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Abstract

This study is about challenges that distress Foundation Phase teachers and learners in classrooms where learners speak different home languages in townships around the Nylstroom circuit of the Limpopo province of South Africa. This diversity is mainly caused by families who migrate from various rural settlements to seek jobs around urban areas, causing such learners to be subjected to being taught in languages that are not their home language. Moreover, the article aims to warrant that the Department of Basic Education and district offices make a provision for this changing situation to accommodate the affected learners. The FP language policy mandates the teaching of learners in their home language which places educators and learners in a challenging position due to their poor performance. Qualitative research methodology was used, and data was collected from 4 primary schools by means of interviews. The findings of the study revealed that both educators and learners do struggle; however, the learners usually improve as the year progresses. The researchers read a number of articles to get a more complete picture of the policy that would include people who speak other languages in schools where other students are being unfairly treated in high school classes in the Foundation Phase.

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Review Article**Teaching Literacy in Linguistically Diverse Foundation Phase Classrooms: Challenges for Teacher and Learners *****Zodwa KODI ¹  Pule PHINDANE ²  Elias Tsakane NGOBENI ³ ****Abstract**

This study is about challenges that distress Foundation Phase teachers and learners in classrooms where learners speak different home languages in townships around the Nylstroom circuit of the Limpopo province of South Africa. This diversity is mainly caused by families who migrate from various rural settlements to seek jobs around urban areas, causing such learners to be subjected to being taught in languages that are not their home language. Moreover, the article aims to warrant that the Department of Basic Education and district offices make a provision for this changing situation to accommodate the affected learners. The FP language policy mandates the teaching of learners in their home language which places educators and learners in a challenging position due to their poor performance. Qualitative research methodology was used, and data was collected from 4 primary schools by means of interviews. The findings of the study revealed that both educators and learners do struggle; however, the learners usually improve as the year progresses. The researchers read a number of articles to get a more complete picture of the policy that would include people who speak other languages in schools where other students are being unfairly treated in high school classes in the Foundation Phase.

Keywords: Linguistic diversity, foundation phase, home language, policy**1. INTRODUCTION**

The current study explores how Foundation Phase (FP) grade 1 educators using Sepedi as a language of learning and teaching (LoLT) deal with Xitsonga learners in their classrooms. The experience and training they received from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as well as Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), are for Sepedi classrooms. The language policy, which mandates the use of home language (HL), directs FP teaching and learning. This is based on the conjecture that learners would easily understand content as they have already acquired basic concepts from their mother tongue because they have been communicating with families at home. Qhoboshiane and Phindane (2022) suggest that amongst the four language skills directed by DBE (2011), speaking is utterly central to communication, and it constitutes a bigger part of communication in general, whereas (Aprianto et al., 2020) are of the view that speaking is one of the most challenging language skills. However, the FP expects educators to prioritize teaching speaking over other language skills. The Xitsonga learners can easily learn Sepedi because educators use more of it as they are not conversant in Xitsonga. It is also worth mentioning that learners of this age collaborate with their friends through

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play, and learning a language informally can be easier than in formal settings. Moreover, research has proved that laying a solid foundation in lower grades produces better performance for future learning.

South African families have migrated from rural areas to urban areas in recent years, seeking jobs and better opportunities. Typically, they find employment in towns and mines, and they live in informal settlements close to their workplaces. Their children, who are currently attending school, are compelled to attend schools where the higher education options do not align with their preferences. According to [Evans and Loomis \(2009\)](#), suburbanisation has continuously and intensively transformed communal structures since 2011; the situation has completely impacted demographics in societies. In the same vein, [Dlamini \(2022\)](#) points out that most parents who occupy informal settlements can only afford to take their children to no-fee schools in the townships nearer to their places of residence.

1.1 Home Language Policy in the Foundation Phase

Although all FP learners are supposed to be taught in the languages of their choice ([Cook, 1999](#); [DBE, 2011](#); [Steyn, 2002](#)), these learners are deprived of that right. The concerns are stronger as educators also struggle to teach learners who do not understand the language of the school in the FP classrooms ([Arasomwan & Mashiya, 2021](#)). Schools are similarly protected because they have the option of teaching using any of the approved South African languages, as long as it is one of the official languages mentioned in the Language in Education Policy ([LiEP, 1997](#)) and Jeffery and Van [Beuningen \(2020\)](#). The policy further stipulates that learners must secure admission to their preferred school, provided there is available space. According to [Calitz and Wright \(2021\)](#), the medium of instruction is selected by the School Governing Body (SGB) guided by the language policy of the society. Hence, [Joubert \(2023\)](#) emphasises that FP educators need more support to improve both their teaching skills and content. Speaking the language of learning and teaching should also begin at home; however, [Botha \(2022\)](#) asserts that when children reside in homes where the language is inaccessible or non-existent, their language development stagnates.

Home language teaching essentially starts in early childhood development (ECD) classrooms. [Szelei et al. \(2020\)](#) state that early childhood educator education programmes presently need students to take some general coursework to learn about diversity to deal with the young ones professionally. He further states that the ECD practitioners teaching Grade R learners are of the view that HL is the most suitable language in which meaningful learning can easily occur. [Nemeth \(2021\)](#) posits that they encounter it at home, as it serves as their primary mode of communication with their families. This statement confirms the likelihood that the status quo remains in other FP grades, while research has proved that learners who obtain a favourable foundation in the early grades are likely to perform better throughout their schooling ([Yeager & Dweck, 2020](#)). The situation calls for a need for knowledge of understanding teaching in a multilingual classroom by educators, whereas, while consulting authors regarding this topic, the language and culture from where the learners come is one of the basic needs. This is the area in which the department must provide orientation courses to FP educators.

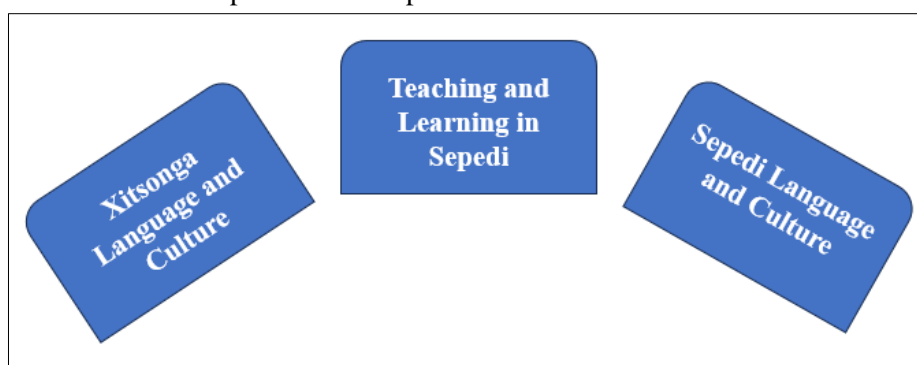


Figure 1. Languages that migrant learners must learn

Table 1 below depicts the differences between teaching HL speaking learners and learners from a different HL.

Table 1. Differences between teaching home language speakers and learners from different languages

Monolingualism	Multilingualism
Knowledge of one Language	Knowledge of many languages
Vocabulary, skills and culture are limited	Learners are exposed to more vocabulary, skills and cultures
Skills are limited	Multiskilled
Educator does not learn much from learners	Teacher also learns from learners
May experience difficulties in adapting to many places in the world	Can easily adapt to any cultures and places in the world
One size fits all approach	Different approaches to accommodate all learners

1.2. Supporting the teaching in a target language

Curricula must provide tools and resources to facilitate the teaching and learning of foreign languages, specifically Xitsonga, in light of the widespread practice of immigration ([Horgan, et al., 2022](#)). For multilingual teaching practice (MLP) to work, teachers need to plan and prepare for class by using their own experiences along with the learner's background information. However, because the teachers do not know enough about the learners' culture and deep background, some of the learners' cultural and contextual features are lost ([Calafato, 2020](#)). When planning to teach in a multilingual classroom, the educator must come up with new vocabulary and skills from the source language and know how they differ from those of the target language to accommodate the migrant learners. In this case, Xitsonga is the source language, while the target language is Sepedi. [Calafato \(2020\)](#) further declares that government must encourage multilingualism because of immigration. Schools that have immigrant learners should always establish the extent to which educators are willing to practice multilingual teaching. Unwillingness to teach immigrant learners in the FP can hinder these learners from accessing education. However, it is not the case in the school in which the study was conducted because the educators were all trying their best, but the department had not provided necessary resources.

1.3 Research Questions

- What are the challenges that FP educators experience when teaching learners who have a different HL in their classrooms?
- What means of support do educators, learners and parents receive for teaching Xitsonga learners in the Sepedi HL?

1.4 Research Objectives

- To establish the implications of teaching learners with a different HL in the FP classroom.
- To determine the support that is needed to educators, learners and parent for the successful teaching, and
- learning of Xitsonga learners in Sepedi HL.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

This study uses the teacher expertise model developed by Shulman in 1987. Shulman suggests dissimilar categories of teacher knowledge that are to be distinguished, such as disciplinary information and educational content knowledge in a language. Disciplinary knowledge implies a confined body of knowledge specifically designed for the subject in question, which is fundamental knowledge for acquiring a language teaching profession. A teacher must satisfy some standards to qualify to teach a subject or grade. The schoolwork also determines the teacher's knowledge of the

language, meaning that the teacher should possess specialised knowledge in the subject. Hence, Reynolds, et al. (2021) state that the disciplinary expertise of the language educators was drawn from the domain of linguistics, but nowadays it involves a much wider scope of content. The scope of content in a language incorporates vocabulary, language structures, and grammar in general, which in this case were a challenge to educators. Most importantly, Kavanagh, et al. (2021) suggest that teachers in the FP must be practical and adapt to practices like singing, jumping, and crafting objects and be patient when dealing with learners with different languages.

2. METHODS

The study used a qualitative method for data gathering. The shortage of time to conduct this research study and a few schools where a different HL was used to teach learners who speak a different HL from their mother tongue were the two reasons for using a single research method. The study determined that a qualitative research approach was appropriate to address the advanced research questions. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is useful because it gives a deep, complex, and complete picture of meanings, activities, non-observable, and observable phenomena, outlooks, purposes, and behaviours. This is best achieved through true-to-life investigation. This qualitative study was conducted in a primary school that attracted a diverse student body from various linguistic backgrounds. The students came from a school in Nylstroom where Sepedi is the main language used, even though there were also Xitsonga speakers there. The study looked into what it is like to be a teacher in an FP classroom where students speak different languages and cultures. They also looked at how to best understand the differences between students' languages and cultures. The study aimed to determine the methods teachers use to interact with linguistically diverse learners in first language literacy grades and how they handle these challenges. This also involves preparing such learners for higher grades. The teacher's pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) and disciplinary data were the main concerns in this study. Moreover, the study sought to investigate how FP learners learn from a language that is not their mother tongue.

2.1 Instrumentation and Data analysis

Interviews were conducted to nine educators from the three sampled primary schools, namely, two grade one schools and one FP head of department, i.e. three participants from each of the three schools. Grade 1 educators were purposively chosen as they are directly involved and have firsthand information on teaching Sepedi to Xitsonga-speaking learners in these schools. This was to assist the investigator in answering the research questions of the study (Creswell, 2014). As immigration and the mushrooming of the informal settlements were not also new in the area, the exclusive individualities in this situation incorporated Sepedi-speaking educators who did not have more than 5 years in the field to establish what skills were provided by institutions of higher learning and the support they were receiving from DBE to address this situation.

The researchers analysed data by means of content analysis and model by Shulman (1987) of teacher information and data evaluation, reflecting the teachers' educational subject knowledge of teaching mastery and their content awareness of language and background. The educators' subject matter and linguistic knowledge of their learners' language were judged.

3. FINDINGS

The conclusions of the study indicated that Sepedi had been the only LoLT used in the school since its inception, as determined by the LiEP. The language policy further stipulates that learners in the FP must be taught in their mother tongue; however, when the learners from wealthy families were taken to English-medium schools, they did not manage to go to fee-paying schools. In response to

research question 1, the biggest challenge was that Sepedi and Xitsonga were too different languages, and it was not simple for educators to teach new concepts to children who have to start with basic concepts. Secondly, there was no support from both homes and the department of education. Teachers expressed that they had applied to teach Sepedi, but the advertisements for the posts they applied for did not include any mention of Xitsonga. The last grade one educator to arrive at the school mentioned that there was a phrase that stated that knowledge of Xitsonga would be an advantage, but no further information was given on the advert.

Only Sepedi received access to the support materials, including textbooks, resources, and charts. They complained that they had been requesting the school to either train them in Xitsonga or to hire Xitsonga educators because they learn with learners most of the time. Some mentioned that they have a responsibility to find translated words, but finding suitable words is not always possible. They provide learners with common words to give to their parents to assist them in homework and reading, which is not even taken seriously by some parents.

Some problems with township classes include crowded classrooms that make it hard for teachers to give each student the attention they need and do not let students who need help translating from Xitsonga to Sepedi interact with each other enough. Other challenges are policy boundaries, such as time frames, as all subjects have policies that include contact time for time on task. The inability to assist children by parents also pose a problem. Some of the responses from participants were that parents do not afford extra classes where learners can be taught in Sepedi, as one of the teachers said she offers such classes for all the FP classes. It became evident that parents are supposed to assist with homework but are not knowledgeable about the subject, while some are working as labourers, so they come back home late and tired. [Suárez Fernández et al. \(2022\)](#) mention the importance of noting that parents and guardians play a tremendous role in supporting their children's language learning journey. According to [Nation \(2021\)](#), educators should design learning words in the language of the foreign learners, who are Xitsonga in this case, make a table, and give synonyms of the Sepedi ones for homework. Parents must assist with homework, where they will use the vocabulary chart they receive from the educators. This shortcoming became more evident during the COVID-19 era when learners were platooning school and were given more exercises to do at home. Most parents failed to assist their children with schoolwork during this critical period because of the instabilities and uncertainties.

The enrolment of learners and the availability of accommodation also played a significant role, as these schools were not suitable for Xitsonga children. It was clear that most students were studying Sepedi for education but not to specialise. One of the highlights was that educators also revealed that they often observe learners playing and communicating in both Sepedi and Xitsonga amongst themselves, learning from each other. It was also noted that the children in Grade 1 struggle a lot with Sepedi but improve as they progress, and the remarkable improvement is noted in grade as the year progresses, becoming better as they get used to the language. Even though they improve, most of them retain their normal accent when they are speaking. The head of the department in one school bemoaned the slow progress and fewer tasks, as some learners needed more time to understand, which delayed the rest of the Sepedi learners.

4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

4.1 Systemic Challenges for Dealing with Linguistic Diversity

The subject of relocation in South Africa does not only affect social and economic areas of life; it also affects education, as learners also get schooling in different backgrounds. It is also important to highlight the challenges faced by educators who instruct students in foreign languages within the affected schools. [Botha \(2022\)](#) mentions that one of the contradictions in the SA is that FP teachers often face the challenge of conducting their lessons using a language that is not spoken by learners at

home. This adversely affects both teachers and learners. The investigation highlights general challenges in dealing with language and phonological diversity in the FP classrooms. Therefore, the main point of disagreement is that students' right to be taught in the language they prefer has been violated, especially during the FP, and teachers are also having trouble meeting their students' needs.

The challenges mentioned included the teacher's inadequacy of language competence, content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, awareness of the educational context, and educational content knowledge. The implications for teacher training then demonstrate the necessity of adequately training teachers to deal with some elements of multilingualism and linguistically and ethnically diverse classrooms (Snyder & Fenner, 2021). All the above statements show the frustrations on the part of educators who struggle to look for the correct vocabulary whenever they are preparing for a lesson. Nevertheless, the researcher noted that even though educators do not speak a language, they are able to associate with their native languages through their personal research, planning, and preparation.

The context in the school aggravates the current literacy adversity of most African children who do not know their home languages. In cases where elite parents take their children to English-medium schools, they become more supportive of the school by assisting children, finding tutors to help them, and attending school meetings. According to Research Question 2, educators and the system in general expect the parents of these learners to be more responsible in assisting their children. Like in the elite families where learners have English as the HL at school, some homes go to the extent of switching the language to accommodate the school-going children. Teachers in the schools where the study took place expressed their dissatisfaction with the lack of home support. Nevertheless, teachers are expected to learn, practice, and understand concepts better than the learners they are teaching, but it was not always the case in this investigation. Lave (2021), referring to the Nigerian education system, states that the crisis of community movement has caused one indigenous language to become the dominant language (LoLT) while other languages co-exist in the same area. Similarly, this situation is like the choice to use the Swahili language as a dominant LoLT in schools in East Africa where other indigenous home languages are used (Senkoro, 2022). To deal with this situation, a wide range of policy issues, from broad socio-political and socio-economic effects, will be reviewed because it is not an entirely educational factor.

4.2 Knowledge of the Educational Context

The teacher's knowledge and understanding of the community, language, and culture in all of which learners belong is decisive. Dhungana, et al. (2021) suggested that when teachers teach, they need to be supportive and responsive to learners' needs through their knowledge of the context. Likewise, there is a need for a good relationship with the parents of the learners, whether they are educated or not. This notion is supported by Holtug (2021), when he mentions that there must be harmony and justice in the politics of social differences when dealing with migrants. Ladson-Billings (2021) underscore the significance of utilising culturally relevant resources such as texts, rhymes, jingles, songs, and charts to facilitate learners' engagement with the environment. Their knowledge of the educational context was compromised by the lack of knowledge and resources on the part of educators. To accommodate the Xitsonga learners, their lessons were not very deep. As a result, the Sepedi learners did not get very rich and informative lessons because the teachers might not have followed the standards for teaching. Furthermore, the slower pace of the lessons led to a compromise in the coverage of content. It is also predictable that the teachers avoid other topics, as they are not conversant with Xitsonga.

The study indicates a variety of barriers that hinder progress and successful learning by Xitsonga children who happen to be in Sepedi classrooms because of migration. Language multiplicity is a social justice and inclusivity anxiety that requires attention from many educational departments in many countries, including South Africa, of which many are caused by migration in search of greener pastures. Other shortcomings are caused by unskilled educators around multilingualism in the

languages they find themselves teaching in schools. The current study specifies that the institutions of higher learning did not provide educators with sufficient expertise to handle cultural and linguistic diversity with learners from different backgrounds. In Limpopo province, where the study was conducted, the department of education has not taken steps to equip educators with and support necessary material resources to deal with the situation, while parents are also not skilled to assist their children. However, a slight progress develops as learners get used to the language through communication with peers and from educators' creative methods. The subject needs to be taken seriously by researchers and policymakers so that all FP learners are taught in their HL, either by supporting teachers or employing educators who have knowledge of their mother tongue.

Ethics Committee Decision

Due to the scope and method of the study, ethics committee permission was not required.

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