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Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa for learners with severe intellectual disability.

by

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ABSTRACT

Background: Supporting learners with a severe intellectual disability (SID) who come from diverse language backgrounds presents teachers with complex choices and decisions regarding the language(s) they use in their classrooms. Understanding teachers' perceptions in this matter can assist all role players, such as administrators and policy makers as well as auxiliary support personnel such as speech-language therapists, to support teachers in their decisions and practices. This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of foundation phase teachers in schools for learners with SID, that have high linguistic diversity, about their language practices and choices. Specifically, the study aimed to: (i) describe the language(s) teachers use with the learners in their classrooms; (ii) to describe the factors that teachers take into account when deciding on which language(s) to use with their learners; and (iii) to explore teachers' beliefs and feelings about language practices and choices for learners with SID in their classes.

Methods: This study followed a qualitative design employing semi-structured interviews. The perceptions of eight teachers were explored using open-ended interview questions, guided by an interview schedule. Data from the interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed using an inductive coding process to identify themes and sub-themes.

Findings: Four themes were identified, namely: (a) language practices; (b) learners' needs and abilities; (c) constraints, possibilities and strategies; and (d) beliefs about language learning and teaching. Most teachers used multiple languages in their classrooms. Teachers were found to take many factors into consideration when making choices about the language practices in their classrooms. The language of teaching and learning of the school, learners' language proficiency and current and future language needs, as well as the multilingual South African context and the hegemony of English were considered. Decisions sometimes required compromises as circumstances prevented teachers from engaging in what they saw as best practice.

Conclusion: Teachers attempted to be responsive to the needs and abilities of their learners, but also took the larger socio-linguistic context into consideration in their language practices and choices. Support needs in the form of curriculum and learning materials were identified. Further research is needed to understand the influences of language practices on language- and learning outcomes in learners with SID.

Keywords: home language (HL), language of learning and teaching (LoLT), linguistic diversity, multilingualism, severe intellectual disability (SID), teachers

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

List of abbreviations

AAC:	Augmentative and alternative communication
ADHD:	Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
ASD:	Autism Spectrum Disorder
DBE:	Department of Basic Education
DCAPS:	Differentiated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DD:	Developmental disabilities
DOE:	Department of Education
HL:	Home language
ID:	Intellectual disabilities
L2:	Language 2 (second or additional language)
LiEP:	Language in Education Policy
LoLT:	Language of Learning and Teaching
LoLTs:	Languages of Learning and Teaching
SID:	Severe Intellectual Disability

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Problem statement

According to international consensus, the use of a learner's home language (HL) for education can greatly contribute to successful learning (Plüddemann, 2015). A HL is defined as the language the learner knows best (Stein, 2017) and it is, typically, the first acquired language (Mizza, 2014). Learners will develop a strong linguistic foundation if taught in a language that they understand. According to research, the use of the HL is very valuable for the development of a person's cultural and personal identity, as well as for emotional development (Chürr, 2013).

In contrast, the use of a different language other than the HL, especially during the initial years of formal education, can have an adverse effect on educational outcomes and also result in a decline in HL skills – termed subtractive multilingualism (Plüddemann, 1997). This particularly may be the case when the HL is perceived to be of low social status, and when parents have limited time to reinforce the HL (Plüddemann, 1997). Children who are unable to understand the language used in the classroom are not able to participate, to ask questions, or demonstrate what they know (Bachore, 2014). This may result in poor language skills in both the HL as well as the language of teaching and learning (LoLT) (Plüddemann, 1997). On the other hand, schools can also play an important role in providing an opportunity to learn (an) additional language(s) in a way that leads to good proficiency in multiple languages – termed additive multilingualism. This is typically only achieved if support for the child's HL is provided (Collier, 1989). Being skilled in multiple languages holds many advantages, especially in multilingual societies like the South African society. For example, when taught in English, there may be more access to further education and job opportunities (Chürr, 2013; Posel & Casale, 2011), as well as having a tool for socioeconomic mobility (Banda, 2000).

South Africa is a linguistically diverse nation. According to the 2011 census, 98,4% of South Africans speak one (or more) of the 11 official languages, with isiZulu

being the HL of 22,7% of the population and English spoken as a first language by 9,6% of respondents (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The diversity of HLs of learners in the basic education system poses challenges for teachers and policy makers in terms of choosing the language(s) of learning and teaching (LoLT) for schools and classrooms, and also for engaging in practices that support language and educational outcomes of all learners (Kathard et al., 2017; Posel & Casale, 2011).

Learners with severe intellectual disability (SID) in South Africa may face additional challenges related to language exposure and language learning within the South African education system. Firstly, schools for learners with SID may be even more diverse in terms of learner HL as there are limited numbers of schools supporting learners with SID. As a result, learners may attend schools that are situated outside of their language communities. This may make it impossible to select a LoLT to suit all learners. Many of these schools do not have hostel facilities, so out of necessity, parents must enrol their children in schools that are accessible by means of transport, regardless of the LoLT of the school. Secondly, beliefs relating to the ability of learners with SID to acquire a second language may be overly negative, and professionals such as teachers might believe that a completely monolingual approach may be beneficial for learners (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). Such an approach may withhold appropriate second language learning opportunities from learners on the one hand, or result in subtractive multilingualism on the other hand, where the HL is not supported. In some cases, parents may even be advised to actively repress the HL and refrain from using it (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). The learning difficulties that learners with SID experience may be exacerbated by these language practices.

Learners with SID may be candidates for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) due to being non-verbal (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). Choosing languages to be supported through the use of AAC for learners with diverse linguistic backgrounds will require careful consideration (Soto & Yu, 2014; Tönsing, van Niekerk, Schlünz, & Wilken, 2018). AAC practitioners will have to consider the LoLT of the school, the language practices in the classroom, as well as the learners' HL in this process, while also taking into consideration numerous other implementation factors.

Since teachers play a central role in choosing and implementing certain language practices within classrooms, and since their practices can influence learners' educational outcomes, it is important to investigate these further. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the perceptions of teachers at schools for learners with SID on their language practices and choices, with specific focus on what these practices are, how teachers decide on their language practices, how they perceive the effect of these practices, and how they feel about them.

1.2 Definitions and terminology

To provide more clarity on the terminology used in this study, a list of terms and definitions is supplied in Table 1.

Table 1

Definition of Terms Used in This Study

Term	Definition
Monolingualism	The use of one language only.
Multilingualism	The ability to use more than one language in everyday life (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).
Additive bilingualism	When a person learns one language first and a second language is added (García & Sylvan, 2011).
Subtractive bilingualism	A person learns one language, but when the second language is added, less time is devoted to the first language, leading to a decline in language skills in the first language (Saneka, 2019).
Home language (HL)/ Home languages (HLs)	Refers to the first language a person learns (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Nordquist et al., 2019).
Second language (L2)	Refers to a second or additional language a person learns (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).
Immersion	Where the language of learning and teaching is different from a learner's HL and the learner learns

Term	Definition
	both the language skills and the substance of the learning area at the same time (Admiraal, Westhof & DeBot, 2006; Stein, 2017).
Code-switching / Code-mixing	Alternating between two languages within the same sentence and speech situation (Ncoko, Osman, & Cockcroft, 2000; Probyn, 2009).
Minority language	Although this term is customarily applied to a language spoken by less than 50% of the population of a given area (Grin, 1992), it can also describe the indigenous language(s) in post-colonial countries (Agyekum, 2018). In the current dissertation, the term describes the African languages of South Africa, that were not granted official status under the previous apartheid regime.
Majority language	The dominant language of an area (Posel & Zeller, 2016). In post-colonial countries often the language of the previous colonists (Agyekum, 2018).
Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT)	The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is the language stipulated by the school as the language to be used for teaching (Department of Basic Education, 2010).
Intellectual disability (ID)	Intellectual disability is characterised by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behaviour (Ware et al., 2015).
Severe intellectual disability (SID)	Severe Intellectual Disability is constituted by a significant impairment with an IQ of between 55 and 69 (Murray & McKenzie, 2014).
Learner	Describes a child who accesses and is educated within the basic education system in South Africa.

Term	Definition
Language in Education Policy (LiEP)	A policy written by the Department of Education guiding the use of language(s) in the basic education system in South Africa.
School language policy	The school language policy is drawn up by the School Governing Body (SGB) of each school. This policy stipulates the language(s) to be used as language(s) of learning and teaching in the school.
Differentiated Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (DCAPS)	The differentiated curriculum is designed to meet the individual needs and interests of each learner with ID (Department of Basic Education, 2018). It is a modification of the general Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement that contains the curriculum applicable to all learners in South Africa (except those who follow DCAPS).

1.3 Literature review

As a background to this study, I will commence with a brief introduction of the significance of language skills in formal education. The literature related to language in education for linguistically diverse learners will then be reviewed. Firstly, I will focus on policy and practice more globally and, secondly, specifically on the South African context. Thereafter, I will focus on the teacher's role in classroom language practices first more generally, and then with specific focus on the South African context. Lastly, I will focus on classroom language practices for learners with SID who come from linguistically diverse backgrounds. The dearth of research in this regard will be highlighted as a rationale for having conducted this study.

1.3.1 Language skills in the formal education system: Learning language and using language to learn

In the first 5-6 years of life, the communication skills of a child without disabilities change from the use of only pre-intentional, pre-symbolic communication signals as a new-born to that of a fully symbolic, intentional communicator. By the time a child enters school (around the age of 6) they typically have a vocabulary of around 3000 words (Rosselli et al., 2014), and can understand and produce mature syntactical and grammatical structures. Language skills are considered critical in the development of children's cognitive skills (Rosselli et al., 2014). Being taught at school unlocks knowledge of the different aspects of language, such as phonology, lexicon, semantics and grammar, according to Riva, Nichelli and Devoti, 2000 (as cited in Rosselli et al., 2014). This development is linked to the progress towards concrete operations. The introduction to formal education consequently enhances the child's linguistic input and, ultimately, facilitates the development of metalinguistic understanding. According to the social constructivist language acquisition theory, language is made possible by both the human brain and human culture (Von Tetzchner & Grove, 2003). It is thus learned through guidance from more competent language users in the child's environment (Bruner, 1983). Although language skills (especially written language skills) are refined throughout a child's school years, it is typically assumed that children already have a good language foundation when they enter formal education. Much of the learning in the formal education system takes place via language, as the teacher uses spoken language to explain learning content, and expects the learners to use language to clarify, ask, and demonstrate their knowledge (Friedlander, 1997). Whereas oral language is an unconscious process, written language is a conscious process that can be modelled by linguistic theory (Parisse, 2002). A good oral language foundation is critical to developing written language skills (McCutchen & Stull, 2015). Good literacy skills enhance autonomy, economic opportunity and active citizenship in adult life, and are regarded as fundamental to all other learning (Genlott & Grönlund, 2013).

To ensure successful language learning, all four language skills, that is reading, writing, listening and speaking, should be effectively integrated (Sadiku, 2015). When

there is a discrepancy between the language known by the child and the language used in school (i.e., the LoLT), it may lead to low academic achievement (da Rocha, 2009). Academic achievement can be facilitated, on the other hand, if the child is educated in a language with which he or she will be familiar. In situations where the primary language used in the classroom is not the child's HL, it would be helpful to use the HL as well as the LoLT in order to help develop both these languages with the purpose to aid cognitive development (Salmona Madriñan (2014). The HL is used to support the LoLT, but the HL should not be alienated. (Salmona Madriñan, 2014). A positive attitude towards the LoLT is beneficial, as it will lessen the alienation of HL (da Rocha, 2009).

1.3.2 Language in education for linguistically diverse learners: Language in education policies and language practices

Language in education policies and practices are concerned with how and when one or more language(s) are used for teaching and learning in the classroom (Stein, 2017). In completely unilingual communities (i.e., where everyone speaks the same language), policies and practices may be straightforward and easy to implement without disadvantaging any learner. However, in the face of increasing globalisation and mobility of people and people groups, classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, including linguistic diversity (Solly & Esch, 2014). Both policy makers and policy implementers (i.e., teachers) are therefore challenged to take this diversity into account when making decisions as to which language(s) will be used in classrooms.

Underlying these policy and practice decisions are language ideologies and beliefs. Some policy makers and implementers believe that learners should eventually all become proficient in one majority language (assimilationist view). Such a belief may be undergirded by the perceived status of this language as compared to other 'less useful' languages. Alternatively, policy makers and implementers may believe that multilingualism and language diversity should be fostered (Tucker, 1998). The South African Language in Education Policy (LiEP)(Department of Education, 1997) states that learners need to learn two languages and confirms the active promotion of functional multilingualism.

In addition to the envisaged language outcomes, beliefs about the learning of one versus multiple languages and the beliefs about learning in one or multiple languages may come into play. In additive bilingualism, a learner enters school using his/her HL and L2 is added without discontinuing the use of the HL (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). This is seen as a move towards a learner's bilingualism. However, when less time is devoted to the HL after the introduction of the L2, it can lead to the decline of language skills in the HL (Saneka, 2019). The child thus moves away from multilingualism back to monolingualism (Cummins, 2015). Although both of these practices are used globally, the use of the L2 should not be seen as endangering the HL, and should rather be seen as a stepping stone to the learning of the L2 and, ultimately, a multilingual learner (Cummins, 2015).

In the US, language in education policies have at times encouraged bilingualism, while at other times repressing it. The National Defence Education Act, created in 1958, encouraged the use of foreign-language education in the US. This came after a period when all native languages were repressed, and their use discouraged. Another change came in the 1980's when the advantages of bilingual education were questioned (Ovando, 2003). Even though the Bilingual Education Act was passed into the United States (US) Law in 1986, opposition against bilingual education in the US gained momentum in the late 1990's when diverse groups of opponents attacked the policies and practices of teaching English Language Learners through their native language (De Costa & Qin, 2016). Currently, transitional bilingual education is mostly used in the US and facilitates learning in the learners' HL while transitioning to English (Martinez et al., 2014). Students can also be subjected to immersion education, in which the LoLT is different from the learners' HL (Admiraal et al., 2006; Stein, 2017). A study conducted by Umansky, Valentino and Reardon (2015) in the US indicated that students in immersion programs have a higher English proficiency level by the second grade, even though their proficiency is equal to that of dual-language learners by the higher grades. Overall, their study showed that education programs that included English and the HL led to equivalent or better academic outcomes. In a meta-analysis of four studies conducted in the USA, Rolstad, Mahoney and Glass (2007) also found that bilingual programs led to better educational outcomes than English-only programs.

In Europe the practices differ from country to country. In the Netherlands, the predominant bilingual education method is that of 50% immersion, in which half of the curriculum is taught in English and the other 50% in Dutch (Admiraal et al., 2006). The additive bilingual approach has been gaining momentum in Spain in the last two decades. Bilingual education is encouraged, thus also promoting an awareness of cultural diversity (Gerena & Ramírez-Verdugo, 2014). The aim of this project is to prepare learners to become fully competent in English. Several models of bilingual education exist in Germany ranging from the classic model where bilingual education starts in the sixth grade, through short-term programmes where certain subjects are taught in the foreign language for a specific duration or immersion programs in conjunction with other European countries, to an integrated foreign-language model where teaching is done in the HL but the resources are presented in the foreign language to foster plurilingualism (Vázquez, 2007). A meta-analysis by Reljic, Ferrin and Martin (2015) showed that, across five European studies, bilingual education programmes resulted in better literacy outcomes for learners than immersion programs. In India, 1 652 HLs were recorded in the 1961 Indian census, of which 22 are recognised as constitutional official languages (Mohanty, 2018). Children who enter schools with a minority language as HL are subjected to immersion education due to the decline of the number of languages used in Indian schools. This has a subtractive effect on their HLs. Currently English is seen as a power language in India (Mohanty, 2018) but also as a “language killer” (Mohanty, 2018), suppressing the use of indigenous languages.

Apart from educational outcomes, sociolinguistic factors should also be considered. Proficiency in various languages can be a determining factor for inclusion in the family and community (de Klerk, 2002a, Petrovic, 2015). Subtractive language practices can lead to learners losing proficiency in the language spoken in the community and can then lead to alienation from this community (de Klerk, 2002a).

1.3.3 Language in Education: The South African context

1.3.3.1 Historical and social background

Until 1994, South Africa was ruled under apartheid legislation, which included separate schools for white English and Afrikaans speakers, and separate schools (grouped according to languages) for African learners (Probyn, 2009). In the latter schools, African languages[1] were used as LoLT from Grade 1 to Grade 8, after which Afrikaans was used alongside English. In 1976, the Nationalist government attempted to enforce the use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction for half of the curriculum, the other half being taught in English creating the spark needed for the Soweto uprising (Probyn, 2009). The concept of HL education in African schools was thus negatively affected by its close links to the apartheid language education policies. The apartheid system promoted HL education as an instrument of division between different groups, not only between African people and white people, but between different African groups themselves (Barkhuizen, 2002). While white learners were taught in either English or Afrikaans (being their HLs), African learners were taught in English or Afrikaans from the 8th grade onwards (Banda, 2000; Barkhuizen, 2002; Gilmartin, 2004), with their HL used for the teaching of religious instruction (Barkhuizen, 2002). The use of English and Afrikaans as official languages reinforced the inequality of educational exit points, as the majority of South Africans had to use a language they were not fully familiar with for official communications (Gilmartin, 2004). Negative attitudes developed towards Afrikaans and, simultaneously, the motivation to learn indigenous languages dwindled (Gilmartin, 2004). Lanham, as quoted in Banda (2000), states that social segregation caused white teachers to be removed from African schools. The African learners' only contact with English thus came from teachers who themselves had been deprived of robust opportunities for learning English (Banda, 2000). Due to the disintegration of what was termed "Bantu education", African learners associated HL education with failure and poor quality (Banda, 2000, p. 53).

1.3.3.2 Current policy and practice

The South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) recognises the right of every citizen to use the language of his/her choice and all languages are to be treated equally. The constitution of South Africa (1996), as well as the LiEP (Department of Education, 1997), makes a commitment to children to provide them with education in their HL – provided it is one of the 11 official languages of South Africa and that it is reasonably practicable. The LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) states that learners need to learn two languages, but not necessarily English and Afrikaans. It also confirms the active promotion of functional multilingualism. South Africa's LiEP has been heralded as one of the most progressive in the world (Landon, as cited in Probyn et al., 2002) and as an example to other African countries (Alexander, 2000).

One of the main aims of the South African LiEP is to counteract disadvantages that resulted from mismatches between children's HLs and the LoLT (Department of Education, 1997). It also states that every school's governing body will decide how multilingualism will be promoted in their school. The teachers will thus have input in this decision. Promoting multilingualism can be done by either using more than one language as LoLT, or by offering additional languages as subjects. In the LiEP (Department of Education, 1997), the Department of Education also commits itself to promote additive multilingualism – that is, to promote learners' competence in additional languages (besides their HL), but not at the expense of their HL. It aspires to "facilitate communication across the barriers of colour, language and region" (Department of Education, 1997, p. 1). A system of additive bilingualism would assist learners in acquiring the second language incrementally, but the reality is often that of immersion (Admiraal et al., 2006) when language-minority learners are taught in a majority language at the expense of their first language. The aim of this immersion is to develop

[1] The term African language refers to the languages of sub-Saharan Africa, divided into several linguistic families. In South Africa, English and Afrikaans are excluded from this term being classified as two West-Germanic languages.

the learners' skills in a language that might be foreign to them, but that dominates daily life outside of school.

In spite of the focus of the policy on HL education, most learners in South Africa (about 65,3%) have English as their LoLT (Department of Basic Education, 2010), even though English is the first language of only 9,6% of people in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2012) (see Figure 1).

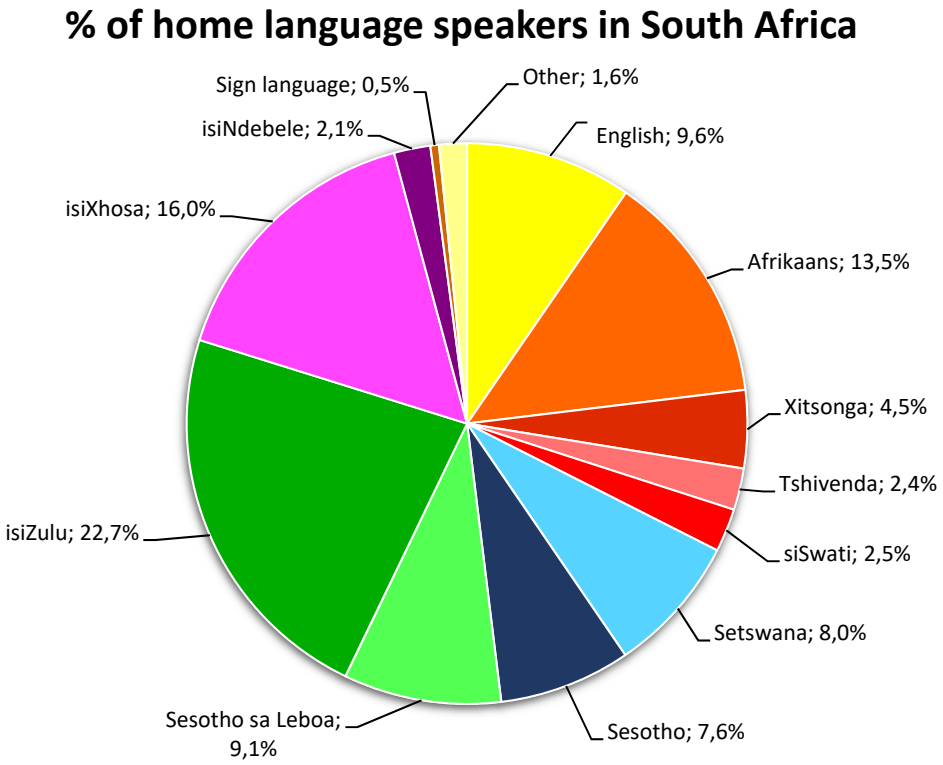

Figure 1. Languages spoken in South Africa. (Source: Statistics SA Census 2011)

In the earlier grades (Grades 1-3) the percentage of learners taught in English is lower (24,4%). However, the percentage of learners learning in English rises to 81% on average for Grades 4-12. In their report (Department of Basic Education, 2010) on the implementation of the National Curriculum Statement, the task team expressed their concern regarding the need to introduce English as a subject from as early as Grade 1, in order to prepare the learners for changing the LoLT to English in Grade 4. Recommendations of introducing English as first additional language in the foundation

phase were accepted and implemented in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (Plüddemann, 2015).

The overwhelming move towards English as the LoLT has various and complex reasons. One contributing factor is that the complex multilingual enrolment in schools makes it difficult to choose a common African language as the LoLT (Kathard et al., 2017; Posel & Casale, 2011). Webb, Lafon and Pare (2010) furthermore state that African languages are perceived as not having economic or social power. African languages were associated with the inferior quality of teaching during apartheid (de Wet, 2002), and as a result still have negative connotations for some speakers. English is often seen as the language of social advancement (Gilmartin, 2004) and as being significantly more useful than African languages, particularly in terms of seeking and finding employment (Barkhuizen, 2002). Historically 'white' Schools, in which English or Afrikaans is the medium of instruction, still benefit from historical advantages of better funding and infrastructure and are therefore often able to attract well-qualified teachers. These schools are, therefore, often seen as offering better educational opportunities (de Klerk, 2002a).

While the move towards English is understandable, many authors have blamed this unsupported transition to English as the only LoLT in the 4th grade for contributing significantly to South Africa's poor academic and, specifically, literacy outcomes (Heugh, 2002; Kathard et al., 2017). The current preference of English as the LoLT is thought to impede learning and lead to the poor mastery of not only English, but of the HL as well (Banda, 2000). The notion of increased exposure to English and a decrease in the use of the HL does not fit in with educational research, since some students are less likely to perform well if less use is made of the HL in education (Heugh, 2002). In addition, the National Educational and Evaluation Development Unit (NEEDU) report mentions poor teacher knowledge in language skills as a handicap to effective teaching (Department of Basic Education, 2013).

1.3.4 Language in education: The teacher's role

Teachers are the enactors (or non-enactors) of educational language policies in the classroom and, as such, they have an important role to play, even though this role is underrated (Lo Bianco, 2010). Ultimately, what happens in classrooms depends on what teachers do with the policy, not solely on the language policy itself (McCarty, Collins, & Hopson, 2011). According to Probyn (2009), teachers can play different roles when implementing policy. Policy violators resist working with unworkable policies and will use techniques like code-switching (Probyn, 2009) to aid understanding of subject content. They can also become policy interpreters who try to make sense of policies that have been compiled without appropriate consultation. By virtue of their classroom practices, teachers can also be policy performers through contributing to language planning at school level (Lo Bianco, 2010). Teachers who are ahead of policies and practices, and who anticipate the future by heading pilot programs, can be seen as policy advocates (Plüddemann, 2013). Some of these policy advocates, enrolled for the Advanced Certificate in Bilingual Education, stated that teaching in HL is the best practice. They added that structured code-switching should be used to help learners benefit from being taught in English. They reiterated the importance of the use of proper grounding in the HL (Plüddemann, 2015). Their strong arguments indicated the depth of feeling to support, and not undermine, the language transformation plan regarding additive bilingualism.

Teachers' language practices may be influenced by several factors besides the official LiEP. Schools often have policies set up by administrators who expect teachers to apply the policies to a whole group or groups as if everyone has the same needs (García & Sylvan, 2011). Teachers, however, may want to respond differently to different learners, and may therefore modify the practices they should prescribe by the policies, in order to meet the diverse needs of their students (Derakhshan, 2015). Teachers may also hold language ideologies of their own and have beliefs about their own, and the learners', language capacity that may influence their practices.

Studies have been done on teacher perceptions about teaching learners who are immigrants using a minority language compared to the majority language used in the school (Psaltou-Joycey et al., 2018). Some teachers perceive the experience as negative, feeling that they have not been trained in dealing with learners from other language groups (Meidl & Meidl, 2013), and thus lack confidence (Téllez & Manthey, 2015). Some teachers also rate their capacity to provide good quality education as low (Téllez & Manthey, 2015). Teachers sometimes feel that they struggle to meet the children's needs (Griffiths, 2007). Some feel that they have to rely on their own resourcefulness and put in extra effort beyond the call of duty (de Klerk, 2002b). Policy restrictions are also perceived as having a negative influence on how second languages are taught. Teachers report that their efforts are often hampered by policies that are forcing them to use a curriculum that does not meet the needs of their diverse learners or allow them to individualize instruction as needed (Meidl & Meidl, 2013). Some teachers want to make more use of the learners' HL in class, but policies in some institutions do not allow teachers to use the children's HL in the classes (Yuvayapan, 2019).

In contrast with the negative perceptions of some teachers, others rate their own efficacy as positive (Téllez & Manthey, 2015). The use of specific teaching techniques, like code-switching, is perceived as being helpful (Yuvayapan, 2019) as it enhances a better understanding of the learning content as well as enhancing the second language by linking it to the first language. The use of HL to assist learners with limited proficiency also enhances learning (Yuvayapan, 2019). The use of L2 development strategies such as workshops, developed by schools, aim to improve the abilities of teachers who teach learners not familiar with the LoLT and thus improving their confidence (Téllez & Manthey, 2015). As the 21st century is characterised by the simultaneous use of languages for communication and media, the definition of the concept bilingualism, or multilingualism, will also have to be more dynamic and flexible (García & Sylvan, 2011). Translanguaging recognises the use of more than one language in the classroom for subject content or language teaching (García & Sylvan, 2011; Makalela, 2015). South African schools present many opportunities to use more than three languages in their

diverse classrooms. The concept of dynamic plurilingual education comes to the fore when the learners learn not only from the teachers, but from their friends as well (García & Sylvan, 2011) to form a unity between a variety of languages. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) further state that the teachers are thus learners and the learners also teachers. This pedagogical approach actively works against the domination of one group of people over another.

In the modern South African context, an increasing number of teachers are teaching in a minority language/L2 instead of HL and are caught between conflicting goals of teaching subject content and teaching an additional language. South African teachers are often aware that learners would benefit from the use of the HL as the LoLT (de Klerk, 2002b), but also experience tremendous pressure to use English as the LoLT (Probyn et al., 2002). In a study done in four school districts in the Eastern Cape, Probyn et al. (2002) found that several teachers used code-switching to explain a concept in another language to aid comprehension and ensure that the pupils understood all the concepts. The impetus to use the HL often came from learners giving incorrect answers to questions posed in English. Other studies also found that teachers in South African schools use code-switching to achieve effective teaching and learning roles (Van Staden, Bosker & Bergbauer, 2016). Code-switching is used in many classrooms where the teacher and learners share a common HL, but the LoLT is English (Probyn, 2009). It is quite common to use code-switching to enhance learners' understanding and to aid communication in class (Webb et al., 2010). Though some teachers regard it as being "illicit" (Probyn et al., 2002, p. 38), "alternative pedagogical approaches for multilingual classrooms have begun to recognize simultaneous use of more than one language in classrooms for either language or content subject teaching and learning" (Makalela, 2015, p. 200). An empirical study undertaken by de Wet (2002), found that 78,9% of the respondents indicated that they use code-switching, which shows the importance they place on the use of HL in education. Urban vernaculars are also used in classes (Webb et al., 2010) to improve understanding of concepts. Teachers, though, can often lack the English proficiency to effectively teach across the curriculum (de Wet, 2002) and the medium of instruction thus becomes a barrier to effective learning and teaching (Probyn, 2001). Students also often resort to

rote learning as they lack the language proficiency to gain real understanding of the curriculum (Probyn et al., 2002). The teacher's classroom practices are thus shaped by the language proficiency of the learners (Probyn, 2009). As Probyn (2009) further reports, there is often a conflict between what is possible in practice in the class and the official LoLT of the school. This creates extra tension for educators (Probyn, 2009).

1.3.5 Language in education practices in children with intellectual disabilities

In order to contextualize language in education practice for learners with ID, this section will commence with a brief overview of intellectual disability. The literature on language learning and second language learning in children with ID will then briefly be reviewed. Thereafter Language in Education policies and practices for learners with ID will be discussed.

1.3.5.1 Intellectual disability

Intellectual disability (ID) is a condition characterised by three features: (a) deficits in cognition; (b) deficits in adaptive functioning; and (c) an onset during the developmental period (Chiurazzi & Pirozzi, 2016; Gilissen et al., 2014; Marrus & Hall, 2017). It is a lifelong condition (McKenzie et al., 2016). About 1-3% of the worldwide population has ID (Gilissen et al., 2014; Mckenzie et al., 2016; Nemerimana et al., 2018) and the gender ratio of male to female is about 1.6:1 (Marrus & Hall, 2017). Persons with ID often have comorbid conditions such as autism spectrum disorders, epilepsy and neuromuscular deficits (Chiurazzi & Pirozzi, 2016). The severity of ID has been described based on intelligence quotient (IQ) measures with an IQ of 50-70 being mild, 40-55 as moderate, 24-40 severe and less than 24 as profound (Nemerimana et al., 2018).

ID can have either genetic causes (chromosomal abnormalities, e.g., Down Syndrome or single gene disorders) or non-genetic causes (Karam et al., 2015; Murray & McKenzie, 2014; Nemerimana et al., 2018). Non-genetic causes include prenatal, perinatal, postnatal and environmental problems (Karam et al., 2015; Nemerimana et al., 2018). Environmental problems such as parental medical issues and alcoholism can

often be avoided, but are more commonly prevalent in low- and middle-income countries (Karam et al., 2015). Although the suspicion of ID can arise in infancy, less severe cases may not be diagnosed until the child reaches school-going age (Marrus & Hall, 2017).

1.3.5.2 Language learning and multilingualism in learners with ID

The language ability of learners with ID are often delayed (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Van der Schuit et al., 2011). Many studies link the language level of learners with intellectual disability to their mental age (Rondal, 2001), although there are many variations (Van der Schuit et al., 2011). Language levels may be faster or slower than suggested by their mental age (Van der Schuit et al., 2011). In a study on learners with ID, Van Tilborg et al., (2014) found that these learners lagged behind their peers in language acquisition and that language skills that were predictors of later literacy acquisition were limited in learners with ID. Children with ID assessed at age 4-5 showed extensive language delays (Van der Schuit et al., 2011), however, the bigger their vocabulary at age 4, the greater the possibility that they will have acquired improved syntax skills by the age of 5 (Van Tilborg et al., 2014). Van der Schuit (2011) also found that children with ID require a larger critical mass of vocabulary for syntactic development to commence.

A considerable amount of research has been done on bilingualism in typically developing (TD) children, but very little research has been done regarding bilingualism in children with ID (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Kohnert & Medina, 2009; Mohammadian & Dolatabadi, 2016; Ware et al., 2015). Children with language-learning disabilities are usually not considered as suitable candidates for dual-language learning (Paradis, 2007), as parents are often concerned about their children's ability to learn a second language (Ware et al., 2015). Parents often believe that their children would become confused when introduced to a second language and that their development would be delayed even further (Ware et al., 2015). Practices are frequently based on what is regarded as common sense instead of evidence (Paradis, 2007) despite many reports on successful L2 learning by children with ID (Kay-Raining Bird, Genesee &

Verhoeven 2016; Ware et al., 2015). Reviews by Bird, Genesee and Verhoeven (2017) and Ware, Lye and Kyffin (2015) suggest that learners with ID do have the capacity to become bilingual and manage to acquire the second language without significant effect on the HL development (Ware et al., 2015). Even though evidence suggests that children with ID are not disadvantaged by multilingual exposure, it remains important to look at each child as an individual and as having different abilities (Ware et al., 2015). The initial support of learners with ID in HL to aid progress (Ware et al., 2015) has been proven successful. When learners with ID are taught in a language other than their HL without prior exposure to this language, subtractive multilingualism may pose a further risk to their language learning (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).

Uljarević, Katsos, Hudry and Gibson (2016) state in the conclusion of their overview of recent research that there seems to be little reason to assume that multilingualism has a negative influence on a child with neurodevelopmental disorders, with a similar observation made by Kay-Raining Bird (2016). Even though many of the families in studies were advised to use only one language when communicating with their children (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Ware et al., 2015), many families reported positive effects of bilingualism in their children's involvement in activities in the community (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). Another positive effect of teaching children with ID a second language is the reduction of their feelings of being different by being able to fit into the community (Mohammadian & Dolatabadi, 2016). A teacher that has a positive influence on his/her learners by compelling them to make progress, has beneficial input effects on L2 learning in pupils with ID (Mohammadian & Dolatabadi, 2016).

1.3.5.3 Language in education policies and practices for learners with disabilities and learners with ID

In various countries, there seems to be a lack of connection between policies governing language in education and policies governing provisions for learners with disabilities, including those with ID. Ware et al. (2015) found in their literature review on bilingualism and learners with ID that consideration of the specific needs of bilingual learners with ID on the level of National policy is rare. Where policies do exist on

national level, it is more likely to be a broad-based policy stretching across all forms of special needs and not specifically targeted at learners with ID (Ware et al., 2015).

While South Africa has committed itself to an inclusive education system in Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), there are no separate policies governing language in education issues for learners with disabilities. However, the LiEP explicitly states that the agenda to promote multilingualism does not apply to learners with serious language developmental problems and intellectual disabilities (Department of Education, 1997). There is thus no specific reference to a LiEP for schools catering for learners with SID.

A literature review on the topic of language in education for learners with ID from bilingual or minority language groups has revealed a dearth of studies on this topic (Ware et al., 2015). The authors report that only one doctoral thesis (Myers, as cited in Ware et al, 2015) had empirically compared the effects of bilingual versus immersion programmes on learners with special educational needs, some of whom had ID. Myers found no difference in academic achievements of learners. These findings are in line with those found for children without disabilities. Ware et al. (2015) recommended that more studies be conducted into methods of support for learners with ID developing language skills and becoming bilingual.

An international survey by Marinova-Todd et al. (2016), regarding the provision of bilingual support for learners with developmental disabilities across four countries (the USA, Canada, the UK and the Netherlands), showed a complete disconnection between opinion and practice. Even though teachers believed that learners with developmental disabilities (DD) are capable of learning another language or becoming bilingual, these learners had less access to bilingual support services than their peers without disabilities. Second language classes were also less accessible for these learners. Learners with ID whose HL was a minority language were often taught and assessed in a majority language, despite the research respondents' general disagreement with the practice. Despite the findings indicating a big discrepancy between professional opinions and current practices, professionals seem to be supportive of bilingual opportunities for learners with developmental disabilities.

In order to identify studies on specific language in education practices employed for learners with disabilities (including those with ID) who are educated in languages other than their HL, a systematic literature search was conducted.

The search terms are portrayed in Figure 2.

Population		**Exposure**		**Outcome**
child* AND disabilit*	**AND**	Language in education	**AND**	bilingual* OR multilingual*

Figure 2. Systematic search terms

The search terms were entered via EBSCOHOST into the following databases:

- Academic Search Complete
- E-Journals
- ERIC
- Family and Social Studies Worldwide
- Humanities Source
- MasterFILE Premier
- APA PsycArticles
- APA PsycInfo
- Teacher Reference Centre

Limits were set in terms of date (between 1990 and 2020), type (Academic Journals) and language (limited to English).

Studies were included if they described language in education practices for learners in the public education system (i.e., primary and secondary education), who had developmental disabilities (e.g., ID, autism spectrum disorders [ASD], or Down Syndrome). However, studies were excluded if the practices described concerned

students with specific language impairment, learning disabilities, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), as learners who have these conditions as a primary diagnosis typically have ID. Studies were also excluded if they targeted learners who were deaf or hard of hearing, as other language-related factors may be relevant to influence educational practices. Studies on students in the tertiary education system were also excluded.

The PRISMA diagram (Figure 3) depicts the systematic search process.

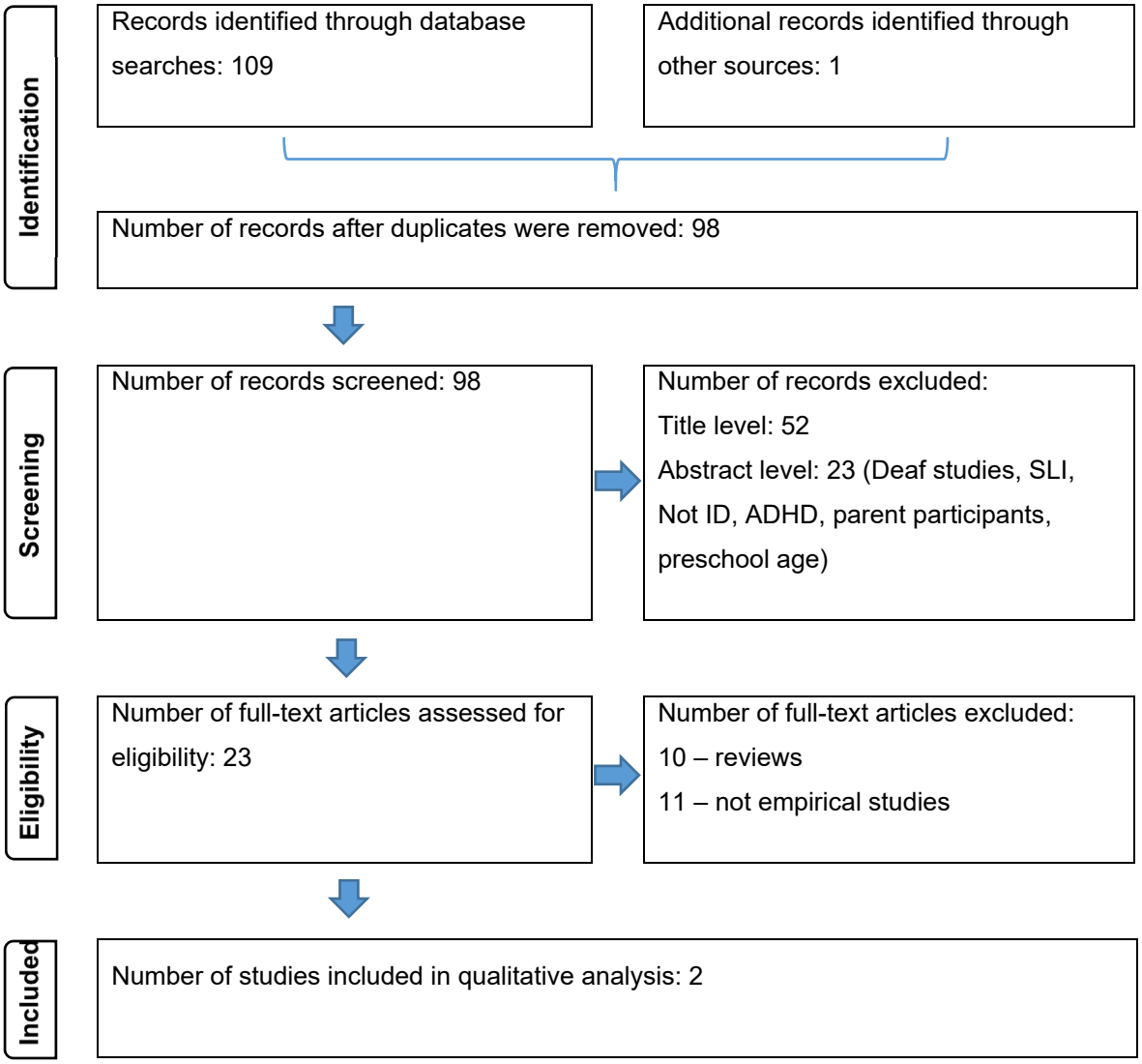

Figure 3. Prisma diagram of the systematic search process.

The studies included in the review are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary of Studies in the Systematic Search

	Author	Article title	Publi-cation date	Participants	Design used	Aim	Language in education practices described	Conclusions drawn
1	Bos & Reyes	Conversations with a Latina Teacher about Education for Language-Minority Students with Special Needs	1996	Bilingual Special Education Teacher with experience in teaching students with a variety of developmental disabilities, including ID	Qualitative - In-depth interviews	To determine what shaped her successful tuition of Language Minority Special Needs children.	Ms. Reyes uses a blended approach to teaching consisting of four key strategies: Students need time to play with and explore the second language - thus a natural approach to learning language; building her teaching around the background knowledge and sociocultural experiences of her students; using the students' first language to support the second language; and using direct teaching and concentrated practice where students had not mastered required skills.	Teachers that teach bilingual learners with developmental disabilities need to be skilled in Special education, but also in the pedagogics of second language acquisition or bilingual teaching. More research is needed on specific teaching methods or strategies to address these issues.
2	Arreaga-Mayer, Utley, Perdemo-Rivera & Greenwood	Ecobehavioural assessment of instructional contexts in bilingual special education programs for English language learners at risk for developmental disabilities	2003	Thirty-six English language learners at risk for or with established developmental disabilities (including ID) and their teachers	Qualitative - Observations	The study aimed to describe the instructional context as well as teacher and learner behaviour pertaining to English language learners at risk for developmental disabilities.	Besides other outcomes, the study highlighted that English was used almost exclusively in classrooms. The HL was used only 5% of the time.	The authors made no direct conclusions as to the impact of this finding on educational outcomes; however, they highlighted the need to assess its impact in further studies.

Very few studies are available on specific language in education practices employed for learners with disabilities (including those with ID) who are educated in languages other than their HL. The two studies included were based on English Language Learners (ELLs) with developmental disabilities, most of whom were immigrants being taught in the language of their adopted countries. The Arreaga-Mayer et.al. (2003) study showed the lack of opportunities for learners to interact using the newly acquired language on account of the teacher doing most of the talking. The teacher involved in the study by Bos and Reyes (1996) credits her success her interactive involvement with her learners in a culturally sensitive way. She also allowed them a lot of time to experiment with the new language without constantly rectifying its incorrect use. Ms. Reyes stressed the importance of supporting the learners' new language by using the HL to explain concepts when necessary. The authors concluded that teachers who teach learners with special needs who are bilingual need to be skilled in both special education and the teaching of bilingual learners while using strategies to ensure effective learning. These two studies offer some perspectives on language in education practices for learners with developmental disabilities, but fail to differentiate those employed specifically for learners with ID.

The literature on language in education practices for learners with ID is extremely limited. There is a dearth of even basic descriptive studies and qualitative investigations to describe current practices by teachers or their perceptions about these practices, not to mention the lack of experimentally controlled investigations to determine best practices. While experimentally controlled studies to identify the effect of specific language in education practices on a variety of outcomes measures, such as academic achievement, language development and social inclusion in the family and community, of learners with ID are needed, descriptive and qualitative studies can provide a baseline understanding of existing practices and perceptions about these practices.

As there is no literature available on classroom practices in schools for learners with ID in South Africa, this study aimed to determine the perceptions of teachers at schools for learners with SID in Mpumalanga, South Africa, on their language practices and choices. The study also aimed to determine which languages the teachers choose

to use in their classes for teaching, as well as the factors influencing their choices. Teachers' perceptions about the effects of their language choices and practices in their classrooms, as well as their beliefs and feelings about these practices and choices on the learners have been explored.

1.4 Summary

Researchers agree that language in education practices should be responsive to the needs and circumstances of learners. For learners from diverse language backgrounds, language in education practices that include the use of the learners' HL alongside the less familiar LoLT (L2) have been found to lead to better educational outcomes than immersion approaches for learners without disabilities.

In South Africa, language teaching has gone through several changes through history. The LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) makes provision for learners to be educated in their HL, while also advocating multilingualism to be integrated into the school system. Choosing a language(s) of learning and teaching (LoLT) often makes it difficult to find common ground as learners attending a school (or even an individual class) may come from very diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This often results in learners being educated in a language different from their HL. Despite English not being the HL of the majority of learners, teaching is done in English, especially from Grade 4, putting strain on the teachers as well as learners to achieve positive results.

Even though the language development of learners with disabilities (including intellectual disabilities) is slower than that of their typically developing peers, researchers agree that they do have the ability to learn an additional language (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016; Ware et al., 2015). Research points to the fact that this is better achieved when the learners' HL is used to support the additional language during the learning process. Additional research is needed to determine the most successful language in education practices in teaching learners with ID with diverse linguistic backgrounds and -needs.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 Main aim

The main aim of the study was to determine the perceptions of teachers in the foundation phase at three schools for learners with SID in Mpumalanga, South Africa, on their classroom language practices and choices.

2.1.2 Sub-aims

The sub-aims of the study were:

i. To describe the language(s) teachers use with the learners in their classrooms
ii. To describe the factors that teachers take into account when deciding on which language(s) to use with their learners;
iii. To explore teachers' beliefs and feelings about language practices and choices for learners with SID in their classes.

2.2 Research design and stages

A qualitative design was used. A qualitative design is suitable for the in-depth explorations of phenomena as experienced by participants when as yet little is known about these experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The first aim was to describe phenomena in greater detail. The phenomena are the subjective experiences of the teachers targeted in the study. The study thus focused on teachers and the special features and links that are shared among them (Flick, 2013). A phenomenological approach was used to determine the language practices and choices of teachers in the junior phase at three schools for learners with SID, with high linguistic diversity amongst learners, by using in-depth interviews based on a semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix A). This approach was suited to this study as it could be used to describe the meanings of an experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). The similarities and

differences found in the participants' experiences were used to define categories (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2019) that were in turn used to group and compare data.

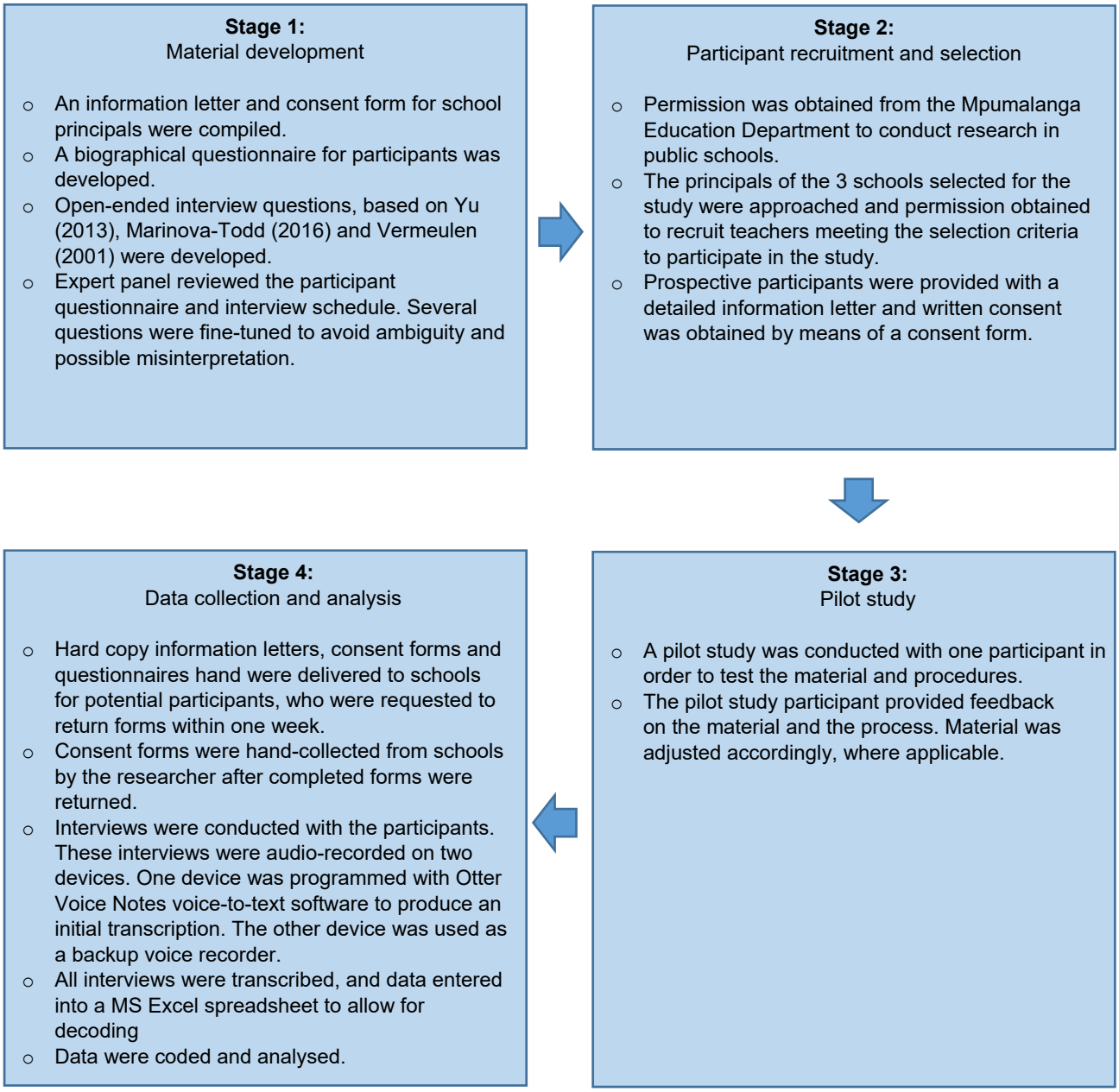

Figure 4. Stages of the Study.

2.3 Pilot study

In order to test the suitability of the proposed procedures, one pilot interview was held. One teacher that had consented to participate in the study was approached to participate in the pilot study interview. The teacher was interviewed on a one-on-one basis at a suitable location to reduce background interference. The interview was audio-recorded using the Otter Voice Notes application loaded onto a Samsung A7 Smartphone. The automatic transcription function of this application was also used to generate an initial transcript. The transcript was exported to a MS Word document. The transcript was re-checked by listening to the audio-recording using Veho ZB-6 earphones and corrected on a computer. A back-up recording was done using the Voice Recorder application on a Samsung Android Active (SM-T365) Tablet. Data was coded by creating an initial Code book to reduce and simplify data (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011).

Table 3 reflects the aims, materials used, procedures and recommendations of the pilot study.

Table *3*
Pilot Study Aims, Materials, Procedures, Results and Recommendations

Aim	**Materials**	**Procedures**	**Results**	**Recommendations**
To determine if the Teacher information letter and consent form were clear	Teacher information letter and consent form (Appendix D)	The participant was asked to read the information letter and consent form (Appendix D) and provide feedback on both.	Teacher information and consent form were clear – no adjustments needed.	No changes.
To determine the comprehensiveness, clarity and appropriateness of the biographical questionnaire	Biographical questionnaire (Appendix E)	The participant was asked to provide feedback after completing the biographical questionnaire (Appendix E).	Questionnaire was deemed comprehensive and clear.	No changes.
To determine the comprehensiveness, clarity and appropriateness of the interview schedule	Interview schedule (Appendix A)	The interview schedule was used during the pilot study interview. Open-ended questions were asked. The participant was asked if he/she has any recommendations regarding the questions and whether the questions were appropriate. The teacher was asked if any questions should be added to make the interview schedule more comprehensive.	It was found that some questions needed to be worded slightly differently. And, to achieve a more logical flow, some questions moved around in the order.	Six questions remained the same, but of these four were moved to a different position in the schedule. Three questions were moved and the wording modified. Two questions were deleted. Four questions were added as clarification.

Aim	Materials	Procedures	Results	Recommendations
To determine if the recording devices captured the interview effectively	Samsung A7 Smartphone and Samsung Android Active (SM-T365) Tablet, computer, earphones	A Samsung A7 Smartphone with Otter Voice Notes application as well as a Samsung Android Active Tablet with Voice Recorder application was used to audio-record the interview. The recordings were listened to in order to determine if they were intelligible.	Both devices functioned effectively.	No changes.
To determine if the Otter Voice Notes application was effective in creating an initial transcription of the recorded interview	Otter Voice Notes application, computer, earphones and external hard drive for backup	This application automatically transcribes a recorded speech file as a text file that can be exported to MS Word for editing. To ensure that the transcription of the interview was correct, the interviewer listened to the audio-recording and made the applicable corrections to the transcription in the text file to reflect the interview accurately.	The Otter Voice Notes worked effectively, and reduced time spent on transcription. Transfer of transcription to Word for editing was successful. Backups were made onto an external hard drive.	No changes.
To determine the reliability of the transcribed and checked transcript	Computer with transcription document, sound recording on backup device	An independent rater listened to the audio-recording and checked the reliability of the transcription. The percentage agreement between the transcription and the checking was done by dividing all agreements	A 1% disagreement was found.	Consensus was reached.

Aim	Materials	Procedures	Results	Recommendations
		by the sum of agreements and disagreements. Disagreements were calculated from additions, omissions and differently transcribed words.		
To determine whether the collected data were suitable for the inductive thematic analysis needed to answer the research question	Printed text file, data entered into MS Excel for analysis	A code book was developed and tested according to the six stages as set out in Braun & Clarke (2006) 1. Becoming familiar with the data 2. Generating initial codes 3. Searching for themes 4. Reviewing themes 5. Defining and naming themes 6. Producing the report	A thematic analysis was used to capture provisional codes and themes.	Code book was refined.

2.4 Participants

2.4.1 Selection Criteria

In order to take part in the study, participants had to comply with the criteria as set out in Table 4 below.

Table 4
Participant Selection Criteria

Criterion	Justification	Measure used
Teacher must be registered at the South African Council for Educators (SACE).	Participants must be qualified teachers. According to law, SACE keeps a record of teachers qualified to teach (SACE, 200)	Biographical questionnaire (Appendix E)
Teacher currently teaching at a school for learners with SID who come from diverse language backgrounds.	The language practices and choices of teachers at these particular schools are under investigation.	Biographical questionnaire (Appendix E)
Teachers should have taught at their current school for at least two years.	Educators should be familiar with the language situation at the school and also have experience with the Differentiated National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (Department of Basic Education, 2017) introduced in 2017.	Biographical questionnaire (Appendix E)
Teacher should be proficient in oral and written English to read the information letter, give informed written consent, complete a biographical questionnaire, and participate in an interview with open-ended questions.	The researcher is not able to speak an African language, so English will be used for all interviews to have fair treatment of all participants.	Reported by Principal and biographical questionnaire (Appendix E)
Teacher must be teaching in the foundation phase (learners aged 5;0 [years;months]-12;11) (Department of Basic Education, 2017b)	Learners in the foundation phase would be more affected by discrepancies between the HL and LoLT, as they would typically have been exposed to the LoLT for a more limited time than learners in the senior phases.	Recruitment was done amongst teachers in the junior phase.

2.4.2 Sampling and recruitment

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities (Appendix B). Purposeful convenience sampling was used to select participants, as the participants needed to be knowledgeable about the topic. Teachers teaching in the foundation phase at three schools for learners with SID within reasonable traveling distance of the researcher's residence and in the same district were recruited. Permission was obtained from the Mpumalanga Department of Education (see Appendix C) to conduct research in public schools. Permission was sought from three school principals to recruit teachers from their schools. Principals who granted permission were supplied with a summary of the selection criteria and asked to hand information letters and consent forms (see Appendix D) to three teachers at their school whom they nominated for participation. By including teachers from three different schools the researcher ensured that teachers from diverse language backgrounds and learners from diverse language backgrounds were included in the study. Each principal nominated three teachers, and each teacher signed the consent form. One teacher acted as pilot participant, while the other eight participated in the main study.

2.4.3 Description of participants

Additional descriptive information about the participant was obtained via the biographical questionnaire (see Appendix E). The learners attending the classes of the participating teachers are impacted by the decisions made regarding languages to be used in the classroom. These 112 indirect participants have 10 of the 11 official languages as HLs. Figure 5 summarises the participants' biographical information as well as the HLs of these learners.

Table *5*
Description of Participants

Participant number	Gender	Teaching experience (years)	Experience in teaching learners with SID (years)	LoLT of school	Home language	Other languages spoken/understood	Home languages of learners in teacher's class
1	F	22	12	English/isiZulu	South-Sotho	English, Afrikaans, isiZulu, Pedi	isiZulu (n=11) Ndebele (n=6)
2	F	24	19	English/isiZulu	Sepedi	English, Afrikaans, Tsonga, isiZulu, Xitsonga	isiZulu (n=6) Sesotho (n=2) Sepedi (n=1) Setswana (2) isiNdebele (n=2) siSwati (n=2)
3	F	15	2	English/ Afrikaans	Afrikaans	English	isiZulu (n=9) Afrikaans (n=2) Sesotho (n=3)
4	F	12	12	English/isiZulu	North Sotho	English, Tswana, isiZulu	isiZulu (n=7) Sepedi (n=2) isiNdebele (n=2)
5	F	23	6	English/ Afrikaans	Afrikaans	English	isiZulu (n=7) Afrikaans (n=3)
6	F	6	6	English/isiZulu	isiZulu	English, Afrikaans, Sotho, Xhosa, Ndebele	isiZulu (n=10) Sesotho (n=2) isiNdebele (n=3) Siswati (n=3) English (n=1) isiXhosa (n=1)
7	F	26	4	English/isiZulu	Sesotho	English, isiZulu, Sepedi, isiXhosa, Afrikaans	isiZulu (n=9) isiNdebele (n=2) Xitsonga (n=1) isiXhosa (n=1)
8	F	18	12	English/ Afrikaans	Afrikaans	English	isiZulu (n=12)

2.5 Materials and equipment

Materials used in this study will consist of information letters, permission and consent forms, questionnaires and an interview schedule.

2.5.1 Materials used for providing information and obtaining consent

An information letter for school principals detailing all aspects of the study as well as a permission form were developed (see Appendix F). The information letter explained the purpose of the study and what was expected of the principal as well as the participants. Selection criteria for participants were also explained. The information letter was discussed during the interview with the principals. Any other detail or more information they required was given during the interview. A short questionnaire about the language policy of the school (see Appendix G), in order to obtain background information, was given to the principals to complete. This was used to compare the official language policy of the schools with that of the language/s selected for use in classes.

Each potential participant was supplied with an information letter with details of the study as well as a consent form (see Appendix D). They were requested to indicate whether or not they grant consent to participate by completing the form. Any issues that needed clarification by the researcher were answered as needed. As the researcher is unable to speak African languages, all request forms, permission- and consent forms were compiled in English so as not to advantage or disadvantage any participants.

2.5.2 Biographical questionnaire

All consenting participants were requested to complete a biographical questionnaire in order to gain insight into the teaching experience as well as language proficiency of the participants (see Appendix E). Questions regarding participants' teaching experience, own HL, HLs of their respective learners, as well as their proficiency in the languages involved, were included in the questionnaire. These aspects were included in the questionnaire to describe the participant sample more meticulously. The biographical questionnaire was reviewed and discussed by the expert

panel consisting of nine professional Speech Language Pathologists with AAC expertise. Several questions were streamlined to ensure that no ambiguous questions were included.

2.5.3 Semi-structured interview schedule

An interview schedule (see Appendix A) was drafted to guide the semi-structured interviews. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) consisted of the author's own questions as well as questions adapted from interview guides by Mueller, Singer and Carranza (2006); Mueller, Singer and Grace (2004) and selected items from a survey by Marinova-Todd et al., (2016). The interview schedule was checked by an expert panel. Several questions were fine-tuned to be less ambiguous and less open to misinterpretation based on the feedback provided by the panel. The interview schedule was then also further amended based on the findings of the pilot study (see Table 3).

2.5.4 Equipment

The Otter Voice Notes application downloaded onto a Samsung A7 Smartphone was used to audio-record the interviews. This application generated an audio file as well as an initial transcription of the audio content. Back-up recordings were done using the Voice Recorder application on a Samsung Android Active (SM-T365) Tablet. Veho ZB-6 earphones were used to listen to the recordings.

2.6 Procedures

2.6.1 General procedures

Ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. Permission to conduct research was obtained from the Mpumalanga Department of Education and principals of relevant schools. Informed consent was obtained from participating teachers.

2.6.2 Data collection

The interviews for the main study were scheduled at times when the participants were available at school or at home after school hours and conducted on an individual basis. Five participants were interviewed at their respective schools and three at their homes. The interview commenced with the researcher greeting the participant and thanking her for her participation. The researcher confirmed consent verbally. It was reiterated that participation was voluntary and that she had the right to withdraw at any time with no consequences. Participants were reminded that they may refrain from answering questions. It was confirmed that the biographical questionnaire was completed and fully understood. The interview schedule was then followed. Clarifying questions were asked and confirmations of some answers elicited. The researcher thanked each participant again for their participation.

All interviews were recorded on two devices. An audio-recording was made on a Samsung A7 Smartphone. The Otter Voice Notes application downloaded onto the phone created an initial transcript which was exported to a MS Word document for transcription. A backup audio-recording was made on a Samsung Android Active tablet. Interviews lasted between 5 and 12 minutes, with five interviews lasting around 8 minutes.

An interview elaboration was be done after each interview session by writing down the researcher's self-reflection on the interview as well as additional information on the participant's reactions.

2.6.3 Data transcription

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Voice recognition software in the form of Otter Voice Notes was used to generate an initial transcription. The researcher then listened to all audio-recordings while checking this initial transcription and correcting it. Conversation fillers were indicated in the transcripts, but care was given not to overwhelm the transcription with interjections from the interviewer,

especially where the interview was conducted in the participant's second language (MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004). An independent transcriber also transcribed 20% of each recording. Percentage agreement was calculated as described in Section 2.6.5.

2.6.4 Data analysis

Initially, the intention was to use a combination of deductive and inductive coding. The coding scheme developed by van Dalen (2019) was intended to be used as a framework (deductive aspect), while specific codes were to be added to this framework inductively. However, when commencing with the coding, it became clear that not all the overall themes in van Dalen's framework matched the data obtained from the teachers. It was therefore decided to use an inductive thematic analysis in order to summarise the key features of the data set. The six phases of thematic analysis as set out by Braun & Clarke (2012) and Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017) were followed. The researcher first became familiar with the data by reading the transcriptions and listening to the audio-recordings. The researcher made notes of ideas that seemed relevant to the research question as well as sub-aims. Several repeating codes started to emerge when the transcriptions of individual participants were compared. Sub-themes were developed to group codes together with clear boundaries to distinguish between them. Codes with similar topics were then clustered into themes. These themes were studied in terms of their applicability to the study and were established according to distinctive features. Themes were then named and provisional definitions for each theme were written to differentiate between them. An initial coding scheme was developed and verified by the supervisor. In a second cycle of coding, the researcher coded all data using this coding scheme. The supervisor then checked the coding and made revisions and changes, updating codes, subthemes, themes and definitions in the coding scheme. Changes were discussed in a series of meetings until consensus on the coding and the coding scheme was reached between the researcher and the supervisor. The final coding scheme is provided in Appendix H. Once the data had been analysed by using the coding scheme and an initial report drafted, a precis and description of the themes and subthemes was sent to participants to check that the themes they mentioned had been captured (Birt et al., 2016; Carlson, 2010). This was done by

sending the summary as a pdf document to all the participants via WhatsApp or e-mail. They were informed that it was a summary of findings rather than a detailed transcription (Carlson, 2010). The participants were supposed to be able to recognise their statements in the summary. They were asked to indicate anything they might like to change or add (Birt et al., 2016). Six participants responded positively and two did not respond. No changes were requested. Responses were gathered and the existing data codes (Birt et al., 2016) used for the final analysis.

2.6.5 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several steps were taken. The semi-structured interview schedule was based on published research and interview guides on similar topics, namely those by Marinova-Todd et al. (2016) as well as the researcher's own questions. A second transcription of 20% per recording was done by an independent transcriber. The reliability of the transcriptions was estimated by calculating the percentage of agreement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Agreements}}{\text{Agreements + disagreements (additions + omissions + differences)}} \text{ X } 100$$

A percentage of 99% agreement was calculated. All disagreements were examined, compared and corrected where applicable.

As an additional measure of trustworthiness, synthesised member checking was conducted (Birt et al., 2016). An easy-read summary and description of the themes and subthemes (see Appendix I) was sent to participants to check that the themes they mentioned had been captured (Birt et al., 2016; Carlson, 2010). They were informed that it was a summary of findings rather than a detailed transcription (Carlson, 2010). The participants were supposed to be able to recognise their statements in the summary. They were asked to indicate anything they might like to change or add. Six participants responded. None wanted any changes. As no additions were made, the data were accepted.

Collaborative data analysis by the researcher and supervisor was done to bring a diverse perspective on the analysis and produce an agreed interpretation (Cornish, Gillespie, & Zittoun, 2019). As the researcher had to take a critical attitude towards the research, personal investment in the research topic had to be mitigated (Bauer & Gaskell, 1999). Combining the perspectives of the researcher and supervisor thus enabled critical reflection and distance to each perspective (Gillespie, 2012).

2.6.6 Positionality of researcher

The researcher is currently an AAC consultant at one of the three schools targeted in the survey. Objectivity through bracketing will be used, as far as possible, by seeking evidence contradicting pre-conceived ideas (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) and concentrating on what the participants are saying. As nine teachers were interviewed (eight participants in the main study and one participant in the pilot study), it would be expected that diverse ideas will be identified.

2.7 Ethical issues

Approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) as well as a signed consent letter from the Mpumalanga Department of Education were obtained before any interviews were done.

Since human participants were involved in this study, the researcher, at all times, upheld the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, as set out in the Belmont Report (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1979). These principles were applied in this study in the way described below:

Respect for persons: This principle was upheld by disclosing fully to the participants, in a detailed information letter, all aspects of the study before they were requested to give consent. All participants were free to ask questions at any stage. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time. All data collected from a participant who would have withdrawn would have been destroyed. Participants' information was treated as confidential and all

data identifying the person or specific workplace was removed from the records at the earliest possible stage of analysis. Audio-recordings and transcriptions of interviews were kept strictly confidential and pseudonyms were used for the names of individuals during transcriptions. These recordings and transcriptions are only available to the researcher and the supervisor. Learners were only identified by using initials and not full names. Copies of the interviews were backed up onto an external storage. All raw data will be stored at CAAC for the period of fifteen (15) years in electronic format and as a hard copy.

Beneficence: No risks were anticipated during participation. Statements made by the participants were not shared with anyone outside of the research team (supervisor and research assistant). Potential benefits of the research are that teachers will be able to reflect on their language practices and choices and become cognisant of how these may influence the learners. The findings should help teachers gain insight into challenges faced by teachers regarding language practices.

Justice: Convenience and purposeful sampling was used to select participants as specific criteria needed to be met. Teachers that chose to participate were not advantaged or disadvantaged through their participation. Findings were reported honestly and truthfully without alterations (Cornelison, 1998; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Choosing not to participate would not have disadvantaged any person.

3. FINDINGS

All teachers provided codable data in response to the interview questions. The transcribed responses were divided into 240 segments. The end of a segment was determined either by a change in speaker, or by a change in topic that necessitated a new code. Of these 240 segments, 215 segments were coded. A total of 25 text segments could not be assigned a code due to the following reasons: 11 segments were related to background information; seven segments were confirmations/requests for clarification; four were not related to any theme; two were repetitions and one was unclear. The remaining 216 coded segments were categorized into the following four themes: (a) language practices, (b) learners' needs and abilities, (c) constraints, possibilities and strategies and (d) beliefs about language learning and teaching. Most segments were only assigned one code. However, two segments were each given two different codes as they related to two different themes.

An overview of the themes, subthemes and examples of codes categorized under the specific subthemes is provided in Table 7. The number of segments classified under specific subthemes as well as the number of participants mentioning a specific subtheme is also indicated. In the sections following the table, the four themes are explained in greater detail, and illustrated with quotes from the participants. All quotes are italicized. The authors' clarifications added into the quotes are enclosed in square brackets.

Table 6
Themes, Subthemes and Examples of Issues Mentioned by Participants

Theme	Subtheme	No. of segments	No. of teachers	Examples of codes
Language practices	English mostly	5	3	English almost exclusively English for Maths assessment
	English and isiZulu	23	7	English and assistants translate to isiZulu where necessary English and isiZulu are mixed English in teaching, isiZulu for additional explanations English worksheets explained in English, then in isiZulu English and isiZulu for teaching, class discussions and explanations
	English, Afrikaans and isiZulu	4	1	Alternate per week between English and Afrikaans as LoLT Learners can answer in any language English and Afrikaans (LoLTs) mostly and some isiZulu words
	isiZulu	4	3	isiZulu for talking in class isiZulu for assessment isiZulu for conversations
Learners' needs and abilities	Current language proficiency	30	8	Diverse HL profiles of learners make isiZulu learning material inappropriate English proficiency better than isiZulu English proficiency improves English proficiency is limited but classroom exposure improves it English proficiency limited in some learners isiZulu explanations are understood isiZulu is HL of most isiZulu proficiency is common to most learners isiZulu is understood by everyone
	Learners' language needs	23	8	Multilingualism will facilitate peer communication Afrikaans or English for employment English and isiZulu for employment and community integration English for further school education English proficiency will give learners status and counteract experience of failure English will be important after school
	In relation to beliefs about languages	10	6	English is known by the majority of people in SA English is easier to understand than HL English is everywhere English is international English will open doors isiZulu is difficult to read and write
Constraints, Possibilities and Strategies	AAC and visual aids	5	3	Picture cards to bridge between languages Pictures to scaffold understanding Teaching aids to scaffold understanding
	Assistants as translators	5	2	Assistant not proficient in all the learners' HL's Assists with explanation For children who do not understand languages used in the classroom currently
	Curriculum and learning material	31	8	Curriculum for HL only in English, hard to translate to isiZulu Curriculum only in English is adapted by teacher

Theme	Subtheme	No. of segments	No. of teachers	Examples of codes
				Curriculum only in English makes it hard and differentiation is needed
				Material bought by teacher herself
				Material in English means learners complete written work in English
				Material in isiZulu needed
				Material in isiZulu not available so teacher makes her own
				Limited resources to help learners with limited English proficiency
	Other constraints and strategies	6	3	Adapt pace to assist learners with limited English proficiency
				Extra explanation and simplification of work to assist learners with limited English proficiency
				No Math terms in African languages
	School language policy	5	4	Teacher adheres to official LoLT
				Official Policy does not allow what is best
				Policy not compatible with language proficiency of learners
				Policy not compatible with teacher language proficiency
	Teacher language proficiency	10	3	Compatible with that of all/most learners
				Creating tolerance for teacher's limited proficiency in LoLT (isiZulu)
				Incompatibility between teacher's HL and learners' language proficiency
				Limited proficiency in LoLT – teacher asks colleagues for translations
				Limited proficiency in LoLT (isiZulu) precludes teacher from being able to make use of isiZulu worksheets even if they were available
Beliefs about language learning and language in education practices	Learners' ability to learn more than one language	11	8	A progressive condition in a learner can cause language loss
				Depends on learner
				Yes, if teaching is only in one language (presumably additional language – sequential bilingualism)
				Yes, speaking but maybe not writing
	Opinions about language choices and practices in class	32	8	Choice depends on learner
				Monolingual English (mainly) is hard for learners but beneficial in the long run
				Monolingual English is important
				Monolingual English with some translation is beneficial
				Multilingual teaching with 2 LoLTs still does not accommodate all learners' HLs
				Multiple languages (especially when not HL) are very difficult for learners
				Multiple languages are beneficial
				Multiple languages taught as subjects so that learners have a chance to learn their HL

3.1 Language Practices

A total of 34 coded segments were related to this theme. Teachers spoke about the use of various languages and language combinations in their classrooms, sometimes with different choices made for different classroom activities (e.g., discussions, teaching, giving instructions or making assessments). All teachers used English at least some of the time and all used English for more than one classroom activity. I thought this was unsurprising because English was one of the LoLTs in each of the three schools included in the study. However, differences emerged regarding the extent to which one or more other languages (in most cases the second official LoLT) were also used in the classroom. Four subthemes describing four different practices were therefore identified under this theme, namely: (a) English and isiZulu; (b) English mostly; (c) English, Afrikaans and isiZulu; and (d) isiZulu.

3.1.1 English and isiZulu

Six of the educators reported they combined use of these two languages in class on a regular basis. Five of these educators taught at schools where both English and isiZulu were the official LoLTs. The educators at these schools were all proficient, to some extent, in both languages and used both languages in class, in a seemingly integrated manner.

> *So we sometimes do Zulu and English. Even if you teach you teach in English but you explain in Zulu.* **[P1]**

> *We'll do them [phonics] in English, but if they don't understand we explain it in Zulu.* **[P1]**

> *I use English and Zulu [for teaching]… both languages… I just teach Zulu and English, they understand better in English.* **[P4]**

> *I teach with both languages, English and Zulu. Yeah, I have to repeat it. I start by Zulu. After that, I explain in English again. Double double.* **[P6]**

In assessments, in order that they can understand, actually, I'm using both languages. Yes, is easier for them, because when I speak in English then I try to switch and speak in Zulu so that they can understand. **[P7]**

It became apparent from the responses that these language switches were often deliberate attempts to increase understanding, as will be further discussed under Section 3.2.1.

The sixth teacher who mentioned the use of both English and isiZulu in the classroom taught at a school where both English and Afrikaans were the official LoLTs. This teacher was not proficient in isiZulu and the class assistant translated her instructions into isiZulu for learners who did not understand English.

I use English every day [for giving instructions]. To help learners that do not understand, the assistant translates it into Zulu. **[P8]**

The degree to which both English and isiZulu were used in the classroom seemed to differ considerably amongst these teachers, with one teacher seeming to suggest a predominance for isiZulu (P7), while another (P9) taught in English and the class assistant translated her teaching into isiZulu for learners who struggled to understand. A more balanced approach seemed to be implied by the remaining teachers.

3.1.2 English mostly

A focus on English in one or all classroom interactions and teaching situations was noted by three teachers. One teacher focused on English almost exclusively in all her teaching and classroom interactions. This teacher taught at a school where English and Afrikaans were designated as LoLTs.

We mostly use English, because I'm also a language teacher, we try to focus more on the English. **[P3]**

She seemed not to be in favour of incorporating other languages in the classroom as noted in her comment:

English, English [for class discussion]. Now and then, if we need to explain something specifically, we will ask the assistant to maybe use their home language to explain, but we try to do it not as… on a regular basis. **[P3]**

She also noted that the DCAPS curriculum is currently only available in English *"so we only focus on English for the moment"* **[P3]**. Two teachers foregrounded English for assessments, with one teacher specifically highlighting the use of English for Math assessments. She noted that *"there is nothing… mathematically said in an African language. So, we use English*". **[P2]**

3.1.3 English, Afrikaans and some isiZulu

One of the three schools had both English and Afrikaans as official LoLTs. One teacher at this school reported the use of these two languages in class in an alternating fashion:

We alternate. I usually do on a weekly basis, week one will be English, week two Afrikaans, and so forth. That I'll focus on that one language of instruction. **[P5]**

The same teacher also stressed that either language was acceptable for the learner to use in class:

But when I ask a child a question, and the child answer in the other language I accepted it as correct. I don't rectify, or repeat it in the other language. I just accept it and repeat what the child said exactly as the child said it. **[P5]**

This teacher also mentioned using some isiZulu as a teaching strategy to help learners acquire the LoLT:

We mainly use English and Afrikaans, but some of the pupils who come to our school are not at all familiar with any words of English or Afrikaans, so then I try and help myself with some Zulu words to use that to teach the child either English or Afrikaans. **[P5]**

3.1.4 isiZulu

Three teachers who used English and isiZulu in class reported the exclusive use of isiZulu for particular purposes. These included assessment, literacy, and classroom conversations.

> *… just talking in class, we are talking in Zulu.* **[P7]**

> *I use isiZulu [for conversations*]. **[P4]**

> *Assessment, we are doing only Zulu.* **[P6]**

> *… we are doing, only Zulu, Zulu [reading and writing].* **[P6]**

3.2 Learners' needs and abilities

Teachers frequently mentioned the needs and abilities of learners, usually as an explanation of why they chose to use and promote specific language practices in class. A total of 63 segments were related to this theme. Three sub-themes emerged under this theme, namely: (a) learners' language proficiency; (b) learners' language needs; and (c) learners' language needs in relation to beliefs about languages.

3.2.1. Learners' language proficiency

Several teachers highlighted that most or all their learners came from isiZulu language backgrounds, and that their proficiency in isiZulu was therefore better than their proficiency in English.

> *… this is a Zulu dominant community.* **[P2]**

> *… because most of our learners, are Zulus, so they don't understand English, most of them.* **[P1]**

> *I speak Zulu for those, especially sometimes some of them. They can't even understand English.* **[P7]**

isiZulu was also highlighted as a language understood by most learners, even those from different language backgrounds.

> *But most of them they do understand [isiZulu] even if they speak in Ndebele, but they do understand Zulu. Like I was saying, Zulu and Ndebele, they are most similar.* **[P1]**

In contrast, one teacher remarked that she had no need for learning material in isiZulu, because learners came from different language backgrounds. Even though she used some isiZulu for explanations in class, when asked whether she felt isiZulu learning materials were needed, she remarked:

> *No, I don't think so. Because all learners come from different backgrounds and different home languages. So, it will not be easy for them to learn isiZulu, because it will be like depriving them something they should know or forcing them to do what they should not be doing.* **[P2]**

Interestingly, one teacher felt that even though her learners came from an isiZulu language background, they learnt and understood English better than their HL:

> *I think SID learners learn better in English than Zulu. That's a point. Yes, they understand easier in English than in Zulu.* **[P4]**

> *My learners are autistic. So, here at school, they want us to teach – to use their home language, but I thought they don't understand good in Zulu. So, I just teach Zulu and English, they understand better in English.* **[P4]**

This teacher seemed to imply that the learners' diagnosis had something to do with this proclivity for English.

Three teachers remarked on the learners' increase in English proficiency through their exposure to English at school.

> *It's not easy at first, but I can see how they improve [in English]. It goes slow but we can see improvement.* **[P3]**

Even though they are not really fluent with English or clear or perfect, but somewhere, somehow this [classroom exposure to English] builds them because they know some words or things they could identify while they work in their communities, because they've learned that in their classrooms. So, it's easy to identify some of the things in English. **[P2]**

3.2.2 Learners' language needs

Teachers not only remarked on learners' language proficiency, but also on the current and future language needs of their learners. One teacher felt that learners would currently benefit from being multilingual. As the learners did not all share the same HL, peer interactions would be fostered if learners could communicate in a common language.

During their play time, for example, they need to communicate with their peers. What if the other one doesn't know the language? So, it might benefit them if there is a language they can both communicate in. **[P2]**

Teachers were asked about the languages they felt their learners would need to know to progress further in the basic education system. Four teachers highlighted English.

I think English is the only language that can drive them higher. **[P2]**

I think English [for higher grades]. **[P3]**

To read and write, they need English. **[P4]**

The senior teachers also teach in English. **[P8]**

However, two teachers highlighted isiZulu and one suggested that a combination of English and Afrikaans would be helpful. This suggestion was most likely made due to the school having English and Afrikaans as LoLTs.

Language, just Zulu. **[P1]**

In order for them to go to their higher grades, I think Zulu for them. **[P7]**

The language of instruction [English or Afrikaans]. **[P5]**

When asked about community integration, four teachers felt that the learners' HL (in most cases isiZulu) would be relevant to know. Some teachers seemed to imply that there was no need for another language.

… with communities their own language is fine. **[P2]**

If they're just in their small, little area where they come from, then they will be able to cope for the very, very weak learners only with the mother tongue. **[P5]**

However, three teachers felt that English would be helpful for community integration.

Definitely, English so that's why I say it's better for them to learn the English language, and to, so that they can help themselves in their environment. **[P8]**

I think English is the best thing [for the future] because majority of us, we know English. Yes, I think it's the best thing. **[P6]**

Since we are teaching them in English and Zulu, I think it would be better for them to understand both languages. **[P7]**

When asked about language priorities for employment, English was highlighted by the majority of the teachers.

*For employment I think English is the language they should be equipped with.***[P2]**

These learners must go out into the outside world and they must be able to communicate and find a job somewhere, and maybe English is the best for them to be able to go out there and live a good life. **[P3]**

One teacher also highlighted that knowledge of English acquired in the school would give learners opportunities and counteract their experience of failure in the regular neighbourhood school:

> *Because most, most of them, they are not, they were not good in their, previous schools, some of them. When they come here, at a special school, I think we must put something to them, let them know English, that will make them to be something in future.* **[P7]**

3.2.3 In relation to beliefs about languages

Teachers expressed a high premium placed on the importance of learning English. This seemed grounded in their views of English as a language with a far reach and high status.

> *English is everywhere.* **[P2]**

> *English is an international language.* **[P8]**

> *English is the most important language at this moment everywhere in the world.* **[P3]**

> *I think English will open more doors.* **[P5]**

Some teachers also feel that it is easier to learn in English than in isiZulu, highlighting specifically that they felt acquiring literacy in isiZulu was difficult.

> *I think English is most easier for them.* **[P6]**

> *… but if they do explain for them in English [it] is going to be easier for them not in their mother language.* **[P6]**

> *Zulu is very difficult even to write and read.* **[P4]**

> *… because Zulu names, to write, is more difficult than English words.* **[P6]**

3.3 Constraints, possibilities and strategies

Teachers described several language-related constraints they experienced that influenced their ability to fulfil their teaching task effectively. However, they also highlighted the possibilities afforded to them, for example, via language-related resources. They also mentioned strategies they used to circumvent constraints, and the measures that were undertaken to enable the scaffolding of understanding when working in either one or both LoLTs of the school. A total of 61 segments were coded as belonging to this theme. Six subthemes were identified under this theme: (a) AAC and visual aids; (b) Assistants as translators; (c) Curriculum and learning material; (d) Other constraints and strategies; (e) School language policy; and (f) Teacher language proficiency.

3.3.1 AAC and visual aids

Three teachers mentioned the use of AAC and visual aids to bridge between languages and scaffold understanding. These aids included Makaton symbols as well as several resources that could be seen or touched to enhance understanding.

> *… then the language is not so abstract anymore. Then I usually put [isiZulu] at the bottom of the picture, so then I will use the Zulu with the English, to teach them that language.* **[P5]**

> *If the child doesn't understand both of the things that I'm teaching, I reach the child through pictures.* **[P6]**

> *It is better if the teaching aids are there. Then you tell them I'm talking about this, come and look at it, you see, like that.* **[P7]**

> *I'm making use of [aid] to help them, let them see what I am talking about, let them feel, let them touch, if it's something that they must touch it, then we are together.* **[P7]**

3.3.2 Assistants as translators

In the school where the official LoLTs are English and Afrikaans, none of the participating teachers were able to communicate in isiZulu, as it is not required in the school's language policy. There were, however, several learners that attend the school without prior knowledge of the LoLTs and the teachers must find ways in which to help the learners understand the curriculum presented. Each of the teachers in the school had a class assistant that is an African-home language speaker. These assistants were sometimes engaged as translators.

> *If we need to explain something specifically, we will ask the assistant to maybe use their home language to explain.* **[P3]**

> *To help learners that do not understand, the assistant translates it into Zulu.* **[P8]**

There were, however, some constraints involved in the system of using a class assistant to translate into the learners' HLs.

> *She is not [able to translate into all home languages].* **[P3]**

3.3.3 Curriculum and learning material

The 30 segments dedicated to matters regarding the curriculum and learning represented very diverse opinions. The DCAPS curriculum is currently only available in English. This represented a few constraints on the teachers' ability to transfer information to the learners. The teachers had to translate all information before presenting it to the learners.

> *How will teachers translate English to Zulu. It's a problem even for teachers.* **[P4]**

> *Yeah, and it's very difficult to direct translate to Zulu.* **[P4]**

> *… we help the learners, where they do not understand [the English curriculum] by translating it into Zulu.* **[P8]**

Even when the teachers taught isiZulu as HL, they had to do the phonics in English, as there was no isiZulu HL curriculum available.

> *You will have to choose sounds, because you cannot teach the same phonetics, so it's a lot of extra work for the teachers.* **[P5]**

Five teachers felt that the curriculum only being available in English did not constrain them too much. They believe they have devised several strategies to overcome the problem.

> *It doesn't affect my teaching [the fact that the DCAPS curriculum is only available in English]. Because as a teacher, they want you to understand the curriculum first before imparting it to the learners.* **[P2]**

> *I first check this DCAPS curriculum, after this I do my own notes… to suit those children that might not understand.* **[P6]**

> *It doesn't affect so much… like I say, it's English. Then I explain in Zulu so that they will get me.* **[P7]**

> *Not really [affect me], because we can help the learners, where they do not understand it to… by translating it to Zulu.* **[P8]**

In reply to the question if relevant resources in the form of workbooks or worksheets were available for use, all participants indicated that there is nothing available in non-English languages.

> *Everything is in English but Zulu, no.* **[P2]**

> *The resources I have, come[s] out of my own pocket that I've accumulated over the years, it's not given by the department.* **[P5]**

> *I had to go to another school to borrow some worksheets that are written in Zulu that might be similar.* **[P6]**

Actually, I have only English in these textbooks… textbooks and worksheets in English. **[P7]**

Teachers also commented though, that not only was the lack of resources in non-English languages a concern, but the level at which workbooks and worksheets was pitched was also often not appropriate. Teachers had to adapt and simplify the materials in order to be relevant to their learners.

No, we don't have relevant resources, we're just using the books that they gave us from the mainstream then we adapt it from there. **[P1]**

I do have [resources], not specifically for special schools, but normal school workbooks and so that I use, but I do make it easier and change a few things. **[P3]**

Mostly I do my own worksheets. **[P8]**

As most of the teachers reported teaching in both isiZulu and English, or Afrikaans and English, some of them noted the lack of resources in the learners' HL and feel that these would benefit the learners.

So, if we can get books that are written in Zulu, I think they will benefit more. **[P1]**

Yes, we would have benefitted [from having isiZulu books] because, as I'm saying, our learners doesn't understand English, they understand Zulu more than English. **[P1]**

One of the teachers commented that the younger learners are not as affected by a lack of worksheets in their HL but needed different types of resources.

These learners are… 80% plus, not really capable of learning from worksheets, and I think they must rather assist us with other means of instruction, something less abstract. **[P5]**

3.3.4 Other constraints and strategies

Having a class where multiple HLs were represented, posed constraints to the teacher when choosing a LoLT. One teacher proposed that grouping the children according to HLs would help, but also noted limited practicality of that suggestion.

> *The ideal would be if we could have grouped the children so that I could only teach in one language.* **[P5]**

> *I know it's impossible because you already have to look at other logistics so you cannot use language to decide who's in which class.* **[P5]**

Apart from translation into HL to scaffold understanding, one of the teachers reported that she often adapted the curriculum to help the learners learn more effectively.

> *… then we go slower, as I say, we can't keep up with the curriculum.* **[P3]**

> *We will then take those learners and maybe explain to them in an easier way or make the work easier for them so that they can at least understand.* **[P3]**

3.3.5 School language policy

The three schools represented in this study all have official language policies that stated the LoLT to be used. Teachers mentioned aligning their language practices to the LoLT, for example, Participant 6 indicated using English and Afrikaans, *"… because the languages of instruction is English and Afrikaans."* However, teachers also indicated that the official school language policies sometimes caused dilemmas or difficulties, for example, when the expectation to teach in a certain language was not supported with a curriculum in that language.

> *[The curriculum] is [only] available in English, but they say home language they… are expecting us to teach home language [isiZulu].* **[P4]**

The policy is also not always compatible with the language proficiency of either teacher or learners.

> *I'm not a Zulu speaking person. Having to explain to learners in Zulu, sometimes I don't even know what that is or how to pronounce it properly. So, it's a challenge. But according to the school's rules we have to understand the Zulu language.* **[P2]**

When the school language policy did not align with the HLs of the learners, the teachers had to make choices that would be best suited to their learners.

> *Home language always, always the best but because the language that our school teaches is English [or Afrikaans as other LoLT]… under the circumstances it's best to teach them in English.* **[P8]**

Despite a school having two official LoLTs, preference may still be given to one of the specified languages.

> *So here at school they want us to use their home language [isiZulu], but I thought [think] they don't understand good [well] in Zulu.* **[P4]**

3.3.6 Teacher language proficiency

All the teachers involved in the study were proficient in English (as per participant selection criteria). In addition, five teachers were conversant in several African languages.

> *I know almost every language in South Africa so I'm able to communicate with every learner in every language.* **[P2]**

This did not, however, mean that teachers were always linguistically able to manage. Several teachers accentuated the fact that they, despite understanding and speaking isiZulu, do not have full command of the language. This also sometimes has to be explained to the learners for them to understand the language diversity of the people around them.

Actually, I'm a Sotho, if I do have a child speaking Tsonga or whatever, I will be having a challenge. **[P1]**

If I don't know some of the words in Zulu, I refer to the Zulu-speaking people and ask. **[P7]**

Yeah, before explaining anything, I do explain to my learners that they should not laugh, because I'm also not a Zulu-speaking person. So, if I say something in a Sotho-like tongue, they should not laugh. **[P2]**

3.4 Beliefs about language learning and language in education practices

This theme elicited 43 segments. Opinions were sought about the choices made regarding the LoLT to be used in class, and specifically about their opinions regarding mono- or multilingual teaching. Teachers were also asked for their opinions regarding the learners' ability to learn more than one language, thus becoming bi-/multilingual. Two subthemes were accordingly identified: (a) Learners' ability to learn in more than one language; and (b) Opinions about language choices and practices in class. Opinions on both subthemes varied considerably.

3.4.1 Learners' ability to learn in more than one language

Some teachers concurred with international studies that SID learners can learn an additional language. The teachers believe that it greatly depends on the specific learner. Some teachers seemed to mention some prerequisites to learners with SID acquiring more than one language.

There are some [who have the capability to learn more than one language.] The disabilities are so vast, and none of them are the same. **[P5]**

Some of them can learn in English and manage quite well. **[P8]**

They have the ability [to learn more than one language], if you can teach them in one language. **[P7]** (sequential bilingualism)

Several teachers were of the opinion that the learners will cope with learning English. They felt that learners would manage oral command of a second language, but not necessarily the other aspects of an additional language.

> *… because learning [to speak] is not as difficult as writing.* **[P2]**
>
> *To speak it will be fine. But writing is another thing.* **[P2]**
>
> *Not reading and writing. Maybe speaking more than one language, but I think it will be hard.* **[P3]**

3.4.2 Opinions about language choices and practices in class

The 32 segments in this subtheme offered widely varied opinions. At times, the same teachers offered seemingly contrasting opinions, possibly evidence of some conflict they may experience in considering different constraints on their choices. They may also sometimes be torn between what they feel is best language practice per se and what is best given the constraints within which they need to make their choices.

In some comments, teachers highlighted that they felt that monolingual teaching was best.

> *I think we are trying to do the right thing by trying to focus on a specific language, for example English.* **[P3]**
>
> *But, to me, it can be better if they are taught in one language.* **[P7]**

Some teachers suggested that this language should be English, while others suggested it should be the HL.

> *Home languages, or mother tongue language, always, always the best.* **[P8]**
>
> *I think the best thing for them is to learn in English.* **[P6]**

Concomitant negative comments were sometimes made about teaching in more than one language.

No, I don't think so. It's not good [current practice of using two languages]. **[P4]**

The majority of them [should learn in] just one [language], they do not have the ability of more than one. I think it's already very, very difficult that they have to learn in a language that's not their mother tongue. **[P5]**

Several teachers highlighted that teaching in English (only, or in combination with another language) was helpful and would benefit the learners in the long run, even though it was sometimes difficult for them initially.

But I still… say that English, I think, is the language that we need to teach the children… so I think if you just have patience and carry on that it's a good thing for the children in the long run. **[P3]**

We should keep on teaching these kids in English, so that they can understand also English. **[P7]**

I think so [that they do benefit from being taught in English]. I think it's hard on them. They struggle. It's not easy at first, but I can see how they improve. It goes slow but we can see improvement. And I think it's important because they must be able to speak English. **[P3]**

Teaching in both English and isiZulu is being considered the ideal situation by three participants, even though it is not always the easiest option.

I think it [being taught in English and isiZulu] is the best situation for them. **[P7]**

They benefit a lot [from being taught in English and isiZulu]. **[P4]**

Yes, they do benefit a lot. **[P6]**

Sometimes the practice followed was not the ideal setup, but the best choice for the teacher to make under difficult circumstances. With reference to her practice of teaching in English one week and in Afrikaans the next week, and using some isiZulu to scaffold understanding, one teacher remarked:

It's the best solution I could come up with in the current situation, because I have learners with… some's Afrikaans, some English, Sotho or Zulu, so it's four different mother tongues, and I'm trying to make the best of it. **[P5]**

A suggestion was also made to adjust the LoLT of the school to accommodate more learners. With the diverse HLs, the most common HL used in the community the learners come from is usually picked as LoLT. There might, however, be large numbers of learners with a similar HL, different from the LoLT, attending a specific school.

Even if it's a Zulu school, there are some learners that are Sotho's. You know if we can add even Sotho. **[P1]**

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to determine the perceptions of teachers in the foundation phase at three schools for learners with SID in Mpumalanga, South Africa, on their classroom language practices and choices. All classrooms were linguistically diverse, and all schools had two languages as official LoLTs. Teaching contexts were therefore linguistically diverse and sometimes complex. The findings show that teachers made deliberate language choices within these contexts, and that the learners' needs and abilities were an important consideration in their decisions. Teachers' responsiveness to the needs and abilities of learners in their class has also been shown to direct teachers' language practices in other contexts. One of the most important ways in which the teachers responded to the different needs of the learners, was to differentiate their teaching to suit the needs of specific learners (Pozas, Letzel, & Schneider, 2019). Where it was needed, teachers in this study tended to use several strategies (Gonzalez, 2014) to assist learners with poor English language proficiency. Code-switching was notably mentioned, while teachers translated materials and made use of visual support to scaffold learning, as also suggested by Gonzalez (2014). However, findings also show that various constraints sometimes limit teachers from doing what they feel may be 'best'. This too has been found in previous studies where teachers carried on teaching in English, even though they knew it had very little positive effect (Probyn et al. 2002). Most of the teachers in this study felt that learners with SID were able to learn a second language, even if it was at a slow tempo and with some restrictions. These findings were consistent with the findings of Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2016) in a narrative review of studies on bilingualism in children with developmental disorders. This belief by most teachers was reflected in their practice of actively fostering multilingualism in the learners in their class.

Four themes were identified during data analysis, namely: (a) language practices; (b) learners' needs and abilities; (c) constraints, possibilities and strategies; and (d) beliefs about language learning and teaching. Within the first theme, teachers referred to the use of various languages and combinations of languages in the classroom, sometimes with different choices made for different activities. The second

theme looked at teachers' perceptions about learners' current and future language learning needs, as well as their current language proficiencies. Constraints keeping teachers from employing what they believe would be 'best' language practices, as well as ways in which they remedy the situation, were discussed in the third theme. Lastly, in the fourth theme, teachers discussed their beliefs about the learners' ability to learn more than one language, as well as their opinions about the best language practices in the classroom.

The findings of the study were in alignment with the main findings. Firstly, teachers' choice of a language/languages to use in their classrooms, as well as the factors they take into account for their decisions, was considered. Secondly, the constraints under which teacher's realise their language practices, and the strategies they use to circumvent these, were considered. Lastly, some of the teachers' beliefs about language learning and language in education practices were discussed.

4.1 Teachers' choice of (a) language(s) to use in classrooms and the factors taken into account for these decisions

The use of a learner's HL can greatly contribute to successful learning (Plüddemann, 2015). It was thus not surprising to find that isiZulu, the HL of the majority of learners, was used in all classrooms to a certain extent. At all the participating schools, teachers report using isiZulu (at least to some extent) to scaffold understanding and enhance learning when teaching in L2 (Yuvayapan, 2019). This was either done through alternating between languages and code-switching by the teacher herself, or by relying on a class assistant to translate when the teacher was not proficient in the learners' HL. Meta-analyses by Greene (1997); Reljić, Ferring, and Martin (2015); and Rolstad, Mahoney, and Glass (2007) confirmed that learners involved in bilingual education had an advantage over learners that were enrolled in immersion education. This thus confirmed the advantage that the learners involved in this study through the use of their HL during lessons. The incorporation of the HL into the classroom not only enabled learners to participate and even ask questions (Bachore, 2014), but also functioned as a way of supporting the acquisition of an L2, or to achieve proficiency in

multiple languages (Collier, 1989). Two of the schools involved in the study had English and isiZulu as LoLTs, which gave the teachers an opportunity to teach in either language, but to support their teaching by using the HL of the majority of learners in order to help develop both these languages. The use of HL to support L2 learning ensures that the children not only learn a new language, but that the HL does not get neglected (Salmona Madriñan, 2014) – a situation that can lead to subtractive multilingualism (Plüddemann, 1997). The HL is not used on a constant basis, but as support to scaffold understanding of L2, as confirmed by Salmona Madriñan (2014). A study by Mizza (2014) also found that reading and writing competencies in L2 may rise considerably when supportive literacy attention is given to the HL.

Teachers mentioned that the incorporation of the HL into the classroom was often a response to the learners' current limited L2 proficiency. This was also highlighted in the study by Probyn et al. (2002), where the teachers justified their use of the learners' HL to explain difficult concepts which the learners did not understand in English. In a school in the Eastern Cape, teachers decided not to discourage the use of the HL at school, but to rather encourage the use of English (de Klerk, 2002b). In most cases school language policies also allowed teachers some manoeuvrability regarding their language use in class. Because isiZulu was a LoLT in two of the schools, the use of isiZulu in the classroom may have been perceived as having official support. This may have given teachers the confidence to code-switch between the HL and English. Code-switching is often used, by teachers sharing the learners' HL, to further understanding, for emphasis, as well as support and scaffolding of responses (Probyn, 2009). However, previous South African studies have shown that teachers sometimes regarded code-switching with some suspicion or guilt as they felt the pressure to use only English (Probyn, 2009). Such sentiments were not expressed in the current study.

Despite the official LoLT and school language policies that are put in place, what happens in the classroom depends on what teachers do with the policy (McCarty et al., 2011). This was highlighted by a teacher who stated that the learners with ASD cope better by learning in English (L2) than in the HL that policy requires. This is a clear case of a teacher responding differently to meet the needs of her learners best (Derakhshan,

2015), instead of applying a policy across the board as if all learners have the same needs (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). It must be noted though, that no evidence exists to support that English is easier to learn for children with ASD than a particular HL. Quality and quantity of language exposure has been shown to be an important factor in language learning, and this has also been found for children with ASD (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016). Higher levels of L2 exposure have also been indicated as leading to larger L2 vocabularies (Hambly & Fombonne, 2014). Children with ASD have been shown to benefit particularly from video modelling, and it may therefore be possible that exposure to a particular language via the television or via videos would affect their language skills slightly differently to those of children without disabilities (Corbett & Abdullah, 2005). However, this information was not obtained for the learners whom the participants taught.

Not all learners in the classrooms of the participating teachers benefitted from scaffolding in their HL. 30,3% of learners did not have English, Afrikaans or isiZulu as HLs. The complex multilingual enrolment in many South African schools makes it hard to find a common language as LoLT (Kathard et al., 2017; Posel & Casale, 2011). Although isiZulu was clearly the HL of the majority of the learners, there were still learners who came from different language backgrounds. Also, one teacher seemed to focus on English almost exclusively, while another focused on English and Afrikaans, and only integrated isiZulu to a limited extent. Both these teachers taught at the school where English and Afrikaans were the LoLTs, and neither of these teachers were conversant in isiZulu or other African languages, which were the HLs of most of the learners in their class. Teachers made varying comments about how they accommodated learners whose HL differed from the LoLT. One teacher mentioned that she was proficient in all the HLs that learners in her class spoke, and another mentioned that her class assistant could translate for learners whose HL differed from the LoLT. Various other teachers acknowledged that they found it difficult to accommodate the language needs of learners whose HL differed from the LoLT, with some reporting the use of pictures or visual aids, or a slower pace in teaching. Teachers thus have to code-switch or rely on help from colleagues or class assistants to help

translate for learners that do not understand the LoLT. Teaching time is lost by spending extra time on translation instead of on teaching.

The research evidence for learners with typical development supports the use of the HL in educational contexts to scaffold learning instead of using immersion (Greene, 1997; Reljić et al., 2015; Rolstad et al., 2007). At present, a search of the peer-reviewed published literature revealed no empirical study that systematically compared the effect of different languages in education practices on educational outcomes for learners with ID. However, according to Ware et al. (2015), the benefit of incorporating the HL into instruction of children without disabilities, especially in the initial grades, is likely applicable to learners with ID as well.

In South Africa, a large proportion of learners do not receive instruction in their HL (Department of Basic Education, 2010). Various practical and/or ideological reasons may be responsible, and these may affect learners with ID as much as they affect learners without disabilities. Probyn et al. (2002) reported that learners, whose HL differs from the LoLT, are often expected to adjust to the language and culture of a school. Also, as stated by de Klerk (2002a), historically “white” schools, in which English and Afrikaans are the mediums of instruction, are still often benefitting from historical privilege and the associated virtuous cycles that keep these schools better-resourced and able to attract well-qualified teachers. Thus, they are often preferred by parents. This makes for an interesting situation where a large proportion, and sometimes the majority of learners, have a different HL than the LoLT of the school, and are taught by teachers who cannot speak their HL. Although the Constitution and the LiEP (Department of Education,1997) foreground the importance of education in the HL, it also foregrounds individual choice, of parents and learners, to be educated in a language that is not their HL. The language policy at the school is determined by the governing body in response to community requests and needs. Parents may want their children to attend schools where the HL is not one of the LoLTs. Some parents may believe that such an immersion approach may facilitate the learning of a new language (de Klerk, 2002a). For other parents, the issue may be more about the quality of education they believe they receive at such a school (de Klerk, 2002b). While it was

beyond the scope of the study to determine why there was a discrepancy between LoLT and HL of the majority of learners at one of the schools, the above-mentioned factors may have played a role.

A second finding is the prevalence of English in the classrooms, despite the fact that this was the HL of only one of the learners in the respective participants' classes. This echoes the findings of the Department of Education (2010) in indicating that 65,3% of learners had English as LoLT in 2007 despite only 7% of learners using English as their HL (Department of Education, 2010). Although resource constraints to support teaching in other languages (e.g., the DCAPS curriculum only being available in English) may have played a role in teachers' decisions, it seems that teachers more prominently highlighted the importance of learning English, especially for their learners' futures. While some teachers concurred that the learners would cope sufficiently with their HL in their own communities, the general feeling was that being skilled in an additional language (mostly English) would hold several advantages for the future, as was also found by Churr (2013). In her 2013 study aimed at the importance of HL education in South African public schools, Churr highlighted the national and international importance of English. She also confirmed that most parents were convinced that having a command of English would greatly benefit their children. A choice must thus be made between HL education and an English education which is often requested by the parents. The wide reach and international importance of English was mentioned by several teachers, supporting the statement made by Churr (2013). Posel and Casale (2011) reported on studies done in Cape Town, South Africa, that confirmed the advantage that English-proficient individuals had in obtaining (better) job opportunities. English is often seen as a requisite for further education, job opportunities as well as a tool for socioeconomic mobility (Banda, 2000). Statements made by teachers also support Gilmartin (2004) that English is often seen as the language of social advancement. The lack of knowledge of English may even disadvantage learners whilst seeking employment. Banda (2000) even went as far as stating that African learners who have only been taught in their HLs would be economically and educationally disempowered. Teachers stressed that learners may not necessarily become proficient in written skills in English, but that oral proficiency should suffice.

As several of the learners enrolled in SID schools first attended mainstream schools, it is common that they feel inferior due to their inability to achieve in their previous schools. The status of English was underlined by the statement of one teacher that English skills could boost self-esteem. The boost in self-esteem achieved on being able to converse with their peers in the language they learn at school, has been proven to be mainly in their own minds (Baumeister et al., 2003), but happiness was also found to boost self-confidence. The children might not necessarily perform better but will feel better about themselves.

Overall, the majority of teachers seemed to support the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) in their efforts to equip all learners with the ability to use their own language freely, as well as becoming bilingual. This is proven by the fact that most of the teachers in this study use a combination of isiZulu (the HL of the majority of the learners) as well as English in their classes. The importance placed on learning English was also evident in their practices. A stance that is mirrored in the DCAPS curriculum and statistics on the use of English as a LoLT in South Africa's basic education system, where 65% of learners are educated in English (Department of Basic Education, 2010) while English is only reported as being the HL of 9,6% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2012). The exposure of learners with SID to multiple languages in the education system, found in this study, contrasts somewhat with the findings of an international survey conducted by Marinova-Todd et al. (2016). These authors found that, across six sites from four countries (the US, Canada, the UK and the Netherlands), informants reported that children with severe disabilities, including SID, were often exposed to only one language in the education and rehabilitation context. This might be due to bilingualism not being considered as a priority for learners with DD, or the lack of specialised services in their HL. This is in contrast to the priority of bi/multilingualism that is included in policies for learners without disabilities. In South Africa, great emphasis is placed on the importance of bi/multilingualism in the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and in the LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) to recognise the valuable asset of the country's cultural diversity.

4.2 Constraints and strategies

During the interviews the teachers mentioned several constraints that influenced their ability to engage in classroom language practices as they saw fit. These constraints ranged from policies, the curriculum and resources, to their own language proficiency. While the teachers mentioned these constraints, they also mentioned a variety of strategies they engaged in to overcome these constraints.

In one of the schools, the official LoLTs are English and Afrikaans. None of the participants from this school were proficient in African languages. The term African language refers to the languages of sub-Saharan Africa, divided into several linguistic families. In South Africa, English and Afrikaans are excluded from this term being classified as two West-Germanic languages.

As most of the learners in their classes were from an African language background, teachers' own language proficiency often constrained them in their efforts to teach in a language that was easily accessible to the majority of learners. As the school recognised this constraint, all the teachers have class assistants who are proficient in at least some African languages. These assistants were sometimes engaged as translators to translate from the LoLT into the HL to scaffold understanding for learners, a practice that has also been reported on in a previous study (Yuvayapan, 2019). These translations are only done when needed and not on a full-time basis.

The fact that the DCAPS curriculum was only available in English was mentioned as a constraint by most of the teachers. If teachers wanted to teach in a different language, they needed to translate the curriculum. This may be possible for subjects like Maths and Life Skills, but is more difficult for language instruction, due to differences in phonics, grammar, and so forth. Teachers also mentioned that the whole process of translating the content of the curriculum was not only time consuming, but a lot of extra work. However, it seemed that various teachers were willing to undertake this process – consulting with colleagues and obtaining materials from mainstream schools at times. People with a positive attitude tend to focus on what they are able to do instead of focusing on what they don't have. Solutions tend to become more creative

when barriers get bigger (Miles, 2014). The teachers in this study have shown that they can overcome their barriers to bring about effective teaching.

It is evident from studies that children, especially in the early grades, should be taught in the language that they understand best (Plüddemann, 2015), which will usually be their HL to enable them to develop a strong language foundation. Instruction of L2 can then be introduced as additive bilingualism (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011). It would thus mean that HL learning material should be available for use. The catalogue of the Department of Basic Education contains workbooks for both Home- and First Additional Language levels for all official languages (Department of Basic Education, 2019) to support the use of any language as HL. This is, however, not the case for schools for learners with special needs, where the curriculum is only available in English at this stage with no workbooks available yet. While the supporting dedicated DCAPS learning material is still in the development stage, since the curriculum was launched in 2017, the teachers must be creative in their efforts to obtain/create appropriate worksheets and other learning material. Some of the strategies mentioned to overcome this problem were not only creating their own worksheets, but also obtaining HL worksheets and workbooks (where possible) from mainstream teachers and adapting them for use for learners with SID.

The specific needs of bilingual learners with ID are rarely mentioned in national policies (Ware et al., 2015). This is also the case in the South African LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) which promotes multilingualism, but also specifically mentions that the policy does not apply to learners with SID. It does not specify what it expects from schools for learners with SID. The LiEP promotes the use of the HL at least during the foundational years. This leaves schools, to a certain extent, to follow tried and trusted policies. As the LiEP (Department of Education, 1997) stipulates that the School Governing Body (SGB) of each school is responsible for language choices and -implementation, the individual schools were able to decide on the languages to be used as LoLTs. Implementing these school language policies did, however, in a few cases, constrain the teachers. Where a school policy specified HL as first language and English as first additional language (FAL), the teachers had to face the English-only

curriculum constraint again. The DCAPS English FAL curriculum is also only available for grades four and five. They were thus caught between policy requirements and availability of materials. The policies were, in most cases, aligned with the HLs of the majority of learners in the school, but no formal policy provision was made for the learners with HLs different from the LoLT. Teachers were also not always HL speakers of the LoLT but had overcome these constraints with the help of colleagues. These teachers could thus be seen as policy interpreters (Peter Plüddemann, 2015) who try to make sense of directives given.

Children with severe intellectual disabilities may benefit from the use of AAC to aid with vocabulary acquisition (Stephenson, 2009). Drager et al. (2006) also confirmed its use for learners with SID to practice new, targeted concepts and achieve vocabulary expansion. Aided augmented input involves the use of speech supplemented by pointing to, and by the use of, graphic symbols or pictures as a model for vocabulary expansion (Dada & Alant, 2009). Teachers reported successes in using various forms of AAC and other visual aids to scaffold language understanding as suggested by Salmona Madriñan (2014). This entailed using some AAC symbols and pictures with different languages as the gloss under pictures and illustrations, as well as using wall charts as illustrations. All aided visual input is accompanied by the constant use of natural speech. One of the teachers reported that she also encouraged her learners to touch resources when applicable to involve more senses in the learning process. In the discussion on their study, Dada and Alant (2009) reported on the positive results after the introduction of the aided stimulation program on vocabulary development. The addition of aided language stimulation assisted the learners in acquiring the target vocabulary for the specific activities. These strategies were mentioned by teachers in this study as ways to overcome language barriers and enhance learning.

4.3 Teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching

Most participants' positive beliefs about the learners' abilities to become multilingual align with the findings of numerous studies suggesting that learners with ID do have the ability to learn a second language (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016).

Marinova-Todd et al (2016) found similar beliefs in their study involving educators and other professionals across four different countries. Participants in their study were generally convinced that learners with disabilities could learn a second language, although they were slightly less convinced about this ability in learners with severe disabilities (including SID) than they were in learners with mild disabilities. In the current study, too, some teachers added that for learners with SID to learn an L2 took time and proceeded at a slow pace. In judging language learning potential, it is always important to look at each child's individual situation (Jordaan, 2008), and particularly at the interaction between the child and his/her language learning environment (Ware et al., 2015), as this interaction ultimately determines the language achievements of the child (von Tetzchner & Grove, 2003). A direct link between the amount of time a learner is exposed to L2 and their ability to acquire the language was shown in a study by Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2016).

Some teachers in the current study feel that, while most learners would be able to learn to speak an additional language, writing and reading skills might prove too hard to learn. This was confirmed by Verhoeven and Vermeer (2006) in a study of second language learners with ID in the Netherlands. They indicated that learners with ID are doubly disadvantaged with respect to higher order literacy skills due to their ID and that they were less exposed to the second language at home. Paradis (2007) confirmed that language acquisition in children with ID is possible, but that it may be regarding certain features due to the children's deficits.

Even though most teachers in this study indicated that they teach in more than one language and that most of their learners can cope with learning L2, many still made comments that suggest that they felt monolingual teaching, if possible and practical, would be a good option for the learners in their classes. This finding seems to contradict various positive statements about the benefits of multilingual teaching that the same teachers also expressed. It is possible that these contradictory findings are an expression of some underlying tensions that teachers experience in their fundamental beliefs between mono- versus multilingualism. It seems that, on some level, they may still believe that monolingual practices may be preferable – whether in general for

everyone or particularly for learners with SID is not clear. On the other hand, a multilingual language environment like South Africa may make a multilingual approach a necessity. Petrovic (2015) comments that language choices are never made solely at an individual level, but always considers the language community around the speaker. Remarks by teachers that highlighted the current practices as not ideal, but as the best under the circumstances, further allude to the tensions they seem to have experienced.

Tension in language choices and practices have also been reported by other researchers. Yu (2013) reported on parents' concerns regarding bilingualism. Parents of minority-language learners with ASD in the US were keen for their children to become bilingual but were concerned that in learning additional languages the children might fail to develop adequate language skills in either language. Bilingualism was thus a desirable, but speculative option. Similarly, in a study by de Klerk (2002a), she reports on Xhosa parents' opinions regarding enrolling their children in English-language schools. Even though the parents agreed that they had made the right decision, their language choice came at a cost. Several parents mentioned the lack of interaction with (or even ostracism from) peers in the townships, the lack of learning proper Xhosa, and fears of losing their own culture.

Several professionals still advise parents of children with disabilities to use a monolingual approach (Jordaan, 2008). This could be due to the therapist's own language proficiency (Jordaan, 2008; Ware et al., 2015) or the perception that becoming multilingual is difficult for children with ID. Such sentiments were also expressed by some teachers in this study, contrasting with positive remarks about multilingualism. Although there is evidence that suggests that multilingualism is possible for learners with Down syndrome (many of whom have ID), and that it does not influence their language learning negatively (Kay-Raining Bird et al., 2016), there is as yet no evidence regarding the effect of different languages in education practices on learning outcomes of learners with SID. In absence of such studies, teachers have little empirical guidance in their choice of practices.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, the perceptions of teachers on their language choices and practices in their classes for learners with SID from diverse language backgrounds were investigated. The study specifically set out to describe: (i) the language(s) teachers use with the learners in their classrooms; (ii) factors that teachers take into account when deciding on which language(s) to use; and (iii) teachers' beliefs and feelings about language practices and choices for learners with SID in their classes. This research study was conducted by interviewing eight participants teaching at three schools for SID in the Mpumalanga province in South Africa on the topic of the current study. A summary of the main findings is presented in the following section.

5.1 Summary of main findings

From the interviews, four themes related to the sub-aims of the study emerged. Teachers spoke about: (a) their language practices and choices; (b) learners' needs and abilities; (c) constraints, possibilities and strategies; and (d) their beliefs about language learning and language in education practices related to learners with SID. All teachers used more than one language in their classrooms, although the extent of using one versus multiple languages varied. Attempts to incorporate the HL of most learners have been made in most of the classrooms. At the same time, English was also used in all classrooms, and seemed to predominate in some. It became clear, to the researcher, that teachers took many aspects into consideration when making language choices in their classes. One important consideration seemed to be the learners' needs and abilities. Teachers took into consideration the learners' current language proficiency as well as their current- and future linguistic needs. English proficiency was highlighted as a means to improve chances of further education and employment. Teachers mentioned several constraints that they faced when fulfilling their teaching task. The main constraint was the lack of the DCAPS curriculum in languages other than English, as well as appropriate resources. The teachers all managed to find strategies to overcome these constraints but indicated the need for additional resources. Another of the constraints was the teachers' own language proficiency, but strategies were also put into place to resolve these issues using various translators. It was clear from the

interviews that teachers often have to compromise on their language choices due to policy or other constraining factors. Even though various educators indicated that they thought the learners with SID should be taught monolingually, most of them taught in both the official LoLTs of the schools. This was not always considered as the ideal situation, but teachers had to make the best choices and decisions under the circumstances. Most of the teachers felt that the majority of learners did benefit from multilingual teaching.

5.2. Critical evaluation of the study

5.2.1 Strengths

This study is the first to have attempted to explore teachers' perceptions of language practices and choices for learners with SID in South Africa. It provides an initial point of reference to describe language in education practices for learners with SID through the lens of the teacher. The qualitative descriptive nature of the study is appropriate as a starting point for investigating a field which is severely under-researched (Ware et al., 2015).

The interview format allowed for an in-depth conversation to develop between the researcher and each participant. The researcher was able to follow up on interesting points mentioned, and both the participant and interviewer could clarify aspects that were unclear. These contributed to the integrity and depth of the data collected. The individual nature of the interviews reduced participant reactivity, which may have been more prevalent had a focus group been utilised. Transcript reliability was checked by an independent transcriber by listening to complete audio-recordings and comparing it to the transcriptions. As the percentage agreement was 99%, minimal corrections to disagreements were made.

The trustworthiness of the procedure was increased by using a joint coding process between the researcher and the supervisor, with two cycles of coding and the development of preliminary themes in between the two cycles.

Synthesised member checking was conducted as an additional measure. A summary of the findings was sent to each participant as a PDF document on WhatsApp

or by e-mail. Six of the participants responded positively and agreed with the summary. This strengthened the trustworthiness of the data.

5.2.2 Limitations

Several limitations to this study should be acknowledged. As with most qualitative studies, the sample size was relatively small. While recurring themes could be identified and a measure of saturation was achieved on these, some views and perspectives were only mentioned by one participant, and data saturation was not achieved. This might be due to the diversity in language proficiency amongst the teachers, with some having proficiency in African languages, while others had proficiency only in English and Afrikaans. Also, one school had English and Afrikaans as LoLTs while the other two had isiZulu and English as LoLTs. This diversity may have led to diverse opinions and practices.

The sample of participants was drawn from one of the four education districts in Mpumalanga. The participants therefore came from a specific geographical location. This may have influenced findings, as participants would all have been exposed to similar district and provincial language educational practices and policies. Findings may therefore not be representative of teachers in other districts or provinces, where policy and practice may differ. Despite homogeneity in terms of geographical location, the LoLTs in the schools differed, and the HL background of the participants (and compatibility of this background with the HL of their learners) was also heterogenous. This therefore brought in variability and a possibility that findings may be more transferrable.

Various precautions were taken to limit bias. This was achieved by having two persons code the data, as well as having the participants review the summary of the findings. This study was, however, based on interviews and participants may have responded in a way that influenced some findings. Teachers have reported on perceived practices, which may differ from real practices. They may also have answered in a way that they would consider as socially acceptable. Researcher bias may be considered as a weakness of the study, though all possible measures were taken to prevent this through reflection and bracketing. The researcher also sought

evidence contradicting pre-conceived ideas (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) and concentrated on what the participants were saying.

The information was obtained through interviews. Actual language practices were not observed in class. The findings reported therefore do not represent actual practices, but only reported practices. According to Yu (2013), reported language practices and actual language practices may differ considerably.

5.3 Implications for practice

The findings of the study show a multitude of factors that teachers in schools for learners with SID must bear in mind when considering their language practices and choices. In order to be truly successful in their practices, relevant stakeholders, like school principals and the Department of Education, need to be sensitive towards the perspectives of teachers. In many cases teachers have experience and have developed practices that they perceive to benefit the learners in their classes. All stakeholders should be involved in discussions to ensure that learners with SID are not disadvantaged by language practices and choices necessitated by matters beyond the stakeholders' control, such as resources being available in English only. These practices can easily lead to subtractive multilingualism (Plüddemann, 1997) if learners are unable to maintain their HL proficiency due to lack of resources.

The findings suggest a need for teachers, educational authors and curriculum material developers to develop appropriate resources in all the official languages of South Africa to enable more effective teaching. Teacher training should also be adapted to ensure that teachers are not only trained as special needs educators, but also in the pedagogics of second language acquisition or bilingual teaching (Bos & Reyes, 1996). Teachers should also be trained in multiple strategies that are effective with second-language learners (Orosco & O'Connor, 2014). Some teachers indicated that the HL of the learners was mainly used for informal conversation. However, teachers may be encouraged to extend the use of the HL beyond conversations only, and to use it in academic activities as well. This can confirm the status of the HL and also support learning (Arreaga-Mayer et al., 2003). AAC practitioners and speech language

pathologists need to be cognisant of the language choices and preferences of the parents as well as the languages used in class. It is of the utmost importance that the therapists collaborate with the parents and teachers to ensure that those choices and preferences are observed. This implies that therapists might need to prepare AAC resources or therapy in various languages to meet these preferences.

5.4 Recommendations for further studies

This study offers an initial impression on the perceptions of teachers from a specific geographical region in South Africa on the language practices and choices they engage in when teaching learners with SID. Further studies are needed to compare the language choices and practices of teachers in schools for learners with SID across more districts and provinces to the findings obtained in this regional study.

As all three of the schools targeted in this study have English as one of their LoLTs, and the DCAPS curriculum is only available in English, it may be particularly interesting to investigate choices and practices of teachers at schools where English is not included as LoLT. It will be important to determine how the strong feelings that participating teachers have on the learners' acquisition of English compares to those of teachers at schools where English is not used as LoLT.

As teacher choices and practices do not occur in a vacuum, further studies could investigate the perceptions of parents of learners with SID on education language practices, as well as their preferences and reasons for these. Similarly, the way that governing bodies of schools for learners with SID come to make decisions about the LoLTs of the school may be important to investigate.

There is a dearth of studies investigating the possible influences of language in education practices on educational and language outcomes of children with SID. While studies on the effect of educational practices in any population are complicated by the heterogeneity of participants and the range of possible outcomes that can be investigated (many of which are achieved only over the long term and are subject to many other influences), such studies could guide teachers in their language practices and choices. Such studies could range from case descriptions of the practices of

teachers regarded as ‘successful’, to more controlled experimental studies. However, the latter are likely to only investigate the short-term implementation of practices on short-term outcomes.

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Appendix A

Interview Schedule

Interview schedule: Participating teachers

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. The purpose of this interview is to determine which languages are chosen for learning and teaching and what your experiences are regarding these choices. The interview should take about an hour. The interview will be audio-recorded to allow me to do a transcription for analysis purposes.

1. Tell me about the languages you use in your classroom every day.
   a) Which language is used for everyday conversation and giving instructions? Motivation?
   b) Which language is used for teaching?
   c) Which language is used for class discussions? Motivation?
   d) Which language is used for assessment? Motivation?
2. If you could choose to use one or more languages to use for teaching children in your class – what language(s) would you choose? Why would you choose that language/those languages?
3. The DCAPS curriculum is currently only available in English. How does this align with the LoLT used in your classroom?
4. Which measures are put in place to assist learners that do not understand the LoLT?
5. Do you think that the learners benefit from being taught in _____?
   a) If yes, how do they benefit?
   b) If not, why?
6. Do you think learners with SID should learn in 1 or more languages?
7. Do you think SID learners have the ability to learn more than one language?
8. What could be done regarding your language choices to assist the learners to benefit more from your teaching?
9. Do you have access to resources (worksheets, assessment etc.) in the LoLT?
10. In which language would you like additional resources to be available in order to facilitate more effective teaching and learning?

11. Describe the ideal situation that would suit your learners in terms of language learning.
12. Are you satisfied with your current language choices regarding the LoLT used in your class?
13. Is there anything that you would have liked to change regarding the language choices you have made for teaching?

Interview commenced: _____

Interview concluded: _____

Duration of interview: _____

Appendix B

Ethics Approval - University of Pretoria

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Humanities 100.
1919 - 2019
Research Ethics Committee

2 March 2020

Dear Mrs RE van Wyk

Project Title:	Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa for learners with severe intellectual disability.
Researcher:	Mrs RE van Wyk
Supervisor:	Prof KM Tönsing
Department:	CAAC
Reference number:	28467109 (HUM007/0919)
Degree:	Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 2 March 2020. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

Prof Innocent Pikirayi
Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za

Appendix C

Permission to conduct research –

Mpumalanga Department of Education

education

MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ikhamanga Building. Government Boulevard. Riverside Park, Mpumalanga Province
Private Bag X11341, Mbombeia. 1200.
Tel: 013 766 5552.[1]5115. Toll Free Line: 0800 203 116

Litiko Temftiftdvo. U!nnyango we Fundo Departement van Onderwys Ndzawalo ya Dyandzo

Mrs. R.E. van Wyk
6 HM Swart Street
SECUNDA
2302

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: MRS R.E. VAN WYK

Your application to conduct research study was received and is therefore acknowledged. The title of your study reads thus: "Teachers perceptions about language practices and choices in Mpumalanga, South Africa for learners with severe intellectual ability." The aims and the objectives of the study may benefit the department in particular the foundation phase area of the curriculum. Your request is approved subject to you observing the provisions of the departmental research policy which is available in the departmental website and available on request. You are also requested to adhere to your University's research ethics as spelt out in your research ethics document.

In terms of the research policy, data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment with affected participants. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may consider implementing your findings if that will be in the best interest of the department. To this effect, your final approved research report (both soft and hard copy) should be submitted to the department as soon as you complete your research project. You may be required to prepare a presentation and present at the department's annual research dialogue.

For more information kindly liaise with the department's research unit @ 013 766 5476 or a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za.

The department wishes you well in this important project and pledges to give you the necessary support you may need.

MR. J.R. NKOSI

ACTING HEAD: EDUCATION

12 / 12 / 2019

DATE

Appendix D

Information letter and consent form - Participants

October 2019

Dear Teacher

Re: Participation in a survey regarding teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability.

My name is Renera van Wyk. I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) at the University of Pretoria. The title of my study is *Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability*. The aim of the study is *to determine the language practices and choices of teachers in the junior phase at three schools for learners with SID*.

I have been granted permission by the Department of Education of your province to access particular SID schools in order to carry out the above research. Please see attached copy of this permission letter. The principal of your school has also granted permission for me to approach teachers in the school for possible participation in this study.

Rationale for the study

The language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at public schools for learners with severe intellectual disability (SID) is not necessarily the home language (mother tongue). The current curriculum for learners with SID is only available in English. This may prevent learners from getting the full benefit of education. The information gathered in this study will help to gain a better understanding of the situation within which educators of SID learners find themselves, and will also help us understand educators' challenges and needs.

Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Room 2-36, Com path Building, Lynnwood Road
University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20
Hatfield 0028, South Africa
Tel +27 (0)12 420 2001
Fax +27 (0) 86 5100841
Email saak@up.ac.za
wwwcaac.up.ac.za

What will be expected of me should I participate?

The study is aimed at teachers who:

- are teaching learners between the ages of 5;0 and 12;11 at SID schools where learners have more than one different home language, and
- have been teaching at a SID school for a minimum of two years.

Should this apply to you and should you consent to take part in the study, I would then like to schedule a meeting with you and other participants at your school. You will be requested to complete a questionnaire of 10 questions. This should take about 10 minutes. I will be present during the completion of the questionnaire to clarify any questions. The interview will be done according to an interview schedule, but you are welcome to bring up new ideas as a result of what is said.

What are my rights as a participant?

Participation in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any point in time and all data you contributed will be immediately destroyed. Your name and the name of the school will not be entered on the questionnaire or transcription of the interview. All data will be reported in a way that neither you nor the school's name will be made known.

Who will have access to the results of the study?

The data will be stored as both hard copy and in electronic format at the University of Pretoria for 15 years. The data obtained from the research may be used for a scientific article and conference presentations. The data regarding language choices obtained from the deidentified interview transcripts may be used for further analyses. No personal identification or data identifying the participant or school will be revealed on the questionnaires or transcribed interviews. Results will be made available to the MDE and to any participating educator or principal from participating schools who expresses an interest.

What are the risks and benefits?

Kindly note that the interview questions do not contain any potentially uncomfortable questions and are not aimed at testing your knowledge. The interview will not contain questions about the language choices of colleagues, only that of the participant. Questions are purely based on your experiences and perceptions. The study does not pose any threat or potential harm to you. The benefits of the study include gaining a better understanding about teachers' perceptions and choices regarding the LoLT used in their classes. It will also help us understand educators' challenges and needs.

I would appreciate your consideration of this request. Should you be willing to participate in the study, I would appreciate if you could complete the attached reply slip. Please contact me should you have further questions.

Kind regards

_____
Renera van Wyk
Email: reneravanwyk@gmail.com
Cell: 082 825 1583

_____
Kerstin Tönsing
Supervisor and Associate Professor
Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication
Email:
kerstin.tonsing@up.ac.za
Office tel: 012 420 2001

Participant Informed Consent: Consent Reply Slip

Name of Educator: _____

Name of School: _____

Project title: Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability.

Researcher: Renera E. van Wyk
Master's Student
Centre for AAC
Cell: 082 825 1583

Supervisor: Associate Professor Kerstin Tönsing

I, _____ ,
Name and surname

☐ consent to participate in the study entitled *Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability* conducted by *Renera van Wyk* under the supervision of *Associate Professor Kerstin Tönsing*. This consent is voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded. I understand that the data will be stored for 15 years at the CAAC and that all data will be treated confidentially. I understand that the data may be re-used for analysis. I understand that the data may be used for a scientific article and for conference presentations. I understand that all information used and obtained in this study will be treated as confidential.

OR

☐ do not give consent to participate in the study entitled *Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability* conducted by *Renera van Wyk*.

_____ _____

Educator Signature Date

Appendix E

Biographical Questionnaire - Participants

Biographical Questionnaire

1. For how many years have you been teaching? _____
2. What are your total years of teaching experience in an LSEN school? _____
3. What are your total years of teaching experience in a school for learners with SID? _____
4. What is your home language? _____
5. What other languages do you speak/understand?
   5.1_____
   5.2_____
   5.3_____
   5.4_____
   5.5 _____
6. Please rate how well you understand, speak, read and write all the languages you know on a scale of 1 (=very poorly) to 5(= excellent)

	Speak	Understand	Read	Write
Home language please write name of language here):				
Additional language 1 (please write name of language here):				
Additional language 2 (please write name of language here):				
Additional language 3 (please write name of language here):				
Additional language 4 (please write name of language here):				

Additional language 5 (please write name of language here):				

7. How many learners are in your class?_____

8. Please indicate the number of learners in your class that come from different home language backgrounds

☐	isiZulu	☐	Sepedi	☐	English
☐	Afrikaans	☐	Setswana	☐	Xitsonga
☐	isiVenda	☐	Ndebele	☐	Xhosa
☐	Sotho	☐	Swazi	☐	Venda

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

☐ Other (Please specify) _____

9. Which language is used for teaching? _____

Appendix F

Information letter and consent form - Participants

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Humanities 100.
1919 - 2019
Centre for Augmentative & Alternative Communication

To: The Principal, (name of principal
(Name of School)

Date:

Dear (name of Principal)

Re: Permission to conduct research study at your school

My name is Renera van Wyk. I am currently enrolled for a Master's degree in Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) at the University of Pretoria. The title of my study is "Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability". The main aim of the study is to determine the language practices and choices of teachers in the junior phase at three schools for learners with SID.

I have been granted permission by the Mpumalanga Department of Education to access particular SID schools in order to carry out the above research. Please see attached copy of this permission letter. I would be much obliged if you would permit me to include (name of school) in this study.

Rationale for the study

The language of learning and teaching (LoLT) at public schools for learners with severe intellectual disability (SID) is not necessarily the home language (mother tongue). The current curriculum for learners with SID is only available in English. This may prevent learners from getting the full benefit of education. This study will investigate the language choices that teachers make when teaching learners with diverse mother tongues.

Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Room 2-36, Com path Building, Lynnwood Road
University of Pretoria, Private Bag X20
Hatfield 0028, South Africa
Tel +27 (0)12 420 2001
Fax +27 (0) 86 5100841
Email saak@up.ac.za
wwwcaac.up.ac.za

What will be expected of the school?
I will require your help to identify three teachers currently teaching learners between the ages of 5 and 11 to participate in the study. A venue for each interview will be required (the teacher's classroom will be appropriate unless otherwise requested). All participation will be on a voluntary basis and the data collected will be kept strictly confidential.

What will be expected of the teachers participating in the study?
Teachers will be asked to complete a short survey for demographic purposes. I will also be doing interviews with the applicable teachers. These interviews will take place during a time convenient to the teacher. This time will not interfere with contact time with learners. Interviews will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis.

The following ethical principles will be upheld within this study:
Permission has been obtained from the Mpumalanga Department of Education (see attached).

- Potential participants will be informed of every aspect of the study via a detailed information letter.
- Participation in the study is strictly voluntary.
- Written consent will be obtained from participants prior to conducting the study.
- All participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences to themselves. Should participants withdraw, their data will be immediately destroyed.
- The recordings which are made during the study will be accessed only by the researcher and her supervisor.
- All information will be kept confidential from those external to the study. Any identifying information will be removed from the transcription (e.g., names of people and places will not be transcribed). No individual or school names will be mentioned in any published data.

Who will have access to the results?
The research will be stored in both hard copy and electronic format at the University of Pretoria in the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication for 15 years.

The data obtained from the research will be used for writing a Master's dissertation, writing scientific papers and for presentation at professional conferences and seminars. Neither the school's name nor any other identifying information about the school or the participants will be included in any publication or presentation. A summary of results will be made available for any interested principals or participants. Once again, neither the school's name nor any other identifying information about the school or participants will be included. Transcriptions (from which all identifying information has been removed) may be used for secondary data analysis. Voice recordings will only be used for further analysis if consent from the teachers has been obtained again.

What are the risks and the benefits?
At no time during participation in the research will the educators miss out on contact time with learners. Potential benefits of this study may include guidance regarding language choices in multilingual teaching.

May I kindly ask you to complete the permission reply slip overleaf to indicate whether or not you give permission for me to recruit participants from your school?

Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor if you have any questions about this study. I look forward to receiving your response.

Kind regards,

Renera van Wyk Date

Email: reneravanwyk@gmail.com
Cell: 082 825 1583

Supervisor:

Associate Professor Kerstin Tönsing Date

Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication

Email: kerstin.tonsing@up.ac.za
Tel: 012 420 2001

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Humanities 100
1919 - 2019
Centre for Augmentative & Alternative Communication

Principal permission: Reply slip

Name of principal: _____

Name of School: _____

Project title: Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability.

Researcher: Renera E. van Wyk
Master's Student
Centre for AAC
Cell: 082 825 1583

Supervisor: Associate Professor Kerstin Tönsing

I, _____
Name and surname

(please tick box that applies)

☐ give permission to *Renera van Wyk* to recruit teachers from the school named above for possible participation in the study entitled *Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability* conducted by *Renera van Wyk*, under the supervision of *Associate Professor Kerstin Tönsing*. This permission is voluntary and I understand that I may withdraw it at any time. I understand that interviews with participating teachers will be audio-recorded. I understand that the data will be stored for 15 years at the CAAC and that all data will be treated confidentially. I understand that the data may be re-used for analysis. I understand that the data may be used for a scientific article and for conference presentations. I understand that all information used and obtained in this study will be treated as confidential.

OR

☐ do not give permission to *Renera van Wyk* to recruit teachers from the school named above for possible participation in the study entitled "Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in South African schools for learners with severe intellectual disability."

_____
Principal signature

_____
Date

School stamp

Appendix G

Questionnaire – School Language Policy

Questionnaire: School Language Policy			
1.	What is the official LoLT of the school (as per SA SAMS)?		
2.	Does the school have a language policy?	Yes	No
3.	If yes, please provide a brief summary of the main points of the policy:		
4.	Has the LoLT of the school changed since the introduction of the new DCAPS curriculum?	Yes	No
5.	If yes, please provide details:		
6.	How does the school apply the Language in Education Policy regarding additive multilingualism?		

Appendix H

Coding Scheme

Coding Scheme

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
Language practice (language/combination of languages teachers have chosen to use in class)	English (one of 2 official LoLTs) mostly	English almost exclusively	We mostly use English, because I'm also a language teacher we try to focus on English [P3]; Even the CAPS curriculum nowadays is actually in English [P3]
		English for Maths assessment	Depending on the subject. In Maths we mostly use English [P2]
	English (one of 2 official LoLTs) and isiZulu	English and assistant then translates to HL where necessary	…if we need to explain something specifically, we will ask the assistant to maybe use their home language to explain [P3]; To help learners that do not understand, the assistant translates it into Zulu [P8].
		English mostly, but isiZulu for extra explanations	II teach them in English, I switch to Zulu so that they can understand what I am saying [P7]; If you teach in English but you explain in Zulu. [P1]
		English for assessment	In order that they can understand…I'm using both languages [P7]
		English and isiZulu for teaching	I teach with both languages…I have to repeat it [P6]; I start by Zulu, after that, I explain in English again. Double, double [P6]
	English and Afrikaans (2 official LoLTs) and isiZulu	Alternate per week between two official LoLTs	Week one will be English, week two Afrikaans and so forth [P5]
		English and Afrikaans and some HL words	…some of the pupils that come to our school are not at all familiar with any words in English or Afrikaans, so them I try and help myself with some Zulu words…[P5]
	isiZulu (1 of 2 official LoLTs)	isiZulu for talking in class / conversations	…just talking in class…we are talking Zulu…[P7] I use isiZulu for conversations... [P4]
Learners' needs and abilities (what are the learners' needs regarding language learning and how does it match current abilities)	Current language proficiency	All learners proficient in English and/or isiZulu (2 LoLTs)	because those who doesn't understand Zulu. If I do talk in English they did understand, and the one that is in Zulu. [P6]
		Diverse HL profiles make Zulu learning material inappropriate	No, I don't think so (i.e. no need for Material in languages other than English). Because all learners come from different backgrounds and different home languages. So, it will not be easy for them to learn isiZulu, because it will be like depriving them something they should know or forcing them to do what they should not be doing. [P2]
		English and HL proficient	Yes, I think so because at home they are talking their own language. And then at school speaking English. [P4]
		English proficiency is limited but classroom exposure improves it	even though they are not really relevant (fluent) with English or clear or perfect, but somewhere somehow this build them because they know some words or things they could identify while they work in their communities because they've learned that in their classrooms so it's easy to identify some of the things in English.[P2]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
		English proficiency limited in most learners	Because most of our learners, are Zulus, so they don't understand English, most of them [P1]
			If you speak English only, they don't understand, or they understand (a little) [P1]
		English proficiency limited in some learners	I speak Zulu for those, especially sometimes some of them. They can't even understand English, then I will try to explain in Zulu so that we can work all together. [P7]
			Like I say, in English, some of them, very few they understand. [P7]
		isiZulu understood by everyone	I can't say is the best ***but Zulu seems to be the only language every learner can understand.*** *[P2]*
			Yes. They do understand Zulu. [P4]
		Proficient in either/both LoLT is a benefit for learner	Proficient in either/both LoLT is a benefit for learner [P5]
		Want to learn English	and they want to, really, they really want to learn English. [P8]
	Learners' language needs	Multilingualism will facilitate peer communication	I think more languages will benefit them. Because during their play time, for example, they need to communicate with their peers. What if the other one doesn't know the other language? So it might benefit them if there is a language that they can both communicate in [P2]
		Afrikaans or English for employment	***But, if we want to think about the possibility of employment, I do think that they should know at least English or Afrikaans***, I think English might open more doors, but ***either one of those will be to their benefit.*** *[P5]*
		English and isiZulu for employment and community integration	English and Zulu (in adult life). They must. I don't, let me say, not they must. Since we are teaching them in English and Zulu, I think it would be better for them to understand both languages. [P7]
		English for employment	Like…they know Zulu, but if it comes when they are now grown up, they are looking for the job. And you come to a place whereby you go…you cannot go and say, "im ngifuna umsebenzi, in, in, in Zulu. At least this must be in English, and Zulu where it can be able to speak to the…maybe to the people whom he's working, he or she's working with. [P7]
			Yeah, for employment I think English is the language they should be employed (equipped) with [P2]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
		English for employment and community integration	Definitely English (for future employment and community inclusion). [P3]
			Definitely English so that's why I say it's better for them to learn the English language, and to, so that they can help themselves in their environment. [P8]
			I think English is the best thing (for the future) because majority of us, we know English Y***es, I think it's the best thing (Zulu and English)*** *[P6]*
		English for further school education	English. Because the senior teachers also teach in English, [P8]
			Yeah, I think English is the only language that can drive them higher. [P2]
			I think English. (For higher grades) [P3]
			No, for to read and write, they need English. [P4]
		English proficiency will give learners status and counteract experience of failure	Because most…most of them, they are not…they were not good in their previous…previous schools, some of them. When they come here…at a special school…I think we must put something to them, let them know English, that will make them to be something in future [P7]
		English will be NB after leaving school	because when they leave school and they go out into the world, they must be able to, to understand and speak English well and speaking is like the most important thing. [P3]
		HL for weak learners who stay in their community	If they're just in their small little area where they come from, then they will be able to cope for the very, very weak learners only with the mother tongue. [P5]
			but with communities their own language is fine. [P2]
		isiZulu for further school education	In order for them to go to their higher grades…you know what…This year's kids, they are given me a very tough job. But I think Zulu for them. [P7]
			Language, just Zulu. (for higher grades) [P1]
	In relation to beliefs about languages	English known by majority	because majority of us, we know English [P6]
		English is easier to understand than HL	It will be easier for them if they are going to the other grade. The work there maybe is difficult for them. But if they do explain for them in English is going to be easier for them not in their mother language. [P6]
		English is everywhere	because everywhere they go or everything they do is written in English and English is everywhere. [P8]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
		English is international	Definitely, because English is an international language and mostly they can help themselves in English where they are...in their environment [P8]
		English needed in greater community	because if you go anywhere in, if it's not in the township, if you go anywhere in another mall or in a restaurant, usually, preferably they'll help you in English, so I think it's a tool that we try and assess (assist) them with. [P5]
		English will open doors	I think English might open more doors [P5]
		isiZulu is difficult to read and write	because Zulu is very difficult even to write and to read, [P4]
		isiZulu is difficult to write	because Zulu names…to write… is more difficult than English words. [P6]
Constraints, possibilities and strategies (problems that the teachers face while preparing and teaching; possible solutions as well as strategies that are (or can be) used to solve some of the problems)	AAC and visual aids	Picture cards to bridge between languages	From district, nothing that I'm aware of, the school…not for the other languages as such, but they do support us if we go for Makaton or any other AAC workshops. And that does seem to help, because then the language is not so abstract anymore. And also the AAC cards, then I usually put at the bottom of the picture that we use to train the child a Zulu word then so then I will use the Zulu with the English, and the English before and after the Zulu to teach them that language.[P6]; If the child doesn't understand both of the things that I'm teaching, I reach the child through pictures.[P6].
		Teaching aids to scaffold understanding	In order to understand…if I'm teaching, I make use of the teaching aids. I'm making use of … to show them, let them see what am I talking about, let them feel, let them touch, if it's something that they must touch it...Then, we are together. When you are teaching them…is better if the teaching aids are there…then you tell them I'm taking about this…come and look at it, you see, like that. [P7];
	Adapt teaching	Adapt pace to assist learners with limited English proficiency	That's, that's difficult (if child does not understand English or Zulu). As I say, then we…then we go slower. And we, as I say, we can't keep up with the curriculum as it is. So, we will then take those learners and maybe explain to them in a(n) easier way or make the work easier for them so that they can at least understand. (learners that don't understand) [P3]
	Assistants as translators	Assists with explanations/understanding	Now and then if we need to explain something specifically, we will ask the assistant to maybe use their HL to explain, but we try to do it not as …on a regular basis. [P3]; Then (for non-English and non-Zulu child) we can also…you must also use the assistant for translation… to translate the language. [P8]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
	Curriculum and learning material	Curriculum for HL only in English, hard to translate	They say it's home language but written in English. Yeah, and it's very difficult to direct translate, to Zulu. [P4]; if this (these) children find it (English curriculum) hard, we struggle it takes time. And we go slower. We can't keep up with the curriculum as it is. We definitely do some differentiation as well to make it easier for the learners but we try, we try. [P3]
		Curriculum not available in Zulu	No, we don't have. (Zulu Curriculum) [P1]; Actually, we translate it from English to Zulu. (Curriculum) [P1]
		Curriculum only in English	but even the CAPS curriculum nowadays is actually English. You don't get it in Afrikaans at this moment for our schools, [P3]
		Curriculum only in English, hard for teachers to translate	and even the curriculum for home language is written in English not in Zulu. How will teachers translate English to Zulu? It's a problem, even to teachers. [P4]
		Material in English obtained from mainstream needs to be adapted	No, we don't have relevant resources, we're just using the books that they gave us from the mainstream (in English) then we adapt it from there. Maths…and Life skills. English. [P1]
			I do have (resources), not specifically for special schools, but normal school workbooks and so that I use but I do make it easier and change a few things. [P3]
		Material in Zulu needed	Yes, we would have benefited (from having Zulu books) because, as I'm saying our learners doesn't understand English, they understand uh…Zulu more than English. So, if we can get uh…books that are written in Zulu, I think they will benefit more. [P1]
		Material only in English	(Resources available) In English only. [P4]
			Everything (resources and Material) is in English but Zulu, no.[P2]
			Usually…. Actually, I have only English in these textbooks, you see, textbooks and worksheets in English. [P7]
	School language policy	Official policy does not allow teachers to do what is really best, English is a compromise	Home languages or mother language, or mother tongue language, always, always the best but because the language that our school teaches is English…English is the best…Under the circumstances it's the best to teach them in English. [P8]
		Official policy to use HL not compatible with language proficiency of learners	My learners are autistic. So, here at school, they want us to teach to use their home language, but I thought they don't understand good in Zulu. [P4]
	Teacher language proficiency	Compatible with Sotho speakers and would allow teacher to adapt LoLT	(If I had a class with predominantly Sotho HL learners I would teach in Sotho) Yes, because I'm also a Sotho. I learn Sotho, can speak Sotho fluently, I can write Sotho fluently. Because when I have done Sotho from grade R, grade one to grade 12. [P1]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
		Compatible with that of all/most learners	I didn't have …. I don't know what can I say, because I never had a such a child (whose language I could not speak) [P1]
		Limited proficiency in LoLT (Zulu)	(It) is also difficult for me as a teacher because I'm not a Zulu speaking person. Having to explain to learners in Zulu sometimes I don't even know what that is or how to pronounce it properly. So, it's a challenge. But according to the school's rules we have to understand the Zulu language. [P2]
			I can't pronounce words like they do. [P2]
		Limited proficiency in LoLT (Zulu) -precludes teacher being able to make use of Zulu worksheets even if they were available	I don't, I don't think it will be. It will be okay for me much for me, because, I… I know little of Zulu. Little of Zulu. I can speak some of the words if, even if I speak them, they laugh me. No, Tshidi, it is not like that…because I'm a Sotho speaking….so...most of the time, I like to speak with them in English, then if, like, I usually explain with simple words. I cannot go deeper in Zulu. [P7]
Beliefs about language learning and teaching (what teachers believe regarding the learners' language abilities and what will be best for them)	Learners' ability to learn more than one language	Depends on learner, some learn English	But some of them can learn in English and manage quite well [P8]
		Yes, speaking but maybe not writing	I think yes, because learning is not as difficult as writing. I mean, speaking, speaking is simple…than written work. (able to learn more languages) [P2]
			Not reading and writing maybe speaking more than one language but I think it will be hard. [P3]
	Teaching in one vs multiple languages	Monolingual English is important	But still I go back to say that English I think is the language that we need to teach the children so I think if you just have patience and carry on in that it's a good thing for the children in the long run. [P3]
			What can I say? I think the best thing for them is to learn in English, [P6]
		Monolingual English with some translation is beneficial	Currently in my class, yes, because they are all Zulu speaking children and for me to teach them in English and for the assistant to help me to translate it. It's at the best for them. [P8]
		Multiple languages are not the best but a practical solution	I don't think it's the best situation, but it's the best solution I could come up with in the current situation, because I have learners with… some's Afrikaans, some English, Sotho or Zulu, so it's four different mother tongues, and I'm trying to make the best of it. [P5]
		Multiple languages are beneficial	(Learners should learn) In two languages. [P1]
			Yes, I think they benefit a lot (from being taught in English and isiZulu) [P4]

Theme (definition)	Subtheme	Codes (examples)	Examples of quotes
			Yeah, they do benefit a lot, (from using English and isiZulu) [P6]
			Yes, is easier for them (when I teach in English and Zulu) [P7]

Appendix I

Synthesised member checking

Introductory letter and summary of findings

Request for feedback

Dear Participant

As part of my Master's studies, I recently interviewed you about your language practices and choices regarding your class in a SID school. Firstly, I would like to thank you for taking the time to do the interview and sharing your practices and choices with me. I have learnt a lot from our discussion.

I have summarised all the information I received from the eight ladies that I have interviewed. Please see this summary (attached).

In order to make sure that I have included everything, I would like to ask you to please read through the summary. If you think that I have not interpreted something correctly, or have missed a statement, please let me know. You can indicate it in an email, or email me a time that would be suitable for me to call you.

I would be grateful for your response to reach me by 20 May 2020.

Kind regards,
Renera van Wyk
Cell: 082 825 1583

Summary of main issues mentioned in teacher interviews

Language practices

This refers to the use of various languages and combinations of languages used in the classroom, sometimes with different choices made for different activities.

English mostly

Some teachers indicated that they use mainly English in class. This is partially due to the DCAPS curriculum only being available in English, but is sometimes used as unifying language in a multilingual class.

English and isiZulu

As English and isiZulu are the two official LoLTs of two of the three schools targeted in the study, seven of the educators use a combination of these two languages in class on a regular basis. Several of the teachers teach in English, but will use isiZulu to explain certain concepts to ensure sufficient understanding. The two languages are also often mixed in class. Where a teacher is unable to speak an African language, the help of a class assistant is used to translate concepts into the learners' HLs.

English and Afrikaans and isiZulu

As one of the schools has English and Afrikaans as LoLTs, these two languages are used in class. Several learners attending the school have no pre-knowledge of either of the two LoLTs. The class assistants help to translate when it is needed, although not on a constant basis. Learners are also helped to understand key concepts by using pictures and other visual material to scaffold understanding.

isiZulu

isiZulu is mostly used for class discussions and general conversation. In most cases where isiZulu is used for teaching, it is also translated into English to introduce learners to the language. English is also taught as FAL (First Additional Language).

Learners' needs and abilities

This section is about teachers' perceptions about learners' current language learning needs and how this matches their abilities

Current language proficiency

isiZulu was indicated as the home language (HL) of 71 of the 112 learners in the targeted group. isiZulu is also one of the LoLTs of two of the three schools. Most learners thus speak isiZulu in their communities. Even the learners that have another African language as HL seem to understand isiZulu. English is introduced either as a LoLT or as a subject in all three schools. Some teachers felt that the learners find it very hard to learn a second language and may only manage to master a verbal command of the second language and not be able to read or write in the additional language. There were, however, also teachers that felt that some learners found it easier to learn to read and write English than isiZulu. Even where isiZulu is a HL, some learners are reported to cope better in English.

Learners' language needs

The learners do not all share the same HL and sometimes have to communicate with someone in another language than the HL. It is thus the opinion of most of the teachers that it would be beneficial for learners to learn an additional language. There is consensus between the teachers regarding the fact that the learners' HL would suffice in their own communities, but that they would most likely need English as an additional language when seeking employment or moving out of their direct communities.

In relation to beliefs about languages

A high premium is placed on the importance of learning English. Teachers regard English as an important language that is used everywhere in the world. English is also seen as a language that can open more doors for them in the future. Several teachers mentioned the fact that English is easier to read and write than isiZulu.

Constraints, possibilities and strategies

This section deals with constraints that keep teachers from teaching efficiently, as well as ways in which they remedy the situation

AAC and visual aids

The use of picture cards, Makaton symbols and various other visual support systems were mentioned by teachers. It has been found to be very useful to bridge a language gap between teacher and learner, but also to make concepts more concrete and less abstract to the learners. Learners are encouraged to look at and touch these educational aids.

Assistants as translators

At the school where English and Afrikaans are the LoLTs, the teachers are not required to be able to speak African languages. To enable learners that do not understand either of the LoLTs, use is made of class assistants (SASO therapists) to help with explaining the necessary concepts in the learners' HL (if possible). Care is taken that this is done in such a way that no learner is left behind because of their language proficiency. Translation by assistants is not done constantly, but only when needed.

Curriculum and learning material

The teachers had varied opinions about this topic. The fact that the DCAPS curriculum is currently only available in English is an equaliser between the schools and teachers. Some teachers felt that the unavailability of the curriculum in other languages hampered effective teaching as it is not always possible to directly translate all information. It also puts a lots of pressure (timewise) on teachers to have to translate the curriculum. As English is the only language where provision has been made regarding phonics, it forces teachers to do most of the written work in English, despite it not being the learners' HL. There were teachers, however, that did not find the English curriculum as a hampering factor in their teaching.

Resources supplied by the Education Department are not always appropriate, as mainstream books are supplied. These are not always applicable and can seldom be

used as is. In most cases these worksheets (workbooks) have to be adapted to suit the DCAPS curriculum. Some teachers generate and supply their own worksheets, where other teachers have received help from mainstream educators in the form of worksheets that could be adapted to suit their needs.

A number of teachers felt that worksheets/workbooks in the learners' HL would be beneficial to aid understanding. As the learners do not all share the same HL, and all teachers do not have the same language proficiency, it would be hard to cover all bases, so English is mostly regarded as a safe alternative.

Other constraints and strategies

As some classes have learners from many different linguistic backgrounds, it is sometimes difficult to accommodate all learners. Strategies to help teachers achieve their goals are adapting teaching by going slower, making the work easier or helping the learner in a language that the learner understands. One strategy that would assist in this matter, but is deemed impractical to implement, would be to group learners according to HLs to enable a teacher to use only one language in class if so preferred.

School language policy

All the schools represented in the study have language policies indicating the LoLTs to be used in the school. Even though these policies are followed, it sometimes becomes a constraint, as the LoLT is not always the best choice for the learners. School policy sometimes prescribes a specific language to be used as LoLT, but it proves to be hard (or impossible) to implement due to the lack of the DCAPS curriculum in other languages. Most teachers feel that HL would be best for teaching, but are not able to do so due to the above-mentioned constraints.

Teacher language proficiency

All the teachers involved in the study are proficient in English. Most of the participants are proficient in more than one African language which makes it easier to meet the needs of teaching in two languages. Where the teacher is not proficient in the learners' HL, the help of a translator, whether another teacher or a class assistant is used to aid

understanding. As all teachers are not isiZulu HL speakers, the help of colleagues is sometimes used to ensure the correct vocabulary use and pronunciation.

Beliefs about language learning and teaching

This section dealt with teachers' beliefs about the learners' ability to learn more than one language and about what language situation would be best for them in class.

Learners' ability to learn more than one language

Most teachers concurred that learners have the ability to learn more than one language. There were, however, some provisos regarding this statement. It will depend on the specific learner, some may learn faster than others, some may be able to learn to speak a second language, but might be unable to learn to read and write in the second language. Some learners are reported to cope well in learning English as second language. The opinion was also expressed that some learners really want to learn English.

Teaching in one versus multiple languages

Once again there were widely varied opinions offered. Some teachers felt that monolingual teaching (teaching in one language only) is the best situation for the SID learners. This could either be the HL or a second language. Even though some teachers felt that HL teaching would benefit most learners, it is not always a practical option as the learners' HL may not be in line with the LoLTs of the school.

Teaching in English and isiZulu is being considered as the ideal situation by most of the participants, although it is not always the easiest option. Using English, either as the main- or additional language, is an advantage where several linguistic backgrounds are represented in a class and it is an equalising factor.

Even though teachers are sometimes required to use two languages in class, it is not always considered the best for the learners. In cases where there is a large group of, for example, Sotho learners in a school that does not have Sotho as a LoLT, adaptions could be made to accommodate these learners in their HL.

Appendix J

Statement from Language Editor

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16 July 2020

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I, Donna Moore (8004100251085), declare that I have copy-edited the following mini dissertation for spelling, grammar, punctuation and formatting:

Teachers' perceptions about language practices and choices in schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa for learners with severe intellectual disability.

by

Renera Elsabé van Wyk

Student no: 28467109

All changes were indicated by track changes and comments for the author to verify, correct and finalise.

The undersigned bears no responsibility for the changes made after the submission of this declaration.

Donna Moore

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