

# Exploring Mother Tongue Education in the Foundation Phase to Promote Linguistic Diversity: Learning Barriers in a Historically Disadvantaged School

**Maimona Salie,**

*Western Cape Education Department, Cape Town, South Africa*

*Email: maimonasalie@yahoo.com*

**Mokgadi Moletsane,**

*Department of Educational Psychology, University of the Western Cape, Belville, South Africa*

## **Abstract**

*This study focused on exploring the challenges of mother tongue education in the Foundation Phase in promoting linguistic diversity at a historically disadvantaged school in the Western Cape, South Africa. It adopted a qualitative case study located within an interpretive research paradigm. Focus group discussions and interviews were used for data collection, and the thematic analysis technique was employed for qualitative data. Thirty-two participants including twelve Foundation Phase learners (n=12: females = 6; males = 6; ages 7-9 years), eight Foundation Phase educators (n=8 female educators, ages 29-56 years), and twelve parents or caregivers (n=12, ages between 29-57 years) were purposively selected as participants from a historically disadvantaged school. This study found that non-mother tongue English-speaking learners in the Foundation Phase, growing up in historically disadvantaged areas and attending disadvantaged schools, experienced several learning barriers. These included educators' lack of proficiency regarding non-mother tongue learners' language, psychological-social barriers, and cultural diversity. This study concluded that some learners' linguistic rights in the Foundation Phase classrooms were seriously compromised because they did not receive their mother tongue instruction.*

**Keywords:** Learning Barriers, Non-Mother Tongue Learning, Foundation Phase, Historically Disadvantaged Schools, Linguistic Diversity

## **1. Introduction**

Within the context of the post-1994 political, socio-economic, and educational transformation, classrooms that have previously accommodated learners exclusive of certain homogeneous groups in South Africa have undergone significant learner population changes. South African society has become more open as social relations have become less formal (Engelbrecht et al., 1999). Consequently, South African classrooms are no longer as homogeneous as they used to be (Salie, 2018), teaching experienced in the Foundation Phase of more than ten years. South African schools are now hosting learners speaking different languages, with varying learning styles, operating at different departmental and intellectual levels; learners with diverse socio-economic, ethnic, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. The authors understood linguistic diversity as referring to learners who speak different indigenous South African languages and English in the South African context.

Many forums and conferences convened at both national and international levels to promote the discourses around the right of inclusive education for all learners. In 1992, the National Education Coordinating Committee (1997), based on a broadly democratic and non-racial principle, set about developing proposals for reforming the formal education system into a unitary education system. The Salamanca Statement (1994) on the principles, policy, and practice in special education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994) proclaimed that regular schools with an inclusive orientation effectively combat discriminatory attitudes. These regular schools with an inclusive education create welcoming communities and buildings on an inclusive society to accomplish quality education for all. The Salamanca Statement (1994) further proclaimed that inclusive education in mainstream schools equips learners with cultural awareness, tolerance, and communication skills as they enter the modern world.

This investigation seeks to stimulate the education system's reformation into a more inclusive one, which emphasised education that should occur within a formal and informal system for it to be beneficial to all. The White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001) acknowledged that the early years of a child's life are critical for acquiring language and culture. Young children learn best through communication, significant social-cultural activities as they interact with their environment. The Education White Paper 6 (2001) stipulated that the effects of learners who are experiencing barriers to learning in mainstream education classrooms need to be addressed through various forms of support (DoE, 2001:26). Effective policy management, planning, and monitoring capacity to guide and support inclusive education and training (DoE, 2001:46) are critical.

Despite the measures taken by the Department of Education to ensure equal, accessible, and quality learning opportunities for all learners, many learners still experience barriers to learning because they are deprived of the attention or support they need in the classroom (Ladbrook, 2009). According to the Education White Paper 6 (2001), an inclusive education system acknowledges that all learners can learn and need support. This implies that educational structures, systems, and learning methodologies should be designed to meet all learners' needs. This poses a challenge for primary school teachers, who face a twin challenge of addressing cultural and linguistic diversity in classroom mediation. These educators needed support to overcome these challenges. The success of inclusive education depends mainly on collaborative effort from educators, parents, and the community. Parental and community support generated a sense of belonging and trust in young learners from shared experiences. Walton (2011:243) emphasised the community and parents' roles in supporting inclusion *in relationship with others,* and emphasising cooperation, sharing, and understanding. Mukuna (2013) asserted that the idea of *Ubuntu* in the South African context is cited in various texts as a unique indigenous form of communion with others. As a democratic society, South Africa promotes diversity, which propagates an inclusive educational system. Diversity incorporates both the community and parents' strength and tolerance and the trustworthiness of its elements, notably caring, sharing, and acceptance. The continuous development and growth of diversity, especially in minority languages, is characterised by *Ubuntu*, an African word meaning "humanity to others." This is an African philosophy of being that says, "*I am because we are, or I am fully disadvantaged human communities,* largely depend on the majority's acceptance of the less developed official languages of the minority (Crystal, 2012).

In South Africa, minority groups' mother tongue faced a predicament regarding their language and culture because it is neglected at the expense of English as the medium of class instruction. However, English, which serves as the medium of teaching and learning, dominates the world of work opportunities. Conversely, learners' mother tongue is the language that develops their cultural identity, behaviour, and attitudes and inculcates a sense of belonging that they partly get from their mother tongue. The classrooms become very diverse because sitting next to one another are learners who experience educational barriers; there are highly gifted learners, under-achievers, learners from diverse economic backgrounds, and learners with a preferred learning mode. These factors have prompted the Department of Education and parents to expeditiously address the barriers to learning that some of the disadvantaged non-mother tongue. English-speaking learners are experiencing in classrooms where English is the instructional medium (Owen-Smith, 2010). These disadvantaged learners are often deprived of home support in their learning, as many of them come from poverty-stricken backgrounds where they suffer the brunt of malnutrition. Owing to their backgrounds, they already lag in the development of their first language. Thus, they may not have spoken language skills in their first language for them to develop reading with comprehension and creative writing skills (Navsaria et al., 2011; Prinsloo, 2011).

Every South African citizen has the right to be educated in the language of their choice (DoE, 1997). There is thus an urgent need to address the challenges that non-mother tongue English-speaking learners are experiencing. Brock-Utne et al. (2004:26) argued that 'choosing a language of instruction would involve allocating educational functions to a language(s). This choice would affect a wide range of policy issues, from broad ideological and socio-economic concerns to purely educational considerations. Hence, South Africa needs to invest in an education system that benefits its entire people. Still, the system should also be useful and competitive on the global market and preserve the language(s) and culture(s) of minority groups.

High levels of investment in human capital and a robust education system are the key drivers of a country's economic growth. Investors are not interested in an unproductive human capital because of learning barriers that should have been overcome during formal education. Many first-world countries have invested immensely in

human capital to expedite their economic growth. From Germany to Japan, the world's economic powerhouses attribute much of their economic successes to their massive human capital investments (Guardian News and Media, 2016). Admittedly, South Africa's current level of spending on public education about the GDP surpasses the global average. Investment in human resources training has grown significantly following the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998) and the Skills Development Levies Act, 1999 (Republic of South Africa, 1999). However, the current quality and outcomes of education and manpower training do not justify these high investment levels as South Africa still has a very high dropout and failure rate in primary and high schools (Alexander, 2010; Spaul, 2015).

According to Spaul (2015), despite the high levels of investment in education and manpower training, of all the South African learners who registered for Grade 1 in 2003, only half made it to Grade 12. Many learners drop out of school because the barriers that impede their learning are not being addressed. This phenomenon presents a considerable challenge, requiring the South African government to consider human resource development as one of its most pressing priorities. South Africa needs to prioritise strategies that equip people with the requisite skills required to successfully implement current strategies to accelerate the country's accelerated growth to attain competitiveness on the global market.

English takes centre stage as a medium of instruction in higher education to enhance critical thinking and learning in South Africa. South Africa must maintain this status quo because it has already invested a well-developed workforce of English medium instructors in exercising this task but not at the expense of minority groups' language and culture. South Africa needs to balance protecting minority groups' languages, cultures and developing skills required to compete globally.

## **2. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges of mother tongue education in the Foundation Phase in promoting linguistic diversity can be a learning barrier in a historically disadvantaged school.

## **3. Methodology**

### *3.1 Research Design*

A research design is a logical strategy employed in gathering evidence underpinning the desired knowledge (De Vos, 2005). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined research methodology as referring to how the researcher collects and analyses data. These methods have been developed to acquire knowledge, ensuring the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the data. This study was a qualitative case study design, which is located within an interpretive research paradigm. Interpretivist researcher tend to endow feelings, events, and social circumstances with meaning (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

According to Neill (2007), the key tenets of qualitative research are:

- It aims to give a complete, detailed description.
- In qualitative research, the design emerges as the study unfolds.
- The researcher is the key data gathering instrument.
- Subjective, individualised interpretation of events is essential and is achieved through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and so forth.
- Data are in the form of words, pictures, or objects.
- Qualitative data are richer, more time-consuming, and less generalisable.
- The researcher tend to become subjectively immersed in the subject manner.

The case study design was ideal for this study because it focuses on context and participants' lives and experiences (De Wet, 2010). This design used multiple sources of evidence to make its findings more credible and authentic (Yin, 2018). In this study, researchers used the qualitative approach to investigate and interpret the growing frustration stemming from the challenges experienced by non-mother tongue English-speaking Foundation Phase learners in classrooms where English is the medium of instruction in South Africa's Western Cape Province.

### *3.2 Participants and Setting*

The participants were purposively drawn from a historically disadvantaged primary school in a disadvantaged area in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. IsiXhosa-speaking Foundation Phase learners grew up in historically disadvantaged areas, attended disadvantaged schools, and experienced several barriers impeding their education. These South African primary schools provide formal compulsory education to children aged 6 and 13 years. This school was purposively chosen because its learners were known for speaking diverse languages, cultures, and socio-economic backgrounds. The study consisted of thirty-two participants, which included 12 Foundation Phase learners (n=12, 6 females and 6 males, ages between 7 and 9 years); 12 parents or caregivers (of Foundation Phase learners, n=12) and 8 Foundation Phase educators (n=8, aged 29-57 years) with various levels of educational qualifications and experiences. All the learner participants spoke IsiXhosa, a practice by a minority, as their primary language and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). All the educator participants were trained to teach English and Afrikaans as media of instruction.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

#### 3.3.1 Focus Group Interviews

This study conducted two focus group interviews (one with parents and the other with educators). A focus group interview entails a situation where the researcher simultaneously interviews several participants, while an individual interview entails each participant being interviewed individually (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The researchers used the focus group discussions to interview English-speaking Foundation Phase educators, some of whom were also conversant in Afrikaans. Some of the IsiXhosa-speaking parents were also conversant in English. The focus group interviews lasted from one to two hours and were held at the school. This technique was beneficial because it allowed participants with similar interests and concerns to express their opinions regarding the challenges experienced by learners, parents, and educators due to English as a Medium of Instruction in the classroom. The researchers ensured that no participant or group of participants dominated the discussion as each participant in the focus group was allowed to contribute actively to the discussion. This study conducted two focus group discussions to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. It also employed interpreters to translate the IsiXhosa and Afrikaans into English to ensure that every participant understood all the points being raised.

#### 3.3.2 Individual Interviews

This study used individualised in-depth interviews with Foundation Phase learners. Individual interviews with 12 learners lasted about 30 minutes per learner. The participants were given more than one interview to ensure the reliability and validity of the data at hand. The participants were interviewed in a familiar, natural, friendly, and educational environment. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with all the learners. These semi-structured interviews included unstructured questions evolving from the dialogical interchange between the researcher and each participant, directly relating to the challenges in terms of their culture that IsiXhosa-speaking learners experience in their classrooms with English as Medium of Instruction (EMI). This method was useful because of the quality, validity, and reliability of the data. Its ability allows the researchers to use the benefits of paralinguistic features and gestures from interviews on a face-to-face basis to increase the responses' validity and reliability (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Bolderston, 2012).

**Table 1:** Key Points of Individual Interviews and Focus Groups Discussions (Salie, 2018)

Individual Interviews	Focus Group Discussions
Are appropriate for topics that might be sensitive to people	Rely on the dynamics of group interaction
Individual in-depth interviews generate data in one-on-one sittings	Group interaction may facilitate an exchange of ideas and information that stimulates thinking among group members and allows them to build on each other's ideas
It may place informants in a one-on-one position to explain themselves	It may limit new ideas and information to be shared by the group

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed by using a thematic framework proposed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). This framework classified and organised data according to the key themes, concepts, and emergent categories. Each category was divided into sub-categories as the data were analysed. The relationships amongst the categories were established by discovering patterns in the data. The researchers triangulated and cross-validated data sources and data-collection strategies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To find regularities in the data, the researchers compared the different sources (parents, educators, and Foundation Phase learners). The researchers adopted two data collection methods (interviews with individual Foundation Phase learners and focus group discussions with parents and educators). In addition, the researchers simultaneously looked for discrepancies and negative evidence that might modify or refute certain patterns. The developed patterns and themes were then used to report the experiences of the participants. The anonymity of the participants was protected by the use of pseudonyms during the presentation of the results.

### 3.4 Procedure

The researchers ensured that the collected data analysis would be beneficial to the research participants and other researchers and society. During the research process, the researchers asked broad questions that allowed the participants to proffer answers in their own words, allowing them to qualify their understanding of participants' experiences through further probing questions. The observation method allowed the researchers to scrutinise participants' behaviour, which inevitably increased the study's reliability and validity. This study was intended to help participants whose mother tongue was not their medium of instruction and educators whose instruction medium was not the learners' mother tongue in their class. The researchers hoped that this research would guide parents in making informed decisions before enrolling their children in schools where the medium of instruction is not in their mother tongue.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of the Western Cape and the Western Cape Education Department in South Africa. The participants were informed of the nature and objectives of the research. Regarding learners under 18 years of age, the researchers obtained informed consent from their parents or legal guardians for this study. The participants' actual names and their educational institutions were substituted with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. De Vos (2005:63) stated that much research is undertaken in South Africa across cultural boundaries, but emphasised that people do not take the time to get to know and respect one another's cultural customs and norms. To ensure cooperation and respect from participants, the researchers researched the participants' target culture and customs and discerned how participants might perceive them. The researchers also made efforts to understand and respect the participants' cultures and customs through understanding the meanings people attach to their experiences, cultures, and customs.

## 4. Results and Discussion

This study showed that IsiXhosa-speaking Foundation Phase learners who grew up in historically disadvantaged areas and attended disadvantaged schools experienced several barriers impeding their education. These included exposure to IsiXhosa as their primary language, psychological-social barriers, challenges related to cognitive ability, and lack of parental involvement and support.

### Focus Group Discussions

Table 2: *Quotes from the participants regarding EMI (Salie, 2018)*

Educator II	“Yes, learners do struggle with English”.
Educator VI	“English is foreign to the learners.”
Educator VII	“You can quickly see that English is not their mother tongue”.
Parent C	“My child goes to our neighbour to ask for help with his homework”.
Parent H	“His English is not right”.
Parent K	“My child reads a lot of wrong words when he reads to me ...”

### Individual interviews

Table 3: *Quotes from the participants regarding EMI (Salie, 2018)*

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Learner A	“English is nice...It is nice for school work... not for talking...”
Learner D	“I like my teacher because she speaks nice English”.
Learner F	“My teacher says it is okay if I speak wrong English. I must just speak”.
Learner G	“I must speak English in class if I want to learn English”.
Learner H	“My teacher says it is okay if I make mistakes”.
Learner J	“I want to learn good English...”.

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#### 4.1 Exposure to IsiXhosa as a Primary Language

The participating learners experienced learning barriers because their mother tongue was IsiXhosa, and their language of instruction was English. Many of these participating learners experienced learning challenges because of their limited exposure to English as a language of instruction and a home environment of poor literacy in second-language reading materials. Some participants even experienced learning barriers not because of lower performance but because of their limited English acquisition due to their lack of English exposure in their homes. The researchers noted that through observation and access to learners' daily writing materials, tasks, and assessments, many participating learners in this study experienced difficulties in reading comprehension. Therefore, they cannot articulate their responses due to their limited English vocabulary, sequencing grammatical errors in writing and speaking, and difficulties following and understanding class discussions. Besides, some learners reportedly experienced isolation in communicating their concerns and views in English because they understand that nobody understands what they try to say. This again resulted in some of them experiencing anxiety in speaking and reading. The quotes from educators and parents determined this during the focus group discussions.

“... You can sense their anxiety, especially when they must read from the board .... They struggle with pronunciation, leading to grammatical errors and misunderstanding. We say bad (naughty), but they say bed (furniture), giving the sentence a different meaning ...” (Educator III).

“... My lack of understanding of their culture just adds to the existing problem” (Educator III).

Saito et al. (1999) indicated that reading in a second language could provoke anxiety in some learners who receive instruction in their second language. Saito et al.'s (1999) study highlighted that learners' reading anxiety could also increase with their reading difficulty perception in a second language.

This study revealed that the more anxious IsiXhosa-speaking learners become, the more their grammar and pronunciation errors increase in English. Learners either started stuttering, repeating the question, pausing for long periods, or just keeping quiet. Their lack of spoken English, owing to their background, constrained their ability to express themselves freely. This could lead them to poor performance in tests and a general inability to perform in class, especially verbal assessments, which contributed to educators coming up with inaccurate assessments. However, these findings agreed with previous literature, which indicated that the learners' mother tongue positively influenced children's education in cognitive and affective development (Brock-Utne, 2005; Desai, 2003; Langenhoven, 2005; Govender, 2010). Therefore, this contributed to the learners' limited vocabulary and grammar. According to Govender (2010), IsiZulu-speaking learners cannot understand English messages because they are unfamiliar with English vocabulary at school.

#### 4.2 Psychological-Social Barriers

This study found that the participants experienced psychological-social barriers because they were afraid of exposing their inaccuracies and weaknesses in English as their second language, which result in them being labelled negatively. These inadequacies were caused by anxiety, lack of motivation, and misinformed cultural values and morals because of emotions such as fear and nervousness blurring their thinking ability, thus failing to organise the message that ought to be communicated. When a message is not properly organised, it cannot be conveyed effectively, leading to miscommunication. This study indicates that such anxiety and lack of motivation related to EMI. It was found that the IsiXhosa-speaking learners going through the Foundation Phase were experiencing anxiety emanating from the fear of making grammatical mistakes and answering questions incorrectly. The learners' anxiety stemmed from a desire to avoid making mistakes when answering questions because they felt that their answers were under scrutiny by fellow learners. The emphasis was more on comprehending the content than on the fluency of the English dialogue. They also experienced anxiety when

they were asked to read English texts aloud. It could be that the text might have been unfamiliar to them in terms of their culture and them trying to master their language of learning. These Foundation Phase IsiXhosa-speaking learners felt exposed and isolated when their English use was the focal point of attention in the classroom. The following quote captures a participant's understanding of learners' feelings regarding expressing themselves in English:

*“Yes, they feel isolated because they are too afraid of being snubbed at. Misunderstanding of their culture could be another factor”* (Educator II).

Dedman (2005) believed that anxiety, insecurity, lack of motivation, and passive learning are the psychological-social factors at play in learners' language instruction in classrooms. Besides, a comparative study conducted by Nomlomo (2007) revealed self-esteem as a psychological factor that could affect IsiXhosa learners when learning the English language. Resultantly, most of the learners in this study were shy and could hardly express themselves freely in English because of a lack of confidence.

#### *4.3 Cultural Awareness*

Since cultural diversity has become the norm, the need to assimilate these diverse groups into one homogeneous entity has become imperative for smooth communication in schools, universities, companies, or social settings. It has thus become very important to promote cultural diversity. Daniel and Friedman (2005:2) suggest that ‘being culturally competent in an educational setting means teachers acknowledging and supporting children’s mother tongue and culture so that ties between the family and school are strengthened’. The best place to start to emphasize the importance of culture will be at the Foundation Phase because it opens young learners' minds to different cultural experiences. Young children also tend to more easily and effectively influence adults' minds because they are aware of their vulnerability. Enriching learners to believe in their own culture helps open their minds to embrace cultural diversity. Thus, cultural diversity can lead to fewer prejudices as it increases interaction and understanding of each other’s cultures.

South African learners going through the Foundation Phase benefit from their exposure to diverse cultures in their classrooms because they already have cultural diversity. South African children are exposed to rich cultural diversity experiences constructed around play and outside the classroom. Children play through their child-initiated efforts at school, which involve their diverse cultural environments and their mother tongue. A variety of play types have the potential to foster creative development. The most influential play is imaginative play, which forms part of the Foundation Phase curriculum (DoE, 2003). The imaginary play uses fantasy and symbolism to stimulate creativity, especially of culture. Simultaneously, learners learn more about one another’s cultures and are also motivated to solve problems, with objects and ideas being combined to create new possibilities (Bodraw, Leong & Hensen, 2000). This created the affective and cultural experiences related to emotions such as joy, humour, anger, and resistance in a diverse cultural environment that is safe to explore. Ebrahim (2007) asserted that multicultural schools' learners could contradict conformity by using the mother tongue in play with one another. They can create newness through verbal gymnastics and language play that suits the purposes.

#### *4.5 Cultural Respect with Communication Development*

During the interviews with IsiXhosa-speaking learners and parents, it was noted that cultural respect for older people played a huge role in their cultural upbringing. Culture constituted their way of life. Their culture restrains children from engaging spontaneously and naturally in dialogue with adults. This inhibited IsiXhosa-speaking learners’ from developing language because they are not encouraged to interrelate freely with adults. This tended to impede the development of logical thinking in learners. During the interviews with IsiXhosa-speaking learners, it was also noted that they avoided eye contact with older people. A learner participant stated:

*“My teacher knows a lot of things. My utata says I must listen in class, not talk. I must be a good girl. Good girls that listen get clever”* (Learner, K).

Their culture regarded it as disrespectful to maintain eye contact when talking to an older person. This has the potential to create a barrier that could have been avoided if the IsiXhosa-speaking learners had eye contact with

their educator. Educators, especially in the Foundation Phase, tend to use gestures when speaking to IsiXhosa-speaking learners as a strategy that helps them interpret information. Contrary, the IsiXhosa-speaking learners do not see the gestures and cannot use the concrete aid used to help them interpret information. This hurts the IsiXhosa-speaking learners' English language development because gestures are seen as a form of communication that supports oral dialogue.

The danger associated with learning a second language is that the learners' cultural identity is weeded out, putting the learners' cultural identity at risk of undermining. The contradiction is that learners receive reading and writing instruction in a second language and do not develop their critical reading and writing skills in their language, which may gradually weaken their cultural identity. Carefully selected cultural material and learning aids can positively influence learners' reading and learning in general.

Originally a means of communication, language eventually becomes internalised into a means of the child's thinking and control of activity. Vygotsky (1896-1934) argued for incorporating human culture and history into studies that seek to understand the human mind's development. The Development Theory, from a Vygotskian perspective, proposes an interaction between learners' social world (culture) and their cognitive development (Seng 1997:4). Great emphasis is placed on the child's culture, particularly on the constructive role of peer interactions in relationships and parents or caregivers in terms of culture. Cultural interaction is seen as a means of providing comprehensible input to the learners and fundamental to an individual's cognitive and affective growth (Clark & Clark, 2008: 104).

Language and cultural diversity in the South African context has sometimes constituted barriers to learning. Learners whose culture and language differ from those of the school may experience learning barriers (Prinsloo, 2005a: 37). Culture is closely linked to language, and in turn, this is closely connected to thinking and learning. The researchers' point of view is that when learners have a good grasp of a language and can learn effectively using their mother tongue primary language, learners develop critical thinking in that language. Hence, any sudden paradigm shift in the learning language may, unfortunately, affect those learners who may already be competent in a particular language, and this may constitute a barrier to learning. Research evidence shows that because of the link between culture, language, thinking, and learning, sudden disturbances in the accustomed language of learning can affect learners' cognitive development and academic performance (Donald et al., 2002: 219). Learners' self-esteem decreases, and anxiety levels increase when expressing ideas that challenge their culture through a new language.

#### *4.6 Lack of Parental Involvement and Support*

This study indicated that lack of parental involvement and support could be a learning barrier in promoting mother tongue at school. All the Foundation Phase educators agreed that parental involvement and support were crucial in reducing learning challenges and sharing culture amongst learners and educators. However, some of the IsiXhosa-speaking learners were experiencing significant learning barriers in their classrooms where English was the medium of instruction, which hampered their academic progress. Similarly, most educators felt that it was not their responsibility to engage parents, but that of the school management team. They indicated that it was challenging to change the behaviour and attitudes of adults. This revealed that educators also felt overload with work and, therefore, did not have the time to teach parents how to support and guide their children to develop academically. This indicated that most parents were not actively involved in supporting their children's academic development.

Furthermore, Holmarsdottir (2005) and Nomlomo (2007) perceived parental involvement related to the parents' competency and literacy. In a comparative study, Nomlomo's (2007) revealed that parental involvement was more evident in the case of learners who were taught in IsiZulu than those taught in English. This finding confirmed the link between parental proficiency and the effectiveness of the learner's language acquisition. When parents have proficiency in the medium of instruction, it will allow them to assist with their child's schoolwork. Parents who lacked such proficiency could hardly assist their children with their homework.

Parents play a crucial role in assisting their children to become successful independent learners. Most of the parents advocated parental support. The school should reach out to parents to enrich themselves to make wise, informed decisions on how to support their children to enhance their academic achievement. These parents were looking for specific ways of becoming involved and thus help their children.

## **5. Conclusion**

In summary, the use of learners' mother tongue accompanied by their culture in their texts, values, and morals in the classroom promoted a smooth transition between home and school. This means that learners can get more involved in the learning process and speed up basic literacy skills. It also enabled more flexibility, innovation, and creativity in educator preparation. Using learners' mother tongue in the Foundation Phase could be more likely to get the general community's support in the learning process and created emotional stability that translated to cognitive stability. It further leads to a better educational outcome. Schools should thus produce learners who are better prepared to acquire knowledge, attitudes, and skills to interact positively and productively with people in South Africa's diverse and democratic society.

Some limitations were encountered during the execution of this study. This research focused on the experiences of non-mother tongue English-speaking Foundation Phase learners whose mother tongue is IsiXhosa. This excludes other mother tongues, such as Afrikaans and IsiZulu. South Africa has 11 official languages that exclude sign language. Foundation Phase learners would have been deprived of, thus creating possible barriers in terms of language acquisition at schools. This research also revealed several correlational dimensions such as school location, poor quality school, especially at children's early learning, which was not explored to its full potential.

Finally, this study recommends that future comparative research is conducted on curriculum adaptation strategies and how they would be rolled out in linguistic diversity in the classroom. Future research should also investigate how South African schools can reach out to parents to create culturally aware school-family partnerships to reduce cultural discontinuities, create diverse learning opportunities, improve ethnic and racial perceptions and attitudes, and foster inter-ethnic friendships enhance learning. South African schools should consider providing parents with necessary materials and activities to accommodate families' needs from different cultural backgrounds. This will enhance parental involvement and support to reduce the challenges their children experience in the classrooms where English is the medium of instruction.

According to Hammar (2003), mother tongue in language teaching can foster an understanding of one's own culture and other cultures. To understand one's culture and that of other people, one should be able to communicate. The best way for Foundation Phase learners to communicate with comprehension is through their mother tongue. However, language usage is related to social and cultural values; language is regarded as a social and cultural phenomenon. Mother tongue language is a natural, unconscious phenomenon that develops due to environmental exposure from the day a child is born. However, cultural dynamics are difficult because the culture is unconscious to the people since they are born; they are learned to see and do things at an unconscious level. Culture instills in people's different values; people experience and value things in a certain way that differs from other cultures. As people get older and step outside of their cultural boundaries, they start seeing their culture's impact on their behaviour. Thus, children must be given formal structural education that uses their mother tongue as a useful communication tool. They must be taught to understand their own culture to respect others. Children need to manage cultural diversity by recognising and learning it, admitting and making enquiries when they do not understand aspects of this cultural diversity. They should shun fear when it comes to learning because there is fear when one does not understand. Educators in the Foundation Phase has a critical task at this level of a learners' development. Thus, it is essential to create a good partnership between parents or caregivers and the school to foster diverse cultural and linguistic development. When a mismatch between learners' prior experience and the school's expectations is huge, learners may be less likely to succeed owing to learning barriers. Mismatches occur when developmental criteria, expectations for individual performance, and explanations for learners of various cultural groups are either overly narrow or rigid.

As holistic education for children, the importance of the Foundation Phase is reflected in South Africa's constitution (South Africa, 1996a). All children go to school to learn. The ability to learn is an essential phenomenon for living, and with a few exceptions, all children can learn. Understanding how cultural and linguistic differences affect learners' learning can help foster an understanding of what schools can do to improve learners' positive outcomes. The kind of change that South Africa seeks to accomplish is not easy. It requires the utmost skill and effort from all stakeholders if this change has to happen. Unless the relations between culture and mother tongue education in the Foundation Phase have been articulated, it remains challenging to provide the kind of schooling needed. Madiba's dream was for South Africa to develop into a nation of peace, harmony, respect, and national unity that everyone can be proud to be a part of, a country that epitomises what other nations emulate. The onus is on South Africa's citizenry for this dream to translate to reality.

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