

Early reading skills related to Grade 1 English Second Language literacy in rural South African schools



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Background: Many South African children attend African language mediums of instruction (MOI) schools, learn English as an additional language and switch to English MOI three years later. There is still much to be researched about how a child's first and second language literacy develops over time in South Africa.

Aim: This study aims to outline the first and second language skills at the start of Grade 1, which are associated with English Second Language literacy at the end of Grade 1 through the use of a longitudinal design.

Setting: Data was collected from 80 predominantly rural no-fee isiZulu and Siswati MOI schools in Mpumalanga.

Methods: A total of 1347 learners were randomly selected from these schools and were individually assessed on various first language (isiZulu or Siswati) and English skills at the start and end of Grade 1.

Results: The data show that learners begin school with varying first and second language oral language proficiency levels, and most learners are pre-literate. Decoding skills improved over the year, but 45.7% and 35% of learners were still unable to read a first language or English word correctly in 1 min.

Conclusion: The data confirm the importance of first language phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge for later word-reading abilities in isiZulu, Siswati and English, as well as their importance for English spelling. The study highlights the importance of the systematic development of English oral proficiency during the Foundation Phase especially for rural children who are not exposed to English in their communities.

Keywords: isiZulu; Siswati; English Second Language; literacy; transfer; longitudinal; high-poverty schools.

Introduction

Early literacy has taken centre stage as one of the most important aspects in ensuring sustained learning throughout an individual's schooling career. Through the acquisition and transfer of knowledge via reading and writing, literacy allows individuals to unlock their full potential and become better contributors to modern society. Literacy, therefore, does not only hold major benefits for the individual but also has spill-over effects on the broader society, and at a national level is associated with economic growth.

Literacy rates with respect to all languages are very low in South Africa, with 78% of Grade 4 learners not having reached the low international benchmark in their first language (L1) in the Progress in International Reading Literacy Studies (PIRLS) assessment in 2016 (Howie et al. 2017). Although the South African language policy promotes the teaching of reading in learners' L1 during the first three years of schooling, further learning from the fourth grade will most likely take place in English (ESL)¹ for the majority of learners. This implies that learners do not only need to be able to read for meaning in their L1 but also in English.

The literacy issue is complicated in South Africa. Although the Language in Education Policy (South Africa 1996) allows for L1 education, most children have L1 education for the first three years of schooling only. Because of the perceived and real economic benefits of English literacy (Casale & Posel 2011; Van der Walt & Evans 2017), most children in South Africa will attend

1. In the South African curriculum, instruction in English as a second language (ESL) is referred to as English as First Additional Language because English is not necessarily a second language for most learners. However, to align with international literature, we will use the term ESL when referring to English as First Additional Language.

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ethnolinguistic identities upon which the sector was founded The introductory chapter lays out the background to the entire book with an emphasis on the policy and practice perspectives on the intersections The middle chapters describe the so called White Universities Black Universities and Middle Man Minorities Universities The final chapter maps out future directions of the discourses on language and identity formation in South Africa s higher education **African History** Daniel Richard Smith,1993 **Handbook of Cross-cultural Psychology: Basic processes and human development** John W. Berry,Ype H. Poortinga,Janak Pandey,1997 The second volume in a set of three this text incorporates the views of authors from a variety of nations cultures traditions and perspectives It summarizes research in the areas of basic processes and developmental psychology adopting a dynamic constructivist and socio historical approach *Improving National Education Systems After COVID-19* Nuno Crato,Harry Anthony Patrinos,2024-10-14 This open access book compares and analyses the results in twelve countries of the two latest international student assessments Progress in International Reading Literacy Study 2021 PIRLS and the Programme for International Student Assessment 2022 PISA and tries to disentangle the effects of the pandemic from the long term trends in education It is one of the first or maybe the first published volumes to provide a global assessment of the devastating impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on student learning as measured by independent international comparative surveys The 12 countries discussed in this volume represent a wide variety of educational systems including Chile Ecuador England Estonia Italy the Netherlands Poland Portugal South Africa Spain and the United States It compiles diverse scenarios including countries that are high performers countries that perform at the OECD mean and countries that are struggling to attain the OECD average Each country has its history that reflects efforts to cope with pandemic school closures and to improve educational achievement A major topic discussed in this edited volume is related to understanding the diverse circumstances for the variations in results within different countries Why did learning loss in specific locations How much learning was lost Why is a country continuously declining Why is another country constantly improving Why is there higher or less levels of inequality How is a country regularly improving with an outdated curriculum Which policies have worked and which ones have not What can we do now This book is a valuable contribution to answer these concerns based on a diverse sample of countries and research questions

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