

**Parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a language of learning and teaching in the primary schools in Libangeni Circuit Mpumalanga**

**by**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, JULIA MAGOKGOALE MATHIBELA, declare that this dissertation is my own work and that all sources have been acknowledged.

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my late parents, Peter Phafane and Emily Mosete Masemola, my brother and my three sisters, as well as my husband, Andrew Mogokgo and my children, Bonolo and Mpho.

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# **PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS ISINDEBELE AS A LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE LIBANGENI CIRCUIT, MPUMALANGA**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background overview**

This research deals with issues related to mother tongue education and language in education policy implementation within a multilingual setting. The main aim of the research is to investigate parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a language of learning and teaching in primary schools in the Libangeni Circuit, resorting under the Nkangala District Office, Mpumalanga.

The history of South Africa is characterised by the application of policies and laws that used language as a tool for segregation rather than a unifying factor. South Africans have just emerged from an era and a system that was birthed by the need to use linguistic diversity as a tool to manipulate and segregate people for political control. The desired end result was to create a formidable political power-base.

The Bantu Education system was, for example, devised with the intention of creating a segregated society. Both Bantu Education and the language policy of the time formed an integral part of the apartheid system (Heugh, 2000).

Consequently, the Language Service, which is an important state entity which currently resides in the Department of Arts and Culture, was located in the central Department of Education during this period in history. However, the Language Boards of various indigenous languages, which played an equally significant role in language development of the indigenous languages, were located in the segregated Department of Bantu Education.

Language and the politics of language can therefore not be divorced.

The main thrust of these two important aspects in language development, (a segregated education system and a language policy designed for separate development) as Heugh (2000) asserts, was basically to ensure provision of unequal resources to the linguistically diverse population with an aim of providing “a cognitively impoverished curriculum that would result in a massive under-education of the majority of the population” (Heugh, 2000). This would probably later have an impact on parental attitudes whether negative or positive.

## **1.2 Rationale**

Research findings have indicated that not much has been done in terms of research with regards to the investigation of parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a language of learning and teaching in South Africa.

This research therefore envisages adding value to the research field in terms of investigating attitudes that might have a direct impact on the development of isiNdebele, as a language that could be used in high function domains. The Constitution of South Africa supports parity of esteem with regards to the development and use of all official languages in South Africa.

## **1.3 A brief historical background of the isiNdebele language**

The origin of the Ndebele people can be traced to the Nguni language group constituted by isiZulu, isiXhosa, SiSwati and isiNdebele speakers.

According to the historical account King Musi had two sons, Manala and Ndzundza. Following his death, succession to the throne became a problem that eventually led to the division of his kingdom.

The division saw the Manala followers living around Pretoria whilst the Ndzundza followers moved to the East and settled around Middelburg, Witbank, Belfast, and Bethal (<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/language/about/isindebele.html>) ; Kruger (1983)

Despite their differences the two groups managed to maintain their rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

However, two distinct dialects, the Manala and the Ndzundza dialects, emerged and formed the isiNdebele language.

There are however some slight phonemic and phonological differences between the two dialects as indicated by Mashiyane (2000) in his research.

According to Mashiyane (2000), it has been observed that in the case of Absolute Pronouns, the initial 'n' sound in the third person, plural number, as used by the speakers of the Ndzundza dialect, is often substituted with the 'l' sound by the Manala speakers as reflected in the following examples:

**Ndzundza:** Nina nikhamba niqale lokhu okuphasi kodwa.

**Manala:** Lina likhamba liqale lokhu okuphasi kodwa.

*(You walk about minding only the ones on the ground) (Mashiyane, 2000)*

It is interesting to compare the sentence construction as reflected in the Manala variety of isiNdebele, with that of Sepedi in the following examples:

**Manala:** Lina likhamba liqale lokhu o kuphasi kodwa.

**Sepedi:** Lena le sepela le lebeletše tša fase fela.

The Manala sentence construction rules seems to follow that of the Sepedi (Sesotho language groups) which is influenced by the noun class prefixes.

The example above indicates the extent to which Sepedi as a dominant language has impacted on isiNdebele as a subordinate language.

It further indicates how language shift has impacted on the development of isiNdebele.

Notwithstanding such morphological and phonological differences the two remain the major dialects of isiNdebele language, which is the focus of this research in terms of parental attitudes and how attitudes affect the development and use of the language as a medium of instruction in education.

The establishment of the KwaNdebele homeland in 1984 played a significant role in strengthening the linguistic and cultural identity of isiNdebele speakers.

#### 1.4 A statistical representation of the South African languages (1996, 2001)

The 1996 and 2001 census data captured by Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) depict the population statistics and demographics of all official languages spoken in South Africa. (See figure 1 below)

The statistics reveal that the percentage of mother tongue English speakers in South Africa is low (8.6 and 8.2) as compared to that of isiZulu (22.9; 23.8) and/or isiXhosa (17.9; 17.6) respectively.

IsiNdebele is the least spoken official language in South Africa and the percentage home language speakers (as a percentage of the total population) was 1.5 % (1996) and 1.6 % (2001) respectively. (The marginal increase of 1.5% to 1.6 % can probably be attributed to natural population growth.)

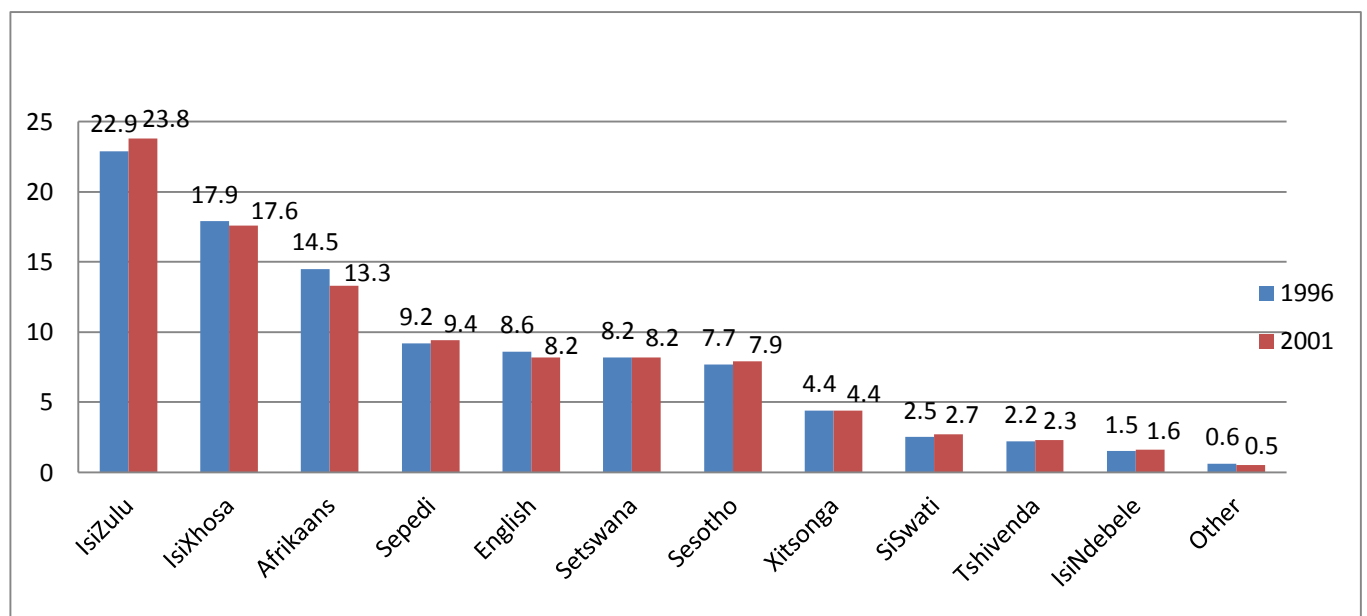


Figure 1: Census 1996 and 2001 - Distribution of the population by first home language  
Source: J M Mathibela (adapted from Statistics South Africa)

The graph above portrays minority languages such as Xitsonga, Tshivenda, SiSwati and isiNdebele as the least spoken languages and therefore probably the most marginalised and underdeveloped indigenous languages in South Africa.

### 1.5 The graphical representation of languages in the 2011 census

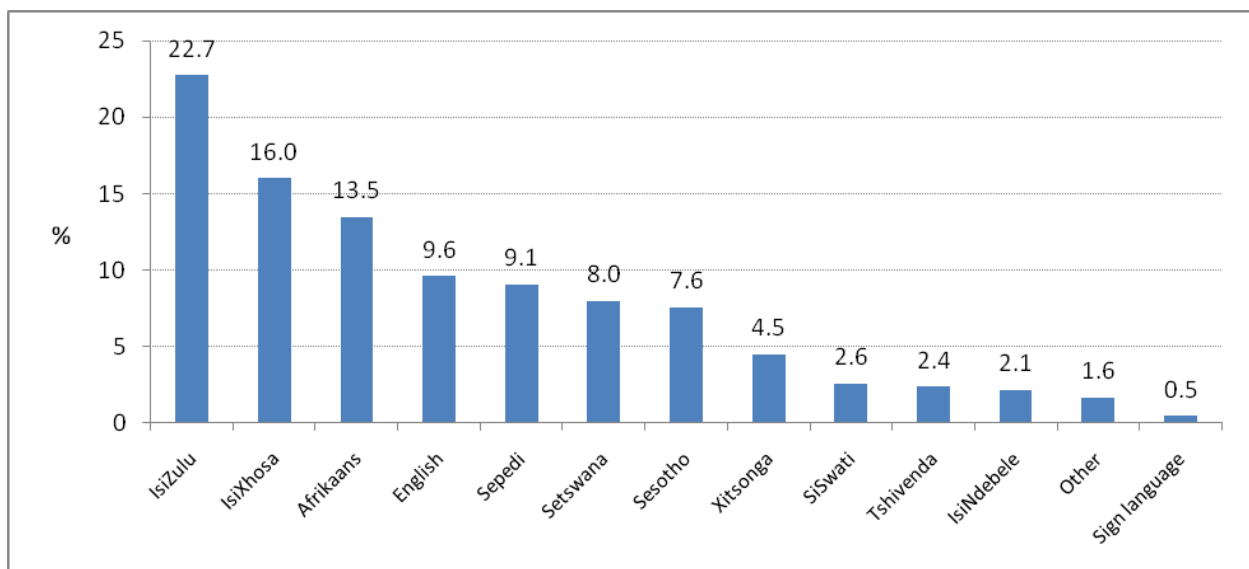


Figure 2: Distribution of the population by first language spoken (percentage)-Census 2011  
Source: Statistics South Africa

According to the 2011 census, isiZulu is the most frequently spoken language by South Africa’s households followed by isiXhosa and Afrikaans. It is however interesting to note that South African Sign Language with its 0.5 percentage, is included in the 2011 census as a language used by the Deaf community in South Africa.

The capturing of this data demonstrates the government’s commitment to the democratic process espoused by the Constitution of South Africa. Hopefully the next census will also reflect other minority languages such as the Khoi and San languages which, unlike Sign language for the purpose of census, are still classified under other.

isiNdebele as a minority language portrays a marked improvement from 1.6 (2001) in figure 1 above, to 2.1 (2011) as reflected in figure 2 (Statistics South Africa).

The graph below indicates the actual numbers and relevant percentages in terms of the actual official languages spoken in South Africa, with South African Sign Language included, although not yet a recognised official language of the Deaf community in South Africa.

### 1.6 A graphical representation of 1996, 2001 and 2011 census (first languages)

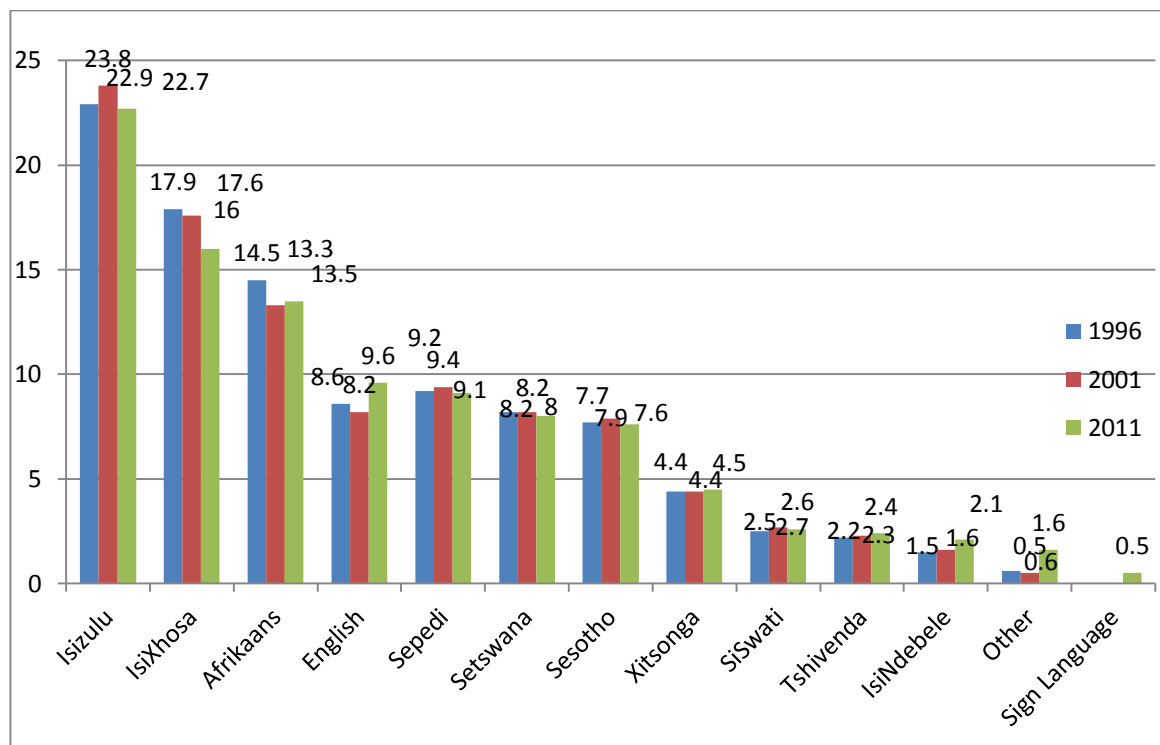


Figure 3: Distribution of population by first language (home language)

A comparison of the 1996, 2001 and 2011 census

Source: J M Mathibela (adapted from Statistics South Africa)

The graph in figure 3 depicts an alarming picture of the results of the 2011 census in terms of indigenous official languages spoken as home languages in South Africa.

A comparison of the census 1996, 2001 and 2011 in terms of home languages, indicates percentage decreases in terms of isiZulu (22.9, 23.8, 22.7), isiXhosa (17.9, 17.6, 16.0), Sepedi (9.2, 9.4, 9.1), Setswana (8.2, 8.2, 8.0), Sesotho (7.7, 7.9, 7.6), and SiSwati (2.5, 2.7, 2.5).

With the exception of SiSwati, which portrays a decline in terms of statistical data, there is however a marginal increase in percentage terms for the more marginalised languages.



Xitsonga increased slightly from 4.4 (1996, 2001) to 4.5 (2011), whilst Tshivenda increased from 2.3 (2001) to 2.4 (2011). The marginal increase could be attributed to population growth.

However, in the case of isiNdebele which portrays a marked increase from 1996, 2001 to 2011 (1.5, 1.6, 2.1), various reasons could be attributed to the increase.

This includes but is not limited to intensive awareness campaigns which were cooperative efforts of certain organisations. One such example is the 2008 awareness campaign that was a joint venture between the Pan South African Language Board, the Mpumalanga Department of Education (Nkangala District) and Dr J S Moroka municipality. The aim of the campaigns was to sensitize the communities about the value of isiNdebele as their cultural heritage.

Notwithstanding such improvements, the challenges are still enormous in terms of the actual language use and implementation of various governmental language policies and acts. Such challenges will form part of the discussions in the subsequent chapters.

The census statistics on English and Afrikaans on the other hand is also on the increase although Afrikaans has yet to reach and pass the 1996, 14.5 % mark. It has however managed to gradually increase from 13.3 (2001) to 13.5 (2011).

Conversely, English increased from 8.2 (2001) to 9.6 (2011), which is a relatively marked percentage increase given the prevailing challenge of the hegemony of English in South Africa.

## **1.7 The role of minority languages in South Africa**

A minority can be defined as “a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious, or (other) characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language” (Capotorti, 1979:7, as cited in Cenoz and Corter 2008:7). The definition by Capotorti therefore seems to be still relevant.

The deduction could be made that a minority language is a language spoken by a minority group in a multilingual country. In South Africa, however, " a typology has been constructed in terms of languages thus referring to them as either 'high status', 'low status' or 'endangered' languages depending on the situation" (Alexander, 2001:3).

Alexander (2001) gives two reasons for this preference. Firstly, that this was done to uphold the spirit of nation building in line with the constitutional aspirations and imperatives that support parity of esteem and non-discrimination based on linguistic inclination.

Secondly, this was done to redress the imbalances of the past in that the actual minority languages (English and Afrikaans) as indicated by the statistics in figure 1 above, portray characteristics of 'majority' languages according to sociolinguists and sociologists of language since they are dominant (Alexander, 2001:3).

The latter depict less percentages on the graph as compared to isiZulu and isiXhosa and yet play a dominant role in terms of status and use in high function domains. In terms of the sociolinguistics classification as indicated by Alexander (2001) English and Afrikaans are therefore 'high status' languages. This aspect is clearly captured in figure 3 above (1996, 2001 and 2011 census respectively) which clearly depicts the percentages of Afrikaans and English, as low compared to those of other official languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa.

The graphical representation in figure 3 portrays high percentages in terms of isiZulu and isiXhosa, yet in terms of use in high function domains, the dominant languages are English and Afrikaans. This explains why the Constitution of South Africa espouses parity of esteem for all official languages in South Africa.

## **2. Problem statement and research questions**

### **2.1 Problem statement**

Notwithstanding what the census portrays, the hegemony of English and its influence on the use of the specific languages as LoLT<sup>1</sup> in South Africa, is gradually leading to language shift.

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<sup>1</sup> LoLT is an acronym for the language of learning and teaching

Webb and Kembo-Sure (2000) attest that:

Language shift occurs when the speakers of one language begin to use a second language for more and more functions until they eventually only use the second language even in personal and intimate contexts (Webb and Kembo-Sure, 2000:13).

I postulated two hypotheses in an attempt to identify the attitude problem which forms the basis of this research. One hypothesis made in this research is that language attitudes may influence the choice of English as LoLT, thus promoting the hegemony of English in South Africa. Parental attitudes may play a critical role in this regard.

Similarly, negative attitudes towards isiNdebele may pose a serious threat to the development and promotion of the language. This action would relegate isiNdebele to a position of a subordinate language that is regarded as unsuitable for use in high function domains.

A further hypothesis is that mother tongue education is viewed in a negative light and seen as a measure that “denies blacks access to English and therefore to power and thus contributes to keeping the black population subordinate” (Webb, 1991:4). Such attitudes by parents, if prevalent, may deprive learners of the proven advantages of cognitive development and satisfactory scholastic performance which are associated with mother tongue education during formative years.

The problem is compounded by the multilingual situation in South Africa. The trend seems to be prevalent within the indigenous languages themselves, where more dominant languages in terms of development and acquisition seem to dominate the more marginalised and less developed indigenous languages, as might be the case with isiNdebele, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and SiSwati. Hence, besides highlighting issues regarding the hegemony of English, this research study will attempt to focus on how attitudes impact on the development and promotion of isiNdebele, one of the more marginalised official languages in South Africa.

The Language in Education Policy (1997:2) espouses additive bilingualism. According to the policy, “all learners shall offer at least one approved language as a subject in Grade 1 and Grade 2. From Grade 3 onwards, all learners shall offer their language of learning and teaching and at least one additional approved language as subject”.

This is the most controversial aspect of the policy because parents, who have the right to decide on the language of learning and teaching, especially in the primary schools, often opt for either early immersion or transit into English or any other language that is not a Home Language of the learners to be used as a LoLT. In some cases this might occur as early as Grade 1, in the Foundation Phase. The second language might be a dominant language in the area that is used as a LoLT for other learners at the school, as might be the case with isiNdebele learners.

This implies that learners are deprived of the opportunity to be exposed to cognitive development that is crucial to their development and success in education.

This research study endeavours to investigate whether this is the case with isiNdebele in the Libangeni area. The research will further investigate the attitudes of the isiNdebele speaking parents towards the use of a home language as a LoLT as espoused by the National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS<sup>2</sup>) of 2012.

The “National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement is a single, comprehensive, and concise policy document, which replaces the current Subject and Learning Area Statements, Learning Programme Guidelines and Subject Assessment Guidelines for all subjects listed in the National Curriculum Statements Grade R-12” ([www.education.gov.za/](http://www.education.gov.za/)).

This revised curriculum emphasizes the use of home languages as LoLTs in the Foundation Phase which implies that, all official languages could be used as LoLTs in the Foundation Phase.

In its attempt to investigate the attitudes of isiNdebele speaking parents towards the use of mother tongue as LoLT, the research will focus on a random selection of schools in the Libangeni Circuit, in Mpumalanga.

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<sup>2</sup> CAPS form part of the National Curriculum Statements Grade R-12, which represent a policy statement for learning and teaching in South African schools and comprises the following:

- (a) Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for all approved subjects
- (b) National policy pertaining to the programme and promotion requirements of the National Curriculum Statement Grades R-12, and
- (c) National Protocol for Assessment Grade R-12 ([www.education.gov.za](http://www.education.gov.za/))

Focus group discussions will be held with the members of the school governing bodies to determine their attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele, the dominant home language in the district, as LoLT in the schools.

## **2.2 Research questions**

The research will further endeavour to answer, inter alia, the following questions regarding parental attitudes towards isiNdebele language:

- What are the attitudes of parents in the focus area (Libangeni Circuit) towards the home language (isiNdebele) as LoLT?
- If attitudes are perceived to be negative towards isiNdebele as LoLT, what are the causes for the negative attitudes?

The questions that will be used as guidelines for discussions in the focus groups will be captured in Appendix A of the research. Appendix A will provide a more comprehensive number of questions to be used in this regard. Further than that, a focus group schedule, Appendix B, will also be included to indicate the discussion group schedule allocated for the various focus groups.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. Theoretical framework and literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the four main aspects intended to assist the researcher in the investigation of parental attitudes and perspectives towards isiNdebele as a language that could be used as the language of learning and teaching.

Firstly, the theoretical framework will ensure that the research is focused on attitudes. Secondly, the literature review will focus on the legislative imperatives that would set a stage for debate on language development and how attitudes would affect such development either positively or negatively. Thirdly, the focus will be on language planning and management that also has a bearing on attitudes.

Finally, the discussions will revolve around research findings as well as perspectives on language perceptions and attitudes in identifying and choosing the school language policy and ultimately the language of learning and teaching.

#### 2.2 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework positions one's research in a discipline within which one is operating. Henning et al (2004:25), liken it to 'lenses' through which one views the world depending on the topic and the type of inquiry, thus providing the stance the researcher adopts. It is worth noting that there are a large number and a wide variety of theoretical frameworks available to qualitative researchers.

According to Anfara and Mertz (2006:xxvii) a well-read qualitative researcher could apply theoretical frameworks from different disciplines such as economics, sociology, political science, psychology, biology, physics and others, as long as they are applicable to the research problem chosen.

For the purpose of this research study the theoretical framework will be applied from the perspective of sociolinguistics and related fields of research namely, language politics and language planning. Within this framework attitude studies are relevant research tools.

The effects of politics in society are evident once it becomes clear that the dominant language is used for all primary domains whilst the subordinate languages are relegated to a position devoid of high status function as was the case with the indigenous languages of South Africa in the previous dispensation.

The historical analysis of education in South Africa points to a period of an increase domination of minority languages by the other so-called majority languages in the country. The same principle seems to apply to the majority of indigenous languages that were exposed to domination by minority languages. This action led to increased socio-economic and attitudinal problems that affect policy implementation of mother tongue education in schools.

Although various factors come into play to support the statement, it suffices to note that all these political factors led to the imbalances in terms of the development of languages in the country.

Eric Hobsbawm's statement, quoted by Dan O' Meara, in his paper presented at the inaugural conference of the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust at the University of Western Cape, seems to hit the nail on the head when he categorically states that, "nations do not create themselves but are created by their enemies." He further states that:

without British colonisation; without extraordinary insensitivity of white English speakers to the Afrikaans language; without the deaths of 25,000 Boer women and children in British concentration camps in 1900-1902 without the exclusion of Afrikaans speakers from effective participation in the capitalist economy, there would probably have been no Afrikaner nationalism (O'Meara 1997:14).

Conversely, one could also unequivocally take it further and state that even separate development policies that resulted in linguistic, socio-economic and political exclusion of blacks in South Africa, would not have been initiated had events not unfolded as they did in South Africa.

The observations made by O' Meara could best be illustrated by events that led to the 1976 Soweto Uprising, that were fuelled by the learners' refusal to use Afrikaans as a language of learning and teaching.

Afrikaans was associated with oppression and domination of the majority in the country, hence the revolt.

Besides regarding changes influenced by the economic, societal and political climate of the time as some of the factors that influenced the uprising, Ndlovu further cited as one of the underlining factors:

the ideological role of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at selected schools, coupled with educational, epistemological and pedagogical factors that seem to have fostered resistance through the 'autonomous' actions of parents and students. (Ndlovu 1998: 317)

History seems to have repeated itself in terms of language domination in this regard. The result was that some learners lost their lives, whilst others disappeared mysteriously without trace. The Hector Pieterse Museum attests to the results of language domination.

According to the Hector Pieterse museum, “ On 16 June 1976, Soweto high school students took to the streets in a peaceful protest against the mandatory use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction in black secondary schools.

On the way to the stadium the students were met by police, who ordered them to end the march and disperse. A violent confrontation ensued, in which students threw stones and police fired shots. News of the events in Soweto soon spread, igniting uprisings around the country in which more than 550 people died. One of the first to die on June 16 was Pieterse” ([http://www.gauteng.net/attraction/hector\\_pieterse\\_memorial\\_and\\_museum/](http://www.gauteng.net/attraction/hector_pieterse_memorial_and_museum/)).

Besides investigating how politics of language might influence attitudes towards using isiNdebele as LoLT in the target schools, the research study will further assess how the implementation process (and/or failure thereof) in terms of the Language in Education Policy as well as the role of the School Governing Bodies, affect parental attitudes in this regard.



## **2.3 Literature review**

### **2.3.1 Legislative imperatives and regulations**

The research will take note of investigations undertaken over the years regarding the value of mother tongue education to learners, especially during the formative years.

It will further identify attitudinal factors that influence the implementation of the Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997 in schools.

Reference will also be made to both the national and international research findings regarding attitudes and how they might affect the use of a language as a language of learning and teaching.

It is however important to first briefly highlight the legislative imperatives that govern and support policy formulation in this regard.

#### **2.3.1.1 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**

The development of the Constitution of South Africa that came into effect in 1996 led to the promulgation of the Language in Education Policy in July, 1997. The Bill of Rights in Section 29 (2) of the Constitution states that:

Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable...taking into account equity (and) practicability...(The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:14).

The Constitution clearly states the right to education in all official languages in line with the Language in Education Policy of 1997.

#### **2.3.1.2 The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996**

The South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996 supports and authorises the School Governing Bodies to be actively involved in the education of the learners.

According to clause 6 (2) of the Act:

The School Governing Body of a public school may determine the language policy of a school subject to the Constitution, this Act and any applicable provincial law (South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996).

The amendment of the Act ensures that there be no discrimination and exclusion of learners in terms of language in schools.

Amendments were made through an insertion of section 6B as part of the South African Schools Act.

The amendment of the Act reads:

**Non-discrimination in respect of official languages**

**6B** The governing body of a public school must ensure that –

- (a) there is no unfair discrimination in respect of any section 21 (1) (b); and
- (b) the first additional language and any other official language offered, as provided for in the curriculum are offered on the same level (The Basic Education Laws Amendment Act No.15 of 2011:6).

### **2.3.1.3 The Language in Education Policy of 1997**

The Language in Education Policy of 1997, sub section 4.1.6, further states that:

The right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual. The right has, however, to be exercised within the overall framework of the obligation on the education system to promote multilingualism (Language in Education Policy 1997:3).

The implementation of the Language in Education Policy that espouses additive bilingual education is therefore in line with the Constitution of South Africa and the Bill of Rights.

### **2.3.1.4 Use of Official Languages Act of 2012**

The promulgation of the Use of Official Languages Act of 2012 is an attempt by government to indicate the political will in terms of raising the status of all official languages in South Africa thus ensuring parity of esteem.

According to section 2 of the Act, the objective is to:

regulate and monitor the use of official languages for government purposes by national government; promote parity of esteem and equitable treatment of official languages of the Republic; facilitate equitable access to services and information of national government; and promote good language management by national government for efficient public service administration and to meet the needs of the public (Use of Official Languages Act No.12 of 2012: 4).

The Use of Official Languages Act of 2012 therefore envisages creating a climate that is conducive to the effective implementation of the National Language Policy, in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. The emphasis is on the use of all the official languages of South Africa, taking into account equity and parity of esteem.

The Act, if well implemented, will enable not only the effective implementation of the National Language Policy, but also the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the implementation.

Although it is still premature to assess the implementation process pertaining to the Act, the research will, where applicable, investigate the parental attitudes of isiNdebele users in terms of LoLT in this regard.

### **2.3.2 Language Planning and Management**

The issue of language policy implementation is fundamental in language planning. The failure of a language policy to have outcomes envisaged by language planners, can in most cases be attributed to poor planning with regards to the implementation of the policy.

Implementation may be regarded as the most important aspect that would ensure the success of language planning. At the same time, one should not lose sight of the fact that this is the most problematic area of language planning, because it involves many detailed planning, inter alia: "...deciding on concrete steps, allocation of financial resources, devising time tables for completion, evaluation, enforcement, and cross-checking - and it may also 'even' involve a 'long view' of the process that may not outlast the impatience of politicians seeking quick fixes for a problem" (Schiffman, 2006:3).

Language planning according to Heugh et al (2007:19) could be understood to include three elements:

Status planning: - which involves decisions about which languages are to be used for high status functions like legislations (Acts of Parliament): national, regional and local government, in formal education etc.

Corpus planning: - which involves the development of written language (orthography, dictionaries, terminology development, standardization of the spoken forms in written form)

Acquisition planning: - which involves the development of language learning programmes, learning materials, and translation.

All these aspects, when correctly applied by language planners in South Africa could play a crucial role in ensuring that the indigenous languages of South Africa ultimately acquire parity of esteem.

This would lead to indigenous languages being used in domains such as education, politics, economy, technology and many other high function domains that would ultimately result in their being recognised as resources in the global village. The more marginalised languages would also benefit in terms of development.

These are some of the most critical aspects of language planning and management that need to be taken into cognisance by language planners in South Africa, to ensure that parental antipathy does not act against the objective of development and promotion of indigenous languages to the level of high function domains.

The Use of Official Languages Act of 2012 emphasises the establishment of language units in government departments as well as the monitoring of the use of official languages by national government. However, much still needs to be done in terms of implementation and language management to guard against attitude problems.

The Act further envisages addressing the issue of status language planning as alluded to by Heugh (2007). It is, in my view, imperative that all major role players must be actively involved in status, corpus, acquisition and all other aspects of planning such as prestige planning. However, as Heugh (2007) alludes, proper planning, including an implementation plan, monitoring and evaluation tool, must accompany the Use of Official Languages Act of 2012.

The decision by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, to make isiZulu a compulsory course for all undergraduate student, entails ensuring status language planning of the institution with regards to language policy implementation. Professor Renuka Vithal , (SAPA, Sunday Times, 18 May 2013), attest that "... in a country that continues to be divided on the basis of linguistic identities, languages should serve to bring diverse learning communities together and promote social cohesion " .

This action, will however, set a stage for further discourse around mother tongue education, multilingualism and language planning in South Africa.

Negative attitudes towards indigenous home languages still prevail in Africa today. This is evident from the fact that most ex-colonial countries prefer foreign languages (English, French and Portuguese) as LoLT in education. Introspection is needed and it may be ideal to re-consider the idea of decolonisation of the mind as suggested by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Wa Thiong'o, 1994).

Research further reveals that in the South African context various views are advanced regarding the preferred use of English as against Afrikaans. The latter is regarded as the language of oppression and an instrument used to promote and further the ideals of the apartheid system and its oppressive laws.

Contrary to this, English enjoys preferential treatment by various people whose sentiments are echoed by some linguists who indicate that English is being regarded as either "a language of unification and even of liberation" (Alexander, 1989:56), or "the vehicle of ideologies of freedom and independence" (Heugh, 1987:206), and "the symbol of liberal values and liberation" (Webb, 1991:4).

Notwithstanding the fact that other factors might have also influenced the process, it could be argued that the attitude displayed in such statements might perhaps explain why figure 3 of the 2011 census (as indicated in chapter 1 of this research), depicts a marked percentage increase of English as a home language, from 8.6% in 2001 to 9.6% in 2011.

A downward trend is however observed with most indigenous languages.

Conversely, one could further argue that language shift might have influenced the increase as more and more urban middle class blacks opt for English as a ‘lingua franca’ in their homes, especially where both parents could not speak the home language of the other partner. In such cases, English is used as a ‘home language’ for the sake of communication in both the home environment and in other more important sectors of the society.

This move might also have influenced the relative decline in percentage with regard to indigenous languages such as isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sepedi, Setswana, Sesotho and other more marginalised languages that portray a percentage decline in the 2011 census statistics. The impact of language shift, if any, should therefore not be underestimated in this regard.

The attitude problem is a major challenge to education and language planning in South Africa. This problem is compounded by the growing antipathy towards African languages which is a direct result of a policy which, according to Hartshorne, (1995:311) envisaged extending mother tongue as a language of learning and teaching beyond Grade 4 in the primary schools.

The attitude problem can be regarded as one of the major drivers in favour of English as a LoLT, thus promoting the hegemony of English in South Africa. The use of mother tongue as LoLT is seen in the negative light.

The situation is compounded by the multilingual situation in South Africa. In such cases language prejudice assumes a major role in the assessment of policies and their implementation.

### **2.3.3 Research findings on attitudes and choice of LoLT**

#### **2.3.3.1 Mother tongue education and language attitudes**

Researchers past and present have drawn a parallel between mother tongue education and cognitive development and hence overall ultimate performance of the learner throughout the latter’s education. The issue of policy and actual practice comes into play thus highlighting the importance of policy implementation.

Walker (1996) supports the call for innovative mother tongue education as advocated by UNESCO's Basic Education Division, because mother tongue education (MTE) provides efficiency to languages, and further enhances self-esteem and strengthens ethnic identity.

The research findings in an article by De Wet (2000) regarding the influence of attitudes on the choice of LoLT in South Africa indicate that the majority of learners and their parents reject their constitutional rights to mother tongue education.

This entails that research findings that attest to the value of mother tongue education, especially during formative years, are disregarded as English is perceived to be vital to economic and political empowerment.

Kamwangamalu (2004) further emphasizes the value of language in economic development. This, he argues, would yield positive results and return on investment if policy makers and language planners could ensure that language plays a key role in economic development and planning.

These aspects are key factors in language development as they impact on both policy making and policy review and ultimately economic development of the country.

Most developed countries in the world, such as for example Germany and China recognize the value of mother tongue in all sectors of the society and thus have a competitive edge in the global economy. Their languages are used in all important domains that contribute towards economic growth such as education, science and technology which are key factors to economic development.

Kamwangamalu (2004) attest to two factors, "the relevance of language as a defining element of economic processes such as production, distribution and consumption and the relevance of language as an element in the acquisition of which individual actors may have a good reason to invest".

Kamwangamalu (2009) further argues that "...for indigenous African languages to survive they must be given a share of the market value that ex-colonial languages have in the African linguistic marketplace"

Iyamu and Ogiegbaen (2007) report many challenges to mother tongue education faced by Nigerian schools that could be attributed to their religious and colonial past. Questionnaires on the issue of the implementation of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, administered to 1000 primary school teachers and 1500 parents of primary school children, revealed that both parents and teachers appreciate the value of mother tongue education. However, the findings further revealed that parents have negative attitudes towards their children being taught in the mother tongue.

The identified challenges in this case are a lack of suitable teaching materials as well as a need for a language that would both unify and satisfy the needs of all. The identified language for this purpose was again a colonial language.

One wonders if arriving at this decision might have been influenced primarily by the fact that Nigeria has many languages which might have led to the need to provide a middle ground for all languages. One therefore tends to think that in order to avoid the issue of ethnicity, parental choice might have inclined more towards opting for a colonial language to bridge the gap.

When parents deliberately disown indigenous languages their right to operate in important high function domains in society, their actions pose a serious problem in language development.

Thiba (2001) investigated language attitudes and practices of high school learners, educators and parents in the North West Province in South Africa. Parents and learners in selected schools in Mafikeng and Vryburg areas were interviewed regarding preferences for LoLT in terms of Setswana.

The results indicated preference for English as both a subject and as LoLT. Competency in English was once more cited as key towards success in giving learners a competitive edge in the global village. The issue of a successful and effective career path as well as economic emancipation attached to English as a language influenced the attitude of learners and parents towards Setswana as LoLT in this study.



A parallel can be drawn in this regard with isiNdebele which falls within the same category of official languages in South Africa. Not much has been done in the area of research on parental attitudes and the influence of such attitudes specifically on isiNdebele.

This research project therefore aims to contribute towards filling the gap in the existing body of research in terms of isiNdebele as LoLT in the primary schools.

The challenges facing isiNdebele are further compounded by the issue of language shift and the resultant dominance by the more developed indigenous languages including Setswana.

Snayers and Du Plessis (2006) support the issue of mother tongue instruction as an important aspect in the effective implementation of bilingual education and cognitive development of learners in South Africa. The article further challenges the prevalent negative attitudes of parents and communities towards these languages.

### **2.3.3.2 Additive bilingualism**

Additive bilingualism refers to the practice whereby a Home Language (HL) is chosen as LoLT whilst an Additional Language(s) (AL) is added on and used as a subject.

Pluddemann (2010), in his presentation in the Department of Basic Education Colloquium on Language in the Schooling System, defines additive bilingualism as “the process of maintaining and developing the learner’s best-known language(s) while other languages are added on”. (Pluddemann (2010:3) in Report of Colloquium on Language in the Schooling System unpublished.)

Pluddeman further supports the offering of mother tongue based education (MTE) in the first six years of schooling to ensure a sound foundation in the Intermediate Phase, especially with regard to the First Additional Language (FAL). Banda (2000) also discusses the position of mother tongue in terms of additive bilingualism in South Africa. His study focuses on sociolinguistics, cultural and political factors that influence the implementation of additive bilingualism and hence the Language in Education Policy.

Perceptions of black South Africans towards language and education are discussed within the perimeters of eleven (11) official languages that must be taken into consideration in the implementation of mother tongue education.

Banda argues that South Africans need to strike a balance between negative perceptions towards home languages and the need for excellent performance in the classroom.

He further argues that a language in education policy should “ensure that each language plays a facilitative role rather than a displacive (sic) role [...], (and) that bilingual programmes should evolve out of the geo-political, socio-economic and educational needs” of the country (Banda, 2000:63). This supports the need assessment that will ensure proper language planning and management as discussed previously.

In his article addressing mother tongue education or bilingual education in South Africa Balfour (2007) highlights the need to change the approach towards debates in this regard. The article therefore addresses the debate from the perspective of “educational imperatives in relation to theoretical, socio-geographic and socio-economic contingencies that affect their sustainability”.

### **2.3.3.3 The National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)**

The curriculum and policy review which brought about the emphasis of home languages in the Foundation Phase in recent years seems to indicate that there is a change of perception in terms of the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools.

The decision taken by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa, to review the curriculum policy and introduce and/or offer the First Additional Language (FAL) alongside the Home Languages (HL) in the Foundation Phase, could be viewed as an attempt by the department to implement additive bilingual education in line with the Language in Education Policy of 1997.

In most schools where the home language of the learner is an indigenous (African) language, the preferred choice of FAL is English in Foundation Phase.

Pluddemann (2010:18) argues that the advantage of introducing FAL in Gr 1 could be the provision of a good foundation for late-transit model (to English from Gr 7). This he reckons will succeed on condition the teaching of FAL is effective.

According to the CAPS departmental policy, the transition however takes effect at Grade 4 (Intermediate Phase) level rather than at Grade 7 (Senior Phase) level as recommended by Pluddemann. The early rather than late- transit model has been adopted.

Although the introduction of a FAL<sup>3</sup> would expose the learners to a second language (English) at an early age in preparation for the Intermediate Phase where English would be used as LoLT<sup>4</sup> for all content subjects, the department should however ensure that the merit of this action does not have a deterrent effect towards the development and promotion of indigenous languages in South Africa.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, research indicates that the value of mother tongue education, especially during the formative years, cannot be over-emphasized. Parental attitudes towards the indigenous languages, however, play a crucial role in ensuring that indigenous languages are used in high function domains such as in the education sector. Hence, it is imperative to investigate the parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as LoLT in this research.

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3. The First Additional Language refers to a language which is not a mother tongue but which is used for certain communicative functions in a society, that is, medium of learning and teaching in education (CAPS intermediate Phase: 8)

<sup>4</sup> LoLT is the acronym of the language of learning and teaching. It is the medium of instruction chosen by the school, and may not necessarily be the mother tongue of the learner. Home Language and First Additional Language are the levels at which the language is taught as a subject.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. Research Design Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the research method that will be used in the investigation of the identified problem statement to achieve the envisaged goal.

A qualitative research approach will be adopted to examine the attitude of parents towards using isiNdebele as LoLT in the primary schools in Libangeni. A qualitative research methodology is selected because it could be used to examine amongst others in-depth perspectives, attitudes and complexities in a particular situation (Barnett, 2002).

A focus group method will be applied in data collection to ensure maximum participation and involvement of the school governing body members who will represent parents in the Libangeni circuit. Interviews will be conducted to a certain extend during focus group meetings to determine parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele in education.

#### 3.2 What is a focus group?

##### 3.2.1 Brief overview of the focus group method

Focus groups are more recent methods of data collection that are used in social science research alongside surveys, questionnaires and one-on-one interviews. They are popularly used by marketers in the economic sector as well as politicians interested in responding to the needs of the people in terms of service delivery.

Focus groups were initially used as one of the methods of data collection that could be used with either surveys or interviews. According to Barnett (2002), focus groups were sometimes used as pilot studies in preparation for large-scale research where surveys and questionnaires were utilised for data collection.

Vaughn et. al (1996) quoted by Barnett (2002) espouse that “ it was not until the late 1980s and the early 1990s that the social sciences recognized focus group interviews as important data sources in themselves. However since then, the method is increasingly used.

### **3.2.2 The Focus group method**

A focus group method is an effective tool used to assess attitudes in a given situation, especially with regards to interviewers using open-ended questions.

Barnett (2002:1) alludes that it serves to “...investigate concerns, experiences, or attitudes and /or beliefs... thus explaining how stories, ideas, attitudes and experiences function within a certain cultural setting ...”

Kitzinger (1995:299), on the other hand, purports that the technique can be viewed as “... a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between research participants in order to generate data.”

Kitzinger (1995:299), further argues that in cross-cultural research within ethnic minorities the technique is “particularly sensitive to cultural variables”.

In the same vein, while utilising this method, I would attempt to identify dominant cultural traits of isiNdebele such as values, norms and standards as well as traces of feelings and/or attitudes that might be prevalent in the selected targeted groups.

This research will further try to identify traces of deviant values and norms that might not necessarily be regarded as such by the group but might actually be deviant in terms of the isiNdebele cultural values and norms, especially when such deviant norms apply to prejudice against subordinate minority languages.

Such norms might portray some influence on the relationship that exists between isiNdebele and other indigenous languages that might be prevalent in the designated research area. Such behavioural patterns are sometimes observed amongst indigenous languages that display dominant characteristics towards the under developed and more marginalised indigenous languages.

The classification of such languages as comparatively more developed in terms of certain norms and standards, might sometimes evoke attitudinal behaviours towards the use of the under developed languages in high function domains.

The field work and focus group method will therefore assist to access whether such practices are prevalent within the targeted Libangeni schools.

### **3.3 Participative method**

In a focus group setting, participants are encouraged to interact. Contrary to an interview situation where a researcher would request each person to respond to specific questions, in this particular case the researcher would encourage participants to engage actively in discussions in terms of “exchanging anecdotes, asking questions, sharing experiences and commenting on each other’s experiences and points of view” (Kitzinger, 1995:299).

The participative method will be operative in this regard. This interaction will hopefully fuel lively discussions that would be beneficial to the research thus unravelling according to Kitzinger (1995) the mystery posed by three important questions “*what* people think, how they think and the reason *why* they think that way”. It is important in this research to gauge the attitudes of the people towards their language.

### **3.4 Parental involvement and the focus group method**

This method can be used by both the quantitative and qualitative researchers in the process of data collection. The suitability of this research technique for the assessment of the parental attitudes in schools in Libangeni cannot be questioned. The added advantage of this method is that it does not discriminate against the illiterate and further serves to encourage maximum participation from all involved.

In a quest to create a homogeneous environment, I will strive for homogeneity in terms of focus group participation by capitalising on shared experiences of the target group. It is important to note that the composition of the school governing body is three pronged namely the parents, the educators and the learners.

However, this applies mainly to the secondary schools, whereas in the case of primary schools only the educators and parents form part of the school governing body (SGB).

In both cases the parents constitute 51% of the total membership of the SGB. The percentage share is indicative of the fact that parents are critical stakeholders in terms of decision making in the school governance. This explains why the SGBs and parents form a critical strategic part of this research with regards to parental involvement.

In terms of school governance, members have the same understanding with regards to decision making and other related issues of governance. Such an understanding creates a homogeneous environment suitable for the operation of focus groups in a given situation, irrespective of the level of education of the targeted group.

According to (Stewart et al, 2007:44), the use of focus groups alone can be a sufficient basis for decision making, in situations where there is reason to believe that the group of people and/or population of interest is relatively homogeneous, at least in respect of the issue at hand. This is achieved through random sampling of a group that is representative of a larger population. In terms of this research, the school governing bodies in Libangeni are regarded as the acceptable respondents' representative of the isiNdebele speaking population in the area.

Parents will be guided and capacitated with regard to understanding the implications of the language policies, language acts, and regulations operative in school governance. The Language in Education Policy of 1997 and other related acts and regulations, will serve as a point of reference in this regard.

One will however guard against external influence on their responses to questions and/or participation in group discussions. This will be the most challenging aspect of the focus group method.

It is imperative to guard against outside interferences and influences that might influence the flow of discussions in focus groups.

The main purpose is to ensure that research findings reflect the unique outcomes pertaining to the attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as LoLT in Libangeni. The result should in no way reflect bias.

### **3.5 Selection criteria**

The selection of participating schools will be done through random sampling of five primary schools in the Libangeni Circuit. This will be done through the assistance of the circuit management under whose jurisdiction the schools are located.

The sampling frame, which is made up of members of the school governing bodies in the targeted schools in the area, is representative of the parents, by virtue of the type of service they render in schools. It suffices therefore to view them as the appropriate sampling for the research objective aimed at studying the attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a language of learning and teaching in schools within the targeted area.

The researcher envisages that the outcomes of the research would be generalised as symptomatic of the researched topic and hence representative of the attitudes of the targeted population (isiNdebele speakers) in this regard

### **3.6 Target group**

The target group will consist of anything between ten (10) and thirty (30) people. This will accommodate flexibility since the number of focus group members might differ from school to school because of certain variables affecting these schools.

The target group will consist of the school governing body members of five primary schools in Libangeni. The group will consist of both the parent and the educator/teacher component. The expected number of participants given by the principals from the schools serving as research centres might therefore vary for various reasons, including but not limited to availability of all school governing body members in a group setting (Refer to Appendix B).



This entails that discussions will be held with selected parents and educators who are part of the SGB management.

Such members will therefore be expected to be involved in decision making in terms of policy making and other related important aspects of school management and governance.

This includes, but is not limited to, issues pertaining to the monitoring of the implementation of the Language in Education Policy that ultimately impacts on the development of the school language policies.

The development of school policies is one of the most important roles of the SGBs. This process gives guidance to the development, choice and use of the LoLTs in schools.

The Use of Languages Act of 2012 will also assist with the implementation process of mother tongue education.

### **3.7 Research Questions**

The research questions will be utilised as a basis to solicit answers from participants (Refer to Appendix A).

These open ended-questions will operate as guidelines to structured, focused discussions.

In an attempt to study the attitudes of isiNdebele speakers towards the use of their language as LoLT, it is therefore important to assess their feelings on very relevant topical issues in this regard.

### **3.8 The usefulness of focus groups in research**

Since this method will be utilised in this particular research study, it is imperative to examine both its advantages and disadvantages within the qualitative research fields.

Prior to discussing the advantages and disadvantages, it would be interesting to note its general usefulness as identified by Stewart et al (2007).

According to Stewart et al (2007:41-42), focus groups can be used to perform the following tasks:

- To obtain general background information about a topic of interest.
- To generate research hypotheses that can be submitted to further research and testing using more qualitative approaches.
- To stimulate new ideas and creative concepts.
- To diagnose the potential for problems with a new program, service, or product.
- To generate impressions of products, programs, services, institutions, or other objects of interest.
- To learn how respondents talk about the phenomenon of interest in order to facilitate the design of questionnaires, survey instruments, or other research tools that might be employed in more quantitative research.
- To interpret previously obtained qualitative results.

Focus group discussions regarding the introduction and emphasis of a home language as LoLT in the Foundation Phase could certainly evoke perceptions that would be of interest to the research topic.

It would be interesting to diagnose, as bullet four above indicates, any potential attitudinal problems that this process or service might bring about to the teaching of isiNdebele in the Foundation Phase in the Libangeni circuit.

On the contrary, it would also be interesting to investigate the merits identified by the focus groups in this regard.

### **3.9 The benefits of focus groups**

The benefits of the focus group method cannot be underestimated. This method is useful for the investigation of attitudes in a given setting.

This research will utilise the method because of the benefits attached to it especially with regards to attitudes.

In terms of benefits derived from this research method Stewart et al (2007: 42-43), identify the following:

- The method is a cost effective way of collecting data as compared to individual interviews.
- The participative method enables participants to create an ambiance for follow-up questions as a critical aspect in research.
- A rich amount of data is obtainable in the respondents' own words and the researcher is therefore able to obtain deeper levels of meaning, make important connections, and identify subtle nuances in expression and meaning.
- Focus groups create a synergistic effect in that respondents react and build on responses of other group members, thus effecting a unique data production.
- The flexibility of the focus group technique enables a researcher to use the method to research various topics in different settings.
- Data collection is made possible even from children, semi-literate and illiterate people.
- The results obtained in such a way are extremely user friendly and easy to understand. This makes it easier for decision makers to understand the results and verbal responses.

The differences of opinion amongst group members assist researchers to identify how and why individuals either differ in opinion regarding certain matters, or reject particular ideas downright. Both verbal responses and the resultant outcomes are important in the achievement of the envisaged goal.

### **3.10 The demerits of focus groups**

Despite the advantages cited in using the technique, disadvantages are also prevalent. However, in spite of the disadvantages identified, the focus group method is still a popular method of studying attitudes within the social qualitative research arena.

The critical factor that the researcher needs to guard against is to ensure that there is no bias in terms of results obtained.

This pertains to situations where, in the process of seeking consensus on a particular topic, the researcher might unwittingly influence the outcomes in terms of the provision of clues and/or guidance about the type of envisaged or desired outcomes. This refers to what is sometimes called giving pointers or leads to interviewees.

Trying to avoid being entrapped by such shortcomings, will therefore be top priority in this research. This is however the most difficult part of the research since it requires more objectivity in terms of ensuring less external influences on the desired outcomes of the research.

### **3.11 An interview guide**

In order to embark on a successful interview one needs to develop an interview guide. The purpose of this exercise is to provide guidance during group discussions. Focus groups are conducted using a discussion guide (Morgan, 1989; Stewart, 2007).

This is a valuable tool that is used in a quest to achieve consistency in data collection. Utilising it keeps the focus group discussions within the designed parameters that contain topics the researcher envisages to cover. It further assists in ensuring that all important features relevant to the objective of the research are covered. All discussions will therefore be directed towards parental attitudes towards isiNdebele in this regard.

The timeframes allocated for each section serve as a yardstick to measure the amount of work covered in each section. The researcher is hence expected to ensure that there is a homogeneous approach to all targeted research fields. This implies that an element of homogeneity or consistency would be expected to be prevalent within the targeted schools and school governing bodies in order to portray the envisaged outcome.

The research questions in Appendix A will be a useful tool to be used to ensure consistency in different focus groups in this regard.

An interview guide could also be referred to as a discussion guide because it helps facilitate the discussions through outlined relevant topics. A well-structured guide will therefore result in a logical flow of the discussion.

This will presumably culminate in the creation of an environment which will display consistency within the different groups in terms of topics discussed although the groups will not necessarily be gathered in one location.

The schools in the Libangeni area are a classic example of this. The researcher will visit each school per appointment. This entails that a schedule for fieldwork will be developed complete with time allocation or slot for each visit. Reference is made in this regard to the Focus Group Schedule that was developed for the purpose of this research. (Refer to Appendix B).

A set of questions that will be used during discussions and/or interviews has been developed in chapter 1 (see Appendix A). This will ensure homogeneity in terms of the answering of questions since the same model will be adopted by the researcher throughout the fieldwork and implementation process.

### **3.12 The process of conducting a focus group interview**

The process of conducting a focus group interview will entail planning and organising prior to the actual interviews.

The most critical features in such planning will revolve around the composition of the group, its size, the type of questions asked to obtain effective results, the role of researcher (facilitator) and the time allocation for discussions.

### **3.13 Questions and answers**

In line with the requirements of the focus group method, the preparation of thought provoking questions is imperative to achieve the desired effect. The formulation of questions should be in line with the aim and purpose of the research. (Reference is once more made to Appendix A).

Thought provoking questions will probably result in the application of analytical skills that would evoke further clarity seeking questions.

Such questions will stimulate discussions during the interviews and thus create an environment conducive to further elaborations and clarifications of important aspects of the research. The questions will be open-ended to ensure the interviewees are given opportunities to apply their minds.

The researcher should capitalise on limiting interruptions during questions time. It is advisable to reserve pertinent questions and follow-ups for an opportune time when the respondent has finished talking. To uphold the credibility of the research, participants must be able to finish their thoughts without external interruptions.

The art of good listening skills and note taking on the part of the researcher will be paramount to reaching the desired effect.

It is therefore imperative to steer the boat towards the anchor without causing shock waves that will disturb the current flow of discussions, whilst at the same time guarding against external influence on such discussions. The art of interviewing must therefore be well mastered because it can either make or break the whole process.

### **3.14 Planning to conduct focus groups**

#### **Research purpose**

These important aspects that will provide direction to this research were discussed in chapter 1 and hence, preclude the need for further discussions.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

The focus group method is a suitable method to be used when conducting research in communities. In most cases parents are either semi-literate or illiterate. Hence, the method is a valuable qualitative research tool to be used in data collection.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. Data Collection and Data analysis

#### 4.1 Data collection

##### 4.1.1 Introduction and background

The focus group method of data collection was used to collect data. Permission was obtained from the District Manager of Nkangala District, the Circuit Manager of Libangeni and the principals of the targeted schools. Five schools participated as the research fields for the purpose of this research.

##### 4.1.2 Selection criteria

The selection process was done through random sampling of five schools through the assistance of the Circuit office. The selection criterion was that participating schools should offer isiNdebele as either a subject and/or a language of learning and teaching.

The research field covered villages such as Loding, Segoko and Vaalbank. The demographics in the area are mainly isiNdebele and Sepedi while Setswana is spoken to a limited extent.

##### 4.1.3 Target group

The selected participating schools were Makhosoke 1 Junior Primary, Loding Primary, Semonate Combined, Sisisizwe Primary and Mbulawa High School. Makhosoke 1, Mbulawa and Loding schools are situated in Loding village while Semonate is situated in Segoko and Sisisiwe in Vaalbank. Although the focus of the research was on the primary schools, I found it necessary to benchmark with the feeder high school to find out how the effects of attitude, whether positive or negative, can also affect the local high school that offer isiNdebele in the area. Mbulawa High school was therefore included for the purpose of benchmarking in this regard.

#### **4.1.4 Focus Group composition and size**

A total number of five groups participated in the focus group discussions. The focus group size ranged from three (3) to ten (10). A total of 32 respondents participated in the research.

The School Governing Body (SGB) composition consisted of the teacher component, which in most cases included the principal and the educators serving in the SGB. The parent component consisted of the elected members of SGB from the neighbouring communities.

The principals played a vital role in organising the meetings (refer to Appendix B).

Although meetings took place mainly in the afternoon, parents were encouraged to attend such meetings.

#### **4.1.5 Challenges faced during data collection**

The process of fieldwork and data collection did not go without challenges and delays since the time scheduled for field work coincided with the national general elections of the new school governing body members. The process had to be deferred until the new members were inaugurated into office.

During the focus group discussions in one school, only teachers were available for discussions. Nevertheless, the objective of the focus group was reached because the teachers were themselves members of the schools governing body and were therefore familiar with issues pertaining to attitudes from both angles. However, it was regrettable that the parent component of the school governing body was not available for the focus group discussions.

Notwithstanding the support provided by principals in arranging focus group meetings, poor attendance became a challenge in certain areas. In yet another scenario only two members attended the meeting; a teacher from one of the local high schools and a member of the school governing body representing the parent component. The two were invited to join the local neighbouring participating primary school, to enable them to discuss their views in a normal focus group setting in terms of numbers.



#### **4.1.6 Brief historical background of Loding village**

This historical background serves to give a better understanding of the research field in which most targeted schools are situated. Loding is a village in Mpumalanga which is shared by people of Ndebele, Pedi and Tswana origin.

The land was acquired from a certain Mr Opperman, as a joint venture by all the chiefs in the area.

Although this became a communal village owned by the different chiefs, the Sepedi language seems to have dominated all languages because of various factors. This included the fact that isiNdebele in particular was not a written language. The language was less developed and without an orthography. This domination still continues even today.

This is however a place where the Manala clan, under chief Makhosoke 1, came to settle when they moved from Wallmansthal near Pretoria.

The Tswanas also came to settle in the area because they were interested in harvesting 'lodi', a type of vegetation that grows in the area that was used to make ropes. This explains why the area is named Loding.

Segoko is a neighbouring village close to Loding, where most of the Tswanas settled. Semonate Combined School is situated in Segoko, however, the rest of the schools that form part of the research field are situated in Loding with the exception of Sisisizwe which is situated in the nearby Vaalbank Township, in Libangeni.

#### **4.1.7 Group 1: Makhosoke 1 Junior Primary**

##### **4.1.7.1 Introduction**

Five focus groups were identified to discuss the attitudes of parents in the targeted area. Data collection will be followed by data analysis to assess the impact of attitudes, whether positive or negative, on the use of isiNdebele as a subject or as a LoLT in Libangeni circuit.

Makhosoke is a Foundation Phase school that offers classes from grade R-3. The principal of the school availed herself to participate in the focus group discussions.

Three educators formed part of the teacher/educator component of the SGB whilst six members constituted the parent component. Seven members including the principal attended the focus group discussions. One educator and one parent were absent.

Data collection will be followed by data analysis to assess the impact of attitudes, whether positive or negative, on the use of isiNdebele as a subject or as a LoLT in Libageni circuit.

#### **4.1.7.2 Method**

The focus group discussion, took place with maximum participation from all parties involved. The participative method was used and participants engaged in active discussions.

The use of indigenous languages encouraged all participants to be involved. The level of education did not pose any barriers, since the focus group method equally accommodates both the literate and semi-literate people engaged in group discussions.

The group's knowledge of issues pertaining to governance created a homogeneous environment conducive to robust discussions.

The interview questions were used to serve as a guide to the research, as well as to ensure a homogeneous approach to the research problem in all the focus groups.

The focus group participated actively and answered the questions in a manner indicative of the fact that they have a common ground with regards to the purpose of the research.

#### **4.1.7.3 Interview discussions**

The focus group identified various factors as the cause of negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT in this school. The interview guide and research questions were used to source information during focus group discussions.

The questions were answered as follows:

*(i) What are the attitudes of parents in the focus area, towards Home Language (isiNdebele) as a LoLT?*

The participants indicated that parents, in particular grand-parents, wanted their grand children to learn in their home language but, because of intermarriage and integration, it is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve this objective. Sepedi is a dominant language in the area and the working fathers do not get enough time to bond with their children.

This leaves the mother in a more influential position to decide on the home language spoken in the home. This however ultimately creates negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

*(ii) Are the attitudes positive or negative?*

The attitudes of parents appear to be positive on the surface, because according to the principal, 90% attend parents' meetings where they are encouraged, by the principal and the SGB, to register children in classes where isiNdebele is used as a LoLT.

The principal further indicated that, parents all agree in principle that this action will assist in the development of the language. The challenge is that when they register the learners in Grade R -3, they prefer to revert back to registering them in classes using Sepedi as a LoLT. This indicates that they have negative perceptions towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

*(iii) What causes the negative perceptions of Home Language as a LoLT, if any?*

Participants identified the following factors:

- **Intermarriage**

Intermarriage has a deterrent effect on the development of isiNdebele in Libangeni. The elderly support the development of isiNdebele, but intermarriage introduces its own challenges.

This results in negative attitudes towards isiNdebele, displayed at an early age, by both learners and parents who could not speak the language.

The effects of intermarriage when ill-channelled might result in barriers that affect language development.

In Libangeni area intermarriages exist between isiNdebele speakers and people speaking indigenous languages such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, Xitsonga, Sepedi and Setswana. Although this could have created a vibrant multilingual environment, it has instead impacted negatively on the development of isiNdebele.

The children from such relationships in most cases speak the ‘mother tongue’. In this context mother tongue refers to the home language spoken by the mother that would not necessarily be isiNdebele.

The challenge is that in most cases the whole family usually adopts such a language as a ‘home language’ used for purposes of communication within the family and in all spheres of society. This ultimately impacts negatively on the choice of a LoLT in the Foundation Phase.

One respondent quoted the Chief’s (Ngwenyama) remarks in a gathering where such challenges were identified and discussed referring to the challenge as, the question of fulfilling the expression “Kgodu e botse e tswa lerotseng.” This is a Sepedi idiomatic expression which could be loosely translated as ‘the best juice comes from the squash melon.’

This proverb was used to refer to the fact that women bond very well with children. Such a bond influences the language the child would learn to speak for communication purposes.

The influence of the mother to the child during cognitive development is therefore immeasurable, unless the other partner plays an active role.

This is aggravated by the fact that most mothers falling in this category, are basically monolingual and not multilingual as might be the case in most urban environments.

The participants agreed that intermarriage is valuable but it should not be done at the expense of the cultural heritage of the Ndebeles. They laid emphasis on the value of culture and language, since language forms a very integral part of any culture.

Intermarriage is therefore regarded as the main cause of negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT, because it influences the isiNdebele speakers to speak other languages at the expense of isiNdebele. This ultimately impacts negatively on the choice of a LoLT in the Foundation Phase. The benefit of being multilingual turns into a setback for the development of isiNdebele as a language.

- **Enrolment**

The enrolment of learners in Libangeni schools creates a further challenge. The situation is aggravated by parents whose home language is not isiNdebele, although in terms of demographics such families are categorised as Ndebeles. The choice of a home language for learners proves to be a challenge in this regard.

Parents from such families enrol the learners in classes using a different LoLT to isiNdebele. Such practises can be observed as early as the Foundation Phase level.

The two-way immersion seems to aggravate the situation since the learner will be faced with a choice of more than one language that could serve as a LoLT.

Since the Language in Education Policy allows learners to choose their own LoLT, the parents who represent minor learners in the Foundation Phase make such decisions. In many instances, the choice displays a level of negative attitudes and perceptions towards isiNdebele, since the language preference in terms of the LoLT becomes ultimately Sepedi.

- **The language medium used in pre-schools**

Participants regarded the LoLT used for communication in pre-schools as a major problem. Most crèches in the area use Sepedi as a LoLT during pre-school. Parents enrol their children in pre-schools to prepare them for Grade R.

Since the pre-schools use either Sepedi or Setswana predominantly as their LoLT, isiNdebele speaking parents who enrol their children in such pre-schools unwittingly prepare their children to offer Sepedi as a LoLT in Grade R, once the children are school ready.

Lack of facilities offering school readiness in isiNdebele is another major challenge in this regard. Further than that, the challenge faced by isiNdebele speaking parents is that the pre-schools are independent institutions that are privately owned as business entities. Since they are not government institutions, there are no regulations governing their existence other than that of the private sector. It is therefore difficult to either choose or enforce the use of isiNdebele in this regard.

The use of other languages in kindergartens therefore impacts negatively on the attitude of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

The participants are of the opinion that the communities should open up crèches that would use isiNdebele as a LoLT. They believe that this action would encourage parents to enrol learners in isiNdebele classes in Grade R, because they would have undergone school readiness using isiNdebele as a LoLT.

- **The multi-grade system in Grade 1-3**

The choice of a LoLT made by parents of minor learners has a negative impact on the development of isiNdebele. The enrolment becomes skewed, such that more learners enrol for Sepedi, whilst only a small number of learners enrol for isiNdebele.

The result is the creation of the system of multi-grading. Multi-grading occurs when learners belonging to different grades, are taught at different levels of grading in one class. This implies that Grade 1-3 learners offering isiNdebele as a LoLT may be in one class but be taught in different levels.

The group work method is applied as one of the methods of teaching multi-grade classes. The system of multi-grading has adverse effects on teaching since the learner does not receive the required time allocation per subject, for the specific grade during teaching.

This retards the progress of the learners in terms of the amount of work taught by the teacher per period.

Since isiNdebele is taught through multi-grading due to low enrolment numbers, the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT results in negative attitudes towards isiNdebele. The result is the choice of Sepedi as a LoLT in the Foundation Phase.

According to the SGBs who form part of the educator component in Makhosoke 1 Junior Primary, the isiNdebele speaking parents even remove the learners, who cannot speak Sepedi fluently, from the isiNdebele classes and enrol them in Sepedi classes.

Multi-grading is regarded as a set-back in education.

- **Performance of learners**

The cognitive development of learners is critical in the Foundation Phase. Parents are dissatisfied with the multi-grade system. They are of the view that teachers teaching multi-grade classes (Grade 1-3) cannot attain the Learning Outcomes (LOs) allocated for the specific grades, within the allocated time.

Some parents take drastic measures of removing learners from the class and requesting that they be placed in the Sepedi class.

Parents who force the learners to be taught in an unfamiliar LoLT believe that the learners will ultimately cope with the language, although their home language is isiNdebele. The advice provided by the principal and the SGBs is ignored in this regard. The performance of the learners is affected by such decisions. The parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT therefore impacts negatively on the performance of learners.

- **Parental perceptions and its effects**

Both the educators and the learners are affected by such parental attitudes and perceptions. Most parents in Libangeni area have the perception that isiNdebele is not suitable to be used as a LoLT; hence they prefer to enrol their children in Sepedi classes.

According to parental perceptions, in terms of quality education, using Sepedi as a LoLT is more advantageous to learners than using isiNdebele.

Parents seem to equate the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT with poor education. The use of isiNdebele as a LoLT, to some parents, is equivalent to denying the learners their rights to quality education. The perception of equating Sepedi with quality education has developed.

The result of such perceptions is poor performance, since the affected learners have to learn two foreign languages, the LoLT at HL level, as well as the FAL, simultaneously. Such perceptions further contribute to the increase in the level of illiteracy as portrayed by the Annual National Assessment (ANA) 2012 results, in literacy and numeracy.

The ANA results have over the years revealed that some learners could hardly read and write in their mother tongue (home language). The negative perceptions further add strains on the meagre resources that are available since, they create demands for more individual attention for learners who are under performing in terms of literacy. The competencies of such learners in both Sepedi and isiNdebele languages are highly affected and compromised.

- **Overcrowding**

The parental choice of a LoLT in the Foundation Phase results in overcrowding in Sepedi classes whilst the isiNdebele classes have fewer learners. In Makhosoke Junior Primary School for example, there is one Grade 1 isiNdebele multi-grade class catering for Grade 1-3 learners with an enrolment of 11 learners. On the other hand there are two Grade 1 Sepedi classes with the enrolment of 54 learners in each class. The choice and attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT therefore has a negative impact on the development of isiNdebele as a language.

- **Shortage of isiNdebele educators**

The schools in Libangeni circuit experience a shortage of educators who could teach isiNdebele. The low numbers of learners offering isiNdebele, result in educators being transferred to schools with high volumes of enrolment.



The decision by the Department of Basic Education to close the Ndebele Teacher Training College further resulted in the shortage of isiNdebele educators. Teachers trained at Ndebele College of Education have their own language challenges that will be discussed at a later stage.

The shortage of isiNdebele teachers results in negative parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT. Some parents regard enrolling a child in an isiNdebele class as tantamount to setting the child for failure.

The assessment requirements that expect learners to pass a home language in order to be promoted to the next level aggravates the situation of negative perceptions of the parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

The systems of redeployment of teachers seem to aggravate the situation because in most cases the redeployed isiNdebele teachers create a vacuum of teachers who are knowledgeable in terms of the teaching of isiNdebele. The ratio of teachers teaching Sepedi in Libangeni far exceeds that of those teaching isiNdebele.

Redeployment impacts negatively on the development of isiNdebele because; redeployed teachers are in most cases replaced by Sepedi teachers in accordance with identified needs. This process results in negative parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT. It further creates a perception that Sepedi is a dominant language that could be used in high function domains such as in education.

- **Environmental and societal influence**

The focus group cited environmental and societal pressure as some of the contributing factors that influence the attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT. Due to prevailing perceptions regarding the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT, parents influence each other in terms of preference and the choice of a LoLT.

The result of such preferences is reflected in the performance of learners. Such learners mix Sepedi and isiNdebele in their written work.

The teachers assist in placing the learners in the correct classes but the challenge continues, fuelled by environmental pressure and negative perceptions.

Some parents even request to have their children removed from isiNdebele classes and placed in Sepedi classes because of the attitude problem.

Sometimes children from one family offer different LoLTs in the primary schools because of parental perceptions that, one particular child will cope better in a Sepedi class than in an isiNdebele class.

A case of the Ndala (name changed to protect the identity of the child) children in Makhosoke Junior Primary is an example of such decisions. The parents removed a child in a class where isiNdebele is used as a LoLT and requested that he be placed in a Sepedi class irrespective of the child's home language, being isiNdebele.

In this particular case, two children from the same family are enrolled in different classes, one in the Sepedi class, another one in the isiNdebele class. The perception of the parents, who are Ndebeles is that, the child who is enrolled in the Sepedi class will perform better in that class, because he is not coping with isiNdebele, his own home language.

The intervention by the SGB and the principal did not achieve the desired effect in this case. The problem was compounded by the fact that in line with the Language in Education Policy, the choice of a LoLT for minors is the responsibility of the parents. The school management and the SGB could only advise the parents.

According to the principal, the decisions taken in parents meetings are not implemented. In such meetings parents agree in principle to enrol the learners in isiNdebele classes but in practice the opposite prevails. As a result of this only about 10% of the learners use isiNdebele as a LoLT, whilst 90% are enrolled in Sepedi classes.

Participants made an observation that it is ironic that the primary school, named after the chief of the Manala clan, Chief Makhosoke 1, should be 'promoting' Sepedi as a LoLT because of the parental attitudes towards isiNdebele

- **Urbanisation and migrant labour**

Political factors which gave birth to the system of migrant labour and urbanisation contribute to parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as LoLT. Libangeni is a rural area which supplies the neighbouring city of Tshwane with labourers.

The absence of the economically active men during the day or week, coupled with the distance travelled between work and home, resulted in women taking leadership roles in terms of assisting children with homework.

The challenge in this regard is that most women are of Pedi origin, married to Ndebeles. Such parents would prefer Sepedi as a LoLT, to enable them to assist learners with homework whilst their husbands are at work.

*(iv) Why is it important that each child should have a Home Language?*

The response was that each child should have a home language because it is important in terms of performance.

*(v) In your opinion is it correct to allow your child to be taught in your Home Language at school?*

The respondents are of the opinion that every child must have knowledge of his origin, cultural roots and cultural heritage. Language is part of one's cultural heritage. It is therefore important for a child to be taught in his own home language.

*(vi) At what level do you think the child should start being taught in Home Language?*

According to participants a child should start being taught in the home language from home and as early as Grade R in school.

*(vii) Are there any advantages/disadvantages in using isiNdebele as a LoLT in school?*

According to participants the merits of using isiNdebele as a LoLT are amongst others, the fact that the performance of learners from Grade R-12 will improve. The Language will develop and be used as a LoLT. The negative attitudes and perception that prevail now will disappear.

*(viii) Does your school have a language policy?*

According to the participants, the Language Policy of the school is isiNdebele and Sepedi.

*(ix) Which procedures were followed when the School Language Policy was drafted?*

The parents were involved in decision making through the active participation of the SGB in the formulation of the policy. A parents' meeting was called for the adoption and approval of the policy. The school management and the SGB ensured that the languages used as LoLTs are representative of the demographics of the Libangeni area.

*(x) Do parents play their role as stakeholders in decision-making regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools?*

Participants indicated that parents play their role in decision making because according to the principal 90% of the parents attend parents' meetings. The parents are therefore part of decision-making in this regard. The only challenge is in the implementation of the policy.

The problem that the school management and the SGBs identified is that, parents only agree in principle to the implementation of the policy, but in practice there is no buy-in from the community in this regard.

There are negative attitudes and perceptions that prevail in terms of using isiNdebele as a LoLT. Such attitudes defeat the purpose of promoting isiNdebele because the status quo is perpetuated, with parents continuing to enrol learners in Sepedi classes, where the LoLT is not isiNdebele. The promises made in parents' meetings are never fulfilled. Such negative attitudes and the resultant language shift affect the development of isiNdebele as a language.

*(xi) If the answer is yes, do they (parents) regard this as their responsibility?*

The respondents' answer was uncertain. Participants could provide neither a positive nor a negative answer simply because the enrolment in isiNdebele classes remained low. This implies that parents do not play their role effectively.

*(xii) If not, whose responsibility do you think it is?*

Participants agreed that it is the parents' responsibility.

(xiii) *Do you agree with this perception?*

The respondents agree with this perception because parental involvement is critical towards the development of a child, especially during the formative years.

#### **4.1.8 Group 2 and 3: Loding Primary and Mbulawa High School**

##### **4.1.8.1 Introduction**

The research field is an intermediate school situated in Loding village next to the neighbouring Mbulawa High School that serves as a feeder school for the combined school, in the Libangeni area. Five members of the SGB participated in the group discussions including two members from Mbulawa High School. Loding Primary School offers tuition for the Intermediate Phase learners from Grade 4-6.

##### **4.1.8.2 Method**

The method of data collection used in this regard was the focus group method. Participants were involved in focus group discussions that ensured participation of all involved.

The participants were SGB members from both the parents and teacher component. The interview questions were used to ensure active participation by all involved.

##### **4.1.8.3 Interview discussions**

The following interview questions were discussed:

(i) *What are the attitudes of parents, in the focus area, towards the Home Language (isiNdebele) as a LoLT?*

The participants are of the opinion that the parents dislike using isiNdebele as a LoLT, especially in the formative years. This reaction was unexpected since it became evident at the time when the use of home languages was re-introduced and emphasized by the Department of Basic Education.

Although this move is in line with the Language in Education Policy of 1997 and the reviewed National Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) of 2012, parental attitudes remained negative.

The negative parental attitudes that prevail in Makhosoke 1, directly affect the Loding Primary School in many respects.

More and more learners opt for Sepedi in the Intermediate Phase, thus impacting negatively on the enrolment of learners using isiNdebele as a LoLT.

At the time of this research (2012) the overall enrolments of isiNdebele in all the classes were as follows: Grade 4: 4 learners; Grade 5: 3 learners; Grade 6: 7 learners. The total enrolment for learners enrolled for isiNdebele in the whole school was 14.

However, not all the learners enrolled in these classes are isiNdebele speakers. There are for example isiZulu, SiSwati and Xitsonga learners that enrolled for isiNdebele.

Unlike in Makhosoke 1, the school does not practice the multi-grading system. Learners are offered isiNdebele during the period allocated for isiNdebele and therefore receive enough normal teaching time allocated for isiNdebele in line with the curriculum. Notwithstanding this positive factor, the enrolment of learners in isiNdebele classes portrays the effects of negative parental attitudes towards the language.

*(ii) Are the attitudes positive or negative?*

Negative parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT prevail in Libangeni.

According to the participants, the fact that parents are supporting Sepedi as a LoLT by enrolling learners in Sepedi classes when their surnames attest to the fact that they are isiNdebele speakers, portray negative parental attitudes.

*(iii) What causes the negative perceptions of the Home Language as a LoLT, if any?*

Various factors can be attributed to the negative parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

The following are some of the challenges highlighted by the respondents:

- **The shortage of trained isiNdebele teachers**

The shortage of trained isiNdebele teachers was again highlighted as one of the challenges faced by both parents and educators in the development and use of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

The late introduction of isiNdebele as a written language has a bearing on the negative attitudes of parents towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

Although the teacher responsible for isiNdebele in Loding is an Ndebele, she underwent teacher training in Setswana since the Libangeni area is close to the erstwhile Bophuthatswana. However, since isiNdebele is her home language she manages to teach isiNdebele.

- **Homework**

Parents cannot assist with homework because of the language shift that makes it impossible to practise multilingualism where Sepedi is a predominant language.

The issue of intermarriage that aggravates the situation was again highlighted in discussions. The parents who are not isiNdebele speakers, but have intermarried with the Ndebeles, are prone to influence the choice of the home language spoken by the family and ultimately the choice of a LoLT for learners.

Homework presents another identified problem. Parents cannot assist with homework, especially with regard to background knowledge of isiNdebele in terms of cultural norms and standards. To most parents oral knowledge and history is part and parcel of their cultural heritage, but they cannot assist with homework.

Illiteracy was cited as a barrier with regards to assisting with homework. Learners ultimately develop negative attitudes towards isiNdebele because of lack of parental involvement from illiterate and semi-literate parents who can only speak the language.

- **Lack of knowledge of isiNdebele**

Some parents, who were taught either Sepedi or Setswana at school, are themselves not competent speakers of isiNdebele and therefore cannot assist with homework.

The fact that the majority of isiNdebele speakers can only speak the language but cannot write it is a great challenge to the development of the language.

This entails that to the majority of people in Libangeni area, isiNdebele is mainly a spoken language. This results in negative attitudes towards its use as a LoLT.

- **Lack of parental involvement in policy-making**

The level of parental involvement varies from group to group. Participants in this group were not satisfied with the level of parental involvement in issues of policy-making.

Participants felt that due to the level of education and the fact that most parents are illiterate, they are not involved in issues of policy- making.

Parents do not attend parents' meetings in great numbers and therefore there is never any buy-in from parents in terms of policy-making and implementation.

The school management therefore practise a top down approach in this regard.

Lack of consultation and involvement, regarding issues pertaining to decision making may therefore be attributed to the negative perceptions of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

Parental involvement in critical decision making is imperative to the use of indigenous languages in high function domains.

Participants, however, demonstrated willingness to participate in decision making in future should they be given a chance.



- **Language domination and societal changes**

The society in which one lives determines the language one speaks. The environmental influence in terms of the language spoken in an area can therefore have adverse effects on the minority languages in a given setting.

Sepedi is a dominant language spoken in Libangeni area and because of negative perceptions towards isiNdebele the ultimate result is language shift.

According to respondents, societal changes and peer pressure result in negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

A case of cultural deviation was cited, where young single unmarried parents enrol their children in Sepedi classes although they themselves speak isiNdebele.

The surnames used for enrolment in such cases are those of the biological fathers of the children.

This is a deviation from the cultural norms because in line with the cultural norms and standards of most indigenous people, the children of an unmarried single parent takes the surname of the mother's family until the mother is married.

Although these are deviations from cultural norms, in terms of attitudes such cultural deviations indicate negative attitudes that exist towards isiNdebele both as a language and as a LoLT.

*(iv) Why is it important that each child should have a Home Language?*

According to the participants, a home language gives each child cultural identity and serves as a foundation of learning.

Further than that, a home language gives a learner the necessary competency that would maximize his potential and performance, especially in the formative years.

(v) *In your opinion, is it correct to allow your child to be taught in your Home Language at school?*

Participants responded that it is right although they indicated that children do not get any support from the parents in terms of assisting with homework.

(vi) *At what level do you think the child should start being taught in the Home Language?*

The participants agreed that home language teaching should start at home and continue through pre-school.

The participants further echoed the sentiment of the other SGBs, in highlighting the need to establish pre-schools that would offer isiNdebele as a LoLT to prepare the learners for Grade R. The current situation in pre-schools favours Sepedi as a LoLT.

(vii) *Are there any advantages/disadvantages in using isiNdebele as a LoLT in school?*

Participants identified various advantages of using isiNdebele as a LoLT.

- **Advantages**

The participants cited as an advantage the availability of a bursary scheme that offers assistance to learners who would like to further their studies specializing in linguistics.

The aim of the bursary is to develop isiNdebele. This is the outcome of a collaborative effort of the Mpumalanga Provincial government with relevant stakeholders.

Participants view this as a positive action that will encourage more publications and thus make isiNdebele sustainable.

The respondents further identified the need to protect the language and ensure that isiNdebele speakers have the opportunity to develop their own language through research to make it sustainable.

This action will guard against the commercialisation of the language at the expense of language users and knowledge holders.

*(viii) Does your school have a language policy?*

The language policy of Loding primary school is isiNdebele, Sepedi and English. It has been developed before the new members of the SGB were elected, including the teacher component whose members are relatively new.

Participants did not contribute in its development. According to participants the policy has not been translated into isiNdebele.

*(ix) Which procedures were followed when the School Language Policy was drafted?*

Since the language policy was developed a long time ago, participants could not comment on procedures that were followed.

In the discussions that followed, the participants indicated that Mbulawa High school's policy includes isiNdebele, Sepedi, Setswana, English and Afrikaans. The participants felt that correct procedures were not followed in drafting the policy, since all the feeder schools around Loding do not offer Afrikaans as a subject.

Participants regard this as an oversight, that when corrected could benefit all isiNdebele speakers in terms of performance in the Further Education and Training (FET) band.

The participants are of the opinion that learning Afrikaans will result in economic empowerment of learners, should the subject be introduced earlier in the Intermediate Phase. Participants are of the opinion that most isiNdebele speakers are competent in Afrikaans.

*(x) Do parents play their role as stakeholders in decision-making regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools?*

The parents (SGBs) do not exercise their rights in decision making because they are not knowledgeable regarding the existence of governance manuals. Access to such manuals will empower SGBs with the much needed information regarding decision making, as well as their roles and functions in governance.

Participants attribute lack of information and knowledge regarding the roles of the SGBs to the level of literacy as well as the leadership style of the school management.

The participants further indicated that lack of access to information might in some cases be regarded as a deliberate effort on the part of some principals, to keep the SGB members uninformed to avoid challenges.

Participants, however, agreed that access to information is a fundamental educational right and therefore photocopies of the manual need to be made available to SGB members to keep them informed and empowered. This will enable SGBs to play their role, of making meaningful contributions in discussions as important stakeholders in language policy development, decision making and school governance.

*(xi) If the answer is yes, do they (parents) regard this as their responsibility?*

Participants regard decision making as their responsibility but are of the opinion that there should be no barriers with regards to access to information.

*(xii) If not whose responsibility do you think it is?*

Parents agreed that decision making with regard to policy issues is their responsibility.

*(xiii) Do you agree with this perception?*

The respondents agree with this perception and further indicated that lack of knowledge serves as a drawback in terms of decision making and might create perceptions that will serve as barriers to isiNdebele language development.

#### **4.1.9 Group 4: Semonate Combined School**

##### **4.1.9.1 Introduction**

Semonate Combined School is situated on the border of Loding and Segoko villages. This is a combined school catering for isiNdebele learners in Grade 7-9. It is a combined school because Grade 7 forms part of the Senior Phase in the General Education Band. The school was selected to serve as a research field with the focus on grade 7.

However since language cuts across all barriers, discussions targeted the parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT which affected all grades irrespective of the target group.

#### **4.1.9.2 Method**

The focus group method was used to investigate parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as LoLT.

#### **4.1.9.3 Interview discussions**

The participants answered the interview questions that were used to source information as follows:

*(i) What are the attitudes of parents in the focus area towards the Home Language (isiNdebele) as a LoLT?*

Respondents are of the opinion that parents are not interested in isiNdebele because they enrol their children in pre-schools (crèches), Grade R and Grade 1 classes, that offer Sepedi as a LoLT. The foundation that is laid from the beginning is therefore defective. Participants agreed that such actions display lack of interest and negative parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as their home language.

*(ii) Are the attitudes positive or negative?*

The fact that the parents enrol their children in crèches that would lay a foundation that would not assist the learners in their future performances is an indication that the attitudes of the parents towards isiNdebele are negative.

*(iii) What causes the negative perceptions of the Home Language as a LoLT, if any?*

The participants indicated the following as some of the contributing factors towards the negative perceptions of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

- **Language domination**

The choice of a home language that would serve as a communication tool at home is very critical in language development. If not carefully managed, this might result in the creation of an imbalance that would result in the domination of one language at the expense of the others.

This will result in the language being regarded as a subordinate language. Language domination ultimately leads to negative attitudes towards the subordinate languages as is the case with isiNdebele in Libangeni.

### **Intermarriage**

The respondents indicated that intermarriage in itself is an important cultural practice that should be cherished. This should however not be done at the expense of language development.

The problem in Libangeni is that, it has become a barrier towards language development in terms of the isiNdebele language. The outcome of intermarriage in this regard has been the development of negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

- **Lack of promotion of value of multilingualism**

The participants agreed that it is important to use isiNdebele language as a LoLT in school, however; the value of multilingualism should be embraced in the process.

The participants further highlighted the fact that women have the key to the solution of the problems created by intermarriage. They indicated that women, who are married to the Ndebeles but could not speak isiNdebele, should be encouraged to learn to speak the language.

This would instil cultural pride in the children and create a multilingual society that would benefit the community.

Multilingualism should therefore be embraced as an asset, but not at the expense of the development of the isiNdebele language and culture.

Parents are of the opinion that the time is opportune for them to encourage children to learn and speak isiNdebele.

Parents believe that the introduction of isiNdebele as a LoLT and as a subject in the Foundation Phase is in line with the constitutional mandate with regards to the development of languages.

- **Migration**

According to the historical background as indicated in Chapter 1, after the division of Ndebeles into two main clans, the Manala clan came to settle in Wallmansthal, near Pretoria.

The Ndundza clan migrated to the east and settled in areas like Bronkhorstspuit and Belfast, in what is known as the Mpumalanga Province today.

According to the respondents, the Manala clan lived in harmony with the Tswanas and the Pedis in Wallmansthal.

The fact that the Manala clan, unlike the Ndundza clan, has been mixing with many other language speakers, had a negative impact on isiNdebele.

Sepedi and Setswana impacted negatively on isiNdebele, a subordinate language. With Sepedi being a dominant language in the area, this encounter resulted in language shift in favour of Sepedi.

The Ndzundza clan, on the other hand, is not as accommodating to people of other cultures and languages. They prefer to use their own language in communication. The major challenge was however that isiNdebele was just a spoken language until recently.

Both clans constitute the isiNdebele language group which is now plagued by negative attitudes especially in the Libangeni area.

- **Ignorance**

Participants highlighted the level of ignorance prevailing amongst the Ndebeles with regards to the challenges facing their language, especially in education.

Respondents further identified the need for awareness campaigns, to create awareness to communities regarding the plight of isiNdebele in the Libangeni area.

- **Over-accommodating**

Participants regard the parental attitudes towards isiNdebele that have resulted in parents enrolling their children in different classes other than isiNdebele classes, as over-accommodating other languages.

Parents are forced to waive their rights as isiNdebele speakers and through over-accommodating other languages in their development. The participants further regard lack of competent qualified teachers, who are trained to offer isiNdebele, as the main problem.

The type of LoLT used in teacher training colleges created a problem for isiNdebele speakers. Teachers trained using either isiZulu or Sepedi as LoLT regard both the spoken and written isiNdebele as difficult.

An in-service training is probably needed to capacitate teachers and ensure teacher development in terms of language development and methodology.

*(iv) Why is it important that each child should have a Home Language?*

According to the respondents a home language is valuable to teach a child about his origin and cultural heritage.

*(v) In your opinion is it correct to allow your child to be taught in your Home Language at school?*

The respondents indicated that a home language will lay a strong foundation for the child. It would further enhance the learner's competence and high performance. It would also enable teachers to teach across the curriculum.

*(vi) At what level do you think the child should start being taught in a Home Language?*

Participants responded that a child should start being taught in a home language from home and in kindergarten in preparation for school readiness in Grade R.



(vii) *Are there any advantages/disadvantages in using isiNdebele as a LoLT in schools?*

The participants highlighted the following benefits that could be derived from using isiNdebele as a LoLT:

- **Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET)**

The use of a home language as a LoLT will assist in the development of isiNdebele as a language. The ABET literacy classes will increase the level of knowledge of the parents to enable them to assist learners with homework.

The illiteracy levels will be reduced.

- **Culture and heritage**

The learner will be empowered to know their culture and heritage.

- **Performance**

Using isiNdebele as a LoLT will enable teachers to teach across the curriculum. Teaching content subjects like Mathematics and Science in isiNdebele will enable learners to comprehend the concepts. The performance of the learners will therefore be enhanced.

- **The economic value**

The participants also identified the potential economic value of the indigenous languages if they could be used in high function domains.

Using the indigenous languages in high function domains will add positive outcomes to the economy of the country as is the case with Afrikaans.

It will further raise the status of indigenous languages such as isiNdebele. The need to benchmark with Afrikaans in this regard was identified.

Participants further identified the disadvantages of not using isiNdebele as a LoLT as follows:

- **Lack of ABET resources**

There is no ABET programme available in isiNdebele in this area. The Khari Ri Gude mass literacy campaign that was started in 2008, is available in Sepedi and Setswana in Loding and Segoko respectively. There is a shortage of material and support in isiNdebele in Loding.

- **The level of literacy in home languages**

Participants highlighted the challenges that are caused by the lack of a strong foundation in home languages in the Foundation Phase.

This result in learners being unable to read and write in their home languages as revealed by the ANA results. The attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT aggravate the situation.

*(viii) Does your school have a language policy?*

The participants responded that the school indeed has a language policy. The language policy includes isiNdebele, Sepedi, Setswana and English. English is used for the purpose of official communication, for example in government circulars, policies and acts.

All other official languages are used for routine communication with parents and during visits and parents' meetings. Sepedi and Setswana are used interchangeably during meetings with parents. The policy is therefore based on three languages: English, Sepedi/Setswana and isiNdebele.

*(ix) Which procedures were followed when the School Language Policy was drafted?*

The SGB was involved in the drafting of the school language policy. The demographics of the area in terms of languages spoken by the communities were taken into consideration. A parents' meeting was called to adopt and approve the policy.

*(x) Do parents play their role as stakeholders in decision-making regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools?*

The participants responded that parents play their role in decision-making as stakeholders in the implementation of the Language in Education Policy, yet the enrolment in isiNdebele classes remains unchanged. The enrolment at the time of the research was as follows: Grade 7: 7 learners; Grade 8: 9 learners and Grade 9: 8 learners. These figures give us a total number of 24 isiNdebele learners in Semonate Combined School in 2012. Respondents believed that parents could clearly do more to ensure the improvement of the learner enrolment in classes where isiNdebele is either used as a LoLT or taught as a subject.

*(xi) If the answer is yes, do they (parents) regard this as their responsibility?*

The respondents were positive that parents regard this as their responsibility since they are involved in the SGB and attend parents' meetings. However, in practice this does not seem to be the case because, according to the respondents there is a prevailing situation of learners with Ndebele surnames who are registered in classes where Sepedi is used as a LoLT.

*(xii) If not, whose responsibility do you think it is?*

The respondents agreed that it is their responsibility as parents.

*(xiii) Do you agree with this perception?*

The participants agree with the perception that parental involvement is critical to decision making in school.

#### **4.1.10 Group 5: Sizisizwe Junior Primary School**

##### **4.1.10.1 Introduction**

The Sizisizwe Junior Primary School is situated in Vaalbank Township in Libangeni. The school offers isiNdebele from Grade R-3 and was selected to serve as a research field.

##### **4.1.10.2 Method**

The focus group method was also used for the collection of data in this research.

The interview questions were used as a guide to the researcher to ensure homogeneity in terms of the approach to the problem investigated.

#### **4.1.10.3 Interview discussions**

The interview questions were answered as follows:

(i) *What are the attitudes of parents in the focus group area, towards the Home Language (isiNdebele) as a LoLT?*

The respondents identified the parental attitudes as negative as reflected in the enrolment. Parents seem to follow the trend that prevails in other areas where, parental preference of a LoLT for most parents remains Sepedi rather than isiNdebele.

(ii) *Are the attitudes positive or negative?*

As already indicated the parents display negative attitudes towards isiNdebele as a LoLT.

(iii) *What causes the negative perceptions of Home Language as a LoLT, if any?*

Factors that contribute towards the negative perceptions of isiNdebele as a LoLT were identified by the respondents as follows:

- **Intermarriage**

Intermarriage is a cultural norm that brings with it the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism depending on the outcomes of the relationship. However, where one party remains monolingual, it becomes a problem. Sepedi is a dominant language in the Libangeni area.

In the case of intermarriages Sepedi seems to dominate as the preferred home language used for communication at home, irrespective of the fact that the real home language in most cases is supposed to be isiNdebele.

The only indicator that would point to the fact that the household is an Ndebele household would be the surname carried by the family of that particular household.

When the children are enrolled in school the parents (usually the mothers) enrol the children in classes where Sepedi is used as a LoLT.

- **Homework**

Homework forms an integral part of the learner's education. Participants agreed that both the parents and the educators are responsible for the education of the learner. They believe that parents should be responsible to assist learners with their homework.

Most isiNdebele speaking parents however, enrol their children to be offered Sepedi as a subject and as a LoLT from as early as the Foundation Phase.

Lack of self-confidence in terms of assisting learners with homework seems to be the main drive in this regard. Such actions are caused by various reasons that were cited by participants in previous group discussions.

Some parents who studied Sepedi at school for example, are comfortable with enrolling their children in Sepedi classes where they will be able to assist them with homework.

Since isiNdebele was only introduced as a written language in schools in 1985, most parents regard it as a difficult language compared to either Sepedi or isiZulu that they studied at school.

There are also cases of parents who are both Ndebeles but their preferred LoLT would be Sepedi. This is a clear example of negative attitudes towards isiNdebele that might lead to language shift.

Some learners who stay with grand-parents who speak Sepedi while parents are at work, also prefer Sepedi as a LoLT in order to get assisted with homework.

Finally, parents whose home language is Sepedi, perpetuate language shift which started in the home environment, in the classroom situation.

This becomes problematic in that it deprives the learner of his cultural heritage because of language shift.

Such parents display negative attitudes towards isiNdebele and influence the choice of learners in the Foundation Phase. As a result in most instances, Sepedi becomes the preferred LoLT for such learners in the Foundation Phase.

- **The multi-grade system**

In Sisisizwe primary school the multi-grade system is only practised in Grade R, where both Sepedi and isiNdebele learners share a classroom. The only difference in the system is that teachers are provided for both languages.

- **Low enrolment numbers**

Unlike at Makhosoke 1 the situation in Sisisizwe is different. The system of multi-grading is practised in R as already indicated.

Although the system of class teaching is adopted from Grade 1-3, however, the enrolment in isiNdebele classes is still low but relatively better compared to that of the other targeted schools. The Grade 1 class has seventeen (17) learners, Grade 2 eighteen (18) and Grade 3 fourteen (14) learners.

*(iv) Why is it important that each child should have a Home Language?*

The respondents indicated that it is important that each child should have a home language because it will enable them to know their culture and origin. Language is a legacy of one's cultural heritage. It helps define ones origin. It is also an important communication tool.

*(v) In your opinion is it correct to allow your child to be taught in your Home Language at school?*

Respondents agreed that it is important for a child to be taught in his/her home language because it will enhance the child's understanding of concepts and competencies and ensure high performance. The child learns better when taught through a medium that he understands.

*(vi) At what level do you think the child should start being taught in Home Language?*

According to participants this should start in Grade R, thus laying a foundation on what the child learnt at home.

*(vii) Are there any advantages/disadvantages in using isiNdebele as a LoLT in school?*

The respondents indicated that using isiNdebele promotes multilingualism since in the past isiNdebele was not taught in the school.

It further promotes freedom of association and social cohesion as indicated by some Sepedi learners who managed to memorize the Lord's Prayer in isiNdebele.

*(viii) Does your school have a language policy?*

The participants indicated that the language policy of the school is Sepedi and isiNdebele.

*(ix) Which procedures were followed when the School Language policy was drafted?*

The SGB was involved in the drafting of the policy before it was adopted.

*(x) Do parents play their role as stakeholders in decision-making regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools?*

According to the respondent, parents do visit the school to investigate whether the learners are placed in the right classes where isiNdebele is used as a LoLT.

It was further indicated that in Grade R and Grade 1 especially, learners get lost and find themselves in wrong classes where isiNdebele is not used as a LoLT. The parents usually alert the teachers when such incidents occur. This enables learners to be taught in the LoLT they understand because teachers place them in correct classes.

*(xi) If the answer is yes, do they (parents) regard this as their responsibility?*

The parents regard this as their responsibility as already explained.

*(xii) Do you agree with this perception?*

Yes, respondents agree with the perception because parents are critical stakeholders in the Language in Education Policy implementation and school policy development.

## **4.2 Data Analysis**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

The parental antipathy towards the use of home language as the language of learning and teaching cannot be overlooked.

Further than that, the research is an important intervention since negative attitudes towards the use of indigenous languages in high function domains are a serious impediment to the development of both learners and the previously marginalized languages.

The Language in Education Policy of 1997 stresses the importance of home language teaching, with home language used as either the language of learning and teaching or studied as a subject.

Additive bilingualism is supposedly expected to form the basis of the multilingual approach to learning in South Africa, yet the implementation of the Language in Education Policy poses some challenges to both the educators and parents, as indicated in the focus group discussions in the Libangeni circuit.

### **4.2.2 Research findings**

#### **4.2.2.1 Introduction**

In this research data collection was done through the focus group method. The focus group method is a very effective and useful method in a homogeneous group setting.

Although members of the school governing body consisted of both parents and educators, participation was very satisfactory.

The parents warmed up to discussions pertaining to attitudes. The educators participated actively with regards to issues pertaining to the LoLT and how attitudes affect performance.



This entails that the element of homogeneity prevailed in terms of common issues of language policy and governance. The fact that the focus group method is suitable for both the educated, the semi-literate and the illiterate participants, became quite evident during group discussions.

Participants were able to highlight very valuable information and raise pertinent issues pertaining to negative attitudes of isiNdebele speakers towards their own language.

The level of education did not affect the performance in these group discussions. Participants were at liberty to use the language of their choice. The use of indigenous languages during discussions levelled the plane field and created a homogeneous ground conducive to active participation by all involved.

The literacy level and education background did not create the much anticipated challenges often associated with such parent /educator relationships.

The focus group discussions revealed that various factors affect the negative perceptions towards the value of isiNdebele as an official language suitable to be used as a LoLT.

Through the use of the interview questions, various factors that affect the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT were identified. Some cultural deviation were also identified as some of the factors that affect the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

The choice of a LoLT for minor learners was also identified as a challenge to the development of isiNdebele. This refers for example, to the situation where a parent decided on which home language will be suitable to be used as LoLT for a learner in the Foundation Phase.

Due to prevalent perceptions that influence the choice of a LoLT, the parents chose a home language and a LoLT that the learner was not familiar with. Such unilateral decisions, though made with good intentions, are made to the detriment of isiNdebele as a language since they ultimately affect both the development of the learner and that of the language, in a negative way.

#### 4.2.2.2 The choice of the language of learning and teaching in Grade R-3

The choice of a LoLT in Grade R-3 should be done in line with the prescripts of the Language in Education Policy that stipulates that, in the case of a minor, the choice should be done by the parents. The parent therefore takes the responsibility of making decisions on behalf of the minor in the Foundation Phase.

It is therefore incumbent upon the parent to make the best decision for the minor child that would facilitate the process of learning.

Research has proven that mother tongue education is valuable for the cognitive development of a child during the formative years. The home language of the learner is regarded as an important basis for the learner in the Foundation Phase.

In an additive bilingual education setting such as in South Africa, a strong foundation of the home language will help the learner with an effective second language acquisition.

#### 4.2.2.3 Preferences in terms of the choice of a LoLT: Grade R-3

Table 1 below indicates the learner's preference in terms of the choice of a LoLT in Grade R-3. This table reflects the number of learners who speak isiNdebele as a home language but prefer to use another language as a LoLT in the Foundation Phase.

**Table 1: Learners whose home language is isiNdebele but the preferred LoLT is Sepedi: in Grade R-3 (2012)**

Name of school	Grade				Home language	Preferred LoLT	No of learners
	R	1	2	3			
Makhosoke 1	10	2	6	7	isiNdebele	Sepedi	25
Sizisizwe		11	8	6	isiNdebele	Sepedi	25

The statistics were obtained from class registers

The choice of the language of learning and teaching especially in the primary school is a critical determinant in terms of learner performance. Parental involvement plays a critical role in his regard. Both the parents and the learners have constitutional rights to education and linguistic preference. However, many isiNdebele speaking parents do not to exercise such rights especially during the child's critical formative years, since they seem to make wrong choices.

In line with the Constitution and the Language in Education Policy: "Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable..." (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996:14).

This implies everyone in the country, without exception, should exercise such rights. This constitutional imperative therefore also applies to the isiNdebele learners whose rights appear to be violated in this regard.

Table 1 above indicates the choice of parents in the Foundation Phase. It is clear that parents choose Sepedi as against isiNdebele in the Foundation Phase. This will have a ripple effect on performance in the consecutive phases.

Notwithstanding the provision made by the Department of Basic Education with regards to mother tongue education through additive bilingualism, the parental choice of a LoLT is still a downside in certain communities.

The focus group participants confirmed the issue of language shift prevalent amongst isiNdebele speakers, as the single negative influential effect in this regard. Parents seem to deliberately enrol the learners in Sepedi classes instead of the isiNdebele classes as discussed under data collection. The trend seems to be prevalent as early as Grade R (Table 1) in the Foundation Phase.

The target schools ensured provision for Grade R for both Sepedi and isiNdebele, the predominant languages in the area; however, enrolment in Sepedi classes far exceeds that of isiNdebele classes in a school like Makhosoke 1 for example.

Enrolment as portrayed by Table 1 above indicates a prevalent tendency to make wrong choices with regards to the LoLT. Various reasons could be attributed to these behavioural patterns as indicated in the focus group discussions.

Parents agreed that this is the right time for them to encourage children to learn, speak and write isiNdebele because the language is an official language recognized by the Constitution of South Africa. Contrariwise, their actions highlighted different indicators. Table 2 below, compares the enrolment of the learners in the Sepedi classes with that of learners in the isiNdebele classes. The numbers captured in the table confirms the argument that Sepedi is a dominant language in the Libangeni area.

**Table 2: A comparison of enrolment for examination in isiNdebele and Sepedi classes  
Gr.R-7 (Data adapted from Term 2 Analysis of Results Schedule 2012)**

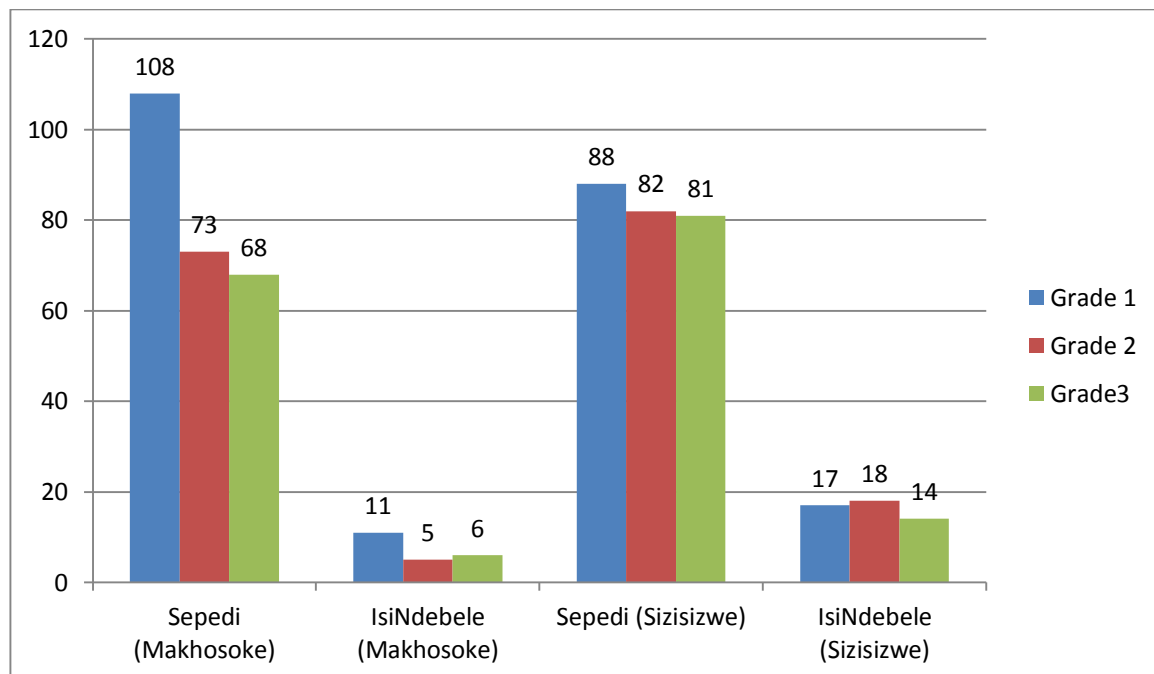
Name of school	Grade								Total	Sepedi/ isiNdebele
	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Makhosoke 1	68	108	73	68					248	<b>Sepedi</b>
Makhosoke 1		11	05	06					22	isiNdebele
Sizisizwe	69	88	82	81					250	<b>Sepedi</b>
Sizisizwe		17	18	14					49	isiNdebele
Loding					55	75	70		200	<b>Sepedi</b>
Loding					4	3	7		14	isiNdebele
Semonate								71	71	<b>Sepedi</b>
Semonate								07	07	isiNdebele

This explains why the numbers decrease further as the learners move to higher classes. The situation in Libangeni therefore has to be prioritised for urgent intervention not only by the community, but also by all stakeholders in language development.

The graphical representations in figure 4 and 5 below give a more vivid picture of the situation.

Figure 4 below compares the enrolment of learners in Makhosoke 1 Junior Primary in Loding, with that of Sizisizwe Junior Primary School in Vaalbank Township.

The numbers clearly indicate that Sepedi is a dominant language in Libangeni. Notwithstanding the fact that the area is also densely populated by the Ndebeles of the Manala clan, under Chief Makhosoke 11, Sepedi remains a dominant language.



**Figure 4: A comparison of enrolment for examination in Grade 1-3 (Sepedi and isiNdebele) in Makhosoke 1 and Sizisizwe Junior Primary Schools in 2012**

Due to various factors that were highlighted in the focus group discussions, isiNdebele is fast losing ground in this area.

The perceptions that prevail culminated into negative parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT in schools.

The graphical representation in figure 4 above depicts how the numbers in isiNdebele decreases from Grade 2 to Grade 3 even though there was a slight improvement in numbers in the previous year.

Although Makhosoke 1 had enrolled eleven (11) Grade 1 isiNdebele learners in 2012; which implied that there was an improvement from five (5) in Grade 2 and six (6) in Grade 3 in the previous year; such an improvement is insignificant compared to hundred and eight (108) Grade 1, seventy-three (73) Grade 2 and sixty-eight (68) Grade 3 respectively, in Sepedi of the same year (refer to figure 4).

The situation raises some concerns since it would appear that there is no improvement in terms of enrolment in isiNdebele in both Makhosoke 1 and Sizisizwe primary schools. On the other hand the enrolment in Sepedi classes in Makhosoke has reached just over a 100 mark. This graph agrees with what was discussed in focus group discussions.

It emphasizes the fact that more and more isiNdebele speaking parents enrol the learners in Sepedi classes where the LoLT is Sepedi.

The graph depicts the negative attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT during formative years. The increase in the use of Sepedi as a LoLT in Sizisizwe is also very high. It is in the region of just over the 80 mark. This attests to the fact that Sepedi dominates.

Language shift prevails in this area. Parents deliberately prefer to use another home language which is not their mother tongue at the expense of the development of both the learners and isiNdebele.

The situation in Sizisizwe is promising in terms of enrolment in isiNdebele, but the increase in enrolment in isiNdebele is still very low. The attitudes of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT are still negative although there is a slight change of attitudes reflected by the numbers.

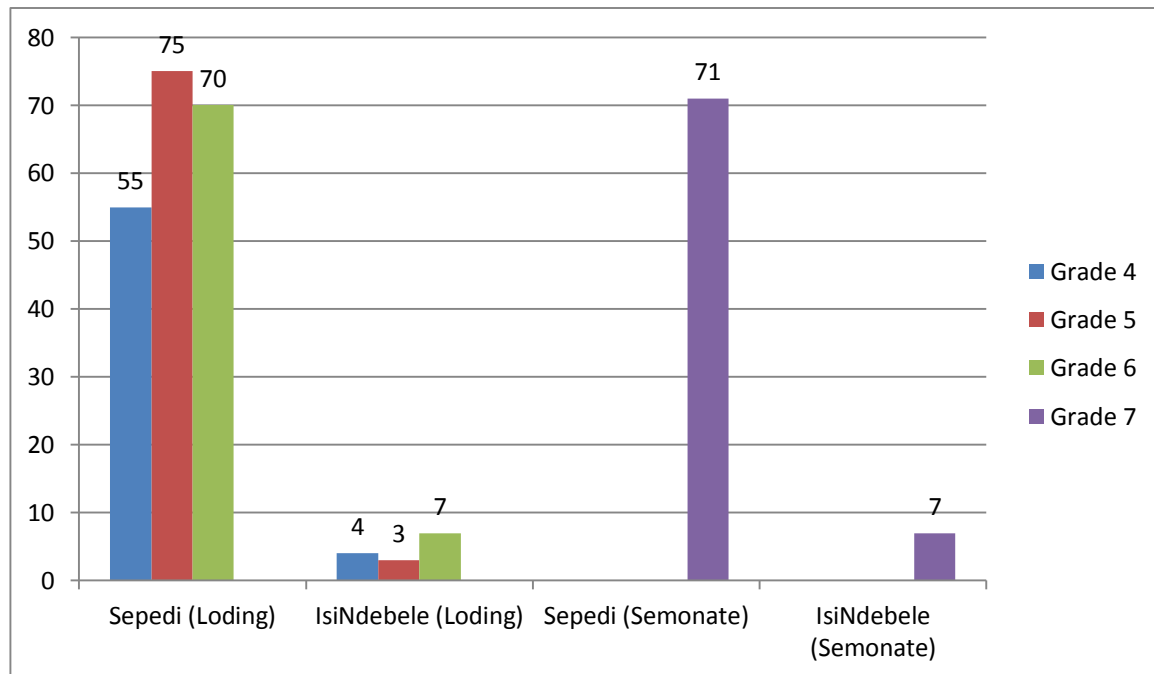
The improvement in numbers is constant. If one compares numbers in isiNdebele classes one realises that in Grade 2 the learners are 18, which means in 2011 the Grade 1 learners were probably 18. However, in 2012 the numbers decreased to 17 learners in Grade 1.

Even if the decrease is slight, with the situation in isiNdebele classes being what it is, the enrolment of one learner makes a vast difference in terms of numbers and ultimately improvement in enrolment.

One cannot even begin to compare 88 (learners) in Grade 1, Sepedi class (2012) with 17 (learners) in Grade 1 isiNdebele class, of the same year (2012). The graph gives a clear picture of which language is a dominant language. The enrolment numbers in Sisisizwe are on a gradual incline moving towards a 90 mark.

At the time of this research, the enrolment in Sisisizwe was 81 in Grade 3 (2012), 82 in Grade 2 (2012) and 88 in Grade 1(2012) for Sepedi respectively. This graph (figure 4) portrays an increase in enrolment in Sepedi classes compared to isiNdebele classes which could hardly reach a total of 20 learners per class. This could have at least justified a pupil/teacher ratio of 1: 25 learners in terms of isiNdebele.

#### 4.2.2.3 The effects of language preference on isiNdebele as a subject ( in Grade 4-7)



**Figure 5: A comparison of enrolment in Grade 4-7 Sepedi and isiNdebele in Loding Primary and Semonate Combined School**

Language shift plays a critical role in this situation because isiNdebele speakers use other languages (Sepedi in particular) in high function domains.

Figure 5 above portrays a similar situation in the Intermediate and Senior Phases in Loding and Semonate respectively.

The enrolment numbers in both Loding primary and Semonate Combined reached beyond a 70 mark in Sepedi, whilst the enrolment for isiNdebele could hardly reach the 10 mark.

Since Semonate caters for learners from Grade 7 -9, the low isiNdebele numbers in Grade 7 indicate that the negative attitudes of parents have a direct influence on enrolment and performance in isiNdebele in the Senior Phase.

The data analysis<sup>5</sup> of the statistics implies that fewer learners write examinations in isiNdebele than in Sepedi in the Libangeni circuit. This trend has a negative impact on the development of isiNdebele as a language.

The negative attitude of parents towards isiNdebele as a LoLT can be attributed to the low enrolment of learners who wrote the examinations. Parental attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT can result in outcomes that would have an impact on the present and future development of the language.

#### **4.2.3 The phasing out of isiNdebele at specific schools and related challenges**

The picture painted by this research reminds one of a report given in one of the discussion groups that, in some schools in neighbouring villages isiNdebele language has been discontinued as a school subject.

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<sup>5</sup> The statistical data used in this analysis was obtained from schedules in the targeted schools. (**The Analysis of Results for the Second and Third Terms in 2012**). The data was used to evaluate the enrolment even during the assessment period. The numbers for both languages (Sepedi and isiNdebele) depict the prevalent enrolment patterns (in Grade 1-3 and Grade 4-7 respectively) that indicate that more learners are assessed in Sepedi than in isiNdebele, although both languages are offered as subjects and used as LoLTs



The action could probably be attributed to some of the research findings similar to those identified in the focus group discussions.

The main reason for the discontinuation might probably be attributed to low numbers. The focus group participants indicated that both parents and learners were devastated by this decision.

Some learners had to relocate to schools far away from home where isiNdebele is still taught as a school subject, whilst others decided to enrol in either Sepedi and/or Setswana classes in the local schools. This impacted negatively on the development of isiNdebele as a subject

Some of the affected schools and villages included Matempule Primary and Gobholibi High School in Matempule village, Itsoseng Combined School in Troya village and Sibongile Primary School in Dihekeng village.

These schools no longer offer isiNdebele as a language although there are isiNdebele speakers in these villages. This is however an area that would need further research.

### **4.2.3 Conclusion**

The situation in these affected schools serves as a pointer to the challenges that isiNdebele language is facing in terms of language development. The parental antipathy towards the use of isiNdebele as LoLT in Libangeni plays a critical role in this regard.

It is incumbent upon parents to be agents of change with regards to attitudinal changes that would positively affect the development of isiNdebele. This would result in positive spin-offs in terms of an increase in enrolment where isiNdebele is offered as a subject and a preferred LoLT.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. The observations and comments on the findings

#### 5.1 The summary of the findings

The SGBs are aware of the tremendous challenges that face them in terms of exercising decision making powers regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy. Policies and the rights of parents (and SGBs) to decide on the languages of learning and teaching were discussed by the various focus groups. There seems to be a gradual understanding of the roles and functions of parents and SGBs as decision makers in policy implementation, hence parents could identify needs and challenges.

#### 5.2 Method applied

A participative approach was utilised to afford the focus groups maximum participation in group discussions. I was careful not to influence the decisions of the focus group members. It is imperative that the final conclusions in the group discussions should lie with the focus group. The researcher also ensured that members who could dominate the group in discussions were kept under control whilst at the same time they were given the latitude to participate in the discussions. The Language in Education Policy, the South African Schools Act and the Constitution formed the basis of reference for group discussions. Each group deliberated on issues pertaining to the attitudes of parents towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

Each group member was given a chance to engage in further discussions and exchange opinions and ideas. The groups were at liberty to exercise their rights in using any official language used in the area to enable them to highlight important points. Parents warmed up to discussions and were willing to share problems experienced in their home environments and schools with the focus groups members. The group discussions motivated and encouraged participants to unwind and be actively involved in group discussions. The parents realized that when it comes to the education of their children, they have the power within themselves to effect changes and influence decision making in a useful and effective way.

Parents further realized that they need to be resourceful and ensure that isiNdebele is developed through their involvement as major stakeholders in decision making, especially with regards to using the language as a LoLT.

### **5.3 The summary of points highlighted in group discussion**

The following is a synopsis of the points highlighted during focus group discussions:

- There are boundaries created between some educators and parents which make access to information such as governance manuals not an easy task.
- The teachers' disregard of the parents' level of literacy acts as a barrier towards the effective implementation of the Language in Education Policy of 1997.
- Sepedi is a dominant language in a predominantly Ndebele area.
- The pre-school and Grade R learners are exposed to Sepedi and/or Setswana during formative years whilst isiNdebele is disregarded by the Ndebeles.
- The practice of self-domination result in learners being deliberately enrolled in Sepedi classes where the LoLT is not isiNdebele.
- Language shift is fast becoming a norm in the Libangeni area.
- Redeployment compounds the problem of the shortage of human resources in terms of trained isiNdebele teachers and thus leads to the decline in terms of enrolments.
- The shortage of isiNdebele teachers coupled with the low enrolment of learners preferring to be taught in isiNdebele creates a low morale for both learners and teachers. This results in parents making wrong decisions with regards to the choice of a LoLT in the Foundation Phase.
- IsiNdebele speaking teachers, if recruited by the SGB members, end up offering other subjects (in other learning areas) other than isiNdebele.
- The closure of the Ndebele Training College as the only college that trained teachers added to the problem.
- Some SGB members are not involved in the development of school policies, hence they are not aware of the existence of such policies and/or how such policies were drafted.
- The parental antipathy towards isiNdebele coupled with low enrolments might have probably led to the de-registration of isiNdebele as a subject in the affected schools.

## **5.4 Observations and comments**

According to my observation there are perceptions that exist regarding the value of isiNdebele as a language that could be used in high function domains such as in education, politics, the economy and other important sectors in the society. It is important to dispel the false perceptions and sensitize parents about the value of mother tongue education.

### **5.4.1 Perceptions**

The following are some of the identified perceptions that prevail within the society:

**Perception 1:** IsiNdebele is not a suitable language to be either taught as a subject or used as a LoLT in school.

#### **Comment**

All 11 official languages of South Africa qualify to be taught as subjects and to be used as LoLTs in school. In terms of the Constitution of South Africa, isiNdebele has equal status with other official languages and therefore qualifies to be both taught and used as a subject and LoLT.

**Perception 2:** The use of Sepedi as a LoLT will provide the learners with quality education, whilst using isiNdebele as LoLT will provide the learners with inferior education.

#### **Comment**

It is important for each learner to use the home language that he understands as a LoLT. This will enhance the learner's performance. Research has proven that the use of a home language as a LoLT is important for the cognitive development of a learner during the formative years. Using Sepedi as a LoLT is not equivalent to quality education. Both Sepedi and isiNdebele are official languages that have equal status in line with the Constitution. Both languages can be used as LoLTs to provide quality education to the learners.

**Perception 3:** Sepedi is a more suitable language to be used as a LoLT in the primary schools where isiNdebele is offered as a subject and used as a LoLT by the speakers. Sepedi is believed to be a suitable LoLT because of certain advantages attached to the use of the language.

### **Comment**

Research has proven that in a bilingual setting early immersion in a foreign language (be it Sepedi, Setswana or English) could result in poor academic performance of a learner because of poor cognitive development. Instead of performing well in Mathematics and Science for example, the learner will perform worse than those who experienced late immersion with fully developed cognitive and analytical skills.

The use of the home language that the learner understands will result in high performance of the learner.

IsiNdebele is a more suitable language to be used as a LoLT in this regard. Having a sound foundation in a home language will also enhance the competency of the learner in second language acquisition.

The parents who enrol isiNdebele speaking learners in Sepedi classes in Grade1, under the false impression that they will cope, makes it more difficult for the learners to acquire competency in the First Additional Language (FAL).

It further deprives the learner of the benefits of cognitive development that comes with mother tongue education or the use of home language as a LoLT.

In line with the requirements of the revised curriculum with effect from 2011, learners have to learn two languages in the Foundation Phase, the Home Language (HL) and the FAL. The learner is however only expected to master basic concepts in terms of vocabulary in the FAL, to be promoted to the next grade.

**Perception 4:** Enrolling for Sepedi and/or Setswana in Grade 12 will give the learner a better chance of high performance in the Grade 12 external examinations than would be the case with isiNdebele.

### **Comment**

The performance of learners in Grade 12 can be attributed to various factors. A learner with well-developed cognitive and analytical skills acquired during the formative years will perform well in higher levels of education. The learner's language skills and analytical skills needed to understand mathematical concepts will be well developed. This will result in above average performance in the higher levels of education.

The level of commitment, dedication and the attitude of the learner towards his/her studies, are some of the valuable contributing factors towards high performance. Various factors therefore come into play with regards to the general performance of the learner in all subjects in the Grade 12 final examinations.

**Perception 5:** IsiNdebele is a difficult subject to learn.

### **Comment**

It needs a change of attitude and commitment to acquire any knowledge. There is nothing difficult if one is dedicated and prepared to learn. A positive attitude will assist in maximising one's potential.

It should be noted that the list of existing false perceptions is not exhausted; however these are examples of some of the predominant beliefs which lead to negative attitudes towards the use of isiNdebele as a LoLT in Libangeni.

## **5.4.2 Challenges faced in the introduction of isiNdebele as a subject and LoLT**

The introduction of isiNdebele in the curriculum was plagued by many problems which led to the negative perceptions and attitudes towards isiNdebele.

Firstly, isiNdebele was not offered as a school subject during the past decade, since the language was only a spoken language that was largely undeveloped. The isiNdebele speaking learners were either taught in isiZulu, Sepedi or Setswana in the primary schools, depending on the location of the school and the dominant language in that particular community.

Consequently these languages gradually gained momentum in their use in various domains in the society.

The result was that isiNdebele was relegated to a subordinate position by its speakers who preferred to use either isiZulu, Sepedi or Setswana in high function domains as well as in personal communications. The main reason was that unlike isiNdebele, the latter had acquired the status of being written languages mainly through the contributions of missionaries who assisted in developing their orthographies.

Secondly, isiNdebele did not have the Spelling and Orthography Rules (Imithetho yokutlola nokupeleda isiNdebele), to guide the educators and policy implementers in terms of the correct usage of grammatical, spelling and orthography rules. The other preferred languages had existing spelling and orthography rules which were reviewed over the years by its users.

In comparison with the other languages, isiZulu was the most advanced in terms of development and had an added advantage of being classified as an Nguni language, as was the case with isiNdebele. The isiNdebele learners were therefore taught isiZulu up to the highest level of education, despite the fact that it was not their mother tongue.

Thirdly, isiNdebele speaking teachers, who were trained in isiZulu, preferred offering isiZulu as a subject in the secondary schools and as a LoLT in the primary schools for obvious reasons. It must be noted that the Ndebele College of Education also offered isiZulu in teacher training to prospective teachers, hence the adage 'isiNdebele is difficult' to teach.

Fourthly, the shortage of resources in terms of literature in African languages created another challenge for all African languages, but more so for isiNdebele speakers. The shortage being more acute in the case of children's literature compounded the problems in the implementation of isiNdebele as a LoLT.

Lack of resources in terms of reference materials, dictionaries, and literature and grammar books highlighted the plight of the language. Although this shortage is slightly alleviated, it is still a critical area that needs urgent attention even today.

Fifthly, the morphological, syntactical and semantics problems as observed by Mashiyane (2000) and Skhosana (2002) in his unpublished conference paper, referred to in Mamabolo (2005), created linguistic debates and arguments over different lexical items with the same meaning debated by the Manala and Ndzundza dialects. A need for intensive lexicographical research was identified by Skhosana (2002).

The Manala and the Ndzundza dialects are the two main varieties of isiNdebele which need to be unified to form one standardised language to facilitate the development and use of the language. Such differences further compound the problem as highlighted by Skhosana (2002) and Mashiyane (2000). It is incumbent upon language developers and researchers to investigate such differences further, especially during the review of the isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules.

Lastly, in terms of implementation, lack of standardised isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules as reflected above is a serious impediment to the development and implementation of isiNdebele as a subject and language of learning and teaching. In 2008, PanSALB released a revised edition of the 1995 first isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules.

Since PanSALB review the Spelling and Orthography Rules of all the previously marginalised languages after a period of five years. This will be a suitable time for isiNdebele language experts to continue with the standardization of isiNdebele, although this will obviously be work in progress.

The year 1985 marks a watershed in the history of the Ndebeles in that, the former KwaNdebele homeland government recognised isiNdebele as the official language of the homeland. This decision raised the status and use of isiNdebele in the community and the KwaNdebele homeland Government.



This action coupled with the introduction of isiNdebele for the first time in the curriculum in the same year, restored the dignity of isiNdebele speakers which was eroded over the years by linguistic oppression and domination by dominant languages.

For the first time in the history of its development, isiNdebele was destined to be used in high function domains, although this was not devoid of problems.

It is evident that the politics of language cannot be divorced from language planning. As stated by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 113) “language-in-education planning really cannot be undertaken until the process has reached the policy decision stage”. The decision making is normally done by politicians. Apparently the former KwaNdebele government was either under pressure to implement or planning simply did not reach this stage. The implementers did not seem to have followed the six primary objectives of language-in-education planning as suggested by Kaplan et al (1997).

Firstly, when planning to introduce a new language it is important to determine the target group in terms of who in the school population will receive language education and in which language(s). This implies that it is imperative to identify the target population learners and students who will be offered the language(s) as a subject and/or medium of learning.

Kaplan et al (1997) further suggest asking inter alia the following pertinent questions:

Which children are targeted? How many will there be? Is there a plan to keep a steady flow of children into the established language curricula over many years, or will new languages be introduced periodically to respond to popular demand as that demand changes in response to real-world political and economic situations? How do parents feel about the language introduced? Will they support or oppose the enrolment of their children in language learning? (Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997:115).

Such insightful questions would serve as guidelines in the identification of the targeted population. The success of the newly introduced subject depended entirely on parental support according to Kaplan et al (1997). The parental antipathy towards the introduction of isiNdebele as a LoLT or a subject to be taught in school makes one wonder whether such questions were seriously considered.

Secondly, the question of teacher supply is of utmost importance. It is therefore important to identify both the learner or student pool and the teacher pool that would make such planning sustainable. The training needs identified by the planners must indicate whether the teacher training needed is pre-service or in-service; this will then inform the duration of training.

It must, however, be noted that the need for regular in-service training is paramount to the successful implementation of the project.

The unfortunate decision to close down the Ndebele College of Education, the only teacher training college that offered training to isiNdebele speakers, was a setback. The college could have played a major role as an in-service training centre for teachers who were initially trained in isiZulu.

Thirdly, the curriculum should be prepared in advance to ensure that the implementation period and duration in terms of time allocation is clearly understood. Planning should include even the introduction of the second language.

It is however common knowledge that with regard to planning, languages are far down on the priorities scale for politicians. IsiNdebele could probably not have escaped such a reality.

Fourthly, resources in terms of material and methods to be applied are critical aspects. Teachers do not all belong to the same generation therefore there is a need to bridge the generational gap in terms of either pre-service or in-service training.

The question of material development is another matter worth noting, especially with regards to the shortage of material in African languages in general and in children's literature in particular.

The question of the availability of resources in terms of textbooks, readers, teacher's guides, and teaching aids cannot be over emphasized. IsiNdebele was and is still mainly affected by limited resources. There is a need for urgent intervention by the language experts in this field.

Fifthly, Kaplan and Baldauf (1997: 116) attest that "the definition (identification) of available resources to support language education programme" poses another major challenge.

Financial resources must be allocated in terms of the identified needs and clearly the KwaNdebele government was both under pressure and under resourced to provide both material (textbooks) and human resources to schools. Such challenges are still prevalent today.

Lastly, the issue of assessment and evaluation should determine the impact of the intervention. Kaplan et al (1997) believe that the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of performance of the learners are critical. They further attest that the effectiveness of the programme is also critical for monitoring and evaluation of the intervention.

Proper planning of the process, to my observation, would have eliminated the problems pertaining to the uncertainty related to which language is suitable to serve as LoLT for isiNdebele speakers, especially in the Foundation Phase. Other languages such as Sepedi and Setswana would have been allocated their space in the system for the mother tongue speakers of those particular languages.

The KwaNdebele homeland, established in 1984, suddenly found itself faced with the compelling need to have an official language to run its homeland government affairs. The need to develop the language became eminent because it was in line with the ideals of the then separate development. The latter implemented the separatist function of the language as entrenched in the apartheid principle of separate development.

The introduction of isiNdebele as a subject and part of the curriculum was therefore flawed because standard procedures in language planning were clearly not followed.

Another ground breaking event was the introduction of isiNdebele as an undergraduate course in the institutions of higher learning that led to the first intake of students by both the University of Pretoria and the University of Zululand in 1997. The first learners to pass isiNdebele as a subject in the matriculation examinations were the 1996 learners. This implies that the 1996 Grade 12 learners formed part of the first intake of isiNdebele students at the university. This was another giant leap undertaken. Unfortunately the University of Zululand discontinued offering isiNdebele shortly after the introduction of the course because of problems encountered.

### **5.4.3 Language prejudice and its effect on the acceptance of isiNdebele as a LoLT**

Lack of proper planning was accentuated by the problems of language shift that were prevalent in the society. Bambgose (1998) highlights the fact that negative prejudice is characterised by negative evaluation of one's own language or speech patterns in preference for someone else's language. Such preferences are on an increase in schools around the Libangeni area. This ultimately translates into language shift.

The introduction of isiNdebele as a subject was a gradual process that started in the Foundation Phase and gradually moved to the higher levels. The process was plagued by problems and scepticisms. Parents regarded isiNdebele as not yet fully developed to be introduced in schools as a subject.

Parents further registered their concerns and fears with regards to offering isiNdebele as a subject in high schools. Their concerns were that this action might ultimately affect the performance of learners in the final matriculation examinations. Consequently, parents embarked on a passive resistance by disregarding isiNdebele as a subject and a LoLT. (Skhosana, 2002)

There was even a call for the withdrawal and/or temporary suspension of the introduction of isiNdebele in schools until such time that the government had addressed the identified problems (Skhosana 2002:6-8, unpublished paper quoted in Mamabolo, (2005).

Such perceptions are still prevalent today, especially in Libangeni area where Sepedi is a dominant language, whilst isiNdebele is subordinate.

As reflected in group discussions the perceptions created are that isiNdebele is inferior to isiZulu, Sepedi and Setswana.

### **5.4.4 Parental choice and the impact of language shift in primary schools in Libangeni**

Language shift in Libangeni causes major problems because the learners use their mother tongue in the early stages of their development.

However, pre-school learners are taught the basics in a language that is not their mother tongue, because parents enrol them in pre-schools using either Sepedi or Setswana as the language of learning and teaching.

This implies that prior knowledge that the child acquires at home is lost on the first day of school. The cognitive development of the learners is affected and the learners lose self-confidence.

The Constitution of South Africa is a strong support or buttress of our civil rights, but this is not the case with learners in Libangeni, especially in the Foundation Phase. The choice of isiNdebele speaking parents who deliberately choose to enrol learners in classes where either Sepedi or Setswana is the language of learning and teaching in the Foundation Phase, is disturbing.

The Language in Education Policy of 1997 stresses the importance of home language teaching with the selected home language used as either the language of learning and teaching or studied as a subject.

Additive bilingualism is supposedly expected to form the basis of the multilingual approach to learning in South Africa, yet the implementation of the Language in Education Policy, poses some challenges to both the educators and parents as is the case in Libangeni. There is a need to sensitize parents about the impact of language shift on language development.

The isiNdebele speakers have been subjected to various challenges that left them unable to clearly distinguish between right and wrong.

There is an identified national need to sensitize parents about the value of mother tongue in education. However, the case of isiNdebele is quite unique.

Sensitizing the parents about the value of mother tongue will ensure the acquisition of cognitive development of the learners during the formative years.

The parental antipathy towards isiNdebele as LoLT will hopefully decrease in the process.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

### **5.5.1 Parents should:**

- Lead in decision making regarding the development of language policies in their schools, as major stakeholders in decision making in this regard. The school management will only assist in providing guidelines in terms of rules and regulations governing the involvement of the SGBs.
- Take part in the development of the language policy of the school, which has a direct impact on the language of learning and teaching in the school.
- Make the right choices regarding the home language, to ensure that learners are not deprived of their linguistic rights, cultural heritage and proper cognitive development in the Foundation Phase. This process will facilitate the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools.
- Ensure that cooperation exists between the school and the parents.
- Ensure that a level of trust and patience is developed between the two parties.
- Ensure that positive attitudes that are regarded as crucial for the effective implementation of the Language in Education Policy exist.
- Ensure that both parties (educators and parents) develop self-confidence, discipline, commitment and tolerance with regard to issues pertaining to school language policy development and implementation (e.g. the development of a school policy that will govern the school in its communication and activities, academically and otherwise).
- Be visible enough at school to ensure proper management and the effective monitoring and implementation of language in education policies, (including security measures for the schools which would be clearly explained in the home language) in the interest of both the learners and educators.
- Ensure the school provides access to information to parents.
- Guide the community with regards to the choice of the right LoLT for learners especially in the Foundation Phase (Grade R-3), based on the practicality of the existing policies and regulations as well as research findings in this regard.
- Encourage the communities to start pre-schools (crèches) that will use isiNdebele as a LoLT, to dispel the negative attitudes of parents towards the use of isiNdebele as a subject and LoLT in school.

### **5.5.2 The government must:**

- Ensure that resources are made available to the schools in terms of isiNdebele literature and textbooks
- Ensure that the shortage of isiNdebele teachers is alleviated. The decision to re-open the former Ndebele College of Education is applauded.
- Ensure that both the prospective Foundation Phase teachers and the teachers trained in isiZulu (in the former Ndebele college of Education) receive teacher development in terms of both the pre-service as well as in-service training.
- Ensure the provision of training in terms of in-service to teachers who regard isiNdebele as a difficult subject, since training was offered in isiZulu and even in Sepedi and Setswana to some of the teachers who are currently teaching isiNdebele. (The need for such teacher development and in-service training has been identified in focus group discussions).
- Ensure that the Pan South African Language Board provides the isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules (Imithetho yokutlola nokupeleda isiNdebele).
- Ensure that the isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules are reviewed and standardised on a regular basis to cater for both the Manala and the Ndzundza dialects.
- Ensure the use of the isiNdebele Spelling and Orthography Rules to assist the teachers with correct language usage in the promotion and development of isiNdebele.
- Provide in-service training, resources and guidance to the Foundation Phase teachers who are already in the field, to ensure cognitive development of learners and capacity building of the teachers.
- Encourage Grade R teachers to teach the learners in their respective mother tongues in preparation for Grade 1.
- Encourage the establishment of pre-schools that will use isiNdebele as a LoLT.
- Ensure that no learner is compelled to be taught through a foreign language other than mother tongue that is used as a LoLT.
- Ensure that proper guidance is provided to the parents with regards to the merits of exercising their rights in choosing the correct LoLT for learners in the Foundation Phase.
- Ensure that the rights of minor learners, exercised by parents on their behalf, are not violated in the process of choosing the correct LoLT.

Finally, parental attitudes towards isiNdebele as a language of learning and teaching need to be explored further. It would be interesting to research how language shift has affected the development of the language and to compare the outcomes with the effects of the parental attitudes towards bilingual education through investigating their preferences.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The negative attitudes of isiNdebele parents towards the use isiNdebele as a LoLT are caused by various factors including false perceptions that need to be dispelled.

The major drawback, however, has been the lack of proper language planning and consultations when decisions were taken to introduce isiNdebele as a subject and LoLT in schools.

The research reveals that there is no buy-in from the communities in terms of using isiNdebele as a LoLT in Libangeni. Most people seem to be unaware of the dangers facing the language, especially the threat of language shift.

The government decisions caused problems that started at the top and cascaded down to the lowest level of education. The then government should have followed the right procedures and planned according to the availability of resources, in terms of human and capital resources as requested in language planning. Poor planning and language shift are in my opinion the cause of parental antipathy towards isiNdebele in the Libangeni circuit.

Proper language planning should be embarked upon to redress the challenges faced by the Libangeni communities in this regard. More awareness campaigns should be organised. The government must ensure that there is buy-in from the community with regards to the use of isiNdebele in high function domains in Libangeni. This will ensure the protection and preservation of isiNdebele as a minority language.

It is worth noting that the government has taken some strides towards addressing some of the concerns identified in this research.



The re-opening of the former KwaNdebele College of Education, as Siyabuswa Campus of the University of Johannesburg, is regarded as a major breakthrough for the isiNdebele language.

This action will close the existing gap with regards to the shortage of teachers especially in the Foundation Phase.

There is however still more to be done in terms of ensuring the change of parental antipathy towards isiNdebele as a subject and as a LoLT in Libangeni. Every Ndebele parent should embark on attitudinal change with regards to the various needs identified in this research.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Questions**

#### **Focus Group Method**

1. What are the attitudes of parents in the focus area towards Home Language (isiNdebele) as LoLT?
2. Are the attitudes positive or negative?
3. What causes the negative perceptions of Home Language as LoLT, if any?
4. Why is it important that each child should have a Home Language?
5. In your opinion is it correct to allow your child to be taught in your Home Language at school?
6. At what level do you think the child should start being taught in Home Language?
7. Are there any advantages /disadvantages in using isiNdebele as LoLT in school?
8. Does your school have a language policy?
9. Which procedures were followed when the School Language Policy was drafted?
10. Do parents play their role as stakeholders in decision-making regarding the implementation of the Language in Education Policy in schools?
11. If the answer is yes, do they (parents) regard this as their responsibility?
12. If not, whose responsibility do you think it is?
13. Do you agree with this perception?

## APPENDIX B: THE FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

No.	Name of school	Name of principal	Place	School Governing Bodies		Date
				Teacher Component	Parent Component	
1	Mbulwa High	Mr Mamokebe	Loding	3	7	31/10/12
2	Makhosoke 1 Primary	Mrs Boshomane	Loding	3	6	31/10/12
3	Loding Primary	Mr Sefolo	Loding	3	1	01/11/12
4	Semonate Combined	Mrs Nkgodi	Segoko	4	6	01/11/12
5	Sizisizwe Primary	Mr Moteme	Vaalbank	3	1	02/11/12

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