

A Comparison of Reading and Writing Proficiency in Home Language among Xitsonga Speaking Learners in South African Primary Township Schools

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KEYWORDS Standardised Test Performance. Reading Skills. Writing Skills. Home Language. Underachievement

ABSTRACT A primary challenge in the multicultural school is to meet the needs of learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds. Although English as language of teaching and learning (LoLT) has been the popular choice among parents and learners in most South African schools since 1994, proficiency in home language plays an important part in cognitive development and provides the common underlying proficiency for the successful acquisition of English among learners. Learners' academic achievement is closely linked to their proficiency in both their home language and the second language (L2). This article reports on an investigation of the Xitsonga reading performance and Xitsonga writing performance of Grade 7 learners in township schools who are using English as LoLT. A literature study investigated the role of home language in supporting second language acquisition as well as the relationship between reading and writing skills. An empirical inquiry compared the assessment of reading performance in Xitsonga and writing performance in Xitsonga of selected Grade 7 learners through standardised testing. Findings indicated that learners performed poorly in both reading and writing skills. This holds implications for home language teaching methods used in schools and learners attitudes towards learning in their L1.