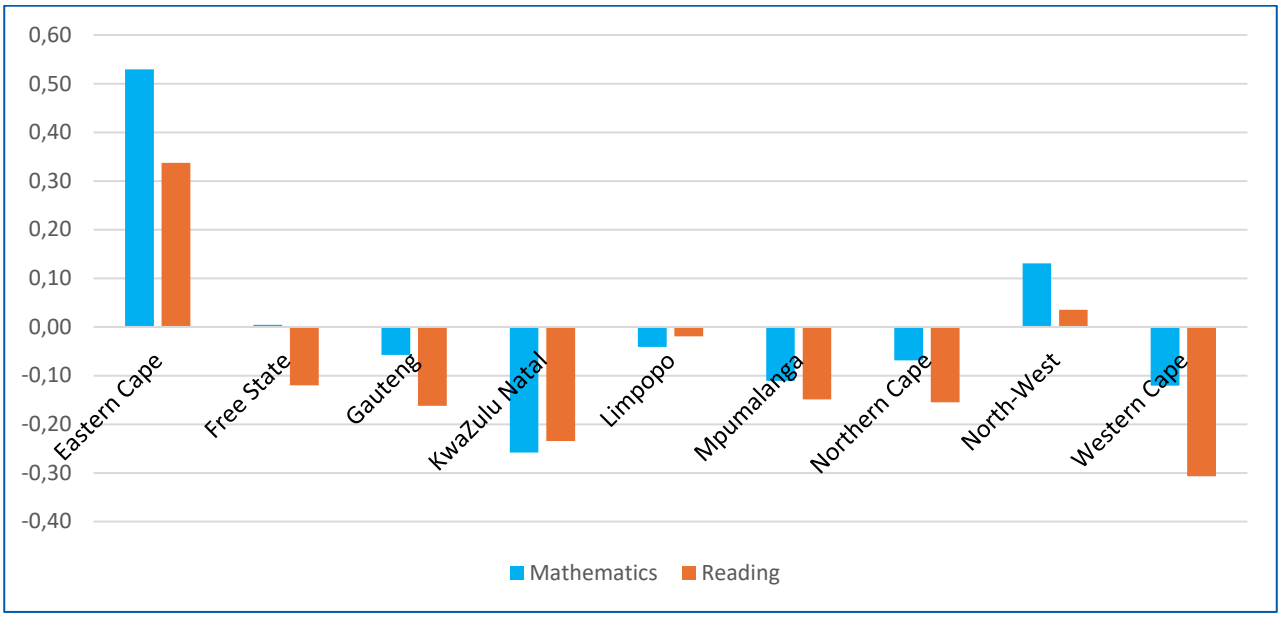


Figure 24: Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by classroom practices indices by province

Eastern Cape is the only province that stands out for learners whose teachers performed certain tasks every day displayed higher performance in Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

In Grade 3, in most languages, there is a negligible effect size. However, for learners completing the test in Afrikaans, English, or IsiXhosa, there is a small negative relationship between classroom practices and learning outcomes. This means that learners completing the test in these languages, whose teachers performed certain tasks every day, displayed lower performances in Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

In Grade 6, the effect size of the teacher performing certain tasks every day is negligible, except in Reading Literacy classrooms for learners completing the test in Afrikaans. For these learners, the effect size is negative and small, meaning that learners completing the test in Afrikaans, whose teachers performed certain tasks every day, displayed lower performances in Reading Literacy.

In Grade 9, the effect size remains similar for Reading Literacy classrooms in Afrikaans. In Mathematics classrooms, the relationship between a teacher performing certain tasks every day and their learners' Mathematics outcomes was higher than in Grade 6, for learners completing the test in Afrikaans. In classrooms for learners who completed the test in English, the effect size of a teacher performing certain tasks every day in Mathematics classrooms remains negligible, but there is a small negative relationship between a teacher performing certain tasks every day in Reading Literacy classrooms and their learners' Reading Literacy outcomes. This means that learners whose teachers performed certain tasks every day displayed lower performances in Reading Literacy in Afrikaans and English, and lower performances in Mathematics in Afrikaans.

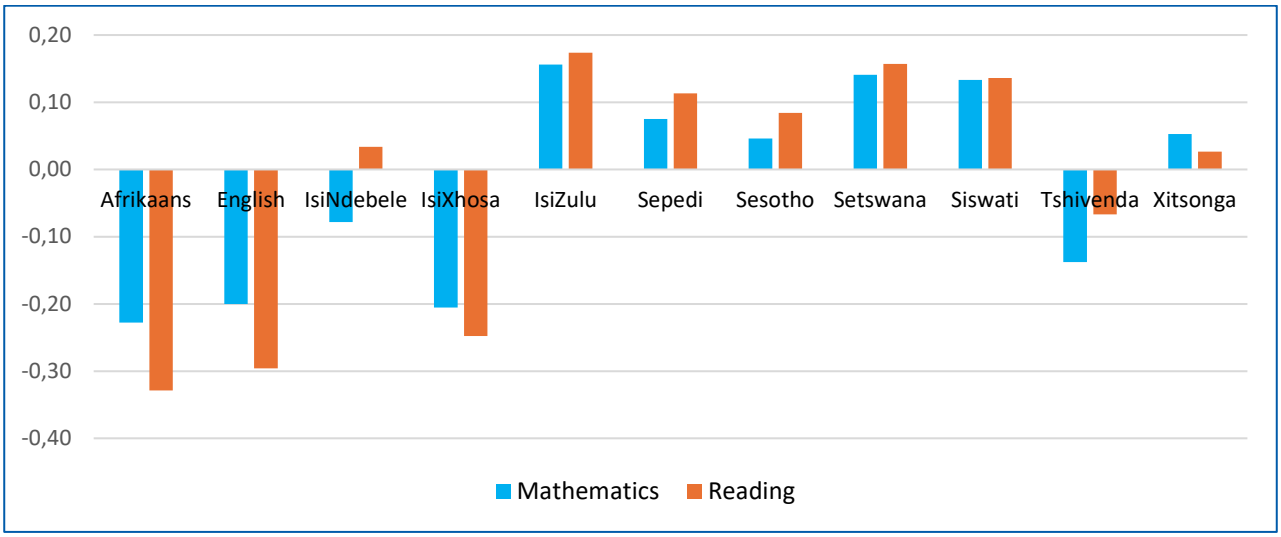


Figure 25: Grade 3 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by classroom practices indices by test language

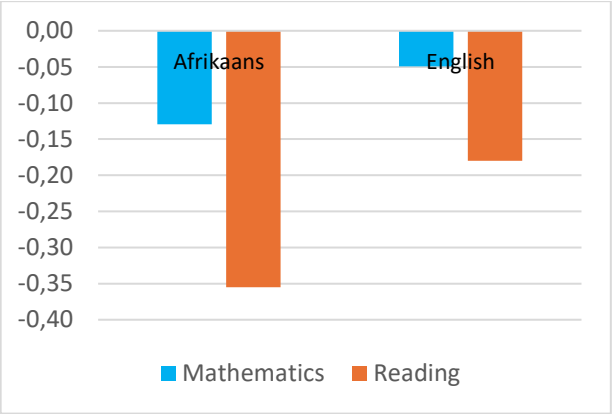


Figure 26:Grade 6 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievements by classroom practices indices by test language

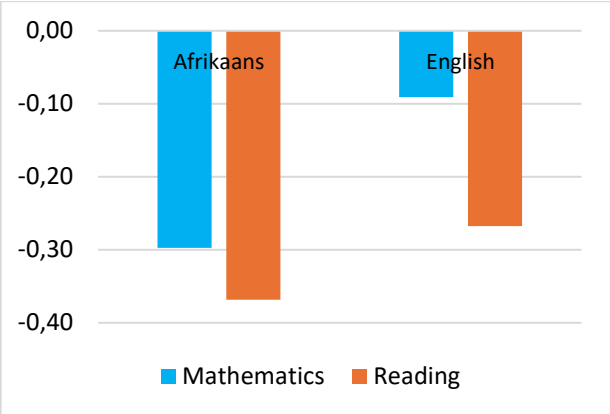


Figure 27: Grade 9 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by classroom practices indices by test language

4.1.3. School factors

This section introduces learners' perspectives on school and home environments, based on their level of agreement with several statements related to school enjoyment, safety, teacher relationships, and home support. These responses help to illustrate the support and motivational factors influencing learners' academic attitudes and engagement across both school and home settings. Table 8 below presents overall learner responses.

Table 10: Positive educational environments index: proportion of learners in all Grades

	Disagree a lot	Disagree a little	Agree a little	Agree a lot	Invalid or missing
I enjoy coming to school	9.17	5.49	14.14	71.19	7.61
I feel safe in my school	8.07	8.72	20.35	62.86	9.97
My teachers care about me	8.40	8.41	21.44	61.75	10.68
My teachers encourage me to work hard	7.86	6.12	13.05	72.96	10.44
I enjoy learning at school	6.92	5.43	12.60	75.05	9.82
I like my teachers	6.76	5.90	16.22	71.12	10.33
My parent(s)/guardian(s) think it is important that I do well at school	6.24	4.19	8.09	81.47	10.68
Someone at home helps me with my homework	11.85	7.97	18.84	61.34	9.97
My parent(s)/guardian(s) ask me about what I am learning at school	8.00	7.61	19.17	65.22	10.59
My parent(s)/guardian(s) read to me when I was younger	12.11	9.03	19.22	59.65	10.36

The figure below shows the effect sizes for the difference in Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by learners with positive educational environments for each Grade level. The effect size of positive educational environments on Reading Literacy and Mathematics performance is almost small in Grade 3, meaning that Grade 3 learners who report having more positive educational environments displayed higher achievement in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics. In Grade 6, the effect sizes were negligible. However, in Grade 9, a small negative effect size was found. This means that Grade 9 learners who report having more positive educational environments displayed lower achievement in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

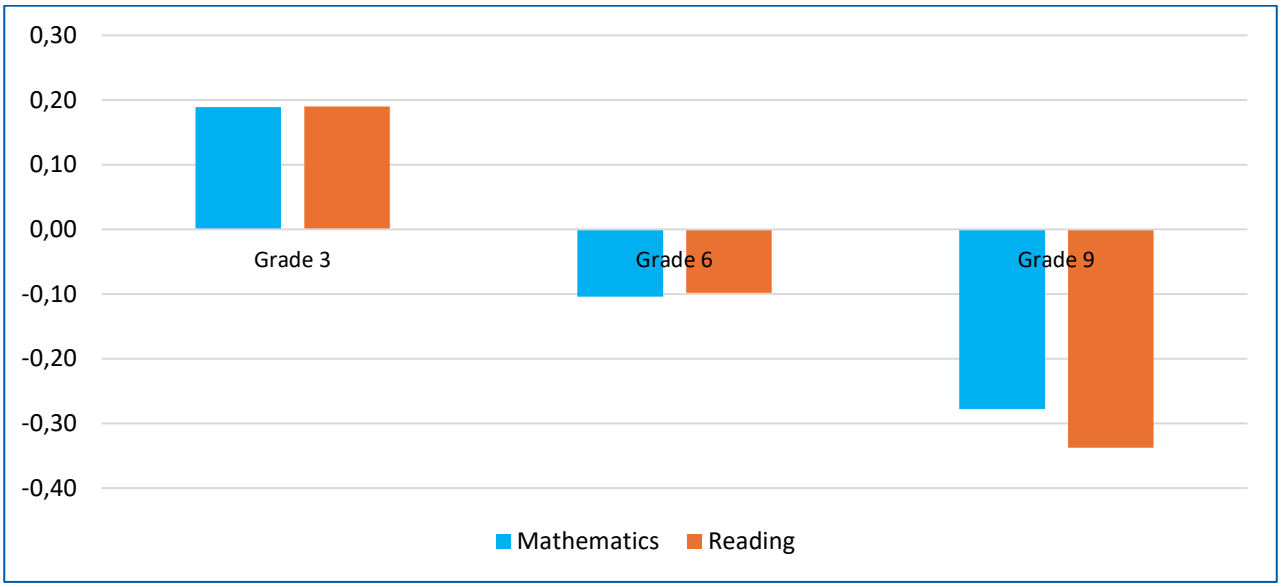


Figure 28: Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by positive Educational Environments Index by Grade

The next set of figures shows the effect sizes for the difference in Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by learners with positive educational environments for each Grade level by test language. In Grade 3, effect sizes for learners taking the test in Afrikaans or English are negligible. However, for all other languages, effect sizes are positive and small to medium. This means that for learners taking the test in African languages, those with more positive educational environments displayed higher performance in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

Grade 3 learners who report having more positive educational environments displayed higher achievement in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics espicially for learners taking the test in African languages.

Again, for Grades 6 and 9, the relationship between positive educational environments and learning outcomes becomes negative. In Grade 6, the effect size is negligible for learners taking the test in English, but small for those taking the test in Afrikaans. In Grade 9, the effect size is small for learners taking the test in English, but medium for those taking the test in Afrikaans. This means that learners with more positive educational environments displayed lower performance in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics, and the relationship is always stronger for learners taking the test in Afrikaans than it is for those taking the test in English.

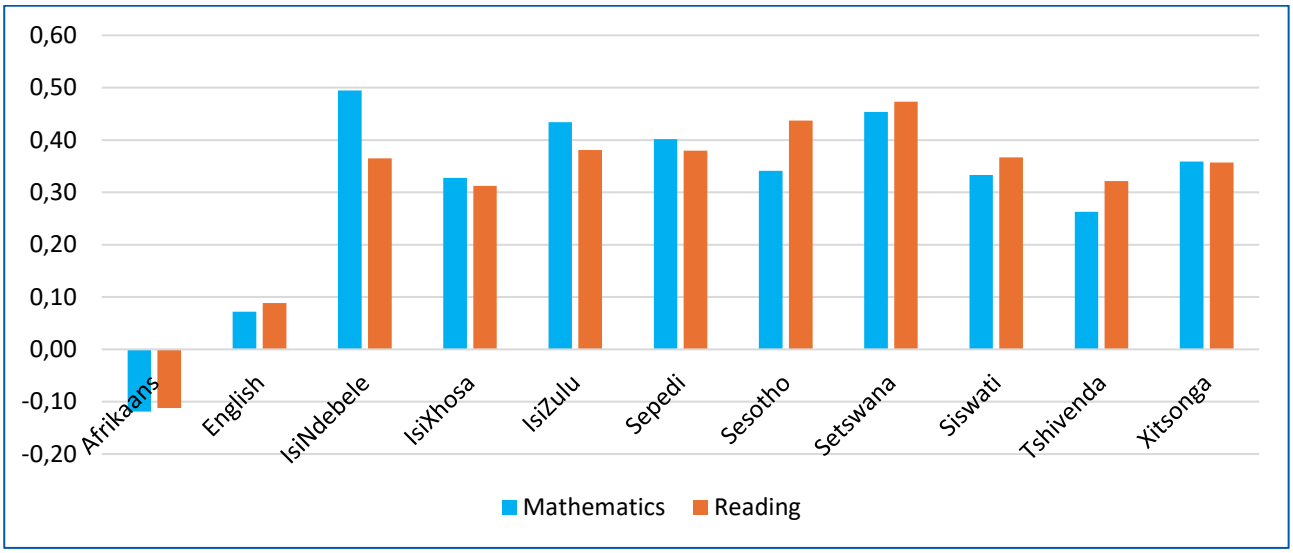


Figure 29: Grade 3 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by positive educational environments index, by test language

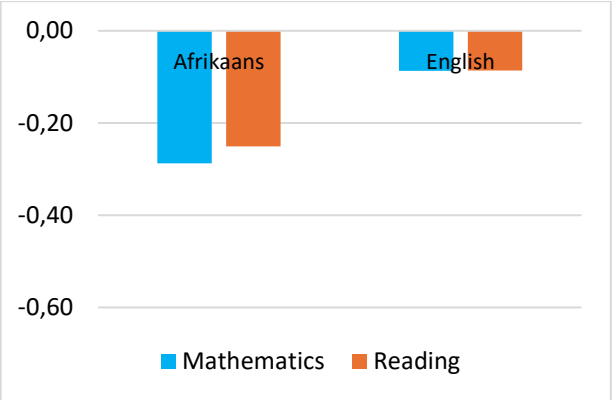


Figure 30: Grade 6 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by positive educational environments index by test language

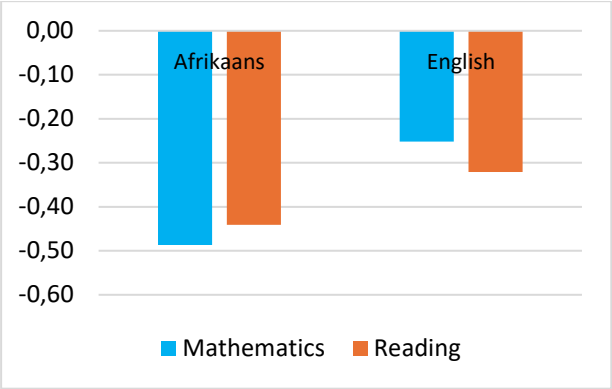


Figure 31: Grade 9 Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by positive educational environments index by test language

The effect size of positive educational environments was found to be negligible across most provinces except North West (positive small) and Western Cape (negative small). When examined by Grade and gender and by province and gender, the differences in effect size between boys and girls did not differ substantially.

4.1.4. Home Environment Factors

This section introduces parents' responses regarding household resources and ownership of certain items. Where data was unavailable in the parent questionnaire, valid responses were supplemented from the learner questionnaire for items marked with an asterisk. These responses provide insight into the household resources that may support or influence learners' learning environments.

Table 11: Home environment index: Proportions of households with certain items, all Grades

	Yes	No	Invalid or missing
Running tap water*	74.63	25.37	15.91
Electricity*	93.88	6.12	15.09
Flushing toilet*	59.29	40.71	16.68
Radio*	63.72	36.28	17.78
Television*	86.54	13.46	15.62
A satellite dish*	68.37	31.63	18.59
A DVD or CD player*	48.22	51.78	18.96
A computer/laptop/tablet*	33.83	66.17	20.50
Access to the internet (from the learner questionnaire)	47.17	52.83	32.48
Cell phone*	91.42	8.58	16.66
Motor vehicle or motorbike (combined into a single variable)	34.13	65.87	31.39
Bicycle	19.42	80.58	33.94

Learner access to essential resources that can promote learning is generally high. A high percentage of learners across grades 3, 6, and 9 have access to basic amenities with almost 87% of them having access to a television and 68% of them have one with a satellite dish. More than 90% of learners have access to a cell phone but just over third of learners have access to a computer device and less than 50% of them have access to the internet.

The next figure shows the effect size for the difference in Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by home environment factors for each Grade level.

Home environment factors have a medium positive relationship with learning outcomes in Grade 3 and a large positive relationship in Grades 6 and 9 for both Reading Literacy and Mathematics. This means that wealthier learners perform better in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

While PIRLS and TIMSS measure wealth and socioeconomic status differently to SASE, South African results from these international assessments are in line with findings here, showing that learners

with higher wealth or socioeconomic status perform better in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

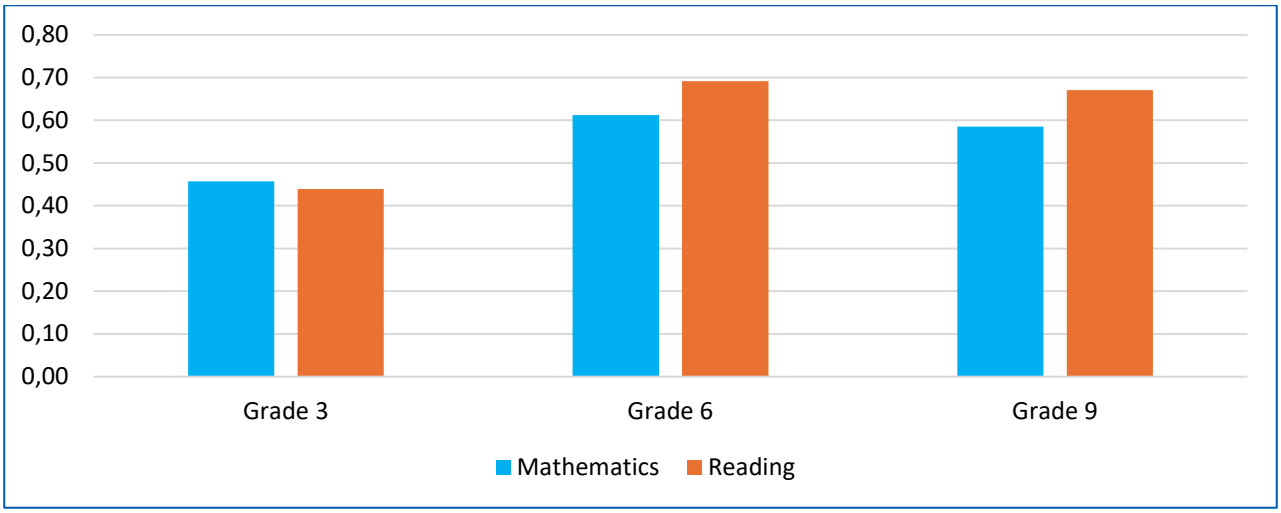


Figure 32: Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by learner home environment by Grade

The next figure shows the effect size for the difference in Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by home environment factors for each province. The effect size of home environment factors on Reading Literacy and Mathematics performance differs across provinces but is always positive. This means that in all provinces, wealthier learners displayed higher achievement in both Mathematics and Reading Literacy. A medium effect size was found in Gauteng for both Mathematics and Reading Literacy. Most other provinces were found to have small to medium effect sizes except for Limpopo, where the relationship between a learner's wealth and their performance in Reading Literacy, and Mathematics was negligible.

Please note, however, that effect sizes are influenced by the amount of variance in both the outcome variable (Reading Literacy and Mathematics performance) and the predictor variable (home environment factors). As such, while it appears that in Limpopo wealth does not have a significant effect on performance, it could be that there were a large number of learners in that province of low wealth, and/or that a high proportion of learners were low-performing.

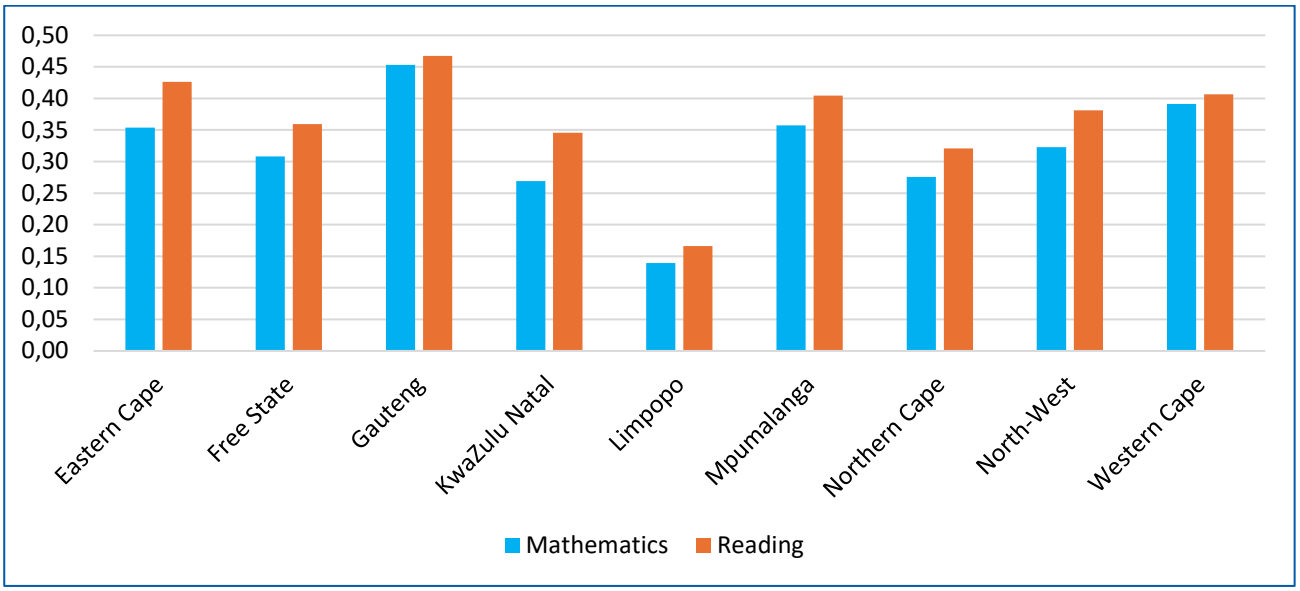


Figure 33: Reading Literacy and Mathematics achievement by home environment factors by province

The effect size of home environment factors on Reading Literacy and Mathematics performance is positive across all provinces. This means that in all provinces, wealthier learners displayed higher achievement in both Mathematics and Reading Literacy.

4.2. Macrosystem Analysis

The macro-level analysis in this report is based on nine core focus areas outlined in the whole school evaluation framework. Each area includes detailed findings and an accompanying Z-score chart. In this chart, a Z-score of 0 indicates an average score, while positive scores are above average and negative scores are below average. Negative findings are represented on the left of the chart, while positive findings are on the right, giving a clear visual of how each focus area performs relative to the average.

Data for the whole school evaluation (WSE) was collected via contextual questionnaires completed by officials, along with learners, parents, teachers, and principals from 227 sampled schools. These schools formed a subset of the larger SASE sample. The data captured additional information on various factors influencing learning, such as learner demographics, household resources, teaching methods, school environment, and district support. Schools were randomly selected to ensure an even provincial distribution, with a representative sample of education districts and a balanced spread across school quintiles. The survey concentrated on nine specific areas: basic functionality, quality of teaching and learning and teacher development, learner achievement, leadership and communication, curriculum provision and resources, governance and relationships, safety, security and discipline, infrastructure, and parents and community.

The findings based on the nine focus areas of the report are presented next:

4.2.1. Basic functionality of the school

It was found that Quintile 1 schools faced greater challenges due to large class sizes (the recommended ratio for secondary school class size is 1:35 and 1:40 for primary schools) and higher levels of teacher and learner absenteeism.

The Eastern Cape, Free State, and Mpumalanga provinces had large class sizes, and the Free State reported higher levels of learner and teacher absenteeism. The Free State, North West, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga provinces experienced low teacher attendance at schools. Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and Northern Cape provinces had more moderate class sizes and levels of absenteeism. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 1 per quintile and province.

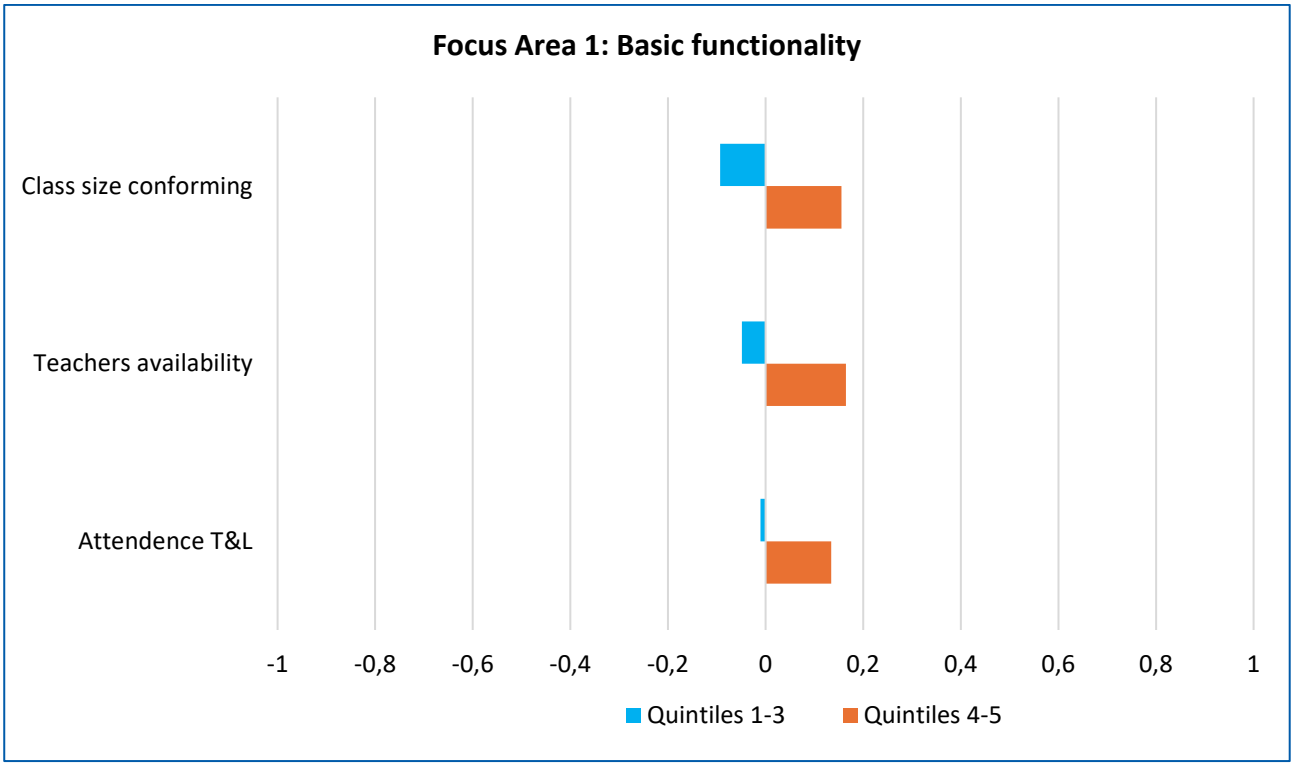


Figure 34: Focus Area 1: Basic Functionality per quintile

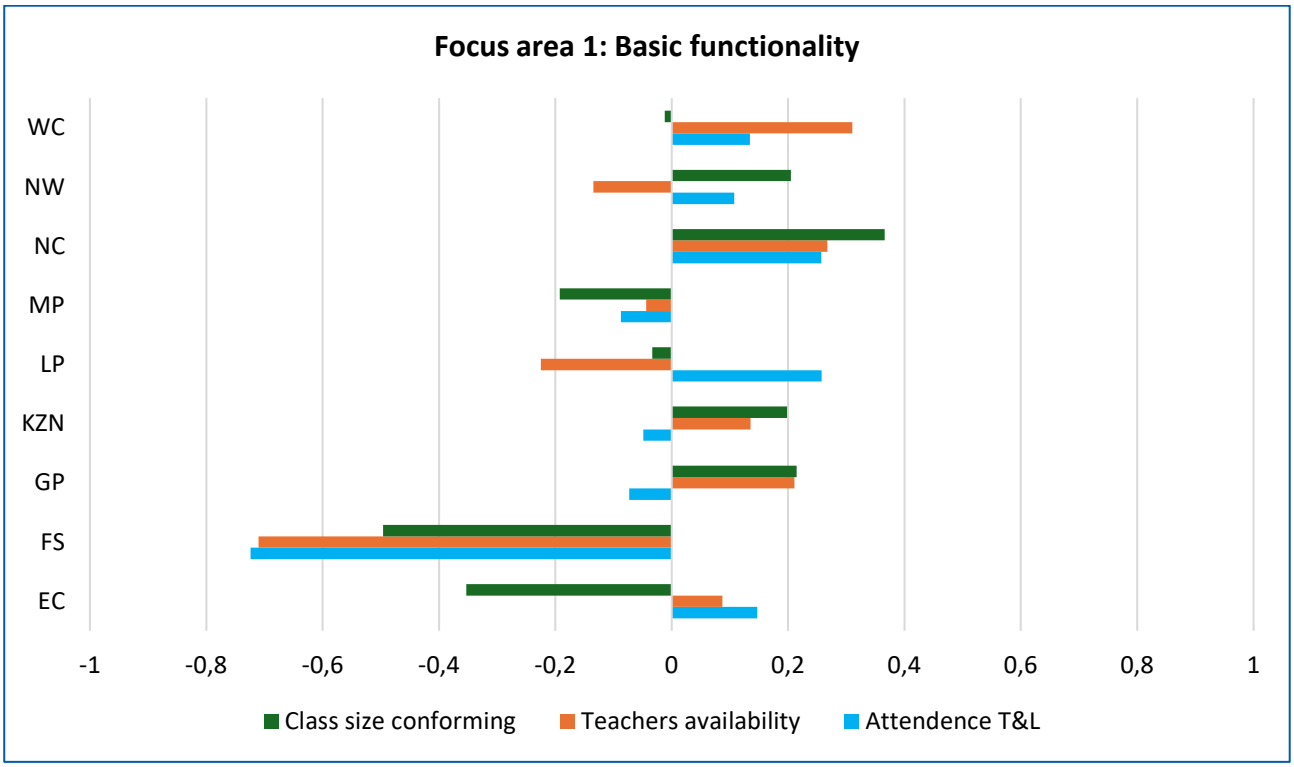


Figure 35: Focus Area 1: Basic Functionality per province

The Eastern Cape, Free State, and Mpumalanga provinces had large class sizes, and the Free State reported higher levels of learner and teacher absenteeism. This was most prevalent among quintile 1-3 schools.

Quintile 1 and 3 schools faced similar challenges with large class sizes, and higher teacher and learner absenteeism. Quintile 2 schools reported moderate class sizes and learner and teacher absenteeism. Quintile 4 schools reported larger class sizes, and moderate learner and teacher absenteeism. Quintile 5 schools had lower learner-to-teacher ratios and lower absenteeism rates.

4.2.2. Quality of teaching and learning and teacher development

It was found that Grade 9 learners did much less written work, which was also not as effectively scaffolded by teachers as Grade 6 learners. Furthermore, intervention strategies were fewer and less effective for Grade 9 learners than for Grade 3 and 6 learners. However, addressing learning barriers through intervention strategies at participating schools was generally effective. In KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Northern Cape, North West, and Mpumalanga provinces, these strategies were less effective. It was also found that schools with processes in place to identify learners with learning difficulties and implement interventions had better academic results. Levels of addressing barriers to learning increased as the quintile increased. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 2 per quintile and province.

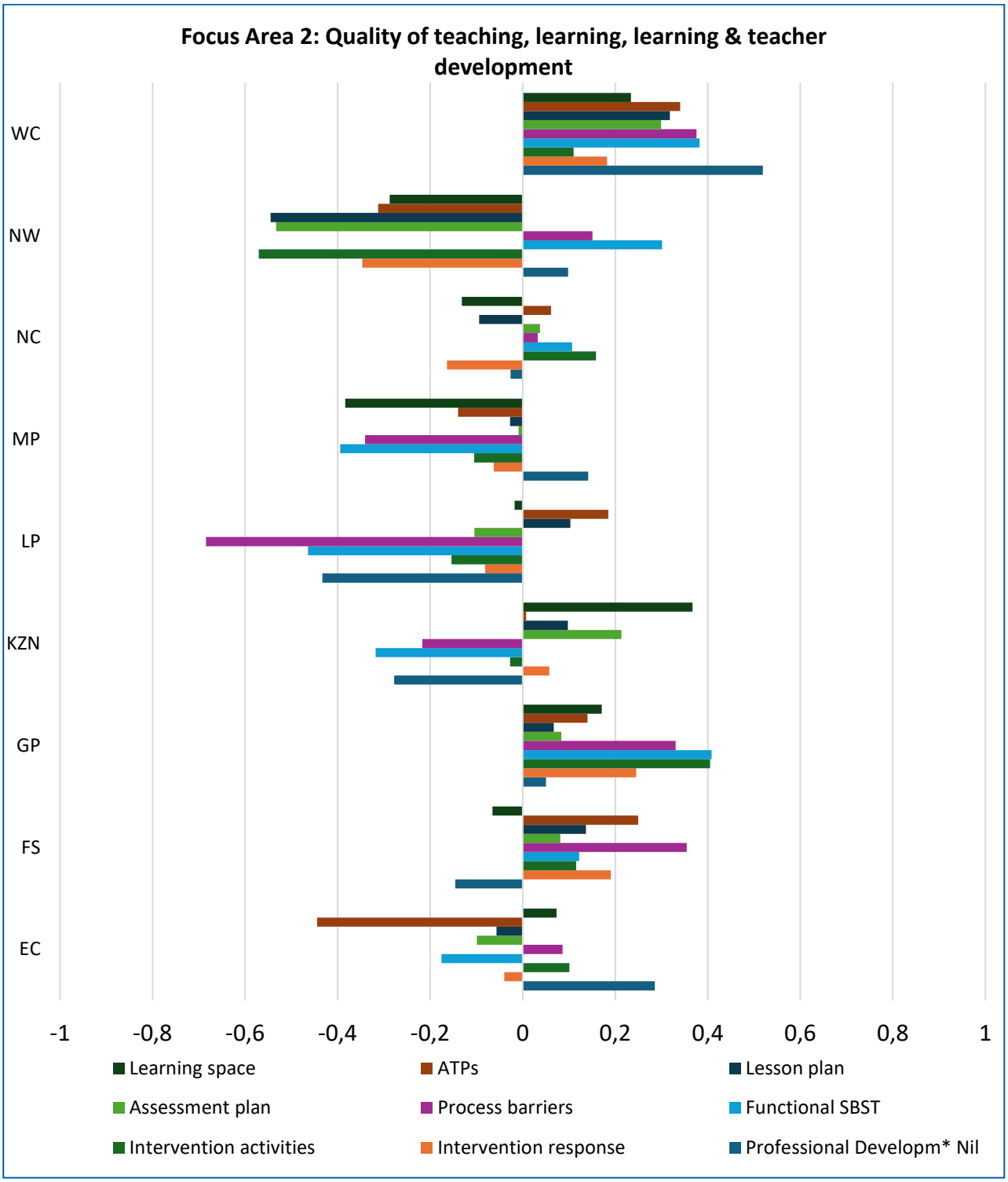


Figure 36: Provincial quality of teaching, learning, and teacher development

Addressing learning barriers through intervention strategies at participating schools was generally effective. However, in KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Northern Cape, North West, and Mpumalanga provinces, these strategies were less effective.

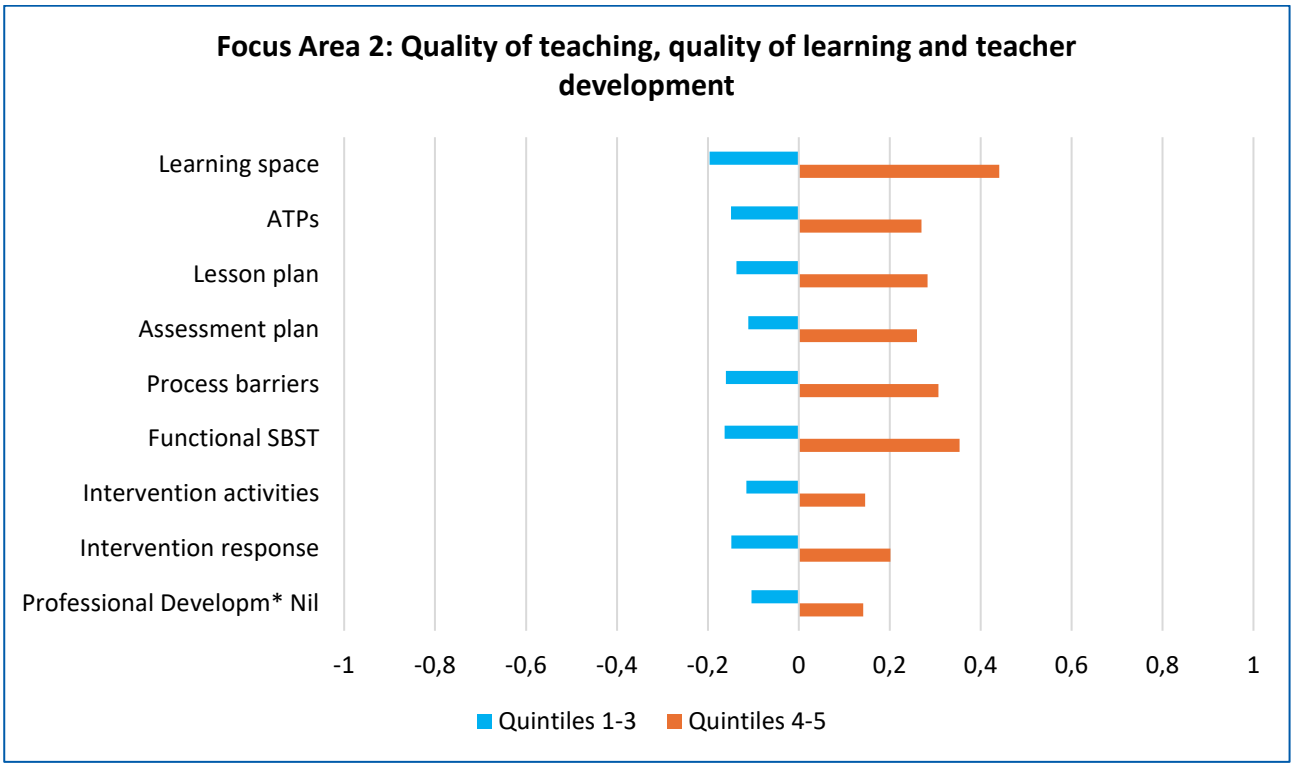


Figure 37: Focus Area 2: Quality of teaching, learning, and teacher development per quintile ranking

4.2.3. Learner academic, extra- and co-curricular achievement

Learners in Grades 3, 6, and 9 achieved lower scores in Mathematics than in the language of learning and teaching (LoLT). The LoLT at schools could be the subject taken at home language (HL) or first additional level (FAL). The results in both Mathematics and LoLT decreased from Grade 3 to 9, especially in Mathematics, as fewer learners achieved 50% in these learning areas. Gauteng and the Western Cape performed consistently better across all the Grades.

There was a general decline in learner performance from primary to secondary schools (Grade 12 results included) in all provinces.

Grade 3 and 6 performance was higher than in Grade 9 in all provinces and across all quintiles. Even though Further Education and Training (Grades 10 to 12) performance was better than Grade 9 there was a general trend in declining achievement from primary to secondary school across all quintiles. This trend is mirrored in the availability and completeness of school records (which assist with intervention strategies), with higher availability in Grades 3 and 6 than in Grade 9.

COVID-19's impact on extramural activities was more detrimental for lower-quintile schools than for higher-quintile schools. This was exasperated by commuting challenges and a lack of extra-mural amenities. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 3 per quintile and province.

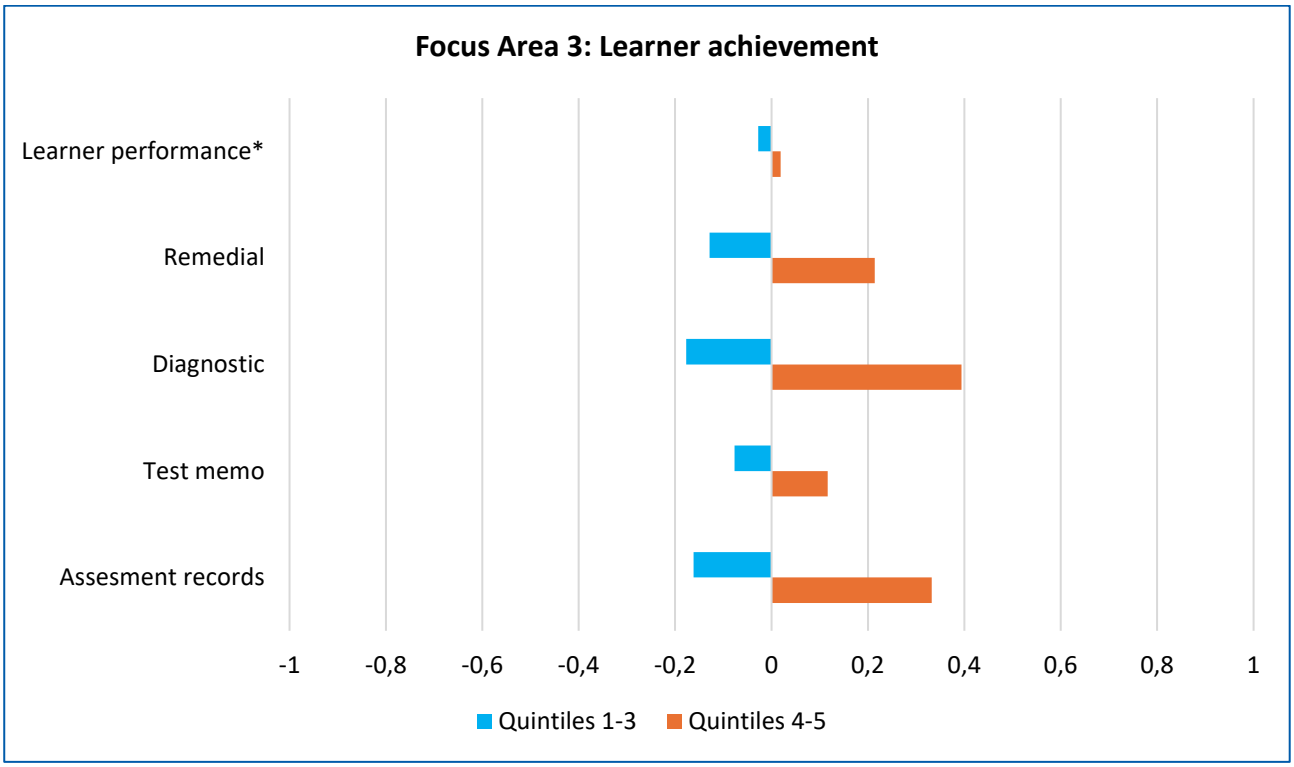


Figure 38: Focus Area 3: Learner Achievement per quintile

The results of school-based assessment records in both Mathematics and LoLT decreased from Grade 3 to 9, especially in Mathematics, as fewer learners achieved 50% in these learning areas. Gauteng and the Western Cape performed consistently better across all the Grades, though Grades 10 to 12 performance was better than Grade 9.

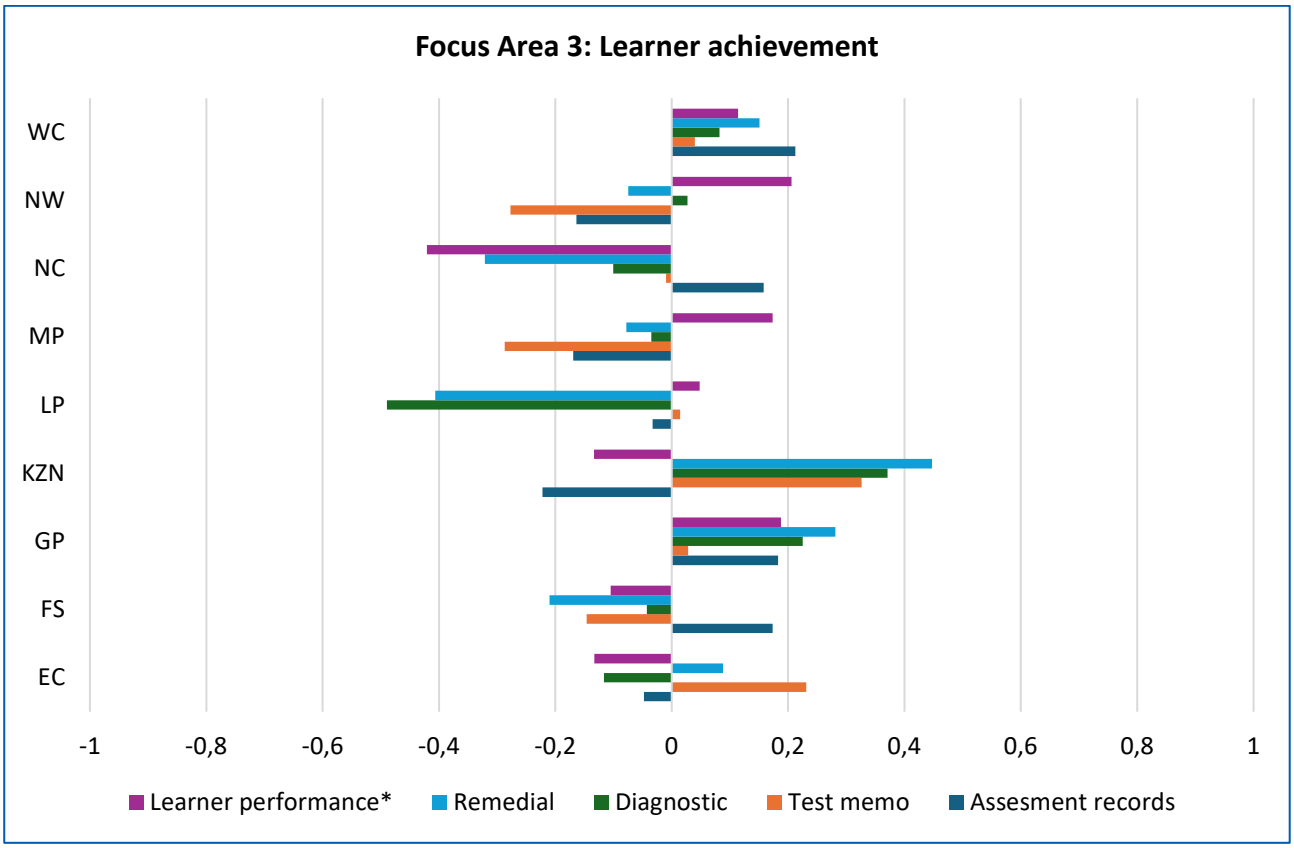


Figure 39: Focus Area 3: Provincial Learner Achievement

4.2.4. Leadership, management and communication

There was a lack of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities for teachers. This was due to the School Management Teams (SMTs) facing operational, infrastructural, and resource challenges.

Monitoring planning and preparation, as well as the curriculum, was more successfully implemented than professional development and lesson observation across Grades and quintiles. However, less than half of the SMTs adequately monitored teachers' curriculum activities, planning and preparation, professional development, and classroom teaching.

Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus are 4 per quintile and province.

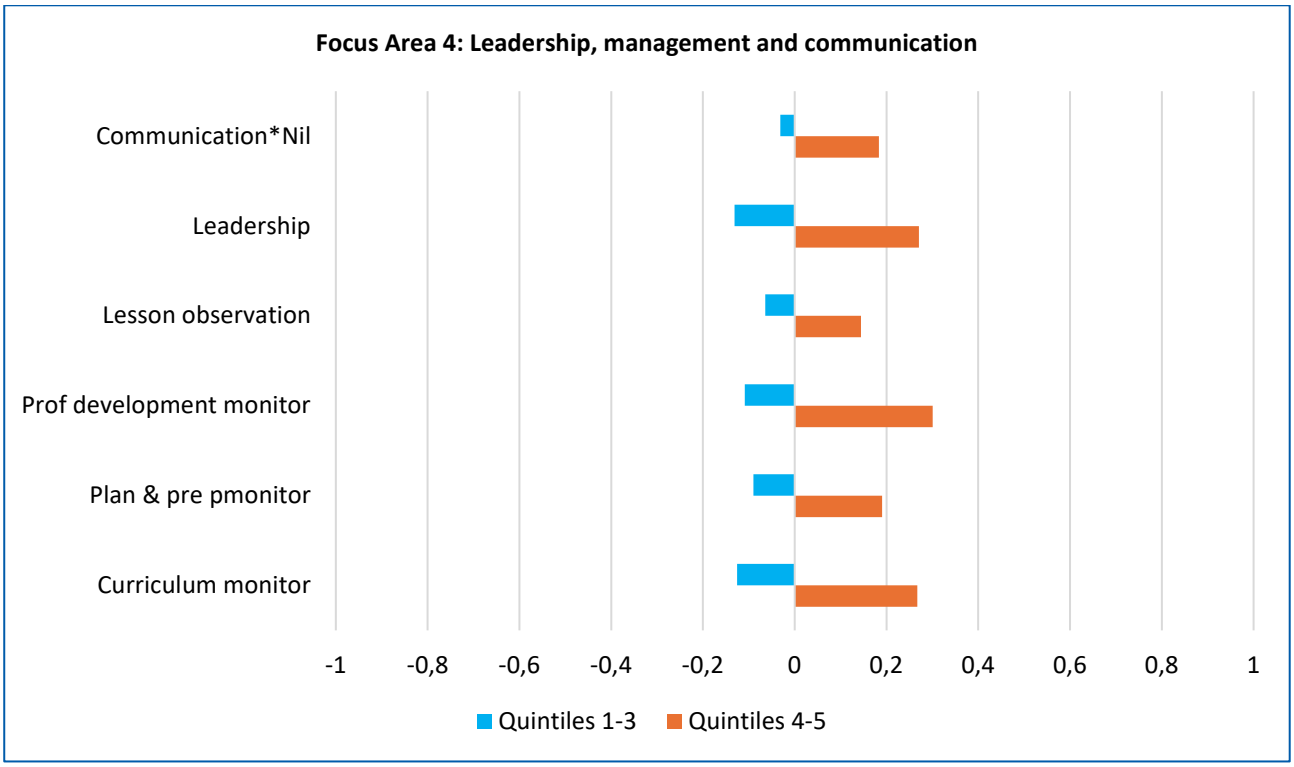


Figure 40: Focus Area 4: Leadership, management, and communication per quintile

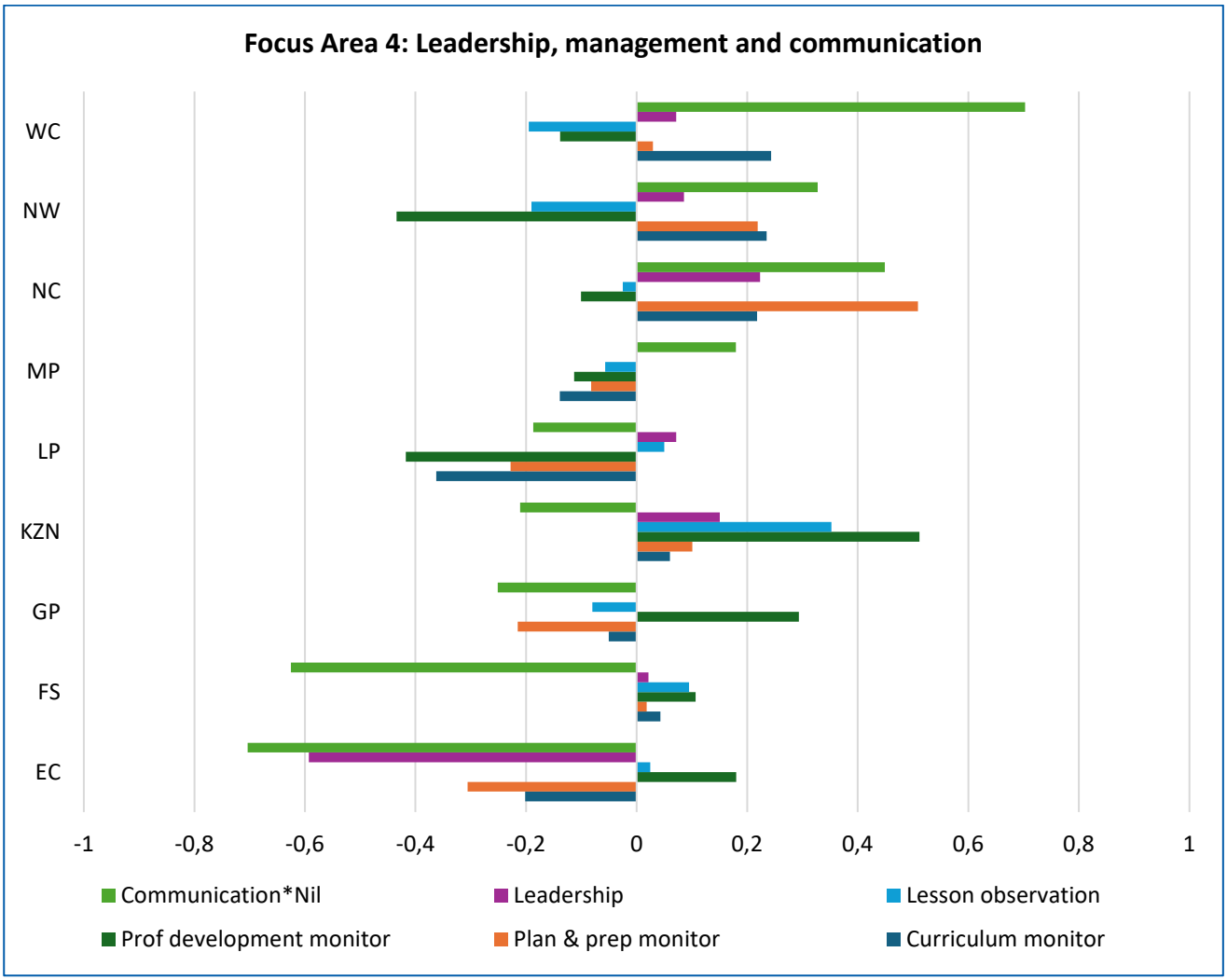


Figure 41: Leadership, management, and communication per province

4.2.5. Curriculum provision and resources

It was found that CAPS compliance was excellent. CAPS-aligned textbooks were generally available, but more so for Grades 3 and 6, than for Grade 9.

On average, textbook and Reading Literacy book availability was higher for the lower Grades across all quintiles, with challenges in LTSM distribution reported in Grade 9. Teachers were qualified to teach, but access to ICT devices (except for Quintile 5) and Reading Literacy books was inadequate, except in Gauteng and the Western Cape, which had ample Reading Literacy-book resources. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 5 per province.

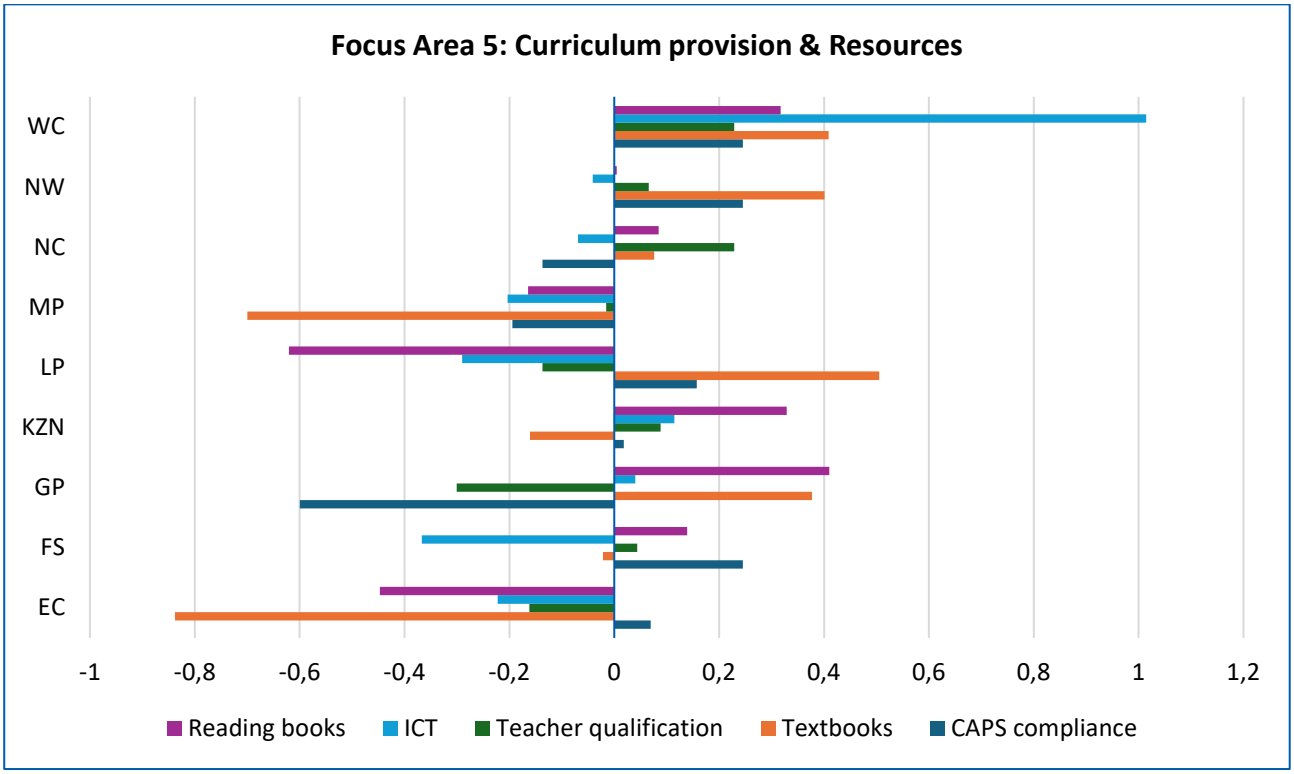


Figure 42: Focus Area 5: Provincial Curriculum Provision and Resources

In Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape learners have limited access to a textbook and Western Cape and teacher access to ICT devices in the Western Cape is much higher than the other provinces.

4.2.6. Governance and relationships

Although there were some challenges, a very high rating of more than 90% was given to School Governing Bodies (SGBs) functionality (including budgeting and finance). Generally, there was an excellent performance rating in both functionality and outputs, indicating robust SGB operations. The averages were 94% for functionality and 92% for outputs. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 6 per quintile and province.

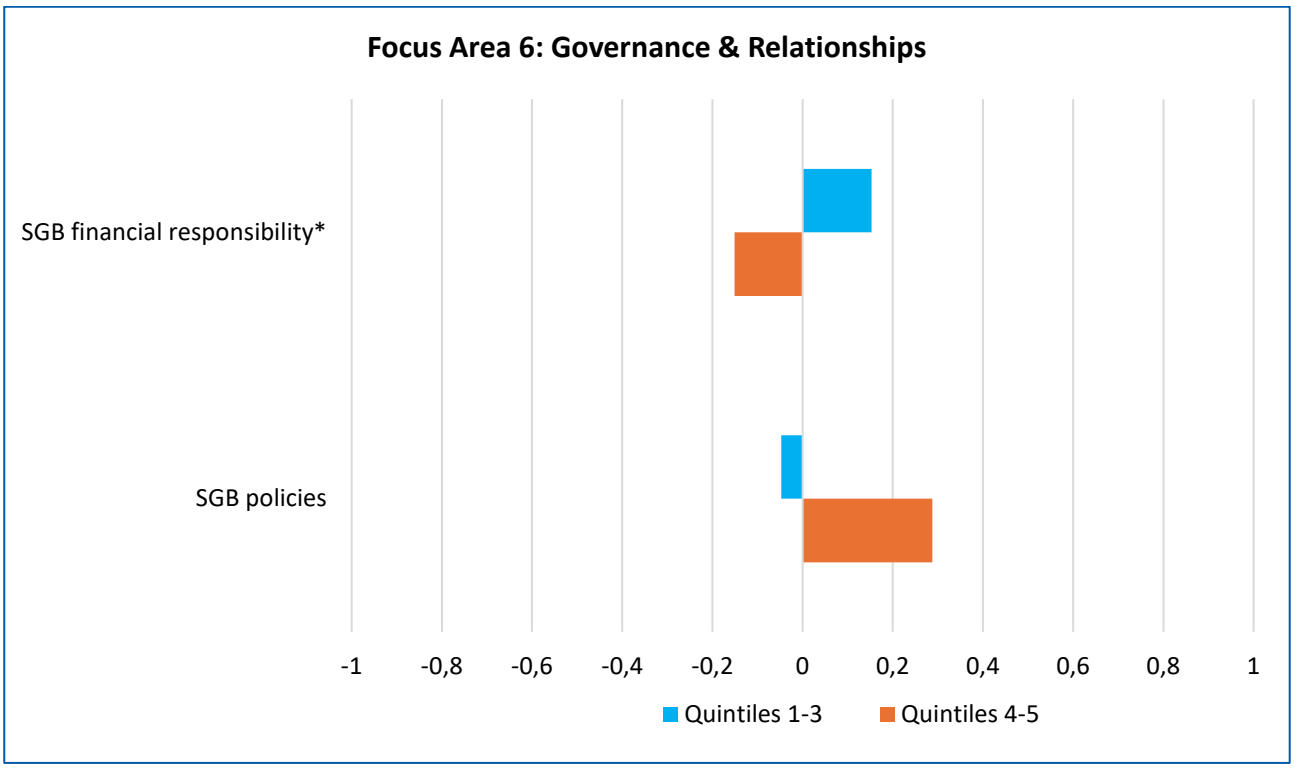


Figure 43: Focus Area 6: Governance and Relationships (Per quintile)

There was an excellent performance rating in both functionality and outputs, indicating robust SGB operations.

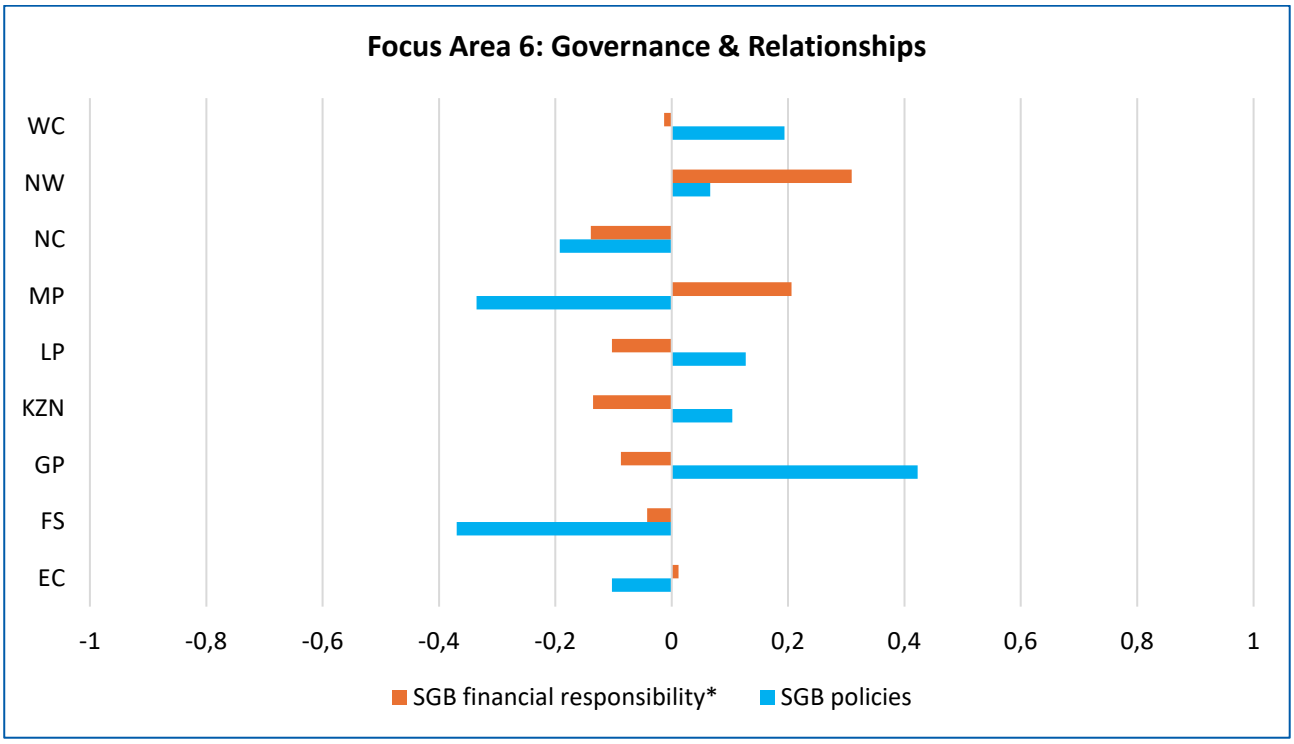


Figure 44: Focus Area 6: Governance and Relationships (per province)

4.2.7. School safety, security and discipline

More than 80% of learners participated in the National School Nutrition Programme. 79% of learners received social grants. However, only 59% of learners in Quintile 1 schools received social grants, a finding that requires further investigation as to why eligible children are not receiving social grants.

School rules and disciplinary processes were generally well implemented, and access control was effectively maintained. However, vandalism, school supervision outside of the classroom, and theft were highlighted as negatively affecting school safety. Serious misconduct cases are more prevalent in North West and Mpumalanga.

Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 7 per quintile and province.

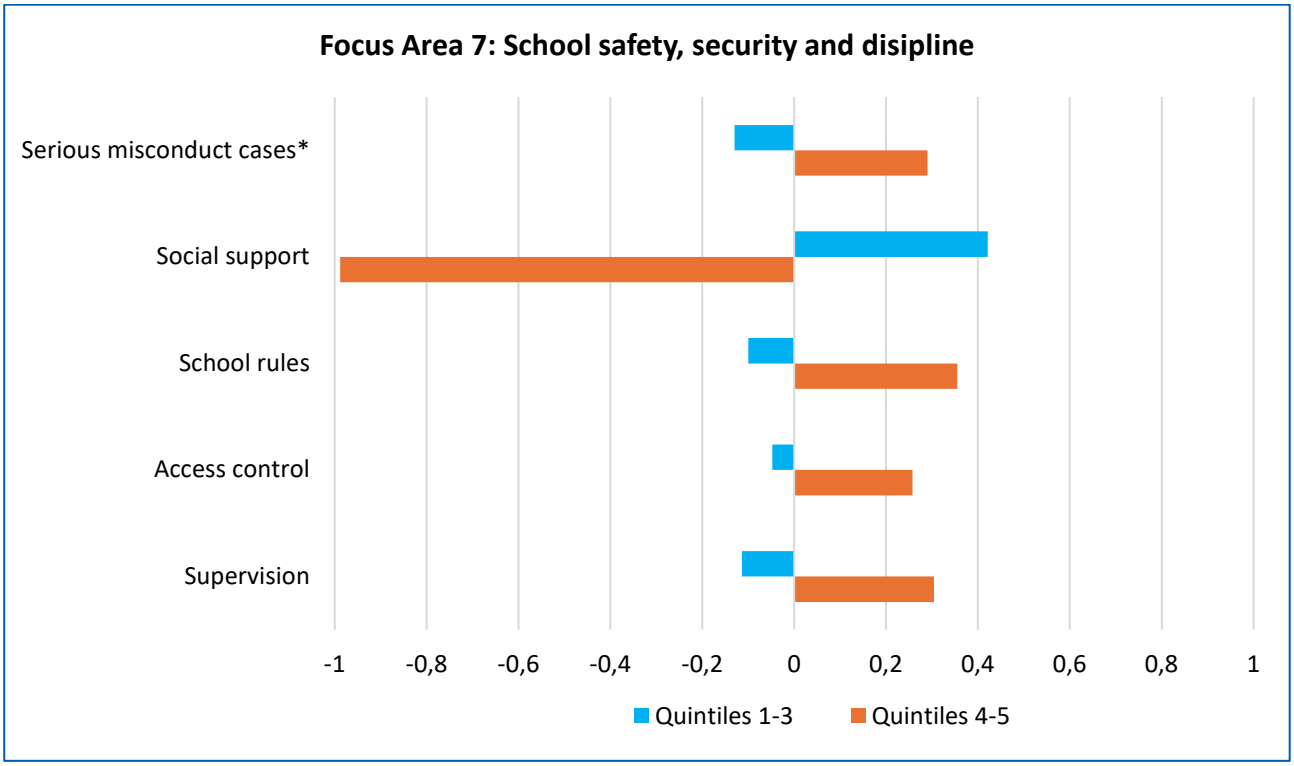


Figure 45: Focus Area 7: School Safety, security and discipline(per quintile)

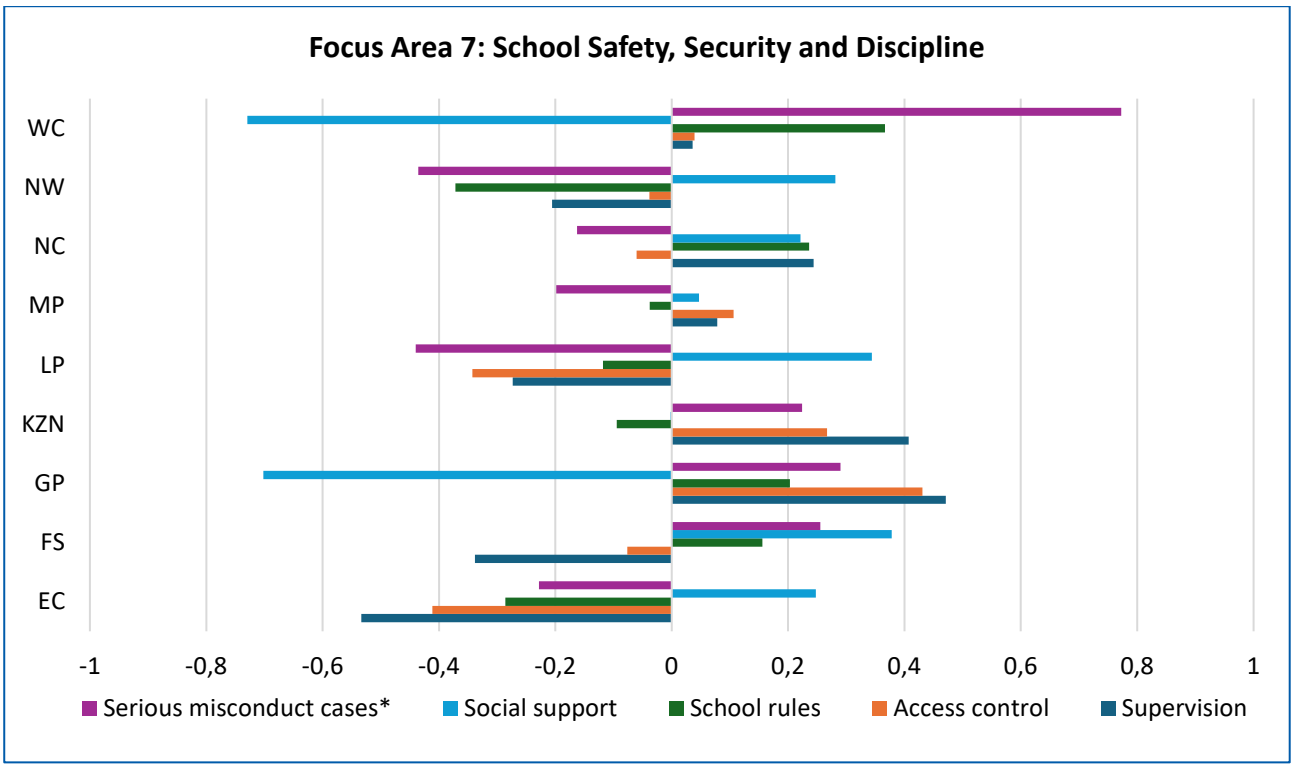


Figure 46: Focus Area 7: School safety, security and discipline (per province)

4.2.8. School Infrastructure

Water and electricity sourcing to schools were generally sufficient, though challenges were experienced with electricity backup systems, which were further hampered by load shedding. There were many schools with no access to water or electricity.

Ablution facilities at schools were satisfactory but vandalism was reported as a problem area (for instance, stealing of copper pipes).

School terrain grounds were rated as moderate, but most grounds were underdeveloped. Classroom accommodation responses were mixed.

Only 57% of schools had sufficient classroom spaces, 45% of classrooms were overcrowded, 35% did not have adequate furniture, and 75% were not equipped with ICT resources. Western Cape schools had sufficient infrastructure but it was lacking in the Eastern Cape.

Regarding other facilities (furniture, staffroom, SMT offices, science laboratories, library, computer laboratory, access for the disabled, sick bay, and a perimeter fence), there was a disturbing disparity between quintiles, with Quintile 5 schools having access to more and better facilities than Quintile 1 schools. Generally, schools reported positively on having perimeter fences.

In general, higher-quintile schools had better infrastructure than lower quintiles. Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 8 per province.

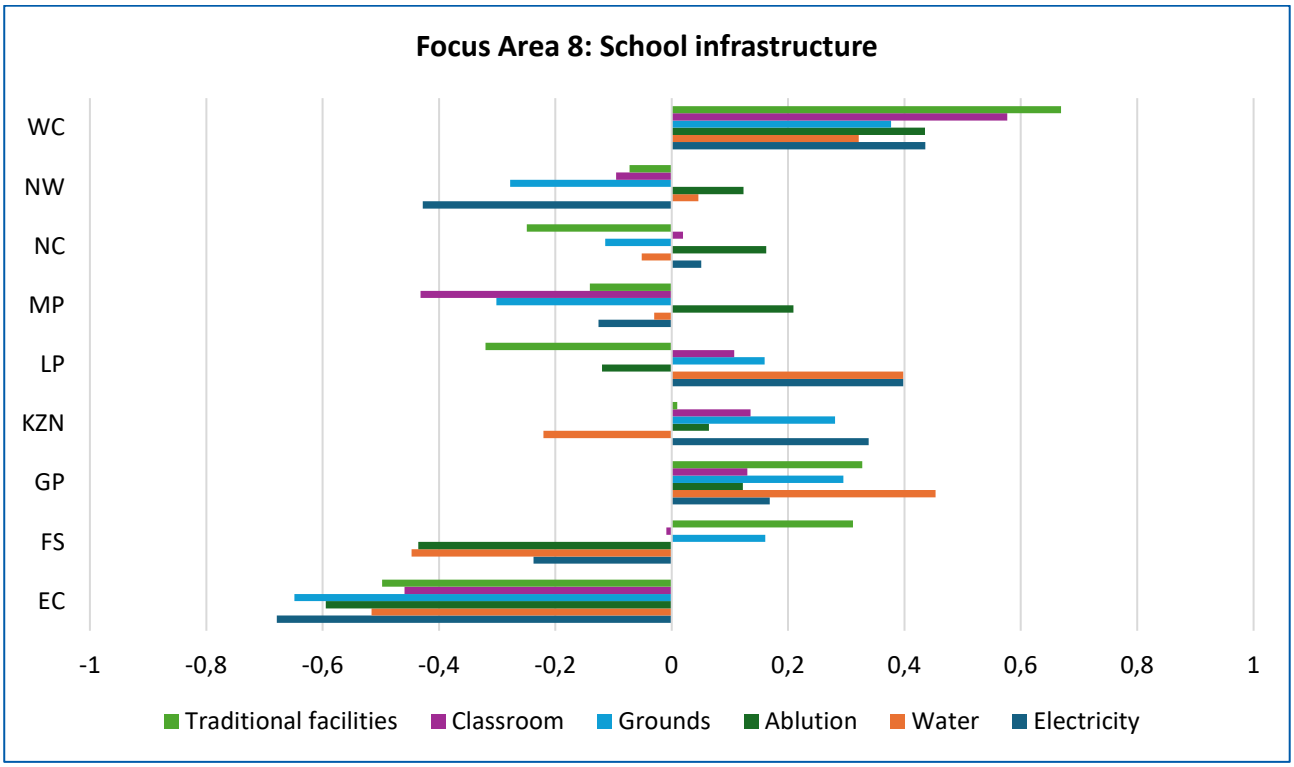


Figure 47: Focus Area 8: School Infrastructure (per province)

4.2.9. Parents and community

The scores for parental involvement and connections with the community (including local services like NGOs and businesses) show a clear upward gradient from Quintile 1 to 5. There is variation in parental involvement, with some provinces performing better than others.

Limpopo, Free State and Western Cape reported high levels of parental involvement, with lower parental involvement reported for Gauteng, Northern Cape, and Mpumalanga.

This was due to pandemic restrictions, socio-economic challenges, and the cost of travel to and from school. Links to community services vary, with some provinces reporting strong community engagement and others weaker connections. KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape demonstrated strong links with community/local services, whereas Limpopo and Mpumalanga indicated weaker links with community services. It was found that NGOs engaged less with lower quintile schools, which also registered lower community engagement.

Below is the graph showing the Z-Scores for focus area 9 per quintile and province.

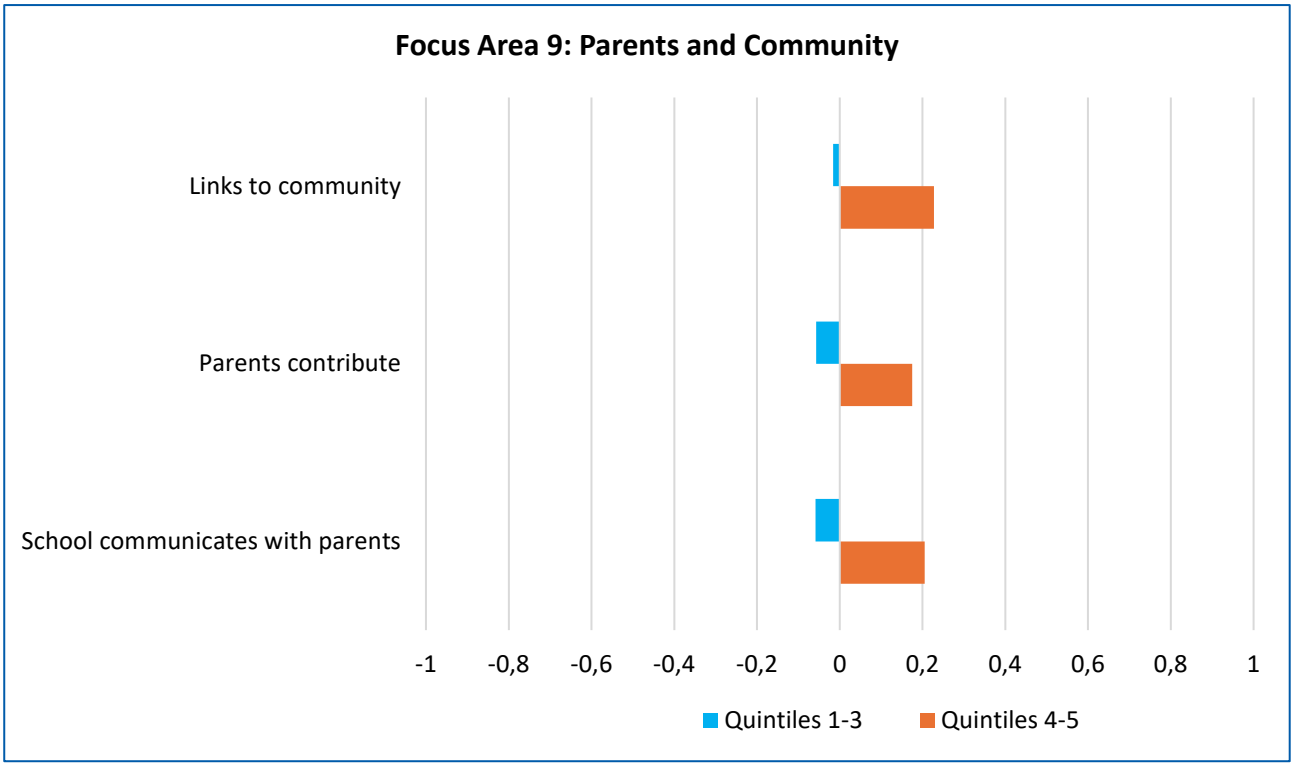


Figure 48: Focus Area 9: Parents and Community (per quintile)

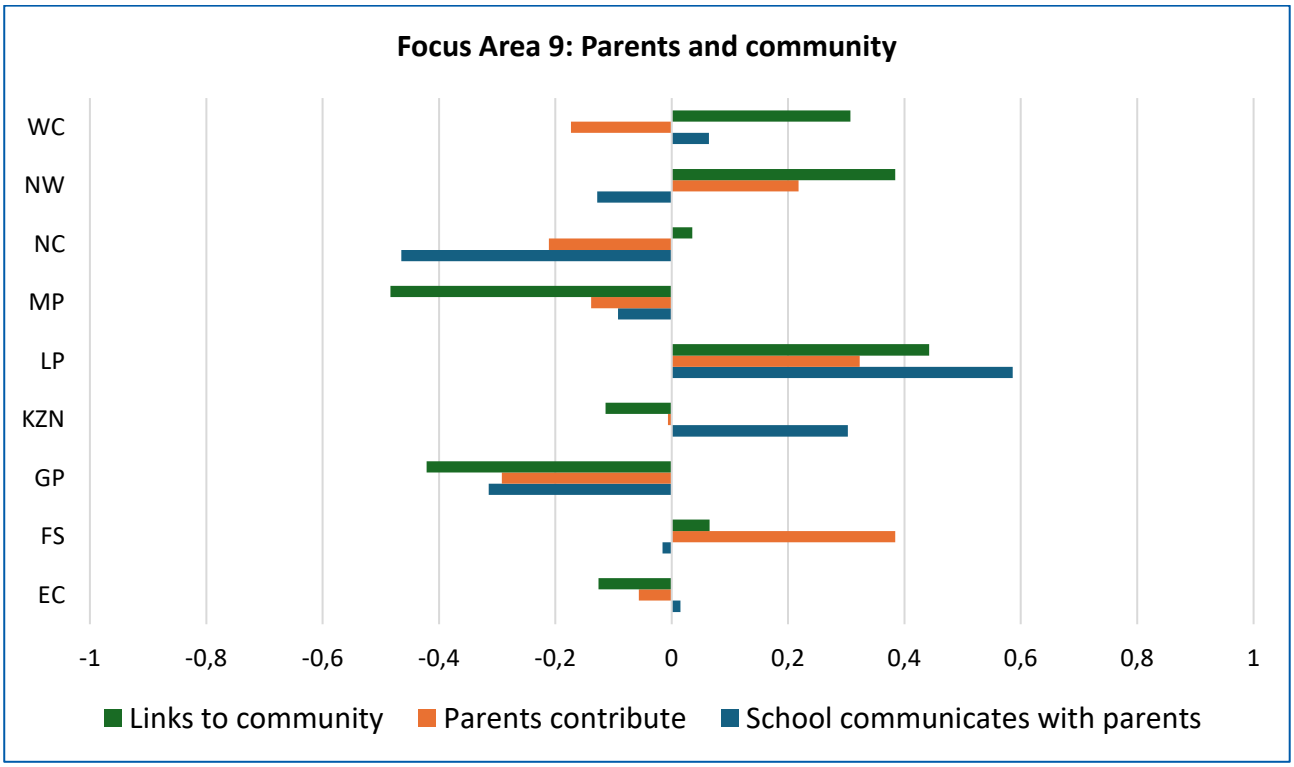


Figure 49: Focus Area 9: Parents and Community (per province)

4.3. Mesosystem Level

Using the Conceptual framework, this section examines the relationships between the micro- and macrosystems. Initial findings are presented for the School, Classroom/Teacher, and Learner/Home contexts. Given the similarity of the findings, the results presented apply to learner performance in both Reading Literacy and Mathematics.

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) techniques were applied to identify factors affecting learner performance. SEM is a comprehensive statistical approach that helps researchers understand complex relationships between multiple variables in a study. This method is particularly valuable because it allows an examination of how different factors work together and influence each other, similar to putting together pieces of a puzzle to see the complete picture.

In the analysis, SEM enabled simultaneously the testing of multiple relationships between variables rather than examining each relationship in isolation. Observations can be made on both direct relationships (like how teaching quality directly affects learner performance) and indirect relationships (like how teaching quality might affect learner motivation, which in turn affects their performance).

4.3.1. School contexts

District Support: Includes school monitoring and visits by support teams. It positively correlates with Mathematics performance, indicating that schools with regular support tend to have better outcomes.

School Resources: Involves essential facilities like water, toilets, electricity, libraries, and special rooms. A significant positive correlation (0.960) with learner performance shows that well-resourced schools support better Mathematics outcomes.

Principal Background: Factors such as experience, gender, and qualifications positively impact learner performance (correlation of 0.189), though less so than resources.

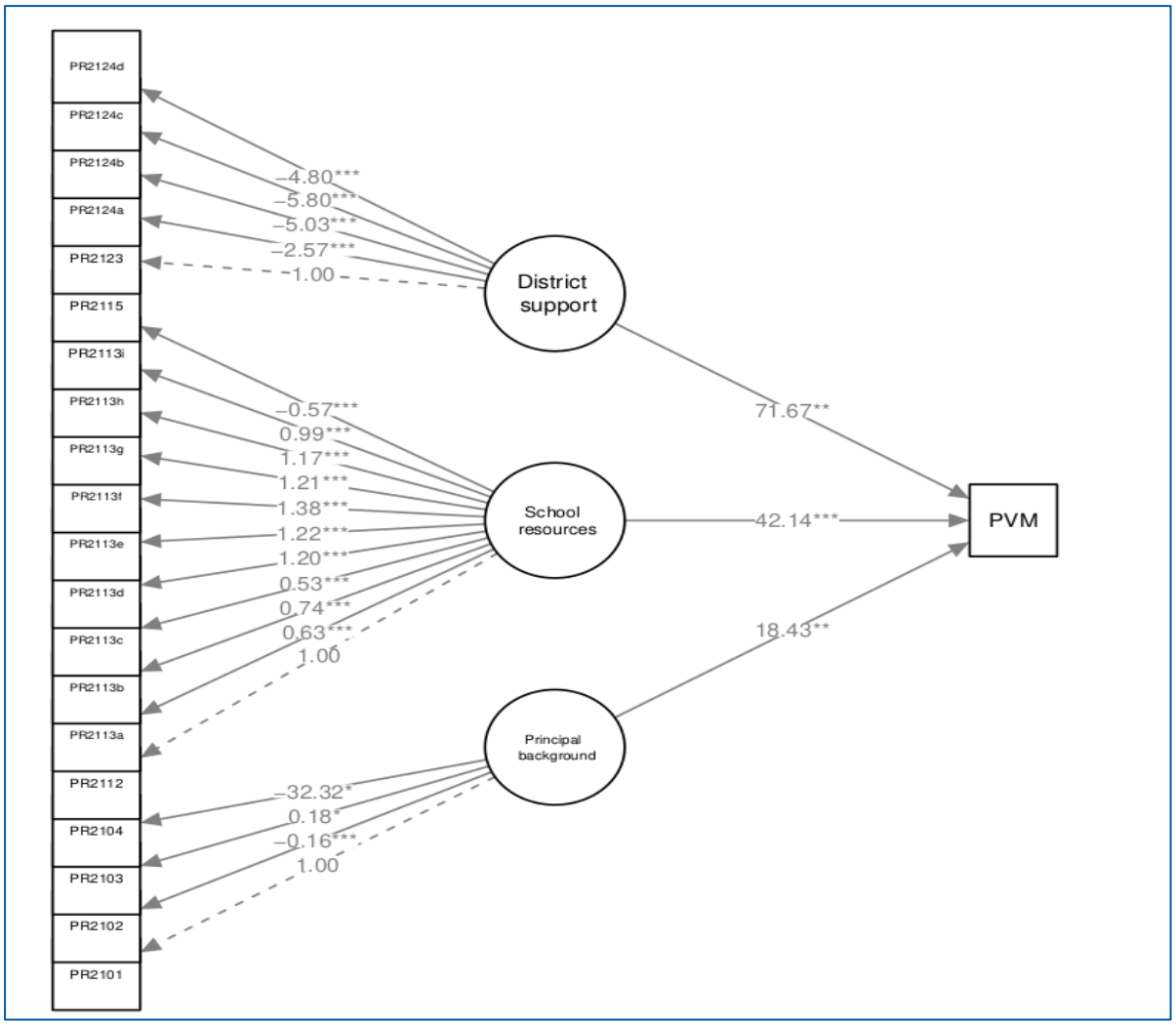


Figure 50: Structural equation modelling for the school context

The following findings were key: Schools with regular support tend to have better outcomes; well-resourced schools support better Mathematics outcomes; and principal background Factors such as experience, gender, and qualifications positively impact learner performance. However, school resources were the main factor contributing to learner performance. The correlations between the latent variables and learner performance indicated that the latent variable school resources were the main factor contributing to learner performance, followed by principal background and district support (Table 12).

Table 12: Correlation between latent variables and maths plausible values

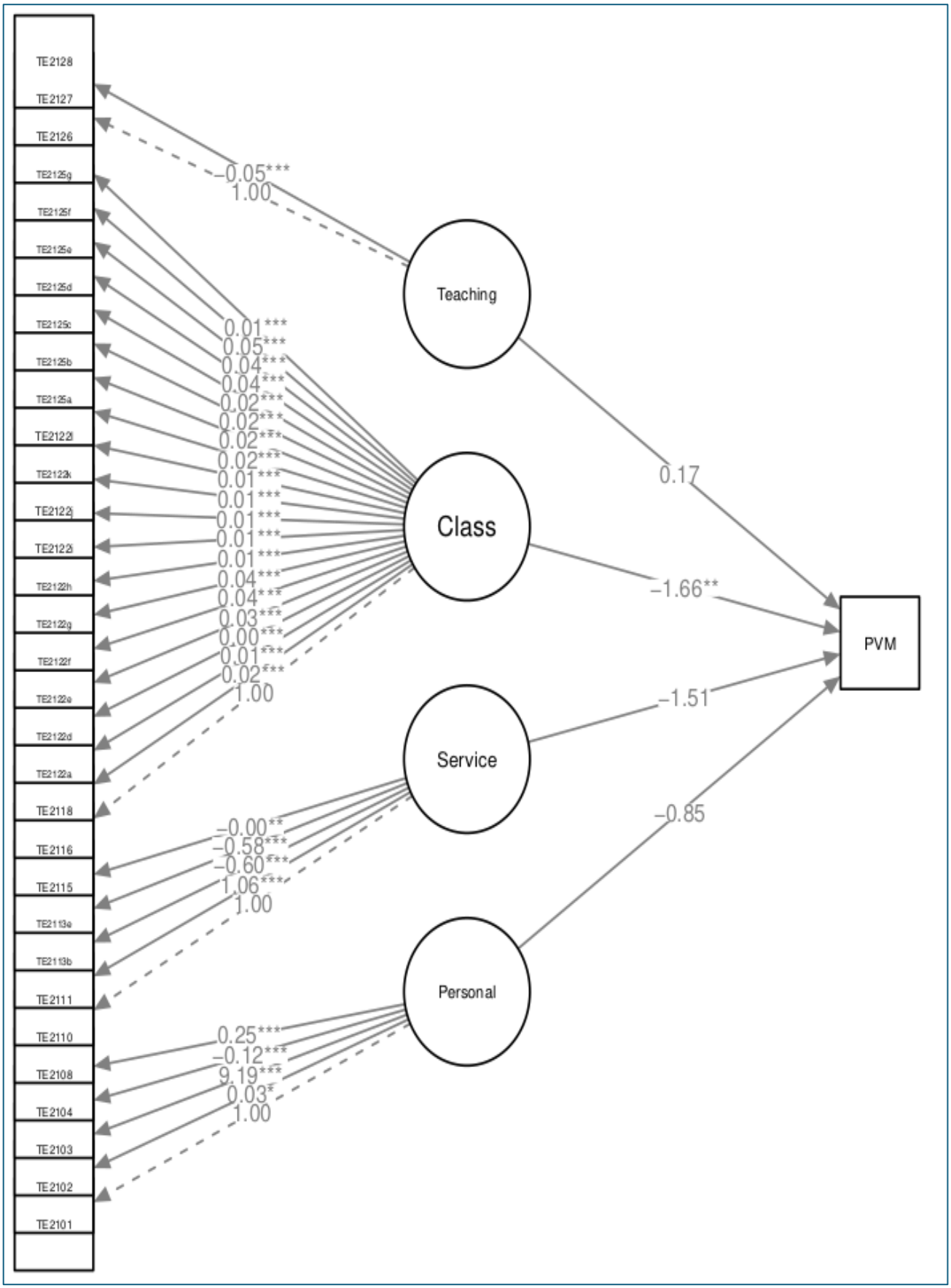
Latent variable	Maths
Principal background	0,189
School resources	0,960
District support	0,07

4.3.2. Classroom/Teacher Contexts

The analysis for the classroom showed that four key factors are associated with learner performance in the Mathematics test, namely teaching, classroom, service, and personal.

1. Teaching time and preparation: Refers to the lesson length and time spent preparing for lessons and marking, revealing a strong positive impact (correlation of 0.555), indicating structured and extended teaching times improve performance.
2. Classroom Conditions: Includes learner numbers and physical conditions of the classroom, showing a negative correlation (-0.984), meaning that overcrowded or inadequate classrooms negatively affect learning.
3. In-Service Courses: Although related to professional training, it has a slight negative correlation (-0.056), suggesting possible mismatches between training content and practical needs.
4. Teacher characteristics: This includes teacher experience and personal factors, showing a modest positive impact (correlation of 0.116).

An experience teacher that prepares well and utilises time efficiently in an appropriately sized classroom correlates positively with improved learner performance but there seems to be a mismatch between training content of in-service courses and practical needs.



Structural equation modelling for the classroom context

Figure 51: Structural equation modelling for the teacher context

Correlation analysis showed that the dimensions with the highest correlations with Mathematics performance were 'classroom condition and schooling context' and 'teaching time and preparation', followed by 'personal characteristics and 'in-service course'. The "Class and School" dimension showed a negative correlation with performance; therefore, we can conclude that schools with a smaller number of learners per classroom and adequate physical structure increase learner performance.

The "teaching time and preparation'" factor showed a positive correlation with performance, indicating that a greater number of lessons, more time to prepare classes and an increase in the amount of homework improve learner performance.

Table 13: Correlation between latent variables and maths plausible values for teaching questionnaire

Latent variable	Maths Performance
Personal Characteristics	0,116
In-service courses	-0,056
Teaching time and preparation	0,555
Classroom and School	-0,984

4.3.3. Learner/Home Contexts

For the learner-parent context, four significant latent variables were observed to explain academic performance, namely learner frequency, learner structure, parental involvement, and parental support. The latent variable Learner attendance and meals is positively associated with school performance and is composed of questions related to school attendance and frequency of school meals. Therefore, higher school attendance and better nutrition improve academic performance.

The latent variable **Learner's home environment** is related to housing conditions (water, electricity, toilet, radio, etc). It can be concluded that learners living in houses with more resources and facilities demonstrate increased academic performance.

The latent variable of **Parents' participation** is associated with parental involvement in school activities. A negative association was obtained because the questionnaire presented the answers in decreasing order so that higher frequencies were represented by 1 and lower frequencies by 3 or 4. It can be concluded that greater parental involvement in school activities improves academic performance.

The latent variable **Parents' support** is associated with learner support for school activities at home, and it is positively associated with school performance, so more parents' involvement in school activities at home, like homework, improves school performance.

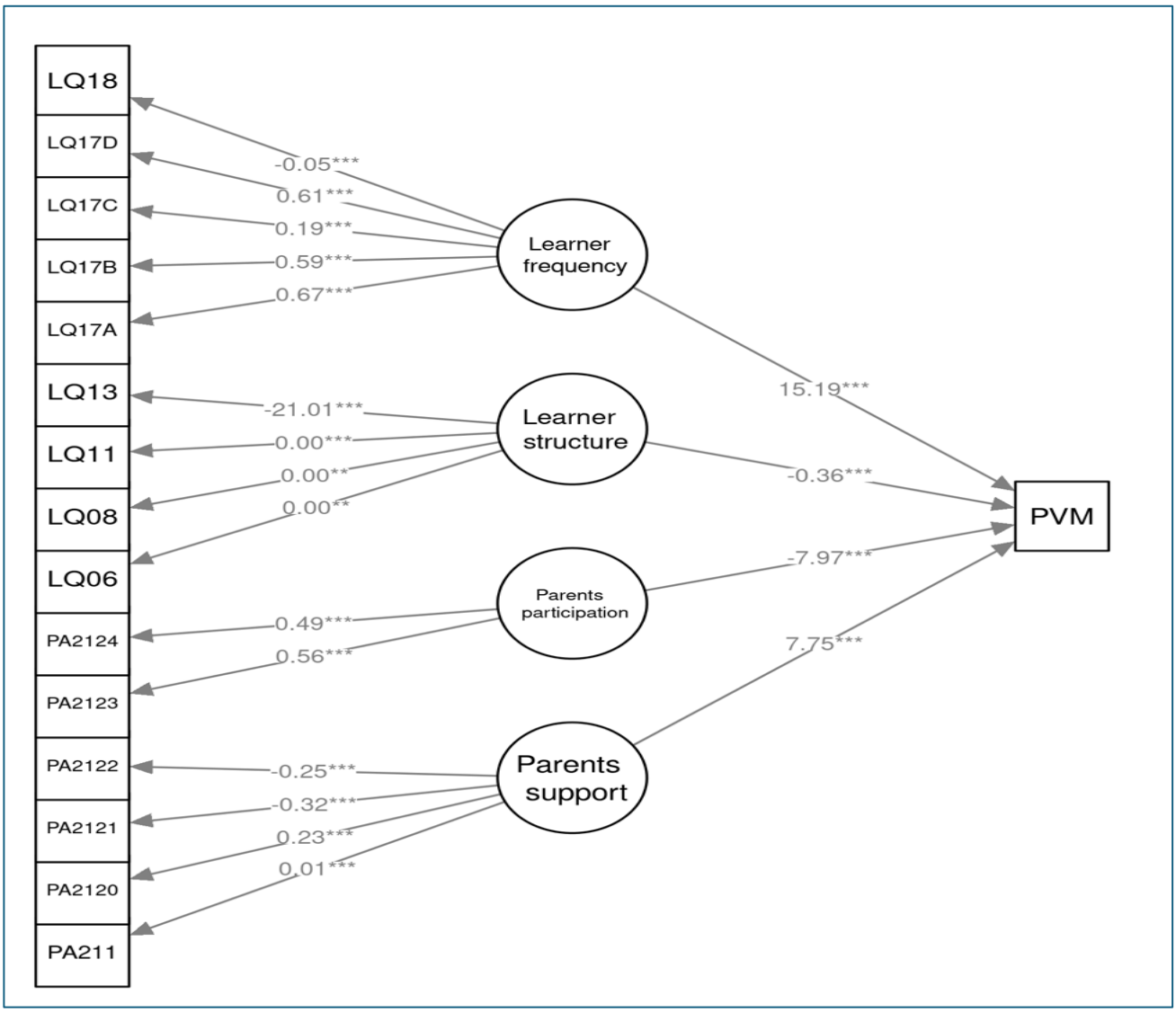


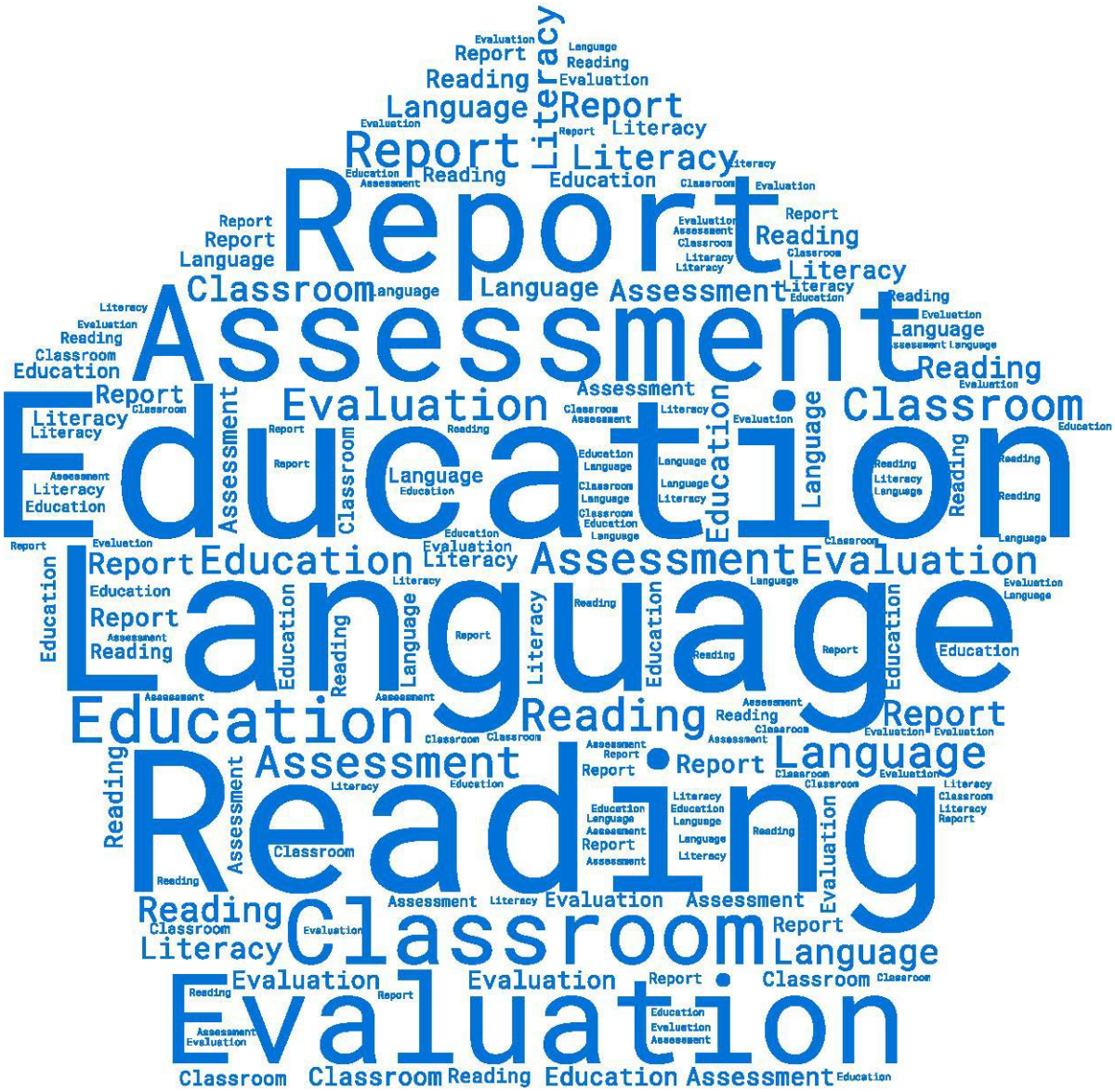
Figure 52: Structural equation modelling for the learner-parent context

The correlation analysis of learner-parent factors reveals that parental support at home (r=0.794) and participation in school activities (r=-0.621, reverse coded) have the strongest relationships with Mathematics performance, followed by learner attendance and meals (r=0.434) and home living conditions (r=-0.386, reverse coded).

These results demonstrate that both direct parental involvement (through homework help and school engagement) and structural factors (like regular attendance and adequate housing) play crucial roles in supporting learner achievement in Mathematics.

Table 14: Correlation between latent variables and maths plausible values for learner-parent questionnaire

Latent variable	Maths
Learner frequency	0.434
Learner structure	-0.386
Parents participation	-0.621
Parents support	0.794


Report
Assessment
Education
Language
Reading
Evaluation
Classroom
Literacy

Recommendations

5. Recommendations

Based on the specific in-school and out-of-school factors discussed in the previous section, this section outlines specific micro-, meso and macro-level recommendations emanating from the baseline South African Systemic Evaluation study. Arising out the micro- and mesosystem analyses, targeted recommendations are listed for improving Reading Literacy and Mathematics specifically for Grade 3 learners. The recommendations focus on improving foundational skills in Reading Literacy and Mathematics to support achievement growth from early learning to long-term development. At the macrosystem level, focused recommendations address overarching strategies needed to enhance the enabling environment and support services to schools for improving learning outcomes across the sector. Key findings and recommendations are highlighted for emphasis.

5.1. Specific Recommendations on Reading Literacy and Numeracy

This section presents the implications of the findings arising out the micro-and meso-level analyses specific to Grade 3 Reading Literacy and Numeracy.

Implications for Grade 3 Reading Literacy

The SASE revealed that understanding and addressing Grade 3 learners' Reading Literacy performance levels play a crucial role in supporting their achievement, teachers' guiding instructional decision-making and promoting continuous improvement in Reading Literacy with comprehension. According to the National Framework for the Teaching of Reading Literacy in African Languages in the Foundation Phase (DBE, 2020: 16), "comprehension is the ability to process, understand and make sense of a text and integrate the text's meaning with what the reader already knows".

Reading Literacy performance levels for Grade 3 learners in South Africa indicate that there is a huge percentage of learners who are not performing at a required Reading Literacy level for learners at this Grade.

Grade 3 is an exit Grade in the Foundation Phase (DBE, 2011). The percentage of Grade 3 learners in South Africa who can read at an "Enhancing" level is very low and those who can read at an "Extending" Reading Literacy performance level is extremely low. This raises concerns because for some learners when they proceed to Grade 4 (Intermediate Phase), they transition to a language of learning and teaching (LoLT) that is different from their home language (HL).

Nationally, the largest group of learners (43%) are functioning at the Evolving level, indicating they are still constructing Grade-level knowledge and skills. Concerningly, 37% of learners are at the Emerging level, only beginning to develop foundational Reading Literacy skills. Only 17% demonstrate Grade-level understanding at the Enhancing level, while a mere 3% reach the Extending level, exhibiting advanced skills.

A targeted national intervention is needed to support learners who are not at the required grade 3 level especially for learners in poor performing provinces and languages. This should be linked to Mother-tongue based reading literacy (MBRL) strategy based on the morphological awareness and promotion of African Languages. There needs to be a greater match between home language and the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). Consideration should be given towards extending the home language LoLT into the intermediate and senior phases

Provincial variations are also stark, with Western Cape and Gauteng outperforming other provinces. The Western Cape has the lowest percentage of learners at the Emerging level (23%) and the highest at the Enhancing and Extending levels combined (39%). In contrast, provinces like North West and Limpopo face significant challenges, with 51% and 48% of learners at the Emerging level respectively.

Provincial disparities highlight the need for targeted interventions in underperforming provinces, especially in the Limpopo and North West.

Gender differences indicate that girls consistently outperform boys. Nationally, 27% of girls are at the Emerging level compared to 47% of boys, a substantial 20 percentage point difference. This gap is most pronounced in KwaZulu-Natal, where 35% of girls are at the Emerging level compared to 52% of boys. The Western Cape shows the smallest gender gap, though it remains significant.

Greater support is needed for the boy learner especially in more rural provinces and lower quintiles.

Socioeconomic factors, represented by school quintiles, show a clear correlation with Reading Literacy performance. Quintiles 1-3, representing the poorest schools, show similar performance levels, with 41% to 45% of learners at the Emerging level. In stark contrast, only 16% of learners in Quintile 5 schools are at this level. The impact of language is also significant, with learners whose home language matches the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) generally performing better. This is particularly evident in English and Afrikaans medium schools, which consistently outperform schools using African languages such as LoLT.

Implications for Supporting Learners

Supporting Grade 3 learners' Reading Literacy abilities has substantial educational, cognitive, emotional, and social implications. Reading Literacy stimulates learners' brain development, improving their cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and critical thinking. Thus, the more they read, the more they know concepts, vocabulary, and Reading Literacy habits. Grade 3 learners require knowledge which prepares them for content transition in Grade 4. Given that Reading Literacy exposes learners to new concepts, vocabulary, and ideas, thereby their knowledge base and language skills also expand. In essence, Grade 3 learners' Reading Literacy abilities are essential for learning across the curriculum. Their improved Reading Literacy skills frequently correlate with greater overall academic performance in additional Languages, Mathematics, and Life Skills.

Using the school-based assessment results learners must be diagnosed in terms of four levels support needed. The four levels of support identified through the SASE should be mapped for Grades R, 1 and 2 in the foundation phase. This will enable stronger linking and benchmarking of school-based assessment to systemic large-scale national assessments. This will allow a more granular analysis for the teacher at the classroom level along specific proficiency levels.

For example, at the Emerging Level: Grade 3 learners require extensive guidance and extensive support from their teachers as the more knowledgeable others (MKOs). This includes teachers' focus on building foundational skills, providing scaffolded instruction and detailed feedback as well as offering ample opportunities to apply knowledge in real-world context.

At the Evolving Reading Literacy Performance Level: Grade 3 learners require extensive guidance and targeted support from their teachers. To provide guidance and support, teachers should build on learners' existing knowledge and skills; aim to address specific areas of weakness as well as provide additional practice opportunities in applying knowledge to real-world contexts.

At the Enhancing Reading Literacy Performance Level: Grade 3 learners require moderate guidance and targeted support. Their teachers must provide tasks that encourage critical thinking, and problem-solving. Reading Literacy tasks should also support the application of knowledge and skills in real-world contexts.

At the Extending Reading Literacy Performance Level: At this level, Grade 3 learners require limited guidance and limited support. Therefore, their teachers must give them tasks that are more

challenging for independent exploration and self-assessment. They must also focus on fostering creativity to apply knowledge and skills to novel and challenging contexts.

Implications for improving teaching

Various implications of Reading Literacy performance levels are significant for Grade 3 teachers, District and Province officials, and Subject Advisors for improving teaching.

Specific implications for improving teaching should include: 1) Developmentally appropriate pedagogy planning linked to Reading Literacy proficiency levels, 2) Allocation of learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) including Workbooks that facilitate Reading Literacy in different South African languages, 3) identification of areas for improvement, 4) Early Intervention for alleviation of barriers to Reading Literacy, and 5) Parental involvement.

a) Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy Planning

When teachers understand the four Grade 3 learners' Reading Literacy proficiency levels (RPLs), this allows them to plan how to adopt and teach developmentally appropriate Reading Literacy content and also ensure that the pedagogical practices that they use meet individual learners' needs and learning styles. Developmentally appropriate pedagogy enables teachers to provide appropriate interventions for individual learners with a variation of barriers to Reading Literacy. These are the learners who perform at Emerging or Evolving levels.

Teachers have to offer extensive guidance and targeted support to learners in Emerging or Evolving levels, whilst providing appropriate challenging Reading Literacy tasks for those Grade 3 learners performing at Enhancing and Extending levels. It is advised that teachers must give learners differentiated instructions that support them effectively and address their diverse developmental needs.

b) Allocation of learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs) that facilitate Reading Literacy in different South African languages

Schools can use data on learners' Reading Literacy performance levels to strategically allocate LTSM, that is; the LTSM that is graded according to levels, is needed by the school and appropriate for the schools' contexts. This may involve providing additional support, interventions, or enrichment opportunities based on learners' needs. This is believed to assist in ensuring that LTSMs are directed where they are most needed to support learners' achievement. The Draft National Policy for the

provisioning and management of learning and teaching support material stipulates that LTSM provisioning is meant for all learners and teachers. "The policy ensures production and selection of quality LTSM and makes such available to all learners in public schools."

Every learner and teacher must have access to the minimum set of core materials that is graded and linked to pedagogical support. Hence, consideration should be given to the current form and utility of DBE workbooks.

c) Identification of areas for improvement

When teachers engage themselves in the comprehensive engagement of analysing Grade 3 learners' Reading Literacy performance levels, this can help them to understand specific areas of strength and weakness in learners' Reading Literacy skills. Such kind of information can guide them in choosing different areas in Reading Literacy activities that require attention and development, as well as giving them the highlights of areas where additional focus is necessary to improve Grade 3 learners' overall Reading Literacy skills. For example, learners functioning at Emerging can be given tasks that include knowledge of basic single sounds learned in class. They can also read a simple text with the teacher's help and be able to read a simple short story with the teacher's help. Whereas learners at the slightly above level, Evolving Level, can be engaged in tasks that require knowledge of basic single and double sounds learned in class. They can also read a simple text independently as well as be able to read and comment on a simple story and identify key details in a text.

Learner support should be provided within a MBRL strategy and specifically linked to the morphology of the home language of learners.

d) Early Intervention for early alleviation of barriers to Reading Literacy

Grade 3 in South Africa is the Foundation Phase exit Grade (DBE, 2011). Therefore, identifying learners who are performing below the expected Grade level early enables the school and teachers to implement targeted early interventions and early support to prevent further barriers to Reading Literacy, more especially learners' skill of Reading Literacy with comprehension. Early intervention is significant for addressing Reading Literacy difficulties and ensuring that all Grade 3 learners are allowed to succeed in the Intermediate Phase where most of them are currently compelled to change the LoLT and use the one that is different from their HL. **Limiting the changing of LoLT in Grade 4 will also allow teachers to offer better and extended support to learners with barriers to Reading Literacy.**

e) Parental Involvement

Teachers must share information about each learner's Reading Literacy performance levels with parents or caregivers. Parental involvement is a hugely deterministic factor in a child's learning outcomes. This often encourages collaboration between parents, caregivers, and teachers; hence the learner receives optimum support at home.

Collaboration between parents or caregivers and teachers helps parents to understand their child's strengths and areas for improvement and enables them to reinforce Reading Literacy and engagement with Reading Literacy tasks outside of school.

Implications for Grade 3 Numeracy

Similar recommendations also hold true for Grade 3 Numeracy. At the national level, 40% of Grade 3 learners in Mathematics are functioning at the Evolving level, while 26% are at the Emerging level. Encouragingly, 27% demonstrate Grade-level understanding at the Enhancing level, though only 7% reach the Extending level. These figures indicate that a significant portion of learners are still developing foundational mathematical skills.

Provincial disparities are evident, with Western Cape and Gauteng consistently outperforming other provinces. These two regions have the lowest percentages of learners at the Emerging level and the highest at the Extending level. In contrast, provinces like Limpopo and North West face substantial challenges, with higher percentages of learners at the Emerging level.

Gender differences are notable across all provinces, with girls generally outperforming boys. This trend is particularly pronounced at the Emerging level, where boys consistently show higher percentages than girls. The gender gap is most evident in lower quintile schools, suggesting that socioeconomic factors may exacerbate gender disparities in Mathematics performance.

The impact of language is significant, with Afrikaans and English medium schools showing better results than those using African languages as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). This trend persists across all performance levels, highlighting the need for targeted support in schools using African languages such as LoLT. Additionally, learners whose home language matches the LoLT tend to perform better, emphasising the importance of language alignment in mathematical learning.

Implications for policy and practice for the Department of Basic Education (DBE)

According to the national picture of Grade 3 learners' mathematical performance, 40% of the learners are performing on the evolving level. This implies that the learners are adapting to their understanding and application of knowledge and skills through interactions with teachers and peers. Teachers thus need to further support the learners with more tasks to enhance the application of knowledge and skills to develop them to reach the enhancing performance level. Those learners at the enhancing level (27%) can be given more demanding tasks scaffolded to ensure that their independent learning is further strengthened so that they can reach the extending level. The following policy and/or programme interventions are needed:

1. **The Curriculum Strengthening framework must include the development of proficiency levels for Reading Literacy and Mathematics in the Foundation Phase that make it easier for teachers to diagnose, remediate and support learners. Based on these proficiency levels, subject advisors can assist teachers in designing scaffolding tasks to allow the learners to apply and improve their knowledge and skills from one level to the next. A guideline document developed by the DBE Language and Mathematics units should be made available to schools. In addition, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement section four should be revised to reflect current assessment reforms.**
2. **Expanding the rollout of the General Education Certificate (GEC) Grade 9 assessment model to other grades could also play a significant role in improving learner's application of skills as the model affords learners expanded opportunities to reflect a broader and more holistic range of skills, capabilities, and talents. Through the GEC, the system could signal a much-needed shift from percentage scoring and normative feedback to more holistic feedback based on proficiency scales.**
3. **Teacher development is a viable route to take where teachers are supported in how to design interventions to support their learners to not just understand concepts but also apply them. DBE must roll out an extensive AFL teacher training programme aimed at assisting teachers to develop lesson plans linked to formative assessment and the use of summative data for formative purposes. This will enhance remediation programmes for improving learning. Provinces like Limpopo and North West need specific and targeted support for their teachers and should be prioritised for AFL rollout. Additionally, the NAF must focus on strengthening teachers' assessment skills through an assessment for learning approach (AFL), ensuring greater alignment with the curriculum and recovery**

initiatives and goals. An AFL approach will maintain focus on long-term pedagogical and assessment improvement across all phases and will encourage greater use of formative assessment practices and a greater focus on improving learning.

4. **The province and gender data highlight the disparity between boys and girls in all the provinces where girls outperform boys. The boy child should receive interventions to boost their morale and combat self-doubt and at a national level, this can be rolled out. Parents and the community at large should also be targeted with researched information, and provincial officials taking hands with psychologists, to devise interventions to shift the mindset of the community at large in supporting boys in improving their performance at the school level. It needs to be backed up with statistics that the boy child is not performing at the level of the girls and jointly the provincial education department, researchers and the community need to grapple with this issue. Schools should monitor and track the conceptual development of the boy child from early learning to identify and close learning gaps between the two gender groups.**
5. **It is nothing new and quite understandable that Quintile 4 and 5 schools are performing much better than Quintile 1-3 schools. A lack of resources is one of the reasons why low-quintile schools are not performing as well as higher-quintile schools. At the provincial level, the education department should devise ways to address this divide by working with business donors to support low-income schools in obtaining more resources, employing more teachers through outside funding and in that way reducing the number of learners per class. One option is to capacitate senior management to write proposals to companies in their quest to get more funding. Another possibility is also for Quintile 5 schools to adopt schools from lower quintiles and mentor them on aspects like discipline, administration, planning, etc.**
6. **The more effective use of teacher assistants is another avenue to follow where government provides schools with teacher assistants. The programme on the presidential youth education initiative (PYEI) could be further enhanced to facilitate this. The training, monitoring, and capacitating of these teacher assistants can ensure that learners are growing to meet the Grade-level knowledge and skills where learners at the emerging level get drill and practice activities in smaller groups, learners at the evolving level, get more customised applications with the help of the teacher assistants.**

7. **The LoLT has a direct effect on teaching and learning and at the provincial and district level, staff need to ensure that teachers competent in the LoLT are appointed. If not, training should be provided to get teachers at a competent level to effectively teach. Also, monitoring should be done on a district and cluster level to ensure that teachers are competent in teaching, designing assessments, and communicating with learners using the LoLT. Where the LoLT and HL differ, monitoring should also be done to ensure that learners are taught in LoLT and that code-switching and trans-language techniques are demonstrated to teachers as a way of addressing the language barriers. The strengthening of Mother-Tongue Reading Literacy (MBRL) strategy and the introduction of Mother-Tongue based Bilingual Education should be implemented and supported across the sector.**
8. **Early childhood development (ECD) is a critical priority for influencing long-term learning outcomes in Reading Literacy and Mathematics. Early exposure to positive language-specific learning environments helps children develop key cognitive, social, and emotional abilities that are crucial for acquiring basic skills in Reading Literacy, and Mathematics. Prioritizing ECD can prevent learning gaps from widening, promote school readiness, and foster a lifelong love of learning, ultimately improving overall educational outcomes.**

5.2 System Support Recommendations for Provincial Education Departments

Considering the findings, the following recommendations focus on specific actions for provinces to support schools to become more effective and enabling learning environments.

5.2.1 Basic functionality

The Eastern Cape, Free State, and Mpumalanga provinces had large class sizes, and the Free State reported higher levels of learner and teacher absenteeism. This was most prevalent among quintile 1-3 schools.

These provinces must conduct an audit of class sizes in all their primary and secondary schools and establish whether more schools need to be built or whether existing schools can be better utilised. The Free State Department of Education must specifically conduct an audit on learner and teacher absenteeism which was found to be higher than all other provinces.

5.2.2 Quality of Teaching and Learning

A substantial number of learners lack foundational skills, emphasizing the need for teachers to focus on building these core abilities and comprehension strategies. Teachers in provinces with larger numbers of underperforming learners require additional resources and professional development to bridge these achievement gaps effectively. The disparity of learning outcomes between Western Cape and Gauteng and the other nine shows that the quality of teaching and learning across our provinces are not the same. Contributing factors in Limpopo and North-West are poor performing languages and the performance of quintile 1-3 schools. Limpopo was not very effective in dealing with learners with barriers.

Learners in poor performing provinces will benefit from the implementation of MBRL and Mother-Tongue based Bi-lingual Education (MTbBE) which could provide enhanced language support to help them overcome language barriers in their learning journey.

In addition, provincial education departments need to conduct an audit of all interventions on Reading Literacy and Mathematics carried out by various units to assess their effectiveness and impact. This will help identify successful initiatives that can be taken to scale and will assist with budget reprioritisation.

5.2.3 Learner Achievement

Many schools in poor-performing provinces did not have an effective assessment plan and did not have functional school-based support teams (SBST).

All provinces should note that the record-keeping in Grades 3 and 6 (primary schools) were more complete than for Grade 9 (secondary schools).

The school-based assessment records suggest that Grades' 3 & 6 performances are generally high across all provinces, with the highest performance seen in Gauteng, Northern Cape and Western Cape. The Grade 9 performance is noticeably lower in all provinces, with the lowest performance in Northern Cape. The drop in Mathematics performance is more pronounced, especially in Grade 9, where only 36% of learners achieved 50% and above. The FET performance, while higher than Grade 9, is also indicative of the decline in achievement from primary to secondary school.

Provinces are not effectively monitoring the support to learners through their SBST. Addressing learning barriers through intervention strategies at participating schools in KwaZulu-Natal,

Limpopo, Northern Cape, North West, and Mpumalanga provinces were less effective than the other provinces.

5.2.4 Leadership, management and communication

Across all provinces, there was a lack of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities for teachers. Monitoring, planning and preparation by school management teams on curriculum was more successfully implemented than professional development and lesson observation across Grades and quintiles with 57% of schools indicating no CPD at all. The Northern Cape showed the highest level of curriculum monitoring.

The varying levels of monitoring suggest the need for provinces to work towards improving their Professional Development and Lesson Observation schedules.

In the Western Cape, Northern Cape, North West, and Mpumalanga, there were effective communication strategies in schools but in the other 5 provinces, communication strategies were less than adequate and these strategies should be improved. In 6 out of the 9 provinces, the leadership of schools was seen as having a positive impact on the school environment but in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, the leadership impact of the school was negligible.

In the Eastern Cape, there was a strong negative effect of school leadership suggesting that leadership records were either not complete or available

5.2.5 Curriculum provision and resources

Across all provinces, the study highlights substantial disparities in resource access between non-fee-paying, lower-quintile schools and fee-paying, higher-quintile schools, pointing to high inequities in the education system. The lower availability of reading books in the lower quintile schools is noted as a significant barrier to developing literacy skills. In addition, the limited availability of essential resources, such as textbooks, ICT devices, and suitable classroom facilities, in lower-quintile schools restricts learning opportunities. Reading books for Grade 9 show high variances among provinces, with Gauteng, North West, and Western Cape showing higher availability and Eastern Cape and Limpopo showing significantly less availability of books. An additional consideration for all provinces on availability of reading books is more learning materials in African languages and training for teachers in multilingual instruction techniques are required.

The availability of ICT resources across all provinces except the Western Cape was particularly low, especially in primary schools with only marginal increases observed in secondary schools.

The use of ICT resources by teachers in primary schools is low and needs to be better supported.

In terms of human resources, approximately 95% of teachers who were in positions were qualified to teach the subject at the specific grade and they had the relevant qualification in relation to the relevant schooling phase, having specialised in the subject.

5.2.6 Governance and relationships

Generally, there was an excellent performance rating in both functionality and outputs, indicating robust School Governing Body (SGB) operations. Slight areas of concern were schools keeping outdated policies and essential policies not being signed off.

5.2.7 Safety and security

Vandalism and theft significantly impact school safety, reflecting wider societal issues that influence school environments. These issues were noted as key factors compromising the security of schools. On actual misconduct, the highest was interpersonal violence, physical and verbal (50% of all incidents), with substance abuse the next (17%).

Serious misconduct cases were mainly observed in school records in North West and Limpopo.

School supervision of learners varied across provinces with the lowest levels of school supervision observed in the Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo and North West. The highest levels of access control were in North West and the lowest in Limpopo. The application of school rules is generally high across all provinces, with Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, and Western Cape showing the highest levels.

Positive influences such as the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and the high overall percentage of learners receiving social grants, and in some schools, the supply of shoes and clothing, reflect the positive influence on the system.

Only 59% of learners in Quintile 1 schools receive social grants, a finding that requires further investigation as to why eligible children are not receiving social grants.

5.2.8 Infrastructure

Across all provinces, access to essential services such as water and electricity was quite high. The presence of ablution facilities favourable but vandalism was noted as a problem. Nationally, 57% of schools had sufficient classrooms, 45% of classrooms were overcrowded, 35% did not have adequate furniture, and 75% were not equipped with ICT resources. The availability of school grounds and classrooms was the lowest among the nine provinces. While some provinces may have high percentages for all infrastructure elements, others show high levels of variability, indicating disparities in school infrastructure quality across provinces. There is a striking disparate comparison between the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape on infrastructure elements. Schools in the Free State were also lacking in terms of traditional facilities.

The Eastern Cape is noticeably below the means of other provinces in terms of school infrastructure. Ensuring adequate infrastructure is vital to providing a safe and conducive learning environment for learners, and the findings clearly signal the need for more equity in infrastructure provision.

5.2.9 Parents and the community

The scores for parental involvement and links with the community show a clear upward gradient from Quintile 1 to 5. Links with the community were measured by the schools' use of local services. These were good (only local businesses and non-governmental organisations fell below 75%). It was found that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engage less with lower quintile schools. Limpopo, Free State and Western Cape reported high levels of parental involvement, with lower parental involvement reported for Gauteng, Northern Cape, and North West.

Schools in Gauteng, Northern Cape, and Nort West should revisit how they communicate with parents of learners.

KwaZulu-Natal and the Northern Cape demonstrated strong links with community/local services, whereas Limpopo and Mpumalanga indicated weaker links with community services.

6. Conclusion

The SASE positions itself as a flagship monitoring and tracking programme of the Department of Basic Education which manifests credible and reliable data and findings to improve learning outcomes in Reading Literacy and Mathematics. A deliberate standpoint is that the cognitive achievement of learners needs to be interpreted in the context of in-school and out-of-school factors that influence this achievement. This first implementation of SASE provides the sector with a system wide ecological understanding about the education system and school contexts. This report presented a deeper dive into factors that enable or constrain learner performance to better inform educational policies and programmes. Factors influencing learning outcomes have been presented on three levels to further guide policy development, policy amendment and targeted interventions.

Future editions of this report will broaden and expand on the current scope of diagnostics, underlining the unwavering commitment of the Department of Basic Education towards evidence-based decision-making that has currency and relevance. Future cycles of SASE will enable stakeholders to monitor system performance and evaluate the implementation and impact of policies and programmes arising out of this cycle which historically forms an important baseline measure of learner achievement in the South African education system.

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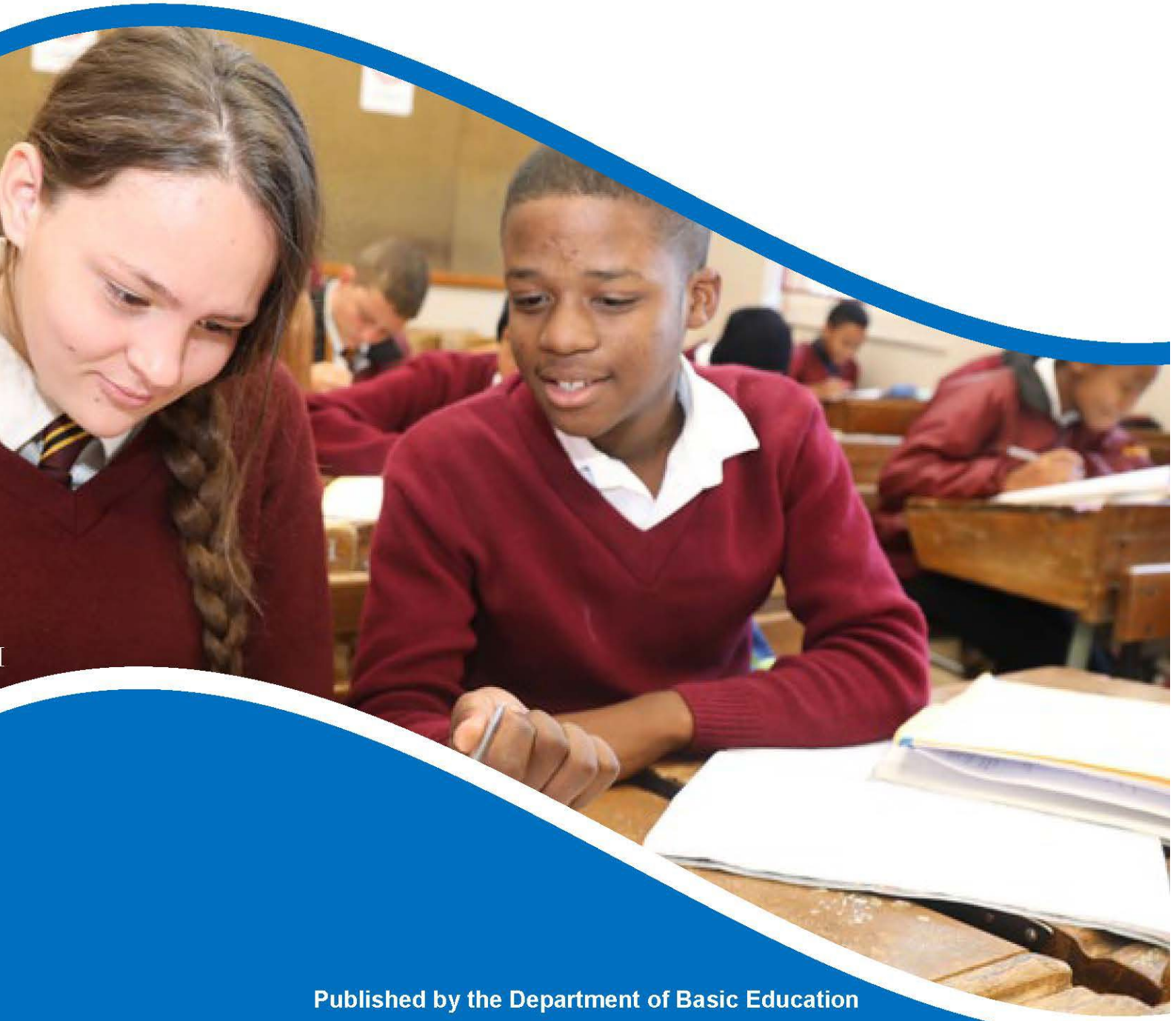

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