



1. Call for proposals

This is a call for services of organisations, academic institutions, and NPOs to design an innovative project to address English First Additional Language (EFAL) learning backlogs for the Senior Phase (Grade 8 & 9). The project will be implemented from January 2022 – December 2023.

While learning backlogs (achievement gaps) can be described in broader terms, for purposes of this project, we define them as follows:

- Gaps in foundational knowledge of a subject by the learners. These gaps are exacerbated often by gaps in the content knowledge and pedagogy of teachers.

2. Problem statement

Over the last 10 years, both local and international research has found that:

- Twenty-nine percent of Grade 4 learners are illiterate, while 58% cannot read for meaning in neither their home language nor in English, which is taught as an additional language in the Foundation Phase.
- More than 70% of the poorest half of our children cannot read with comprehension by Grade 4. As a result, children face learning difficulties in languages and all other school subjects throughout their schooling careers.
- These learning difficulties result in knowledge backlogs that become pervasive by the time learners reach high school. In particular, in subjects such as maths and science, where learning is cumulative, the acquisition of new and more complex curriculum knowledge without foundational knowledge in place becomes a struggle.

The learning backlogs in content subjects is compounded by implementation of a language policy where learners switch to English as the language of teaching and learning in Grade 4. By Senior Phase, learners are expected to have achieved a higher level of language competence to enable them to read to learn in a wide variety of literary and non-literary texts¹. In particular, reading and writing are framed within a cognitive process² that requires learners to understand difficult content. Thinking critically, constructing new knowledge, producing positive effects on recall and comprehension of text are critical skills to navigate high school. The reality is that these skills are more difficult to absorb for learners taught in their second language and moreover, when their literacy skills and reading comprehension are not fully developed.

These challenges are borne out by the 2015 Annual National Assessments (ANAs) performance scores where Grade 9 learners achieved an average of 43% in Home Language, 33% in EFAL

¹ University of Pretoria Centre for Evaluations and Assessments, PIRLS Review 2016.

² Mayaba, N.; Otterup, T. & Webb, P. (2013). Writing in Science Classrooms: Some Case Studies in South African and Swedish Second-language Classrooms. *African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*.

and 14% in Maths. The non-proficiency in English, which is the predominant Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) in the Senior Phase, leads to significant learning backlogs, contributing to high learner dropout rates and learners struggling to complete the FET Phase (Grade 10-12) with quality passes. Hence, without being proficient in the English language³, solving problems or answering questions becomes an overwhelming impediment.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the already existing education inequalities. The recently published NIDS-CRAM study⁴ suggests that disadvantaged learners, primarily in primary schools, learnt 50-75% less than what they normally learn. While similar research is not available for Senior Phase learners, it would be fair to deduce that they too would be in a worse off position academically.

3. Zenex interest in Senior Phase backlogs

The Zenex Foundation Strategy 2025 identifies addressing learning backlogs in the Senior Phase as a key lever to improve learner achievement. The Senior Phase is one of the worst performing and neglected parts of the schooling system.

In the phase, the Foundation seeks to:

1. explore different interventions/models for addressing learning backlogs/learner achievement gaps in EFAL,
2. pilot innovations that target both teachers and/or learners,
3. build evidence for system learning and scale-up.

4. Scope of the project

This call for proposals is for an innovative project in the Senior Phase (Grades 8 & 9 only) that will address learning backlogs in EFAL.

Whilst Zenex will allow for innovative ideas, the scope of the project will be guided by the following considerations:

- The project can be implemented in school (within curriculum time)⁵ or after school (extra-curricular),
- The project will follow a cohort of learners from Grade 8 to Grade 9 and will be implemented over two years from 2022 – 2023,
- The project can target teachers and/or learners,
- The project should ideally incorporate a technology element/tool.
- The project is intended to be implemented in 40 schools across four provinces, namely Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape.
- Please note that this project will be evaluated.

³ Spaull, N.; Kotzé, J. 2015. Starting behind and staying behind in South Africa: The case of insurmountable learning deficits in mathematics. *International Journal of Educational Development*.

⁴ Spaull, N., Daniels, R. C et al. (2021) NIDS-CRAM Wave 4 Synthesis Report.t: <https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/1.-Spaull-N.-Daniels-R.-C-et-al.-2021-NIDS-CRAM-Wave-4-Synthesis-Report..pdf>

⁵ There is concern that teachers are overloaded and are mandated to focus on curriculum recovery, proposals must show sensitivity to this context.

5. Task interpretation

- Kindly submit NOT more than a five-page proposal outlining how you understand the task and how you will undertake the task.
- Affirmative action principles will be used to assess applications.

Only shortlisted organisations will be notified. Organisations can submit joint submissions or share the call with others.

6. Proposal submission process

Activity	Date
Submission of proposals	31 May 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A brief outline of how you understand the task.• An outline of the project implementation, indicating target group, mode of delivery, use and explanation of technology.• An indicative budget and timelines.• Experience and expertise of the organisation and team that will deliver the project.• List of team members including race and gender.• Details of the Board/ Trustees of the organisation.	
Applicants to participate in interview process	By 4th June 2021

7. Contact Person for Queries and Submission

Queries and proposals must be emailed to: Ms Lauren Fok lauren@zenexfoundation.org.za or tel: 011 481 7820.

CLOSING DATE: 31 MAY 2021

The Zenex Foundation is an independent education grant-maker established in 1995 to improve teaching and learning outcomes in language and mathematics in South Africa. This strategic focus is driven by evidence of a proven relationship between language proficiency and success in mathematics, as critical for overall learner achievement. The Foundation's entire budget is committed to the fields of language and mathematics in Basic Education. To date, we have disbursed over R1 billion in the South African education sector, the impact of which continues to be evaluated through extensive research and evaluation to ensure that every investment and project drives the advancement of education.

Please visit our website at www.zenexfoundation.org.za for detailed information on our work.