



ZENÉX

F O U N D A T I O N

Leading | Connecting | Learning

Context: Literacy rather than just reading

- Reading is crucial but should not be a sole criterion for literacy achievement, especially in the early grades (Pressley and Allington, 2015).
- The disproportionate focus on reading across the world (Alexander, 2002) can partially be attributed to the fact that it is relatively easier to measure in contrast to oracy or writing.
- Oral language is the basis for literacy development (Barton, 2007; Heath, 1982).
- A literacy perspective is essential in the early grades and in culturally and linguistically diverse societies (Bualit, 2018; Janks, 2010).
- An overemphasis and a narrow conception of reading could lead to misdiagnoses of SA literacy challenges, false solutions and missed opportunities (Bualit, 2018).

Context: 'Under-investment in African languages'

- From a structural and corpus point of view, SA official African languages are some of the most documented languages in the 'developing' world.
- However, very little work sociolinguistic and pragmatic work has been undertaken in these languages.
- Even less empirical and theoretical work has been conducted in these languages in relation to how insights about linguistic structure, pragmatic features and sociolinguistic patterns may be used to inform the practice of education.

The reading crisis

Regardless of the assessment tool, the majority of South African children perform extremely poorly in reading and writing in the early phases of primary education (Fleisch, 2008; 2012; Spaul, 2013; Taylor & Yu, 2009; Van der Berg, 2008). Beyond the low results across the system, it is characterised by a stark bimodal distribution.

Defining learning backlogs

A learning backlog is the gap between learner knowledge, skills and attitudes in a specific subject or learning area, at a certain point in time, relative to where they should be according to some measure, such as a place in a curriculum or a score on a test. Backlogs for many learners are pervasive and cumulative.

Some learning backlogs are less severe; they may be episodic, isolated and limited to a specific subject or area of the curriculum. Such backlogs are easier to overcome.

Promising interventions in primary schooling

- Gauteng Primary Literacy and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) (Fleisch, Schoer, Roberts & Thornton, 2016)
- Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS) (Fleisch, 2018)
- National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT) (NECT, 2018)
- Magic Classroom Collective (Ramadiro & Porteus, 2017)

Collective lessons emerging from interventions

- There are no magic bullets – no intervention study to date has demonstrated significant gains through a light touch intervention design.
- The most promising interventions largely combine systematic and structured instructional materials, just-in-time training, and classroom-based support.
- Interventions that have demonstrated most impact include a relatively high dose of coaching, with coaching visits roughly monthly across the intervention.

Collective lessons emerging from interventions

- Interventions appear to have a quicker impact in the Foundation Phase. The significant impact of the GPLMS in the Foundation Phase, for example, fell away by Grade 4.
- Interventions take time. When interventions measure an effect size, it is often measurable only after two years.
- Change is gradual. The effect size of interventions synthesising the experience from low- and middle-income countries suggests that the impact is relatively small (upwards of around 0.1 standard deviation). It appears that interventions in the Foundation Phase in South Africa may have a slightly larger effect (upwards of around 0.2 standard deviations), measured across at least three years.

Post-apartheid education reform and learning backlogs

A fundamental aim of post-apartheid education transformation/reform was to raise standards for all students and to close the achievement gap between Black and White learners.

Three major policy initiatives.

- > A single national department of education and a national curriculum.
- > Significant increase in public spending.
- > National and common framework for teacher education.

Closing the achievement gap, reducing or eliminating learning backlogs -- lessons from other countries

- Safe housing so that children come to school ready to learn.
- Access to quality early childhood programmes for all children and preferably programmes that include use of the language(s) of the child.
- Equitably funded schools that ensures that the best qualified teachers are equitably distributed in the education system.
- Well-supported and trained teachers.

Closing the achievement gap, reducing or eliminating learning backlogs -- lessons from other countries

- Schools that are organised for in-depth learner and teacher learning.
- Curriculum content and standards that are focused on so-called 21st century learning goals, such as critical and creative thinking, digital skills, ability to work with people from diverse backgrounds, and the promotion of multilingualism in both important national and international languages.

Recommendations

- Language in learning

- > African languages as LOLT but lack of adequate re-sourcing and LOLTs.
- > Urgent need to revise LiEP to reflect current thinking about language and the ways in which people actually use language.
- > Full implementation of LiEP (additive bi/multilingualism)
- > Bi/multilingual teacher education

Recommendations

- Provisioning: Classrooms, curriculum, and teacher development
 - > Meet basic norms for infrastructure and facilities.
 - > Books in the classroom.
 - > School libraries.
 - > A variety of fiction and non-fiction books in African languages.
 - > Full implementation of LiEP (additive bi/multilingualism)
 - > Bite-size, customized and on-going in-service teacher education and classroom-based support on specific literacy topics.



Thank you