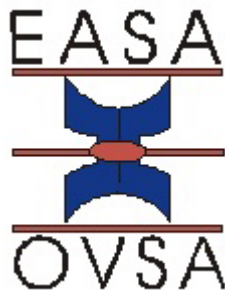


Call for papers: Special issue



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Beyond language policy intention to implementation: Evidence of multilingualism in South African primary school classrooms

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The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) (Department of Education, 1997) is an attempt to promote language equity and quality education in all 11 official languages. In the preamble to the policy document (*The South African National Educational System Language Policy*, 1997) it is recognised that the cultural diversity of South Africa is a national strength. With this strength in mind, the Language in Education Policy aims at promoting multilingualism and the development of all 11 official languages specified in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The underlying principle in the LiEP is to maintain home language(s), while providing access to the effective acquisition of additional languages. The Department of Education therefore follows an additive approach to promoting bilingualism from a mother-tongue base – learners who have a strong mother-tongue foundation participate more actively and with more confidence in their learning and outperform peers who only operate from a second language (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011). According to Heugh (2000), in the policy it is recognised that learners will need a strong proficiency in at least one other language and that for most learners, English will be a language of high priority. Bilingual or multilingual education is conceptualised as adding a second or even a third language to the learner's repertoire, in order to promote academic and linguistic success. The policy neither prevents access to English, nor diminishes the learner's opportunity to engage meaningfully in English. Instead, the policy offers the use of English a much better opportunity for expansion as medium of communication (Heugh, 2000). South Africa's results in the 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) provide empirical evidence for Grade 4 reading literacy achievement. As with previous cycles of South African participation in PIRLS, overall achievement across each of the 11 official languages remains disappointingly low and Grade 4 learners who were tested in African languages were at a distinct disadvantage of under-performance. Based on evidence such as those emanating from PIRLS, work has been conducted by a number of researchers to uncover the role of language, and specifically African languages, in school performance (see for example Granville, Janks, Mphahlele, Reed, Watson, Joseph & Ramani, 1998; Nyika, 2009; Van Staden, Bosker & Bergbauer, 2016). This call for papers is aimed at initiating further discussion and/or evidence to inform the LiEP and extend the debate of languages in education in South Africa beyond policy implementation to incorporate evidence of multilingualism and how it is addressed in classrooms.

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