# Promoting multilingualism: Foundation Phase teachers' experiences in teaching isiXhosa to native speakers of Afrikaans

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After 1994, South African policy changes brought about variations in language education resulting in many monolingual classrooms becoming multilingual. Much of the current literature focuses on either providing recommendations to diverse approaches of teaching a second language or describing the experiences of second language learners while limited studies unearthed teachers' experiences in multilingual classrooms, especially where the language of learning and teaching (LoLT) was Afrikaans. In this article we examine responses of teachers in the Northern Cape to teaching isiXhosa to learners whose mother-tongue is Afrikaans. From an interpretivist lens and using a case study design, we present 6 Afrikaans Foundation Phase teachers' (FPTs) experiences in teaching isiXhosa as a second First Additional Language (FAL) to non-isiXhosa speakers. Data from in-depth email interviews were coded and thematically analysed. The results from this study show that, while teachers regard multilingualism as fundamental, they equally regard the isiXhosa curriculum as a tool to develop learners' language proficiency.

**Keywords:** case study design; First Additional Language; Language in Education Policy (LiEP); multilingualism

## Introduction

The road taken by South Africa over the past 26 years of democracy, particularly with reference to language issues, is extraordinary in different ways. Davenport (1991) relays the story of how English and Dutch (later Afrikaans) were regarded as the approved languages of this republic since the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910. Afrikaans replaced Dutch in 1926 and this contributed to this language becoming the focal point of education policy (Hartshorne, 1999; Henrard, 2001). An intensification of the Afrikaans hegemony was evident since the 1950s. The Bantu Education Act of 1953, the Coloured Persons Education Act of 1963, and the Indian Education Act of 1965 compartmentalised education in South Africa on a sealed racist basis and increased a focus on Afrikaans as medium of instruction (Prah, 2018). The strong emphasis on Afrikaans served a multiple purpose: to maintain political power (Hartshorne, 1999), to establish a kind of ethnic identity, and to discourage access to all other languages spoken in South Africa (Heugh, 1995).

Following the catastrophic consequences of the afore-mentioned education policy acts, the LiEP was promulgated in 1997. The LiEP (Department of Education [DoE], 1997b) is grounded on the acknowledgement that South Africa is multilingual and that the home language is the best suitable language for learning. The adding of additional languages (a second and third language) as part of an additive multilingualism approach provides for a robust ability in other languages and as such, the LiEP aims to "support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa…" (DoE, 1997b:2). In promoting respect for diverse languages, the LiEP (DoE, 1997b) attempts to encourage multilingualism and support language justness and quality education in all 11 official languages, thus acknowledging the cultural diversity in South Africa. An additive approach was implemented by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), Republic of South Africa (RSA) to ensure a practice of bilingualism from a mother-tongue base. This implies that teachers should ensure that learners, who have a healthy mother-tongue foundation, participate more vigorously and self-assured in acquiring other languages (Edwards & Ngwaru, 2011).

In addition to the LiEP, a draft of The Incremental Introduction of African Languages in South African Schools (IIAL) was introduced in 2013 as it aims to

> *promote and strengthen the use of African languages by all learners in the school system by introducing learners incrementally to learning an African language from Grade 1 to 12* (DBE, RSA, 2013:5); and to
> *improve proficiency in and utility of the previously marginalized African languages (at First Additional Language level)* (DBE, RSA, 2013:5).

At the forefront of facilitating African languages in South African schools are teachers who themselves may be perturbed in teaching languages other than Afrikaans and English. Hence, we asked the question: *What are the experiences of Foundation Phase Teachers in teaching isiXhosa as an unfamiliar African language to non-native speakers?*

Drawing on six FPTs' voices at a school in the Namakwa region in the Northern Cape province of South Africa, we describe their experiences in teaching isiXhosa as a second FAL in line with the requirements of the IIAL.

## Literature Review

"…a person who speaks multiple languages has a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, and learn reading more easily" (Cook, 2001:415).

Drawing on Cook (2001), we reflect on various issues at play which may be deemed relevant to this research.

### Perspectives on monolingualism, bilingualism, multilingualism and translanguaging

While Küçükler and Tosuncuoglu (2018) pronounce monolingualism as the capacity of individuals to verbally express themselves in one particular language, Hinton (2016) regards monolingualism in an educational setting as the provision of instruction in only one language. In education, the subtractive nature of monolingualism, in terms of speaking one language or teaching in one language, should be foregrounded. This implies that when schools or a society regard monolingualism as valuable, it may be because a particular ideology is advanced, which may limit further linguistic development (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008). However, researchers agree that the acquisition of a second language may be more beneficial than being able to speak only one language. In their study, Abu-Rabia and Sanitsky (2010) found that competence in a second language may, among others, open doors to work opportunities and enhance communication between individuals.

Bilingualism is described as the ability to utilise more than one language as a means of communication for improved problem solving skills (Leikin, 2013), superior understanding arising in the midst of language interference (Filippi, Morris, Richardson, Bright, Thomas, Karmiloff-Smith & Marian, 2015), proficiency in word learning (Havy, Bouchon & Nazzi, 2016), and better extrapolative abilities (Zirnstein, Van Hell & Kroll, 2019). Significantly, bilinguals' improved perceptive functioning is controlled by bilingual proficiency when a bilingual's languages are vocalised in a similar setting and whether there is recurrent language interchanging (Green & Abutalebi, 2013 as cited in Verhagen, De Bree & Unsworth, 2020:47).

Importantly, multilingualism goes beyond a modest resistance between monolingual and bilingual scholastic models (Herzog-Punzenberger, Le Pichon-Vorstman & Siarova, 2017). Krumm and Reich (2013) emphasise that for teachers to gain confidence in language proficiency, multilingualism explicitly focuses, among others, on the development of language knowledge spheres, its cultural value and incorporating an assortment of teaching strategies. Li (2017) affirms that multilingualism suggests the ability of communicating in multiple languages, whether active (through writing and speaking) or inactive (through reading and listening). Like Okal (2014) we concur with the notion of multilingualism as an all-encompassing term featuring bilingualism (ability to be fluent in two languages), trilingualism (capacity of individuals to verbalise themselves in three languages) including the ability to speak in excess of three languages. Arguably, multilingualism seems to appear more democratic, diverse and dynamic than bilingualism and monolingualism. By speaking of multilingualism in this way, substance is given to translanguaging because it assists individuals to embrace orientations (particularly to multilinguals) and value their proficiency in their individual terms (Canagarajah, 2011). As Khubchandani (1997) validates, translanguaging is about applying a semantic predilection, and not only comprises individuals drawing from all the languages in their collection to communicate, it also includes traveling between the languages conveyed by others to co-construct significance.

Notably, schools in the Namakwa region are predominantly bilingual (Afrikaans as mother tongue and medium of communication) and English FAL, which is taught in schools. The DBE, RSA (2013) is irrevocable in its statement that a multilingual discourse is voiced in the IIAL, which schools should adhere to and which teachers should enact. Regrettably, teachers in the Namaqualand region are often not adequately trained to cope with the diverse challenges that they encounter in multilingual classrooms. For teachers to be efficacious in a multilingual and diverse classroom, they need to be empowered with teaching and learning strategies to develop learners' language proficiency (Hooijer & Fourie, 2009). Such understanding would comprise elementary language achievement abilities, educational concepts and matters regarding multilingual teaching practices in line with existing language policies (Hooijer & Fourie, 2009).

### The role of language policy in promoting multilingualism

Although some important strides haven been made in terms of language policy development since the 1950s, like solving language planning challenges (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017:232), the field has widened to include almost any issue related to language. A language policy is not merely about a language but signifies the symbiosis between language and the ecological relationship between languages which should revolve around multilingual networking

(Annamalai, 2002; Johnson, 2013). In the South African context, efforts to encourage multilingualism is preserved in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which aims "to promote, and create conditions for the development and use of all official languages" (RSA, 1996:5). This constitutional demand is complemented by the Language in Education Policy (DoE, 1997b), which emphasises the promotion of multilingualism because "being multilingual should be a defining character of being South African" (p. 1), and the DBE, RSA (2013), which intends to "further multilingualism" (p. 4). The rationale behind the promotion of multilingualism is to eliminate "the negative stereotypes of the African languages which are held not only by English and Afrikaans speakers, but even by many of the speakers of the African languages themselves" (Language Plan Task Group, 1996:14–15).

The promotion of multilingualism in South Africa currently follows an additive approach, "to provide for more than one language of teaching where the need arises" (DoE, 1997a:2) and "when a person learns a language (or languages) in addition to his or her home language. In an additive multilingual programme, the home language is strengthened and affirmed while any further language learned is seen as adding value" (DBE, RSA, 2013:3). Significantly, the use of additive multilingualism, "has become a shorthand expression for a language-in-education approach designed to foster multilingual proficiency, cognitive development and general social empowerment" (Plüddemann, 2015:186–187). Learners of an additional language therefore develop competence in that language while maintaining the home language and thus adding to instead of subtracting from an individuals' language collection.

### Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)

The teaching and learning of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are considered the fundamental objectives of the teaching and learning of languages. The former set of skills constitute the ability to communicate particularly, but not exclusively, in the reciprocal language skills of listening and speaking. The latter constitutes the related thought and linguistic skills that are applied in the processes of learning across the curriculum (Cummins, 2008; Khatib & Taie, 2016).

The South African National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for languages in all phases and grades, include the following as specific aims of teaching and learning languages at FAL level; among others to "acquire

the language skills required for academic learning across the curriculum; listen, speak, read/view and write/present the language with confidence and enjoyment" (DBE, 2011:9). Additionally, attitudes and skills, including using language appropriately, imaginatively and intuitively considering audience, purpose and context, form the basis for life-long learning and enabling learners to articulate their findings and experiences about the world in writing and orally. The first aim explicitly aligns with CALP, while the rest overtly embody BICS. Significantly, similarities between the two categories of proficiency are detected, because successful communication in social and academic contexts depends on drawing on a repertoire of existing cognitive and language skills to express oneself appropriately in context.

When Afrikaans is offered at FAL level in the Foundation Phase, specific aims outlined in BICS and CALP inform the objectives of teaching and learning. However, when Afrikaans is introduced in Grade 2, the focus of teaching and learning is mainly on BICS. It gradually focuses on learners' CALP in isiXhosa. This occurs in the context of an additive approach to multilingualism where teachers are able to support the learning of isiXhosa, based on learners' BICS and CALP in Afrikaans.

### Teachers' experiences in multilingual classrooms

De Angelis (2011) conducted a study to interpret the views of 176 teachers in secondary schools in Great Britain, Australia and Italy about the role of previous language awareness and the preferment of multilingualism in improving children's ability to learn languages. The findings revealed teachers' support for mother tongue use, because the use of multiple languages in class may delay divergent language acquisition (De Angelis's, 2011). In another study, examining multilingualism opinions among second language teachers in Germany (Heyder & Schädlich, 2014, as cited in Haukås, 2016), almost all the teachers were optimistic about the advantages of speaking different vernaculars in school.

In their research, Hugo and Nieman (2010) found that South African teachers usually struggle with phonemic and phonetic challenges as well as a shortage of terminology, subsequently, teachers find it demanding to interpret, analyse and use information during language teaching. Teachers who participated in a South African study on language acquisition indicated that they were never trained to use African languages (isiXhosa) for teaching across the syllabus (Cekiso, Meyiwa & Mashige, 2019:7).

The multilingual nature of South African society has an effect on how the learning of additional languages is interpreted and understood, particularly in situations where multiple languages

are used because of the exchanges that are likely to happen among the languages and the practices in learning them (Cenoz & Genesee, 1998, as cited in Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019).

## Methodology

Considering that the goal of the study reported on here was the context-specific nature of teachers' knowledge and experiences in teaching isiXhosa to non-native speakers, a qualitative case study approach was adopted in an interpretive manner. In this article, we draw on the theoretical guidelines provided by phenomenology because of its "focus on individuals' interpretations of events in their lifeworlds within the context of broader social structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:3). We used FPTs' experiences of teaching isiXhosa to native speakers of Afrikaans to interpret and construct our understanding from collected information. True to McQueen's (2002) clarification of an interpretivist stance in viewing the world "through a series of individual eyes and choosing participants who have their own interpretations of reality to encompass the worldview" (p. 55), we approached the realities of the teachers who own their experiences and are of a specific culture or group (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

### Participants and Setting

The Northern Cape is the most unique of the nine provinces of South Africa (Alexander, 2020) with a language distribution of four main languages, namely Afrikaans (54%), Setswana (33%), isiXhosa (5%) and English (3.4%) and other languages (4.6%) not widely spoken in the province (Alexander, 2020). The quintile 5, rural public school in this study is situated in a small town near the capital city of the Namaqua region housing predominantly Afrikaans speakers from low income and disadvantaged communities. Learners and teachers share Afrikaans as a mother tongue while English is offered as FAL. Since 2019, isiXhosa has been presented as a second FAL at Grade 1 and 2 level as per the requirements of the IIAL. Teachers have no formal training in speaking, reading, writing and teaching isiXhosa, which creates anxieties about meeting the curricular demands of the subject. In an endeavour to mitigate these challenges, teachers hold cluster meetings with learning area managers of the DoE once a term to share teaching practices on methods and general best practices on how to ensure learner progression in acquiring isiXhosa as a second FAL.

Purposive sampling allowed us to gather data relevant to a typical case to gain an understanding of the research context and to answer the research question. Six Grade 1 and 2 monolingual Afrikaans-speaking teachers were selected to participate. Three female Heads of Department (HoDs) aged between 50 and 55 and three post-level 1 teachers aged between 25 and 35 (all holding a Bachelors in Education (B.Ed.) degree as highest qualification) were identified. In addition to their informal knowledge and experience gained while teaching isiXhosa, eligibility criteria included accessibility, availability and willingness to participate, and the capacity to communicate their experiences in an eloquent and thoughtful way (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979).

### Research Instruments

In-depth, semi-structured online email interviews were used to generate data for the study. Preliminary interactions with the research participants indicated email as the preferred mode of engagement over other online means such as Skype and Zoom due to connectivity constraints. Prior to distributing the interview schedules, we conducted informal, unstructured telephonic pilot interviews. In these we used comprehensive theme directors with a few straightforward questions to ensure that meaning was not lost in the way that the questions were asked. This allowed us to develop a keen understanding of the participants' experiences in teaching isiXhosa and to develop meaningful and relevant questions. As participants used their personalised email addresses, these were accessible and considered low cost instruments which offered the participants relative anonymity and afforded them time to reflect on the research questions at leisure (James, 2016).

Each participant received a password-protected, semi-structured interview schedule containing 10 open-ended questions via email.

To attain optimal use of interview time, interview schedules serve a suitable purpose of exploring several participants' views more methodically and systematically, while keeping the interview focused on the anticipated line of action (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Once the completed interview schedules were received, responses were reviewed. In instances where it seemed necessary, follow-up questions were emailed to the relevant participants.

### Ethical Considerations

Written permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Northern Cape Department of Education (NCDoE), from the principal of the school, and from the participating FPTs. Teachers completed consent forms which were forwarded to and returned via email. Confidentiality was ensured as the password-protected interview schedules and answers were only exchanged between the researchers and participants.

## Data Analysis and Interpretation

Thematic analysis was conducted. Seeing that our analysis was based on the themes emerging from the data, we followed an inductive approach to thematic analysis because the identified themes were strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A six-step procedure was applied which included familiarisation with the data; coding the data; generating broad themes; reviewing the themes by assessing how well they represented the research questions; defining and naming themes based on the research question; and writing up the analysis of the data (Caulfield, 2020; Nowell, Morris, White & Moules, 2017). Codes P1 to P6 were used to characterise the six FPTs. The following themes were identified: *multiple language teaching in the Foundation Phase (FP), multilingualism and teachers' isiXhosa knowledge fields, and the socio-cultural and linguistic value of learning and teaching isiXhosa*. To ensure credibility, teachers were invited to confirm our understanding of the information gleaned from the interviews.

## Discussion

### Multiple Language Teaching in the Foundation Phase

Teachers in the FP generally regard the teaching of multiple languages (Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa) as positive: "*Recently, I witnessed how a learner at another school asked a question in isiXhosa. The teacher tried to explain in Afrikaans without much success. If the teacher would have had knowledge about isiXhosa, the learner could have been assisted much better*" (P3) and "*Multilingualism can contribute to the development of learners' qualities as human beings. It also prepares learners for the world out there*" (P5). It is significant to note that teachers are experiencing challenges with code switching (to Afrikaans) in a bid to explain concepts in isiXhosa, without much success. Although, according to Alby and Léglise (2018) and Taylor-Leech and Ollerhead (2019), teaching in multiple languages may promote communication skills and contribute to improved learning cultures. Teachers in this school had to devise creative teaching strategies to promote learning. A teacher remarked: "*I normally group my learners if there is a difficult word or concept to be grasped – so that they can practice it together while gaining more confidence to articulate it, but I always make sure I praise them*" (P6). Co-operative learning activities and individualised feedback form the basis of the interactions in the isiXhosa classroom, where teachers have to navigate and share learning strategies without having formal training in teaching the language.

Additionally, FPTs indicated that the teaching of the three languages was not always experienced positively. Learning Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa alongside each other often confuses learners and do not necessarily contribute to improving language abilities. The participants indicated that: "*Learners struggle with Afrikaans HL* [Home Language] *because they do not read much. EFAL* [English First Additional Language] *is too much work. In general, both languages are a challenge*" (P2); and "*More time should be afforded for the teaching of isiXhosa. As we only have general knowledge in isiXhosa, it results in learners not speaking the language correctly and sometimes we cannot finish the curriculum*" (P5). Arguably, multilingualism does not spontaneously improve additional language learning. As a means of dealing with time constraints, some scholars indicate that teachers may force their learners to learn isiXhosa instead of using various teaching strategies and encouraging them to practice the language as much as possible (Hoadley, 2015; Wildeman & Nomdo, 2007). Teachers reiterated that they did not "force" learners and maintained that they strove to providing learners with the linguistic tools for ensuring performance. They hastened to concede that with their meagre proficiency in isiXhosa, and without the relevant training, it was challenging to achieve. The implication is that, although the LiEP and IIAL aim at promoting multilingualism in the classroom, teachers perceive themselves as lacking confidence and variety of language repertoires required to teach isiXhosa. Although teachers were seemingly positive regarding the promotion of multilingualism and found it challenging to adapt to policy requirements and meeting the curriculum development specifications for isiXhosa as second FAL, much needs to be done to ensure that learners are provided with the language tools to gain the required subject competence.

Drawing on Erling, Adinolfi and Hultgren (2017), implications are that professional teacher development initiatives should be launched at national, regional, provincial and institutional level to support the implementation of flexible multilingual approaches in classrooms. The integration of sound pedagogical practices and flexible approaches to teach [for example: isiXhosa] may enhance learning. It is further incumbent upon material and curriculum developers to focus on appropriate resource development for the subject. The isiXhosa curriculum should align with the content of the Afrikaans and English curricula to support teaching and learning. Additionally, to better understand the potential of local language use, classroom code-switching and translanguaging in supporting learning in isiXhosa (switching from Afrikaans to isiXhosa) should be regarded as significant. These sentiments were echoed by the teachers.

*It is often very difficult to find the balance between oral and written tasks in the different languages we teach, and you know when learners cannot easy make the connections. It is difficult, really… that is*

*why I often explain in Afrikaans, just to help them make sense of it all.* (P4)

*In my class I am very worried that the meanings of words in isiXhosa get lost when I'm translating it to Afrikaans. It takes a lot of preparation to find the best way to explain to my learners, and then you are not even sure if they will understand you.* (P1)

The value of a multilingual approach may be appreciated in terms of the formative function of language which involves "the use of language as an instrument for providing and receiving information or expressing emotions and desires, all which play a significant role in interpersonal and social interaction" (Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000:2, as cited in Aziakpono & Bekker, 2010:40). In their study on multilingual pedagogies, Catalano and Hamann (2016) indicate that such an approach may assist individuals to see what may be possible regarding language use, while appreciating the value of teaching a specific language.

### Multilingualism and Teachers' isiXhosa Knowledge Domains

Language teachers' knowledge fields refer to the expertise, understanding, awareness, knowledge, and skills required to teach effectively (Faez, 2011; Tedick, 2009). One participant unwaveringly indicated a lack of expertise to teach isiXhosa: "*I know that one should be able to demonstrate the relationship between the sounds of the spoken language, and the letters. With isiXhosa I am not so sure. I'm definitely not an expert*" (P3). In this regard, research indicates that teachers should, among others, have a combination of knowledge to teach languages (Ball, Thames & Phelps, 2008; Bertram, Christiansen & Mukeredzi, 2015; Taylor & Taylor, 2013) including subjective knowledge; educational content knowledge and content knowledge. However, teachers indicated their lack of knowledge as follows: "*I did not receive any formal training nor did I complete an examination of some kind. I am not always sure that I am on the right track. If I could just have good knowledge about the language*" (P4). "*Insufficient training resulted in lots of frustration for teachers. I indeed need more training to build my knowledge to be comfortable with the teaching of isiXhosa*" (P5). Judging from these responses, teachers were sensitive and concerned about acquiring the language skills and there was a reasonable expectation to be adequately trained to teach isiXhosa.

In keeping with the views of the participants, a lack of teaching support from the education authorities may be interpreted as disinterest regarding the importance and implementation of the programme. A crucial perception raised by teachers was that a needs analysis and training programme should be conducted to address their teaching and learning needs in the implementation of isiXhosa in Afrikaans-medium schools. The need for training can be attributed to the situation where teachers used Afrikaans as LoLT and in this sense, justifies teachers' requests for training to teach in a language other than what they and the learners are used to.

### Socio-Cultural and Linguistic Value of Learning and Teaching isiXhosa

Exposure to a language, other than the learners' mother tongue, may assist them to realise socio-cultural ability. The socio-cultural status of a community may be enhanced when opportunities arise where learners can experience association with other cultures through language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, as cited in Chibaka, 2018). In this instance, intercultural ability is considered the skill to successfully communicate with people of other cultures while multilingualism enables people to appreciate other cultures easier than monolinguals (Barac & Bialystok, 2012; Piller, 2017; Yang, 2020). When asked about the socio-cultural and linguistic value of teaching and learning isiXhosa, teachers responded as follows:

*Learners acquire a better understanding of people's cultures. It also helps that learners respect others from an early age* (P4).

*I think it is of great value. A parent recently told me that her Grade 2 child asked something in isiXhosa at home. I think it was 'Ndifuna isonka.' She asked her child what it meant and the response was 'I want bread.' The parent told me that she was so surprised, yet so proud.* (P5)

*I think the fact that learners are exposed to isiXhosa is important and it will help them to communicate in different languages one day* (P6).

*What I see are my learners' excitement when I share how learning a new language can make a difference in their families lives one day* (P3).

The above quotes emphasise something crucial about teachers' sense of pride as they relayed the value that they thought the learners may derive from learning isiXhosa, but also the ability of the language to enhance its speakers' general communicative ability. It seems as if teachers acknowledge the value of multilingualism and how learners may appreciate cultural awareness and become more creative and contribute economically in society. In earlier responses, teachers indicated that they were insecure and unfamiliar with the language and modality of teaching and learning isiXhosa. Teachers acknowledging the value of nurturing isiXhosa, coupled with the Constitution (RSA, 1996) and language policies in South Africa, provide the means to promote multilingualism, where a range of rewards, including cultivating an innovative workforce and contributing to the country's economic growth, may be reaped.

An opinion regarding the value of isiXhosa may be considered self-contradicting in terms of the location of the school and the community it serves as it is barely spoken in the Namaqualand

region. However, we believe that the teaching and learning of an additional language may serve symbolically as an emblem of its user's new identity and provide a new lens through which to view the world. Learning appropriate linguistic habits involves more than learning the language or expressing views on the value thereof as it involves social and psychological adaptation, and changes in beliefs and attitudes towards such languages (De Klerk, 2000).

## Conclusion

Despite the small size of our sample, the findings are valuable as they provide insights into how teachers are still grappling with promoting multilingualism and innovative teaching strategies to develop FP learners' multilingual abilities from an early age. Significantly, the accomplishment of a multilingual educational methodology largely depends on the multilingual proficiency of teachers. As such, the purpose of our suggestions with reference to multilingual action-competence activities, should be regarded as part of a novel approach to assist FPTs in the teaching of isiXhosa in their classrooms – motivating them to move from uncertain multilingual practitioners to individuals who gradually play an active role in teaching and constructing knowledge about isiXhosa.

This article supports earlier findings in the literature which indicate that, although consciousness about language multiplicity are considered, there are still educational constraints that need thoughtful consideration by the government and other education stakeholders (Prosper & Nomlomo, 2016). The importance of finding a balance between teaching support, subject knowledge competencies and learner performance, seems to flow over into the participants' self-awareness and positive outlook.

Based on the findings in this research, we suggest that an exploration into the content and delivery of on-the-job training regarding teachers' multilingual proficiency be considered as a point of departure.

## Authors' Contributions

Dr Papashane conducted the literature review, Dr De Klerk compiled the methodology section and led the email interviews, while Dr Palmer and Dr De Klerk conducted the analysis. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

## Notes

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