Results of the Funda Wande intervention in Limpopo (2021-2022)

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7th February 2023

1. Overview and policy issues

The reading crisis in South Africa is a complex issue with multiple contributing factors. One of the primary reasons is a lack of resources and teacher expertise. Access to reading materials and opportunities to engage with text is limited in South African classrooms, especially in African languages. Furthermore, teachers have not had sufficient opportunities to acquire specialized knowledge in teaching reading, particularly in African languages. This lack of knowledge and resources, coupled with large and diverse classes, makes it difficult for teachers to effectively integrate resources and implement effective pedagogical practices. The result is a lack of curriculum coverage and a focus on teacher-led instruction and communalized whole-class activities with limited targeted individual practice and feedback[45.]

In several countries and contexts with large and heterogenous classes, policymakers have attempted to use teacher assistants or youth volunteers to help with classroom management and provide additional small group or one-on-one support to children. With an extremely high youth unemployment rate, harnessing the potential of unemployed youth holds particular promise in the South African context. In late 2020 the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and Presidency introduced the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI)–Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI) which is now in its fourth phase providing training and placement for around 840 000 youth on five to eight month contracts as education or general assistants in public schools at a cost of R25.5 billion[46]. However, there has been no evaluation of this programme.

Recognizing the need to improve the content knowledge and pedagogical skills of teachers while providing them with high-quality supporting materials, Funda Wande developed a comprehensive set of materials for Reading for Meaning in specific African languages. All materials are aligned to the CAPS curriculum and integrated so that teachers can move seamlessly between the different materials. In addition to these Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), Funda Wande developed a Teacher Assistant (TA) programme in Limpopo with the aim of developing a model to effectively select, train and support matriculants to assist teachers within a structured programme to improve early literacy outcomes. If successful, this model could inform the design of the ongoing BEEI and other youth initiatives.

This note reflects on the design, implementation and results of the first two years of the Funda Wande intervention in Limpopo, as well as considerations for how the project can improve learning outcomes at scale.
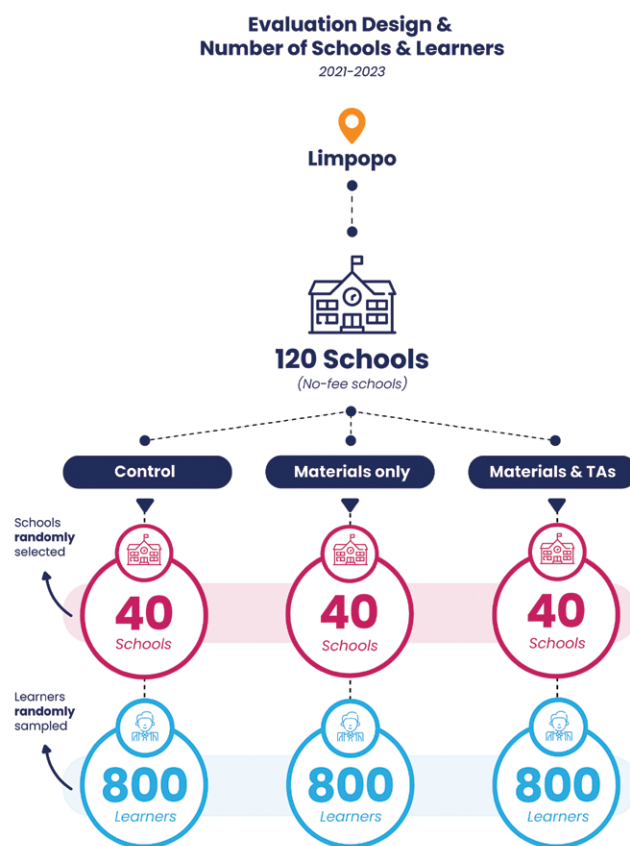
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45 See Taylor 2019, Hoadley 2012; Hoadley 2018 and NEEDU 2013 for detailed discussion on how these various factors contribute to the reading crisis in South Africa.
46 Department of Basic Education and Presidential Employment Stimulus 2022: page 19

2. Evaluation

The impact evaluation uses a randomized control trial (RCT) with 120 no-fee schools in the Limpopo districts of Capricorn North and Capricorn South randomized into one of three arms – Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), LTSM together with a Teaching Assistant (TA) assigned to each classroom, and control – over three years (2021-2023). The schools are all no-fee (quintile 1-3) Sepedi language of learning and teaching (LOLT) in the Foundation Phase and were selected in collaboration with the Limpopo Department of Education (LPDOE).

During the third term of 2021, the evaluation team conducted Early Grade Reading Assessments (EGRA) with around 2400 grade 2 learners across the 120 schools. These same learners were re-assessed in the third term of 2022 when most of them were in Grade 2[47]. In addition to learner assessments, the team conducted an audit of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Funda Wande and Bala Wande learner workbooks for two randomly selected learners in each school.

Evaluation Design & Number of Schools & Learners
2021-2023

Limpopo

120 Schools
(No-fee schools)

Control	Materials only	Materials & TAs

Schools **randomly** selected

40 Schools — **40** Schools — **40** Schools

Learners **randomly** sampled

800 Learners — **800** Learners — **800** Learners

3. Intervention details

Funda Wande Learner and Teacher Support Materials

The Funda Wande materials were rigorously developed over two years with inputs from government curriculum advisors and a range of linguists and language specialists from five South African universities and built on the strengths of previous literacy programmes in South Africa and the continent. The LTSM comprise (1) activity workbooks for each learner, (2) teacher guides aligned to the learner workbooks that explain to the teacher what they need to teach and how, and (3) for grade 1 teachers big books for shared reading which are also available in the learner workbooks. In addition, each learner received their own copy of the Vula Bula anthology comprising 16 sequenced Sepedi stories developed by Molteno.

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47 The team were able to re-assess 91%, 90% and 92% of learners in the control, LSTM and LTSM+TA arms.

The materials are accompanied by centralised teacher training conducted by the Funda Wande Literacy specialists. Teachers received a two-day training at the beginning of each term on literacy which covered materials orientation and key content areas.

Funda Wande Teacher Assistants

Teacher assistants were recruited through a rigorous selection process managed by Funda Wande. In 2021, about 780 applicants took the competency assessments of which 165 were invited to an in-person day long selection bootcamp. From this process, 93 teaching assistants were hired who supplemented the 113 TAs retained from the 2021 cohort for grades R-2 in 2022. TAs attended school daily and mostly remained with their assigned teacher for the year.

Mentors[48] trained and supervised TAs with support from Funda Wande Literacy specialists. TAs had four days of training per term (two days each for Literacy and Mathematics). This training was aligned with the teacher training on content and materials provided. Mentors also conducted classroom observations where each TAs had at least one visit from their Mentor per month. After the class observations, Mentors gave one-on-one or group feedback to TAs in the presence or absence of the teacher based on their professional opinion.

TAs were expected to perform the following duties[49]:
- Help the teacher oversee and assist learners during whole class and independent (individual) activities. Revise concepts with learners that Teachers had previously taught.
- Help the teacher identify and support struggling learners to grasp specific skills and concepts.
- Help the teacher set up the classroom before lessons and pack away materials afterwards. Assist the teacher with administration (such as taking roll call or marking).

TAs were not trained nor permitted to perform the following tasks:
- Teach new material/curriculum to learners or supervise classes alone for more than 15 minutes[50].
- Arrange or supervise extracurricular trips or activities for learners or cover any financial costs of learners or teachers.
- Communicate with parents regarding the progress or challenges of the learners

4. Results

The Funda Wande programme led to large improvements in reading outcomes. In the third term of Grade 2, learners in Funda Wande skills performed significantly better across the full range of Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) subtasks compared to learners in control schools.

The combination of Funda Wande materials and Funda Wande teacher assistants resulted in the largest gains. On the composite EGRA measure, learners in schools that received the materials only outperformed their peers in control schools by 0.2 standard deviations. Learners in schools with the teacher assistants, have average composite EGRA scores that were 0.5 standard deviations higher than learners in control schools.

In terms of years of learning, the gains from the Funda Wande programme are substantial. We estimate that the effect of the programme is the equivalent of 59% of a year of learning for the materials only arm and 129% of a year of learning for the teacher assistant arm[51].
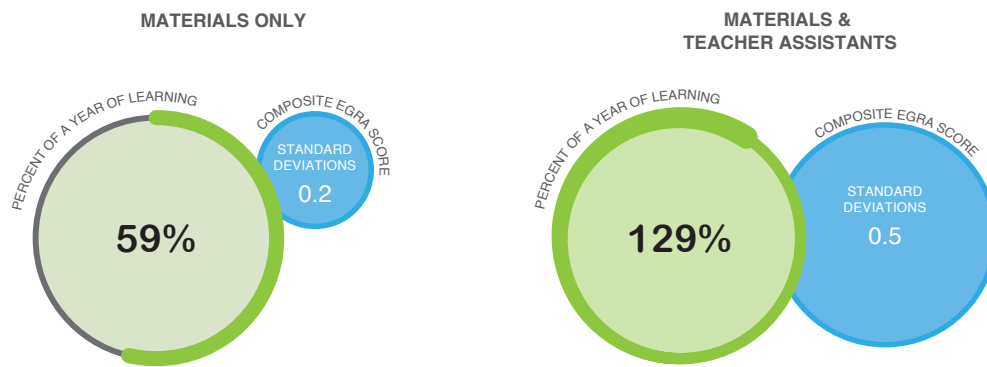
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48 Mentors have tertiary education qualifications in social sciences. Although not all are required to have a professional qualification in education, they are all required to have experience in working with young learners in some capacity. In 2022, there were 9 Mentors for 205 TAs across grades R to 2.

49 Additionally, the TA is obligated to report to their Mentor- who would, in turn, report to the School Management Team and the Funda Wande TA Project Manager - any incident where the rights of any children would be violated as per the Children's Act. 38 of 2005

50 In the event of the teacher's absence, the TA was allowed to supervise the class and do revision work, provided another school teacher did regular visits. If the TA supervised class was not visited by any teachers for more than 30 minutes, they were required to leave the classroom, inform the HOD, and inform their Mentor. They would return to the classroom when another school teacher was present. Anecdotes suggest that TAs would sometimes be left alone with learners for longer than 30 minutes and would end up teaching the class.
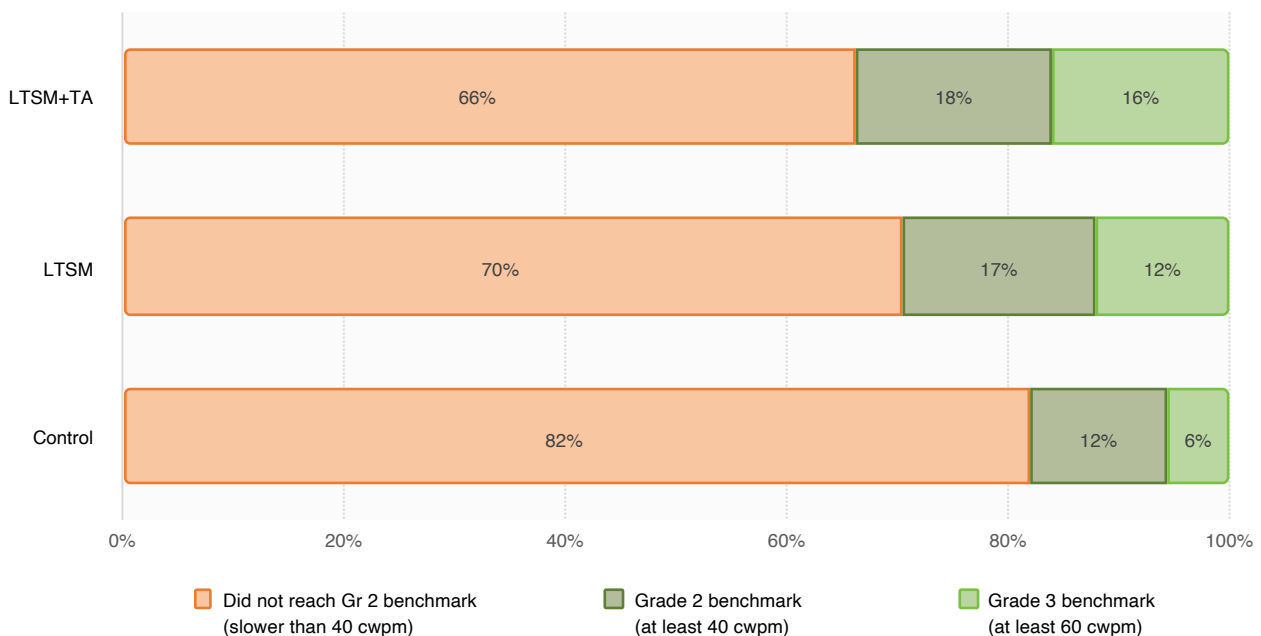
51 van der Berg et al. 2022 estimate that a year of learning in the Foundation Phase equates to 0.4 standard deviations.

EGRA composite score

MATERIALS ONLY	MATERIALS & TEACHER ASSISTANTS

PERCENT OF A YEAR OF LEARNING

COMPOSITE EGRA SCORE

59%

STANDARD DEVIATIONS
0.2

PERCENT OF A YEAR OF LEARNING

COMPOSITE EGRA SCORE

129%

STANDARD DEVIATIONS
0.5

Reading gains are also educationally meaningful with learners in Funda Wande schools significantly more likely to reach the Department of Education's (DBE) newly established grade–specific benchmarks for Sepedi[52]. By the third term of Grade 2, the percentage of learners reaching the Grade 2 benchmark was only 18% in control schools compared to 30% and 34% in materials only and teacher assistant schools respectively. This signals that the Funda Wande program has been effective in moving a significant proportion of learners to the expected performance level for their grade. There is clearly a substantial way to go to get every learner to meet the benchmarks, but these results are very encouraging, particularly considering the learning losses associated with COVID–related school disruptions[53]. Looking to the benchmark for the end of Grade 1, we find substantially more learners in teacher assistant schools were meeting this earlier benchmark (59%) compared to learners in control schools (42%).

Figure 1. Percent of learners reaching Sepedi grade–specific reading benchmarks

LTSM+TA	66%	18%	16%
LTSM	70%	17%	12%
Control	82%	12%	6%

Did not reach Gr 2 benchmark (slower than 40 cwpm)   Grade 2 benchmark (at least 40 cwpm)   Grade 3 benchmark (at least 60 cwpm)

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52 The Sepedi benchmarks (Ardington et al. 2022) are as follows:

End of Grade 1: all learners should correctly sound at least 40 letters per minute

End of Grade 2: all learners should correctly read at least 40 words per minute

End of Grade 3: all learners should correctly read at least 60 words per minute

53 Various South African studies suggest that learners lost between 40% to 118% of a year of literacy learning due to school closures and rotational time–tabling (Ardington, Wills and Kotze 2021, Kotze et al. 2022, van der Berg et al. 2022).
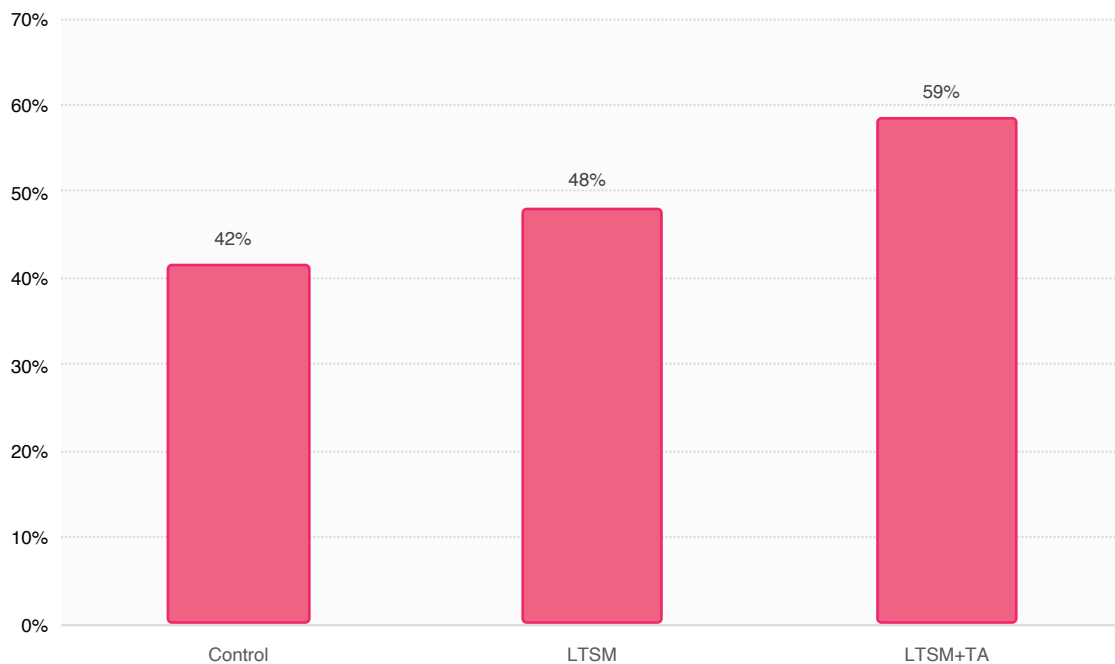
Reported use of the Funda Wande materials is very high and similar in both treatment arms. Around 90% of teachers report using the Funda Wande teacher guide daily and 89% report using the Funda Wande Learner Activity Booklet (LAB) daily. Teachers in the TA arm are more likely to report frequent use (daily or multiple times per week) of the Vula Bula anthologies (85%) than teachers in the materials only schools (62%).
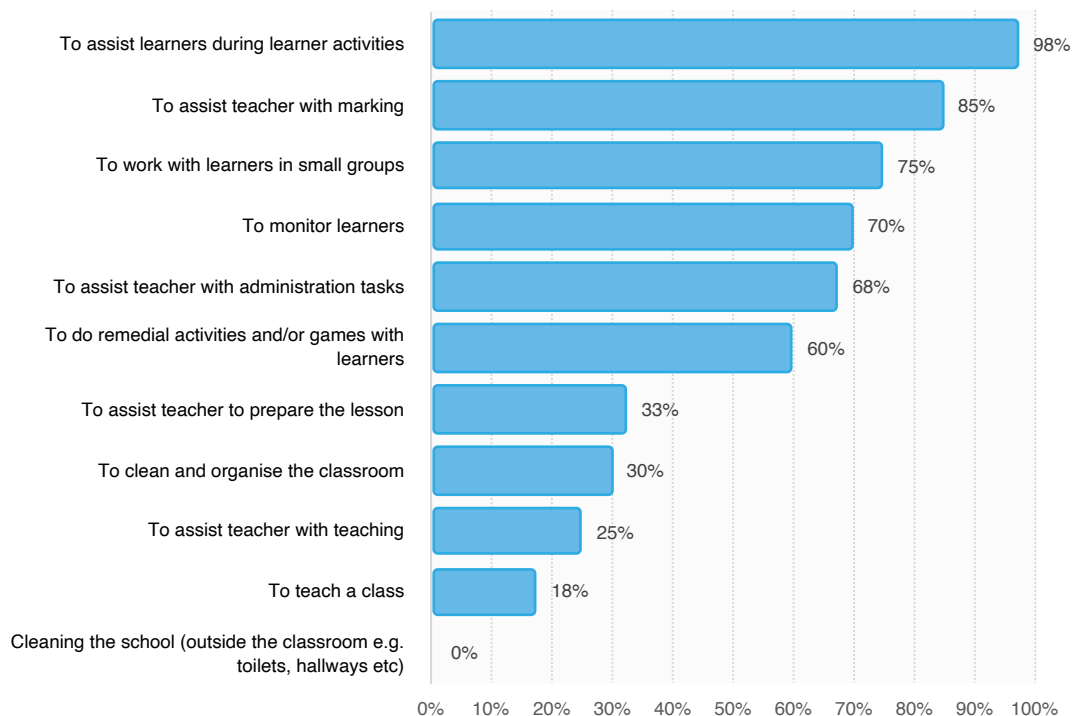
An audit of learner workbooks shows that learners in treatment schools complete many more pages than their peers in control schools. The average number of completed (partially or fully) pages in the DBE Rainbow Home Language workbook and the Funda Wande LABs was 54, 134 and 159 pages for the two randomly selected learners from control, materials only and teacher assistant schools respectively. While workbook usage is much higher on average in treatment schools, there is substantial variability in usage across schools with each treatment arm. This suggests that Funda Wande may be able to strengthen their impact if they are able to ensure greater and more uniform fidelity to this key component of the intervention.

Average number of completed pages in Home Language workbooks

CONTROL
54

MATERIALS ONLY
134

MATERIALS & TEACHER ASSISTANTS
159

Teachers provide very positive reports on the Funda Wande teacher assistants and mentors. Almost all teachers (98%) report that the teacher assistants are helpful or very helpful. Unprompted, teachers describe assisting learners with group activities (98%), assisting the teacher with marking (85%) and working with learners in small groups (75%) as the most common roles of the teacher assistants in their classrooms.

Figure 3. Teachers unprompted reports on the role of Funda Wande teacher assistants in their classroom

Role	Percentage
To assist learners during learner activities	98%
To assist teacher with marking	85%
To work with learners in small groups	75%
To monitor learners	70%
To assist teacher with administration tasks	68%
To do remedial activities and/or games with learners	60%
To assist teacher to prepare the lesson	33%
To clean and organise the classroom	30%
To assist teacher with teaching	25%
To teach a class	18%
Cleaning the school (outside the classroom e.g. toilets, hallways etc)	0%

5. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The provision of Funda Wande selected, trained and supported teacher assistants over six school terms has proved highly effective in improving foundational reading skills, particularly considering the limited exposure that learners had to the programme in the first year. The evaluation establishes that unemployed youth are able to assist teachers in substantially improving learning outcomes in the early grades, if the following conditions are in place: (1) rigorous recruitment and selection of the youth, (2) high-quality learner and teacher materials in classrooms, (3) comprehensive training for youth that is aligned to the materials, and (4) continuous support on how to fulfil their duties.

The current BEEI demonstrates that a scaled-up version of the Funda Wande TA programme is organisationally, politically and financially feasible. In providing a model of how to recruit, train, mentor and monitor young people to have an effective impact on learner reading outcomes, the intervention and accompanying evaluation have some limitations. The impacts are measured over a fairly short period that includes months of disrupted schooling due to COVID. It will be important to ascertain the extent to which initial gains are maintained or possibly compounded in the medium and long term. The schools are based in two education districts in one province. However, these low resourced and under-performing no-fee schools share characteristics with the vast majority of schools in our education system. One key concern with scaling up this programme is the ability to continue to selectively recruit youth. The very high youth unemployment rate, together with the large number of applicants for the BEEI positions suggest that this should not be a major constraint to scale.

While the results for the materials only arm of the intervention are more modest, learner gains in these schools are significant and educationally meaningful. This is an important piece of evidence around the impact of well designed and contextually appropriate resources that are mindful of barriers to use. Earlier studies in Africa have led to a common wisdom that resources without ongoing support are seldom effective. This is unfortunate and overly-simplistic as each of these studies is careful to point out

reasons as to why the inputs were effective (e.g. wrong language, wrong level, materials locked away)[54]. The evaluation provides evidence that a comprehensive set of high quality, integrated resources that are aligned to the curriculum and provided to learners in a one-to-one ratio can result in substantive improvements in early grade reading.

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54 See Glewwe, Kremer and Moulin 2019 and Sabarwal, Evans and Marshak 2014 as two key examples.

Improving reading for meaning in the Western Cape

Almaret du Toit (Western Cape Education Department)

7th February 2023

1. Background

In March 2020, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) rolled out a reading strategy. This strategy is built on six pillars: learner support, teacher professional development, research, parental involvement, the provisioning of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM), and advocacy. The strategy is available at https://wcedeportal.co.za/eresource/145371.
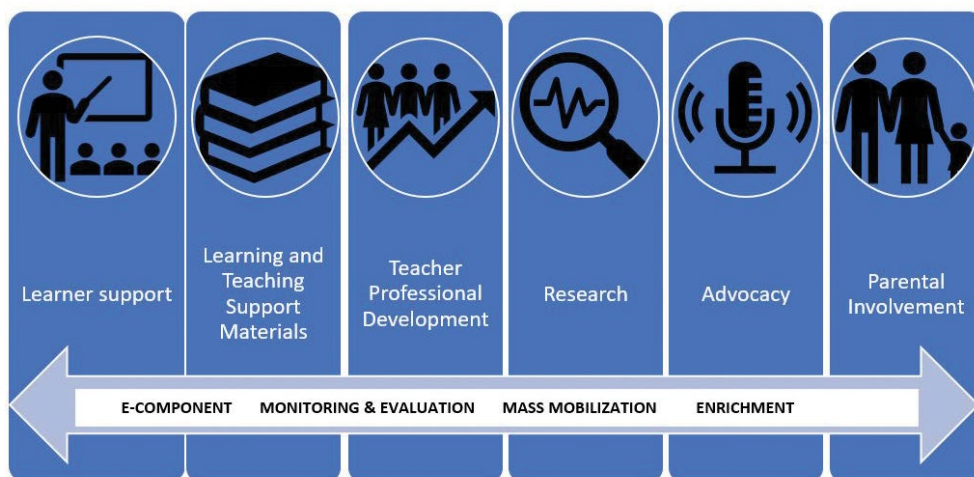
In 2019, as part of the Foundation Phase five-year strategic plan for Languages, the WCED decided to follow a differentiated approach for each of the three Home Languages. For Afrikaans and English Home Language, a decision was taken to follow a synthetic phonics approach to reading. As the orthographies within the IsiXhosa Language differ from the other two Home Languages; the decision was taken to adopt the structured Literacy Home Language programme. These decisions were made after in-depth research on the Science of Reading.

The WCED systemic results (2021) indicated that only 42% of Grade 3 learners could read for meaning. Our current way of teaching is not bringing about the necessary change in the system.

In 2021 Foundation Phase was identified as a key priority of the department. All directorates across the departments were to ensure that Foundation Phase becomes the focus point. With this, a considerable budget was allocated to Foundation Phase to enable the department to provide the necessary resources to all schools.
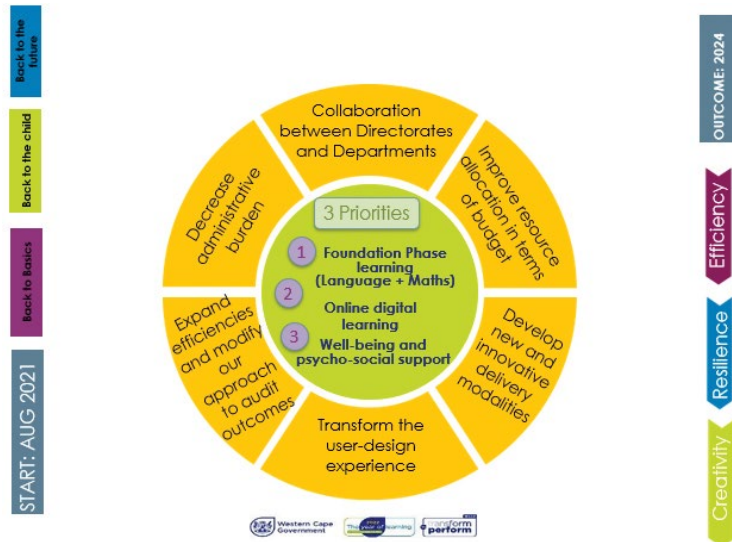
2. WCED partnership with Funda Wande

In 2020 the WCED partnered with Funda Wande NGO to develop a programme for Afrikaans Home Language. At the time of the partnership, the isiXhosa Home Language programme was already developed. The synthetic phonics approach was included in the programme for Afrikaans Home Language. This programme was implemented to strengthen reading in the Foundation Phase (FP). This is also forming part of the Western Cape Reading strategy.

The Funda Wande pilot

The WCED, in collaboration with Funda Wande piloted the Synthetic Phonics approach to teach children to read in forty Afrikaans LoLT schools in 2021. At the same time, the structured Literacy Home Language programme was piloted in ten isiXhosa LoLT schools. Due to Covid and rotational timetables followed by schools, the resources could not effectively be tested out. Therefore, in 2022 the WCED added another fifty Afrikaans LoLT schools in Grade 1 to the pilot, while the original forty pilot schools continued to implement the programme in Grade 2. In 2023 there will be a full rollout to all Grade 1 Afrikaans and IsiXhosa LoLT classes in the province. The original forty Afrikaans pilot schools and ten isiXhosa LoLT pilot schools will implement the programme in Grade 3, while the additional fifty pilot schools will continue to implement the programme in Grade 2 in 2023. Teacher training took place on a quarterly basis. This was done by Senior Curriculum Planners at Head Office as well as by subject advisers. Subject Advisers also underwent quarterly upskilling to ensure they are capacitated to train the teachers.
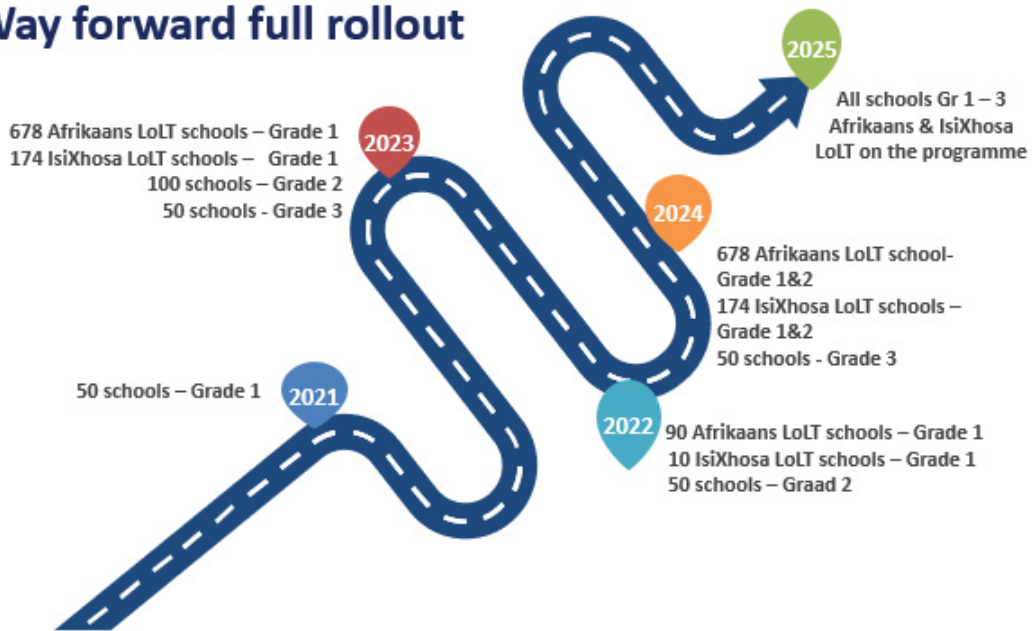
Provisioning of Learning and Teaching Support Material

The Funda Wande programme consists of Teacher guides and Learner books for each term and grade. Furthermore, Big Books are also provided to schools for each term. Additional to this, schools are provided with decodable graded readers for all Afrikaans Home Language classrooms while Vula Bula Anthologies and group-guided reading booklets are procured for all the isiXhosa Home Language classrooms. An eClassroom was also developed in each of these languages to support teachers with additional resources in the classroom. The Funda Wande original pilot of forty Afrikaans LoLT and ten IsiXhosa LoLT schools is funded by Funda Wande, while the additional pilot was budgeted for by the Western Cape Education Department to a cost of R2,500,000.
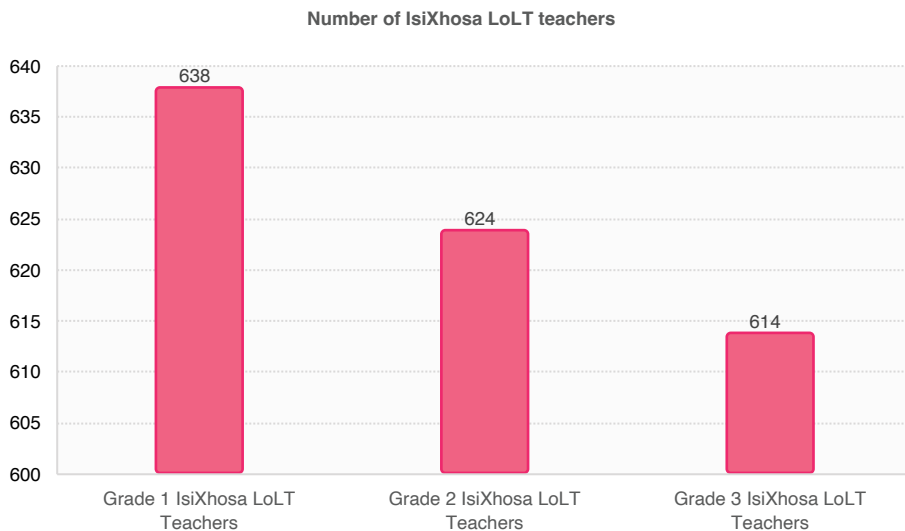
Overview of the staggered rollout

The WCED will continue in 2023 to support the hundred pilot schools through quarterly online training sessions. The upskilling of subject advisers will also be ongoing in 2023. From 2023 to 2025, the Funda Wande programme will be incrementally rolled out to all Afrikaans and IsiXhosa LoLT classes. A train-the-trainer model will be followed. Subject Advisers will be trained and be capacitated to support and monitor the program in February 2023. Lead teachers were identified in schools that were part of the original pilot. These Lead Teachers will also be trained in February 2023. These teachers will lead and coordinate Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in their various districts to share good practices and support each other – each one teach one. Dry-runs will be held with the lead teachers before they conduct a PLC. All grade 1 teachers will be trained during the April holidays in 2023 while grade 2 and 3 teachers will be trained in 2024 and 2025 respectively.
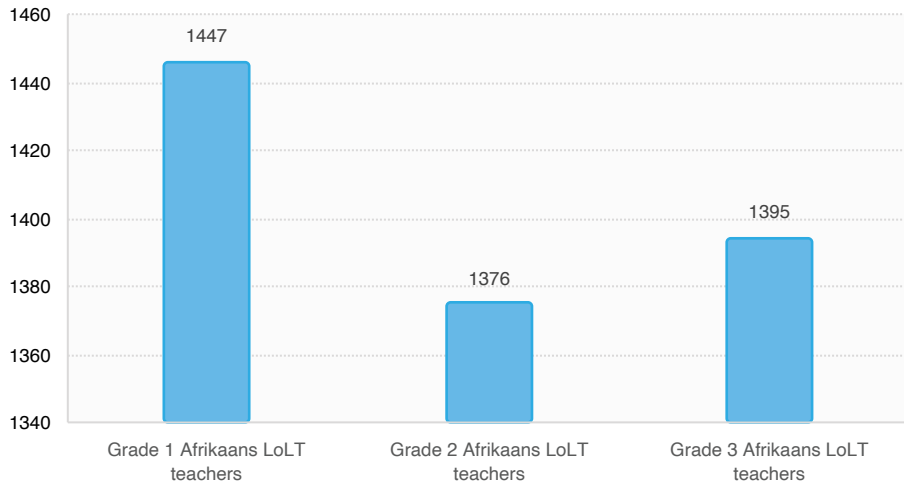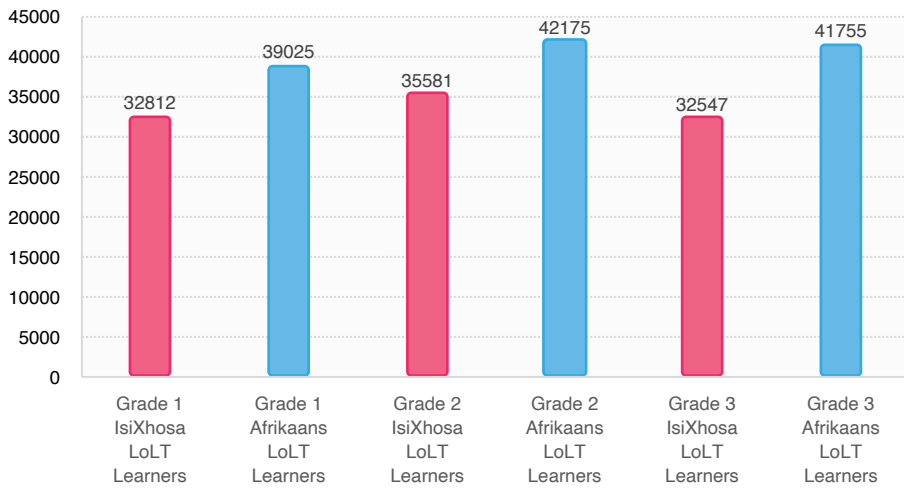
Way forward full rollout

678 Afrikaans LoLT schools – Grade 1
174 IsiXhosa LoLT schools – Grade 1
100 schools – Grade 2
50 schools - Grade 3

2023

2025
All schools Gr 1 – 3
Afrikaans & IsiXhosa
LoLT on the programme

2024
678 Afrikaans LoLT school-
Grade 1&2
174 IsiXhosa LoLT schools –
Grade 1&2
50 schools - Grade 3

50 schools – Grade 1

2021

2022 90 Afrikaans LoLT schools – Grade 1
10 IsiXhosa LoLT schools – Grade 1
50 schools – Graad 2

2.1. Scale of full rollout:

Below graphs gives an indication of the scale of the rollout:

Number of IsiXhosa LoLT teachers

Grade	Number
Grade 1 IsiXhosa LoLT Teachers	638
Grade 2 IsiXhosa LoLT Teachers	624
Grade 3 IsiXhosa LoLT Teachers	614

Number of Afrikaans LoLT teachers

Category	Value
Grade 1 Afrikaans LoLT teachers	1447
Grade 2 Afrikaans LoLT teachers	1376
Grade 3 Afrikaans LoLT teachers	1395

Learner Numbers

Category	Value
Grade 1 IsiXhosa LoLT Learners	32812
Grade 1 Afrikaans LoLT Learners	39025
Grade 2 IsiXhosa LoLT Learners	35581
Grade 2 Afrikaans LoLT Learners	42175
Grade 3 IsiXhosa LoLT Learners	32547
Grade 3 Afrikaans LoLT Learners	41755

Number of IsiXhosa LoLT EAs

Category	Value
Grade 1 IsiXhosa LoLT EAs	638
Grade 2 IsiXhosa LoLT EAs	624
Grade 3 IsiXhosa LoLT EAs	614

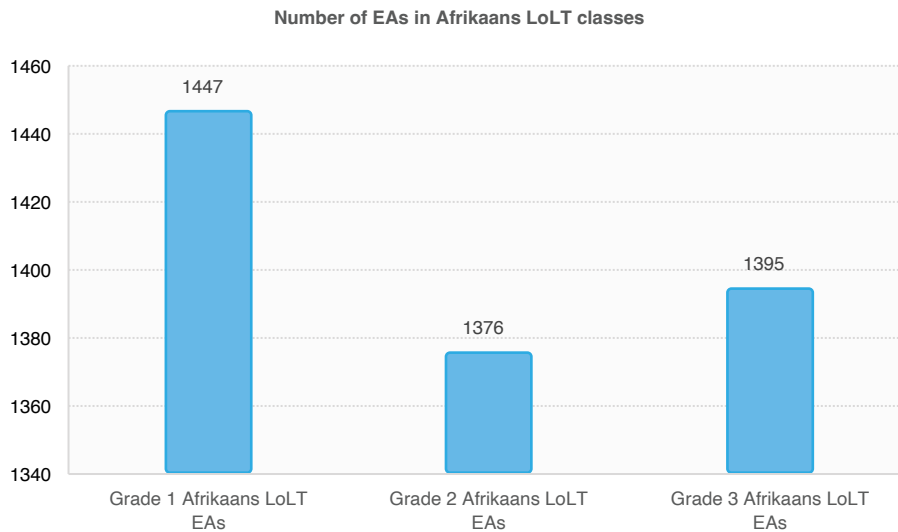**Number of EAs in Afrikaans LoLT classes**

2.2. Monitoring and support

The WCED currently has sixty-seven Foundation Phase subject advisers of which twenty are IsiXhosa LoLT. These advisers will, apart from the training also be responsible for monitoring and support. This they will do during school visits. There will be specific focuses of support for each of the different grades.

Furthermore, as part of the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI), teacher assistants will be placed in every Foundation Phase classroom that opted to be part of the programme. These teacher assistants will be trained on how to do basic monitoring. It will also be expected from each teacher assistant to complete a mandatory forty-hour course on Reading for Meaning. This will be done through the Funda Wande Moodle platform. Thereafter, teacher assistants will also assist in basic monitoring. Monitoring will also be done by senior curriculum planners of Head Office.

2.3. Costing of the full rollout

The estimated costing of the full rollout comes to a total of R110 913 424,00 over the three-year period. See breakdown in diagram below:

BUDGET FULL ROLLOUT
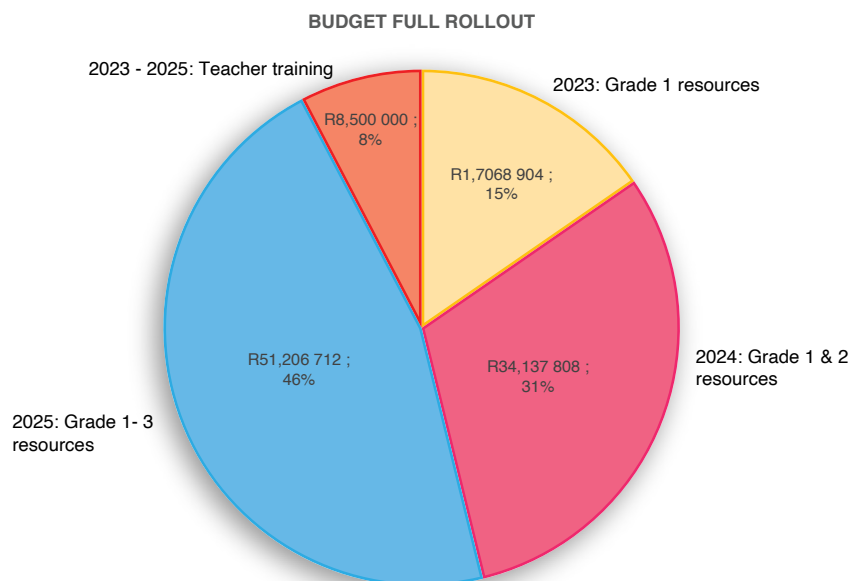
3. Conclusion

To enter in a rollout of this magnitude requires careful planning, ample budget provisioning as well as the buy in from the whole of the department. Classrooms are to be sourced with the necessary re-sources inclusive of readers, big books, teacher guides and learner books. Implementation after training is crucial and the monitoring thereof imperative. The WCED is committed to ensure that every learner can read for meaning by the age of ten.

3

Has reading instruction in early grade classrooms changed over the last decade?

Ursula Hoadley (UCT)

7th February 2023

The focus in this note is on issues relating to reading at the level of the classroom. What aspects of reading instruction have changed over the last ten years? The note draws on Hoadley and Boyd (2022).

1. How has the broader policy context in relation to reading shifted over the last decade?

There have been four key shifts in relation to the reading landscape in the last 10 years.

The national curriculum was reformed and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was introduced in 2012. This highly specified curriculum delineated the main components for reading instruction: phonics, comprehension, vocabulary and fluency. It also mandated different forms of reading: shared, paired, independent and group guided reading (GGR) as well as read-alouds and oral language development (listening and speaking). The CAPS also specified the required amount of time to be spent on different aspects of reading instruction

More text was introduced into classrooms. The main source was the DBE workbooks from 2011, providing all Foundation Phase learners with a CAPS-aligned workbook containing fiction and non-fiction text and activities in all 11 official languages. A second major source of text was increased development of readers. Notable in this regard was the Vula Bula series, readers that have been appropriately sequenced in terms of the linguistic demands of reading in different African languages (as opposed to being direct translations from English as occurred in the past) (see Katz & Rees, 2022). In 2019, Vula Bula anthologies (a collection of the storybooks into grade level single volumes) were distributed to all learners in the Eastern Cape, with positive reading shifts in reading outcomes reported (see Ardington & Spaull, 2022).

The Annual National Assessments (ANAs) were run from 2011 to 2014. These provided the first major national assessment of reading at the primary school level. The low scores on the ANAs showed results which were much more accessible and direct for teachers than those of PIRLS or SACMEQ. Despite extensive criticism of the tests, they served to alert the system generally to the very low levels of reading across the grades.

There was a growth in large-scale interventions to support reading, most notably the Gauteng Primary Literacy and Maths Strategy (GPLMS), the Early Grade Reading Studies (EGRS I and EGRS II), the Programme to Improve Learning Outcomes (PILO), National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) and Funda Wande. These large-scale studies followed a 'structured pedagogy' approach that has become a dominant approach in interventions across Africa and elsewhere to address the identified 'reading crisis' (Piper & Dubeck, 2021). They provide a combination of scripted lesson plans, coaching and training and learning materials aimed at more purposeful and predictable reading instruction over time focused on the development of the key components of learning to read.

2. In what ways has reading instruction in classrooms shifted over the last decade?

A review by Hoadley (2012) outlined reading instructional practices in South African primary school classrooms, found severe shortages of texts across classrooms associated with a largely oral pedagogy focused on decoding single letters, words and sentences. Little evaluation was evident across classrooms, pacing was found to be extremely slow and teachers' levels of competence in teaching reading was weak. A follow up review in 2022 (Hoadley & Boyd, 2022) considered classroom-based research conducted between 2010 and 2020 to assess whether there had been changes in teachers' instructional practices in the context of the changes in the reading landscape described above.

Positive shifts

Improvements in three areas of reading instruction were identified in the context of large-scale projects that measured student outcomes in relation to interventions. These were firstly, greater access to, and use of, text, in particular, text in African languages. Secondly, more structured and routine reading instruction (where lessons were more likely to be focused around a text and more coherent). Thirdly, the teaching of a wider range of reading activities within lessons. These factors correlated with improved reading outcomes. These aspects were also found to be improved in classrooms not subjected to interventions, the shifts probably rooted in two key policy interventions – CAPS (more structured teaching of a range of reading activities) and the DBE Workbooks (more African language text available and used in classrooms).

Mixed findings

In relation to time use there were mixed findings in the review. On the one hand, research found much less wastage of instructional time than in the past. On the other, the very slow pacing of instruction found previously persisted, with excessive time allocated to copying and marking work, activities that hold little learning potential. Teaching reading at this level requires careful, sustained and patient engagement that occurs at a relatively fast pace to keep learners' interest, with regular changes in focus / activity in order to meet the relatively short attention span of learners this age. Rather, what was found were long chunks of time on single, simple activities lacking in energy.

Stasis

Three aspects to reading pedagogy were found resistant to change: teacher knowledge, individualisation, and feedback. Reading and writing are not understood and practised as individual activities. Whole class activities are given precedence over individual meaning making, and the teacher takes primary responsibility for making sense of text and presenting this to the class. Writing consists almost entirely of copying either teacher-generated or collectively created text. Learners in this form of pedagogy are a largely **passive, collective and undifferentiate**d grouping.

Teacher knowledge is seen in two ways. teachers struggle to manage text appropriately and strike a balance between comprehension and enjoyment of the text, and teaching decoding and text structure.

Engagement with the text is often limited to everyday meanings and discussions, not providing sufficient depth of interpretation to enable reading to advance learners' knowledge. Understanding teachers' **pedagogic orientation to text** may require understanding how teachers themselves learned to read and write and whether and how they read in their everyday lives. Secondly, teachers avoid more challenging aspects of teaching (non-constrained skills) and hold very **low expectations** of learners. Tasks are simplified and only low level, factual questions that require no inferencing are asked in classrooms.

Positive shifts	Some shift	No change
• Availability and use of texts • Teaching a range of range of reading strategies • Structure and routine to lessons	• Less time wastage • Slow pace • Weak time management	• Low levels of cognitive demand • Lack of individualizing • Slow pace • Lack of feedback • Low levels of teacher knowledge

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4

Moving from inputs to outcomes
Realising the Right to Basic Education by developing South African law to include a right to read and write

Cameron McConnachie (Legal Resources Centre) and Sipumelele Lucwaba (Funda Wande)

7th February 2023

We believe that the development of binding literacy regulations based on widely accepted core elements of literacy instruction would be a useful development, with the potential to accelerate improvements in literacy rates and give children the best chance possible to realise their right to read, or their right to basic education. Existing policy, legislation and jurisprudence all suggest that regulations would be appropriate, and, in the case of a breach of those regulations, that the courts would willingly direct the government to comply with them.

1. The inability to read for meaning as a breach of the right to basic education

The South African education system has seen some improvements in learner results since PIRLS 2006, but recent trajectories still posit that it will take 80 years before 95% of Grade 4 learners are able to read for meaning (Spaull 2022), and those are pre-Covid-19 trajectories.

The inability of the majority of our learners to read and write for meaning is an indicator of a system failing to provide all of the inputs necessary to give children a reasonable opportunity to learn to read for meaning. It is also the infringement of an existing right – the right to basic education. An infringement of the right can only be remedied by addressing a group of interrelated and complex inputs and processes, rather than one solitary input, for example, making textbooks available to all learners. Whether there should be a stand-alone 'right to read' that grants learners the right to a specific outcome, or, on the other hand, that the right to basic education should be interpreted in a way that being unable to read for meaning constitutes an infringement of the right, may be legally significant but we believe it is of little practical importance. We submit that remedying a breach of either right would call for similar, if not the same, remedies.

2. Moving from aspirational policies and plans to binding regulations

South Africa is not short on policies, frameworks and strategies that have been developed in the last 20 years to address the reading crisis in the Foundation Phase: Drop Everything and Read, Read to Lead, the Early Grade Reading Studies, the 2008 National Reading Strategy, the Eastern Cape's Reading Plan 2019–2023, the Western Cape Reading Strategy 2020–2025, to name but a few. But, unlike regulations,

these are not laws. They represent what national and provincial governments hope to achieve – their good intentions and aspirations – with some principles and methods that the State hopes will be used to achieve them. As excellent as many of these policies may be, they are not binding. They do not set standards or procedures that must be followed. Budgets are sometimes made available to fund the implementation of the campaigns and policies, at least for a period, but these are discretionary, and the state can move funds away from them as they please. Many policies are not well understood by those that need to implement them, and in some cases, they may not even be aware of them. There is also a real threat of policy overlap and contradiction, with multiple role-players pushing different policies and interventions. We submit that binding regulations, drawn up by the DBE and provincial education department's own experts on literacy, with input from the public (including teachers, academics, and civil society) would provide the much-needed, binding blueprint for improving literacy levels as quickly as possible.

3. What would be included in the regulations?

A review of the literacy literature reveals four[55] necessary, largely uncontested, strategic interventions to improve literacy which we believe, at a minimum, should be found in binding regulations – time, teaching, text and testing.
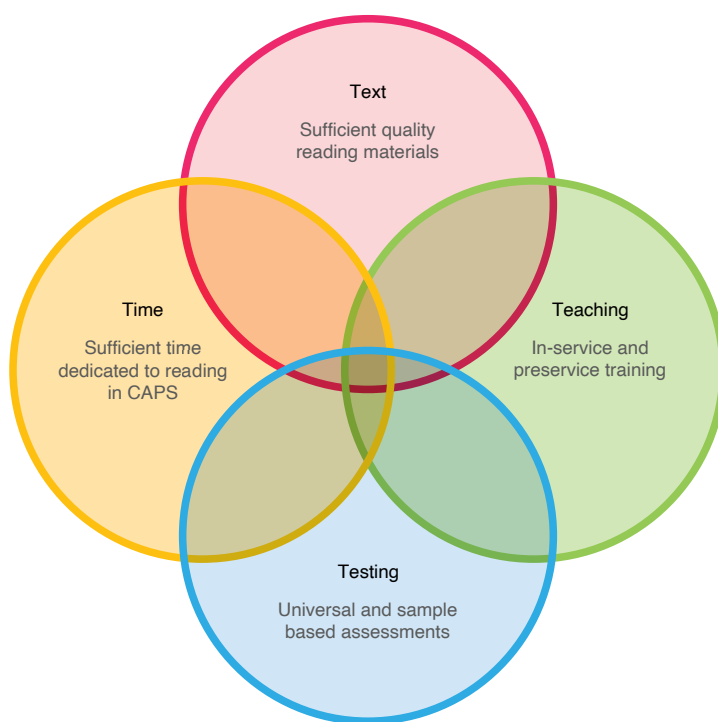
Time: Acquiring proficient literacy skills takes time, particularly for low-achieving students. Even if the recommended CAPS guidelines are followed, it appears that not enough focus is being placed on literacy in our curriculum at the Foundation Phase. We submit the CAPS document should be reviewed and ways found to ensure that sufficient time is both allocated to and actually spent on literacy activities. The proposed reading regulations should reference the curriculum in relation to literacy. It must be crystal clear what is required of teachers during the time they must spend on literacy activities.

Teaching: Teacher knowledge and skills in reading pedagogy must improve for literacy rates to improve. Ensuring that university teaching programmes are fully accredited (not always the case) and that university-based teacher educators are in tune with what teachers need to know is critical. Reading regulations that prescribe quality, accredited literacy training for Foundation and Intermediate Phase student teachers must ensure that all teachers entering the system are well-equipped to assist children

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55 Literature refers to 6Ts for effective primary school literacy instruction – time, teaching, texts, testing, tasks and talk, see Allington (2002) and Spaull & Pretorius (2022). However , we argue that at least the first four of the 'Ts' (i.e. time, teaching, texts, testing), from the South African perspective, must be adequately addressed by the state in the proposed regulations, as part of the content of the right to read. The remaining 'Ts' (tasks and talk) could arguably be canvassed in the regulations dealing with teaching, and we suggest that they would not be appropriate as standalone elements

reach the benchmark by the age of 10, and teachers already in the system must complete in-service training of a particular quality that is assessed. Teachers should be given a reasonable amount of time to successfully complete the course.

Text: In 2008 the DBE gazetted "guidelines" for recommended reading materials, setting out what could be described as the minimum package required. Despite this, 15 years later, severe shortages of quality, appropriate reading materials at multiple levels to cater for the range of abilities in classrooms persist. We believe that the DBE's "guidelines" need to be updated and then upgraded to binding standards that require sufficient texts to be available. Policies are too easily ignored.

Testing: To know if children are on track to realise their right to read, there must be assessments. While there are criticisms of a slavish reliance on testing, there is also a growing acknowledgment that without regular standardised testing in some form, we are unable to get even a basic understanding of the scope, location, and nature of the literacy problem in South Africa. Without widespread universal testing, we also have little sense of whether interventions are making any difference. The regulations should prescribe what is tested and when.

4. Are binding regulations feasible?

Legislating for literacy achievement is not novel. Numerous US states have adopted legislation that requires schools to adopt particular approaches to reading instruction (Pondiscio 2021) and in North Carolina, the law now requires that teacher licensing includes "three continuing education credits directly related to literacy and based upon the science of reading method" (Moore 2021, 1). South Africa needs to craft its own reading laws in order to systematically address the four problematic "T"s, and overcome the State's uneven and ad hoc responses to the literacy crisis that have resulted in a smorgasbord of policies. Regulations are also needed to provide clarity to the state on its obligations in terms of delivery and budgeting. Significant improvements to literacy levels could be made if reading regulations are well-crafted, using a broad, participatory process.

5. What are the next steps to developing reading regulations?

In quarter 1, 2023, a number of civil society organisations will launch the **"Right to Read Regulations Campaign"** which aims to mobilize civil society and the education sector, as well as society at large, to call on the Minister to draft (with help from literacy experts) and then adopt binding reading regulations. It is hoped this will be achieved through traditional advocacy methods, but if those are unsuccessful, litigation to direct the Minister to adopt regulations could be considered.

The **specific objectives** for the Campaign are to ensure that:
- Reading Regulations are drafted and circulated for comment within 12 months, and adopted within 24 months
- There is general consensus amongst stakeholders, and experts that the regulations at least address the current problems summarised by the four Ts.
- Sufficient Budget is set aside/identified by the DBE and PEDs to implement the regulations.

The South African Human Rights Commission, Funda Wande, Section27, and the Legal Resources Centre are founding organisations for the Campaign, however once launched, any organisation or network affiliation can join the Campaign.

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5

Implementing our intentions to improve early grade reading

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7th February 2023

1. Introduction

I was asked to write wearing any one of my 'hats'. I have written on the understanding that this short paper does not represent any of the above hats. At the same time, the views are deeply informed by the work of PILO in working at scale in five provinces, and in the DBE, and some of my current preoccupations in the work of the NPC.

We know that early reading and numeracy must be a national priority if we are to improve educational outcomes: There is adequate evidence of the persistently poor performance of learners in early reading (and in numeracy[56]). Without these tools of navigating text, the trajectory of subsequent learner falters and exacerbates socio-economic inequalities[57].

What we know about what works: There is an established literature in South Africa on the development and assessment of methodologies for early grade reading that could be taken to scale in a national campaign. This includes Fleisch's, The Education Triple Cocktail: System-wide Instructional Reform in South Africa (2018)[58] and the collaborative research led by the DBE in the 'Early Grade Reading Study' (EGRS) project[59]. There is sufficient evidence that the key elements of adequate reading material for learners, and support to teachers (both professional support and development, and structured pedagogical guidelines) contribute to reading improvement.

A campaign to improve early reading and numeracy can build on what works – but must address implementation challenges.

This short paper will :
- propose key strategies that are fundamental to success of an early grade reading and numeracy (EGL/N) campaign,
- identify weaknesses in government 'implementation'.

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56 I will flag early numeracy throughout as a reminder of the urgency of work in this area. It is noted that The DBE is now working with partners to accelerate work on early numeracy

57 The corpus of work of Nic Spaull provides ample evidence of this. See for example Spaull, N. (2013). "Poverty & privilege: Primary school inequality in South Africa". International Journal of Educational Development" 33; 436-447

58 https://openuctpress.uct.ac.za/uctpress/catalog/book/50

59 https://www.education.gov.za/Programmes/EarlyGradeReadingStudy.aspx

Understanding of these should scaffold the execution of any intentions to build on what we know works in early reading and numeracy (EGR/N) at a larger scale within government.

The campaign must be premised on leadership by government, and support for building the necessary capabilities where these are acknowledged to be weak at different levels.

2. Why a campaign?

Change management: Those who must implement the changes at school, district and provincial changes are often weary of changes (from 'above'), often poorly resourced, implemented with a compliance mentality, with little fidelity to the intentions, and with minimal effect. They must be persuaded that the investment in the institutional and personal changes is worth their effort. Elmore[60] has suggested that "... Schools are accustomed to changing without producing any improvement." Kotter's work on understanding why change fails[61] is instructive and could be the starting point for building understanding of what change is required, why it is necessary, and how it will help with the pressing concerns of all concerned within the multiple competing priorities demanding energy.

Speaking the language of educators: Materials and training that does not engage preconceived ideas is often politely 'listened to' without resulting in any disruption of established and trusted practice[62]. Edicts do not change practice.

Stakeholder 'buy–in': An EGL/N strategy must harness and align the energies of all key stakeholders: officials at national, provincial, and district levels and educators and managers at school level. Teacher unions are essential allies in building and sustaining the conditions for success, and in learning about what is working, and what is not. The reservations currently unions have about overly prescriptive structured pedagogy that limits – rather than builds - teacher professionalism must be respectfully engaged, and a common understanding developed.

Funding partners: A nationally coherent strategy that inspires the active contribution of funding partners (in different localities and with varying programmatic contributions in addition to material resources) will strengthen the resource base of the campaign. We must anticipate funding challenges[63], and a campaign that mobilises resources will be key. Funding partners may need to themselves invest in better understanding government processes and challenges in order to be effective partners.

Education NGOs: South Africa is fortunate to have many NGOs working in reading (but unevenly distributed across the country). The coordination of all of these efforts would be unrealistically ambitious, but I believe that these partners would value part of a broader national effort, and could simply be asked, through NASCEE, to reinforce the approach and the pedagogies of the campaign in their work.

Broader society: Improving EFL/N can be accelerated by the active involvement of the many places children live their lives outside of school at home, and in community structures (such as, for example, faith communities) both of which would see the value of the campaign and be committed to its outcomes. There are already a range of existing programmes of support to caregivers from which strategies can be learned, replicated, and extended.

A commitment to a relentless focus on the campaign despite changes in context, new priorities, and setbacks so that momentum, and confidence that the goals can be achieved is sustained

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60 See, for example, Elmore (2206) Leadership as the Practice of Improvement https://www.oecd.org/education/school/37133264.pdf

61 https://dc.etsu.edu/honors/10/

62 Teacher unions often quote Earl (in Timperley et al, 2007, viii): "People come to learning with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught or may learn them superficially and revert to their preconceptions in real situations."

63 The Public Economy Project (PEP) at the Wits Centre for Inequality Studies has published an independent appraisal of expenditure choices evident in of budget data. The paper argues that basic education 'will see significant declines in real resource allocation and will be reduced as a share of the budget' (p. 8) and will face 'deep cuts to real spending' (p.9), and that this decline will be evident in 'reduced investment in employee compensation and goods and services.' Reduced expenditure on employee compensation implies larger class-sizes – and unrealistic class sizes will undermine success, and reduced expenditure on goods and services will have consequences for the availability of reading material.

3. Identifying and responding to implementation challenges

These lessons are drawn from the work of PILO and from the work of van der Berg, Gustafsson, and Malindi[64]. Many of these challenges are not unique to education but are common to the challenges of state capacity across many departments.

A capable and developmental state able to intervene to correct historical inequities: The NDP 25 Year Review published in 2019[65] identified the need to strengthen strategic capacity across government, "The real issue is whether there is a well-articulated and robust strategic intent and planning that effectively directs the public service, and if there are equally robust mechanisms for translating this intent into policies, plans and programmes …"

Intentional practices of learning from what works, and what does not work: We would benefit from greater courage in assessing implementation failures (rather than defensive compliance reporting as both government and the NGO sector), and frank introspection – with contributions from key stakeholders – on why programmes or initiatives have not succeeded. Rigorous reflection on systemic (or smaller) initiatives that have succeeded, and why, and how, can inform systemic improvement. An example in Basic Education where the failure to analyse key factors driving success were inadequately analysed meant that when the progress subsequently faltered without explanation, and the regression was not conclusively analysed to guide future action is provided by van der Berg et al,

> *" The DBE has attributed improvements [in international systemic evaluations] to: better access to books among learners; a strong focus on assessing learners, specifically through the Annual National Assessments (ANA) programme; and clearer pedagogical instructions to teachers in the form of CAPS documentation… Insofar as this explanation of causes is correct, it points to the need to preserve the drivers of positive change at all costs…The absence of a rigorous systemic analysis of drivers of this quality improvement was a missed opportunity for learning as this progress was not sustained in subsequent performance in international benchmarking initiatives"*

He concludes that we do not have a rigorous evidence-based analysis of why the system was improving, or declining - what we know is that we are a system capable of improving, to sustain improvement- we need to invest more effort in understanding what drove past improvements.

Translating learning from research into actionable plans: The use of evidence in planning, the coherence of plans and their indicators, and the meaningful monitoring of implementation is weak. An EGR/N intervention should be constructed to strengthen the architecture of planning and implementation and model best practice within the partnerships established to address EGR/N.

Indicators for monitoring progress and using this throughout the system: The use of data and evidence in planning, programme implementation, and monitoring must be a key focus in the development of an EGR/N intervention. The campaign must agree on definitions of success and failure, on mechanisms for regular monitoring of progress, on agreements on both lead and lag indicators, and on mechanisms for adjusting targets and implementation strategies in the light of learning and changing contexts. These mechanisms must be understood, built, and used from school level as part of institutional reflection so that principals and officials appreciate the value of data and want to use it better rather than feeling that they are wasting time in data collection that does not translate into useful insight or meaningful action in their work.[66]

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64 For a more comprehensive examination of some implementation challenges in learning, planning, establishing evidence-based measurable indicators, and aligning components of the system – see: Education and Skills for the Economy and Links to Labour Markets in South Africa (van der Berg. S, Gustafsson. M, and Malindi. K. https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/assets/Documents/Education%20and%20skills%20for%20the%20economy%20and%20links%20to%20labour%20markets%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf

65 Towards a 25 Year Review, 1994-2019

66 See Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, Success by Numbers: How using Data can Unlock the Potential of the South African R-12 Public Education System (2013)

Plans that are aligned across levels and budget: A national campaign would be implemented across provinces. Planning and budgeting must align across these levels. Van der Berg reports that 'A 2017 study commissioned by National Treasury found that silo effects within education departments tend to be replicated in departmental planning documents, the result being that interlinkages and contributions of budgets and activities to overall outcomes are often not clear.' (p.20)

Paying attention to human and material resource constraints: We need to understand and plan for systemic weaknesses in supporting the professional work of teachers. In particular the time and resource limitations on curriculum delivery and support Specialists at district level, and department heads at school level.

A Systemic Approach: Improvements in classroom practice must be integrated into the work of SMT and Districts. If these role players are not integral to implementation and monitoring, the campaign cannot succeed.

6

South African languages reading benchmarks policy brief

Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Lesang Sebaeng and Zamangwe Zwane (Department of Basic Education)

7th February 2023

1. Introduction

In early 2019 South African president Cyril Ramaphosa articulated a new and clear expectation for basic education: every child should be able to read for meaning by age 10 (South African Government, 2019). While reading for meaning is the goal of reading, reading is a complex and hierarchical process. A range of foundational reading subskills needs to be mastered before one can comprehend or understand what is in a text.

In response, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in collaboration with various stakeholders has been leading the establishment of early-grade reading benchmarks for all eleven South African languages. These benchmarks set key thresholds of early reading outcomes, such as reading fluency (words read correctly per minute) that are necessary for children to reach in grades 1, 2 and 3 to be on track to read with adequate comprehension by the age of ten. Given the different orthographic structures of South Africa's various languages, these benchmarks need to be developed separately for the different language groups.

2. Which benchmarks have been developed?

So far efforts by the DBE have developed and officially adopted early-grade reading benchmarks for the Nguni language group, the Sesotho-Setswana language group, English First Additional Language (EFAL) and Afrikaans. The benchmarks are for **Grade 1 to 3 for Home Languages and then Grade 1 to 6 for EFAL. This table summarises all the available reading benchmarks.**

Table 1: South African Languages Reading Benchmarks

	Nguni home language group (Siswati, isiZulu, isiXhosa)	Sesotho-Setswana home language group	Afrikaans home language	English First Additional Language
By the end of grade 1, all learners should be able to sound	40 clspm (letters)	40 clspm (letters)	40 clspm	N/A
By the end of grade 2, all learners should be able to sound	20 cwpm (Words and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Grade 2)	40 cwpm (Words and ORF Grade 2)	50 cwpm	30 cwpm
By the end of grade 3, all learners should be able to sound	35 cwpm (ORF Grade 4)	60 cwpm (ORF Grade 4)	80 cwpm	50 cwpm
By the end of grade 4, all learners should be able to sound	N/A	N/A	N/A	70 cwpm
By the end of grade 5, all learners should be able to sound	N/A	N/A	N/A	90 cwpm
By the end of grade 6, all learners should be able to sound	N/A	N/A	N/A	100 cwpm

3. What are the uses of Reading Benchmarks?

With the use of the reading benchmarks, we can categorise each learner's reading level to measure their progress during the year to see if they are reading on track for their grade. Table 2 below shows the various uses of benchmarks. These uses are split into 3 categories: National and Provincial administration, Schools, and the Classroom. Each of these are currently being explored by the DBE.

Table 2: Usage of African Language Reading Benchmarks

National and Provincial Administration	School	Classroom
Establishes definition of reading proficiency	Standards and targets that school leaders can aim towards	Standard against which to measure learner skills
Clearly communicates standards and targets	Standardises assessment practices across and within schools	Early identification of learners at risk of not being able to read

In addition to the uses above, teacher training providers (both pre-service and in-service) should integrate these benchmarks into their programmes. Programme developers in a multi-donor context can integrate benchmarks into the design of Early Grade Reading interventions. District Curriculum Teams can identify realistic targets against which to assess appropriate achievement for each grade and school. For donors and evaluators, benchmarks provide an explicit standardised criterion against which programmes can be valued to determine their effectiveness and impact.

4. How were the benchmarks established?

A design process convened by the DBE with multiple stakeholders including RTI International specialists who have led similar processes in other developing country contexts was initiated. The design process culminated in the Setting Reading Benchmarks report (Khulisa Management Services, 2020) documenting data approaches and empirical methodologies to support benchmarking. The design phase informed

decisions on which grades and languages to benchmark; e.g. Grade 1, 2 and 3 respectively for Home Language. A further decision was taken to benchmark each language separately and then compare these benchmarks within each African language family. If consistent patterns emerged, then a language family benchmark could be adopted.

5. How were languages and data selected?

The choice of which language to benchmark first was informed by the availability of existing reading data. For the Nguni language group, learner assessment data from five different studies in three Nguni languages: isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Siswati were used. This resulted in it being the largest compilation of early grade reading assessment data. This included nearly 16,400 unique learners across 660 typically no-fee schools. No large-scale data was available for isiNdebele. The Sesotho-Setswana early grade reading benchmarks are based on reading assessments of more than 24 000 unique learners across more than 400 no-fee schools in the North West, Free State and Limpopo provinces. The Afrikaans benchmarks are based on data collected from 100 schools in 2022 in the Western Cape. The EFAL benchmarks drew on five different studies, data was compiled with multiple assessment points for over 20,000 unique learners from Grades 2 to 7, across 6 of 9 provinces. These data are almost exclusively drawn from no-fee schools.

6. Future Plans

Plans are underway to benchmark three languages in 2023; Xitsonga, Tshivenda and English Home Language. This would conclude all the languages. This work has been led by the DBE in collaboration with a strong coalition of donors, academics and officials including the DBE, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Research on Socio-Economics Policy (ReSEP), the University of Cape Town (UCT), Funda Wande, Old Mutual and Zenex Foundation have been collaborating in this work to date.

Detailed reports are accessible here:

Design Report- Setting Reading Benchmarks in South Africa

Summary Report- Benchmarking in the Nguni Languages

Technical Report- Benchmarking Early Grade Reading Skills in Nguni Languages

Afrikaans Early Grade Reading Benchmarks Report

Summary Report- English as a First Additional Language Benchmarking

Technical Report- English as a First Additional Language Benchmarking

Sesotho-Setswana Language Group Benchmarks Report

Technical Report- Sepedi Early Grade Reading Benchmarks

Summary Report-Setswana Early Grade Reading Benchmarks

Technical Report-Setswana Early Grade Reading Benchmarks

Sesotho-Setswana Language Group Benchmarks Learning Brief (English)

Sesotho-Setswana Language Group Benchmarks Learning Brief (Sepedi)

Sesotho-Setswana Language Group Benchmarks Learning Brief (Sesotho)

Sesotho-Setswana Language Group Benchmarks Learning Brief (Setswana)

English as a First Additional Language Benchmark Learning Brief

Afrikaans Learning Brief (English)

Afrikaans Learning Brief (Afrikaans)

7

Gauteng Grade R language and mathematics improvement project

Nathalie Vereen (JET), Phumelele Tloubatla (Gauteng Department of Education),

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7th February 2023

1. Introduction

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) established its Education Road Map 2019 – 2024 with 5 Strategic Goals, wherein Strategic Goal #1 is Early Childhood Development. Subsequently a 10 pillar ECD Strategy was developed to deliver on this Strategic Goal 1 and was linked to GET Strategy to create a continuum and seamless transitioning from Grade R to Grade 1 and the entire Foundation phase. Hence the project "Grade R Home Languages and Mathematics Improvement" is firmly located within the ECD Strategy
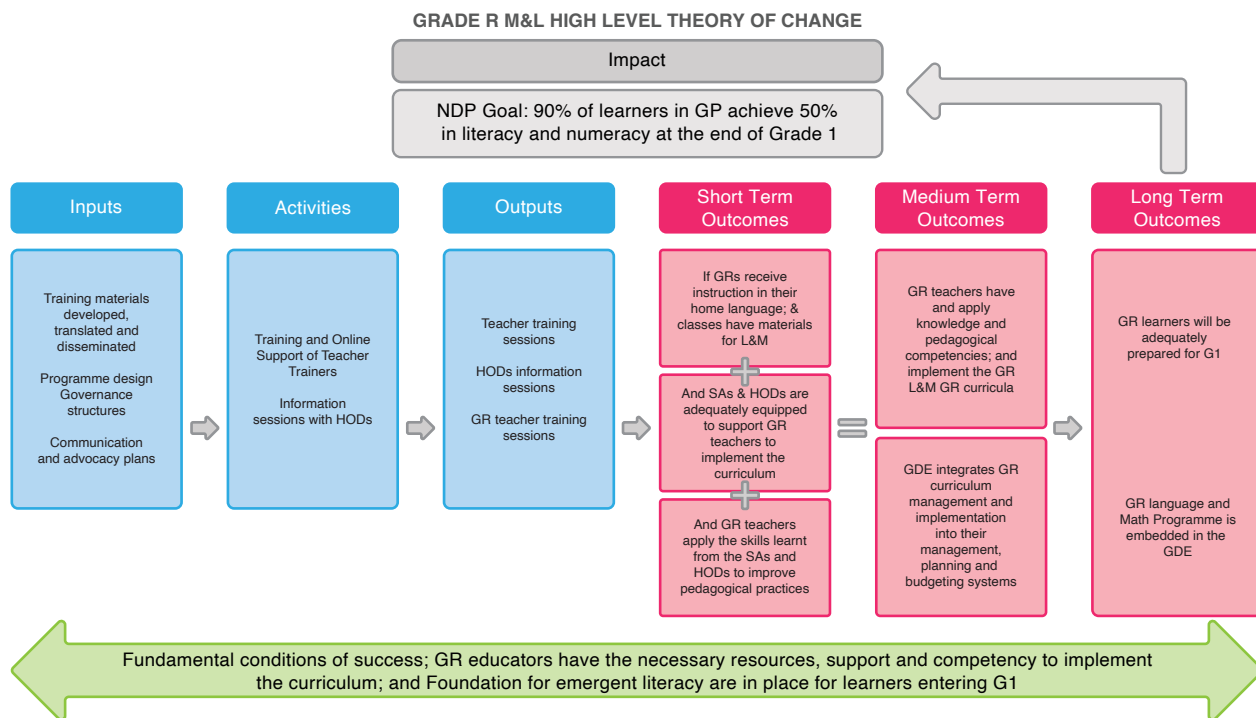
2. Background and context that informed the project

In 2016 the GDE and the Gauteng Education Development Trust (GEDT) were engaged in discussions on possible interventions to improve the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge of Grade R teachers/practitioners.

A range of studies have indicated the long-term cognitive, social and academic benefits of early education, resulting in increasing emphasis on the good quality of pre-school programmes. To redress the effects of poverty and reverse the stubborn trend of educational under-achievement, the right foundations for learning must be laid in the period before children begin formal schooling. The GDE is building and strengthening its work in ECD and Grade R, in line with national policy developments.

The project is aligned to the GDE's key goal of improving the quality of teaching and learning of Home Languages and Mathematics in Grade R through play-based learning, improving assessment practices, improving learner readiness for formal schooling and focusing on emergent reading. The sustainability of the change that is envisioned through the project is already an integral part of the GDE's long-term planning, and the intervention will support the initiation of the work.

3. High level theory of change

GRADE R M&L HIGH LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE

Impact
NDP Goal: 90% of learners in GP achieve 50% in literacy and numeracy at the end of Grade 1

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcomes
Training materials developed, translated and disseminated Programme design Governance structures Communication and advocacy plans	Training and Online Support of Teacher Trainers Information sessions with HODs	Teacher training sessions HODs information sessions GR teacher training sessions	If GRs receive instruction in their home language; & classes have materials for L&M And SAs & HODs are adequately equipped to support GR teachers to implement the curriculum And GR teachers apply the skills learnt from the SAs and HODs to improve pedagogical practices	GR teachers have and apply knowledge and pedagogical competencies; and implement the GR L&M GR curricula GDE integrates GR curriculum management and implementation into their management, planning and budgeting systems	GR learners will be adequately prepared for G1 GR language and Math Programme is embedded in the GDE

Fundamental conditions of success; GR educators have the necessary resources, support and competency to implement the curriculum; and Foundation for emergent literacy are in place for learners entering G1

4. Focus of the project

The total number of targeted learners enrolled in Gr R is 130 000 in any given academic year, 4500 grade R practitioners/teachers in public schools and 500 grade R practitioners in registered ECD Community based centres.

The project focuses on 1) Development and versioning of the home languages and mathematics training materials into eleven languages; 2) provision of these materials and classroom resources including the Maths kit to all Grade R teachers in all public schools and registered ECD centres that offer Grade R (in 2024); 3) training of 190 Foundation Phase subject advisors as teacher trainers with 10 of them as Master trainers; 4) holding information sessions for 1380 Foundation Phase Departmental Heads; 5) Training of the 4500 Grade R teachers and practitioners, and provisioning of classroom-based resources for both home languages and mathematics in different languages.

The Project is rolled- out in three implementation phases:

- Phase 1 for project set-up with the output being project management and governance structures,
- Phase 2 focused on material development and project design while
- Phase 3 is on project implementation.

Percentage of Funding distribution for Phase 2 and Phase 3.

GDE	20%
Funders Group	80%

The Funders Group, inclusive of the GEDT, Zenex Foundation and USAID will spend R86.7m from 2021 up to 2024. An initial R10m was invested by the GEDT and Zenex Foundation from 2019-2020 to design the programme, plan and start implementation, including to onboard the primary technical partners – Wordworks and the UCT: School Development Unit, through JET Education Services (phase 1 of the programme phase).

The innovation of the Programme is that the primary investment is towards the development and versioning of the classrooms and teacher materials for both language and mathematics in all SA official languages. The GDE and language experts quality assured all the materials and both technical partners signed Creative Commons Licencing agreements with JET (PMO); this will ensure access to other provinces and organisations to a full suite of open source documents for replication.

The GDE has committed R20m towards this programme and has been instrumental to fund the cost of all the trainers (180-190), the data provision and training facilities across the districts.

An annual spend of R20-24m is invested by the Funder Group and the budget and financial management are the responsibility of JET as PMO.

5. Implementation partners and their responsibilities

	Partner	Roles
1	GDE	Custodian, Funder, PSC member
2	GEDT	Funder and custodian
3	USAID	Funder and PSC members
4	Zenex Foundation	
5	JET Education Services	Project management, PSC secretariat,
6	Wordworks	Home Languages service provider contracted by JET for re-versioning of home languages materials into eleven languages and training of its 10 Master trainers and 180 teacher trainers
7	School Development unit (SDU) of the University of Cape Town	Mathematics service provider contracted by JET for re-versioning of Maths materials into 11 languages and training of its 10 Master trainers and the same 180 teacher trainers

The project is funded by GEDT, Zenex Foundation, USAID and managed by JET Education Services as the Project Management Office (PMO) which reports to the Project Steering Committee (PSC). GDE also funds the project but not through the PMO.

The goal of the project is for all Grade R learners in Gauteng Province to be ready for Grade 1, with 90 percent of learners achieving 50 percent in literacy and numeracy at the end of Grade 1 in line with the goals of the NDP.

6. Training Dosage

Provision of materials and classroom resources	• A set of 5000 training materials and classroom resources produced and • Each Gr R teacher and trainer (subject advisor) provided with a set of materials and classroom resources for each term for both Home languages and mathematics in the languages offered at their schools.
Subject advisers as teacher trainers through training of trainers for both components	Once off 5-day face to face block training at the beginning of training for each component followed by face to face Quarterly sessions held for eight hours on a Saturday covering content for the whole term.
Foundation Phase Departmental Heads Information sessions	On-line quarterly information sessions held for two hours to inform the departmental heads about what Gr R teachers will be trained on, for them to be able to offer support and monitor implementation
Grade R teachers and practitioners	Eleven monthly training sessions are held on a Saturday for eight hours and one day during the school holidays.

7. Training logistics

GDE responsibilities	JET responsibilities
• Communication of all training logistics with the teacher trainers (Foundation Phase subject advisers) • Secure training venues for training of the trainers across the province	• Secure travel, accommodation and catering of the training of trainers (TOT) with input from GDE on catering suppliers. • Communication with GDE on logistics
• Organises all logistics for training of Grade R teachers: securing of laptops, provision of data to trainers and power banks, securing of venues, PPS, catering, attendance registers, • Communication with schools on all relevant training logistics including invitations.	

8. Materials developed & versioned in eleven official languages

- Home languages: Concept guides, activity guides, workbooks for teachers, facilitators' guides, puppets, sequence cards, big books, game cards
- Mathematics: Concept guide, activity guides, workbooks for teachers, facilitators' guides, poster book and Maths kit.

9. The expected targets:

All the Gr R teachers in Public Ordinary and Special Schools who attended training (a maximum of 4,000 and 500 practitioners in the ECD registered sites)

- Frequently use the developed sets of materials,
- Use innovative play–based teaching methodologies and
- Participate in the community of practices set up by GDE to strengthen sharing of good practices.

10. Principles

The project is guided by key principles, which also guide the work of the GDE. It is systemic and embedded in the GDE for implementation across the GP targeting all public ordinary schools and special schools. It is linked to Foundation Phase (FP) to sustain the impact and sustainability beyond the momentum provided by the project. It is premised on the capacity of the GDE, the provision of good quality training to trainers and Grade R teachers/practitioners and that the FP DH and senior management teams are able to support Grade R and the linkage to Grade 1.

Grade R teachers/practitioners will be incentivized through training endorsed by the South African Council for Educators (SACE). It is designed to contribute to continuous professional development (CPD) points.

11. Internal and external monitoring

The project is monitored internally by GDE monthly, the Project Steering Committee (once a year) and the PMO through onsite visits, monthly project meetings and quarterly reports to ensure continuous oversight, management and quality assurance. It is evaluated externally by an independent evaluator appointed by Zenex Foundation.

12. Project timelines and completion status

Year	Activities	Status
2016	GDE and GEDT – discussions in the ECD sector	All completed
2018	• JET was commissioned to conduct an overview of continuous professional development (CPD) and delivery mechanism needs for Gr R • The Funder Group was approached by GDE	
2019	• GDE and GEDT initiated the project • Consultation with all stakeholders	
2020–2021	Additional funding was secured from the Funder Group Design and planning, material development/reversioning in all eleven languages, setting up of governance and management structures, advocacy, prepare for implementation	
2021–2022	• Provision of Home language materials and classroom resources to Gr R teachers • Home language training of trainers, dry runs, orientation and training of Grade R teachers • Quarterly online Home languages information sessions for Foundation Phase Departmental heads • Home Languages baseline study: learner testing, classroom observations, stakeholder interviews and teacher testing (pre and post testing)	
2023	• Provision of Mathematics materials and the Maths kit to trainers and Grade R teachers • Mathematics training of trainers, dry runs, orientation and training of Grade R teachers • Quarterly online Mathematics information sessions for Foundation Phase Departmental heads • Mathematics baseline study: learner testing, classroom observations, and teacher testing (pre and post testing) • Planning, preparations and development of the Special Needs materials	In Progress
2024	• Training of registered ECD sites, special needs schools and catch up sessions for new teachers in POS. • External evaluation activities continue.	

8

Summary note on "COVID-19 disruptions and education in South Africa: Two years of evidence"

Gabrielle Wills and Servaas van der Berg (Resep, Stellenbosch University)

7th February 2023

1. About this note

Although school attendance and economic activity has returned to a more usual state of functioning after the removal of COVID-19 related lockdown restrictions, pandemic disruptions to schooling are far from over. In this note for the Reading Panel 2023, we summarise the main findings from a report titled "COVID-19 disruptions and education in South Africa: Two years of evidence". The report reviews what we know about learning losses and other schooling impacts in South Africa after two pandemic years (2020 and 2021). We highlight specifically pandemic-related impacts on South African learner's literacy levels.

2. Main findings

2.1. **There have been extensive learning losses in the General Education and Training (GET) Phase.**
The Western Cape Systemic Tests are written in Grades 3, 6, and 9 in language and mathematics at year end. Conservatively, compared to cohorts assessed in 2019, Grade 3, 6 and 9 cohorts assessed in 2021 were 40-70% of a school year behind in language and much more behind, 95-106% of a school year, in mathematics (Van der Berg et al. 2022). Expressed in standard deviations, learning losses in South Africa have been larger than average learning losses reported in an international review of COVID-19 impacts (Patrinos et al., 2022), although losses in LMICs are underrepresented in that review.

2.2. **Average learner performance declines in a pandemic context appear to be larger in primary grades (Grade 3 or 6 compared to Grade 9) and larger in mathematics than language as revealed in the Western Cape Systemic Tests** (Van der Berg et al., 2022). However, language losses in earlier grades are likely underestimated where lower-order reading and language skills are not tested in those written assessments. Despite the inclusion of multiple-choice questions in the Grade 3 literacy Western Cape Systemic Test, making it possible to get some questions correct through random guessing, there were significant floor effects on the test in 2019 and even more so in 2021. Therefore, pandemic impacts on lower-order reading skills (such as oral reading fluency or alphabetic knowledge) are not being effectively captured in the tests.

2.3. **The widening of already high levels of learning inequality** across wealthier and poorer parts of the system from the Western Cape Systemic Tests is observed in both language and mathematics, especially at the Grade 3 level.

2.4. **Losses in early grade reading skills over two pandemic years, between 46% and 118% of a year of learning in no-fee school samples, has exacerbated an existing early grade reading crisis.** In 2020 among a learner sample in Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga no-fee schools, a 57–81% reduction in reading development in Nguni Home Languages and a 62% reduction in reading development in English First Additional language (EFAL) was observed compared to a normal Grade 2 or 4 year (Ardington et al. 2021). By the third term of 2021, Grade 4 learners in a North West no-fee school sample had lost 46–118% of a normal year of learning in foundational reading skills. Figure 1 illustrates these losses showing learners' average development in oral reading fluency or word reading during a normal school year and then during pandemic years. After two pandemic years, Grade 4 learners in term 3 of 2021 were reading about the same number (or even fewer) words in a minute than Grade 3 learners in the same schools in term 3 of 2019. Not shown in the figure is the substantial decline in basic alphabetic knowledge. Pre-pandemic, Grade 2s in the Eastern Cape sample would usually sound an additional 23 letters correctly over a year. In 2020, alphabetic knowledge development during Grade 2 declined to just 7 additional letters. Pandemic-related deterioration in early grade reading is of significant consequence for children's development (Wills et al., 2022) and attaining a national goal that children read for meaning by age 10.

Figure 1: Reading development over a year. Normal school year vs. COVID-19 pandemic years. Evidence from no-fee samples.
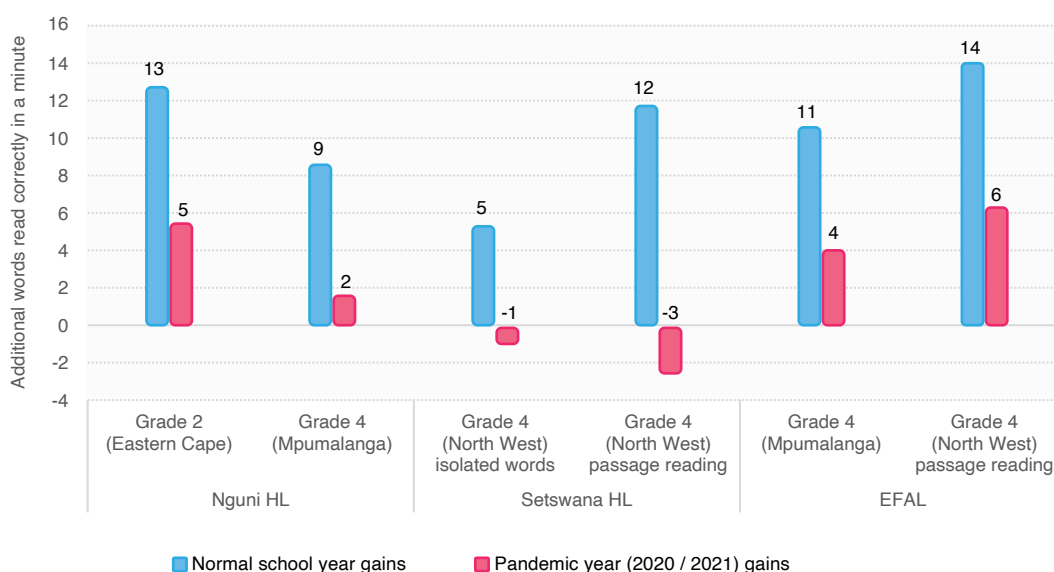
Notes: Grade 2 (Eastern Cape) & Grade 4 (Mpumalanga) estimates from Ardington, Wills & Kotze (2021) using Funda Wande, EGRS II and SPS data. Estimates for North West are from own calculations using Grade 3 and 4 EGRS I (2018) and RSP (2021) data, updating estimates in Kotze et al. (2022). Estimates from school fixed effects and/or difference-in-difference regression. HL = Home Language, EFAL = English First Additional Language.

2.5. **Expect declines in South Africa's PIRLS 2021 results in lieu of pandemic impacts on early grade reading and language.** Applying a 0.27 standard deviation learning loss in Grade 6 Language in the Western Cape Systemic Tests to the national 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) result implies that the 80% that could not read for meaning in the 2016 PIRLS would 'rise to an astonishing 88%' (Van der Berg et al., 2022, p45). Expected declines should be viewed against the fact that PIRLS may underestimate losses in lower-order reading skills not assessed in this written reading comprehension test.

2.6. **Learning losses are likely attributed to lost contact teaching time, with evidence of less work done in 2020 and 2021.** Nationally across all learners, 54% of contact time was lost in 2020 due to

changes to the school calendar (DBE, 2022a, p5). In the second half of 2021, 22% of contact time in Grade 3 was lost due to rotations and regular absenteeism (Gustafsson, 2022b). In the Western Cape, an average of 155 school days, or 39% of contact time, was lost across 2020 and 2021 (Van der Berg et al., 2022). Year-on-year comparisons (2021 vs. 2018) of work done in Grade 3 Home Language and English First Additional Language in Department of Basic Education workbooks in a North West sample, show significant reductions in exercises completed, writing of full sentences and paragraphs in 2021.

2.7. **A major pandemic trend is the large and sustained reductions in repetition rates at all grade levels in 2020 and 2021, but particularly in Grade 10 and 11** (see Figure 2). For instance, in 2016 almost a third of Grade 10s in the Eastern Cape (EC) and Gauteng (GP) were not progressed to Grade 11. Grade 10 repetition rates declined to 18% (EC) and 17% (GP) in 2020 and stabilised slightly to 23% (EC) and 24% (GP) in 2021. More lenient progression occurred as final year marks were based less on examinations and more on higher contributions of more lenient School-Based Assessments (SBAs) (Hoadley, 2020). Gustafsson (2022a, p1) also finds that nationally the Grade 11 to 12 promotion rate rose "from 67% in 2019 (for Grade 11 learners moving to Grade 12 in 2020) to 79% in 2020 (Grade 11 learners moving to Grade 12 in 2021)".

2.8. **Repetition rates in 2020 and 2021 also declined in primary grades, including in Grade 1.** Historically high repetition rates in Grade 1 declined to pre-pandemic Grade 2 repetition levels by the end of 2021, evidenced in two provinces (the Eastern Cape and Gauteng). This will have implications for the acquisition of foundational reading and numeracy skills taught in Grade 1 if pre-pandemic patterns of 'holding back' children in Grade 1 were related to school readiness.

Figure 2: Reduction in repetition rates (i.e., not being progressed) during the pandemic. Gauteng and the Eastern Cape province.
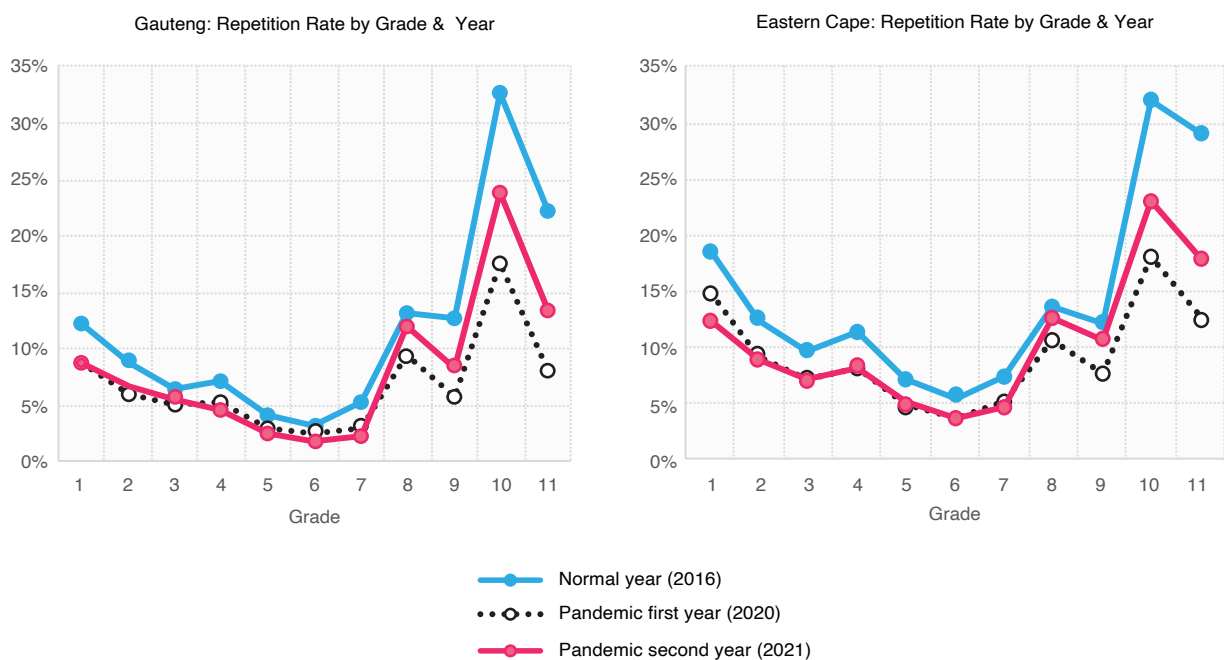
Source: Data Driven Districts. Calculation by Van Wyk & Van der Berg (2022) using a balanced school sample in each province. Calculations using data for up to 1.5 million Grade 1–12 learners in each province. Repetition rates in each year identify the percentage of enrolled learners who were not progressed to a higher grade the following year.

2.9. **Contrary to expectations, overall dropping out in South Africa declined during the pandemic, especially at the secondary level. There have also been large commensurate increases in total school enrolment.** Between 2018 and 2021 total school enrolment rose by half a million, mainly due to *reduced* dropout (DBE, 2022a, p2). Accounting for population increases, in all provinces enrolment between 2020 and 2021 increased among learners aged 15 and older (DBE, 2022b). Of

the roughly 1 million learners that enter Grade 1, those leaving before Grade 12 declined from around 460 000 before the pandemic to perhaps as low as 200 000 in 2021 (DBE, 2022a, p2). This is in significant contrast to initial fears of dramatic pandemic-related increases in learners leaving school before Grade 12 (Shepherd & Mohohlwane 2021, 2022). Where dropout did occur between 2020 and 2021, it was in the initial school grades. About 2.3% fewer children than expected (roughly 27 000) had not enrolled as first-time learners in 2021, while up to 19 000 learners at the compulsory school-going age dropped out. General enrolment and dropout trends in 2020 administrative data are supported by patterns in survey data (Statistics South Africa 2022, p8).

2.10. As an unexpected outcome, "the pandemic may have pushed the system onto a new level at which far more youths obtain the NSC [National Senior Certificate] for many years into the future" (DBE, 2022a, p4). Many more will qualify for entry into tertiary studies. Related to pre-pandemic rises in secondary enrolment, altered assessment practices in 2020 and large increases in promotion rates at the end of Grade 11 in 2020, there was an unprecedented number of candidates (704 000) in 2021 writing the NSC and achieving a Bachelors-level pass (a 38% increase on 2019). Despite many more candidates, the NSC results did not reflect any notable negative COVID-19 impacts. This should not constitute evidence that there have been no learning losses in the system, especially where Grade 12s lost far fewer school days than other grades. The NSC as a certification system, is not designed to measure the overall quality of the education system.

3. Moving forward

Except for the Western Cape, South Africa has yet to demonstrate a cohesive and robust action plan to remediate losses. In the General Education and Training Phase, more time needs to be allocated to language and mathematics, in turn requiring freeing-up time from non-core subjects (Van der Berg et al. 2022). Educator Assistants, made possible through the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative, could be better used for recovery support and helping individual learners catch up content in core subjects. To identify learning gaps, diagnostic assessments of learners' knowledge will also be required. One-on-one assessments in large class settings could be supported by Educator Assistants with appropriate training. In India, volunteers working in after-school catch-up programmes significantly helped to mitigate learning losses (Singh et al. 2022).

In-person remediation is unequivocally the preferred approach to addressing learning losses. Not only is remote instruction found to be less effective in remediating learning gaps (Muñoz-Najar et al. 2021), few South African learners were reached through remote learning. In 2020, nationally just 11% of South African youth aged 5-24 attending an educational institution had engaged in remote learning. Access to remote learning opportunities was also highly unequal (Statistics South Africa, 2022, p12). Nevertheless, in the event of a future lockdown, relatively high smartphone proliferation among youth (Statistics South Africa, 2022, p17) suggests phone-based or SMS learning opportunities could be better leveraged.

In conclusion, twin pandemic shocks of learning losses and enrolment increases have occurred in a context where education budgets are being squeezed. Enrolment increases in higher grades need to be addressed through realigning progression rules to effective assessment practices. Furthermore, budget cuts should not preclude prioritising remediating losses, a task that requires much more than adjusting Annual Teaching Plans. The long-term human development losses for South Africa of doing nothing to remediate losses will be more severe than the short-to-medium term costs of effective intervention.

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