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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Master of Education by Research Dissertation

Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms

By

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A research study submitted to the Wits School of Education, Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTERS IN EDUCATION (M Ed)

2025

Declaration

I, **Monica Chinombe, (698634),** hereby declare that this research project, ***Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms,*** is my own work. It is being submitted as part of the Master's degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university. I have compiled a comprehensive list of references in alphabetical order, adhering to APA citation style. I am aware of the serious consequences that may arise if the university determines that the work submitted is not my own or if I fail to properly acknowledge sources or ideas that are not my own.



M.Chinombe

02 March 2025

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Abstract

South Africa is renowned for its linguistic diversity, officially recognising 12 languages: Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, and South African Sign Language, DBE (2024). Despite this rich multilingualism, English remains the dominant medium of instruction in many South African schools, Mkhize and Balfour (2017**).** Just 23% of South Africans identify English or Afrikaans as their home language, "yet 100% of children are expected to navigate their school years in these languages exclusively" Albertyn and Guzula (2020:1). Neglecting the development of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in learners' mother tongues can significantly impede their overall language acquisition and academic success, Owen – Smith (2010). Implementing the transition from home language to English in the Foundation Phase is particularly concerning, as globalisation pressures often prompt a rapid shift from mother tongues to English as the primary language of instruction, Reily et al. (2020). This abrupt change can exacerbate existing educational disparities, highlighting the urgent need for a critical examination of language policies and their practical implementation within South African schools. In the Foundation Phase, how can learners grasp the material being taught if they do not fully comprehend the language of instruction? This sudden language shift worsens current educational inequalities, emphasising the critical need to re-evaluate and effectively implement language policies in South African schools. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of using home language in teaching reading comprehension to multilingual third-grade Foundation Phase learners, English versus isiZulu. This study employed a mixed-methods (pragmatism) approach to investigate the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms. The research was conducted in Gauteng, Johannesburg, at 2 government schools with 99 learners participating. The schools were predominantly populated by Black African learners, the majority of whom were isiZulu speakers. The mixed method involved collecting data through qualitative (classroom observations and interviews) and quantitative (pre-and post-test assessments) in English and isiZulu. Data gathered from classroom observations and teacher interviews was analysed using the thematic analysis method. Quantitative data from the written tests (pre- and post-tests) was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. From the results recorded, the use of teaching in learners' home language had the most improvement, with many learners scoring high marks. This study's findings show that home language is a powerful tool in the teaching and learning of learners, especially in the Foundation Phase. One of the recommendations to policymakers, quoting from

the Mwanza (2020) study, emphasises that teaching should serve the learners, not policy, highlighting that educational policies must be designed with the best interests of learners at heart. Specifically, policies regarding the language of teaching and learning should be learner-centred, focusing on supporting students' learning, development, and academic success.

List of Abbreviations:

BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DoE	Department of Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
EHL	English Home Language
FAL	First Additional Language
HL	Home Language
LoTL	Language of Teaching and Learning
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

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Chapter 1
Orientation

1.1 Introduction and Study Background

There is increasing recognition that education in a person's native language is more effective than bilingual or second language instruction, Mwanza (2020), Olanibi et al. (2021) and World Bank (2021). Both approaches have their merits, and their effectiveness is based on multiple factors, such as linguistic diversity of the society, and cultural context or available resources. According to Uys et al (2007), English has become the dominant medium of instruction in Southern African education. In Johannesburg, as in much of South Africa, English is predominantly used as the medium of instruction from Grade R through Grade 12. This is despite only 23% of South Africans identifying English or Afrikaans as their home language, meaning that most children are expected to navigate their entire schooling in a language that is not their mother tongue, Albertyn and Guzula (2020). South Africa is renowned for its linguistic diversity, officially recognising 12 languages: Ndebele, Northern Sotho, SiSwati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaans, Sign Language, and South African English, DBE (2024). However, English remains the dominant language in many schools, Mkhize and Balfour (2017). This situation raises concerns about how learners in the Foundation Phase comprehend their lessons when they do not fully understand the language of instruction. Research conducted by Olanibi et al. (2021), Obiegbu (2016), Charamba (2023), Carrim and Nkomo (2023), and Albertyn and Guzula (2020) indicates that learning in a language that learners do not fully comprehend can impede comprehension and academic performance, particularly in the early years of education.

In South Africa, many learners are often unfairly labelled as deficient English monolinguals rather than being acknowledged as resourceful bilingual individuals, Albertyn and Guzula (2020). The researcher believes that language barriers contribute significantly to learners' struggles with reading comprehension, as they may not fully grasp the language of learning and teaching (LOLT). To shift this perception, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach that values the importance of home language in education. Recognising and encouraging the use of home languages can enhance learners' acquisition of new languages, such as English. Unfortunately, by Grade 4, most learners are compelled to switch entirely to Afrikaans and English, despite lacking proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing in these languages, Albertyn and Guzula (2020).

PIRLS evaluates reading literacy in children in Grade 4 just after completing the Foundation Phase, which excludes kindergarten or pre-primary education by sampling a diverse group of learners from participating countries, Maroco (2021). According to Mullis et al. (2016), the PIRLS framework serves as the foundation for evaluating learners' reading achievements in Grade 4 literacy assessments. Conducted every four years, the study examines whether children in these countries, including South Africa, are reading with understanding. An analysis of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) offered valuable insight into the reading abilities of South African learners, highlighting significant disparities influenced by school resources and socioeconomic factors, Ollis (2017).

Reading for comprehension remains a significant challenge in South Africa, as evidenced by the consistency of low reading levels reported in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) results from 2011, 2016, and 2021. The reading difficulties observed in Grade 4 learners often stem from challenges encountered during the Foundation Phase from Grades 1 to 3. These assessments target learners who have just completed Grade 3 and are transitioning into Grade 4. Over the years, South Africa's PIRLS results have been consistently poor, reflecting the ongoing struggles in reading comprehension. The results from previous years are presented below.

According to Howie et al. (2007), the 2006 PIRLS results revealed that South African learners had the lowest scores among the 45 participating education systems. Most Grade 5 learners failed to reach the international average score of 500, indicating that they were not performing at the expected level. Similarly, reports by Howie et al. (2001) highlighted that eight out of ten South African learners who took the PIRLS tests scored below 50% in language skills, with literacy scores ranging between 0% and 35%.

Then, the most recent PIRLS results further underscore this persistent challenge. In 2021, 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa were unable to read for understanding in any language, Human Rights Commission (2023). This alarming statistic demonstrates that South Africa's reading proficiency crisis, first highlighted in 2006, remains unresolved. Reading difficulties that begin in the Foundation Phase persist into the Intermediate Phase, which is why many Grade 4 learners continue to struggle with reading. Despite years of assessment and intervention efforts, the 2021 PIRLS results confirm that a significant majority of learners still struggle with reading for comprehension.

Language learning is a challenge in South Africa as many learners learn in a language that is not their mother tongue, Department of Education (2023). The persistently low reading performance in South Africa, as seen in previous PIRLS assessments compared to other countries, is often linked to the complexity of the country's language-in-education policies, Howie et al. (2016). These poor results are closely linked to the challenges posed by the country's linguistic framework in education. By Grade 4, most South African learners transition to English as the language of teaching and learning, despite not having fully mastered it, contributing to their low academic performance, Owen-Smith (2010).

When learners struggle to read for meaning, their comprehension skills are significantly affected, impacting their ability to learn across all subjects. In South Africa, children are frequently taught and assessed in languages that are not spoken at home, which creates obstacles to developing crucial reading and writing skills in their early years, UNESCO (n.d). This challenge is particularly evident in the Foundation Phase, where language barriers can hinder understanding and contribute to poor academic performance, Olanibi et al. (2021), Obiegbu (2016) and Cunningham (2019). Since literacy forms the foundation of all learning, reading and writing periods outlined in the CAPS (2011) curriculum must be effectively utilised in schools. According to Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016), learners with weak word recognition and decoding skills tend to read slowly and lack fluency, making it difficult for them to apply comprehension strategies successfully. Developing strong reading comprehension skills during the early years is essential for a child's long-term educational success.

In South African education, many children begin using English as the language of learning in Grade 4, which requires them to achieve a high level of proficiency in reading and writing English by the end of Grade 3, Howie et al. (2016). The challenge stems from the fact that many children may not have acquired the required English language skills by the time they need to use it for learning more complex subjects in Grade 4. For effective learning to take place, learners must be able to understand spoken and written language, as well as express themselves fluently through reading, writing, and verbal communication in the language of instruction, which may not be the case for those who are not yet fluent in English.

Recognising the importance of home language as a medium of instruction, particularly in the early years, can lead to better learning outcomes and a more inclusive educational experience for children. According to the World Bank (2021), children learn more effectively and develop

a stronger understanding when taught in a language they can comprehend, which also creates a solid foundation for acquiring additional languages.

Although the policy is grounded in the constitution, the use of the first language (also known as the learner's home language or mother tongue) as a medium of instruction continues to be addressed inconsistently across schools and among stakeholders, Howie et al. (2011). The language policy for schools is shaped by the principles outlined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996a), the South African Schools Act, and the Constitution, which acknowledges the 11 official languages listed in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 Percentage of learners with HL, FAL and LoTL - 2011

Languages	HL%	FAL%	LoLT%	Total %
English	7.1	65.1	67.7	47
IsiZulu	26.3	7.5	7.3	14
IsiXhosa	19.3	6.6	5.7	11
Afrikaans	9.3	10.0	9.5	10
Sepedi	10.7	3.2	3.1	6
Sesotho	7.1	2.4	2.5	4
Setswana	8.0	3.0	3.2	4
Siswati	3.2	1.1	1.1	2
Xitsonga	4.6	1.3	1.0	2
Tshivenda	2.8	1.3	1.1	1
IsiNdebele	2.0	0.4	0.1	1
Total				100

Source: DBE 2011 Annual School Survey

Table 1.1 above displays the percentages of children in South Africa based on their home languages. The data from Table 1.1 reveals that only 7.1% of children speak English as their home language, while 65.1% learn English as a first additional language, and 67.7% are taught in English as the language of teaching and learning. IsiZulu, on the other hand, has the highest percentage of children speaking it as their home language in South Africa, but the percentages of children learning isiZulu as a first additional language and using it as the language of teaching and learning are significantly lower compared to English and Afrikaans. Furthermore, Afrikaans, often used as a first additional language in schools, has a higher percentage of children who speak it as their home language and learn it as a first additional language.

The English language is often regarded as a more dominant language, perhaps due to its global significance, with proficiency in it offering advantages in various contexts, Coleman (2017).

According to the Department of Education (2010), schools should maintain home languages as the language of teaching and learning while also providing opportunities to learn an additional language. Language issues are complex, particularly because learners are expected to become fluent in English by the end of the Foundation Phase, after only three years of exposure. The Language in Education Policy mandates that English be the primary language of curriculum and instruction from Grade 4 onwards for most learners, Howie et al. (2016), but this is not the case in most South African schools.

The research was motivated by the need to understand the poor PIRLS results obtained by South Africa from 2006 to 2021. The pressing need for this research is highlighted by South Africa's recent literacy crisis, with "81% of South African Grade 4 learners unable to read for meaning in any language,"Human Rights Commission (2023:1). The study suggests that addressing these language-related challenges, particularly in the Foundation Phase, is crucial for overcoming educational obstacles and ensuring academic success of South African learners, Taylor et al. (2018).

The study sought to contribute to the broader conversation about the effectiveness of using home language to teach reading comprehension in Grade 3 classrooms in South Africa. As a multilingual country, South Africa grapples with a complex issue of language in education, where language disparities pose significant challenges. These disparities can create barriers to effective teaching and learning.

1.2 Problem Statement

The issue being examined pertains to the use of English as the primary language of instruction in schools, regardless of whether it is the learners' home language or whether they are native English speakers, particularly in the Foundation Phase. Children need to be taught in a language they understand; however, according to UNESCO (n.d), 40% of the global population lacks access to education in a language they speak or understand. In South Africa, many children are taught and assessed in languages they do not speak at home, Olanibi et al. (2021). This significantly impedes their early acquisition of critical reading and writing skills, UNESCO (n.d). This lack of access to education in their home language can impede the development of essential reading and comprehension abilities.

From the PIRLS 2021 results, children are struggling with comprehension, often lacking the necessary language skills to understand what they are being taught in both English and their

home languages, Human Rights Commission (2023). Additionally, they have not yet developed sufficient proficiency in their home language to use it as a foundation for learning a second language, Phala and Hugo (2022). A successful transition requires more time and a structured approach to language development. The reading challenges in Grade 4 stem from issues in the Foundation Phase, which is why this research was conducted in Grade 3 classrooms, the final year of the Foundation Phase. The study focused on investigating whether learners comprehend better in English or isiZulu, their home language.

As Makalela (2016) asserts, language is inseparable from the soul of its speakers. Language is not merely a tool for communication but an integral part of its speakers' identity. When we ask children to abandon their home language and adopt only the language of instruction, we are essentially asking them to suppress a crucial aspect of who they are. This creates a barrier to learning, as they are not only absorbing new content being taught, but they are also attempting to do so in a language that may not fully connect with them personally or cognitively.

If language challenges are not addressed, we risk hindering the child's holistic development. Many South African learners are compelled to leave parts of their identity at the school gate and embrace a new culture within the classroom, which can lead to a loss of cultural connection. This is a widespread issue in South African schools, where language barriers prevent effective learning and hinder both teachers and learners from fully expressing themselves. When a child feels that their whole self is not accepted in the classroom, their academic performance will be affected negatively.

There is a gap in research regarding whether children grasp concepts more effectively when learning in their home language compared to languages such as English or Afrikaans. If language challenges are not addressed, South Africa is likely continue to face low reading and comprehension proficiency levels, with many learners struggling academically due to limited proficiency in both the language of instruction and their home languages. This study was conducted in two schools where learners were taught in English, despite not being native English speakers.

1.3 Study Rationale

Language barriers in South African schools often prevent children from fully participating in classroom discussions. Learners "will not talk or participate in the classroom as much as they would want to because socially, they believe that if you cannot speak English, you are not

proficient enough," Dixon and Peake (2008:88). This social perception contributes to a lack of participation, which in turn affects their learning experience and overall academic success as learners who are not proficient in English will not participate as much as they would want because of this language barrier.

In my teaching experience, especially during the early years of schooling, I noticed that many learners struggled to engage fully due to language barriers. While teaching at a government school, I faced challenges with learner participation when delivering lessons in English. In my Grade 3 class, some children would remain silent, shy to speak up when engaged in English and avoid participating in group activities. However, when I spoke to them in their home languages even if it was just a single word they would respond with enthusiasm, smiling and engaging actively. It became clear that language was the primary barrier preventing them from expressing themselves during class discussions.

This experience sparked my curiosity about how learners might perform if taught in their home language, which became the motivation for this research. Many learners remain quiet because of their limited proficiency in the language of instruction used. Through this study, I aimed to explore whether children learn more effectively in their home language isiZulu, in the context of this study or in English as a first additional language. The findings, along with other research on language in education, could provide valuable insights for policymakers, enabling them to make informed decisions about language implementation in the Foundation Phase.

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive data on the experiences of both learners and teachers when using isiZulu as the language of instruction in the Foundation Phase, compared to English (LoTL). The focus was on Grade 3 learners, who studied in English as their home language while isiZulu, their home language, was taught as the first additional language (FAL). Through a combination of pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, and interviews, the research aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by teachers and learners.

The study's findings were anticipated to provide valuable insights that could influence educational policies and classroom practices in South African schools. These insights could assist educators and policymakers in developing targeted strategies to promote equitable access to quality education, particularly for learners facing challenges related to home language instruction in the early years. Ultimately, this research aimed to fill a significant gap in the

existing literature and offer practical recommendations to enhance the educational experience of African learners in South Africa.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

To establish a strong theoretical framework, this study drew on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Gonzalez's (2005) funds of knowledge**.**

1.4.1 Social Cultural Theory

The first theory relevant to this study is Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which highlights the crucial role of social interaction in cognitive development. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that learning is fundamentally a social process, where community and culture shape how children construct meaning, McLeod (2014). His theory underscores the influence of cultural context on cognitive growth, asserting that children's thinking is shaped by the societies in which they are raised, McLeod (2014), Alisaari et al. (2019) and Moll (2019). Through active participation in their learning environment, children develop a new understanding, which in turn reinforces the importance of social and cultural interactions in education.

Sociocultural theory sees learning and development as deeply rooted in social interactions, occurring as learners engage with people, objects, and experiences in a collaborative setting, Gao (2013). Interaction plays a crucial role in the learning process, as cognitive development is shaped through social and cultural engagement. In the classroom, learners develop critical thinking skills through meaningful interactions that acknowledge their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Regardless of whether a child's home language is used as the language of instruction, teachers must recognise its significance. Learning is an active process; it occurs in social contexts rather than solitary efforts, so schools and societies should serve as essential platforms for fostering meaningful interactions, Alisaari et al. (2019).

According to the Open University (2013)**,** as cited by Alisaari et al. (2019)**,** human beings are shaped by their cultures, and these cultures influence how, when, and why we do things. This theory is closely connected to the study, as it highlights how human behaviours and perceptions are socially constructed, with much of what we do and how we see the world being influenced by our cultural backgrounds. Vygotsky (1978) argues that children first gain knowledge through interactions with others and later incorporate this knowledge, adding their own values, Topciu and Myftiu (2015). Through these interactions, children learn from more knowledgeable

individuals, gradually internalising knowledge and developing the ability to apply it independently, thus shaping their understanding of the world. Teachers can incorporate tasks that reflect students' cultures, fostering a sense of holistic acceptance in the classroom. It is beneficial for educators to gather background information about their students to ensure they accommodate the diverse needs of all learners. To maximise children's potential, education stakeholders must consider their cultural backgrounds, as ignoring these backgrounds denies children a complete, holistic experience. This research was socially constructed, with significant emphasis on people; teachers were interviewed, and students were taught in both their home language (isiZulu) and English, the language of instruction.

1.4.2 Funds of Knowledge

The second theory relevant to this study is Funds of Knowledge, as outlined by Gonzalez (2005**).** Funds of Knowledge refers to the "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being," González et al. (2005:72). It can also be understood as the culturally rich knowledge that students bring from their homes and communities into the classroom, Weng and Ataei (2022). This theory emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing students' diverse cultural backgrounds, and it advocates for building school knowledge based on these diverse experiences.

This theory emphasises the importance of considering culture, families, communities, and social context when teaching, particularly in South Africa's multilingual classrooms. According to Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014**)** and Moll (2019)**,** human beings are inherently connected to their social environments, which include a collective body of knowledge, skills, and resources. Teachers should recognise and leverage students' social backgrounds to enhance learning. It is crucial to understand that culture is not something that can be left at the door when entering the classroom and picked up again when leaving; it is an integral part of who we are. Schools and educators should work with students' cultural backgrounds to make learning more relevant and meaningful.

Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) stated that students are most likely to learn and retain new information when it connects to their existing knowledge, particularly their prior funds of identity. Schools, families and communities should work together because learning does not take place in isolation; it is deeply embedded in the community context. Teachers who are

familiar with this knowledge can use it as a foundation for learning, making it essential to acknowledge students' cultures in the learning environment. Involving the community, family, and curriculum as a bridge to language acquisition, especially in Foundation Phase classrooms, would greatly benefit learners. This is especially important when learning a new language, as engagement with the community helps learners develop a deeper self-understanding and enriches their learning experience.

Understanding a student's funds of identity is crucial for teachers to select suitable instructional materials and relate the curriculum content to the students' culture, identity, and personal experiences, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014). Considering learners' backgrounds is important because when children see themselves reflected in the curriculum, they are more likely to engage actively, Mogara et al. (2023), Carrim and Nkomo (2023), Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021), Zhang et al. (2023) and Olanibi et al. (2021).

1.4.3 Justification for Theoretical Frameworks

Sociocultural theory and the funds of knowledge framework were selected for this study because they are highly relevant and emphasise the importance of social and cultural factors in the language learning process. Language learning cannot occur in isolation without considering learners' cultures, societies, and home languages (prior knowledge), McLeod (2014) and Weng and Ataei (2022). Both theories highlight the role of culture in shaping cognitive development. Recognising and incorporating cultural knowledge can serve as a valuable resource in teaching and learning, especially in a multilingual context like South Africa, where this research is conducted.

These two theories intersect because they are both learner-centred, focusing on learning from a more knowledgeable other and utilising funds of knowledge, which emphasises building upon what the learner already knows. When integrated into the learning process, particularly in language acquisition, they promote meaning-making and encourage greater engagement from learners. By incorporating learners' prior knowledge into the process of learning a new language, teachers can make it easier for learners to absorb and use the new language. This approach aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) idea that learners benefit from interaction with more knowledgeable others, creating an optimal learning environment for language acquisition.

1.5 Research Questions

1.5.1 The main research questions for the study:

1. How does the language of teaching and learning impact reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase?
2. To what extent does the use of home language enhance reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners?

1.6 Hypothesis

The research was based on specific hypotheses, which were tested through data analysis to determine whether they could be confirmed or refuted.

Research Hypothesis: The language of instruction significantly impacts the academic performance of Grade 3 learners who are acquiring knowledge in the English language, distinct from their home language, which is isiZulu.

Null Hypothesis: The null hypothesis posits that the language of instruction (English vs. isiZulu) does not have a meaningful impact on the learners' comprehension performance. Any observed variations in performance are attributed to random chance, rather than the language used for instruction. In other words, the null hypothesis assumes that the language of instruction has no effect on the learners' ability to understand the material, and any differences in results are purely coincidental.

Through exploring these questions, the study sought to offer valuable insights into language education, with practical recommendations for improving teaching methods and shaping educational policies in a diverse and evolving learning environment.

1.7 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using home language in teaching reading comprehension to multilingual third-grade Foundation Phase learners, English versus isiZulu.

1.7.1 The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the impact of using the home language on enhancing reading comprehension skills.

2. To explore the strategies teachers employ to assist children who are struggling with the language of instruction.

1.8 Definition of Concepts

***English-medium of instruction*:** In this study, it meant "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries where the first language of the majority of the population is not English," Pham (2022:189).

Foundation Phase: From Grades R to 3 in South Africa, it is the Foundation Phase. In this study, Foundation Phase was taken to mean the first three years of formal schooling in South Africa.

***Grade 3* –** Last year of Foundation Phase before Grade 4 (intermediate phase) CAPS (2011).

***Home language* – "**Home language refers to the language that is spoken most frequently at home by a learner" (DBE, 2010:12). In this study, home language meant the language spoken frequently within a learner's household.

isiZulu language: Southern Bantu language of the Nguni group.

***Language* -** "Language is a guide to social reality … it powerfully conditions all our thinking about social problems and processes," Kramsch (2014:32). In this study, language meant the language that learners use at home and the transition to learn a new language at school.

Language of teaching and learning: "It refers to the language or medium of instruction via which learning and teaching (including assessment) for all subjects is facilitated," DBE (2010:13). In this study, it meant the specific language or medium through which teaching and learning take place for all subjects; it is crucial to understand that language of instruction has an impact on students' performance and comprehension.

Literacy: Literacy is defined as, "the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices," Frankel et al. (2016:7). In this study, literacy meant the ability to read and write with understanding, socialising and communicating in the language of teaching and learning, in this case, English in the Foundation Phase.

Monolingual: In this study, it meant "the ability (or person) to speak or understand only one language, such as to write or speak in only one language," Pham (2022:189).

Mother tongue: Refers to "the language that a learner has acquired in his/her early years, and which has formally become his/her natural instrument of thought and communication," DoE (2010:3). In this study, mother tongue meant a language that has become a child's primary means of thought and communication.

Multilingualism – Multilingualism*:* Refers to the "ability to speak more than two languages; or to be proficient in many languages," DoE (2010:3). In this study, multilingual individuals could be affected by various factors that included cultural background and their upbringing.

1.9 Research Design and Methodology

The following provides an overview of the research methodology and design implemented in this study.

1.9.1 Research Design

Al-Hakim (2000) suggests that research design primarily centres on the goals, uses, purposes, intentions, and plans, while also considering practical constraints such as location, time, budget, and the availability of the researcher. A well-structured research design is essential for guiding the collection and interpretation of data, ensuring that the findings are meaningful and aligned with the research questions. For this study, the concurrent triangulation research design was employed.

1.9.1.1 Concurrent Triangulation Design

This approach involves the simultaneous collection of both qualitative and quantitative data during the same phase of the research, and this was done at two government primary schools in Johannesburg. According to Creswell and Clark (2018), the concurrent triangulation method aims to leverage the strengths of both data types, ensuring that the insights and perspectives of the participants are integrated into the final report. The findings from the qualitative and quantitative data were analysed independently and then compared to provide a more thorough understanding of the research problem.

This method is used to confirm, cross-validate, or verify findings. It is often employed to overcome weaknesses in one method by utilising the strengths of another, Pardede (2019). By

using both qualitative (interviews, questionnaires) and quantitative (writing controlled tests) methods to collect data on the same topic, this study benefits from a more comprehensive understanding and enhances the credibility of the research. It enables the researcher to cross-validate findings from both methods, such as identifying patterns, codes, and inconsistencies. This process led to a more in-depth understanding of the research topic.

1.9.2 Research Methodology

1.9.2.1 Mixed Methods approach

This research study adopted a mixed methods approach. Mixed methods research approach is a methodology that involves "collecting, analysing, and integrating (or mixing) quantitative and qualitative research (and data) in a single study or a longitudinal program of inquiry," Bulsara (2015:6). The reason for selecting this method is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the language challenges in South African Foundation Phase classrooms by combining both qualitative and quantitative data within the same study, rather than relying on just one method.

1.9.2.2 Qualitative Data

Qualitative research focuses on "exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem," Creswell (2014), as cited in Almalki(2016:291). This method aimed to gain insights and interpretations from the participants in the study. Qualitative research is a method of exploring and understanding different experiences by looking at them through an individual's perspective, Vishnevsky and Beanlands (2004). It emphasises meaning and interpretation through one-on-one interviews and classroom observations.

The researcher used thematic analysis to interpret the collected data. The primary goal of qualitative research, "whatever kind – is to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience ... human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse," Ramsook (2018:14). This approach is particularly effective for smaller samples. It was appropriate for this study because four teachers from a public school were interviewed to gain deeper insights into the topic. Additionally, lessons were observed for both the experimental and control groups, providing a rich context for understanding the impact of language instruction on learners.

1.9.2.3 Quantitative Data

Quantitative studies are useful for investigating how variables are related, identifying trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population, and evaluating the effects of a treatment or intervention on a specific outcome, Yates and Leggett (2016). In this study, by comparing outcomes from a treatment and control group, specifically the use of English and isiZulu, the researcher assessed the significant impact and performance of learners in both groups. The data was quantified in scores to create an evidence-based report. This method is suitable for this study because, after teaching in both English and isiZulu, the researcher compared numerically collected data, such as how many learners understood better in each language, to draw meaningful conclusions.

1.10 Research Paradigm

The term "paradigm" was introduced by Thomas Kuhn (1970), “to describe the shared generalisations, beliefs, and values of a community of specialists regarding the nature of reality and knowledge,” Kaushik and Walsh (2019:3). Research questions, data collection methods, and interpretations must align with the chosen research paradigm to ensure that the study produces meaningful and coherent findings. For this study, the selected research paradigm was pragmatism, as it aligned with the mixed methods approach chosen for data collection.

This study adopted the pragmatism paradigm, focusing on mixed methods, to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Pragmatists prioritise the nature of experience, Kaushik and Walsh (2019). This paradigm focuses on the practical and realistic nature of human experiences. It was suited for this study because it acknowledged that reality is not fixed; rather, what we know is shaped by society and cultural contexts, meaning that reality evolves and is dynamic, not static.

This paradigm was relevant to this study because it allows for the integration of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). This integration provided a more comprehensive analysis of the research questions and led to meaningful results that are directly relevant to the study.

1.11 Research Sampling

For this study, purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used. According to Palinkas (2015), purposive sampling is a technique employed in qualitative research to identify and select the most effective sources of information. It involves finding and choosing individuals or groups who have significant knowledge or experience with the phenomenon

being studied, Palinkas (2015). The advantage of this method was that it allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed information from experienced participants, that is, the teachers teaching Grade 3 in the Foundation Phase. The 2 selected Grade 3 classes with a minimum of 44 learners in each class provided a total of 99 learners participating in the study. One of these classes was assigned to the control group, and the other was designated as the experimental group.

1.12 Data Collection

The researcher collected data using a mixed-method approach, meaning both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were used.

1.12.1 Qualitative Data

Qualitative data was collected through interviews and classroom observations. Collecting qualitative data was helpful as it aimed to generate a hypothesis from the data sources, offering a thorough understanding of the research problem.

Teacher Interviews – According to Jackman et al. (2022), interviews are fundamental methods of data collection that provide in-depth experiential information through active interactions between two or more individuals about a specific topic or activity.

The researcher interviewed four Grade 3 teachers from 2 government schools in Johannesburg to gain insights into their experiences of teaching English to learners who have isiZulu as a home language. The interview questions were semi-structured, offering the flexibility to ask additional questions based on the teachers' responses. The interview consisted of 6 questions and lasted for 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the need for follow-up questions. The researcher obtained permission to record the interview process, and only 3 teachers agreed to be recorded. This method of data collection was highly useful for the research, as it allowed the researcher to gather data from experienced participants who work with learners and are familiar with the dynamics of South African classrooms.

Classroom observations - The researcher observed 4 teachers from 2 public schools in Johannesburg during their language literacy lessons in English and isiZulu. According to Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011), classroom observation is the process of carefully watching someone. This was a controlled observation, as the place and time were known – the participants were Grade 3 learners and teachers in public schools in Gauteng Province. By conducting these observations, the researcher was able to see how the learners responded in the English and

isiZulu lessons, how the teachers delivered knowledge, how they taught comprehension, as well as the use of language FAL and HL in the comprehension lessons.

1.12.2 Quantitative Data

The quantitative data for this study was collected through pre- and post-tests. The researcher drafted pre-and post-test activities and, before administering them, consulted with the Grade 3 teachers to ensure that the tests were age-appropriate and suitable for the learners.

The pre-tests were administered first in English HL, the language of teaching and learning at the school, and all the learners completed this test. Afterwards, the researcher divided the learners into two groups under the same conditions: one group would learn in English, and the other in isiZulu (with the isiZulu group consisting of learners whose mother tongue is isiZulu). The comprehension activity was based on the story *Losing the Teddy Bear* and included eight multiple-choice questions and two sentence constructions, totalling 10 questions. Learners were given 25 minutes to complete the activity.

The researcher provided comprehension stories to the learners in their respective language groups. In one group, the story (which was the same for both languages) was in English, and the other was in isiZulu, and all this was done under the same conditions. After reading the story, the learners were asked to answer questions. Based on the test results, the researcher analysed whether they understood the story better in English or isiZulu, depending on their assigned group. The test results would reveal which language the learners comprehended more effectively, based on their performance.

1.13 Data analysis

After the data was collected, the researcher proceeded to analyse the data.

1.13.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used to analyse qualitative data by exploring and identifying themes within the data. The researcher identified repeated patterns from the data collected in Grade 3 Foundation Phase classrooms. Thematic analysis was particularly suitable for this mixed-methods approach, as it allowed the researcher to analyse data concurrently, providing deeper insights into participants' perspectives. This process involved identifying and analysing data through the creation of codes and themes.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six steps for analysing data, identifying codes, and developing themes.

The first step was familiarising oneself with the data, which involved immersing oneself in the data set and engaging deeply with the information collected. The researcher re-listened to the interview audios and re-read data from classroom observations, interviews, and teacher questionnaires, Braun and Clarke (2006).

The second step began after the researcher had read and familiarised themselves with the data, forming initial ideas about what was significant and interesting in the data, Braun and Clarke (2006). This phase involved generating codes, where the researcher analysed the data in-depth and created keywords that represented the key aspects of the data.

The third step was searching for themes from the generated codes. The researcher looked for patterns and themes within the coded data and organised these codes into categories that aligned with broader themes.

The fourth phase was reviewing themes. At this stage, the researcher combined related codes into themes and justified the inclusion of each theme based on the data collected. The themes supported the coded data and contributed to answering the research questions comprehensively.

The fifth step was defining and naming themes. The researcher assigned meaningful names to the themes and described their significance to the data, Nowell et al (2017). The researcher ensured that each theme was related to the data and research questions.

The sixth and final step was writing the thematic analysis report. Once the themes were identified and defined, the researcher compiled a report that represented the findings. This involved quoting from the data collected, including teacher interviews, classroom observations, questionnaires, and the marked activities from the learners. The report offered a detailed account of the identified themes and their implications for the research.

1.13.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

To analyse the quantitative data in this study, descriptive and inferential statistics were used. This approach focused on summarising and organising the data collected from the pre- and post-tests that the learners completed. The method allowed the researcher to understand the key characteristics of the data and provide a clear overview of the collected information.

1.13.3 Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

The researcher used measures such as the mean, bar charts, range, and mode to provide a snapshot of the collected data. After the learners completed the pre- and post-tests, the researcher calculated the mean, mode, range, and standard deviation for each of the two groups. Recording the pre- and post-test results helped in comparing the outcomes before and after the intervention. No predictions were made using this design; instead, the researcher used the information collected from the dataset to identify trends, patterns, and visual representations to gain an understanding of the data.

Inferential statistics allowed the researcher to generalise findings from the small data set to a larger population, drawing meaningful conclusions that extend beyond the specific data set. From this, the researcher compared the results of both groups and assessed the learning gains between the two groups in both languages.

1.14 Research ethics

In research, ethics are essential for protecting the welfare of participants, especially when working with vulnerable groups like young children. Before starting the research, the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee approved the study by granting an ethical clearance certificate and assigning the protocol number "H24/05/24." This approval highlights the dedication to maintaining ethical standards throughout the research. The following section outlines the main considerations factored in to ensure ethical practices in this study:

Validity and Reliability of Quantitative Data

In this study, validity referred to whether the instrument accurately measured the intended behaviour and how effectively the measuring tool performed its function. Reliability, as described by Surucu and Maslakci (2020), refers to the consistency of the measured values obtained from repeated measurements under the same conditions using the same instrument. It reflects the degree to which the results remained stable and consistent over time. The researcher ensured careful planning, quality control, and the implementation of strategies for data collection and analysis to maintain both validity and reliability throughout the study.

Trustworthiness of qualitative data

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data and the findings of the study.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data or the participants' views, as well as the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted and represented them, Cope (2014). To ensure the credibility of the findings, teachers and learners were allowed to voluntarily participate in the research study, which helped establish trust in the results. The researcher sought permission to record the one-on-one interviews, enabling the opportunity to re-listen to the audio recordings during the data analysis phase, ensuring accurate findings that reflected the reality being studied. Additionally, during classroom observations, the researcher ensured that the analysis and reporting of events in Grade 3 classes were conducted without bias.

Transferability

According to Cope (2014), transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other settings or groups, especially when the results hold meaning for individuals not involved in the study, and readers can relate the findings to their own experiences. The researcher collected data from 2 primary schools in Johannesburg, allowing for a comparison of the findings within a specific context and examining whether the results would be the same or different in other schools. Despite the research being conducted in different contexts, the insights and findings from one school may still be relevant and similar to those from the other, contributing to the broader applicability of the study's results.

Dependability

It refers to the consistency and reliability of the study's methods, procedures, and findings. In this study, the researcher interviewed experienced Grade 3 teachers, and their responses provided solid and well-grounded interpretations. According to Cope (2014), a study is considered dependable if its findings can be replicated with similar participants under similar conditions. The dependability of the findings in this study was ensured through rigorous data collection techniques and thorough procedures in analysing the data, which allowed for consistent and reliable results.

Confirmability

The researcher demonstrated confirmability by explaining how conclusions and interpretations were drawn, ensuring that the findings were directly derived from the data. The researcher focused on understanding the participants' experiences, particularly those of the Grade 3 teachers, as they were integral to the research process. To ensure confirmability, the researcher remained mindful of personal biases and frameworks that could influence the interpretation of the data, striving to maintain objectivity throughout the analysis.

1.15 Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained approval from the University of the Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee before starting the research, with the protocol number "H24/05/24." This approval emphasises the dedication to carrying out ethical research, honouring the rights and dignity of participants, and making sure the study adheres to principles that focus on both the well-being of individuals and the overall welfare of the participants (teachers and learners).

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this research was voluntary, and the participants took part willingly. They were informed that participation was voluntary, and at any point, they could choose to withdraw without any consequences. No participant was forced or coerced into taking part.

Confidentiality

The research participants' identities, ages, and responses were not linked to them in any way. Ethicist (2015) stated that confidentiality concerns how data is managed, restricting access to only those who are authorised to view it. To ensure confidentiality, teachers and learners were assigned numbers 1 to 4 for teachers, and similarly for learners and these numbers were used throughout the research instead of their names. Information was shared only with those who needed to know, and it was not disclosed to those who did not. Both teachers' and learners' participation remained anonymous, and their responses were kept private and confidential.

Anonymity

Participants in the study took part willingly, without any pressure. To ensure the validity of the study, the participants had autonomy over their responses, and these responses were kept anonymous in the final report, not linked to their identities. The participant's personal details (such as their name, address, or email).

Informed Consent

The aim of the research was communicated to all participants, including parents, teachers, the school principal, and the Gauteng Department of Education, before the research began. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point if they felt uneasy. All participants consented to participate by signing the consent forms provided by the researcher. For the learners, consent forms were signed by their parents, as they were minors.

Beneficence

No harm was caused to the participants in this study. The information and data collected were kept confidential, and no participant's name or school was disclosed. The findings from this research were intended to benefit all education stakeholders, including policymakers, with positive and constructive outcomes.

Potential for Harm

To address any potential harm, the researcher adhered to ethical principles and guidelines, including obtaining informed consent, respecting participants, and ensuring their autonomy and confidentiality. The researcher was prepared to address any issues of harm that might arise and would take the necessary steps to correct them.

Full Disclosure

The researcher was transparent throughout the research process, providing a complete and honest account of the study, including any conflicts, to advance knowledge and maintain ethical conduct. Comprehensive information about the study, including the methodology and procedures, was shared with participants. Participation was voluntary, and the researcher did not offer any monetary compensation to participants.

1.16 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted in South Africa at two government primary schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province. The researcher only collected data from these 2 schools, which formed a small sample. As a result, the findings did not provide a true reflection of what happens in all South African Foundation Phase classrooms.

1.17 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 – introduced the study, which explored the efficacy of using a home language to teach reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms. This chapter provided the background of the problem, the problem statement, the research questions, the purpose of the study, and the rationale. It also covered the literature review, and the methodology and paradigms adopted for the study.

Chapter 2 – focused on the literature review, discussing key concepts such as language, monolingualism, and multilingualism, the use of home language in teaching and learning globally, in Africa and South Africa, and internationally.

Chapter 3 – outlined the research design, research paradigm, and methods used in the research, with the study being conducted through a mixed methods approach.

Chapter 4 – focused on data analysis and the discussion of the findings, examining the themes identified from the data collected through interviews, classroom observations, and intervention tests.

Chapter 5 – This chapter consists of a summary of the study, recommendations from the researcher, and conclusion to the study.

1.18 Conclusion

In conclusion, Chapter 1 outlined the background of the research problem, the motivation behind the study, and the theoretical framework that guided the research. It also presented the problem statement, hypotheses, research design, and methodology. Additionally, the limitations of the study were discussed, along with a statement on the ethical considerations involved in the research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

This literature review section presents an analysis of research findings that are related to this study. This review covered topics such as monolingualism in education, multilingual pedagogies in education, and the use of home language as a language of teaching and learning, with a focus on international perspectives, as well as insights from Africa and South Africa, where the research study took place.

2.1 Monolingualism in Education

Children learn most effectively in a language they understand, yet education in South Africa and many other countries still relies on colonial languages like English as the primary medium of instruction, Reily et al. (2022), UNESCO (n.d). Around 80% of schools use English in their multilingual classrooms, reinforcing the dominance of the language, Charamba (2022). This creates a significant challenge for learners in the foundation phase whose first language is different from the language of instruction. These learners face difficulties grasping concepts, engaging in critical thinking, and expressing themselves freely due to this language barrier. For effective learning, language should not only be seen as a tool for communication but as the foundation of all formal education. Therefore, it is crucial for learning to take place in a language that students are familiar with and understand, particularly during the early years of education, Olanibi et al. (2021), Obiegbu (2016), Charamba (2023) andCarrim and Nkomo (2023).

2.1.1 Definition of Monolingualism in Education

According to Sagna and Hantgon (2021), a monolingual community refers to one where only a single default language is used for communication among its residents. In South Africa, many schools, especially those considered prestigious, use English as the home language and the medium of instruction. This emphasis on English can lead to the erosion of African languages and cultures. When we prioritise English above all else, we risk losing our identities, cultural traditions, and stories, as well as the ability to foster inclusivity. Hinton (2016) notes that in the United States, English is considered the only language worth studying and is valued by those in power. If South African schools continue to overlook the significance of home languages, we may fall into the same trap of prioritising English exclusively, resulting in unequal treatment

of students. This can particularly hinder performance when children struggle to understand the language of instruction, Watson and Shapiro (2023). Home languages play a crucial role in shaping our behaviour, norms, and community life, which is why it is important to preserve them. We should not allow our languages to fade or deprive children of the opportunity to learn in their mother tongues.

Monolingualism is when a person knows and uses only one language, but has a passive understanding of other languages, Coleman (2017). In a monolingual school setting, despite students possibly being exposed to other languages, the focus is solely on learning and communicating in one language, such as English. In such environments, teachers use only one language of instruction, typically English, without incorporating other languages, Hinton (2016) and Watson and Shapiro (2018). Although learners have their home languages and may be exposed to others in their community, they do not learn through these languages, which hinders the appreciation of South Africa's linguistic diversity. With 13 official languages, relying exclusively on English from primary school through to university contributes to the gradual decline of local languages, Coleman (2017). The researcher believes it is unjust to suppress learners' identities and language heritage in favour of English alone, as the monolingual approach is not realistic in a multilingual society.

The bias towards English and monolingual ideologies in post-colonial contexts like South Africa is prevalent, as many schools use English as the medium of instruction, marginalising black children and perpetuating racism within the education system. The choice of language in education is inherently political, Coleman (2017), and the dominance of English fails to recognise the value and importance of other languages spoken within black communities. This exclusion denies children the opportunity to learn in their home languages or in languages that align with their cultural identities. If many schools in South Africa continue to teach in English, it sustains colonial legacies, maintaining inequality in the education system. It is crucial to create an inclusive educational environment that empowers all linguistic resources of the children in our schools. Often, parents enrol their children in private schools to provide them access to English language instruction, inadvertently reinforcing the preference for English in their children’s lives and communities.

Shapiro and Watson (2023) argued that English monolingualism acts as a colonising force that suppresses other languages, and the cultural identities tied to them. They further state that monolingualism disproportionately affects minority or vulnerable communities and their

languages. The dominance of English in most South African schools has led to the devaluation of other languages, particularly for minority groups. If someone does not know English, even if they are proficient in other languages, they may be unfairly viewed as less intelligent, Shapiro and Watson (2023) and McKinney (2023). During colonial times, language was used as a tool for domination, promoting Western ways while disregarding indigenous cultures. Therefore, educational stakeholders must acknowledge the importance of home languages in the education system, especially in the Foundation Phase. In a monolingual system, home languages are often seen as obstacles to learning English and neglecting them can lead to a loss of heritage, Watson and Shapiro (2018). This marginalisation can reinforce stereotypes, and when children feel that their culture is not valued in the classroom, they may not engage fully in their learning.

2.1.2 Monolingualism in Saudi Arabia, Russia and England

The research conducted by Shamim et al. (2016) in Saudi Arabia illustrates the challenges faced by learners due to the dominance of English as the language of instruction in higher grades and universities. While Arabic is the national language, students begin learning English in Grade 6 and continue to study it through high school. However, many graduate with limited English proficiency, which presents a major challenge for those with low English competence. Teachers and learners should both recognise the importance of English in the global context, yet the study found that teaching both Arabic and English could be beneficial for students' learning. When concepts were explained in Arabic, especially in science subjects, students demonstrated better understanding. This highlights the importance of incorporating both languages from the beginning of education to support deeper comprehension. The monolingual approach to teaching in English often undermines students' abilities to fully grasp concepts, which negatively impacts their academic performance and increases the cost of university education, as English proficiency needs to be taught alongside content.

In a qualitative study conducted by Gundarina and Simpson (2022), they examined a monolingual approach to teaching linguistics to minority pupils in an English primary school for Key Stage Two (7-11 years old). The study focused on a case involving Katerina, a 7-year-old Russian-speaking immigrant who had been living in the UK for three years. The research explored her experience of learning in English as the sole medium of instruction, despite having no prior experience with school or the English language. The study revealed how detrimental this approach was to her learning experience and well-being. Data was collected over seven months through field notes, and interviews with Katerina, her mother, and her teacher. Thematic

analysis was used to interpret the findings. Katerina was not allowed to speak Russian, her first language (L1) at school, and there were consequences if she was caught, such as a short break or a deduction of reward points. However, during the times when she was allowed to use Russian, Katerina became more sociable and performed better than she did in English. The teacher observed a noticeable improvement in her behaviour and engagement, but insisted that Katerina needed to master English to succeed academically. From this study, one can see that home language is important, as the research highlights how using a child's home language (in this case, Russian) can positively impact their social interactions and academic performance. Allowing Katerina to use her L1 helped her feel more comfortable and confident, leading to better outcomes compared to a strict monolingual English-only approach, Cunningham (2019).

In a twelve-month ethnographic study conducted in the UK, Fashanu et al. (2020) researched 30 multilingual children aged 4-5 at an inner-city school. The children primarily spoke languages other than English at home, but were only allowed to use English at school. They often resorted to using their home languages in secret, especially during playtime. Despite being discouraged from using their native languages, the children continued to do so, highlighting their commitment to maintaining their linguistic heritage. This behaviour reveals how enforcing monolingualism marginalises linguistic diversity and hinders self-expression, which can lead to feelings of alienation.

Enforcing English monolingualism marginalises the diversity and cultures of other languages, preventing many individuals from fully expressing themselves. This approach reinforces power dynamics that privilege English speakers while diminishing the value of speakers of other languages. Teachers must create a more inclusive educational experience for all learners. Embracing home languages fosters an equitable learning environment, allowing children to express themselves fully and enhancing their overall educational experience.

2.1.3 Monolingualism in Africa

The superiority given to the English language precedes other local languages in Africa at large. English has been prioritised since colonial times, and it still maintains its dominance to this day. The dominance of English in composition studies and classrooms fundamentally upholds an imperialist legacy that dehumanises individuals in various ways, Watson and Shapiro (2018). When a child's first language is not English, and many schools prioritise English as the primary language of instruction, as a result, learners often feel marginalised and may fail to see the value

of their home languages. This creates a barrier to their education, as seen in the studies below, both in primary schools and in universities, which contributes to social hierarchies and inequality, particularly among minority groups in Africa.

In a qualitative study conducted in Binga District, Zimbabwe by Chikasha (2021), on how minority language learners experience language use in multilingual classrooms. Tonga is the predominant language of learners in Binga, but most of the teachers were Shona and Ndebele first language speakers with no competence in Tsonga. Data was collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and a sample of 40 learners. The study adopted a grounded theory framework. Lessons were delivered in English, but because the teachers' L1 was Shona and Ndebele, they often used them in the classrooms. Ndebele and Shona as LOTL isolating the Tonga learners. As a result, this led to negative attitudes towards school and high failure rates, as learners struggled to understand the language of instruction. It was noted that those learners who were proficient in Shona, Ndebele, and English performed better on tests and had a more positive attitude towards school. Complaints were made, however, that Shona and Ndebele were difficult to understand for some students.

The neglect of the Tonga language in the classroom led to learners underperforming, dropping out of school, and developing negative attitudes towards those languages, Chikasha (2021). Prioritising some languages over others can result in children not enjoying their schooling experience. If teachers use students' first language (L1), they should also incorporate the Tonga language, which is spoken by most learners, to ensure that everyone feels included and accepted.

In another study in a monolingual setting, in Tanzania, Kiswahili is used as the medium of instruction in primary schools, while English is introduced in secondary and higher education. This shift can negatively affect student performance, as learners must adapt to a new language, making it difficult for them to fully engage with and understand their lessons, Coleman (2017). In my view, monolingualism from this perspective in Tanzania was ineffective, as teaching languages separately often forces learners to first master the language before they can comprehend the content. It would be more beneficial to teach both Kiswahili and English from Grade 1, so students are already familiar with English when it becomes the primary language of instruction. This approach would allow Tanzania to integrate both languages, acknowledging the importance of Kiswahili while still using English for certain subjects, such as Science and

ICT, Coleman (2017). By incorporating both languages, Tanzania would avoid undermining its home language and instead foster a more inclusive educational environment.

In 2014, Malawi introduced a policy where Chichewa was used as the lingua franca in primary schools, with a transition to English starting from Standard 5. However, the new policy mandated that English should be the sole language used in education, Reily et al. (2020). It will be difficult to implement this policy, especially considering that only 0.18% of the Malawian population speaks English as their home language, while over 70% have Chichewa as their first language. Education policy forums should acknowledge the prominence of Chichewa and better cater to the needs of the majority population, rather than focusing solely on English. There needs to be a balance that promotes the home language of the majority while also encouraging English acquisition for future economic and academic opportunities.

Building on Foucault's ideas, the validation and suppression of specific language practices can be understood through a post-structural perspective, which examines how dominant languages are considered "superior, while other language practices are often deemed inferior, Fashanu et al. (2020). When one language is promoted by discouraging the use of other languages, people end up adopting that language's culture, as they will not only use it for communication purposes, but also lose a sense of their own identity. In most schools, they use English (LOTL) only because it might be under the disguise that one language brings unity and social cohesion, but this comes at the expense of suppressing our native cultures and home languages, Makalela (2016). Even from my teaching experience at a private school in Fourways South Africa, I observed that parents speak with their children in their home languages at drop-off and pick-up time. However, when we are in the classroom, the pervasive influence of the English-only environment takes over, leaving our natives at the door makes learners succumb to social pressures so that we won't be judged or scrutinised by others. As a result, we devalue our languages. We deem our languages as not worthy or enough by prioritising the English language, Fashanu et al. (2020).

The dominance of English in schools prioritises conformity over individuality, Fashanu et al. (2020). I agree with this statement as this was evident in my own experience at Gutu High School in Zimbabwe, where speaking in Shona was punishable. We even referred to our home language as ‘vernacular,’ and many learners, especially those not fluent in English, felt silenced. This experience made me feel small and embarrassed about my culture and language. Foucault (1972) believed that educational institutions serve as spaces where specific knowledge and

practices are validated in accordance with dominant discourses. In my case, the pressure to conform to the school's English-only environment led to a loss of pride in my cultural identity. Even now, I still fight it. I resonate with the studies conducted by Charamba and Nkomo (2023) and Gundarina and Simpson (2022), who argue that prioritising English alone stifles creativity, problem-solving skills, and academic achievement, particularly when students lack proficiency in the language of instruction. The majority of the learners are silenced because they are not proficient in English.

The practice of monolingualism in Africa disadvantages many people due to the continent's linguistic diversity. For example, in Zambia, limited progress in the early grades is due to monolingual language practices influenced by policies based on monolingual ideologies, Mwanza (2020). Schools need to foster linguistic diversity to promote inclusive and effective education, ensuring that all children are taught in a language they understand to perform well. Education should prioritise learners' needs, not just policy Mwanza (2020). Policies should be designed to cater to the learners' needs, and curricula must reflect the diverse needs of South African children. The colonial nature of African language policies prevents the inclusion of multilingual voices in the classroom, despite Sub-Saharan Africa's inherent multilingualism, thereby undermining African languages, Fashanu et al. (2020) and Banda and Mwanza (2017). The monolingual approach to teaching and learning in South African classrooms will not be effective because of the nation's multilingual nature, with 13 official languages. The decision about which language to prioritise is complex, making language instruction difficult, Obiegbu (2016).

Relying on one language of instruction may prevent children from fully utilising their linguistic resources to understand the material they are being taught. Learning in a particular language involves more than just communication; it requires comprehension of the content. Learners must not only understand basic language skills but also become proficient in the language of instruction if they are to succeed academically. Monolingualism, whether consciously or unconsciously, supports a system that maintains the dominance of certain languages over others, Watson and Shapiro (2018). Therefore, all educational stakeholders must recognise the significance of linguistic diversity in both schools and society.

2.1.4 Monolingualism in South Africa

In South Africa, the study by Robertson and Graven (2019) focused on Grade 4 learners' struggles with numeracy, particularly fractions, when English was the language of instruction. Data was collected through interviews, lesson data and 31 classroom transcript data. Seventy five percent (75%) of the learners in the Grade 3 classes scored below, while 50% the teachers realised that the learners did not understand the LOTL, which was English, Robert and Graven (2019). From the findings, language is very important in learning, "mathematics is not only about numbers: 'add this', 'subtract this'. There are lots of languages involved" Robertson and Graven (2019:223). This is compounded by the fact that in many contexts in South Africa, English is used as the sole language of instruction, even though it may not be the learners' home language. Many learners struggled not only with the content but also with the language itself, as they were not proficient in the English language. When students were allowed to use their home language, Xhosa, they showed improved engagement and understanding. The study concluded that home language proficiency is critical to academic success, especially in the early years, as it allows learners to connect abstract concepts to their everyday experiences.

The study by Robertson and Graven (2019) highlights a significant challenge faced by Grade 4 learners in South Africa, where English is used as the language of teaching and learning (LOTL). Still, many students have not developed sufficient proficiency in the language. Mogara et al. (2023) and Charamba (2019) add that poor academic performance can be attributed to a lack of proficiency in the language of instruction. Language proficiency plays a critical role in a student's ability to engage with content, ask questions, and participate in classroom discussions. Without this proficiency, students are at a disadvantage because they are not only trying to learn complex academic content, but they are also simultaneously trying to learn and use a new language. This dual challenge can lead to frustration and disengagement, as students feel unable to fully comprehend the lessons, even when they understand the mathematical concepts.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by learners in South Africa, as illustrated by Robertson and Graven's (2019) study, underscore the need for greater attention to language proficiency in educational settings. To address poor academic performance and support students' success, it is crucial to consider the impact of language on learning, particularly when English is used as the sole medium of instruction in contexts where many learners are not fluent in the language.

2.2 Multilingualism in Education

The quote “language is man and man is language,” Ndiribe and Aboh (2022:2) speaks to the profound connection between language and identity. Language is not just a tool for communication; it is intrinsically linked to who we are, shaping our thoughts, behaviours, and interactions with the world. For children, their home language is a vital part of their being, as it carries the cultural, emotional, and cognitive weight of their upbringing. It is the lens through which they see and understand the world, and it plays a central role in their development.

As Makalela (2016) asserted, language is inseparable from the soul of its speakers. This means that when we ask children to leave behind their home language and only embrace the language of instruction, we are asking them to suppress a significant part of their identity. This can create a barrier to learning because they are not just learning new content; they are trying to do so in a language that might not fully resonate with them on a personal or cognitive level.

Practising multilingualism in the classroom, therefore, is not just beneficial; it is necessary. By embracing multiple languages, we recognise and value the diverse identities of our students, which allows them to thrive. Multilingualism not only enhances cognitive development by drawing on students' full linguistic repertoires but also promotes a sense of belonging. When children are allowed to bring their home language into the classroom, they are more likely to feel seen, heard, and respected, which can positively impact their self-esteem and academic success.

Incorporating multilingualism also helps students communicate more effectively, as they can express themselves fully in a language they are comfortable with, while also gradually acquiring proficiency in the language of instruction. This balanced approach allows for a deeper understanding of content and fosters an inclusive environment where students feel empowered to participate and learn. The classroom should be a space that celebrates linguistic diversity, understanding that each student's language contributes to the richness of the learning experience.

2.2.1 Definition of Multilingualism

Multilingualism, according to Coleman (2017), refers to a person who can communicate in more than two spoken or written languages and language varieties. It is further defined as the process of constructing meaning, forming experiences, and gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages is referred to as bilingual learning or bilingual education, Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021). Multilingualism can be through living in diverse

communities formal education, living in foreign countries or immersion. If we are flexible in communication with two or more languages, we increase or enhance our memory skills, and have better and faster thinking. The purpose of human interaction is to be able to comprehend what the other person is communicating, so multilingualism enhances the chances of understanding each other when they can communicate in two or more languages. It is a great skill that opens doors to understanding and communication across all diverse communities in South Africa, especially when there are many official languages.

The different ways people utilise and merge the codes in their communicative repertoire when speaking and writing, Coleman (2017). It is indeed an advantage to be fluent in many languages, especially in South Africa, where there are 12 official languages. Language is a powerful tool that helps in more than communication; it fosters friendship and a good understanding of diverse cultures. When we understand each other's cultures, we can see and understand people from their point of view or in the way that they see the world. Language itself can be a barrier in communication in general, a lack of it can make people isolate themselves, so multilingualism opens doors for communication, inclusion and a good comprehensive understanding of the world around us. If South African classrooms foster multilingualism, better comprehension and better communication will be inevitable.

In Africa, English is mostly used as a primary language of teaching and learning while neglecting our African languages. This creates difficulties for many learners as they do not know the language of teaching and learning, and there is no connection with it, creating a gap in their academic work. Learning in a language that they do not fully understand may result in learners not fully grasping the content taught. Prioritising English may lead to marginalisation as it creates boundaries to learning. The advantage of multilingualism lies in allowing the language of teaching and learning to be one that learners understand. Using languages closely tied to students' backgrounds can enhance their learning experience and increase their confidence.

2.2.2 Multilingualism Worldwide

Another case study, as stated in Espinosa and Lehner-Quam (2019), described how the use of a multilingual book, Marta, helped children use many languages, showing that multilingualism can be an effective way to make a deeper understanding. By using many languages, it allows for better communication, and learners can express themselves clearly. It also allows for a

deeper understanding of the world around them and confidence. The activity allowed students to create their text based on their drawings, and the teacher also jotted down their ideas to represent them in English and Spanish. For example, a learner drew a horse with a child and wrote ‘to a horse, Camila is lenta slow very slow.’ This representation in both English and Spanish allowed learners to express their thoughts in multiple languages. This fosters a sense of belonging and pride without implying that other languages are better than one's own.

Karpava (2022) conducted a study in Cyprus by exploring the beliefs of 40 prospective English as a foreign language teachers regarding multilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive education. Data was collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and online blogs used to record their feelings and views on their teaching and learning experiences. From the findings, multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities, improves social skills, fosters understanding and acceptance of other cultures, and supports the promotion of peace, Karpava (2022). Teachers expressed a positive attitude, multilingualism helps in communication and open minds and goes as far as creating better career opportunities, business relations and so forth abroad, Seltzer et al (2020). The culture of a country should be prioritised, and we must approach each culture with respect, even in our classrooms. Teachers should support students, ensuring that no one belittles or disrespects another’s culture. Recognising learners' home languages can help enrich learning; when learners understand the language of teaching and learning, they are more likely to engage and participate in their studies, so teachers can leverage this, Carrim and Nkomo (2023). Teachers need to allow learners to use languages interchangeably, especially in the Foundation Phase, enhancing communication while accommodating individuals with different backgrounds to make them feel accepted. Some teachers argued that since the goal is to communicate in English, children should just learn English from the get-go without having to use their home language to get there.

In an ethnographic case study by Weng and Ataei (2022), on how David (teacher), multilingual and multicultural practices promoted students' multilingualism identities in a mid-western University. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and recordings of the interactions. The participants of the study were mainly Chinese and a few from Korea, Japan, Malaysia and other European countries. He displayed his multilingualism and multiculturalism to his students through modelling that encouraged the students to bring/share their pictures of places where they have been. With his eagerness to learn about other people's cultures, students will also feel the need to learn about other cultures, for example, the use of their home language in lessons when discussing topics without being

explicitly instructed to do so. This shows that as teachers, we have a big role to play in the education system to promote multilingualism.

As teachers receive training, there is a need for greater awareness in promoting language diversity in the classroom. This is important because when teachers are open and inclusive, learners feel more comfortable and confident to express themselves. I can personally relate to this, as when I first arrived from another country as a first-year student, I was quiet and shy about fully expressing myself. We had a tutor for New Literacies for teachers 1, Scott from England, who often shared insights into his Welsh culture. This encouraged us all to share our own cultures freely, thanks to his dedication and motivation. We took turns each week to share about our cultures without any fear of being judged, and I will always cherish this. Teachers need to be flexible in utilising students' cultural funds of knowledge, accepting their languages, cultural backgrounds, and even their gender orientations, and integrating these aspects into the learning environment.

2.2.3 Multilingualism in Africa

In another study conducted by Simachenya and Mambwe (2023), on multilingual practices in selected primary schools in urban areas of Livingstone, Zambia, involving 40 teachers and learners over 8 weeks. Using purposive sampling, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations in twenty lessons. Teachers use Nyanja (the language spoken by most children in the class) and English to facilitate learning, as most of the learners use Nyanja to understand concepts in the classroom. The prescribed languages were Tonga and English; children used Nyanja whenever they needed to express themselves in the classrooms, during group work and so forth. Teachers in this study used the linguistic features of English, Tonga, and Nyanja as a resource for meaning-making. Bringing in inclusiveness, teachers were not bothered by many languages in the class; they wanted to create meaningful comprehension of what they were teaching. The power of language is evident when teachers use Nyanja as a first language (L1) to manage classroom disruptions. This demonstrates that language is a powerful tool, even in disciplinary situations. It aligns with Nelson Mandela's famous quote: ‘When you talk to a man in a language he understands, it goes to the heart.’ Language, when used effectively, can connect with learners on a deeper emotional level, fostering understanding and respect.

In a qualitative case study conducted by Nyamayedenga (2022), investigating how multilingualism can be utilised as a resource to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), at a primary school in Warren Park, Harare, Zimbabwe, 21 teachers participated, but 3 teachers were purposively selected as the sample of the study. The LOTL was English, and learners struggled to express themselves in the language; however, they could understand Shona and Ndebele. When teachers used children's home languages, children understood better. The use of multilingualism in the classroom will not only assist teachers in communication but also help learners learn effectively and improve their work. The findings of the study revealed that when only English was used, learners struggled to understand the material, showing that monolingualism did not work in this context. However, when teachers incorporated Shona, Ndebele, and English, the learners understood better. This finding aligns with a study by Simachena and Mambwe (2023), which showed that children performed better when their home languages were used in instruction.

2.2.4 Multilingualism in South Africa

According to Makalela (2018), utilising African languages is a powerful tool in fostering unity and diversity. From a study he observed in a South African community, ubuntu translanguaging focuses on utilising African languages to create shared meanings among people in the communities. Language is a powerful tool for communication and the sharing of ideas. When people are willing to learn each other's languages and use them to communicate, or when individuals are free to express themselves in a language they know, it fosters cooperation and a sense of belonging within the community. Language should not be a barrier; people should feel free to express themselves. By sharing ideas in different languages, we promote learning from others and encourage the ability to speak languages beyond one's own. When people from diverse backgrounds share their stories, it leads to a deeper understanding of each other's languages and cultures. Makalela (2018) also proposed that schools should embrace the richness of African languages to strengthen unity and diversity in the country and the world.

In a study conducted by The Hub for Multilingual Education and Literacies (HUMEL), Makalela (2019), for professional development to enhance the teachers' skills in translanguaging, an intensive two-week programme was held. After the induction, teachers were sent back to their schools in Gauteng, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces to engage with the materials and experience they had learnt with the support of researchers and university instructors. Data was collected from Grade 3 lessons that had 25 learners in a remote rural area

in Limpopo Province, where the LOTL was Sepedi and English, even though other learners' languages were Ndebele, Xitsonga, Tshivenda and isiZulu. Makalela (2019) stated that teachers were required to develop teaching philosophies that incorporate more than one language in the three parts of the activities. The key criteria were that learners had to retell or rewrite texts in a language different from the input language, and they discussed these in the classroom to enhance their comprehension and ideas for improvement. The results from this study showed that intentional translanguaging increased levels of comprehension, and it builds a sense of community among various speakers of languages through multiple language greetings, through stability and deeper comprehension of content and vocabulary, as quoted from Makalela (2019). This research highlights the important role of teachers in embracing multilingualism to support meaning-making, flexibility, and creativity, ultimately facilitating a richer and more inclusive learning experience.

In a qualitative study conducted by Omidire and Ayob (2022), in South Africa, at 2 schools in Grades 5 and 6, data was collected through classroom observations, interviews, document analysis and storyboards. The study involved introducing and integrating learners' home languages (Sepedi and isiZulu) in the teaching and learning process in addition to English, the LOTL at the schools. English passages were translated into isiZulu and Sepedi, and audio recordings were made. The findings suggest that translations facilitated a better understanding. Omidire and Ayob (2022) asserted that incorporating learners' home languages in the classroom helped them feel accepted, leading to improved understanding and greater engagement using multiple languages during lessons.

It is crucial for educational systems to recognise and embrace multilingualism, not only to improve academic performance but also to preserve cultural identities and foster inclusivity. This reinforces the idea that multilingual approaches to education, where students are encouraged to use both their home language and the language of instruction, are essential for promoting deeper learning and academic success. It also highlights the need for educational systems to be more inclusive and recognise the value of students' linguistic diversity in the learning process. By allowing students to use their home language in the classroom, schools can help ensure that learners are not only able to engage with the content but also feel valued and understood, which in turn can improve both their academic performance and emotional well-being.

2.3 The Use of Home Language as the Language of Teaching and Learning

2.3.1 Definition of Home Language

The concept of mother tongue is explained as follows: the first language, mother tongue, or more accurately, native language, is the only language spoken by a monolingual person, learned naturally in their native environment and serving all their linguistic needs, Akintunde and Akuta (2021).

Mother tongue (MT) is also defined as "the language which a group of people considered to be inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually become their natural instrument of thoughts and communication," Obiegbu (2016:51). A person's first language, also known as their native language, is typically acquired naturally without formal education. According to Akintunde and Akuta (2021), mother tongue is the language a child acquires at birth; it is the first language of the child. It is through the mother tongue that a child first becomes aware of the world. A child starts with knowledge of one language and then learns additional languages. When school knowledge is built on the foundation of the mother tongue, learners are better able to understand and decode information, leading to greater confidence in participating. By drawing on their prior experiences, learners are more likely to succeed academically, Brunette et al. (2019).

According to McKinney (2023), home language refers to the language spoken within the household. It is the first language acquired in early childhood and naturally becomes the primary means of thought and communication, Obiegbu (2016). If children learn in their home language, it provides them with the opportunity to have a solid foundation in literacy skills in a language that they are familiar with before they are introduced to another language like English, Reily et al. (2020). Using a child's home language in the classroom provides them with freedom of expression and a sense of acceptance, especially in Grade 1, where it is their first exposure to formal schooling. Learning becomes easier when children understand the language of instruction. Supporting this, Akintunde and Akuta (2021) stated that what a child learns in their home language is more easily acquired than in any foreign language. Therefore, using a child's home language in education is beneficial for their academic journey.

The goal in the South African educational system should be promoting the growth of home languages while learning a new language that is not their home language, Mckinney (2023). The importance of using one's home language as LOTL, as asserted by Nhongo and Tshotsho

(2021), is that it provides the psychological foundations of human cognition. This shows that language serves as a medium of thought, so it is an advantage if learners can be granted an opportunity to learn in their mother tongue. The most important valuable tool that teachers can use, especially in the Foundation Phase, is the language that the children already know. If the learners are proficient in the language of instruction, their performance will most likely be high. Research shows that maintaining a home language, especially in the first years of schooling, has a positive impact on the academic achievement of learners, Cunningham (2019), Mckinney (2023) and Obiegbu (2016).

2.3.2 The Use of Home Language Worldwide

According to Coleman (2017), if children keep their mother tongue, it helps them learn another language. An example is given of Chinese learners who were able to write texts in English when they drew on their native language to leverage their learning of English. Chinese learners were able to learn English by drawing from their native languages. It might be difficult if teachers do not leverage the child's home language; instead, they should use it to their advantage. The importance of home language in the teaching and learning process is important, as we can see again from the study conducted by Fu, Hadjioannou, and Zhou (2019), which showcased how translanguaging supports bilingual learners in communication and writing. From one example, a learner named Amina faced difficulties in writing until her teacher encouraged her to draw from her home language, which was Arabic. This incorporation helped her to communicate her thoughts effectively, and her writing improved as well. Leveraging the mother tongue of the learners is a very powerful tool to reach the full potential of the learners.

Cunningham (2020) conducted research where he analysed the teachers' discourses and attitudes about their responsibilities for language learning and maintenance of home language at British primary schools. Data was collected from 13 open/semi-structured teacher interviews because teachers are at the centre of promoting language practices in the classroom. From the findings of this study, the majority of the teachers were keen on maintaining the learners' home language in the classrooms. I quote, “I think keeping their natural language is an extremely important characteristic, it’s part of their culture, it’s who they are it’s what they are, it’s what makes them unique,” Cunningham (2020:219). The findings of this study align with Makalela's (2018, 2020) research on the importance of culture in the teaching and learning process. He emphasises that culture is an integral part of who a person is; it cannot be discarded like clothing. Children cannot leave their cultural identity at the classroom door and pick it up when they go home. Therefore, teachers must promote the use of home languages to ensure that learners can perform to the best of their abilities.

In Cunningham's (2020) study, some teachers expressed the belief that losing one's home language is not a shame because culture is not something visibly marked on a person. As they noted, when you meet someone in the street, their identity is not determined solely by their language; it is about who they are as a person. It was observed in Cunningham's (2020) study that other children will now be shy to use their home languages in the classrooms after being exposed to English. The researchers feel like schools, homes, teachers, parents, and children

are responsible for maintaining the home languages. In schools, there will be a 'downward' and 'upward' shift in the process of language attrition, meaning the decline in the use of home language and an 'upward' shift in the English language. Loss of home language is seen as a positive thing while gaining proficiency in English, as Cunningham (2019) calls it ‘holiday language’ referring to our home languages. Maintaining home languages, especially in the current era, is becoming increasingly difficult as English has become the dominant language of instruction in many schools.

Another study conducted in Norway by Neokleous and Ofte (2020) observed four teachers in primary and lower secondary schools unravelling their attitudes towards mother tongue use in the classrooms. Data was gathered through formal classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in four classes. From the findings of this study, the use of their mother tongue, Norwegian, has made learners understand instruction and concepts better, bolstering learner and teacher confidence, and deepening understanding of Norwegian, Neokleous and Ofte (2020). The findings of this study align with Carrim and Nkomo (2023), Olaninbi et al (2021) and Mogara et al.s (2023) findings that using local languages in schools promotes equality and acceptance, ensuring that no child is left behind. When teachers use learners' mother tongue to introduce a new language, it creates an inclusive environment where students feel valued and understood. This approach helps bridge language gaps, making learning more accessible and fostering a sense of belonging and confidence among learners.

Some teachers also stated that the use of their mother tongue in the classroom created a dependency on the language, which might create confusion about when to use home language and could lead children to not speak English at all (Neokleous and Ofte, 2020). Learners need flexibility, so the researcher feels that the use of the mother tongue should be more in the lower primary schools, leveraging it to learn English.

2.3.3 The Use of Home Languages in Africa

Research conducted by Obiegbu (2016) in Nigeria to investigate the effect of mother tongue instruction on the effective teaching and learning of English in selected primary schools in Anambra and Enugu States of Nigeria employed a survey research design. The study adopted a descriptive survey method, and data was collected through teacher questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. The participants were randomly selected. From the data collected from 50 teachers who participated, it was revealed that using the mother tongue in learning the English

language is very effective. Seeing the impact of the mother tongue on education, it was further suggested that the mother tongue should be used in the early years of primary schooling, Obiegbu (2016). On answering one of the questions used in the questionnaires, "on whether pupils score highly in the English language because of MT foundation, 51% "agree", 29% "strongly agree", 14% "disagree" and 6% "strongly disagree," (Obiegbu, 2016:55). In total, 80 percent of the participants of the study agreed that indeed home language helps in learning other languages. According to Obiegbu (2016), it was revealed that prolonging the use of home languages in learning a new language enhances the chances of English knowledge. This aligns with the findings of Cunningham (2019) and Coleman (2017), who state in their research that the home language serves as a bridge, a valuable asset in learning a new language, especially during the Foundation Phase. Using the home language in early education provides a strong foundation, helping learners grasp new concepts more effectively and supporting their overall language development. According to Kula and Mwanza (2022), comprehension tasks are better understood when a familiar language is encouraged rather than using a foreign language, especially in the early grades of schooling.

In a study conducted by Mwanza (2020), on whether the instruction of mother tongue duration matters before transitioning into the second language affects the literacy levels in Zambia. Data was collected by reviewing selected data from studies that have been conducted throughout one to four years using the mother tongue. Mwanza (2020) stated that from his finding, teachers lack teaching and learning materials to teach effectively, and in the transition from their home language to English as a language of teaching and learning, teachers are inadequately trained for this fundamental. The study suggests the need for training of the teachers for the transition to know how to use language practice.

2.3.4 The Use of Home Language in South Africa

In a qualitative study conducted by Mashige et al. (2019) in the South African Eastern Cape province, at three rural schools, the benefits of employing the mother tongue, isiXhosa, in teaching during the Foundation Phase were explored. Participants of the study were nine foundation phase teachers who were interviewed. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The study revealed that teachers are not fully equipped, as they said that their training is no longer relevant to the recent curriculum requirements to teach in home languages and there was a lack of vocabulary in subjects like Mathematics and Science, which made it difficult to teach the concepts. Even if they want to teach in IsiXhosa, there are not many resources written

in Xhosa available at the schools to use. Mgijima and Makalela (2016) also stated that the difficulties of Xhosa words led children to understand some words better in English, which shows the prevalence of the English language.

English remains the dominant language used in many South African schools, even though it is a home language to less than 10% of the population, Graven and Robertson (2020). In a study conducted by Graven and Robertson (2020) in Eastern Cape, South Africa, in Grade 4 Mathematics on the use of home language in mathematics classrooms where the school has a different medium of instruction, in this case English. Data was collected through teacher interviews, assessment data, and lesson observations. The use of English alongside their home language opens doors for understanding, which shows the importance of a multilingual approach in South Africa. The findings of this study are similar to those from Robertson and Graven (2019), showing how the use of home language allows for more cognitively engaged learning, improved strategic performance and conceptual understanding. One teacher continued to use isiXhosa, and it resulted in children having mathematical sense reasoning shown through conceptual understanding, strategic competence and adaptive reasoning. When the learners were writing on the board, the teacher engaged the learners in their home language, and that may have helped the other learners to understand the mathematical concepts.

Different languages that the learners have in the classrooms should be seen as a resource, not a barrier to learning; it is a genuine resource for sense-making in our multilingual societies, especially in South Africa. If the mother tongue is not recognised, it creates a language disconnect and can be a barrier to education. It is difficult to choose which language to prioritise over the other, but teachers should take advantage of learners' home language as a resource in learning another, as Obiegbu (2016) suggests.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, language is a powerful tool in education. Carrim and Nkomo (2023) and Zhang et al. (2023) also argued that home languages are invaluable tools in the learning process, particularly in the early years of schooling. They suggest that children's cognitive and conceptual development can be more robust when they are allowed to use their first language in the classroom, as it enhances their ability to understand abstract ideas. In the early stages of education, when students are building foundational skills, a supportive language environment is critical. Home languages provide a familiar foundation on which new academic concepts can be built, and they enable children to fully engage with and understand the content being taught.

The next chapter, Chapter 3, presents a detailed research methodology and design of how data was collected.

Chapter 3
Research Method and Design

3.1 Introduction

This section describes how this study was conducted. It entails the research method, paradigms, design and techniques used.

3.2 Research Method

This research study utilised a mixed methods approach, which involves "collecting, analysing, and integrating (or mixing) quantitative and qualitative research (and data) in a single study or a longitudinal program of inquiry" (Bulsara, 2015:6). The rationale for choosing this method was to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the language challenges in South African Foundation Phase classrooms by combining both qualitative and quantitative data, rather than relying on a single method.

3.3 Research Paradigm

This study adopted the pragmatism paradigm, focusing on mixed methods, to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Pragmatists prioritise the ‘nature of experience,’ Kaushik and Walsh (2019). This paradigm focuses on the practical and realistic nature of human experiences. It was suited for this study because it acknowledges that reality is not fixed; rather, what we know is shaped by society and cultural contexts, meaning that reality evolves and is dynamic, not static.

3.4 Questioning Dominant Discourses

For this study, the researcher critically examined existing educational research and practices that are related to the study in terms of using English as a language of teaching and learning while neglecting the learner's home language.

3.5 Research Design

Al-Hakim (2000) argues that research design primarily emphasises the goals, uses, objectives, goals, and strategies, while also considering practical limitations such as location, time, budget, and the researcher's availability. A well-organised research design is crucial for guiding the data

collection and interpretation process, ensuring that the findings are relevant and aligned with the research questions. For this study, a concurrent triangulation research design was employed.

3.5.1 Concurrent Triangulation

This method entails collecting both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously during a single phase of the research, which was conducted at two government primary schools in Johannesburg. As noted by Creswell and Clark (2018), the concurrent triangulation design seeks to capitalise on the strengths of each data type, ensuring that participants' insights and perspectives are meaningfully incorporated into the final analysis. The qualitative and quantitative data were analysed separately and later compared to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

This approach is employed to confirm, cross-validate, or verify research findings (Ipek, 2022) and is often used to address the limitations of one method by drawing on the strengths of another (Pardede, 2019). In this study, both qualitative methods (such as interviews and questionnaires) and quantitative methods (such as controlled writing tests) were used to gather data on the same topic. This combination allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the research issue and strengthened the study's credibility. By cross-validating results from both approaches, identifying patterns, codes, and inconsistencies, the researcher gained a deeper and more nuanced insight into the topic.

3.6 Research Site

This study was conducted in Grade 3 classrooms at two multilingual primary schools in Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, South Africa. One school is in Johannesburg and serves a large number of learners from Parktown, parts of Johannesburg, Bram Fisher, Randburg and other surrounding areas of the city.

The other school in Johannesburg serves a large number of learners from both Cosmo City township and the Honeydew informal settlements. These areas are under-resourced, with many residents living in government-issued RDP homes (Reconstruction and Development Programme), primarily from lower-income or working-class backgrounds. Additionally, there are informal settlements in squatter camps in Honeydew, where communities are waiting for government assistance to receive RDP homes. The primary languages spoken by the learners are indigenous African languages, including Sepedi, isiZulu, and Tshivenda.

These schools had some learners whose home language was isiZulu, but the medium of instruction was English. Each class in both schools had over 40 learners, and most of the teachers in the Foundation Phase had been teaching for more than 10 years, which made them highly experienced and suitable for this study. They were skilled in using multilingual pedagogies, having participated in various workshops on multilingual teaching. A key feature of both schools, regardless of the communities they serve, is that English is used as the language of instruction (FAL).

3.7 Population

This study focused on Grade 3 Foundation Phase learners, who are taught in English as their home language while being isiZulu home language speakers. In the South African context, Grade 3 learners are aged between 8 and 10 years old. From School 1, 44 learners participated, and 18 of them were isiZulu home language speakers. From School 2, 55 learners participated, and 26 of them participated in the isiZulu post-tests.

3.8 Sample Sampling Technique

The Heads of Department (HODs) at the schools assisted me in selecting both the classes and teachers for my research, drawing on their extensive experience. They recommended two teachers from each school, each with over 10 years of experience teaching in the Foundation Phase. The class selection was based on the teachers' experience. The four teachers I observed were also the same teachers I interviewed. The class assigned for isiZulu consisted of isiZulu native speakers learning isiZulu as a First Additional Language (FAL), while the other classes were studying Afrikaans as a FAL.

3.9 Data Collection

This section details the study's data collection process, offering an overview of the methods used to obtain relevant information. For this study, a mixed-method approach was used to collect data.

3.9.1 Mixed Method Research

Qualitative Research

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021), qualitative research focuses on qualitative phenomena, emphasising aspects such as quality and diversity, and it involves looking in-depth

at non-numerical data. Data was gathered through classroom observations and interviews with teachers.

Interviews: There were 8 interview questions, and 4 experienced Foundation Phase teachers were interviewed from 2 schools.

Classroom observations: These were conducted in both English and isiZulu classes. The researcher used a guide to observe what was transpiring in these language classes. The observations were conducted for 30 minutes per lesson according to the timetables that I got from the schools. The observation sheet is attached in the Appendix 5 section.

Quantitative Research

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021), quantitative research focuses on the aspect of quantity. It involves objects or phenomena that can be measured or expressed in numerical terms, or aspects that can be counted. The learners participated in the pre- and post-tests. The pre-test was in English while the post test was in English and isiZulu.

The English and isiZulu tests were the same and administered under the same conditions. The test consisted of 8 multiple-choice questions and 2 sentence construction tasks. The results were analysed and presented in graphs, with detailed findings provided in Chapter 4.

3.10 Data Analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and observations. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), codes serve as the foundation for identifying patterns and developing themes, enabling a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the data. From the classroom observations and the interview responses, all these responses were broken down into themes and recorded by the researcher in Chapter 4.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised to analyse the quantitative data in this study. This approach focused on summarising and organising the data from the learners' pre- and post-tests. It enabled the researcher to identify key characteristics of the data and present a clear and concise overview of the collected information.

Descriptive and Inferential Statistics

The researcher employed various measures, including mean, bar charts, range, and mode, to provide an overview of the collected data. After the learners completed the pre-and post-tests, the researcher calculated the mean, mode, range, and standard deviation for each of the two groups. Recording the pre-and post-test results facilitated a comparison of outcomes before and after the intervention. This design did not involve making predictions; instead, the researcher used the collected data to identify trends, patterns, and visual representations, which helped gain insights into the dataset. Inferential statistics enabled the researcher to generalise findings from the small dataset to a larger population, allowing for meaningful conclusions beyond the specific data. As a result, the researcher was able to compare the outcomes of both groups and assess the learning gains between them in both languages.

3.11 Quality Assurance of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The researcher of the present study checked with participants to make sure that their statements are accurately recorded and properly analysed to ensure credibility. The use of audio tapes from the two teacher that agreed also helped the researcher maintain credibility for the interviews and notes were done after each observation to make sure accurate information is recorded.

Reliability and Validity of Quantitative Data

In this study, validity was concerned with how accurately the instrument measured the intended behaviour and how well it performed its intended function. Reliability, as explained by Surucu and Maslakci (2020), was a measure of the consistency of the values obtained from repeated measurements under the same conditions with the same instrument. It indicated how stable and consistent the results were over time. To ensure both validity and reliability throughout the study, the researcher focused on careful planning, quality control, and implementing effective strategies for data collection and analysis.

Transferability

The researcher collected data from two schools in Johannesburg. At one school, data was collected concurrently for both quantitative and qualitative purposes through classroom observations, interviews, and pre- and post-tests in English and isiZulu and the same was done at the second school. To ensure a comprehensive understanding and effectively address the research questions, the researcher analysed and presented the quantitative and qualitative data separately in Chapter 4. Emphasis was placed on providing a detailed description of the

phenomena under investigation to enhance the transferability of the qualitative data. This approach aimed to strengthen the reliability and credibility of the study's findings by incorporating multiple perspectives and sources of information.

Dependability

To ensure dependability in mixed-method research, several strategies can be utilised. One such approach is methodological triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources and methods to enhance the credibility and confirmability of the findings. In this study, 99 learners from both schools were observed and assessed through pre- and post-tests in English and isiZulu. To ensure the dependability of the study's findings, the researcher employed three data collection methods: interviews, classroom observations, and pre-and post-tests. Additionally, the researcher sought feedback from other researchers and incorporated their comments to further strengthen the dependability of the study.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in any research study to safeguard the rights and welfare of participants and to uphold the integrity of the research process. For this study, several key ethical concerns were addressed:

Voluntary Participation - Participation in this research was voluntary, and the participants chose to take part willingly. They were informed that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time if they wished. No one was compelled or forced to participate.

Confidentiality and Anonymity - The research participants were not named, and their ages and responses were not linked to them in any way. To ensure confidentiality, learners and teachers were assigned numbers, from 1 to 4 for teachers and the same for learners. These numbers were used throughout the research instead of their names. Information was restricted to those who needed to know and was not shared with those who did not. The participation of teachers and learners was anonymous, and their responses were not linked to them, ensuring that the information remained private and confidential.

Informed Consent - The aim of this research was communicated to all participants, including parents, teachers, the school principal, and the Gauteng Department of Education, before the research began. Participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they felt uncomfortable. All participants agreed to take part in the study by signing

the consent forms provided by the researcher. For learners, the parents signed the consent forms, as the learners were minors, they only gave their assent.

Beneficence - No harm whatsoever was done to the participants in this study. The research findings aimed to benefit all education stakeholders, including policymakers, to contribute positively to the field in areas of language teaching and learning.

Potential for harm - In this research, to address the potential for harm, the researcher adhered to ethical principles and guidelines, including securing informed consent from the participants, respecting their rights, and ensuring autonomy and confidentiality. The researcher was prepared to address any harm that might occur and take the necessary steps to rectify it.

Full Disclosure - The researcher was transparent by providing a complete and honest account of the research process, findings, and any conflicts, contributing to the advancement of knowledge and maintaining ethical conduct throughout the study. The researcher provided transparent and comprehensive information about the study, including the methodology and procedures. Participants in this study took part willingly and of their own free will, with no monetary compensation offered by the researcher.

Avoidance of Plagiarism - The researcher ensured that all sources of information, including literature and data, were properly cited and credited, thereby maintaining the integrity of the research process.

Approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB) - Approval was obtained from the institution's review board to ensure adherence to all ethical guidelines, with the protocol number "H24/05/24." before conducting the research.

3.13 Chapter Summary

The study employed a mixed-method approach to gather data from two schools in Johannesburg, examining the effectiveness of using home language in teaching comprehension to Grade 3 learners. Data collection methods included classroom observations, interviews, as well as pre-tests in English and post-tests in both English and isiZulu. Participants were informed about the research objectives, potential risks, confidentiality measures, and the need for informed consent.

3.14 Conclusion

The primary objective of the study was to examine whether language influences learning outcomes in comprehension within Grade 3 classrooms. Following data collection, the analysis and interpretation were conducted in the next chapter. Chapter 4 presents a detailed examination of the findings and the conclusions drawn from the data. By exploring these factors, the researcher sought to provide valuable insights that support educational practices and inform policy development.

Chapter 4

Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

The previous chapter covered the methodological approach of the study. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the study in three phases. The first phase focuses on qualitative analysis derived from classroom observations. The second phase offers qualitative interpretations based on teachers' responses from the interviews and finally, it includes the quantitative analysis of pre-and post-tests conducted in English and isiZulu.

4.1 Introduction

This present study focused on the Foundation Phase educational setting, aiming to explore the experiences of Grade 3 learners whose home language is isiZulu, while English is used as the primary language of instruction at school, and isiZulu is taught as a First Additional Language. The investigation included teacher interviews, classroom observations, and the administration of pre- and post-tests in English and isiZulu. The resulting data is carefully documented and structured, offering a strong basis for comprehensive qualitative insights and quantitative analysis.

The study included a qualitative analysis based on teacher interviews and classroom observations. Through these interviews, the researcher aimed to capture teachers' perspectives on their experiences teaching learners who were not instructed in their home language. Findings from the quantitative analysis were presented using bar graphs and tables to visualise the academic progress of learners exposed to different teaching approaches.

4.1.1 The primary aim of this research was to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the language of teaching and learning impact reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase?
2. To what extent does the use of home language enhance reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners?

Research hypothesis: The language of instruction plays a vital role in the academic performance of Grade 3 learners who are learning in a language different from their home language.

Null Hypothesis: The language of instruction (English) does not have a significant impact on the academic performance of Grade 3 learners whose home language is isiZulu.

4.2 Data presentation and analysis

This research study adopted a mixed methods approach, which included collecting data using a qualitative approach (interviews and classroom observations) and a quantitative approach (pre- and post-tests), Bulsara (2015). The data analysis in this study was carried out with careful attention, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Both types of data were collected concurrently to provide a comprehensive view of the study. Qualitatively, the researcher conducted interviews with experienced teachers to gain insights into language use in the classroom. Classroom observations were also carried out to capture real-time learner engagement and the dynamics of languages within the classroom setting. For the quantitative aspect, all participants participated in a pre-test in English. Still, in the same setting under the same conditions, the learners were divided into English and isiZulu groups, consisting of learners who participated in the post-test for English and isiZulu home language speakers. This approach allowed for a comparison of the impact of each language intervention on the learners' performance.

4.2.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

To explore the effectiveness of using home language versus English in Grade 3 classrooms, the researcher gathered qualitative data through interviews and classroom observations. Qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups assign to a social or human issue, Almalki (2016). This approach is centred on gaining insights and understanding of the participants' perspectives. In other words, qualitative research is a way of learning about different experiences through the lens of a person, Vishnevsky and Beanlands (2004). The researcher gave a detailed report on classroom observations, followed by interviews, with both methods focusing on capturing meanings and interpretations.

4.2.2 Analysis of classroom observations using Thematic Analysis

Classroom Observations – According to Angrosino and Rosenberg (2011), observation is the process of carefully watching someone in a particular setting. Classroom observations are vital in research because they offer rich, contextual, and real-time insights into the dynamics of teaching and learning, providing data that is often more nuanced and authentic than other

research methods. This makes them a valuable tool for understanding complex educational phenomena.

The researcher observed four teachers from two public schools in Gauteng, conducting observations of five English and isiZulu lessons at each school. Each lesson lasted 30 minutes. The observations in this study were controlled, as both the location and time were predetermined, and the participants were Grade 3 learners and their teachers. Through these observations, the researcher was able to examine the comprehension lessons, the use of the targeted language in the lessons (isiZulu and English), and the learners' understanding in the Grade 3 classrooms. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the findings from the classroom observations.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method used to analyse qualitative data by identifying and exploring patterns or themes within it. In this study, the researcher applied thematic analysis to examine data collected from Grade 3 Foundation Phase classrooms, using teacher interviews and classroom observations. This method is particularly suitable as it allows the identification of repeated patterns across the data, which were used to gain insight into the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Thematic analysis is effective within a mixed-methods approach because it enables the researcher to analyse qualitative data alongside quantitative data, providing a richer, more nuanced understanding of the findings. By identifying and analysing the data into codes and themes, thematic analysis helped uncover deeper insights into the participants' cognitive processes and experiences.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline six key steps for conducting thematic analysis, which serve as a structured approach for identifying codes and themes within qualitative data. To begin with, the researcher immersed herself in the data by carefully reading and re-reading it to become fully familiar with its content. Next, initial codes were generated that were directly relevant to the research questions. Following this, the data was reviewed, and identified codes and patterns were developed into potential themes. Lastly, names were assigned to the recurring themes, as described below.

4.2.3 Emerging themes for classroom observations

PHASE ONE: QUALITATIVE INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

- **Schools:** 2 Primary schools, which I referred to as Schools 1 and 2 for ethical reasons
- **Grade:** 3
- **Duration:** 6 days of observations at each school
- **Subjects Observed:** English and isiZulu classes

Theme 1: The efficacy of home language use in comprehension lessons.

The language of teaching and learning refers to "the language or medium of instruction via which learning and teaching (including assessment) for all subjects is facilitated," DBE (2010:13). In this study, it meant the specific language or medium through which teaching and learning take place for all subjects; it is crucial to understand that language of instruction has an impact on learners' performance and comprehension. This theme was generated for use, which targets isiZulu and English.

In both English and isiZulu lessons observed, a key focus was the purposeful use of the target language. For instance, English was exclusively used during the English lessons, and isiZulu was used in the isiZulu lessons even though the teacher and some learners were code-switching to English. I began by describing what took place in the isiZulu lessons.

In the isiZulu comprehension lessons at **School 1**, the teacher reads the story 'Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu' to the learners and then asks questions. What I observed from the learners' responses was that they did not understand the story fully, especially unfamiliar words like 'izifonyo' and 'inthuthu', so they could not answer the questions relating to that. Moreover, their misunderstanding of words like '*inthuthu'* as smoke from a car instead of industrial smoke showed a gap in their contextual comprehension of the story; thus, according to Cain and Oakhill (2014), who stated that understanding a text is not possible without first grasping the meaning of the individual words. According to Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016), facilitating a class discussion on the main themes and background knowledge of the story is key to understanding comprehension. In this case, the story was titled 'Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu.' If the teacher had explained the topic to the learners, especially new words, it could have helped them to understand the context and how words like '*inthuthu'* relate to the story's main topic.

Some learners were responding in English and isiZulu to questions asked, which indicates that they may not have grasped isiZulu to confidently express themselves in that language alone. Even though the teacher insisted that the learners use the isiZulu language in the lesson, most

of them mixed the languages, drawing from both English and isiZulu. For example, in another lesson, the comprehension title was ‘Izilwane Zaseplasini’ when the teacher asked what we get from the farm, they responded saying, ‘amatamati, amacows’. Mixing languages again was a sign that they may be struggling to fully express themselves in isiZulu, especially when it comes to certain vocabulary. This is common, especially if learners have not developed proficiency in both languages.

For example, in a study conducted by Makalela (2019), where intentional translanguaging increased levels of comprehension, it builds a sense of community among various speakers of languages through multiple language greetings, through stability and deeper comprehension of content and vocabulary. It links to these observations above; the teacher could have used it as an advantage by building language bridges not just emphasizing on using isiZulu and correcting them for example when a leaner says 'amacows' the teachers can then help them to answer correctly 'amacows – izinkomo' guiding them to use the correct isiZulu terms rather than not correcting them at all. By making the lesson more interactive and visually rich, while embracing the learners' bilingualism, the teacher can create a more engaging and effective learning experience.

In another isiZulu comprehension lesson at school 2**,** the use of the targeted language was not strict, according to what I observed in the classroom. The teacher and the learners were mixing languages, isiZulu and English. However, the majority of learners in the class spoke in their home language, which is isiZulu. Again, the teacher reads the comprehension, then the learners read after her. Some were reading while others were moving their lips, and others were just sitting without much supervision.

Learners were able to understand isiZulu, but the difficulty was that they did not know how to read it. If the teacher reads to them, they will understand, and they will participate in answering the comprehension questions. The challenge arose when the teacher did not explain certain words, such as 'hlwebula, uhlwayi', which prevented the children from fully comprehending the story. Knowledge of vocabulary helps individuals interpret texts more effectively because they can understand and infer meanings beyond the literal sense of the words used, Cain and Oakhill (2014). It was important in this case for the teacher to explain new words, as they would have helped the learners understand the story.

In another isiZulu lesson at School 2, the learners were learning about ‘Ukungcola’. The learners and the teacher used the target language, isiZulu, in the lesson. The teacher reads, and the learners read after her. The teacher taught them a song that linked to the story ‘*ukungcola kwemvelo’*. After the lesson, the teacher asked questions about the story, and most learners in the class managed to answer in isiZulu. Even when they were discussing ‘*ukungcola esikolweni, ukungcola ekhaya,’* they could respond in the isiZulu language, even though some of them were mixing languages.

From the English observations at School 1, the teacher who was observed uses English as the language of teaching and learning in their lessons. The learners understood the language of teaching and learning; it was evident from their participation in the comprehension that they understood it. For example, when they were learning about ‘**Safety at home’**, the teacher linked the lesson to their everyday knowledge by asking about the dangerous items they have at home and how they can be safe at home. They could relate to the story and responded in English. This made the lesson interactive, and after the learners shared their experiences, it encouraged them to pay attention to the new knowledge being taught. When the teacher read the story, the children paid attention and participated in the lesson, responding in the targeted language, which is English. The teacher asked learners to read passages of the story in their reading groups. For example, the green group would read the first paragraph, then the red group would read the second paragraph, and so forth. From my observations, the majority of the learners knew how to read.

At School 2, learners and teachers used the targeted language, which is English, in the teaching and learning process. The learners were also mixing languages in the English classroom, for example, when they were learning about "Kiddy Times," an article about Lesedi Primary School winning the cleanup prize again! The learners did not participate well in the lesson, and the teacher seemed not to pay attention to what she just told this, instead telling them to be serious about school. Learners were mixing languages, isiZulu and English, for example, when they wanted to say ‘newspaper' they could say ‘amaphepha.' When asked about what they saw in the picture, they said, 'bayangcolisa' instead of saying 'learners are littering.' They did not use English, the targeted language, exclusively.

Theme 2: Translanguaging as a facilitator of comprehension and engagement

According to the RAND Reading Study Group (2002), "comprehension is the process of eliciting and making meaning through interaction and involvement with written language,"

Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016:230). For this study, comprehension goes beyond simply reading words; it involves the reader understanding the text, interpreting its meaning, and connecting new information with prior knowledge. The key focus is on interaction; comprehension occurs when readers actively engage with the text, critically analysing, questioning, and reflecting on what they read, Mullis et al. (2016) and Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016). It is not a passive activity of merely decoding words, but an active and continuous process in which the reader constructs meaning through engagement and interpretation.

Comprehension is the core purpose of reading. From the observations that I did in the isiZulu comprehension lesson at School 1. There was a challenge with the isiZulu comprehension; the majority of the children did not fully comprehend what was read to them. It was observed that they were not able to answer questions. The teacher read to them and asked questions about the story, but the learners were unable to answer. In the end, the teacher wrote questions and answers for them on the board for them to write, but the majority of the learners did not engage with the text at all. Reading was a challenge based on what was observed when the learners were reading.

From the isiZulu classroom observations at School 1, the topic was 'Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu'. For example, from the isiZulu lesson observations at School 1, learners found it difficult to understand words like 'izifonyo, inthuthu' that were in a comprehension story, and the teacher did not even attempt to explain them. As a result, they did not fully understand the story, and they even had some difficulties when they had to answer questions. The teacher promoted passive learning, of which, according to Chlapana (2021), comprehension involves more than recalling ideas from a story; learners need to be involved in critical thinking for themselves and connect ideas with the story so that they understand. This was not the case in the classroom; the learners did not know the main points in the story and had some difficulties understanding the words in the story. Learners must engage in independent thinking to cultivate their comprehension skills, Chlapana (2021). Teachers need to make use of comprehension strategies to enhance their understanding and gradually encourage them to answer questions on their own, Chlapana (2021) and Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016).

In another isiZulu lesson at School 1, comprehension was a challenge, especially with questions that had no direct answers from the story. The teacher read to the learners and wrote questions with blank spaces for them to write answers, but still, some of them left the spaces blank. I

witnessed this when I was moving around to check their work. It was difficult for some learners to read isiZulu, as they relied on the teacher to read to them.

In another comprehension lesson, Izilwane Zaseplasini,' the teacher just read out the story to the learners without engaging them. The learners were not paying attention as much as the teacher was reading. According to Chlapana (2021), activating background knowledge through appropriate techniques before and during reading is crucial for a reader or listener. This process helps them connect their existing word knowledge with new information and concepts introduced in the text. The topic is relatable to most learners; the teacher could have activated learners' prior knowledge by asking them questions like, *"Ngabe ukhona owake waya ezu?" or "Yiziphi izilwane ozibonile?*" and so forth. This was going to make the lesson more relatable to the learners' experience and connect with the content being taught. The idea is that comprehension is not just about understanding words in isolation but about making connections between existing knowledge and new concepts, Chlapana (2021) and Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016). Whether in reading or listening, the process of linking prior knowledge to new information is vital for deeper understanding and learning.

In another isiZulu lesson at School 2, the learners were learning about '*Ukungcola'*. The learners understood the lesson, and, quoting from Ardiyan et al. (2022), the teacher employed the KWL strategy, which stands for "what I Know," "what I Want to learn," and "what I have learnt." She first asked the learners what they knew about, what 'ukungcola' meant, and so forth. From the learners' responses, she asked them what they would like to know about the story, for example, what they thought the story was about and what they would like to learn from it. After reading the story, the learners participated in the lesson, which showed that they understood the story. For example, from the story, they learned that '*sigeza izandla, sicosha amaphepha, sihlanza izimphahla,'* all the responses were directly from the story. They learnt about the effects of living in a dirty environment, taking from their responses, they said, *ukucola kuyasigulisa, ukucola kuyabulala.'* They responded in the targeted language, and one could see that the learners understood the isiZulu lesson. They even linked 'ukungcola' with Johannesburg surroundings, as their school is in the CBD, and spoke about how dirty the surroundings are.

Still at School 2**,** when the learners were reading an isiZulu comprehension story, *Siyabhaka nogogo*' some were reading, and some were not reading. For those who read, each time they came across a word they did not know, they lowered their voices and moved on to the next

without much supervision. The topic was '*Siyabhaka nogogo*.' After reading, the teacher gave them the comprehension activity to write. Using comprehension strategies such as prediction, visualisation, and making connections, among others, can help students become more engaged and take greater responsibility in the teaching and learning process (Chlapana, 2021). For example, this was a good topic as it may relate to many learners in the classroom giving them more opportunities for learners to engage with the topic by asking about the learner's background knowledge and asking them to predict so that the learners understand or be creative using some other comprehension strategies in the lesson, Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016) and Sua (2021).

In an English classroom observation at School 1, the topic was 'Safety at Home.' Before reading the story, the teacher linked the lesson to their everyday knowledge by asking about the dangerous items they have at home and how they can be safe. The learners connected to the topic, as evidenced by their responses, which showed that they were happy to share their experiences with their fellow learners. This resonates with a study by Sua (2021), which found that employing comprehension strategies in teaching enabled readers to access new knowledge, enhancing their motivation and understanding of the knowledge taught. This was evident in the classroom, where learners shared their stories after reading the text. They were attentive and actively participated, demonstrating a strong motivation to learn.

During another observation at School 1, the topic was "Stranger." The learners demonstrated an awareness of the importance of not engaging with strangers, indicating that they had retained a lot of information from previous lessons. They spoke extensively about "Strangers," recalling a related event from when they were in Grade 2, where they shared lessons on how to react when encountering a stranger. The teacher began the lesson by asking them what they thought a stranger was, which prompted active participation as students shared their own experiences. This was an important step in teaching comprehension to readers, as according to Kendeou et al. (2016) and Chlapana (2021), readers must draw on their prior knowledge and experiences while reading, focusing on the connections between the text, their own lives, and the broader world to improve their reading comprehension.

The learners were fully engaged, positively impacting their comprehension and ability to answer questions. When learners are engaged, they understand the content, Sua (2021). As I moved around the classroom, I noticed that most learners were able to answer correctly, demonstrating their understanding of the material. The atmosphere was lively, with students

correcting each other on the events of the story, reflecting the seriousness of their engagement. Readers must draw on their prior knowledge and experiences while reading, focusing on the connections between the text, their own lives, and the broader world to improve their reading comprehension. Soto et al. (2019) affirm that successful reading comprehension involves an active interaction with the text, allowing the reader to deepen their understanding through skills such as decoding, analysis, and organising the content. This experience reinforced the idea that when teachers create an engaging and dynamic classroom environment, learners are more likely to understand and retain the information being taught.

In another English class at School 2, the topic was ‘Hunting in the old days.’ There was no initial vocabulary teaching; learners had to use dictionaries to check the meaning of words after reading the story. The learners found it challenging to grasp the concepts as they could not relate to the story.

Azizifar et al. (2015) pointed out that teaching reading requires the use of a variety of strategies, including drawing on prior knowledge, asking questions, making predictions, summarising key ideas, and monitoring comprehension. This did not transpire in the lesson; the teacher did not facilitate their understanding by using visuals, such as pictures, to provide context for the story. As a result, many students raised their hands to ask for the meanings of unfamiliar words or approached the teacher’s desk for clarification on terms like "burrows," "spear," "swam," and "butchered." This interrupted the learning process for those trying to focus on answering questions. The teacher should have explained these meanings before reading the story to help learners better understand the content and prepare them to answer questions, Sua (2021). Due to a lack of understanding of certain words, many students struggled to follow along with the story and became less engaged with the text.

As I moved around the classroom checking the learners' work, I noticed them trying to explain new concepts to each other in their home language during the English lesson. The teacher could have preemptively explained new words, perhaps by using images to illustrate terms like "spear." Even after consulting the dictionary, many learners still struggled to grasp the words. Encouraging peer learning, where students share their interpretations of words with the class, or promoting prediction activities, could help equip them with the necessary understanding to follow the story. This approach would likely reduce interruptions during writing tasks and enhance overall comprehension.

From my observations in the English classes at Schools 1 and 2, I noticed that many teachers tend to read to the learners. As a result, when it comes time for the students to read independently, they struggle. Some students read in groups but often misread or added words that were not in the text. This reliance on the teacher can hinder the development of independent reading skills. It is essential for teachers to gradually shift their focus toward encouraging learners to read independently. This practice would not only help improve their reading skills but also enhance their comprehension and boost their confidence in their abilities.

Theme 3: Multilingualism and learner participation

Participation enables students to expand their knowledge, show their understanding of the curriculum, gain confidence, and apply theory to practice, Susak (2016). Active learner participation is crucial as it generally improves understanding, retention, and the ability to use knowledge. It also promotes critical thinking, increases self-confidence, and motivates learners to take ownership of their learning. In both educational research and classroom environments, it is regarded as a key factor in improving overall learning outcomes.

In isiZulu classes at School 1, learner participation was minimal. The teacher read the story 'Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu' to the learners and then asked questions. Based on their responses, it was evident that they struggled to understand, particularly with unfamiliar words like '*izifonyo* and *inthuthu,'* which hindered their ability to answer questions accurately. Factors such as limited vocabulary understanding, a lack of background knowledge, and the teacher-centred approach contributed to their low level of engagement.

During an English lesson at School 1, when the teacher engaged learners by asking about their own experiences with strangers or safety at home, they actively participated, sharing personal family stories, even though they were mixing languages to express themselves fully. This highlights how learner-centred approaches that connect with students' personal lives and experiences can create a more dynamic classroom environment and lead to better learning outcomes.

For example, in an English lesson at School 1, after reading the story *Safety at Home,* learners were asked to write about dangers in their own homes. This task sparked high engagement, as students were eager to discuss familiar risks from their personal experiences. By drawing on their own experiences, each learner actively participated, making the learning experience more meaningful and unique. As I walked around observing, I noticed that everyone was writing

something, in contrast to other lessons, such as *Hunting in the Olden Days*, which felt less relevant to them. This example underscores the importance of relevance and context in learning when content connects to real-life experiences, students are more likely to engage deeply.

In another observation at School 1, activities that actively involved learners made task completion much easier. In one lesson, students were given a choice of four topics to write about and were allowed to vote on their favourite. They enthusiastically chose the topic *Aliens*, sparking excitement as they began putting their imaginations on paper. All students participated in brainstorming, creating a mind map as a class, and the teacher allowed them to add their ideas. It was evident that learners enjoyed having control over their work; as I walked around, I could see everyone engaged in writing and taking pride in their efforts.

In another isiZulu lesson at School 2, the learners were learning about '*Ukungcola'*. The learners and the teacher used the target language, isiZulu, in the lesson. The teacher reads and the learners follow by reading after her. The teacher taught them a song that linked to the story *'ukungcola kwemvelo'*. Stories and songs are important parts of many African cultures, including isiZulu culture, and they serve as traditional ways of passing down knowledge, values, and lessons. By engaging the learners, the teacher created a meaningful way to help make meaningful connections between their home experiences and academic learning.

In the lesson observation at School 2, where learners were reading an isiZulu comprehension story titled '*Siyabhaka Nogogo*,' participation was minimal, although this story provided an excellent opportunity to explore the relevance of socio-cultural theory and funds of knowledge in teaching reading comprehension. The choice of topic is culturally relevant and connected to many learners' backgrounds, but the teacher's minimal guidance when learners encountered unknown words limited engagement. Many learners may have had similar experiences, making this story personally meaningful for them, and offering a chance for deeper engagement by drawing from their lived experiences, Smith et al. (2021).

The general observation that learners in both English and isiZulu classes at Schools 1 and 2 are struggling to complete their work and often get stuck on questions, despite having the comprehension text in front of them, can highlight several underlying factors. The observed difficulty in answering questions may also indicate a need for collaborative learning strategies that allow students to support one another in comprehension tasks. Socio-cultural theory emphasises the importance of learning in social contexts, where students can acquire knowledge

through interaction with their peers. Teachers and learners can help each other with skimming and scanning techniques to boost their confidence. Drawing on sociocultural theory and funds of knowledge, we can analyse the possible causes of these difficulties and suggest strategies to enhance comprehension and engagement.

Observations from Schools 1 and 2 revealed that low participation was due to learners not being involved. According to the Funds of Knowledge theory, learners bring valuable experiences and cultural knowledge from their homes into the classroom. Tapping into the learners' background knowledge in the lessons could have made the topics more relatable and meaningful to the learners. Learners' lived experiences are valuable resources for learning school knowledge. A more interactive lesson and a learner-centred approach create dialogue to build an understanding of new content.

4.3 Emerging themes for teacher interviews

Teacher Interviews – According to Jackman et al. (2022), interviews are fundamental data-gathering methods that provide in-depth, experiential information through active interactions between two or more individuals about a specific topic or activity. In this study, the researcher interviewed four teachers from two public schools in Johannesburg to gain insight into their experiences teaching in multilingual environments. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on the teachers' responses. There were six questions. The researcher requested permission to record the interviews; only three teachers agreed. For the other teacher, I had to write down what she was saying. This data collection method is valuable research as it provides insights from experienced teachers who work directly with students in South Africa's multilingual classrooms, offering a realistic understanding of the daily challenges and dynamics they face.

Four Grade 3 teachers were interviewed (all females). The table below presents the profile of the teachers who took part in this study:

Table 4.1 Profile of teachers in Grade 3 classrooms

School and number of learners	Teacher's home language	Language of teaching and learning at school/work	Teaching experience
School 1	isiZulu	isiZulu (FAL)	11 years

School 2	isiNdebele	isiZulu (FAL)	15 years
School 1	Afrikaans	English (HL)	23 years
School 2	isiTswana	English (HL)	15 years

Table 4.1 presents the profiles of the teachers participating in this study. At School 1, the isiZulu teacher was an isiZulu native speaker from KwaZulu-Natal, and the English teacher was an Afrikaner who did not know any African language. From school 2, the isiZulu teacher was an isiNdebele speaker, and the English teacher was an isiTswana home language speaker. All the teachers who participated in this study were purposively selected; they have a long teaching experience ranging from 11 to 23 years of service.

School 1 uses English as the language of teaching and learning, with isiZulu and Afrikaans as second additional languages. School 2 also uses English as the language of teaching and learning, with isiZulu as the second additional language.

4.3.1 Findings

Data was analysed by assigning codes and then generating themes.

4.3.2 Discussion of Themes and Categories

Theme 1: Effectiveness of home language in the development of literacy skills

The isiZulu teacher from School 1 stated that in her isiZulu classroom, the most spoken home language among her learners is isiZulu, as indicated by how the parents registered the 18 learners as isiZulu home language speakers. The other 2 out of the 44 learners in the classroom have other languages, while the rest speak Afrikaans. Here are some of her responses to the interview questions and analysis below:

Question - "How many languages can you speak?"

isiZulu teacher 1: 2 English and isiZulu.

Question - "Why do you think it's important to use home language in the classroom?"

isiZulu teacher 1: "It's important because it develops literacy skills for learners and in most cases, it is the language that they understand."

Analysis

The isiZulu teacher is fluent in both English and isiZulu. The teacher emphasises two key points: using the home language in the classroom helps develop literacy skills, and it is the language with which students are most comfortable, making it easier for them to understand lessons. Akintunde and Akuta (2021), Obiegbu (2016) and Mwanza (2020) stated that it is through the mother tongue that children first become aware of the world, learning it before acquiring others. When school knowledge is based on their mother tongue, learners are better able to comprehend and decode information. This increases their confidence to engage with the material, drawing on their prior knowledge, which in turn improves their academic success, as noted by Brunette et al. (2019) and Mwanza (2020).

This aligns with the findings of Nyamayedenga (2022) and Omidire and Ayob (2022), who found that using the home language in teaching and learning enhances comprehension, fosters a sense of community among speakers of different languages, and leads to improved academic performance and a deeper understanding of content and vocabulary. Hence, this supports the teachers' notes that home language makes it easier for learners to understand the content taught in schools. When students are proficient in their home language, they are more likely to succeed academically in other languages as well. Furthermore, teaching in the home language promotes cultural and emotional comfort, creating a more positive learning environment.

Question - Do you think learners learn better when instructed in their home languages? Why?

isi*Zulu Teacher 1*: “From my experience when I was teaching at home (KZN), learners understood better when taught in isiZulu but at this school, I think parents at home are using English to communicate with their children, for example, in my classroom I must explain some concepts in English for some of them to understand."

“How does learning in a language that is not their mother tongue affect the learners?”

isi*Zulu teacher 1*: "They spend more time learning in English at this school, and the time allocated for isiZulu is less as compared to English; as a result, they lag in isiZulu. I think I am the last person to speak to them in isiZulu because I believe they use English even at home, and sometimes even English, as some of them do not understand it. Parents nowadays want their children to learn English at all costs, which is why they take them to English preschools and

primary schools, believing their children will learn better. Even here at this school, we have isiZulu and Afrikaans as first additional languages, but you find out that parents push for their children to learn Afrikaans. Even if they are isiZulu speakers, at the end of the day, children will have so many languages at a young age.

Teacher 1 offers two main insights: her experience in KZN, where she notes that learners in their previous teaching experience, where isiZulu was used as the medium of instruction, understood better. This links to studies conducted by Nhongo and Tshotsho (2021), which show that learners are more confident and comfortable when they can express themselves in their native language. It fosters a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and understood. Teachers should build on what the child already knows to address what they do not know. For instance, in the case of Teacher 1's experience in KZN, learners who were taught in isiZulu understood the material more easily because they were already familiar with the language and cultural context. The use of home language enhances comprehension and helps build critical thinking and literacy skills, making it easier for students to understand complex topics.

Another insight from the isiZulu teacher 1 stated that the use of the home language (isiZulu) is decreasing because parents use English at home. As a result, the teacher needs to explain certain concepts in English to ensure understanding. Fashanu et al. (2020) stated that when one language is promoted by discouraging the use of other languages, people end up adopting that language's culture, as they will not only use it for communication purposes, but ultimately, we lose our identity. Parents nowadays often choose to use English when communicating with their children, but this comes at the expense of suppressing their native cultures and home languages, Makalela (2016).

Responses from isiZulu teacher at School 2

“How many languages can you speak?”

isiZulu teacher 2: 3 English, isiNdebele and isiZulu.

“Why do you think it’s important to use home language in the classroom?”

isiZulu teacher 2: “Home language is important because they can relate to it, and they use it at home and school with their peers, so if the children relate to something, they learn better.”

Analysis

The isiZulu teacher stated that they can speak isiZulu, English, and isiNdebele fluently. The isiZulu teacher 2 provides two main reasons for the importance of using the home language in the classroom. The teacher explains that students can relate to their home language because they use it both at home and with their peers. The teacher also asserted that when students can relate to what they are learning, they learn more effectively. Social interaction is essential for learning, and when the language spoken in the classroom reflects the language students use in their everyday lives, it creates a smoother transition between home and school, Akintunde and Akuta (2021). This approach helps establish an inclusive environment where learners feel respected and supported, encouraging greater participation and alleviating concerns about language barriers, Omidire and Ayob (2022).

"Do you think learners learn better when instructed in their home languages? Why?

isi*Zulu Teacher 2*: "I think they learn better in their home languages because they know it and they can engage with the content being taught.

"How does learning in a language that is not their mother tongue affect the learners?"

isi*Zulu teacher 2:* I think they will face challenges in understanding, and when learners do not understand the language, it will be difficult to teach it and for them to comprehend. It is also a challenge here at school because learners understand the isiZulu language, but it's a challenge to read and write isiZulu, and sometimes some of the concepts we explain are in English.

Analysis

The teacher highlights that learners learn more effectively in their home languages because they are familiar with and comfortable using them. When learners use their home language, they can engage more deeply with the content. isiZulu Teacher 2 further points out that while students benefit from learning in their home language, teaching in a language they do not fully understand creates comprehension challenges, making it difficult for both students and teachers to connect with the material. This is similar to Cunningham's (2020) studies; home language is who they are, so if home language is used in the classroom, it creates and fosters a positive, inclusive, and effective learning environment. It supports cognitive development, academic success, cultural identity, and overall well-being of the learners. Additionally, the teacher notes that although students understand isiZulu, they struggle with reading and writing it, and the use of English to explain certain concepts adds another layer of difficulty to the learning process.

Theme 2 - Perspectives of English as a language of teaching and learning

Responses from an English teacher from School 1

“How many languages can you speak?”

I can speak Afrikaans and English fluently.

Why do you think using the home language in the classroom is important for students' learning?

English teacher 1: "Well, I take it from my side, my home language is Afrikaans. Obviously, the advantage is definitely there learning in the home language because it is the language that most are familiar with and associated with that language from home.

“Do you think learners learn better when instructed in their home languages? Why?

English Teacher 1: You saw it earlier, I automatically switch to Afrikaans when I speak to my colleagues, and I have also listened to some of the learners who have other home languages during break time. When they talk to one another, they switch to their home languages because they feel more secure and comfortable, as that language is known to them.

“How does learning in a language that is not their mother tongue affect the learners?”

English teacher 1: I think most of the learners here understand English. Sometimes we get frustrated when you go to a school and you tell parents that the home language is English. Someone brings their child who cannot speak English at all, which is a huge disadvantage because most of the things they are not going to understand, and most of the teachers do not speak an African language. I do not speak any African language. Hence, there is a huge advantage of education in your home language.

Responses from an English teacher from School 2

“How many languages can you speak?”

I can speak Tswana, English and isiPedi.

“Why do you think it’s important to use home language in the classroom?”

English teacher 1: it is important because home language is the language that they may understand in my English class I end up switching to home languages because some learners do not understand English.

“Do you think learners learn better when instructed in their home languages? Why?

Yes, I think it would be better for them to learn in their mother tongue. At this school, English is their home language, and It is becoming increasingly global. Because learners in this class have different languages, we must use English to accommodate everyone.

“How does learning in a language that is not their mother tongue affect the learners?”
They do not understand the language (English) well, so they will not learn much compared to when it's their home language, I think. They spend most of their time learning English. Parents bring their children to English Home language schools because they believe their children will learn better; they take the time to learn the language of teaching and learning, whereas if they went to an isiZulu-speaking school, it could have been better.

Analysis

Teachers' responses from Schools 1 and 2 expressed that learning in a child's home language is especially beneficial in the Foundation Phase. They feel limited in helping learners who might need explanations in their home language, as they don't speak the learners' languages. Despite seeing their children struggle with English, parents still prefer English-medium education. Teachers also noted that they naturally switch to their home language when they meet someone who shares it, as it creates an immediate connection. Additionally, an English teacher from School 2 mentioned often hearing students converse in their home languages during break time.

The teacher's feedback highlights the complexities of language choice in education, especially in multilingual environments. While parents often choose English-medium schools, hoping this will provide their children with better future opportunities, the reality is that these learners face challenges with English comprehension, slowing their overall progress. Instead of focusing on learning new concepts, much of the time is spent building basic English skills, which hinders deeper understanding. I think schools should bring dual language programs to allow learners to build foundational skills in their home languages and then slowly introduce English.

Theme 3 – Language and Resource Crisis

In interviews with isiZulu teachers from Schools 1 and 2, both noted that it is challenging for learners to be taught exclusively in isiZulu because they are accustomed to using a mix of English and isiZulu from preschool through primary school. This blending of languages leads to code-switching during lessons. Many parents, particularly in larger cities like Johannesburg, communicate with their children primarily in English, which contributes to the learners’ comfort with English alongside isiZulu.

“What strategies do you use to assist learners who are having difficulty understanding the language of instruction?"

isiZulu teacher 1: 'You might find out I am the last person who speaks to these learners in isiZulu, so it poses a challenge, especially because we do not learn isiZulu every day like English, the learners always forget what we teach in isiZulu. What I do is try to recap what we've learnt, but it's always a challenge.

English teacher 1: 'This is an English medium school, but you find out that they are parents who bring their children here, knowing that the learners do not understand English. Most teachers here have Afrikaans as HL. We do not know any African language, so it will be a huge disadvantage if you bring your child into my class if they don't understand English. The plus side is that small children are like sponges. They learn quickly, so they can pick up the language more quickly than a 15-year-old, or I will be able to pick it up.

English teacher 2: responded to the question by saying that 'the difference in home languages is a challenge, especially because the learners and I do not share the same home language. It presents a challenge because there are times when we do not understand each other. You can teach in English and see that the learner does not understand, so sometimes I try to explain it in isiZulu, but I am not fluent in it, so I just try. What I like about our learners is they are like sponges, they learn languages more quickly than an adult, so I think they will be fine.'

"What are some of the challenges you face when teaching isiZulu or English, and how do you address them?

isiZulu teachers 1 and 2 complained about the lack of resources in teaching isiZulu as a First additional language. They feel that if resources were available, it would be easier for them to teach because they could use cards, pictures, or even charts to help with the teaching and learning process.

English teachers 1 and 2 complained about the lack of understanding of English as the language of teaching and learning. This posed a challenge, as how can learning occur without a language that the children can comprehend?

4.4 Discussion of Results - Qualitative data

The classroom observations in both isiZulu and English lessons revealed that the targeted language was effectively used throughout the classrooms. For instance, during an isiZulu lesson

on 'Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu', learners struggled with understanding words like 'izifonyo' and 'inthuthu' in the comprehension text. When learners do not grasp key vocabulary, it becomes challenging for them to fully understand the text, a challenge that also applies to the English language. According to Pourhosein and Sabouri (2016), facilitating class discussions on the main themes and providing background knowledge is crucial for comprehension. Teachers should focus on teaching vocabulary before students engage with the text, as this ensures they will have a better understanding when reading.

From the observations, another common trend was the use of multiple languages by both learners and some teachers, going beyond the intended language of the lesson. For instance, during the isiZulu lesson on 'Izilwane Zaseplasini', when the teacher asked what products we get from the farm, students responded with terms like 'amatamati' and 'amacows'. This mixing of languages suggests that learners may struggle to fully express themselves in isiZulu, particularly when it comes to specific vocabulary. In a study conducted by Makalela (2019), intentional translanguaging was shown to enhance comprehension levels. It fosters a sense of community among speakers of different languages using multiple-language greetings, which contributes to greater stability and a deeper understanding of both content and vocabulary. In this case, if learners used their home language during English lessons, teachers could have leveraged it to their advantage by explaining and translating the vocabulary that learners were mixing up.

The difficulty learners face in relating to unfamiliar topics or concepts is evident from the observations. For instance, when the lesson was about 'Hunting in the old days,' the learners had low participation because they struggled to understand some of the words used in the lesson. This lack of familiarity with both the subject matter and certain vocabulary made it harder for them to engage with the content. Since the topic was outside of their everyday experiences, it created a barrier to comprehension, leading to reduced participation and involvement in the lesson. If learners cannot relate to the content, they may fail to see the relevance of the lesson to their own lives, making it harder for them to connect with and apply the knowledge. They may feel excluded from the lesson and will not participate fully, which will affect their academic success, Charamba and Nkomo (2023).

From the interviews, it was revealed that one challenge in the classroom is that some teachers do not fully understand the language of the learners. This creates a barrier, particularly in the Foundation Phase, as both teachers and learners are often forced to communicate in English.

About 80% of schools use English as the primary language of instruction in their multilingual classrooms, reinforcing the dominance of English, Charamba (2022). For example, in one school, the isiZulu teacher is a native isiNdebele speaker, and the English teacher is an Afrikaans speaker. As a result, learners are generally required to use English to communicate. This reliance on English can lead to unequal treatment, as language barriers may affect learners' performance. When children do not fully understand the language of instruction, it can hinder their ability to engage and perform well, as discussed by Watson and Shapiro (2023) and Hinton (2016). Learners who are not proficient in English may withhold their thoughts or struggle to contribute to class discussions, further exacerbating the challenge. As Charamba and Nkomo (2023) point out, prioritising English exclusively can stifle creativity, problem-solving skills, and academic success, particularly when students lack proficiency in the language of instruction. This approach limits their ability to excel and fully engage with the content.

The dominance of the English language has led many parents to choose English-medium schools for their children. According to Sagna and Hantgon (2021), when a single language becomes the default means of communication in a community, it can result in the loss of African languages and cultural practices, especially when English is prioritised. In South Africa, many schools, particularly those considered to be of higher status, use English as both the home language and the language of teaching and learning. The erosion of indigenous languages means a loss of cultural identity, stories, and a sense of inclusivity, as noted by Makalela (2019) and Watson and Shapiro (2018).

As Shapiro and Watson (2023) argue, English monolingualism serves as a colonising force, further marginalising local languages and their associated cultural identities. One teacher mentioned in an interview that learners and parents primarily use English at home, meaning the isiZulu teacher often becomes the last person to speak isiZulu with the students. Some isiZulu native speakers in schools are opting to learn Afrikaans as a first additional language, even when isiZulu is offered as an option. This shift reflects a broader trend of undervaluing indigenous languages in favour of English, further disconnecting learners from their cultural roots.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching should prioritise the needs of learners, rather than solely adhering to policy, as Mwanza (2020) suggested. The primary focus of teaching should be on what benefits and supports the learners' learning and development, rather than strictly following educational

policies or regulations. For learning to be effective, language is not merely a tool for communication but the foundation of all formal learning. Therefore, it is most beneficial for learning to occur in a language that learners are familiar with or can easily understand, especially in the early years of education, Olanibi et al. (2021), Obiegbu (2016), Charamba (2023) and Carrim and Nkomo (2023).

4.6 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative studies are appropriate for examining connections between variables, outlining trends, attitudes, or opinions within a population, and assessing the impact of treatment or intervention on a result, Yates and Leggett (2016). By comparing outcomes from a treatment and control group, in this case, the use of English and isiZulu, the researcher reported on the significant impact and performance of the learners from both groups. Data was quantified in scores to compile an evidence-based report. This method was suitable for the study because, after teaching in English and isiZulu, the researcher compared the data collected numerically, for example, by determining how many learners understood better and in which language.

Quantitative data for the study was gathered through pre-and post-tests. The researcher created the pre- and post-test activities and, before administering them, consulted Grade 3 teachers to ensure the tasks were appropriate for the learners' age and level. All teachers approved the content. The comprehension activity, which lasted 30 minutes, was based on the story "Losing the Teddy Bear" and featured 10 questions, eight of which were multiple-choice and two were open-ended. The pre-test was first administered in English, the language of teaching and learning at both Schools 1 and 2, with all students from both schools participating.

After completing the pre-test under the same conditions, the researcher divided the learners into isiZulu and English groups: one received instruction in English, while the other was taught in isiZulu. The isiZulu group comprised learners who spoke isiZulu as their home language, with support from the resident teachers. Each group was then given a comprehension passage in their respective language, one in English and the other in isiZulu. After reading the passage, the learners answered questions, and their responses were analysed to determine whether they demonstrated better comprehension in English or isiZulu. The results indicated which language facilitated greater understanding among the learners.

4.6.1 Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis suggests that the language of instruction, English vs. isiZulu, has no significant effect on the learners' comprehension performance. Any observed differences in performance are due to chance and not the language used for instruction. This implies that the null hypothesis assumes no impact of the language of instruction on learners' ability to comprehend the material, and any differences in outcomes are random rather than a result of the instructional language.

4.6.2 Alternative Hypothesis

The alternative hypothesis, as described by Punch (2011) and cited in Charamba (2017), is the opposite of the null hypothesis, and it is represented in the research or experimental proposition within the context of statistical analysis. There is a significant difference in the comprehension performance of learners when taught in English compared to when taught in isiZulu. This alternative hypothesis suggests that the language of instruction (English or isiZulu) does influence learners' comprehension performance, and any observed difference in performance between the two groups is not due to chance. Essentially, while the null hypothesis assumes no effect (no difference between groups), the alternative hypothesis posits that the language of instruction influences how well learners understand the material.

4.7 The socio-demographic characteristics of the learners

The research was conducted at two schools in the Grade 3 class. The resident teacher assisted with information regarding the learner's home languages. The researcher verbally asked for permission from the learners, and they agreed to participate in the study by signing the learners' assent forms.

Table 4.2 Socio-demographics of the learners

Variable	**Category**	**Number of participants**	**% of participants**
Gender – School 1	**Boys**	**20**	**45.5**
	Girls	**24**	**54.5**
	Total	**44**	**100**
Gender - School 2	**Boys**	**26**	**47.3**
	Girls	29	52.7

	Total	55	100
Home language	English	0	0
	isiZulu (Home language) School 1 School 2	 20 26	 45 47

Table 4.2 provides a detailed socio-demographic breakdown of the participants. At School 1, out of 44 learners, the majority were girls, making up 54.5% (24 out of 44), with boys comprising 45.5% (20 out of 44). Similarly, at School 2, there were more girls than boys, with 52.5% (29 out of 55) girls and 47.3% (26 out of 55) boys. A noteworthy finding is that 45% of learners at School 1 and 47% at School 2 spoke isiZulu as their home language, while no participant had English as their home language, despite English being the language of instruction. This demonstrates that the participants were well-suited for the study, as the research aimed to work with learners whose home language differs from the language of instruction used as HL at school.

4.8 Pre-test Analysis

The English comprehension test consisted of 10 questions: 8 multiple-choice questions and 2 sentence construction tasks, in which students had to use two words from a set of four provided options. All Grade 3 students from Schools 1 and 2 took the English Language pre-test. Before the test, each student was assigned a unique identification number. The numbers ranged from 1 up to, for example, 44 in School 1, depending on the total number of students in the class.

Pre-test results at school 1

A total of 44 learners from School 1 took part in the English pre-test. The researcher handed out the question papers and gave the learners instructions, which were to read the story and answer the questions. In the multiple-choice section, they were asked to circle the correct answer and then select two words from the four provided in question 9 to use in creating their own sentences. The entire class completed the test before any teaching intervention. The results from the School English pre-tests for School 1 are as follows:

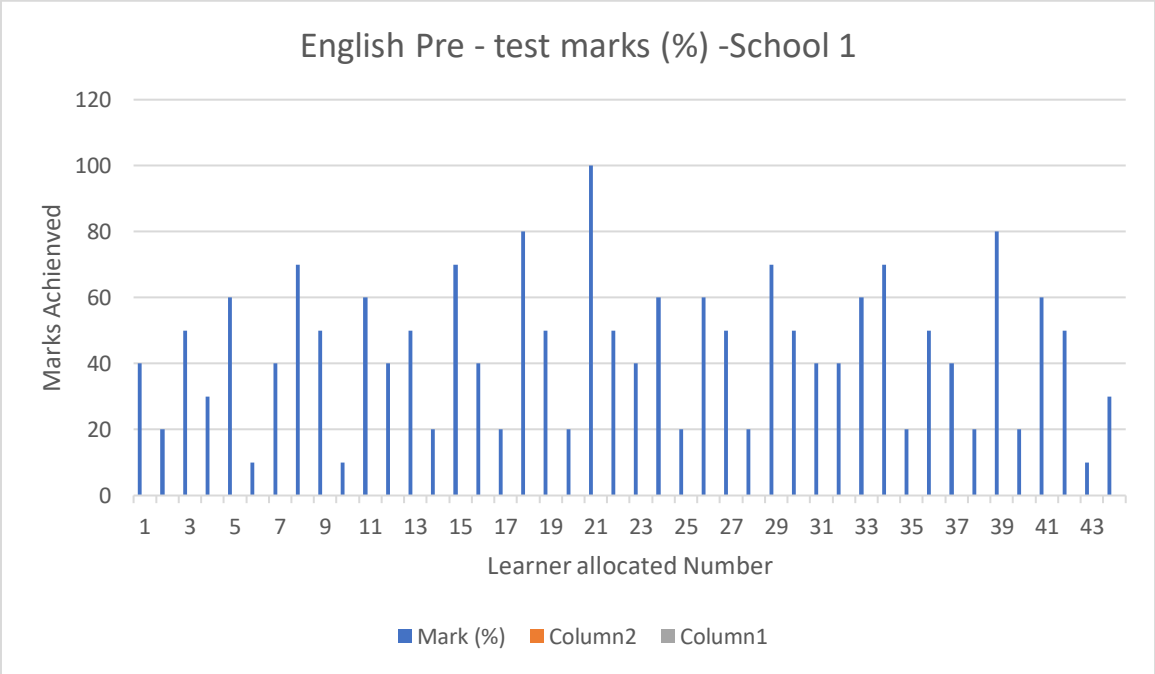


Figure 4.1 English Pre-test Marks (%) for all learners – School 1

Figure 4.1 illustrates the performance of 44 learners in the English pre-test at School 1, before any intervention. Half of the learners (50%) who scored between 5 and 10 marks met the minimum passing score of 50%, which is considered an adequate achievement (Level 4) according to the DBE (2011) standards for home language level (HL), in this case, English. The other 50% did not meet this threshold. The scores at School 1 are evenly distributed between 0 and 8 marks, with most learners scoring between 3 and 6 marks. The highest frequency of scores occurs around the 5-mark range, suggesting a moderate level of performance overall. Notably, 4 learners achieved a meritorious score of 70-79%, and 3 learners earned an outstanding score of 80-100%. These results suggest that while some learners performed well, the majority (50%) struggled to fully comprehend the text.

4.9 Pre-test results - School 2

A total of 55 learners from School 2 took part in the English pre-test. The researcher handed out the question papers and gave the learners instructions, which were to read the story and answer the questions. In the multiple-choice section, they were asked to circle the correct answer and then select two words from the four provided in question 9 to use in creating their own sentences. The entire class completed the test before any teaching intervention. The results from School 2 are as follows:

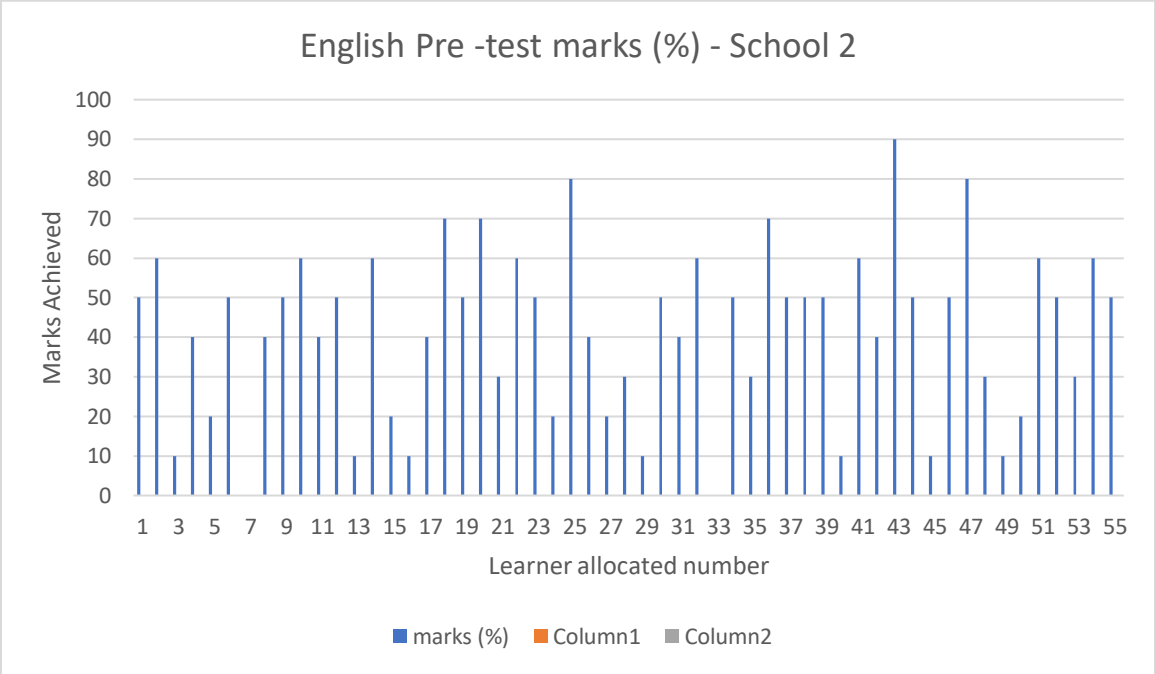


Figure 4.2 Pre-test Marks (%) for all learners – School 2

Figure 4.2 shows the performance of 55 learners in English pre-tests before intervention at School 2. 50.1% comprising of learners who got between 5 to 10 of the learners managed to meet the minimum passing score of 50.1% which is the adequate achievement (Level 4) (50%-59%), DBE (2011), in one official language at home language level in this case HL is English. The other 49.1% of the learners did not manage to meet the adequate requirements. School 2 has a noticeable peak at 5 marks, where most learners scored. This suggests that many learners performed similarly, though some performed lower with scores clustering around 10–20 percent. Very few learners scored above 70%. Only 2 learners managed to achieve outstanding results of 80 to 90 percent.

Table 4.3 A Statistical Analysis of English pre-test between Schools 1 and 2

	Mean	**Mode**	**Median**
School 1	**4.4**	**2 and 5**	**4**
School 2	**4.2**	**5**	**5**

School 1

Mean: 4.4 – On average, learners in School 1 scored 4.4 out of 10, suggesting performance was below the halfway mark. Mode: 2 and 5 – The most common scores were 2 and 5, indicating a

spread between lower and moderate performance. Median: 4 – The middle score is 4, which aligns with the mean and shows that most learners scored below average.

School 2

Median: 5 – The middle score is 5, showing that half of the learners scored below 5 and half scored above, which is slightly better than School 1. Mode 5 shows that many learners achieved a slightly higher performance compared to School 1.

Observations for both Schools

The graphs show that learners generally performed poorly, with most scores clustered below the 50% mark. This may suggest that the learners did not understand what they were reading, as indicated by their performances, or that they did not read at all, given the lack of teaching intervention in the pre-tests. While grading the scripts, I noticed that some learners did not follow the instructions; some were circling two answers from the multiple-choice questions to show that they were unsure, even if they understood the story, despite the activity being straightforward. It seems that they may have rushed through the questions without fully understanding the story.

School 2 has a higher concentration of learners at the 5-mark level, while School 1's scores are more spread out. Both schools have a low number of high scorers 8-10 marks, suggesting room for improvement. Both schools have low average scores below 5, indicating that overall performance was not strong in either group. School 2 has a higher median and mode, suggesting that a larger proportion of its students scored around 5. The results show room for improvement in comprehension skills, as most students didn't perform well on the activity.

Based on the results, there is not enough evidence to conclude that a significant difference exists between the performance of the groups being compared. In hypothesis testing, the null hypothesis cannot be rejected; the data does not show strong enough evidence to prove otherwise. In this case, the performance of the groups in the study does not differ significantly based on the collected data, meaning any observed differences could be due to chance rather than a meaningful effect.

4.10 English Results after intervention (posttests) – School 1

During the English intervention lessons at School 1, I began by asking students to interpret the comprehension story by looking at the pictures in the story. We collaboratively discussed the

images and the theme of the story. Afterward, we discussed their teddy bears and how they would feel if they lost them. Although the lesson was taught in English, some learners shared their thoughts in their home languages, which helped deepen their understanding of the story.

A total of 24 learners from School 1 participated in the English post-tests, still under the same conditions as pre-tests. The researcher distributed the question papers and provided instructions, which included reading the story and answering the questions. In the multiple-choice section, learners were asked to circle the correct answer. Additionally, on question 9, they had to select two words from the four provided and use them to create their own sentences. The results from School 1 are summarised below.

The results for School 1 are summarised below

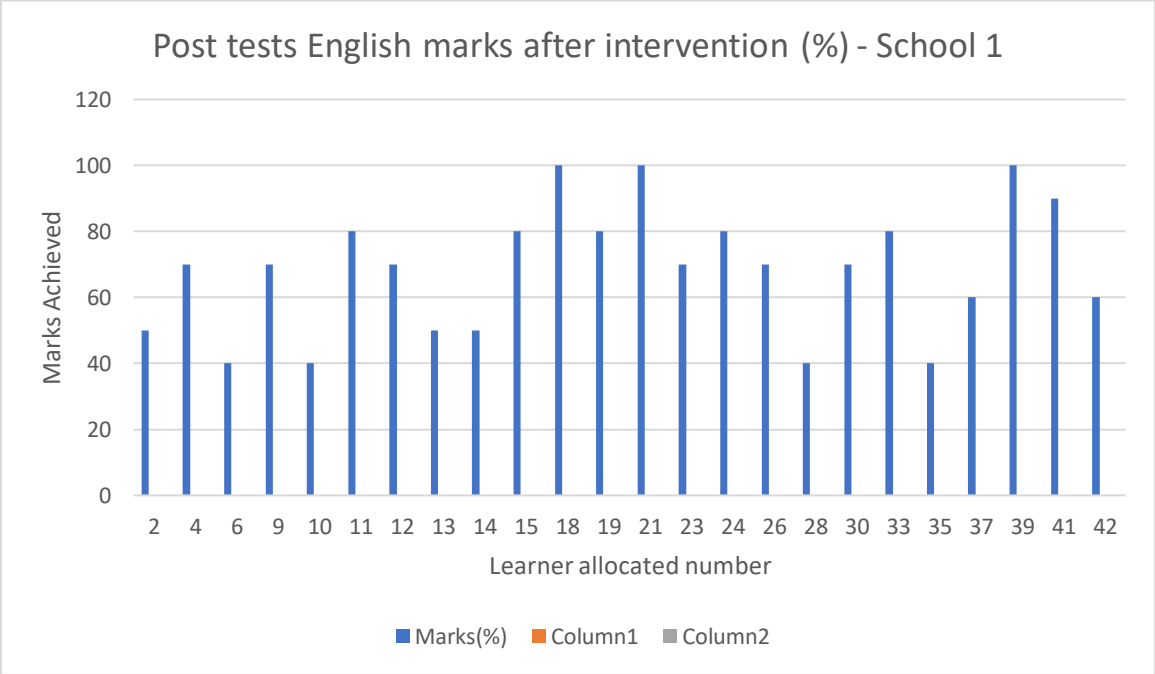


Figure 4.3 English post-test marks after the intervention – School 1

Figure 4.3 shows post-test English marks after intervention at School 1. Only 4 learners scored below 50%, they scored 40 % which is not a pass mark because they learn English as a HL, Department of Education (2011). The other 22 learners scored 50% and above, with 4 learners scoring higher marks 80% (outstanding achievement). This group shows significant improvement, suggesting that the intervention may have had a positive impact on their performance, as seen in the higher frequency of scores above 50%. Most learners fall within the 50%-80% range, indicating good post-intervention performance, with a few exceptional

cases scoring very high. This suggests that the intervention approach that was used may have catered to the needs of most learners.

The fact that 4 learners (16%) scored below 40% after intervention is concerning, as it suggests possible learning challenges and the need for targeted interventions. These four students, who scored the lowest with 4 out of 10, need close monitoring to identify the factors affecting their understanding. While standardised curriculum components are important, using adaptable teaching strategies and focused support can address diverse learning needs and help all learners achieve their full potential.

If the hypothesis is accepted, it suggests that the language of teaching and learning did not significantly impact the learners' comprehension. After the intervention, the distribution of scores, with most learners falling between 50% and 80%, indicates that the majority performed well. This could be attributed to the explanation of vocabulary and connecting the story to the learners' everyday lives. A few exceptional cases, where learners scored very high, further emphasise the success of the intervention. Overall, this suggests that the approach used effectively addressed the needs of most learners, resulting in positive outcomes.

4.11 English Results after Intervention (posttests)– School 2

In the English intervention lessons at School 2, the same approach and activities were used as at School 1. I started by asking the students to predict what the story might be about based on the pictures. We discussed the pictures together, along with the topic of the story. Then, we discussed their teddy bears and how they would feel if they were to lose them. At School 2, 29 learners participated in the post-tests.

The results are summarised below

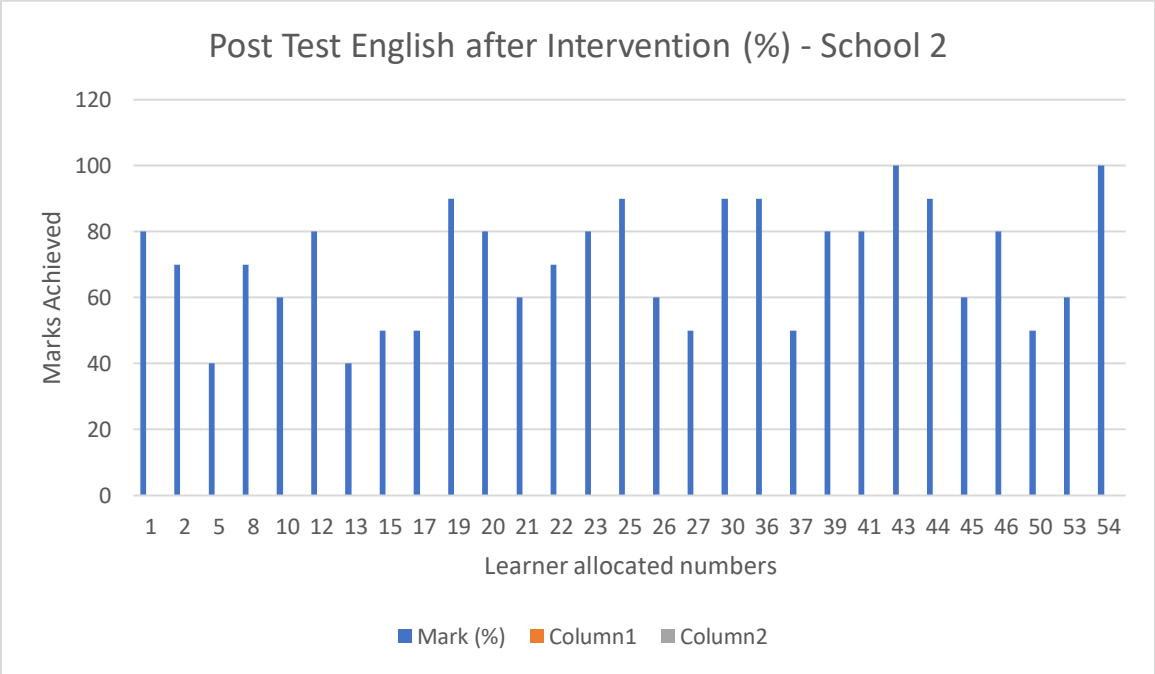


Figure 4.4 English post-test after intervention (%) – School 2

The graph illustrates the results of the English post-tests at School 2. While 93% (27) of the learners scored 50% and above, with 2 learners achieving an outstanding 100%, demonstrating strong comprehension and possibly a good response to the intervention. Overall, a larger portion of learners in this group achieved above 50%, which is a positive sign of the intervention's effectiveness for these students at a satisfactory level. Even more impressive, more than half 58% (17) of the learners scored between 60% – 100% indicating substantial achievement. This impressive accomplishment highlights the overall effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing student comprehension and skill. From the results, the hypothesis was rejected because there was a significant improvement after the intervention, which suggests that the intervention in English led to positive results. This might indicate that learners can adapt effectively to English as the medium of instruction with proper support. Since a significant portion of learners performed well after the intervention, it implies that using comprehension strategies when teaching comprehension, whether in the home language lesson, English lesson or a well-supported second language, can enhance understanding and learning outcomes in the Foundation Phase.

Comparison between two schools and Overall Observations

This analysis offers insights into the impact of the intervention on students' English performance at Schools 1 and 2. Like School 1, School 2 displays a mixed pattern of results,

with some students achieving high marks of meritorious achievement, ranging from 80 to 100%. While the intervention seems to be effective for many, a portion of students continue to struggle, indicating a need for targeted support for those scoring below 40%. According to the Department of Education (2011), the passing mark for home language in the Foundation Phase is 50%, highlighting the need for additional assistance to help these learners reach the required standard. Overall, both schools appear to benefit from the intervention, though there remains a clear distinction between high

4.4:

Table 4.4 A Statistical Analysis of English post-test between Schools 1 and 2

	Mean	**Mode**	**Median**
School 1	**6.8**	**7**	**7**
School 2	**7**	**8**	**7**

Mean: **School 1** has a mean score of 6.8, which is slightly lower than School 2's mean of 7. This indicates that, on average, learners in School 2 scored a little higher than those in School 1.

Mode: **School 1** has a mode of 7, meaning most students in this school scored 7. **School 2** has a mode of 8, indicating that a larger number of students in this school scored 8. This difference in mode reflects that more students in School 2 scored on the higher end and because their data was more than 29 learners participated.

Median: Both schools have a median score of 7, indicating that the middle score for both distributions is the same. This indicates that, although the central tendency is similar for both schools, School 2 has a higher concentration of students in the top-scoring range, as reflected in its mode and mean. Overall, these measures reinforce the impression that students in School 2 generally scored slightly higher, which may suggest the effectiveness of the intervention between the two schools.

Score Distribution: Both schools have a spread of scores from 4 to 10, with no scores below 4.

This data may indicate variations in the intervention's effectiveness between the two schools, with School 1 having more students in the higher score range. Upon reviewing the scores, it

appears that many students scored between 4 and 8 because of the structure of the test, particularly the balance between multiple-choice questions and sentence construction tasks, which influenced the distribution of scores. The main difficulty arose in the sentence-writing portion, which is why many students remained in the 4-8 range. Those who scored 9 or 10 were able to successfully construct sentences using the provided words, indicating that these students likely possess stronger language skills, which go beyond passive recognition and understanding.

4.12 isiZulu Results After Intervention School 1

In the isiZulu lessons at both School 1 and School 2, still under the same conditions as the English pre-test, I began by engaging the students in a discussion about the story 'Ulahlekile uthedhibhe'. We analysed the pictures as a group and shared our thoughts. Then, we shifted to a more personal topic, encouraging the students to discuss their experiences with teddy bears and how they would feel if they were to lose them. Although the lesson was conducted in isiZulu, some students expressed their ideas in isiZulu, while others used English for certain words, like "teddy." This blend of languages enriched the discussion and helped me gain a deeper understanding of the students' perspectives on the story.

At School 1, a total of 20 learners took part in the isiZulu post-test. This group included two students who speak isiPedi as their home language and are learning isiZulu as an additional language. The remaining 18 students identified isiZulu as their home language, according to their registration records and the resident teacher.

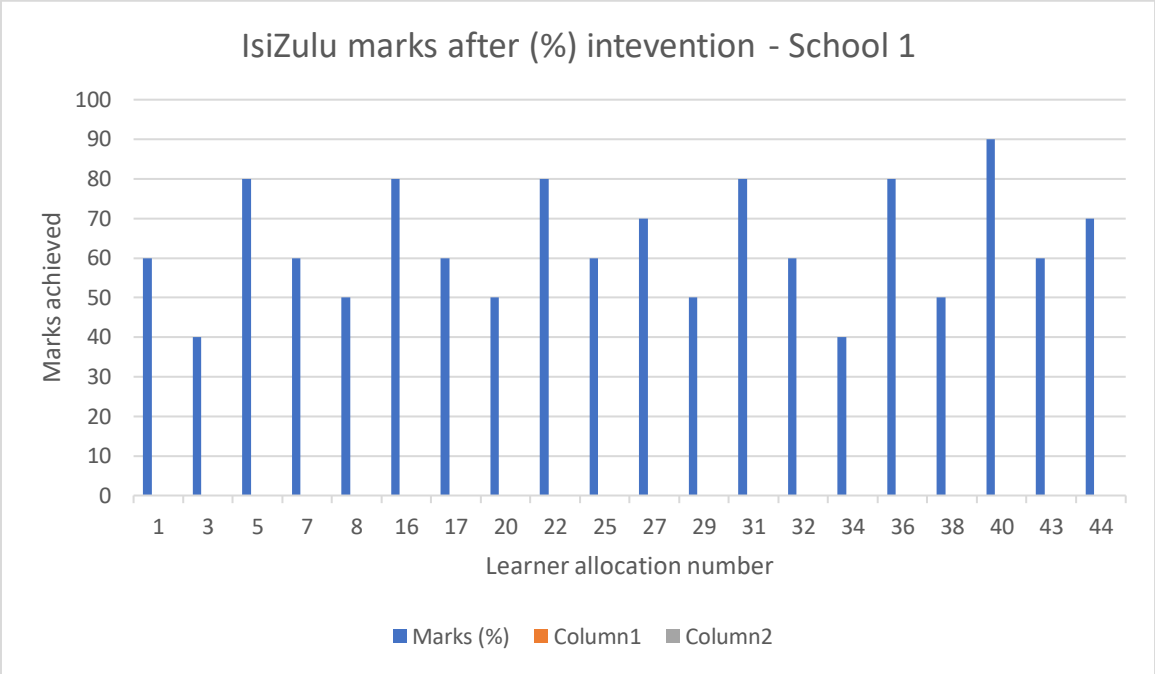


Figure 4.5 IsiZulu Marks (%) After Intervention – School 1

The graph illustrates the results of the isiZulu marks after (%) intervention at School 1. 2 learners achieved 40%, which means these learners have passed the test according to Department of Education standards, where a score of 40% is considered as a pass for additional languages, Department of Education (2011). 90% (18) of the learners achieved between 50% and an outstanding 90%. Additionally, 6 learners (30%) exceeded the 75% mark, showcasing a mastery of key concepts and skills. These top performers provide valuable insights into effective learning strategies and potential benchmarks for the group. This notable achievement underscores the success of the intervention in improving student comprehension and skills.

The research hypothesis in this case was accepted because the intervention significantly improved student comprehension and skills in isiZulu, as evidenced by the high percentage of learners achieving passing and outstanding marks, with a notable portion exceeding the 75% mark, indicating mastery of key concepts and skills. This hypothesis reflects the strong results observed in the post-test, where most learners performed well, and a substantial number demonstrated a high level of mastery. These outcomes suggest that the intervention in the isiZulu home language was effective in enhancing learners' understanding of comprehension.

4.13 isiZulu Results After Intervention School 1

At School 2, 26 students participated in the post-test. The teacher organised the isiZulu-speaking learners who are part of the isiZulu FAL to take part in this assessment.

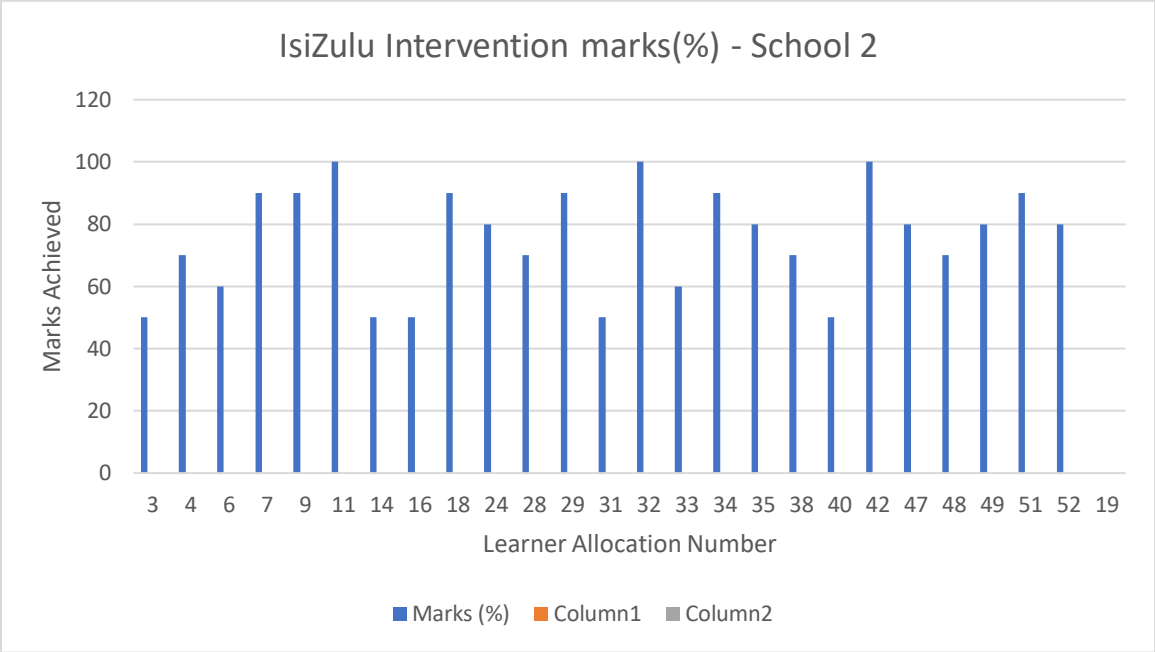


Figure 4.6 isiZulu marks (%) after intervention – School 2

The graph presents the isiZulu marks (%) after intervention at School 2. As per the Department of Education (2011), the pass mark for additional home languages is 40%. The graph shows that all 26 learners scored 50% or higher. Notably, 53% of learners (14 out of 26) scored within the 80-100% range, demonstrating exceptional mastery, while 3 learners achieved a perfect score of 100%. This reflects a strong grasp of essential concepts and skills, with these high achievers offering insights into effective learning strategies and setting potential benchmarks for the group.

This accomplishment highlights the intervention's success in enhancing student comprehension and skills. Overally, this analysis points to the intervention's considerable success in boosting comprehension and skills, as seen in the high number of learners who achieved both passing and outstanding marks. The hypothesis in this case was accepted because the intervention significantly improved student comprehension and skills, as evidenced by the high number of learners who achieved passing and outstanding marks in the isiZulu post-tests. The strong outcomes suggest that the strategies used in the intervention could be valuable for future educational practices.

Table 4.5 A Statistical Analysis of isiZulu post-test between Schools 1 and 2

	Mean	**Mode**	**Median**
School 1	**6**	**6**	**6**
School 2	**7**	**6 and 8**	**8**

This chart shows the isiZulu test results for learners from Schools 1 and 2 after intervention. Here is what it represents:

Score Distribution:

The chart displays the score distribution, ranging from 4 to 10 out of 10, for both schools. Importantly, no learner scored below 4, demonstrating a consistent baseline level of performance. School 2 shows a slight edge, with a higher number of learners achieving the top score of 10, while School 1 has no learners reaching a perfect score. This contrast underscores a difference in peak performance between the two schools.

Mean: **School 1** has an average score of 6, while School 2 has a slightly higher average of 7. This indicates that students in School 2 generally scored higher on average compared to those in School 1.

Mode: The most frequent score in School 1 is 6. School 2 has two modes, 6 and 8, showing that both scores appear frequently. The higher mode in School 2 suggests that more students scored toward the upper range.

Median: The median score for School 1 is 6, indicating that half of the students scored below this point, and half scored above it. School 2 has a median of 8, indicating that the middle score is higher in this group.

The group average score of 60% from School 1 and 70% from School 2 reflects a positive performance from the learners after the intervention. The results show that the learners have done well, demonstrating an understanding of the language by surpassing the minimum 40% benchmark set by CAPS (2011). These outcomes indicate that learners in School 2 generally outperformed those in School 1, with a larger number achieving higher scores. This may suggest that the intervention was more effective at School 2, where learners demonstrated a stronger understanding of isiZulu, as reflected in their better performance.

4.14 Discussion of Results Quantitative Results

These findings enhance the validity of this research and lend significant credence to our theoretical framework and research questions. The statistical success here carries deep implications, showing that our intervention centred on enhancing comprehension in Literacy (both English and isiZulu) has effectively paved the way for improved comprehension outcomes among Grade Three learners in both schools. This impact goes beyond mere numbers; it represents a potential shift in educational practices. The current study highlights the remarkable potential of learners when comprehension is taught effectively, suggesting a transformative influence within the educational landscape. It also underscores the transformative potential of learners when teachers effectively teach comprehension.

In the pre-tests, all learners from both Schools 1 and 2 participated, providing insight into their performance before any intervention. At School 1, 44 learners took the English pre-test. Fifty per cent of the learners, who scored between 5 and 10 marks, met the minimum passing score of 50%, which is considered an adequate achievement (Level 4**)** according to the DBE (2011) standards for home language (HL), in this case, English. The remaining 50% of learners did not meet this threshold. At School 2, 55 learners participated in the pre-test. 50.1% of learners, who scored between 5 and 10 marks, managed to meet the minimum passing score of 50.1%, which is also considered an adequate achievement, Level 4 (50%-59%), for the home language (HL) English pass mark, according to the DBE (2011). The remaining 49.1% of learners did not meet the required passing score. In summary, both schools had a similar proportion of learners (around 50%) meeting the minimum passing score, with the remaining learners falling short of the required achievement level. These results provide a baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of any future intervention aimed at improving learner performance.

The English post-intervention results reflect the group's significant success, with average scores in School 1 rising from 44.4% to 68.8% and in School 2 from 42.2% to 70%, demonstrating the powerful effectiveness of using comprehension strategies. This impressive progress underscores the impact of the intervention. Similarly, in isiZulu, average post-intervention scores reached 60% in School 1 and 70% in School 2, with all learners passing, as the pass mark for additional languages is 40%, DBE (2011). The fact that all learners surpassed the 40% pass mark in isiZulu as an additional language is noteworthy. It suggests that the intervention not only raised high performers but also elevated all learners to a baseline level of comprehension

proficiency. The deliberate use of comprehension strategies in these lessons led to a substantial improvement in learner performance.

The fact that the intervention raised the scores of both high performers and those struggling to meet the minimum requirements shows that it helped elevate the entire group's proficiency, rather than just benefiting a select few. Overall, the use of targeted comprehension strategies in these lessons played a crucial role in driving substantial improvement in learner performance, helping all students achieve a higher level of comprehension in both English and isiZulu.

This analysis shows that intentional, targeted comprehension strategies can greatly improve learner performance across languages, representing a significant advancement in literacy education and unlocking a powerful driver of academic success. These results make a strong case for expanding similar interventions to other grades and language programmes. However, some limitations exist, such as the sample size and possible external influences, which call for further research to validate and extend these findings. Nonetheless, the study's solid statistical evidence and impactful outcomes support the value of integrating effective comprehension strategies. By enabling students to harness their linguistic diversity, educators can open a path to academic excellence, creating a more inclusive and enriching learning environment for all students.

4.15 Conclusion

In this study, we found that when the intervention lessons were conducted in isiZulu, the majority of learners passed, according to the DBE (2011) pass rate. Cunningham (2019) and Coleman (2017) stated that home language is a bridge, a valuable asset in learning, especially in the Foundation Phase. This statement is supported by the results of the post-intervention isiZulu tests.

The English post-intervention results demonstrate significant success, with average scores increasing from 44.4% to 68.8% at School 1 and from 42.2% to 70% at School 2, highlighting the strong effectiveness of the comprehension strategies used. Before the intervention, the average English scores were 44.4% at School 1 and 42.2% at School 2.

Although learners used their home language, isiZulu, during the posttest discussions, the researcher allowed this approach, citing the work of Obiegbu (2016), Human Rights Commission (2023), who emphasize the importance of recognising the mother tongue in the

Foundation Phase, different languages in the classroom should be viewed as resources rather than barriers to learning. This perspective is especially relevant in multilingual societies like South Africa, where learners' home languages can play a vital role in their understanding and learning. When learners contributed to class discussions in isiZulu, I welcomed their responses, ensuring they felt that there was nothing wrong with using their home language in an English lesson. As a result, the participation rate was high, as most learners contributed to the lesson using both their mother tongue and the English language.

In isiZulu, average post-intervention scores increased to 60% at School 1 and 70% at School 2, with all learners passing, as the pass mark for additional languages is 40%, DBE (2011). The fact that every learner exceeded this threshold is significant, indicating that the intervention not only boosted the performance of higher achievers but also helped elevate all learners to a foundational level of comprehension proficiency. The hypothesis states that using the home language, isiZulu, can significantly impact the performance of learners, which was true in this case, as the learners managed to achieve a 100% pass rate, according to the DBE (2011) pass rate for additional languages.

This study recognizes that incorporating home languages and embracing multilingualism in classrooms fosters an inclusive environment where all learners can thrive without fear of language barriers. While further research on a larger scale is needed, this study lays the groundwork for future policymakers, highlighting the importance of home languages as a valuable tool in helping learners reach their full potential.

Chapter 5
Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the research findings, draws conclusions, and suggests recommendations based on the study's results.

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the study was to explore the effectiveness of using home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 classrooms in South Africa. The research focused on learners who speak isiZulu as their home language but are taught in English HL at school.

The research explored two questions:

5.1.1 Research Questions

1. How does the language of teaching and learning affect reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase?
2. To what extent is home language effective in promoting reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners?

To address the research questions, this study employed a mixed-methods collection of data – qualitative (interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative (English pre-tests and English and isiZulu post-tests).

5.2 Summary of Research Findings

This section summarises the findings from both qualitative data (interviews and classroom observations) and quantitative data (pre- and post-tests).

5.2.1 Qualitative Data (classroom observations)

The researcher observed English and isiZulu comprehension lessons. Classroom observations revealed that learners appeared passive when the topic was something they couldn't relate to or fully understand, as shown by their responses. However, when the teacher engaged with the learners and explained vocabulary, it was evident from their responses and increased participation that they had grasped the concepts in both English and isiZulu lessons. In contrast, when learners struggled to understand the language or vocabulary used in either isiZulu or

English comprehension passages, they had difficulty even participating in answering questions. For instance, when learning about ‘Imiphumela yokungcoliseka kwemvelo kubantu' or 'Hunting in the Old Days,' comprehension stories, the learners struggled to relate to the topic, and their interpretations of the story were often inaccurate because they did not relate to the story.

These findings align with Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory of learning, which posits that learning is a social process shaped by the interactions between learners and their environment. According to this theory, when a teacher actively engages with learners by explaining vocabulary and relating the content to their lived experiences, the learners become more involved in the learning process, Smith et al (2021), as seen in the ‘Ukungcola’ or ‘Stranger’ comprehension story in Chapter 4 above. This demonstrates that learning is not a passive activity but is co-constructed through collaborative dialogue between the teacher and the learners, Espinosa and Lehner-Quam (2019). When the teacher makes a concerted effort to connect with learners and ensures that the content is understandable, it leads to deeper engagement, Karpava (2022). This supports the idea that learners' ability to understand and participate in lessons is closely tied to the social and cultural relevance of the language and concepts being taught, Mudzielwana (2013). If the content or vocabulary feels unfamiliar or disconnected from students' everyday lives, they may struggle to make sense of it. This reinforces the importance of tailoring instruction to the learners' cultural backgrounds and prior knowledge, allowing them to make meaningful connections to the content, Makalela (2018).

This analysis also ties into the Funds of Knowledge theoretical framework, which emphasises that learners bring valuable knowledge from their home and community experiences into the classroom, Esteban-Guitart (2014). The difficulties learners had in relating to the story, for example, ‘Ukungcola kwemvelo kubantu’ (environmental pollution) suggest that the content was not connected to their funds of knowledge. Teachers should not teach in isolation; learners have their daily lived experiences, which are rooted in their funds of knowledge. Through these experiences, they can help in understanding school knowledge, Esteban-Guitart (2014). If learners have little personal or community experience with environmental pollution, or if the vocabulary used is unfamiliar to their everyday knowledge, it becomes challenging for them to engage with the topic, Smith et al (2021). If teachers can teach from everyday knowledge to school knowledge, it will help many learners relate to new concepts being taught.

However, when the topic was aligned with the learners' personal experiences, as seen in the lesson on "Safety at Home," the engagement was much stronger. The teacher first connected

the lesson to their everyday knowledge by asking about dangerous items at home and how they can stay safe. This connection to their own lives made the topic more relevant and accessible. The students eagerly shared their experiences, demonstrating their connection to the content. When teaching aligns with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it facilitates deeper learning. The teacher's ability to engage with students, explain vocabulary, and create relevant contextual connections is crucial in helping learners make connections between their everyday experiences and academic content. This, in turn, makes the lesson more engaging and meaningful. The importance of language in comprehension cannot be overstated, as it's difficult to fully understand a concept in a language that is not familiar or accessible to the learner. By drawing from students' funds of knowledge, teachers can make learning more inclusive, effective, and engaging, Smith et al (2021) and Kendeou et al. (2016).

Classroom observations reveal that language plays a crucial role in both teaching and learning. The significance of using comprehension strategies cannot be overstated, as they serve as the key to understanding the message of the stories. However, further research on a larger scale is necessary to explore the long-term effects of teaching comprehension through learners' home languages.

5.2.2 Interviews

In the interviews, all four teachers emphasised the crucial role of using the home language in teaching and learning. The isiZulu teacher from School 1 highlighted that using the home language helps learners understand better, as it is a language they are familiar with. The isiZulu ulu teacher from School 2 also emphasised its importance, especially in the Foundation Phase, as learners can relate to it, leading to better comprehension. The Afrikaans teacher agreed, stating that knowing a language makes learning easier. For example, as a teacher, when speaking with my Afrikaans-speaking colleagues, I naturally switch to Afrikaans because I feel more comfortable with it than English. The English teacher from School 2 further stressed the importance of home language, noting that it is often the language students understand best. In some cases, the teacher switches to the learners' home languages to clarify concepts for those who struggle with English.

Akintunde and Akuta (2021), Obiegbu (2016) and Mwanza (2020) assert that children first become aware of the world through their mother tongue, learning it before acquiring additional languages. The goal of reading comprehension is to understand, and when learners understand

the language of instruction, their comprehension improves. Studies by Nyamayedenga (2022) and Omidire and Ayob (2022) further support this, highlighting that using the home language in teaching enhances comprehension, builds a sense of community among speakers of various languages, and improves academic performance, along with a deeper understanding of content and vocabulary. This aligns with the teachers' observations that home language facilitates learners' understanding of school content. Nhongo and Tshotsho (2021) also note that learners are more confident and comfortable when they can express themselves in their native language.

Teachers also mentioned that many parents prioritise English over their home languages, as a result, some learners choose Afrikaans as a first additional language, even if they are native isiZulu speakers. For example, the isiZulu teacher shared that learners understood better when taught in isiZulu, but at this school, I think parents at home are using English to communicate with their children. For example, in my classroom, I must explain some concepts in English for some of them to understand.' This reflects the broader trend where "English is fast replacing local languages, with English being given precedence over other local languages in Africa, Reily et al (2020). Fashanu et al. (2020) noted that when one language is promoted while others are discouraged, people often adopt that language's culture, using it not only for communication but also as part of their identity. This shift, as Makalela (2016) observes, results in a loss of native cultures and home languages as parents increasingly choose to communicate with their children in English, inadvertently suppressing their cultural heritage.

In conclusion, analysing the interview notes reveals the complexities surrounding language choice in education, particularly in multilingual settings. While many parents opt for English-medium schools, believing it will offer their children better future opportunities, the reality is that these learners often struggle with English comprehension, which impedes their overall progress. Rather than focusing on mastering new concepts, much of their time is spent developing basic English skills, which hinders a deeper understanding of the concepts.

The interviews highlighted the significant impact of home language instruction on the teaching and learning experiences of Grade 3 learners. All the teachers recognised that learners perform best when taught in their home language. However, further research is required on a larger scale to understand the impact of using home languages in teaching comprehension in Grade 3 classrooms.

5.3 Quantitative Results

5.3.1 Pre and post-tests

Before the intervention, some learners' English marks were below the 50% minimum pass mark set by the Home Language DBE (2011) guidelines. School 1 averaged 44.4% and School 2 at 42.2%. The post-intervention results in English demonstrate notable success, with the average score in School 1 rising from 44.4% to 68.8% and in School 2 from 42.2% to 70%, highlighting the effectiveness of the comprehension strategies used. This impressive progress emphasises the impact of intervention. Similarly, in isiZulu, the average scores increased to 60% in School 1 and 70% in School 2, with all learners passing, as the pass mark for additional languages is 40%. This outcome is significant, as it shows that the intervention benefited not only top performers but also ensured that all learners achieved a foundational level of comprehension. The intentional focus on comprehension strategies led to substantial improvements in learner performance.

5.4 Answering Research Questions

5.4.1 How does the language of teaching and learning affect reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase?

Recognising and leveraging learners' existing linguistic repertoires, including their home languages, is essential for fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment, Nhongo and Tshotsho (2021). This comprehensive approach encourages deeper engagement and holds significant potential to enhance academic achievement for all learners, as supported by research from Carrim and Nkomo (2023), Olaninbi et al. (2021) and Mogara et al. (2023).

Home language is undeniably vital in enhancing teaching and learning comprehension during the Foundation Phase, Mwanza (2020). After analysing the post-tests in isiZulu conducted post-intervention, all learners successfully met the CAPS (2011) pass mark for additional languages, which is 40%. I fully align with the research by Cunningham (2019), McKinney (2023) and Obiegbu (2016), which emphasises that preserving the mother tongue or home language, particularly in the early years of schooling, has a positive influence on learners' academic performance.

The use of home language significantly enhances comprehension and fosters critical thinking and literacy skills, making it easier for students to grasp complex topics. For instance, in the observed lesson on ‘Ukungcola,’ the teacher effectively tapped into learners’ background knowledge and engaged them in the lesson. The learners’ active participation indicated their

understanding, which was facilitated by the connection to their everyday lives, Kendeou et al. (2016), Chlapana (2021) and Smith et al. (2021). This approach boosts their confidence in engaging with the material, allowing them to draw on their prior knowledge, which ultimately improves academic success, as highlighted by Brunette et al. (2019) and Mwanza (2020).

In this study, learners were taught in English as a home language. An isiZulu teacher from School 1 mentioned that some students struggle with certain isiZulu vocabulary, and she often needs to explain in English some of the isiZulu words. She noted that many parents now use English at home and send their children to English-speaking preschools, leading to students communicating more in English than in their home language. The English teacher also observed that some parents choose Afrikaans as an additional language, even though the school offers isiZulu as their home language. Prioritising one language over others can negatively impact students' enjoyment of school, as Chikasha (2021) suggests. Language and culture are deeply interconnected, and texts, stories, and teaching methods that reflect a learner's cultural background help make comprehension more natural, Smith et al (2021). When one language is promoted at the expense of others, people often adopt the culture of that language, using it not just for communication but as part of their identity. As a result, we risk losing our true selves by suppressing our native languages, Fashanu et al. (2020) and Makalela (2016). This is what is happening now in schools: learners are losing their sense of identity and embracing English-speaking cultures instead.

Indeed, home language plays a crucial role in the Foundation Phase. As the English teacher, who is an Afrikaans speaker with no knowledge of any Bantu languages, pointed out, she stresses the importance of home languages. She explained that whenever she interacts with her Afrikaans-speaking colleagues, she automatically switches to Afrikaans, allowing her to connect more deeply with her language and culture. However, she feels it's unfair to the learners who are deprived of the opportunity to learn in their mother tongue, even at school. When these learners struggle to understand something in her class, she feels unable to assist them in any language other than English, which limits her ability to help them effectively. This highlights the importance of home languages in the early years of schooling, as learners can grasp certain content more effectively when taught in their home language. It allows for better understanding and engagement, as students can relate more directly to the material, making the learning process smoother and more meaningful.

In conclusion, it is important to understand that learner diversity demands a comprehensive approach to education. None of the learners in the classroom had English as their first language, yet they navigate their learning in English. However, schools have the opportunity to acknowledge and incorporate their home languages in the learning process, which can support language development. Recognising and building on learners' existing linguistic abilities, including their home languages, while also promoting English proficiency that will be needed from Grade 4 onwards, is essential for effective learning.

5.4.2 To what extent is home language effective in promoting reading comprehension among Grade 3 learners?

To a greater extent, based on the findings of this study, I agree with the research conducted by Human Rights Commission (2023), UNESCO (n.d), Olanibi et al (2021) and Obiegu (2016), which suggests that mother tongue (MT) education is more effective than bilingual or second language mediums of instruction. This is evident from classroom observations, which show that home language is indeed effective in promoting reading comprehension in the Foundation Phase. When school knowledge is connected to students' cultural backgrounds and experiences, it becomes easier for them to understand. This connection makes them feel included in the learning process. Furthermore, when the content is relevant to the learners, it boosts their confidence, and confidence often leads to greater participation and ownership of learning. As a result, these deeper connections with the content can significantly enhance academic performance.

Research hypothesis: The language of instruction plays a vital role in the academic performance of Grade 3 learners who are studying in a language different from their home language. In this case, the home language was isiZulu, and the language of teaching and learning was English.

The hypothesis for this study was accepted based on the learners' outcomes or performances. Overally, learners performed better in the isiZulu tests compared to the English tests.

The English post-intervention results show remarkable success for the group, with average scores increasing significantly in School 1 from 44.4% to 68.8% and in School 2 from 42.2% to 70%. These results highlight the strong impact of the comprehension strategies used. In isiZulu, average post-intervention scores rose to 60% in School 1 and 70% in School 2, with all students passing, as the required pass mark for additional languages is 40%. It's especially

noteworthy that every learner exceeded the 40% pass mark in isiZulu, suggesting that the intervention not only benefited high achievers but also raised the overall level of comprehension proficiency across the group. The intentional implementation of comprehension strategies in these lessons resulted in significant improvements in learner performance.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations were proposed to policymakers, principals and classroom teachers.

Recommendations 1 – Policymakers

Mwanza (2020) emphasised that teaching should serve learners, not policy, highlighting that educational policies must be designed with the best interests of learners at heart. Specifically, policies regarding the language of teaching and learning should be learner-centred, focusing on supporting students' learning, development, and academic success.

"Language is man and man is language," Ndiribe and Aboh (2022:2). This statement reinforces the idea that language is fundamental to our identity, our thought processes, and our relationships with the world. Therefore, policymakers cannot afford to overlook the importance of home languages in the Foundation Phase. Home languages should be used as a bridge to learn English and other languages, as they shape our identities and cognitive processes. Language issues must be prioritised, especially in the early years of primary school, to foster effective learning and development.

Recommendation 2 – Principals

It would be beneficial for principals and class teachers to work hand in hand in implementing dual-language programs that enable learners to first establish a strong foundation in their home languages before gradually introducing English. This approach can enhance students' overall language proficiency, allowing them to transfer skills from their home language to English, while also fostering a deeper understanding of both languages. By providing a balanced language learning environment, students can strengthen their cognitive abilities and cultural identity, leading to better academic performance and greater confidence in their language skills.

Recommendation 3 – Teachers

Teacher Training and Support: Teachers should receive training to understand the crucial role of learners' home languages in the learning process and how these languages can be

harnessed as valuable tools for learning. Professional development programmes and conferences should be organised to help teachers effectively balance language instruction with an appreciation for cultural diversity. These initiatives should ensure that all languages in the classroom are recognised, respected, and incorporated into teaching practices to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all learners.

Schools should foster an inclusive classroom environment where students feel safe and empowered to use their home language without fear of punishment, for instance, speaking only English in English lessons. This approach of inclusiveness values the diversity of learners, supporting their academic development by affirming their native language and cultural identity. By recognising and respecting learners' linguistic backgrounds, educators create a space where all learners can thrive and fully engage in the learning process.

5.6 Future Research

Further research conducted over an extended period would provide valuable insights into the effective use of home language in teaching and learning comprehension in Grade 3 classrooms. If this research is carried out in both urban and rural areas, it could reveal patterns that demonstrate the effectiveness of home language instruction. This would allow for more informed, nuanced language choices to be made, ultimately enhancing the learning experience and academic success for learners across diverse settings.

5.7 Research Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes insights to the research body on exploring the effectiveness of using home language in teaching comprehension in Grade 3 classrooms. Based on the pre- and post-test results, classroom observations, and interviews, learners' ability to understand and engage with content is deeply influenced by the social and cultural relevance of the language and concepts being taught. When the content or vocabulary is unfamiliar or disconnected from students' lived experiences, they may struggle to grasp its meaning. The data collected emphasises that the language of teaching and learning has a significant impact on reading comprehension, highlighting the importance of using language that resonates with students' backgrounds to enhance their understanding and learning outcomes. This proved the hypothesis of the study to be true/, as the language difference between the home language, isiZulu, and the language of instruction, English, had an impact on the learners' academic performance in the

comprehension activity all learners who participated in isiZulu comprehension passed, according to the DBE (2011) pass rate for additional languages.

It is crucial to recognise that learner diversity demands a comprehensive approach to education. By acknowledging and building on students' existing linguistic abilities, including their home languages, while also fostering proficiency in the language of teaching and learning, we can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This holistic approach has the potential to enhance academic achievement for all learners, cultivating an atmosphere where every student can thrive and succeed.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 Letter to the Principal, SGB Chair – School 1



University of Witwatersrand,
27 St Andrews rd, Parktown
Johannesburg
2193

Cosmo City Primary School
Angola Ave
Cosmo City
2188

01 June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at Cosmo City Primary School

My name is Monica Chin'ombe. I am studying for a B.Ed Masters in Education in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2024. I am seeking permission to do research at your School – Cosmo City Primary. I am conducting research in the foundation phase division. The title of my study is **Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.** My research involves dealing with Grade Three teachers, and I will be looking at their experiences in teaching learners in English versus isiZulu for six days.

I will invite individuals from your organisation to participate in this study, including teachers and learners. The research will entail collecting data through classroom observations, activities for learners and teacher interviews. I will observe two language lessons for each, that is, the English and Zulu lessons, during the school hours. I will interview two teachers, and it will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes each, which will be audio recorded. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and their identities (their names and the name of the school) will be kept anonymous.

I will ask for parents' consent through letters for their children to participate in the study, and I will not take photos or videos of the learners. Learners will participate in a 30-minute activity for English and Zulu. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the organisation) will be kept anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated as a dissertation. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organisation.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as it is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Monica Chin'ombe
0739565903
698634@students.wits.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr Erasmos Charamba
Erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

Appendix 2 Letter to the Principal, SGB Chair – School 2

University of Witwatersrand,
27 St Andrews rd, Parktown
Johannesburg
2193

Greenside Primary School
Vardon Rd
Greenside
Randburg
2193

01 June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at Greenside Primary School

My name is Monica Chin'ombe. I am studying for a B.Ed Master's in Education in the School of Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg 2024. I am seeking permission to do research at your school, Greenside Primary. I am conducting research in the foundation phase division. The title of my study is **Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.** My research involves dealing with Grade Three teachers, and I will be looking at their experiences in teaching learners in English versus Zulu for six days.

I will invite individuals from your organisation to participate in this study, that is, the teachers and learners. The research will entail collecting data through classroom observations, activities for learners and teacher interviews. I will observe two language lessons for each, that is, the English and Zulu lessons, during the school hours. I will interview two teachers, and it will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes each, which will be audio recorded. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated

confidentially, and their identities (their names and the name of the school) will be kept anonymous.

I will ask for parents' consent through letters for their children to participate in the study, I will not take photos or videos of the learners. Learners will participate in a 30-minute activity for English and Zulu. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Participants will be asked to give their written or verbal consent before the research begins. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and identities (their names and the name of the organisation) will be kept anonymous unless otherwise expressly indicated. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

The results will be communicated as a dissertation. The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study.

I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your organisation.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Yours sincerely,

Monica Chin'ombe

0739565903
698634@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr Erasmos Charamba
Erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

Appendix 3 Information Sheet for teachers



27 June 2024

Dear Grade Three teachers,

My name is Monica Chin'ombe and I am a B.Ed. Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg School of Education. My supervisor is Dr Erasmos Charamba. I am conducting a research study in the Foundation phase and the study tittle is Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview, if you decide to take part your participation in this research study will last about 15 minutes interview time. The interview activity will take place on the 30th of July at your school.

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview activity. This data will be stored on my personal iCloud which I only have access to. The interview will be confidential. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life, OR some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview. This research study will be written as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Monica Chin'ombe

Researcher:
Monica Chinombe, 698634@students.wits.ac.za, 0739565903

Supervisor:
Dr Erasmos Charamba, erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za, : 0785461420

Appendix 4 Teacher's Consent Form



Title of project: Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.

Name of researcher: Monica Chin'ombe, 698634@students.wits.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr Erasmos Charamba, Erasmoscharamba@wits.co.za

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview activity may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview activity may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I acknowledge that my participation in this focus group during data collection cannot be anonymous or confidential, but that anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed when the researcher is reporting the data.	YES	NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview, but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 5 Grade Three Teacher Observation Schedule

Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms	
This scale is intended to capture teachers' practice when teaching reading (strategies and so forth)	
Categories	Observations
The use of language – the language used by both teacher and learners in the classroom	
Learners' participation in the less	
Teachers employ various comprehension strategies to teach students how to understand and interpret texts.	
Adapting lessons to meet the individual levels or needs of learners. Are learners using the target language when interacting with the teacher and their classmates?	
Facilitating language learning and helping learners become proficient communicators in their target language	

Appendix 6 Grade Three Teacher Interview Schedule

Date: _____/_____/____

Please, may you fill in the form below and circle the applicable response. This is to indicate you voluntarily give consent to participate in the study titled: **Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.**

I _____ (teacher's name) give permission to the following:

Permission to observe you in class

I agree to be observed in class. YES/NO

Permission to be audiotaped

I agree to be audiotaped during the interview or observation lesson YES/NO

I know that the audiotapes will be used for this project only

Permission to be interviewed

I would like to be interviewed for this study. YES/NO

I know that I can stop the interview at any time and do not have to

answer all the questions asked. YES/NO

Informed Consent

I understand that:

- My name and information will be kept confidential and safe, and my name and the name of my school will not be revealed.
- I do not have to answer every question and can withdraw from the study at any time.
- I can ask not to be audio taped.
- All the data collected during this study will be destroyed within 3-5 years after completion of my project.

Sign: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 7 Grade Three Teacher Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to do this interview. This interview will help with my research titled **"Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms."** I am interested in finding out how Grade Three teachers manage in teaching in a language that is not the children's mother tongue/ home language. The information we gather today will be used to help me write the research report for my studies. Please be assured that no individual will be named in my research, and nothing will be linked back to the interviewee. Therefore, everything you tell me will be treated as confidential.

— The interview might take 10 to 15 minutes.

— Are you happy to take part in the interview today? You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point if you wish to.

— Do you have any questions before we start?

— Just to help me with my notes, is it OK to record our conversation? YES/NO

Questions

1. How many languages can you speak? What are they?

2. Do you think learners learn better when instructed in their home language? If yes, why is it so?

3. Why do you think using the home language in the classroom is important for learners' education?

4. How does learning in a language that is not your home language affect the learners?

5. What strategies do you use to assist learners who are having difficulty in understanding the language of instruction?

6. According to you, what is the best way to learning a new language in the foundation phase?

Thank you!!

Appendix 8 Letter to Parent/Guardian

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

01 June 2024

Dear Grade Three parents,

My name is Monica Chin'ombe and I am a B.Ed. Masters student at the University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg School of Education. My supervisor is Dr Erasmos Charamba. I am conducting a research study in the Foundation phase and the study title is **Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.**

I am asking for your consent for your child to take part in this research study, which will last for four days during normal school hours. The reason I have chosen this school is because of the language of teaching and learning which is English and FAL is Zulu.

I would like to seek permission for your child to participate in the study in this way:

- I will be observing them during their Literacy and isiZulu lessons
- I will document their participation in the lesson in the form of a video of the resources they use, not their photos

Your child will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. S/he will be reassured that s/he can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating, and your child will not be paid for this study. Your child's name and identity will always be kept confidential and in all academic writing about the study. His/her individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. This research study will be written as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor at the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human

Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,

Monica Chin'ombe

Researcher:

Monica Chin'ombe, 698634@students.wits.ac.za, 0739565903

Supervisor:

Dr Erasmos Charamba, erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za, : 0785461420

Appendix 9 Parent Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Title of project: Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms

Name of researcher: Monica Chin'ombe, 698634@students.wits.ac.za
Supervisor: Dr Erasmos Charamba, erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

I, ……., agree that my child ……..… can participate in this research project.

I agree with the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that my child can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from the class activities may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I acknowledge that my child's participation in this focus group during data collection cannot be anonymous or confidential, but that anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed when the researcher is reporting the data.	YES	NO

…… (signature)
…… (name of parent/guardian)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 10 Learner information sheet

Date: _____/_____/____

Dear Grade 3 learners

I would like to seek permission from you to participate in the study in this way:

- I will be observing how you work in Literacy lessons
- I will document your participation in the lesson in the form of a video of the resources you use, not your photos/pictures
- I would want you to participate in the isiZulu and English lessons as part of this research study

You will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. You can withdraw her/his permission at any time during this project without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study, and there is no payment for participating in this study.

Your name and identity will always be kept confidential in all academic writing about the study. Your privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely
Monica Chin'ombe
Supervisor's contact details:
Cell: 0785461420, Email: erasmos.charamba@wits.ac.za

Appendix 11 Learner Assent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

My name is: _____

I would like to participate		
I don't know if I would like to participate		
I would not like to participate		

Sign_____

Date_____

Appendix 12 isiZulu Learner Activity

Ulahlekile uthedibhe

Buka izithombe ukhulume ngokubonayo





Funda

Bekumnandi kubo kaDumi. UDumi ungiphe isipho esihle. Ungiphe uthedibhe. Unesikhumba esithambile.
Sibuyele ekhaya ngetekisi. Izulu liqale ukuna sisendleleni. Kube sengathi ilanga lishonile kwabanda. Umama wangembathisa ngengubo ngafudumala.
Siphume ngemvula etekisini sayongena esangweni ekhaya. Ngitshele umama ukuthi angimboni uthedibhe. Akekho. Bengithi wehlile etekisini. Ngavele ngakhala. Bengikhalela ukuyomfuna etekisini.
Sambheka engutsheni efudumalayo. Nangu. Uphephile. Ngajabula.



1. **Masibhale:Khetha impendulo efanele**

Ngubani uBongi?	
A	**UBongi intombazana**
B	**UBongi ngumfana**
C	**UBongi uthedibhe**

Imayelana nani indaba?	
A	**UBongi udlala nomngani**
B	**UBongi uyagijima emvuleni**
C	**UBongi ulahlekelwa nguthedibhe**

Izulu linjani endabeni?	
A	**Belishisa**
B	**Bekushisa, kwabanda lana**
C	**Line usuku lonke**

Uphatheke kanjani uBongi uma ethola ukuthi uthedibhe ulahlekile?	
A	**UBongi wakhala**
B	**UBongi wajabula**
C	**UBongi akezwa lutho**

Ukwazi kanjani lokho?	
A	**Ngoba UBongi wathula**
B	**Ngoba UBongi wajabula**
C	**Ngoba UBongi wayengajabule**

Umtholepi uthedibhe wakhe?	
A	**Etekisini**
B	**Engutsheni efudumalayo**
C	**Esikoleni**

Unesikhumba esinjani uthedibhe?	
A	**Esithambile**
B	**Esibovu**
C	**Siphephile**

Ungazizwa unjani mauzolahlekelwa uthedibhe wakho?	
A	**Bengizojabula**
B	**Bengizokhala**
C	**Bengizohleka**

2. **Sebenzisa lamagama. Funda la magama, sebenzisa amagama amabili ubhale imisho**

uthedibhe	**isipho**
ekhaya	**ingubo**

Appendix 13 English Learner Activity

The lost teddy bear

Look at the pictures below and talk about what you see (analyse the pictures)





Read

It was fun at Dumi's house. Dumi gave me a beautiful gift. She gave me a teddy bear. It has soft skin/fur. We went back home using a taxi. It started raining while we were on our way. It was as if the sun had set, and it became cold. My mother covered me with a blanket, and I got warm. The moment we got out of the taxi, it was still raining, and we went into the house. I told my mother that I could not see my teddy bear. It is not there, I thought we got out of the tax with it. I just cried. I was crying because I wanted to go back and look for my teddy bear in the taxi. We searched for it in the warm blanket. Here it is. It is safe. I am happy.

1 Let us write: Choose the correct symbol and circle it

Who is Bongi?

A	Bongi is a girl
B	Bongi is a boy
C	Bongi is the teddy bear

What is the story about?

A	Bongi is playing with a friend
B	Bongi is running in the rain
C	Bongi lost her teddy bear

How was the weather like in the story?

A	It was hot
B	It was hot then it got cold
C	It rained the whole day

How did Bongi feel when she realised that the teddy bear was lost?

A	Bongi cried
B	Bongi was happy
C	Bongi did not feel anything

How do you know that?

A	Because Bongi cried
B	Because Bongi was happy
C	Because Bongi was not happy

Where did she find her teddy bear?

A	In the taxi
B	In the warm blanket
C	At school

What type of skin does a teddy bear have?

A	Soft
B	Red
C	Safe

How would you feel if you were to lose your teddy bear?

A	I would be happy
B	I would cry
C	I would laugh

Read the following words and use any two words to write sentences

teddy bear	gift
Home	blanket

Appendix 14 Ethics Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Matanga

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H24/05/24**

PROJECT TITLE Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms

INVESTIGATOR(S) Mrs M Matanga

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT Wits School of Education/

DATE CONSIDERED 17 May 2024

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE Approved
Risk Level: Minimal

EXPIRY DATE 04 September 2027

DATE 05 September 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Watermeyer)

cc: Supervisor : Dr E Charamba

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **A SIGNED COPY** returned to the Secretary electronically. Unreported changes to the application may invalidate the clearance given by the HREC (Non-Medical)

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee. **I/we agree to completion of a regular progress report. For Minimal and Low Risk studies, this is due annually on 31 December. For Medium and High Risk studies, this is due twice annually on 30 June and 31 December.**

Signature

06/07/2024
Date

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix 15 GDE Approval



GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**10 July 2024**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2024– 30 September 2024** **2024/191**
Name of Researcher:	**Chinombe M**
Address of Researcher:	**2 Milkwood /Cornelius Street**
	Weltervreden Park/ Roodepoort
Telephone Number:	**073 9565 903**
Email address:	**698634@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Topic:	**Exploring the efficacy of home language in teaching reading comprehension in Grade 3 South African classrooms.**
Name of University:	**Wits**
Type of qualification	**Masters**
Number and type of schools:	**2 Primary Schools**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg North**

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

10/07/2024

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
2. *The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.*
3. ***Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.***
4. ***The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.***
5. *A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*
6. *A letter / document that outline the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.*
7. *The Researcher will make every effort obtain the goodwill and co-operation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers and learners involved. Persons who offer their co-operation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.*
8. *Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school programme is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.*
9. *Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.*
10. *Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.*
11. *It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.*
12. *The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her own research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes and telephones and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.*
13. *The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.*
14. *On completion of the study the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.*
15. *The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.*
16. *Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a brief summary of the purpose, findings and recommendations of the research study.*

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....

Dr Gumani Mukatuni
DCES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: ....10/07/2024.....

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

Appendix 16 Letter of Approval from School

Greenside Primary
School
Vardon Rd,
Greenside,
Randburg,
2193

13 June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Permission to contact research at Greenside Primary School

This is to confirm that Monica Chinombe has been given permission to collect data for her Master's degree program at Greenside Primary School. She will collect data through interviews, classroom observations and a Grade 3 compulsory activity (Zulu and English).

For more information, please contact us.

Regards



Principal/HOD

Appendix 17 Letter of Approval from School

Cosmo City Junior Primary School
Angola Avenue
Cosmo City
Johannesburg
2188

27 August 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Permission to conduct research at Cosmo City Junior Primary School

This is to confirm that Monica Chinombe has been given permission to collect data for her Master's Degree program at Cosmo City Junior Primary School. She will collect data through interviews, classroom observations and a Grade 3 comprehension activity (Zulu and English).

For more information please contact us.

Regards

GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
27 -08- 2024
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ORIGINALITY REPORT

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SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Tshehla, Lina Puleng. "Mother Tongue Education in a Multilingual South African Township School.", University of Johannesburg (South Africa), 2024 Publication	1%
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