PRACTITIONERS' EXPERIENCES IN USING SESOTHO AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN GRADE R CLASSES IN QWAQWA

by

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DEDICATION

The success of this study is largely attributed to my four children, namely my two daughters, Mamello and Lerato, and my two sons in law, Kgomotso and Tsepo. Thank you for encouraging me to carry on *bana baka,*even when I felt like it was difficult and impossible to achieve. You all believed in me and this made me determined to complete my studies.

I also want to dedicate this study to the students at the UFS Qwaqwa Campus with whom I began my career as a junior lecturer in the foundation phase in 2012. Thank you for believing in me and my competence to be your teacher and mentor.

DECLARATION

I, Edith Matseliso Lesupi, declare that the thesis hereby submitted by me for the MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS (MEd) degree at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at another university. I further cede copyright of this thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

Signature_____Date:

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Dr Dipane Hlalele, thank you for always allowing me ample time with my supervisor. This made my difficult journey worthwhile.

Maseeng, Leetoane and Neli, your support during difficult times kept us together. You always believed that everyone of us belonged somewhere in the world of academia. You were always encouraging me to give my best. Thank you friends.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore Grade R practitioners' experiences of using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. The study was approached through an interpretative paradigm, loosely using a phenomenological perspective, which helped to focus on the lived experiences of Grade R practitioners. The study focused on three questions:

- How does the Qwaqwa context influence the use of Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R?
- What do practitioners' teaching experiences suggest about Sesotho as the medium of instruction in Grade R?
- What are the challenges practitioners' experience in using Sesotho as a medium of instruction?

The study involved the Qwaqwa region, Free State Province. Eight practitioners from Grade R participated in the study. Each had at least three years of experience. This study used a qualitative approach in order to understand the experiences of the practitioners in teaching Grade R in the mother tongue. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. This helped to have a flexible approach to hearing the voices of the practitioners.

The findings of the study showed that Qwaqwa has a rapidly changing social context. Many foreigners are settling in the area, affecting not only how Sesotho is spoken, but also the development of languages other than Sesotho. These have an influence on the children in Grade R as they are exposed to different languages in their community. The practitioners felt very proud of using Sesotho as the medium of instruction in their classes. However, they were concerned about the lack of support for teachers of African languages in Grade R. The challenges experienced related to planning, teaching, assessment, learning and teaching support materials. Although some head of departments and principals were helpful, it was clear that learning facilitators from the department and other departmental officials needed more capacity-building programmes to assist practitioners.

This study adds to the call for greater attention to be paid to the use of African languages, such as Sesotho, as the medium of instruction in Grade R. This grade is

the entry point of basic schooling. Therefore, it needs a strong, coherent foundation in order to be effective in the learning of basic skills in the foundation phase. The draft policy on the introduction of African languages in South African schools is promising a new direction in mother tongue instruction in African languages.

KEYWORDS

African languages, Sesotho, Grade R, Practitioners, Free State

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSDE	California State Department of Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
HOD	Head of Department
IIEP	Institution of International Economic Policy
LF	Learning Facilitator
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and teaching support material
MT	Mother tongue
OAU	Organization of African Union
PANSALB	Pan South African Language Board
PGCE FP	Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Foundation Phase)
PRAESA	Project for Study of Alternative Education in South Africa
ReSEP	Research on Socio-Economic Policy
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SGB	School Governing Body
SMRS	Systematic method for reading success
UFS	University of the Free State
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction and background of the study

Sesotho is one of the nine indigenous languages that was side-lined and regarded as less important during the apartheid era. The language policy during this era recognised and respected the two languages which were labelled as the 'official' languages.

De Klerk and Bosch (1994) highlight that, language of teaching and learning in the era of the Bantustan was either English or Afrikaans. Amongst other things, the Bantustan promoted indigenous languages according to the speakers of the different African Languages. Khosa (2012) highlights the fact that, the Bantustan Education Act (Act 47 of 1953) was introduced to divide the quality of education amongst indigenous language speakers and English and Afrikaans speakers. The author adds that this Act had two objectives, namely, to encourage South Africa to favour English and Afrikaans over the indigenous languages and to use the underdeveloped African languages to suppress the majority (Khosa 2013). The marginalisation of African languages is still felt in democratic South African. For example, De Klerk and Bosch (1994) noted that in the turn to democracy in the Eastern Cape, where the majority of citizens speak isiXhosa, the main languages of learning and teaching in schools remained English and Afrikaans.

This is not just limited to the Eastern Cape but is also the case in other provinces. African languages still suffer from under-development. As a result black African people do not have the confidence to educate their children in the indigenous languages. This lack of demand means that indigenous languages still suffer discrimination.

Tshotsho (2013), in his debate on the mother tongue and language policy in South Africa, alludes to the fact that, before 1994 and the institution of a democratic government, English and Afrikaans were given the status of priority and economic power. Tshotsho goes on to say that cultural advantage through language meant that children whose mother tongue was English or Afrikaans had the necessary

linguistic capital needed for them to forge ahead. Since their home language matched that of the school, together with the racial advantage, this meant that white South Africans did much better academically than their counterparts who were not taught in their language of origin.

The above status quo created a disturbing reality in which language featured as one of the means of dividing South African society. The turn to democracy, however, sought to level the playing fields. African languages began to feature strongly as one of the arenas for transformation in the South African Education System. The South African Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997) was key in providing a framework for language choice in schools. This development opened the door for African languages to feature strongly in education. For the Foundation Phase, which is the entry level to basic schooling, this meant that children could be taught in their mother tongue if the language of learning and teaching chosen by the school governing body permitted this. Leaving the choice to the school governing body is problematic. The lack of support for teachers in African languages means that schools are still experiencing difficulties in implementing African languages in the Foundation Phase. Taking into account the role of language and its relationship to thought and culture, and the fact that young children are in their formative years, means that compromises are being made (Motshabi 2006) especially in relation to optimal growth, development and learning. This impacts negatively on the optimal language development and related knowledge and skills which are critical to build a solid foundation.

Practitioners[1]/teachers are the key to facilitating quality experiences for young children through teaching in their mother tongue. This issue is particularly important at the entry point of basic schooling, as it sets the tone for what is to follow. The practitioners are supposed to model good language practices for the children. This study, therefore, focused on Grade R practitioners using Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R classes. In order to contextualise this study I present a historical account of the language debate in South Africa.

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[1] In this study the term practitioners instead of teachers is used. The participants were still obtaining their qualification at the minimum level and hence did not attain teacher status. They were also very used to referring to themselves as practitioners. Since this study is about valuing participants' perspectives it was decided to use the term practitioner throughout the study.

1.2   Language history in apartheid South Africa

McDonald (2002) notes that, during the apartheid period, the then ruling party (National Party) built a vision of discriminating ethno-linguistics for indigenous South African languages. Together with locating all ethnic groups to homelands where they would stay together in the Bantustans, language became part of the separatist mentality of the apartheid regime. Language areas for each ethnic group were established between 1950 and 1960. For example, the Basotho were located in Qwaqwa, Xhosas in Transkei, Zulus in KwaZulu-Natal, and Batswana in Bophuthatswana. In keeping with the larger project of apartheid, language freedom was still not granted. The ruling party entrenched the dominance of Afrikaans and English. The leaders of the Bantustans had no say in the formulation of the policies which affected citizens in their respective areas. This language oppression, together with other aspects of apartheid engineering, had a devastating effect on black Africans in South Africa.

After activism to abolish apartheid, came the education protests, as noted by Abadzi, (2006). Black South Africans received inferior education and were deprived of being taught in their mother tongue. For example, children who received education during the apartheid era were deprived of the chance to be the best performers compared to their counterparts who were taught in English or Afrikaans (their language of birth from junior primary to tertiary education). Abadzi goes on to say that to be able to use a second language correctly, proficiency in a first language is essential and predicts success. Unfortunately this was not the case for the majority of South African children who had to decode a foreign language that had very little to do with their linguistic competence.

Monaghan (2011) defines South Africa as a multi-lingual society that has always experienced unique "linguistic" problems because the official languages differed from the indigenous languages. Monaghan goes on to highlight the fact that this led to protests that had tragic consequences. In Soweto in 1976, many black students lost their lives as they fought against the use of the language of the oppressor, namely, Afrikaans. African languages were well catered in the first seven year of schooling but remained under developed. In addition to the language issues, student protest was also directed towards demanding equal and responsive education.

When South Africa became a democracy in 1994, Sesotho became one of the nine indigenous languages to obtain recognition in the country's first post-apartheid constitution. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), among other things, also gives children the right to be educated in the language of their choice. It guarantees "language freedom", which was previously only enjoyed by a few in the country.

Taking into account the brief historical exposition, this study is closely aligned to the aims and objectives of the Language in Education Policy (1997), which seeks to protect individual rights. Tshotsho (2013) adds greater weight to the latter when he states that language is a fundamental human right. In agreement with this, the Bill of Rights (Section 31), as noted in the Constitution of the Republic Of South Africa (1996), presents the following important points:

- Every person shall have the right to use the language of his/her choice
- No person shall be discriminated against on the grounds of language
- Every person has the right to insist that the state communicates with her/him at national level in the language of his/her choice.

The points above provide an important foundation for my study as do the goals explained below:

- To promote national unity
- To entrench democracy, which includes the protection of language rights
- To promote multilingualism
- To promote respect for and tolerance towards linguistic and cultural diversity
- To promote national economic development
- To further the elaboration and modernisation of the African languages.

This study focuses on the experiences of practitioners using Sesotho as the language of teaching in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. It also explores the challenges, successes and the extent to which practitioners have been supported and empowered since the importance of mother tongue-based education in the Foundation Phase has been emphasised. South Africa has eleven official languages. The use of all these languages, including the dominant ones, need to be researched

in order to understand how they contribute to children's early education. This study takes the context of Grade R practitioners in Qwaqwa to gain insight into the implementation of a language policy where Sesotho is used as the language of learning and teaching. Since the practitioners are at the interface of practice, their views, perceptions and comments were important to consider in this study.

1.3   Value of education in the mother tongue

This study pays attention to the positive aspect of children receiving their education in their mother tongue, which is an African language. This is in keeping with the literature that argues for the promotion of teaching and learning in the mother tongue. Abadzi (2006) states that mother tongue-based education is the efficient way of learning for the poor. I believe that Abadzi's view is narrow and limiting – mother tongue is important for all people in all social classes. It is tied to people's identity and it should be respected.

Foley (2006) echoes the importance of mother tongue-based education. He states that children should receive education in their mother tongue as this guarantees good outcomes. From personal experience, I can say that the opposite is also true. Being a Mosotho woman who grew up being ashamed of her own language (Sesotho), since it was never recognised and seemed to be a language that deprives one of life opportunities, I have great admiration for the goals of our constitution which shows commitment to decentralising the dominant languages and making space for African languages. As stated by De Sousa and Broom (2011), although all the indigenous languages are now recognised constitutionally, learners are still taught in a language that is not their home languages in some of Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. This is often English. The experiences of the practitioners will be helpful in determining why they still feel that English is the easiest way of teaching.

The purpose of this study was to explore practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. Mashiya (2010) and Alexander (2009) share the view that only the language that the beginner learner knows best when entering school, should be their language of learning and teaching. Mashiya (2010) further adds that, for a child to communicate well and become fully functional, the language of origin should be well developed, not only at home but

throughout the phase level. To ensure that this not only takes place at home, but also at school, the experiences of practitioners', who are generally under-qualified, were very important to consider. I made the assumption that most of these practitioners were using the language that they felt comfortable in and were probably code-switching as well. When emphasising the disadvantages of using the language that teachers are not confident with, Ebrahim (2009) adds that non-English mother tongue speakers, who are placed in schools where English is the medium of instruction, do not always perform well due to language being foreign to them. Children in these classes are perceived as 'remedial' children or overlooked without sufficient support.

It is important to investigate how universities, as teacher training institutions, are involved in developing courses on African languages for a broader understanding of language, culture, and thought. Government Gazette no 35028, amongst other factors stresses the need for Higher Education Institutions to use indigenous languages as medium of instruction. However, Kaschula (2013) alludes that there is no proper monitoring as to how far this language Policy is being implemented. Ebrahim (2009) alludes to the fact that, as teachers are the ones holding the keys to unlock mother-tongue instruction, they need to be trained and equipped to understand the ways in which young children use their mother tongue before they can use it efficiently as language of teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers need enough pedagogic content knowledge in order to teach effectively in the mother tongue. Ebrahim draws attention to the importance of examining the training of Foundation Phase teachers in all institutions for teacher education. Taking this into consideration makes it clear that, although one can speak a language, skills are still needed to use it as a language of teaching in the classroom. This is where universities have a part to play in supporting mother tongue-based education.

Plüddemann (2007) notes that, despite the Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997), African languages continue to experience marginalisation and are being side-lined in "pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes". Taking into account what is highlighted by the DoE, it is clear that even higher institutions are not doing as expected to empower teachers to be efficient in the delivery of mother tongue education. This is tied to insufficient expertise in the different languages and the reluctance of African students to participate in programmes where an African

language is the language of learning and teaching. (Pluddemann 2007)

I consider my study as making a small contribution towards generation building by focusing on an African language. I do this by creating an opportunity for Grade R practitioners to share their experiences in using Sesotho as a medium of instruction in the Qwaqwa region, Free State. Their voices were listened to in a way that created an inviting space to talk about Sesotho as a language of teaching and learning.

1.4 Factors to consider for mother tongue-based education

There are six factors that the Systematic Method for Reading Success (SMRS) (Hollingsworth & Gains 2009) emphasises for quality implementation. These factors are important to this study and are as follows:

- **Language model:** The language model and the geographic status of the area should be considered. The language that is mostly spoken should also be taken into consideration. It is important to consider the model that will help learners with oral and academic support to integrate both home language (Sesotho) and English. The SMRS emphasises the fact that, irrespective of the model used, learners must get enough support so that they are proficient in their own language. This will lead to proficiency in the second language. When this is applied to my study, it is necessary for the language model to be grounded in the development of Sesotho.
- **Language distribution:** There is more or less an even distribution of Sesotho throughout Qwaqwa. This distribution is affected by foreigners bringing in other languages. Even though this is minimal, it is still influential. A point to consider is distribution of pure and diluted Sesotho.
- **Teachers' recruitment and preparation:** How practitioners/teachers are recruited and how they are prepared for the challenges of teaching an underdeveloped language were important to consider for this study. Since the policy allows children to be taught in their mother tongue, with the aim of producing good outcomes, the recruitment of teachers should be done with great care. My experience, however, tells me otherwise. Not much thought is given to this aspect.

- **Material development and provision:** As one of the aims in this study is to inform teacher training and development of materials, this is a very important factor to consider when one researches mother tongue-based education. Materials used in schools have to be designed in such a way that they benefit learners. The accessibility of these materials should also be for all schools, especially in the rural areas.

- **Parental support:** The parents play a very important role in the education of their children. They have to be invited and encouraged to participate in their children's education. Their voices are not necessarily taken into account when policies are designed. It is expected that there will be much resistance if parents are ignored and government decisions imposed on them. Parental support is guaranteed where parents are consulted. Chapter 4 of this study discusses the views of the participants with regard to parental involvement.

- **Educational and sector alignment:** Another important factor raised by the SMRS is that educational activities should align with the language of learning and teaching. Policies for practice and teacher training should be aligned. It is recommended that practitioners/teachers receive in-service training that will capacitate them and boost their confidence (see Chapter 5 of this study).

1.5   Difficulties in teaching in the mother tongue

Foley (2006) argues that, although it is important to teach young learners in their mother tongue, there are real difficulties involved. Due consideration should be given to the practical aspects. Some of the factors that create problems are as follows:

- **Parents:** According to Buthelezi (2002) parents still believe that their children are best taught when the medium of instruction is English. This belief impacts negatively on the Sesotho language and culture. The author notes that when parents are faced with having to choose between English and African languages, they opt for English. They believe that it would empower their children in a way that will bring more economic prosperity. Buthelezi (2002) believes that this type of attitude has contributed to the

marginalisation of African languages. Parents still regard English as the language of power. This attitude creates a problem weakens language policy which affirms the African languages. It could be asked: if children are raised in a way that shows no love for their indigenous language, how will schools convince them to participate in an education which is not valued by their parents as primary educators?

Parents need to be convinced of the value of educating their children in the African languages. Alexander (2009) states that mother tongue is the language in which we first meet the world. This makes it simpler for children to form concepts and engage in logical thinking, which leads to successful learning. It is, therefore, important for parents to regard mother tongue-based education and teaching in a positive way. This can inspire their children to recognise the value of their own abilities to learn a relevant language.

Braam (2004) emphasises that depriving children education in their mother tongue can lead to severe under-achievement, self-confidence issues, and cultural hostility. This problem was raised by the participants who indicated that, regardless the language policy in South Africa, parents still feel that Sesotho or other indigenous languages will not give their children the desired future. If parents, who are expected to support the policy which recognises their own language, are negative, it makes it difficult for schools to implement.

Frederickse (1992) states that, in South Africa, English is still regarded as being better than other languages and as seen from above parents are buying into this view. This study aligns itself with all researchers who are committed to promoting mother tongue-based education in South Africa. Parent support for mother tongue-based education is a complex issue. The language policies are not supported by those who develop them. In South Africa this is evident when black African elite groups still educate their children in schools that teach in English. The poor are still expected to educate their children using their indigenous languages. Language is part of the discussion on inequalities in South Africa.

1.6   Terminology and school books in Southern African languages

One problem surrounding mother tongue-based education is the lack of terminology in African languages. The Project for the Study of Alternative Education in South Africa, (PRAESA) researched the feasibility of how much African languages have been used in education. Mahlasela (2012) found that there is a lack of teaching and learning materials in African languages to support mother tongue-based education. The authors state that the National Terminology Service, within the National Language Service in the Department of Arts and Culture, is compiling a terminology bank currently. Although there are problems, the efforts are commendable. The building of shared terminologies will help in the advancement of knowledge and skills in teacher education for the Foundation Phase.

Bengu (1996) highlights that although everyone has the right to be taught in the language of their choice the practical implementation is problematic. Bengu adds that there are also very few enthusiastic speakers of African languages and a reluctance to use indigenous languages as languages of teaching. Both lack of books and lack of enthusiasm from native speakers works against developing mother tongue-based education using African languages. This could mean that South Africa runs the risk of losing African languages among a new generation.

The problems outlined above, together with my discussion from historical and contextual perspectives, shed light on the nature of the problems related to mother tongue-based education in an African language in South Africa. Bearing in mind that teachers are the drivers of success in the implementation of the Language in Education Policy, together with systemic support, my study provides insight into what is happening at Grade R level.

1.7   Context of Grade R in South Africa

Preschool education in South Africa has been an area of struggle. Ebrahim (2010) traced the shifts in early care and education in three different stages in South African history. During apartheid the early years were used to create a separate and unequal childhoods. Limited custodial care in poor quality settings was provided for black children. White children had access to stimulating early childhood programme. The government supported early childhood education for children from 3 to 5 years.

Through the activism of the non-governmental organisations the inequalities in the preschool years were highlighted. When South Africa became a democracy the preschool years became an area for reconstruction and redress. There was overwhelming support for one year of government supported preschool education. The White Paper 5 in Early Childood Education (DoE 2001) focuses on the introduction of Grade R into the basic education system. Grade R is for children from 5 to 6. It is part of the Foundation Phase which includes children from 6 to 9 years (South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) 2010). There have been various initiatives to include Grade R in both the public and the private schooling system. The main aim is universal provision supported by the government in 2019. The earlier targets to universalise Grade R in 2010 and 2014 were partially met. SAIDE (2010) notes that the efforts to implement universal provision is complicated and has not been driven by a common vision for the country. Grade R should not be seen as an isolated grade. It is and should be seen as an integral part of the Foundation Phase.

The expansion of Grade R is to create access, however, this is problematic, especially in terms of quality. A recent study on the impact that Grade R is making on learning outcomes of children is quite disturbing (Van der Berg et al. 2013) The research report prepared by Stellenbosch University, Research on Socio-Economic Policy (ReSEP) notes the following:

- The expansion of Grade R has been rapid. From 2001 to 2012, Grade R enrolments increased from 242 000 to 768 000. This means that 45 000 additional learners and a thousand classrooms have been created thus far. Another 55 000 children attend Grade R in ECD centres. This means that there is a total of 804 000 children in Grade R. In total, 78% of 5-year olds had been in an educational programme of some sort in 2009. The public schools accommodate more than 90% of all Grade Rs; thus only 10% are provided for outside public primary schools.
- Poor children are not benefiting from Grade R provision. The report states that, although advantaged school are benefitting, the schools in the lowest three quintiles are not making an impact. This means that the inequalities are further entrenched. One of the factors affecting poor performance is how mother tongue-based education takes place in this grade. According to

the report, Grade R is more educationally sound in the strong provinces such as Gauteng, the Northern Cape and the Western Cape.

- Another aspect of concern is the cost per learner. This is lower in Grade R. This affects the opportunities that the children have to learn. For African languages, more money needs to be dedicated to building sound learning outcomes. More attention needs to be directed towards providing a supportive framework for implementation, high quality teacher training and programmes for parental support.

- The quality of teaching and learning in Grade R has also been an aspect that needs intervention. If African languages are to be effective, teachers need to have a sound understanding of many aspects of child development and language learning.

1.8   Grade R teacher qualification

There is noticeable improvement in the qualification of Grade R practitioners. The number of Grade R practitioners who have a level 6 qualification has increased. While this is the case, it is still a problem for mother tongue-based education. More efforts need to be directed towards teaching in African languages as home language and greater monitoring and support is needed.

Table 1.1: Qualification of Grade R practitioners

PROVINCE	Number of Practitioners at each of the NQF Level					
	Below L4	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	<Level 6	Total
EC	228	3920	181	436	0	4765
FS	84	282	237	667		1270
GP	10	120	1420	600	560	2710
KZN	200	4 812	386	904	184	6 486
LP				1080		1080
MP	200	792	700	234	139	2,065
NC	8	310	305	101	12	736
NW	Only employ qualified teachers in Grade R in public schools					
WC	51	533	661	290	232	1 767
TOTAL	781	10 769	3 890	4 312	1 127	20 879

1.8.1 Qualification pathways for unqualified and under-qualified teachers and Grade R practitioners

It is encouraging to note that qualifications were developed since Grade R began to feature as a year of preschool education in the basic education system. This helped to get more qualified teachers in the field, although it is not enough. The latest addition is the Grade R Diploma, which offers Grade R teachers an opportunity to upgrade their qualifications and bridge into the Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase teaching.

Table 1.2: Qualification pathways for Grade R teachers

Present Qualification(s)	Qualification Pathway
Less than level 4 Less than Matric	Can possibly access Dip (Grade R Teaching), using RPL, CAT or age exemption to assist.
NQF L4	Likely to qualify for age exemption. If so, can access Dip (Grade R Teaching), or B Ed (FP) directly.
Matric	Those with matric degree ad diploma endorsement / exemption can access directly.
NQF L5	Dip (Grade R) or B Ed (FP) via CAT, recognising cognate credits (not automatic)
NPDE	Dip (Grade R) or B Ed (FP) via CAT, recognising cognate credits (not automatic) NPDE holders are recognised to be professionally qualified. Thus a quicker route to an appropriate professional qualification for NPDE holders would be to register for an Adv Cert (FP Teaching) or and Adv Cert (Grade R Teaching)

1.9   Language distribution in the Foundation Phase

In what follows, the quantitative data of language distribution is presented. These statistics provide a picture of the different aspects related to the language distribution in South Africa. It is clear that the dominant language in South Africa is still English. The pie graph shows that 65.3% of children fall within the English home language category.

Figure 1.1: Percentage of learners by home language (DBE 2010)
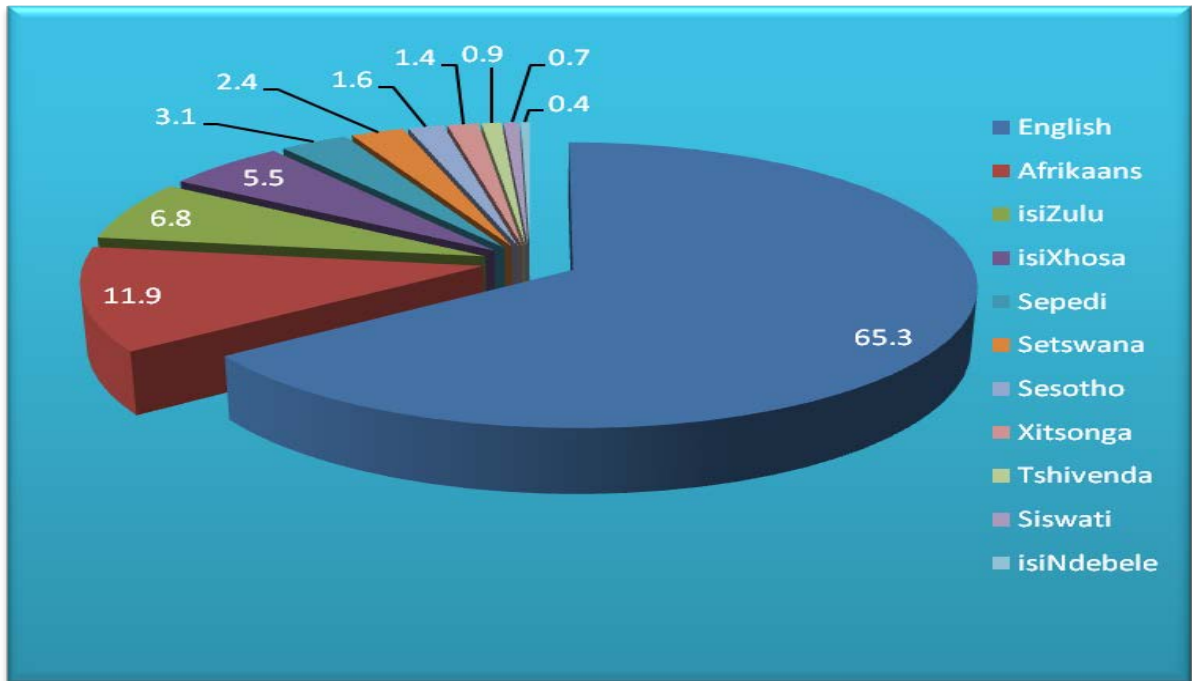
Home languages of the majority of learners in the country are isiZulu and isiXhosa respectively.
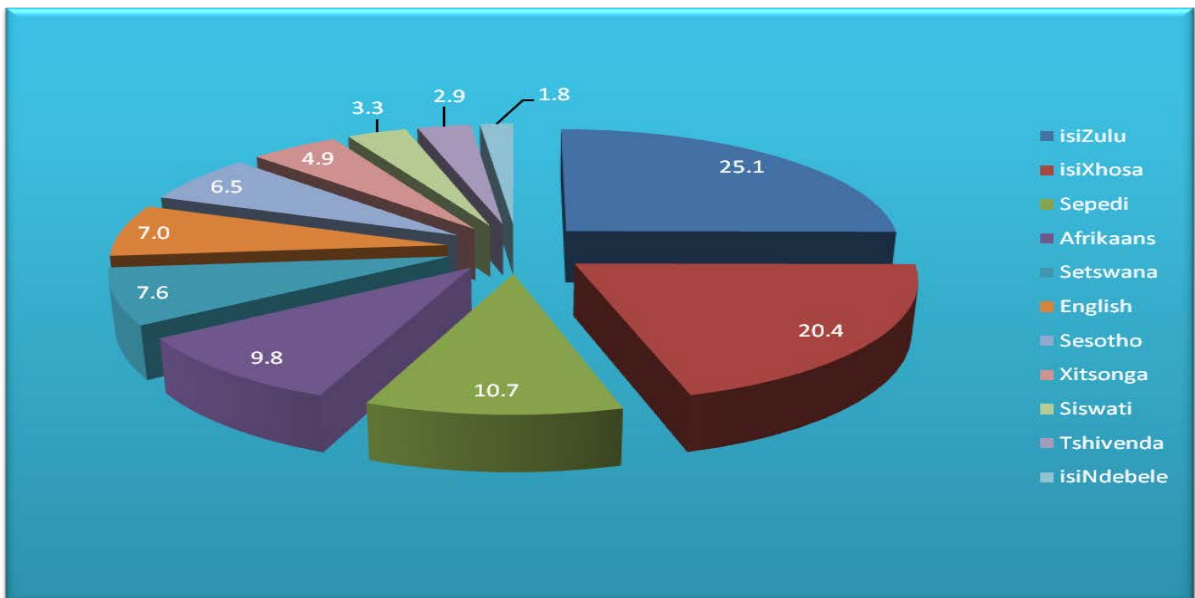
Figure 1.2: Percentage of learners by language of learning and teaching(DBE 2010).

Between 1998 and 2007, there was a significant increase in the percentage of foundation phase learners who learned in their home language.

Figure 1.3: Learners learning in their home language in the Foundation Phase from 1998 to 2007 (DBE 2010)

Figure 1.3 explains the teacher supply and demand in relation to teachers in the different languages. Clearly there is a need for more teachers to be trained in an African language, taking into account the estimated Foundation Phase enrolment.

Table 1.3: Language in the Foundation Phase for 2012

Language	% of total population	Estimated FP enrolment, 2012	Estimated # FP teachers, 2012 (LER=31.1)	Estimated replacement demand (RSA) for FP teachers by languages, 2012 at 4.5% att. Rate	Total supply of NTGs in FP per language, 2012	Supply-demand deficit in FP per language, 2012
IsiZulu	22. 74	913, 821	29, 383	1, 322	577	-745
IsiXhosa	16. 00	643, 074	20, 678	930	31	-899
Afrikaans	13. 45	540, 616	17, 383	782	675	-107
English	9. 60	385, 849	12, 407	558	389	-169
Sepedi	9.06	364, 237	11, 712	527	45	-482
Setswana	7. 98	320, 758	10, 314	464	15	-449
Sesotho	7. 55	303, 59-	9, 762	439	8	-431
Xitsonga	4. 47	179, 584	5, 774	260	19	-241
SiSwati	2 .55	102, 290	3, 289	148	0	-148
Tshivenda	2. 37	95,377	3, 067	138	4	-134
IsiNdebele	2.14	85.979	2, 765	124	2	-122
Other	1. 63	65.319	2.100	95		
Sign language	0. 46	18.506	595	95		
TOTAL	100.0	4.018,999	129.228	5.815	1765	-4.050

1.10   Current position of the language of learning and teaching in schools

According to the Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) draft policy (Department of Basic Education (DBE) 2013), the Language in Education Policy states that school governing bodies (SGBs) determine the language of learning and teaching that schools adopt. The tables and figures provided show that the main problem involves implementation once the choice is made. The Department of Education has to take the lead in making mother tongue-based education in an African language a reality. This, however, is complicated by several factors as discussed earlier in this chapter.

1.11   Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT)

The IIAL draft policy (DBE 2013) highlights the fact that indigenous languages are mostly used in the Foundation Phase because this is where learners are exposed to

critical areas of learning such as writing, reading and mathematical skills. When these learners proceed to the Intermediate Phase, they are taught in English and their mother tongue becomes the first additional language. Afrikaans and English are still prestigious in South Africa, because these are the only languages used beyond the Foundation Phase to tertiary level. This points to the fact that learners who are Afrikaans and English speakers are more advantaged than their peers who have to change to a foreign language before mastering the basic skills. Hence, academic achievement is most likely to differ.

1.11.1 Opportunities for home language learning

According to the IIAL draft policy (DBE 2013:13), delivering education to children at home language level "assumes that the learners come to school able to speak and understand that language". The language that the children are most grounded in should be the language of learning and teaching in order to master the basic literacy skills.

1.11.2 Opportunities for first additional language (FAL)

Children who are well equipped in their home language stand a chance of doing well in the first additional language. Their language skills practiced in the home language serves as an important foundation for building the new language. It is encouraging to see that the implementation of the IIAL policy in South Africa recognises African languages, where English or Afrikaans is the language of learning and teaching. This means that the schools in Qwaqwa offering education in English and Afrikaans will now have Sesotho as their FAL (DBE 2013). The IIAL draft policy (DBE 2013) states that learners from Grade 1 must be introduced to one language, English in most cases, as their first additional language. This will produce good results once basic skills have been achieved through mother tongue-based education, provided that all other aspects are in place for sound mother tongue-based education.

1.12   Incremental introduction of African languages

The Incremental introduction of African Languages (IIAL) draft policy (DBE 2013) has involved some research and phased implementation. In the Free State Province 20 schools will be chosen. This will help to start off the incremental introduction of the

African languages that will take place from Grade 1 to Grade 12. This is a very interesting taking into account the history of marginalisation. Sesotho is gaining back its worth.

The IIAL draft policy (DBE 2013:24) states that "the aim is to increase access to language by all learners beyond English and Afrikaans, and promote social cohesion by expanding opportunities for the development of African language as a significant way of preserving heritage and culture". The IIAL draft policy is also committed to the development of African languages as FAL. In 2015 all pilot schools will implement African language as FAL, and this will continue until 2026, when the 2015 group will be in Grade 12.

1.12.1 Foundation Phase instructional time

The new focus on African languages will impact on how instructional time is distributed. Table 1.4 shows how language will be distributed instructionally in the Foundation Phase from Grade 1 to Grade 3. Although this excludes Grade R it is important to know for the development of the Foundation Phase learner.

Table 1.4: Instructional time in the Foundation Phase

Subject	Grade 1-2	Grade 3
Home Language	8/7	8/7
First Additional Language -1st	2/3	¾
First Additional Language -2nd	2/3	¾
Total for Language	**12**	**14**
Mathematics	7	7
Life Skills	6	7
Total – current allocation	**23**	**25**
Total – when the 2nd FAL is allocated the equal number of hours allocated to the other FAL	**25**	**28**
	An extension of two hours per week – 24 minutes per day	An extension of three hours per week – 36 minutes per day

1.13   Rationale and significance of the study

From the sections that have been discussed so far it is clear that I undertook this study because of personal and professional reasons. I am first and foremost an African woman who values her heritage and takes cultural pride in who she is. Sesotho is my mother tongue and it gives me my ethnic identity. I was also a teacher

at school and higher education where I used English and Sesotho to further the learning of those under my care.

My experience in teaching African learners for twenty one years in a medium of English was a difficult one. Children who were Tswana speaking, came to school without knowing any English, but were expected to be taught in English. This frustrated me. I felt that I had a heavy teaching load and had to adjust to a foreign language. The children's experiences, including mine, were unpleasant. I was deeply affected by learners' transfer to be educated in Tswana schools. Though this meant losing them from the school where I was teaching, I was impressed by how well these children did when they were taught in their mother tongue. The good performance in African language medium schools proved that learners were frustrated by receiving education in English. The language barrier created negativity in the children. My study is, therefore, deeply informed by negative experiences where there was a mismatch between the learner's mother tongue and the medium of instruction. Bennis (2003) argues that no one is able to empower others if he or she does not understand himself/herself.

With the Strategic Method for Reading Success (SMRS), South Africa highlights that mother tongue-based education is mostly beneficial if it starts in the early years of the child's education, especially in pre-school, because this is where a child learns new concepts (reading). The SMRS project also alludes to the fact that a great amount of time is wasted when content is delivered in a language that learners are not familiar with, because the teacher must first struggle in making sure that the children understand, speak and are able to read the foreign language. Bear-Nicholas (2009) highlights that children, who are taught in their mother tongue, are more likely to be registered and attend school whereas those who are enrolled in schools where a foreign language is the medium of instruction are most likely to drop out. As a Mosotho girl who received education in English and did not find it an easy journey, I still remember my peers who could have at least been somewhere in life academically but dropped out because they could not cope with English.

This study is also inspired by my entering the world of research since my appointment as a lecturer for the Foundation Phase. I was gaining new insight on the value of teaching in the mother tongue and in an African language. I could think in

more scientific ways of why large numbers of learners were considered to be remedial children when they had the strength of a mother tongue to help them to be high achievers. I worried about how, in my experience as a teacher, I used to retain only 30% of the children, because they did not follow instructions and they struggled with reading. I realise now that those learners were not hopeless; they struggled with the language of instruction. As a researcher I gained a better understanding of this.

This study focuses on Qwaqwa, a Sesotho dominated area, which plays an important part in the growing up of a Mosotho child. I was highly inspired to carry out SMRS (Hollingsworth & Gains 2009) contend that the mother tongue affords parents an opportunity to be involved in the education of their children and it also encourages community involvement. The community is able to support schools and participate freely as there are no language barrier. It is not always easy to find community members who understand the English language as well as their own native language. As the SMRS notes, a foreign language can distance community members from the smooth running of schools because they do not feel part of it. I believe that my study makes a contribution to understanding the key issues related to Sesotho as a medium of instruction for Grade R children.

Ball (2011) states that, where mother tongue-based education is used, learners' "home culture" and "traditional knowledge" are reinforced. Knowing how practitioners experience the use of Sesotho does give insight into how the Sesotho culture is being integrated into the curriculum. It is also helpful in making sense of how learners, from Grade R, can be exposed to their culture and tradition through the powerful medium of language. Personally, I feel that this study is important to encourage debates on the link between language, thought and culture.

Another rationale that informed my study is the growing attention that African languages are receiving from the Department of Basic Education. Grade R is now an official part of basic education in South Africa. President Zuma emphasised the universalization of Grade R as one of the 13 outputs in the "Education for All Campaign". From 2015 it will be compulsory for every learner to receive education from Grade R (DBE 2011). Output 3 of this campaign emphasises "improved early childhood development". This study is helpful in contributing to knowledge production of teachers' experiences in teaching in an African language. Through practitioners'

experiences, this study highlights the areas of concern in the implementation of Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R. This is helpful to consider if improve academic performance through the entry point of Grade R has to improve.

Curriculum documents and support material are translated into African languages. While this is problematic in terms of the version of the language that is used and the pitfalls of translating from English, it is a move in the right direction. There is also a development towards having centres for excellence in practice where African languages are used. In studying the experiences of the practitioners in Grade R using Sesotho, this study contributes to the knowledge base about African languages and the areas of need for teacher development.

Myburg, Poggenpoel and Van Rensburg (2004) allude to the fact that, if children do not speak the language of instruction, or are not familiar with it, there will not be authenticity in teaching and learning. This study makes a small contribution to showing the authenticity of using an African language as the language of teaching and learning. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states firmly that all 11 official languages "must enjoy parity of esteem and must be treated equitably". This study becomes significant in the sense that it will also add to the debates on African languages as medium of instruction in the Foundation Phase. The findings of this study will be helpful in thinking about the curriculum as practice for African languages. It will also inform the areas that need attention, namely pedagogy, materials development, parental support and teacher development.

1.13.1 Aim and research questions

The primary aim of this study was to explore practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. The following research questions informed this study:

- How does the Qwaqwa context influence the use of Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R?
- What do practitioners' teaching experiences suggest about Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R?
- What are the challenges practitioners' experience in using Sesotho as a medium of instruction?

1.13.2 Objectives of the study

The following objectives were set for this study:

- To establish how context influences practitioners' experiences in teaching Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa.
- To understand practitioners' experiences in teaching in Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa.
- To shed light on the challenges practitioners experience in teaching Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R in Qwaqwa.
- To assess the implications of making an African language an LOLT in early schooling.

1.14   Overview of research design and methodology

Marumo (2012) defines research design as a plan or tool used in investigation. It assists the researcher to acquire evidence and can also help in answering research questions. Marumo goes on to define research design as ways of conducting a study which will, among others, include time (when), participants (who) and conditions on which data will be attained.

A qualitative research approach was used in this study. McMillian and Schumacher (2001) argue that this method uses words to define a phenomenon or facts. In addition to this, qualitative research also takes into account the emotions of participants, their beliefs, their attitudes and their values (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005). Babbie (2004) defines this approach as the type of research capable of producing a richer understanding of a number of social phenomena achievable through observational methods, as well as others, in a deliberate and well-planned manner. This approach, according to Banister (1994), is an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do.

Using a qualitative approach helped me to obtain a deeper understanding of how Sesotho is valued in Qwaqwa. The experiences of the Grade R practitioners alerted me to the issues that need to be addressed. This is how I collected my data:

- I included eight practitioners in the study. The reason for using eight practitioners was to get a manageable number of views pertaining to how

the Sesotho language is viewed in Qwaqwa, and how they experienced using it in different schools.

- They were selected using purposive sampling. According to Patton (2002), a researcher who uses purposive interviews has a certain group of people in mind, who are chosen with a specific purpose. Since I did not want to generalise my findings to all Grade R practitioners, I purposively chose eight of them.

- They were all from Qwaqwa. This context was most suited for this study because this is a Sesotho dominated area.

- I conducted semi-structured interviews as it was most suited to the flexibility I needed in my study. Cohen and Manion (1999) state that this kind of interview gives flexibility and freedom to interviewees, such as asking questions and adding to the issues that are probed.

- Each interview was recorded, transcribed and analysed. The participants were made aware that the interview was going to be recorded so as not to miss important facts while transcribing. Permission was therefore asked beforehand to record conversations. Data was analysed using thematic analysis for qualitative research.

- Ethical issues were handled in accordance with guidelines provided by the University of the Free State and my own commitment to be an ethical researcher of African languages. As stated in Chapter 3 of this study, my participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw from participating at any time. All participation was voluntary.

1.15 Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: In this chapter I set the context for my study. The study had to be located in the historical events that led to the marginalisation of African languages. I provided the history and showed the shifts that happened since 1994. I also provided a discussion on mother tongue-based education to explain some of the critical aspects for the development of African languages as an example of education in the mother tongue. I also discussed the new developments on the incremental introduction of African languages in the Foundation Phase. I then presented the details of my study related to aims, research questions, research approach and methodology.

Chapter 2: In this chapter, I studied the literature on mother tongue language more closely. I began with a discussion of the theoretical ideas I used in the study. I also inserted my personal experiences as a Mosotho girl receiving education in English. I showed how this unfortunate response to my education affected my learning and those whom I attended school with. Chapter 2 also looked at advantages together with disadvantages and challenges of mother tongue-based education. I also discussed the language policy of SA and compared it with other countries.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 outlines my research approach, namely, qualitative. It also states why I chose to do my research in Qwaqwa. I discuss the design, context, participants, method and ethical issues that shaped my study. This chapter also explains how I analysed the data to arrive at the findings.

Chapter 4: This chapter provides the findings and the discussion. In this chapter, I discuss the responses of participants and their experiences in using Sesotho as language of teaching.

Chapter 5: In order to present a holistic picture of my study, the chapter summaries are also presented. I provide suggestions on how the facilitation of African languages should take place. I feel that my suggestions will be valuable to the Department of Education, higher institutions and those who produce learning/teaching material, to also prioritise African languages.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

I begin this chapter by presenting the theoretical ideas that informed this study. I outline the key ideas of the interpretive paradigm and phenomenology. Phenomenology is a study of personal experiences that one encounters from the first point of view (Pieterson 2002). Phenomenology deals with different kinds of experiences which, among others, are people's emotions, how they imagine or desire things. Sesotho as a language has a story about how people experience it. My background as a Mosotho woman who was deprived of being competent in my own language, forms part of phenomenology.

After a discussion on the theoretical ideas, definitions of mother tongue are explored. I present multiple definitions. The different definitions are important to consider in order to gain perspectives on the key ideas for this study. I then explore the importance of using mother tongue-based education in Grade R classes. I present some studies in order to shed light on how mother tongue-based education can be of benefit to learners in rural areas like Qwaqwa. I then deepen the insights related to language policy. Since the policy in South Africa supports mother tongue-based education in African languages in primary schools, I found it important to share the opportunities it provides. The next part of this chapter discusses African languages and mother tongue-based education. It is important to investigate the realities of African languages and their extension as languages of teaching. I then mention the problems and challenges facing mother tongue-based education, which discusses the ideas presented in Chapter 1 in more detail.

2.2   Paradigm and theoretical perspective

2.2.1   Interpretive paradigm

This study follows the interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen et al. (2005), the interpretive paradigm helps the researcher to acquire knowledge by investigating a phenomena where interpretation from a subjective standpoint is valued. This

paradigm studies individuals with their many characteristics, different human behaviours, opinions and attitudes. Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) describe this paradigm in more detail, stating that situations are viewed through the eyes of the participant. In this study the inputs of the participants are used to make sense of Sesotho as the medium of instruction. Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) further deepen ideas in the interpretive paradigm. They note how understanding and meaning of people and situations are given priority, including the subjectivity of the researcher. Views and perspectives of the researcher are noted as trustworthy and authentic, together with those of participants.

Taylor, Kermode and Roberts (2006) note that the interpretive paradigm is about having a wider vision or a sense of how deep something can be. Weaver and Olson (2006) relate the paradigm to beliefs and practices that form regulators for research foci. My study dealt with practitioners' experiences. The manner in which they understood what happened in their teaching in Sesotho was important. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm was suitable. In this study, practitioners' voices were listened to subjectively and in the context of Grade R in the Qwaqwa region. Creswell (2003) highlights that interpretive approaches rely mainly on interviewing the participants. I used semi-structured interviews to get to know practitioners' views through face-to-face interaction with them.

2.3   Phenomenology

My study is also informed by phenomenology, which stems from the interpretative paradigm. Patton (2002) defines phenomenology as the study that concentrates more on the experiences of people and the impact of those experiences in their life. As I interviewed my participants about their experiences in using Sesotho as medium of instruction, I was able to understand how these experiences influenced their life. This included positive and the negative aspects.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) define phenomenology as the way researchers perform interviews that will help them to address the view of their participants when collecting data. It was very important for me, as a researcher, to put myself in the shoes of my participants while collecting data. Being of the same ethnic group helped me to relate to their frustrations, especially when it came to parents who resisted Sesotho as the

medium of instruction.

According to Orbe (2009) there are different assumptions behind phenomenology. This is clear from the definitions discussed so far. The whole idea of objective, distant, unbiased research is rejected. There is a focus on human behaviour so that its nature can be understood. The person is important and must be understood in terms of how they mirror the society they live in. It is important to capture the conscious experience. Working with human subjects require greater flexibility.

When a phenomenological approach is taken, there is specific effort to shed light on a phenomena by how the main actors in the situation perceive their situation. In this study, the practitioners were the main actors. By talking to them through semi-structured interviews, it was possible to get information on their experiences. The personal perspectives and interpretations are valued. Through this approach it was possible to get insight into peoples' ways of acting and why they act in specific ways (Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993).

My study, *although not strongly,* is aligned to certain phenomenological procedures. In this regard I found Creswell's (2003) ideas relevant to my study. He notes that the following procedures are required to align a study to a phenomenological inquiry:

- The researcher needs to understand the philosophical perspective behind the approach, especially the concept of studying how people experience a phenomenon. As noted earlier in this chapter, my study had a direct link with the philosophical foundations of phenomenology.
- The investigator writes research that explores the meaning of that experience for individuals and asks individuals to describe their average lived experience. As I was drafting my research questions, I ensured that they would afford the participants an opportunity to include their lived experiences that went beyond the classrooms. The loosely structured questions also afforded them a chance to elaborate on Qwaqwa as a context where Sesotho is the dominant language.
- The investigator collects data from individuals who have experienced a phenomenon under investigation. Typically, this information is collected through interviews. In agreement with this procedure, I chose participants who had experience in Grade R and who had experience of using Sesotho in their

classrooms. I used semi-structured interviews as a flexible encounter to access the lived experiences of Grade R practitioners.

- Phenomenological data analysis: When this is used strictly, protocols done are divided into statements or horizontalisation. The units are transformed into clusters of meanings. These meanings are linked to make a general description of the experience, including textual and structural descriptions. My approach to the analysis was similar and related to thematic qualitative data analysis.

- Phenomenological reports end with findings related to the essential and invariant structure of the experience. My study ends with a different dimension of the experiences of teaching, using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. Hence, it provides some insight into the structure of the experience.

In summary, my study has varying degrees of alignment to the phenomenological inquiry through a focus on the lived experiences of Grade R practitioners.

2.4   Definition of mother tongue-based education

Sesotho is an African home language. It is also referred to as the mother tongue. Mother tongue has been defined differently in different contexts by those concerned with language issues in research and as academic projects. A common place to look for a definition is in dictionaries. The South African Oxford secondary school dictionary (2006) defines mother tongue as the language that has been learnt or has been spoken from birth. This can also be defined as one's first language. With this explanation, it is clear that mother tongue plays an important role in beginning one's educational journey. If a child has been speaking the mother tongue from birth, he has learnt new words, constructed sentences and used other building blocks for comprehension. It is, therefore, highly unlikely that the child's education in the mother tongue can create problems, bearing in mind that he also needs to be exposed to good primary educators – parents and teachers who are fluent in the mother tongue.

In examining the definitions of mother tongue further, I found that Monroe (1996) highlights that it is the first language a person learns in childhood and can understand very well. Munroe stresses the idea of a primary language that comes naturally from children's exposure to it in the immediate environment. Benjamin and

Miksic (2011) goes deeper into issues that are helpful to think about the role of the language models and actors in children's life. He explains that the mother tongue is not only the language that one learns from the mother, but also the speaker's, which forms the significant others in the child's family and community. In the context of my study in Qwaqwa, the dominant language is Sesotho and this is regarded as mother tongue. It is most likely that young children will pick this language despite the presence of other languages spoken by foreigners and immigrants.

Bolaji (2007) provides greater insight to the link between mother tongue-based education and academic success. He defines mother tongue-based education as a way that leads to academic success. He adds that language plays a great role in improving leaners' performance and it contributes to high achievement. On a similar note, Obama (1995) defines mother tongue as a way in which a child will understand himself, his world, his culture, his community and a way that will make a child hungry to learn.

From the above, it becomes clear that when mother tongue is used as a medium of instruction, it can increase children's love for education. Additionally, less drop outs could occur due to language ceasing to be a barrier to learning. These ideas can be related to Tulasiewiz's work on mother tongue. Tulasiewicz (2005) believes that mother tongue is the language that the community speaks, and enables the enculturation process and individual growth to linguistic perception of the world. Taking Obama and Tulasiewiz's definitions into consideration, one can agree that being taught in the language that you fully understand can increase your desire to learn and can also motivate teachers to help children to learn.

If in this study I take into account Tulasiewicz (2005) statement that language of pride is reinforced when most people in the community speak in the mother tongue, then it is an expectation and a natural assumption that teachers who normally live in the area will be upholding the language of the community if parents assent to this. Sesotho then becomes the mother tongue in Qwaqwa as it is the language that the community speaks and takes cultural pride in.

Instruction related to mother tongue is an important aspect in this study. Alexander (2009), who was a key figure in language debates in South Africa, provides a description of mother tongue-based education that was helpful in my study. He

describes mother tongue-based education as a way that leads to the beginning of effective teaching and learning. He adds that the language children know best should be their language of learning. The definition of Alexander and the those discussed earlier may differ in some respects, but in essence they all agree that mother tongue-based education is a productive means of delivering learning to young learners. For this to happen, however, it is necessary for all systemic conditions in schooling to be in place. Effective instruction is only possible when teachers are qualified, materials are available, the learning environment is conducive and assessment is authentic. Mashiya (2010) and Obama (1995) also state that being educated in the mother tongue creates an inclusive environment for parental involvement in education. The medium of instruction in school is not foreign to parents and they can, therefore, actively participate in their children's education.

From all that has been discussed so far, it is clear that mother tongue-based education lays the foundation for children to develop their linguistic capital. When it is used to shape effective practice with children, it becomes a good starting point for children to learn about their cultures and their roles in society. Their personal and social identities are formed in a way that brings linguistic and cultural pride. No one can be effectively introduced to their culture and customs in a foreign language. The translations distort the picture of the content and reality of a person's life.

In this study, mother tongue-based education is understood as a solution to problems faced in early learning. From the literature it is clear that it is the best way of delivering education to children in early schooling and the best way of laying strong a foundation for children's development. Mother tongue-based education helps with building children's self-confidence and strengthening their cultural beliefs.

2.5   Importance of mother tongue-based education

Part of this aspect has been covered in the previous section and in Chapter 1. From the discussion so far it sends out a clear message that I fully support mother tongue-based education. In my study I wanted to determine the importance of Sesotho as the medium of instruction in Grade R, which is the entry point to the Foundation Phase. I was concerned about practitioners' experiences of teaching in

Sesotho as the medium of instruction and the benefits and challenges that they experience in providing Grade R education in the mother tongue.

Phatudi (2013) states that one's language of origin can result in good outcomes and can make learning a second language an easy task. Phatudi continues to stress linguistic force of mother tongue by indicating that if a learner is forced to learn in his second language, the language skills maybe affected and this can result in lack of interest in the whole schooling journey. Taking this finding into consideration, it is understandable why it is valued in the South African context. Receiving education in the mother tongue, which is an African language, is part of the social justice agenda that needs to address past inequities in our society.

There is strong evidence to support Grade R education to take place in the mother tongue. The AfriForum organisation, which promotes and honours all eleven languages, states that children are better able to understand subjects like mathematics when they are taught in their home language. He noted that children find it easier to master new concepts if they are instructed in their language of origin. It makes sense when we consider that the learner already understands the language as part of his linguistic socialisation. The introduction of mathematical concepts in the language that he knows does not need effort or consume time. This is in contrast to starting to teach a foreign language and then introducing mathematical terms to a learner who is struggling to master his own language. Mother tongue-based education seems to be the way forward to a successful and stress-free learning experience.

Trudell (2005) emphasises the importance of mother tongue-based education by focusing on parents. When education is in the mother tongue, it offers parents greater social control over what teachers do and which decisions the schools make. Parents do not have to feel excluded and intimidated by the language of instruction used to educate their children. Trudell's point cannot be ignored in this study, because Grade R children's education should be a partnership between parents and practitioners. It is, therefore, important that parents understand what is done at school. Language will, therefore, play a very important role, because it is the medium through which the parents will attempt to connect with their children educationally.

I have already noted that, according to the South African Schools Act (1997), parents

can choose the language of learning and teaching for the school through the school governing bodies (SGBs). Joubert and Bray (2007) allude to the fact that the participation of these SGB structures is vital, because, among other functions, they decide on the language of teaching, admission policy and other decision making that contribute to the smooth running of schools. In previously disadvantaged areas, it was important to alert parents to these structures and the power they had in deciding the language of learning and teaching. It becomes difficult for parents to be part of the smooth running of the school if the language of instruction is not the one used at home or the one they understand. This makes them less competent to suggest or come up with changes in school. Learning has to take place at school and at home. If parents are not at liberty to monitor and supervise their children's school work due to a language barrier, progress is likely to be slow. Parents may find themselves having minimal participation in homework, not because they are not interested in their children's education, but because they are not conversant with the language of teaching used at school. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) gives equal status to the eleven official languages. The South African Broadcasting Corporation recognises these languages when reading the news and in young children's educational programmes. Radio stations are also broadcasting in the indigenous languages. This is promising, taking into account how African languages were side-lined previously.

Mulama (2006) also highlights the importance of mother tongue-based education if it starts in the early years of a child's schooling. The language that the learner understand makes learning enjoyable, because there is no difficulty in making sense of what is said or explained. As I indicated in Chapter 1 of this study, my experience as a foundation phase teacher for more than twenty years taught me that it is not easy for young learners to learn efficiently if they do not understand the language that the teacher is using in class. I agree with Mulama (2006) that mother tongue-based education may result in a high chance of success for learners. In my teaching, I saw how happy children who were educated in their mother tongue, compared to their counterparts who were taught in English. My own children attended an English medium school. They cried every morning when they had to go to school. The language used at home was 100% Sesotho and they were faced with the challenge of switching to English or face punishment. This resulted in poor performance and

frustration. My experiences in a school where the medium of instruction was English, while my mother tongue is Sesotho, initiated this study. I can testify that learning in a second language can make parents happy, but it does not make children happy. I was initially happy to see my children in an English medium school, but they struggled.

Hacikyan, Basmajian, Franchuk and Ouzounian (2005) stipulate the value of mother tongue-based education in the formative years of a child as vital and beneficial to reading and spelling problems. Their findings show that mother tongue-based education is universally acknowledged as being good for young children. Although it is widely acknowledged as highly beneficial by these three researchers, they also indicate that implementing a schooling system that values mother tongue-based education is problematic. Gacheche (2013) alludes to the fact that, to have an effective system where mother tongue education succeeds is expensive but also adds that, it can be even more costly if the country does not have one in place.

There are schools and communities which resist mother tongue-based education. Where this is the case the common belief is that it does not produce competent learners who can face the challenges of the Western world. Those who resist know that being fluent in English has economic power. They often state that the African languages do not have global appeal.

Mashiya (2010) highlights that most teachers still find using English the easiest way of delivering learning and teaching even though their English usage is of poor quality. When the mother tongue is not used as the medium of education, children can be objectified. Freire (1973:47-49) stipulates that using a foreign or second language in schools turn children into objects of their world instead of subjects. However, Freire stresses that teaching children in their home language means that learning new concepts does not have to be postponed until learners grasp the second language. This suggests that mother tongue-based education allows children to be active learners as they have the necessary linguistic skill to participate in their learning.

The value of mother tongue-based education in a child's early years was noted in a Save the Children (UK) study in developing world contexts (UNESCO 2005). The study included the application of mother tongue–based education in schools across Africa, Latin America and Asia. The focus of this research project was on how to

improve quality and access of education for children who were disadvantaged by their ethnicity. The findings showed that in the children's experience the language of education acted as a major barrier. Mother tongue-based education was viewed as a solution to learning difficulties that were found among learners who were taught in a language that was foreign to them. The study echoes the need for mother tongue-based education for children experiencing multiple levels of disadvantage (UNESCO 2005).

The World Bank (2008) estimated that more than half the children who drop out of school globally do not have access to a school using their home language. I identify with the World Bank's (2008) view on learners dropping out due to a language barrier. The pressure on my own children to perform was so heavy that they sometimes chose to be sick rather than being exposed to a learning situation that made them feel incompetent. The scenario changed once African languages were introduced at a later stage in their schooling. Their marks and their motivation to go to school improved.

As a mother I can say that the fear children experience is very real. There are many compromises when children are fearful. They are not able to build a strong conceptual picture of the world and academic concepts through a language that they understand (Alidou et al. 2006). They are also not able to make connections to other languages successfully because of their emotions and lack of cognitive preparation to do so. The Grade R children come to school with knowing their language of origin. The foundation that will be built on could be solid and act as a good starting point when a second or third language is introduced.

My experience as a Sesotho speaking learner who was taught in English has been a difficult one. I used to listen to the teacher and then take some time trying to translate what was said into Sesotho, which is my mother tongue. By the time I tried to digest and translate, the teacher was far ahead. This led to gaps in my learning. The language barrier I experienced resulted in me repeating one grade. I had to learn how to process instructions and respond to them. I had to spend a year in the same grade to understand this process. It was very difficult and painful for me. It also led to a low self-esteem, especially since it was the norm for children to be retained because they were experiencing difficulties with the English language. Coming from

a deep rural area where parents and guardians did not speak English made school an unpleasant experience. There were days when we were expected to speak English only. I opted to keep quiet to avoid punishment. These were very humiliating days because if you were caught speaking Sesotho, you were reported to the principal and you would go for detention and corporal punishment would be administered. Keeping quiet was the solution for most of us.

It was not easy to ask for explanation in any of the subjects I did not understand because of the language barrier. Being educated in my home language (Sesotho) could have given me a better education than the one I received. Relating my experience to Obama's (1995) assertion that mother tongue-based education helps a child to understand himself, his culture and have a hunger to learn, I can strongly testify that this drive was taken away from me by the system that marginalised my mother tongue and forced me to speak English. The hunger to learn was not there; instead I chose to pretend to be sick and stayed at home. I wanted to save myself from being punished and ridiculed. The language barrier made school demotivating. My schooling experience severely hampered opportunities to think critically and assert myself as an active participant in learning.

I never had confidence in school because up to Grade 7, I battled to express myself in English. Had I received education in my mother tongue, I would not have repeated a grade. My grandmother would always tell us how important it was to repeat a grade to master the English language. My Sesotho language marks and those of my classmates were always above 80% because we enjoyed it, loved it and understood it better than English. Because Sesotho was regarded as less important, no award was given. We always had public speaking competitions in English, but not once were these in Sesotho. This is how little regard the authorities had for African languages.

Going back to Dutcher's (1997) point where he emphasises the importance of mother tongue-based education as a contributor to a child's self-confidence, the brightest learners in a school using an African language would always feel inferior when having speech competitions in an English school because of the stereotype of believing that the African language is of less importance. Automatically, they would perform badly, believing that the superior ones, the 'winners,' are those who are

taught in English and Afrikaans. Their confidence was at an all-time low because their mother tongue was not respected.

Benson (2004), and Thomas and Collier (1997) reinforce the idea of strong motivation to learn when the mother tongue forms the medium of instruction. From the personal stories that I have shared, no child will pretend to be sick if he/she is educated in the language spoken by parents and neighbours. This is true especially in the context of Qwaqwa where this study took place. Sesotho is the dominant language and hence most Grade R children would have been exposed to it. Most early childhood centres in Qwaqwa use Sesotho as medium of education, because the majority of homes are Sesotho speaking and most of the practitioners teaching in these centres are Sesotho first language speakers. There are, however, Grade R classes in Qwaqwa which still believe that children should be taught in English. Kunene (2009) notes how parents are opting for English as LOLT for their children instead of African languages and they put pressure on the school to choose this as the language of learning and teaching. It is important to take note of the experiences of the practitioners participating in this study. It is envisaged that this study will modestly contribute in bringing about the pride and respect that the Sesotho language deserves.

Tripathi and Sinha (2013) highlight that the loss of language means the loss of human diversity and the knowledge contained therein. Going back to my personal experiences as a young girl, I always thought my grandmother was an embarrassment to me because she did not speak any English. I never wanted her to attend school meetings. The apartheid system, which undermined African languages, did not equip me to value my language and retain the pride as explained by Tripathi and Sinha. Instead, I always wished that I was born speaking a language that would make me feel important. Sesotho was not that language.

Emphasising the importance of one's language, Tripathi and Sinha (2013) note that it is the most fundamental way that cultural information is communicated and preserved. Giving priority to one's native language was also raised by Fasold, (1992:293), where he indicated that: "the language that children can effectively use should be given priority in the selection of the medium of instruction. If this is done, it becomes clear that the choice in virtually every case will be the child's mother

tongue".

The positive aspects of mother tongue-based education can never be over-emphasised. Chumbow (1990) stipulate that the early use of the mother tongue in the life of a young child will offer permanence for the child's course of learning, which in turn enhances his/her cognitive development. Ogechi (2009) alludes that, regardless of the good benefits of mother tongue-based education that were discussed at the UNESCO conference held in 1953, there are countries which are still reluctant to implement the discussed facts regarding mother tongue-based education. Ogechi further states that the resistance is due to colonial legacies, or locals who still have a negative attitude towards their own language. Ogechi adds that mother tongue-based education benefits learners psychologically, socially, and educationally, and that extra effort should be made to ensure freedom and human dignity. This is a critical point if we consider the holistic development of Grade R children through early education. As stated above, mother tongue-based education in Qwaqwa will contribute towards developing children to have the necessary skills valued by their society.

2.6   Language policies

This was briefly discussed in Chapter 1. In this section I examine some of the issues related to language policies. I also present language policies from other countries. This is helpful in understanding the perspectives taken and the context from which it comes. Heugh (2005) indicates that the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) protects the language rights of all its citizens. This provides protection against the violation of rights and education. These authors further unpack the South African language policy and highlights that language rights are crucial in a democratic education system where equal opportunities must be given to all citizens. Since the constitution respects all languages, it encouraged me to pursue my study so that I could make a contribution.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) does not regard any language superior to others. Heugh (2002) stipulates that the rights of English speakers in South Africa are still guaranteed because of the high international status and public use which English enjoys as a language. Bearing in mind the evidence

presented thus far, it is reasonable to assume that using Sesotho as medium of education in Qwaqwa will not undermine English; instead, it will build children's self-esteem and provide a strong academic foundation so that they can also learn to be proficient in English.

The Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB), which was established in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 106 of 1996), has the mandate to promote and ensure respect, equal use and development of all eleven official languages in South Africa (Act 59 of 1995) (PanSALB 1999). PanSALB was also mandated to focus on the following areas:

- Status of language planning
- Language in education
- Translation and interpretation
- Language rights and mediation
- Lexicography, terminology and place names
- Research

To add to the importance of all languages being given equal worth and preference, PanSALB launched a campaign in May 2004 aimed at making South Africans aware of their right to be served in the language that they understand in all government offices (PanSALB 2004). This is a powerful force of liberation for those who grew up during the apartheid era. They were no longer slaves of the English and Afrikaans languages.

Another organisation that takes an activist stand to support language rights is AfriForum. This organisation was founded in South Africa in June 1902. As indicated by Lubbe and Du Plessis, (2009) organisations like PanSALB and AfriForum also protect and promote the rights of communities culturally, religiously and linguistically. It could be argued that, if children in the Foundation Phase in Qwaqwa can grow up knowing their mother tongue and valuing it in the same way as English or Afrikaans, they will be the ambassadors to raise the profile of their culture and African Languages. Lubbe and Du Plessis (2009) also highlights that the mandate of AfriForum is to acknowledge and to recognise the usage of all the languages of South Africa. Language is linked to human rights and to human dignity. It becomes

evident that learners' rights and dignity will be respected if they can receive education in the language that they understand. They will be able to communicate with their parents about what was done at school, which will contribute to parents being involved in their children's education. As noted earlier in Chapter 2 the language barrier can result in frustration for both parents and their children.

There have been some positive developments to move the African language agenda forward that are worth noting. It is encouraging to note that there are now dedicated bursaries for the training of foundation phase teachers in African languages. There is also a movement to develop centres of excellence for the development of African languages.

It is important to also note the status of African languages in other countries. Awedoba (2001) highlights that the language policy on education states that children in Ghana should be taught in their mother tongue for the first three years of their schooling. Thereafter, English is introduced and the indigenous language is taught as a subject. This policy has taken heed of the need for children to be taught in their mother tongue in early schooling and to make the transition to the foreign language in Grade 4. This is developmentally appropriate where the children would have received good grounding in their mother tongue.

On the other hand, Owu-Ewie (2006), also from Ghana, indicates that the language policy on education that was passed in May 2002 mandated English as the medium of instruction in public schools from Grade 1. This meant that Ghanaian languages were replaced as medium of education. As most countries around the globe promulgate mother tongue-based education, this policy attracted much criticism from traditional leaders and academics(Owu-Ewie2006). However, the government's main argument for an English-only language policy was that there was a lack of materials in native languages to support teachers. Another concern was qualified teachers to teach specifically in content subjects in Ghanaian languages. Teacher preparation and material to support them, therefore, became the main reasons for supporting a foreign language for early education.

Masilo (2008) highlights that in Lesotho, the language policy stipulates that Sesotho, which is mother tongue, should be used from Grade 1 up to Grade 3 as the medium of instruction. English is only prescribed as language of teaching from Grade 4

upwards. From the results of the benefits of mother education to young learners, Lesotho joins other African countries that preserve pride, culture and language. It is recognised that culture and language are national assets.

2.7 Problems and challenges facing mother tongue as medium of instruction

Joseph (2000) draws attention to the power of attitude towards one's language. He argues that teachers' positive attitude towards learning will facilitate young children's progress. The opposite is also true – teachers' negative attitude will hinder learners' progress. Baker (1996) states the following: "In the life span of a language, attitude is fundamental. For the death or survival of every language, attitude could be a corner stone." This being the case, it is possible that practitioners in Qwaqwa are likely to have a negative attitude towards Sesotho as it was not one of the two prestigious languages in South Africa. From my experience it is clear that when English is given priority, teachers feel that the standard of learning is dropping when their mother tongue is being used and over emphasised. This fear compromises developmentally appropriate linguistic experiences. Fasold (1984) stipulates that negative attitudes towards one's language will influence how teachers deal with children. The children will grow up wishing they were born in another country that at least spoke a better language than theirs.

Kwesi (2009) points that, although it is being argued that African languages are not well developed to address modern technology and modern scientific terminology, these languages should be used for an entire educational system. Kwesi feels that African languages should be used so that Africans can feel liberated, and as a democratic right. Although Kwesi supports mother tongue-based education, and I agree with him, the reality is that it will not be possible to facilitate quality learning if the material are not well developed and teachers have not been trained on how to use the language in teaching young children. When support is not readily available, teachers will resort to using what is easily available.

Fasold (1984) provides some insight into the different areas which affect the implementation of sound mother tongue-based education. They are as follows:

- Lack of text books and other educational materials

- Shortage of trained teachers to teach in mother tongue
- Lack of general reading materials
- Inadequate vocabulary.

The above points prove that there are problems that will hinder the progress. Grade R learners need to learn by inspecting; if there are no reading materials, no trained educators and no adequate vocabulary, the results are likely to be below grade level expectations. The California State Department of Education (CSDE) (2005) received the following inputs from the experts about the importance of mother tongue practitioners:

- Speakers of a language other than English can make a priceless contribution for their countries, so it is very important to maintain this natural resource.
- Sustaining the first language and culture of non-English proficient children may help to increase their self-importance and reciprocate an unfavourable attitude of linguistic minority.

The above two points are really important in my study in the sense that they highlight the importance of maintaining 'natural resources'. Sesotho, as a language, is a natural resource for the Basotho as a nation and it must be maintained. Using it as language of learning and teaching will raise the level. As the second point alludes, it is very important to sustain one's first language as this will enhance "self-worth" and reduce an "attitude of (becoming a) linguistic minority."

Boak and Ndaruhutse (2011) state that, although there are many valid reasons to implement mother tongue-based education, resources are limited. Some African countries like Mozambique, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Mali and Burkina Faso admitted that, because of a lack of instructional materials, initiation of African language projects did not achieve their aims. Another challenge in implementing mother tongue-based education is finding practitioners who are proficient and well trained, according to IIEP (1997). Speaking a language fluently does not qualify one to be an efficient teacher. Proper training on how to use the language in the classroom situation is required – e.g. subject and pedagogic knowledge. For this study it is important to investigate how empowered practitioners are to teach in Sesotho in Grade R classes.

It is also imperative to investigate problems that might be caused by the education system. Boak and Ndaruhutse (2011) state that there are problems in recruiting teachers with the ability to provide quality education in the mother tongue. The problem is caused by an education system which has limited understanding of the key issues affecting mother tongue-based education in the early years. This poses a challenge to the South African government, to not only pass the policies but be there to monitor and solve the problems that might hamper the initiative.

Another issue to consider is how language policies are driven. Teshome (2008) states that the language policies in most countries are more politically driven than pedagogically driven. This had been the case in South Africa where the apartheid system deprived African learners of quality education and passed the language policies that only benefited white children. This affected the attitude of teachers and parents towards delivering teaching in the mother tongue. Even after the revised South African Schools Act (No. 84 of 1996) on language policy, and key developments to grow, African languages teachers still feel that English is superior to Sesotho.

Boak and Ndaruhutse (2011) highlight the importance of taking mother tongue practitioners seriously. He states that respecting the right of communities to maintain and develop their cultural identity and language while promoting strong skills across the curriculum is of great importance. Young (2009) indicates that the ideal situation for mother tongue-based education to be effective, is for the education system to identify suitable teachers who are fluent in the language, who are familiar with local culture, and those who are respected by members of community and are sufficiently motivated to learn new aspects to teach in the mother tongue. This makes it evident that culture and language exist hand in glove.

2.8   Summary

In this chapter I reviewed the literature on mother tongue-based education. I started this chapter by locating my study in the interpretive paradigm. I used phenomenology as a lens for my study. This helped me to focus on the lived experiences of my participants. I then analysed the definitions of mother tongue. I showed the link to early childhood experiences and the learning environment. It was important for my

study to investigate the context. Practitioners in the study formed an important part in the formal learning environment. In the discussion on the importance of mother tongue-based education and teaching I discussed the link to building cultural pride, self-esteem and confidence in children. The discussion on language policies showed what was available to children, teachers and the community to develop the mother tongue. The discussion on the problems showed the importance of investing in resources and paying attention to support materials and teacher development. This allowed me to not only investigate the opportunities that were created for the development of Sesotho as language, but also the challenges that practitioners faced. In the next chapter I present the research design and the methodology.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I present the choices I made in the research approach and the methodology. A qualitative approach was used to tap into the experiences of Grade R teachers using Sesotho as the medium of teaching. I outline the choice I made in selecting and interviewing the teachers. The ethical issues are also discussed.

3.2   Research paradigm

Donmoy (2006) defines paradigm as a set of assumptions shared and drawn up by members of a research community. Donmoy goes on to define paradigm as something serving as an example or model of how things should be done. In this study, the research paradigm is framed by the interpretive paradigm (see Chapter 2 for more detail). Choosing this paradigm was ideal, since I was engaging with practitioners whose lived experiences were of importance. O'Donoghue (2006) defines interpretivism as a researcher who "concentrates on the meaning people bring to behaviour and situations, and using those meanings to understand their worlds." In this study, I interacted with Grade R practitioners and gathered data about their experiences of teaching in Sesotho in Qwaqwa. Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006) allude to the fact that first-hand information is what the interpretive researcher relies on. The authors go on to emphasise that this paradigm will help the researcher to obtain rich detail that will lead to authentic findings. In the case of my study the interpretive paradigm was suitable as it enabled me to interact with the practitioners in a relaxed environment. I wanted them to be able to give information on their experiences freely. I also wanted them to feel valued, taking into account the history of marginalisation of African language teachers. My familiarity with the Qwaqwa context was also an added advantage.

Neuman (2011) provides greater detail on the interpretive paradigm. He contends that it is "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds". In this

study, the natural setting refers to the practitioners' site for the interviews. They were all interviewed at their centres and at schools. This method of collecting information worked well in reaching an "understanding and interpretation" of the way my participants created their social world.

According to Cohen et al. (2011), the researcher in the interpretive paradigm wants to acquire knowledge by investigating the phenomena of the world and human in many ways – hence phenomenology provided a relevant lens. This lens helps the researcher to study people in a subjective way. Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) state that this makes it possible to view social reality as construction. This assisted me in taking into consideration my participants' views as building blocks for the reality of teaching Grade R children in a Sesotho language environment

3.3   Research approach

In this study I used a qualitative approach. This approach allows the subjective meaning of practitioners to come to the fore. Through a qualitative approach, my participants were able to talk about the current successes and problems they encountered in using Sesotho as language of teaching in Qwaqwa. They were also able to share other contextual experiences of using Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Qwaqwa. Their knowledge of the history of Qwaqwa and Sesotho as a language enabled them to express the linguistic needs of the children in the community.

Given (2008) defines a qualitative approach as a crucial way in which people relate and give meaning to either the social, material or cultural environment. In this study, I worked with participants so that I could get their responses based on their cultural and social environment with special reference to languages. Struwig and Stead (2001) highlight that qualitative researchers are highly interested in getting participants' perspective on what is being researched. These authors go on to define qualitative research as an approach whereby the researcher seeks to get information by trying to see through the eyes of the participant. The application of this approach enabled participants to share their view, opinions and perceptions freely.

Another reason why I chose qualitative research is because of what is highlighted by Merriam (1998),who states that this method is "socially constructed by individuals in

interaction with their world". I found this method suitable because I had one-on-one interviews with my participants as I indicated in the interview chapter. This suited my study, because I worked with participants who were directly involved with the teaching of Grade R learners in Sesotho. The approach gives me, as the researcher, insight into what takes place in the class and beyond.

3.4   Challenges of using a qualitative approach

Denscombe (2003) state that qualitative research enables the researcher to have one-on-one conversations with the participants. This enables the researcher to understand their views and how they perceive the knowledge that they already possess. In my study, this was difficult. I experienced problems with the participants who were naturally shy. The power issues were also strong. I was from a university and they were from Grade R. As practitioners their voices were not listened to very often. They found it strange that I wanted to know their experiences. This was different from how they were treated when they went for departmental workshops or when they were visited by the learning facilitators. I managed to deal with this aspect by introducing myself as a Foundation Phase teacher who had an understanding of the difficulties of teaching children in their mother tongue. This was helpful in putting them at ease.

During the semi-structured interviews, some participants were providing one word answers. Fortunately, the technique allowed me to probe. Cresswell (2003) defines qualitative research as "an approach as useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon". I felt that probing helped me to obtain insight into Sesotho language teaching. I also found that I had to make sure that the Sesotho I was using was familiar to the participants, taking into account that I had been exposed to the diluted form of Sesotho in my experiences as a teacher.

3.5   Context and participants

The study was undertaken in a Sesotho dominated area of Qwaqwa in the Eastern Free State. The context was chosen because Sesotho in its pure form is most prevalent in this area and it is spoken by the majority of citizens. Hammersley (2008) notes the importance of context when he states that "central to most types of

qualitative research inquiry is the idea that human action of whatever kind can be properly understood only in context". Hammersley (2008) adds that some researchers in qualitative study consider context as necessarily relative purpose and perspective. In this study I deliberately probed the issue of context and its influence on the linguistic opportunities and profiles. I found this necessary in order to gain a fuller perspective on practitioners' experiences.

3.6   Participants and sampling

Barnett, Ogden and Daniells (2008) define participants as subjects, interviewees, informants or respondents. Eight practitioners participated in this study. Barnett et al. (2008) add that participants play an important role in research because they contribute to data production in many different ways: being in interviews, filling questionnaires or participating in activities where there is direct observation. In my study, my participants shared their experiences through semi-structured interviews (discussed further on in this chapter).

According to Morgan (2010), sampling is a way of selecting sources for gathering data from a wide range of possibilities. Related to this definition, Terre Blanche et al. (2006) define sampling as a technique that involves decisions about which population or which events will be observed or form part of the interview process. Morgan (2010) also states that sampling can be done in different ways such as: purposive, random, convenience, quota and snowball sampling.

I used purposive sampling in this study. De Vos et al. (2005) define purposive sampling as a technique based mainly on the researcher's decision. I was not interested in generalising my findings. I did not have to look for all characteristics representing the population of Grade R teachers in Qwaqwa. In my study, I used purposive sampling, which was also convenient. I used the following criteria for the selection of my participants:

Table 1.5: Selection of Participants

Age	Qualification	Experience	School context	Pseudonym
36	Grade 12	9 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 1
44	Grade 12	14 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 2
32	N4	9 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 3
56	Standard 8	20 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 4
29	N6	10 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 5
35	Grade 12	13 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 6
42	PTC	17 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 7
39	N4	15 years	Sesotho LOLT	Participant 8

- Practitioners teaching in Qwaqwa near the university
- Practitioners who have at least three years teaching experience in Grade R
- Practitioners whose mother tongue is Sesotho
- Practitioners who had experience in using Sesotho as medium of instruction
- Practitioners who were enthusiastic to participate after a brief explanation.

3.7   Methods, data and data collection

My understanding of the above was informed by the broad understanding of the term 'methodology'. Henning (2004) refers to methodology as "the coherent group of methods that complement one another and that will have the ability to fit to deliver data and findings that will reflect research questions and suit the purpose of the

research". On the same issue of defining methodology, Holloway and Jefferson (2000) note that it is a plan or system that will guide the researcher on procedures or methods to follow. Swartzel and Eloff (2012) describe research methodology as a way in which the researcher acquires the results of a problem that is being researched or the research problem itself. Donmoyer (2006) goes on to define methodology as the process of collecting data or information with the aim of making sound decisions. The definition further states that methodology can include interviews, surveys, research techniques and research publications. In order to gather the information I had to find a suitable way of collecting the data.

Schreiber and Stern (2001) explain the term 'data' as a collection of information. He goes on to define data in qualitative research as non-numerical, but as having quite a number of sources which can be grouped verbally or non-verbally. Miller (1996) defines data collection as an essential or important exercise which makes or forms a greater part of the results of the research. While collecting data in Qwaqwa, I was able to determine that the participants were eager to teach in Sesotho. By collecting the data I realise how much they are struggling to teach in the language that they are not conversant with – English. In conjunction with this, LeCompte and Schensul (2010) allude to the fact that methods of data collection in qualitative research mostly involve face-to-face interaction with participants.

I conducted semi-structured interviews as this method is most suited to the flexibility I needed in my study. Cohen et al. (2005) note that this method of data collection allows for participants' subjective meanings to come through. According to Walter and Dekker (2011), a semi-structured interview is an ideal technique to collect qualitative data. Walter and Dekker explain that it is the tool that allows the participant the time and scope to talk about his or her opinion on a certain subject. Ayres (2008) defines a semi-structured interview as a qualitative strategy of collecting data whereby the researcher asks participants a series of questions, which are predetermined, but which are open ended. Ayres goes on to state that researchers who choose this method develop the guide for the participants in advance. As my aim in this study was to understand the practitioners' experiences in using mother tongue-based education (Sesotho) in Grade R, semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility I needed. While I was interviewing the individual participants, I gave each ample time to voice their views. I allowed all of them to

answer the questions in Sesotho, which was the language that they were confident in. Although some were shy, others felt at ease to express themselves.

The semi-structured interview method allowed one-on-one conversation with my participants. I asked questions, waited for the response and asked for clarity where I thought it was necessary. The participants were given enough time to talk about their experiences and when they thought the questions were unclear, I gave them the opportunity to ask for clarification.

According to Cohen et al. (2005), the researcher can also use probes and prompts in semi-structured interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning participants are making. Cohen goes on to state that probes and prompts are valuable in semi-structured interviews– especially in the case of shy participants who find it hard to respond spontaneously. The following themes guided the semi-structured interviews:

- Biographical data
    - Training of the participants
    - Experience as Grade R practitioners

- Context data
    - The history of Qwaqwa
    - The development of Sesotho
    - The influence of Sesotho in Grade R classes

- Teachers' experience in teaching in Sesotho
    - Planning
    - Teacher development
    - Assessment
    - Learner support material
    - Support from HODs, the principal and district
    - Impact on delivery of quality education

3.8   Validity in qualitative research

Ary et al. (2009) note that validity involves the truthfulness or accuracy of the

findings. This means that the findings have to be credible. Credibility in qualitative research involves the degree to which the findings and the methods that are used can be trusted (De Vos et al. 2005). When a researcher pays attention to issues of validity in qualitative research, special attention is given to the design, context, participants, the data collection method and analysis. How the data is collected and the researchers' ability to show the findings are also important.

In order to ensure the validity for this study, I worked closely with critical friends in the Sustainable Rural Learning Ecology team and my supervisor. I also discussed my transcripts with the practitioners to check if I captured their meaning properly. The participants, however, felt that this was not necessary. Since I was a lecturer at the university they trusted me to report their narratives in a coherent way.

3.9   Reliability in qualitative research

Cohen et al. (2005) define reliability in research as synonym to consistency, and a tool that is concerned with accuracy. Terre Blanche et al. (1999) shed light on another angle of reliability, namely, "the degree to which results are repeatable". Miller (1996) adds that reliability in qualitative research can be defined as independent. Neuman (2000) concurs with Miller (1996) by explaining reliability as dependability or consistency. Dependability refers to the extent to which variations can be explained. To ensure reliability the researcher must demonstrate that the methods used are consistent and reproducible.

In this study I explained the rationale for the methods and procedures I used. I also tape-recorded the interviews to ensure that participants' voices were captured accurately. I developed a descriptive text that was discussed with my supervisor. I also gave an account of some of the challenges I faced.

3.10   Data analysis

Van den Hoonaard (2006) defines four important steps that researchers can follow when analysing data. The first step should be to analyse the data as soon as it has been collected. This gives the researcher enough insight to gather further data. Taking the suggestion into account, I transcribed my data as soon as I collected data

from two participants. This way of working helped me to identify the similarities and differences with a small number of participants.

My second step was to engage in memoing. Van den Hoonaard (2006) alludes that memoing is the process that takes place when the researcher takes "personal, conceptual, or theoretical ideas or reflection that come in mind as they collect and analyse the data" into consideration. Groenewald (2004) defines memoing as a way that the researcher uses to identify important facts from the data that was collected. It can be written as ideas or concepts and their relation to one another. I began the memoing process by first developing a descriptive text using the pre-identified themes from the semi-structured interviews. I was then able to examine the ideas and concepts that emerged from the text as a lived experience.

The third step I followed in my analysis was to build themes. Terre Blanche et al. (1999) define coding in qualitative research as "breaking up of data in an analytically relevant way". The pre-identified themes were carefully examined to see how ideas were connected to each other and the type of narrative they created. For example, the one on context had different levels of ideas that I had to package in a logical and coherent way. In organising the themes, I arranged them from the big contextual picture to the micro level aspects related to the practice.

3.11 Ethics

Resnik (1998) explains ethics as morals or rules for distinguishing between right and wrong and a code of professional conduct. Ethics in research helps researchers to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour with participants. Terre Blanche et al. (1999) emphasise the importance of research design being drawn in careful consideration of ethical issues. The authors highlight the fact that the research process must take the welfare and respect the rights of participants into consideration. The University of the Free State Ethics Committee granted ethical clearance for this study.

In order to obtain informed consent for the study, all the relevant stakeholders were consulted. I gave the participant a week's time to complete the consent forms and to decide if they were interested in participating in the research. Initially I had difficulty in securing permission from the Department of Education. After several attempts I

managed to secure a meeting with an official who was happy to give approval for the study to go ahead. This positive response was largely related to the interest in the development of African languages.

My participants' dignity and anonymity was respected throughout the process of collecting data. De Vos et al. (2005) describe anonymity in qualitative research as the act whereby research participants' identity and responses cannot be identified. In ethics, and in most professional codes of conduct, researchers are expected to protect and respect the privacy and dignity of their participants through "anonymity and confidentiality". All participants are referred to in anonymous terms in this study. Any identifying information has been removed from the study. All the data collected has been kept confidential and will only be accessible to the study leader and myself. Participation was voluntary and the participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw from participation whenever they felt the need to.

Neuman (2000) highlights the importance of respecting your "subjects" in your research. He goes on to say that researchers should avoid unnecessary or irreversible damage to their participants. Participation in research should ensure that there will be no harm. Taking this into consideration, my participants were treated with respect throughout, which resulted in building a relationship for further projects.

3.12 Summary

In this chapter I provided a description of the research approach and the methodology used in my study. The qualitative research approach was suitable for the theoretical ideas from the interpretive paradigm and from phenomenology. Qualitative researching allowed me to get closer to the lived experiences of my participants. I used purposive sampling that included convenience to secure my participants. Doing qualitative research is challenging. I shared some of the challenges I experienced. Through semi-structured interviews I was able to use a flexible way to gather data from my participants. I also showed how validity and reliability was dealt with in this study. The ethical issues were also explained. In the next chapter, I present the findings and the discussion.

CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of my study. Voils, Sandelowski, Barroso and Hasselblad (2008) define findings in qualitative research as interpretation that the researchers will make out of collected data. My main concern was practitioners' experiences related to using Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R classes. I discuss the following:

- The rural context of Qwaqwa
- Sesotho in the schooling context
- Training for teaching in Sesotho as a home language
- Positive and negative experiences in using Sesotho as LOLT
- Challenges and support from stakeholders.

4.2   Context of Qwaqwa

Practitioners in the study noted that there was a difference in the way in which Sesotho was spoken in rural and urban areas. They were of the opinion that the purest form of Sesotho was spoken in the rural areas. They were also able to identify the rural areas in which pure Sesotho was spoken. P3 and P1 noted that "diluted" Sesotho in urban areas resulted from the mixing of languages, namely English and isZulu. This was resulting in pure Sesotho becoming extinct.

> *P1: Sesotho is no longer spoken well in the urban areas, especially in Phuthaditjaba. The real Sesotho is spoken in the rural areas like Mabolela and Bolata.*
>
> *P2: There is great difference in the way Sesotho is spoken in the rural areas of Qwaqwa as compared to urban areas. The rural areas like Tsheseng and Monontsha still use pure Sesotho whereas Phuthaditjhaba is using diluted Sesotho and there is lot of English mixture while talking.*

> *P3: In urban areas, people do not speak pure Sesotho anymore. They mix it with Zulu words. They have really lost the language and its dying bit by bit.*
>
> *P1: Mmh, our learners are really affected, especially those who come from Phuthaditjhaba where there are many tribes who reside there on business purposes. They struggle to speak pure Sesotho, they mix with English and other languages like Zulu.*
>
> *P4: Let me start with the rural areas. Let me mention ThabaBosiu and Qoqolosing. These are very rural. These are the areas where Sesotho is pure and the people here still respect their language. There is a problem with areas like Phuthaditjhaba and Clubview. Sesotho is dying slowly in these areas because there are many foreigners.*

Leonard (2008) contends that when a language is endangered, it runs the risk of losing all its speakers to foreign languages. This means that the new generation of children will not be able speak the native language simply because they will not hear it spoken in its purest form. In other words the reproduction of the pure language does not take place. This is a great loss for a country that takes pride in promoting the indigenous languages.

P4 identified an important reason why pure Sesotho is endangered. The increase of foreigners means that more of the foreign language is spoken and there is a greater possibility for mixing the languages in the urban areas. It could be argued that the communicative needs over-rides the need to preserve a particular language.

There is a functional reason why foreigners flood certain urban areas. Most of the participants shared the view that the foreigners opened small businesses and this leads to all sorts of changes, including the language spoken. However, the rural areas are remote and foreigners find it difficult to find homes and open businesses. This means that the rural people are still a strong group that continue to speak pure Sesotho without mixing in foreign terms.

4.3   Sesotho in the schooling context

Alexander (2009) provides a description of mother tongue which is helpful to consider before discussing Sesotho in schools. His main point, as noted in the

review, was the relationship between mother tongue-based education and effective teaching. In this study, the Qwaqwa context makes it compulsory (if supported by parents) to use Sesotho as the language of teaching – it is spoken by the majority of the community members.

Most of the participants answered positively on the question that needed their views on Sesotho being made a language of teaching. They felt that it was a good move and will result in good outcomes for learners. Their views are in agreement with Mashiya (2010) and Obama (1995) who had the following to say:

- Mother tongue-based education leads to a "hunger to learn"
- Mother tongue-based education assists children to acquire global and standard languages
- Mother tongue-based education enables parents to contribute to their children's education.

The way in which Sesotho is spoken in the rural and urban context does affect what happens in schools. Practitioners spoke about particular aspects which influenced their teaching. P7 had the following to say: *It is really affecting my teaching because I have to work hard to convince these children and to correct their way of talking.* The language use, vocabulary, and number words were identified as some of the aspects that were problematic in facilitating learning. The following illustrates this:

> *P8: Oh it has affected the Sesotho in schools. I don't think we are the only school complaining. Can I make an example, Sesotho is a language that has its own vocabulary like "water-metsi, door-lemati/lehlafi, teaspoon-teelepele". The way Sesotho is now spoken in the rural areas, those words are no longer used correctly.*
> *P4: Learners battle a lot in Sesotho especially when it comes to saying number words in Sesotho. Parents do not speak the right language at home so we have to do the spade work. These things of mixing languages are affecting the teaching of Sesotho in my class a lot but I still try my best.*
> *P6: It has affected Sesotho a lot because the very same learners who are somehow trying to be like their counterparts in English schools, battle to write pure Sesotho.*

A sense of struggle and loss is felt in the responses above. Hoffmann (2009) stresses the importance of language heritage in a paper called *Endangered languages, linguistics and culture*. The concerns in the paper fit in with the participants' concern about the dying of the Sesotho language. The author talks about the sadness that would come about in one's life if one morning all the people who spoke an indigenous language vanished and there was no one to talk to.

From the literature study it was clear that language heritage is every citizen's right. The schools and the teachers are the ones who have been assigned the mandate of giving life to all eleven languages in South Africa. If the schools are experiencing problems related to the dilution of the language, it makes it difficult to regain its worth and dignity. Greater support from the Department of Basic Education is required.

From the analysis of the context it is reasonable to assume that schools situated in the urban areas of Qwaqwa are the ones suffering the most, because this is where changes occur. Teachers in these schools experience problems when teaching in Sesotho. Since the rural residents still use the language in its purest form, the learners have greater exposure to the Sesotho that is valued by traditional communities. They do not experience the language struggles that learners in the urban area shave.

Taking the point highlighted by Hoffmann earlier, the loss of one's mother tongue is a scary experience. You are forced to use a second language, because the people around you have little understanding of your mother tongue. The South African language policy serves as an important tool to preserve African languages. While this is the case, there is a wide gap between policy and practice. Teachers are struggling with the implementation of the national curriculum, and teaching in the home language is one of the aspects complicating curriculum delivery. A broader range of stakeholders also need to be active. Practitioners/teachers at grassroots who are suitably trained are the main people who can drive quality language outcomes.

Another important point in this study was to find out how practitioners feel about Sesotho being made a medium of instruction. Since practitioners are the drivers of implementation, it was important to consider their input. All participants agreed that Sesotho must be the medium of instruction in Grade R. One participant drew on the

home-school language relationship to support Sesotho as the language of learning and teaching. She had the following to say:

> **P2**: *I think Sesotho should be used as medium of instruction because this is a Sesotho area and most of the people here are Basotho. The parents of the learners here are Basotho so when we give out homework, it makes it easier for them to help them. I am a Mosotho so I feel very comfortable to teach in Sesotho. If we switch to English as a language of teaching, I see it as problem because the majority of parents here are Basotho. The school is situated in a Sesotho dominated area, so English will not work here. Switching to English will not be easy for me.*

The links between language, culture and tradition was also raised to strengthen the call for Sesotho as the medium of instruction. Two participants had the following to say:

> **P2**: *Yes, yes, to me it is a good thing for Sesotho to be made medium of instruction in this school especially from Grade R. You must understand that these children's mother tongue is Sesotho, they come here knowing Sesotho so well. It is at their advantage to be taught in Sesotho. Let me make an example, if I teach them the food in Sesotho, food eaten like "dikahare, kgodueamokopu, nyekwe", how will I teach that in English? My answer to you is, Grade R learners should be taught in Sesotho. Let us stop being too westernised mam. It does not help our kids and our culture. Culturally, Mosotho child has to come to school knowing a bit of his/her clan and how to resusitate it. So, mother tongue instruction is going to help us teach this to our learners. "Seboko", one's clan is very important for a person to know where he/she is from and where he/she is going. We teach this to our Grade R learners with the help of their parents.*
>
> **P4**: *I am actually proud because I am a Mosotho woman. I can see that mother tongue instruction will bring back the respect that our language was about to lose. Do you know what I do when parents come here to enrol their children, I do not allow them to give me English names. I want Sesotho names because they always have meaning. Let me give you an example, I have names like "Mmasontaha". This name means this girl was born on*

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Sunday. There is also another one named "Matshediso". Immediately, this name tells me that this child comes after the one that passed away. So, if we teach in Sesotho, I will always have a platform to teach culture and tradition to my learners from young age. I am so happy that the policy is allowing us to teach in our mother tongue.

Two participants linked mother tongue-based teaching in Sesotho directly to producing good results. This was especially true if it begins in Grade R, where the foundation is strengthened. The excerpt below shows this:

P3: I personally think it is a good idea for these children to be taught in Sesotho because it is the language they understand and I think it will result in good results, especially if it starts in Grade R.

P2:Sesotho will also help us to produce good results. Like, mmh, yes, learners will understand and follow instructions and so the failure rate will decrease. Tataisong school respects Sesotho, the principal always takes these learners to Basotho Cultural village so that they can see the Sesotho food like "dipapi". You must visit us during culture day and see how we respect Sesotho. Our attire will show you how we respect our culture. I think it is ok but parents are not supportive.

The evidence thus far shows that there is full support for Sesotho as the language of learning and teaching. The practitioners all had a strong command of the Sesotho language. However, this does not necessarily mean that they were good teachers. Gacheche (2010) emphasises that, because of little or no training, teachers choose to deviate from the policy and teach in English. The pull towards English can be understood in terms of success in higher grades where English is the language of learning and teaching. This study draws attention to a focused plan for teacher training where African languages feature as the home language

Richards and Lockhart (1994) believe that teachers should be able to deliver conversations at learner's developmental levels so that they can understand what is being taught. The two authors go on to say that if teachers' second language command is not at an acceptable standard, and it is used as language of learning and teaching, the erroneous and poor knowledge is transferred to the learner. In the study, although practitioners were experienced in spoken Sesotho, they were not

trained to deliver teaching in Sesotho. Hence, they lacked professional skills and language content knowledge, not only in Sesotho, but also teaching English as an additional language. It can be argued that the teachers are competent in speaking the language, but do not have the pedagogic tools to deliver it in developmentally appropriate ways for Grade R children.

The participants generally had a positive attitude towards Sesotho as a language of learning and teaching. Joseph (2000) stipulates the power of attitude. Teachers' positive attitude towards learning will facilitate young children's progress. Teachers' negative attitude will hinder learners' progress. When asked about any negative experiences, they had the following to say:

> *P4: The negative experiences? I really do not have… So I do not really have negative experiences. I get new words from them.*
> *P6: Not so many negative experiences because the majority of the learners speak Sesotho.*
> *P7: I really do not have negative experiences. I do well when I teach in Sesotho.*

It was clear that participants felt that teaching in Sesotho was helping children to learn. They noted how children's understanding increased and they felt at ease with the learning experience. They participate actively. This creates a positive emotional environment for the learners. The responses that follow show this:

> *P1: Learners grasp immediately because I use the language they understand. I don't have to repeat one thing many times due to language barrier. Learners feel free to ask me questions because they can use their mother tongue.*
> *P2: The fact that I need not translate when I teach in Sesotho, makes my teaching so easy. My energy and my time are not wasted.*
> *P3: Learners understand better, they follow instructions because this is the language spoken at home. I have realised that, they ask questions freely because language is not a barrier.*
> *P7: Good experiences? Let me say I ask them to make poems in Sesotho. You can see their faces that they are happy and they enjoy what they do. I*

don't think they would have the understanding that they have if I used English.

Mashiya (2011) highlights that, for every learner to communicate well and become fully functional, the language of origin should be well developed, not only at home but throughout the foundation phase. This agrees with what most of practitioners in the study indicated; it becomes easier to introduce their lessons in Sesotho because there is no need to translate anything.

Mashiya (2011) also alludes to the fact that the language that Grade R learners master when entering school is recommended as their language of learning and teaching. The answers of the participants agree with what Mashiya (2011) says. Practitioners feel that mother tongue-based education makes learners feel free to ask questions without any hesitation. A learner does not have to think of a second language vocabulary, and translate it, before the question can be asked. This also contributes to happy and free learners who do not have the fear of being ridiculed. P7 indicated that when it comes to teaching songs and poems, using a learner's mother tongue is very important. A song and a poem are enjoyed more when they are learned or taught in the mother tongue.

4.4 Training for teaching in Sesotho as a home language

Taking into account the marginalisation of African languages in South Africa, it is important to examine the quality of teacher training. The study shows that there is a huge gap in advancing Sesotho as a medium of instruction. There is no formal training in Sesotho as a home language. The participants have all been exposed to training in English. They rely on the knowledge they have and more competent colleagues to develop their skills. This leads to frustration. The excerpts that follow show this:

> *P1: I don't have any training but last year in 2012, I worked under a colleague who is now retired. As for formal training, I don't have any. I depend on the colleagues.*
> *P3: Ok, I don't have formal training to teach in Sesotho. I attend in-service training but everything is done in English. I get frustrated every time after the training because, why is it done in English and I am expected to teach*

in Sesotho? So I can say to you, I don't have any training to teach in mother tongue.

P6: *But as for the qualification as a teacher, I don't have. I rely on the workshops run by the LFs.*

P7: *We get training in the form of workshops done by the LFs. Actually, they don't train us to teach in Sesotho. They only show us how to use these work books from the department.*

P8: *I don't know what the government can do to give us proper training so that we can be confident when teach in Sesotho.*

The concern of participants draws attention to teacher training institutions. Higher institutions still marginalise the African languages (DoE 1997). Mbatha (2008) states that the only higher institution that formally used an African language in teaching in South Africa in the early 2000 was the University of KwaZulu-Natal. It also ran a bilingual Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Foundation Phase) (PGCE FP).IsiZulu is used for teaching, together with English. The teacher education policy reinforces support for this kind of response (DoE 1997) For example, the following important stipulations are noted:

- Programmes that will improve teachers' competence in the language of learning and teaching, and in the teaching of literacy.
- The link between language and learning must be promoted, including the use of indigenous languages. Programmes to promote language in education will be supported and all teachers should have the opportunity of learning an indigenous Africa language.

Plüddemann, Nolomo and Jabe (2010) state that the report given by the Minister of Education recommends that each university or college in South Africa should choose at least one or more indigenous language to be developed for use in higher institutions. The University of the Western Cape has singled out isiXhosa (MoE 2003: 21). It is, however, difficult to attract personnel who want to invest in the development of African languages and to create sufficient demand. The conditional bursary scheme is assisting.

Speaking the language is not the same as using it as a medium of instruction. Ebrahim (2009) states that teachers are the ones who are holding the key to unlock

the mother tongue, so they have to be trained in understanding ways in which young children use their mother tongue before they can use it effectively as language of learning and teaching. This means that teacher training should not only teach African languages in the conversational mode but also as a mother tongue.

4.5   Challenges experienced

Assistance for planning is poor

A critical part of teachers' professional skills is directly related to planning, teaching methods and assessment. With regard to planning there were varied responses from the practitioners in the study. One participant was using the English curriculum documents to do her planning in Sesotho. Another participant relied on her own intuition to develop her plans, while two participants were using the Sesotho guidelines prepared by the Department. These were the responses in relation to planning:

> *P1: I have challenges with planning because the material from the department of education is written in English, and I have to plan in Sesotho. Assessment is also a problem because the terminology is in English and some of the words are not there in Sesotho.*
>
> *P8: I just do it my own way and I know it is wrong.*
>
> *P3: There is lot of challenge with planning. The challenges are not bad because the tool from the department for assessment is written in Sesotho for Mathematics and Lifeskills.*
>
> *P4: My planning document is in Sesotho so I don't have problems really. Even the assessment forms are in Sesotho so that makes life easier for me.*
>
> *P5: My planning document is in Sesotho so I don't have problems really. Even the assessment forms are in Sesotho so that makes life easier for me.*

Although the DBE has curriculum documents in each language, it is obvious that not all practitioners are using them. This could be attributed to teacher motivation, access to documents, lack of support from the DoE officials, difficulty in decoding the official Sesotho used in the documents and difficulty with concepts, e.g. in mathematics.

On the issue of practitioners struggling with policy documents in the rural schools, most of them raised their concern about the little support they get from departmental officials. It was surprising to hear that some of the community based centres heard the word 'subject advisor' for the first time. If these officials are competent to guide mother tongue-based education, as valued in the constitution, then little can be expected from practitioners on the ground. Regular visits to schools will motivate teachers to plan in the language of teaching and it will assist people like P8 who said *I just do my own thing and I know it is wrong*. In cases like this, it is the learners who suffer from the poor learning opportunities created by demotivated teachers. Distribution of curriculum documentation in the African languages must be followed by sound support through regular monitoring and workshops.

It was clear in the study that the people who should be assisting practitioners are incompetent in giving assistance. The learning facilitators (LFs) are supposed to serve as key people who assist practitioners. It was evident that they needed further training to assist practitioners. They are also overstretched given the demand. This was frustrating practitioners and the quality of planning was affected. The following responses show this:

> *P4: I sometimes face problems with planning. These LFs to be honest are also not sure of this new way of planning. They confuse us so much. I sometimes resort to my HOD to help me.*
>
> *P5: I have serious problems with planning and assessment. Very serious…I have resorted to planning in English rather than not planning at all. I am hoping that the LFs will visit our school so that I can discuss this challenge with them.*
>
> *P3: I am so sorry but I am just going to be honest with you. I have been teaching for more than fifteen years and in the same school, this one. I don't really plan.*

Benson (2004) highlights the importance of sufficient training for teachers on how to implement mother tongue-based education. Benson (2004) alludes to the fact that the lack of training may lead to teachers avoiding "unknown good" and resort to the "known bad". As noted, one participant does not plan at all. This is counterproductive to getting early education in South Africa to an acceptable level of quality.

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However, three participants were happy and said they managed planning because they attended workshops. Some raised the issue of difficulties with transport to venues where trainings were held. From my experience I realised that those who suffer the most when it comes to workshop attendance are those who reside in deep rural areas of Qwaqwa. They seem to have really been forgotten or neglected. This type of inequality has to be addressed within the framework of quality early education.

Availability of learner support materials is a cause for concern

Taking into account that children in the foundation phase are largely in the concrete stage of development, teaching needs to be strengthened by using relevant learner support material. This creates opportunities for active learning and hands-on activities. Few participants indicated that they resorted to making their own materials. Some were fortunate enough to have received these from the Department of Education. These are the responses of the practitioners:

> *P1: I don't have enough LTSM that I use in Sesotho…For mathematics there is nothing that guides me. I do what I think will benefit the children.*
>
> *P2: The department provided us to a certain extend but I believe in making my own teaching aids.*
>
> *P3: I have posters and puppets. They are really helpful when I teach all the subjects. These learners love puppets. Grade R learners learn by seeing and by touching.*
>
> *P8: We struggle mam with learning support material. There are schools which have been provided but it is not all of us.*
>
> *P6: We have books written in Sesotho, even the Maths is now written in Sesotho. We use workbooks from the department and learners love them so much.*

As indicated by these practitioners, the availability of learning support materials is still a problem. Together with the limitations of being in a rural context, the shortage of learner support materials makes teaching a difficult task. Fasold (1984) identifies lack of text books, reading materials, and other educational materials as factors complicating teaching in the mother tongue. By examining the challenges that Fasold raised, it could be argued that, as a nation, we cannot avoid the fact that not many

teachers, and especially practitioners, have been trained to deliver education in indigenous languages. If we compare the variety of English books with the Sesotho books on the shelves, the gap is disturbing.

The department/government should have started by tasking publishing houses to write a variety of reading books in all eleven languages from Grade R to Grade 3. Where this process has taken place, the quality has to be carefully monitored. They should make sure that all the schools have these, not only Section 21 schools. They should also have ensured that practitioners are well trained and can offer support to each other. The dissatisfaction of practitioners who complain of not knowing what to do would be minimised. The practitioners are happy to teach in Sesotho, but clearly some of them are struggling.

When support material, such as books, are available, they can contribute positively to academic achievement (Heneveld & Craig 1996).

High quality learning materials is a matter of concern (Diallo 2006). Books used to educate children in Africa are written in former colonial languages. This means that a small elite become proficient; the majority experiences difficulty in communicating in colonial languages, which children experience in overcrowded classrooms and taught by teachers whose own proficiency is often limited (Alidou et al. 2006).It was clear from the study that learner support materials were perceived as valuable tools to further children's learning and to support teachers in their ability to teach. They had the following to say:

> *P1: Like I said, these materials are of a great help because Sesotho words are long and they are difficult.*
> *P2: They are very useful because if you teach Grade R learners, they have to see not just hear you say "cat, dog". They have to see it and maybe touch.*
> *P3: It was not going to be easy to teach without these tools.*
> *P4: The learning support materials have always been helpful. I just wish I had enough. But the little that I have really helps me.*

Participants also suggested possible improvement of the LTSM. These suggestions related to teachers being consulted in material development, integration of other

media to support teaching and learning and a full range of resources available in Sesotho. The excerpts below illustrate this:

> *P1: I think maybe we as teachers in Grade R should be consulted when materials are made. We should be invited to the meetings and our views should be taken into consideration because we are the ones dealing with children…. We are the ones who know what these learners really need in terms of material development.*
>
> *P2: Remember there used to be programs on the radio long time ago, which helped learners to be good in English, can we not have those programs in all the eleven languages in South Africa?*
>
> *P3: I wish these big books can be written in Sesotho so that I don't have to translate.*
>
> *P4: They should all be written in Sesotho. There is no point if we are asked to teach in Sesotho when the materials are still written in English.*

4.6   Support from management

Grade R has only recently been incorporated into basic education in South Africa. Some still reside in community based centres, although the vision is to provide Grade R in all schools. Grade R was governed in isolation. Community-based sites were encouraged to link up with schools. Within the school, the Grade R classes do not necessarily receive the same kind of attention as Grades 1,2 and 3. It was important in my study to find out how much support participants received from management. Participants reported HODs and principals as being the pillar of support. The LFs, at district level, however, did not offer the support needed as noted elsewhere in this chapter. The excerpts below illustrate the support received from management:

> *P1: My HOD is encouraging me to use Sesotho and she assists me a lot when it comes to planning in Sesotho.* My principal *is also supportive when it comes to teaching in Sesotho.*
>
> *P2: My HOD is very supportive, she always reminds us that it is important to teach in Sesotho.* My principal *is also very supportive… He once told us that Afrikaaners do well at school because they are taught in their mother*

tongue... My principal organises the LFs to come and capacitate us about this policy. To be honest with you, we have enough support. The principal even encouraged parents to buy their children slates, so that we can use the olden way of teaching.

P5:My HOD is helpful you know. She visits our classrooms to see if we have problems. We have also a supporting principal. He has taken us for workshops twice this year already. The department I will say is supporting us because all these workbooks that we use are from the department.

P3:In this school we have only the principal, no HOD. She is so supportive really. The LFs from district office does not really support us. They paid us a visit once to see what we are doing.

4.7   Parents responses to Sesotho as language of learning and teaching

In the study participants noted that not all parents were happy with their children being taught in Sesotho. Those who were negative were worried about the quality of their children's education when Sesotho is used as the language of teaching and learning. Some wealthy parents took their children out of the school. The following excerpts provide more insight into parents' responses:

P1: Parents in this area seem to be happy with their kids being taught in Sesotho. I say this because no parent has ever complained to the principal about his/her child being taught in Sesotho.

P2: Parents were divided in two in the beginning. They were those who supported this policy and those who were really unhappy. Some even took their out and took them to Harrismith.

P3: You know, really I cannot say all the parents are impressed…They still feel that this policy of Sesotho being used as medium of instruction is depriving their kids of best education.

P4: Ehhhh, eish, how will I put it? In this school, most of the parents are not happy that their children are taught in Sesotho. They would love to take them to English medium schools but they cannot afford.

P5: Parents do not like their children to be taught in Sesotho. We have tried during parents meeting to make them aware that this is government policy and it should be respected.

Trudell (2005) contends that mother tongue-based education contributes to warm working relations between parents and teachers. Clearly this has not been the case from the way in which the practitioners describe the parents' responses to Sesotho as the language of learning and teaching. Parents value English as the language of power for the workplace. Hence, they support it. From my personal experience I know that parents still feel that "my child cannot be taught by my neighbour, whom I grew up with". This really makes them think that education offered in big towns is the best and they have removed their children from local schools in Qwaqwa. The children travel to towns like Bethlehem and Harrismith. Education that is offered, especially by white teachers, is regarded as the best. What also makes it difficult for parents to believe in Sesotho as a medium of instruction, is the fact that the same teachers also take their children to towns where they are taught in English.

Hassani, (2013) highlights that parents must be well informed about how their children will benefit when they receive mother tongue-based education. He goes on to say that they must be reassured that learning in the mother tongue does not pose a threat to learning a foreign language. One of the shortcomings of the policies that affects schooling is that the voice of the parent is marginalised. As a parent I was never included in decisions about the LOLT at my children's school. We were informed that this is the decision of the government as it stands. Most parents are uneducated. They are smart enough to realise that English ensures job opportunities. The parents in Qwaqwa and all over South Africa know that English is the language that will improve their children's future. They were educated during the apartheid regime, where only two languages were important and recognised. Even though there are school governing bodies, it is the vocal and powerful few that will get their voices heard.

Bender et al. (2005) state that children who are taught in their mother tongue were five times less likely to repeat a class, and the chances of dropping out of school were three times less. Now, the important question to ask with regard to these parents' resilience is whether they are ever shown these advantages. They still regard Sesotho as the language that is going to close doors for their children and that will leave their children unemployed and out of touch with modern-day realities.

As the world celebrated International Mother Tongue-day on the 21st February, and

this day being celebrated every year in South Africa since 2000, it would have been beneficial if full parental involvement was secured. Only teachers are part of these celebrations, leaving out the less privileged in rural areas. Listening to the participants' responses on the question of parents removing their children from Sesotho schools, made me understand where these parents were coming from. My own children received education in English from Grade R, even though I had an opportunity of taking them to a Sesotho school. This happened because of my personal experiences. I struggled with English because I attended a less privileged school with no resources. I always envied my peers who were educated in English schools. They had more opportunities and were always respected in the village for their way of speaking English with a beautiful accent.

I did not want my children to travel this 'painful route'. I, therefore, placed them in English schools. I too, did not value my mother tongue. Sesotho, as a language, could have opened up doors for my two girls. I now have so many regrets, and hence my motivation to do a study of this nature. I am able to relate to the parents who do not support mother tongue-based education in Qwaqwa and still let their young children, from Grade R, travel long distances in the early hours to the towns that offer education in English.

I also think that parents need to be convinced that teachers are well equipped to deliver mother tongue-based education. The stereotype thinking that black teachers are not knowledgeable, is still strong. Parents invest much in their children's education, so they need to be convinced that the teachers their children are exposed to, offer high quality education.

4.8   Suggestions for improving Sesotho as the LOLT

Participants in the study were able to make useful suggestions on how to improve Sesotho as the medium of instruction. They had the following to say:

> *P1: If we can encourage trips to places of interests like Basotho Cultural Village, these trips will instil love and pride of Sesotho in our children and even to us as teachers.*

> *P2: Instead of holding beauty contests for these little ones, which is not our culture, we must have Sesotho dances like "ditolobonya, mokgibo, mokopu songs" for girls. For boys we must have "mangae, ndlamo, mohobelo".*
>
> *P3: I would recommend that Sesotho books are written with interesting topics, for example, books full of history, at the level of these children, these children should know where they come from and where they are going to....Why are all computer programs not written in Sesotho? Why mam? Computers should be invented in Sesotho.*
>
> *P4: I think we should involve parents so that they can feel that they are part of the decision. If we invite them to come to school and read these children Sesotho stories and to narrate olden stories, they will support the decision and maybe see how important it is.*
>
> *P5: We need more Sesotho reading books and story books.*

As P2 and P4 indicated, Sesotho as medium of instruction will help retain the Basotho culture, heritage and tradition. Young (2009) finds mother tongue-based education a way of awarding the community and parents power and a say in their children's education. If parents are part of their children's education, they are able to instil culture and assist the school when functions like those mentioned by P2 takes place. P4 feels that the teaching of Sesotho and its usage as language of teaching can be successful if parents are involved in the decision making. This is true and it takes this debate back to parents being introduced to new policies and changes before they are implemented. They will be able to ask questions and to raise their concerns. They will also feel that they are part of the decision and will, therefore, give greater support the teachers if they face problems.

Another participant felt that schools in Qwaqwa should do away with Western celebrations and stick to cultural ways of doing things in order to improve Sesotho as medium of instruction. While this is a very narrow way of looking at the education of young children, it nonetheless presents some options such as cultural dances, songs dramas, or celebrations. From my experience of having my children in English medium schools, I feel that they produced good results because they engaged children in activities like debates and dialogue competitions. As a Mosotho girl, I took part in English debates in my school, but I have never ever been involved in any Sesotho competitions in my entire life.

Dutcher (1997) alludes to the fact that for mother tongue-based education to succeed, countries engaged in it must make sure that learners are fully engaged instructionally, not for the teachers to talk to them or write much on the chalkboard and expect learners to copy this to learn at home. Dutcher also feels that bringing parents to school and educating them about the benefits of the language that their children will be educated in should be the government's main priority. It is clear that parental engagement and involvement is one of the answers to the successful use of Sesotho as medium of instruction.

4.9   Summary

In this chapter I presented the findings of my study. I answered my research question on the experiences of Grade R practitioners in using Sesotho as a medium of instruction in the context of Qwaqwa. The findings show that pure Sesotho runs the risk of becoming extinct because of mixing of languages. The school then becomes an institution to preserve the language and pass it on to the next generation. The practitioners in the study welcomed Sesotho as the language of learning and teaching.

Practitioners reported many positive spin-offs such as stronger home-school relationships, reinforcement of culture, improved academic performance and learning as fun and enjoyment. The lack of teacher training in Sesotho as a home language is a threat. The other challenges relate to support from LFs, management and the availability of learner support materials. The parental response is also a cause for concern. More effort needs to be directed towards alerting parents to the value of educating their children in Sesotho

The next and final chapter presents the conclusions, implications and future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1   Introduction

In this study I explored Grade R practitioners' experiences of using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. I approached the study determining specific areas of focus in each chapter. In this final chapter I present the conclusions and the implications (suggestions) of my study. I begin by presenting an overview of the first three chapters of my study. This is followed by suggestions, limitations, and possibilities for future research.

5.2   Overview of the first three chapters

In Chapter 1, I presented to the reader the background to my study. I showed how the language history in apartheid South Africa marginalised African languages. This led to the underdevelopment of African languages. The language marginalisation was part of the broader apartheid project, which divided people according to race and ethnicity. I then provided a brief discussion on the value of mother tongue-based education for young children. This was followed by the factors to be considered for mother tongue-based education and the difficulties that were experienced in teaching in the mother tongue. I presented the rationale for the study, aims, objective, overview of research design and chapter outline.

In Chapter 2, I presented the theoretical perspective of my study and the literature review. This study was undertaken from an interpretive paradigm. In order to be sensitive to the lived experiences of practitioners in Grade R, I used phenomenology as a theoretical perspective. This allowed me to view the practitioners as people having different angles to experiences in knowing the context of Sesotho as the mother tongue in Qwaqwa. I explored a variety of definitions of mother tongue and agreed that it was an essential way to promote quality learning for young children. The importance of mother tongue was discussed. The review showed that young children benefit from having their mother tongue as the medium of instruction and that this should be the way in which their foundational years should be shaped. I investigated issues related to the language policies in South Africa and elsewhere in

the world in more detail. The immersion in the mother tongue is favoured, with the foreign language being introduced in the intermediate phase of education. This also has its problems if the children did not get a good grounding in the foundation phase.

In **Chapter 3** I discussed the research paradigm, design and methodology. In keeping with the interpretive paradigm and phenomenology I used a qualitative approach to my study. I discussed how the interpretive paradigm gave me a set of assumptions to work with. The qualitative research approach allowed me to pay attention to the subjective meanings of the participants. I also made a note that qualitative research is complex and difficult. I presented the challenges. I chose eight participants from the Qwaqwa region where Sesotho is the dominant African language. Through purposive sampling I was able to select Grade R practitioners according to certain criteria. I used semi-structured interviews as they were flexible and allowed me to probe. The validity, reliability, data analysis and ethics were discussed.

Chapter Four - findings of the study

The lived experiences of Grade R practitioners in Qwaqwa show that there is still many aspects that need attention to make Sesotho an effective medium of instruction in Qwaqwa .The context of Qwaqwa shows a particular language dynamic that is important to consider for the development of Sesotho as a language of learning and teaching. The study showed that the practitioners felt that pure Sesotho was being diluted because of the influx of foreigners into the area. There is also some noticeable difference in the way Sesotho is spoken in the rural areas as compared to the way it is spoken in the urban areas, which has also affected schools. The influence of English was also affecting the quality of Sesotho that children were being exposed to.

The practitioners were very positive about using Sesotho as the medium of instruction in Grade R. They felt that the language was in keeping with the identity of the Basotho people and, therefore, was a tool of cultural pride. They wanted Grade R children to learn this language early so that they would not become 'westernised' and lose touch with the Basotho cultural traditions.

It was not surprising that the practitioners linked Sesotho to good achievement in

school. This endorses the literature on the value of mother tongue-based education. The practitioners in the study felt that the children were at ease because they did not experience a language barrier when they were taught in Sesotho.

While the practitioners were upbeat about Sesotho as the medium of instruction, we are well aware that, in South Africa, children taught in their home language are not producing good results. For example, the Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS) (2011) showed that when Grade 4 children were tested in English and Afrikaans they did well; however, those who were tested in the African languages had low outcomes. These children wrote their test in their home language. Those who performed poorly wrote in Sepedi and Tshivenda – which represent the poorest performing language group.

The above makes it important to examine some of the challenges related to making Sesotho the medium of instruction. Quality teaching is highly dependent on how teachers are trained. In this study the training was perceived as problematic. The participants noted how they relied on more experienced colleagues to build competence in teaching in Sesotho as the home language. The little training that they received was largely in English. The participants found it difficult to translate their training from English into practice in Sesotho. The main people responsible for the training were the learning facilitators, who themselves were unsure about how to lend support for using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. Practical hands-on training is needed.

Another challenge that participants mentioned was the difficulties they experienced in planning for the day. Although the Department of Basic Education provided the curriculum documents in all languages, it was clear that not all the practitioners were using them. The translations were not familiar to some participants, especially the assessment tools.

Additional support materials to inform teaching and learning in Sesotho in Grade R is needed, especially since there was a lack of a shared understanding of Sesotho used for teaching. Some participants in the study were making their own teaching aids and using what was provided by the DBE. It was also evident that there was a need for adequate learning and teaching support materials. The participants also felt that it was necessary to consult Grade R teachers when support materials were

being developed for Grade R. They felt that they were best placed to make suggestions for what should be included in the support materials. With regard to support from school management, it was clear in the study that heads of departments in the foundation phase were playing a key role in facilitating quality education. Principals were also motivating the practitioners and providing emotional support.

The study also highlighted the importance of parents in the development of Sesotho as the medium of instruction. It was clear that parents were not impressed with Sesotho being the language of learning and teaching in Grade R. This is the entry point of schooling. The parents were well aware of the importance of English for the world of work. They, therefore, resisted the introduction of Sesotho. Some parents took their children away to schools where English was the language of learning and teaching. De Klerk and Bosch (1994) also had similar findings in a study with parents in the Eastern Cape.

It was good to note that the practitioners were willing to share their vision of what needs to be done to make Sesotho an effective language of learning and teaching so that it could promote good educational outcomes for children in Grade R. They felt that learning Sesotho as a language must be tied to promoting cultural pride. The need for books in Sesotho was also stressed. Including parents to inform the development of African languages was favoured. A variety of media (radio, ICT, print) promoting Sesotho was viewed as an effective way to promote greater visibility for using an African language.

5.3   Way forward

Sibaya, Sibaya and Mugisha (1996) state that "As long as education in South Africa is driven by politics rather than by a scientifically proven approach, agony will prevail". Taking this into consideration, it is important that research continues to inform the development of African languages in South Africa.

One of the key nodes for the development of African languages is the proposal on African Language Centres (Draft Minutes Free State Provincial Teacher Education and Development 2014). In order for these centres to be effective, they should have both a research and a practical focus in each province. This will help to use an

evidence-based approach for what works for mother tongue-based education in African languages. We need to grow the knowledge base so that our actions are appropriate. The African Language Centres must have a strong link to the departmental District Teacher Development Centres if it is to be effective. It might also be relevant to attach some of the centres to universities that are promoting African languages e.g. the University of the Free State Centre for African Studies. Provincial committees of specialists in a particular language must be established. These committees must be involved in material making, curriculum designing, text book choice for learners and workbooks used from Grade R. Cultural activities must be planned to suit the context and they should be part of the curriculum.

Another area for intervention is Grade R qualifications. Language of instruction is the heart of education. It must be delivered by people who are able to do this effectively, not just those who are speaking it fluently. It must be delivered by people who will be able to instil cultural values and who can transmit it cognitively(Gacheche 2010). The new Grade R Diploma must be designed to cater for teaching in the African home languages. Many of the practitioners in Grade R are under-qualified. They need intensive theoretical and practical training that is sensitive to how teaching and learning should take place for young children. Their training must include not only the 'what' and 'how' but also the 'why' aspect. The model of the reflective teacher must inform the delivery of these qualifications. African languages must be thoroughly developed as home languages for teacher education in order to build the disciplinary and pedagogic knowledge of teachers.

Teacher training institutions must pay attention to the Teacher Supply and Demand Information for African languages as released by the Department of Higher Education. This will ensure that training takes place in the relevant African language of the province. Universities would have to be responsive to the needs when they enrol new students for the Bachelor of Education in foundation phase teaching. The dedication of the Fundza bursary for students studying African languages must continue.

High visibility of African languages must be strengthened through various media. A mother tongue-based education system with a sufficient number of well trained teachers and adequate instructional materials cannot be successfully implemented if

the language policy is weak or ill thought-out (Gacheche 2010).

Learner and teacher support materials must continue to be produced to meet a variety of teacher needs. As noted in this study, this project must include teachers' ideas based on their experiences of teaching children in African languages, but also research evidence on what works best for South African children's language needs at the entry point of basic education. Sailors, Martinez and Villareal (2013) conducted a study on teacher authored supplementary reading materials in African languages. The findings suggest that, when teachers are given the opportunity to write materials for the children, they are able to reflect the cultural, linguistic and lived experiences of the children they are writing for.

The material produced in the study focused on important aspects of the South African society. When young children are given a text that is foreign to them, they do not connect with the ideas and experiences. This is especially the case for children who are in marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The teachers are the insiders who can represent the lived experiences of the children.

5.4   Limitations of the study

I chose only eight practitioners who were teaching Grade R and who are based in Qwaqwa. The sample was small and does not lend itself to generalisations. However, working with the small sample allowed me to gain an understanding of the experiences related to Sesotho as a medium of instruction. Another limitation was the fact that the teachers were from one part of Qwaqwa only. A greater sample from Qwaqwa would have been valuable. The time and financial constraints of this study limited the scope of this study.

5.5   Future research

This study only dealt with practitioners' experiences. It is important to investigate the experiences of a wide variety of stakeholders.

- **Parents' experiences:** It would be worthwhile to investigate how parents in all African languages experience education of their children in the mother tongue. This will facilitate a comparative analysis of parent experiences

across the different African languages. The commonalities and differences can be used to inform policy and practice

- **Children's experiences:** It will also be interesting to know how the people who are taught in Sesotho feel. Using child friendly techniques to listen to children will be valuable in shaping their teaching and learning experiences.

- **Practitioners' pedagogy:** The type of pedagogies practitioners use, and the effects of the need to track within the framework of promoting effective African language instruction.

- **The perspective of subject advisor and other education officials:** From a monitoring perspective it will be important to find evidence on how subject advisors and curriculum specialists view the process of monitoring the implementation of African languages.

5.6   Reflections

Conducting this study has been an amazing experience for me. This is especially the case because of the geographical context. Qwaqwa brought the memories of my childhood alive. I remember the experiences of growing up in a small village in Lesotho. At some of the centres where I conducted the interviews, I found typical Basotho girls, who reminded me of my days in Junior Primary, relying solely on my teachers for guidance. I witnessed children participating in the feeding scheme and this brought about many memories of the inequalities in the context. Sesotho as a language, however, is an asset. The language buzz reminded me of the richness of my culture.

Researching this topic also brought much joy. I met people who still speak pure Sesotho. Among my participants, there was a lady who narrated the story of "Lekgalo la mantsopa" and the history of the Basotho cultural village in Qwaqwa. I learnt new things that I would not have known if I had not conduct this study. I also learnt of some cultures that I did not know about – like the area in Qwaqwa where women were still struggling to give birth and were taken to pray to the ancestors for assistance. I was told that Qwaqwa citizens and people from all over the country visit this area to pray, even to solve their marital problems. This study gave me the opportunity to be culturally enriched.

I am proud of the fact that I am able to make some contribution to the debates on African languages. I can also talk about African languages with more authority after this study. I am now able to quote important studies that show the value of the mother tongue. In my current role as a Grade R specialist in the Department of Basic Education this is really helpful, especially since I still come across narrow views on the use of African languages in the early years.

5.7   Conclusion

> "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to
> change the world. If you talk to a man in a language he
> understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his
> language, that goes to his heart". Nelson Mandela.

I end this study with this famous quote to remind us that we have a great deal of work to do to bring about educational change in South Africa through our teachers and through supporting them in teaching in the African languages. We need to not only touch people's heads but also their hearts.

This study centred around practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as the medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. My findings in this study show that there is support for using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. However, this is complicated by proper infrastructure for quality education in an African language. Some parents and teachers still think that indigenous languages will not benefit their children for their future roles in the South African and global society. It is heart-warming to note that practitioners are quite happy to deliver education in the language they are conversant with. Practitioners need systemic support to ensure that the enthusiasm they have does not fade away.

Teaching young children without having relevant resources or teaching aids is difficult. Resources should be supplied to the practitioners. The resource centres that are in the districts should be used and the value of these centres should be brought to the attention of practitioners in the rural areas. Community members need to feel that they own their children's education. Involving them will create warm working relations between them and the entire school. Education in the early years of the foundation phase should be turned into a joint venture.

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Appendix 1

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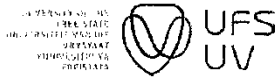
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24 February 2012

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

PRACTITIONERS EXPERIENCES IN USING SESOTHO AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN GRADE R CLASSES IN QWA QWA.

Dear Ms M Lesupi

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-EDU-2012-0009

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise. At the conclusion of your research project, please submit a project report stating how the research progressed and confirming any changes to methodology or practice that arose during the project itself. This report should be under 500 words long and should contain only a brief summary focusing primarily on ethical considerations, issues that may have arisen and steps taken to deal with them during the course of the research. Upon receipt of this report, a final ethical clearance certificate will be issued to you, which will form part of your final dissertation.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barclay
Faculty Ethics Officer
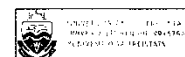
Appendix 2

MY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The rural context of Qwaqwa

1. Tell me about the about the history of Qwaqwa as a Sesotho dominated area
2. Tell me about the differences of the way in which Sesotho is spoken in the rural community as compared to the urban community
3. How does this affect Sesotho in schools?
4. What do you think about making Sesotho the medium of instruction in your school in Grade R class?

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES IN USING SESOTHO A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

5. Tell me more about your training to teach Sesotho as a home language in Grade R.
6. What are the good experiences you have in teaching Sesotho in Grade R?
7. Tell me about the negative experiences you have in teaching Sesotho in Grade R.
8. What challenges o you experience with regard to the following:
i) Planning
ii) Teaching approaches
iii) assessment
9. How do you deal with challenges you experience in
o **Planning**
o **Teaching approaches**
o **Assessment**
10. What kinds of learner support materials do you have to help you to teach Sesotho?
11. How do these support material help you?
12. What can be done to improve the material?
13. How much support do you receive from the following?
i) HOD
ii) Principal
iii) District officials
14. Tell me about parents' response with regard to their children being taught in Sesotho
15. What do you think of we should do to improve Sesotho as a medium of instruction in Grade R?
16. Is there anything you want to tell me about the teaching of Sesotho in Grade R that I have not asked you?

Appendix 3

**LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE FREE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TO THE PRINCIPAL**

My name is Edith Matseliso Lesupi. I am studying towards a Masters in Education at the University of Free. My topic for research is as follows: *Practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa.* I am funded by the European Union Grant that was awarded to the Department of higher Education- Teacher Directorate.

The aim of my study is to gain an understanding of Grade R practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. In order to gain data for my study, I will be interviewing 8 practitioners from school-based Grade R classes in Qwaqwa. Some practitioners will be from your school. I will be using semi-structured interviews for an hour with each practitioner. This approach is flexible and I will be sensitive to the needs of the practitioners. All interviews will be conducted after school hours. The data will be audio taped and transcribed. The data for the study will be used in the thesis and for journal articles and conferences presentations.

The information I receive will be confidential. The practitioners in the study will be referred to in anonymous term in y study. All participation is voluntary and they can withdraw their participation at any time disadvantage. Should you have any queries regarding this study kindly contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Edith Matseliso Lesupi

Institution: University of the Freestate, Nelson Mandela Drive, Bloemfontein, 9301

Contact: 051 404 4908

Mobile: 0794152347

Email: lesupiem@edu.fs.gov.za

edith.lesupi@gmail.co

Supervisor: Prof Hasina Ebrahim

Email: ebrahimhb@ufs.ac.za

DETACH AND RETURN

I,_____
(first name and surname)

Have read an understood the contents of this letter. I hereby grant permission to conduct the research.

_____

Signature

Appendix4

LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE PRACTITIONERS
TO Mr/Miss/Mrs_____

My name is Edith Matseliso Lesupi. I am studying towards a Masters in Education at the University of Free. My topic for research is as follows: *Practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as medium of instruction in Grade R classes in Qwaqwa.* I am funded by the European Union Grant that was awarded to the Department of higher Education- Teacher Directorate.

The aim of my study is to gain an understanding of Grade R practitioners' experiences in using Sesotho as the medium of instruction. In order to gain data for my study, I will be interviewing you. I will be using semi-structured interviews for an hour with each practitioner. This approach is flexible and I will be sensitive to the needs of the practitioners. All interviews will be conducted after school hours. The data will be audio taped and transcribed. The data for the study will be used in the thesis and for journal articles and conferences presentations.

The information I receive will be confidential. The practitioners in the study will be referred to in anonymous term in y study. All participation is voluntary and they can withdraw their participation at any time disadvantage. Should you have any queries regarding this study kindly contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely

Researcher: Edith Matseliso Lesupi

Institution: University of the Free State, Nelson Mandela Drive, Bloemfontein, 9301

Contact: 058 718 5465

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Email: lesupiem@edu.fs.gov.za

Supervisor: Prof Hasina Ebrahim

Email: ebrahimhb@ufs.ac.za

DETACH AND RETURNI,

_____

(First name and surname)

I have read and understood the contents of this letter. I hereby grant permission to conduct the research.

_____

Signature