Teaching Methodological Challenges of Indigenous African Languages in the Foundation Phase

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Abstract

The dialectic on the pedagogy of indigenous African languages in the Foundation Phase has occupied academic space lately. African language teachers seem to face the challenges of teaching the indigenous languages. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges of teaching African languages at foundation phase and how they could be solved. The study adopted constructivist paradigm and qualitative approach. The paradigm holds that knowledge is a social Construction, therefore, there are multiple realities. Data were generated from the critical review of related literature for the past seven years on the teaching of indigenous African languages at the Foundation Phase. It was analysed thematically following Castle and Nolen's five steps of thematic analysis namely; compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting and concluding in order to get to the depth of the phenomenon. Deconstruction theory formed the theoretical frame work for this study. The theory holds that there are always cracks, new ways of doing things, thus making changes from what is considered the norm. The findings point to insufficient indigenous language teaching materials. They are also archaic and not even digitalized. They are also not user friendly. Poor teacher training in African languages ia another finding. The study concludes that there is poor government financial support which results in insufficient teaching materials. Poor teacher training in African indigenous languages leads to ineffective teaching methods, thus poor learners' performance. The study therefore, recommends effective teacher training for foundation phase and the government should fund the digitalization and accessibility of teaching materials.

Keywords: indigenous African languages; foundation phase; teaching methods, challenges

1. Introduction and Background

The teaching of indigenous African languages in the Foundation Phase (FP) in South Africa is a cause for concern because African language teachers seem to face challenges in teaching such languages. The discussion is consistent with Khanyile & Awung's (2022) statement that in isiZulu language, for example, words that are used in textbooks are unfamiliar to the children and to teachers as well. The situation confuses learners so teachers are forced to use modern words in isiZulu that could be easily interpreted and understood by learners at FP (Cekiso et al., 2019). The challenge complicates the teaching and learning of the indigenous languages thereof. The scholars also conducted a similar study on isiXhosa as a medium of instruction at foundation phase. The study revealed that teachers who used material written in isiXhosa complained that the vocabulary used was not user-friendly to learners. They described it as old, deep, and traditional compared to modern isiXhosa, which is mixed with words from other languages. The

assertions imply that teachers at FP are struggling to reach out to learners as expected because of the complexity of the language used in the text books, bearing in mind that learners at FP are not yet communicatively competent in their mother tongue language. In addition, it can also be deduced that modern isiXhosa accommodates the use of words from other languages thus possibility of code switching.

Taking the discussion further is the understanding that indigenous languages consist of the knowledge and wisdom of indigenous communities through stories, proverbs, folktales, myths, poetry and songs that convey meanings about individuals, society, culture and nature interactions (Shava and Manyike, 2018). It can be inferred that mother tongue language carries learners' identity, culture and traditions, beliefs and ways of living as well as ability to acquire new knowledge. The scholars further argue that it is important for learners to value their language and knowledge and see their application in formal education processes. That is, through the mentioned traditional games and activities that learners enjoy at home while learning and acquiring language and

knowledge at the same time, it would be ideal for them to see a continuation of such knowledge acquisition even in a classroom setting because they all involve requisite and generic communication skills such as listening and speaking, expression, as well as discussion. On the contrary, if learners do not study their indigenous languages, their linguistic and communicative competencies are restricted, thus making it even more difficult to acquire new knowledge in the African and Western contexts. The analogy is in line with the understanding that indigenous languages and related knowledge are essential components for the identity of indigenous people (Shava and Manyike, 2018). The scholars also postulate that for indigenous people, indigenous languages are both a right and a resource because languages embody culture, knowledge and associated practices of any group of people. The idea implies that if African indigenous languages are not effectively taught, cultural knowledge, linguistic and communicative competences are lost, hence; learners' inability to relate new concepts with what they have already acquired and learnt (schemas) from their culture.

Furthermore, in most schools, learners also transit from using their mother tongue or their home language (HL) as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) to using English as the medium of instruction (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). The scholars further argue that it is important that learners are supported during this transition period to develop both their HL and First Additional Language (FAL). On the contrary, leaners' inability to frequently use their mother tongue creates more chances of losing the language. In South Africa, the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) was developed to redress the inequalities of the past and allow freedom of choice by promoting "additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education" (Department of Education, 1997: 2). The policy was aimed to overcome disadvantages experienced by learners as a result of differences between their home language and the language of learning and teaching, as it promoted and supported the pedagogy of all other languages that learners may require (Department of Education, 1997), thus promoting equal access to education. The policy further encouraged the development of programmes to compensate languages that were neglected and disadvantaged in the past. The policy clearly states that all language subjects must be allocated an equal amount of time and resources (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). The rationale behind this initiative is to show respect for language diversity and to view each language as valuable and to fulfill each individual learner's language rights (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). Regardless of the efforts discussed above, the policy has not been successfully implemented in many educational settings as evidenced by the existing gap between policy and practice (Nugraha, 2019). For example, South Africa is widely known as one of the most linguistically diverse countries with eleven official languages, but English still remains the dominant language in many classrooms and the society at large. The scholar further argues that the inherited LiEP is underpinned by racial and linguistic discrimination because it is informed by a monoglossic ideology that embraces the concept of languages as separate entities that are clearly distinguished by defined boundaries. There is no mention of the possibility of using more than one language simultaneously.

Studies carried out in this field have discussed pedagogical challenges in IsiXhosa and IsiZulu, the use of the mother tongue as a language of instruction and the language policy. There is however dearth in the space of effective teaching of African indigenous languages at the foundation phase. This study therefore sets out to explore the challenges teachers at FP experience in teaching African indigenous languages and the solutions to the challenges.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Teachers at the foundation phase seem to face challenges in teaching African indigenous languages. Majola & Cekiso (2023) share the same view point that some learners have a negative attitude towards isiXhosa as a home language (HL). The implication is that if learners hate a particular indigenous language as a subject, they switch-off their learning apparatus about that subject even if teachers can teach it effectively. The negativity about that language prevents them from positive thinking, learning and understanding. The scholars further state that teachers complain that they have limited time and resources; thus, using Baca to simplify Xhosa may be time-consuming, and learners may end up not understanding isiXhosa which is the HL they would have registered for. Furthermore, learners also struggle with Xhosa because they do not use it at home or with friends but only in the classroom (Majola & Cekiso, 2023). It can be inferred that with lack of everyday communication in isiXhosa at home, teaching and learning in the language will not be easy. Consistent with the discussion are Carrim, & Nkomo (2023)'s statement that South African educators are faced with the challenge of trying to redress the educational imbalances inherited from the past by considering ways of promoting mother tongue-based education. There may be more than three different home languages spoken by learners while the LoLT is English. The teacher is presented with the challenge of trying to accommodate a linguistically diverse group of learners. This implies that teachers should be multilingually competent so that they can accommodate all learners in their mother tongue languages. Contrary to the idea above, teacher training institutions do not train teachers for multilingualism teaching yet multilingualism can be of help to teachers to enhance learning as it promotes interpretation. In many multilingual classrooms, learners are second language learners (L2) who are learning through a language (medium) other than their HL or L1. However, this remains a contentious issue, as most parents prefer English (due to its superior status) as a medium of instruction rather than learners' HL (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). It can be deduced that the negative attitudes learners have toward the indigenous languages emanate from their parents who look down upon them. Contrary to the assertion, when African teachers are able to teach the indigenous languages effectively without challenges, a collaborative approach between teachers and learners is enhanced (Tsaure and Sani, 2024). That is, the acquisition and learning of new content knowledge related to the indigenous languages is improved. The aim of the study therefore, is to explore challenges teachers at FP experience in teaching the indigenous African languages and how such challenges could be solved.

1.2 Research questions

What are the challenges teachers face in teaching indigenous languages at foundation face?

How can such challenges be solved?

2. Theoretical frame work

The study is based on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. Derrida explains that deconstruction attempts to locate the cracks, that is, dismantling the cultural, philosophical and institutional structures (Turner, 2016). In the context of this study, the theory challenges and attempts to change the already existing social

construction that English language is considered the only language of prestige and language of instruction in South Africa to such an extent that even the African indigenous languages are taught in English. It also deconstructs /decolonises the apartheid Education system which had brainwashed the Africans to belittle their own languages. It dismantles and changes those racist structures by suggesting new ways of teaching indigenous languages in their mother tongue not in English. The theory further holds that every system is a social construction. That is, something that has been assembled and constructed entails exclusions, so deconstruction seeks out those points or cracks in the system where it disguises the fact of its incompleteness, its failure to cohere as a self-contained whole (Hendricks, 2016). The implication is that the theory interrogates those underlying meanings and implications since knowledge/ experience is a social construction. For that reason, there are multiple realities/ meanings which implies different ways of doing things. The assertion is in line with Sikiriva's (2020) understanding that a text always has cracks and fissures by which it is unavoidably exposed to the outside; it is open to another reader, to ever-changing interpretations. The theory corresponds with the constructivism paradigm which is based on the principle that every system is socially constructed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The theory advocates for the deconstruction of such cultural and apartheid structures. It challenges the presence in western belief and philosophy as the absolute truth, pure and unchallenged (Hendricks, 2016). The theory, therefore, questions the fundamental distinctions/ oppositions in Western philosophy (apartheid system) through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. It looks at the opposite/differences in meaning, a reduction of a text for there is nothing outside/ beyond the text (Turner, 2016). In the context of this study, the theory challenges issues around the teaching of the African indigenous languages. It questions the downgrading of mother tongue languages in the African context. In fact, it looks at African languages differently and argues that there is no single ideal way of teaching African languages rather, there are different ways of teaching indigenous languages in the African context. The theory therefore deconstructs and decolonises the existing structures around the African indigenous languages.

3. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. It is a critical review of the global existing literature on the challenges of teaching the African indigenous languages. The study is supported by the constructivism paradigm which claims that reality is socially constructed and therefore subjective. The paraigm aims to generate knowledge through people's individual viewpoints and the significance ascribed to those viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018). That is, one is able to make meaning after grappling with written texts or peoples' views for better and deeper understanding. Furthermore, constructivists also view knowledge as constructed by the processes individuals undertake (interpret) to make sense of their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The scholars imply that knowledge on the challenges of teaching the indigenous languages was constructed after critically examining and interpreting the related literature.

Furthermore, Merriam (2009:23) states that qualitative research is used by researchers who are interested in ''(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences''. What is more, the purpose of educational qualitative research is to improve practice and the basic qualitative research design is particularly well suited to obtain an in-depth understanding of effective educational processes (Merriam and personal communication, 2013). The scholar further argues that a basic qualitative study can be used to uncover strategies, techniques, and practices of highly effective teachers and administrators. It for the above reason that this study is qualitive. In furtherance to that, the qualitative research approach corresponds with the constructivism paradigm in that the two do not seek to generalise but attempt to thoroughly understand the phenomenon from the researcher's point of view (Creswell, and Poth 2018; Rajasekar, Philominathan, and Chinnathanmbi, 2013). It is for the above reasons this study adopted qualitative research design that would enable the researcher to dwell deeper into the teaching of African indigenous languages at the foundation phase and strategies that could improve it. In addition, qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena regarding the meanings people bring to them (Aspers, and Corte, 2019). It also allows the reader to learn something new and probably find viable solutions to a problem (Islam and Faraj, 2022). In the context of this study the researcher critically examined the literature on the phenomenon (challenges and solutions of teaching African indigenous languages), identified patterns, categorised them into themes, interpreted them, and constructed new knowledge. The steps are consistent with Castle and Nolen's (2018) five steps of thematic anlysis. The researcher compiled the data into usable form. The step is in line with the understanding that compiling data into a usable form is the first step to finding meaningful answers to the research questions and to transcribe the data so that it can easily be seen (Riessman, 1993; Bird, 2005). After getting the data in a consistent and organized format, then the researcher separated the data to discover its components. Disassembling the data is the second step (Ticket 2005, Miles & Huberman, 1994). Castleberry & Nolen (2018) maintain that data should be separated, taken apart and create meaningful groupings. The researcher started coding which involves identifying interesting features and data systematically across the entire data and it occurs at multiple levels. The third step is reassembling which is bringing together related data. Castlebury & Nolen (2018) explain that in this stage the codes or categories to which each concept is mapped are then put into context with each other to create themes. The researcher thematised the data. Some themes were merged while others were broken down into separate identified themes and then analytically reviewed. Interpreting is the fourth step in which the researcher made analytical conclusions from the data presented as codes and then themes. The researcher wrote names of each code and brief description on a separate piece of paper. The researcher reviewed the themes, which involves the refinement of the tentative themes already identified. In the fifth phase which is defining and naming the themes, the researcher described and refined the themes that would be presented for analysis. In summary, since data analysis is understood as classifying collected information into workable chunks the researcher categorized the data according to the objectives of the study.The researcher also allowed the emerging issues related to the phenomenon in discussion. The process of analyzing the data starts when data is being collected and it is a continuous process which does not end until the study is complete. This critical review of the global literature on the phenomenon is from the studies by (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024, Tsaure, & Sani, 2024, Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023, Majola & Cekiso 2023, Khanyile & Awung, 2022, Phajane, 2022, MacSwan, 2019, Shiora 2019, Mgijima and Makalela, 2016).

4. Literature review

4.1 The challenges of teaching African indigenous languages

There are challenges teachers at foundation phase encounter when teaching African indigenous languages. According to Mlambo & Matfunjwa (2024) indigenous languages face limited digital accessibility because of resource scarcity; they, however, must be technologically preserved so that they can be used in various disciplines without losing their identity. At the moment the African languages are not electronically preserved for ease of access and authenticity. The assertions imply that African language teachers cannot easily access all content materials they want on African languages. They currently rely on limited hard copies for reference. This is contrary to ease of access of teaching materials in other disciplines such as English and Science. The analogy is consistent with the understanding that teachers have limited time and resources in teaching isiXhosa for example, and in some situations, they even end up using Baca to simplify Xhosa which they complain is time-consuming, and learners may end up not understanding Xhosa, yet it is the home language (HL) they had registered for (Majola & Cekiso, 2023). Moreover, most digital gadgets in different disciplines are written in English, this implies that there is always information related to many subjects but the same cannot be said about indigenous languages.

Taking the discussion further, research shows that in the study carried out on the teaching and learning of the African languages particularly isiXhosa and isiZulu, the participants of the study revealed that the language used in the textbooks was old and traditional, which was different from the isiZulu spoken by the wider community (Khanyile & Awung, 2022). The educators also complained about the level of isiZulu that teacher guides and textbooks were written in. The assertions imply that the current material in the two indigenous languages is not user friendly, it is archaic, too deep, unfamiliar and difficult for both teachers and students. There is a need therefore for African language teaching materials to be upgraded, simplified and communicative. The analogy is consistent with Cekiso et al. (2019)'s similar study on isiXhosa as a medium of instruction at foundation phase. The study revealed that teachers who used material written in isiXhosa complained that the vocabulary used was not user friendly to learners. They described it as old, deep and traditional as compared to the modern isiXhosa that is mixed with words from other languages. This is also a reality for the isiZulu language. The same view point is shared by Khanyile & Awung, (2022) that textbooks are unfamiliar to children and teachers as well. The study also revealed that all participants indicated that there are currently no resources such as textbooks for the nine African languages in the secondary schools and bookstores and it will be too costly for the government to have the resources (Mabaso-Nkuna et al.,2024). It is therefore not surprising that the participants of this study admitted to not having enough subject specific terms as a major challenge to teaching in isiZulu which compelled them to resort to code-switching and translation in order to facilitate the lessons (Cekiso et al., 2019).

Furthermore, another challenge is that teachers are compelled to teach through a language they do not know well (Patten & Newhart, 2018). That is, isiZulu teacher for example may be asked to teach isiXhosa or vice versa. This implies that content knowledge and the teaching methods for the language one has not majored in may be limited therefore challenging. Moreover, Phajane, (2022) opines that teachers want learners to speak African languages correctly without using any borrowed words, or other

words from other African languages that refer to the same thing. That can be challenging because language is dynamic and it keeps on changing. Most importantly, learners at FP are explorers, they are open to learning any new words in any language at their disposal so it is not easy for them to speak a language without borrowing words from other languages because they are not yet communicatively competent.

In the study carried out in uThungulu District on teaching using mother tongue language, the results revealed that the implementation at uThungulu District was fraught with challenges such as ill-adapted terminology for mother-tongue teaching, negative attitudes from the community, lack of training for teaching in the mother tongue and lack of resources (Khanyile & Awun, 2022). The scholars further argue that the post-apartheid language policy of South Africa grants every child the right to study in their mother tongue. Despite this provision, mother-tongue education in indigenous languages has only been implemented in some schools in the country, and this has also been limited to the first three grades of primary education (Khanyile & Awung, 2023). It can be inferred that teaching and learning in mother tongue languages has complications such as, lack of enough or appropriate jargon, hatred from parents and learners, poor teacher training as well as inadequate resources.

Furthermore, Cekiso et al., (2019) conducted a similar study on isiXhosa as a medium of instruction at foundation phase. The study revealed that majority of FP teachers had not received training in using isiXhosa as a medium of instruction. The authors suggest that teacher training institutions should provide adequate and relevant professional training to FP teachers so that they could teach in isiXhosa optimally. It can therefore be understood that pressurizing learners into learning through a medium other than their first language (L1) results in poor comprehension levels, as evidenced by the 2016 PIRLS results (Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena, & Mcleod Palane, 2017). The scholars above imply that mother tongue language is a key factor in learning and acquisition of new knowledge. This is consistent with the ideology that language is crucial to a person's life because it reflects their identity, culture and surroundings (Barakabitze, et al., 2019). Mother tongue language therefore encompasses knowledge acquisition and production.

Taking the discussion further, in a study carried in Pupae New Gunea project whose purpose was to support elementary teachers in integrating indigenous cultural practices and learners home language in implementation of Mathematics syllabus, the study revealed barriers such as professional development, culture clashes, translation of learning concepts and a lack of language policy implementation pose a problem when integrating indigenous languages into teaching practices (Saneka & de Witt, 2019; da Silva et al., 2023). The implication is that there are challenges in teaching and even including indigenous languages because of different cultural background learners have.

In the Italian context, Bonomi (2020) highlights the lack of integration of Latino-Hispanic languages into educational learning environments, which has led to the loss of cultural identity and heritage. It can be inferred that the absence or even the exlusion of the indigenous languages in the Italian context/ curriculum leads to the loss tradition,culture and identity. In Botswana, Chebanne and Kewagamang (2020) show that language policies have been used to exclude other Indigegenous languages in the country. Furthermore, these scholars propose a framework for marginalised languages. Similar to Botswana, the Eurocentric New Zealand education system has failed Māori Tamariki, leading to poor academic performance at schools and a lost ability to speak in the

Māori language. However, the introduction of the Māori medium education for early childhood development has proven to be effective in improving educational outcomes and revitalising the Māori Tamariki language.

This paper examines how language-based artificial intelligence is envisaged to imagine new futures for indigenous languages. It draws on the visions, programmes, and plans of six language initiatives that are developing language technology for often-marginalised indigenous, tribal, and minority (ITM) languages, such as Gondi, Maithili, Rajasthani and Mundari, in India. We note three distinct discourses: (1) technological optimism in utilising these new opportunities by claiming space for otherwise-marginalised languages, (2) the imperative for collaborative and collective work in order to address sparse datasets, and (3) the need to negotiate the contested nature of imagining a new collective future. This paper argues that indigenous language technology is not just a technical project but a contested process of subverting linguistic hierarchy through the 'active presencing' of these languages.

There has been a surge of new initiatives that use artificial intelligence (AI) to advance language education, including often-marginalised Indigenous 1 , tribal, and minority (ITM) languages. The use of self-learning predictive models, machine-learning systems, and automated data processing through Natural Language Processing in these language technologies are expected to create inno vative spaces for Indigenous, tribal, and minority (ITM) language education (Bali et al. 2019; NITI Aayog 2018). As ITM languages usually lack institutional spaces for learning like schools, these language technologies are anticipated to open up new learning opportunities, through its revitaliza tion and increased functionality.

The language initiatives were overwhelmingly guided by the idea that view language-based AI is a powerful tool to support ITM language education, especially to facilitate language learning, preserve endangered languages, and promote cultural diversity.(Uma and Dey 2025)

AI-based language technology is often seen as a tool to imagine a new world. This paper examines the discourses on new possibilities that these human-technology interactions are expected to unlock and how technologies are envisaged to enable the imagination of new futures for minoritized languages. In this paper, we examined six language initiatives, across big and small actors in this space, that are working towards utilising these technologies to preserve and promote Indigenous, tribal and minority (ITM) languages in India. (Uma and Dey 2025)

4.2. Strategies to promote effective teaching of African indigenous languages

Literature provides different strategies that could be employed to solve the challenges African indigenous language teachers face in teaching FP learners. According to Tsaure, & Sani (2024), the development of indigenous language competence in a school environment necessitates a collaborative approach between teachers and students. The scholars further argue that this partnership is essential for fostering a learning atmosphere where indigenous languages are not only taught but actively used in daily interactions. The assertions imply that communicative competence in indigenous languages should be established not only in class but even outside where learners are free to communicate in their mother tongue and interact with peers in informal and natural settings. Students and teachers should work together and share knowledge in their mother tongue language. This will create a harmonious relationship between teachers and learners, hence

improved students' performance. Moreover, learners' home language should be considered as a resource for attaining deeper levels of meaning (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). That means indigenous languages should facilitate better understanding of content knowledge. It is therefore ideal that revitalizing and resuscitating indigenous languages is imperative for fostering effective teaching and learning environments (Tsaure & Sani, 2024). The reason is they are the sources of knowledge because they help learners contextualise and familiarise concepts and content knowledge using African indigenous background.

Furthermore, another strategy that could help FP teachers improve their indigenous languages' teaching in the classroom is peer interpreting (Language of Learning and Teaching to Setswana) to close the largest gaps in verbal interaction in the classroom, typically when some students did not understand the teacher (Phajane, 2022). The implication of the extracts is that teachers could use learners themselves to help one another interpret and understand the content delivered in their mother tongue.

Literature further indicate that teachers could also be trained on how to develop their own material in isiXhosa for effective teaching since there is a shortage of learner support material written in isiXhosa (Cekiso et al.,2019; Mashige, et al., 2019). Moreover, the scholars also suggest that the material for the entire FP curriculum in institutions of higher learning should be translated into isiXhosa to prepare pre-service teacher trainees on what to expect in the FP classrooms. This could further be achieved through government's intervention by offering bursaries for student teachers specialising in African languages like isiXhosa (Cekiso et al., 2019). In those courses, students should be taught how to use isiXhosa as the medium of instruction for the entire FP curriculum (Cekiso et al.,2019). They further recommend that all textbooks, readers, educational media, study guides and related literature be made available in isiXhosa (Cekiso et al., 2019).

Most teachers recommended codeswitching and translation of support material into isiXhosa (Cekiso et al., 2019). In an attempt to include all languages and all learners in the classroom, teachers have implemented a number of strategies into their language classrooms. In South Africa's bilingual and multilingual FP classroom, there is a pervasiveness of "code-switching" which can be defined as a practice of switching between two or more languages in one conversation (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). Although code-switching can be a beneficial practice if used strategically, it poses challenges in multilingual classrooms that are populated with many different home languages, particularly where the teachers are monolingual or bilingual and unfamiliar with the L1 of learners in the classroom (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). The scholars further argue that, code-switching is based on monolingual ideologies that views learners' bilingualism as various discrete languages rather than fluid and dynamic.

Taking the discussion further, literature reveals that adequate funding is crucial for the development of language resources, teacher training, and the overall enhancement of language-based educational programs (Tsaure, & Sani, 2024). The scholars also emphasise that the availability of learning and instructional materials in indigenous languages is crucial for the success of this language policy. Experts specializing in these languages should be tasked with translating existing science and other subject textbooks, ensuring that pupils have access to quality educational materials in their native languages (Tsaure, & Sani, 2024). Turner and Koopman (2018) even asserted that the development of subject-specific terminologies in indigenous languages is important if these languages have to function as media of instruction. It can be deduced from the assertions that the development of teaching

material in the indigenous languages is a necessity because it will produce the relevant jargon in the African languages. In addition, it is clear from the evaluation studies discussed earlier that there is a need to build capacity in teacher training institutions for adequately preparing teachers to teach both HLs and additional languages effectively, especially the mechanics of reading and writing (Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). In order to address poor language and literacy achievement in South African schools, the DBE, in 2015, initiated a collaborative, large-scale impact evaluation project named the Early Grade Reading Study (Taylor, Cilliers, Prinsloo, Fleisch, & Reddy, 2017). Pedagogies that take into account the unique features of the African languages with different orthographies might help to improve reading competence (Spaull, Pretorius, and Mohohlwane, 2020).

Research also shows that the implementation of the language in education policy (LIEP) (DoE 1997), has not been very successful to date due to poor language and literacy teaching practices (Wildsmith-Cromarty and Balfour 2019), and the general lack of reading materials in the African languages to meet subject requirements (Paran and Williams 2007; Shiora 2019). As a follow up, currently, the South African Government has also come up with another Language-in-Education Policy which stipulates the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction and as a subject of study (Nwammuo & Salawu, 2018). The policy highlights that these languages can be preserved by making them widely accessible to users through various strategies such as localisation of daily used technology, translation through crowdsourcing, digitilisation and archiving (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024). The policies promote the indigenous languages as the mode of instruction and their accessibility.

Translanguaging pedagogy has been reported to be successful in other phases of education (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). According to Garcia and Kano (2014: 261), Translanguaging is "a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new socio-political realities by interrogating linguistic inequality". The study suggests that, by adopting a Translanguaging approach, teachers can enhance multilingual learners' literacy skills through strategies such as home-language, translation, juxtaposing languages and the flexible and dynamic use of the multimodal semiotic repertoire (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). A Translanguaging approach acknowledges "the value and multiplicity of linguistic diversity" (MacSwan, 2019:190) and fosters the dynamic and flexible use of multiple languages simultaneously to enhance learning. Translanguaging encourages the dynamic and integrative use of languages by bilingual or multilingual learners thus creating a space for learners to use all their languages concurrently. This study indicated that TL and multimodal strategies result in powerful learning opportunities and meaningful collaborative participation (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). Translanguaging strategies involved the development of receptive skills and productive skills by utilising oral and text-based approaches to allow the student participants the opportunity to practice using the language by juxtaposing the language of input and output (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). The scholars further argue that there is evidence that Translanguaging strategies and techniques can be incorporated in Foundation Phase to develop learners' literacy skills as shown in the review studies. For example, teachers can elicit learners' background knowledge by drawing on their HL and English simultaneously, juxtaposing the languages and utilising multicultural and multilingual reading resources (Carrim, &

Nkomo, 2023; Shiora 2019). Teachers use Translanguaging to facilitate understanding for their learners but this is not 'purposeful or systematic' in any defined way and does not serve to build up an academic discourse in any language. This is called 'horizontal multilingualism' of an informal, fluid kind (Heugh, 2021).

Furthermore, translanguaging fosters learners' creativity and encourages them to transcend beyond what is in the text to create something unique that echoes their personal bilingual experiences (Carrim & Nkomo, 2023). TL strategies enhances the teaching of learners on how to draw inferences from the blended isiXhosa-English reading passages by applying appropriate prior knowledge while reading. Findings indicated a significant improvement in the learner participants' performance from the pre-test to the post-test. This suggests that the TL intervention contributes positively to learners' reading performance in both languages, as it improved learners' ability to apply relevant background knowledge when reading (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). Drawing on learners' background and using texts that relate to their background and experiences creates a link to the text, thus making the content more relatable for the learners and enhancing their reading comprehension. Secondly, the learners' English vocabulary can be developed through home language, the use of translations, using texts in learners' HL and English, using multilingual resources, and utilising learners' multimodal semiotic repertoire. Drawing on vocabulary from learners' HL and using translations during and after reading a text can improve speaking and listening skills and comprehension of the text. Learners can refer to the texts in their HL when trying to understand the meaning of a word in the English text (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). Other learners mentioned that during the learning and teaching process, they used both Xhosa and Baca because that enabled them to bridge some gaps between the two languages easily (Majola & Cekiso 2023). The use of multilingualism in education will result in learners succeeding academically who also have a good grounding of their own culture and identity (Shava and Manyike, 2018).

It is important that educators overcome these linguistic injustices by placing equal value on all languages and escape these ideologies by deconstructing the idea of languages as "pure and bounded entities". This necessitates a post-structuralist shift through the adoption of pedagogies or approaches to learning that accommodate and include emergent bilingual learners so as to provide these learners with an equal opportunity to learn in a linguistically diverse classroom and a socially just education system (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023).

In a study carried in Pupae New Gunea project whose purpose was to support elementary teachers in integrating indigenous cultural practices and learners home language in implementation of Mathematics syllabus, the study revealed that teachers responded positively to the use of language resources. They also showed their willingness to use their own knowledge of their indigenous culture and language to develop and teach Mathematics curriculum (Edment-Wathen, et al., 2019).

In a study carried out in India to examine how language-based artificial intelligence is envisaged to imagine new futures for indigenous languages. It drew on the visions, programmes, and plans of six language initiatives that are developing language technology for often-marginalised indigenous, tribal, and minority (ITM) languages, such as Gondi, Maithili, Rajasthani and Mundari, in India (Pradhan and Dey, 2025). Three distinct discourses were noted : (1) technological optimism in utilising these new opportunities by claiming space for otherwise-marginalised languages, (2) the imperative for collaborative and collective work in order to address sparse datasets, and (3) the need to negotiate the

contested nature of imagining a new collective future. The implication is that AI can be very important in the teaching of indigenous languages but collective work and collaboration among teachers is necessary. The study argued that indigenous language technology is not just a technical project but a contested process of subverting linguistic hierarchy through the 'active presencing' of these languages.

Furthermore, there has been a surge of new initiatives that use artificial intelligence (AI) to advance language education, including often-marginalised Indigenous languages, tribal, and minority (ITM) languages. The use of self-learning predictive models, machine-learning systems, and automated data processing through Natural Language Processing in these language technologies are expected to create inno vative spaces for Indigenous, tribal, and minority (ITM) language education (Bali et al. 2019; NITI Aayog 2018). As ITM languages usually lack institutional spaces for learning like schools, these language technologies are anticipated to open up new learning opportunities, through its revitaliza tion and increased functionality. The language initiatives were overwhelmingly guided by the idea that view language-based AI is a powerful tool to support ITM language education, especially to facilitate language learning, preserve endangered languages, and promote cultural diversity (Pradhan and Dey 2025)

AI-based language technology is often seen as a tool to imagine a new world. the discourses on new possibilities that these human-technology interactions are expected to unlock and how technologies are envisaged to enable the imagination of new futures for minoritized languages. In this paper, we examined six language initiatives, across big and small actors in this space, that are working towards utilising these technologies to preserve and promote Indigenous, tribal and minority (ITM) languages in India (Pradhan and Dey, 2025)

5. Data analysis

Data were analyzed qualitatively. Qualitative analysis can be referred to as a method of analyzing a particular subject using non-numeric plus non-quantifiable indicators, behavior, and characteristics to determine its overall situation, quality, value, or any other parameter (Wallstreetmojo Team, and Vaidya, 2023). That is, it analyses data without using quantity to get the depth, quality, pattern and the trend of the teaching of African indigenous languages so as to make own interpretation based on the given data. Qualitative analysis also includes interpreting, identifying, and examining patterns and themes in textual data and determining how they help understand the phenomena more profoundly for answering questions (Islam and Faraj, 2022). This study therefore adopted Thematic Analysis which refers to a process of segmentation, categorization and relinking of aspects of the data prior to the final interpretation (Matthew & Liz, 2010). The researcher organised data into tangible and physical component, separated it, classified and rearranged it. Furthermore, TA can also be defined as a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset (Castleberry & Amanda (2018). It is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is discussed or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities. The researcher critically compiled the literature on the teaching of the indigenous African languages then disassembled it to create meaningful groupings, identified patterns, categorised them into themes that go together or have connections, interpreted them and made analytic conclusions; thus, constructed new knowledge.

5.1 Findings and discussions
The study explored the challenges of teaching the African indigenous languages at the foundation phase and possible strategies to solve them. The researcher critically reviewed and analysed the related literature on the phenomenon. Dominant themes (challenges) that emerged from the data are: limited digital accessibility, resource scarcity/lack of resources; old, traditional and archaic language used in the textbooks not having enough subject specific terms, teachers compelled to teach through the language they have not trained for and lack of training in teaching in mother tongue languages. Possible solutions (strategies) for effective teaching of indigenous language at FP are: development of indigenous language competence in a school environment, teacher training in (developing their own material and teaching in multilingual classrooms), code switching, adequate funding for accessibility and availability of learning and instructional materials in indigenous languages, South African Language-in-Education Policy, Translanguaging pedagogy and multilingualism.

5.2 The challenges of teaching the indigenous languages at foundation phase
The literature-related findings on the teaching of the African indigenous languages revealed that the challenges are resource scarcity which include limited digital accessibility (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024; Mabaso-Nkuna et al.,2024; Majola & Cekiso, 2023). The scholars imply that African language teachers are not able to teach the indigenous languages effectively because the teaching materials and resources are limited and not easily accessible. The textbooks and other teaching materials are not even digitalised. If they were accessible online/ internet, the teaching and learning would improve because both teachers and learners could easily access them. Furthermore, the literature also reveals that currently the available text books are full of archaic, and unfamiliar language which does not have subject specific terms/jargon (Mabaso-Nkuna et al.,2024; Khanyile & Awung, 2022; Cekiso et al, 2019). This means when a language is difficult to understand by teachers and students, its teaching and learning are complicated. Another challenge is that teachers are sometimes forced to teach through a language they have not trained for (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Teaching in a language one has not majored in could be challenging because the content knowledge might be limited so are teaching methods. Lack of training in teaching mother tongue languages also emerged as a finding. Literature reveals that some teachers have not been adequately trained to teach in their mother tongue languages (Khanyile & Awun, 2022; Cekiso et al., 2019). The practice poses a challenge in the sense that teachers may fail to use the relevant background knowledge learners already have.

5.3 Strategies to solve the challenges
The literature-related findings revealed a number of possible solutions to the challenges discussed above. Teachers at FP could develop indigenous language competence in a school environment (Tsaure & Sani, 2024). That is, they could help learners speak their mother tongue languages freely in and outside class as that would help them acquire, learn, and improve the language easily. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that mother tongue language is the foundation of knowledge acquisition and construction, so linguistic and communication competences would enable learners relate and acquire new knowledge in their space. The analogy is consistent with the understanding that home languages help learners to attain deeper levels of meaning (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023). They are able to think deeply in their mother tongue

language therefore able to transfer their schema into the new knowledge in any language. Taking the discussion further, the literature also points that, teachers could be trained to develop their own teaching material and how to teach in multilingual classrooms (Khanyile & Awun, 2022; Cekiso et al.,2019; Mashige, et al., 2019; Wildsmith-Cromarty & Balfour, 2019). It is important that teachers should not be stereotyped and follow provided teaching material alone, rather, they should be flexible enough and find new sources to compensate for the already existing resources. Also, it is crucial that teacher training institutions should train African language teachers to teach in multilingual classes for effective learning of indigenous languages at FP. Another strategy that teachers could employ to improve the teaching of indigenous languages is code-switching (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023; Cekiso et al., 2019). Using two languages in one conversation could also help teachers reach learners who might not be familiar or competent in the language of instruction to understand better. Moreover, data also reveal that there is a need for adequate funding for accessibility and availability of learning and instructional materials in indigenous languages (Tsaure, & Sani, 2024; Turner and Koopman, 2018). The suggestion implies that the government should support the initiative of facilitating accessibility of teaching material in indigenous languages. The findings also revealed that the South African Language-in-Education Policy stipulates the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction and as a subject of study (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024; Nwammuo & Salawu, 2018). The policy promotes effective teaching of indigenous languages by using mother tongue languages themselves as a mode of instruction as well. This implies a possibility of code switching and multilingualism. In addition, Translanguaging pedagogy and multilingualism also emerged as the pedagogical strategies that could improve the teaching of the indigenous languages at FP (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023; Shiora 2019; Shava and Manyike, 2018; Coetzee Van Rooy 2018). They allow teachers to use different languages to help students understand the concepts. They accommodate all the students from different African languages.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that African indigenous language teachers are not able to teach effectively because of lack of appropriate relevant material written in the indigenous languages. This comes as a result of lack of government financial support to help teachers and language experts to translate the already existing material into African languages and to digitalise the material. Furthermore, the study also concludes that there is lack of teacher training to use different teaching strategies to teach indigenous languages which results in some teachers teaching languages they have not majored in. In addition, pedagogical strategies such as code switching, multilingualism as well as Translanguaging could improve the teaching of the African indigenous languages at FP.

7. Recommendation

The study recommends that African indigenous language teachers improve their teaching at FP by creating a mother tongue language atmosphere on and off the class. This will improve students linguistic and communicative competencies because learners will be familiar with content knowledge. It also recommends that African language teachers should be trained to teach mother tongue languages and indigenous languages so that all students could be accommodated in instruction. The study further recommends

teachers to use code-switching, translanguaging and multilingualism strategies to efficiently teach indigenous languages (Carrim, & Nkomo, 2023; Cekiso et al., 2019). The reason is that the strategies accommodate all learners from different indigenous languages. Another recommendation is the inclusion of AI in the teachers pedagogical lessons. AI is not only helpful to teachers at FP but also to the learners themselves in that they study on their own with the support of AI. The study however, did not cover what could be done to help teachers at the foundation phase to teach both mother tongue and indigenous languages simultaneously so as to reach all learners from different cultural backgrounds. Future research is therefore required on the training of African indigenous language teachers to effectively teach both mother tongue and indigenous languages.

Funding

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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