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# Challenges facing primary school educators of English Second (or Other) Language learners in the Western Cape

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*We were prompted by the prevalence of English Second or Other Language (ESOL) learners identified by educators as having language disorders and being referred for Speech-Language Therapy. We describe challenges faced by Grade 1, 2 and 3 educators at government schools in the Cape Metropolitan area who were working with such learners. Applying a mixed-methods descriptive design, a self-administered questionnaire and three focus groups were used for data collection. Educator perceptions and experiences regarding ESOL learners were described. Some participant educators at schools that were not former Model C schools had large classes, including large proportions of ESOL learners. Furthermore, there was a shortage of educators who were able to speak isiXhosa, the most frequently occurring first (or home) language of the region's ESOL learners. Challenges faced by educators when teaching ESOL learners included learners' academic and socio-emotional difficulties and a lack of parent involvement in their children's education. Participant educators indicated a need for departmental, professional and parental support, and additional training and resources. Implications and recommendations for speech-language therapist and educator collaborations and speech-language therapists' participation in educator training were identified.*

**Keywords:** collaboration; educator experiences; educator needs; ESOL learners, Speech-Language Therapists in educational settings; Speech Language Therapy

## Introduction

The majority of learners in South Africa are bi- or multi-lingual, and attend school in a language that is not their first language (Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB), 2000). These learners are frequently inappropriately referred for Speech-Language Therapy (SLT) for a 'language disorder' (Crago, Eriks-Brophy, Pesco & McAlpine, 1997; Stoffels, 2004). Therefore English-second (or other) language (ESOL) learners are being 'pathologised' because educators may interpret language differences as deficiencies (Crago *et al.*, 1997). Consequently SLTs should work with educators to promote language learning to prevent academic difficulties related to language differences (O'Connor, 2003; Dawber & Jordaan, 1999; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003; Jordaan & Yelland, 2003).

### Context

South Africa has eleven official languages. This creates logistical difficulties (Adler, 2001), which, together with the widespread preference for education in English (Vesely, 2000), result in the Revised National Curriculum Statement's (RNCS) (Department of Education, 2002) language policy only being partially implemented. This language policy uses an additive approach to bi- or multi-lingualism, whereby the first language is maintained and used as a basis for the learning of another language (Chick & McKay, 2001; The Advisory Panel on Language Policy, 2000). This approach has benefits for the learner as "continued development of both languages into literate domains … is a precondition for enhanced cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth" (Cummins, 2000:37). Due to the partial implementation of the language policy, South African educators face the challenges of large numbers of ESOL learners in their classes (PANSALB, 2000).

Cummins (2000:59) distinguishes between basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), "the registers of language that children acquire in school and which they need to use effectively if they are to progress successfully through the grades". Although learners may be able to use English competently among peers and in social settings (BICS), they may not be proficient in the type of language expected in the classroom (CALP) (Cummins, 2000). While it takes ESOL learners approximately two years to become competent in English BICS, it takes them five to seven years to reach the same level as their first-language peers in terms of CALP (Hall, 1996; Cummins, 2000).

Struggling academically can lower ESOL learners' self-esteem and confidence, in turn perhaps affecting other areas of learning and functioning (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999) through frustration, social isolation, and disciplinary problems (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003). Time spent to resolve these can interrupt the flow of lessons (Pluddemann, Mati & Mahlahela-Thusi, 2000) and add to ESOL learners' difficulties which are often exacerbated by poverty, hunger, and fatigue through travelling long distances to school (Stoffels, 2004).

Educators have expressed concern that learners do not receive supportive input in their additional language at home (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003). A need for greater parent collaboration has been indicated, (O'Connor, 2003; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003; SASLHA Ethics and Standards Committee, 2003) and parents need to be informed about language acquisition and language stimulation (SASLHA Ethics and Standards Committee, 2003).

In their study with 32 participants working with pre-school learners in Gauteng province, DuPlessis and Naudé (2003) identified needed and helpful strategies including assistance in developing and selecting appropriate material for language lessons (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003), partnership teaching — involving other learners, educators, support staff and senior school management (Hall, 1996; Ngidi & Qwabe, 2006) — as well as including educators in curriculum development and planning as key agents (Carl, 2005). District-based and institutional level support teams at schools are a prospective resource for educators working with ESOL learners (Department of Education, 2001). In addition, in an earlier study with 23 participants at six primary schools in Cape Town, educators reported that teaching assistants fluent in the mother tongue of ESOL learners helps them to cope better (O'Connor, 2003) — this has been implemented, prioritising teaching assistants in foundation phase classes to assist with literacy and numeracy (Western Cape Education Department (WCED), 2006).

Educator training is a key need to support the proper implementation of the language-in-education policy in a multilingual approach to education (Alexander, 2002). In the South African context educators need training in bilingualism, second language acquisition and learning in a second language (O'Connor, 2003; Du Plessis & Louw, 2008; Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003). Moreover, educators need language awareness and sensitivity about how different environmental contexts — home, community and school — affect the learner (Young, 1995). Language-across-the-curriculum should form part of South African educator training courses (Uys, Van der Walt, Van der Berg & Botha, 2007), as this highlights how subject knowledge is encoded in language and how educator-learner interaction is shaped by language processes like questioning, explaining and instruction-giving, as well as the role of textbooks (Young, 1995).

Some ESOL learners underachieve academically as a result of learning in a language that is not their first language (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999; Ortiz, 1997; Statham, 1997). Educators need to know the difference between learning difficulties and language-based academic problems (Ortiz, 1997) to avoid the mistaken diagnosis of a 'learning' difficulty in ESOL learners (Statham, 1997).

Educators have expressed an interest in collaborating with SLTs (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008; Farber & Klein, 1999; Wadle, 1991) who may be able to assist in some of their challenges (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999; Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994; Jordaan, 1992; Jordaan & Yelland, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Struthers & Lewis, 2004;) if they are made available to the wider community (Rossi & Stuart, 2007). SLTs are 'language focused' and able to explain the effects of language on learning, and could provide curriculum guidelines for all content areas through language skills on listening, speaking, reading and writing (Wadle, 1991). SLTs could also assist educators in identifying learners with language disorders needing direct intervention (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999). Collaboration should reflect a transdisciplinary approach where different disciplines are integrated into a united entity to manage learners from a holistic perspective (Rapport, McWilliam & Smith, 2004). Professionals engaging in collaboration would need to help one another learn some of their profession's skills (Rapport *et al.*, 2004). Such collaboration will benefit ESOL learners, other learners with language problems as well as educators and speech-language therapists (DiMeo, Merritt & Culatta, 1998; Cirrin & Penner, 1995). Furthermore, language problems may be prevented through educators becoming more aware of language difficulties and adapting their language to meet learners' needs (Cirrin & Penner, 1995) while SLTs can learn more about curricula, teaching methods and implementing programmes with large groups (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998; Farber & Klein, 1999). SLTs may help educators to use clearer language as complex English demands high levels of auditory processing and short term memory skills (Brice & Brice, 2000). SLTs could ensure carry-over of speech and language skills in classrooms as well as providing information and support to the teacher (Lewis, 2004; Wadle, 1991). Years of teaching experience and the degree to which educators collaborate with other professionals have been found to affect educators' perceptions of their own competence (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008). Speech and language services provided in a classroom-setting facilitate communicative competence and promote academic success (Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994). Educators learning language techniques with broad applicability (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998; Jordaan & Yelland, 2003) may benefit all learners in the class (Pershey & Rapking, 2002). SLTs need to be able to provide support that is not only directed at the learner, but also the educator, school-environment and parents through a health promoting model (Struthers & Lewis, 2004).

Our purpose in this paper was to expand upon the previously identified challenges of educators with regard to ESOL learners in other South African contexts, by including a larger sample of educators of junior-primary ESOL learners, in the complex context of the Cape Metropole. This gave rise to the research question:

> What are the challenges facing educators working with ESOL learners in the Cape Metropolitan area?

## Method

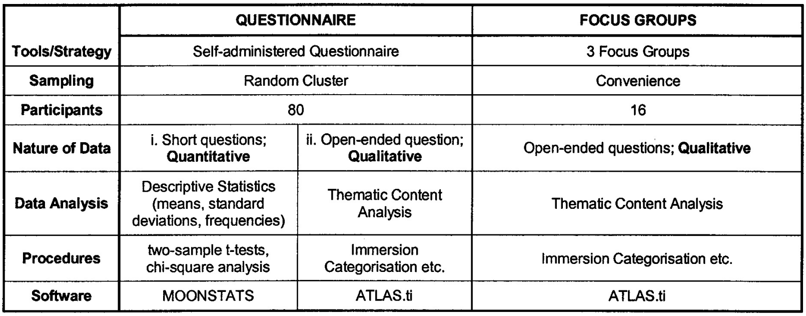
In order to inform the practice of SLTs in meeting the challenges facing educators working with ESOL learners in the Cape Metropolitan area, we aimed to describe:

- Educators' perceptions of the difficulties experienced by ESOL learners;
- challenges faced by educators when teaching ESOL learners.

Applying a mixed-methods design, the first part of the study consisted of a self-administered questionnaire which delivered both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative element was used, in line with interpretive practice (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003), to analyse how educators teaching ESOL learners constructed their experiences and what meaning they attached to them. The second part consisted of focus groups and delivered qualitative data. This allowed a more in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges of educators from their own perspectives with regard to teaching ESOL learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Katzenellenbogen, Joubert & Abdool Karim, 1997). Figure 1 provides an overview of the method.

For the questionnaire, participants were selected according to the following criteria: Grade 1, 2 or 3 educators at English-medium government primary schools in the Cape Metropolitan area, with a minimum of three ESOL learners in their class. Random cluster sampling of schools rather than individual educators was used (Oppenheim, 1992). Twenty-three schools, a third of the schools in the Cape Metropolitan Area, were obtained from the WCED website (2005) and approached, inviting Grade 1, 2 or 3 educators to participate in the research.

Following Ethics Committee approval, permission for the research was obtained firstly from the WCED for schools under their jurisdiction, then from the principals of selected schools, and finally, the Grade 1, 2, and 3 educators were invited to participate via an information letter, with consent form and questionnaire.



| | **QUESTIONNAIRE** | | **FOCUS GROUPS** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Tools/Strategy** | Self-administered Questionnaire | | 3 Focus Groups |
| **Sampling** | Random Cluster | | Convenience |
| **Participants** | 80 | | 16 |
| **Nature of Data** | i. Short questions; **Quantitative** | ii. Open-ended question; **Qualitative** | Open-ended questions; **Qualitative** |
| **Data Analysis** | Descriptive Statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) | Thematic Content Analysis | Thematic Content Analysis |
| **Procedures** | two-sample t-tests, chi-square analysis | Immersion Categorisation etc. | Immersion Categorisation etc. |
| **Software** | MOONSTATS | ATLAS.ti | ATLAS.ti |

Figure 1 Overview of method

Of the 139 educators approached, 100 returned their questionnaires — a response rate of 72%. Six of the participating schools were previously Model C schools (regarded as privileged 'white' schools during apartheid), while other schools were formerly 'coloured' schools that had subsequently experienced an influx of isiXhosa-speaking learners. Seventeen participants' questionnaires (all from former Model C schools) were excluded for having fewer than three ESOL learners in their classes, and three were incomplete. Therefore, the sample size for questionnaires was 80: consisting of 27 Grade 1, 30 Grade 2 and 23 Grade 3 educators from a total of 21 schools, representing all areas within the Cape Metropolitan region.

For the focus groups, convenience sampling included participants on the basis of their availability (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). All participants who completed the questionnaire were invited to attend a focus group. Interested participants were contacted, resulting in 31 interested participants. Communication difficulties resulted in only 16 participants in three focus groups held at schools convenient for the respondents: the first and third consisted of six educators each who worked at former 'coloured' schools, with four participants from a former 'Model C' school in the second group.

The questionnaire consisted of predominantly closed questions, including varied response formats — Likert Scale, Checklist (with multiple options), Yes/No questions and One-word-answers (Katzenellenbogen *et al.*, 1997). Every effort was made to avoid ambiguities and an option for 'other' was provided for most questions (Kanjee, 1999). An open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire provided an opportunity for respondents to add any further relevant information (Katzenellenbogen *et al.*, 1997).

The focus groups provided qualitative information about participants' attitudes, perceptions and opinions (Katzenellenbogen *et al.*, 1997). Owing to the differences between the schools — the number of ESOL learners and the availability of resources — varied information was obtained. As only eager educators may have attended the focus groups, there was a possibility of volunteer bias, therefore results from the focus groups cannot be generalised. A research assistant noted verbal and non-verbal interaction, and groups were tape-recorded and orthographically transcribed for content analysis. The focus groups followed an open-ended format with the aim of understanding concepts from the perspective of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), with planned questions as well as discussion on issues that arose within the focus groups. The researcher summarised and reflected within the focus groups to verify understanding; and findings from consecutive focus groups were confirmed to ensure that the researcher had not misinterpreted the results (Cresswell, 1998). Data saturation occurred by the end of the third focus group when the same information recurred and new data could be integrated into already devised categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The quantitative data were analysed for frequency, means and standard deviations. Two-sample *t* tests were used, to assess the difference between means, and chi-square analysis to measure the association between certain categories (Howell, 1999). Measures of reliability and validity included the pilot study and verification of 10% of the questionnaire coding by an independent external observer, after which one minor change was made.

The qualitative data were analysed by means of thematic content analysis, which involves immersion in the data, familiarisation, theme induction, coding, elaboration, interpretation and checking (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The data was coded by breaking it down into "labelled, meaningful pieces" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:143). These data were then used to determine categories. Within the categories, codes were divided into subcategories (Katzenellenbogen *et al.*, 1997) and these, along with the categories, were used to establish emerging themes.

Precautions were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the qualitative data according to the criteria of credibility, applicability, dependability and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These included the following steps: personal preconceptions, biases and beliefs in the context of the research were acknowledged and analysed (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) and peer debriefing occurred (Krefting, 1991). Thick descriptions of the context would enable other researchers to establish the similarity with their context, while negative or opposing data were included for analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A detailed audit trail that described exact steps followed in the research process ensured that the research could be replicated (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999), while triangulation of methods enhanced the trustworthiness of the study and triangulation of data ensured a correct understanding of the phenomenon (Cresswell, 1998; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

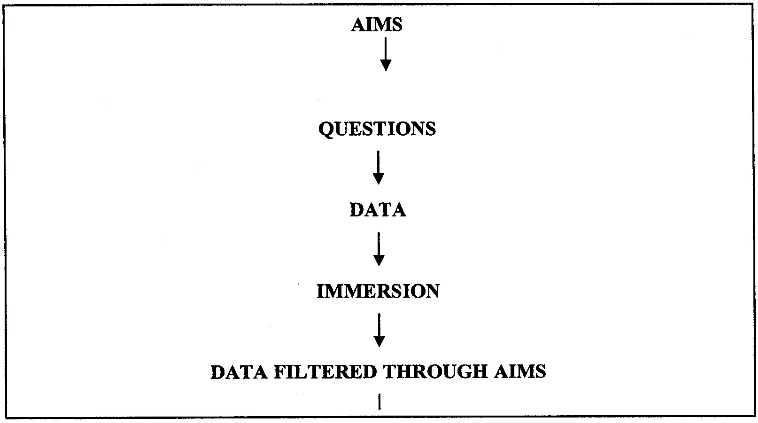


Figure 2 Content analysis of qualitative data

## Results and discussion

Participating educators reported that 87.5% of their ESOL learners had isiXhosa as a first language, followed by Afrikaans and then other languages.

### Educators' perceptions regarding the difficulties experienced by ESOL learners

ESOL learners taught by participants in this study experienced various academic challenges such as having to repeat a year, or proceeding to the next grade without adequate grasp of the previous grade's work. Having very little exposure to English at home, and tending to speak in their home language to peers at school, many learners may not even have had adequate BICS in English, thereby affecting their CALP in English (Cummins, 2000). So as not to affect their self-esteem, ESOL learners who had not coped academically in a grade may be promoted to the next grade where they should receive additional support (WCED, 2004). Participants felt that this practice was not always in the best interests of the ESOL learners since they may always remain behind academically. Although the schools had access to rehabilitative support such as psychologists and learning support teachers (Department of Education, 2001), these multifunctional teams were often understaffed and unable to see all the children who needed help.

ESOL learners' first language also influenced their development of English, for example, pronunciation affected their phonics in their writing, and concepts such as gendered pronouns confused isiXhosa speakers where personal pronouns for male and female are the same:

> *I mean, it must be really confusing for someone who's a second language learner to come and have to figure out that three sounds, I mean, have different letter combinations but they all make the same sound.*

*Socio-emotional problems* associated with learning in a language that is not their first language meant learners lost their home language and culture. For example, educators felt that isiXhosa-first language ESOL learners lost their first language vocabulary by replacing some words with English equivalents. This could be the effect of ESOL learners not using their first language for high level cognition (Morrow, Jordaan & Fridjhon, 2005) or due to the predominant use of English in the media and in urban areas (Vesely, 2000). ESOL learners' limited English language skills leading to a difficulty with expressing themselves, and confusion from not understanding instructions, contributed to a lack of confidence.

Discipline and behaviour problems amongst ESOL learners due to large class sizes were compounded by language issues. As one participant indicated:

> *You can't sit with a group of 4 children, then 40 of them will do what they want to do.*

Thirty-four percent of participating educators frequently experienced discipline problems with ESOL learners — with larger classes being notably more difficult than smaller classes, due to limited comprehension skills of ESOL learners and linguistic and cultural mismatches between them and educators (Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003; Pluddemann *et al.*, 2000; Schulze & Steyn, 2007).

*Parent involvement* (e.g. when parents helped their children with schoolwork at home) was reported to contribute to good progress of ESOL learners. However, while most educators (76%) reported that they tried to collaborate with parents of ESOL learners, it emerged in the focus groups that despite trying to involve parents, few responded. Educators were aware of the benefits of encouraging parents to use their first language when helping children with homework as well as creating opportunities for their child to listen and interact in English (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999). Sometimes parents could not assist with their child's schoolwork as they themselves did not understand English, or were illiterate or unable to read and write in English. Social circumstances such as long hours of work, transport, or finances may also have affected parents' involvement.

### The challenges faced by educators working with ESOL learners

In spite of feeling sympathy towards ESOL learners, educators felt *frustrated* working with them, because of heavy workloads. As they first had to teach the language and vocabulary for specific content, they found it impossible to complete the syllabus for the year. Also having learners in the class with better English abilities, educators reported having to teach on diverse language and academic levels (see also Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003).

Educators reported being required to give extra attention to learners who were not keeping up, as well as adequately challenging stronger learners, in order to ensure that all learners in their class had an equally effective education. Large numbers of ESOL learners in their classes increased the workload in all teaching areas such as marking and preparation of lessons, leaving educators feeling over-worked and resentful, for example:

> *I constantly feel that I am over-working and something's not fair towards me somewhere along the line. I'm doing work that I shouldn't be doing.*

Some of the participants' frustration stemmed from the presence of ESOL learners in class. Believing that it offered a better education (see Vesely, 2000) parents sent their children to an English school, thereby creating additional work for educators. Parents' limited involvement with their children's schoolwork further frustrated educators.

Thirty-four percent of educators reported frequent problems with discipline, identifying their main problem as not being able to speak the first language of ESOL learners (43%). Only 9% spoke isiXhosa as a first language and none were able to speak isiXhosa as an additional language, therefore also experiencing difficulties in collaborating with parents (see Willett, Solsken & Wilson-Keenan, 1999).

The size and demographics of classes were also sources of frustration. As class sizes increased, the frequency of problems increased: lack of knowledge of second language acquisition processes ($\chi^2 = 16.22$; df = 2; $p < 0.001$); lack of knowledge of bilingualism ($\chi^2 = 6.64$; df = 2; $p = 0.036$) and problems with discipline due to limited comprehension of ESOL learners ($\chi^2 = 9.69$; df = 2; $p = 0.008$). Educators with large classes (more than 30 learners) were more likely to experience these problems frequently than educators with smaller classes (less than 30 learners). Most educators (69%) had more than 30 learners in their class and they felt that not only would smaller classes make their responsibilities easier, they would be of more benefit to the ESOL learners:

> *... the smaller classes. It is not because we have such a load and you know we want the easy way out. It's not like that. You know the child ... the third language child, the Xhosa child ... they need so much of time to talk ...*

A statistically significant association was found between class size and felt competency of the participants when teaching ESOL learners ($\chi^2 = 6.40$; df = 2; $p = 0.041$). More educators with classes above 30 ESOL learners (28%) felt competent only in some circumstances compared to educators with smaller classes (4%). Conversely, significantly more educators of smaller classes (70%) felt competent, in most circumstances, than educators with larger classes (45%).

Using the two-sample *t* test a significant difference was found between mean class size for previously Model C schools and other schools ($t = 7.06$; df = 78; $p < 0.001$). Educators at the former had significantly smaller classes than the other educators: a mean class size of 24.9 learners (*SD* = 5.098) and 36.8 learners (*SD* = 6.537), respectively. However, only 18 previously Model C schools educators were included in the sample as others had fewer than three ESOL learners in their classes, so these results should be interpreted with caution.

A significant association was found between the type of school and the frequency with which the problems were experienced. Educators teaching at schools that were not previously Model C schools were more likely to frequently experience problems of:

- not being able to speak the ESOL learners' first language ($\chi^2 = 11.35$; df = 2; $p = 0.003$);
- a lack of knowledge of ESOL learners' cultural characteristics ($\chi^2 = 9.30$; df = 2; $p = 0.010$);
- a lack of knowledge of second language acquisition ($\chi^2 = 17.42$; df = 2; $p < 0.001$);
- a lack of knowledge of bilingualism ($\chi^2 = 18.51$; df = 2; $p < 0.001$);
- discipline problems due to ESOL learners not understanding instructions ($\chi^2 = 15.30$; df = 2; $p < 0.001$).

This can be ascribed to educators having bigger classes and a higher percentage of ESOL learners in their classes. These results should be interpreted with caution, due to sample size.

These quantitative results were confirmed in the focus group where former 'Model C' school educators experienced less frustration and more support than educators in the other focus groups.

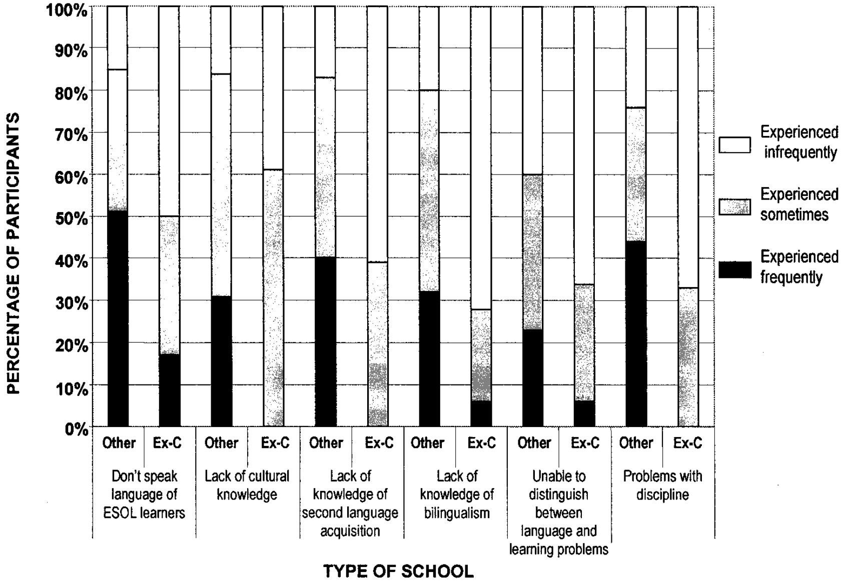


Figure 3 Type of school and frequency of problems experienced

Although The Language Policy and Plan for South Africa (The Advisory Panel on Language Policy, 2000) strongly encourages learners to learn in their first language, the data collected in this study showed that large numbers of learners were attending school in English when English was not their home language or the language used for neighbourhood communication (see also PANSALB, 2000). Forty-one percent of educators had more than 60% ESOL learners in their classes, while two had 100%. There was a significantly higher percentage of ESOL learners at schools that were not former Model C schools ($t = 5.74$; df = 45.98; $p < 0.001$).

### *Support*

While educators from the former Model C school appreciated the support they had, participants from other schools felt unsupported and alone, feeling that they bore all the responsibility for educating learners in their classes without support from key contributors. They also felt disempowered because they had to refer decisions about learners repeating grades to an external team who would make the ultimate decision. In spite of the Western Cape Education Department being aware of the large classes and large numbers of ESOL learners, the educators felt that their needs were not being heard and met:

> *Nobody seems to help us. We had a meeting in August, all of us were sitting here and no one could help us. What are you going to do as School X but the department can't help us, we must come up with strategies.*

Educators who took part in this study would welcome previously identified strategies such as partnership teaching (Hall 1996), teacher aids (see O'Connor, 2003) and isiXhosa-speaking aids (see Pluddemann *et al.*, 2000). The WCED's recent roll-out of teaching assistant posts for schools in the Western Cape is responding to this urgent need.

In addition, educators found that having a language enrichment teacher to provide language support and facilitate acquisition of English for ESOL learners in a functional and enjoyable environmentuseful. Not all schools had a language enrichment teacher, but this role could be fulfilled by SLTs: 86% of educators said they would like assistance from an SLT while 84% said they needed professional help to evaluate the language needs of ESOL learners. This confirms earlier findings that SLTs can provide practical assistance to educators in the classroom (see Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994; Lewis, 2004; Struthers & Lewis, 2004; DiMeo *et al.*, 1998).

Educators also expressed a need for *greater availability* of educator support teams (Department of Education, 2001) for learners who needed them. These were seen as understaffed and not always available. Educators also felt that parents of ESOL learners should help bear the burden of responsibility for their children's education, confirming that it would benefit the learners and reduce their own frustrations (Du Plessis & Louw, 2008).

### *Resources*

Almost all participants (92.5%) expressed the need for specific language teaching resources for teaching ESOL learners (see also Du Plessis & Naudé, 2003; O'Connor, 2003; Pluddemann *et al.*, 2000), which they sometimes provided themselves. They needed simple picture vocabulary theme books and objects and pictures to demonstrate vocabulary, as well as home programmes and worksheets to assist ESOL learners to work with an English proficient, literate adult at home.

Fundamentally, educators needed basic resources for their classroom. Owing to their social circumstances not many learners had their own stationery and unless educators provided out of their own pockets, they were unable to do creative activities with the learners. Educators also needed bigger classrooms since classes were very crowded — two educators in the third focus group were sharing one room:

> *... I'm with* [Participant F] *in Grade 2, we share a class. In fact it's a hall with a partition. So there's 44 that side and 44 this side. It is sheer madness sometimes. Sometimes she takes her class out to do something outside because it just gets so rough here on the other side.*

### *Training*

Lack of training was significantly associated with the frequency of problems experienced in the classroom because of a lack of knowledge of bilingualism ($\chi^2 = 6.26$; df = 2; $p = 0.044$). Participant educators learnt through own, gathered experience about teaching ESOL learners, and 94% wanted more formal training, mostly practical.

Although they had attended workshops on teaching ESOL learners, educators wanted to observe practical demonstrations on how to implement the strategies they had learnt, preferably with their own learners. As SLTs facilitate the comprehension and use of language (Wadle, 1991) they can assist in training educators (Jordaan, 1992) by working with them in the classroom (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998; Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994; Lewis, 2004; Struthers & Lewis, 2004). Participating educators expressed an openness to learning from and collaborating with SLTs on an ongoing basis as 'language experts' in the classroom:

> When two professionals are engaged in a collaborative teaching effort, one can facilitate a particular student's response or mediate learning as needed while the other can concentrate on content (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998: 41).

This would also assist ESOL learners who are struggling academically, simultaneously alleviating educator frustration, as found earlier (Cirrin & Penner, 1995; DiMeo *et al.*, 1998).

Besides practical training, the educators wanted training in isiXhosa, the home language of most ESOL learners in this particular study, as only 9% were able to teach in isiXhosa. Educators knew basic isiXhosa words — learnt through "*desperation*" — and they met a good response from isiXhosa-first language ESOL learners when trying to speak isiXhosa. Educators knew that they could not provide optimal education for ESOL learners without being able to speak their home language, in line with Alexander (2002).

## Implications and recommendations

The educators' responses indicated multiple challenges, including the need for multi-level strategies to optimise SLT inputs, and SLT-educator collaborations.

## SLT collaboration with educators

A transdisciplinary approach to meet the diverse challenges of educators and ESOL learners can be used by educators for language interventions either on their own or by consultation with SLTs outside the classroom. SLTs need to inform the Department of Education, schools and educators about their roles (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998) in order to secure posts in education, which should be included in policies and negotiated with school administrations (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998). SLTs would need to broaden their focus for a truly transdisciplinary approach (Rapport *et al.*, 2004), where they may have to assist educators in areas besides communication. From those who realise the benefits, professional collaboration must be factored into both SLTs' and educators' schedules (Elksnin & Capilouto, 1994; Farber & Klein, 1999; Pershey & Rapking, 2002). As language intervention is most beneficial to learners in their first language (Jordaan & Yelland, 2003), educators need SLTs who speak an African language to assist them. Collaboration holds many benefits for ESOL learners: contextual language assistance in the learning environment (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998); not being 'pathologised' for learning a new language; development of literacy and numeracy skills; benefit to all learners in the class (Pershey & Rapking, 2002); and SLTs could help educators support and inform parents (Jordaan & Yelland, 2003). Previously identified skills that SLTs can bring to a classroom situation include:

- Classroom observation to identify learners needing assistance and those who can act as 'peer-helpers' (DiMeo *et al.*, 1998);
- pre-teaching vocabulary relevant to lessons (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999);
- task analysis skills (Wadle, 1991) — for analysis of curriculum guidelines and assessment standards into composite skills that can be taught (Lewis, 2004);
- assist educators in recognising the language demands of the curriculum (Dawber & Jordaan, 1999), identifying appropriate language for ESOL learners (Brice & Brice, 2000), developing appropriate questioning techniques and facilitating acquisition of CALP in English for ESOL learners (Jordaan & Yelland, 2003);
- sharing ideas on enhancing ESOL learners' self-esteem by respecting their first language and culture and sharing strategies for using themes in teaching (Jordaan & Yelland, 2003).

## Other practical implications and recommendations

Qualified and student educators in the Western Cape require training in bilingualism, second language acquisition and isiXhosa language and culture. Though some external theoretical training on second language acquisition and isiXhosa language and culture is needed, SLTs could provide some in-service training in the normal flow of a lesson.

A multi-lingual approach to education, in the Western Cape context studied here, requires more isiXhosa-speaking educators as well as teacher aids both of which the WCED is in the process of implementing (Smith, 2005;

WCED, 2006). This will, to some extent, relieve pressure of large classes and disciplinary problems associated with educators not speaking the first language of learners.

'ESOL parents' need information and education through popular media and workshops on how best to help their children's education especially at English-medium schools.

## Conclusion

Educators face numerous challenges when teaching ESOL learners. Besides the academic and socio-emotional difficulties of ESOL learners, educators participating in this study were frustrated by a considerable workload and large classes with many ESOL learners per class, especially in schools other than former Model C schools. There was a discrepancy in support and resources available to ex-Model C schools and other schools. Educators called for increased resources and departmental, professional and parental support as well as practical training in teaching ESOL learners and in isiXhosa language and culture.

More in-depth knowledge about the needs, experiences and coping strategies of educators teaching ESOL learners could lead to better training for educators, and better preparation for SLTs for their roles in supporting educators. This knowledge could also initiate further research leading to possible policy changes to meet educators' needs. With many ESOL learners attending school in English, meeting the challenges of educators, partially through the involvement of SLTs, will ensure that learners achieve their academic potential and have the same opportunities in life as their peers who are learning in their first language.

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