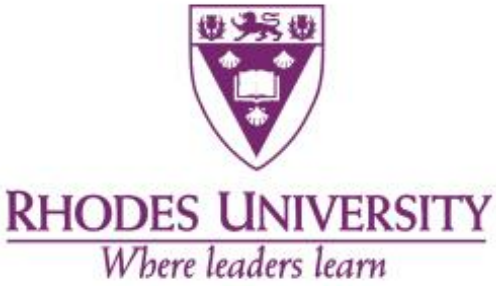

SETTING THE BASELINE

Foundational literacy in Kwanobuhle

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Abbreviations used

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance (a statistical test)
CAPS: Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (current curriculum for SA schools)
CSD: Centre for Social Development, Rhodes University
CSI: Corporate Social Investment
DBE: Department of Basic Education
EGRA: Early Grade Reading Assessment (a test)
EQ: Emotional Intelligence
FAL: First Additional Language (usually English, in this context)
HL: Home Language (usually isiXhosa, in this context)
HoD: Head of Department
ORF: Oral Reading Fluency (a measure of reading ability)
SE: socio-economic
VW: Volkswagen
VWCT: VW Community Trust
WCPM or wcpm: words correct per minute (units in which ORF is measured)

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Introduction and background

VW has a long history of Corporate Social Investment (CSI) in the Port Elizabeth area, specifically in education, through the VW Community Trust. Initially responses to the crisis faced by South African education since 1994, especially at institutions that VW workers' children attend, were at tertiary level in the form of university bursaries, and at high school level in the form of bursaries for Senior Certificate and Grade 8. This financial support yielded results on an individual basis, but not at a broader community level, which was anticipated by the VW Community Trust. The return on this investment in education has yet to be seen in people getting improved jobs so that they can sustain a better-quality life for themselves.

The emphasis has now shifted toward assessing and improving literacy in Foundation Phase, namely, Grade 3. The reason is that research reveals that the majority of learners in Foundation Phase cannot read by the time they complete Grade 3 (Fleisch, 2008). An investment in improving literacy acquisition at an early stage of a child's life provides an increased opportunity of academic success at school and in later life. The intervention itself has yet to be determined and will be squarely based on the findings of baseline data gathered on the state of foundational literacy in Grade 3, as well as an observation of classroom environments.

Foundational literacy

The ability to read is a fundamental skill that helps a child succeed in personal life, at school, in the workplace and in society at large (Mukherji & O'Dea, 2000). In fact, ability to read is the most important educational outcome of primary education. Furthermore, reading is a complex process that does not take place naturally like spoken language acquisition does. For adults, reading is something we take for granted; this is not the case for children, however.

A Vygotskian theoretical framework was chosen to underpin this research because Lev Vygotsky is widely recognized as a theorist who was concerned with learning as a social and liberating force (Cole, 1996; Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Hedegaard, 2001; Stetsenko, 2012). In the context of South Africa's relatively new democracy, it has been recognized that education is a force for change (Fleish, 2011). Vygotsky provides the researcher with an understanding of pedagogical practice that is particularly relevant to this research and the context of teaching and learning.

The Vygotskian approach to literacy instruction can be seen as a largely collaborative effort (Jennings & Di, 1996) whereby students take responsibility for their own learning and the teacher acts as a guide to facilitate the construction of knowledge. For this reason it is essential that the teacher create a classroom learning environment that allows for both independent and collaborative learning.

Michael Cole (2005) coined the term "tool" or "artefact" to describe how learning takes place within a socio-cultural context, as suggested by Vygotsky. Perhaps one of the most important cultural tools is that of our reading and writing systems which facilitate

new learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), cultural tools transform human mental abilities, enabling increased memory capacity, problem solving, emotional competency, increased attention span and organised thinking. A classic example of children using external tools to expand their higher mental functions, is that of a Foundation Phase learner sitting in a book corner and using a book to retell a story to a puppet sitting on the shelf (Harrison, 2014). By internalising the symbols and sounds of the alphabet, words from a word wall, and sentences in the story book, learners practice their reading skills, but the success of the internalization is dependent on a socially mediated context, such as a classroom.

Vygotsky (1978) described a number of stages in the child's development through the use of culturally mediated tools. The first step involves repeated exposure to that tool which, in our example, would be the print-rich environment of the classroom, encompassing a book corner, word wall, alphabet chart and thematic posters. The second stage is the opportunity to be scaffolded in learning through the support of the teacher or peers, and mediation of cultural tools such as a word wall. In the third stage, the learners may work independently to practise their new learning which, in this case, would be reading. In the book corner, the learner may choose a book which he can practise reading and retell the story to a puppet placed on the book shelf. Through the retelling process, the learner uses his own language and draws from existing knowledge to consolidate new learning. In this way, through the use of a print-rich environment, the learner is guided by the teacher and the tools/artefacts which provide opportunity to practise new skills and internalise new learning.

What do children need to learn in order to read?

According to Pretorius (2016), foundational literacy means that, "By the end of Grade 3, children must be able to read accurately, at a steady pace and with meaning and enjoyment." To do this, children need to be able to decode words.

Reading needs to be taught explicitly over a number of years for learners to become "fast, accurate and comprehending readers" (Pretorius & Mokhwesana, 2009). The two main components of reading were decoding and comprehension. Decoding refers to the ability to break words down into smaller units, e.g. syllables or letters, and understanding the relationship between the written letters and the spoken sounds of language, while comprehension means understanding the text as a whole. The ability to recognise letters of the alphabet and how they relate to the sounds of the language is called understanding the "alphabetic code." There is no way of bypassing the decoding step in the reading process. Children who were unable to "crack the code", will not be able to read fluently and with comprehension.

According to Konza (2011), children become fluent readers by practising their reading skills at their independent reading levels. The more they read, the more their reading skills "become automatized and the number of words they can read instantly on sight increases substantially". However, children who read very slowly, place so much energy and attention on decoding that they do not have the cognitive capacity to understand

what the text actually means. If the message is not transmitted to the brain within a certain timeframe, meaning is lost.

Thus, the developing brain needs time and practice to build up representations in each component and connect them automatically (Pretorius, 2016). Fluency and comprehension work symbiotically. It is only possible to read fluently if comprehension is happening concurrently. Similarly, if reading is not fluent, comprehension is compromised. By the end of Grade 3, decoding must be accurate and automatic. This is a necessary condition for comprehension.

Methodology

Research goal

One of the main aims of the Grade-3 baseline literacy assessments was to determine whether, by the third term of Grade 3, learners had foundational literacy skills in place that would stand them in good stead for when they made the transition to the Intermediate Phase in Grade 4. Grade 4 is an important transition period, where textbooks in the learning subjects become increasingly important, and success at school is closely associated with the ability to 'read to learn'.

Aims:

The main aims of this research are to:

1. provide a clear baseline of the reading level of learners at the end of Foundation Phase (i.e., in Grade 3) in seven schools in the Kwanobuhle area of Port Elizabeth, and
2. assess the literacy features of the Grade-3 classrooms which the learners occupy.

Research questions:

The questions which guided the research were:

- Are children in Grade 3 able to read accurately, at a steady pace and with meaning in their Home Language (isiXhosa)?
- Do their classrooms provide an enabling environment for literacy development?
- To what extent can learners recognize letter-sound relationships in isiXhosa?
- To what extent can children recognize words and read fluently in isiXhosa?
- To what extent can children understand what they have read in isiXhosa?
- In what ways does a print-rich environment influence a child's ability to read in isiXhosa?

Research methods

A mixed methods approach was adopted to conduct this research because mixed methods allow the researcher to:

- analyse a variety of data which strengthens the validity of conclusions;
- answer questions from a number of different perspectives;
- ensure that there are no gaps in data collection;

- analyse data such that, if one method does not provide answers, another method may assist (Creswell, 2003);
- analyse any pre-existing assumptions with a view to potentially refuting them.

On 18 July 2016, six researchers, drawn from CSD staff, were trained by Prof L. Pretorius in Grahamstown in how to conduct the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) Test with Grade-3 learners and fill in the Classroom Observation Tool. On 19 July 2016, a Stakeholder's Meeting was held in Kwanobuhle to inform the principals and the Grade-3 teachers about the purpose of the research, timeline for the research, the pre-intervention audit process, and to set dates for conducting the EGRA test and Classroom Observation in the schools.

The sample consisted of seven schools: five intervention schools and two control schools. The five intervention schools were targeted as future recipients of a VWCT sponsored intervention. The control schools had previously been recipients of VW-sponsored interventions. The latter specifically stated that they were happy to be part of the data collection process, but did not want to be part of any further intervention. A stratified sample of 12 Grade-3 learners was used for conducting the EGRA test: four learners with above average literacy skills, four learners with average skills and four learners with below average skills. The test took approximately 15 minutes, per learner, to administer. The CSD researchers worked in pairs because not all were fluent in isiXhosa. While the isiXhosa speaker administered the test, the other conducted the Classroom Observation tool and took photographs.

Participants

The assessment of literacy skills in the early years requires individual, one-on-one testing. This is time consuming, as only a limited number of learners can be tested in the course of a morning. Each school was asked to provide a stratified sample consisting of learners whom they regarded as the top four learners, middle four and bottom four, based on previous class assessments undertaken by their Grade-3 teachers. A total of 84 Grade-3 learners from the seven schools were assessed, that is, 12 from each school. The gender composition was 33 boys and 51 girls, and the average age of the learners was 8.68 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age and gender of the Grade-3 learners across schools.

Categories	Intervention schools	Control schools	Totals
Boys (n)	24	9	33
Girls (n)	36	15	51
8-9 years (n)	55	23	78
10-12+ years (n)	5	1	6
Mean age of Grade-3 learners (years)	8.68	8.54	8.64

Ethical measures

Before the researchers went to the schools, permission was received from the principals of the schools and the parents of all the learners were required to sign consent forms. A stakeholders meeting was held before the research commenced to provide a platform for discussion. Regarding photographs, the researchers were asked to take photographs at break time when the children were out of the classroom, or to only photograph the backs of learners. No teachers or staff were included in any photographic evidence. Pre-arranged times were determined with each participating school in order to accommodate the schools' programmes.

Assessment instruments

The Grade-3 baseline study involved assessment of four foundational literacy skills, viz. (1) knowledge of letter sounds, (2) the ability to read a list of familiar words, (3) the ability to read words in a connected passage with accuracy and fluency (referred to as Oral Reading Fluency, henceforth ORF), and (4) ability to answer some oral comprehension questions, to determine whether the learners understood what they had read.

The literacy assessment was based on the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) instrument. The EGRA test was used because it is reliable and well-known and has been translated into isiXhosa. It has been applied in more than 40 countries and in most languages. The original instrument was adapted to accommodate the Grade-3 learners in this research. For example, the original ORF passage was more appropriate for Grade-1 learners, so it was replaced with a passage taken from an isiXhosa reader widely used in South African Grade-2 and -3 classes.

Assessment of the first three skills involve **timed tests**, in which learners were given a minute in which to perform each task. The reason for this was to determine to what extent the early foundational skills had become automatized. When children first learn to read, they do so slowly and haltingly, and attentional capacity 'uses up' working memory. The more familiar they become with the written code, and the more practised they get, the more accurate and faster their reading becomes. This enables their working

memory to be 'freed up' during reading so that they can pay attention to comprehension (LaBerge & Samuels 1974; Stanovich 1986, 2000). If readers spend too much time trying to figure out how to decode words, their working memory is too preoccupied with decoding and so comprehension is compromised.

A Classroom Observation Tool was designed for the purpose of the baseline study, using a Likert Scale of 1-5 to assess seven aspects of the classroom, with a view to gauging the level of print-richness.

Data analysis

In this research, data was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Data were collected and analysed from the EGRA tests, Classroom Observation Tool and photographs.

Each school was assigned a colour and number and each learner a number. The control schools were Schools 4 (Red) and 5 (Purple) which had previously had interventions. The other schools were those that had been identified as subjects for intervention in 2017, and will henceforth be referred to as the intervention schools.

The quantitative results of the study are presented first, followed by the qualitative findings (below). Thereafter a general discussion of the findings of the study is given, followed by recommendations.

Results: quantitative component: literacy assessments

In the sections below, the results of the basic literacy assessments are given in terms of overall mean differences between the intervention and control schools, and according to gender and age differences across the schools. Also given are the percentages of non-readers in each school and across the sample.

Four basic measures of literacy assessment

The performance scores of the Grade-3 learners in the four components of literacy that were assessed are presented in terms of means and standard deviations (Table 2). The means reflect raw scores. A composite score, derived from the four components of the test, is given in the final column, to show the mean performance of the schools relative to each other. This composite score is a convenient index to rank the schools' performance.

Table 2: Mean performance on literacy measures across schools.

Schools	Letter-sound knowledge (110)	Word reading (50)	Oral Reading Fluency (wcpm)	Oral reading comprehension (5)	Composite score
Mean, all schools (SD)	59.40 (7.70)	31.98 (5.29)	24.10 (5.25)	1.90 (0.39)	
School 1 (Orange)	64.33	31.33	25.33	1.67	122
School 2 (Blue)	62.83	30.67	24.92	2.25	119
School 3 (Green)	59.92	38.75	28.92	2.42	129
School 4 (Red)	71.92	39.17	27.42	2.25	140
School 5 (Purple)	51.83	31.58	24	1.75	109
School 6 (Pink)	54.75	26.58	19.92	1.58	101
School 7 (Yellow)	50.25	26.75	14	1.42	92

There was considerable variance in performance across the schools (Table 2). In terms of ability to identify letter-sounds fluently, only learners in School 4 (Red) performed well in this. Learners in Schools 5 (Purple), 6 (Pink) and 7 (Yellow) were slower and less accurate in this domain. Given that these were Grade-3 learners, mastery in this domain should have been achieved by this stage of Foundation Phase, but this was not evident in the results. Although letter-sound knowledge per se does not guarantee fluent reading, not knowing letter-sound relationships makes decoding extremely challenging. The ability to read words fast and accurately, both out of context (e.g., words standing on their own) or in context (e.g., in a passage) as reflected in the ORF score, was generally quite low for Grade-3 learners, with means not exceeding 28 wcpm. The composite scores showed that School 4 (Red) outperformed the others, followed by School 3 (Green). Schools 5 (Purple), 6 (Pink) and 7 (Yellow) were the weakest. The difference between the highest composite score of 140 (School 4, Red) and the lowest composite score of 92 (School 7, Yellow) was 48, or 52% relative to the low score. This can be regarded as a relatively large difference between schools of comparable socio-economic status, which raises interesting and relevant questions with regard to the learning environments at the schools.

One might have expected that the best performing schools would have been Schools 4 (Red) and 5 (Purple) because these were the control schools that had previously had literacy interventions. While School 4 (Red) was indeed the best performing school overall, School 5 (Purple) was ranked fifth out of seven, which can be viewed as a disappointing outcome.

We now look at the performance of the schools more closely in terms of ORF scores, as these are a relatively sensitive quantifiable index of foundational literacy.

Analysis of ORF across all seven schools

The average number of words read correctly per minute (wcpm/WCPM) across all schools was 23.7 wcpm, which is extremely slow reading (Figure 1). Note that this is the reading speed one expects of Grade-1 learners. The weakest schools in terms of ORF scores were Schools 6 (Pink) and 7 (Yellow) which were significantly below the overall mean, especially School 7 (Yellow) at 14.5 wcpm (Figure 1).

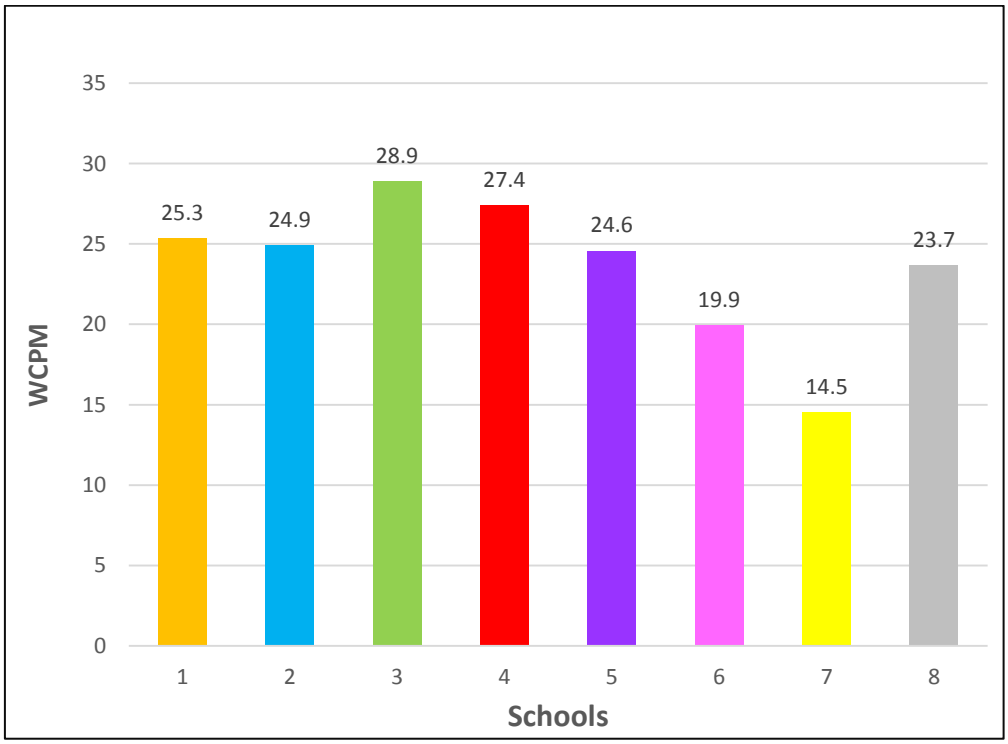

Figure 1: Mean ORF scores per school. "School 8" is the overall mean of the seven schools.

The box-and-whisker plots below show the range of ORF performance more clearly. The black line in the box represents the median score, while the lower and upper limits of the box represent the performance of learners at the 25th and 75th percentile respectively (i.e., the weaker and stronger learners in the group). The 'whiskers' show minimum and maximum performance and identify the outliers. Seeing the variation in ORF in these plots facilitates commentary on learner performance in relation to potential support and pedagogy. There were two learners in the cohort who managed to read the ORF passage of 56 words in one minute, and six learners who managed to read more than 41 wcpm (41-47 wcpm), which indicated that such reading rates are possible in isiXhosa in Grade 3. In four of the schools, learners read slowly, below 30 wcpm.

The medians were comparable across all seven schools. The long whiskers for most schools suggested that there were many outliers in the data (many very small or very large data points). In School 2 (Blue), student results did not vary much. The data in School 7 (Yellow) was skewed, having a median closer to the weakest readers in the other schools. The median (midpoint) was larger than the mean (average), which implies that there were more small values than large values in our sample. All in all, the box and whisker plots had similar shapes, which may imply that there is no particular school effect with regards to the ORF results.

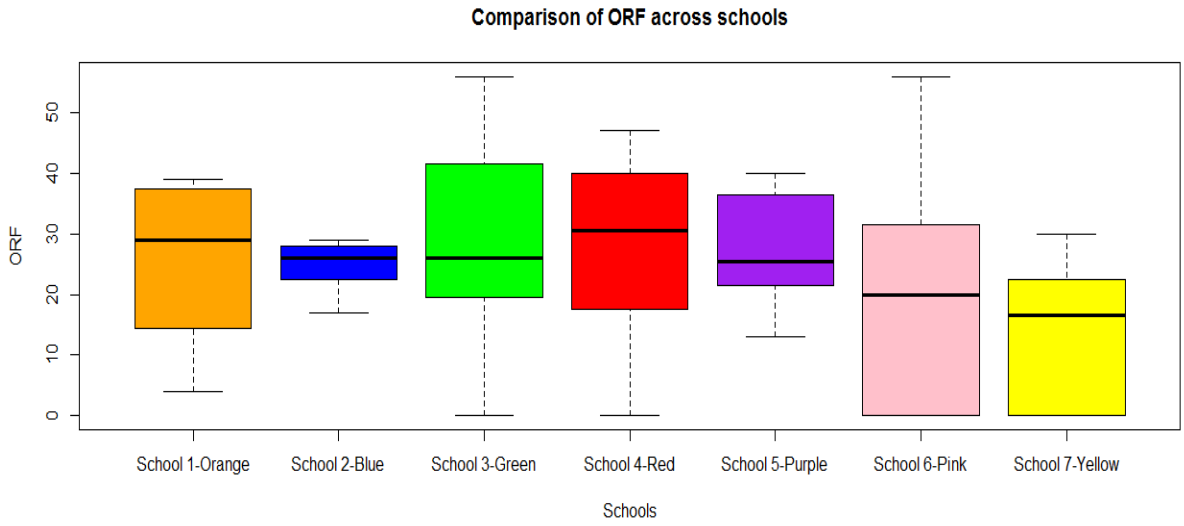

Figure 2: Comparison of ORF across schools.

As a final step in the analysis of the ORF data, an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) was used to test for significant differences in ORF between schools (Cornish, 2006). The data were divided into seven strata, represented by the seven schools, with learner results in seven non-overlapping groups. The samples drawn from each stratum were of equal size (n=12), giving a total of 84 observations in the data set (Table 3).

Table 3: ANOVA results for differences in ORF between the schools.[1]

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	30.3920	11.7637	2.584	0.01197*
School 1 (Orange)	-0.5694	3.1287	-0.182	0.85614
School 3 (Green)	2.6361	4.7996	0.549	0.58466
School 4 (Red)	0.6662	4.5035	0.148	0.88285
School 5 (Purple)	2.4839	3.7080	0.670	0.50523
School 6 (Pink)	-5.9630	4.5391	-1.314	0.19343
School 7 (Yellow)	-12.6848	3.0419	-4.170	8.94e-05***

The school coefficient was not significantly different from zero in predicting the ORF score, except for School 7 (Yellow), whose ORF results were much lower and differed significantly from the others (Table 3). In other words, despite the apparent differences in ORF between schools (Table 2, Figure 1), there was more ORF variation *within*

[1] Six school outputs were compared against School 2 (Blue), hence School 2 is not shown in this table. For example, School 3 (Green) was estimated on average to increase the output score two times more than the School 2, and School 7 (Yellow) was estimated to decrease the output score 12 times more than the School 2. Key to probability levels: *: p<0.05 or 5%; **: p<0.01 or 1%; ***: p<0.01 or 0.1%

schools than there was between schools, indicating that no school produced more fluent readers than the other schools.

Gender and age differences across the schools

Table 4: Mean performance on literacy measures across gender and age.

Gender differences	Letter-sound mean	Word reading	ORF	Oral Reading comprehension
Boys	57.8	29.91	20.09	1.6
Girls	60.39	33.31	26.69	2.1
Age differences				
8-9 yrs	59.06	32.12	24.08	1.9
10-12+ yrs	63.83	30.17	24.33	1.7

The results showed that girls performed better than boys across the different literacy items (Table 4). While ORF scores in both genders appear normally distributed, the girls out-performed the boys, as evidenced by a higher median and longer upper whisker (Figure 3). The boys reading at the 75th percentile were more or less at the median of the girl readers (Figure 3).

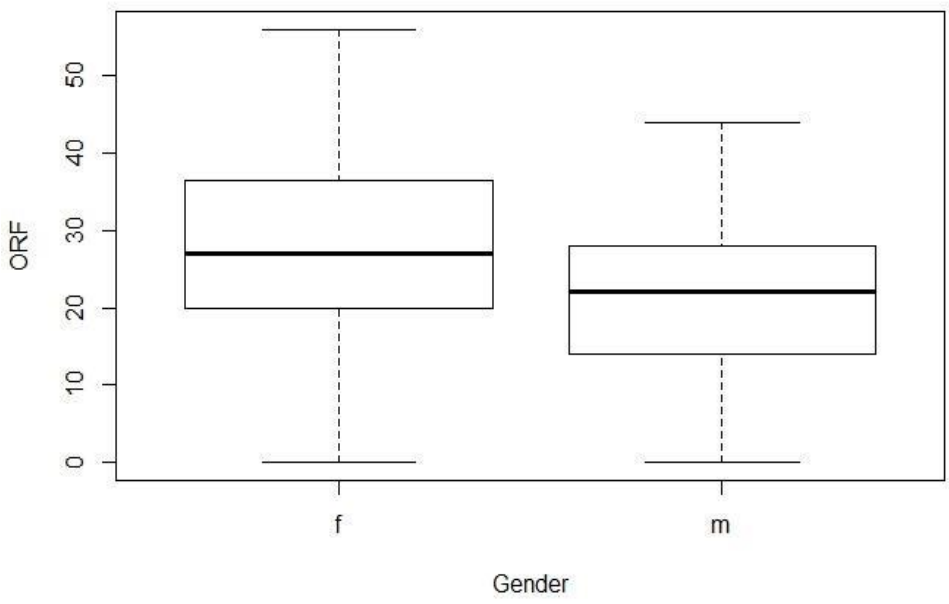

Figure 3: Box plot of ORF across gender.

These gender differences were significant at the $p<0.05$ level (Table 5). Age in this cohort was not a statistically significant factor (Table 5). Although the older learners performed slightly better on letter-sound fluency, their performance was weaker for word reading and ORF (Table 4). Repeating another year in Foundation Phase does not seem to have made a difference to their overall literacy development. Given the small sample size of older children, strong conclusions are not possible.

Table 5: ANOVA results for differences in gender and age between the schools.[2]

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	30.3920	11.7637	2.584	0.01197*
Age	0.2765	1.3454	0.205	0.83781
Gender	-5.9162	2.8489	-2.077	0.04167*

Non-readers across the schools

Another way of examining the data is to see how many non-readers there were in each school. English is the most widely researched language in terms of reading, and developmental norms for HL English readers have been established. They indicate that learners who cannot read connected text at 40 wcpm by the end of Grade 1 are vulnerable readers in need of special attention. Furthermore, readers who perform at <25% in comprehension are regarded as non-readers.

ORF norms in African languages would be different, given the agglutinating nature of African languages. Even though such norms have not yet been established for African languages, initial research in this field suggests that Grade-1 readers can read at 20-25 wcpm in the Nguni languages (e.g., isiXhosa and isiZulu). Reading below 20 wcpm in a Nguni language in Foundation Phase indicates vulnerable readers, that is, learners who have not yet mastered the basics of reading and can be regarded as non-readers. Using 20 wcpm as a benchmark in isiXhosa, there were relatively large proportions of non-readers at each school (Table 3). It is disturbing how high the number of non-readers was across the schools, and particularly at Schools 1 (Orange), 6 (Pink) and 7 (Yellow). Although School 2 (Blue) had relatively few non-readers (16.6%), the overall mean at the school was still extremely low, indicating that the schools are not producing learners who are reading at optimal levels by the time they are in Grade 3. The schools targeted for intervention in this baseline study have a high number of non-readers in each sample, and are clearly in need of instructional support.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that in this small study, class size did not seem to have a direct bearing on literacy performance. School 7 (Yellow) performed the worst with a mean ORF of only 14.5 wcpm and 58% of non-readers, yet it had the smallest number of children in the class (32) (Table 6). This suggests that the potential benefits of smaller classes are cancelled when early reading instruction is badly taught.

[2] Key to probability levels: *: p<0.05 or 5%; **: p<0.01 or 1%; ***: p<0.01 or 0.1%

Table 6: Mean ORF and non-readers across schools.

School	Mean ORF (wcpm)	Percentage of non-readers in sample	Class size
School 1 (Orange)	25.3	41.6	53
School 2 (Blue)	24.9	16.6	39
School 3 (Green)	28.9	16.7	45
School 4 (Red, control)	27.4	38.3	41
School 5 (Purple, control)	24.4	41.7	36
School 6 (Pink)	19.9	50.0	55
School 7 (Yellow)	14.5	58.3	32

Results: qualitative findings: classroom observations

We turn now to the qualitative findings of the study to see what they revealed about some of the enabling conditions provided at each school, and how these outcomes might inform our understanding of the quantitative results obtained (above). The findings herein are presented using a selection of data drawn from the classroom observation tool, with the criteria for the selection grounded in what is considered appropriate to establish a classroom environment that is conducive to foundational literacy.

The reading corner

It is widely considered important to stimulate a love of reading by providing regular opportunities for learners to read, both in classroom time through the formal reading exercises and as an informal activity by means of a reading corner where learners may access reading matter once they have completed set tasks (Roskos & Neuman, 2011; Mignano & Weinstein, 2007; Martin, Lovat & Purnell, 2004). How the reading corner is set up, whether books are changed on a regular basis, whether themes of reading matter are made available and where the book corner is placed in terms of accessibility, are all considered important for nurturing a love of reading in the Foundation Phase learner. The observation tool that was used to assess the classroom environment, placed some emphasis on these aspects.

An 'inviting/attractive' book corner should have the following elements:

- A mat/carpet to allow a learner to sit at floor level;
- Large cushions to allow the learner to sit comfortably on the floor;
- Small chairs to allow the learner to sit comfortably while handling a book;
- Age appropriate books to ensure that the reading material is accessible;
- Books in HL (isiXhosa in this case), to allow learners to relate to what is being read and to meet curriculum requirements;

- Books in FAL (English in this case) to support the development of a second language;
- A bookcase/shelves to display the books to ensure accessibility and to make them more inviting, facilitating selection of something of interest;
- A poster about the handling of books to promote appropriate care of reading materials;
- Other items, such as puppets or soft toys, which supplement reading and invite story-telling. This leads to development of language with learners practising story-telling and reading with, for example, a teddy as an audience.

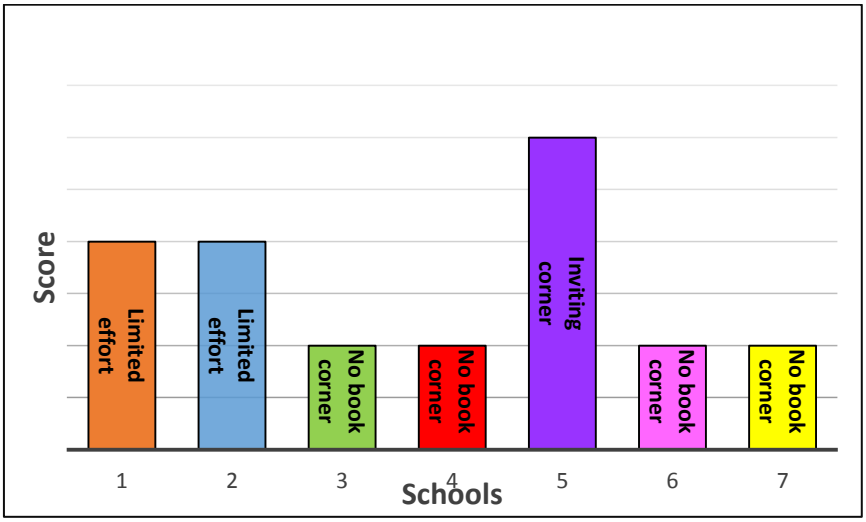

Figure 4: Reading corners: quality across seven schools.

One school, School 5 (Purple, control), was prominent in the quality of their book corner (Figure 4). Four of the seven schools did not have a book corner and two had a sub-standard book corner. Qualitative analysis of the researcher's reports noted that 'no timetabling of reading was evident in the teachers' lesson plans' and 'no child was seen to be reading during class time'.

Photographic evidence showed that book corners were not considered a priority in the classrooms. Most classes had sufficient space to set up a corner or to create a designated space for reading. School 5 (Purple) had the most appropriate book corner in that the books were neatly arranged; there was a variety of books available in different languages and there was an attempt at displaying the books, but it did still require some improvement (Figure 5). The books were not thematically arranged, there were no supplementary resources to invite the reader and there were no soft cushions or chairs to support the reader in sitting in the book corner. However, the teacher had adapted her space to meet the need for a book corner despite limited space in her classroom – there were 36 learners. None of the seven schools had cushions or chairs available for learners to sit on in the reading corners.

Figure 5: School 5 (Purple) book corner. The book shelves were part of a cupboard.

In School 2 (Blue), it was evident that the teacher had misunderstood the purpose of a book corner and had simply created a table for the storage of the learner's work books (Figure 6). This would not facilitate reading. The books were mainly graded readers with no alternative books that might entice the learner to pick up a book and read. There were no cushions or chairs or mat for the learners to sit in the book corner and comfortably select a book to practise their reading.

Figure 6: A book corner labelled in isiXhosa but not English.

It is interesting to note that the schools that had no book corner had somewhat chaotic classroom environments with resources poorly stored, untidy teacher desks and a general sense that the spaces for learning were unimportant (Figures 7-9).

Figure 7: A chaotic piles of learner's books, boxes and papers.

Figure 8: Learners' books jumbled together with boxes, drinking utensils and paper.

Figure 9: It is questionable whether these objects belong in a classroom.

Word walls

Word walls are a key aspect of literacy instruction according to the CAPS curriculum (2011) and should be designed to allow the learners to draw from their existing knowledge by putting up words that they already know, learning from one another by sharing words that they know as a collective group and adding to learners' knowledge by constantly updating the wall with new words that come up from reading and writing exercises, or other lessons. Word walls should be regularly updated in the course of a two-week teaching cycle.

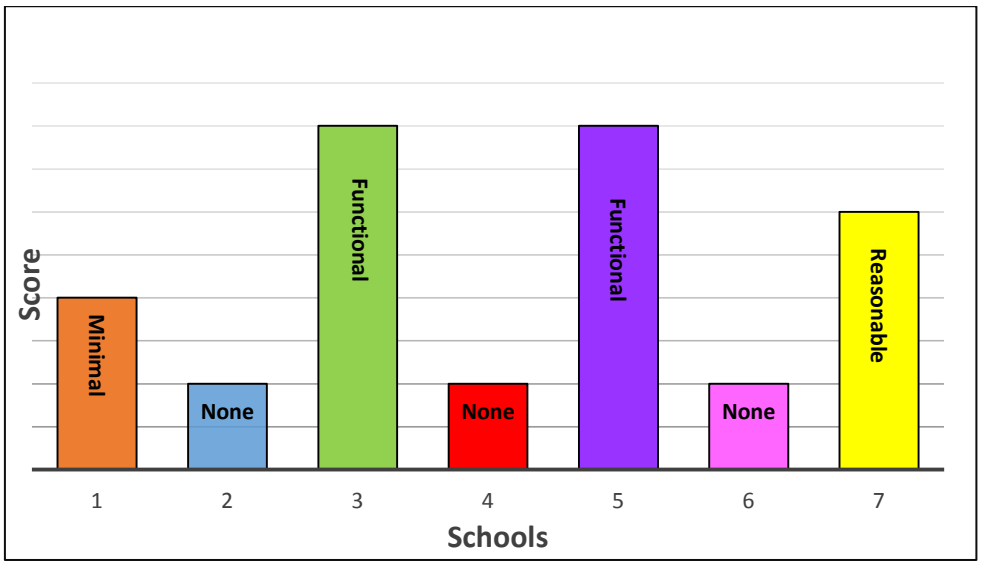

Figure 10: Word walls, in isiXhosa, across seven schools.

Only two of the seven schools had a functional word wall [3] (School 5, Purple, and School 3, Green; Figure 10). School 3 (Green) performed above average in ORF. School 5 (Purple), which was also a control school, was within average results. School 7 (Yellow) showed some usage while School 1 (Orange) had minimal usage. Three schools showed no use at all (2 Blue, 4 Red, and 6 Pink).

Figure 11: School 3 (Green): word wall.

School 3 (Green) had a functional word wall in that there were lists of words that the learners had encountered in their literacy work and were written by hand in isiXhosa (Figure 11). The problems were that the words were not big enough for all learners to be

[3] By this it is meant that there was evidence that the wall was being actively used.

able to copy them from any area of the classroom, the background was unattractive because the wall was peeling and there were no icons or anything that would either invite the learner to look at the words or assist them in decoding the words.

Although the teacher has taken the time to put together lists of words, thereby making it possible to some extent for learners to make use of this visual dictionary to assist with their reading and writing, this would only happen if the teacher actively directed their attention to the word wall and had activities that required the learners to engage with it. The qualitative comments by the field researchers stated that the classroom was not print rich, had no birthday charts, number chart, weather chart, class rules or alphabet chart. In addition, this classroom had no book corner. The teacher did, however, have a weekly planning file which many of the other teachers in the sampled schools, did not have.

Figure 12: School 1 (Orange): note the size and position of the word wall.

A different model of a word wall was found in School 1 (Orange) (Figure 12). Here the teacher appeared to have a written text with some words that had been extracted to highlight the spelling and to support FAL. Given that this class teacher had 53 learners in the class, it was essential for the word wall to be placed so as to enable as many learners as possible to access the print. In addition, the print needed to be clear and large. This word wall was positioned at the front of the class which may have made it visible to some of the learners (certainly not all of them), but the size of the print and the informal style of writing could have affected how well the learners engaged with this word wall. It was noted by the field researcher that there were random words dotted around the classroom, without any connection to either a picture or a theme. She additionally noted that she did not see any reading or writing taking place, either in the planned activities or during the observed session.

Figure 13: School 5 (Purple): a print-rich environment with labelling.

School 5 (Purple) had a variety of labelling on the walls, including visual icons and labels on the word wall (Figure 13). However, there was limited accommodation for the addition of words that the learners could pick or generate. Labelling was in both English and isiXhosa. The teacher had made use of a variety of posters and friezes to provide a stimulating print-rich environment for the learners.

Figure 14: School 7 (Yellow): high position of the word wall.

In School 7 (Yellow), there was an attempt at a word wall and use of icons to support the words (Figure 14). The placement of the word wall, however, was problematic as it was too high for the learners to easily access the words or add new words. The words were in isiXhosa and appeared to be grouped in themes. This classroom was considered by the field researchers to be lacking in stimulating posters and the organisation of the resources was chaotic (Figure 14).

Alphabet charts

The use of an alphabet chart is particularly important in schools where learners are grappling with more than one language. It provides starting blocks for learning to read and write, when there are alphabet charts for both English and isiXhosa. The learner has the opportunity to compare languages and the presence of an icon next to each letter assists the learner to make the necessary sound-shape connections. Although the learners in the sampled classes were all from Grade 3, their EGRA tests showed that there was a deficit in their understanding of basic letter sounds and shapes. Consequently, alphabet charts would be considered a priority.

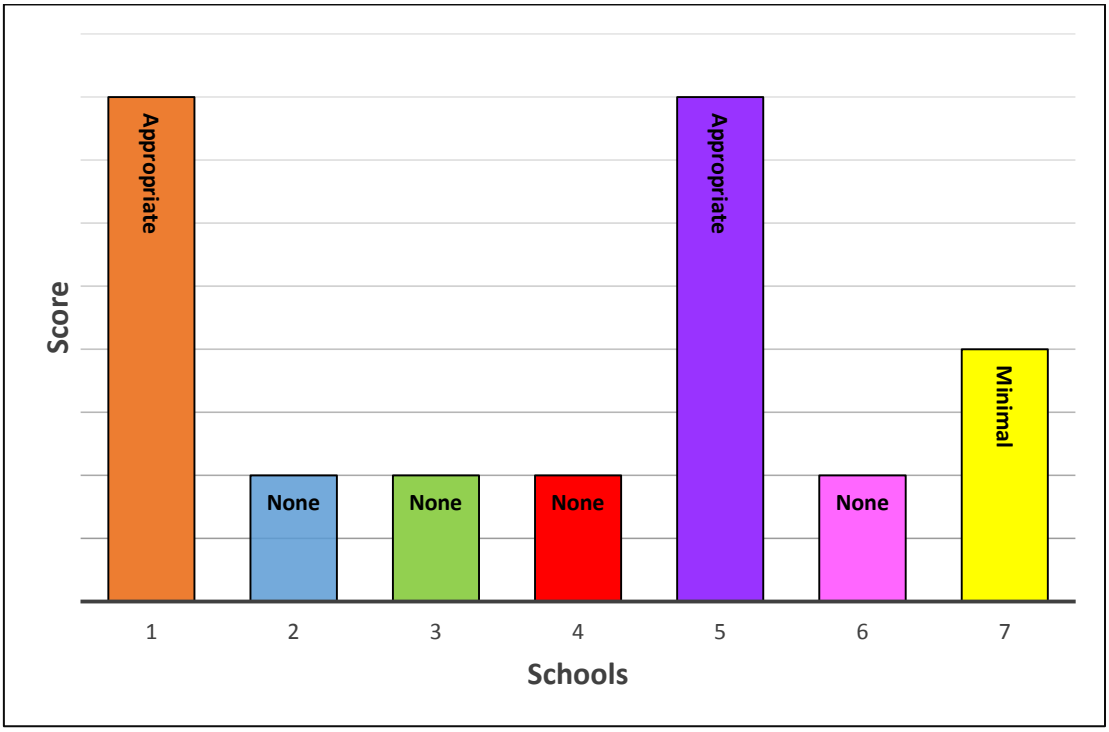

Figure 15: Comparative analysis of alphabet charts, in isiXhosa and/or English, across seven schools.

Schools 1 (Orange, intervention) and 5 (Purple, control) scored the highest in having appropriate alphabet charts (Figure 15). This included a chart in isiXhosa and in English, with icons for each. In the photographic evidence (below) it was clear that the posters were generally poorly displayed with curled edges and tears. In addition, the posters were generally not grouped thematically to facilitate learning.

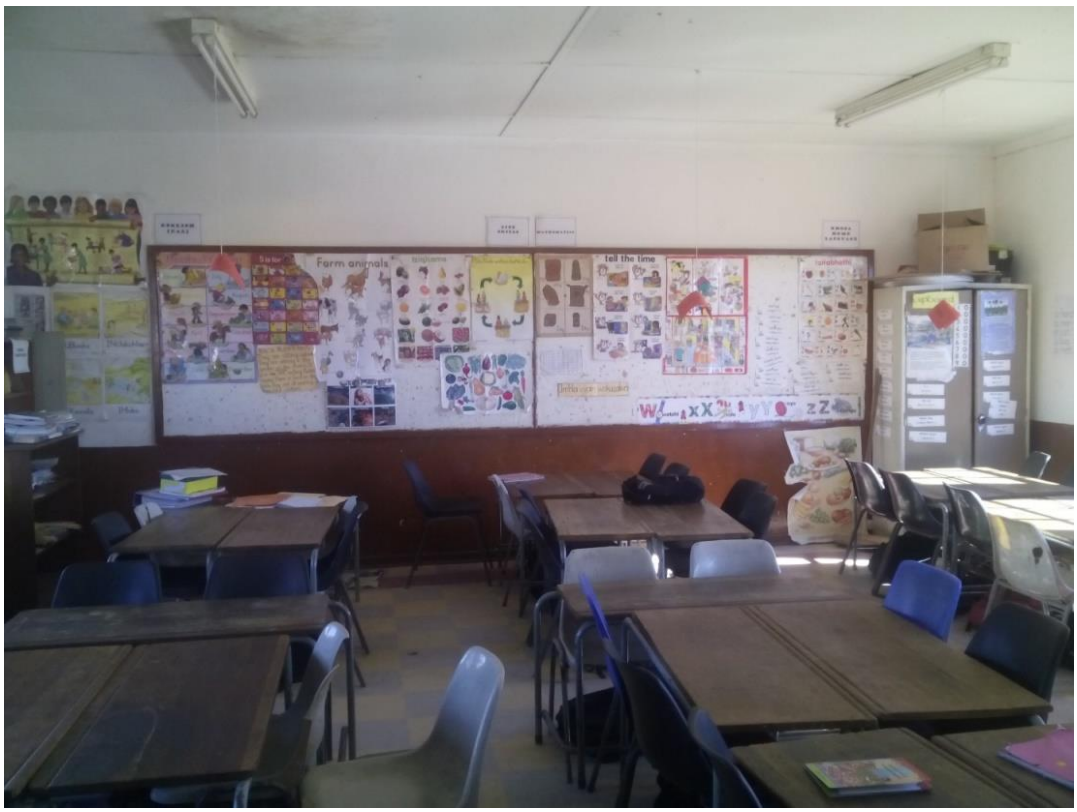

Figure 16: School 1 (Orange): a variety of alphabet posters not grouped together and inadequately displayed.

Figure 17: School 5 (Purple): isiXhosa alphabet chart displayed at the top of the wall.

In School 5 (Purple) the classroom was generally print-rich and both types of alphabet were displayed, including icons. Alphabet charts should be placed at a level that makes

them accessible to learners. However, they are often placed above or below blackboards in Foundation Phase classrooms.

Figure 18: School 7 (Yellow): high display of partial isiXhosa alphabet, but no English alphabet.

In School 7 (Yellow) the alphabet was in mother-tongue and was displayed above the black board. It was placed high up, was incomplete and in black and white, making it less effective because it was not visually appealing, neither did it make all the letters available to the learners.

Cross-cutting analysis

This section deals with an analysis which combined the two types of data, namely the classroom observation tool and ORF test data. (The ORF test was regarded as representative of overall foundational literacy.)

Using regression analysis, a linear model was fitted to the data. The results gave us estimates of the coefficients and their standard errors and p-values (Table 7). The linear model revealed that Age, Reading Corner and Learner Desks were the only factors that tended to increase with increasing ORF scores, but the Age effect was not statistically significant. Females performed significantly better than Males in the ORF test, and students in the A-rated group significantly out-performed students in the C-rated, but not the B-rated group.

The analysis showed that a reading corner was significantly correlated with an increase in ORF scores, but also implied that having a print-rich environment, resources, and a

good classroom environment (other than learner desks and a reading corner) tended to correlate with a decrease in ORF score. (This anomaly is taken up again in the Discussion section, below.)

Table 7: Results from fitting a linear model to the quantitative and qualitative data.[4]

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	891.9946	335.8979	2.656	0.00988**
Age	0.2765	1.3454	0.205	0.83781
Gender male	-5.9162	2.8489	-2.077	0.04167*
Rating B	-1.7628	2.9590	-0.596	0.55336
Rating C	-11.5673	2.8324	-4.084	0.00012***
Print-rich environment	-14.6458	5.6498	-2.592	0.01169*
Reading corner	93.4143	34.8638	2.679	0.00927**
Resources	-15.4545	6.0139	-2.570	0.01241*
Classroom environment	-34.6595	13.0205	-2.662	0.00972**
Learner desks	103.5559	38.4490	2.693	0.00893**
Theme table	-246.8111	91.6525	-2.693	0.00894**

Discussion

It is important to launch children on successful reading trajectories from the start of schooling. If children get off to a slow or uncertain start it becomes difficult for them to catch up later. A faltering initial reading trajectory creates cracks in literacy development which "in time become gaps, and finally...chasms in learning" (Johnson, 2012).

All seven schools in this baseline study were non-fee paying Quintile 1-3 schools (the poorest schools in South Africa) that serve children from communities at a low socio-economic level. Because it is unlikely that children from disadvantaged communities will have rich exposure to and experiences of print-based material and literacy activities in the home, it is even more important that schools in these communities have a strong orientation toward learners' literacy development from the very start of schooling. Exposure to print-based material, explicit instruction in how the alphabetic code works, and the provision of plenty of opportunities to engage in meaningful literacy activities are important conditions for early reading development.

Given the time constraints of this baseline study, attention was focused on two main areas, namely (1) an assessment of the isiXhosa literacy levels of a sample of 84 Grade-3 learners from seven schools in Kwanobuhle, and (2) 'snapshot' assessments of the classroom environments from which the sample was drawn. Informal observations were made of actual teacher literacy practices through the use of a classroom observation tool. This allowed for inferences about classroom literacy practices, and to relate them to the outcomes of the literacy assessments and the classroom snapshots.

Two main findings emerged from this study. Firstly, the outcomes of the quantitative literacy assessment indicated low literacy levels among the sample of 84 Grade-3

[4] Note that ORF data, female gender and Rating A were the bases for comparison, therefore they are not included in this table. (Key to probability levels: *: p<0.05 or 5%; **: p<0.01 or 1%; ***: p<0.01 or 0.1%)

learners tested, suggesting that the learners were not being launched on a strong reading trajectory in the Foundation Phase. Secondly, the outcomes of the qualitative classroom assessments were indicative of classrooms which, on the whole, while not totally print deprived, were not print rich. The print-based resources were not always well organised and managed, some classrooms showed chaotic, disorganised print resources, and several classrooms did not provide enticing, stimulating environments that could enhance and support. Although some of the classrooms did show evidence that teachers were trying to create print-rich environments, their potential impact on reading development was not yet in evidence.

Getting reading right from the start

The two main components of reading are decoding and comprehension. Comprehension is what reading is all about, but comprehension is seriously compromised if decoding skills are not well established. If learners are not familiar with the alphabetic principle (i.e., the knowledge that letters represent sounds in written language) and have not developed a certain level of automaticity (i.e., fluency and accuracy in decoding), then they struggle to understand what they read. Decoding thus forms a necessary, but not sufficient, part of comprehension.

Knowledge of letter-sounds, the ability to read words fluently and accurately out of context, and the ability to read words fluently and accurately in the context of a passage (ORF) are skills that underpin decoding ability. Knowledge of letter-sounds and word reading ability correlate strongly with ORF, and ORF in turns correlates with reading comprehension and is a bridge to comprehension.

Knowledge of **letter-sounds** (phonics) should be taught early in Foundation Phase, especially in Grade 1, as this forms the basis of decoding in an alphabetic language. This should be taught explicitly and mastery should be demonstrated early. Although mastery of letter-sounds does not guarantee fluent word reading, without such knowledge word reading is very difficult. Only learners in School 4 (Red) *approximated* mastery in this area. The schools whose learners performed weakest in this area were also schools whose learners performed poorly in ORF, indicating the knock-on effect of how early cracks in literacy knowledge lead to gaps.

Takeaway 1: *Phonics should be explicitly and systematically taught in Foundation Phase to develop knowledge of letter-sounds, and teachers should be shown how to do this effectively. Although phonics is important, it should not dominate classroom practice. At least 15 minutes of explicit phonics instruction should be done per day, as recommended by CAPS. Mastery of letter-sounds should be clearly demonstrated by the end of Grade 1.*

Although there is a strong relationship between **single-word reading** ability and ORF, readers who struggle tend to find it easier to read words in isolation (out of context) than they do in the context of connected text. The two schools (3, Green and 4, Red) which had relatively high ORF means, were also schools whose learners performed better on

letter-sounds and single word reading. If classroom activities mainly involve children reading words or single sentences from the chalkboard in whole class chorusing and provide few opportunities for meaningful reading practice, then learners are unlikely to develop strong word-reading skills.

Takeaway 2: *Teachers should be aware of the different sub-skills that contribute to decoding fluency and ensure fluency and accuracy in word reading, in and out of context. Practice opportunities should be maximised through a variety of activities, for example, the use of flashcards, word walls, writing supporting reading, shared reading, group guided reading, paired reading and silent independent reading. The meaning of words that children read should also be emphasised, so that vocabulary knowledge is built in tandem with reading.*

ORF is a good indicator of decoding skill. Decoding is a perceptual process where speed matters. The faster the process can be executed, the more efficiently it links incoming information with what is in working memory. Developing automaticity in decoding (i.e., reading fast and accurately) is critical for reading as it frees up working memory, which then enables the reader to pay attention to comprehension while reading. Novice and weak readers expend a lot of cognitive capacity and attention on trying to decode words, and this slows down reading pace and compromises comprehension. The slow ORF pace of the Grade-3 learners in this study is cause for concern. Although norms for ORF in the Nguni languages, with their conjunctive orthography, have not yet been established, but early findings suggest that Grade-1 isiXhosa readers can and should read at 22-28 wcpm, and that by Grade-3 learners should be reading at least 38-45 wcpm. The NEEDU (2013) report on Foundation Phase literacy in South Africa, recommends that learners be reading at 70 wcpm by the end of Grade 3. Yet the majority of learners in this study were reading under 30 wcpm, and only 9% could read at 40 wcpm or more. The early cracks in learners' literacy development can turn into gaps by Grade 3 if learners read slowly and haltingly.

Takeaway 3: *Teachers need to be aware of the importance of fluency in reading, how to promote it and assess it, so that they can explicitly support their learners' ORF development. Providing daily opportunities for learners to practise reading extended text is important, e.g. in group guided, paired and Independent reading. Being made aware of expected reading rates for early grades in isiXhosa will also help teachers achieve these goals.*

The relationship between the classroom environment and literacy performance

The cross-cutting analysis revealed two seemingly contradictory findings (see Table 7, above). On the one hand, there was a positive relationship between having access to a reading corner in a classroom and ORF scores, while on the other hand a classroom environment with more print-based resources appeared to be correlated with a decrease in learner performance in ORF. School 4 (Red), which was generally print poor, had the highest composite score, while School 5 (Purple) scored highest in terms of print

richness, but had the third poorest ORF scores. This seeming contradiction points to the complexity of early reading instruction. It is not being suggested here that having a print-rich environment and making use of resources is an unnecessary or negative exercise, but rather that teachers need to actively engage learners with print and books and build this into their planning and pedagogy in order for the resources to pay dividends and build learners' literacy. The majority (91%) of learners in the baseline study were reading at levels more appropriate to Grade 1 than Grade 3, irrespective of how the classrooms looked.

The availability of a reading corner was shown to be a factor correlated with increased performance on the ORF test when cross-cutting analyses were undertaken. However, the quality of book corners and availability of the latter was highly problematic in this research sample. Qualitative analysis of field researcher data and photographs evidenced that none of the seven schools had enticing book corners, neither were there cushions or chairs available for learners to sit on in the reading corner. This would suggest that there may be issues linked to availability of space and or teacher attitude towards the importance of a book corner in promoting foundational literacy. For example, it was noted in School 2 (Blue) that, although the book corner was rudimentary, the teacher had made some handmade books in isiXhosa, but most of the space used was for storing work books as opposed to inviting the reading of books for pleasure purposes. This would suggest that the teacher did not consider the book corner to be important or she did not understand the purpose of a book corner. It is clear that when teachers are trained they need to be made aware of how important a book corner is and how to set up such a space in their learning environment. It is interesting to note that the schools that had no book corner also showed concomitant signs of a chaotic classroom environment, with resources poorly stored, untidy teacher desks and a general sense that the spaces for learning were unimportant.

Likewise, the presence and quality of word walls were varied across the seven schools. All too frequently Foundation Phase teachers might have a word wall, but this is rarely added to and often simply contains the learners' names which are placed on the wall at the beginning of the year, but then never updated or engaged with as a teaching tool (Harrison, 2014). This means that the learner is not getting the full benefit of the word wall. Some word walls were in inappropriate places where the learners could not see or engage with them properly.

Takeaway 4: *Teachers need to be made aware of the link between exposure and accessibility to literacy resources and literacy development. Helping teachers build print-rich classrooms is an important way of enhancing literacy development, especially for children from low SE backgrounds. However, it is important to also show teachers how to manage their print resources and integrate them into daily classroom practice in ways that will impact literacy development.*

Classroom environments

The outcomes of the classroom assessments show that, while some effort was made to make classrooms more print-rich, especially in some schools (e.g., School 5, Purple), there was still much room for improvement across all the schools. Improving the print-richness of classrooms needs to happen on two levels: the *structural* and the *functional.*

The **structural** refers to the sheer physical presence of books, posters, friezes, labels, word walls, etc. This is the more quantitative aspect of creating a print-rich classroom, where amount of 'richness' matters. There should be plenty of different written things to read in the classroom on a regular basis. This is especially important when children come from homes which are print poor. However, teachers need to know how to display these in optimal ways where young children will best notice them and benefit from them. They also need to update the print-based material regularly to reflect what is being taught in the classroom, and they need to store and manage their resources effectively.

The *functional* refers to *how* the print-based material is valued and used. This is the more qualitative aspect of creating a print-rich environment that moves teachers beyond 'window-dressing' their classrooms. Simply putting things up on the walls to make the classroom 'look good' will not enhance learners' literacy development. Teachers need to interact with the literacy artefacts daily and show children in what way they are used and are meaningful. For example, a weather chart can be used every day to engage learners in practical ways in observing the weather, learning and recognising weather words and the way we 'discourse' about the weather. Teachers can help learners move beyond the everyday words of *sunny*, *cloudy*, *windy* to more advanced weather words (*blustery*, *breezy*, *overcast*) in both HL and FAL, with children learning both oral and written forms by way of labels or flashcards. Numeracy skills can be developed through recording temperatures, etc. In this way, the print-rich classroom becomes a natural extension of the teaching-learning spiral of integrated speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary development and thinking skills, in both HL and FAL, in ways that orient children to meaningful literacy practices. Creating a print-rich classroom is not about window dressing, but about using the space to enhance learning through planning and pedagogy.

Takeaway 5: *Teachers need support not only in terms of introducing more print-based materials into their classrooms, but also in how to manage their resources and how to integrate the print-based materials into meaningful classroom practice. It is these latter aspects that are often lacking in interventions that put resources into schools without showing teachers how to care for and use such resources.*

Teacher assessment of learners' literacy levels

Another finding that emerged from the baseline study was the mismatch at times between teachers' perceptions of their top performers and what the assessments actually revealed.

There was some evidence that learners who had been identified by teachers as being top readers (Group A) did not perform as well as learners in the middle 'average' group (Group B), and some readers in the middle did not perform at all. At times, learners identified as weak readers performed similarly to readers who were claimed to be good or average. For example, a learner from School 3 (Green) who was judged to be an average middle-group reader by the teacher, was one of only two learners in the entire sample of 84 learners who was able to read the passage of 56 words within one minute and could answer the comprehension questions correctly. In School 2 (Blue) there was very little difference in performance between the A, B and C group readers. Several of the learners in School 5 (Purple) also did not read according to their assigned reading group.

The anomalies between the groupings and learner performance could be attributed to teachers not allocating the correct children to each group, as some of the field researchers noted that, when they arrived at the school, the teachers did not have a list of learners ready for assessment. An alternative explanation could be that the learners were nervous and did not perform at optimal level. However, these anomalies do raise questions about the criteria that teachers use to assess their learners' reading abilities, how accurate their assessments are, and whether learners are, in fact, assessed at all. Qualitative analysis of the data evidenced that in many of the classrooms there were no graded reading books, no HL literacy activities in the learners' DBE workbooks had been marked, and FAL workbooks had not been used in the first two terms. These factors, singly and together, make it difficult for teachers to identify early deficiencies in literacy development and how to address them.

Takeaway 6: *Teachers in the Foundation Phase need to be given support in how to assess different aspects of decoding and comprehension in the early years in order to identify reading problems early and give learners appropriate support.*

Planning for literacy

From the qualitative component of the study, planning and organisation did not emerge as strong features of classroom practice. The fieldworkers noted that in two of the schools teachers did not have a lesson-plan file, with two more schools having either poor planning or simply using departmental exemplars, which suggests that they have not consciously adapted the lessons to meet their own teaching and learning contexts. None of the teachers consciously planned for any reading activities in their average day and it was noticed that resources such as *Edupeg* books were lying unused in corners of classrooms.

Takeaway 7: *Teachers need support in preparing and planning to teach literacy. This means setting long and short-term goals, daily goals, planning weekly lessons, assessing learners appropriately and providing ample opportunity for learners to both practise and enjoy reading.*

Gender differences

The results showed that the girls are more likely to do better than their male peers in literacy. This is in line with research elsewhere showing that girls perform better than boys in the Foundation Phase years (Coley, 2001; Gambell & Hunter, 1999). Researchers who have suggested a female advantage have indicated a variety of explanations which range from biological differences in their cognitive development to physical maturation and different cultural expectations that are frequently placed on male and female children (Sommers, 2001).

All of the top scores bar one (Learner 35) were achieved by girls in the 8-9 age group. The lowest scores were all demonstrated by boys spread across the stratified sample of readers in Groups a, b and c. The slowest reader was a boy who read at 14 wcpm. Of the four learners in School 6 (Pink) who scored zero for ORF, three were boys and one was a girl.

Although age was not found to be a significant factor in this study (probably due to the small number of older learners), it is interesting to note that five of the learners in School 6 (Pink) were 9 years old and one of the learners who scored zero for ORF was 10 years old. Retaining struggling learners and simply making them repeat a grade is not effective unless the school actively helps such learners gain mastery of the very skills that have held them back.

Takeaway 8: *Because of the strong gender differences that emerged, it could be argued that there are grounds for separating the sexes in the first three grades of schooling, taking into account potentially different styles of pedagogy that might assist boys to realise their literacy potential. However, this is not a strategy that all schools might find feasible.*

Recommendations and conclusions

A number of recommendations can be derived from the process of benchmarking Grade-3 learners in this study. These are as follows:

- Early reading instruction requires teachers who are knowledgeable about how reading works, how it develops, how best to support and assess the different decoding and comprehension skills that together make up a skilled reader, and how to create an enabling environment that supports literacy activities on a daily basis. Literacy interventions need to help build up Foundation Phase teachers' content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge and curriculum knowledge with regard to literacy instruction and development.
- Given the early cracks in literacy development that this baseline study has revealed, it is important that the development of strong decoding and comprehension skills be developed from the start of Grade 1, to prevent cracks turning into gaps. Foundation Phase teachers need to teach phonics explicitly

and systematically, and attention needs to be paid to helping learners read accurately, fluently and with meaning, in both HL and FAL.

- Teachers need support in planning and managing activities and resources that provide learners with daily practice opportunities for reading extended texts, engaging with texts in meaningful ways and, above all, finding enjoyment and pleasure in doing so. This is especially important for learners who come from low SE homes where literacy resources are scarce.
- All teachers need to be given assistance in setting up book corners with an understanding of the importance of this space and how to create it, even in an over-crowded classroom.
- All teachers need support in planning for reading to take place in their classrooms daily, including use of the book corner.
- All teachers need to understand that having resources available does not equal literacy learning. The teacher must know how to incorporate those resources into their everyday teaching. Posters, charts, word wall, etc., must be updated on regularly and remain current to be effective. Teachers must consciously mediate literacy through engaging not only with the cultural tools/symbols that make up the print-rich classroom environment, but by setting clear goals when planning their literacy lessons. The aforementioned goals must be fluid and shift according to the class and individual needs of the learners. Adopting this approach to pedagogy should be workshopped with the teachers.
- The use of word walls needs to be unpacked and teachers given support in how to fully utilize this teaching resource.
- Labelling and posters in the classroom should be in both English and isiXhosa to assist learners to make connections between the languages. This is particularly important given that the learners will progress to Grade 4 the following year when English will become the medium of instruction.
- All teachers need to evaluate the position of their posters, alphabet charts and word walls, taking into account accessibility of these resources to ensure that learners can engage with the materials. All of these should not be placed at the back of the classroom or too high.
- How teachers assess their learners needs to be determined and, where necessary, assistance should be given to teachers.
- Teachers should be held accountable for their planning to HoDs and/or Principals of schools. They need to work together in grades and as a phase to set goals and plan their teaching, and this needs to be monitored in a supportive way. In this way teachers will be able to identify gaps and assist learners to fill gaps. In order for principals, HoDs and teachers to achieve this, they may require training.
- Although the research sample showed that class size was not a factor in getting results (results were low irrespective of class size), there is sufficient evidence to suggest that reducing class size will enable more individual attention. Class numbers need to be re-examined with creative ideas adopted to provide support for teachers who have classes of more than 36 learners. Assistance in teaching large groups of learners should be workshopped with teachers. Making use of a

Vygotskian approach to teaching will allow for collaborative learning, with more capable peers assisting those who are less capable. The addition of training in emotional intelligence (EQ) will enable positive discipline which is particularly important when teachers are dealing with high class numbers.

- Given the gender differences in literacy development, some schools might consider piloting an intervention where boys and girls are split in the early grades with a view to adopting different pedagogic strategies to accommodating the learning styles of the sexes. In this way, the boys may be helped to realise their potential.
- Teachers should be mindful of the way in which materials are stored. Learners should be encouraged to be tidy and teachers should set a good example. Learners can be involved in keeping classrooms tidy by means of a monitor system. This will build respect for the environment that can be filtered from the school into the community at large.
- Learners must be given plenty of opportunity to read extended texts (i.e. short stories) and generate their own texts. This type of activity should be incorporated into teachers' lesson plans.
- A programme to inform parents on how to support the literacy development of their child, should be provided. Clear instructions and support should be given to parents to facilitate providing children with opportunities to consolidate new learning on the home front.

Suggested plan of action

The following is suggested as a potential plan of action to incorporate the above-mentioned specifics, related to improving foundational literacy through improved pedagogic practices, into a programme of interventions supported by VW:

1. *Work collaboratively with the existing stakeholders to provide a comprehensive intervention from Grade 1 to Grade 3.*
2. *Work with Grades 1 and 2 to implement a programme with the teachers, principals and HoDs, to ensure that intervention takes place before Grade 3.*
3. *Work with teachers, principals and HoDs to develop their understanding of their role in ensuring that foundational literacy is put in place, and in building knowledge of literacy pedagogy.*
4. *An existing programme to achieve the aforementioned points is presently being used across the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape. It has the added advantage of providing teachers with professional development points and is being accredited as a Rhodes University short course, thereby increasing the potential for teachers to engage with the programme.*
5. *Benchmark each grade twice in the year (in the first and third terms) as a basis for monitoring and evaluation of the interventions. The benchmarks should be presented on an annual basis at the VW literacy conference and could be used to adjust programmes over a three-year period.*

6. *This should be a longitudinal study which will allow researchers to track learners from Grade 1 to 3, thereby achieving a comprehensive picture of VWCT's impact in the schools in Kwanobuhle. At the same time, the teachers should be involved in the tracking so that their understanding of assessment practices can be deepened.*
7. *Four stakeholder meetings should be held per annum, with parties working collaboratively to support one another's programmes, thereby maximizing potential success.*
8. *The research material generated by this project should be published in order to make the value of this study available to a wider national and international audience.*

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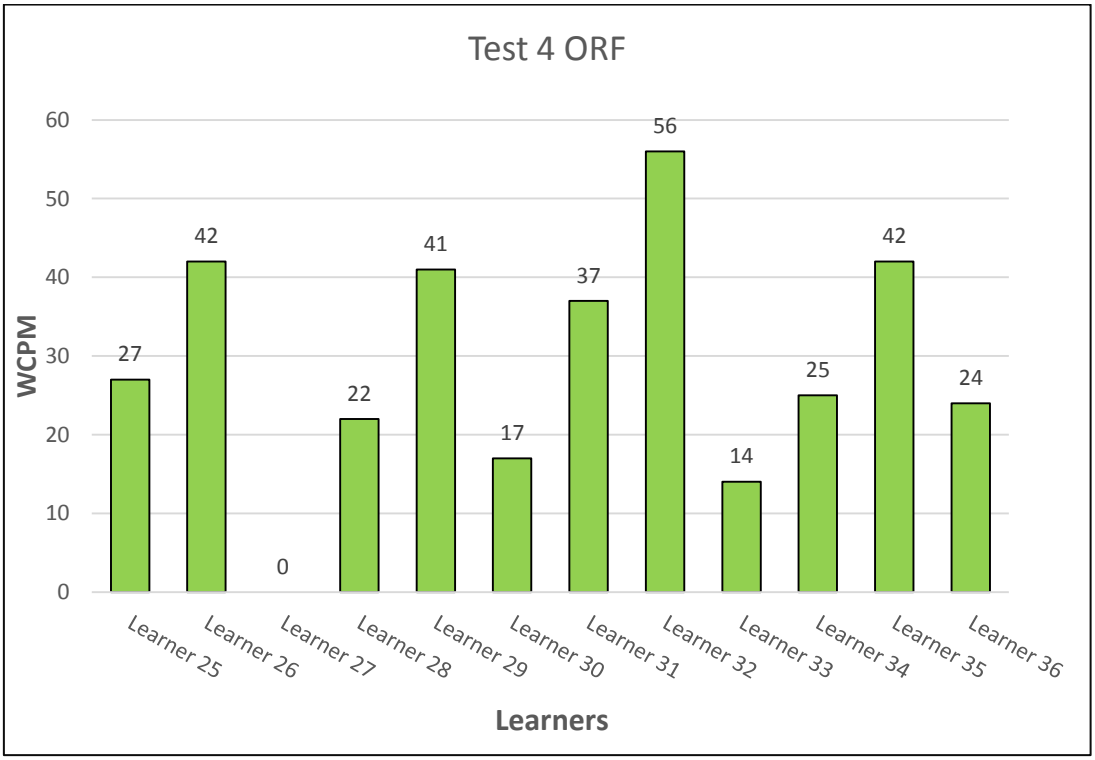
Appendix 1: School summaries

In this appendix, the data for each school are presented and can be used to provide specific interventions per school. The schools are discussed in non-numerical order, giving preference to the school that performed the best, followed by the two control schools and the remaining intervention schools. ORF results, together with Tests 1, 2 and 3 are presented. Tests 1-3 were examined in terms of performance related to age and gender as these were considered additionally important factors when understanding foundational literacy in Grade 3.

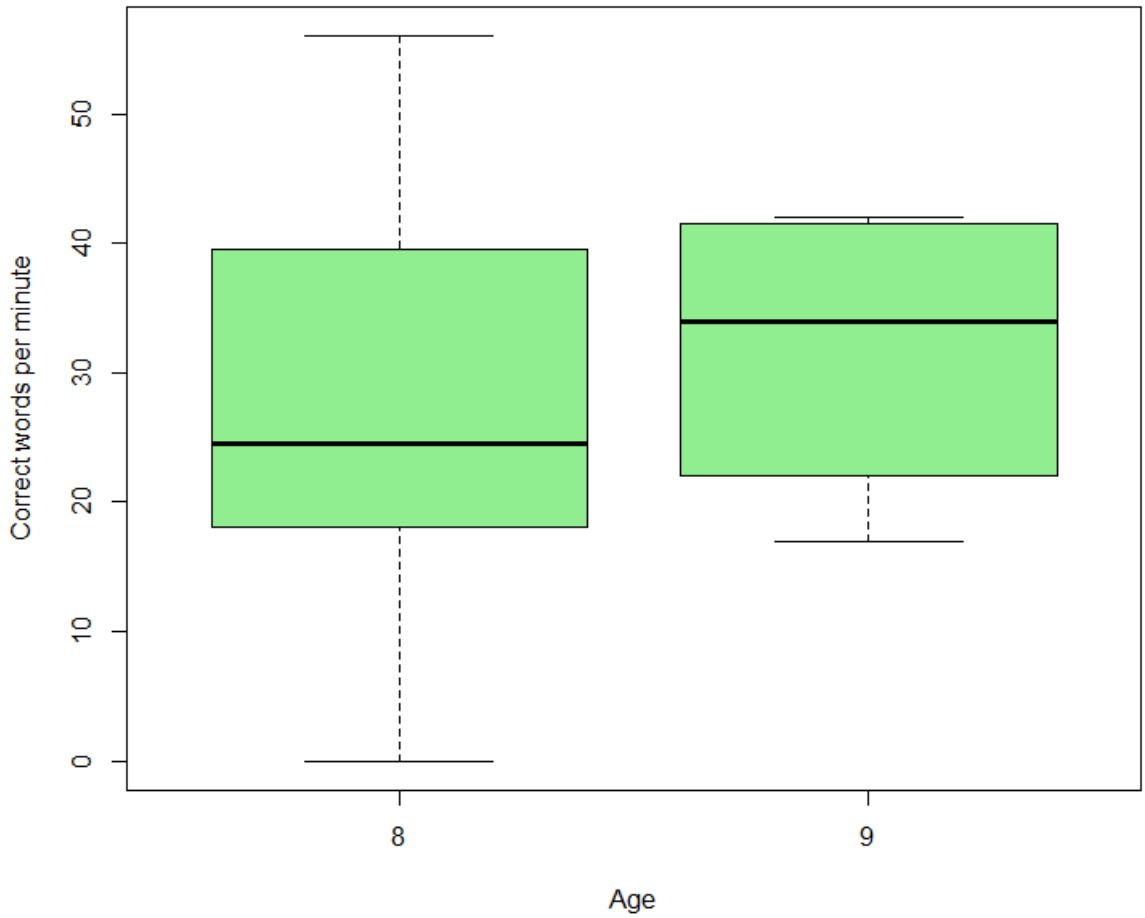
School 3 (Green)

There were 45 learners in this Grade-3 class.

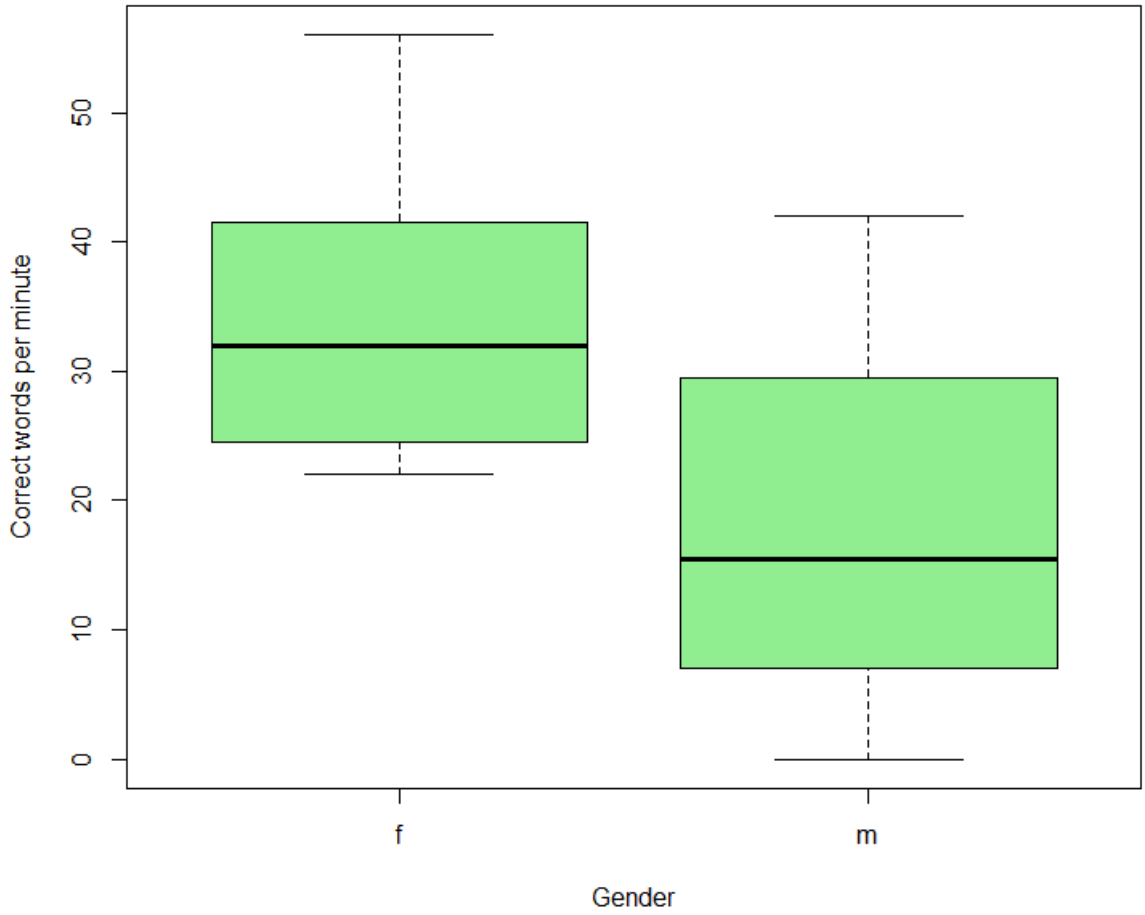


Learners were in the (a), (b) and (c) groups respectively: 26 (female), 29 (female) and 35 (male), but all scored 41-42 wcpm. This raised the question of how they were chosen by the teacher. Learners 25 (female), 28 (female), 34 (female) and 36 (female) scored 22-27 wcpm. It should be noted that all of the latter were female, with Learner 25 placed in the (a) group and therefore could be expected to have scored in the higher percentile, and similarly for Learner 28 who only scored 22 and was in the (b) group. This illustrates an anomaly between the teacher's choice of groupings and learner performance. All of the top scores, bar one (Learner 35), were achieved by female students in the 8-9 age group. The lowest scores were all demonstrated by male learners spread across the stratified sample of (a), (b) and (c) with Learner 27 (male, 8 years old) not processing any words; Learner 30 (male, 9 years old) scoring 17 out of 56 and Learner 33 (male, 8 years old) scoring 14 out of 56 wcpm. This means that this sample

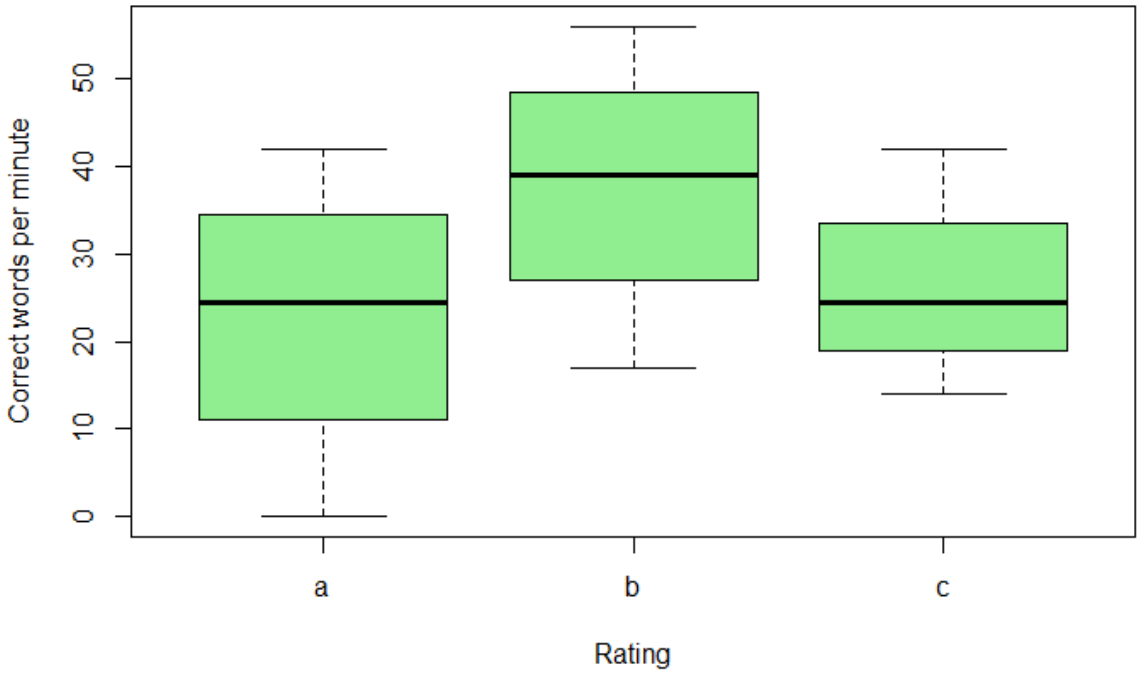
potentially supports the idea that female students perform above male students and that the students were within the performance level of their age group.



The means for these two age groups were very similar. Both categories were slightly skewed. Though the 8-year old group had the lowest and the highest result, from observing the boxes and their thickness, we can see that the results were similar. The heavy overlap between the boxplots suggests that there were no significant differences between the performances of the two age groups in this test.



The boxes show that the girls outperformed boys in this test. We see that the lowest score in the female category was approximately equal to the mean of the male category, and the highest mark in the male category was approximately equal to the 75th percentile in the female scores.

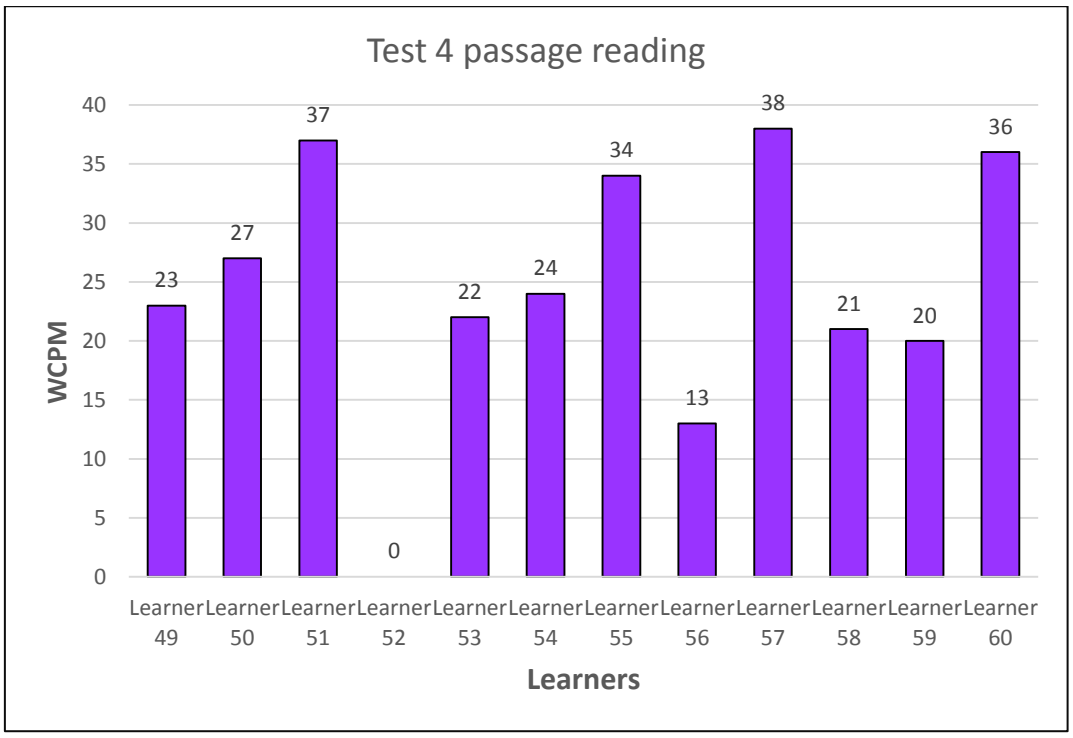


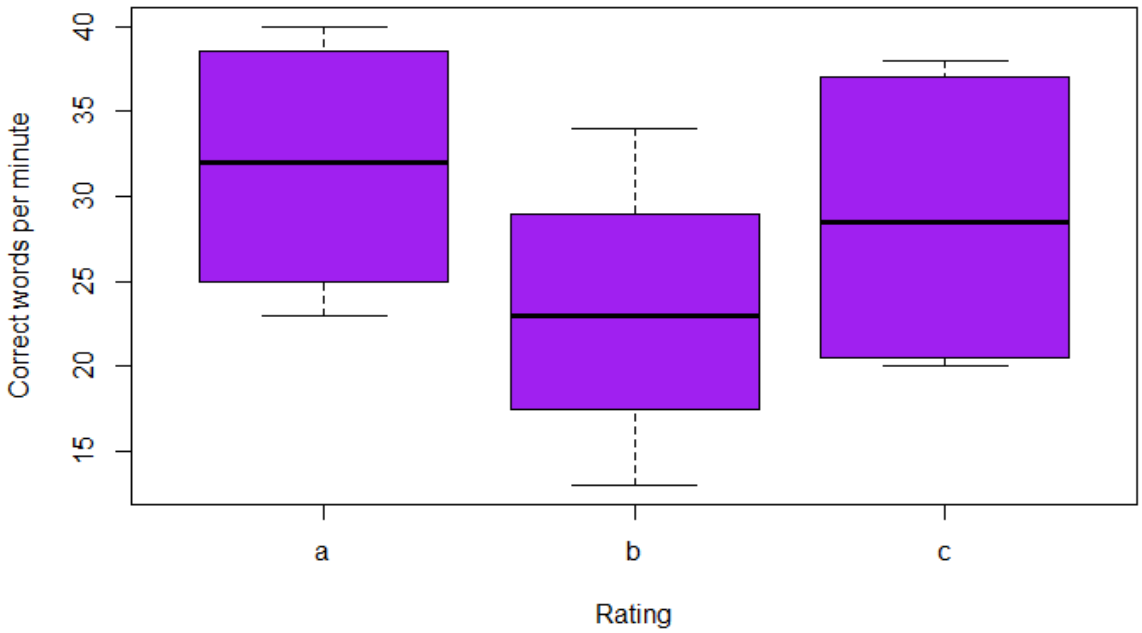
The boxes show us that the learners in the (b) category outperformed all others. The means the (a) and (c) groups were similar. The students in the (a) group performed the worst; this is also shown by the slight skewed (a) group box plot. Perhaps the teacher should have had the students in the (b) group as (a) students.

School 5 (Purple, control)

In the classroom observation tests, this school performed better than all other schools, demonstrating a print-rich environment with a book corner, words wall and alphabet charts in both English and isiXhosa. There were 36 learners in this Grade-3 class.

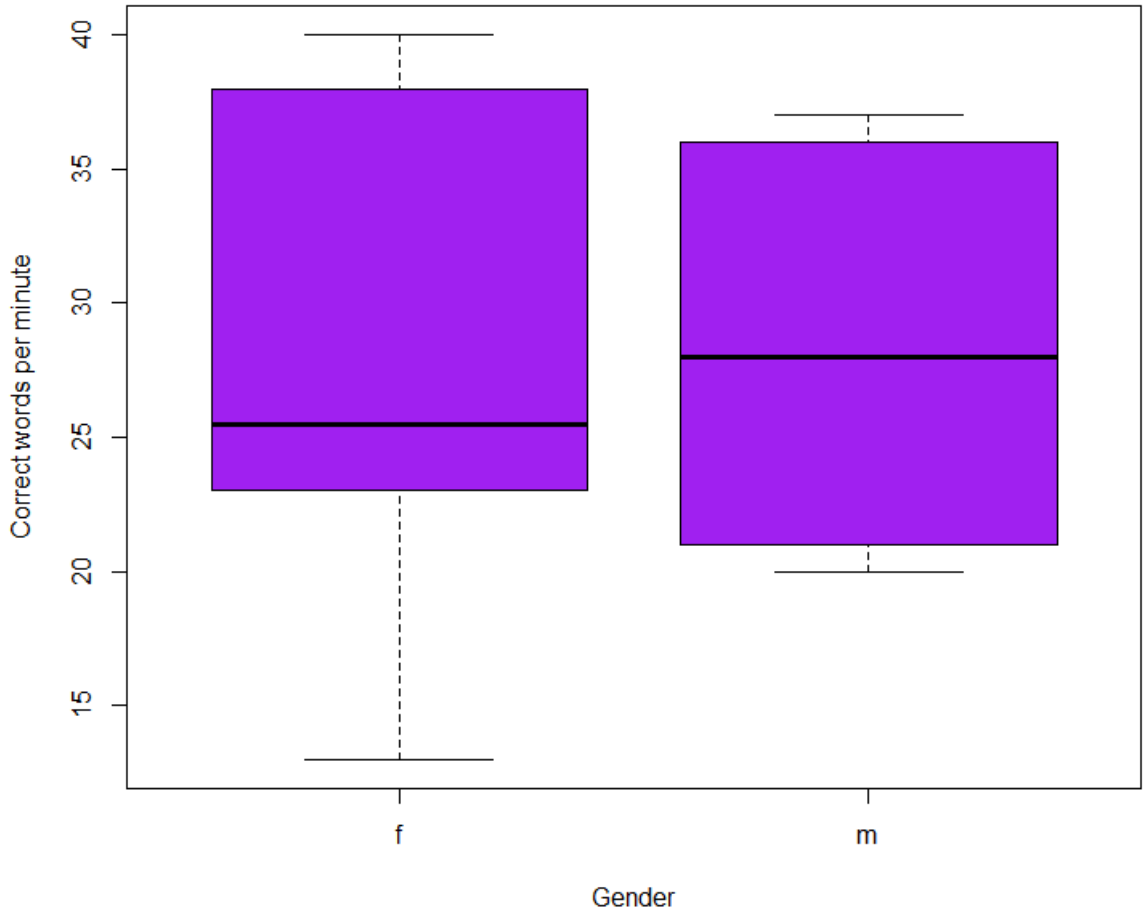
This school appeared to have received some validation for their efforts in that the teacher had a new classroom and was motivated to provide resources that would support literacy learning. It is interesting to note, however, that the teacher concerned did not have a lesson plan file, something that was noted in two of the seven schools, with two more schools having either poor planning or simply using departmental exemplars, which suggests that they did not consciously adapt the lessons to meet their teaching and learning contexts.





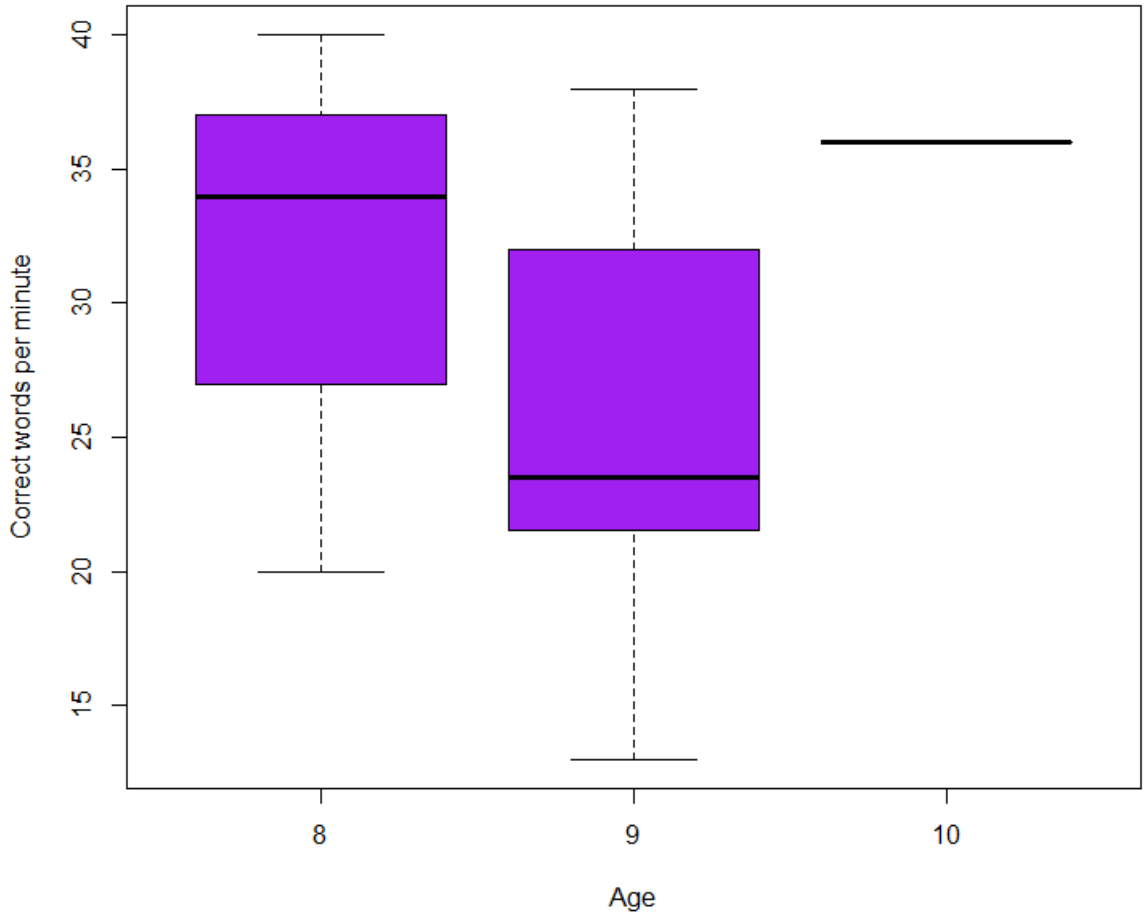
Learner 52 (female, 8 years old) did not score any words when reading the passage and it can be seen from the graph that six (50%) of the stratified sample only scored in the twenties when reading. Additionally it should be noted that the learners in the (a) group (learners 49-51) scored below expectation for this quintile, raising the question of how the teacher selected the sample and potentially how she assessed her learners. Given the fact that this school scored the highest in their classroom environment, it could have been expected that the learners would perform better than the others. The fact that this was not the case, may be attributed to poor selection of the sample on the part of the teacher and whether or not the teacher actively refers to the items that make up the print

rich environment. By this it is meant that having resources available does not equate to learning. The teacher would need to actively refer to word walls, posters and labels when teaching, together with providing time for reading in the reading corner. Qualitative analysis showed that none of the teachers consciously planned for any reading activities in their average day and that resources such as *Edupeg* books lay unused in corners of classrooms.



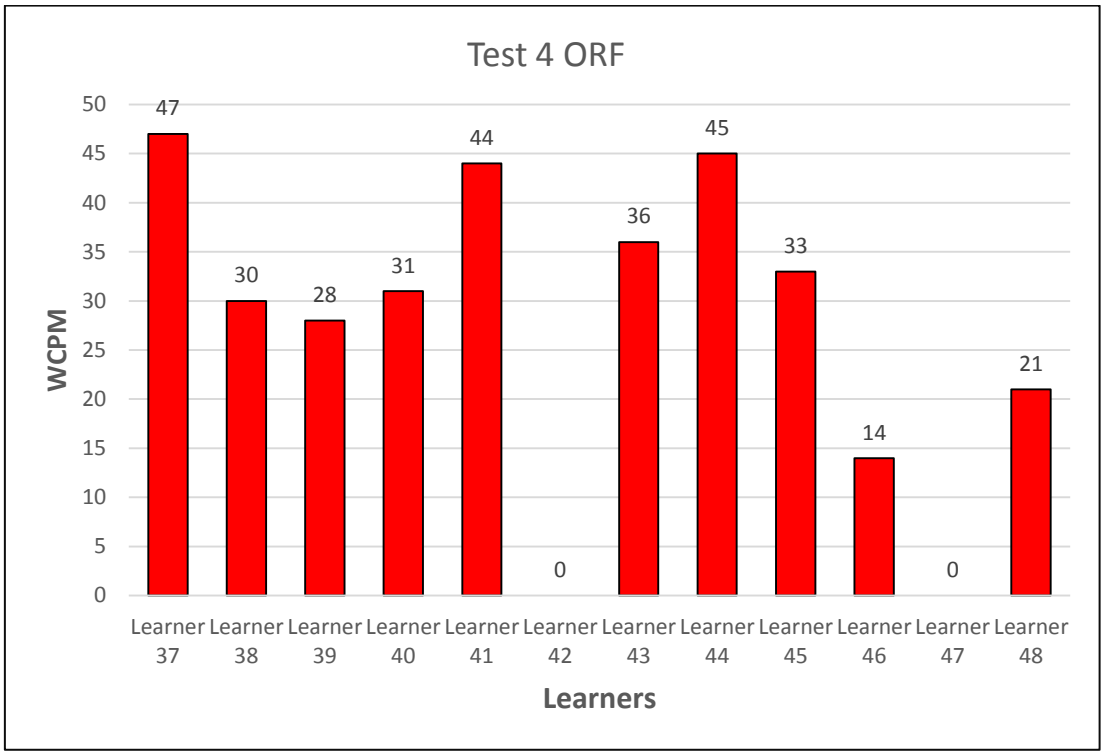
The performances of the two groups were similar as the average and medians were comparatively close. The two plots overlapped a lot. The male student scores were, however, very symmetrically distributed, while those of the female students were heavily skewed such that more of the female students performed above average in their group. The female group also had the lowest and highest scores in this test.

The (a) and (c) group outperformed the (b) group. The data in all groups appeared evenly distributed. The scores in the (a) and (c) groups were similar; in fact, there was little difference between these groups as the boxplots overlapped a lot.

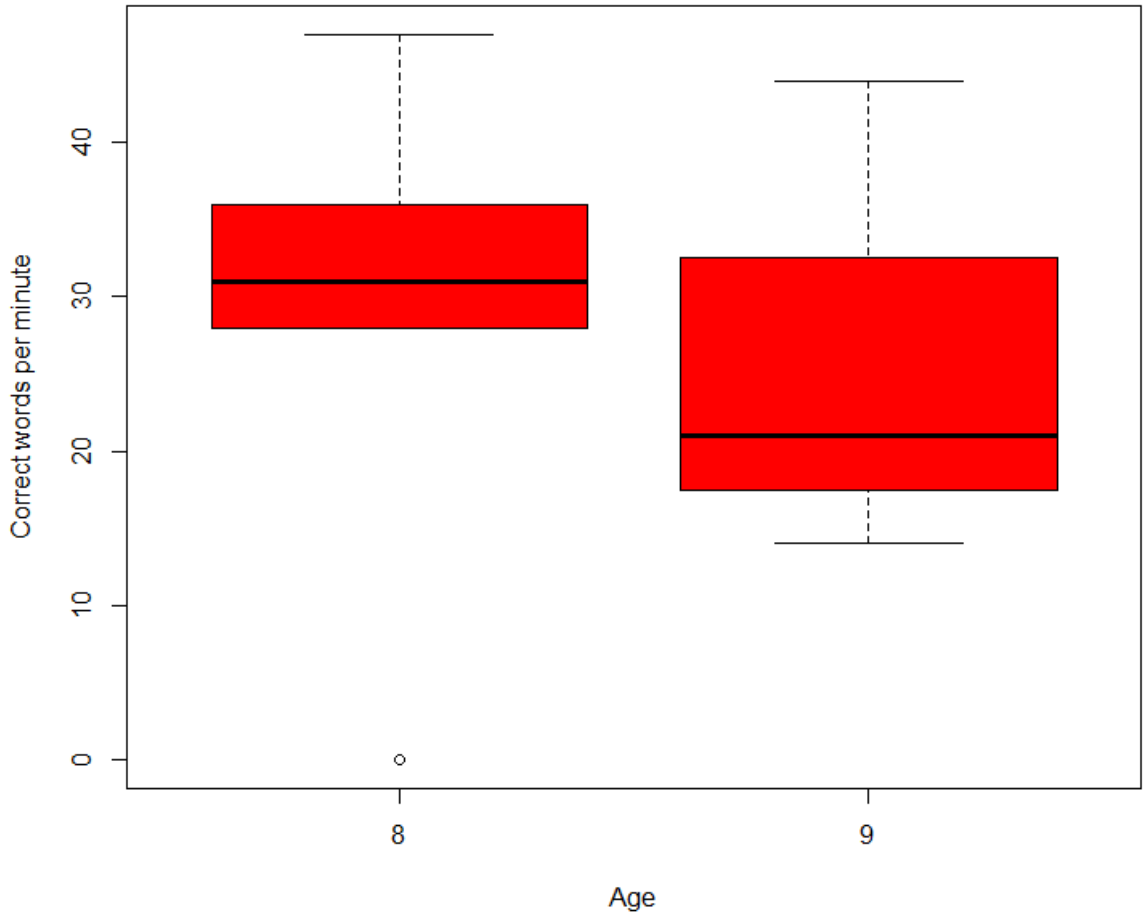


The 8-year olds outperformed all other groups in this test. The box plot showed, however, that scores in this group were heavily skewed, meaning that a relatively high percentage of students performed poorly in this group. Most of the students in the 9-year old group performed above average.

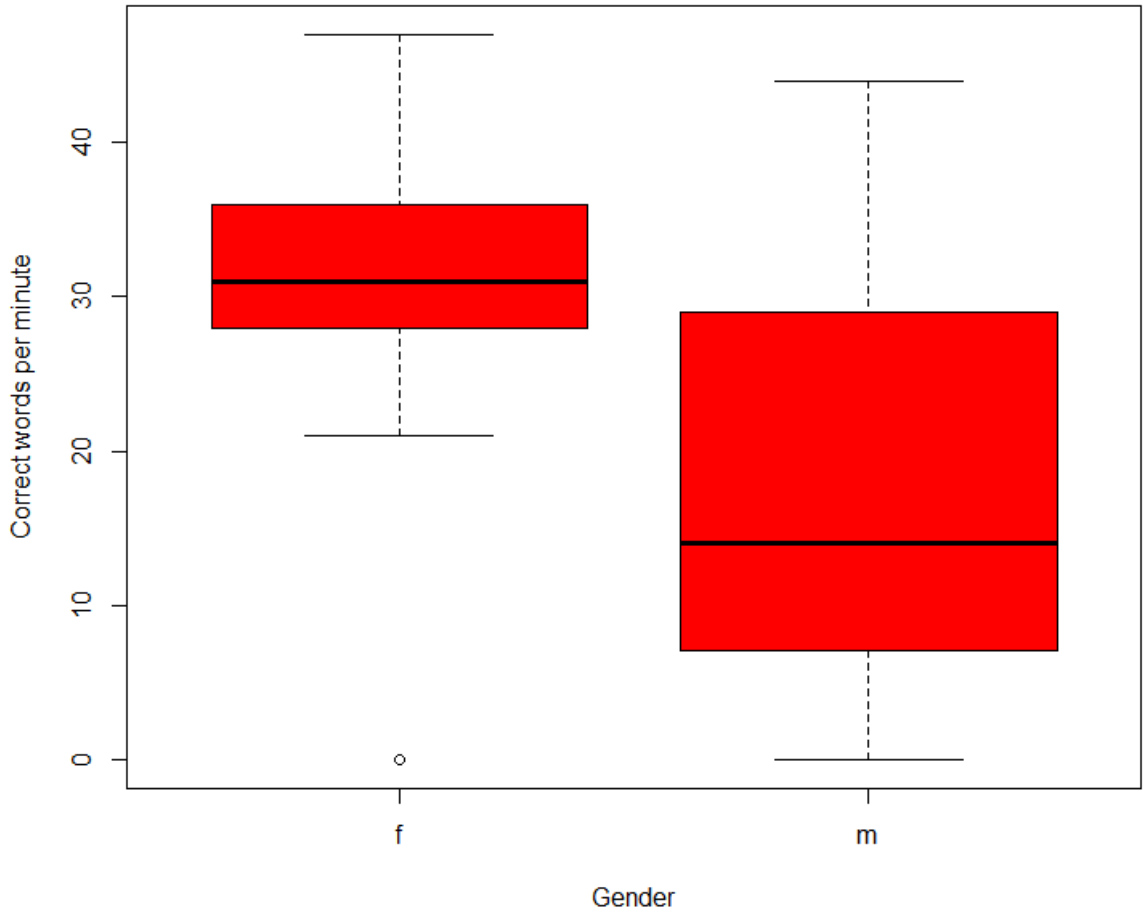
School 4 (Red Control)



The classroom observation tool evidenced that School 4 (Red) had no reading corner, word wall was a rudimentary isiXhosa poster and an English alphabet chart, leading to the conclusion that this was not a sufficiently print-rich environment for learning. The class consisted of 41 learners (16 girls and 25 boys) and had a chaotic environment with learners' books stored on or between tables and objects piles on cupboards. There appeared to be a shortage of readers leading to learners having to share resources and some simply not engaging in the reading activity. This was not helped by the teacher setting a reading task whilst writing up an exercise on the board, leading to the task being unsupervised and lacking direction, raising the question of whether or not it was a useful exercise. This was, however, the only teacher who was observed to make space for some sort of reading in her day. The field researcher noted that the teacher did make good use of questioning and ensured that the learners understood the concepts being conveyed. In light of the aforementioned comments, it is useful to note that three learners scored in the 44-47-wcpm group and four learners scored in the 30-36-wcpm group, two learners were unable to read the words at all, and three learners scored in the 14-28 wcpm. This suggests that the reading was having some impact, but the lack of supervision or conscious mediation potentially minimized the impact of the activity.



8-year olds outperformed the 9-year olds. The lowest and highest results were from the 8-year olds. The 9-year old scores were skewed such that the majority of the students performed above their average score.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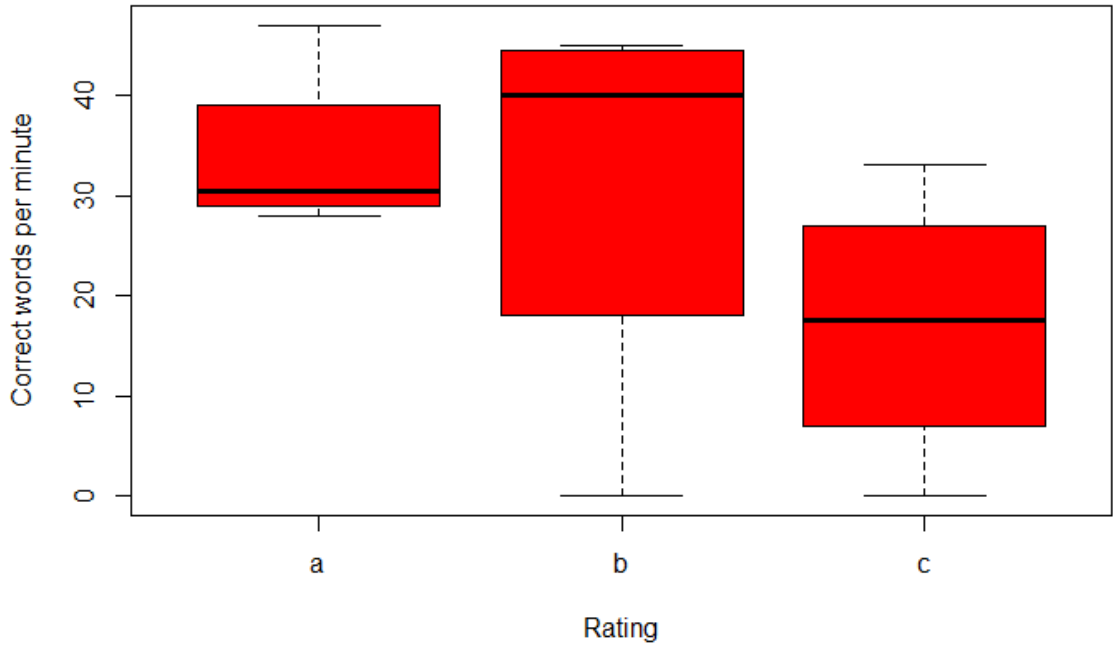
Correct words per minute
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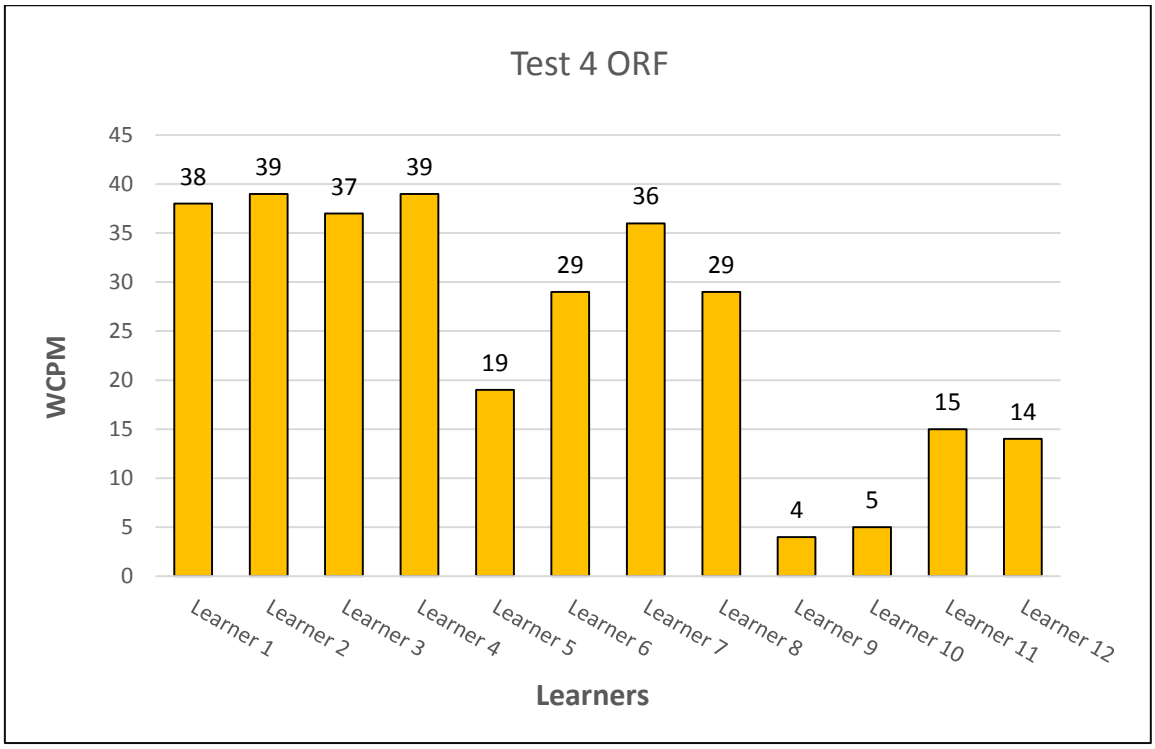
Rating

The girls appeared to outperform the boys in this test. The slight skewedness of the male scores suggests that the majority of the male students performed well in this test. Comparatively, the female scores were more evenly distributed, although the lowest performance was also registered in this group.

The plots suggest that the groups performed as expected, with the (a) group out-performing the other two, and the (c) group performing the poorest. Most of the students in the (a) group performed exceptionally well, which could suggest that indeed the teacher chose the best performing students in the class. The students in the (c) group have an even distribution. We also note that group (b) was heavily skewed such that the majority of the students in this group performed poorly, the lowest score in this group was comparable to the lowest score in the (c) group. The heavy overlap between the (a) and the (b) groups might suggest that the students in the (b) group could be classified as (a) students.

School 1 (Orange)[5]

This school had one of the highest number of learners in the class across the sampled schools (53), resulting in there being no space for a teacher chair or table, torn and scuffed posters that were placed at learner level and damaged, and a book corner that was simply a mess of reading matter with no attempt at display or area for learners to sit and engage. The field researcher noted that there was a lot of 'parroting' work and little evidence of actual reading or writing.

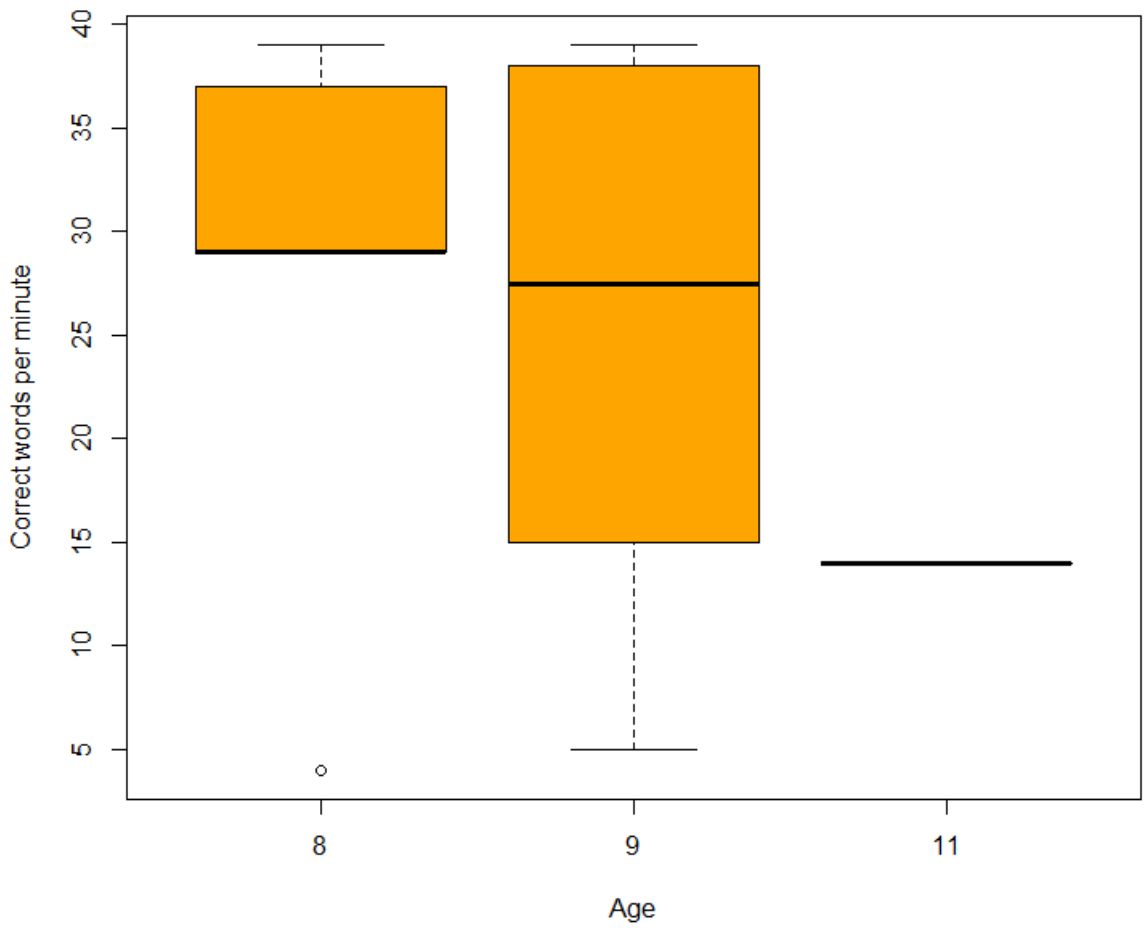


[5] The graph colours match the colour coding for each school.

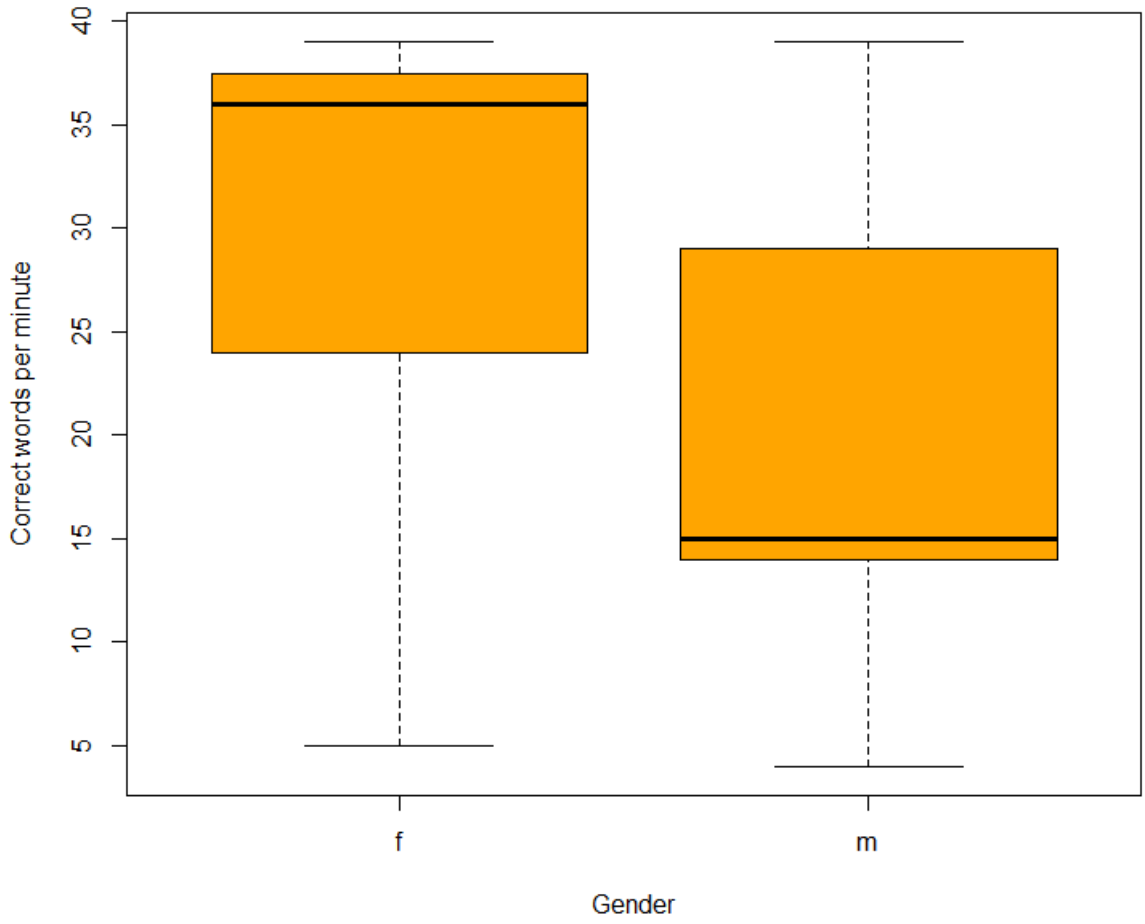
The graph shows that the top quintile learners (Learners 1-4) managed to read up to an average of 38 wcpm, of which three out of the four were female. The middle quintile (Learners 5-8) managed an average of 28 wcpm and the bottom quintile (Learners 9-12) managed 9 wcpm with three out of the four learners being male. Learner 12 was 11 years old and was in the (c) group, suggesting that there may have been learning difficulties as he was outside the average age of his peers. There were no learners that were unable to read the text, as seen in Schools 3, 4 and 5.

It should be noted, therefore, that in the top quintile, no student was able to complete the target of 56 wcpm and that there was a marked difference between the top quintile results and the bottom quintile result of 9 wcpm, suggesting that this teacher had chosen her stratified sample appropriately.

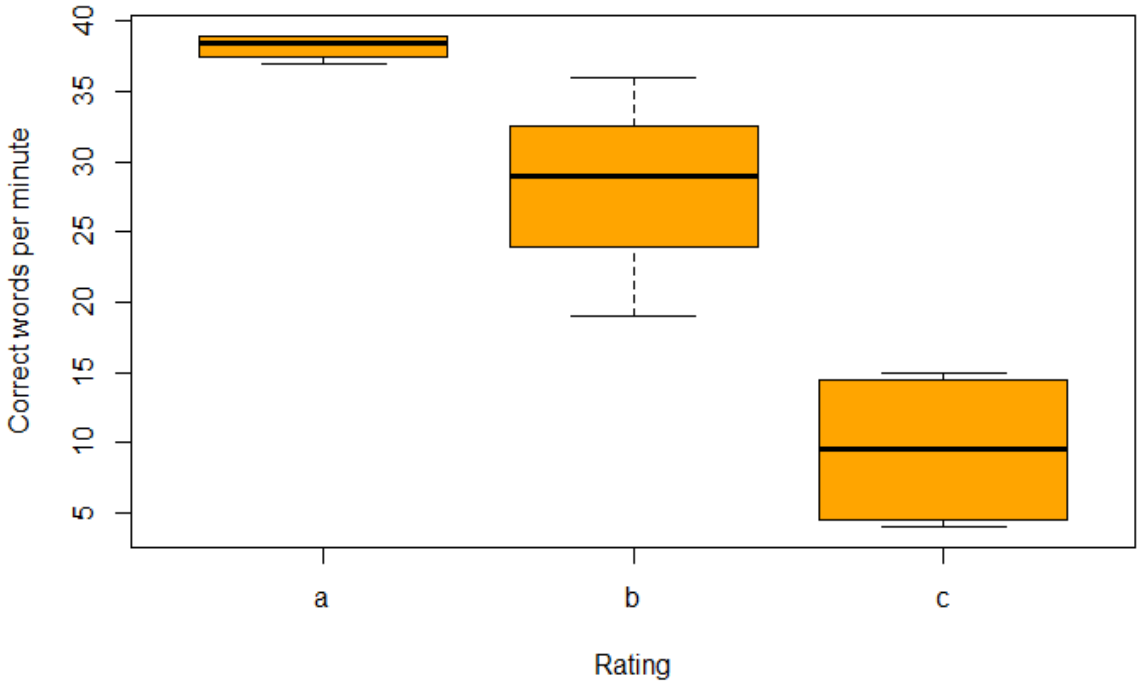
The classroom observation tool evidenced that School 1 (Orange) had a word wall (although somewhat limited) and alphabet charts in English and isiXhosa. The latter were placed at the back of the class which would have made them difficult for learners to draw from when engaging in literacy activities. The learner results could be attributed to the class size which would contribute to difficulties working with individuals and pacing learning at appropriate developmental levels to cater for a variety of learning abilities.



The box plot revealed that the 8-year olds outperformed all other age groups in this test. Their box plot was skewed in such a way that they were likely to have got only high scores for Test 4. The data for the 9-year olds was evenly distributed such that the top students in this age group seem to have performed on par with 8-year olds.



The plots revealed that the females outperformed the male students on this test. However, both plots were heavily skewed in such a way that, even though, on average, the females outperformed the males, there were more females who did not do well on the test, than those who receive high scores. This might be that there were a few female students who did exceptionally well on Test 4. The males had a low average performance, but a majority of them performed above the average for their group.



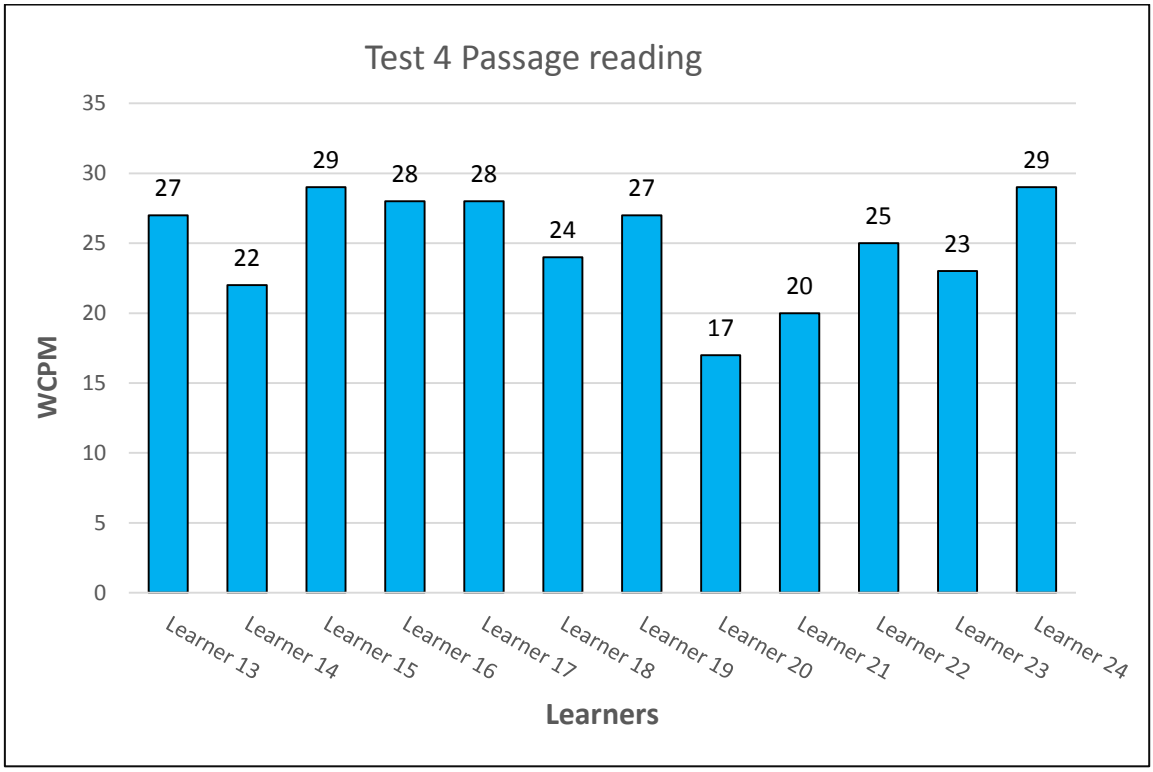
True to the teacher's classification, we see that the (a) rated students outperformed all other groups, and the (c) rated students performed the poorest in Test 4. The scores in the (b) and (c) groups appeared to be evenly distributed, while those in the (a) group were skewed in such a way that only a minority of students in that group scored extremely high on the test. The difference in student performance in these groups was additionally evidenced by the lack of overlap in boxplots.

School 2 (Blue)

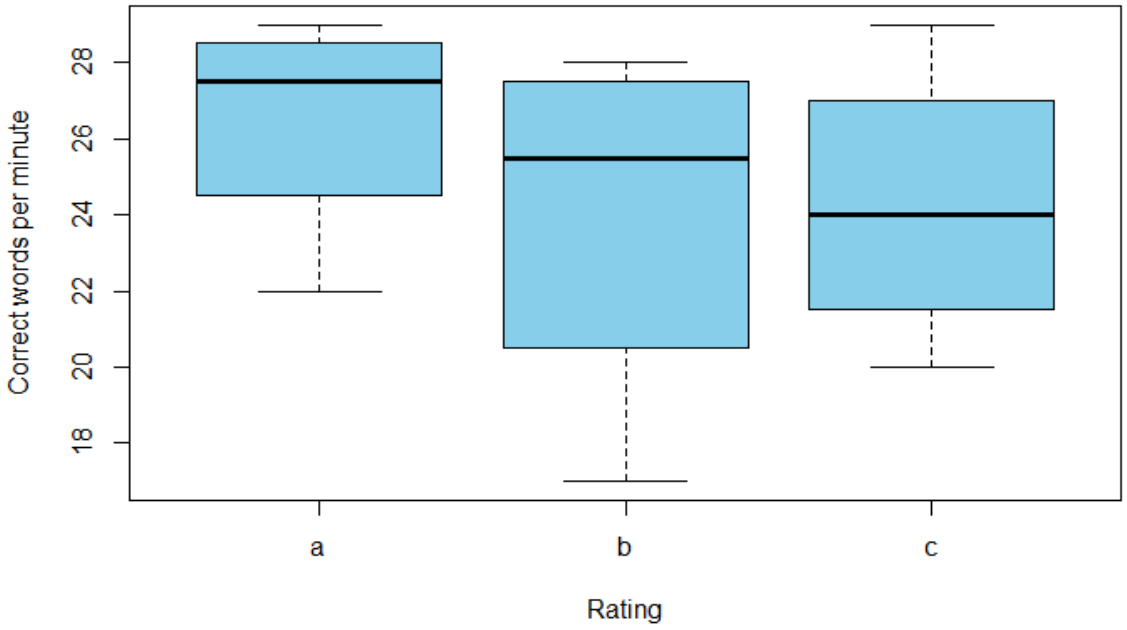
The School 2 (Blue) had 39 learners in the class. The field researcher noted that although the book corner was rudimentary, the teacher had made some handmade books in isiXhosa, but most of the space used was for storing work books as opposed to inviting the reading of books for pleasure. This suggested that the teacher did not consider the book corner to be important or she did not understand the purpose of a book corner. There was no place for learners to sit and peruse any of the reading matter and no designated time was timetabled for such an activity to take place. There was no alphabet chart in mother-tongue, but there was a small English alphabet poster present at the back of the classroom which would not facilitate usage. There was a word wall in English, but nothing in isiXhosa, and the word wall did not accommodate the addition of new words, therefore was not fulfilling its purpose. Generally the classroom had limited posters and was chaotic.

The field researcher noted that the teacher made extensive use of code-switching when addressing her students. Most experts agree that teachers should restrict code switching to the inter-sential type. Namely they should not code switch within a sentence, but can

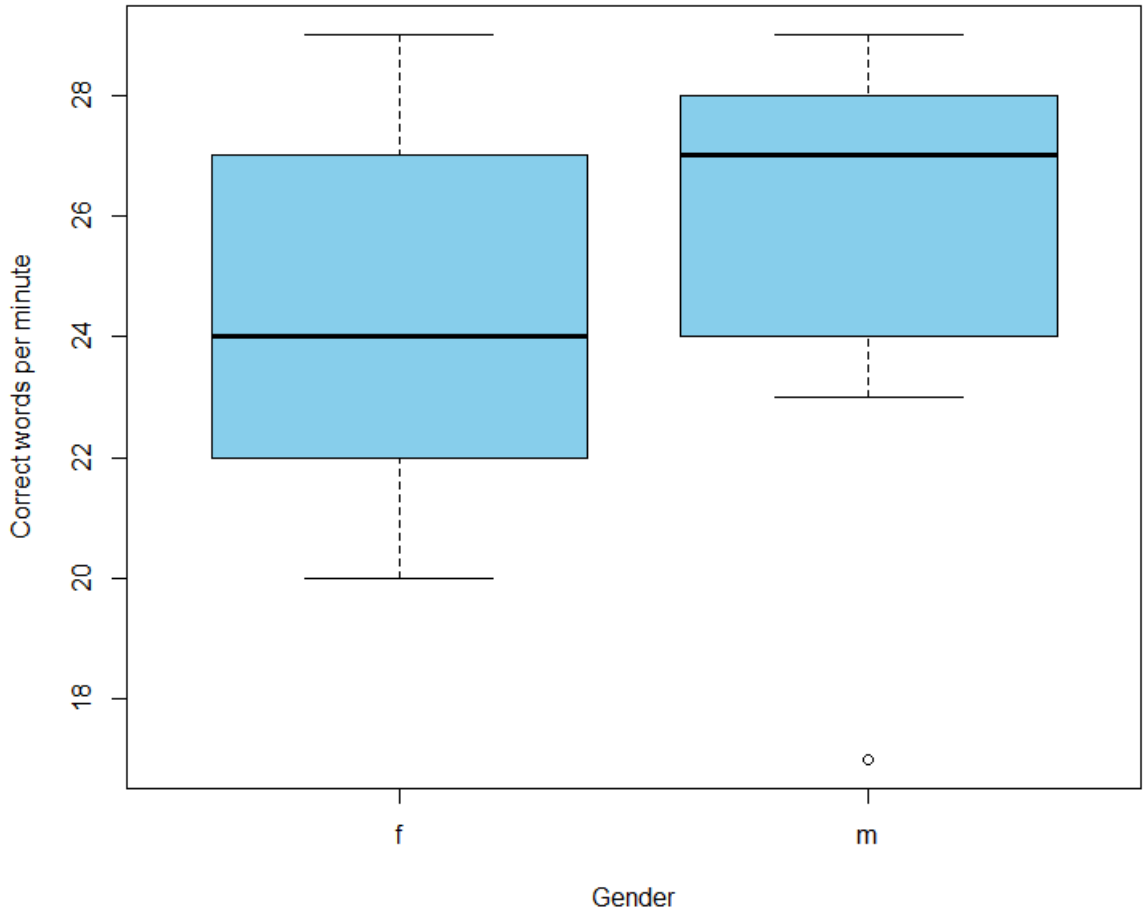
code switch from one sentence to another (Chang et al, 2007; Byer-Heinlein, et al., 2010; Espinosa, 2010; Genesee et al., 2004).The consensus is that it can lead to confusion for learners and should be used in a very conscious manner.



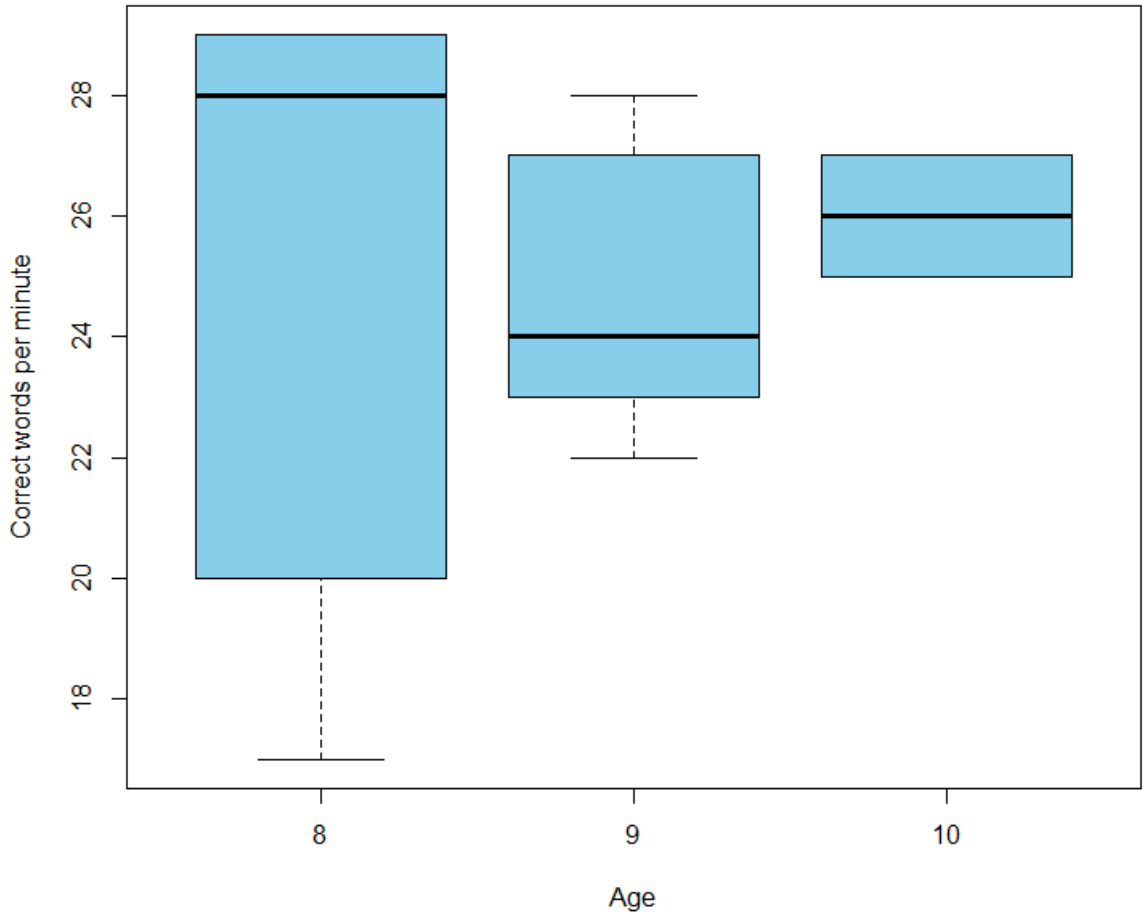
The graph above illustrates that top four learners (learner 13-16) managed an average of 26 wcpm; the middle quintile (learners 17-20) averaged 24 words, and the bottom quintile (learners 21-24) an average of 24 wcpm. The results on the graph show that there was very little difference in performance between the (a), (b) and (c) quintiles. This again raises the question of how the sample was selected by the teacher and how she assessed her learners. There were no learners that were unable to read the passage.



We see that students in the (b) and (c) categories appear to have performed on par in the test. The three categories appear to have similar means. The skewedness in the (a), and (b) groups suggest that only a minority of students in those groups scored high marks. It is interesting to note that the lowest results were for the (b) group, while the (c) group had some of the best results.



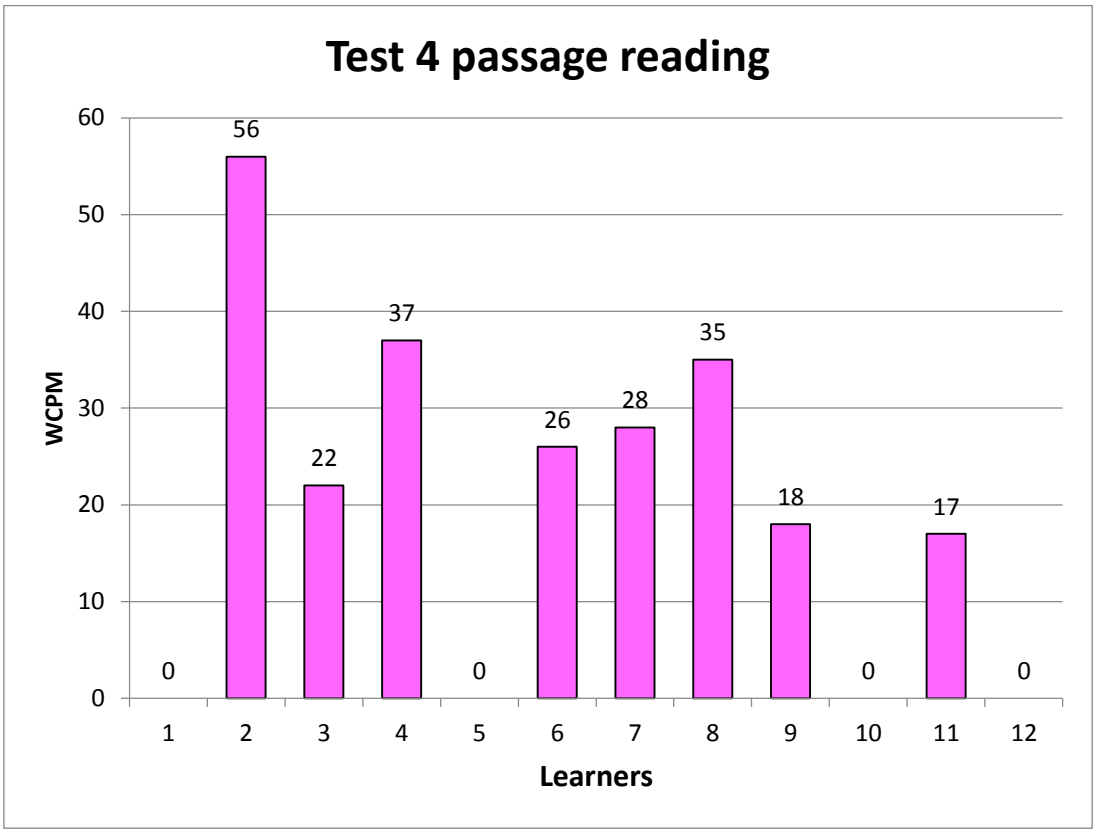
The boys appeared to outperform the girls in this test. 50% of the boys' marks were above the median of the girls' scores. It is also interesting to note that the top performances in each group were on par, and the lowest result for this test came from the male group as evidenced by the outlier. The heavy overlap might suggest that gender performances in this group were not significantly different.



The 8- and 9-year old groups had highly skewed scores such that the majority of 8-year olds did poorly on the test, while the majority of 9-year olds did well. The three groups, however, had similar means. We also noted that the poorest score on the test was from the 8-year olds. The large overlap between the groups suggested that there was no significant performance difference between 8-year old top students and students in older age groups.

School 6 (Pink)

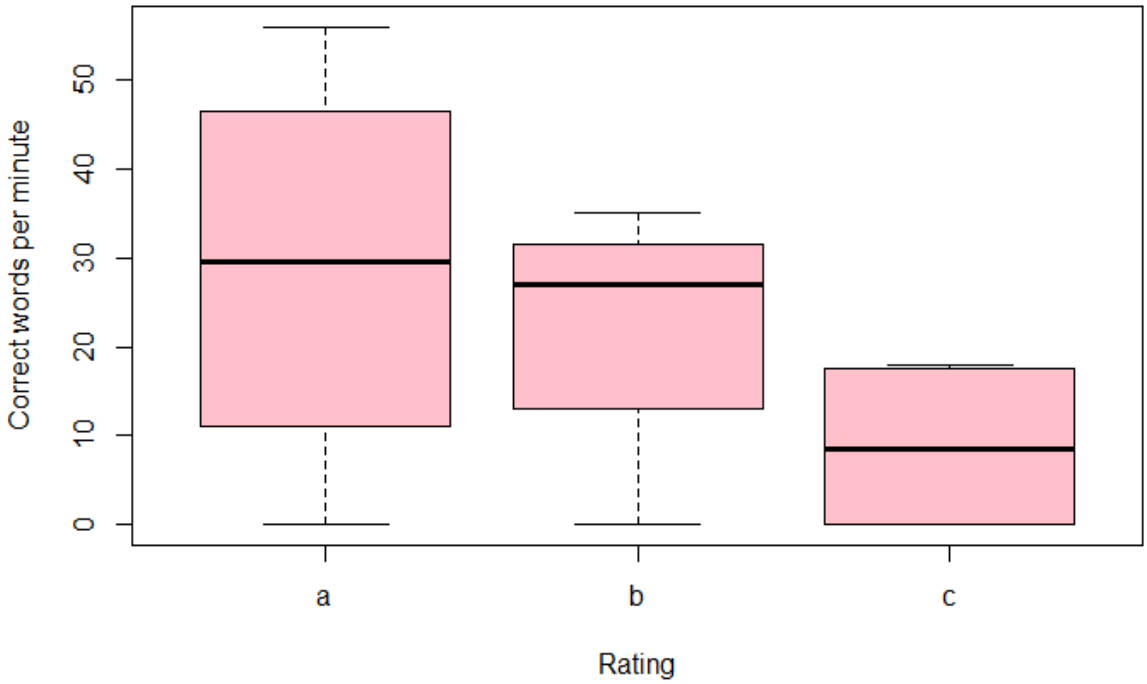
There were 55 learners in School 6's Grade-3 class. Although it had some posters, they were largely displayed at the back of the classroom. There was no word wall or alphabet chart in isiXhosa, but there was a book corner. This consisted of a couple of English readers standing upright on a table in amongst work books and papers. This may have been something that was hastily put together to accommodate the presence of a researcher or the result of a teacher simply not understanding the purpose of a book corner. There was no evidence of a space or chair in front of the book display that would allow for learners to engage with the books. The classroom was untidy with space taken up with old boxes, plastic bags, papers and broken tables. Given the size of the class and how valuable space was, it seemed significant that space was wasted in this manner.



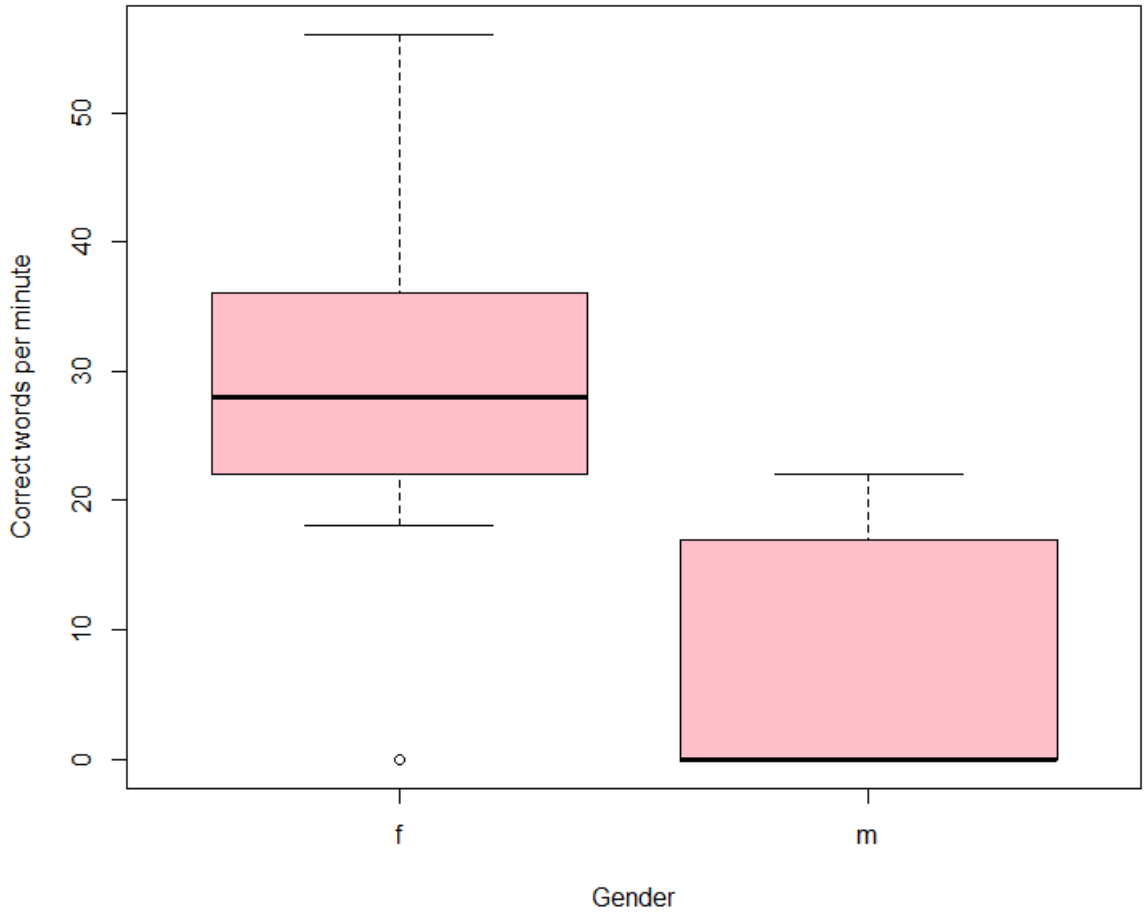
The above graph for School 6 (Pink) shows that Learner 62 achieved 56 wcpm for ORF and was one of only two learners to achieve this result. This learner was an 8-year old girl. She read the passage within a minute and scored full marks for comprehension. She scored 70 out of 110 for her phonics. This was better than Learner 32 at School 3 (Green), who achieved 57 out of 110. It does however show that her phonics were not as strong as the rest of her literacy skills which may prove problematic as words become more complex. The absence of appropriate alphabet charts in her classroom environment would not assist in this regard.

Four learners (61, 65, 70 and 72) scored zero for the reading passage. It is interesting to note that again there was an anomaly between the stratified sample and the learner results, with two of the learners who scored zero being in the top and middle quintiles, respectively. Qualitative analysis evidenced that there were no graded readers present and that no literacy activities in the learners' work books had been marked or the FAL workbooks used in terms one and two. This would have made it difficult for the teacher to determine where the gaps lay for learners and to determine the ability groups. This may have been a contributing factor in the anomaly.

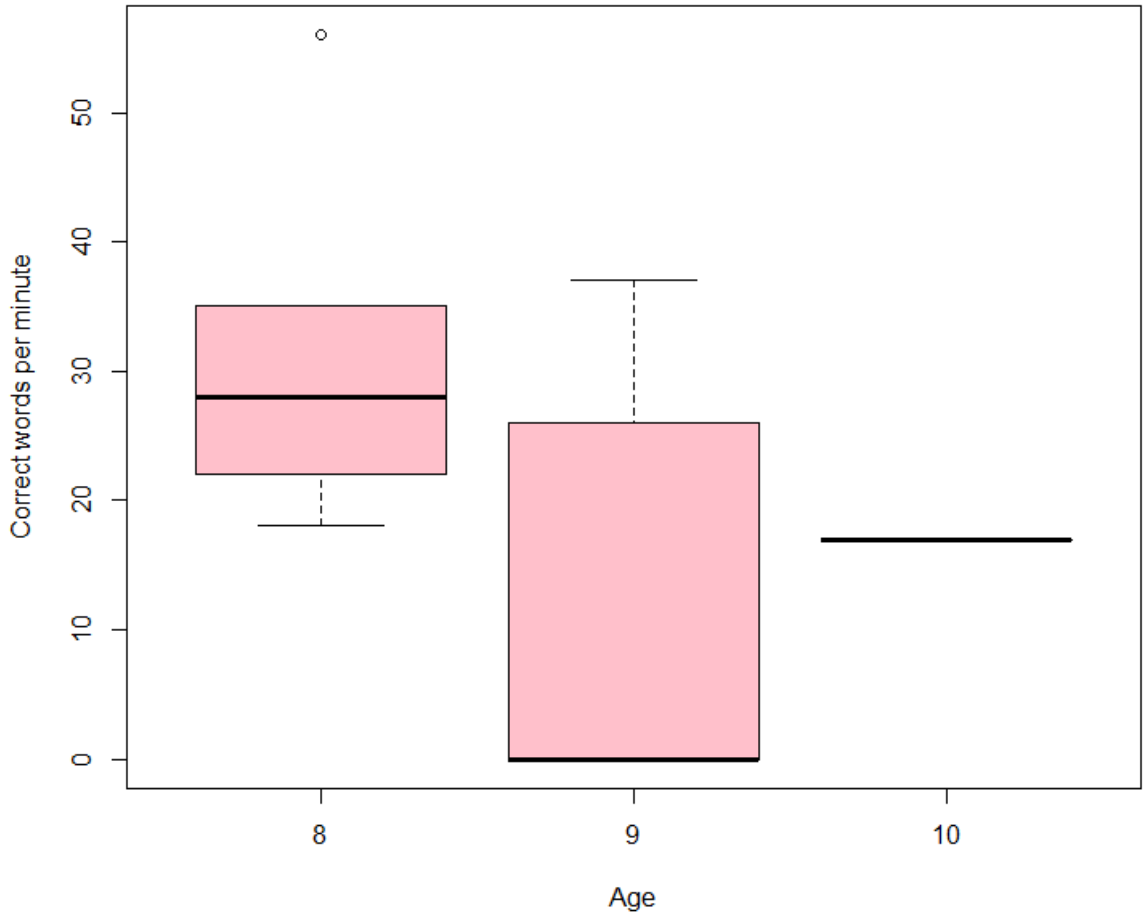
Five of the sampled learners were 9 years old and one of the learners who scored zero, was 10 years old. In addition of the four learners who scored zero, three were male and one was female.



There was much overlap between the lower scores of group (a) and the scores of group (b), which suggests that some of the students in group (a) could be classified into group (b). The (c) group scores were weighted heavily such that the majority of students in that group performed poorly.



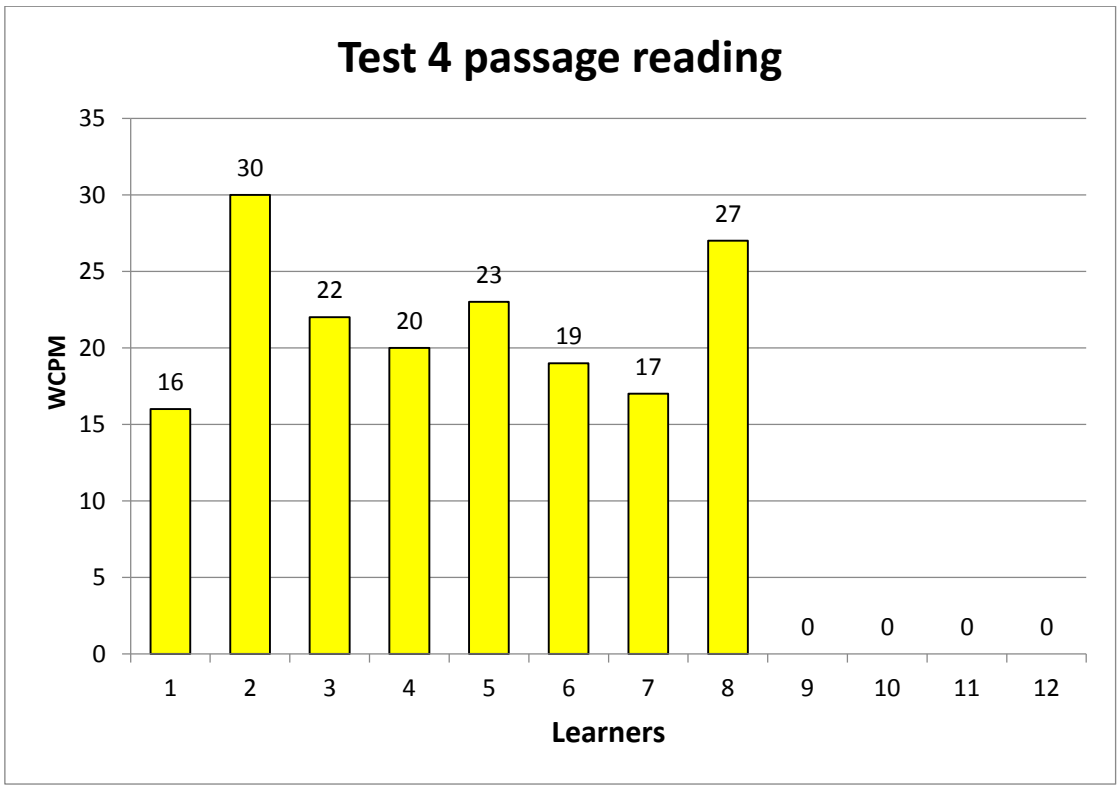
The girls outperformed the boys, as evidenced in the lack of overlap between the two groups, and the female low scores being comparable to the top male scores. It is also interesting to note that almost all male students performed higher than the average for their group, indicating that a few boys performed especially badly.



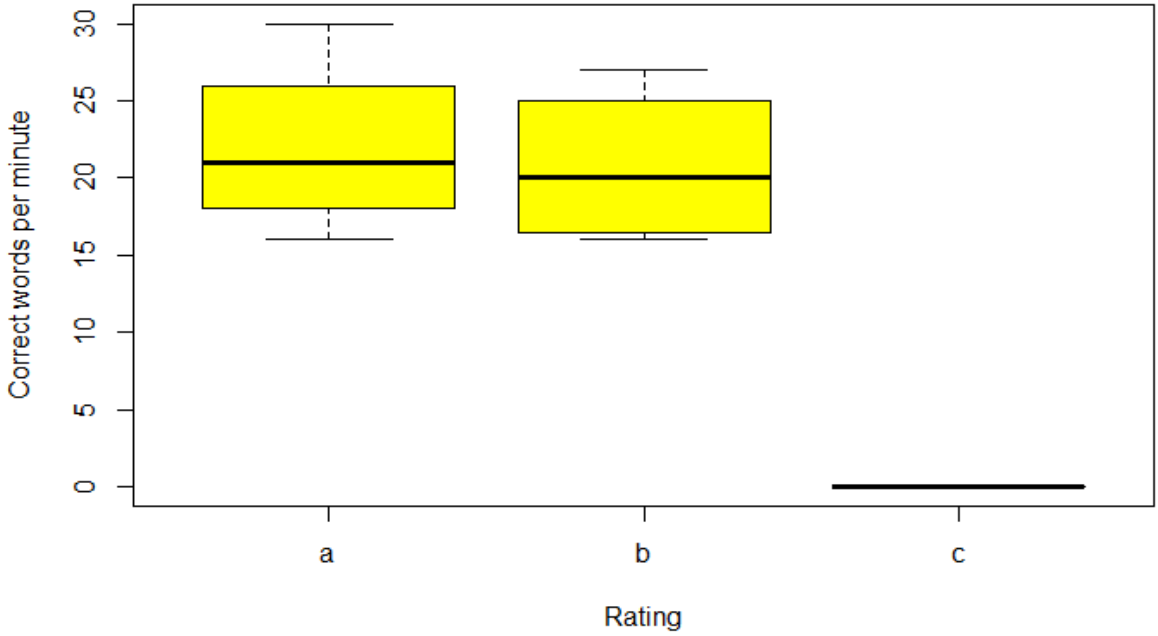
The boxplots suggested that 8-year olds performed the best in this test, as they had a higher average than other age groups. The data for 9-year olds was heavily skewed, suggesting that the majority of them did well in the test when compared to a few at the bottom. The overlap suggested that top performing 9-year olds can be compared to average performing 8-year olds.

School 7 (Yellow)

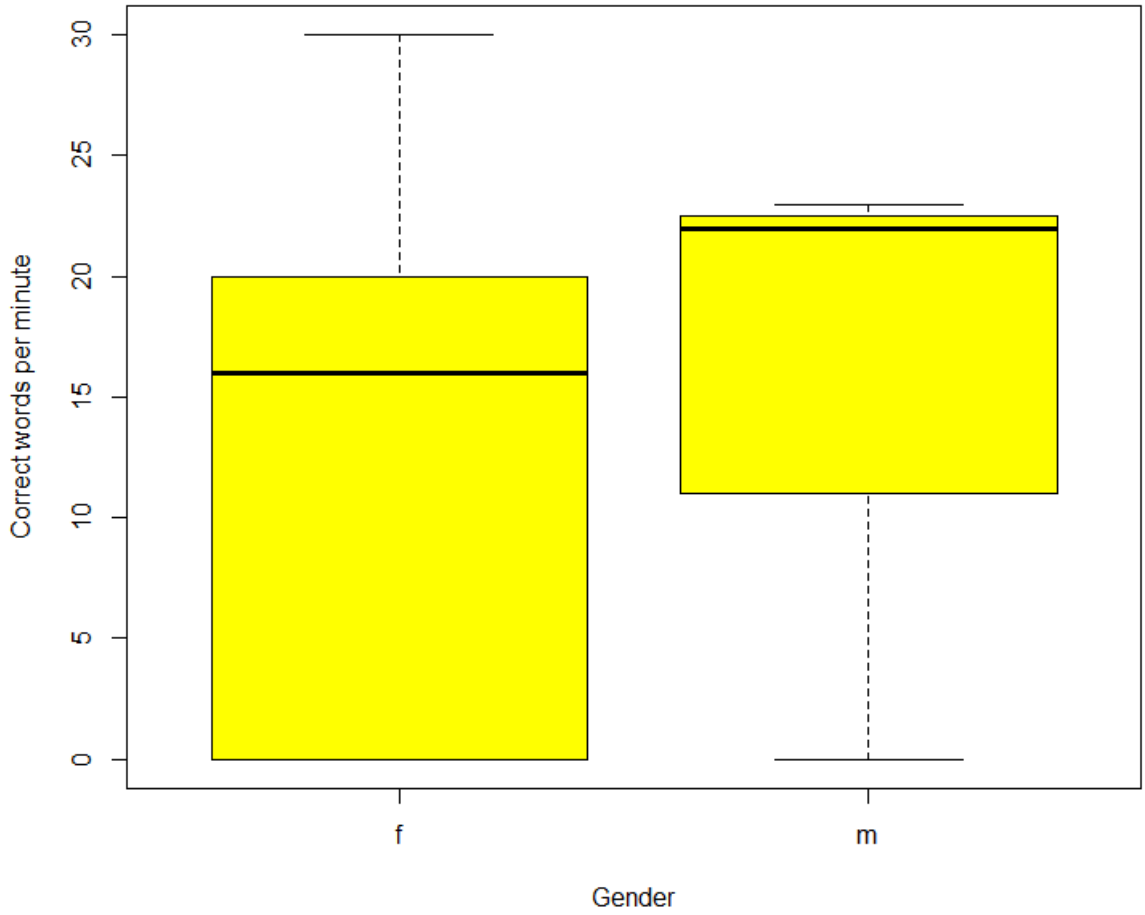
The Grade-3 class in School 7 (Yellow) had 32 learners. There was no book corner in evidence. An alphabet chart was present in isiXhosa, but it was a rudimentary sample printed in black and white. While there was a word wall, the lists lacked icons and did not accommodate the addition of new words. The presence of printed materials was minimal. The classroom spaces were untidy with books, papers and bags left lying around.



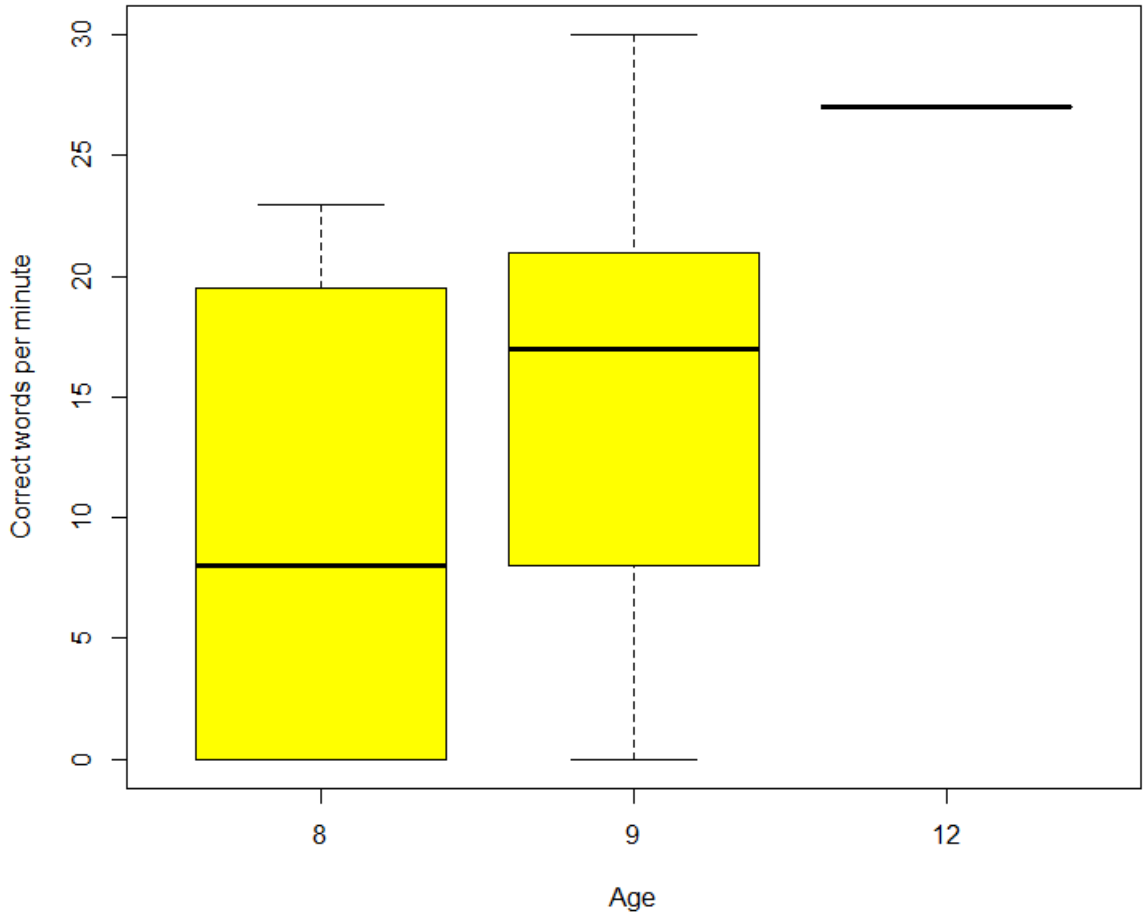
The graph shows the learners in the (a) group (learners 73-76) performed well below expectation for this type of grading, namely 16-30 wcpm for the reading of the passage in the EGRA test. All four sampled learners in the (c) group (learners 81-84) were unable to read any words contained in the passage. Three of the bottom four learners were female and one was male, but all learners were within the average age group for Grade 3, namely 8-9 years of age. Only one learner (80) was 12 years of age, which was beyond the expected age for this grade. This female learner scored 47 out of 110 for the phonics test; 34 words were read in test two; 32 words were read in the passage with only five incorrect words and she scored 4 out of 5 for the comprehension test. It could be expected that a learner who was three years ahead in age would perform better than her peers, however, relative to her age this was not an exceptional outcome. The overall performance of the learners in this class was poor.



The boxplots for the (a) and (b) groups were similar and overlapped considerably, which suggests that there was no difference between these groups. The (c) group performed the poorest as predicted by the teacher's selection, however, the degree of poor performance was alarming.



The boys appear to have outperformed the girls, even though the majority of them did poorly in the test. We can see that the female scores were heavily skewed such that the majority did poorly on the test; however, the top scores in this test were from girls.



The box plot suggests that the 9-year olds performed the best in this test, while the 8-year olds performed the poorest. Most 8-year olds performed above average in their group, and the top score in this test was from the 9-year old group, which was comparable to the 12-year old student's score.

Appendix 2: EGRA Tests

education

Department:
Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

EARLY GRADE READING ASSESSMENT

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

Department of Education

Pretoria

2011

Early Grade Reading Assessment

A Guide for Teachers

2011

Department of Education

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Assess passage reading (PR)

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Charts for learners to read

Progression chart

Learner Assessment Booklet

Multiple marking sheets

TO THE TEACHER:

1. Use this tool to assess learners' **reading fluency** as follows:

• **Letter sounds**	How many letters can the learner sound **correctly** in one minute?
• **Word reading (test for phonemic awareness)**	How many words can the learner read **correctly** in one minute?
• **Passage reading**	How many words can the learner read **correctly** and fluently in one minute? And, do the learners understand what they read? The point is **not** mere speed, but to read fluently.

2. Ask learners questions on the passage reading to assess their **comprehension:** How many questions can the learner answer **correctly** after having read the passage?

3. **Important**: This is merely an assessment tool. It is not the intention that the learners should be taught how to use these tools, or coached deliberately to perform well in these specific tasks. The point is not to memorise these tasks. If learners receive proper, overall reading instruction, they will perform well in these assessments. However, the focus should be on proper instruction, not on specifically coaching learners to do these assessment tasks.

WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

You will need:

1. This early grade assessment tool.
2. A stopwatch or a minute timer.
3. The Learner Assessment Booklet for recording each learner's performance.

WHEN WILL YOU ASSESS LEARNER READING SKILLS?

Assess learner reading skills to establish a baseline and to monitor progression in reading over time as follows:

1. At the **beginning** (**Beg**) of the academic year (towards the end of the first term), to establish their entry levels of reading (baseline assessment).
2. **Mid**-year (towards the end of the second term or the beginning of the third term), to assess if their reading levels have improved, remained the same or deteriorated (progression level assessment).

3. At the **end** of the academic year to evaluate if learners have achieved the expected levels of **fluency** and **comprehension** for their grade.
4. However, please take note that once a learner has mastered a skill (i.e. has met the benchmark), there is no need for continued assessment later on during the year. So, if a learner has mastered the letter sounds properly, there is no need to continue assessing this learner.
5. Similarly, if a learner cannot read a simple word list, it does not make sense to assess the learner's capacity to read and comprehend a passage.

WHAT DOES THE ASSESSMENT TOOL CONTAIN?

1. Instructions on how to carry out the assessments.
2. Charts (Charts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3) of **letters** that learners must recognise and sound aloud.
3. Charts (Charts 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) of **words** that learners must read out aloud.
4. Several **passages** (Charts 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3) that learners must read out aloud.
5. **Questions**, based on the passages, which learners must answer to illustrate their comprehension of the reading passage.
6. **A progression sheet** to monitor the reading progress over time. You will use the sheet to enter each score for each learner for the four (4) tasks relating to reading fluency. Column 1 will be for letter sounds (LS); column 2 for familiar word reading (WR); column 3 for passage reading (PR) and column 4 for comprehension (CO). Once again, please take note that there is no need to re-assess a learner once the learner has met the benchmark.
7. Marking sheets for the learners (Learner Assessment Booklet).

1. Assess letter sounds (LS)

Show the learner the chart of letters. (Charts 1.1, 1.2 or 1.3, depending on the term.)

Say to the learner: **"Here is a page full of letters. I would like you to sound as many letters as you can. I'd like you to start here and move across the page.** (Point to the leftmost letter in the top row, moving from left to right. Sound the example letters provided to the learner.) **When I say, 'Begin', sound the letters as best you can. Point to each letter as you sound it. If you don't know the sound of a letter, I'll pronounce it for you. Put your finger on the first letter. Ready? Begin."**

- Start the timer when you say, "**Begin**".
- In your marking sheet, strike a line through a letter that the learner sounds incorrectly or cannot sound at all. For example: ~~a~~
- If the learner stops for more than three (3) seconds, pronounce the sound and strike a line through the letter. For example: ~~a~~
- If the entire first line has strike-through lines across all the letters, stop the assessment and indicate that zero letters have been read by the learner.
- If the learner corrects himself/herself upon sounding a letter, accept it as correct.
- If the learner says the name rather than the sound, say "**Sound**".
- After one minute, say "**Stop**". Place a bracket (**]**) after the last letter that the learner has sounded correctly.
- Count and record the number of letters that the learner has sounded correctly on the progression sheet for the letter sounds (LS) task.
- If the learner sounds all the letters correctly in less than one (1) minute, make a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the letter sounds (LS) task and do not assess the learner any further in this task.

Letter sounds

Example for marking Chart 1.1

l	~~z~~	s	~~w~~	M	j	i	~~y~~	a	h
h	e	r	o	T	c]	i	e	t	o
e	n	f	v	b	k	o	d	a	t
g	s	u	x	A	i	r	n	d	p

In this case, the learner was able to sound only up to the letter “c”, which is followed by the bracket (**]**), entered by the teacher. The teacher only counts up to here, namely: 16. In other words, the learner sounded only 16 letters. Furthermore, the learner made three (3) mistakes, and the teacher has done a strike-through on “z”, “w” and “y”. Therefore, the learner sounded only 13 letters correctly. So the teacher enters “13” on the progression sheet for this assessment period for this letter sounds task (LS).

If the learner has managed to sound all the letters correctly in <u>less than one minute</u>, the teacher puts a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the letter sounds task (LS) and the assessment is regarded as having been

2. Assess familiar word reading (WR)

Show the learner the chart of words. (Charts 2.1, 2.2, or 2.3, depending on the term.)

Say to the learner: **"Look at these words."** (Point to the words provided as 'Examples'. Read the provided example words to the learner.) **"Here are some more words. I'd like you to start here,"** (point to the first word on Chart 2) **"and move across the page."** (Point across the page.) **"When I say, 'Begin', read the words as best as you can. Point to each word as you read it. If you don't know the word, I'll read it for you. Put your finger on the first word. Ready? Begin."**

- Start the timer when you say, "**Begin**".
- On your marking sheet, strike a line through a word that the learner reads incorrectly or cannot read at all. For example: ~~sad~~
- If the learner stops for more than three (3) seconds, provide the word and strike a line through the word. For example: ~~sad~~
- If the entire first line has strike-through lines across all the words, stop the assessment and indicate that zero words have been read by the learner.
- If the learner corrects himself/herself upon reading a word, accept it as correct.
- After one (1) minute, say: "**Stop**". Place a bracket (**]**) after the last word that the learner has read correctly.
- Count and record the number of words that the learner has read correctly on the progression sheet for the word reading (WR) task.
- If the learner reads all the words correctly in less than one (1) minute, make a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the familiar word reading (WR) task and do not assess the learner any further in this task.

Familiar words

Example for marking Chart 2.1

back	came	but	look	went	what	did	be
got	me	eat	do	like	~~there~~	~~little~~	with
had	are]	your	make	put	he	see	it
the	all	here	no	from	tree	out	an
come	will	time	my	you	too	cat	she
have	some	away	down	A	them	we	in
that	they	can	one	not	of	this	his
was	is	when	so	go	dog	at	day
big	just	said	her	into	to	up	very
for	mother	and	now	on	where	get	then

The learner read for one (1) minute. In this case, the learner was able to read only up to the word “are”, which is followed by the bracket (**]**), entered by the teacher. The teacher only counts up to here, namely: 18. In other words, the learner only read 18 words. Furthermore, the learner made two (2) mistakes or failed to read two (2) words, and the teacher has done a strike-through on “there” and “little”. Therefore, the learner only read 16 words correctly. So the teacher enters “16” on the progression sheet for this assessment period for this word reading (WR) task.

If the learner had managed to read al the words correctly in <u>less than one minute</u>, the teacher puts a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the word reading (WR) task and the assessment is regarded as having been

3. Passage reading (PR)

Ask the learner to read the following story aloud, and time him or her. (You will be showing Charts 3.1, 3.2 or 3.3, depending on the term.)

Say to the learner**: "I'm going to ask you to read this story out loud. If you get stuck, I will tell you the word so that you can keep on reading. When I say, 'Stop', I will ask you some questions about what you have just read. Therefore, do your best while reading. Start here.** (Point to the first word of the passage.) **Ready? Begin."**

- Start the timer when you say, "**Begin**".
- In the Learner Assessment Booklet, strike a line through the word that the learner reads incorrectly. For example: ~~little~~
- If you provided a word, do not mark it as correct.
- If the learner corrects himself/herself upon reading a word, accept it as correct.
- After one minute, say: "**Stop**". Mark the final word attempted by the learner, before you said "**Stop**", with a bracket (**]**).
- Count and record the number of words the learner has read correctly on the progression sheet for the passage reading task (PR).
- If the learner reads all the words correctly in less than one (1) minute, then make a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the passage reading (PR) task and do not assess the learner any further in this task.

Example for marking Chart 3.1

	Words per line
Jabu had a ~~little~~ dog. The little dog was fat and happy. One day	14
Jabu and the dog went out to play in the fields ~~behind~~ Jabu's house.	14
The little dog liked to play tricks and he ran away.**]** The little dog got lost.	16
Jabu was sad. But after a while the dog came back. He had been gone	15
for only a little while.	5
Jabu took the dog home. When they got home Jabu gave the dog a	14
bone. The dog ate it.	5
The little dog was happy, so he slept. Jabu also went to sleep. They both	15
slept for a very long time and played again when they woke up.	13
	111

The learner read for one (1) minute. In this case, the learner was only able to read up to the word "away", which is followed by the bracket (**]**), entered by the teacher. The teacher counts up to here, namely: 39. In other words, the learner only read only 39 words. Furthermore, the learner made two (2) mistakes or failed to read two words, and the teacher has done a strike-through on "little" and "behind". Therefore, the learner only read 37 words correctly. So the teacher enters "37" on the progression sheet for this assessment period for the passage reading (PR) task.

If the learner had managed to read all the words correctly in <u>less than one minute</u>, the teacher puts a tick mark (✓) on the progression sheet for the passage reading (PR) task and the assessment is regarded as having been

4. Comprehension questions (CO)

Say to the learner: "**Now I am going to ask you a few questions about the story you have just read. Try to answer the questions as best you can".**

- Tick a correct response (✓) **next to each question** in the Learner Assessment Booklet.

Comprehension questions

Example for marking Chart 3.1

Question	Answer	Correct
1. Who had a dog?	Jabu	✓
2. Was the dog big or little?	Little	✓
3. Was the dog thin or fat?	Fat	✓
4. Where did Jabu take the dog?	Accept either "To play" or "Home" **or** "To the fields"	
5. What did the dog do after he got the bone?	He slept" **or** "He ate it")	

Total of correctly answered questions: 3

In this case the learner answered three (3) questions correctly, so the teacher enters "3" on the progression sheet for this assessment period for this comprehension task (CO).

Letter sound fluency

Chart 1.1

Examples: b s

l	z	s	w	M	j	i	y	a	H
h	e	r	o	T	c	i	e	t	O
e	n	f	v	B	k	o	d	a	T
g	s	u	x	A	i	r	n	d	P

Letter sound fluency

Chart 1.2

Examples: b s

g	t	w	d	T	b	k	v	e	i
l	e	h	r	J	c	r	t	s	i
z	ɑ	u	o	E	f	n	m	x	s
o	n	h	p	D	i	o	ɑ	y	ɑ

Letter sound fluency
Chart 1.3

Examples: b s

a	x	m	n	L	w	f	h	r	o
y	i	g	u	D	i	s	e	t	o
c	s	t	d	A	t	o	r	j	i
k	b	n	v	H	e	a	p	e	z

Familiar word fluency
Chart 2.1

Examples: pot bell

back	came	but	look	went	what	did	be
got	me	eat	do	like	there	little	with
had	are	your	make	put	He	see	it
the	all	here	no	from	tree	out	an
come	will	time	my	you	Too	cat	she
have	some	away	down	a	them	we	in
that	they	can	one	not	Of	this	his
was	is	when	so	go	dog	at	day
big	just	said	her	into	To	up	very
for	mother	and	now	on	where	get	then

Familiar word fluency
Chart 2.2

Examples: pot bell

here	some	he	will	had	For	so	now
do	my	at	came	time	Day	too	big
was	out	they	when	and	A	them	is
it	look	she	went	just	See	up	tree
what	eat	back	with	from	You	one	this
but	be	an	of	get	Are	the	her
me	not	mother	said	that	Did	there	dog
to	got	we	make	his	Into	cat	very
no	put	then	on	like	come	your	go
in	where	away	can	little	All	have	down

Familiar word fluency
Chart 2.3

Examples: pot bell

her	can	in	there	go	back	that	for
one	away	it	had	so	All	came	put
from	do	be	make	a	out	was	dog
and	he	your	down	tree	eat	too	she
now	you	to	then	got	what	me	some
said	day	when	have	look	see	get	went
into	but	on	an	his	very	not	this
is	cat	at	big	of	with	up	here
did	the	like	they	just	come	are	no
mother	we	them	where	my	little	time	will

Passage reading
Chart 3.1

Jabu had a little dog. The little dog was fat and happy. One day Jabu and the dog went out to play in the fields behind Jabu's house.

The little dog liked to play tricks and he ran away. The little dog got lost. Jabu was sad. But after a while the dog came back. He had been gone for only a little while.

Jabu took the dog home. When they got home Jabu gave the dog a bone. The dog ate it.

The little dog was happy, so he slept. Jabu also went to sleep. They both slept for a very long time and played again when they woke up.

Passage reading
Chart 3.2

Everyone was in the playground at the school. It was after the holidays. The children were playing with their toys. Nomsa had brought a plastic snake along. She had bought it while on holiday with her parents.

Mrs May, their teacher, called everyone inside. Anne liked to play tricks. Anne had an idea. She wanted to play a trick on Mrs May.

Anne cried out that she could see a snake in the playground. Sipho said he could see it too. Ben asked what kind of snake it was. Mrs May told them it was a black adder. Anne smiled. She said it was only a plastic snake.

After Anne had played her trick, all the children started reading their interesting books.

Passage reading
Chart 3.3

Once there was a giant called Nunu. He was big and ugly. He also liked to eat people. One day he saw a clever and brave girl called Lulu. He caught her. He wanted to eat her, but Lulu was too clever for the giant.

Lulu told the giant that she would taste better with salt. The giant put Lulu in his bag. He left the bag in the field. Then he went to get the salt from his house.

Lulu got out of the bag and ran home to her family.

When the giant came back he found that the bag was empty. He was angry. He went to bed hungry that night.

Lulu was happy.

Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA)
Progression Sheet
(See notes on using progression sheet at the end of the sheet)

School:	
Teacher:	
Grade:	

Learner's surname & initials	**Assessment 1 (Beg)** **Date:**				**Assessment 2 (Mid)** **Date:**				**Assessment 3 (End)** **Date:**				**Com-ments**
	1 (LS)	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	
1: Eng. speakers 2: Non-Eng. speakers	20	NA/25/55 NA/20/35	NA/35/75 NA/25/50	5	30	10/40/65 10/25/45	15/55/95 10/35/66	5	40	25/55/75 20/35/55	35/75/105 25/50/80	5	
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Learner's surname & initials	Assessment 1 (Beg) Date:				Assessment 2 (Mid) Date:				Assessment 3 (End) Date:				Com-ments
	1 (LS)	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	
1: Eng. speakers 2: Non-Eng. speakers	20	NA/25/55 NA/20/35	NA/35/75 NA/25/50	5	30	10/40/65 10/25/45	15/55/95 10/35/66	5	40	25/55/75 20/35/55	35/75/105 25/50/80	5	
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	1 (LS)	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	
1: Eng. speakers 2: Non-Eng. speakers	20	NA/25/55 NA/20/35	NA/35/75 NA/25/50	5	30	10/40/65 10/25/45	15/55/95 10/35/66	5	40	25/55/75 20/35/55	35/75/105 25/50/80	5	
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Learner's surname & initials	Assessment 1 (Beg) Date:				Assessment 2 (Mid) Date:				Assessment 3 (End) Date:				Com-ments
	1 (LS)	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	
1: Eng. speakers 2: Non-Eng. speakers	20	NA/25/55 NA/20/35	NA/35/75 NA/25/50	5	30	10/40/65 10/25/45	15/55/95 10/35/66	5	40	25/55/75 20/35/55	35/75/105 25/50/80	5	
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Learner's surname & initials	Assessment 1 (Beg) Date:				Assessment 2 (Mid) Date:				Assessment 3 (End) Date:				Com-ments
	1 (LS)	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	**1 (LS)**	**2 (WR)**	**3 (PR)**	**4 (CO)**	
1: Eng. speakers 2: Non-Eng. speakers	20	NA/25/55 NA/20/35	NA/35/75 NA/25/50	5	30	10/40/65 10/25/45	15/55/95 10/35/66	5	40	25/55/75 20/35/55	35/75/105 25/50/80	5	
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Using the progression sheet:

1. For the word reading (WR) and passage reading (PR) tasks, there are two rows of benchmarks. The first row is aimed at an English medium school, where the learners come from an English-speaking background. That means that the learners meet three requirements, namely: (i) They speak English at home or English is spoken widely in their environment. (ii) They come from a print-rich environment (i.e. there are lots of advertisements, roads signs or posters next to the roads, as well as TV, newspapers and magazines in their immediate environment). (iii) Their parents typically work in an English environment. The second row is aimed at English medium schools, where the majority of learners do not come from an English-speaking background. In other words, these learners do not meet the three requirements stated above.

2. For each of these two tasks there are three numbers, for example 10/40/65. These refer to fluency benchmarks or standards. The 10/40/65 for word reading (WR) for Assessment 2 means that learners attending a school with learners from an English-speaking background should be reading 10 familiar words per minute by mid-year in Grade 1; 40 by mid-year in Grade 2; and 65 by mid-year in Grade 3. The NA means that, in Grade 1, that task is not assessed during the first term, so as to give the learners a chance to first master that particular skill.

3. The letter sound (LS) task should be fully learnt for all the letters during Grade 1, so there are no benchmarks for other grades. However, if learners in a higher grade are not able to sound 40 letters per minute, this needs to be noted.

4. Finally, when a learner has already met the benchmark or standard, make a tick (✓) and do not re-assess this task during the later terms or even during a higher grade.