Bridging Literacy: The contribution of Rhodes University literacy programmes in the literacy development of Foundation Phase children in a non-fee primary school in Joza, Makhanda.

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Abstract

Literacy is fundamental to educational success and social participation. However, global literacy levels remain unsatisfactory, particularly in countries like South Africa with low quality and unequal education. In post-apartheid South Africa, attempts to improve livelihoods have led to the development of various mechanisms and strategies aimed at addressing inequality gaps, particularly in the realm of education. One example is the mandate for higher education institutions to be socially responsive to the needs and wants of their local communities, based on the knowledge and resource exposure gained as they conduct their core functions of teaching and research. This study focuses on the community literacy programmes initiated by Rhodes University in Makhanda, evaluating their contribution to the development of literacy skills in foundation phase children at a non-fee primary school in the Joza community. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically. Social capital theory was then applied to explore the role of community-university partnerships in promoting literacy as part of community development. Findings reveal that such literacy programmes foster multi-level partnerships among stakeholders, enhance children's social-emotional development, and support the improvement of literacy practices in the school. The study highlights the importance of values such as mutual benefit, trust, and collective action in these partnerships formed within the literacy programmes.

Keywords: literacy development, partnership, social capital, engaged citizenship

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother, Miss Ndileka Gloria Kosi, for her great fight and resilience against lymphoma cancer 4B. The thesis is not about cancer, but to us (me and her) is proof of how God has carried us for each other throughout the years.

May her beautiful soul rest in peace *MamVala, Dikela, Noni, Yongose*.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Over the past decade, research has indicated that South African literacy and educational quality levels are unsatisfactory. Researchers have explored multiple factors likely to be influencing this educational crisis, including inadequate implementation of policy strategies, unequal resource allocation (i.e. allocation of learning material, infrastructure, financial resources and human resources), socio-economic barriers, and lack of parental involvement (Spaull *et al.,* 2017). These factors represent fundamental influence agents in education performance and are thus rightfully explored as avenues by which the current educational challenges could be addressed. Focus of most research has been particularly on lower-level education, i.e. primary school, as the foundation of the education process. The principal function of primary school is to develop basic and crucial skills in language, reading, comprehension and numeracy. This study's focus is on the foundation phase of primary education.

The South African Department of Basic Education (DBE) reports that 40% of the average foundation phase school day is allocated to teaching literacy and numeracy skills (DoE, 2003:28) It is important to define literacy within the context of this study, as the term has many different forms, definitions and interpretations. In this study, literacy refers to the ability to read and write with understanding. This most basic definition of literacy is foundational as it underpins the development and acquisition of other more sophisticated degrees of literacy (ILA Foundation, 2021). This definition captures the nuanced aspects of literacy as a social process that remains in need of further development in overcoming South Africa's overall educational crisis.

Education has been a major point of focus on South Africa's post-apartheid redress agenda. Thus, various redress mechanisms and strategies have been employed in the post-apartheid educational sphere, including the mandate for Higher Education (HE) institutions to respond to social needs in their surrounding communities. Whilst extensive research on education and literacy has been undertaken in response to this mandate, few studies have explored how community-university partnerships might be formulated within small settings to enable HE institutions to effectively and directly address educational challenges at the local scale. Thus, the role that universities could potentially play using their unique suite of resources (e.g., finances, student engagement, research

expertise) in overcoming educational challenges within their communities has been underexplored and underdeveloped.

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to bridge this research gap as it explores the potential of community-university partnerships to assist in overcoming educational challenges at the local scale. The exploration takes the form of a case study in which the impact of Rhodes University literacy programmes is assessed in the context of a non-fee public primary school in Joza, Makhanda (formerly known as Grahamstown).

1.3 Context of the Study

Literacy is a bedrock of children's education and lifelong learning (Zua, 2021:96). Developing strong literacy skills is crucial as they directly influence cognitive development, social participation and academic success (SACMEQ, 2011:1). In South Africa, where many children face socio-economic challenges, literacy initiatives are vital in bridging the educational gap resulting from the socio-economic barriers. This gap is recognised by the Department of Basic Education which has arranged schools into quintiles based on their socio-economic levels (SACMEQ, 2011:2). This study's case-study school is categorised on quintile 3 in Makhanda, a local home to Rhodes University.

Rhodes University has implemented various literacy programmes aimed at enhancing reading and writing skills among young learners in Makhanda. This study focuses on primary school programmes designed for the foundation phase, evaluating the contribution of these programmes in no-fee primary schools in Makhanda where access to quality education resources is often limited.

The chosen case-study school is a beneficiary of all the foundation phase literacy programmes implemented in Makhanda by Rhodes University. It is in Joza - a township facing significant socio-economic challenges which often impact the educational opportunities available to its children. No-fee primary schools in South Africa serve as critical educational institutions, providing socio-economically disadvantaged children access to education. In 2016, about 80% of South African children attended non-fee schools which received annual financial subsidy from the government (DBE, 2021).

Unfortunately, many learners in such schools tend to struggle with literacy, which hinders their overall academic performance, school retention and overall, their future social participation potential. In line with this trend, illiteracy levels in Foundation Phase learners in Makhanda were indeed found to be particularly high in the no-fee schools (Long, 2023:3). Thus, understanding the impact, both current and potential, of collaborative (i.e. community-university) literacy programmes in these contexts is essential in the bid to address the educational challenges faced by these young learners.

Literacy's significance is recognised globally. It is acknowledged as a fundamental goal on the road towards Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2017; Zua, 2021), and as essential to personal progress and social mobility. However, unsatisfactory literacy levels in various parts of the world continue to ignite concern with respect to the goal of achieving sustainable development by the stated 2030 target (World Bank, 2019; Murray, 2021:2). One could argue these levels to be an after-effect of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. However, before the pandemic the United Nations recognised that over 200 million children would not be literate by 2030 (United Nations, 2021). The observation by the World Bank depicts the crisis facing education, particularly in the sphere of literacy.

1.4 Literature Review

Globally, the conceptualisation of literacy has evolved over time as society has advanced in areas such as technology and media. This has ignited debate regarding its proper definition. However, multiple studies concur that reading and writing remain the foundational skills by which to identify and measure literacy (De Witt, 2009:619; De Witt & Lessing, 2017:1846; Long, 2023:2; Millin, 2015; Prinsloo, 1999:1).

Studies have indicated that literacy rates in various parts of the world remain unsatisfactory as poverty and other social struggles continue to hinder children's access to quality education (Murray, 2021; World Bank, 2019). This is significant because, as mentioned above, literacy is not only important for the academic success of individuals and their potential to be active participants of society, but also for the realisation of global sustainable development. Indeed, literacy is embedded in the achievement of each of the 17 sustainable development goals (McKay, 2018:392; Zua, 2021:96).

In South Africa, scholars have continued to report on the literacy crisis facing the nation, considering various aspects that might influence literacy development, e.g. language of learning and teaching, resources and infrastructure, home support, and even the inequality inherent in the country's education system (Howie *et al.,* 2007; Millin, 2015; Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Reading Panel, 2022; Van Staden, 2014).

Very few studies have explored the role of HE institutions in fostering literacy development within small communities. A study by Mwedzi (2024) examines the role of community-based programmes in public secondary schools at Grade 12 level, with a special focus on one of Rhodes University's local education intervention programmes. Nomsenge (2019) and Mwedzi (2024) found that as a recognised educational city, Makhanda reflects the educational inequalities that exist in the Eastern Cape province at large.

To date, few scholars like Talbot (2022) have explored the impact of Rhodes University's primary school initiatives in Makhanda, and the scope of that study was limited to evaluating the effectiveness of a single foundation phase literacy programme. Because Rhodes University runs several community-university-partnership education programmes, further studies are necessary to probe the effectiveness of these initiatives. This study gravitates towards that research gap as it considers the contribution of a suite of Rhodes University literacy interventions in a no-fee primary school in Makhanda.

1.5 Purpose of the Study, Goals and Questions

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the contribution of Rhodes University's literacy programmes to the development of literacy skills in foundation phase children at one selected public primary school in the Joza community.

The study is guided by one main goal with three subsidiary goals. The main objective is to determine the contribution of the Rhodes University literacy programmes to literacy development at the selected case study school. The subsidiary goals are: to evaluate stakeholders' perspectives on these literacy programmes, to investigate the role of parents in the programmes, and to evaluate the part played by engaged citizenry in the literacy development facilitated by the programmes.

The research questions pertaining to these goals are as follows:

1. How do the Rhodes University literacy programmes contribute to the literacy development of foundation phase children in the selected no-fee primary school in Joza?
2. How do stakeholders (i.e. parents, programme coordinators, teachers and students) perceive the role and contribution of the Rhodes University literacy programmes in the school?
3. Are there gaps in the programmes that need to be addressed and, if so, how might this be accomplished?
4. What is the role of a local community in fostering the development of its children's literacy?

1.6 Methodology and Methods

The study employed a qualitative case-study approach which enabled the collection of rich and detailed insights regarding the experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders involved in the school. It also best facilitated an evaluation of the contribution fostered by the literacy programmes in question, and of areas in which they might require improvement.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews which allowed for the exploration of unanticipated insights revealed by participants. This data was thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and themes within it.

The case study primary school was selected based on its participation in all three foundation phase literacy programmes run by Rhodes University in Makhanda primary schools.

The stakeholders referred to include programme coordinators, university student volunteers, schoolteachers and parents.

1.7 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted with careful attention to ethical concerns. At every step, including recruitment of participants, data collection, data storage, and data analysis, stakeholders' rights were prioritised. Key ethical principles such as anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent, and the assessment of risks and benefits were upheld to ensure the protection of participants and the integrity of the study. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the ethics committee of the Rhodes University humanities faculty.

1.8 Overview of Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertaining to literacy education and development, particularly within the context of Makhanda in the Eastern Cape. Chapter 2 also outlines the theoretical framework (i.e. the social capital concept) that was employed to analyse the partnership between Rhodes University and the case study school. Chapter 3 provides a contextual account, outlining the concept of community engagement (CE) and the role of HE institutions in community development, with a focus on literacy. Chapter 4 comprises a detailed account of the study's research design. This includes a discussion of the methodological paradigm underpinning the study and of the techniques employed and ethical considerations made during the research process. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the collected data and findings which are discussed under three emergent themes. Lastly, Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarising the research findings, acknowledging the limitations of the research, making concluding remarks, and presenting recommendations for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Educational excellence stands as a cornerstone for societal and economic advancement, with literacy serving as its bedrock in shaping the educational trajectory of children. Quality literacy acquisition is pivotal, as it significantly influences children's educational achievement potential (Reading Panel, 2022; UNESCO, 2017). Although there is debate amongst scholars regarding the proper definition of literacy, consensus prevails that its key indicator is the ability to read and write with understanding (Govender & Hugo, 2020; Millin, 2015; Murray, 2021:1). Literacy is a broad concept with various facets including language, reading, writing, comprehension, and communication (Howie et al., 2007; PIRLS, 2021), and it has evolved to include visual and digital abilities as well. This chapter, however, focuses on the primary indicators of literacy, i.e. reading and writing with comprehension.

Despite numerous efforts post-1994, South Africa is still grappling with an educational crisis rooted in poor literacy performance amongst children. South Africa has nine provinces, each exhibiting different levels of educational performance influenced by unique realities of the provinces. The Eastern Cape stands out as requiring urgent attention due to its notably low educational performance. In 2018, 60% of children in the Eastern Cape were found to be unable to read and write for meaning by the end of Grade 4 (Cilliers & Bloch, 2018:1). Towns like Makhanda have been microcosms of the educational challenges and inequalities faced across the province at large (Mwedzi, 2024: 391). However, unlike in most other Eastern Cape contexts, several partnerships have been established in Makhanda with the express aim of intervening to improve educational outcomes in the town at various educational levels (Mwedzi, 2024:394; Nomsenge, 2019:5). These include educational partnerships between Rhodes University and several local schools. This study delves into the literacy landscape of no-fee public schools on the eastern side of Makhanda.

Existing literature on this topic is predominantly concerned with policy reforms and teacher practice and tends to overlook the significant role that on-ground community partnerships could foster in literacy development (Mwedzi, 2024:391). Studies that do consider such relationships tend to approach them from an analytical and critical perspective, and not much as potential

solutions to the current childhood literacy crisis. There are few studies that explore the role played by institutions and organisations in fostering the improvement of educational quality within their communities. This dissertation seeks not to challenge existing literature, but rather to contribute to the scholarship on how communities can collaborate to overcome their educational challenges at a local level.

This chapter explores existing literature in the fields of education and literacy that is pertinent to this study. It examines contextual factors that tend to impact literacy development in South Africa, spotlighting the literacy landscape in Makhanda. Furthermore, the chapter focuses on several literacy intervention programmes being administered at a selected no-fee primary school in Joza (a local township in the East of Makhanda) by Rhodes University (a HE institution within the town).

2.2 Conceptualising Literacy

Globally, the conceptualisation of literacy has evolved as society has experienced technological, industrial and economic transformation. These transformations have impacted on social organisation and engagement, sometimes resulting to varied interpretation and understanding of concepts including literacy (Govender & Hugo, 2020:1; Millin, 2015:107). The concept of literacy can now include aspects like digital and visual literacies and the ability to read and reflect on visual text (like images) to match the demands and trends of contemporary society (Millin, 2015:107). Such changes have led to different ways of understanding literacy and the competencies it entails. Due to such, it is therefore imperative for this study to identify the characteristics and understanding of the literacy concept it employs.

2.2.1 Defining literacy

Multiple literacy studies concur that reading and writing are the foundational skills by which to identify and measure literacy (De Witt, 2009:619; De Witt & Lessing, 2017:1846; Long, 2023:2; Millin, 2015; Prinsloo, 1999:1). Thus, whilst it may seem old fashioned, basic and narrow, this study adopts a definition of literacy premised on these primary indicators which asserts that literacy refers to an ability to read and write in a manner that communicates text identification, meaning construction and comprehension (De Witt & Lessing, 2017:1846; Govender & Hugo, 2020:1; Murray, 2021:1; PIRLS, 2021; Reading Panel, 2022). What makes this definition seem

narrow is the evolution of more recent definitions and measures of literacy that tend to include other contemporary social qualities to the measurement and assessment of literacy; these includes children's evaluation, use, reflection and engagement behaviours with respect to text and digital devices as important factors (Mo, 2019:2; Murray, 2021:1). However, it can be argued that these behaviours are all rooted in an individual's ability to read, write and understand text. Hence, the skills of reading and writing with understanding remain foundational to all kinds of literacy development, helping children navigate their entire education process.

2.2.2 The journey to being literate

Becoming literate is a continuous, multi-stage process progressing from the acquisition of foundational skills to the development of higher-order comprehension abilities. Foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and oral language development are essential for the development of reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of literacy (Moats, 2020). Without mastery of these prerequisite skills, readers struggle to access and make meaning from text as each component builds on and supports the others within a cohesive literacy framework. And so, it is understood that literacy development is a complex process requiring multiple inputs and efforts towards achievement of satisfactory performance. It is imperative to realise that literacy, and as a primary component of overall education, is developed and acquired through social and cumulative processes (Boakye, 2015:134).

Children's literacy, in particular, "does not develop in a vacuum" but is a "socially constructed" process (Pretorius & Machet, 2004:45-46). As a social process, it entails the need for active involvement by various role players in contexts like the home, community and school. Millin (2015:115) states that "learning is a social process" and takes place through social interaction with people who have mastered higher levels of literacy acquisition and can therefore support new learners. This can play out in two ways. Firstly, more knowledgeable others (e.g., teachers, peers, or caregivers) who can interact with and support learners' achievement of better understanding and skilfulness through scaffolding within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (i.e. a characteristic of learning where learners achieve higher levels of understanding and skill acquisition through interactions with these knowledgeable figures, who could be teachers, peers, or caregivers). The ZPD represents the space within which a learner can, with guidance from more knowledgeable others who provide targeted support, accomplish tasks that they could not manage

alone. This process is facilitated by the more knowledgeable other, who provides targeted support that is gradually reduced as the learner becomes more competent (Sosibo, 2024). Secondly, through interactions with more experienced individuals, children become socialised into a group or home by learning its culture, its values, and what appropriate behaviour within it entails. This teaching takes place either through verbal communication or practical demonstration (e.g., a parent modelling what they intend the child to learn and internalise as rightful). This way, the child is being taught what values and behaviours are acceptable in the home. This socially constructive process significantly influences children's literacy development (Van Staden, 2014:2). Thus, cementing that children's literacy does not develop in isolation, rather social interaction across contexts and individuals influences children's literacy development. It is imperative, therefore, to recognise that quality literacy development requires multiple inputs to reach satisfactory levels within communities.

In addition to being a social process, education is also a cumulative one whereby each stage's outcomes constitute the requirements of the subsequent one. Thus, educational processes of literacy acquisition and of overall education should be carefully curated to ensure satisfactory outcomes in an on-going process of advancement. An acknowledgement of the cumulative nature of education is reflected in the fact that most education systems are organised into phases. In South Africa, formal education is organised into a Foundation phase (Grades R-3), an Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6), a Senior Phase (Grades 7-9) and Further Education and Training phase (Grades 10-12) according to the National Qualifications Framework which provides an overview of outcomes and values to be achieved across the education system (Prinsloo, 1999:10). The Foundation Phase's practices and activities are rooted in developing foundational literacy and numeracy skills (DBE, 2003:19). Indeed, 40% of teaching time in the Foundation Phase is allocated to literacy skill development (DBE, 2003:31; Howie *et al*., 2007:6), because these are the skills upon which all later learning and education depend. This time allocation reflects the Foundation Phase's goal to ensure that all children acquire the fundamental skills required to become literate (DBE, 2003:31).

This study focuses on children in the Foundation Phase. It is the first phase and is responsible for the development of "primary skills and knowledge…[which] lays the foundation for further learning" (DBE, 2003:19). This phase is for children aged 5-10 years, as per the regulations of Notice No. 2432 of 1998 and National Policy Act 27 of 1996 (DBE, 2003:19). According to the

South African curriculum, children exiting this phase should have acquired skills in phonics awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Moats, 2020). However, in addition to the classroom-based Foundation Phase literacy development programme, there are two other fundamental contexts in which the acquisition of literacy can and should be greatly supported, namely, the home and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector prior to the commencement of formal schooling (i.e. Grade R).

2.2.3 Contextual factors affecting literacy development

The settings in which children first encounter learning affect their progress in literacy acquisition and development. Thus, the provision of adequate early learning contexts for children fosters their advancement in the education system and their attainment of personal goals (Spaull *et al*., 2017:20). Indeed, several studies have indicated the importance of context in influencing literacy development (De Witt, 2009:619; Millin, 2015:107; Pretorius & Machet, 2004:45; Prinsloo, 1999; Pretorius & Machet, 2004: 45; De Witt, 2009: 619; Millin, 2015: 107).

2.2.3.1 Home-based support and parental involvement

Pretorius and Machet (2004:45) revealed that the construction of meaning, which is pivotal in literacy, is "from the world", meaning it is socially constructed within the various contexts children emerge from and are exposed to. The development of literacy skills is not solely a function of a person's cognitive abilities. Rather it is shaped in various social contexts, with the home being a primary one (Boakye, 2015: 134; De Witt, 2009: 619; Pretorius & Naude, 2002: 447; Pretorius & Machet, 2004: 46; Van Staden, 2014: 2). In fact, it can be asserted that a child's journey to being literate begins in their immediate environments, which is their home (Van Staden, 2014:2). Thus, the practice of literacy-related activities in homes and the value attached to those practices in homes significantly contribute to literacy skill development. Examples of such activities include parents' involvement through buying reading books for their children, parents regularly checking up on their children's school progress, and parents implementing literacy-developing mechanisms (e.g. reading together) in their homes, watching educational shows like some cartoons or installing applications for literacy and numeracy activities in accessible devices.

In the South African context, the role of caregivers and educators in literacy development is especially critical. Research shows that early intervention and quality mediation—characterised by meaningful, interactive support—can significantly influence children's literacy trajectories. The

interaction between caregivers and children within a home or learning environment is vital in promoting literacy as it shapes a child's capacity to engage with language and text. For instance, children from socially disadvantaged communities may face challenges due to limited access to quality intervention, which can impact their ability to develop critical reading and comprehension skills. Caregivers and educators play an essential role in bridging this gap, ensuring that children receive the support necessary to thrive in literacy development (Tayob & Moonsamy, 2018).

Hemmerechts *et al*. (2016) trace the role of the home environment (its socio-economic status and degree of parental involvement) in the development of literacy skills in children. Importantly, for many children, the concept of "home" extends beyond the houses they reside in to their larger communities. This is particularly true in the African context, where there is a shared belief in the role of a community in raising children as encapsulated in the African proverb "it takes a village to raise a child". The dynamics and socio-economic status of a home influence the development of its children's literacy skills (Hemmerechts *et al.,* 2016:4; Van Staden, 2014:2). Its socio-economic status may be influenced by multiple factors, e.g. the education level and employment status of its residents, and the lifestyle and values upheld within it and the community in which it is situated. For instance, in a low-status socio-economic community with high unemployment rates there may not be any reading material available for children, or the interest to checking on their children's educational progress is unlikely to take priority as parents struggle to meet the most basic survival needs. All these factors influence the rate of children's literacy development. Because literacy has such a fundamental impact on a child's future, communities, with the different entities and structures within those communities need to work together to ensure that their children develop literacy skills at a satisfactory rate.

The promotion of literacy-based activities within the home can help increase the likelihood that children will become literate. Engaging young children's brains in age-appropriate reading, listening and speaking activities (e.g., storytelling every night before bed, asking them to recite days of the week, counting or playing literacy games) significantly motivate children and support the stimulation of their early learning. Several studies have indicated that creating an environment of learning in a fun way within the home is crucial in developing children's literacy (Dong *et al.,* 2020; Forte & Salamah, 2022; Li & Doyle, 2022). However, the degree to which children receive such support at home regarding the development of their literacy skills is affected by a range of

factors, including parent education levels and parents' degree of involvement in their children's education process. While it is not in the scope of this dissertation to discuss the varying levels of home-based support children receive, it is essential to remain cognisant of the varying home environments from which children enter the school system. These can significantly affect their school-based achievement, particularly in contexts where adult illiteracy rates are high (Zua, 2021:3).

2.2.3.2 Early childhood development (ECD)

In addition to the home environment, ECD (the educational stage before formal schooling commences) plays a significant role in developing children's literacy abilities. A study conducted on a particular literacy programme operated in Makhanda defines ECD as "the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional development of a child from conception up until the age of six" (Ashley-Cooper *et al*., 2019, cited in Talbot, 2022). The intersection of these fundamental aspects of human development within the ECD stage encapsulates its weightiness in the literacy journey where cognitive, social and emotional aspects all need to be developed simultaneously (Millin, 2015:115). Studies have highlighted the vital role of ECD in literacy development (Choi & Kirkorian, 2016; Lonigan &Goodrich, 2017), but whilst its importance is fully acknowledged, ECD is outside the scope of this dissertation.

2.2.4 The importance of being literate

Being able to provide an adequate context for literacy learning is of importance for children to acquire foundational literacy skills to help them with effective progression to reach higher levels in the education system and meeting their personal goals (Spaull *et al*., 2017:20). Much scholarly attention has been paid to the development of literacy amongst children in various parts of the world (Govendor & Hugo, 2020; Murray, 2021:2; Perry, 2008:57; UNESCO 2017). Literacy is acknowledged not only for its significance within education *per se*, but also for its fundamental contribution to various aspects of societal progress such as individual social mobility, socio-political participation and national economic growth (Saidi, 2023:4; UNESCO, 2017).

2.2.4.1 Literacy for societal progress

Education has been identified as one of the primary drivers of global development, as reflected in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (UNESCO, 2017; Zua, 2021:1). SDG 4 promotes

the provision of quality education for all and highlights the importance of promoting lifelong learning (Zua, 2021:1). Part of ensuring quality education is prioritising the development of adequate literacy skills in children, driving them towards completing school and attaining their goals. The acquisition and development of such an important foundational skill - literacy - increases the potential and incentive for both individuals and societies to develop. This realisation has led to multiple studies in various contexts (e.g. Millin, 2015; Murray, 2021; PIRLS, 2021; Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Spaull, 2013; Spaull *et al*., 2017; Taylor, 2019; Zua, 2021).

Literacy, as an educational cornerstone, has been shown to fundamentally improve a child's prospects for overall academic success (Long, 2023:2; Millin, 2015; Mwedzi, 2024:2). Adequate literacy skills acquired early on equip a child to meet the requirements of subsequent educational stages, and ultimately to find their voices and actively participate in their communities. Literacy has also been found to powerfully contribute to poverty reduction and, consequently, to a decline in other social ills like unemployment and crime (ILA, 2013:11; McNamara *et al*.,2019:57). Thus, the Reading Panel (2022) has gathered a panel of education-committed individuals (one of which is the chancellor of Rhodes University) with a strong will and clear vision with respect to improving the standard of literacy education in South Africa. The panel is focused on the vision that, by 2030, all South African children should be able to read and write with meaning (Reading Panel, 2022).

2.2.4.2 Literacy for personal progress

The acquisition of literacy enables individuals to attain their personal goals, to "develop their knowledge and potential", and to participate in their communities (UNESCO, 2017:13). Being literate allows individuals to access, comprehend, and critically engage with information in diverse contexts. It also enhances their capacity to fully participate in educational, social, and economic activities which, in turn, improves their quality of life and increases their opportunities for social mobility (Moats, 2020). Literacy supports cognitive development, promotes the development of problem-solving skills, and strengthens self-efficacy, enabling individuals to navigate complex tasks and make informed decisions (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2010). Moreover, in a rapidly changing world marked by technological advancement, literacy is a key determinant of employability, as it underpins the development of higher order skills such as digital literacy and critical thinking (OECD, 2019).

For all the reasons outlined above, a great deal of literacy-related research is driven by the motive to improve literacy across the globe (Zua, 2021:1). Likewise, this dissertation focuses on literacy-improvement interventions within the small town of Makhanda, South Africa.

2.3 Literacy in South Africa

South Africa faces many educational challenges, particularly in the realm of child literacy development (De Witt, 2009; Levy *et al*., 2018; Long, 2023; Malda *et al.*, 2014; PIRLS, 2021; Prinsloo, 1999; Spaull, 2013; Spaull *et al*., 2017; Taylor, 2019).

2.3.1 Challenges to literacy development in South Africa

South Africa's regular participation in international assessment and evaluation programmes like the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) has revealed the literacy crisis that it faces. PIRLS is conducted at five-year intervals to track progress in children's literacy skills across various participating countries (Howie *et al*., 2007). It focuses on the degree of literacy at Grade 4 level, which represents the point at which non-English South African students cease to be taught in their respective mother tongues and begin receiving 90% of their lessons in English (Spaull *et al*., 2017:25). The latest PIRLS study conducted in 2021 revealed that 81% of South African Grade 4s were unable to reach 400 points, which is the lowest benchmark in the assessment (PIRLS, 2021; Reading Panel, 2022). Non-fulfilment of the lowest benchmark range (400 to 474 points) indicates that learners are "unable to retrieve basic information from the text to answer simplistic questions" (PIRLS, 2021:6). This means that only 19% of the evaluated South African learners were able to read and write with comprehension. Children's inability to reach the minimum literacy requirement at Grade 4 implies that they will be unable to engage in their learning curricula beyond that point and will therefore find themselves effectively excluded for their remaining academic years (Spaull *et al.,*2017:25).

There are underlying issues in the South African education system that contribute significantly to the literacy dilemma facing its children. Several studies have been conducted to reveal these (e.g. Levy *et al.*, 2018; Spaull, 2013; Spaull *et al.*, 2017; Van Staden, 2014; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). Research within various institutions and organisations like Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE, 2020) reflect a challenge in South Africa's child-literacy One

of the most common pointed out areas of this challenge is inequality and a lack of access to resources.

2.3.1.1 Inequality and educational disparities

The primary issue underlying South Africa's poor literacy development is inequality in its education system. For instance, the 2021 PIRLS results showed that learners in the Eastern Cape, which was a homeland during apartheid and remains one of the poorest South African provinces, only achieved an average of 271 points (129 points below the lowest achievable benchmark of 400). It was also revealed that learners from low-income households scored an average of just 265 points as opposed to the average of 445 points achieved by learners from high-income households. Differences were also noted between children with English or Afrikaans as home languages and those with other home languages – with the former group scoring significantly higher than the latter (PIRLS, 2021:4). These results are like those achieved by South African children in previous PIRLS studies. As such, one wonders what the root cause of these issues is and what continues to drive the inequality in South Africa's education system.

Prinsloo (1999:1) states, "literacy in South Africa is bounded up with the dynamics of colonial conquest and missionary work". Badat (2016) further states that education cannot be analysed outside of its "constitutive beginnings" and reveals the history of disparity between the literate and the illiterate in terms of South Africa's colonial history and the institutionalisation of racist ideologies which guided decisions regarding who deserved quality literacy development and why. Indeed, the values of colonialism included the subjugation, degrading, exclusion, disenfranchising and slavery of black people, which fuelled the establishment of the 1953 Bantu Education Act (Mwedzi, 2024:1; Prinsloo, 1999:2). This became the blueprint for an inherently discriminatory education system for the black people of South Africa that was explicitly designed to reinforce disparities between the "haves" and the "have-nots", to enforce inferiority, and to deprioritise quality education for black people. The result has been generations of illiteracy amongst the black people of South Africa. The systems and laws of colonialism and apartheid were concerned with the deliberate restriction of human freedom and development and withholding quality education was key to the limitation of such liberties (Badat, 2016).

There was "victory" over the apartheid regime in 1994. However, not much of this victory is evident in contemporary, independent South Africa's education system. Levy *et al. (*2018:32)

state, “the educational inputs and outcomes of the end of apartheid were a legacy of inequality and inefficiency”. This acknowledgement does not challenge or undermine the progress made as South Africa works to create a society that empowers black people beyond their previous institutionalised inferiority. Rather, it highlights the contemporary traceability of the colonial and apartheid eras in the South African education system.

Since 1994, South Africa has undergone various transformations. However, inequality in education remains a major concern. Mwedzi (2024:1) notes that quality education is a luxury afforded to the minority of the country’s population. The majority struggle with poor education which often leaves them disadvantaged in the social hierarchy as they are excluded from meaningful social and economic participation (Govender & Hugo, 2020:1; Heugh, 2020:3). South Africa’s education system, post-apartheid, is premised on the principles of equality, quality and access (Howie *et al.*, 2007:5). However, reports reveal enduring disparities between former Model C schools and no-fee schools (Spaull, 2013:436; Taylor, 2019:324). The prevailing inequality in the country may not reflect a lack of effort or will to effect change, but possibly a lack of policy implementation or perhaps an undue focus on superficial aspects rather than the underlying factors that pose major threats to ensuring quality and equality in the education system. For instance, broadening access has been a major focus in transforming South African education (Levy *et al*., 2018:256), but the access granted is mostly to schools that still bear the legacy of inequality in that they were designed for black children who were not deemed worthy of a quality education.

Thus, the South African education system continues to operate in unequal manner, perpetuating the educational divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots". Spaull (2013:436) calls it “dualistic” that South African primary schools operate under different systems within the same country and under the same constitution as they inequitably cater to different groups of people. This “operation under two distinct systems” is detectable in learner performance, socio-economic status and language skills (including reading and writing with comprehension) (Spaull, 2013:436). Furthermore, these divides perpetuate beyond primary schools into the Secondary education which is illustrated by the annual National Senior Certificate (NSC) results that continue to highlight differences in performance between private, former Model C, low-fee and no-fee schools.

Makhanda’s literacy results illustrate the inequality between schools on the western side of town (dominated by private schools and former Model C schools) and those on the eastern side

(dominated by non-fee public schools). On average, the schools of western Makhanda achieve 83% with respect to reading, writing and comprehension abilities, whilst those from eastern Makhanda achieve a mere 32% (Long, 2023:1). The system's disparities also reflect on the allocation of resources to enable the learning process.

2.3.1.2 Lack of access to resources

The distribution and accessibility of learning resources notably influences literacy development. Whilst quality resources significantly influence learning outcomes, studies show that many South African schools are handicapped by their unavailability due to inadequate resource allocation and distribution (Van Staden, 2014:3). Necessary educational resources include infrastructure, learning materials, libraries, and properly qualified teachers.

The school environment plays a significant role in learning outcomes. It is imperative that schools be equipped with infrastructure that is conducive for safe teaching and learning. However, van de Berg & Gustafson (2012) found that non-fee government schools across the country, particularly in rural and low socio-economic areas, continue to operate in dire infrastructural conditions which are bound to negatively affect literacy development for the majority of South African children. However, this dissertation will not delve into this aspect. Rather, it pins its focus in the literacy development of Makhanda.

2.3.2 Literacy in Makhanda

Makhanda is a relatively small town in the Eastern Cape, famous for its educational economy. The Eastern Cape province comprises mainly rural areas, which tend to be characterised by poor living conditions, high unemployment rates, high crime rates, and a low standard of education (Moller, 2003). Cillier & Bloch, (2018:2) report on the low standard of education in the Eastern Cape and highlight that most of its schools are inadequately resourced to produce quality literacy outcomes.

Makhanda's high educational status is based on the fact that it is home to Rhodes University, 16 public primary schools including 2 schools that cater for special education, 4 fee-paying, 3 low-fee and 3 private primary schools (Makhanda Primary Schooling Status Quo Analysis, 2023). The town's primary schools sum up to 26. The town's educational economy is reflected below (see Figure 1) (Hoefnagels *et al.*, 2023:278).

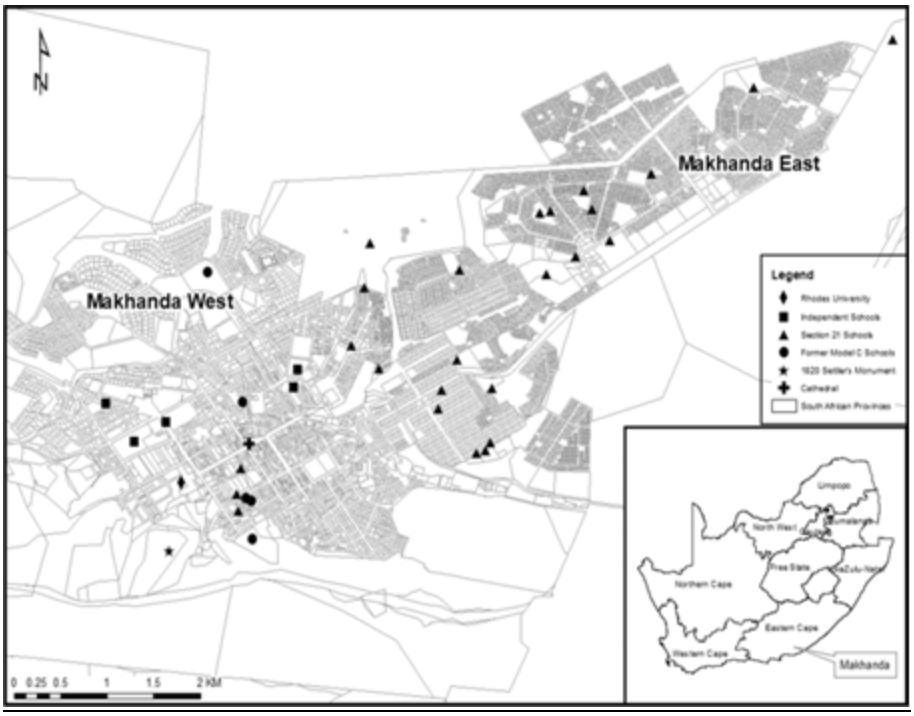

Figure 1: Makhanda and its educational institutions (from Hoefnagels et al., 2023:273)

In addition, education and its improvement are deemed important in Makhanda. A recent census revealed that the proportion of adults (aged 20 upwards) in Makhanda with no schooling has decreased from 6.3% to 3.8%, and the proportion of those in the same age range with higher education qualifications has increased from 11.7% to 16.6% over a five-year period from the last census (Lang, 2023). Furthermore, as opposed to the 19% of children who can read for meaning in South Africa at large, 40% of Makhanda's children can read for meaning (Long, 2023). School retention rates and matric results in Makhanda have also improved over the last decade (Rhodes, 2024). These impressive statistics can likely be attributed to various educational interventions within the town, across organisations and education levels, and demonstrate the town's vibrancy and footprint in education.

Makhanda, through its educational institutions, has established numerous interventions with the goal of maintaining and possibly escalating its educational status. Children's literacy interventions are considered key to this end and several child-literacy programmes have been implemented in Makhanda over time. Research conducted to evaluate these (e.g. Long, 2023; Meiklejohn *et al.*, 2021; Talbot, 2022) has revealed their positive effect on the town's literacy landscape.

Rhodes University has initiated and/or partnered with several of these intervention programmes with other local organisations, which may explain their intensity and effectiveness. Institutions of higher education play a fundamental role in actualising local development. This study considers Rhodes University's contribution to Foundation Phase literacy development at one particular primary school in Joza and utilises a social capital lens to achieve the study's main objective.

2.4 Theoretical Framework: Social Capital in Action

This study utilises the lens of social capital theory to probe the contribution of the Rhodes University's community engagement (CE) literacy programmes to literacy development at the case-study primary school. It is believed that a framework underpinned by social capital theory will foster an understanding of the relational dynamics between the various role players in these partnership programmes, the effect of these programmes on local literacy levels, and ultimately the likely contribution of these interventions to overall community development in Makhanda, particularly the Joza community.

This study introduces a unique theoretical framework - Social Capital in Action - to explore the dimensions and functions of social capital that intersect to establish and operationalise meaningful partnerships in community engagement intervention programmes (such as those considered in this dissertation).

Central to this framework is the integration of the cognitive, relational and structural dimensions of social capital which foster the functions of bonding, bridging and linking amongst stakeholders. These dimensions and functions (supported by norms such as trust, reciprocity and bidirectional learning) underpin the collaboration between partnering stakeholders in the literacy programmes in question, thus inevitably the programmes' outcomes. The norms serve as a glue that holds collaborative partnerships in place. They protect the values upheld and treasured within the partnership, including mutual benefit and mutual respect, which play an essential role in fostering sustainable and productive relationships between partnering stakeholders.

Collectively, the dimensions, functions, norms and values of a partnership contribute to its functionality and its ability to drive collective action towards a shared goal (see Figure 2). In this study, the partnership under consideration is one between Rhodes University and a selected non-

fee Makhanda primary school which was established to facilitate the implementation of a multi-faceted foundation phase literacy intervention at the school.

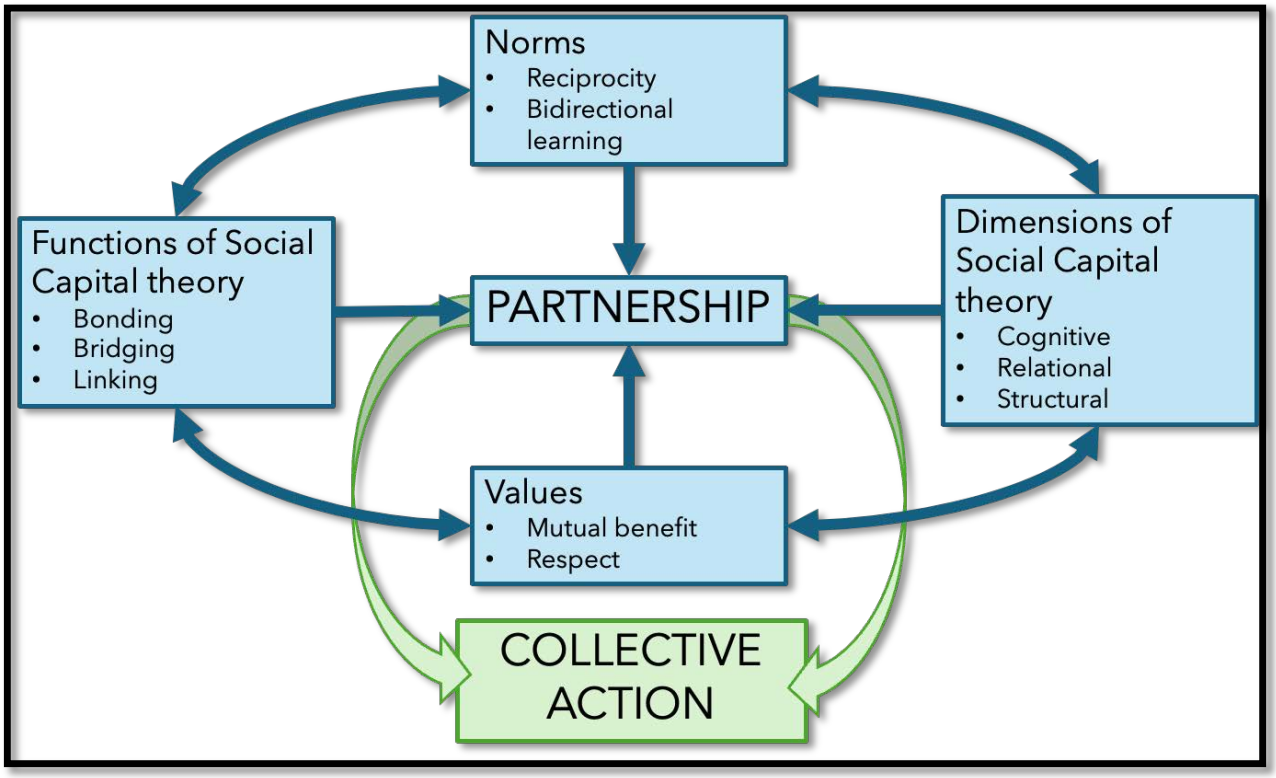

Figure 2: A visual representation of the Social Capital in Action framework

2.4.1 Conceptualisation of social capital

People are social beings, meaning that a big part of who we are is rooted in our social interactions and how we work together. We are socialised to share with, ask of and help one another through life. Of course, how and with whom we ask, help and share differs according to context, but the fact remains that our survival depends on our interactions with one another through which we acquire social capital. Social capital can be explored as both a part of human existence and as a theoretical framework. In this study it is constitutes the latter.

As a theoretical framework, social capital is complex and plagued by often contradictory definitions and understandings as a result of its hybrid origins and the wide range of disciplines it is applied in (Claridge, 2018:7). Indeed, social capital theory is famous for being the most exported theory from sociology to other disciplines like economics, education and politics (Gewirtz,

2005:652; Rogošić & Baranović, 2016:83). Three theorists - Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam - are believed to have catalysed attention to and debate around the concept of social capital through their different uses of it. Their varying stances and the wide range of disciplines that the concept can be applied in have led to the evolution of different conceptualisations and definitions of social capital theory, which is a bit of a dilemma (Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, 2023:2; Mikiewicz, 2021:3). However, for the purposes of this study, the definition adopted is one that cojoins Putnam's idea and Romanowski's wording, depicting that social capital is "an intangible resource emerging from social relations and networks" (Romanowski, 2022:2) and that "…it facilitates coordination and cooperation…" (Putnam, 1993:36). In employing social capital theory as a framework, the study delves into its different dimensions (i.e. structural, cognitive and relational) and its various functions (i.e. bonding, bridging and linking).

2.4.1.1 Social capital as an innate human resource

To the human species, social capital is part of our everyday lives (Claridge 2018:5). We are social beings who are dependent on each other for survival. We rely on social interaction with other humans to figure life out and to make it bearable and liveable. For instance, to have a conversation you would need other persons to engage with what you are saying and exchange views. Our existence is based on the idea that relationships are fundamental in the navigation of life. At the core of this aspect of social capital, as an intuitive part of our being, is the fundamental role played by relationships and how they are a valuable asset to our day-to-day lives (Claridge, 2018:5). Through social interaction one gains social capital which results in, for example, a neighbour to rely on to guard your home when you are out, or someone to help you find a good school for your child. Indeed, in many ways, knowing and interacting with others benefits an individual and communities. Social capital is largely based on our willingness to assist one another. People innately understand the potential benefit to be gained from forming relationships with others. It is this intuitive understanding of social capital that enables people to co-exist and collaborate in navigating existence and survival (Claridge, 2018:6).

Of course, the degree of collaboration and co-existence is influenced by a myriad of factors and values gained via socialisation and choices. For instance, the indigenous peoples of the African continent are bonded by a principle of togetherness, often referred to as *ubuntu,* which enshrines the values of solidarity, belonging and collaboration amongst African people. Africans have

mostly been socialised to exercise kindness toward one another, which can be traced in most of their history of travel and sharing. Social capital is seen as the glue that binds various levels and dimensions of society together (Baporikar, 2014:7; Claridge, 2018:6; Filipovic & Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, 2023:2). This intuitive aspect of social capital is important to this chapter and the dissertation.

2.4.1.2 Social capital for purposive action

Apart from being a natural part of the human experience, social capital can be employed as a complex, multidimensional theoretical framework (Gewirtz et al., 2005:653; Rogošić & Baranović 2016:83). As explained above, for the purposes of this thesis, social capital is defined as "an intangible resource emerging from social relations and networks…that facilitates coordination and cooperation" (Romanowski, 2022:2 & Putnam, 1993:36), with the primary focus being placed on the outcomes or resources that can be attained through social relations and networks rather than on the relations and networks themselves. The applied definition asserts that the concept of social capital is based on the formation of social networks to achieve particular goals. This is referred to as purposive action (Romanowski, 2022:2). Guided by a particular purpose or goal, people tend to form or engage in networks that are likely to enable its fulfilment. An everyday example would be a struggling student befriending an A+ student in the hopes of improving their marks. Goals vary from one person to the next, but the crux remains acquiring the resources necessary for their attainment through formation of or involvement with a network. Going back to the example given, one person might associate themselves with a straight A+ student to gain better knowledge of school subjects and insights with regard to study techniques, whilst another might form such an association with a view to improving their reputation. Each of these hypothetical persons has a goal they want to achieve, to which end they purposively form an association or network connection with somebody who they perceive to hold part of the "recipe for success", as it were.

Social capital theory has been applied in the analysis of various phenomena, including educational ones (McCann *et al*., 2021; Mikiewicz, 2021:5). Society views education as an important tool for achieving personal goals and attaining success. The social perception of education's importance can be traced in famous sayings like "education is the key to success". Studies in education are almost always undergirded by the perspective that education shapes human capital and enables the actualisation of people's full potential (McCann *et al.,* 2021:46; Mikiewicz, 2021:5). Mahmood

(2015:117) recognises the fundamental contribution of social capital to the actualisation of human capital (which is rooted in the availability and use of the knowledge necessary to lead a life of fulfilment) as it facilitates knowledge- and value sharing on the road to development or the attainment of people's personal goals. In this sense, social capital has been recognised as an important tool for ensuring performance, improvement and quality with respect to children's education. Thus, educational success is founded on the importance of collaboration between various stakeholders: teachers, learners, parents and government.

The literacy programmes considered in this dissertation all exist within a larger ecosystem of multiple stakeholders. Using social theory as a framework is useful in evaluating the contributions made by these programmes to Foundation Phase literacy development at the selected case-study school. Furthermore, understanding the social capital that exists within the programmes will be central to any attempts to build reciprocal, cooperative, trustworthy and beneficial social relations between the various programme stakeholders in a bid to confront Makhanda's (which is ultimately South Africa's) literacy crisis (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016:83).

2.4.2 Dimensions of social capital theory

There are several ways in which social capital can manifest in communities. Research by Mahmood (2015) explored three key dimensions affecting where and how social capital may become evident, which were called the structural, cognitive and relational dimensions.

2.4.2.1 Structural dimension

The structural dimension of social capital refers to the general arrangement of relationships in a particular context (Mahmood, 2015:115). It encompasses both the formal and informal linkages that facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation in a network. Within this study it is helpful to consider this dimension in order to understand how the school and Rhodes University have built a partnership that has led to the establishment of the literacy programmes being implemented at the study site. It also offers insight on how they have maintained this partnership in such a way as to ensure that the goals for each side are achieved in a manner that is satisfactory to all stakeholders.

2.4.2.2 Cognitive dimension

The cognitive dimension of social capital encompasses factors related to the sharing of the norms, values and culture that maintain social connections over time, ensuring sustainability of these

relationships and the greater network/s they are part of (Mahmood, 2015:115). For instance, in the context of this study, a shared commitment (by stakeholders in the literacy programmes under consideration) to early literacy development fosters a common vision and cooperative approach to addressing literacy challenges in the Foundation Phase. It enables the institutions and individuals concerned to share knowledge and resources with a view to finding more effective ways of developing children's literacy at the case study school and beyond.

2.4.2.3 Relational dimension

The relational dimension of social capital focuses on the quality of relationships in a particular context. It emphasises personal connections and the strength of ties that exist between individuals and/or organisations, highlighting the extent to which the principles of trust and reciprocity are established between them (Mahmood, 2015:115).

Thus, the structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital theory help illuminate where social capital might emerge. Once this is better comprehended, the forms of social capital (i.e. bonding, bridging and linking) help researchers understand the roles and significance of relationships in a network or partnership.

2.4.3 Forms of social capital

Social capital theory is premised on the formulation of relationships and the value within which they (the relationships) are embedded (Bayat, 2005:4). This value is derived from different functions of capital include bonding-, bridging-, and linking social capital. Broadly, these forms of social capital describe social ties at different scales from small, insular relationships (such as those between two people) to more lateral relationships (i.e. between diverse individuals or groups) and finally to vertical relationships (i.e. between groups or individuals at different levels on the social power hierarchy).

2.4.3.1 Bonding social capital

Bonding social capital generally emerges within an intimate group, where members possess similarities in attributes of identity and space (Bayat, 2005:4; Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). Members of such a group tend to be connected on the strength of their culture, race, class and/or community affiliations. This form of social capital often manifests among family members, community members and close friends. It takes the shape of intimate relationships characterised

by feelings of protection and closeness (Bayat, 2005:5; Claridge, 2018:2). It is often referred to as intra-group ties, which Putnam (1993) perceives as fundamental to "getting by" and overcoming daily barriers and challenges. This form of capital is evident at a micro-level as it manifests between individuals (Bayat, 2005:4).

2.4.3.2 Bridging social capital

Bridging social capital is characterised by extra-group ties, i.e. a transcendence from the intimate realm of bonding capital connections to the formation of ties between different groups and people (Bayat, 2005:4; Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009:408; Claridge, 2018:2). This type of social capital generally emerges when individuals build networks outside of their immediate circles, i.e. with people or groups who may differ from them in attributes of identity (e.g., race, class, religion, or culture) and/or attitude.

Bridging social capital broadens access to knowledge and resources as individuals encounter new and different realities and opportunities in society. It also meets social needs as people are exposed to various modes of civic engagement, knowledge sharing, and engagement (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). However, along with the differences between role players comes the possibility of differences in power levels as networks are grown and established. Bridging social capital tends to emerge at a meso-level, as it incorporates both individual and group relations.

Rhodes University has a diverse student population. The schools, too which the programmes are implemented in, are diverse in various ways. The university students administer literacy programmes in school communities with whom they do not necessarily share class or even race, but with whom they form a relationship to ensure that the children in the school develop the basic skill of reading with understanding through the literacy programmes. This is an example of bridging social capital.

2.4.3.3 Linking social capital

This form of social capital is characterised by the interaction of groups across hierarchical boundaries that exist due to social stratification. As such, where linking social capital emerges, there is inevitably a disparity in power between the relating entities (Bayat, 2005:5; Claridge, 2018:3). The linking form of social capital is essential in providing less empowered stakeholders access to limited, high-quality resources usually only available to those with greater power.

An example of linking social capital is the relationship between Rhodes University's literacy programme coordinator/s and a Joza class teacher who has a Rhodes literacy programme implemented in their class weekly and thus gains access to various items of play equipment that are otherwise out of reach. The university and the no-fee Joza school possess different levels of power, which may be denoted in terms of influence and financial resources, but they form relationships through the literacy programmes for mutual benefit. The benefit for the university is the achievement of its goal of being socially responsive (and maybe attracting more students or sponsorship as a result), and the benefit for the school is a potential improvement in its standard of literacy development.

All these forms of social capital, like the social relations that they represent, are interwoven and intersecting. Bonding, bridging and linking describe various levels of social capital and the value that can emerge from them.

2.4.4 Critiques of Social Capital Theory

Social capital as a theoretical framework has been subject to scholarly attention and critiques; particularly regarding its conceptualisation and operationalisation and how it encompasses two sociological concepts and processes, namely "social" and "capital". Some schools of thought feel it tends to be representative of a metaphor more than a coherent theory (Fine, 2002a cited in Claridge, 2018: 5). However, the emergence of processes understood as social capital has created a form of elasticity and flexibility for the theory, accounted in its multidimensional use across various fields of study. Thus, allowing scholars to use it to see a desired outcome. Adler and Kwon (2002) have noted social capital as a "notion that means many things to many people" thus resulting in a circulation of arguments as each uses the concept to their preferred analysis than it being a rigid theoretical framework. In this study, it is used to account for institutional collaboration and building children's capital through literacy development, thus contributing to their future social participation.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a conceptual foundation for understanding literacy and has contextualised it within Makhanda, South Africa. It has highlighted how scholars remain in contestation regarding the definition of literacy, though they generally agree on the fundamental skills that denote it. In this study, the definition applied is the one embraced by leading international literacy development organisations which characterise literacy as the ability to read and write with understanding (PIRLS, 2021; UNESCO, 2017). As this chapter has highlighted, literacy is a cumulative and social process beginning in the home and continuing through early childhood development (ECD) into formal schooling and one which is influenced by social interaction.

Furthermore, this chapter explored the contextual factors that continue to shape literacy development in South Africa, highlighting two key themes: inequality and resource allocation. Even though the nation is three decades into the post-apartheid era, stark disparities persist in the South African education system. The legacies of apartheid and colonialism remain visible in the dualistic structure of the education system, whereby former Model C schools are significantly better resourced than the no-fee public schools which face chronic underfunding and infrastructural challenges (Prinsloo, 1999; Spaull, 2013). This inequality is reflected in student performance, with the 2021 PIRLS report revealing that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa could not achieve the lowest international benchmark for literacy (PIRLS, 2021). The situation is particularly dire in provinces like the Eastern Cape, where Makhanda is located, which grapple with significant socio-economic challenges (Cilliers & Bloch, 2018; Mwedzi, 2024).

This chapter has highlighted the importance of adequate school infrastructure, availability of learning materials, and access to qualified teachers as essential components of a conducive learning environment. In under-resourced schools, these elements are often absent, further widening the literacy gap (Spaull *et al*., 2017; Van Staden, 2014). The significance of ECD was emphasised, as it represents the foundational stage for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development, all of which are essential for literacy (Pretorius & Machet, 2004; Talbot, 2022). Early intervention coupled with support from caregivers and educators were identified as crucial in a bid to improve literacy outcomes, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Tayob & Moonsamy, 2018; Dong *et al*., 2020).

Finally, this chapter has emphasised that addressing the literacy crisis in South Africa requires a multi-stakeholder approach. The traditional reliance on policy reforms alone is no longer sufficient. Instead, there is a growing recognition of the need for collaborative action through partnerships that leverage social capital. The chapter introduced social capital theory as a conceptual lens for understanding how collaborations between Rhodes University and local schools in Makhanda can support literacy development. Drawing on Putnam's (1993) conceptualisation of the bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital, the chapter argued that community-university partnerships could facilitate trust, resource sharing, and collective action. Such collaborations have the potential to transform literacy outcomes in marginalised communities (Bayat, 2005; Mahmood, 2015). This perspective provides a conceptual foundation for the dissertation’s analysis of Rhodes University's literacy interventions in Makhanda, setting the stage for a deeper examination of the potential for community-driven partnerships to mitigate literacy challenges in South Africa (Reading Panel, 2022; UNESCO, 2017).

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides context on the role of South African HE institutions in community development through community engagement (CE). Traditionally, the two core functions and purposes of HE institutions such as universities were teaching and research. However, post-apartheid, South Africa has adopted a transformation and redress agenda to improve livelihoods and promote socio-economic development, with education at its forefront. Much debate and discussion resulted in HE institutions being mandated to employ an additional purpose - social responsiveness - to address social and economic needs within their local and regional communities. Thus, CE was officially added as the third core function of HE in Government Gazette No.18207 (White paper, 1997).

This chapter explores this function of HE, focusing on Rhodes University and a few of the literacy intervention initiatives that it has undertaken as part of its CE mandate. The chapter begins by discussing HE's role in community development and then explores conceptualisations of different forms of community engagement. Finally, it focuses on the concept of "engaged citizenry" as employed by Rhodes University, and its relation to the literacy development in Makhanda and as a principle underpinning the literacy programmes.

3.2 The Role of Higher Education's Community Engagement Function in Community Development

Community engagement is the primary means by which universities can champion social transformation using their reputations and resources as they strive to establish social and economic justice in their local communities. The idea that universities should foster relationships with their communities is not a new one. For centuries, the call asserting university institution to "align its mission" with the improvement of individual lives, organisations and societies in its particular zone of influence has persisted (Fongwa, 2023:92). Furthermore, the acceptance of social responsibility is not exclusive to South African HE institutions. Fongwa, (2023:93) shows that, at the continental level, in both the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 as well as its Continental

Education Strategy for Africa (CESA), HE is positioned as a key role player in carrying out the AU'S stated mandates through its functions of teaching, research and engagement. The engagement function, in particular, leads to universities working with their communities in various ways, all aimed at improving their well-being and quality of life.

Prior to 1994, the main functions and purposes of HE in South Africa were to teach specialised modules and to produce research that would contribute to the global knowledge pool. However, due to the shift in South Africa's governance and policy ideology after apartheid and overall global development agenda, HE now has been mandated to serve a broader and more inclusive purpose that reflects the diverse range of opportunities and constraints in the country (Fongwa, 2023; White paper, 1997).

During apartheid, HE catered to and accommodated only a minority of the country's population - predominantly those privileged in terms of race and class (Badat, 2016). This exacerbated the inequality in already prevalent in South African society. Post-apartheid, government recognised the fundamental role played by HE, not only in knowledge production and skill development, but also as a tool to foster social transformation (Sibhensana & Maistry, 2023:185). Therefore, the introduction of community engagement as one of HE's primary functions represented a decision to align HE with the nation's value of democracy and its development goals (White Paper, 1997:11). Community engagement, as a function of higher education, speaks to the responsiveness of HE institutions to their communities' social needs, and their commitment to promoting social justice and citizens' wellbeing (Fongwa, 2023; McCann & Talbot, 2022; Saidi, 2023). The transformation of higher education as part of a broader national agenda is reflected in various policy documents (White paper, 1997). By being socially responsive, HE can help bridge the gap in the national status quo through utilising local universities to foster social and economic development at a community level.

Through the function of community engagement, HE's role in shaping social change is enhanced as its resources are channelled into establishing economic and social justice within its communities. The concept of community engagement is conceptualised in various ways.

3.2.1 Forms of community engagement: Engaged Citizenry

Community engagement, as conceptualised at Rhodes University, takes form in four core areas: engaged research, service learning, social innovation and enterprise development, and engaged citizenry. Because this study focuses on engaged citizenry programmes implemented from within the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division, only this form will be further explained.

According to McBeth *et al.* (2010:1), studies have explored the difference between responsible citizenship and engaged citizenry, which is influenced by a multiplicity of factors. These include power possession, resource availability, connection, values and vision. Rhodes University, according to McCann & Talbot, (2022:206), has transformed its terminology with respect to community engagement from "volunteerism" into "engaged citizenry". This is to reflect the university's concept of community engagement whereby "university stakeholders engage with communities without evaluation for curricular purpose or monetary compensation for the purpose of promoting and building partnerships and critical self-awareness through shared projects, thereby recognising that everyone has something to teach and something to learn" (Rhodes University Community Engagement Policy, 2021:5). This often (but not only) happens across faculties and as an extra-curricular activity.

Engaged citizenry builds on the original conceptualisations of traditional volunteering. However, the terms should not be equated. Engaged citizenry is a more thoroughly representative term encapsulating a broader understanding of community engagement and implying "mutually beneficial relationships" (McCann & Talbot, 2022:206-207). It is premised on the notion of active participation to realise social justice, which differentiates it from traditional understandings of volunteerism.

Previously, the act of engaging in a community-related cause would be termed volunteerism. However, there has been a transformation in perception and values over time. Responsible citizenship has been denoted as "duty-based", meaning that being responsible involves acting to address a prevailing social issue. In the realm of literacy, for instance, universities and the community collaborate to implement intervention programmes in an effort to overcome the effects of inequality in education by ensuring literacy attainment despite existing social barriers. This is a deliberate shift away from the traditional conceptualisations of volunteerism which have undertones of learned helplessness and a saviour complex. Tonge *et al*. (2012:578) noted that in

England, duty-based citizenship became a compulsory subject in secondary education with the aim of fostering civic renewal. Subsequent research suggested resultant positive trends in degrees of community engagement and upward social mobility among the youth, indicative of a growing sense of responsible citizenship (Hooge & Oser, 2015; Kuhlane, 2021; McBeth *et al*., 2010; Tonge *et al*., 2012). Furthermore, the concept of responsible citizenry implies a commitment to service that advocates for social change. Tonge *et al*., (2012:580) argue that opportunities to engage in productive citizenry facilitate social advancement in disadvantaged communities and advocacy for social justice. Participation in activities that contribute towards social development is a central theme of engaged citizenry. It is premised on the notion that "community connections… and civic participation are regarded as indicators of positive development, which serve as new goals of…community work" (Moller, 2003:53).

Central to any community engagement learning experience (whether engaged citizenry or service learning) are community-university partnerships that unlock the potential for powerful co-learning and the actualisation of various development goals. Talbot (2022:20) reflects on the significance of establishing partnerships to ensure success, and on how Rhodes University, in its commitment to social transformation, involves multiple community stakeholders in the strategic planning, operation and evaluation of its interventions. Community-university partnerships for social change are grounded on the bedrock of common goals and collective effort using diverse resources.

3.2.2 Engaged Citizenry and Literacy Development at Rhodes University

Through the various forms of CE, universities can realise their third core function and "deal with the challenges…like poverty, unemployment and inequality through promotion of innovation" (Sibhensana & Maistry, 2023:185). Rhodes University's Vice Chancellor-Professor Sizwe Mabizela- fully embraced the social responsibility of the university in his 2015 inaugural speech in which he emphasised that Rhodes University "is not just *in* Grahamstown but is also *of* and *for* Grahamstown" (Vice Chancellor Plan 2024:2). In this statement, Rhodes University recognises its role in meeting Makhanda's needs, particularly in the education sector. Through the innovative Vice Chancellor's Initiative (VCI), it has created a framework directed at improving Makhanda's educational landscape. The aim of the VCI is to "transform the local public schooling sector into a space where every child receives an education that equips him or her for a life of significance" (Vice Chancellor Plan, 2024:3). This social transformation goal is embedded in objectives

established by the university in partnership with community organisations to ensure positive progress.

The VCI includes several targeted intervention programmes across the spectrum of schools in Makhanda and at every phase of the schooling continuum (i.e. from ECD to Matric Second Chance Schools). The VCI has set a target that by 2028, 70% of children in Makhanda's public schools should be able to read and write at their grade levels and demonstrate understanding (Vice Chancellor Plan, 2024:4). This goal was set based on the evaluation of existing interventions across education levels (from ECD to Grade 12) in Makhanda which highlighted the literacy problem and led to the establishment of appropriate additional interventions by which to address it.

Intervention is defined as "an active and purposeful engagement with the intention to change the *status quo*" (Meiklejohn *et al.,* 2021:1). Interventions with respect to literacy are in response to the world-wide literacy crisis which persists despite multiple attempts (including policy changes) to address it (Murray, 2021:2). The need for intervention in the Makhanda public schools has arisen due to several possible factors, like the dysfunctional status of many learners' homes and communities and the no-fee schools' dependency on government subsidy. The responsibility to help meet this need, in the context of Rhodes University, lies within the remit of community engagement.

3.3 Makhanda's literacy development programmes

All public and no-fee primary schools in Makhanda are supported by at least one literacy-focused intervention programme. Across the city, there are over 16 literacy intervention programmes in the foundation phase (Makhanda Primary schooling status quo analysis, 2024). Not all of these are run by the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division (RUCE); several are implemented by other organisations and RU departments. However, RUCE is currently leading the charge with its suite of programmes and its ability to access the highest number of children most regularly. As such, RUCE has become a holding space for literacy-based interventions and organisations across the city and in 2023 formed an alliance called the Makhanda Literacy Collective which resulted in three interlinked projects which comprise a literacy pathway in partner schools starting at Grade R (Budding Q) and continuing through Grade 1 (Project Read) to Grades 2 and 3 (Reading Groups) (VCI Plan, 2024:8-9).

3.3.1 Outline of the RUCE literacy intervention programmes

The Rhodes University literacy intervention programmes in the foundation phase, all of which are carried out at the case-study school, are outlined below. They are all implemented weekly by Rhodes University students who are selected and trained to be part of the engaged citizenry programme.

3.3.1.1 Budding Q

Budding Q is a Grade R targeted intervention aimed at supporting children in their motor development through a fun, play-based programme ensuring the development of adequate pre-literacy skills (Rhodes University, 2024). These skills include the coordination of different body parts (e.g. holding a pen, stringing beads or throwing) which later lead to the establishment of formal literacy behaviours (e.g. writing and eye-tracking for reading).

3.3.1.2 Project Read

Project Read is a phonics-based literacy intervention for Grade 1 leaners. The programme exposes children to foundational literacy skills such as letter-sound recognition using material from Word Works (a local literacy NGO). Learning happens in small, individualised support groups (Rhodes University, 2024).

3.3.1.3 Reading clubs

The reading clubs target Grade 2 and 3 learners to promote reading for enjoyment and reading confidence (Rhodes University, 2024). The aim is to encourage learners to enjoy reading and regard it as a fun activity they can be confident in rather than just a school-based task.

Rhodes University, along with its community partners, run these intervention programmes at a range of schools in Makhanda as a means of contributing towards literacy improvement in the town and the nation. The programmes have been evaluated and shown to be moving towards achieving their goal (Education Chronology Timeline Infographic, 2024; Long, 2023; Talbot, 2022). Despite the programmes' achievements, however, they still contain gaps that need to be filled. For instance, equitable access to these programmes is still not a reality - particularly for no-fee schools with dire infrastructural problems and poor literacy statuses. Furthermore, questions remain with respect to the programmes, such as how parents should be involved in creating support for the development of their children's literacy and whether the forms that the interventions take

foster parental involvement and adequately highlight the significance of home support as a means of ensuring holistic child literacy development.

3.3.2 Joza location, Makhanda

This study focuses on one primary school in Joza location (in the east of Makhanda). The Joza community is big and has six primary schools, one of which is a low-fee school and five of which are no-fee schools. All six of them are characterised by over-crowding in the classrooms, limited access to adequate learning resources, and poor support and training for teachers. These factors have contributed significantly to the low literacy results attained by these schools (Long, 2023:5).

The selected case study school is one at which all the abovementioned literacy interventions (i.e. Budding Q, Project Read and Reading Clubs) have been implemented, which has sparked an interest in evaluating the value and contribution of these programmes to literacy skill development in the children of the school, particularly from stakeholders' point of view.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the role of HE in community development, with a specific focus on Rhodes University's community engagement initiatives in Makhanda. Recognised for its educational economy, Makhanda is home to diverse schools and the prestigious Rhodes University. Beyond the core functions of teaching and research, Rhodes University aims to embrace the responsibility to uplift its local communities through targeted development initiatives. At the heart of this effort is the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) office which, together with the Vice-Chancellor's Initiative (VCI), has spearheaded various intervention programs to support literacy development in Makhanda's schools. Key RUCE initiatives include Budding Q, Project Read and Reading Clubs, all of which prioritise the development of children's literacy skills. The university has established strategic community partnerships to bolster these efforts.

Central to Rhodes University's approach is the concept of engaged citizenry - a shift away from traditional volunteerism towards a more reciprocal and sustained commitment to community development. This approach frames community engagement as a dynamic process of mutual benefit, emphasising long-term social improvement over once-off acts of service. As such, the notion of engaged citizenry provides a conceptual anchor for the university's community

engagement efforts and represents a critical mechanism by which to address literacy as a facet of community development.

This chapter has also illustrated HE's potential to support literacy development in local communities. It contends that Rhodes University's approach of framing literacy development as a strategic and socially embedded process increases its relevance to broader community development and social justice goals.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design adopted for this study. The main study goal was to evaluate the contribution made by RUCE's literacy programmes in a non-fee primary school in Makhanda's Joza location.

The study is underpinned by the following questions:

1. How do the Rhodes University literacy programmes contribute to the literacy development of foundation phase children in the selected no-fee primary school in Joza?
2. How do stakeholders (i.e. parents, programme coordinators, teachers and students) perceive the role and contribution of the Rhodes University literacy programmes in the school?
3. Are there gaps in the programmes that need to be addressed and, if so, how might this be accomplished?
4. What is the role of a local community in fostering the development of its children's literacy?

Given the critical role of literacy in shaping children's educational and social development, it is imperative to evaluate how interventions such as those implemented by Rhodes University contribute to its development.

The research followed a qualitative case-study design to facilitate an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders directly involved with or closely related to the programmes at the selected school. Several techniques were employed during the research process. Firstly, purposive sampling was undertaken to select participants that had relevant roles within the programmes and were likely to have pertinent insights to share regarding the literacy of the children within them. Secondly, a semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix 1) was designed to guide conversations while allowing the flexibility to probe participants' responses more deeply and explore any unanticipated aspects of their experiences which emerged. Thirdly, thematic analysis was employed to interpret the interview data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and themes that emerged from them.

This methodological framework not only aided the development of a comprehensive understanding of the literacy programmes' contribution to the case-study school, but also highlighted particular areas of literacy improvement within that school.

A detailed account of the research process is presented in this chapter in the interests of transparency. The process was designed and followed to ensure rigour with respect to the literacy programme evaluation that was undertaken.

4.2 Research Methodology

The section outlines the paradigm and approach adopted for this research, both of which were chosen based on their relevance to the study area and the objectives of the study.

4.2.1 Research paradigm: interpretivism

The study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to understand the lived experiences and subjective meanings that people attach to social phenomena (Neuman, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interpretivism emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality, asserting that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions between researchers and participants within specific social and cultural study contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm is distinct from positivist approaches in that it rejects the notion of objective, universal truths, asserting instead that multiple realities exist based on individuals' unique perspectives and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Adopting an interpretivist paradigm aligned with the study's aim of exploring various stakeholders' perceptions regarding the Rhodes University literacy programmes at the case-study school. It facilitated a deeper understanding of how different stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, and community members) have experienced and made sense of the contributions made by these programmes over time. Given that these perceptions were influenced by stakeholders' personal, social, and institutional contexts, an interpretivist approach was essential if the richness and diversity of their views was to be captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To operationalise the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative research design was adopted as it allowed for the collection and analysis of descriptive, context-rich data.

4.2.2 Research approach: qualitative case study

This study adopts a qualitative case study design, which is well-suited to exploring the subjective meanings and perceptions that people attach to social phenomena (Bryman, 2016; Neuman, 2014; Bryman, 2016). Qualitative research is characterised by its focus on rich, descriptive data and its emphasis on understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. This approach allows for the collection of in-depth, contextualised information, facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, a qualitative approach was essential to exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the contribution of Rhodes University's literacy programmes to foundational literacy development at the case-study school. By prioritising stakeholder perspectives, the study sought to understand the meanings and value that parents, teachers, student volunteers, and programme coordinators attach to these literacy initiatives. This focus aligns with the qualitative research goal of capturing subjective realities that cannot be fully understood through quantitative approaches.

To further refine the research focus, a case study approach was adopted. A case study is a research strategy that involves an in-depth, contextual analysis of a specific, bounded system such as an organisation, event, or community (Bryman, 2016; Yin, 2018). Case studies are particularly useful for capturing the unique features of a specific context, enabling an exploration of the factors that influence and shape the phenomenon under investigation. In this study, the case is a single no-fee primary school in Makhanda where all three of the RUCE foundation phase literacy programmes are operational. The rationale for selecting this particular school was twofold. Firstly, unlike other schools where only one or two of the RUCE literacy programmes are implemented, this school hosts the full suite of three literacy-focused interventions, making it a valuable case for holistic evaluation. Secondly, the school is in Joza, Makhanda, which is characterised by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and educational underperformance (Lang, 2023; Makhanda Circle of Unity, 2023). Schools in this area are typically non-fee-paying and heavily reliant on government support, a factor that often correlates with lower literacy outcomes (Long, 2023). The chosen study school is in quintile 3, which is characterised by government dependence and low socio-economic status (Long, 2023:2). The disparities in literacy performance between Makhanda's schools underscore the need for focused interventions in areas with the greatest need.

Thus, with this school as a study site, this research project aimed to explore whether the implementation of Rhodes University's literacy programmes contributes to bridging the literacy gap common amongst socio-economically disadvantaged foundation-phase learners. The study recognises that, while a case study generates rich, contextualised knowledge, its findings are specific to the chosen site. As such, the study's findings cannot necessarily be generalised with respect to other non-fee-paying schools in Makhanda or beyond. Nonetheless, it is believed that the insights generated offer valuable lessons on the conditions and practices that facilitate literacy development in resource-constrained communities. The localised focus of the study aligns with the broader goals of qualitative case-study research, which aims to produce contextually grounded knowledge that informs both theory and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, the study captured the perspectives of parents, teachers, student volunteers, and programme coordinators. The approach taken facilitated a deeper exploration of the social and contextual factors that influence the perceived impact of the literacy programmes.

4.2.2.1 Purposive sampling

The technique of purposive sampling was used to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling entails the identification of contributors that are knowledgeable with respect to the phenomenon or context being studied (Neuman, 2014:42). In this case, research participants were selected based on their proximity to and involvement in the three RUCE literacy programmes implemented at the case-study school.

Ultimately, the group of chosen participants comprised parents of children who partake in the literacy programmes at the school (n=3), student volunteers who the administer the programmes on a weekly basis at the school (n=3), teachers that work collaboratively with the student volunteers (n=3), and the coordinators of the three programmes (n=3). Their proximity to the programmes made their insights, experiences and perceptions invaluable in the context of this study.

While purposive sampling has some limitations, like an inability to diversify in terms of gender (Bryman, 2016), it was considered the most suitable for this study because of proximity of the

stakeholders to the programmes and, thus, the ease with which knowledgeable participants could be identified.

4.2.2.2 Data collection through semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were employed in this study as a technique by which to collect necessary and relevant information that would help answer the research question (Colton & Covert, 2007:5). A semi-structured interview schedule was designed to guide this data collection process. It was structured in a way that allowed the participants to explore all avenues opened by the questions posed and gave them a chance to narrate some of their relevant experiences. This facilitated the collection of rich data.

The questions asked were open-ended. This led to unguarded conversations with the interviewees and avoided making them feel like they were props to research or under interrogation, either of which perception may have led to them withholding vital information (Bryman, 2016:10). The semi-structured nature of the interviews aided in the gleaning of great insights from participants and gave the researcher control over the interview process (e.g., there was freedom for the researcher to ask different respondents the same question in different ways, or to move on to the next question if necessary).

The interviews sought to investigate the participants' roles in the programmes, the ways in which they work together and their personal views on literacy and what could be done to improve it. They were conducted in co-negotiated locations to ensure the safety and comfort of all concerned, as well as the elimination of unnecessary travel costs. Most of the programme coordinators and students met with the researcher at the RUCE lounge, whilst parents met with the researcher in their own homes (the researcher was comfortable with this as she is a resident in the neighbourhood) and teachers agreed to meet the researcher at the local community library (after school hours or during the weekend). All information shared during the interviews was captured via audio recordings and field notes which were later fully transcribed in preparation for analysis.

4.2.2.3 Thematic analysis of the data

Thematic analysis techniques were used to organise and explore the collected data. Raw qualitative data sets are usually large and often overwhelming to work with, but thematic analysis is designed to systematically reduce the data in order to make sense of it (Bryman, 2016:7). The thematic

analysis technique of organising and interpreting data allows for identification of prevalent or common themes that it contains.

The themes that emerged were described in relation to the goals of the study and the chosen theoretical framework (i.e. social capital theory) in order to ascertain whether the data collected would be useful in addressing the research question.

Several themes and sub-themes emerged, namely: social emotional development, improved literacy practices, and collective action. These are explored in greater depth in Chapter 5.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical compliance plays an important role in the process of knowledge production. Hence, it is imperative to observe and ensure that high ethical standards are maintained throughout any research project (Babbie, 2023:63). Ethical clearance for this study was granted by the Rhodes University Human Research Ethics committee (certificate number: 2024-7973-9011).

Several core ethical principles were emphasised during the study: informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and participant risk-benefit considerations. These are briefly discussed below.

4.3.1 Informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity

Informed consent by participants was achieved through the provision of consent forms along with a detailed verbal explanation of the study by the researcher. This ensured that all participants understood their role in the process and their freedom to withdraw at any stage. The researcher verbally translated the consent form into isiXhosa where necessary in order to ensure clarity, and interviews with the parents were conducted in isiXhosa which is the home language of both them and the researcher.

The anonymity of participants was preserved by the omission of their names from the audio recordings and transcriptions. Furthermore, all confidential markers and information have been redacted or adapted in this dissertation for the protection of the participants.

4.3.2 Risk-benefit considerations

This study was classified as low risk by the institutional ethics committee. While minor considerations were identified, such as the importance of maintaining the anonymity of participants, risks were mitigated through ethical safeguards such as the use of pseudonyms and ensuring secure data storage. The potential benefits of the study were considered to outweigh these minimal risks. Indeed, by highlighting community-driven literacy interventions, the study stands to provide valuable insights that may inform future educational initiatives and policies.

4.4 Conclusion

The chapter has outlined and explained the adoption in this study of a qualitative case-study approach within an interpretivist paradigm. It has also described various techniques that were employed, such as purposive sampling (to select research participants), semi-structured interviews (to gather qualitative data), and thematic analysis (to reduce, organise and interpret the data). Lastly, the chapter outlined several ethical matters that needed to be considered in the context of this research.

5 PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores participants' perspectives on how the three RUCE literacy programmes (described in the previous chapter) contribute to the development of literacy skills in foundation phase children at the case-study school. Secondary data (with respect to the broader contributions of the literacy programmes in Makhanda) is used to complement the raw data gathered from participants in this study. Thus, the chapter examines how the programmes contribute to the development of both individual learners and the wider community, focusing on three key outcomes: enhanced social-emotional growth in children, improved literacy practices, and collective action among stakeholders. These contributions are explored through the lens of social capital theory, which underscores the importance of networks and collective action in fostering societal change (Putnam, 1993; Romanowski, 2021:4).

The chapter begins by outlining the process through which the data for this study was generated and analysed. Next, it provides an overview of Makhanda's educational status, drawing on literature about the town's literacy development. Thereafter, the four key programme outcomes revealed in the data are explored. First, it is considered how the three RUCE literacy programmes influence children's emotional and social growth through their small-group model. Second, the outcome of improved literacy practices is reflected upon. Third, the emergent theme of collective action is examined, exploring how collaboration among stakeholders has been a central element in the programmes. Finally, the matter of parental involvement within the programmes is considered and identified as an avenue for improvement.

5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was gathered via twelve semi-structured interviews across four categories of participants, i.e. foundation phase teachers at the study school, Rhodes University student volunteers, programme coordinators and parents of children participating in the various programmes. Recruitment was supported by the RUCE division and informed consent was given by all participants. The interviews were conducted individually, recorded (with consent from participants), and later transcribed. The intended and allocated time frame for data collection was one month. However,

scheduling and conducting the interviews proved to be more time-consuming than was initially anticipated. In particular, teachers and parents were often balancing their work and family commitments, which led to delays and extended periods of time needed to complete the data collection. However, in the end twelve successful interviews were conducted, and a rich and varied set of responses and insights was captured.

Each interview was transcribed manually to ensure that the views expressed by participants were accurately captured. The transcription process was crucial in maintaining the validity of the data so that thorough analysis of the content expressed in every interview could be conducted.

After transcription, the data was organised into different categories using a coding memorandum which facilitated the systematic recording of available codes and emerging themes within each transcript, as well as of the researcher's personal reflections on the initial findings. The coding process required multiple readings of transcriptions to gain a proper understanding of participants' views and to avoid the omission of important elements within their responses. The coding categories identified with the help of the memorandum included "in-vivo coding", "values, attitudes and beliefs coding", "versus coding", and "evaluative coding" (Rivas, 2012:372).

Multiple themes were identified. These were reconciled and interpreted into three main themes, all of which were closely related to the tenets of social capital theory which emphasises the significance of networks within a community (Romanowski, 2021:2). The idea of social capital has been used in other, similar studies evaluating education-development partnerships in communities (McCann *et al*., 2021; Meiklejohn *et al.*, 2021; Mwedzi, 2024) particularly in the context of Makhanda.

5.3 Main Themes Emerging from Interview Data

As mentioned above, three main themes emerged during a thematic analysis of the interview data. These were: development of increased social-emotional capacity in children, improved literacy teaching practices, and collective action by stakeholders with a shared goal of eradicating illiteracy. These will now be further discussed and related to the framework of Social Capital Theory.

5.3.1 Development of increased social-emotional capacity in children

One of the most significant findings from the data was a boost in social-emotional capacity among the children participating in the literacy programmes. Rhodes students interviewed (n=3) revealed how they have observed a shift in the way the learners have related to them and responded to the programme sessions, particularly with respect to reading tasks and participation in literacy activities such as storytelling or identifying previously discussed phenomena. The noted shift in learner behaviour and attitude included an increased willingness by learners to admit when they faced struggles than they were at the beginning of the sessions. This was reflected in the words of a *Reading Club* student leader:

> "[The] majority of them are now free and confident to read and can even tell me when they can't pronounce some word, and we work together towards that. That, for me, is very incredible - seeing them shifting from being reserved to them being free and enjoying sessions." (15 August, RUCE office)

The observation of the children becoming "free and confident … and enjoying the sessions" is an indication that their social-emotional capacity is being developed through the literacy programmes. This is significant as social-emotional capacity has been regarded as one of the factors that can affect children's grasp of learning content and, ultimately, their academic performance (Coskun & Oksuz, 2019:38). Thus, the shift noted by the student volunteers becomes a fundamental aspect, revealing the extent of the programmes' reach in the bid to develop the children's literacy skills. Indeed, social-emotional capacity development is essential in light of the understanding that learning is a social process (Millin, 2015:115), and the fact that literacy development encompasses a myriad of factors (Pretorius & Naude, 2002:447) which are social, emotional and cognitive. As children gain confidence in their ability to read and to communicate about their literacy struggles (such as being unable to pronounce a particular word), there is a noticeable improvement in their social-emotional maturity which will ultimately affect their ability to learn and engage with increasingly complex literacy concepts. This observation suggests that the literacy programmes are not just building academic skills, but are also providing safe, supportive spaces where children can develop self-sufficiency, learn to self-advocate, feel emotionally secure in their learning environment, and enjoy their own advancements and abilities.

This is a fundamental contribution of the literacy programmes which aligns with the Social Capital in Action framework whereby the structural and relational dimensions of social capital contribute

to fostering bonds or partnerships between the students implementing the programmes and the children participating in them.

Regarding the provision of a supportive environment that ensures emotional security, the data revealed that the programmes are intentionally structured to ensure successful, mutually beneficial outputs for stakeholders. A *Budding Q* student leader stated:

> "…you know, we work with the kids in small groups. Like, you know each volunteer has two or three kids to work with depending on how many volunteers we have at that session..." (21 August, RUCE).

Small settings have been proven beneficial in children's emotional development (McKee *et al.,* 2014:1272), particularly in relation to their learning process. The interview data reveals that the programmes are structured in a fashion that enables students to work with small groups of learners. Thus, the small group set-up of the RUCE literacy programmes is a pivotal factor in ensuring that attention is paid to each of the learners and their unique needs within the sessions. A traditional classroom in a non-fee school is occupied by large number of learners, rarely below 40-45, and its supervision and management are entrusted to a single teacher. Secondary data suggests that this has led to a myriad of issues including teacher shortage, a decline in individual learner attention, and discipline issues (Wills, 2023:2). Thus, the literacy programmes are structured in a way that maximises the student-to-child ratio in each case. This allows for individual attention to be paid to every learner's abilities and challenges as the children become seen and known by the students they are assigned to. Under these circumstances, when a task is presented, the student volunteer can assess the task requirements and get each of the learners to engage. Secondary data indicates that class or group size influences attitude, behaviour, engagement and performance (Wang & Calvano, 2022:130; Wills, 2023).

Through the small-group model, learners become confident with regards to what they can and cannot do in the weekly sessions. Also, the small setting allows for direct and positive feedback to the children by the students. This forges closer bonds and results in greater motivation and learning for the Rhodes University students as they observe the progress of their groups. Indeed, in the small groups, every small success on the part of a child (e.g. overcoming the inability to pronounce a word or understanding something that they initially found challenging) is indicated by positive feedback and attention received from the student volunteers which significantly increases the children's confidence. Studies have indicated that confidence enhances a learner's motivation,

willingness to engage with academic tasks, commitment, and achievement of desirable literacy skills (Marhayani, 2024:145; Rosalina, 2019:71).

Overall, the individual attention fostered by the structure of the programmes makes children feel valued and understood, which is essential for the development of their literacy skills. When learners feel that someone is invested in their progress and abilities, they are more likely to actively engage in learning activities, which has been reflected in the data regarding their shift in attitude and behaviour within the sessions (denoting a positive shift in the relational dimension of the partnership). In a smaller, less intimidating setting like how the programmes are structured, they feel more comfortable participating in literacy activities, such as reading aloud or contributing to discussions. This increased self-esteem not only aids their academic growth but also contributes to their overall social-emotional development (Marhayani, 2024:146). The intimate nature of the small groups allows for a more relaxed atmosphere where children can express themselves without fear of judgement from the few (1 or 2) peers in the group. Instead, in an atmosphere of safety, positive learning relationships are formed. Thus, illuminating sense of safety, which is based on the relations they have, through the programmes, with their peer(s) and students. As a result of the small group, relationships are formulated.

The interview data further revealed that the small-group model ignites the formation of bonds between the student volunteers and the learners.

A *Budding Q* student volunteer shared this:

> "The children enjoy being seen. You can tell by how they come to us running when we get off the bus. They identify their mom before I even see them, and that's one of the things that always make me go back to them no matter how hard school is. Because I find them to also be an escape from my academic commitments, you know, looking forward to see them smile when they are lined up to identify us as when we arrive." (03 September 2024, RUCE)

> "…we have formed a relationship with the learners which starts by us knowing their names and them knowing our names…even when they see us at the shops in town they recognise and greet us." (03 September 2024, RUCE)

This demonstrates the meaningful relationships forged between the children and the Rhodes students through the literacy programmes. These relationships are premised on mutual respect and

the impetus to achieve literacy goals, but they lead to a spin-off benefit for students in that they provide a positive psycho-social experience that builds their capacity to deal with the hardships of university life.

While the programmes foster social emotional development, small group setting and individual attention, are recognised for influence an improvement in literacy practice.

5.3.2 Improved literacy teaching practices

Another key theme that emerged from the interview data was the notion that the RUCE literacy programmes have led to an improvement in literacy teaching practices in the case-study school. This theme is explored in two parts: knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning, and teacher centrality in the literacy development process.

5.3.2.1 Knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning

The interview data revealed how knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning between stakeholders are believed to result in improved literacy teaching practices. One participant said the following:

> "We're not trying to do something extractive or to take away from what's happening at the school. So, it must fit into the normal school day. It must benefit the students, the learners and the teachers. So mutually respectful and bidirectional, and the obviously like a big thing is learning, like everyone must have an opportunity to learn and grow." (08 August 2024; RUCE)

The above quotation aligns with some of the innate values that the literacy programmes enshrine - that "everyone has the opportunity to learn", and that "we're not trying to …take away from what is happening at the school". It also reflects that, in the programmes, stakeholders share what they know and believe to be the best for the children whilst remaining open to the acquisition of new knowledge from each other, and whilst respecting the environment in which they operate. Thus, what is held to be important in the process is respecting each other enough to achieve the primary goal which is learning. This is in line with the engaged citizenry approach to CE by Rhodes University (Talbot & McCann, 2023:209) whereby, in the case of a collaboration between two entities (here, between Rhodes University and the case-study primary school), the purpose and goal of the unity becomes more significant than the individuals involved (LeBlanc & Bearison, 2004:50). Thus, in the case of this study, the overarching goal of developing children's literacy

skills becomes a catalyst to each of the collaborating entities opening itself to learning from the other about strategies and mechanisms that can be employed to achieve that goal. By respecting the school and valuing bidirectional learning, the RUCE literacy programmes are structured to encourage growth and the flow of knowledge amongst everyone involved, including teachers, students, and learners.

The programmes' encouragement of growth, through knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning is seen in the reflection by a *Project Read* coordinator said the following in one of the interviews:

> "But I also want to note that the Rhodes university student body is diverse and that sets us up perfectly for the different spaces and you find that someone might relate and someone might not, right. They [volunteer] travel to the schools together and so we encourage them to have these conversations. In different sorts of situations that they might come through, I think it's useful that we're working with our leaders to train them [volunteers] but also them training one another as well through their conversations, that got really helpful." (26 August, Lebone centre).

This response reflects the significance of knowledge sharing amongst stakeholders, both in training and throughout their community engagement work. Essentially, sharing experiences provides lessons to colleagues and peers who are unfamiliar with certain aspects of a CE programme. Experience is commonly regarded as a way of acquiring knowledge (LeBlanc & Bearison, 2004:500). Thus, when programme stakeholders have conversations about the different contexts in which they have implemented the programmes and how they have navigated unanticipated circumstances, this constitutes valuable knowledge sharing and results in a kind of mutual training. When such impartation bridges two seemingly unfamiliar groups (e.g. teachers and students) in a knowledge sharing relationship, it signifies the emergence of vertical (linking) capital between the university knowledge systems and school knowledge systems. These middle tier partnerships (between students and teachers) show a productive way to collaborate and share knowledge.

In this vein, one participant revealed that teachers sometimes incorporate programme strategies into their classroom activity:

> "The value that the teachers then place on the programme because they understand now and they apply some of the things that we play with, the games that we use and play with during our sessions we are playing and they use them into other sort of curricular things. Like it's not just volunteers come here, they do the thing

> that they do because they've seen the impact of what we're doing. They're finding other ways to incorporate it into how they teach." (22 August, RUCE)

Teachers' understanding of the goal and purpose underpinning the programmes influences them to allow a space of being taught, through observation and engagement in the programmes, of other ways they can teach literacy in the classrooms. "They're finding other ways to incorporate it into how they teach" reflects that teachers have allowed themselves to be taught even as they are teaching, which shows that bidirectional learning and knowledge sharing are indeed happening between various stakeholders in the literacy programmes. In this way, teachers are empowered with new strategies by which to improve and enrich their learners' classroom experiences. Therefore, in the enrichment of learners' learning experience, teachers play a central role.

One of the study participants said the following:

> "So with their [the teachers'] role, we initially tell them in the beginning that they should feel free to participate in the programme. They are not obliged to partake in the programme. However, it would be nice for them to be there so that at least the kids who we'll be working with can also see that what we are doing the teacher is also doing so that they can follow" (08 August 2024, RUCE)

> "So, we are trying to influence each other you know, you see teachers taking bits from the projects to do in their classes too. It's not all teachers, but really the passionate ones that take that learning." (26 August 2024, Lebone Centre)

This captures the norms (i.e. bidirectional learning and reciprocity) and values (i.e. mutuality) that are essential for enabling and grounding sustainable partnerships between entities that share a common goal.

5.3.2.2 Teacher centrality in the literacy development process

At the centre of successful literacy development are teachers (Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2020:254). In line with this notion, one *Reading Club* volunteer stated:

> "We encourage teachers to take more time to play with children and do literacy activities. I think that we'll see more benefit because they are the ones that work with the children mostly… "(03 September, RUCE)

This response reveals an acknowledgement that teachers are the ones who spend the most time with the children and are therefore best positioned to observe and mediate their literacy development journeys. For this reason, teachers are encouraged to engage learners in literacy-

related play during school hours. Studies have noted the fundamental importance of play in literacy skill development, especially in the foundation phase (Talbot, 2022:3; Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2020:256).

Interview data suggests that teacher centrality is acknowledged and encouraged in the RUCE literacy programmes. As a student leader noted:

> "So with their role, we initially tell them [teachers] in the beginning that they should feel free to participate in the programme… And to those student volunteers who would also want the teacher to be also be involved in discipline."

There is more than one reason to encourage teacher participation in the programmes. A teacher plays multiple roles in the lives of their learners daily, one of which is to be the disciplinarian. Thus, teachers' engagement, through presence or participation, generally positively influences the learners' behaviour and engagement. This is reflected in the following interview response by a student volunteer:

> "…at least the kids who we'll be working with can also see that what we are doing the teacher is also doing so that they can follow… another point that they there is for them at least to be there to discipline the kids. We often get students who are not participating."

Children generally trust their teachers as authority figures with whom they are familiar. Thus, teacher engagement in the sessions, especially initially, markedly influences learner engagement. As the above-quoted student volunteer observed, it is easier for children to participate and "follow" in the programme activities when their teacher is also taking part. This highlights the significance and centrality of the teacher in the process of literacy skill development in the foundation phase. Indeed, children in the foundation phase are dependant, especially on their teachers, and they "will transition from being dependent to independent learners through the support from knowledge others" (Venketsamy & Sibanda, 2020:257).

Teacher perspectives were also explored with respect to how the teachers understand their roles within literacy development, and within the literacy programmes specifically.

One teacher said the following:

> "As teachers, even though we are not rich but I think I am rich and happy when my class performs well and proceed to the next grade." (11 September 2024, community library)

This remark reflects the teacher's investment in their learners' education and success. In this quote, they associate wealth and happiness with the success of their learners, revealing the value they attach to their job. The quote also suggests that the teacher concerned sees it as their duty to ensure that their learners achieve the set outcomes for their grade.

According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement, the primary function of the foundation phase is to ensure that all children acquire the foundational literacy skills of reading and writing (DBE, 2002:9; Howie *et al*., 2006:6). Thus, the joy expressed by the interviewed teacher regarding their learners' success is intertwined with the teacher's own sense of professional fulfilment and identity. This reinforces the central role of teachers in the literacy journey. The above quote also expresses how this teacher does not ascribe wealth to materialistic and tangible resources, but rather to the knowledge and skill development of their learners. This aligns with the view that literacy development does not merely refer to teaching children reading and writing, but also to empowering them with skills that will enable lifelong learning and enhance the likelihood of their future success (Zua, 2021:96).

Another teacher reflected the view that teacher duties go beyond the classroom:

> "One thing people do not know is that being a teacher sometimes needs you to go back home and see where your learners come from so that you can understand more about them, because honestly their home business affects their school business and it is your duty as teacher to go to the homes, speak to their guardians and parents. Because these parents really do not come when you call them in to the school..." (15 September 2024, library).

Several studies have emphasised the influence of the home environment, particularly with respect to socio-economic status and learner support, on children's academic performance (De Witt, 2009:619; Van Staden, 2014:2). The above quote highlights the extent of understanding and support that some teachers bring to bear on their learners' educational journeys, even beyond the classroom. This prompted one of the literacy coordinators to say the following:

> "We [Makhanda] are lucky - our teachers are very passionate." (12 August, RUCE).

Children's literacy development encompasses a myriad of factors. Hence, it is pivotal for teachers to adopt a holistic approach to literacy training. The above quote highlights the teacher's understanding that the learning process is dependent on and shaped by the socio-cultural context

of the learner (Venkestamy & Sibanda, 2020:261). The teacher's engagement in home visitations or calls to parents is motivated by this understanding. Thus, playing a fundamental role in ensuring learners' access to education. Teachers' engagement and willingness to participate in knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning in the context of the literacy programmes counts as an improved literacy practice.

Knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning along with teacher centrality are considered examples of social capital in action within the RUCE programmes. Knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning which leverage relational social capital, i.e. the qualities and characteristics of healthy personal relationships such as trust, mutual respect and collaboration (Claridge, 2018:3). They also emphasise the importance of knowledge and skill exchange amongst stakeholders in children's literacy development programmes, highlighting the role of education in enhancing children's human capital and future social participation (Mahmood, 2015:117; McCann *et al*., 2021:46).

As stated above, relational social capital emphasises qualities like trust, mutual respect and collaboration. Participant data revealed that Rhodes University stakeholders respect the school environment, aiming not to "take away from what is happening at the school" but rather to facilitate collaboration that supports child literacy development. Such collaboration is fostered through a willingness by all stakeholders to be teachable - where "everyone has the opportunity to learn" - and to learn from the expertise and experience of others in the interests of the shared goal of children's literacy development.

According to Chow and Chan (2008:460), "…the presence of shared goals promotes mutual understanding and exchange of ideas. Shared goals can thus be considered the force that holds people together and lets them share what they know…". The relational dimension of social capital focuses on the principles of trust and reciprocity that exist within relationships or between networks (Mahmood, 2015:115). In the context of this study, these principles (which include bidirectional learning and knowledge sharing) contribute to the realisation of the partnership's primary goal: developing children's literacy skills.

The acknowledgement of teacher centrality is a representation of relational social capital. The norms, qualities, and values ascribed to teachers by the programmes empower them and help them realise the importance of their role in literacy development. Teacher participation in the

programmes has been shown to positively influence learners' engagement and behaviour. As one participant shared, "…what we are doing, the teacher is also doing so that they[learners] can follow…". This reflects how learners' attitudes and behaviours are shaped by their teachers' involvement. The influence stems from the trust learners place in their teacher, who is the authority figure with whom they spend much of their time during the week.

One of the key elements of relational social capital is trust (Claridge, 2018:3). The learners' trust in their teachers was evidenced by the way in which they easily followed instructions when the teacher was present and engaged in the sessions. This highlights the 'trust norm' in Social Capital theory – whereby teachers' central role in education and class context, promotes trusting the teacher.

Teacher centrality is also an instance of structural social capital which refers to "the properties of a social system and a network as a whole" (Claridge, 2018:2). Teachers are responsible for creating and maintaining systems that enable students to access and engage with learning opportunities. Through this role, teachers' presence and engagement in the literacy sessions (as authority figures) was found to foster the children's adherence to instructions. As Claridge (2018:2) explains, "structural social capital facilitates conditions of accessibility to various parties for exchanging and transferring knowledge, and for increasing the exchange opportunity". The revelation in the data about teacher duties highlights the fact that teachers play a fundamental role in bridging the gap between the community (homes) and the school network. In the context of the case-study school, this role includes the initiation of visitations with parents/guardians in a bid to attain the educational goals that the teachers and other stakeholders hold dear for the children concerned. Indeed, structural social capital in this case includes the teachers' collaboration and communication with various parties involved in the children's education.

Teachers going beyond school and classroom boundaries and into their learners' homes grants them insight into the learners' socio-cultural contexts. This insight becomes pivotal in enabling these teachers to increase their learners' access to education as they, with knowledge of the various factors at play in their communities, can perform their primary teaching duties more effectively.

Overall, improved literacy practices through teacher centrality and knowledge sharing represent examples of relational and structural social capital. However, they also exemplify collective action amongst the literacy programme stakeholders.

5.3.3 Collective action amongst stakeholders

The third theme emerging from the interview data centred around collaboration through collective action amongst stakeholders. This theme is explored at three levels. Firstly, it is important to consider the broader partnership between Rhodes University and case-study school through the RUCE literacy programmes. Secondly, it is valuable to narrow the focus to the chains of inter-stakeholder relationships formed through the partnership and, in particular, the values upheld within these. Lastly, it is key to probe the area of parental involvement in literacy development - both its significance and the need for its improvement.

A partnership has already been formed between the university and the school by virtue of the implementation of the RUCE literacy programmes in the context of the latter. The collaboration between these two entities fosters an environment/space where literacy needs can be more effectively met. A *Budding Q* coordinator reflected as follows:

> "Like this school - we have been working together for 8 years now, you know, so that relationship has to continue and be positive, encouraging and warm." (12 August 2024, RUCE office)

This quote acknowledges the long-term partnership between the case-study school and the university and expresses a desire to sustain the partnership's positivity.

Collective action refers to collaboration amongst organisations towards a common goal (Claridge, 2018:7). In this context, the common goal is improving children's literacy skills in the foundation phase. Working together for such a lengthy period has yielded positive cooperation between the two institutions, as reflected by the above expression that the partnership "has to continue and be positive…". Indeed, the nature of the partnership ensures engaged and committed cooperation, evidenced by the fact that the school is a beneficiary of all three of the RUCE foundation phase programmes (whilst other schools generally only participate in one or two).

A student leader reflected on the partnership, stating this:

> "It has to be willingness on both sides, and it has to be a connection and a collaboration. And so, it is very important that those trust relationships are kept flourishing because otherwise we have weak links, and we are not going to achieve what we want to achieve." (03 September 2024, RUCE office)

This quote highlights some of the key elements that help ensure a positive collaboration between Rhodes and the school, one of which is a willingness (on both sides) to make a success of the

programmes. The student's reflection emphasises their conviction that "trust relationships must be kept flourishing…" which complements the comment made by the previous participant regarding the fundamentality of maintaining positivity within the relationships formed. It also expresses the student's belief that a failure to maintain positivity in the relationship stands to frustrate or preclude the attainment of the goals that the partnership is based on. The willingness of both parties involved in the partnership prompts their contribution of resources (such as time and energy) in a bid to reach their shared goal.

The abovementioned quotes represent social capital in action. Social capital is premised on the formation of relationships (Claridge, 2018; Mahmood, 2015). As previously explained, social capital theory distinguishes different types of social capital; the quotes above represent examples of relational social capital. The university and the school have built a relationship over eight years, which is experienced as "positive, encouraging and warm". This has become the foundation for continued collective action between them.

The concept of collective action is founded upon the notion of cooperation by different parties for the mutual benefit entailed in the achievement of their shared goal (Chow & Chan, 2008; Claridge, 2018). An improvement in children's literacy skills development will signify an achievement for the Rhodes University literacy programmes and constitute an important step towards the vision of an improved educational status for in Makhanda. Also, it will improve the school's overall academic performance. Thus, it constitutes a mutually beneficial goal.

One of the pivotal elements in social capital theory is trust. The quotes above reflect stakeholders' convictions that establishing relationships and maintaining trust within them results in both parties in a partnership remaining willingly committed to their shared goal.

Initially, when a partnership is established, trust may be hidden or unexpressed, but each party depends on the other to be committed to their respective duties and functions within the collaboration. "Collective action…help[s] in promoting actions between persons [involved in the partnership]" (Chow & Chan, 2008:459).

Social capital entails different functions depending on the nature of the relationship formed (Claridge, 2018:1). One of these functions is linking. Linking capital entails the establishment of a relationship between two entities with different degrees of power and authority (Claridge,

2018:3). Thus, the partnership between Rhodes university and the school represents an instance of linking social capital.

This function of social capital is prevalent in accessing resources. In this context, Rhodes University is the partner in possession of greater power and influence. Through the literacy programmes, it avails its students to the schools as facilitators as well as granting the schools access to many other resources that they would not otherwise be able to obtain. Linking social capital is associated with the norms of respect and trust (Claridge, 2018:3) which were highlighted by the interview data.

Claridge (2018:4) states that linking capital is unlikely to occur without bridging capital. Bridging social capital is entailed in extra-group relations and is demonstrated in how the school and the university have both moved away from immediate group and formulated a relationship, as partners committed to developing children's literacy skills. Linking social capital is therefore an extension of bridging social capital (Claridge, 2018:4).

The institutions' move away from their internal groups to formulate extra-ties, the extra ties were created with an institution of higher social power and influence. The relationship between these two institutions has in turn birthed other relationships between stakeholders at different levels. These connections are enabled by the way in which the programmes are structured, whereby coordinators work with school representatives, teachers work with student leaders, student leaders work with students, and volunteers work with learners.

5.3.3.1 Chains of relationship within the partnership

Interviews with participants revealed that multiple relationships have been fostered by the university-school partnership. A programme coordinator of *Budding Q* reflected on the relationship and working dynamics between herself and the student leaders as follows:

> "…so, our student leaders are the go-betweens, and they are responsible for managing the volunteers and the relationship between the school, the children and the training volunteers. But obviously what happens in the partnership between the school, RUCE and the student leaders is what I have to manage as students come and go." (12 August 2024, RUCE office)

This quote grants insight regarding the dynamics between programme coordinators and student volunteers. For one, the students (particularly the student leaders) are believed in and trusted to

know what to do on site at the school. They are also entrusted with training incoming volunteers and communicating programme progress and challenges to the course coordinators. Trust is identified as an important element in partnerships (Claridge, 2018).

Being a student and having your peers rely on your experience, leadership and knowledge can be a weighty responsibility. However, what can make it bearable, doable and easier is knowing you are not alone in it. A student leader reflected on support offered by programme coordinators to students navigating this responsibility:

> "When it comes to our coordinators they are very much hands-on. They always ask if there's anything we need to feel free to ask. They are always willing to do anything to assist us…" (15 August 2024. RUCE office)

This uncovers the support and encouragement that the coordinators offer to the student volunteers. Students are urged to communicate their needs and challenges so they can be attended to. It is acknowledged that the student leaders and other student volunteers play a crucial role in the relationship between the university and schools through the literacy programmes. This is largely due to how they serve as bridges between the university and the school during the weekly programme sessions in which they interact with both school staff and learners. However, the role that they play is also beneficial for them, personally, as they become empowered through the practical experience and leadership skills that the programmes offer them. It was clear from the above interview that whilst the relationships between the students and the coordinators entail trust on both sides, they are also based on the foundations of knowledge sharing and the creation of a safe space for both parties. That students are encouraged to ask questions and that coordinators are willing to assist them in a "hands on" way as they perform their duties highlights that collaborative action is fostered within these relationships.

One of the *Project Read* coordinators reflected as follows:

> "I think partnerships are everything in terms of how much impact we will be able to make, not just the spread of impact but the depth of impact."

This comment highlights the key role of partnerships in ensuring sustainable and meaningful academic success. Indeed, the impact of any collaborative project is strongly dependent on the strength, nature and stability of the partnership that undergirds it. Furthermore, the above reflection

emphasises that this impact should not only be measured in terms of magnitude (how far reaching the programmes are), but also in terms of depth (how effectively the programmes ensure that foundation phase children develop the essential skills they need to successfully navigate the school system).

One of the teachers involved in the programmes shared her view on the partnership between the university and her school:

> "I enjoy working with the students, you see them being so passionate about the work they are doing with the learners, some of them even bring the children goodies when they come. I have one from last year we still talk on WhatsApp but she graduated and went to work back home." (11 September 2024, school)

This quote touches on multiple relationships, including those between the student volunteers and the foundation phase learners. The teacher's reflection highlights the passion and commitment students show while working with the children. Their enthusiasm is revealed in that they even spend their own money to bring their learners nice things - a significant gesture that represents the strength of the bonds between students and their groups. The quote also highlights the positive relationships that often form between student volunteers and schoolteachers, some of which continue even after the students have graduated and ceased to participate in the literacy programmes and even across distance. Despite the student's graduation and relocation, the relations with the teacher are still maintained through a personal platform. Meaning, while the student was still with the programme, they had positive relations with the teacher, hence sustaining their connection. The multiple chains of relations demonstrate social capital.

These relationships being formed at multiple levels through the literacy programmes are examples of bridging social capital. They bridge gaps that may exist between individuals and sub-groups within in the collaborating parties (i.e. the school and the HE institution), enabling the exchange of knowledge and resources towards the overarching goal of improving children's literacy. Also, the chains of relationships forged through the programmes represent a network of engagement and collaboration between different individuals (e.g. coordinators, teachers, students and learners) which is a representation of social capital in action.

5.3.3.2 Values within the partnerships

The collaborative action undertaken by the university-community partnership is guided by the values enshrined within that partnership.

One of the participants had the following to say in this regard:

> "…I need to trust my director at the Community Engagement Office who heads all of this, to trust the coordinators to do their job. The coordinator needs to trust that the student leaders are gonna do the job. The student leaders are gonna trust the volunteers to show up, right? And we all need to be united to do what we're doing." (22 August, RUCE office)

This quote reveals how trust plays a central role in the partnership. The unity that drives collective action amongst stakeholders in founded on the value of trust. Stakeholders trust each other to be committed to the shared goal, and thus to fulfil their different roles in the partnership. Another volunteer reiterated the importance of trust, not only in fostering collective action but also for the sake of the learners participating in the programme:

> "So, at the very basic level, the volunteer and a child and the teacher need to trust one another so that the child is open to learning. Without the openness and willingness nothing can ever really happen." (03 September 2024, RUCE office)

The quote reveals that, in addition to trust, willingness is a key value driving action by the partnership. Stakeholders must be willing to become instruments that drive the actualisation of the partnership's shared goal. This willingness will drive their commitment to the cause and propel them to cooperate with other stakeholders. The volunteer quoted above noted that the absence of such willingness amongst stakeholders would impede the fulfilment of the programmes' purpose. Success is dependent on each participant carrying out their responsibility.

5.3.3.3 The role of community in literacy development

Several participants stressed the primary role of community in developing children's literacy skills. Literacy development is more a social process than a cognitive one (Millin, 2015:115) which means that communities have a vital part to play in it. Indeed, a child's socio-cultural context has been shown to significantly affect their educational development (Van Standen, 2014). One programme coordinator revealed that:

> “There’s already existing relationships, but this is on a bigger scale now that there’s a lot more coordination and willingness to work together, we cannot work in our silos anymore.” (22 August, RUCE office)

The quote highlights that working in individual corners has not proven effective, and that communities should find a way of working together towards their own development.

Illiteracy has passed the stage of just being a problem; it has escalated to the point of being a real social issue (Prinsloo, 1999:2). Communities need to work together to resolve it in their contexts. When asked about the power of collaboration in literacy improvement efforts, the same coordinator quoted above said this:

> “That's a massive highlight that we double the national average, like as incredible. And things like being able to sit around a table with 20 organizations and all talk the same passionate language about changing the literacy in the town for the better.” (22 August 2024, RUCE office)

This respondent thus revealed that multiple organisations within Makhanda are able to sit together and discuss means and strategies by which to improve the community’s literacy levels and overall academic performance. Highlighting the town’s outstanding literacy performance, the participant also noted the “passionate language” employed by the community when speaking and planning about Makhanda’s literacy education efforts.

A *Project Read* coordinator stated:

> “I think it's a good thing that if you involve the whole community, because remember our children, we all we are all here working together, we're working towards a goal that we want to make kids aware of books, and not just kids but our parents as well and in that way, they can educate themselves, by working together as a community. Together in the literacy, we can just make ourselves stronger.” (26 August 2024, RUCE office)

Thus, the respondent acknowledges the fundamental value and contribution of community members working together to shape their children’s futures through education. In the same vein, another respondent said this:

> “I think the biggest thing about RUCE is that we have access to so many students. No other organisation can do that. And so, it is really important that we partner with organisations in the community so that the influence can reach wider audiences within Makhanda” (28 August 2024, RUCE office)

5.3.3.4 Lack of parental involvement

The power of community involvement in literacy development is a fundamental aspect to the said development. Parent respondents expressed lack of knowledge and involvement regarding the intervention programmes their children participate in. Parents, as primary care-givers, play a fundamental role in shaping their children's future . Part of which involves the values and principles they instill through daily teaching within the household. Upon discussion with stakeholders, the partnership between the programmes operation and the parents was questioned.

One of the parents expressed:

"I don't want to lie I don't know much about the programme, I just hear my son speak about oobhuti noosisi baseRhodes who come to visit and play with them…". (11 September 2024, Joza Location)

The parent expressed her lack of knowledge regarding the purpose of the student visits tp the school and its effect on the children's education. Thus, becoming a weak link in the network of stakeholders pertaining to the literacy development of children. Communication and collective action, as driving principles of ensuring a positive social capital, seem to lack in this regard.

Most participants from the university side of the partnership echoed the following comment made by a student leader:

> "We assume that the school keeps the communication with the parents." (5 September 2024, RUCE office)

However, one parent reflected on their involvement with the school as follows:

> "I am very busy, as you see with meeting with you, but I do want to know about things happening at the school that can help my child's education." (10 September 2024, Joza Location)

This response reveals willingness, from the parents' part to be involved in the culmination of their children's future. Further reveals that parental involvement is affected by a myriad of factors, like work commitments underpinned by the desire to provide basic needs for household survival. It is such factors that require attention and consideration in the implementation of intervention programmes.

Another respondent said this:

> "I'm sure something can be done about parents' inclusion in the programmes, because I mean it is important right?" (15 August 2024, RUCE office)

This response from a student volunteer sparks some hope that this avenue can be reviewed, between RUCE and the school. It is a fundamental aspect in literacy development that aids in ensuring a holistic development. Parental involvement can equip them on various children's academic needs that can be facilitated from home, e.g helping children with homework, registering them for membership at a local library– as means to improve the children's reading and comprehension skills. A rigid collaboration effort and practice can ensure more fruitful results.

5.4 Conclusion

The chapter analysed the perspectives of various stakeholders on the contribution of the RUCE literacy programmes to children's literacy development in Makhanda. Open-ended interviews were conducted with programme coordinators, teachers and student volunteers and the data collected was organised into themes. Three main themes (which are regarded as the contributions made by the programmes) emerged and were discussed as demonstrations of social capital theory in action.

The first theme was centred on the social-emotional capacity development observed in the children participating in the programmes. It emerged that children grew in confidence and engagement, facilitated by the programmes' small group structure whereby each student volunteer is assigned only two or three learners with whom to work. This set-up has been found to foster individual attention and the establishment of meaningful bonds between students and learners. These fostered the development of confidence in the learners to admit their challenges and embrace their abilities. As the students worked consistently with the same learners in small groups, they were able to give these learners individualised attention that is impossible to offer in a larger classroom setting. This theme highlighted the relational dimension of social capital, based on how students and learners interacted with each other in the small groups. This enabled the emergence of bonding social capital as students and learners developed relationships within their small groups during the programme sessions.

The second theme to emerge from the interview data was that of improved literacy practices. This was examined as two separate factors - knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning on the one hand, and teacher centrality on the other. Both primary and secondary data revealed that the sharing of knowledge amongst stakeholders is seen to enable the transfer of skills, and growth towards ensuring that children's literacy is well developed. Stakeholders share knowledge and skills through volunteer training, and by sharing their experiences during trips to the school. The knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning factor highlighted the fact that learning takes place for everyone involved in the programmes and not just for the foundation phase learners themselves. The second factor considered within the theme of improved literacy practices was teacher centrality, which emphasised the pivotal role played by teachers in the literacy development journey. Teacher centrality is acknowledged in the programmes, and teachers are encouraged to engage and participate in the programme sessions due to their significant influence on the engagement and behaviour of the learners. Teacher engagement begets learner engagement based on the learners' trust in their teachers as authority figures. The theme of improved literacy practices is related to cognitive and relational social capital. The transfer of skills and knowledge is an example of cognitive social capital, whilst the interactions between stakeholders considering teacher centrality align with the principles of relational social capital.

The third main theme to be revealed through the interview process was that of collective action. This theme was broken down into four sub-themes: chains of partnership, values within partnerships, the role of community in literacy development, and parental involvement.

The relationship between the school and the university acts an umbrella under which other internal relationships are forged across multiple levels to result in chains of partnership. The umbrella relationship represents bridging and linking social capital, as well as linking social capital due to Rhodes University possessing more power and status than the school.

Chains of partnership (the first sub-theme of collective action) are seen in how coordinators relate with student leaders, student leaders relate with students, coordinators relate with teachers, student leaders relate with teachers, and students relate with learners. All of these are examples of bridging social capital. Additionally, they are examples of relational social capital as these various relationships were found to be grounded on the values of trust, willingness and collaboration (the second sub-theme of collective action) – all of which were considered essential to attaining the

partnership's shared goal of improved child literacy development. The third sub-theme of collective action that emerged was the role of community in literacy development, the fundamental importance of which was emphasised. Finally, participants noted the great significance of parental involvement (the fourth sub-theme of collective action) in the process of developing children's literacy skills but reflected that this element of collective action is currently sadly lacking in the programmes and in the school as a whole. This aspect requires dedicated attention, both from the programme coordinators and the school leadership, as parents are primary agents in teaching children and imparting norms which need to be more centred on educational attainment if children's literacy levels and overall educational performance are to improve.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This study has evaluated the contribution of three Rhodes University literacy programmes to literacy development in foundation phase children at a no-fee primary school in Joza, Makhanda. Through a qualitative case-study approach, qualitative data on literacy outcomes and qualitative insights from educators and participants were gathered.

The findings outline several positive contributions and strengths of the programmes, including enhanced social-emotional development in learners, improved teaching practices, and better collective action toward literacy improvement. The findings underscore the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation of literacy initiatives to ensure they continue to meet the needs of diverse learners.

This chapter will briefly present the findings of the research, outline the implications and limitations of the study, and make some recommendations based on what the study revealed.

6.2 Summary of the Research Findings

Drawing on insights from key stakeholders, including program coordinators, teachers, and student volunteers, three core themes emerged, each illustrating the operationalisation of social capital theory in the literacy programmes under consideration.

The first key finding was that participation in the literacy programmes is considered by stakeholders to enhance the social-emotional capacity development of foundation phase children. This is facilitated by the programmes' small group structure whereby each student volunteer works closely with two or three children over a period of time, fostering individual attention and allowing for stronger interpersonal bonds to develop between learners and volunteers. Individual attention appears to promote the development of learners' confidence, enabling them to confront challenges and embrace their abilities. Such interactions illustrate the relational dimension of social capital, which fosters the emergence of bonding social capital evidenced by the close, trust-based relationships that emerge within the literacy programmes' small groups.

The second key finding of the study relates to improved literacy practices, achieved through two main processes: knowledge sharing and bidirectional learning and teacher centrality. Knowledge

sharing occurs when program coordinators, teachers, and student volunteers exchange skills and insights during volunteer training sessions, school visits, and experience-sharing discussions. This reciprocal learning benefits both children and adult participants, enhancing the literacy development process. Teacher centrality highlights the crucial role of teachers in supporting the programmes' effectiveness. Teachers' active participation strengthens learner engagement and improves classroom behaviour, as children tend to trust and respond to their familiar authority figures. This finding reflects both the cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital. The transfer of knowledge aligns with cognitive social capital, while the role of teachers in building trust and encouraging engagement exemplifies relational social capital.

The final key finding relates to collective action and partnership building, which are essential for sustaining literacy development efforts. The programmes foster chains of partnership that connect various stakeholders, including student leaders, volunteers, teachers, and coordinators. These relationships operate under the broader umbrella of the partnership between Rhodes University and Makhanda schools (here, a particular case-study school) which facilitates multiple levels of collaboration. This exemplifies bridging and linking social capital as the formation of inter-group networks between university stakeholders, schools and the broader community is enabled. Additional dimensions of collective action include the values that undergird the relationships within the collaborative network, e.g. trust, collaboration, and shared goals, all of which were found to profoundly contribute to the success of the literacy programmes. Finally, the findings underscore the importance of community collaboration and parental involvement in the context of literacy development. Whilst participants acknowledged a certain degree of community engagement with respect to children's literacy development and the support thereof, they also highlighted the need for increased parent participation. Parents, as primary agents in children's social and educational development, play a critical role in literacy attainment.

Overall, these findings illustrate the transformative impact of the RUCE literacy programmes on children's educational development in Makhanda. By fostering strong social-emotional development, improving literacy practices, and encouraging collective action, the programmes activate different dimensions of social capital theory - relational, cognitive, and structural. This multifaceted approach underscores the vital role that community engagement, collaboration, and capacity development play in driving sustainable literacy outcomes.

6.3 Implications of the Study

It is clear from the findings that the three RUCE literacy programmes under consideration are beneficial to children's literacy development. They improve learners' motivation and engagement with respect to literacy behaviours and empower teachers to provide more meaningful literacy instruction as a result of their participation in (and observation of) the RUCE programmes. It also seems that the programmes have galvanised a community in a collective bid to attain a common goal – the improvement of childhood literacy development practices in their own context. Considering this, the findings of this research have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in literacy development.

The positive outcomes associated with the RUCE literacy programmes at the case-study school suggest that similar initiatives might be effective in enhancing literacy development in other communities too. Rolling similar programmes out in communities across South Africa could ultimately improve the country's overall literacy performance levels. However, it must be borne in mind that the challenges identified by the study emphasise the need for continuous support and resources to sustain and improve such programmes and communities' commitment to them.

This study contributes to the broader literature on literacy education in South Africa, providing evidence of effective practices that can inform future programme development and policy making.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. Arguably, the biggest limitation was the fact that this study specifically looked only at perceived contributions within the case-study context. It was not in the scope of the study to consider the specific, measurable benefits of the programmes on children's literacy performance (e.g. through literacy assessments or other mixed-method approaches). Also, the research was conducted only within the context of the specified case-study school, which may limit the generalisability of the findings.

There were also challenges related to the study's timeframe (which was only one year). This limited the data collection period and made reaching parents of participating learners at the school particularly difficult. Dealing with parents who had different levels of education required verbal translation of consent forms and interview schedules to ensure ease of expression for all

participants. This was time consuming and required careful attention to ensure that not a single important detail was forfeited in the translation process. The short timeframe of the study also precluded the opportunity to connect with other important literacy stakeholders in Makhanda like Gadra Education, the Joza Youth Hub and many other NGOs, NPOs and literacy-related initiatives. Nonetheless, high standards of quality and ethicality with respect to this study's findings were ensured.

6.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made from a programmatic perspective:

6.5.1 Broaden the reach of the programmes

Rhodes University could consider broadening the reach of its literacy programmes across the range of non-fee schools in Makhanda. Currently, the case-study school is the only school where all three of the foundation phase literacy programmes are offered. In grappling with the 80% illiteracy rate for Makhanda's Grade 3s (Rhodes University, 2024), it is imperative that all schools are targeted for literacy development interventions. Currently, it is understood that there are no criteria for the selection of schools to participate in the programmes. Rather, it is preferred that schools take ownership of their own literacy challenges and reach out for collaborative assistance. This is to ensure that the RUCE literacy programmes are not imposed on schools, and that the programmes remain mutually beneficial interventions that schools are willingly a part of.

6.5.2 Encourage parental involvement

It would be very beneficial to include parents in the literacy programmes, even if only in a limited capacity at first (e.g. in the beginning and at the end of each programme). This would enable programme leaders to inform them of what each programme aims to accomplish and tell them how they could become involved in the process of developing their children's literacy at home.

Parents are generally their children's primary caregivers and thus the instillers of their fundamental values and norms. Through this role, even if unwittingly, parents play a critical role in shaping the values that their children bring to the process of learning. Van Staden (2014:2) recognises the influence of the home in a child's literacy development. Parents can ensure whether a child's home

is a supportive space in which the value of education is emphasised. Even if the parents' own literacy abilities are lacking or poorly developed (as is often the case in socio-economically disadvantaged contexts), this should not determine how engaged or supportive they are in their children's education. Indeed, home-based child literacy support goes beyond the parent's own degree of literacy and can take the form of emotional support, constant check-ins with the child on what they have learnt, consultations with the child's teacher at the end of each term, attendance of school meetings, and asking the child to read aloud whenever possible. Such supportive parental involvement offers emotional assurance to the child and builds their interest in academic work on the basis of wanting to make their parents proud.

6.5.3 Future research opportunities

Further research could explore the impact of the RUCE literacy programmes over a longer period. It would also be beneficial to investigate potential other factors that influence literacy development in similar contexts, and to consider any literacy-related improvements that have been noted at other schools in Makhanda where literacy interventions (by Rhodes and other organisations) are being implemented.

There is also potential for an extension of this study, whereby mixed methods could be employed to measure children's literacy performance before and after involvement in the literacy programmes.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

This study has sought to explore the role that community-university partnerships can play in addressing the persistent literacy challenges faced by primary school learners in many South African communities.

By focusing on the literacy programmes implemented by Rhodes University in Makhanda (and specifically in Joza township), this research has underscored the profound influence of collaborations between institutions of higher education and community schools in supporting educational development in underserved communities.

The findings of this research contribute to the broader discourse on education and development, emphasising the foundational importance of literacy as a bedrock to academic success, lifelong

learning and social participation. As the world continues to battle the global literacy crisis, and as South Africa seeks to meet the challenges posed by its inherited educational inequalities, the insights from this study are timely.

The ability to read and write with understanding is not merely a skill; it is a fundamental tool that empowers individuals to participate fully in society, to break cycles of poverty through access to opportunities, and to contribute to the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - particularly in the realm of quality education.

Reflecting on this research journey, it is evident that confronting the complex educational challenges in South Africa necessitates a multifaceted approach. This study has focused on a specific set of literacy interventions at a particular school, and the generalisability of its findings may be somewhat limited. However, the approach taken by the RUCE literacy programmes has great potential to be generalised across those communities who are determined to engage in collaborative action towards the improvement of their children's educational trajectories.

This study's focus on community-university partnerships has provided a valuable perspective on how academic institutions can collaborate meaningfully with local communities to initiate interventions founded on the values of willingness, trust, knowledge sharing, and cooperation.

As this study concludes, there is optimism that its findings will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational interventions within communities, particularly with respect to literacy development. Moreover, the potential for future research in this field remains vast. Further studies could explore the long-term impact of university-led literacy programmes, the role of policy frameworks in supporting community-university collaborations, and the broader integration of such partnerships into national educational strategies. It is hoped that this research will inspire others to probe possible solutions to literacy challenges both local and global.

In conclusion, the journey of this study has been both challenging and rewarding. It is hoped that it will represent a meaningful contribution to the much larger conversation about the future of education in South Africa and beyond. It is also hoped that the findings of this research will inspire continued action and collaboration between universities and their communities as they tackle pertinent social issues; particularly those that are education related.

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Semi-structured interview schedule

VENUE:
TIME:
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:

Participant Category: Teachers.

1. How are you involved with the programme(s)?
2. Describe, from what you have seen and experienced, what you think the programmes are there for at your school.
3. Take me through the operation of the programmes in the school, when do they take place and at what time of day?
4. From your involvement, what do you think the learners think of the programmes?
5. Please comment on the programmes influence in the teaching and learning style in your classroom.
6. Describe, if any, changes you might have noticed from your learners participating in the programmes and describe how you feel about those changes?
7. How involved are the parents in general? What channels of communication are there between you (as the school) and them?

Participant Category: Parents

1. Do you know of the programmes that operate at your child's school and when they happen?
2. Do you have a established relationship with the school, if so take me through how this relationship is
3. As a parent, how important do you think is your role in shaping your child's future? 4. Describe, if any, change you have identified from your child's performance or behaviour since joining the programme.
5. Do you communicate with the school randomly about your child, besides being called

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to individual or school meetings? How much can you say you know about the school, its operations and your child's performance?
6. Do you think education is important? if yes, why?
7. What do you hope for your child's future?

Participant category: Student volunteers

1. Which programme are you involved with?
2. Take me through the activities and arrangement of the programme?
3. What drove/drives you to be a part of the programme or RUCE?
4. Tell me about your experience with the school, the learners and the programmes. 5. What is your overall opinion about the establishment and implementation of such programmes in society.
6. Before being a RUCE candidate, how much can you say you knew about literacy? 7. Describe the kind of set-up you have with the learners, teachers at the school, your fellow volunteers and coordinators?
8. Has been part of RUCE shaped your attitude and thoughts regarding literacy?If so, elaborate how.

Participant category: Programme Coordinators

1. Which programme do you coordinate and how long has it been?
2. Describe the idea behind your programme's concept of and approach to literacy.
3. How would you describe the relationship between you, students and the sites?
4. Facilitating a programmes has its ups and downs, describe what you do to ensure that the programmes happens, on time, on the scheduled times?
5. Based on your experience, what would you describe as the highlight of working with the school through this programme?
6. Do the programmes cater for parents, in whatever form? if yes, how and describe the parents' engagement or reception. If not, do you think of this as a positive (does not need to be changed) or negative (room for improvement).
7. Overall, looking at research and your site, do you feel the objectives of the programme are met?

8.2 Appendix 2: Participant informed consent form

PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

(To be signed by research participant/s)

Project Title: Bridging literacy: Evaluating the contribution of Rhodes University literacy programmes on the literacy development of a non-fee public school in Joza, Makhanda.

LIYEMA KOSI… from the Department of …**SOCIOLOGY**……, Rhodes University has requested my permission to participate in the above-mentioned research project.

The nature and the purpose of the research project and of this informed consent declaration have been explained to me in a language that I understand.

I am aware that:

1. The purpose of the research project is to evaluate the contribution of Rhodes Engaged Citizenry programmes in developing literacy in the Foundation phase of a non-fee public school in Joza, Makhanda.
2. Rhodes University has given ethical clearance to this research project **7973** and I have seen/may request to see the clearance certificate by contacting the Ethics Coordinator (ethics-committee@ru.ac.za)
3. By participating in this research project I will be contributing towards understanding the contribution of the literacy programmes in the school, and what interventions the Makhanda community has implemented in responding to the national literacy crisis.
4. I will participate in the project by engaging in a semi-structured interview where I will respond to questions prepared by the researcher in their search of my perspective/ knowledge on the contribution of the literacy programmes in the literacy development of children in a public primary school in Joza.
5. My participation is entirely voluntary and should I at any stage wish to withdraw from participating further, I may do so without any negative consequences.
6. I understand that I have the right to refuse to respond to any question that I would prefer not to answer.
7. I will not be compensated for participating in the research, but any expenses (for example taxi fare or lunch money) will be reimbursed.
8. The following risks are associated with my participation: none…….

9. The Researcher intends to publish the research results in the form of thesis. However, confidentiality and anonymity of records will be maintained, and my name and identity will not be revealed to anyone who has not been involved in the conducting of the research.
10. In terms of the Protection of Personal Information Act (No. 4 of 2013) it remains my right to request the Researcher to provide me with a detailed explanation of exactly how confidentiality and anonymity of the data I provide will be achieved. I may also request to know exactly how my personal information will be stored securely, for how long it will be stored.
11. Data collected from me for this research project will not be used for any further study.
12. In terms of the POPI Act, I possess the right to receive feedback about this research. This will take the form of emails for student leaders/teachers/intervention coordinators and word of mouth for parents without email addresses unless **I elect not to receive this feedback.**
13. Any further questions that I might have regarding the nature of the research and/or my participation in it will be answered by Liyema Kosi g19k7474@ru.ac.za…
14. By signing this informed consent declaration, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies. A copy of this informed consent declaration will be given to me, and the original will be kept on record by the Researcher.
15. I **agree** to the Researcher's use of voice recording of my comments and opinions during interviews, the purpose of which is to ensure the accurate recording of my views/responses. Furthermore, I have the right to request a copy of the interview transcriptions to confirm that my opinions are accurately recorded.

I, ……., have read the above information / confirm that the above information has been explained to me in a language that I understand, and I am aware of this document's contents. I have asked all questions that I wished to ask, and these have been answered to my satisfaction. I fully understand what is expected of me during the research.

I have not been pressurised in any way and I voluntarily agree to participate in the above-mentioned project.

…….. …… ……..

Participants signature **Witness** **Date**

8.3 Appendix 3: Ethics approval letter

RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

Rhodes University Human Research Ethics Committee
PO Box 94, Makhanda, 6140, South Africa
t: +27 (0) 46 603 7727
f: +27 (0) 46 603 8822
e: ethics-committee@ru.ac.za
NHREC Registration number: RC-241114-045
https://www.ru.ac.za/researchgateway/ethics/

26 August 2024

Ms. Liyema Kosi

Email: g19k7474@campus.ru.ac.za

Review Reference: 2024-7973-9011

Dear Ms. Kosi,

Title: Bridging literacy: evaluating the contribution of community-university partnerships on the literacy development of Foundation Phase children In Joza A Makhanda.

Researcher: Ms. Liyema Kosi

Supervisor: Ms Anna Talbot Kinsler

This letter confirms that the above research proposal has been reviewed and **APPROVED** by the Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee (HF-REC). Your Approval number is: 2024-7973-9011

Approval has been granted for 1 year. An annual progress report will be required in order to renew approval for an additional period. You will receive an email notifying you when the annual report is due.

Please ensure that the Humanities Faculty REC is notified should any substantive change(s) be made, for whatever reason, during the research process. This includes changes in investigators. Please also ensure that a brief report is submitted to the ethics committee on the completion of the research. The purpose of this report is to indicate whether the research was conducted successfully, if any aspects could not be completed, or if any problems arose that the Humanities Faculty REC should be aware of. If a thesis or dissertation arising from this research is submitted to the library's electronic theses and dissertations (ETD) repository, please notify the committee of the date of submission and/or any reference or cataloguing number allocated.

Sincerely,

Dr Priscilla Boshoff

Chair: Humanities Faculty Research Ethics Committee