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Exploring Challenges of Teaching Isizulu Writing and Reading in The Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase

Dr Melusi Msomi¹, Dr Phindile Dlamini²

^{1,2}University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The instruction of isiZulu literacy in the Foundation Phase (Grades R-3) and Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) presents challenges to literacy advancement. This study examines linguistic, pedagogical, social, and structural barriers, emphasizing significant problems and proposing solutions to enhance isiZulu literacy education. A qualitative study design was employed, incorporating semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. A purposeful sample of isiZulu language educators from urban and rural South African schools was selected. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in literacy instruction. This research is founded on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the significance of language, social interaction, and cultural context in the learning process. It additionally employs the Reading Acquisition Framework, which fosters phonological awareness, orthographic comprehension, and print exposure. Identified challenges encompass linguistic barriers, such as the conjunctive writing system complicating word segmentation; pedagogical issues, including insufficient phonics-based instruction and a dearth of age-appropriate reading materials; socio-economic factors, notably limited parental support and inadequate home literacy resources; systemic issues, particularly the transition to English in Grade 4 affecting literacy development; and overcrowded classrooms restricting individualized attention for learners. The study recommends developing graded isiZulu reading materials, enhancing teacher training in phonics and bilingual literacy strategies, engaging parents in literacy initiatives, revising language transition policies, and employing classroom support strategies such as reduced class sizes and digital tools. Improving isiZulu literacy instruction will enhance linguistic and cognitive abilities, leading to greater academic achievement in both isiZulu and English.

Keywords: socio-economic, pedagogical, theory, qualitative

✉ info@ssmeconf.org

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