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Language and Literacy

South Africa is a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural society. The country's Constitution recognizes 11 official spoken languages (prior to 1993, English and Afrikaans were the only two official languages in the country). Based on the 2011 census, there are 51.7 million South African citizens of which the largest group (22 percent) speak isiZulu, followed by isiXhosa (16 percent) and Afrikaans (13 percent). The remaining eight languages (English, isiNdebele, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga) are spoken by less than 10 percent of the population.[1] In addition to the 11 official spoken languages, sign language, Tsotsitaal, Fanagalo, and the languages associated with the Khoisan population, such as !Xun and Kwedam, are recognized. International languages such as Arabic, Italian, Spanish, Gujarati, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, French, German, Hebrew, Portuguese, Serbian, and Urdu are found across the country and also are examined nationally in secondary school exit examinations.

The Constitution of 1996 specifies that all children in South Africa have the right to be educated in their own language. The Department of Education's Language-in-Education Policy, guided by the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, recommends that, wherever possible, the student's first language be used for teaching and learning, especially in the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3).[a,2] A policy of multilingual education underpins the country's education philosophy and, from Grade 3 onward, all students are expected to have one additional approved language as a subject. An additive bilingual model has been adopted with the underlying principle of maintaining home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s). However, particularly in schools where the dominant first language is an African language, it is not standard practice that every student is educated in his or her first language. This is particularly difficult in high density urban areas where many languages coexist. By contrast, students may have a greater likelihood of being educated in their first language in rural areas, where a more monolingual environment exists.

Language of instruction issues are further complicated at the end of the Foundation Phase because the current Language-in-Education Policy requires that English be the language of curriculum and instruction from Grade 4 onward. Planned alterations to the policy include a proposed amendment to extend home language education for another two years, to the end of Grade 5.[3]

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[a]   For more information about Grade R, or the "reception year," see the section Overview of the Education System.

Overview of the Education System

The National Department of Basic Education oversees the South African schooling system. The Minister of Basic Education and her Deputy Minister head the department and are supported by the Director General, who oversees departmental management. In addition, each of South Africa's nine provinces has a provincial head of education. Each province, in turn, is divided into districts, and district managers report to these provincial heads, while school principals report to the district managers. Education provision and delivery is largely a provincial responsibility, and district offices provide support and advice directly to schools, particularly regarding curriculum. Following the official adoption of the Interim Constitution in 1994, attempts were made to decentralize education decision making. However, problems were encountered with education standards and examination quality when managed provincially; consequently, the government decided to centralize the examination system, including all school exit examinations.

Under the South African Schools Act of 1996, schooling is compulsory from ages 7 to 15. The Department of Basic Education in 2014 started introducing a "reception year" (Grade R) in government primary schools to reduce the disadvantages of students coming from different backgrounds when they start Grade 1. The department intended for all government primary schools to offer reception year by 2019 and for Grade R to become a compulsory year of schooling. Primary schools in South Africa comprise Grades 1 to 7 (ages 6 to 13), and secondary schools include Grades 8 to 12 (ages 14 to 18). There are, however, middle schools in some provinces offering Grades 7 to 9. Early childhood development also forms part of the education system, though not all students have access or the funds to these development centers. The structure of compulsory schooling provision in South Africa is presented in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1: Structure of Compulsory Education in South Africa

Phase	Grades	Ages	Status of Education	School Level
Preprimary	—	4–5	Not compulsory	Preprimary
Foundation	R	5–6	To be compulsory by 2019	Primary
	1–3	7–9	Compulsory	Primary
Intermediate	4–6	10–12	Compulsory	Primary
Senior	7–9	13–15	Compulsory	Primary (to Grade 7) Secondary (Grades 8–9)

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In 2013, there were 12.8 million students taught by 447,149 teachers in 30,027 South African schools. Only 4 percent (513,804) of those students were in independent schools taught by 33,194 teachers in 1,584 schools.[4]

Language/Reading Curriculum in the Fourth Grade

South African education underwent several reforms to address the inequalities of the past. The first curriculum after the 1994 elections was the Nates 2005 curriculum. In September 1997, an initial form of this curriculum was approved as three separate policy documents for the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3), the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6), and the Senior Phase (Grades 7 to 9). The curriculum was revised during 2001 and released as the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002. However, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement was devised not as a new curriculum but as an amendment to the National Curriculum Statement. It was implemented in January 2012 with the first cohort being students in the Foundation Phase (Grades R to 3) and Grade 10.

The Intermediate Phase (which includes Grades 4 and 5) has six subjects: home language, first additional language, mathematics, natural science and technology, social sciences, and life skills. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement has specified instructional time for each of these subjects that the schools should adhere to. Furthermore, the curriculum policy also gives a clear breakdown of the time spent per language skill (i.e., listening and speaking, reading and viewing, writing and presenting, language structures and conventions).[5] Underlying these skills are thinking and reasoning, and language structure and use.

Reading Policy

In a multilingual country like South Africa, the curriculum emphasizes the importance of students reaching high levels of proficiency in at least two languages and being able to communicate in others. The language-specific curriculum (subject statement) follows an additive approach to multilingualism; namely, all students learn a language on a "home language" level (which for most would be their home language) and at least one additional official language, and become competent in their additional language on a second language level, while the home language is maintained and developed.

The language subject area includes all 11 official languages as home languages, first additional languages, and second additional languages (e.g., French, Arabic, or Greek among others used primarily for interpersonal and societal purposes). The policy states that the students' home languages should be used for learning and teaching whenever possible, particularly in the Foundation Phase when children learn to read and write. The reality, however, is that approximately 80 percent of learners officially change to a language that is not their home language in Grade 4. Although the curriculum expects careful planning when students are required to make the transition from their home language to an additional language for learning and teaching, this may not be experienced as such by the learner. The reading and viewing skill aims for students to be able to read and view for information and enjoyment and to recognize the purpose of each type of text. These particular skills also aim to produce students who are creative and critical thinkers.[6]

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In the Foundation Phase, the curriculum reflects the guiding principle that language development involves a gradual process of improving literacy teaching and learning. The curriculum advocates an integrated approach to language and literacy development as it is used across the curriculum, though in Grade 4 onward the language teaching approach is "text-based, communicative and process oriented."[7]

The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement for Grades R to 3 also emphasizes that all students be enabled to learn to read. The curriculum policy gives schools the autonomy to decide whether they would like to have more or less teaching time for home and first additional languages based on the students' needs.[8] Of the seven hours per week allocated to language instruction, 4½ hours is dedicated to phonics, shared reading, and group reading. In this regard, the curriculum recognized that all students must be taught strategies that help them to decode written text and to read with understanding. Students also should learn to interpret pictures and other graphics that will help them make sense of visual and multimedia texts. Furthermore, they should know how to locate and use information, follow a process or argument, summarize, develop their own understanding, and adapt and demonstrate what they learn from their reading. The curriculum also recommends that the classroom be a "print rich" environment.

Exhibit 2 presents an overview of the reading and viewing skills that are specified at Grades R to 3.[9]

Exhibit 2: Reading and Viewing Skills, Grades R to 3

	Skills	Grades
Emergent Reading Skills	▪ Recognizing common objects in pictures and arranging pictures to form a story ▪ Begins to read high frequency words ▪ Book handling skills ▪ Reads own name and names of peers	R–1
Shared Reading	▪ Reads enlarged texts ▪ Sequences the events of the story ▪ Uses visual cues to predict what the story is about ▪ Discusses main idea	R–3
Group Reading	▪ Reads aloud from own book ▪ Uses phonics and contextual and structural analysis to make meaning ▪ Monitors self when reading	1–3
Independent Reading	▪ Reads picture books ▪ Reads own writing	R–1
	▪ Reads own and others' writing ▪ Reads aloud to a partner ▪ Reads independently simple fiction/nonfiction books	2–3

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During the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6), students are expected to further develop their proficiency in reading and viewing a wide range of literary and nonliterary texts, including visual texts. The reading policy envisages students who are able to recognize genre and reflect on the purpose, audience, and context of texts. Through classroom and independent reading, students in this phase learn to become critical and creative thinkers. Students in the Intermediate Phase are assessed in three language areas: Oral Literacy Skills, Language in Context, and Writing. Students need at least an overall score (mark level) of four (50 percent to 59 percent) for home language and of three (40 percent to 49 percent) for first additional language to pass the language subject.

Summary of National Curriculum

In January 2012, the National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 12 was put in place nationally. A single comprehensive curriculum and assessment policy document was developed for each subject, replacing the subject statements, learning program guidelines, and subject assessment guidelines in Grades R to 12 that had been part of the former outcomes-based curricula.[10] The National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 12 aims to produce students who are able to do the following: collect, analyze, organize, and critically evaluate information, and communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and language skills in various modes. Language learning in the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6), encompasses all the official languages in South Africa as well as non-official languages, which can be offered at different language levels.

In the current curriculum, the first language acquired by students is called the home language. The home language level of proficiency ideally reflects the basic interpersonal communication skills required in social situations, as well as the cognitive skills essential for learning across the curriculum. However, many South African schools do not offer the home languages of some or all of the enrolled students, and can offer only one or two languages representative of the community and/or selected by the parent body. As a result, the curricula for home language and first additional language refer to the proficiency level at which the language is offered—native (home) or acquired (additional) language.

In South Africa, many African children start using their first additional language, English, as the language of learning in Grade 4. This means that they must reach a high level of competence in reading and writing in English by the end of Grade 3. Taking this into consideration, the additional language policy implemented effectively means that all children must be taught an additional language from Grade 1 onward in addition to their home language. For most schools offering instruction in Grades 1 to 3 in an African language, this effectively means that English is implemented from Grade 1 as the additional language.[11] For schools where Afrikaans is offered as a home language, in most cases English also is included as the first additional language. In schools where English is offered as a home language in Grades 1 to 3, the additional language will be Afrikaans or an African language, depending on the demographics of the school and the parental choice. At the additional language level, emphasis is placed on the teaching of the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. This level is intended to provide students with literary, aesthetic, and imaginative competencies that will enable them to recreate, imagine, and empower their

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understandings of the world in which they live. Listening and speaking receive less emphasis than reading and writing skills from Grade 7 onward.

The current curriculum places the responsibility on teachers to differentiate reading levels and to select reading materials that will effectively support students. Course readers are considered important for reading instruction, while authentic reading material (library books and other real life texts) are thought to develop higher levels of reading (i.e., independent reading). The current curriculum is much more specific in providing teachers with instructional plans that contain the minimum content that should be covered over two week blocks. The implementation of the specified curriculum has received mixed reaction, as it may support less knowledgeable or less experienced teachers, but highly capable and experienced teachers find it constraining and less helpful.

Last, the National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 12 provides teacher guidelines on the development of a language lesson. It suggests that prereading activities should be used to prepare students for reading. Typical prereading activities include discussions of the text title, predictions about story content, and using key words from the text to engage students before starting to read. The curriculum encourages teachers to interrupt reading sessions by "looking back" at the text in order to verify whether predictions were accurate, or to discuss why things did not develop the way in which students predicted. At the same time, further predictions could be made about the story.[12] Teachers are advised to engage students in reflection following reading. Literal questions could be asked, leading to more complex and abstract answers based on inferences made from the text. Students could be asked to retell, dramatize, or critically discuss the text by focusing on values, messages, or cultural or moral issues conveyed in the text. Other activities include comparing the text to other texts they read independently, or identifying differences and similarities between texts.

Teachers, Teacher Education, and Professional Development

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

There are two possible routes to qualify as a professional teacher in South Africa: a four year Bachelor of Education degree or a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (both are university qualifications). Bachelor's degree programs require at least four years (eight academic semesters) of university study in either Foundation or Intermediate Phase teaching. The Postgraduate Certificate in Education, at either the primary or secondary level, is undertaken after obtaining a bachelor's degree (three years) in science, arts, or commerce, provided the major is a recognized teaching subject.

Requirements for teacher education specific to reading include courses in classroom literacies, literacies in education, early literacy, literacy practices, and cross-curricula reading skills. In conjunction with the aforementioned courses, students also are required to take a language up to second year level, as well as another language at conversational competence level as prescribed by the revised policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications. For example, a student who has Afrikaans as the home language and English as first additional language must then take an African language at the conversational level to meet the requirements of the degree.[13] The

revision of the policy was due to the restructuring of the National Qualifications Framework. Furthermore, prospective teachers must be registered with the South African Council of Educators to apply for a teaching position. However, there are teachers currently practicing without this registration.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

The National Policy Framework for Teacher Education and Development addresses the issue of poor teacher development, brought to light by studies such as PIRLS 2006. Its position in South Africa's in-service and continuing education programs should ensure that teachers are now being trained to teach effectively. In addition to the aforementioned policy, the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework for Teacher Education and Development was introduced, and aims to improve the quality of teacher education and development so as to improve the quality of teaching.[14]

There are many nongovernmental organizations working to promote literacy and provide teachers with opportunities for ongoing professional development. Prior to 1994, these organizations were the primary supporters of in-service teacher professional development; currently, most donor funding passes through the government and many of these organizations have closed. Presently, some organizations (e.g., international agencies, universities, corporate business initiatives, and teacher unions) collaborate with the Department of Basic Education, which now offers much of the in-service professional development to public school teachers. The Department of Basic Education also is moving toward a model of Continuing Professional Development Points, thereby requiring teachers to enroll in and attend courses in order to accumulate a set number of points. The Continuing Professional Development learning programs are intended to provide teachers with opportunities to supplement knowledge and understanding, develop new skills, specializations and interests, and support other teachers, learners, and parents. These programs include professional and practical learning. Teachers with initial teacher education such as a degree may enroll in an advanced certificate program to enhance teaching and learning.

Reading Instruction in the Primary Grades

The current curriculum guidelines for the Grade 4 home language assert that reading and viewing skills are the foundation on which successful learning takes place. Teachers are encouraged to use a repertoire of reading materials in the classroom, including visual texts. The curriculum also suggests that teachers make use of different reading methods and could start with shared reading at the start of the year to build a bridge from the previous grade. Thereafter, teachers are encouraged to use methods such as reading with or to the whole class, guided reading, and independent and pair reading with the aim of enabling students to become independent readers.[15] The curriculum promotes teachers' use of different comprehension activities to gauge whether the students understand what they read.

The reading process is a vital part of daily reading instruction and consists of prereading, reading and post-reading strategies. These strategies should be utilized during any reading activity to guide students through the reading process to ensure learning takes place. The prereading phase entails

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recognition of prior learning; finding the source, author, and publication date of reading materials; and reading the first and last paragraphs to be able to make predictions. The reading phase is where students check their own comprehension, compare predictions, visualize what they are reading, and keep reading if they are not sure about certain parts of the text. In this phase the students also are encouraged to ask a fellow student or teacher for help to make sense of a text and reflect on what they have read. In the last phase, post-reading, students should draw conclusions and write a summary about the main ideas of the text to ask questions about the topic and confirm they understood the content and to evaluate any bias in the text.

Instructional Materials

The National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 12 mandates using core materials that include a prescribed language textbook and a dictionary. In addition to the core materials, the policy stipulates using various forms of texts such as folklore, short stories, novels, drama, and poetry to be used in language classrooms. Teachers also are required to make use of media materials (including newspapers, magazines, and television and radio programs) to form part of language and reading instruction.

Use of Technology

In 2004, the Ministry of Education published a report outlining the strategic, pedagogical, and developmental aspects of implementing e-Education in South Africa. The strategic objective of the e-Education policy regarding Information and Communications Technology (ICT) states:

> Every South African manager, educator, and student in the general and further education training bands will be ICT capable (that is, use ICT confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge they need as lifelong students to achieve personal goals and to be full participants in the global community) by 2013.[16]

The original intention was that schools with ICT were expected to use it to enhance student learning—teachers are encouraged to use ICT to enhance instruction, while management and administration are encouraged to access ICT resources that support curriculum delivery. The policy also stipulates community involvement, entrusting communities with responsibility for supporting, sustaining, and maintaining school computer facilities and allowing after hours community access to these facilities. ICT in the classroom environment is encouraged as technology is developing as a prevailing medium of instruction.[17]

The extent of ICT use still varies among schools and regions, and less than half of the schools in the country have ICT in the school, let alone use it for pedagogy. For example, the provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape have established policies and begun implementing ICT into schools, but ICT in schools has not been prioritized in most provinces and security is a problem due to theft. The nonavailability of ICT is not necessarily due to the lack of financial resources. In most cases, schools with ICT are well resourced schools or under-resourced schools that have received ICT resources from donors. Another challenge of ICT in South African schools is the language used: in most instances,

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ICT and software packages are developed in English.[18] Therefore, there is a need for software developers to create programs in other official languages to assist primary school students and teachers in the teaching and learning processes.

Role of Reading Specialists

South Africa has no official policy regarding reading specialists. Occupational therapists, remedial teachers, and speech therapists are employed in some of the more affluent schools or have established links with well resourced schools, particularly in urban areas. Private services exist, but these also are largely available for students from middle class and upper middle class backgrounds. The majority of children in South African schools do not have access to remedial assistance in reading.

Second Language Instruction

The National Curriculum Statement for Grades R to 12 specifically advocates an additive approach to multilingualism in schools. In schools offering the language of instruction in Grades 1 to 3 in a language other than English, English must be introduced as an additional subject in Grade 1 for students who must transition from another language to English as the main language of instruction in Grade 4. In English schools, Afrikaans or another African language must be introduced in Grade 1. The intention was that use of the students' mother tongue should continue for as long as possible. This policy is based on a transitional bilingual education model in which students make the transition from a bilingual program to English monolingual education. However, the Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools draft policy of 2013 stipulates that an African language be introduced from Grade 1 onward as a second first additional language. One of the main goals of the policy is to "promote and strengthen the use of African languages."[19] The policy was piloted in 2014 across eight provinces and in 228 schools.[20] The implication of this on a national level is that for many schools there will be a third language being introduced in Grade 1. In addition to that representing a significant cognitive load on Grade 1 students, schools will face the logistical challenge of the timetable and provisioning of teachers for the additional language. At this stage, the pilot has not grown to scale nationally.

Accommodation Policies for Instruction and Testing

South Africa has several policies in place to ensure a safe environment conducive to learning for children. The first policy, the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) mandates that schools must admit students and serve their educational needs. The Quality Education for All report was commissioned to gain a better understanding of the provision of special needs education. The report's findings and recommendations were included in the Education White Paper 6 of 2001. The policy was drafted in order to accommodate students with special needs and to form inclusive educational settings.[21] Inclusive classrooms allowed students with a low level of special needs to be part of ordinary classes. Another report, Guidelines for Full Service/Inclusive Schools, is part of the Schooling 2025 Plan to provide additional support for the implementation of inclusive education.

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Students with Reading Difficulties

Diagnostic Testing

No official policy exists on the use of diagnostic tests. Occupational therapists and educational psychologists are employed in some of the more affluent schools or have established links with well resourced schools, particularly in urban areas, and parents bear the costs. The majority of children in South African schools do not have access to services that can provide diagnostic information.

Instruction for Children with Reading Difficulties

Although ordinary schools are the norm in South Africa, a limited number of special education schools exists with approximately 116,504 students in 2013.[22] These include schools for students with special education needs, such as those with learning disabilities, hearing or sight impairments, and certain cognitive or developmental disorders. Since 2012, provision has been made in the new curriculum for students who experience low level barriers to learning to be part of ordinary schools to promote inclusive education practices in all schools in South Africa.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

In February 2010, it was announced that new measures would be introduced to boost the country's education system. All students in Grades 1 to 6 and a sample in Grade 9 were required to take Annual National Assessments (ANAs) that are independently administered. Approximately 7 million students were tested nationally in 2011 to 2015. The ANAs are a major aspect of the educational targets of the National Development Plan to improve education in the country.[23] However, the design, implementation, and subsequent analysis of the tests was seen by many to be problematic. Widespread criticism of the ANAs resulted in a national revolt by teacher unions against the testing, with many schools refusing to test in 2016. The program is suspended and the future plans not yet known.

Apart from national efforts to monitor student progress in reading, provincial departments require teachers to report learning progress regularly to students and parents and to the department. Subject record sheets, which include the topic area assessed, are used to record the performance of students. A combination of grades, codes, and comments is used for recording and reporting purposes. The Department of Education uses a seven-point scale ranging from "code 1: not achieved" (0 percent to 29 percent) to "code 7: outstanding achievement" (80 percent to 100 percent) and includes percentages attained for each subject.

The overall level of student performance is reflected in report cards, which form one of the main communication channels between the school and parents. In public schools, report cards are distributed at the end of each of the four yearly terms (three in the case of private schools). The Department of Basic Education mandates that teachers report regularly to students and parents in the form of report cards, as well as at parent meetings, during school visitation days, and through parent teacher conferences or phone calls. Schools determine which reporting strategies to use.

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Special Reading Initiatives

The Department of Basic Education advocates the Drop All and Read initiative where schools are encouraged to set aside a specific time to engage in a reading activity at least once a week. Another example is the African Storybook Project that was developed by the South African Institute for Distance Education, which was undertaken to promote and expose African language authors to the community and give students to opportunity to read in an African language. The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa enables opportunities for literacy learning among and development for all children in multilingual settings. There are several other initiatives such as Project Literacy, Word Works, and Room to Read, which focus on enhancing reading literacy levels in the country.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Naledi Pandor, former Minister of Education, publicly recognized the value of South Africa's participation in large scale assessments and PIRLS 2006 in particular, whether conducted regionally, nationally, or internationally. She not only lent her support to these assessments but also recognized the difficulties associated with implementation and the generally negative publicity that participation has received. Angie Motshekga, current Minister of Education, stated in a recent speech that the department aims to improve students' reading levels to be age appropriate, and that this call was in response to national and international assessments.[24] The National Department of Basic Education directly manages the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality studies, and supported the administration of PIRLS 2006 and PIRLS 2011 in schools. For PIRLS 2016, the Department of Basic Education's role provided significant funding for the project for the first time in partnership with the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment, University of Pretoria, the other funding partner.

South Africa's results from PIRLS 2006, much worse than predicted, prompted Pandor at the time to introduce important changes to the education system, with a particular focus on reading literacy. These changes in the system were monitored by means of national assessment (Annual National Assessments) and various regional assessments such as the Western Cape Department of Education's systemic testing, though both of these assessments have been disrupted by teacher unions.

The Drop All and Read Campaign is among more than 10 government-led initiatives put in place in South Africa to improve students' reading literacy. Beginning in 2008, the campaign has welcomed Grade R and Grade 1 students into education by providing the children with their own branded bags. Each bag contains a selection of books that the children can read by themselves or that parents and caregivers can read to them. Pandor also initiated the 1,000 Libraries Campaign and the Spelling Bee project. The former targets poorly resourced schools in need of reading materials across the country and will run from 2015 to 2019. The aim of the Spelling Bee project is to improve students' language acquisition. The project was originally designed for Intermediate Phase (Grade 4 to 6) students, but in 2016 the project scope extended to include students from the Foundation Phase (Grades 1 to 3).

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PIRLS 2006 and PIRLS 2011 data also revealed that more than half of the primary schools assessed in 2006 and 2011 had no school or classroom libraries, and that only 6 percent of students live in well resourced homes. The PIRLS 2011 data showed that students who came from the aforementioned schools performed on average 155 points lower than students who were in well resourced schools.[25] In the first quarter of 2008, the government announced that it was doubling the public library budget. Later, in 2014–2015 the total expenditure of basic education was just more than half of the total education budget, amounting to approximately 137.68 million Rand.[26] Over the last couple of years the department has sent storybooks, written in all official languages of South Africa, to more than 11,000 primary schools. The distribution of these books allowed many schools to establish classroom libraries for the first time. Other resources and documents that the Department of Basic Education distributed to schools in recent years include the following:

- The National Reading Strategy document, which outlines activities and approaches to promote and develop the reading skills of students

- A set of Rainbow Workbooks for students in Grades 1 to 9 was developed to enhance their listening, reading, and writing skills

- A Rainbow Workbook Training Manual for teachers to clarify how to use these workbooks in everyday teaching and learning

- A handbook for teachers to develop methods, approaches, and activities to improve their teaching of reading

- A multigrade toolkit for teachers that contains reading resources and guidelines that is based on the curriculum for multigrade schools in rural areas

The extent to which PIRLS 2006 and PIRLS 2011 findings contributed to these developments is uncertain, but the coincidence of the timing of these initiatives and reference to PIRLS in parliamentary debates and influential policy related documents (including Treasury) suggests PIRLS had a considerable influence. PIRLS results have shown some "evidence of systemic failure in education despite almost universal access."[27] However, to monitor whether student competencies are improving, the Department of Basic Education established baseline data on student achievement in literacy and numeracy in the early grades. As part of the Foundations for Learning Campaign, primary school students have been assessed annually via standardized tests, and the resulting data are being compared against established baselines. The Department of Education also implemented the Annual National Assessments to gauge students' performance on language and mathematics from Grades 1 to 9. These initiatives were designed in response to national outcry over students' low performance on national, regional, and international assessments. However, whether directly or indirectly, PIRLS certainly has contributed to a heightened awareness throughout South Africa of the country's current status, problems, and needs regarding literacy.

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