

Chapter #19

FIRST LANGUAGE VERSUS FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE(S) TEACHING IN FOUNDATION PHASE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

In a multicultural society like South Africa, where eleven languages are regarded as official languages, usage of language contributes towards quality education. If languages which are regarded as official according to the Constitution are used differently, this makes the different users of language to be disgruntled as their language is not recognised. In terms of Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) official languages are: Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, IsiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu. The question which arises mostly is whether these (especially formerly marginalised) African languages are mastered by the children. The language of teaching and learning in most schools in South Africa is English. The chapter investigated whether Foundation Phase learners are able to switch from mother tongue (first language) to second language (first additional language) without challenges. Quantitative design was used where questionnaires were used to collect data. Ten (10) Grade 3 teachers from Sibasa Circuit were purposefully sampled as participants. The research paper found that, it is not difficult for learners to learn first additional language before they master their own first language. It is not difficult for learners to comprehend what they have read in first additional language.

Keywords: mother tongue, second language, first additional language, education language policy, first language.

1. INTRODUCTION

South African Department of Education (1997) due to its diverse society promotes multilingualism. Diverse society comes from Whites who speak English and Afrikaans and Blacks (Africans) who speak Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, IsiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu. Whites and Blacks speak eleven languages mentioned above. All these languages are official in terms of Section 6(a) of South African Constitution. Children from different cultural backgrounds have to use their own mother tongues (First Language) to communicate. When they start their education, from Grade R to Grade 3 they are supposed to be taught in their mother tongues (First Language). It should be remembered that the age of a child entering Grade 1 is age five turning six by 30 June in the year of admission. For Grade R which is the reception year, the age is four turning five by 30 June in the year of admission. In terms of Language Policy of 1997 all learners shall offer at least one approved language as a subject in Grade 1 to Grade 2. From Grade 3 (Std. 1) onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as subjects. In most cases by Blacks, additional approved language is English.

2. LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

According to Slavin and Cheung (2003) for many years, the discussion about effective reading programmes for English language learners has revolved around the question of the appropriate language of instruction for children who speak languages other than English. Proponents of native language instruction argue that while children are learning to speak English, they should be taught to read in their native language first, to avoid the failure experience that is likely if children are asked to learn both oral English and English reading at the same time. Children are then transitioned to English-only instruction when their English is sufficient to ensure success, usually in third or fourth grade. Alternatively, many programmes teach young children to read both in their native language and in English at different times of the day. There is an opinion by Fillmore (1991) that once children learn English, they tend not to maintain or to develop the language spoken at home, even if it is the only one their parents know.

3. FIRST LANGUAGE

Clarke and Milne as quoted by Clarke (2009) are of the opinion that the first language, learned in the home, is extremely important and forms the foundation for all later language development. Parents, family members and early childhood professionals are the most significant influences on the development and maintenance of the first language. Clarke (2009) goes on to state that evidence shows that young children can learn more than one language with ease, as long as they are exposed to good language models and have plenty of exposure to both languages. Maintaining the first language does not interfere with the learning of first additional language. Research suggests the opposite—that knowing one language can help the child understand how other languages work. The maintenance of the first or home language is particularly important for the child's development of a positive self-concept and well-being.

Children who have the opportunity to maintain their first language can extend their cognitive development, while learning first additional language. Their level of competence in the first additional language will be related to the level of competence they have achieved in their first language (Cummins, 1984) as quoted by (Clark, 2009). Children with a sound knowledge of their first language will be able to transfer skills from one language to another. Early childhood professionals can play a vital role in the maintenance of children's first languages. They can provide opportunities for children to use their first language in early childhood settings and at school and encourage parents to use the first language at home in order to provide a good foundation for learning first additional language.

4. IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FIRST ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

According to Lang (2009) and Frontiers Academy (2014) if young children are taught how to speak a first additional language it is good for their minds. First additional language learning does not cause language confusion, language delay or cognitive deficit, which have been concerns in the past.

Researchers agree that the earlier a child starts learning a second language, the better, for more reasons than one. Some researchers say that first additional language acquisition skills peak at or before the age of 6 or 7. Others claim that this window extends through puberty. But, they all agree that it's much harder for a child beyond puberty to learn a new

language (Clark, 2016). Clark (2016) further states that bilingual children do not only speak two languages sooner than other single-language peers, but they are also better in tasks that call for a shift in attention. Also, research has demonstrated that children who first mastered their mother tongue and then learn a second language become fluent in the first additional language but never managed to attain the level of excellence of those that learned both languages at once.

Frontier Academy (2014) and Steele (2014) state that there are reasons why children benefit from learning first additional language. The reasons are as follows:

- **Better Linguistics**

If children are exposed to first additional language at an early age (as early as 3 years old) will result in much easier and better fluency than if they learn later in life. Between ages of 8 and 12, children lose the ability to hear and reproduce new sounds as they did when they were younger, making first additional language acquisition not impossible, but more difficult.

- **Cognitive Benefits**

When it comes to learning a new language, some of the biggest benefits for children are those associated with cognitive performance. Research has shown that language learning is more cognitive than linguistic. Following are some of the cognitive benefits to learning a first additional language:

The concept of “object permanence” develops at a younger age; better problem solving skills; better critical thinking skills; more creativity; better flexibility of mind; enhanced memory; and better multi-tasking abilities.

- **Enhanced Thinking Skills**

It is not only cognitive abilities where children who speak a first additional language seem to outperform others; this has also been known to make children more open minded with regards to how they view the world. The ability to think "outside of the box" is something that many professionals hold in high regard because this is related to more effective problem solving abilities. Those who speak more than one language do not simply develop this ability because of the processes that go into learning a new language. They also come into contact with a wider variety of individuals from different backgrounds. What is more, children who speak another language often have the ability to read in other languages, therefore exposing themselves to a wider range of literature.

- **Literacy Skills Enhanced**

One of the side effects of learning a new language, according to a university in Canada, is that it actually gives children an edge when it comes time to learn how to read in that language. Children are often able to apply what they have learned in one language to others, and this is apparent as they go about learning to sound out new words that they read in books, newspapers and blogs, among other resources. As children practice learning to read in a variety of languages, they will inevitably increase the rate at which they read comfortably, allowing them to improve their overall abilities in this field.

- **Higher Academic Achievement**

Along the same lines of the cognitive benefits mentioned above, learning a first additional language can also provide academic benefits. Bilingual children have been shown to have better critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, and greater mental flexibility. All these things result in better academic performance. Bilingual students have been shown to have higher math skills. Contrary to popular belief, not only does learning a first additional language not inhibit the child’s English language proficiency, it enhances and improves it.

- **Cultural Enrichment**

Parents want their children to be well-rounded, to have a love for learning and an appreciation for other cultures, and to grow up to be successful and contributing members of society. Learning a first additional language opens doors that would not otherwise be opened. Bilingual (or trilingual) individuals have access to resources, people, places, and things that the most people would not. Not only can a first additional language provide a competitive edge in the workforce, but it creates a deeper understanding of and appreciation for humanity and culture, which enriches one's life and personal experiences in the world.

- **Societal Contributions**

All parents want their children to change the world. They have high hopes and dreams for their children – not only for their own pride in them, but for the betterment of society and the world at large.

5. AIM OF THE PAPER

The paper investigated whether Foundation Phase learners are able to switch from mother tongue (first language) to second language (first additional language) without challenges.

6. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Quantitative design was used where questionnaires were used to collect data. Grade 3 ten (10) teachers from Sibasa Circuit were purposefully sampled as participants. Data was analysed using SPSS Version 22 software.

7. DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The following discussion is analyzing data and discussing the findings:

7.1. Section A - biographical information

*Table 1.
Gender.*

	Number of participants	Percentages
Male	6	60%
Female	4	40%
Total	10	100%

At least 60% of participants are males. Researchers thought that most males do not teach Grade 3 as compared to females. Surprisingly, 40% of respondents are females given that several literatures show that Foundation Phase classes are always associated with female teaching career (Mashiya, 2014; Jungert, Alm, & Thornberg, 2014; Petersen, 2014; Mukuna & Mutsoso, 2011; Sumsion, 2005; Hofmeyr & Hall, 1996).

Table 2.
Teaching experience.

	Number of participants	Percentages
1-5 years teaching Experience	3	30%
6-10 years teaching Experience	3	30%
11-15 Years teaching Experience	2	20%
16-20 Years teaching Experience	0	0%
20 years above	2	20%
Total	10	100%

Respondents vary according to experience. At least 80% of participants have 1-15 years of teaching experience. It is only 20% of respondents who have 20 and more than 20 years of experience. With this kind of experience researchers believe that they have participants who are well experienced. A study by Yusuf & Dada (2016) on the impact of teachers' qualification and experience on the performance of students show that learners who are taught by experienced teachers perform much better than those who are taught by inexperience and less qualified.

7.2. Section B

Table 3.
Class is composed of learners who come from multicultural backgrounds.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	3	30%
Disagree	3	30%
Neutral	1	10%
Agree	2	20%
Strongly agree	1	10%
Total	10	100%

South Africa has eleven official languages which are English, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, IsiSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu. It means that learners may come from eleven cultural backgrounds. Learners from different cultural backgrounds are allowed to school together by law. It is not surprising to find out that 30% of participants agree that they have learners who come from multicultural backgrounds. The fact that 60% of participants disagree that they teach learners from multicultural backgrounds is because Sibasa Circuit is predominantly dominated by one

culture. Surprisingly 10% of participants indicated that they are neutral. A study by Totic (2012) on ‘Multicultural education in one of the primary schools in Norway reveals broad contestation with regard to espoused benefits of multi-cultural teaching with vast number of participants being in favour of bilingual teaching and stronger forms of collaboration as benefits of bilingual education. This kind contestation is still deliberated in our education system and still remains empirically untested terrain. Alexander (2009) see interconnectedness of race, socio-economic factors, language, religion, learning styles and resources as the main contentious issues confronting teachers in their classes when dealing with multi-cultural issues. It is worth noting that all these issues are common and prevalent across all the former racially-based departments of education and teachers are not necessarily prepared or trained for such new roles (Alexander, 2009). Meier and Hartell (2009) cautioned that given the complexity of handling diversity in education as there is a need for educators or teachers to recognise the validity of differences. Meier and Hartell (2009) suggest that teachers’ own personal and institutional ideologies and perceptions need to be reappraised and they must be a conviction and dedication to facilitate and manage learner diversity.

*Table 4.
Learners understand their first language(s).*

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	3	30%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	1	10%
Agree	3	30%
Strongly agree	3	30%
Total	10	100%

Research over the past three decades increasingly demonstrates that continuing language and literacy in the first language alongside the development of the new language is in the child’s best academic interests. It is understandable that 60% of participants agree that learners understand their first language. Continuing language and literacy in a child’s mother tongue or first language is important not only for subsequent language development, but also for their overall personal and educational development. At least 30% of participants disagree that their learners understand their first language. This means that the participants have a long way to go in teaching their learners their first language. A study by Govender (2010) on ‘Isizulu-Speaking Foundation Phase Learners’ (ISFPLs) Experiences of English as a Second Language in English Medium Schools’ found that teachers believed that Isizulu speaking learners were happy to be enrolled in English medium schools and showed predominately positive attitudes about learning English. However, teachers noted that such ISFPLs have serious cognitive challenges with regard to reading, writing, and comprehension (Govender, 2010).

Table 5.
Use of language policy as a tool in my teaching.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	3	30%
Agree	4	40%
Strongly agree	3	30%
Total	10	100%

The Language Education Policy came into being in 1997. Some of the aims of the Language Education Policy are to promote full participation in society and the economy through equitable and meaningful access to education. According to Language Education Policy from Grade 3 (Std 1) onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as subjects. It is encouraging to find out that 70% of participants make use of Language Education Policy. Adherence to policy is very important. Policies are there to give guidance to the implementers. It is interesting to find out that 0% of participants disagree with the statement. It is worth noting that one of the reasons why ISFPLs were enrolled in English medium schools is that their parents wanted them to speak English fluently (Govender, 2010).

Table 6.
They can write, read and count in first language.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	2	20%
Agree	7	70%
Strongly agree	1	10%
Total	10	100%

According to Bernhardt and Kamil (1995) as cited by Jiang (2011) there are two main positions regarding the relationship between first language literacy and first additional language reading development: the *Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis* and the *Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis*. According to the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, first language literacy provides a good foundation for first additional language reading development. The hypothesis posits that fundamental similarities exist between first language and first additional language skills, and that they are interdependent. Specifically, reading performance in a first additional language is largely shared with reading ability in a first language. At least 80% of participants agree that their learners can read, write and count in the first language. This is advantage to learners as they have basic knowledge and understanding of reading, writing and counting in order for them to comprehend first additional language.

Table 7.
Ability to comprehend what they have read.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	1	10%
Disagree	1	10%
Neutral	2	20%
Agree	5	50%
Strongly agree	1	10%
Total	10	100%

At least 60% of participants agree that their learners can comprehend what they have read. Researchers agree that 40% of participants who do not agree with the statement is high. This becomes a serious concern. Texas Educational Agency (2002) states that over the past few decades, research has revealed a great deal of information about how readers get meaning from what they read and about the kinds of instructional activities and procedures that are most successful in helping students to become good readers. For many years, reading instruction was based on a concept of reading as the application of a set of isolated skills such as identifying words, finding main ideas, identifying cause and effect relationships, comparing and contrasting and sequencing. Comprehension was viewed as the mastery of these skills (Texas Educational Agency, 2002).

In the field of reading, a number of cognitive scientists focused their attention on how readers construct meaning as they read. Specifically, they studied the mental activities that good readers engage in to achieve comprehension. From these studies an entirely new concept emerged about what reading is. Reading is a complex, active process of constructing meaning not skill application. Texas Educational Agency (2002) goes on to state that the act of constructing meaning is:

- Interactive: it involves not just the reader but also the text and the context in which reading takes place.
- Strategic: readers have purposes for their reading and use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct meaning.
- Adaptable: readers change the strategies they use as they read different kinds of text or as they read for different purposes.

While cognitive science research was producing valuable information about comprehension processes, reading education researchers were reporting important findings about what comprehension instruction looks like in the most effective reading classrooms. During reading, good readers read words accurately and quickly, and simultaneously deal with the meanings of those words as well as the meanings of the phrases and sentences into which the words are grouped. Good readers connect the meaning of one sentence to the meaning of another (Texas Educational Agency, 2002). In line with Texas Educational Agency states above it is not surprising to find out that 60% of participants agree that learners can comprehend what they have read in first additional language.

Table 8.
Switching to first additional language is easy.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	3	30%
Disagree	3	30%
Neutral	1	10%
Agree	2	20%
Strongly agree	1	10%
Total	10	100%

At least 60% of participants disagree that switching to first additional language is easy. But 30% of participants agree that switching from first language to first additional language is not easy. Switching to first additional language might be not easy, but it has to be done. Lingholic (2016) is of the opinion that one might be wondering why anyone would go through the discomfort of trying to think in a foreign language, especially during the early stages or learning. Well, for starters, thinking in the language one is trying to learn is one of the easiest ways to review the vocabulary and grammatical patterns one has acquired. By actually forcing one's brain to think in a language it is not used to think in, one will also help activate the newly-acquired information by giving one's a real-life use for it.

These, in turn, will speed-up the passive-to-active vocabulary transition. In a nutshell, passive vocabulary includes the words stored in verbal memory that people partially "understand," but not well enough for active use. One's active vocabulary, on the other hand, includes the words that you can readily use when speaking and writing. Another great reason to practice thinking in a foreign language according to a study conducted by the University of Chicago psychologists, is how language affects reasoning, one will make decisions that will tend to be less biased, more analytic, and more systematic. Why is that? "Because," according to the study of Keysar, Hayakawa and An (2012) "a foreign language provides psychological distance." So by thinking in a foreign language one will not only be jump-starting one's skills in that language, but one will also make smarter decisions (Lingholic, 2016).

Table 9.
Switching to first additional language is a challenge to learners.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	1	10%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Agree	6	60%
Strongly agree	3	30%
Total	10	100%

It is true that switching to first additional language is a challenge to learners as 90% of participants agreed. There are several challenges to switch to first additional language as Wilson (2016) states:

- **Grammar**

English Grammar is complex, making it difficult to remember, master and use logically. Ensuring one uses the correct grammar can be tricky, especially when one is in conversation with someone and speaking at an alarmingly fast pace. Learning grammar is like learning to drive, one can learn all of the theory, rules and regulations, but one won't be good at it unless one practices it and it starts to become second nature to the one who is learning. Grammar is extremely important, incorrect use of grammar can confuse the person one is speaking to and even change the meaning of what one is communicating, what's more is native English speakers are hyper aware of grammar and will notice almost immediately if a grammatical error is made, even if this is the smallest of errors, English speakers are incredibly proud of the language and look negatively on it being used incorrectly.

- **Vocabulary**

It is often a challenge, particularly when it comes to verb variations and understanding which tense should be used in various situations. English has one of the biggest vocabularies of all languages, and it can be very confusing for non-English speakers to master. Using vocabulary inaccurately is incredibly noticeable to anyone whose first language is English, though it doesn't often change the meaning of the text, it does weaken it.

- **Slang and colloquialism**

With the English language having such an extensive vocabulary and complicated grammar, there is enough to teach students wanting to learn English, rarely are learners exposed to the slang words used by English speakers in every day conversation. Sentences can be predominantly filled with slang words, so maintaining a conversation can be difficult for anyone who doesn't understand what they mean.

- **Pronunciation**

Knowing how to pronounce words in English can be very difficult as it isn't always obvious. English speakers have been taught these from an early age, which is how they know not to pronounce the 'k' on 'knight', they are taught the subtleties in how to pronounce something to communicate the right message. Furthermore, depending on the first language of the English student, it can often be difficult to pronounce certain words properly, having not ever had to create that phonetic sound before.

- **Variations in English**

The variations in the different forms of English can often be difficult to understand. For example, the difference between using formal and informal language or the differences between spoken and written language. This leads to students writing words phonetically, that is how they would say it rather than how it is actually spelt, and using informal language, maybe even slang that they have picked up, in formal situations which may perhaps be viewed negatively.

Table 10.
It is easy to switch to first additional language for learners who have mastered their first language.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	1	10%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Agree	7	70%
Strongly agree	2	20%
Total	10	100%

At least 90 % of participants agree that it is easy to switch to first additional language for learners who have mastered their first language. Taylor and Coetzee (2013) noted that even though their findings point to the value of the mother tongue as the language of instruction, it is very important to strengthen the teaching of English as a subject in the early grades to help to facilitate the transition to English in grade four, as recommended by the curriculum and assessment policy statements (CAPS).

Table 11.
It is a challenge to switch to first additional language for learners who have not mastered their first language.

	Number of participants	Percentages
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Neutral	0	0%
Agree	5	50%
Strongly agree	5	50%
Total	10	100%

It is a challenge to switch to first additional language for learners who have not mastered their first language as 100% of participants have indicated. Cook (2013) states that many scholars are advocating for letting the children learn through a language they know well for the first six years at school while at the same time ensuring that English is also introduced as a subject as a co-teaching medium. Cook (2013) also highlights that beside all the advocacy for the introduction of FAL when the children are six or seven years, some educational pundits claim that the vast number of black parents are realising entire economy is now organised on English terms and therefore the chances of success are much greater in the English as a language of instruction that need to be introduced as early in the children schooling as possible. This is seen to be a solution that would lessened the burden of poor mother tongue in the FP classes and the distressing conversion to English later on (Cook, 2013).

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that it is necessary for learners to learn first additional language at a tender age. The crafters of Language Education Policy were right in introducing first additional language to learners. Learners' cognitive development is also considered in learning first additional language. There is no harm in introducing first additional language to learners as participants indicated. At the tender age of the learners, learners are able to pronounce words properly as their tongues are still flexible to can talk and read.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that learners need to be taught first additional language at a tender age. Learners have ability to master languages at an early age of their lives as indicated by this paper. South African language Policy should be adhered as the document which has guidelines on language teaching in primary schools.

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