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**The general reading status of struggling Year 9 students and their teachers'  
perceptions of their needs in New Zealand secondary schools.**

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requirements for the degree of  
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## **Abstract**

Literacy skills are critical to academic, economic, and social success from an individual to a state level. It is in the interest of New Zealand society that literacy education meets the needs of all students. The purpose of this study was to investigate the reading-related difficulties experienced by students entering secondary education and to evaluate the preparedness of secondary teachers to meet the literacy-related needs of their students. In this study, Year 9 students at two secondary schools in central-north New Zealand completed tests of reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, listening comprehension, word-reading skills, knowledge of heuristic decoding rules, and reading self-efficacy. Additionally, teachers of Year 9 students at these schools completed a questionnaire regarding their literacy-related classroom practices. The results showed that 16% of Year 9 students experience significant difficulties with reading comprehension, indicating that these students are not able to engage with secondary-level texts. These students have difficulties with varying combinations of reading vocabulary, word-reading, decoding, language comprehension and low reading self-efficacy. Secondary teachers are responsible for selecting and implementing appropriate instruction to advance the literacy skills of all their students, from those with basic reading difficulties to those who are developing disciplinary-specific literacy skills required for academic success at upper-secondary and tertiary levels. The results of this study showed that teachers of Year 9 students hold sparse and inconsistent levels of literacy-related knowledge and that literacy-related assessment and instructional practices are insufficient. It can be inferred from the results of the questionnaire that teachers of Year 9 students do not regard literacy-related practices

as an important responsibility of a subject area teacher. It is suggested that secondary schools require comprehensive literacy plans that coordinate literacy-related teaching and learning practices across subject areas so that students can receive appropriate and effective literacy support in all their classes. Secondary schools require appropriately qualified, on-site literacy specialists with sufficient allocated time to support the literacy-related teaching and learning needs of teachers and students.

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