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LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

“There is little doubt that the systematic but frequently ignored differences between the language and culture of the school and the language and culture of the learner’s community have often resulted in educational programmes with only marginal success at teaching anything except self-depreciation” (Chuka Eze Okonkwo, 1983)

Language plays a crucial role in learning. Learners are taught all subjects in their school’s language of learning and teaching (LoLT). Fluency of this language, especially when it is different to a learner’s home language, impacts on learners’ ability to understand concepts and to take part in classroom discussion. Language experts continue to test new methods of using language effectively in South Africa’s diverse classrooms. The June issue of the TIMSS SA newsletter focuses on language and learning in South African schools. Our contributors explore the importance of language for the long term educational success of South African learners.

TIMSS South Africa Spotlight on Language and Literacy



Our second [TIMSS-SA Spotlight](#), focuses on the role of language in learning. Using data from the TIMSS 2015 study for both Grade 5 and Grade 9 learners, we explore language, literacy and achievement.

The Place of Translanguaging in Multilingual Education and Assessment

Professor Kathleen Heugh, from the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures at the University of South Australia, and an Honorary Research Fellow in the HSRC’s Education and Skills Development research programme, explores the term ‘[translanguaging](#)’ within the context of multilingual education settings. Through this analysis, she highlights the importance of bilingual learning.

Learning Through a Second Language

Dr Surette van Staden, a senior lecturer in the Department of Science, Mathematics and Technology Education at the University of Pretoria, explores [home language and the language of learning and teaching](#) (LoLT) in South African primary schools. Using data from pre-PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) (2011), she examines the impact on learner achievement where learners are being taught in a language which is not their home language.

How Do Children Make Their World Mathematical?

Professor Elizabeth Henning is the University of Johannesburg’s SARChI Chair in Integrated Studies of Learning Language, Mathematics and Science in the Primary School. Her [study](#) about how young

children make their world mathematical involves the development of reading tests that use the content knowledge of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics in the South African curriculum.

When It Comes To School Science, Language Can Determine Success

In a [2017 article](#) in the South African Journal of Education, Andrea Juan and Mariette Visser, examine the home and school environmental determinants of science achievement of Grade 9 South African learners. The research found a strong association between the frequency with which a learner spoke the language of the test at home and their science achievement. Based on this article, Dr Andrea Juan, highlighted the role of home language in science achievement in a [piece](#) for The Conversation.

What's Happening in Education Research?

The Human Sciences Research Council, together with academics from Wits and Stellenbosch universities, the Department of Basic Education and the University of Oxford, are currently undertaking the [Early Grade Reading Study](#). This study focuses on evaluating three different approaches to improving reading Setswana in the foundation phase of schooling.

First PhD in isiXhosa Published

In 2017, the first PhD [thesis](#) in isiXhosa was published by a student at Rhodes University. Dr Hleze Kunju was among seven other PhD graduates who conducted their thesis in African languages at the university. This was enabled by the University's new [language policy](#), which aims to promote multilingualism and sensitivity in language usage, with a particular focus on Afrikaans and the intellectualisation of isiXhosa.

African Languages Policy

The [Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools draft policy](#), which was introduced in 2013 (which is still a draft in 2017), intends to promote and strengthen the use of African languages by all learners in the school system. The aim is to increase access to languages by all learners, beyond English and Afrikaans. The policy intends to incrementally introduce learners to learning an African language from Grade 1 to 12.

SANLU Dictionaries

The South African National Lexicography Units (SANLU) have developed a range of monolingual, bilingual and trilingual [dictionaries](#), which incorporate various African languages. These include an isiXhosa Maths and Science Dictionary for Intermediate and Senior Phase, and an English-Setswana Bilingual Maths and Natural Science Dictionary for Intermediate and Senior Phase. The introduction of these dictionaries highlights the importance of Maths and Science in education, and the need to make these subjects more accessible to all learners.

Interested in using TIMSS data for research?

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