

Comparative Review of Bilingual Education Research Study Call for Proposals

1. Introduction

This is a call for a researcher or research agency to conduct a study to better understand approaches to bilingual education in the context of a late-exit model.

An amount of **R350,000** is available to undertake this work, which must be completed by **28 March 2027**.

2. Background

Bilingual education uses two or more languages for teaching and learning, with the aim of enabling learners to become highly proficient in more than one language. Its benefits include improved academic achievement, better career prospects, stronger ties between schools and the homes and communities they serve, and enhanced status for indigenous languages.

In line with the Language in Education Policy (LiEP), South Africa follows an additive approach to bilingualism. Historically, however, the majority of South African schools have favoured an early-exit model, in which the Language of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LoLTA) switches from learners' home language to English in Grade 4. The introduction of mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTbBE) in Mathematics and Natural Sciences & Technology in Grades 4 to 6 marks a gradual shift towards a late-exit model. Under this model, learners continue to learn through the school's designated Home Language until Grade 6, while the additional language (such as English) is introduced more gradually alongside it.

The importance of bilingual education to the South African education system is widely recognised. What remains less certain is how to implement it effectively and at scale, and in particular how best to support teachers working within a late-exit model. Although several programmes are already under way at a systemic level, they are not yet grounded in a robust evidence base.

As South Africa moves towards MTbBE implementation in primary schools, there is a pressing need for evidence to guide this work. The sector would benefit from research insights to inform the design of teacher training programmes, as well as evidence-based models and theoretical frameworks for the pedagogical approaches that underpin MTbBE in a late-exit context.

The early stages of MTbBE implementation, along with a comparative review of the literature, offer a valuable opportunity to build this evidence. Lessons emerging now can shed light on the factors that shape successful implementation at scale, including educator training, the availability of resources, and the development of academic and scientific terminology in African languages.

In its current strategy period, Zenex has moved into working in the Intermediate Phase, creating an opportunity to explore how bilingual education can be supported at scale. Furthermore, Zenex has invested previously in resource development, including within the context of MTbBE. Understanding is needed to evaluate the sustainability of these investments and to identify opportunities for future teacher professional development and resource development. The study will be undertaken in partnership with the DBE.

3. Research questions

The central aim of this research project is to answer the following research question: **What are effective approaches to late-exit models of bilingual education that are being implemented in the Global South?**

Further sub-questions will guide the study:

- What is the nature and distribution of late-exit models of bilingual education, with particular emphasis on the Global South?
- What insights are presented in the literature in relation to implementation of mother tongue-based bilingual education in public schooling systems, particularly in the Global South?
- What modalities of bilingual education exist and have been used in the Global South? Which modality has South Africa aligned to, as part of the MTbBE rollout? What lessons can be learned from other contexts for South Africa's MTbBE implementation?
- How is MTbBE being implemented in South Africa? What are the complexities and challenges, as well as lessons learned?
- How do contextual factors impact implementation of bilingual education programmes (such as standardised language versus dialects, language development and terminology, access to resources, and policy)?

4. Scope of work

4.1 Research design

The study will be carried out through desktop research and interviews with key stakeholders. The primary output will be a research report.

4.2 Activities and deliverables

The researcher(s) will be expected to conduct research with the following activities and deliverables as a guide:

- A desktop review of local and international scholarship and relevant local studies, guidelines and related documentation.
- Interviews with key stakeholders (including national and provincial government officials, NGOs and academics) operating in the space of languages and Mathematics.
- A draft research report for review by Zenex and the DBE, followed by a final report incorporating feedback received.
- Knowledge products for dissemination, such as a short research summary or policy brief, and a

presentation of findings at a Zenex and DBE learning event (for example a seminar or roundtable).

Periodic engagement with the Project Management Team on milestones will be expected, which may be in person or virtual.

5. Application process

5.1 Submissions

Interested service providers should submit a proposal of **not more than three A4 pages** that sets out how they will undertake this work. Applicants can also collaborate with other individuals and organisations where necessary. The proposal must include:

- A brief outline of your understanding of the task
- An outline of the process and methodology that you propose
- A plan with high-level activities, period and budget. (The budget should indicate costs for different activities with travel costs specified separately, if relevant.)
- Experience and expertise of the organisation and team that will undertake the study
- List of team members (where applicable) - this includes brief CVs of the team leader and researchers
- A sample of previous work conducted that is similar to the planned work - this may include reports or tools.

5.2 Shortlisting Process

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

The shortlisted individuals/organisations will be required to do a virtual interview on **27 October** to a panel selected by the Zenex Foundation.

All proposals and queries should be directed to Ms Catherine Langsford at catherine@zenexfoundation.org.za.

CLOSING DATE: 23 October 2026

CLOSING TIME: 16:00