# A CASE FOR MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION?

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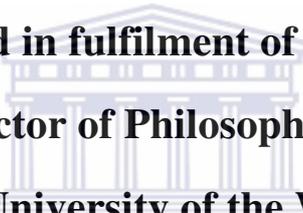
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Abstract

The question as to which language should be used as a medium of instruction in schools in multilingual societies is a controversial one. In South Africa, the question is often posed in binary terms: Should the medium of instruction be a familiar local language such as Xhosa or a language of wider communication like English? This study is an attempt to answer the above question.

The study profiled the writing abilities of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils at Themba Primary, a school located in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape, in both their mother tongue, Xhosa, and in English, their official medium of instruction at school since Grade 4. Three written tasks, which consisted of a narrative piece of writing, a reading comprehension exercise, and an expository piece of writing, were administered to the pupils in English and Xhosa. The purpose of the exercise was to examine some of the implications for educational language policy of the differences in performance in the two languages. All the tasks were authentic, in that they were based on aspects of the pupils' curriculum and written in the formal academic language pupils were expected to be exposed to in their respective grades. All the tasks were graded systematically under controlled conditions.

The theoretical and conceptual framework that guided this study drew essentially on the link between the development of pupils' mother tongue (home language) and the acquisition of academic language proficiency in both the mother tongue and a second language in multilingual contexts. The framework incorporated theories on mother tongue education, bilingual education, multilingual education, second language acquisition and academic language development. It drew substantially on the foundational works of Cummins (1976, 1979, 1980, 1984b, 1986), hence the earlier references throughout the thesis. However, the work of Cummins was complemented by more recent writings such as Alidou et al (2006); Desai et al (2010); Heugh et al

(2007, 2010); May & Hornberger (2008); Qorro et al (2009); Skutnabb-Kangas et al (2009) and others.

At Grade 4 level, the pupils performed significantly better in the Xhosa version of the *narrative task*. Pupil samples indicate that the Xhosa version was almost always much richer than the English version and more true to the pictures in the narrative task. In fact, at Grade 4 level, pupils expressed themselves with great difficulty in English. At Grade 7 level, although the average English performance increased slightly, the gap between the Xhosa and English versions remained virtually unchanged.

Pupils performed poorly in the *reading task* in both grades and in both languages. The average class score in both languages and for both grades was much below 50%. The pattern in reading performance seemed to get worse as pupils moved up the educational ladder. From this it would seem that pupils were not prepared adequately to read the more academically demanding texts they were exposed to in Grade 7. Scores in the *expository task* reflected more or less the same situation as with the narrative task, but pupils performed better in the English task in Grade 7 than they did in Grade 4. Interestingly, pupil scores in the expository task in Xhosa declined in Grade 7.

The findings seem to indicate the following. Firstly, pupils at schools such as Themba Primary are not ready to switch to English as a medium at the beginning of Grade 4. Secondly, pupils need to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency in Xhosa so that they are able to use their mother tongue for learning. For this to happen, pupils need to be exposed to academic texts in Xhosa. Thirdly, pupils need to be exposed to regular engagement with texts in both Xhosa and English. Reading involves much more than decoding. Fourthly, pupils need frequent and regular opportunities to write various kinds of texts in order to develop their productive skills in both Xhosa and English.

A possible ethical issue arising from this study is whether schools continue with the existing language in education policy, even if it disadvantages pupils by not acknowledging their existing language strengths.

Keywords/phrases

Comparisons between English and Xhosa scores

English

Language proficiencies

Medium of instruction

Mother tongue

Mother tongue education

Reading comprehension

Second language acquisition

Writing tasks

Xhosa

Declaration

I declare that

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is my own work, that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references, and that this work has not been submitted previously in its entirety, or in any part, at any other higher education institution for degree purposes.

…………………………………

ZUBEIDA KHATOOM DESAI   March 2012

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to:

my mother, Jamila Desai, who kept my mother tongue, Konkani, alive,

my father, Abdullatief Desai, who introduced me to English,

my uncle, Ebrahim Desai, who expanded my knowledge of Konkani and

my uncle, Abdulla Desai, who introduced me to the wonderful world of books.

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

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Secondly, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Professor Dirk Meerkotter, for his guidance and encouragement throughout the long process. Thanks are also due to my co-supervisor, Professor Stanley Ridge, for his helpful comments and feedback.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS WITH EXPLANATIONS

ACE   Advanced Certificate in Education

ADEA   Association for the Development of Education in Africa

ANA   Annual National Assessment

ANC   African National Congress

BICS   Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills

CALP   Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

CEPD   Centre for Education Policy Development

COSAS   Congress of South African Students

COSATU   Congress of South African Trade Unions

CUMSA   Curriculum Model for South Africa

DACST   Department of Arts and Culture, Science and Technology

DBE   Department of Basic Education

DET   Department of Education and Training

DoE   Department of Education

ELT   English Language Teacher

ESL   English as Second Language

ERS   Education renewal strategy

FEP   Fluent English Proficient

FET   Further Education and Training

GET   General Education and Training

HSRC   Human Sciences Research Council

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language

LEP   Limited English Proficiency

LiEP	Language in Education Policy
LOITASA	Language Of Instruction in Tanzania And South Africa
LoLT	Language of learning and teaching
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MLE	Multilingual Education
MTM	Mother Tongue Medium
NECC	National Education Co-ordinating Committee
NEPI	National Education Policy Investigation
NGO	Non- Governmental Organisation
NLP	National Language Project
NLT	Native Language Teacher
NUFU	Norwegian Programme for Research, Development and Education (acronym in Norwegian)
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PanSALB	Pan South African Language Board
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRAESA	Project for Alternative Education in South Africa
RNCS	Revised National Curriculum Statement
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SASCO	South African Students Congress
SYPP	Six Year Primary Project

UNESCO   United Nations Educational, Scientific ad Cultural Organisation

WCED   Western Cape Education Department

WECTU   Western Cape Teachers Union

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In my thirty-five years of involvement in the education of young people who were historically classified as African or Coloured, two issues of concern have emerged. The first relates to pupils' inadequate subject knowledge and conceptual development whilst the second involves pupils' poor grasp of English, despite having experienced it as a medium of instruction for many years. My experiences as a teacher and teacher educator over the years indicated that there was a link between these two issues. Language plays a crucial role in learning as it is through language that children develop ideas or concepts of the world around them; it is through language that children make sense of the input they receive in the classroom from the teacher and the written texts; and it is through language that children express their understanding of what they have learnt from this input (see, for example, Cummins 2000; Gibbons 2002; Probyn 2008; Tsui and Tollefson 2004, for more on the role of language in education).
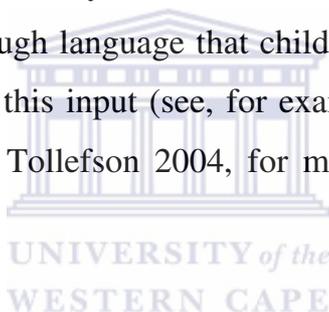
But when the language used for learning is not a language familiar to the pupils, it becomes a barrier to learning (Benson 2009; Brock-Utne 2010; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas 2010; Mohanty 2009; Nomlomo 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000). This barrier becomes more impenetrable when the teacher too is not adequately proficient in the language of instruction, thus making the teacher input even more incomprehensible. In such situations, teachers often resort to using the pupils' mother tongue (which they have in common with the pupils) in spoken communication in order to make themselves understood. However, all written communication and formal assessment in such contexts is expected to be in the unfamiliar language, English in this case. Given this educational scenario, I thought it useful to explore pupils' existing

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proficiencies in the two languages involved (Xhosa[1] and English) in order to provide a profile of them in relation to the two languages.

This is a case study of Xhosa-speaking pupils in Grades 4 and 7 at Themba[2] Primary School in Khayelitsha, a large African township situated near Cape Town International Airport in South Africa. The purpose of the study was to establish whether there existed a case for extending the use of the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond Grade 3. This was done by profiling the proficiencies of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils in three writing tasks in both English and Xhosa in order to assess pupils' strengths and weaknesses in the different tasks and in the two languages, thereby assessing the appropriateness of existing language in education practices. However, exposure to prolonged writing tasks in either language was not a common practice at this school, or at other similarly-located schools (Holmarsdottir 2005), despite it being a requirement in the curriculum.

This chapter locates these two issues, of pupils' inadequate subject knowledge and poor grasp of English, by providing the background to the study, its aims and objectives and the rationale and significance of the study.

The chapter first provides the background to the study by drawing the reader's attention to the following aspects of education in South Africa:

- the continued unequal nature of education provision in South Africa,
- the medium of instruction,
- definitions of mother tongue and
- definitions of multilingualism and multilingual classes.

The chapter then proceeds to state the aims and objectives of the study, before providing a rationale for the study. It then briefly looks at the possible significance of

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[1] Xhosa is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa, as listed in the 1996 Constitution. It has the second largest number of mother tongue speakers (17.6%) after Zulu, according to the 2001 Population Census.
[2] Themba is not the real name of the school. It is a fictitious name used to protect the identity of the school.

the study within a theoretical framework and sums up the research methodology used. It ends with a layout of the chapters in the thesis.

1.1 Background to the study

1.1.1. South African Education: A history of inequality

The 'state' of formal education in a country is often seen as a barometer of the type of society that country is. 'State' in this instance refers to whether education is free and compulsory and to what level it is free. It also refers to how well schools are resourced, both in terms of teaching staff as well as physical resources. This 'state' also indicates the level of inequality in that society. South Africa is no exception in this regard. As I elaborate in Chapter Three, education provision under apartheid was characterized by huge inequalities between the different sections of the population, classified according to racial categories. These categories were used to compartmentalise South Africans formally from 1948 to 1990, the year in which apartheid legally came to an end. For the purposes of this study, I refer to the four major racial categories used in the country at the time: White, Indian, Coloured and African.[3] There were further distinctions within the categories, which I will not discuss in this chapter as they do not have direct bearing on the substance of this study. Those classified African were at the bottom of the hierarchical ladder and are the focus of this study.

Numerous researchers (Christie 2008; Fleisch 2008; Hartshorne 1992; Kallaway 1984, 2002; Macdonald 1990; Taylor & Vinjevold 1999; and others) have written about the sometimes desperate failings of the education system in many schools in South Africa, particularly those catering for African children. Overcrowded classrooms, poorly qualified teachers, lack of resources and malnourished children are some of the features of these schools.

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[3] These categories were not accepted by many people in South Africa, including the present author and many others, who rejected the racial classification of people. For the purposes of this study, however, I will be using these categories to describe the differentiated and unequal system of education that existed in South Africa.

Despite the formal abolition of apartheid and the ushering in of democracy, these problems persist. For example, although segregation in schooling has been abolished, the reality is that almost all schools in townships remain African, largely as far as teacher composition is concerned and wholly in terms of pupil population.

For those classified African, there was (and still is) an additional burden: the medium of instruction. Most children face a disjuncture between school and home, but this disjuncture is significantly widened when the introduction to school is in a language that the child is not familiar with or, as Romaine says, when there is 'a linguistic mismatch' (1995, p. 242) between home and school. For many African children in South Africa, the medium of instruction has tended to be the mother tongue followed (usually abruptly) by English. The switch to English as medium of instruction has varied historically, from being introduced in Year 8 of schooling in 1959, or, as is the case now, in the fourth year, in Grade 4.

The South African school system was restructured after the first democratic elections in 1994. It now consists of the Foundation Phase from Grades 1-3, with pupils starting school generally at seven years of age. This is followed by the Intermediate Phase from Grades 4-6 and then by the Senior Phase from Grades 7-9, when compulsory schooling ends. Grades 1-9 collectively are referred to as General Education and Training (GET). In addition, there is a phase known as Further Education and Training (FET) that consists of Grades 10-12. The FET phase is meant to lead to either academic specialisation or vocational or technical specialisation.

A more detailed description of the shift in medium of instruction is provided in Chapter Three, but first I provide a brief explanation of the term 'mother tongue'.

1.1.2. What is a mother tongue?

As the term 'mother tongue' is understood differently by people, it will be useful to look at how the term has been defined. Here I draw on the typology developed by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984, reproduced in 2000, p. 106), which is still very much in use today.

Table 1.1: Definitions of mother tongue

Criterion	Definition
1. **Origin**	the language one learned first (the language one has established the first long-lasting verbal contacts in)
2. **Identification** a. internal b. external	a. the language one identifies with/as a native speaker of b. the language one is identified with/as a native speaker of, by others
3. **Competence**	the language one knows best
4. **Function**	the language one uses most

(Source: Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, p. 106).

Skutnabb-Kangas points out that:

> … defining 'mother tongue(s)' is not only an academic exercise – it is necessary also for practical purposes … [such as] (census, right to services which are given on the basis of mother tongue, assessment of linguistic qualifications for education, jobs etc.) (2000, pp. 105-6).

She proceeds to identify what her mother tongues are, according to the four criteria mentioned above: *origin, identification, competence and function.* To concretise these definitions, I thought it might be useful to apply her definitions to my own personal situation.

My mother tongue by *origin* is Konkani, a language spoken mainly in Goa but also in other parts of India, such as villages and towns in the State of Maharashtra. There is disagreement amongst linguists and educationists as to whether Konkani is a language in its own right or a variety of Marathi, the official language in the Maharashtra State,

but that debate is not pertinent to this description. My mother tongues by *internal identification* are Konkani and English, but only English by *external identification*. One explanation for the difference in internal and external identification is that, in South Africa, very few adults, and even fewer children, of Indian origin can speak an Indian language. Very few adults of my generation, and hardly any who are younger, actually still speak their 'languages of origin'. In South Africa, it is assumed that 'Indians' have English as their mother tongue and in most cases, such an assumption would be correct. With regard to both *competence* and *function*, my mother tongue would be English. However, if I follow Skutnabb-Kangas's approach in the description of her language biography, I could include Afrikaans under competence, even though my proficiency in Afrikaans is not as good as it is in English when it comes to productive skills such as speaking and writing. I also have a limited competence in Xhosa.

As far as this study is concerned, the criteria of *competence* and *function* are particularly important. There is usually a link between the two – one uses the language(s) one knows best most. However, when it comes to language and education in African schools in South Africa, particularly with regard to the medium of instruction, there is very little correlation between the two criteria. When I make a case for mother tongue education, I am making the case with reference to the criterion of *competence* – the language one knows best. For even though Xhosa, the specific language referred to in the study, is confined to limited domains of use, it is the language the pupils know best and use most at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha, where I conducted this study.

Skutnabb-Kangas alerts us to the fact that the definitions of mother tongue she provides may not always apply in multilingual contexts. The criterion that is most difficult to define is *origin* as:

> … parents and children may not have the same mother tongue … [in] situations where the mother tongue by origin may not be learned in infancy and may not be taught by the primary care-takers … (2000, p. 111).

Despite recent writings (for example, Makoni 2003; Makoni and Pennycook 2008; Pennycook 2002), discussed in Chapter Four of this study, which problematise the notion of mother tongue as a reified construct of a particular language inherited from colonial times and far removed from people's daily language use, I find Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) definitions and descriptions of mother tongue helpful in discussions on language in education as they concretely describe various applications of the use of the mother tongue in daily interaction.

As Tollefson and Tsui (2004) remind us, the choice of a language(s) for the medium of instruction in schools usually arises in multi-ethnic and multilingual countries. But as the term 'mother tongue' is defined in various ways, so is the term 'multilingualism' and its corollary 'multilingual classes'. In the next section I discuss these different understandings.

1.1.3. Multilingualism and multilingual classes

As the term 'mother tongue' can be defined differently, so can the terms 'multilingualism' and 'multilingual classes'. In an earlier study, I posed the question:

> What is a multilingual class in the South African context?
>
> 1. Is a multilingual class a class where pupils come from different language backgrounds?
> 2. Or is it a class where the teacher speaks a different language from the pupils?
> 3. Is it a class where pupils are taught in a language other than their own?
> 4. Or is a multilingual class a class where pupils are taught in more than one language? (Desai 2003, p. 45).

Presumably, the definition one would be working with would depend on the focus. For example, if the focus is on pedagogy, then the last definition would be the most appropriate. But if the focus is on the composition of the class, I would argue that the most suitable definition is the first one. The situation at Themba Primary, the school investigated for this study, refers to the third definition, a class where pupils are taught in a language other than their own for most of their time at school.

However, although the medium of instruction at Themba Primary is officially English, the teachers, who share a first language[4] (Xhosa) with the pupils, tend to use it a great deal in class to make sense of the learning material for their pupils. These teachers try to include pupils in classroom interactions by using their mother tongue, Xhosa. Unfortunately, in such situations, the mother tongue of the pupils is used for spoken interaction only. In schools attended by predominantly African language speakers in the Western Cape, most, if not all, written interaction from Grade 4 onwards is in English. Written assessment, beyond Grade 3, is also in English, except when it relates to Xhosa as a subject.

It is for this reason that I have decided to focus on written interaction in this study. Proficiency in written forms of English is often used to control access to tertiary education and to promising career paths in the private sector, so it is not surprising that there is an emphasis on it. Research done by academic development specialists in South Africa, however, shows that only a small proportion of pupils write well in English by the end of their school careers and most have difficulty with concepts in other subjects. See, for example, various articles in *AD Issues* 1993:1:1; 1997:5:1; 1998:6:1; and Taylor & Vinjevold (1999). To paraphrase Morrow (1993, pp. 3-5), in contexts where there is institutional access, there is no guarantee that epistemological access, that is, meaningful access to the curriculum, will take place. Medium of instruction plays a crucial role in providing, or not providing, such epistemological access.

In post-1994 South Africa, educationists, language professionals and politicians talk positively about linguistic diversity and how to accommodate it (see Lafon 2008; Mda 2004; Owen-Smith 2011; Pandor 2004; Webb 2004). In the educational domain, linguistic diversity in the South African context can be seen from a macro perspective (that is, how linguistic diversity operates in the educational domain in South Africa as a whole) and from a micro perspective (that is, how linguistic diversity manifests itself

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[4] In the literature, mother tongue is also referred to as first language or L1 or as primary language. In this study I use the terms mother tongue and first language (L1) interchangeably.

in a single classroom or school). Too often, the focus of linguists and educationists'
attention has been the latter perspective: how to deal with linguistically diverse classes
and schools. Such schools tend to be schools that previously catered for white,
coloured and Indian children.

I would like to argue that one needs to approach linguistic diversity from a broader
national perspective. After all, only about 28% of South African classrooms and
schools are actually described as 'multi-racial' (SAIRR 2000, p. 129). This figure is
even smaller in provinces such as the Northern Province, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern
Cape (Heugh 2000, p. 22).   In addition, given the legacy of apartheid and the
balkanization of the country in many cases into 'homelands', each with its own
language, linguistically homogeneous classrooms and schools are not unusual. And
such linguistic homogeneity is not confined to the rural areas in South Africa, as the
data from Themba Primary and Deumert et al (2005) illustrate.

My motivation for stressing the distinction between a *macro* and *micro* perspective on
linguistic diversity is two-fold: firstly, a *micro perspective* which focuses on
linguistically diverse classrooms is limited, accounting for 28% of classrooms at most,
as indicated above. Secondly, a *macro perspective* would include linguistically
homogeneous classrooms such as the ones under focus in this study which constitute
most classrooms and schools in South Africa[5].   If one looks at linguistic diversity
from a macro perspective, mother tongue education, as opposed to bilingual or
multilingual education, assumes a greater importance than it currently enjoys, as one's
focus then is on linguistically homogeneous classes consisting of speakers of
particular African languages.

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[5] It has been difficult to obtain reliable data on the degree of multilingualism in classrooms and schools in South
Africa. According to Sue Beard, the Research Librarian at the Education Foundation Trust, formerly known as
Edusource, 44% of all state schools have pupils from more than one home language group (Personal
communication, August 2005). However, this figure includes schools which might have only a handful of
pupils from a different home language group. This implies that probably more schools are linguistically
homogeneous than reflected in official figures. The most recent SAIRR publications on South Africa do not
provide such information.

As I have indicated above, I am aware of a host of factors responsible for the poor quality of education in schools attended by African children. The question of language, more specifically, the question of the medium of instruction is but one of the variables in the equation. However, it is an important variable and one that I focus on in this study.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

The central question of this study is whether there exists a case for extending the use of the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years in African primary schools such as Themba Primary.

As discussed in Chapter Four, many obstacles are presented as reasons for not implementing mother tongue education for speakers of African languages. Whilst I am fully aware of these obstacles, I hope to illustrate through this study that, despite the many real constraints on using African languages as media of instruction, there is a case to be made for extending the use of African languages beyond the initial three years.

In order to address the main research question, I have two main objectives in this study. The first is to profile the proficiencies of pupils in Grade 4 (when the switch to English 'officially' happens) and Grade 7 (the end of primary school) in Xhosa and English in three written tasks. The second objective is to analyse the difference in proficiency in the two languages at Grade 4 and at Grade 7 level.

1.3 Rationale

Since the 1953 UNESCO Committee Report on Mother Tongue Education, the question of which language(s) will serve as medium of instruction has remained a hotly debated issue in multilingual contexts. These contexts, however, vary vastly and it is therefore important to distinguish between them so that practitioners, policy makers and researchers do not think in terms of a single solution for very diverse

contexts. There is a world of difference between those who are learning an additional language voluntarily to expand their linguistic repertoire, and those who are learning an additional language in order to gain access to education and to participate in the wider society. One can further sub-divide the latter group into those who are learning that additional language, immersed in it (such as immigrant children in the United States of America or the United Kingdom) and those who are having to learn that language in an environment where it is not often used (such as the pupils at Themba Primary School in Khayelitsha who are the focus of this study) even in a country where that language predominates in public life (Desai 1999, 2010b; Heugh 2006; Probyn 2008, Qorro 2009).

The axiom that it is best for a child to be taught through his/her mother tongue gained prominence through the 1953 UNESCO Report on the use of vernacular languages in education. This report asserted the right of all children to be educated in their mother tongue. Now, almost seventy years later, controversy continues over the practical difficulties of realising such a right (see Foley 2009; Murray 2002; Probyn 2008). In the interests of sound pedagogy and the facilitation of learning, such a debate has to be located within a broader framework that takes into account factors such as the role of the mother tongue in the broader society; attitudes to mother tongues and languages of wider communication; exposure to languages of wider communication; and the political will to promote indigenous (in this case African) languages. It is increasingly becoming obvious that language in education policy cannot be separated from the broader issues of socio-economic transformation. The focus of the next section is the language situation in South Africa since 1994.

South Africa's language policy of eleven official languages (RSA 1996) has been internationally acclaimed as progressive, liberal and unique (see Adams 1999; Deumert et al 2005; Webb 2010). Yet, a closer examination of language policy in practice reveals that the situation in South Africa is no different from the typical post-colonial situation, whether in Africa or elsewhere. African languages continue to be used in limited domains (see Deumert et al 2005; Mazrui and Mazrui 1998).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the domain of education. The Department of Education's Language in Education Policy Document of July 1997 proclaims that schools, through their governing bodies, can choose any of the official languages as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT), within the bounds of practicability. Despite such a wide choice, the reality is that most schools in the former African townships continue to use English as the sole LoLT, particularly with regard to assessment practices, after Grade 3 (Murray 2002; Vinjevold 1999; Webb 2010).

Despite the July 1997 policy document (DoE 1997a)[6] providing a fairly progressive framework for developing language in education policy, allowing parents (and pupils) the right to choose the medium of instruction, the majority of African pupils at primary schools find themselves in a situation in which they remain at a disadvantage. I refer to this issue more fully in Chapter Three. Since there is no infrastructure in terms of teacher training or materials development to back parental decisions, choice becomes rather meaningless in practice. The picture that continues to emerge from schools is bleak - most pupils have difficulty in coping with the demands of using English as a medium in primary schools (Desai 1999; Heugh 2002; Langenhoven 2010; Nomlomo 2008, 2009; Probyn 2008). Such difficulties, as mentioned above, are usually carried into high school and tertiary institutions. Even those pupils who display a level of proficiency in English at what Cummins (1980) calls the 'basic interpersonal communication skills' (BICS) level, have difficulty with reading and writing tasks. Generally, the learning experience is a frustrating one for both pupils and teachers. Clearly there is a disjuncture between policy and practice.

There is, however, another disjuncture that is not often commented on. When discussing language in education policy, many teachers (and parents and pupils) argue for the use of English as a medium without considering their own practices. As an example, teachers very seldom acknowledge that they code-switch. It is as if they

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[6] There has been no formal change to the 1997 Language in Education Policy. More recent documents (DBE 2010b) merely describe the school and district contexts with regard to home language distribution and language in education at public schools.

deny their own practices. In order to improve on existing practice, this disjuncture between professed attitudes and practices has to be addressed.

1.4 Significance of the study

As indicated earlier in Section 1.2, this study explores whether there is a case to be made for extending the use of pupils' mother tongue, Xhosa, as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years of schooling. Although much has been written about language difficulties experienced by African children, such writing has tended to identify the problem as poor proficiency in English and ways in which to remedy this. In the South African context, pupils' (and teachers') actual linguistic strengths, that is, their abilities in one, or more than one, African language, need to be drawn on. The linguistic interdependence hypothesis (Baker 1993; Benson 2009; Cummins 1979), which states that there is a link between first language (L1) and second language (L2) development, suggests that it would make pedagogic sense to extend proficiency at what Cummins (1980) has called the cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) level in the L1 of pupils and teachers before exposing pupils to English as a medium. Simply put, CALP refers to the 'specialized language required to gain academic qualifications and carry out literacy-related tasks and activities' (Cummins 2000, p. 53) (see Chapter Four for more detail on the theoretical framework guiding this study). Referring to the American and Canadian contexts, Cummins states that policy-makers tend to ignore the fact 'that it typically takes immigrant children at least five years (often more) to catch up academically to native-speakers' English' (2000, p. 16). However, this does not mean that such children should not be exposed to English during this time, particularly in cases where limited reading material is available in pupils' mother tongues. Teachers and policy makers need to be aware that children who are expected to learn in an unfamiliar language require a great deal of assistance in the language of instruction. The situation is made more complicated in a context such as Khayelitsha where, often, the teachers themselves are not very competent in the language of instruction. As Cummins indicates, in such a context:

> … the medium of instruction is one variable that both reflects and interacts with patterns of power relations in the wider society to create academic failure among groups that have historically been subjected to coercive relations of power in the wider society (2000, p. 111).

In the South African context, the Language in Education Policy (DoE 1997a) has given an idealized account of what can happen; it has presented seemingly advanced models as a simple matter of choice without taking into account present realities. Some of the questions that one can ask with regard to the policy document are as follows: On what basis are these choices made? Are they based on existing institutional practices? What is the link between such choices and pupils' language proficiencies?

What has been conspicuously lacking in much of the discussions has been classroom data exploring the role of language in the learning situation. It is precisely this task that I have undertaken by profiling pupils' proficiencies in both Xhosa and English in two grades at a school in Khayelitsha, an African township in the Western Cape. In so doing I hope to provide some insight into pupils' existing language proficiencies in the two languages, English and Xhosa, thereby making a case for using such knowledge as the basis for formulating school language policies and influencing aspects of implementation.

It comes as no surprise that, as elsewhere, debates and discussions around language policy issues in South Africa have been characterised by overt ideologising and rhetoric. Aims are usually stated in idealistic terms with little hope of ever being implemented. In fact, in the post-colonial world, language policies are notorious for remaining statements of intent. For example, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Language Plan of 1986 was indeed an impressive plan to promote African languages in domains other than the ones in which they had conventionally been used. But, more than twenty years later, it still remains largely a plan. At a conference, *Against All Odds*, in Asmara, Eritrea in 2000, delegates once again argued for greater use of African languages in domains other than the personal domain. Its significance

in practice is yet to be realised.   Ultimately, it is issues of implementation that determine whether a policy is successful or not.

1.5 Research Methodology

As indicated earlier in Section 1.2, the main aim of this study was to establish whether there was a case to be made for extending the mother tongue, in this case Xhosa, as a medium of instruction beyond Grade 3 at Themba Primary, where the study was conducted.   The question was answered by profiling existing proficiencies of Grade 4 and 7 pupils in Xhosa, the pupils' mother tongue, and English, the official medium of instruction from Grade 4.   The basic design of this study was a single-case study.   I wanted to probe a particular phenomenon deeply with the aim of understanding it better.   The problem under focus was the medium of instruction. The probing involved a comparison of pupils' writing proficiency in English and Xhosa in Grades 4 and 7.

The research methodology adopted was to profile the proficiencies of pupils in Grades 4 and 7 in three different writing tasks in English and Xhosa.   The tasks involved a narrative piece, a reading comprehension and an expository piece of writing. This was done to establish what pupils could do in these two languages in a context with limited resources and poorly equipped teachers in an English-text but Xhosa-oral environment.   The research methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

1.6 Chapter layout

The thesis consists of eight chapters.   The first chapter sketches the background to the study, states what the aims and objectives have been, the significance of the study in terms of language in education in South Africa and provides a summary of the methodology used. The second chapter is perhaps not a conventional thesis chapter.   It contextualises the study from a personal perspective by tracing my interest and involvement in the language in education question over many years.   It also traces my involvement in language policy development in South Africa, which gives me the opportunity to comment on developments in this field from a critical insider perspective.   The third chapter examines the current language in education policy

from a historical perspective, starting with the advent of National Party rule in 1948 and the introduction of legal apartheid. It also reflects on the ways in which the legacies of the apartheid past continue to haunt us in our decisions today. The fourth chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study by drawing on relevant readings that provide the basis for the study. It also looks at readings that are critical of the framework supported in this study. The fifth chapter provides a description of the research methodology employed in this study, the process of data collection and reasons for particular choices made. In the sixth chapter, I present the data. The seventh chapter analyses and discusses the data. The final chapter draws the thesis together by offering a summary of the main findings, before it proceeds to recommendations emanating from the study. The limitations of the study and proposals concerning further research to be undertaken are also highlighted in the concluding chapter.

CHAPTER TWO
CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

> … I do think that anyone writing on South African issues at present should give some idea of the influences and experiences that have shaped his (sic) views and beliefs about humankind and society … One can strive after objectivity, but there is no such thing as neutrality. Each one of us is shaped by all the influences exerted upon us, by the way in which we have responded to them, and by what we as individuals decided to do as a result (Hartshorne 1992, p. 1)

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, in the spirit of Hartshorne (1992, p. 1), I contextualise the process that led to my embarking on this particular research project - a process that has straddled the personal, the political and the intellectual domains of my life. This chapter is primarily a personal narrative that traces my language history, as well as my involvement in language policy development in South Africa. The chapter starts off with an account of my personal language history, moves on to my experiences as a teacher, then as a master's student in applied linguistics, followed by a combination of political and intellectual endeavours, and culminating in this particular project. The description of this journey suggests the nature of language developments in South Africa and shows that the journey is far from complete, even after the fourth democratic elections in 2009.

2.2. Personal History

In this section I trace my personal history in relation to my experiences with the languages I was exposed to both as a child and later, as an adult.

2.2.1. Language experiences as a child

I grew up quite naturally with three languages: Afrikaans, English and Konkani. The latter was the first language I learnt to speak and it was the home language of my extended family. Afrikaans, or rather a non-standard variety of Afrikaans, was the language used most frequently in Salt River, the neighbourhood in Cape Town in

which I grew up. And English was the language of school, even though many of my fellow pupils spoke either Afrikaans or an Indian language at home. As a child born under apartheid I did not have much exposure to speakers of African languages, and certainly no such exposure at school. The balkanization of parts of South Africa into ten different homelands on the basis of so-called ethnic groups, which by and large happened to coincide with language groups, resulted in very few Africans being located in what was then known as 'white South Africa'. The Western Cape, where I grew up, was also regarded as a 'coloured labour preferential area'. This meant that those classified Coloured would get preference over those classified African when it came to employment. In addition, legislation, such as the Group Areas Act, meant that South Africans were racially segregated when it came to where each 'racial' group was allowed to live and go to school. As a result, I had very little contact with African children or adults, and consequently, very little, if any, exposure to Xhosa, the language of most Africans in the area.

My older 'extended siblings'[7] initially struggled to communicate in English at school, but were able to master English and progress academically. They were fortunate to be taught by good teachers who were proficient in English. When I started school, five years later, I had been exposed to English at home, both through older siblings and through a world of books. My introduction to school was therefore not as difficult as my older siblings' experiences were. At school, I also learnt Afrikaans as a subject at second language level. During the apartheid era Afrikaans was a compulsory subject for all pupils.

There was no formal instruction in Konkani, even at home. My proficiency in Konkani encompassed the aural/oral skills of listening and speaking only. There is no written form of Konkani. Children who speak this language in India are taught literacy in Marathi. There was only one member in the extended family of eighteen that could read and write Marathi. This was my father's brother who had studied in

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[7] Having grown up in an extended family situation, I am taking the liberty of using the term 'extended siblings' to refer to my siblings, as well as my cousins.

India. I also learnt Arabic at home for the purposes of reading the Quran, and Urdu, a language my mother could read. My mother did not learn to write - in any language.

We, the extended siblings, read voraciously in English and Afrikaans. We did not have any sense of being disadvantaged because we were learning through the medium of a language that was not our mother tongue. Our academic performance at school corroborated this perception. English was not my mother tongue, yet I coped academically. Why is this? Why was my situation different from that of a child living in Khayelitsha today?

There are many possible explanations for this difference. I was living in an area where English, after Afrikaans, was the dominant language spoken. The Khayelitsha child, on the other hand, hears very little English, or Afrikaans. I was given English books to read, whilst the average Khayelitsha child does not have such opportunities. I grew up with many languages to learn and thus the learning of languages was part of my cognitive development. The Khayelitsha child is normally introduced to only Xhosa at home. I was taught by teachers who were proficient in English, whilst this is often not the case in Khayelitsha schools. Konkani is an Indian language and does not have any real status in South Africa. There are no radio stations, newspapers or pamphlets in Konkani. Xhosa, on the other hand, is an official language in South Africa and has the second largest number of mother tongue speakers. The Xhosa-speaking child grows up with all the advantages this brings – Xhosa radio stations, Xhosa magazines, Xhosa television programmes, Xhosa signage and so on. So the Xhosa speaker lives in a world which justly gives her a sense that her language is important, but soon after she gets to school, there is a sudden switch to English, and this perception ends.

2.2.2. Teaching and postgraduate experiences

It was only when I started teaching at secondary schools, first in Bonteheuwel, then Heideveld and finally Mitchells Plain - residential areas in Cape Town set aside for those formerly classified as coloured - that I realised the difficulties that many pupils had when learning through a language that was not their home language. Segregation at schools was still rife during this period (1977-1987) but all three schools turned a blind eye to admitting pupils that would have then been classified as African. It was these African pupils who first made me aware of how frustrating the learning experience can be when studying through a language that one is not fully familiar with.

But it was only while I was doing my Masters in Applied Linguistics at the Institute of Education in London in 1987-8 that this concern became an intellectual inquiry. The topic of my master's dissertation was *Towards a language policy for a post-apartheid South Africa,* at a time when the possibility of a post-apartheid South Africa seemed like a remote dream and at a time when few other people inside the country were grappling with a language policy for a new South Africa. Whilst doing research for the dissertation, I became acutely aware of the role that language policy can play in either facilitating or obstructing the learning process - a focus I developed further when I came back to South Africa.

2.3. Political engagement

It is important to see my present preoccupation with mother tongue education as part of a process of continuing engagement with two fundamental questions:

1. What language/s should our pupils be taught in?
2. What additional languages should our pupils learn as subjects?

On the eve of political change in South Africa, in 1990, while over 70% of all South Africans were African language speakers, the situation stood as follows: all pupils

were taught in either English or Afrikaans beyond Grade 4 and all pupils were compelled to learn at least one other language, other than their mother tongue (African National Congress 1990; HSRC 1990). This resulted in English and Afrikaans speakers having a huge advantage academically over African language speakers. Very few English and Afrikaans speaking South Africans opted to learn an African language, as it was not a compulsory subject for them. Learning an African language was therefore largely an activity confined to speakers of African languages and was not seen as a priority. This meant that there was not much focus on developing quality educational materials for, and in, African languages.

I was acutely aware that this situation needed radical redress and my arguments and critical observations led to my involvement in a number of important workshops and processes.

2.3.1. The Harare Workshop

In March 1990 I was invited as the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC[8]) representative from the Western Cape to a workshop on Language Policy organised by the African National Congress in Harare[9], Zimbabwe. The NECC, which previously stood for the National Education Crisis Committee, changed its brief to being a coordinating committee in December 1985. As the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) states, its focus became:

> … to co-ordinate and lead the struggles being waged within education institutions and in communities around the country against an inferior and racist education system, and against a government which was quite unwilling to change it.
> The banner under which this co-ordination took place was that of 'People's Education', a mobilizing ideal which embodie(d) the broad non-racist, non-sexist, and democratic values of

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[8] The NECC was an umbrella body representing various organisations working in the education sector. Some such organisations were the trade union federation, COSATU, teacher organisations such as WECTU, SADTU, parent-teacher associations and student bodies such as COSAS and SASCO. The NECC was one of the bodies regarded as part of the broader mass democratic movement (MDM).

[9] When the idea of having this workshop first arose, the ANC was still a banned organisation and could therefore not operate publicly in South Africa. However, by the time the workshop was held, former President De Klerk had made his now famous announcement of the 2 February 1990, which unbanned all political organisations of the oppressed people. This meant that political activity could now take place freely inside the country.

the loose grouping of organisations which constitute(d) the 'democratic movement' (1993, p. 1).

The Harare workshop heralded the start of the reactivation of the debate on a wider and more representative language policy, which had lain dormant since the 1950s, apart from the work of the National Language Project (NLP), established in 1986 under the leadership of Neville Alexander (see Alexander 1989; Desai 1991 for further details on the establishment of the NLP).

The Harare Workshop led to two major language-in-education policy projects with which I became closely involved:

a) The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) on language and

b) The Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) language in education working group.

2.3.2. The National Education Policy Investigation[10]

The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) was 'an inquiry into policy options for a future education dispensation in South Africa' (NEPI 1993, p. 1), commissioned by the NECC. The NEPI brief was 'to produce an analysis of education options and their implications in all the major areas of education policy' (NEPI 1993, p. 1). One of the areas was language. Five guiding principles were adopted by the NEPI teams to interrogate policy options. These were:

- non-racism;
- non-sexism;
- democracy;
- a unitary system; and
- redress (NEPI 1993, pp. 6-7).

Two of the most salient points to arise from the NEPI Report on Language seemed to address my immediate concerns:

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[10] The NEPI Report on language is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, which outlines the history of language in education policy in South Africa.

- *African languages* were to be actively promoted in an attempt to correct the anomaly of English and Afrikaans having for years enjoyed official status in a country in which the majority of people did not speak them as mother tongues;
- *Language policies* were to be provided and resources developed in order to equalize the opportunities of all citizens for mobility and access to the country's resources (1992, pp. 15-17).

The call for the *promotion of African languages* resulted ultimately in the historic Section 6 of the South African Constitution which gave Pedi, Sotho, Tswana, Swati, Venda, Tsonga, Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Xhosa and Zulu all official status and which called for the active promotion of African languages in public and private life, and which led to the establishment of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB).

Far more difficult and complex was the establishment of a viable *language policy or language policies.* The NEPI research group on language highlighted the problems of language diversity, resources and affluent versus poor schools. It cautioned that particular policies required a commitment on the part of the state and users of the language if they were to be implemented satisfactorily.

Thus, while the promotion of African languages has developed into concrete action, the same cannot be said for language policies. Ironically, it would seem that the very problems highlighted by NEPI ultimately influenced the establishment of a less than rigorous language in education policy. What seems to have been ignored is NEPI's recommendation that schools and communities need to be provided with the necessary information to make responsible choices with regard to language in education policy.

Thus we have the situation today where mother tongue speakers of African languages are still learning complex scientific and mathematical concepts without any written exemplification provided in their own languages. Ask any English-speaking pupil in a an English-speaking suburb like Rondebosch in Cape Town whether she would be

prepared to learn mathematics through the medium of Afrikaans and you would get a resounding "No!" Yet the Xhosa-speaking pupil in Khayelitsha, who has hardly any friends, acquaintances or family members who speak English, has to learn through the medium of English with no interventions or alternatives offered.

2.3.3. *The CEPD Language in education working group*

The Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) was established in the early 1990s to conduct research on education policy which could advise the ANC. The CEPD is still in existence, and its research is often used by the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training. In 1992, a CEPD working group on language in education policy was set up with me as coordinator. The work of this group culminated in a comprehensive document that served as the basis for the section on language in the ANC's *A Policy Framework for Education and Training* that was published in January 1994. But, as stated elsewhere (Desai & Taylor), 'Experience has shown us that those with technical expertise can attempt to influence the process but ultimately the decision is taken by the political actors' (1997, p. 173).

The CEPD Working Group on Language in Education certainly assisted in the process that led up to the production of the 'Yellow Book' as the Policy Framework has popularly come to be known. However, ultimately, it was the political actors who determined the final content. After the book was widely distributed, the ANC convened a conference on Education in April 1994, just before the first democratic elections, to finalise its education policy. I had been asked to summarise the responses received from the public on the language section and present it at the conference. Amongst the responses was one from me for greater currency for African languages by making it compulsory for all pupils to learn an African language. However, this motion was defeated at the conference. It is a proposal I promoted again during the process of assisting in the drafting of the *Values in Education* manifesto (see Department of Education, 2000b). The previous Minister of

Education, Kader Asmal, acknowledged the proposal as an important one, but at the time of writing, it has not yet been implemented.

2.3.4. Legacies of the past

Somehow the legacies of our past continue to haunt us. Attempts at making African languages compulsory as subjects, or as media of instruction, frequently meet up with the response that we do not want a repeat of Soweto 1976 when pupils rebelled against the compulsory use of Afrikaans as a medium. However, in that case, the medium of instruction issue was the catalyst for a response to numerous problems faced by African school pupils. Some such problems were overcrowded schools, high-drop out rates, high failure rates, under-qualified teachers, and the lack of facilities. It is hardly appropriate, then, to equate the compulsory introduction of an African language as a subject, or as a medium, with the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The wider implications are very different.

Those opposing the compulsory introduction of an African language as subject, or as medium, often mention practical reasons, such as the lack of written material in African languages, teacher shortages or parental wishes, as obstacles to implementing such a recommendation (see Murray 2002; Taylor, Muller and Vinjevold 2003). Chapter Four discusses these obstacles in more depth.

2.3.5. Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB)

The PanSALB is a statutory body set up by the government in accordance with Act No. 59 of 1995 (Republic of South Africa). According to the Act, PanSALB's role is to create the conditions for the development and promotion of all the official South African languages, promote multilingualism and foster respect for languages spoken in the country, other than the official languages (Act No.59 of 1995, p. 4). I served on the Board for 5 years from its inception in March 1996 to March 2001. Although the Board was expected to be an independent body which would monitor the state's promotion of multilingualism and facilitate the development of African languages in particular, over the 15 years of its existence, it functions more like a unit in a

government department. At its inception, the Board was answerable to the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST), but since the DACST split into two departments, namely, the Department of Science and Technology and the Department of Arts and Culture, it is now answerable to the latter department. In 1999, an amendment to the PanSALB Act[11] formally subordinated PanSALB to DACST. To echo Perry, 'The short history of PanSALB has been one of decreasing independence and increasing subordination to government control. This has hampered its efficacy, most notably so with regard to its rights mediation function' (2004, p. 172). This has meant that the Board has been unable to function as an independent body and hence unable to carry out its main duties to protect language rights and promote multilingualism. This was the main reason why I did not stand for a second term of office.

2.3.6. Issues of implementation

The above outline highlights my involvement in the area of language in education policy over the past two decades and the process that has led to my particular focus for this study. A constant refrain throughout this chapter has been that language policy makers have to address issues of implementation if they wish to realise their policies. The obverse of this point is that policies have often been determined on ideological grounds, as opposed to pedagogic or practical grounds (see for example, Cummins 2000; May 2008; Murray 2002; Tollefson and Tsui 2004). In reporting this research, I would like to highlight the importance of taking as one's starting point the current reality and current practices. For as the NEPI Report on language has stressed, the particular context pupils and teachers find themselves in is bound to influence the success or otherwise of a policy (1992, pp. 74-88).

A further contextual factor that needs to be borne in mind is that South Africa is the only country in the world that has, at a national level, eleven official languages whose status is enshrined in the Constitution. In terms of the language clauses in the

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[11] Pan South African Language Board Amendment Act, 1999.

Constitution (Clauses 6.1 - 6.5), the onus is on the state to take 'practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these (African) languages.' Pupils desirous of learning through their mother tongues - that is, one or other African language - have the Constitution to back them up. Yet the reality leaves much to be desired. English continues to be the dominant language in education beyond the initial three years of schooling (Mda 2004; Murray 2002; Nomlomo 2009).

2.3.7. *The symbolism of multilingualism*

One of the effects of South Africa's eleven-official-languages policy has been that multilingualism has become a fashionable cause to champion but with no real commitment. This phenomenon is not unique to South Africa. Fishman and Fishman, writing about what they refer to as 'language defense', have the following to say:

> … most of the active language defense on record is more symbolic than substantive. Aggrieved language communities are soothed by having their languages declared 'co-official'. Activists for endangered languages are mollified by putting their languages on official letterheads or by having a song of theirs sung on an important public occasion. … Effective language defense requires more than window dressing (2000, p. 25).

In South Africa, very few people would publicly admit to being opposed to multilingualism. However, multilingualism means different things to different people. For many 'White', 'Coloured' and 'Indian' South Africans, a superficial acquaintance with an African language is taken as promoting multilingualism, often not going beyond the greeting stage in that language. The perception is that multilingualism is fine as long as English, and to a lesser extent, Afrikaans, continue to be the main languages for communicating at official levels. Basic assumptions about the role of English also need to be teased out in education, for much of the language research focussing on pupils at schools tends to examine how pupils cope, or rather do not cope, with English as a medium of instruction (Fleisch 2008; Macdonald 1990, 1993; Macdonald & Burroughs 1991; Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold 2003; amongst others). Even where pupils' home language skills are focussed on, it is usually in relation to English. See for example, Holmarsdottir (2005); Makoni (1993); Peires (1994), and Probyn (2008).

2.3.8. Inequalities in education

My research focuses on pupils at a school that was historically reserved for African language speakers. Seventeen years after the 'new South Africa' came into being, this school, Themba Primary, continues to have only African language speakers as pupils. This is so despite the fact that legislation no longer prohibits pupils from other ethnic groups attending the school. Not surprisingly, with the scrapping of apartheid legislation and segregatory practices, there has been a one-way integration movement. Such movement has been towards the more privileged schools. I will use the former racial classifications to illustrate the point. The general trend[12] is as follows.

White children who can afford it go to private schools. For many of these children, their mother tongues are English and they learn through the medium of English. They live in suburbs which are predominantly English-speaking. Coloured and Indian children, who can afford it, go to the former white state schools and private schools. Their mother tongues are generally either English or Afrikaans and they learn through the medium of these languages. They live in suburbs which are predominantly English and Afrikaans-speaking.

African children who can afford it go to the former white, coloured or Indian schools and private schools. Their mother tongues are usually African languages but they hear a good deal of English at home. They learn through the medium of English and are taught by teachers who are proficient in English. They tend to live in suburbs which are predominantly English or Afrikaans-speaking. Poor African children continue to attend schools in the townships, although some township dwellers do send their children to schools in coloured and Indian suburbs. Their mother tongues are African languages but they learn officially through the medium of English, although their teachers tend to code-switch between English and the particular African language in use. They live in townships which are almost entirely African language-speaking.

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[12] This chapter is largely a personal narrative. Observations made are often based on my experiences, knowledge and analysis of events and have therefore been difficult to reference.

In outlining this trend, I wish to highlight that it is the children of the poor who are most disadvantaged by a language in education policy which continues to use a mainstream language like English, a language they are not sufficiently exposed to.

2.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have traced the development of my particular interest in language policy issues, an interest engendered by my language history, my experiences as an educator, my public involvement in language in education policy debates in South Africa and my role as an activist. That interest remains, although it is now more focused on the educational domain where my academic work locates me.

In the next chapter I trace language in education policy developments in South Africa, particularly from 1948, the year the National Party came into power, to the present.

CHAPTER THREE
LEGACIES OF THE PAST

Language policies for education are highly charged political issues and are seldom if ever decided on educational grounds alone (Hawes 1979, p. 76).

Education cannot be examined in isolation from the political and socio- economic imperatives that operate within society (November 1991, p. 65).

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter One I outlined the background to this study. The issues highlighted were the inequalities in South African education, the medium of instruction issue, definitions of mother tongue, mother tongue education and linguistic diversity in South African society.

In order to understand the extent to which mother tongue instruction has become not only a political dilemma but also a highly sensitive and emotionally charged issue for pupils, parents and teachers, this chapter will elaborate the history and development of language in education policies in South Africa, what I refer to as 'the legacies of the past' in the heading of this chapter. Both Hawes (1979) and November (1991) appropriately remind us that language in education policies cannot be divorced from the socio-political issues of the day. This sentiment is echoed by Hartshorne in his chapter on the language issue in African schooling:

In South Africa, the history of the use of language in African schooling has revolved around the relative positions and status of English, Afrikaans and the African languages, and been determined by the political and economic power of those using the various languages. The decisions have never been taken by those who use African languages in their everyday life, and ironically, when decisions were taken in favour of those languages they were taken without reference to their users, and for purposes far removed from any that had broad community support. The decisions were taken 'for' and not 'by' those most closely involved, served to divide African communities and limited social mobility and access to higher education. … the interests and wishes of the users (pupils, teachers and parents) were subordinated to the political and economic purposes and ideologies of various white groupings. The conflicts between these groupings also spilt over into black schooling, and in particular found expression in the language policies laid down from time to time (1992 pp. 187-188).

This chapter identifies some of the issues that have emerged historically, in language in education policy in South Africa. In my overview, I confine myself to the period 1910 to the present day. For the purposes of this chapter, I distinguish four distinct periods. These are:

1. 1910 to 1948
2. 1948 to 1991
3. 1991 to 1997
4. Recent developments

3.2 The period 1910 to 1948

A few relevant features of South Africa's language policy from 1910 to 1948 are outlined in Hartshorne's historical picture of language in 'black schooling' (1992, pp. 191-195). Official bilingualism was enshrined in Article 137 of the 1910 Union Constitution which read:
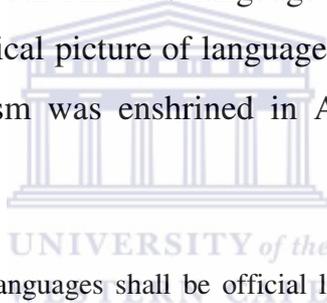
> Both the English and Dutch[13] languages shall be official languages of the Union, and shall be treated on a footing of equality and possess and enjoy equal freedom, rights and privileges (cited in Hartshorne 1992, p. 191).

This decision was to have far-reaching implications for black education in the long term, as outlined below. In the meantime, for the next thirty years or so, the role of the two official languages in white education was to be the dominating issue. There was a growing emphasis on exclusive Afrikaans mother tongue instruction in separate schools, as opposed to a dual medium policy favoured by leaders such as Smuts. The desire was for the creation of a powerful Afrikaner identity which would provide the emotional drive for the acquisition of political and economic power (Hartshorne 1992, p. 191). Dirven (1987) refers to the official bilingualism of the time as 'parallel bilingualism' which, according to him, meant that 'two or more official languages

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[13] In May 1925, Parliament recognised Afrikaans as an official language in the place of Dutch.

have equal official status and that anybody can at any time and in any place use either, at least in principle' (1987, p. 154).

At the time of the Union of South Africa, English was firmly entrenched as the dominant language in black schooling. Dutch/Afrikaans had not become an issue, while in the Transvaal and Natal there was a growing lobby in favour of a greater use of the 'vernacular' languages, as African languages were then called. This position continued until the 1930s.

By 1935, when the Welsh Committee, the Interdepartmental Committee on Native Education, began its investigation, as far as medium of instruction was concerned, the pupil's mother tongue was to be used for the first six years in Natal, for the first four years in the Cape and Free State, and for the first two years in the Transvaal. Thereafter, in practice, English was always used as medium. Apart from the extension of mother tongue instruction until the end of the fourth year in the Transvaal in response to a recommendation made by the Welsh Commission in 1935, this policy remained in effect until the implementation of Bantu Education[14] which extended mother tongue instruction until the end of primary school, so that African pupils now had eight years of mother tongue instruction.

The Welsh Committee of 1935-6, interestingly, was also in favour of extending mother tongue instruction beyond the fourth year of school, but recommended that certain factors had to be in place before this could be realized. These included the development of fixed terminologies in each language, suitable textbooks and a greater availability of literature in these languages. It recommended, long before the balkanization of parts of South Africa into separate 'homelands' and its brand of linguistic apartheid, the organisation of schools in multilingual 'Native' areas on a language basis, or grouping languages such as Xhosa-Zulu and Sotho-Tswana. Only

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[14] When the National Party came into power in 1948 it developed apartheid education through a series of commissions of enquiry (for example, the Eiselen Commission) and legislation such as the Bantu Education Act of 1953. In terms of this Act, African education now fell under the direct control of the state, as opposed to the missionary institutions which were largely responsible for it before then (Soudien 2002, pp. 212-213).

where this was not practicable, was an official language (that is either English or Afrikaans) to be used as a medium of instruction earlier than after four years of schooling. It did not recommend the compulsory study of Afrikaans as a subject at primary school level.

By 1938, when a new curriculum was introduced in the Transvaal, Afrikaans became a compulsory subject in African schools and had to be introduced in the fourth year.

According to Hartshorne:

> From the mid-1930s the purified Nationals of Dr Malan, together with the Afrikaner Broederbond, began to make of Afrikaans a symbol of exclusiveness and separateness, and the struggle for Afrikaans became part of the mission to control and rule over South Africa. In education this struggle expressed itself in a commitment to separate schools, and in a rigid mother-tongue education policy. As National theorists and ideologues turned their attention to African schooling, a clear pattern began to emerge: strict educational separation, a Christian National Education ideology, enforcement and extension of the mother tongue medium, and thereafter the use of Afrikaans with a concomitant decline in the influence of English (1992, p. 195).

The stage was set for the introduction of Bantu Education, compulsory mother tongue instruction and the elevation of Afrikaans in African schooling. The battle between English and Afrikaans, 'die taaltwis'[15] as it has come to be known, played a big part in policy measures of the time.

In tracing developments with regard to language in education policy during the period since 1948, I illustrate how the legacies of the past continue to haunt us in the decisions we take, or do not take, today.

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[15] 'Taaltwis' means language struggle in English. As E.G. Malherbe said years later, 'The Afrikaans language became the symbol of the struggle for national identity… (1977, p. 2). After 1948, the dual medium instruction policy in white schools was replaced with single medium schools in Afrikaans and English, a policy which continues to this day. See also Heugh (2002) in this regard.

3.3 The period 1948 to 1991

With the National Party coming into power in 1948, the foundations of its apartheid philosophy were laid. The doctrine of Christian National Education was introduced. Article 15 of this document, which dealt with African education, stated amongst other things:

> (The native must) be led to an independent acceptance of the Christian and National principles in our teaching … The mother tongue must be the basis of native education and teaching but … the two official languages must be taught as subjects because they are official languages and … the keys to the cultural loans that are necessary to his own cultural progress. (as translated in Rose 1975, pp. 127-8, cited in Hartshorne 1992, p. 196).

The next step in what Hartshorne refers to as 'the evolution of a strict narrow language policy for African education' (1992, p. 196) was the appointment of the Eiselen Commission shortly after the National Party came into power in 1948. The Commission published its report in 1951. This report formed the basis of the Bantu Education Act, No. 47 of 1953, which transferred control of Bantu Education[16] from the provinces to the Department of Native Affairs of the central government. The first Minister of Native Affairs was Dr H.F.Verwoerd.

By centralising African education, the government ended the pivotal role played by missionaries. Grants paid to mission-run primary and secondary schools were phased out progressively until 1957, when all financial assistance to missions ceased. Subsidies paid to teacher-training institutions run by religious bodies ended in 1955 when the Bantu Education Act became law. Those churches that wished to continue their roles in education could do so, on an unsubsidised basis, but they had to apply for registration of such establishments as private schools. No new schools could be established or conducted unless they were registered with the Government (Horrell 1968).

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[16] As a footnote in Malherbe 1977, p. 545 indicates,

> When Dr Verwoerd became Minister of Native Affairs the collective noun Bantu (the people) came into vogue in Nationalist and subsequently general parlance to describe the African population of South Africa, succeeding 'Native' which itself succeeded 'Kaffir'.

The main recommendations of the Eiselen Commission on language matters are succinctly outlined in Hartshorne. They are:

1. All education should be through the medium of the mother tongue for the first four years, and this principle should be progressively extended year by year to all eight years of the primary school.

2. Terminology committees should be set up to produce manuals for the teachers, after which mother-tongue instruction should be introduced gradually in the secondary school.

3. Mother-tongue medium should be used in teacher training colleges for school organisation and method, child psychology, and subjects taught through mother-tongue in the primary school.

4. The first official language (the language which is most generally used in the neighbourhood of the school) should be introduced in the second year of schooling as a subject, and the second official language not later than the fourth year.

5. ONE of the official languages should be a compulsory subject in the secondary school (with the same requirements as those applied to the second language for white pupils), and where the second official language is taken as an optional subject it should have the same status as the third language (French, German, etc) in the case of white pupils.

6. In teacher training colleges both official languages were to be compulsory (Eiselen Report 1951, pp. 146-7, as cited in Hartshorne 1992, pp. 196-7).

In summary, the main changes proposed with regard to language in education were:

- Extending mother tongue education beyond the first four years of primary school to include the primary, secondary and tertiary educational experience of the pupil/student.

- Introducing the first official language in the second year and the second official language in the fourth year.

3.3.1 Language changes between 1956 and 1976

In 1956, the Minister of Native Affairs issued a regulation that required all African children to be educated through the mother tongue from year 1 until year 8, the last year of the primary school at the time (Horrell 1968). The regulation stated that, until 1958, pupils could use a Bantu language or an official language when writing the school-leaving examination at the end of year 8. After 1958, however, the Bantu languages only could be used. The extension of the mother tongue saw the phasing out of 'vernacular' schools where all linguistic groups mixed. Schools now became segregated along linguistic lines. As I indicate in Chapter One, this practice still exists on a relatively large scale.

As far as languages as subjects were concerned, from 1956 the official language predominantly spoken in an area was introduced as a subject in the first year of school, and the second official language introduced in the second year. This meant that within the space of two years after starting school, African children were learning three languages, their own and the two official languages.

At secondary school, Physical Education, Music and the 'vernacular' were to be taught through the mother tongue. The remaining secondary school subjects were to be taught half in English and half in Afrikaans. Schools could, however, apply for special exemption not to use Afrikaans as the medium of instruction.

The period 1968 to 1975 saw an intensification of methods employed to accelerate the process of promoting Afrikaans throughout the school system. Some of the changes during this period were:

- Mother tongue instruction now ended at the end of year 6 (Standard 4).
- In 1972, year 8 moved to the high schools and year 7 became the last primary school year, in line with white schools.

- Both official languages had to be used as media of instruction in year 7 (Standard 5).

- In other words, the 50-50 rule involving the use of both English and Afrikaans as media of instruction was to be enforced earlier, from year 7.

- By 1974, steps had been taken to correct the unequal use of the official languages in secondary schools, and so to increase the use of Afrikaans.

- General Science and practical subjects were to be taught through the English medium while Maths/Arithmetic and Social Studies were to be taught through Afrikaans – what became known as the 50-50 approach as 50% of the key subjects had to be taught in English and 50% in Afrikaans (Hartshorne 1992, p. 202).

The stage was set for the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at the secondary level, justified in terms of the constitutional equality of Afrikaans and English. This process was to have major implications for African education in particular. But by 1968, the principle of the equality of the official languages as media of instruction in African secondary schools was applied in only 26 percent of the schools under the department's control. The rest used English as the medium of instruction.

It is interesting to trace the nature of the opposition to mother tongue education and to the new 50-50 approach. When the Bantu Education Act of 1953 insisted on mother tongue instruction till year 8 (Standard 6) at African primary schools, the ANC, together with many African parents, opposed this measure, arguing that Bantu Education was inferior education and that it would ghettoise their children by dividing them along 'tribal' grounds. There were calls to boycott the schools, and parents were urged to keep their children at home (Desai 1991, p. 113).

Although the campaign did not succeed, it led to a lively debate on language issues in what was know as the 'black press'. I am indebted to Hirson (1981) for the details of this debate. ANC thinking at the time was not homogeneous. There were those

amongst the ANC who were in favour of the use of African languages in education. Two such proponents were Dr J.M. Nhlapo, editor of *Bantu World,* and Peter Roboroka, an ANC Youth League member in the 1950s. Dr Nhlapo far-sightededly proposed that the two main language groups in South Africa, Nguni and Sotho, be standardized to form two national languages.[17] Hirson (1981) reports that the idea was regarded as preposterous at the time. Roboroka saw the language question as one aspect of the struggle for emancipation from white imperialism. He was in favour of a common language for the whole of Africa and suggested Swahili as this common language. Unfortunately, the debate did not lead anywhere and the language question was not taken any further by political groups at the time.[18]

The Soweto[19] uprising put paid to all of this. The State's attempts to impose Afrikaans as a medium of instruction for 50% of subjects in African high schools led to the Soweto uprising in June 1976. What started as a peaceful march by school pupils in Soweto met with police fire which resulted in the death of Hector Petersen, the first casualty of the uprising. The uprising soon spread throughout the country, primarily in township schools. The State was forced to abandon its 50-50 policy and English became the main (if not sole) medium of instruction for African children from the fifth[20] year of school (Desai 1991; NEPI 1992; Probyn 2008). This led to the Education and Training Act No. 90 of 1979.

3.3.2 The 1979 Education and Training Act

The main features of this Act (Department of Education and Training, 1979) in relation to language policy were the following:

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[17] Lestrade (1935, p. 137) had made a similar case for unifying the two main language groups.
[18] A variation of this proposal calling for the harmonization of the different Nguni varieties into one standard variety in the written form, with the same applying to the Sotho varieties, has been taken up by Dr Neville Alexander, a leading proponent of the use of African languages in South Africa today. The language policy work of the organisations to which Alexander belongs is discussed below in more detail (see Alexander 1992 for more detail on this).
[19] Soweto is a large township outside Johanesburg.
[20] With the advent of a new curriculum for schools in 1994, the school programme was reorganised and English was introduced as a medium of instruction in Year 4, which is still the case today.

- Compulsory mother tongue education would now be till the end of Year 4.

- Thereafter parents could choose the medium of instruction.

- The most significant departure from the 1953 Act was the admission that parental choice would be respected, as well as the freedom to choose the medium of instruction (Hartshorne 1992; NEPI 1992).

3.4 The period 1991 to 1997

My close involvement in the development of language policy in South Africa during this period, as outlined in Chapter Two, could prevent me from writing about it with appropriate detachment. However, it also equips me to reflect on it from intimate knowledge. In this awareness of danger and opportunity, I analyse the initiatives that were undertaken on language in education policy by both the government of the day as well as actors in the mass democratic movement.

After the announcement by ex-President de Klerk on 2 February 1990 of the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, PAC and a host of other organisations, and the release of Mandela, there was an air of expectation in the country. In this climate, a series of initiatives was launched which explored possibilities for the 'new South Africa'. The domain of education received prominent attention. Two initiatives that I focus on in this section are the government's Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) with its associated document, *A curriculum model for education in South Africa* (CUMSA), and the National Education Co-ordinating Committee's (NECC's) National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), discussed in the previous chapter.   In addition, I examine the ANC's policy guidelines released in May 1992 in a document called *Ready to govern,* and its *Policy Framework for Education and Training* released in January 1994, and the recommendations of the Language in Education Working Group of the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD), a body set up to advise the ANC's Education Desk (See also Chapter Two).

3.4.1 The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) and a Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa (CUMSA)

By the end of the 1980s, the National Party Government realized that education, particularly education for African pupils, was in crisis. Its response was a policy document titled, *A strategy and programme for education renewal*. The Education Renewal Strategy (ERS), as it came to be known, was released by the Minister of National Education in June 1990. The role of the different languages in education was not specifically addressed by the ERS. It was discussed in an associated document, *A Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa* (CUMSA), released for discussion in 1991. At the time, as Hartshorne indicates,

> there were two government voices: the one represented by the November 1991 Curriculum Model for Education in South Africa (CUMSA), the other by the Department of Education and Training. The first, in representing for the most part white education interests, avoided the issue of medium of instruction and concentrated on languages as subjects of the curriculum (1995, p. 314).

The second voice, the Department of Education and Training (DET), was responsible for the education of those classified African in South Africa. The DET did focus on the medium of instruction, as the next section illustrates.

3.4.2 The 1991 amended language medium policy

Before examining the language proposals in the CUMSA, I want to highlight an interesting development that took place between the publication of the ERS and the CUMSA documents. The Department of Education and Training (DET) amended the Education and Training Act No. 90 of 1979 in the following way:

> … the language or languages to be used as the medium of instruction at a school and the extent and duration of such use shall be determined by the Minister after consultation with the parents of pupils enrolled at that school, which consultation shall take place in the manner prescribed (Education and Training Amendment Act 100 of 1991).

This meant that mother tongue instruction was no longer enforceable by statute and that the choice of medium of instruction could, in effect, be determined independently by each school in consultation with the community and the Department of Education and Training (DET), the apartheid education department concerned with the education of Africans. The DET produced a document, and an information brochure, in 1992

that was sent to schools to help them decide on the appropriate medium of instruction. However, the information contained in these documents gave schools three choices only. These three choices were:

1. Straight for the long-term medium
2. Sudden transfer from the mother tongue to a second language medium
3. Graduated transfer from the mother tongue to a second language medium.

In their document, *The amended language medium policy*, the DET (1992) explain what is meant by each of these options. They describe *Option 1* as: This will mean that English, Afrikaans or an African language will be the only medium of instruction as from the beginning of SSA[21] (1992, p. 7).

However, despite the reference to English, Afrikaans and an African language above, the document then proceeds to give arguments for using English as a medium from the first year. The document is riddled throughout with such contradictions. Despite no mention being made of English in the actual options, it is clear that the intention of the document, and the amendment, was to indicate to schools that English could be used as a medium from the first year of school. This is evident from the explanation provided for the amendment. I quote it in full:

> Despite evidence that mother tongue education is educationally the most desirable, many black parents favour the earlier use of another language, mainly English, as the medium of instruction.
> The present sudden transfer in Std 3[22] to a medium other than the mother tongue occurs at the same time that the content load across the curriculum increases dramatically. These factors occurring together have been causing high failure and drop-out rates in Std 3 and have drawn attention to the inadequacy of many pupils to deal with the demands of a second language medium in Std 3.
> During 1987 and 1988 a task group studied the Department's junior primary curriculum. One of their most important recommendations was that an official language should be phased in as medium of instruction before Std 3. This viewpoint was confirmed by a Human Sciences Research Council investigation into the matter in 1987 and also carries the support of the Council for Education and Training (DET, 1992, pp. 3-4).

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[21] SSA stands for sub-standard A which referred to the first year of school at the time.
[22] Std 3 refers to the fifth year of school.

Option 2 is described as: The mother-tongue serves as medium of instruction up to the end of any standard followed by a switch-over to English or Afrikaans in all subjects except the vernacular[23] (1992, p. 8).

Whilst *Option 3* is described as: … phasing in English or Afrikaans as medium of instruction subject by subject over a period of perhaps two or three years (1992, p. 9).

Interestingly, given the choice, more than half the schools chose the 'graduated transfer to a second language medium'. Heugh indicates that 67% of the DET's 7368 schools returned voting records. Their choices, according to Heugh, were recorded as follows:

Table 3.1: Parental choice with regard to medium of instruction

Straight for English	22%
Straight for Afrikaans	1,5%
Gradual transfer to English	54%
Gradual transfer to Afrikaans	,045%
Sudden transfer to English	13,4%
Retain status quo	7,5%

(Source: Heugh 1993, p. 31)

Although there were three options listed in the amendment, there were variations within each which were captured in the voting process, hence the wider selection mentioned in Heugh (1993).

3.4.3 PanSALB survey

More recent data elicited in a survey commissioned by PanSALB and conducted by MarkData in 2000 shows a similar trend. Contrary to popular perceptions, most respondents wanted pupils to learn in both their mother tongue and English. 7.6% wanted English only as their first choice, whilst 12% opted for English only as their

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[23] This included the status quo at the time when the sudden switch happened in Year 5.

second or further choice. The information is usefully captured in the table by Heugh below:

Table 3.2: Medium of instruction choices in PanSALB survey

	First answer	**Multiple answers included**
Mother tongue instruction and good teaching of another official language should be available	38%	37%
Pupils should have the opportunity to learn both their mother tongue and English equally well	32,6%	42%
Pupils should learn through both English and their mother tongue	21%	39%
It is more important that pupils learn in English than in other languages	7,6%	12%
	99,2%	130%

(Source: Heugh 2000, p. 19).

However, the MarkData survey, commissioned by PanSALB, is open to criticism for various reasons. The categories used in the survey were misleading. They did not all refer to the medium of instruction issue, such as the second statement. The categories were not properly constructed and some overlapped with each other, so that the data was not very reliable. Clear, unambiguous categories would have shown a clearer picture of respondents' attitudes.

3.4.4 The CUMSA document

With regard to the CUMSA document, the government's proposal for a language curriculum was contained on pages 5 and 6 of the executive summary. The document, however, makes no overt mention of the medium of instruction issue, except indirectly, as the recommendation for Grade 2 indicates:

Table 3.3 How many languages will a learner have to offer in each grade?

Grade 1:	one language (on the Ordinary Level) compulsory; a second language (on the Basic Level) optional
Grades 2-4:	two languages (on the Ordinary Level) compulsory, one of which should be the mother tongue/medium of instruction
Grades 5-7:	three languages compulsory, namely English, Afrikaans and the regionally dominant African language; the first two on the Ordinary Level, the third on the Basic Level
Grades 8-9:	two languages (on the Ordinary Level) compulsory; the third language (on the Ordinary Level) or a foreign language (on a Foreign Language Level) optional
Grades 10-11:	two languages (on the Ordinary/Advanced Level) compulsory; with a third language (on the Ordinary Level) or a foreign language (on a Foreign Language Level) optional
Grade 12:	one language compulsory; second/third/foreign language optional; languages from the language package on the Ordinary/Advanced Level; foreign language on a Foreign Language Level.

(Source: National Education Department 1991, CUMSA).

In the document, the meaning of the three levels is given as follows:

- *Basic Level*: intended for learners who lack competence in the particular language. The acquisition of oral communications skills is emphasised.

- *Ordinary Level*: intended for learners with adequate language ability/those who use the particular language as medium of instruction. Emphasis is placed on more complex language structures and on an appreciation for the language, the culture it represents and its literature.

- *Advanced Level*: intended for learners who are proficient in the particular language/s; a sophisticated literature component is therefore included

  (National Education Department 1991, pp. 5-7).

In short, while the CUMSA recommendations involve the compulsory study of three languages from year 5 to year 7, the pupils' home language is not a compulsory subject. Nor is it assumed that the pupils' home language will be the medium of instruction, as is indicated by the requirements for Grades 2-4 above. The recommendations are in fact glaringly silent on the medium of instruction issue.

In the section below, I examine the ANC's 1992 recommendations and compare these with the ERS and CUMSA recommendations.

3.4.5 The ANC's 1992 Policy Guidelines

In May 1992 the ANC published its policy guidelines for a democratic South Africa. The document is called *Ready to Govern*. Paragraph J4 deals with language in education policy. I reproduce it in full below:

> J4.1 We recognize the multilingual nature of South Africa and believe that all individuals must have access through their mother tongue and a language of wider communication to all avenues of social, political, economic, and educational life.
>
> J4.2 We are committed to providing access to a minimum of two languages – a regional lingua franca and English. In cases where, firstly, there is more than one regional lingua franca, access will be provided to each except where not possible because of practical constraints; and secondly, where the home language of the pupil differs from the regional lingua franca, access to the mother tongue will be provided except where impractical.

As the NEPI report (1992, p. 40) indicates, it is not clear what was being referred to by the use of the word *access*. Did it refer to access to a particular language as subject or as medium of instruction? The differences between the then government's recommendations and the ANC's were two-fold: Whilst the CUMSA document recommended that three languages be studied during years 2-4, the ANC guidelines mentioned a maximum of two languages. Unlike the CUMSA which recommended that both English and Afrikaans be compulsory subjects, the ANC document made no mention of Afrikaans, only of English.

The early 1990s saw a proliferation of policy recommendations as political parties positioned themselves for the first democratic elections that were now inevitable. It was in this context that the NEPI Committee made public its examination of policy options.

3.4.6 NEPI and its report on language[24]

In the words of the chairperson of the NEPI Executive Committee, Jakes Gerwel,

> The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) was a project of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC) conducted between December 1990 and August 1992. The object of this investigation was to interrogate policy options in all areas of education within a value framework derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement.
>
> … These reports do not constitute a model for a new education system, nor even a set of recommendations for a more equitable dispensation: the twelve sectoral reports are … an analysis of feasible options for the short-to medium-term future (1992, p. vi).

Altogether, there were 12 such reports, each covering a major educational field. Language was one of them. Some of the other fields were Teacher Education, Adult Education, Curriculum Studies and Early Childhood Education.

In accordance with its mandate, the NEPI group on language presented a range of options for language in education in its report. For each model the report looks at, amongst other things:
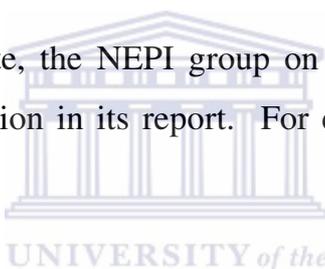
- The necessary conditions for the policy to work well;

- The extent to which these conditions were met in South Africa in 1992;

- The extent to which they could be met in the near or distant future.

The Report acknowledges that, broadly speaking, there are two types of policy:

- The child's home language is used for the teaching of all subjects (except languages) throughout schooling;

- A language that is not the child's home language is used as medium of instruction for all or part of the child's schooling. There are several variations on the second type of policy (NEPI 1992, p. 74).

The report proceeds to look at the following options:

1. Mother tongue or home language throughout formal schooling;

2. Second language throughout;

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[24] See also Chapter Two for a discussion on NEPI.

3. Initial literacy and numeracy in first language (L1) followed by education in second language (L2). Three ways in which the transition can happen are then looked at. These are:

- Delayed immersion into L2 from the beginning of a predetermined school year, which would be the same throughout the country;

- A gradual transition to L2 after initial literacy and numeracy have been established in L1;

- Initial bilingualism followed by transition to L2 when pupils are ready for L2 instruction.

4. Bilingual education throughout schooling (NEPI 1992, pp. 74-88).

Details of each option are captured in the report (NEPI 1992, pp. 74-88). As one of the key participants in the NEPI process, in retrospect I think we may have erred by presenting the options in a neutral way without sufficient guidance as to which policy/policies made better sense in particular contexts. Concrete suggestions in this regard may have been more useful, even though we were specifically tasked not to give guidance. In fact every option had its problems. However, we were correct in warning that the particular context in which a school(s) finds itself would strongly influence the success or otherwise of a policy. The present study illustrates this point clearly. English is supposed to be the pupils' second language at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha. However, pupils get such limited exposure to English that it is more of a foreign language to them. The glossary for the term *second language* in the NEPI Report on language is useful in this regard. It reads as follows:

> (A) language which is acquired or learned after gaining some competence in a first language. Usually it is not used in the learner's home, but it is used in the wider society in which the learner lives. However, there are vast discrepancies in the extent to which different learners are exposed to a 'second language'. In some cases, what is termed a 'second language' may in effect be a 'foreign language', because the learner has no exposure to the language outside the classroom (1992, p. xi).

In addition, the Report usefully cautions that community participation should not be a token gesture: '… allowing choice in educational matters is not sufficient for the

exercise of democracy: people must have the necessary information if they are to make responsible choices' (1992, p. 16).

As King and van den Berg put it, '… it is difficult for a community to decide what it wants if it does not know what is possible' (1992, p. 18).

This is borne out by the fact that, to date, very few schools in the Western Cape, and probably in the country as a whole, have actually taken up the powers vested in them by determining their schools' language policy. By and large, the de facto position, as it existed before 1994, remains in place, with the exception of minor changes such as introducing English a year earlier, at the end of year 3, as it now coincides with the end of the Foundation Phase. Provincial governments are in a better position than schools to recommend particular medium of instruction options as they have the full provincial picture to draw on. This last position was actually a recommendation in NEPI:
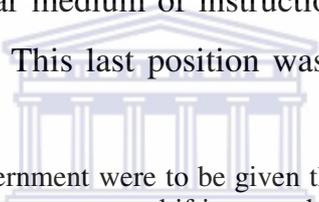
> If a democratic regional government were to be given the responsibility of establishing what the region's needs and resources were, and if it were able to tailor expenditure to serve these needs, this might be a very suitable body to make medium of instruction decisions. It would be able to consult more widely than an individual school community would, and in greater depth than the central government would, about the needs on the ground. It would also have a wide enough picture of needs and resources to be able to deploy the resources to the greatest advantage of all the people in the region (1992, pp. 70-71).

3.4.7 Report of the CEPD Working Group on Language Policy in Education

As indicated in Chapter Two, the Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD) was established to conduct research on education policy to advise the ANC. The working group on language policy in education was tasked to draft recommendations on language in education policy. The working group submitted its report to the Director, Dr Trevor Coombes, in June 1993.

The report consists of two parts. As the preface indicates:

> Part 1 gives an overview of the ANC Policy Guidelines on Language, focusing on those principles which relate to language in education. It draws attention to issues of principle and implementation which remain to be resolved [at the time of writing the report].

Part 2 proposes a policy position for language in education which deals with specific issues in more detail than Part 1. Where different interpretations of ANC policy principles are possible (for example, on the principle of choice), Part 2 offers specific recommendations. (1993, Preface).

The main thrust of Part 1 was to alert policy makers to the inconsistencies in the May 1992 Policy Guidelines between Paragraph N, which dealt with ANC language policy generally and Paragraph J4 which focused on language policy for education. Part 1 suggested that the policy guidelines captured in Paragraph N were 'structured by a dynamic interaction between three main principles':

- *Choice* of languages
- *The right of educational access* to the development of necessary linguistic skills
- *Affirmative action* for languages whose status was reduced under apartheid (1993a, p. 4).

Unlike the general guidelines which did not mention any specific language, or categories of language, Paragraph J4 mentioned English specifically. It also used categories such as *language of wider communication* and *regional lingua franca*. The recommendation of the Working Group therefore was that these clauses needed to be revisited. The Working Group was mindful of the fact that technical experts such as themselves could make recommendations, but that the policy decisions had to be taken by the political actors. Part 1 therefore ended with a list of issues around the three core principles that the Working Group thought needed to be resolved by the political actors.

Part 2 (1993) dealt with the actual recommendations. Below are the twelve key recommendations for implementation:

1. All South African children will learn not fewer than two South African languages, and preferably three, from the first grade and throughout the period of compulsory school attendance.
2. Learning institutions will be required to declare at least three languages spoken by the institutional community as institutional languages, and ensure that these languages are used in all operational aspects of its work.
3. Democratic community structures in consultation with the Ministry of Education will select which language or languages will be used as languages of learning and taught as subjects.

4. The learning of additional South African languages will be strongly encouraged.
5. Languages other than those traditionally recognized as South African may be taught either as subjects or used as languages of learning where appropriate, provided that two South African languages - and preferably three - are also learnt.
6. Language varieties will be recognized and accepted.
7. No child may be refused admission to any school during the early years of the period of compulsory school attendance on the grounds that she/he is not proficient in the languages taught at that school.
8. The State will provide and allocate resources in such a way as to redress past and present imbalances and to make bilingual competence a reality.
9. The State will foster the ideal of multilingualism through the active promotion of all South African languages.
10. The language examination system will be overhauled to promote the creative and innovative teaching and learning of languages.
11. In the long-term, pupils will be examined in any South African language of their choice.
12. A language in education unit will be set up within the Ministry with wide-ranging powers and responsibilities to implement a new language in education policy for South Africa
(CEPD 1993, p. 4).

Although many of these recommendations appear in one or other form in the Language in Education policy document of 1997, the problems pupils experience when learning through a second language remain. The Report of the CEPD's Working Group on Language in education was an important document as its influence on the ANC's 1994 Policy Framework for Education and Training indicates. However, it was ultimately the product of a political process. Although members of the Working Group had thought deeply about the issues, the recommendations were captured in rhetorical terms in the ANC's Policy Framework, as is the practice in many such policy documents. There was not a sufficient focus on implementation.

3.4.8 The ANC's Policy Framework for Education and Training

As part of its preparations for the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994, the Education Department of the African National Congress (ANC) produced a discussion document, *A Policy Framework for Education and Training*, in January 1994. This document, or the Yellow Book as it was subsequently called, set out proposals for ANC policy on education and training, building on the guidelines adopted by the ANC Policy Conference in May 1992 and contained in the document *Ready to Govern*, discussed above. It was widely circulated for comment. For the purposes of this chapter, I confine myself to the section on language in education policy, which constituted part of the section titled "Resources for learning".

As far as the history of language in education policy was concerned, the document highlighted what the ANC considered as important lessons to be learnt from the past:

> The legacy of past language struggles cannot be ignored by the future democratically-elected government. It is of the utmost importance that the correct lessons are learnt and that the cycle of language oppression and resistance be broken, in the interests of building peace in our schools and communities and a common South African nationhood. Four such lessons seem to have priority.
>
> - Language policy in education should be the subject of a nation-wide consultative process, to ensure that proposed changes in policy have the broad consent of the language communities which will be directly affected by them.
> - No person or language community should be compelled to receive education through a language of learning they do not want.
> - No language community should have reason to fear that the education system will be used to suppress its mother tongue.
> - Language restrictions should not be used to exclude citizens from educational opportunities (ANC 1994, p. 62).

It is interesting to examine these caveats in retrospect. With regard to the first lesson about broad consultation, the post-1994 government remains as concerned about consulting 'stakeholders', a term used to describe a range of people likely to be affected by developments in any given area, in this case, language policy. But in the process of consultation, often the very people who need to be consulted are not. Allow me to concretize this point. The Department of Education's 1997 language in education policy devolves a school's language in education policy decision onto school governing bodies and pupils/parents. However, by the end of 2011, very few parents and pupils had actually been consulted about language policy issues. In fact, very few schools have actually developed language in education policies since July 1997 (Heugh 2002; Probyn 2008; Probyn et al 2002). As a result, the situation remains largely unchanged from what it was before 1994. Presently, the only difference is that English is introduced as a medium of instruction a year earlier, at the start of year 4, to coincide with the start of the intermediate phase in the General Education Training Band. The second lesson is a reminder of one of the catalysts of the Soweto Uprising (discussed earlier in this chapter), the compulsory introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction alongside English. Yet, it can also be seen in retrospect as a justification for not making the mother tongue the medium of instruction for pupils who are speakers of African languages. Incidentally, the mother

tongue is the medium of instruction for most pupils who are speakers of Afrikaans and English. The third and fourth lessons are directed more at speakers of Afrikaans. The third one is an attempt to dispel any fears on the part of Afrikaans speakers that their children might not be able to study through the medium of Afrikaans, whilst the fourth lesson we know, from hindsight, refers to African children being excluded from Afrikaans-medium schools if they were not proficient in Afrikaans.

There is a clear link between these lessons and the principles guiding the proposals in the 1994 Policy Framework. The principles are:

- The right of the individual to choose which language or languages to study and to use as a language of learning (medium of instruction).
- The right of the individual to develop the linguistic skills, in the language or languages of his or her choice, which are necessary for full participation in national, provincial, and local life.
- The necessity to promote and develop South African languages that were previously disadvantaged and neglected (1994, p. 63).

The principles are based largely on the general language clauses of the 1992 Policy Guidelines and Part 1 of the CEPD Working Group Report. The third principle could be seen to be in conflict with the other two. For if pupils, or their parents, choose either English and/or Afrikaans to study, why would it be necessary to promote and develop the 'previously disadvantaged' languages? Such development and promotion would have made more sense if African languages had been compulsory as subjects, as was recommended by the reforms proposed by the CUMSA.

Given such principles, it is no surprise that the actual policy recommendations did not say much – the choice was wide open. The choice of language or languages of learning was based on one of three options:

- A language of wider communication, such as English, to which the school community subscribes, irrespective of whether this is the home language of the pupils. If the language chosen is not the home language of the pupils, then it should be introduced gradually. The gradual introduction of the language of wider communication as a language of learning is based on the research evidence which strongly suggests that the conceptual development of children is facilitated by initial learning in their home language.

- The home language of the majority of pupils in a particular school, as long as this does not discriminate against pupils whose home language is different. Where the choice of a single language of learning would discriminate against significant numbers of pupils, schools should, where possible, adopt more than one language of learning. In such cases, parallel classes could be run for different sets of pupils.

- The use of different languages as languages of learning, for example to teach different subjects (1994, p. 64).

The three options above capture the recommendations made in the NEPI Report, *Language* (1992), but without the nuanced description of necessary and sufficient conditions to implement any of the options. As far as languages as subjects were concerned, the 1994 document recommended:

> All South African children should be given access to, and be expected to learn, at least two South African languages throughout the period of compulsory schooling, as subject and/or as language of learning. The learning of more than two languages will be strongly encouraged. …
>
> Schools will be strongly encouraged to offer, if necessary through appropriate incentives, at least one African language … In particular, the learning of an African language by non-African children will be actively promoted, as a contribution to raising the status of these languages, aiding understanding and communication across cultures, and thus building a non-racial society based on common citizenship (ANC 1994, p. 65).

Despite the above proposals, very few 'non-African' children learn an African language. Phrases such as 'strongly encouraged' remain empty promises. As I indicated in Chapter Two, my proposal to make an African language as a subject compulsory for all children was rejected at the ANC's April 1994 conference. This proposal was again made as part of the Values in Education Working Team, but it still remains a proposal, despite the Report (DoE 2000b) being accepted by the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal.

In tracing the development of language in education policy in South Africa since 1991, I have deliberately made detailed references to the original documents to indicate to the reader that there has been a definite trend on the part of first the ANC, and now the government, to refuse to take a firm policy decision on language in education. This trend has continued with the July 1997 Language in education policy document to which I refer later.

3.4.9 Other role-players such as the National Language Project (NLP) and the Project for Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA)

Apart from government initiatives or those coming from the mass democratic movement and the ANC, there were also other proposals on language in education policy. Two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which played an active role in this regard since 1986 are the NLP and PRAESA. Neville Alexander and Kathleen Heugh, two language activists and researchers, were involved in both organisations.

The NLP played an important role through its activities, as well as its popular journal, first called *Language Projects' Review* and then *Bua!* to popularize language policy issues and raise awareness about the importance of African languages in education. Its founding director, Neville Alexander (1992), was instrumental in revisiting the earlier debate about standardizing the Nguni and Sotho varieties into a single written variety for each group. Although the proposal made both linguistic as well as economic sense, it was not favourably received by many speakers of the two language groups. Similarly, despite Makoni's (and others) argument that the eleven languages as captured in the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa are colonial inventions and need to be disinvented (Makoni 2003; Makoni & Pennycook, 2007), speakers of the varieties have an affiliation to and an affinity for such varieties. Makoni and Pennycook argue from the 'premise that *languages, conceptions of languageness* and the *metalanguages* used to describe them are inventions' (2007, p. 1). They further state that 'Missionaries, administrators and other colonial functionaries who wrote grammars and textbooks learnt their own versions of indigenous languages' (2007, p. 7), which Makoni and Pennycook refer to as 'invented indigenous languages' (ibid). The task facing ex-colonised people would be to 'disinvent' these languages and 'reconstitute' them, according to the authors. Both the proponents of standardisation, or 'harmonisation' as it has come to be known, and 'disinvention' would be aware that language is closely related to identity. Any attempt therefore to 'harmonise' or 'disinvent' languages is likely to receive hostility

from the speakers of those languages. Both concepts are discussed further in Chapter Four.

Although PRAESA has continued the popularizing work started by the NLP, its focus has been largely on realizing the goal of additive bilingualism, which is defined by NEPI as 'a form of bilingualism in which the person's home language is maintained while adding competence in another language (NEPI 1992, p. x). In this regard, its researchers have been involved in piloting dual medium approaches at primary schools. In the process of doing so, other needs have been identified, such as the development of terminology and the creation of dictionaries. PRAESA has been involved in compiling a trilingual dictionary on terminology and concepts in Science. PRAESA, and particularly its Director, Neville Alexander and former Senior Researcher, Kathleen Heugh, have also played an important advisory role on language policy to various layers of government.

3.5 Recent language in education policy developments

This section examines closely two key documents on present day language in education policy. There has not been much movement with regard to language in education policy since the 1997 Language in education policy document. I will therefore first discuss these two documents before providing a brief update since 1997. The two documents are:

- *Language in Education Policy* published in terms of Section 3(4)(m) of the National Education Policy Act, 1996 (Act 27 of 1996), and the
- *Norms and Standards regarding Language Policy* published in terms of Section 6(1) of the South African Schools Act, 1996.

The document which publicly announced these two policies on the 14 July 1997 indicated that, although the two policies have different objectives, they 'complement each other and should at all times be read together… (Department of Education 1997a,

p. 1). In the preamble to the Language in education policy, Paragraph 4.1.5, which looks at locally viable approaches to multilingual education, suggests that:

> Whichever route is followed, the underlying principle is to maintain home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s). Hence the Department's position that an additive approach to bilingualism is to be seen as the **normal orientation** (my emphasis) of our language-in-education policy (1997a, p. 3).

Despite such strong sentiments in favour of home language maintenance, the next Paragraph (4.1.6) can be seen to undermine these sentiments by bestowing the right to choose the language of learning and teaching onto the individual learner or parent. This paragraph was undoubtedly influenced by the clause in the Constitution which states as follows:

> Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable (RSA 1996, 29(2)).

However, as I indicate in *Section 3.5.1*, choice without the necessary information and support is not enabling. It merely diverts the focus from the state's responsibility to provide *meaningful* education to all its children, as parents and pupils can then be blamed for the language choices they make.
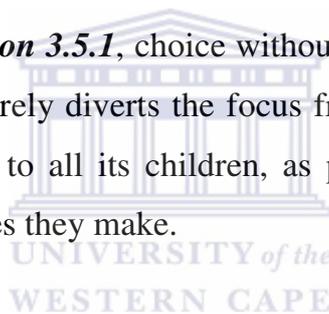
The only qualification for exercising such a choice is that it has to be 'exercised within the overall framework of the obligation on the education system to promote multilingualism' (1997a, p. 3). No mention is made of home language maintenance. How does one reconcile the right of the individual parent/pupil to choose the language of instruction with a rhetorical accommodation of mother tongue instruction or home language maintenance?

A similar tension between the promotion of multilingualism and home language maintenance arises in the aims outlined in the language in education policy (Department of Education, 1997a). Paragraph 4.3.5 takes for granted that there will be mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching by talking about countering such disadvantages. In fact the one aim that refers to pupils'

conceptual growth makes no mention of home language. It might be useful to examine this aim in more detail. Paragraph 4.3.2 sets out the intention:

> [T]o pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst pupils, and hence to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education (1997a, p.4).

The connection between the two phrases of this paragraph is not evident. How will the conceptual growth of pupils be established through a policy of additive multilingualism? Incidentally, the phrase *additive multilingualism* is peculiarly South African. As I indicate in Chapter Four, *additive bilingualism* is a well-known construct in second language acquisition studies, but no mention is made of additive multilingualism in international literature on the subject. It is a phrase actually coined by the Department of Education in South Africa and used for the first time in the 1997 language in education policy document (DoE 1997a).

Historically, language in education policy in South Africa has had two components. These are language as medium of instruction[25] and language as subject. It is interesting to note that there is only one clause in the language in education policy stipulations that refers to medium of instruction or language of learning and teaching (LoLT), as it is known in South Africa. Paragraph, 4.5, reads as follows, 'The language(s) of learning and teaching in a public school must be (an) official language(s)' (1997a, p. 6).

Individual choice is circumscribed by the condition that the LoLT has to be one of the eleven official languages. Again, no mention is made that it should (preferably) be a language pupils are proficient in. We see therefore that there are a number of implicit tensions in the language in education policy. These revolve around three issues, namely, choice, access and multilingualism.

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[25] The language in which learners learn has historically been referred to as medium of instruction. In post-1994 policy documents the term language of learning and teaching (LoLT) has been used instead. I use both terms as the first term, medium of instruction, is more widely used in the literature, but when referring to South African policy documents post 1994, I use the term LoLT.

3.5.1 Issue of choice

Whilst I acknowledge, as stated elsewhere (Desai & Taylor 1997, p. 174), that the Soweto uprising of 1976 is a grim reminder that no state can afford to impose a language policy on pupils, leaving the decision entirely to pupils or parents can be seen as an abdication of responsibility on the part of the post-apartheid State. Currently, most pupils use either English or Afrikaans as the medium of instruction after the first three years at school, that is, the foundation phase. In order to enable pupils or parents to choose one of the nine African official languages as medium of instruction, the state will have to develop resources in these languages, resources such as teachers trained to teach through the African mother tongue, textbooks, reading material and terminology lists. African languages are likely to be seen as viable choices as languages of learning and teaching if they have some currency in domains other than the private, as I outline later in this chapter.

In addition, as Desai and Taylor remind us:
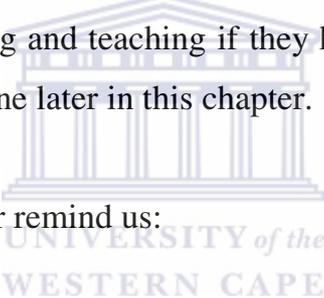
> [T]he history of LiEP under apartheid is still very fresh in people's memories. Promoting the use of African languages as languages of learning is often perceived as an attempt to 'ghettoize' African pupils and deny them access to the mainstream of South African life. Unless such individual choice is accompanied by a public awareness campaign around language and learning issues, the prejudices of the past are likely to militate against individual pupils choosing African languages as languages of learning (1997, p. 175).

If the state were to play a more interventionist role by limiting the choice to languages pupils are familiar with and reasonably proficient in, it would go a long way to promoting and developing African languages, which is one of the aims of the policy. Instead, all kinds of restrictions are imposed to prevent African languages from being used as media of instruction. These are highlighted in the second part of the language policy announcement, the Norms and Standards document, mentioned above. In particular, Paragraphs 5.2.4 and 5.3.2:

5.2.4   Where no school in a school district offers the desired language[26] as a medium of learning and teaching, the learner may request the provincial education department to make provision for instruction in the chosen language, and section 5.3.2 must apply. The provincial education department must make copies of the request available to all schools in the relevant school district.

5.3.2.   Where there are less (sic) than 40[27] requests in Grades 1 to 6, or less (sic) than 35 requests in Grades 7 to 12 for instruction in a language in a given grade not already offered by a school in a particular school district, the head of the provincial department of education will determine how the needs of those pupils will be met … (Department of Education 1997a, pp. 8-9).

If we accept that currently most pupils beyond Year 3 are taught either in English or Afrikaans, it is clear that these regulations mainly affect African languages, and not only in schools formerly set aside for those classified white, coloured or Indian. However, at the latter schools, the regulations apply to pupils entering Years 1 to 3 as well.

3.5.2 Issue of access

Under apartheid, pupils were segregated along so-called racial lines and difference meant inequality. So it is understandable that a post-apartheid government would want to be seen to be breaking down racial enclaves of privilege. In these circumstances, African pupils gaining admission or access to schools formerly set aside for whites would be seen as a victory against apartheid. It does not necessarily mean that African pupils have meaningful access to the curriculum. The main reason for this is that such pupils are usually not very proficient in the language of learning at the former white schools. And usually, there are no teachers who can speak the relevant African language, even though there is learning support for such pupils. In the words of the language in education policy, there is, in such cases, a 'mismatch between the home language and the language of learning' (Department of Education 1997a, p. 4). Although most African schools too use a second language as a medium from the fourth year, the difference between them and the former white schools is that

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[26] It is the learner, or her parent/guardian in the case of a minor, who chooses the language of learning upon application for admission to a particular school.

[27] These figures are informed by the Department's learner-teacher ratios and what it considers cost-effective use of education funds.

almost all teachers at such schools are able to mediate language difficulties for their pupils as they often share a common language.

3.5.3 Issue of multilingualism

A close reading of both the Language in Education Policy document (Department of Education 1997a) and the Norms and Standards document (Department of Education 1996) indicate that the Department has placed greater emphasis on promoting multilingualism than on facilitating learning.   Additive multilingualism is the goal. But how is it to be arrived at? If one looks at the language in education policy both in terms of language as medium and language as subject, it is not clear that additive multilingualism will necessarily be achieved through this policy, although that is supposedly an overriding aim. The constraints with regard to choice of medium of instruction have already been mentioned. In addition, if one looks at the clauses on languages as subjects, there is no guarantee that a learner will choose his or her home language as a subject. In fact, during the compulsory phase of schooling, that is Grades 1 to 9, a learner only needs to pass one language in order to be promoted, compared to two languages before 1994.

3.5.4 Language in education policy development since 1997

One of the main criticisms of the 1997 language in education policy has been that very little attempt has been made by both provincial and national education departments to implement this policy in schools. Surprisingly, there has been no substantive change to the 1997 policy (Department of Education 1997a). However, there have been discussions around ways in which to implement the policy. In 2006, for example, the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, convened a workshop in Cape Town to address issues of implementation, which I attended. General consensus at the workshop was that it made sense to extend the use of the home language to at least the end of Grade 6, but nothing concrete was done to implement this.

Interestingly, the province that came closest to implementing mother tongue education beyond Grade 3 was the Western Cape. In 2002, the Western Cape Education

Department (WCED), through its then MEC for Education, Advocate Gaum, initiated an exploratory study on medium of instruction options for the province, in particular looking at the possibility of extending the mother tongue as a medium of instruction till the end of Year 6.[28] And in 2006 the WCED drafted a language in education transformation plan with the following motivation:

> All primary school-based systemic evaluation and testing, as well as the analysis of performance by learners who are not being tested in their mother tongue (MT) at Grade 12 level, plus the high drop-out rate, give a clear message that the system is not working as it should and, in some case, not at all. We need to take a sharp look at the languages of learning and teaching (LoLTs) which are being used in schools and accept that it is the responsibility of the WCED to point out very clearly the disadvantages of dropping the mother- tongue too early (WCED 2006, pp. 5-8).

The WCED set itself four targets in terms of this plan. These were:

- Support the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction till the end of Grade 6;
- Encourage communicative competence in the three official languages of the Western Cape (Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa);
- Bring parents on board in relation to language in education policy and
- Extend mother tongue education to more pupils through making it also available to speakers of languages other than Afrikaans and English (WCED 2006, pp. 5-8).

This initiative in the Western Cape came about through various pressure groups, such as PRAESA, operating at both a technical as well as a political level, for, ultimately, policy decisions are taken at a political level. A pilot scheme was started at 15 primary schools in the Western Cape in which both PRAESA and the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape were involved. Prospects looked promising, but sadly it was reported to me (anonymously) by a WCED official in 2011 that the WCED would not be continuing with this project as there was not 'enough evidence to support it'. Unfortunately, this has been the history of language in education intervention projects (see, for example, Alidou 2004; Bamgbose 2000; and Heugh et al 2007 in this regard). Government officials are over hasty for quick results but are not prepared to invest in long-term plans to address the many aspects of

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[28] The Task Team submitted its report to the Minister in November 2002. It is available on the WCED website. The Report does not talk directly about mother tongue education. Instead it talks about 'mother-tongue-based bilingual education' (WCED 2002, pp. 1-2), which it regards as 'a more persuasive and more easily comprehensible rendering of the meaning of "additive multilingualism" (2002, pp. 1-2).

extending mother tongue instruction beyond the initial years. The only change that has been introduced is that English is now introduced as a subject in Grade 1 at schools catering for speakers of African languages (see recent curriculum changes introduced by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in 2010).

3.6 Summary and conclusion

The issue of parental choice is a refrain that runs throughout the history of language in education policy in South Africa since the Bantu Education Act of 1953. I would like to repeat the concluding words of the NEPI Report (1992), *Language*, which captures the caution that needs to be exercised around choice:

> Language policy for education needs … to be flexible without being so laissez faire as to allow the perpetuation of present discriminatory practices or ill-informed choices of alternatives to them (1992, p. 93).

A second issue that recurs in the language in education policy debates is the question of whether a particular policy leads to segregation or, as stated earlier, 'ghettoises' pupils. The issue of segregation is a non-starter in present-day South Africa. For, to put it cynically, there are not enough whites around in South Africa for integration to be significant. The demographics of South Africa are vastly different from those in a country like the United States of America where integration is a real demand. What is more important for such pupils is that the education they are exposed to does not exclude them from participating in the economy of the country, and more globally. I discuss this issue further in the section below.

A third area of concern is more serious and that is whether a particular language in education policy, mother tongue education to be precise, will lead to educational closure for particular sections of the population. African languages have historically been used by the apartheid state as a means of educational closure, so it is no surprise that parents view mother tongue instruction with suspicion.

As Myers-Scotton states:

> In a society like South Africa, language becomes a key feature of social closure, with the dominant languages playing an important role in the stratification of the society. This is accomplished either by bureaucratic decree or by a cultural hegemony which the dominant languages sustain through their educational role and their frequent use in print and the media. … its dominance (i.e. English) as the language of reading and writing in South Africa is considerable (1990, p. 29).

The only way to address this fear is to ensure that pupils who use an African language as their language of learning are given access to a language of wider communication, English. It is not sufficient that such pupils are taught English. They need to be taught English by teachers who are proficient in the language and with the necessary resources. These pupils also need to be exposed to situations where they can use English in meaningful ways so that the language does not remain a 'foreign' language.

Although I have deliberately focused on language in education policy in this chapter, I am mindful of the fact that unless we locate the discussion on the role of African languages in a broader context, we are not going to make much progress in extending the use of African languages beyond the home domain. As I have argued elsewhere (Desai 2001), that broader context is often associated with officialising languages. For a language to be regarded as official it needs to function in 'some or all' of the following capacities listed by Fasold (1984) and cited in du Plessis and Pretorius:

- The spoken language of government officials in the exercise of official duties at the national level;
- The language of written communication between and within government agencies at the national level;
- The language in which government records are kept at the national level;
- The language in which laws and regulations governing the nation as a whole are originally written;
- The language in which forms, such as tax forms and various applications related to the national government, are published (1999, p. 5).

Whilst our Constitution (RSA 1996) has adopted eleven languages as official, it is mainly English, and to a lesser extent Afrikaans, that functions in the above capacities. This has obvious implications for language in education policy. Whilst I agree with Harlech-Jones' view (1995) that there is no necessary correlation between declaring a language official and its role in education, I would nevertheless argue that African

languages will seem more attractive as media of instruction if they have greater currency in the day to day running of society.

In this chapter I have traced the history of language in education policy in South Africa from 1910 to the present. In doing so, I have explored recurring issues such as the choice factor and the possible 'ghettoising' effects of language in education policies. I have also attempted to show how the legacies of the past can hold us captive or prevent us from moving on at the rate we would like to. In the next chapter I look at language in education policy from an international perspective to illustrate that, contrary to popular perceptions, South Africa is not unique. Many other countries share similar experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR
WHY MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION?

> Medium of instruction is the most powerful means of maintaining and revitalizing a language and a culture …
> (Tsui and Tollefson 2004, p. 2).

4.1 Introduction

In choosing the title of this chapter, I am aware that the terms *mother tongue* and *mother tongue education* are in themselves controversial. What do we mean by a mother tongue? The term has an emotional load, as I have illustrated in Chapter One when referring to definitions of mother tongue. Pennycook suggests that underlying the notion of mother tongue may be 'a strategically essentialist argument (which) is useful for mobilisation and legislation, but it may also reproduce those fixed categories of identity that many wish simultaneously to avoid' (2002, p. 24). I discuss this argument further in section 4.6 of this chapter.

The term may also obscure the element of choice as happened during the period of apartheid when mother tongues were assigned to particular ethnic groups such as Zulus or Xhosas or Shangaans as part of the grand apartheid plan. In a multilingual society, a family's common language may often not be the mother's, and in some cases not the father's either. Choices are made, for better or for worse.

There are also arguments related specifically to languages committed to writing under colonial circumstances. Makoni (2003) makes the point that African languages in their written forms, and therefore the forms used in formal education, are colonial or missionary inventions, differing both in linguistic range and in political significance from the linguistic practices they were supposedly committing to writing. He suggests that they may need to be 'disinvented' to recover their potential. A related point concerns an element of contemporary practice: the disjuncture between the standard variety used in education and the varieties used by the speakers of that language. This

is a very widespread phenomenon, both in South Africa, and internationally (see, for example, Delpit 1988; Nomlomo 2003; Rampton 1995; Smitherman 1994 and Webb 2010 in this regard). In the case of African languages, Makoni sees the difference between standard and current forms as potentially disabling:

> (T)he magnitude of the disjuncture is so great that there are potentially adverse effects for mother tongue education. Standard African languages are rarely used as primary languages in the homes and playgrounds in African communities, particularly in urban areas (2003, p. 136).

In the face of such compelling arguments, I have opted to continue to use the terms 'mother tongue' and 'mother tongue education'. This requires explanation. In what follows, I attempt a more thorough analysis of the issues and explore theoretical perspectives for answering the question posed in the title of this chapter. In this section, I discuss the contexts in which languages are learnt or used as media of instruction; provide some background information on Khayelitsha, the context in which Themba Primary is located; briefly look at the historic recommendation on mother tongue education by UNESCO in 1953 and its location in bilingual and multilingual contexts.

4.1.1 Contexts for language learning and learning through language

It is generally in multilingual societies that the issues of mother tongue education, bilingual education and second language acquisition arise (see Alidou 2004; Cummins 2009; Hornberger 2008; Lo Bianco 2008; Tollefson 2004). But, as societies differ widely, it is important to distinguish between their dynamics, so that a single solution is not sought for very diverse and complex situations. As I have argued elsewhere (Desai 1999, p. 43), there is a world of difference between those who are learning an additional language voluntarily to expand their linguistic repertoire, and those who are forced to learn an additional language in order to gain access to education and to participate in the wider society. One can sub-divide the latter group into two, that is, those learning the language in an immersion context and those who are learning the additional language primarily in a school context. In the former case, there are those

who are learning that additional language, immersed in it, such as immigrant children in Norway, the United States of America or the United Kingdom. Lily Wong Fillmore sketches this situation very well in the following description:

> The immigrant family is in an ideal situation for language learning since it resides in a setting that provides generous exposure to the language in use. The members of the family can hear and learn the language in the workplace, classroom, neighbourhood, and playground – wherever they come into contact with people who speak the target language well enough to help them learn it (Wong Fillmore 1991, p. 52).

According to her, there are three necessary ingredients for second-language learning. These are:

> (1) *learners* who realise that they need to learn the target language (TL) and are motivated to do so; (2) *speakers of the target language* who know it well enough to provide the learners with access to the language and the help they need for learning it; and (3) *a social setting* which brings learners and TL speakers into frequent enough contact to make language learning possible (1991, pp. 52-53).

In Wong Fillmore's opinion, if any of these ingredients are dysfunctional, language learning will be difficult.
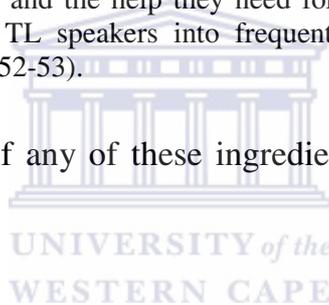
In the case of the pupils at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha, who are the focus of this study, only the first ingredient is present. In such a context, where people have to learn that additional language in an environment where it is not used often, pupils are likely to encounter difficulties with learning English, let alone using it as a medium. In such a situation, mother tongue education would be expected to assume a greater role so as to facilitate pupils' learning.

There is, however, disagreement as to whether English can be regarded as a foreign language in urban areas in South Africa where many transactions are conducted through the medium of English and exposure through media is strong. It is therefore useful to provide some background to Khayelitsha and communities within it, particularly the community in which Themba Primary is located.

4.1.2 Background information on Khayelitsha

Khayelitsha is a large African township situated 30 kilometres east of the city of Cape Town, which was created to house the 'overflow' from the older African townships such as Langa and Gugulethu. It houses approximately 450,000 to 600,000 people in three sections called Section A, Section B and Section C. This figure was considered to be a more reliable figure than the 2001 Census which estimated the population to be 329,002 as people constantly move in and out of Khayelitsha (Information supplied by Janet Gie of the Urban Policy of Strategic Information based in Cape Town on 3 September 2003). Housing in Khayelitsha can be divided into three types: informal settlements which consist largely of makeshift dwellings, basic concrete constructions called core houses and ordinary brick houses. Themba Primary is located in Section B in the midst of all three types of housing. Of the approximately 850 pupils in 1998 when the data was collected, most came from either the core houses or the informal settlements in Section B. About 20% of the pupils lived elsewhere in a township called Mfuleni near Blackheath which is a much smaller township but with a similar housing set up.
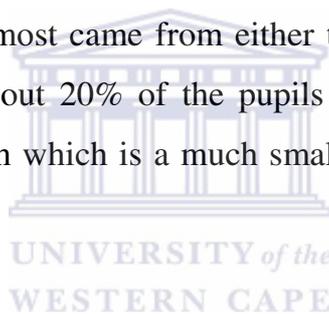
Approximately 99% of the pupils at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha are Xhosa-speaking. All the teachers and the principal too are Xhosa-speaking.

From a survey conducted by researchers from Monash University in Australia as part of a research project on internal migration to Cape Town in 2003-2004, it is clear that apart from school, people are not learning or hearing English in their neighbourhoods, nor are they using it in their daily activities. Below are two tables from the Monash survey which indicate this quite clearly. The tables have been reproduced from Deumert et al (2005).

Table 4.1: Contexts of language acquisition

	School	Relatives	Friends	Work	Other
English (%)	94.2	3.4	5.3	17.0	8.7
Afrikaans (%)	53.8	3.8	9.4	32.0	16.0

(Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003-2004).

Table 4.2: What language(s) do you usually speak …?

	English (%)	Afrikaans (%)	Xhosa (%)	Other (%)
Rural home visit	2.8	1.4	92.5	9.8
Urban neighbourhood	9.3	0.9	99.1	7.0
Religious group	18.7	1.1	94.6	1.6
Spaza shop (in neighbourhood)	8.9	0.9	97.7	0.5
Pick 'n Pay (in the city)	79.0	8.4	57.9	0.5
Hospital/clinic	64.4	4.7	63.1	0.0
Government office	69.4	4.8	48.3	0.0
Schools	65.3	5.6	67.4	0.5
Police	48.8	7.0	86.3	1.0

(Source: Monash Survey of Internal Migration to Cape Town, 2003-2004).

The Monash Survey of internal migration to Cape Town focused on rural-urban migrants in four low-income areas in Cape Town. Ilitha Park in Khayelitsha was one of the areas. Most migrants came from the Eastern Cape, which is a predominantly Xhosa-speaking province. According to the 2001 Census, 83% of residents in the Eastern Cape used Xhosa as their home language. Deumert et al support the view that English is like a foreign language in areas such as Khayelitsha. They argue that

> (a)lthough South Africa projects itself at times as an English-speaking country … , and English has monopolised many areas of public communication, serious concerns have been raised regarding levels of English language proficiency. … The Western Cape Language Audit (2002) … found that only about 50% of Xhosa-speakers in the Western Cape have a level of English proficiency that allows them to explain a simple problem in English (2005, pp. 310-311).

According to the authors, acquisition of English happened primarily in the classroom, where it was often 'officially' a medium of instruction. As reported in the present study, Deumert et al too indicate that

> Even though English is used as medium of instruction in many South African schools, spoken interaction in the classroom (student-student as well as teacher-student) usually takes place in the native language since English competency is low among students as well as among teachers (2005, p. 312).

I have confined myself largely to information on the language situation in Khayelitsha in this chapter to illustrate the context in which English is being learnt and used as a medium of instruction and the implications this has for pupils' ability to learn and access knowledge. Further information on Khayelitsha is supplied in Chapter Five where I describe the research site for this study.

4.1.3 UNESCO's 1953 recommendation and mother tongue education

The axiom that it is best for a child to learn through his or her mother tongue has been a strong element in language struggles for many years. It grew in general currency after the finding of the UNESCO Committee of 1953 which took the position that the language schoolchildren can use most effectively should be selected as the medium of instruction (Fasold 1989). In the words of the Committee:

> It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO 1953, p. 11).

In the literature on mother tongue education a case is seldom made for the importance of mother tongue education for the majority populations of countries like the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Iceland, Norway, France and Germany - to name but a few examples. In these contexts, it is taken for granted that pupils from the majority populations will learn best through their mother tongues. Why is this practice then so problematic that it cannot be extended to the majority of pupils in

African countries and some Asian and Latin American countries and to a minority of pupils from immigrant populations in Western countries? Writing about India, Mohanty concurs:

> Numerous studies continue to show the poor educational achievements of children in submersion education, which has a subtractive effect on their mother tongues. In contrast, studies do show better performance of children in their mother tongue-medium schools (2009, p. 5).

He proceeds to ask, 'Why then are mother tongues neglected despite persuasive evidence to the contrary' (2009, p. 5)?

Possible explanations relate to issues of power and economics. In the preface to their challenging collection on medium of instruction policies, the editors, Tollefson and Tsui, state that:

> ... medium-of-instruction policies are not only about the choice of the language(s) of instruction, but also about a range of important socio-political issues, including globalisation, migration, labor policy, elite competition, and the distribution of economic resources and political power (2004, p. viii).

Tsui and Tollefson continue this point by arguing that

> Medium-of-instruction policy determines which social and linguistic groups have access to political and economic opportunities, and which groups are disenfranchised. It is therefore a key means of power (re)distribution and social (re)construction, as well as a key arena in which political conflicts among countries and ethnolinguistic, social and political groups are realized (2004, p. 2).

In Africa, and other post-colonial contexts, the medium of instruction policy is often a tool for the elites who have mastered the colonial languages to maintain their power and their privileged position (Bamgbose 2000, 2005; Obondo 2008).

Often one hears the argument that it is too costly to implement mother tongue education in countries such as South Africa or Malawi or Ghana, to name but a few. What makes it possible then for a small country like Iceland with a population of about 265,000 (smaller than the population of Khayelitsha) to maintain its own language, Icelandic, as a medium of instruction right up to tertiary level? Holmarsdottir attempts some answers to this question in her article on a 'lesser-used language in the global community':

> It is a policy that comes from the grassroots with the government and official institutions viewing their job as one of service to the people of Iceland. Icelanders are very proud of their language and are extremely determined to continually develop and preserve it for future generations (2001a, p. 379).

The structure of Icelandic and its grammatical categories have remained relatively constant with the result that Icelanders can read medieval Icelandic literature today:

> Growth in vocabulary has primarily come about with the development of new words from the language's roots. The near absence of Latin, Greek and, even more recently, English or Danish vocabulary words, is striking (Holmarsdottir 2001a, p. 387).

A combination of strong language vitality, the existence and systematic coinage of technical terms and the involvement of both government and the private sector in ensuring the language's use can explain why Icelandic is a language that is used in high domains in Iceland, despite the homogenising pull of globalisation forces which generally lead to 'assimilation of the powerless toward the powerful' (Tsui & Tollefson 2004, p. 7).

4.1.4. *Mother tongue education, bilingual education and multilingual education*

The debate on *mother tongue education* has usually focussed on certain contexts, ironically, largely on *multilingual contexts* prevailing in developing countries. In countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany the focus has been more on *bilingual education* for linguistically diverse pupils (Baker 1993; Benson 2009; Bialystok 2001; Cummins 2009; Hakuta 1986; Tosi 1989). Such a context requires of pupils to acquire the majority language efficiently and effectively. The pupils' first languages could be used as a means to facilitate such acquisition, but the end goal is to induct the pupils into the majority language.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will, however, look at the role of mother tongue education in both bilingual contexts (usually in 'developed' countries such as Canada, The United States of America, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) as well as multilingual contexts (usually in 'developing' countries such as India and many sub-Saharan African countries) because the theoretical perspectives on (bi)multilingual

education have relevance for the debates on mother tongue education and vice versa (see Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas 2010a; Skutnabb-Kangas et al 2009). In both contexts, the debate is confounded by concerns other than the educational as indicated above. These concerns can broadly be classified as political, socio-cultural and economic.

This chapter therefore examines the theoretical perspectives on mother tongue education (and bi/multilingual education) and analyses the concerns that cloud the debate. It also attempts to address the many obstacles that are usually cited as a barrier to mother tongue education for the people of developing countries such as Ghana, Malawi, South Africa and others. It proceeds to highlight three case studies from very different backgrounds that illustrate the benefits of maintaining and extending the use of learners' mother tongues in formal education, whilst they are acquiring a second language. It concludes by taking stock of recent developments in the field of mother tongue education and bi/multilingual education.

4.2. **Theoretical constructs in support of mother tongue education**

The motivation for this study is directly linked to the Spolsky quotation used as an epigraph for this thesis: 'It must be obvious to all that incomprehensible education is immoral' (1977, p. 20). The quotation stresses the importance of pupils understanding what they are learning or as King and Benson argue, 'Adoption of a medium of instruction that students comprehend is also effective pedagogy ...' (2004, p. 247). It is not about reifying African languages. Rather, it is about adopting a language in education policy that will facilitate learning, or as Ridge says: 'help real people get the most out of the linguistic resources available to them' (2002, p. 14). Put differently, this study is driven by pedagogical motives: What kind of language in education policy will facilitate the learning process for pupils so that they acquire knowledge of various subjects as well as proficiency in both their mother tongue and the international language of wider communication (English in this case)? What role should the mother tongue, Xhosa, play in their formal education? How do we extend

pupils' initial fluency in Xhosa 'into the registers required for academic success' (Cummins 2009, p. 23)?

In the sections that follow, I first outline the approach adopted, before going into detail into the theoretical constructs employed in this study. The constructs draw largely on the seminal foundational works of Cummins, hence the earlier references.

4.2.1. Mother tongue plus approach

In evaluating the arguments for or against the use of the mother tongue in formal education, proponents of either perspective have recourse to different linguistic/cognitive constructs. However, given that these arguments are usually posed in a multilingual context, the debate is often polarised as either promoting a case for mother tongue or for an international language of wider communication. In South Africa, this polarisation plays itself out as a tension between promoting English and promoting African languages (Trew and Desai 1992). The pull of the force of globalisation in the twenty-first century makes it almost impossible for any country to even contemplate any isolationist policy of ignoring global influences and 'going it alone', as it were. In linguistic terms, such isolationist policies would mean a case for local languages at the expense of international languages of wider communication. However, it would be more sensible to go for a twin-pronged approach - guaranteeing access to local languages as well as guaranteeing access to an international language of wider communication. In the South African context, this would mean promoting both African languages as well as English, as Robin Trew and Zubeida Desai motivated in a submission to the ANC's Constitutional Committee in 1992[29]:

> Language rights need to deal both with what Chinua Achebe has called 'the unassailable position of English', and with the fact that African languages are the primary linguistic resource of most South Africans.

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[29] The ANC issued a Draft Bill of Rights in 1991 that was circulated amongst its members and to interested individuals. The Draft Bill included a section on language rights. Robin Trew and Zubeida Desai submitted to the ANC's Constitutional Committee a document which made textual suggestions, and a motivation thereof, on the Language Rights clause.

The real contradiction between these two facts is expressed, in discussions of language policy, as a tension between acknowledging the role of English and promoting the use of African languages. The argument for English is based on the fact that if we wait for English to be displaced as national lingua franca and general gatekeeper, then a lot of people are going to be disempowered for a very long time, no matter how hard we might struggle to achieve that displacement. The argument for the African languages is based on the fact that 74%[30] of South Africans do not know English (Trew & Desai 1992, p. 2-3).

A similar view is echoed in a recent collection on multilingualism edited by Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas. In the *Introduction* they state quite categorically:

It may appear unnecessary to many readers, but at this point we need also to draw attention to a common misconception about MTM[31] education, where its antagonists construct a false dichotomy of either the MT or the international language. ... (T)here are no serious proposals anywhere in the world which suggest that children at school in the 21st century can do without substantive access to a language of power, usually one of the big international languages. ... (T)here is, quite simply, no other choice than to proceed with strong, additive bilingual and multilingual options (Skutnabb-Kangas and Heugh 2010, p. 19).

4.2.2. Theoretical constructs

Given the reasons enumerated above, it therefore makes sense to use, for the purposes of this study, constructs that take this tension into account and acknowledge the need for an international language of wider communication. The constructs I have worked with are:

a) Additive/subtractive bilingualism;

b) The threshold hypothesis;

c) Semilingualism;

d) The developmental interdependence hypothesis;

e) Basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS);

f) Cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).

Although these constructs can be viewed as forming a cluster, each of these is outlined separately. Many prominent educationists and linguists acknowledge and use this cluster of constructs. Baker (1993); Benson (2009); Cummins (1979, 1980, 1984b,

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[30] The figure of 74% is not entirely accurate given the reliability of the data at the time, but the point being made nevertheless stands, that is, that a large number of South Africans do not know English sufficiently well to function in it. A more accurate figure would be 49% (PanSALB 2000).

[31] MTM stands for mother tongue medium.

2000, 2008, 2009); Heugh (1995, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2009); Skutnabb-Kangas (1981, 1988, 2000, 2009); Spolsky (1986); Tollefson and Tsui (2004); Tosi (1989) and Wong Fillmore (1991) are but some of the names in this group. However, in outlining the constructs, I will be drawing mainly from Cummins (1979, 1980, 1984b, 2000, 2008 and 2009) who has written extensively about them. I will be referring to his earlier 'foundational' writings, as well as to more recent adaptations of his earlier work.

a) Additive/subtractive bilingualism

The term *additive bilingualism* is used to refer to a situation where a second language (L2) is acquired without any loss of the first language (L1). It was first coined by Lambert (1975) cited in Cummins (1979, p. 229). The St Lambert's immersion experiments in Canada in the 1960's are a good example of additive bilingualism within a particular context (Cooper 1989). This experimental project arose out of the desire on the part of English-speaking parents in St. Lambert, a middle-class suburb of Montreal, to improve their children's French by having them immersed in French as a primary language of instruction. All children in the experimental programme came from English-speaking homes and were voluntarily enrolled in the project. Cooper provides the following description of the project:

> Two classes of children were followed from kindergarten through elementary school. … These children's education was conducted exclusively in French during kindergarten and the first grade. From grades two through four, instruction was primarily in French, except for two half-hour daily periods of English-language arts. … (T)he achievements of three "control" classes, two from English-speaking homes, following a conventional English-Canadian academic program, and one from French-speaking homes, following a conventional French-Canadian academic program were described as well. One of the English control classes was a comparison first-grade class of students attending the same school in St. Lambert as the experimental classes. … Control and experimental classes were equivalent in social-class, background and in measured academic aptitude (1989, pp. 54-55).

Cooper proceeds to report on the findings:

> The investigators found that at the end of the fourth grade, the experimental classes were doing just as well in home-language skills as their peers in the English control classes. The experimental classes' achievement in mathematics as well as their measured intelligence was as high as that of the control classes. The French-language proficiency of the experimental classes, while distinguishable in some skills from that of the French controls, was still strikingly higher than that of the English controls. All in all, the comparisons with the control

classes demonstrated that the experimental program resulted in excellent command of the second language with no accompanying deficits in home-language skills or in non-language subjects (1989, p. 55).

Lest the above findings be used 'to immerse' Xhosa-speaking children in Khayelitsha in English-medium classrooms, it is wise to heed the cautionary comments by Cooper:

> The children enrolled in the St. Lambert experimental classes differed in two important respects from most ethnolinguistic minority children. First, the experimental children's home language is regarded as valuable by the larger community. There are many opportunities for its practice outside the home and neighbourhood. It is supported by institutions outside the school. Second, the experimental children's parents were middle-class, well-educated persons, mainly life-long residents of the community. Absent were the disadvantages associated with poverty, dislocation, and powerlessness (1989, p. 56).

Given the above description, a working definition of additive bilingualism would be reasonably good competence in two (or more) languages, one of them being the mother tongue or first language (L1). More recently, Cummins indicates:

> The term *additive bilingualism* refers to the form of bilingualism that results when students add a second language to their intellectual tool-kit while continuing to develop conceptually and academically in their home language (2009, p. 26).

Interestingly, the Department of Education in South Africa outlines additive bilingualism as the goal of its language in education policy (Department of Education Language-in education policy document, 1997a). See also the historical outline of language in education policy in Chapter Three of this study. There are, however, different ways in which one can become additively bilingual. These are:

- The use of both mother tongue and the additional language as media of instruction, also described as a dual medium approach. This was the model used in the early bilingual schools for English and Afrikaans pupils in South Africa.
- The use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction and learning the additional language as a subject, a model used in countries such as the Netherlands and Iceland.

- The use of a second language as the medium of instruction whilst learning the mother tongue as a subject, the model used in the St Lambert's immersion experiments in Canada. Such a model works best when the learner's mother tongue is a dominant language, such as English (Cooper 1989, p. 56).

Subtractive bilingualism, on the other hand, refers to a situation where the L1 is gradually (but often, not so gradually) replaced by a more prestigious L2 (Cummins 1979, p. 229). This usually happens in situations where the mother tongue is not a dominant language and has a low status. Pupils from immigrant communities in countries like the USA or the UK would fall into this category as they usually have to learn in their second language, whilst their mother tongue is rarely acknowledged. It is also a situation in which many African language speakers (and their children) in South Africa, and elsewhere, find themselves.

Both additive and subtractive bilingualism are outcomes of particular approaches to language in education, but they are outcomes which are heavily influenced by contextual factors such as the status of the mother tongue, power relations in that society with regard to speakers of different languages, the quality of teaching, and the availability of resources such as reading materials in particular languages. Pluddemann (1997) raises some interesting issues about the use of the terms 'additive' and 'subtractive' bilingualism in South Africa. He argues that in South Africa there has been a tendency to conflate 'several dimensions of additive and subtractive bilingualism' (1997, p. 19) with the result that the terms could refer to the process of becoming bilingual, a form of bilingualism or the actual outcome referred to above (1997, p. 20). For example, there are those like Luckett (1993, pp. 47-8) who argue that there is a link between the outcome and the process, that is, one can become additively bilingual only in a dual medium education system where two languages are used as media of instruction. But, as Pluddemann cautions, 'it is conceivable that even dual-medium or two-way immersion programmes could fail, in under-resourced or overcrowded circumstances (and hence be termed 'subtractive')' (1997, p. 20).

b) The threshold hypothesis

The *threshold hypothesis* was first postulated by Cummins (1976) and Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977). They suggest that research on cognition and bilingualism is best explained by 'the idea of two thresholds' (as cited in Baker 1993, p. 136). The first threshold is a level for a child to reach to avoid the 'negative consequence of bilingualism' – being inadequately competent in either language. The second threshold is a level required to experience the possible positive benefits of bilingualism. The threshold hypothesis assumes that the positive effects of bilingualism will only come into being once a child has attained a certain minimum level (second threshold level) of competence in the L1 and L2. However, the threshold cannot be defined in absolute terms; it is likely to vary according to the child's stage of cognitive development and the academic demands of different stages of schooling. As the curriculum content becomes more symbolic and requires more abstract formal operational thought processes, the child's 'surface' L1 (and/or L2) competence must be translated into deeper levels of competence in the language. The development of adequate literacy skills is obviously crucial in this respect (see Cummins 1979, pp. 229-233). Cummins argues that the findings of several research studies (such as Cummins and Mulcahy 1978, as cited in Cummins 1979, p.232) suggest that maintenance of L1 skills can have cognitive benefits for minority language children (1979, p. 232). It is useful to note that such research findings are evident in situations as varied as the USA and Nigeria. Examples of such research projects and their findings are provided later in this chapter (see Section 4.7).

What is important about the threshold hypothesis is the notion that the benefits of bilingualism are not automatic. Benefits emerge under certain conditions, and in a particular context (Cummins 1979, p. 229). One of the essential ingredients for such conditions is the maintenance and development of the learner's mother tongue. Another ingredient is the development of materials in the learner's mother tongue so that adequate literacy levels are developed. Drawing on international research, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data, Cummins stresses that

active engagement with literacy is fundamental to students' academic success. The PISA data on the reading attainment of 15 year olds in almost 30 countries showed that 'the level of a student's reading engagement is a better predictor of literacy performance than his or her socioeconomic background, indicating that cultivating a student's interest in reading can help overcome home disadvantages' (OECD 2004, p. 8 as cited in Cummins 2009, pp. 30-31). This is particularly significant for South Africa where there are not many written materials in African languages; in particular there is very little creative literature in African languages. Nor are books in English readily available in areas such as Khayelitsha.

c) Semilingualism

The term *semilingualism* has been used to describe what was referred to above as the 'negative consequences of bilingualism' or when a minimum level of competence has not been reached in either the first or the second language, as outlined in the threshold hypothesis. According to Martin-Jones and Romaine, 'Hansegard (1968) originally used the term 'halvsprakighet' to describe what he believed to be the less than complete linguistic skills of Finnish-Swedish bilingual Finns in Tornedal' (1986, p. 26).

The term *semilingualism* re-emerged in the last three decades of research on the language education of ethnic minority children whose parents are of immigrant origin. In Sweden, for instance, it was used with reference to the language skills of the children of Finnish migrant workers (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa 1976, cited in Cummins 1979, p. 231). Researchers in Canada (Cummins 1979, p. 228) also adopted the term. The central concern, according to Cummins is:

> Why does a home-school language switch result in high levels of functional bilingualism and academic achievement in middle class majority language children … yet lead to inadequate command of both first (L1) and second (L2) languages and poor academic achievement in many minority language children? (1979, p. 222)

However, the term proved to be controversial, and Cummins, among others, disassociated himself from the use of it because of its pejorative connotations (Cummins 2000). The notion of semilingualism received criticism on various grounds. Martin-Jones and Romaine, for example have the following to say:

> Terms such as 'semilingualism' are, in our view, misleading because they implicitly foster the belief that there is such a thing as an ideal, fully competent monolingual or bilingual speaker who has a full or complete version of a language (1986, p. 32).

They also argue that languages used by individual speakers are often functionally differentiated, which means that the same competence does not develop in both varieties or codes (1986, p. 33).

Other criticisms, as summed up in Baker (1993) are that the term posits a deficit view of minority language speakers; does not take into account political and socio-economic conditions that might lead to such outcomes (semilingualism) and privileges school-based language requirements (1993, pp. 9-10). For further detail, the reader is referred to Edelsky et al (1983) and Martin-Jones and Romaine (1986). Tosi (1989) provides a balanced perspective of both points of view. He argues that the Canadian researchers such as Cummins:

> have largely operated within the psychometric tradition which attempted to demonstrate the educational value of bilingualism. … Their academic work and research findings were designed to have an educational impact, to modify beliefs, and to reform school policies. Their contenders, instead, assumed a strict sociolinguistic perspective when they argued that no speaker has a perfect, full, or complete version of either or both of the languages (1989, pp. 109-110).

However, he believes that ultimately both groups of researchers were interested in the same objective.

> The former sought a pedagogically oriented theory that would immediately influence school curricula and classroom instruction. The latter sought to create a humanistic impact on people's attitudes and on language status (Tosi 1989, p.110).

In fact, Martin-Jones and Romaine also acknowledge the commitment of researchers such as Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas to support for the bilingualism of minority

language children (1986, p. 35). Cummins, however, decided to (reluctantly) 'bury the construct' (2000, p. 103):

> (T)here is no justification for continued reference to the construct of 'semilingualism'. The construct has no theoretical value and confuses rather than clarifies the issues. However, liberating the field of applied linguistics from the construct of 'semilingualism' does nothing, by itself, to resolve the issue of how should we conceptualize the nature of 'language proficiency' and its relationship to academic achievement in monolingual and bilingual contexts. …
> However, there appears to be relatively little dispute about the 'existence' of the phenomenon to which the term 'semilingualism' was inappropriately applied, namely, limited access to academic/literate registers in both L1 and L2 among some bilingual groups who experienced the effects of long-term coercive relations of power both in schools and society (2000, pp. 104-105).

d) The developmental interdependence hypothesis[32]

This brings us to the *developmental interdependence hypothesis* also espoused by Cummins (1979, p. 233). This hypothesis states that the development of competence in an L2 is partially a function of the type of competence already developed in the L1 at the time when intensive exposure to the L2 begins. In other words, the acquisition of L2 is influenced by the pupil's level of development in the L1. Cummins suggests that differences in the way in which children's L1 has been developed by their linguistic experiences prior to school contribute to the differential outcomes of a home-school language switch in minority and majority language situations. This could be one of the factors accounting for the success of the Canadian immersion programmes such as the St Lambert experiment of the 1960s (Cooper 1989).

Cummins develops this construct further by drawing on research done in the United States (August & Shanahan 2006). He argues that the 'interdependence hypothesis involves much more than just linguistic transfer' (Cummins 2009, p. 25). According to him, the following five types of transfer are possible:

- Transfer of conceptual elements (e.g. understanding the concept of photosynthesis).

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[32] It is also known as the interdependence hypothesis (See Cummins 2009).

- Transfer of metacognitive and metalinguistics strategies (e.g. strategies of visualizing, use of visuals or graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, vocabulary, acquisition strategies, etc.).
- Transfer of pragmatic aspects of language use (willingness to take risks in communication through L2, ability to use paralinguistic features such as gestures to aid communication, etc.).
- Transfer of specific linguistic elements (knowledge of the meaning of *photo* in *photosynthesis*).
- Transfer of phonological awareness – the knowledge that words are composed of distinct sounds (2009, p. 25).

A pedagogical implication of the above would be that teachers would need to explicitly encourage students to transfer knowledge and skills across languages, instead of forbidding them to use their L1s, as is often the case.

e) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)[33]

An important aspect of academic work is the ability to extract information efficiently from the printed text. Subsequent educational progress largely depends upon how well this task is accomplished. Fluent reading skills are therefore quite crucial. As Smith (1971, cited in Cummins 1979, p. 237) points out, such skills require that the reader's knowledge of language is used to make inferences or predictions about information in the text. The child's ability to process language that is decontextualised, or context-reduced as Cummins puts it (1984b:12), normally part of L1 development, is likely to influence his or her ability to read successfully.

Following the work of Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976), Cummins made a distinction between L2 'surface fluency' and more cognitively and academically related aspects of language proficiency (1979). He argued that in assessing pupils' proficiency in a language, both surface fluency, what he calls *basic interpersonal communication skills* or *BICS* (1980, p. 177), and academic language competence, which he calls *cognitive academic language proficiency* or *CALP*, have to be taken into account. Cummins distinguishes between the two by defining CALP as

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[33] More recently, Cummins has tended to use the terms 'conversational' and 'academic language proficiency' (Cummins 2000, p. 75) interchangeably with the original terms *basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS)* and *cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP)*.

those aspects of language proficiency which are closely related to the development of literacy skills in L1 and L2. … BICS in L1 such as accent, oral fluency, and sociolinguistic competence may be independent of CALP for a variety of reasons … (1980, p. 177).

In a school context, this would refer to a level and type of proficiency necessary for carrying out a specific academic task. According to Cummins, it took immigrant pupils who arrived in Canada after the age of six, 5-7 years, on the average, to approach grade norms in academically-related aspects of English proficiency, whilst it took about 2 years to reach similar grade norms in face-to-face communication (1984b, p. 9). In defence of the two terms, BICS and CALP, he states:

> The distinction was formalized in this way in order to facilitate communication to practitioners involved in educating language minority pupils…[T]he failure of educators to take account of this distinction was (and is) actively contributing to the academic failure of language minority pupils. … Similarly, pupils are frequently exited from bilingual classrooms on the assumption that because they have attained apparently fluent English face-to-face communicative skills, they are therefore, "English proficient" and capable of surviving in an all-English classroom (1984b, p. 4).

As Cummins had argued in an earlier paper:

> (I)f the purpose of language proficiency assessment is to assign bilingual children to classes taught through the language in which they are most capable of learning, it is essential that these measures assess CALP. Thus, if natural communication tasks do not assess CALP, their relevance to the educational performance of bilingual children under linguistically different conditions can be questioned (1980, p. 177).

The BICS-CALP distinction, or variants of it, has been taken up by many other writers working in the broad area of language and education (see Benson 2009; Heugh 2006, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009; to name but some of these authors).

More recently, Cummins re-echoes his initial views on this distinction:

> *The language abilities required for academic success are very different from those operating in everyday conversational contexts* (Italics in original). Sustained development of academic language proficiency across the grade levels requires expansion of vocabulary, grammatical and discourse knowledge far beyond what is required for social communication (2009, p. 22).

A crucial aspect of such development is of course achieved through literacy development, ideally in both the mother tongue and the L2.

In a framework developed to take the BICS-CALP distinction further, Cummins proposes that in the context of bilingual education in the United States,[34] 'language proficiency' can be conceptualized along two continuums. He presents this framework diagrammatically as follows:

Figure 4.1 Cummins's Framework on Language Proficiency[35]
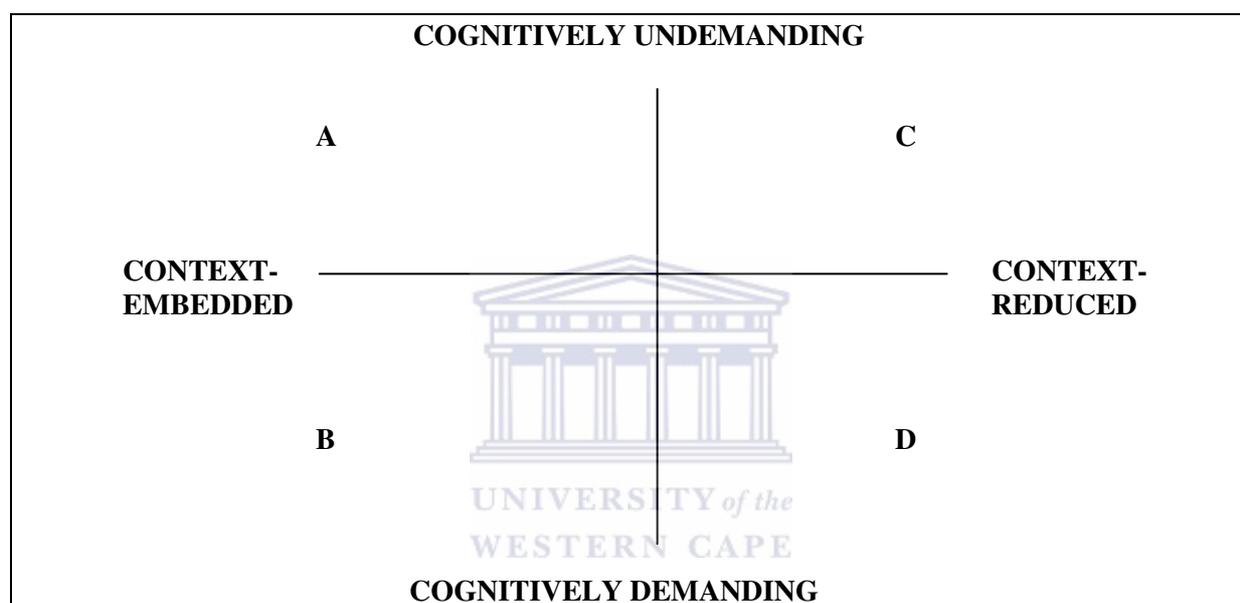
The horizontal continuum relates to the range of contextual support available for expressing or receiving meaning. The extremes of this continuum are described as context-embedded and context-reduced communication, with the former providing opportunities for negotiating meaning whilst the latter relies primarily on linguistic cues. Basically, context-embedded communication arises during inter-personal interaction, whereas in context-reduced communication, the linguistic cues have to be precise to minimize misinterpretation. A face-to-face conversation on a personal matter and writing an academic article would be the two ends of the continuum (Cummins 1984b, pp. 12-13).

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[34] This framework could, however, be applied to any language learning situation.
[35] This figure has been reproduced from Cummins 1984b, p. 12 described as 'Range of contextual support and degree of cognitive involvement in communicative activities'. It is replicated in Cummins 2000, p. 68.

The vertical continuum refers to 'the degree of active cognitive involvement in the task or activity' (1984b, p. 13). The upper end of the continuum relates to communicative tasks and activities that do not require much cognitive involvement, whilst the lower end of the continuum involves activities such as 'writing an essay on a complex theme' (1984b, p. 13). The framework provides the basis for a task analysis of measures of 'language proficiency' and, as such, could provide practical suggestions to practitioners on assessing language proficiency in both L1 and L2[36].

In concrete terms, CALP can therefore relate to the kind of proficiency needed to use a language as a medium of instruction successfully. This is a point taken up by Macdonald (1993) in her writings on African primary education in South Africa. She advocated the need to introduce a subject called English as medium of instruction (EMI), in addition to English as subject, for those pupils who did not have English as their mother tongue but were forced to study through that medium. If the interdependence hypothesis is valid, the L1 and L2 CALP should relate strongly to each other. Cummins does, however, imply that the transfer of CALP abilities from the L1 to the L2 (or vice versa) is not necessarily automatic. Factors such as motivation and attitudes can have a negative effect on such transfer (1980, p. 179).

There are also certain aspects of language proficiency more effectively handled by older pupils than by younger children, or vice versa. The study by Ramsey and Wright in the 1970s of over 1200 immigrant pupils in the Toronto school system who were learning English as a second language (cited in Cummins 1980, p. 180) shows that older L2 pupils, whose L1 CALP is better developed, display a higher level of CALP in the L2 than younger pupils whose L1 CALP is not very developed.

A host of criticisms (for example, Edelsky et al 1983; Martin-Jones and Romaine 1986) were levelled at Cummins for some of the concepts he developed or used in his writings, such as *semilingualism* and the *BICS/CALP* distinction. Cummins (2000)

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[36] In Cummins (2000) examples are provided of practitioners who used this framework (see Chapter Three).

rebuts these criticisms by clarifying misconceptions regarding the constructs of conversational and academic language proficiencies (see Chapters Three and Four in particular in Cummins 2000). He pursues this line of argument in his later work when he distinguishes between 'three very different aspects of proficiency in a language: (a) conversational fluency, (b) discrete language skills and (c) academic language proficiency' (2009, p. 22). According to him, in contexts where minority students have extensive contact with the majority language, as is the case in many immigrant situations such as in the United States or United Kingdom, peer-appropriate conversational fluency in the majority language develops within a year or two of intensive exposure to the language. It takes much longer for pupils who are only exposed to the majority language in the context of schooling (2009, p. 23). As far as academic language proficiency is concerned, he states:

> Numerous research studies have shown that at least five years (and often considerably longer) is required for linguistic minority students to catch up to grade expectations in the majority language. … Because academic language is found primarily in books (including textbooks) and classrooms, it is important to encourage reading as a means of enabling students to gain access to this language… Encouragement of extensive writing, across multiple genres, is also a crucial element in enabling students to gain a sense of control over academic language that is active rather than just passive (Cummins 2009, p. 24).

He argues that if *academic language proficiency or CALP* is accepted as a valid construct, then there are certain implications for instruction. Drawing on Krashen (1993) he states:

> Extensive reading is crucial for academic development since academic language is found primarily in written text. If bilingual students are not reading extensively, they are not getting access to the language of academic success (Cummins 2000, p. 98).

This has serious implications for the pupils at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha, as not many written texts are available to them in their L1 (Xhosa) nor in their L2 (English) – a point I take up later in Chapter Seven.

Despite the criticisms mentioned above, Cummins' writings and theoretical contributions continue to play a part in discussions, research and policy development in the field of bilingual education, as Baker and Hornberger (2001) demonstrate in

their collection of his writings. Dutcher, for example, describes Cummins as 'one of the most influential theorists in the field of first and second language learning' (2004, p. 11).

The linguistic/cognitive constructs outlined above are supported by the elementary pedagogic principle of moving from the familiar to the unfamiliar in educational practice (Gibbons 2002; Pattanayak 1988). It is self-evident that pupils at an elementary stage are likely to learn new concepts and content more effectively through the medium of a language that they know best. As Pattanayak puts it:

> If both the form (i.e. the language) and the content (for instance, scientific concepts) are foreign at the time of the presentation, you make the task impossibly difficult for the child, and defy the pedagogical principle (1988, p. 387).

Since Cummins (and others) developed the theoretical framework discussed above, much research evidence supports his theories and takes them further. As Mohanty states:

> (Researchers) have sought to extend the contours of theories of bilingual education to explore their meaningful applications in complex multilingual societies. ... (A)s MLE[37] moves to different and challengingly complex sociolinguistic contexts, there is a need to extend and contextualise the principles beyond the simpler 'bilingual' applications and to locate optimal models for diverse multilingual contexts (2009, p. 7).

The next section looks at what has come to be known as *mother tongue-based multilingual education* (see Alexander 2005; Alidou et al 2006; Benson 2009; Heugh 2009; Heugh & Skutnabb-Kangas 2010a; Skutnabb-Kangas 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas et al 2009). In an attempt to counter the polarisation of local mother tongues and regional and global languages like Hindi and English, for example, many sociolinguists, applied linguists and educationists have come to prefer the term *mother tongue-based (bi)multilingual education* – a term which acknowledges the inter-

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[37] MLE stands for multilingual education with a strong mother tongue base. See Skutnabb-Kangas et al 2009 and Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010 for more on MLE.

relationship between languages, as well as learners' need to acquire a widely used global language like English.

4.3. Mother tongue-based (bi)multilingual education

In their recent edited collection, Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas define mother tongue-based multilingual education (MLE) as a system:

> based on strong development of the mother tongue (or language of the immediate community best known by the child), with the addition of at least one other language (often two or even three other languages). All will be used for teaching some subjects, in a carefully considered sequence, to achieve high levels of multilingualism and multiliteracy. Bilingual education is a subcategory under multilingual education (2010, p. xii).

This is quite a broad inclusive definition and one wonders whether it is not trying to counter criticisms such as those captured in the edited collection by Prah and Brock-Utne (2009) in which Prah essentially states that Africans are 'among the most multilingual people in the world' (Prah 2009, p. 259) and therefore critiques the notion of an *additive bilingualism* policy in an African context. However, Prah does qualify this 'multilingualism' by saying the following:

> This richness in command over languages is however mainly oral, with little or hardly any bases in literacy. This weakness means that the foundations of multilingualism in Africa are tenuous. It is a multilingualism which suffers from all the debilities of orality as opposed to literacy (2009, p. 259).

It is a point also taken up by Alidou (2004). Drawing on Cummins' theory of linguistic interdependence (1979, 1981), and its successful implementation in North American contexts where both the dominant language and the minority language have long traditions of literacy, Alidou raises some interesting questions about the implications of this theory for multilingual contexts such as those in sub-Saharan Africa. She argues:

> This is not the case with African languages. Most are in the process of acquiring an official orthography and few publications are available in these languages. ... The lack of literate environments in the national languages constitutes a serious barrier, preventing African children from developing adequate literacy skills in the national languages (2004, p. 209).

In other words, the focus in such contexts has to be first on the development of the child's mother tongue or national language. Only when a particular threshold has been reached in the mother tongue will we see the kind of *transfer* Cummins talks about to a dominant language like English or French. This threshold applies both to the development *of* the mother tongue or national language as well as to the child's development *in* the mother tongue. It is for this very reason that I have chosen to focus on mother tongue education rather than bilingual or multilingual education in this study, and hence the title of this chapter.

Alidou (2004, p. 210) calls for a partnership between linguists, writers and local publishing houses to coordinate corpus planning in national languages, encourage writing and the publication and dissemination of texts in these languages. She reminds us that libraries play a crucial role in the development of literacy in resource-poor environments. She argues that 'Literacy cannot develop without a literate environment' (2003, p. 114). There is a high correlation between the availability of books and other educational material and academic success. Alidou cautions that:

> The effectiveness of the use of African languages in education depends not only on the political and economic support of African populations, including educators and policymakers, but also on the availability of a critical mass of experts who can carry out the technical work involved in the development of effective bilingual education (2004, p. 213).

Despite the (technical) constraints outlined above, proponents of mother tongue education (and by extension multilingual education) argue that it is only through use that languages develop and that creative solutions will emerge if there is a commitment to inclusive education, which accommodates linguistic diversity as a challenge rather than a threat.

Given the powerful arguments for mother tongue education, what then are the main obstacles that prevent it from being implemented in schools?

4.4 Obstacles to mother tongue education

Earlier in the chapter I made mention of factors other than educational that influenced the debate. These factors are political, economic, socio-cultural and practical or technical. Cooper argues that often the decision as to which language will be the medium of instruction depends on political considerations:

> Since education is, from the state's point of view, a primary means of social control and, from the individual's or family's point of view, a means for social mobility, it is scarcely surprising that the language of instruction should be an important political issue (1989, p. 112).

I briefly outline some of these obstacles before addressing them one by one. As stated earlier, educational benefits are never the only consideration, and may not even be the most important. As Bull (1964) states:

> What is best for the child psychologically (and pedagogically) may not be what is best for the adult socially, economically or politically and, what is even more significant, what is best for the child and the adult may not be best or even possible for the society (Cited in Fasold 1989, p. 284).

It is interesting to note, as Fasold (1989) observes, that Bull (1964) does not challenge the basic idea that children will learn better if instructed in their mother tongue. However, political, economic, socio-cultural and technical considerations are often used as reasons for not allowing pupils in multilingual contexts to be instructed in their mother tongues, especially if these are not languages of power.

What are some of these considerations that are so powerful that governments throughout the world fall prey to them? In the preface to a book on medium of instruction policies, Tollefson and Tsui pose a series of questions relevant to the debate on mother tongue instruction:

> Which ethnic and linguistic groups will benefit from alternative medium-of-instruction policies? What language policy best fulfills the need for interethnic communication? What policy best maintains a balance between the interests of different ethnic and linguistic groups and thereby ensures an acceptable level of political stability (2004, p. vii)?

They outline that the aim of their book is 'to unravel the complex social and political agendas that underlie decisions on medium-of-instruction policies' (2004, p. viii). The following sections explore these agendas as they apply to South Africa. The objections can broadly be categorised into 'common-sense' assumptions as outlined in the NEPI Report 1992, *Language,* (see also Chapter Three of this study), and more nuanced criticisms of mother tongue education drawing on postmodernism (see Section 4.6).

The NEPI Report, *Language*, outlines 'common-sense' assumptions held by people about language policy issues. Below I briefly outline some of these assumptions and how the NEPI Language Research Group, and others, responded to these. The assumptions are grouped according to the categories outlined above.

- A *political* assumption would be that a multilingual country needs a lingua franca to facilitate the development of national unity.
- An *economic* assumption would be that, as it is costly to use many languages in an official capacity or in the world of business, it makes sense to use the languages that are currently in use in advanced financial, technological and academic fields.
- *Cultural* assumptions revolve around two points: many languages lead to division in society and ethnic rivalry might result if some local languages are given preference over others.
- As far as *technical or practical* assumptions are concerned, technical terms used in the world of science and technology are often not available in local languages. In addition, there are not many materials or textbooks written in local languages and it would take too long to remedy this state of affairs (NEPI 1992, p. 3).

4.5 Responses to obstacles

Each of these common-sense assumptions can, however, be challenged. On the *political* front, one can argue, as Bamgbose (1991, p. 3) does, that in a multilingual context, those citizens who have mastered two (or more) languages are more integrated citizens than those who have only mastered one language, even if that language happens to be the official language. National unity depends on more than language. Linguistic issues can trigger conflict, but there are more fundamental societal divisions such as those connected with structural inequalities (NEPI 1992, p. 4). In fact national unity can be built through acknowledging, not denying, the existence of different languages in a country.

The arguments on the *economic* front assume that it is a question of acquiring either local languages or languages of wider communication. There is no disputing that in a country like South Africa, there is a need for a language like English for people to be able to interact with wider levels of society, particularly the outside world. But it is problematic to make the possibility of such interaction the basis of language in education policies for speakers of African languages who might never get the opportunity to go beyond their local village or township if they are denied meaningful access to education. The link between education and people's aspirations is, however, important. For it is through education that people hope to move out of their existing circumstances. Whether such upward mobility happens or not depends on a variety of factors. But, for the purposes of the arguments raised in this study, it is the role of English acquisition that is under scrutiny. There are many examples in South Africa and Tanzania, to name but two countries, where there is sufficient evidence to indicate that using English as a medium of instruction does not automatically lead to enhanced proficiency in the language, nor to upward mobility (See for example NEPI 1992; Heugh 2002 ; Qorro 2009).

As far as *cultural* arguments go, it needs to be repeated that it is not only language that divides people. There are many other factors such as class inequalities, distribution of

resources, and power relations that lead to rivalry between groups in a country. This is a point taken up by May when he defends Maori-medium education against the accusation that it is separatist and a 'retrenchment in the past' (2004, p. 34). In his view, Maori-medium education is simply making available to the Maori children choices that are taken for granted by majority language speakers.

With regard to the *technical* assumptions, it is important to bear in mind that languages develop through use and the more one uses a language and extends the domains in which it functions, the more likely it is that it will develop. All languages have had to develop new terms for concepts and technological developments that have steadily grown apace. Afrikaans is a good case in point - a language that is now used in education right up to the tertiary level. Developing terminology does not have to be an insuperable problem for any language. Speakers of the language might either decide to coin new terms or to borrow terms from other languages, whichever option best facilitates communication and understanding amongst its speakers. English, for example, has not been averse to borrowing from other languages. As Pattanayak says,

> Terminology represents a concept. If the concept is not clear, then whether the terminology is Hindi, English or Chinese makes no difference. One has learned a label but not understood the concept (1988, p. 386).

In a provocative paper, Ridge (1998) questions whether Afrikaans is a suitable model for the development of African languages. He mentions three reasons why 'any offer of Afrikaans as a general model for the development of African languages will inevitably be misleading' (1998, p. 2). Firstly, the relationship between Afrikaans and Dutch meant that 'Afrikaans could develop fast to meet most of the demands of modern life' as 'Dutch provided the lexis *and the discourses* for higher domain uses *in a modern society*' (1998, p. 2). Secondly, the circumstances under which Afrikaans developed were very different to the current context for language development. As Ridge says, 'The establishment of Afrikaans was a product of single-minded political will, accompanied increasingly by social, political and economic power in the speech community' (1998, p. 3). Under Afrikaner nationalism, the resources of the state were focused on one language. The nine official African languages do not remotely enjoy

such focus. And finally, Afrikaans has been supported throughout its history by Afrikaner capital and Afrikaner social institutions. However, Ridge goes on to argue that there are some striking similarities in the linguistic experiences of speakers of Afrikaans and the African languages. These relate 'to the disorienting experience of urbanisation' (1998, p. 5). Two examples of this he provides are the language situation in schools and issues of identity linked to language.

Ali and Alamin Mazrui (1998, pp. 1-9) raise three possible historical reasons for the lack of promotion and development of indigenous languages in Africa. These are firstly, the pre-eminence of the oral tradition in many languages in sub-Saharan Africa or, as they say:

> The overwhelming majority of sub-Saharan African languages belonged to the oral tradition until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There is no ancient literature outside Ethiopia and the Islamized city states of East and West Africa (1998, p. 5).

Incidentally, the first manuscript printed in Xhosa was as recently as 1824 by the Scottish missionaries, John Bennie and John Ross (Jafta 1971; Mahlasela 1973). According to the Mazruis (1998), it is through the written form that languages are preserved and developed. One can extend this point further - without a *culture of writing*, it will be very difficult to use a particular language in high domains such as government, the courts, and in education (see Cummins' comments in 4.2 above in this regard).

The absence of linguistic nationalism in Africa south of the Sahara is the second reason provided by the Mazruis (1998). They define linguistic nationalism as 'That version of nationalism which is concerned about the value of its own language, seeks to defend it against other languages, and encourages its use and enrichment' (1998, p. 5). They argue that nationalism relating to African languages is relatively weak, compared to countries like India, France and the Middle East. The two exceptions they cite are the Somali and the Afrikaners who both regard language as central to their identity. However, such nationalism always has its price. In all five countries

mentioned above, the nationalism has often led to oppression and the exclusion of other languages.

Linked to the second reason is the third, the question of linguistic diversity and linguistic scale. The Mazruis (1998) argue that the difference between sub-Saharan Africa and India is not linguistic diversity, but rather linguistic scale as many languages in Africa have limited numbers of speakers. This of course has economic implications; for example, it is cheaper to produce books in bulk.

In the current context of globalisation, it can therefore be argued:

> (T)hat it will be difficult to accommodate any diversity in an increasingly shrinking world driven by the imperatives of international capital and World Bank structural adjustment prescriptions (Desai & van der Merwe 1998, p. 246 drawing on Mazrui 1997).

In South Africa, more specifically, pressure to reduce the cost of public education is likely to have a homogenising effect on language in education policies, in a context where resources invested in African languages are minimal (Desai & van der Merwe 1998, p. 246). This is cause for concern. Recently, however, there have been pronouncements on national television by the National Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, about the need for the greater use of African languages in education. The outcome of such pronouncements is not clear at the time of writing.

Tsui and Tollefson point out that:

> Although globalization can bring about more collaboration amongst countries, it also brings about assimilation of the powerless toward the powerful. The effects of assimilation can be very harmful; it not only exacerbates the existing inequalities in power, it may produce nationals who are ambivalent about their own identity; and nations that are stripped of their rich cultural heritage (2004, p. 7).

It is worth mentioning at this point that because South Africans have historically been brought up on a diet of difference, any difference is automatically viewed with suspicion. Hence, one sometimes hears the argument that if white children are being

taught in English, then black children must be taught in English. Ironically, in the South African historical context, English-only policies are thus seen as promoting equality. The fact that the white children are being taught in their mother tongues, whilst the black children are not, is lost sight of.

But the 1996 South African Constitution also promotes diversity. So there is an inevitable tension between the two forces: globalisation and the promotion of diversity. This tension plays itself out in South Africa as the tension between promoting English *or* promoting African languages, as indicated earlier. Unfortunately, this tends to polarise the debate when the real choices are more complex. Parents who opt for English as the medium of instruction from the initial years of schooling cite the benefits of the globalisation phenomenon for choosing English. However, South Africa's official language policy is rooted in a Constitution which honours diversity. The shape of this policy is largely attributable to the dramatic national constitutional negotiations that took place at Kempton Park, defining the post-apartheid state. Here it was a case of the local context - of years of inferior status bestowed on African languages and the desire of Afrikaners to hold on to the official status of their language, Afrikaans - that led to South Africa's becoming the first country in the world to have eleven 'official' languages (De Klerk 2002).

The objections to mother tongue education listed above in Section 4.4 are commonly raised in post-colonial countries by both ruling elites as well as ordinary people. Many, as indicated in this section, (See Section 4.5) have countered them – but not always effectively. In the next section, I examine more nuanced, although somewhat ambivalent, criticisms of mother tongue education which may be more difficult to counter.

4.6. Mother tongue education: some concerns and responses

More recently, a nuanced set of criticisms of mother tongue education, drawing on critical theory and postmodernism, is emerging in recent edited collections and relevant journals (See Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Pennycook 2006; Ricento 2002,

2006b; Tollefson 2006, among others). The main thrust of the criticism is directed at the ideologically-laden nature of the term 'mother tongue' and its corollary 'mother tongue education'. A host of arguments are raised against the use of the term 'mother tongue' (Makoni 1998, 2003; Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Pennycook 2002, 2006; Ricento 2002, 2006). Some of these arguments are as follows:

- It is difficult to determine the mother tongue in bi-and multilingual situations (Ricento 2002).

- In some contexts children can have multiple mother tongues (Ricento 2002).

- The promotion of the mother tongue can further the status quo against the interests of marginalised groups such as in the case of South Africa during apartheid (De Klerk 2002) or Hong Kong and Malaya during British colonial rule (Pennycook 2002). According to De Klerk, 'The legacy of apartheid mother-tongue promotion weighs heavily on attempts to implement multilingual policies' (2002, p. 41). She argues that the challenge for language planners is to 'reframe that legacy and harness it for democratic purposes' (2002, p. 41).

- The use of 'vernaculars' can have negative effects on pupils as these 'vernaculars' have 'colonised images' encoded in them (Makoni 1998).

- Promoting African languages is tantamount to a 'retrospective justification of a bygone era' (Makoni 1998).

- The essentialist status of the mother tongue as the cornerstone of language policy is questioned by Pennycook (2002) and others.

- There is a disjuncture between the 'standard' and the language used in communities with regard to African languages. According to Makoni, 'In the case of African languages, however, the magnitude of the disjuncture is so great that there are potentially adverse effects for mother tongue education' (2003, p. 136). The issue of standardisation of African languages is also taken up by Webb (2004).

A special issue of the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language, Volume 154*[38] edited by Ricento and Wiley (2002) is part of this trend. Articles in this journal reinforce the view that mother tongue education is often seen as problematic, from a political, social and ideological perspective – interestingly not from a pedagogical perspective, which is the focus of my study. In the Introduction to the special issue, Ricento writes:

> The research presented reveals, among other things, just how ideologically encumbered MT [mother tongue – my note] is and why our understanding of contemporary language policies requires a careful analysis of the histories of all ethnolinguistic groups in contact situations, as well as an interpretive framework that resists the tendency to essentialize received categories such as language, ethnicity, identity, and most of all, mother tongue (2002, p. 2).

It is interesting to note that the first two contributors to the special issue, Pennycook and De Klerk, also suggest that proponents of mother tongue education are being essentialist in their approach. 'Essentialism' treats language, identity, ethnicity, culture and related categories as givens rather than as negotiated. A non-essentialist approach would involve, as Pennycook says:

> (the need) … to question the received categories of linguistics and applied linguistics. Such a questioning must include even those most basic concepts such as language and mother tongue. This is not to engage in questioning for its own sake but to engage with the problem that all such terms are historical constructs and carry some of the weight of that historical baggage with them (2002, p. 25).

He proceeds to qualify what he has been problematising by saying that:

> The argument that mother-tongue education may be used as part of social control does not mean we should reject the notion, but it raises concerns … The issues I have been raising in this article do not suggest that we should abandon the notion of the mother tongue, but rather that we should understand it as a strategically essentialist (cf. Spivak 1993) argument … The strategic use of essentialism – whether we are claiming gendered, sexual, cultural, or linguistic identity – is useful for mobilization and legislation, but it may also reproduce those fixed categories of identity that many wish simultaneously to avoid (Pennycook 2002, p. 24).

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[38] Ricento (2002, p. 9) states in his Introduction that all the papers in this special issue were first presented at a colloquium titled "Revisiting the mother tongue question in language policy, planning and politics" at the American Association for Applied Linguistics annual convention in March 2000 in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. The colloquium was organised and chaired by Terence Wiley.

Although Pennycook sees some strategic merit in essentialist approaches to mother tongue education, he also cautions that such approaches could reproduce 'fixed categories of identity'. He provocatively questions the reification of the mother tongue:

> Whether from the point of view of linguists' butterfly-collecting approach to language preservation, liberal concerns with the maintenance of diversity, or arguments in favour of individual and community rights, the mother tongue, rather like the Virgin Mary, remains something in whose direction the congregation of language educators should always genuflect (Pennycook 2002, p. 11).

This is echoed by Makoni who is critical of the African 'vernaculars' because of 'the colonised images encoded' in them:

> The battle for independence is simply not won by opting for vernaculars over English as normally articulated in the decolonisation literature … From UNESCO to the multicultural lobby the potential negative effects of learning through vernaculars is not addressed as it is assumed that it is cognitively and emotionally advantageous that a child learns through such a medium, overlooking as it does the colonized images encoded in such versions of African vernaculars (Makoni 1998, pp. 162-163).

All languages develop dynamically through use, and African languages are no exception. During the height of the struggles against apartheid, African language speakers coined many new words and phrases to capture what was happening in the country. Granted that the difference between Xhosa and Zulu might have been accentuated by missionaries, but today these two varieties exist and are spoken by over 40% of people in South Africa. What does it mean to 'disinvent' these languages if they exist as part of the repertoires of particular speech communities? Does it mean that one ignores the existence of the particular variety? Questioning the mother tongue argument might render one politically suspect in some circles (Pennycook 2002, p. 12) but equally, in other circles, it has become fashionable for Africans to question mother tongue education (see Makoni 1998, pp. 162-163). The 'invention' of languages such as Xhosa or Zulu is conceded, but after a while inventions are usually accepted in societies. Is the 'invention' of Xhosa and Zulu to remain an invention and therefore to be treated with suspicion? Would the same apply to English? Makoni and Pennycook (2007) in their edited collection *Disinventing and reconstituting languages* indicate that their 'intention is to find ways of rethinking

language in the contemporary world ... in order to provide alternative ways forward' (2007, p. 3).

It is important to note that proponents of mother tongue education do not argue for the sole use of the mother tongue. As I mentioned earlier, it is not very useful polarizing the role of African languages versus English or another language of wider communication. Both are useful and needed.

How these languages of wider communication are learnt and taught has to be determined by the context in which they operate. For example, in Tanzania where more than 90% of the population is proficient in Swahili, it makes sense to use that language as the medium of instruction throughout school education, whilst acknowledging the role of English. In such a context English can be learnt as a subject. But then it needs to be taught well by people who are proficient in the language (Qorro 2009). Pupils must gain access, at the appropriate time, to reading materials in English. As Krashen puts it:
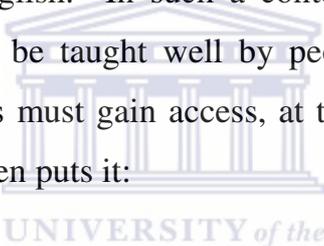
> Free reading in the second language makes a strong contribution to advanced second-language development, for the development of "academic" language. Pleasure reading appears to be the bridge leading to academic language (2002, p. 148).

Choosing to teach English as a subject throughout the school education system, whilst using Swahili as the medium of instruction, does not mean that Tanzania is guilty of a binary approach. Rather, it is choosing a language policy that will both facilitate access to knowledge and ensure that Tanzanian children gain access to a language of wider communication. In the present context, with all its resource constraints, using English as a medium simply is not working and will not work whilst the context remains the same (see Qorro 2009).

In the section that follows, I examine three significant studies which extend the role of the mother tongue in education and illustrate that using the learners' mother tongue or first language does not necessarily impede the acquisition of a second language like English. On the contrary, it enhances learners' academic development in content

subjects such as Mathematics whilst leading to improved proficiency in both mother tongue and English in very different contexts. All three studies corroborate the hypotheses formulated by Cummins (1979, 1980, 1984b, 2000, 2008) discussed in Section 4.2 above.

4.7 Three case studies on extending the mother tongue in education

In this section, I want to draw on three significant studies which illustrate the important role that pupils' first languages play in accessing knowledge as well as facilitating the access of a second language. In a global era where it is important to communicate widely, the importance of additional languages cannot be overstressed. The reader will note that all three of these studies were concerned both with pupils' cognitive development through extending the use of their mother tongue, and with pupils' acquisition of an additional language. The approach adopted was not a choice of either mother tongue or additional language. It gave due weight to both mother tongue and additional language. The researchers in these cases are all advocates of mother tongue education who are fully aware of the dangers of ghettoising pupils by not exposing them to additional languages. At the same time they are aware that in most contexts local languages are ignored at great cost to pupils' cognitive development, as well as to their effective participation in the wider society.

The three significant studies are the work done with Navajo speakers at Rock Point, Arizona, a Navajo Reservation in the USA (see Holm & Holm 1990; McCarty 2010); the Six Year primary Project conducted with Yoruba speakers in Nigeria (see Fafunwa 1978; Bamgbose 2000); and a study sponsored during the Reagan administration by the Department of Education in the United States of America called: *A longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children* (Ramirez et al 1991). All show similar results.

4.7.1 The Navajo Project at Rock Point

This project, reported by Holm and Holm (1990) retrospectively, is particularly interesting for South Africa as it is a very good example of the benefit of co-operating with local communities. It is about:

> a Navajo community and school that went back to parental involvement and community control, that went back to the native language and to the community and Reservation … [for] more effective education for their children (Holm & Holm 1990, p. 170).

In the 1960s, English was essentially a foreign language in the Rock Point community. English was not needed or used by children, except for direct communication with the handful of non-Navajos in the community. And few moved out of the community. Despite this background, educators did not seem to have really tried to teach children to read and write in Navajo. A formal bilingual education programme was started at Rock Point Navajo Community School for grades kindergarten to 12 in the early 1970s. Agnes Holm and Wayne Holm[39] were the co-founders of this programme. The curriculum took the following form:

Kindergarten: Two-thirds of the class time was in Navajo, one third in English.

Grades 1-2: Half the class time was in Navajo, half in English.
Initial literacy was in Navajo, followed by English literacy in Grade 2.

Grades 3-6: One third of the class time which included literature, science and social studies was in Navajo. Math was taught in both languages, but concepts were always introduced first in Navajo, then in English.

Junior High School: One fifth of the class time, which included Science, was in

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[39] The following useful background to the couple is provided in Holm and Holm:

> Agnes Dodge Holm comes from a prominent Navajo family; she was raised in the Navajo community of Crystal on the Reservation. Wayne Holm, an Anglo, came to the Reservation at age 21. Married in 1955, they went to Rock Point in 1960. (After a period of graduate studies) they continued to work at Rock Point until the mid-1980s. (Later) Agnes became the Navajo Language Specialist. Wayne was the first Director … (1990, p. 170).

Navajo.

Senior High School: Just over a tenth of the class time was in Navajo. This
included Social Studies. The latter consisted of Navajo
history, economic development and government

(Holm and Holm 1990, pp. 177-178).

The programme drew on research from well-implemented bilingual-bicultural programmes across the world. As McCarty states:

> The design of the programme was called 'coordinate bilingual instruction', with separate but complementary time devoted to learning in each language. Navajo-language teachers (NLTs) taught and interacted entirely in Navajo, and English-language teachers (ELTs) taught and interacted only in English. … Students learned to read first in Navajo, then English (2010, p. 89).

In developing their programme, the Rock Point community were mindful of many factors. First was the importance of maintaining Navajo as a language both for cultural purposes as well as pedagogical ones. Second was the need for Navajo children to be exposed to and acquire English as a language. The community was cognisant of the important role that English played in the wider society and hence did not want to deprive their children of this opportunity. Third was to inculcate a pride in 'Navajo-ness' and 'to see themselves as capable of succeeding because of, not despite, that Navajo-ness' (Holm and Holm 1990, p. 184). In this regard, both NLTs and ELTs were to plan, instruct and evaluate as teachers so that the equality of the two languages and the teachers was ensured. Fourth, the Rock Point data showed, 'contrary to the conventional wisdom, that being rural and speaking Navajo need not lead to doing poorly in school' (Holm and Holm 1990, p. 184).

As McCarty says,

> Longitudinal data from Rock Point show that students not only outperformed comparable Navajo students in English-only programmes, they surpassed their own previous annual growth rates and those of comparison-group students in BIA[40] schools – and they did so by a greater margin each year' (2010, p. 90, drawing on Holm and Holm 1990).

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[40] Bureau of Indian Affairs

Navajo students also had the benefit of becoming bilingual and biliterate in both Navajo and English.

However, it needs to be borne in mind that the programme described above evolved over more than twenty-five years. It was only in the early 1980s that the first twelfth grade class graduated from the school. A sobering thought indeed, especially for those who seek instant solutions to complex problems. It must also be remembered that this programme provided at least two teachers per class, one Navajo speaking and the other English speaking, in the early grades so that pupils had quality input in both languages. For one of the goals of the programme was to ensure the equality of the two languages and the teachers (Holm & Holm 1990, pp. 176-7). It is also worth noting that the amount of input in the pupils' primary language, Navajo, decreased in correlation with their proficiency in that language and their readiness to be exposed to more material in English. This is in keeping with the tenets of the threshold hypothesis which states that learners in contexts such as the Rock Point one need to have a sufficient level of proficiency in the mother tongue before being able to benefit from exposure to a second language and the developmental interdependence hypothesis which maintains that acquisition of L2 is linked to and influenced by the level of proficiency in the L1 (Cummins 1979). These hypotheses are outlined in Section 4.2 above.

A further feature of the Navajo programme that bears mentioning is the important role played by the parents and the community in providing support for its implementation. Parents who were drawn into the programme had positive attitudes towards maintaining their children's home language in their school career. This programme succeeded because it approached the medium of instruction issue from a holistic and systemic perspective – in other words it acknowledged that 'buy-in' had to be gained from all sectors of the community: the teachers, the students, the parents and the Board (which was akin to a school governing body).

In the next section, I look at an experimental project conducted in the Ife Province in Nigeria in the 1970s which extended the use of Yoruba as a medium of instruction to six years as opposed to the usual three years.

4.7.2 The Six Year Primary Project (SYPP)

Prior to the 1970s, most Nigerian children did not go beyond primary school. Despite its being terminal, primary schooling left much to be desired. Afolayan describes the situation at the time as quite dismal:

> The average Primary Six pupil leaves school without the ability to recognize the Nigerian flag, any awareness of the nature of his country politically, economically or socially, tools for continuous self-education through permanent literacy, or hope for any bright future in the community. He is completely alienated from his agricultural background and generally can only see himself as a failure … (1976, p. 115).

It is in such a context that the Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) was conceptualized. The SYPP was an experiment implemented on a small scale in the Ife Province in Southern Nigeria starting in 1970. The project was primarily concerned with the question of the most appropriate language policy for efficient primary education, to address the deficiencies described by Afolayan above. There were five groups involved in the study. These included both urban and rural pupils. As stated elsewhere:

> Two groups were taught in Yoruba, their L1, for six years, before changing to English as the medium of instruction in secondary school. One of these two groups had a specialist English teacher for English as a subject. The other three groups followed the usual Nigerian model and had L1 medium of instruction until the end of their third year after which they switched to English as a medium of instruction. English was taught to all the groups as a subject, as was Yoruba (NEPI 1992, p. 51).

The SYPP curriculum consisted of English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and Yoruba. The main differences between the old experimental (OE) and the old control (OC) classes were in the medium of instruction in the last three years of primary education as well as in the use of a specialist teacher of English for one of the experimental classes. As the project was extended to ten more schools, additional

variables were brought in, such as the abandonment of specialist teachers of English for the new experimental (NE) classes, the introduction of a new curriculum for both NE and new control (NC) groups, and the introduction of new materials for ELT (Bamgbose 2000, p. 91). Bamgbose (2000, p. 92) provides a useful table to distinguish between the different groups involved in the project:

Table 4.3 Different groups in the SYPP

Group	Medium	Curriculum	English text	English teacher
OE	Yoruba (1-6)	New	New	Specialist
OC	Yoruba (1-3) English (4-6)	New	New	Non-specialist
NE	Yoruba (1-6)	New	New	Non-specialist
NC	Yoruba (1-3) English (4-6)	New	Old	Non-specialist
Traditional Control (TC)	Youruba (1-3) English (4-6)	Old	Old	Non-specialist

Bamgbose outlines the achievements of the experimental classes as follows:

> Between 1976 and 1978[41], the SYPP was subjected to detailed systematic evaluation covering the various subject areas, and intelligence tests as well as psychological/sociometric tests of affective outcomes were also administered. The results show consistently that the best group in all subjects is the Original Experimental (OE) Group followed closely by the New Experimental (NE) Group. The worst group in all cases is the Traditional Control (TC) Group. Hence the difference in medium of instruction is shown to be significant. … Longitudinal follow-up studies also reveal that most of the products of the experimental classes had no difficulty in gaining admission into secondary schools. (And very significantly – my comment) In the planning of the Project, it was envisaged that children in the experimental classes would need an extra year of an enrichment course in English in which concepts learnt in Yoruba would be converted into English; but such was the performance of the children in English that the idea of a conversion course was abandoned long before the children reached the end of the primary school programme. One of the factors responsible for the children's good mastery of English is the use of a specialist teacher of the language and I think that it is a pity that this aspect of the experiment was later abandoned (2000, pp. 92-93).

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[41] Ironically, this was a period of revolt and intense repression in apartheid South Africa triggered by Afrikaans being forced as a medium of instruction on African learners. See Chapter Three of this study for more details on the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

Interestingly, those pupils for whom the change to English medium had been delayed scored better in subjects such as Science, Mathematics and English when they reached their seventh year, which was an English medium environment. In addition, there were many other positive spin-off effects in the project, which was a first step in West Africa. These were:

- the development of the Yoruba language;
- materials development in both Yoruba and English;
- teacher development and
- curriculum development.

As was to be expected, the use of Yoruba as the medium of primary education led to the *development of the language*, particularly at the lexical level. According to Afolayan (1976), there are usually three methods employed by any language to expand its lexical inventory. These are: the creation of new items through the exploitation of the language's morphemic and phonemic resources (as in the creation of the word "iropo" for addition as a mathematical procedure); a change in the totality of the referential coverage of an existing item (as in the use of "idi" to refer to place or position); and the borrowing of items from other languages (such as coining the word "matimatiki" for mathematics). The development of the Yoruba language also involved work on Yoruba orthography and technical or scientific terminology, driven by the needs of this project.

During the life of the project *new materials had to be developed in Yoruba*, particularly in Mathematics and Science. These also had to be produced in English so that the control and the experimental groups had equivalent materials. *Teachers had to be trained* to teach through the medium of Yoruba because up until the 1970s they had been trained in English to teach in English. In fact the teachers were often better qualified to teach in English than in Yoruba, particularly when it came to methodological issues. Inevitably, such activities as materials development and teacher development led to *curriculum development*.

As I stated at the outset of this section, the main objective of the project was to improve the effectiveness of primary education, which was terminal for the majority of pupils. The SYPP was an important project in the history of applied linguistics in Africa as it showed the benefits of extending the use of an African language systematically beyond the initial three years. The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) Project, funded by the Norwegian Programme for Research, Development and Education (NUFU), which I discuss in Section 4.8, is modelled on the SYPP.

The next section looks at a longitudinal study that provides the best evidence (together with the subsequent study by Thomas and Collier 2002, reported on in Section 4.8 below) that late-exit (also known as maintenance or developmental) bilingual education programmes are superior to most early-exit or submersion programmes in terms of predicting student success both academically and in terms of bilingualism and biliteracy in English and a first language.

4.7.3 Ramirez, Yuen and Ramey Longitudinal Study

The third study, a longitudinal study sponsored by the Department of Education in the United States of America was an 8-year project that began in 1983-4 and ended in 1990-1. It is reported in Ramirez et al (1991). The main objective of the study was to compare the effectiveness of three programmes in facilitating the acquisition of English language skills in primary school pupils from a language minority background (or as they are often referred to, limited-English-proficient [LEP] pupils) so that they could succeed in an English-only mainstream class. The three programmes were structured English immersion, early-exit, and late-exit transitional bilingual education programmes for 'language-minority children.' The main difference between these three programmes was the amount of English used for instruction and the length of time pupils participated in each programme. Drawing on Ramirez et al (1991), I discuss the main features and findings of the longitudinal study:

a) Description of longitudinal study

Structured immersion strategy programme

All instruction was in English. The teachers had specialized training in meeting the needs of LEP pupils in the form of a bilingual education credential or English as a second language (ESL) credential. In addition, they had strong receptive skills in Spanish, the pupils' primary language. English was taught through the content areas. However, there was a strong language development component in each such content lesson. The use of the child's primary language was limited primarily to clarify English instruction. Beginning in the kindergarten, a LEP pupil would be expected to be mainstreamed within two to three years.

Early-exit programme

There was some initial instruction in the child's primary language, about thirty to sixty minutes per day. This was usually limited to the introduction of initial reading skills. All other instruction was in English, with the child's primary language used only as a support, for clarification. However, instruction in the primary language was quickly phased out over the next two years so that by grade two, virtually all instruction was in English. Pupils in this programme were expected to be mainstreamed by the end of the first or second grade, similar to the structured immersion programme. The teachers in this programme too had a bilingual education credential. This type of programme was the kind typically funded through the Bilingual Education Act.

Late-exit programme

In contrast, pupils in this programme received a minimum of forty percent of their total instructional time in Spanish (Spanish language arts, reading, and other content areas such as mathematics, social studies, and/or science). Pupils remained in this programme through the sixth grade, regardless of whether they were considered 'fluent-English-proficient FEP') or not. Again, the teachers had a bilingual education credential. In addition, teachers working in this programme tended largely to come

from a similar background as their pupils and were sufficiently fluent in Spanish to teach in it.

b) Findings of the longitudinal study

Two phases were involved in the data analysis of this study. The first addressed issues on research design such as comparability of background characteristics across the three programmes. The second phase addressed issues of programme effectiveness. With minor exceptions, schools in the three programmes were comparable as far as background characteristics were concerned (Ramirez et al 1991).

As far as programme effectiveness was concerned, after four years in their respective programmes, LEP pupils in immersion strategy and early-exit programmes demonstrated comparable skills in mathematics, language, and reading when tested in English. As the school districts that chose to implement the late-exit programmes did not provide either an immersion strategy or an early-exit programme, the three late-exit programmes are compared with one another as two of them (Site D & E) used approximately forty per cent of Spanish during grades five and six, whilst the one district (Site G) used more than ninety per cent English in the last two grades. By the end of the sixth grade, sites D and E had significantly higher mathematics skills than pupils in site G who were abruptly transitioned into English instruction. As far as English language reading skills were concerned, pupils at site D who also had the highest skills in English language and reading in the first grade, completed the sixth grade with the highest scores. In the two areas of English language and reading, Sites E and G ended the sixth grade with the same skills, despite Site E exposing learners to less English. Interestingly, pupils in all types of programmes increased their skills in English language and reading from kindergarten to third grade as fast, or faster, than the norming population. The same, however, did not apply to mathematics in which case pupils in these alternative programmes experienced a growth rate slower than the norming population. The picture changes, however, when one takes a longer look, particularly at sites D and E in the late-exit group, at the picture from grade 1 to 6. Such a picture shows that both sites developed either as fast, if not faster, than the

norming population in their English language and reading skills, as well as their mathematics skills.

In conclusion, as the executive summary of the longitudinal study states:

> These findings suggest that providing LEP pupils with substantial amounts of instruction in their primary language does not impede their acquisition of English language skills, but that it is as effective as being provided with large amounts of English. Of equal importance is the finding that pupils who are provided with substantial amounts of primary language instruction are also able to learn and improve their skills in other content areas as fast as or faster than the norming population, in contrast to pupils who are transitioned quickly into English-only instruction (Ramirez 1991, p. 36).

Two notable features of the late-exit programme were that, firstly, teachers in such a programme assigned and corrected more homework than was done in either of the other two programmes. Secondly, there was greater parental involvement in the late-exit programme. As Ramirez et al put it:

> The higher proportion of late-exit parents monitoring and ensuring that their children complete their homework might be facilitated by the provision of homework in Spanish and/or the encouragement of use of Spanish for instruction by school personnel (1991, p. 361).

A similar observation was made in the SYPP – see earlier section. This is an important argument in favour of mother tongue education and is often overlooked when discussing the merits or demerits of mother tongue education.

The three case studies reported on above all involved extending the use of the learners' mother tongues (Navajo, Yoruba and Spanish) systematically as media of instruction, in conjunction with English. These case studies are important for South Africa for various reasons. Firstly, the tension between promoting a language of wider communication like English and local languages like Xhosa is a tension present in all the studies reviewed above. The case studies provide clear evidence of learners' competence in English not suffering as a result of extending the use of local languages as media of instruction. Secondly, the importance of involving local communities in supporting their children's education is a crucial factor in many of the case studies, as

it is in South Africa. Such parental and community support is more possible if local languages are used in education. Thirdly, the case studies emphasise the importance of teacher training in realising the use of local languages as media of instruction. Fourthly, in some of the case studies (Navajo study and SYPP), the development of terminology in local languages was necessary, a feature that is present in the South African scenario as well (see Nomlomo 2008; Mbekwa 2008). Fifthly, materials had to be developed in local languages for these languages to be used as academic languages. And finally, negative attitudes towards local languages as media of instruction had to be consciously counteracted, as they are in South Africa.

Lest the reader complain that these studies were conducted some decades ago and hence may be outdated, I want to briefly take stock of recent ongoing developments in what has been referred to as mother tongue-based (bi)multilingual education to indicate that the same principles and hypotheses are equally applicable today.

4.8 Taking stock of recent developments in the field of mother tongue education

Despite the critiques of mother tongue and mother tongue education raised above, communities all over the world continue to experiment with the use of the mother tongue in education. 'Experiment' may be the operative word though, as very seldom are these 'experiments' scaled up to serve the greater population. There are of course exceptions, such as the work done in Ethiopia to promote local languages, although, even in this case, moves to reverse or halt the policy are beginning to emerge (see Benson et al 2010; Heugh et al 2007; and Heugh et al 2010 for more detail on Ethiopia).

In this section I draw on certain key texts (Alidou et al 2006; Brock-Utne and Skattum 2009; Brock-Utne at al 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010; Desai et al 2010; Dutcher 2004; Heugh et al, 2007; Heugh and Skutnabb-Kangas 2010a; Nomlomo 2009; Qorro et al 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas et al 2009; Thomas and Collier 2002; Tollefson and Tsui 2004) which describe and examine the use of the mother tongue in education in

various contexts across the globe. Despite the challenges referred to above, the communities discussed in these texts continue to extend the use of the mother tongue or familiar local language as a medium of education. In the section that follows I draw mainly on developments in sub-Saharan Africa, but also refer to other multilingual contexts such as the United States of America where there are many 'minority' language communities. The first section focuses on the stock-taking exercise on mother tongue and bilingual education commissioned by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA).

4.8.1 *The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) stock-taking exercise on mother tongue and bilingual education in sub-Saharan Africa (Alidou et al 2006)*

In 2005 ADEA commissioned a stock-taking research exercise on the 'state-of-the-art on mother tongue and bilingual education in formal and non-formal education in sub-Saharan Africa' (Alidou et al 2006, p. 7). The UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) were requested to organise and coordinate the study with ADEA. As stated in the Executive Summary of the Report, the research had three objectives. These were:

1. To document and analyze research and experiences of African countries with regard to the use of African languages as the medium of instruction and the adaptation of curricula to local context and culture;
2. To explore the state of the art of mother tongue and bilingual education with emphasis on its situation in Africa South of the Sahara;
3. To facilitate policy dialogue on the issues of the use of African languages and bilingual education (Alidou et al 2006, p. 7).

The six researchers tasked with this exercise had to give priority to studies which were supported by sound theoretical and empirical evidence and which were, preferably, evaluated independently. Learner achievement was a special focus of attention. Altogether programmes in 25 countries were considered (Alidou et al 2006, p. 9). The researchers argue that:

> (U)sing African languages as media of instruction for at least six years and implementing multilingual language models in schools will not only increase considerably the social returns of investments in education, but will additionally boost the social and economic development of African nations and contribute to the improvement of the continent to knowledge creation and scientific development (Alidou et al 2006, p. 7).

In his chapter, Wolff argues that to achieve the above, three major obstacles have to be overcome. These are:

1. The uninformed attitude towards language in education by key stakeholders in Africa;
2. Western experts' negative attitudes regarding African languages; and
3. The fact that African universities are not fulfilling the leadership role they should have in promoting and developing mother tongue education (2006, p. 11).

The last obstacle in particular is one which can be addressed, as is evident from translation of learner support materials in Science, Mathematics and Biology into Xhosa and Kiswahili as part of the LOITASA Project.

In her chapter on Language Education Models, Heugh (2006) looks at different language education models and the extent to which they use African languages as media of instruction. Her conclusion is that despite the considerable efforts to develop and support the use of local languages in Africa, they do not go far enough. Most of the models tend to exit too early to the ex-colonial language. Drawing on international and African research such as Thomas and Collier (2002) and Bamgbose (2000), she argues that for the benefits of mother tongue education to be lasting, mother tongues should be used as media for a minimum of six years, but preferably longer. Alidou and Brock-Utne (2006) in their first chapter draw attention to the inadequacy of the existing teacher training programmes which do not equip teachers to teach through the mother tongue or to teach bilingually. They also refer to the lack of appropriate educational materials in both mother tongues as well as second languages.

The Executive Summary of the ADEA Report concludes as follows:

> There are ... numerous mother tongue literacy programs, transcription of oral languages, community-based and non-government based organisations, donor and development agencies, specialised university departments. Each of these initiatives needs to be encouraged in their

respective settings and supported further. However their potential cannot be realised if they are subsumed into education systems which discourage the use of African languages after the initial years of early literacy or short-term mother tongue programs. Every effort should be directed towards building on these existing resources (Alidou et al 2006, p. 25).

This conclusion captures the problem in many multilingual contexts – how to get governments to make a long-term investment in local indigenous languages so that pupils can access knowledge in familiar languages and be enabled to acquire additional languages which provide wider access, such as English. In the next section I look at one African country's attempts to use local languages as media of instruction in primary school (see Benson et al, 2010; Heugh et al 2007; Heugh et al 2010 for more detail on the Ethiopian model).

4.8.2 Study on medium of instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia

In 1994 Ethiopia adopted a national Education and Training Policy (Ministry of Education/MoE 1994 cited in Heugh et al 2010) which focussed on extending the use of the mother tongue, particularly as a medium of instruction, for the full eight years of primary schooling. The policy also included the teaching of Amharic, the working language of government as well as a national language, as a subject to speakers of other languages and, from grade 1, the teaching of English as a subject before it becomes the medium of instruction for secondary and higher education (Benson et al 2010; Heugh et al 2007[42]; Heugh et al 2010).

As part of a bigger review of its education policy, the Ministry of Education commissioned a study on the medium of instruction in primary education in Ethiopia. The consultants appointed were two international researchers, Dr Kathleen Heugh (Team leader) and Dr Carol Benson and two national researchers, Dr Berhanu Bogale and Mr Mekonnen Alemu Gebre Yohannes (Heugh et al 2007). The team were commissioned:

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[42] The 2007 report focuses on data collected in 2006 as part of the commissioned contract. The 2010 references contain more updated information as well as the results of the 2008 systemic assessments.

to explore the existing models and practices of language acquisition and learning in Ethiopia since adoption of the mother tongue medium (MTM) policy, and to determine which practices have been most effective, in order to make evidence-based recommendations for language education policy and practice (Benson et al 2010, p. 41).

Fieldwork was conducted in eight of the nine regions along with the city administration of Addis Ababa to collect a range of data. The team indicate that:

(T)he decentralised nature of educational decision-making in Ethiopia has made it possible for the semi-autonomous regional states to choose appropriate languages and develop the materials needed to implement national policy, albeit to varying degrees and with greater challenges in more linguistically diverse regions. This fact of uneven implementation makes Ethiopia something of a microcosm of the different models of bi-and multilingual education currently on offer throughout the world. This study provides some clear evidence that particular learning outcomes are associated with the degree to which mother tongues are developed (Benson et al 2010, pp. 41-42).

The different language models are captured in a useful table in Heugh et al, reproduced below:
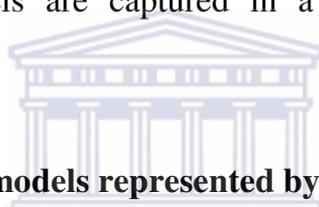
Table 4.4   Language models represented by region in Ethiopia

Region	Years of mother tongue medium	Grade in which there is a switch to English medium
Oromiya* Tigray Somali Amhara	8	9
Amhara (since 2006) Harari	6 for maths and science; 8 for other subjects	7 for maths and science; 9 for other subjects
Addis Ababa Dire Dawa** SNNPR[43] (until 2004)	6	7
SNNPR (since 2005/6)	4	5
Afar Benishangul Gumuz	0 (but 6 years – L2 Amharic)	7

(Source: Heugh et al 2010, p. 290).

*Afan Oromo is also offered in Oromifa-speaking streams in other regions where there are substantial numbers of speakers, e.g. Amhara region.
** One subject, civics is taught in MT for 8 years.

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[43] Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region.

Heugh et al highlight that, despite many challenges:

> the implementation of a bilingual education policy for Amharic speakers, and trilingual policy for most school pupils in Ethiopia, … could be seen as an exceptional success over the ten to twelve year period between 1994-2005/6 … It has been possible, in fact, to develop MTM education in 23 Ethiopian languages and engage in language development work in at least 34 languages within a decade, partially enabled by language development activities decentralised to the level of each regional administration (2010, p. 288).

Given this remarkable progress over such a short period of time, what does this policy reveal in terms of student performance in system-wide assessment? Once again, I refer to a table in Heugh et al (2010) which I reproduce below:

Table 4.5: Weighted mean achievement scores by mother tongue vs. English medium of instruction for three national assessments of grade 8 students in Ethiopia

Year of assessment	MOI	N	English	Maths	Biology	Chem	Physics	Average %
2000	MTs	1570	37.41	42.73	57.85	45.41		45.85
	Eng	3529	39.07	36.20	42.40	38.00		38.92
2004	MTs	3744	40.65	42.60	47.30	43.19	39.62	42.67
	Eng	4265	41.43	39.43	35.93	37.28	31.53	37.12
2008	MTs	3406	38.30	34.30	44.00	37.30	34.60	37.70
	Eng	7001	38.70	34.00	34.90	33.20	30.70	34.30

Adapted from MoE/NOE 2001, MoE/NOE 2004, GEQAEA 2008 by Heugh et al (2010)

The research team provide a cautionary note with regard to the scores above:

> Before going into the comparisons, it should be noted that the average scores are generally low across the curriculum. While this might be surprising to some readers, it is unfortunately not an unusual phenomenon in African countries and can be attributed to poverty, poor educational resources, often content-heavy and inappropriate curriculum. … (T)he scores are within the range of other system-wide studies in Africa, even those found in wealthier countries in Africa such as South Africa. … (Heugh et al 2010, p. 292).

As I indicate below, when referring to the LOITASA Project, mother tongue (medium) education is a necessary but not sufficient condition to improve the quality of education in poor contexts such as the ones in Ethiopia and the site of this particular study, Khayelitsha. As can be seen from the above table, no region achieved an

average of 50% which would be a minimal pass rate. The closest regions in Ethiopia came to 50% were those which taught in MTM in Grade 8 – 45.85%. Nevertheless, as Heugh et al (2010) indicate, those taught in their mother tongue (or a national language such as Amharic) achieved higher scores in all subjects except English. Even in the latter case, the difference between the two scores was not very high (see Heugh et al 2007 and Heugh et al 2010 for more detail with regard to the systemic scores).

The research team (Heugh et al 2007, 2010) highlight the aspirations for English and the negative 'washback effect' it has on the other languages, both in terms of resources allocated to English and the earlier introduction of English as a medium. Benson et al state:

> In response to pressure for high levels of English language proficiency in school leaving examinations … and teacher under-preparedness for conducting English lessons, the Ministry of Education has undertaken a number of extraordinary and expensive projects since 2004. One of these, the English Language Improvement Programme (ELIP) in collaboration with the British Council, trained a core group at the teacher training colleges in 2005 and established English Language Improvement Centres at colleges and universities. … At the time of our study in 2006, 42% of the national teacher education budget was routed towards this programme. A second strategy to improve English language provision and teaching has been the installation in 2004 of (plasma generation) television monitors in all secondary classrooms of the country… (2010, p. 49).

In response, the research team (Heugh et al 2007, 2010) recommended that more of the resources be diverted to MTM and the development of local languages and reading materials in them. They suggest that the introduction of English as a subject be delayed till teachers who are proficient in the language are available: 'The mere presence of English as a subject from grade 1 is meaningless if teachers are not proficient' (Heugh et al 2010, p. 308). The team concludes that:

> (D)espite the current reversal of policy, … the system-wide implementation of multilingual education across a large poor country was achieved with remarkable efficiency within a short period of time and it has much experience to offer other countries by way of large-scale data (Heugh et al 2010, p. 311).

Perhaps it is precisely this 'short period of time' that is the problem if one looks at the 25 years that it took a much smaller project such as the Rock Point one to successfully implement MTM education (Holm and Holm 1990). The careful planning that went into the SYPP (Bamgbose 2000) is another example, as is the longitudinal study conducted by Ramirez et al in 1991. Ethiopia needs to give its regions time to develop the MTM models and time to develop an effective model for the acquisition of English. As the educationist Stoddart says, "Perhaps one slogan might be 'Later English means better English!' Another might equally be 'Later English means better science, mathematics, geography…' (Stoddart 1986, p. 19 cited in Benson et al 2010, p. 48).

The next section looks at a small- scale experimental project extending the use of the mother tongue in education, the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa project, also referred to as LOITASA, in which I have been centrally involved.

4.8.3 *The Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) Project*

The LOITASA Project is known in donor circles as a 'South-South-North' cooperation project. The first phase of the project began in January 2002 and ended in December 2006, whilst the second phase started in 2007 and will continue till the end of 2011. It is funded by The Norwegian Programme for Research, Development and Education (NUFU). The project involves both a research part and a staff development or capacity building part. The research part of the LOITASA project consisted of two elements: one descriptive and analytical and the other an empirical, intervention project. The descriptive/analytical part involved an analysis of the current language in education situation in Tanzania and South Africa and was the focus of our first edited collection (see Brock-Utne et al 2003). What follows is a description of the South African side of the project.

Project description and rationale

The study in both phases was a longitudinal one spreading over three years (Grades 4-6) and involved two primary schools in urban townships in the Western Cape. At each school one class constituted the experimental group and the other a control group. The experimental group was taught Science and Geography (Mathematics replaced Geography in the second phase) in Xhosa while the control group was taught these subjects in English. The same pupils were part of the project from Grades 4-6 in each phase. The project monitored the progress of pupils in the two subjects, Science and Geography (Mathematics). In addition, qualitative data was collected through classroom observations and interviews with teachers, pupils and parents. Existing learner support materials in English in the three subject areas were translated into Xhosa. These materials were provided free of charge to both the experimental and control groups. There was also a teacher-training component to the project.

By conducting a study where the mother tongue of the pupils (Xhosa) was used as a medium of instruction in two key subject areas in Grades 4-6, we wanted to explore whether pupils would learn better through the use of this medium as opposed to an unfamiliar language (English). The questions we focused on were the following: Would this switch to the mother tongue be in the best interests of the pupils for the acquisition of knowledge in Science and Geography (later Mathematics)? Would it facilitate the acquisition of English? Would it be in the interest of national development? We hoped to throw some light on the question of the consequences of continuing with English as a medium of instruction, as opposed to using a medium which was more familiar to the pupils.

Some findings of the LOITASA Project

Nomlomo outlines some of the findings that emerged from the first phase of the LOITASA Project in South Africa in the Science classrooms taught in Xhosa as follows:

> Learners developed high self-esteem and better confidence as they participated in classroom activities in their own language. They were spontaneous in responding to teachers' questions and they could express themselves clearly in their mother tongue (isiXhosa). Their written work made more sense than their counterparts who were taught through the medium of English. They could elaborate on issues, making use of complex sentences which showed originality and better understanding of Science concepts (2008, p. 88).

See Nomlomo (2008 and 2009) for details of actual examples from pupils' scripts. Nomlomo also points to a positive correlation between the use of Xhosa as a medium of instruction and pupils' understanding and academic performance in Science. For example, the pass rate in Science in Grade 5 for the Xhosa class ranged from 70 to 86%. Pupils in the Xhosa-medium class consistently outperformed their counterparts who were taught in English.

Similarly, Langenhoven states that '(w)hen pupils use their mother tongue to read and talk about a topic, they construct meaning, making sense of their world and thus generating a better understanding of scientific concepts instead of memorizing scientific facts' (2010, p. 135). Langenhoven illustrates the complexities involved in assessing learners in a language that is not their first language. In other words, how do you know whether the concept in Science is misunderstood or whether a learner is simply not able to express himself in English. It is for this reason that Langenhoven asked learners to sketch their understanding of certain concepts. He argues that '(d)rawings are revealing and although mere suppositions, can generate meaningful insights into how pupils' conceptual understanding develops' (Langenhoven 2010, p. 140).

Despite important gains made by the project, as captured in the LOITASA edited volumes (Brock-Utne et al 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010; Qorro et al 2008; Desai et al 2010), there have been many challenges as well. Desai outlines some of these:

> Concern was expressed by the research team after classroom observations that, despite a new curriculum which emphasized a learner-centred approach, teaching in both the experimental and control groups was characterized by a predominantly teacher-centred approach. Children spent most of their time listening to the teachers talking, with occasional choral responses

from the students. Where questions were asked of pupils, they were largely of an information-seeking kind. The higher-order thinking that did take place in the four classrooms of these two schools was linked to assessment tasks in the learner support materials provided by the project (Desai 2010, pp. 209-210).[44]

The conclusion that Desai (and other researchers in the project) have come to is that:

> Mother tongue education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to remedy such teacher-centred approaches in the classroom, particularly in subjects such as Natural Science where it is expected that pupils' natural curiosity and higher-order thinking are to be encouraged. An intimacy with subject knowledge on the part of the teachers is needed to develop a confidence and boldness in teachers which, in turn, could lead to greater pupil involvement in learning (Desai 2010, p. 210).

This is a point also taken up by Cummins when he states that 'bilingual education… is not by itself a panacea for underachievement' (2009, p. 20). However, this does not mean that efforts to promote mother tongue education are futile. One needs to bear in mind that the one variable that remains constant in educational research is the correlation between socio-economic status (SES) and academic achievement. Language of instruction remains an important factor but it is not sufficient in turning around poor academic achievement in resource-constrained poor areas. As Wolff so powerfully said, 'Language is not everything in education, but without language everything is nothing in education' (Wolff 2006, p. 50).

The final study in this brief stock-taking exercise is the longitudinal study conducted by Thomas and Collier in the United States.

4.8.4 The Thomas and Collier longitudinal study

The study entitled *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement* carried out by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier (2002) is one of the largest investigations of educational effectiveness ever conducted (Cummins 2000). Thomas and Collier describe their research in the Executive Summary as follows:

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[44] Dutcher (2004, pp. 23-24) reports similar findings from a bilingual programme in El Quiche in Guatemala where traditional teaching methods were employed, even in classes where children were taught in their first language.

> Our research from 1985 to 2001 has focused on analysing the great variety of education services provided for language minority (LM) students in U.S. public schools and the resulting long-term academic achievement of these students. This five-year research study (1996-2001) is our most recent overview of the types of U.S. school programs provided for these linguistically and culturally diverse students, focusing on English language learners' (ELLs/LEPs) long-term academic achievement in Grades K-12. This study includes qualitative and quantitative research findings from five urban and rural research sites in the northeast, northwest, south-central, and south-east U.S. … (The research) provides whole school district views of policy decision-making that is data-driven regarding designing, implementing, evaluating, and reforming the education of LM students (Thomas & Collier 2002, p. 1).

They examined various models of school 'bilingual' education which included full immersion programmes in a minority language, dual-medium or two-way programmes where both minority and majority languages (usually Spanish and English) were used as media of instruction, transitional bilingual education programmes, ESL programmes and English-only programmes (May 2008; Thomas and Collier 2002). As with the Ramirez study, one of Thomas and Collier's findings was that the most effective programmes resulted in achievement gains for bilingual students that were above the level of their monolingual peers in mainstream classes. These gains were most evident in programmes where the L1 was used as a medium of instruction for an extended period of time. Some key findings of their research are as follows:

> … One-way and two-way developmental bilingual education programs … are the only programs we have found to date that assist students to fully reach the 50th percentile in both L1 and L2 in all subjects and to maintain that level of high achievement, or reach even higher levels through the end of schooling. The fewest dropouts come from these programs. …

> Students with no proficiency in English must NOT be placed in short-term programs of only 1-3 years. … (T)he minimum length of time it takes to reach grade-level performance in second language (L2) is 4 years. Furthermore, only ELLs with at least 4 years of primary language schooling reach grade-level performance in L2 in 4 years. … (S)tudents with no primary language schooling (either in home country or host country) are not able to reach grade-level performance in L2. …

> The strongest predictor of L2 student achievement is amount of formal L1 schooling. The more L1 grade-level schooling, the higher L2 achievement (Thomas & Collier 2002, p. 7).

In both the Ramirez study (1991) and the Thomas and Collier one (2002), length of L1-medium education was more influential than any other factor in predicting the educational success of bilingual students, including socio-economic status.

Given the above review of studies which have employed the use of learners' mother tongues or first languages, let us look again at the theoretical and conceptual framework which has guided this study.

4.9 Theoretical and conceptual framework

The focus of this study is on the medium of instruction issue: Is there a case for extending the mother tongue as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years? Tsui and Tollefson indicate that the interpretation of medium of instruction policies 'must be situated in their socio-political contexts, which are inseparable from their historical contexts' (2004, p. 3). They argue that many earlier studies on medium of instruction (in the 1970s and 1980s) were motivated by educational concerns and tended to ignore the socio-political contexts in which they were implemented. Whilst I acknowledge that decisions around medium of instruction policies are usually taken on political grounds, I consider it important in this study to foreground the educational concerns. As King and Benson state:

> Adoption of a medium of instruction that students comprehend is also effective pedagogy, independent of language-planning goals. This perspective rests on a number of widely cited principles including the efficacy of first-language literacy instruction (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000); the transferability of skills from the first language to the second (Cummins 2001; Krashen 1996); and the interdependence of first-and second-language competence (Ramirez, Yuen, & Ramey 1991; Thomas & Collier 2002) (King and Benson 2004, p. 247).

The theoretical and conceptual framework guiding this study (and which has been outlined in this chapter) therefore draws essentially on the link between the development of a pupil's mother tongue (home language) and the acquisition of academic language proficiency in both the mother tongue and a second language in multilingual contexts. In such contexts, the second language is usually a prestigious

language like English whilst the first language is a minority language often used only in a local context.

The framework incorporates theories on mother tongue education, bilingual education, multilingual education, second language acquisition and academic language development drawing on the work of linguists, sociolinguists and applied linguists such as Alidou (2003, 2004); Alidou et al (2006); Baker (1993); Benson (2009); Cummins (2000, 2009); Heugh (1995, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2009); King & Benson (2004); Prah (2009); Skutnabb-Kangas (1981, 2000, 2009); among others. The constructs focussed on in this chapter were largely developed by Cummins (1976, 1979, 1980, 1984b, 1986, 2000, 2009) and can be seen as a cluster, as indicated in Section 4.2. The constructs are: *additive/subtractive bilingualism, the threshold hypothesis, semilingualism[45], the developmental interdependence hypothesis, basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP).*
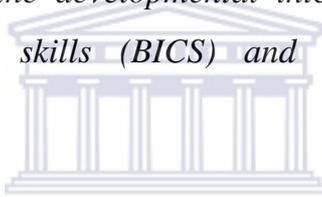
In conclusion, Cummins corroborates the point made by Tsui and Tollefson (2004) above, when he reminds us that the 'use of a language as a medium of instruction in state-funded school systems confers recognition and status on that language and its speakers' (2009, p. 19). However, he reiterates his earlier hypothesis on the relationship between first language development and second language acquisition:

> *Significant positive relationships exist between the development of academic skills in first (L1) and second (L2) languages.* This is true even for languages that are dissimilar (e.g. Spanish and Basque; English and Chinese; Dutch and Turkish). …
> *The most successful bilingual programs are those that aim to develop bilingualism and biliteracy.* Short-term transitional programs are less successful in developing both L2 and L1 literacy than programs such as dual language programs that continue to promote both L1 and L2 literacy throughout elementary school (2009, p. 20).

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[45] Cummins later disassociated himself from the term (2000).

4.10 Summary

In this chapter I have described the theoretical foundations for mother tongue education by drawing particularly on the work of Cummins (see Section 4.9 above). I acknowledge that his work is primarily focused on language minority children in majority language contexts. However, the arguments and constructs he uses in support of maintaining the mother tongue apply to countries like South Africa as well, as is evident from the case studies described above. I have then proceeded to look at some of the more commonly expressed objections or obstacles to mother tongue education and responded to each of these concerns. The next section looked at more nuanced objections to mother tongue education which accuse the proponents of mother tongue education of being essentialist and binary. I respond to these criticisms accordingly. The chapter ends on a positive note by first looking at three case studies which involved the extension and maintenance of the mother tongue in education, at least till the end of primary education. It then briefly takes stock of recent studies involving the use of learners' mother tongues.

The next chapter focuses on the research design and methods employed in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

Blaxter et al point out that

> … research is not a wholly objective activity carried out by detached scientists. It is … a social activity powerfully affected by the researcher's own motivations and values. It also takes place within a broader social context, within which politics and power relations influence what research is undertaken, how it is carried out, and whether and how it is reported and acted upon (1996, p. 15).

Bearing the above in mind, in this chapter, I outline the design of this study and provide a clear description of the processes followed in conducting this research. The chapter consists of the following sections:

- Basic design of study,
- The context and participants in the research,
- Instrumentation and measures,
- Data collection,
- Procedures of analysis,
- Issues of validity and reliability,
- Ethical considerations and
- Limitations of the study.

5.2 Basic design of study

This project was designed as a single-case study. I wanted to probe a particular phenomenon deeply, not necessarily to generalize on the basis of the analysis, but rather to begin to understand a particular problem or issue. In this case, the issue was the medium of instruction. The probing involved a comparison of pupils'

proficiencies in writing tasks[46] in English and Xhosa at a primary school in Khayelitsha.

Adelman et al (1980, as cited in Cohen & Manion 1994) identify as one of the advantages of case study research the fact that data generated from such research is 'strong in reality'. According to them, this 'strength in reality is because case studies are down-to-earth and attention holding, in harmony with the reader's own experience …' (1994, p. 123). Adelman et al also argue that

> [c]ase studies are a step to action … Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy making … At its best, they allow readers to judge the implications of a study for themselves (1980, as cited in Cohen & Manion 1994, p. 123).

Case studies are usually in-depth exploratory studies of a particular phenomenon or issue, and can include a mixture of methods such as personal observation, the use of informants for data collection and analysis of tasks administered (Hua & David 2008; Mouton 2001). The case study is ideally suited to the needs and resources of the small-scale researcher for it allows a focus on just one example. This might be the researcher's place of work or another institution with which the researcher has a connection, such as a school in this case. According to Hua and David, the case study design has a number of advantages. They state:

> A key strength is that it allows *multiple sources* and *techniques* in the data-gathering process. Data can be both qualitative and quantitative and can come from primary research as well as from secondary sources such as government publication, novels, etc. Tools for collecting data can include surveys, *tests* (my emphasis), instruments, interviews, and observation. … a case study is able to provide *rich* and *in-depth* data on the behaviour of an individual or small group (2008, p. 99).

Bassey (1999) provides a useful description of educational case studies in his monograph on the subject. I reproduce the description in full below:

> An educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

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[46] Like Hughes (1989, p. 4), who incidentally refers to the use of the word 'test' instead of 'task', I use the word *task* to refer to a structured attempt to measure language ability.

- conducted within a localized boundary of space and time (i.e. a singularity);

- into *interesting* aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system;

- mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons;

- in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers;

- or of theoreticians who are working to these ends;

- in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able

  (a) to explore *significant* features of the case,

  (b) to create *plausible* interpretations of what is found,

  (c) to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations,

  (d) to construct a *worthwhile* argument or story,

  (e) to relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature,

  (f) to convey *convincingly* to an audience this argument or story,

  (g) to provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments (Bassey 1999. p. 58) (see also Hua & David 2008 and Mwinsheikhe 2008 for more information on educational case studies).

I address some of these characteristics in the analysis and discussion of the data in Chapters 6 and 7.

Nunan developed a useful typology of case studies based on Stenhouse (1983) which I reproduce below:

Table 5.1: Typology of case studies

Type	Description
Neo-ethnographic	The in-depth investigation of a single case by a participant observer
Evaluative	An investigation carried out in order to evaluate policy or practice
Multi-site	A study carried out by several researchers on more than one site
Action	An investigation carried out by a classroom practitioner in his or her professional context

(Source: Nunan 1992, p. 78)

See also Cohen, Morrison & Manion (2007) and Hua & David (2008) in this regard.

In relation to Nunan's typology described above, I would place this research study in the second block, that is, an evaluative study. In this case I am looking at the language in education policy in practice, in relation to pupils' proficiencies in the two languages, English and Xhosa, at a particular school. By highlighting the pupils' existing language proficiencies, I am implicitly questioning the wisdom of using English as the main medium of instruction from Grade 4.

In line with the above typology, Henning et al indicate that 'Some case studies may employ methods that *collect data in a controlled fashion* (my emphasis) and process the data statistically; therefore they use quantitative methods of data collection and analysis' (2004, p. 32). The data that I elicited for this study through the administering and assessing of writing tasks in English and Xhosa would fall into this category of *collecting data in a controlled fashion.* Henning et al further describe a case study as:

> When you read a case study, you expect to find therein detailed data about the phenomenon that has been studied, no matter what (suitable) methods have been used and what the theoretical position of the researcher may be. Many case studies use both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering and analysis to present a full picture of the phenomenon (2004, p. 33).

They proceed to make the telling point that there has to be a 'goodness of fit' (2004, p. 33) with regard to the research question. The research question that has driven this study is, 'Is there a case for extending the use of the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years in African primary schools such as Themba Primary?'

How do these understandings of what constitutes a case study relate to this research study? In the next section, I describe the basic design of this study in the light of the literature on case studies and on research methodology.

Drawing on Bassey's (1999) description above, this study was conducted at a single school, Themba Primary in Khayelitsha. It involved the administration and assessment of three different writing tasks to pupils in Grades 4 and 7 in a real-life

context as a way of exploring their proficiencies in both English and Xhosa. The purpose of the exploration was to establish what proficiencies pupils had in written Xhosa and English in the two grades in order to establish whether they had greater proficiency in their home language, Xhosa, or not. This exploration was linked to the issue of the medium of instruction at Themba Primary which switched to English as a medium as early as Grade 4.

Referring to the assessment of second languages, Wigglesworth states that

> … tasks are designed to measure learners' productive language skills through performances which allow candidates to demonstrate the kinds of language skills that may be required in a real world context (2008, p. 111).

In the context of this study, the 'real world' refers to content subject knowledge which is highly dependent on the pupil's knowledge of the language of instruction. The tasks administered were assessed on the basis of criteria developed by the researcher and triangulated by a reference group set up for the purpose. These criteria, as well as the concept of triangulation, are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

5.2.1 Weaknesses in the case study design

An oft-heard concern about case studies is that they provide little basis for "scientific" generalization. This is a real concern in that the case study does not represent a 'sample'. In a case study, the researcher's goal is, '… to expand and generalize theories … and not to enumerate frequencies' (Yin 1994, p. 10). Yin expands on this point when he writes that case study researchers should 'generalize findings to "theory" (1994, p. 37). According to Yin, as with scientific experiments, case studies 'rely on analytical generalization. In analytical generalization, the investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory' (1994, p. 36).

Yin (1994, p. 41) warns researchers doing a single-case study to address all major concerns before limiting themselves to it. Hua & David also mention 'susceptibility to bias' (2008, p. 100) as a weakness in the case study design, as researchers work

quite closely with participants and might have difficulty remaining detached. Often, researchers are advised against single-case studies because the findings of such studies might not be applicable to other situations. Such criticism might be levelled at this particular study. There is, however, an issue that needs to be raised here. As a teacher/academic for the past thirty-four years in South Africa, I have a fairly good understanding of what is happening in South African, and in particular, Western Cape classrooms. It is such understanding that increased my confidence in accepting that the findings of this study are probably not unique to Themba Primary. There are, in my view, many schools where similar results might be obtained. Such schools can be characterised as those schools located in townships previously set aside for those classified African. In the Western Cape, for example, this situation is compounded by the fact that greater numbers of pupils from rural areas in the Eastern Cape, a neighbouring province, are coming to the Western Cape. Such pupils' exposure to English is undoubtedly more limited than the urban pupils in Khayelitsha. For example, a similar task to the reading comprehension task used by me was administered by a Norwegian doctoral candidate at three township primary schools in the Western Cape and produced results similar to the ones in this study (see Holmarsdottir 2005).

Phillips and Pugh make a pertinent observation when they say:

> … non-researchers often regard research results as being demonstrations of the obvious or trivial elaborations of established knowledge. But this examination has to be done continually because this is how we probe for what is not obvious and discover elaborations that are not trivial. The key to the approach is to keep firmly in mind that the classic position of a researcher is not that of one who knows the right answers but of one who is struggling to find out what the right questions might be (2000, pp. 47- 48).

5.2.2 Methods of data collection

The research methods employed in this study were to elicit data 'in a controlled fashion' as Henning et al (2004) state, and then to assess the data using particular criteria, drawing on Hughes (1989) and Weir (1993). The data elicited were to profile the proficiencies of pupils in grades four and seven in both English and Xhosa in three

different writing tasks. This was done to establish what pupils could do in these two languages given the circumstances they found themselves in – with limited resources and poorly equipped teachers in an English-text but Xhosa-oral environment.

5.2.3 Pilot study

Prior to conducting this study at Themba Primary, I had carried out a limited pilot study in October 1997 at Khanyisa Primary, a similar school also located in Khayelitsha, to serve as a guide before I started the actual study. As Yin says, 'The pilot case study helps investigators to refine their data collection plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed' (1994, p. 74).

The pilot study was limited in that I administered only the first task, the narrative piece of writing, to Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils. The reading comprehension and expository writing tasks were not administered at Khanyisa Primary as the Grade 4 and 7 teachers had decided to use the remainder of the month to prepare for the final year-end examination. I learnt a useful lesson from this exercise. As a researcher, I needed to take proper account of the teachers and their concerns. The pupils at Khanyisa Primary enjoyed doing the task and performed much better in the Xhosa version than in the English, in both grades. The teachers, on the other hand, saw the fact that their pupils were not writing very well in English as a poor reflection on themselves and tried to influence the pupils' writing. I realized that if I wanted to ensure that the teachers did not assist the pupils in doing the tasks, I would have to be present on all occasions when the tasks were completed. This is precisely what I did at Themba Primary. I also spent some time with the teachers explaining to them that the research I was engaged in was not to judge them, but rather to assess their pupils' language proficiencies. Some of the teachers' fears seemed to be allayed by this explanation.

5.3 Context and participants of the research study

Before I provide a description of the context in which the research for this study was conducted, I need to alert the reader to the fact that the research data was collected in

October 1998. Although readers may question the relevance of the data for this study, I am confident to state, on the basis of my continued involvement in the field of research, that, in Dickensian terms, 'all has changed and nothing has changed' in South African schools during the period 1998 to the present (see Christie 2008 and Fleisch 2008 in this regard). The conditions under which pupils in African townships attend school remain very similar to the conditions at Themba Primary in 1998. The language in education practices too remain the same, as described in Chapters 2 and 3. And pupils' scores in reading continue to be very low in both the home language, as well as in English, as is borne out by Holmarsdottir's research (2005), data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie et al 2008), and the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) in literacy conducted in 2011, as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Themba Primary, where I conducted primary research in October 1998 with Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils, is situated in Khayelitsha, an African township just beyond Cape Town International Airport and 30 kilometres east of the City of Cape Town. As indicated in Section 4.1.2, Khayelitsha is home to approximately 450,000 to 600,000 people. The population, who come from the older more established townships such as Gugulethu and Nyanga, and also from the Eastern Cape, are predominantly Xhosa-speaking, as 96.8% of households had Xhosa as their most common home language[47]. The population of Khayelitsha is a young population, with 29.6% of it consisting of people aged 14 years and younger, and 75% being younger than 35. The highest educational qualification of adults was relatively low, with about 76% of those who were 20 years and older not having a matriculation qualification,[48] and only 4.3% having a post-matric qualification. A high percentage of the workforce (44.1%) is in relatively unskilled occupations. A high percentage of the population (50.8%) was formally unemployed at the time of the 2001 Census. The majority of households

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[47] This information is drawn from Census 2001 data, as compiled by the Information and Knowledge Management Department in April 2005.
[48] The matriculation qualification is the highest school leaving certificate after 12 years of schooling.

(57.4%) lived in shacks in informal settlements whilst about 30% lived in houses on separate stands. See Section 4.1.2 for additional information on Khayelitsha.

The targeted pupils at Themba Prmary all had Xhosa as their home language. So did their teachers. According to the Principal, the same position prevailed in all the other classes. Despite this linguistic composition at Themba Primary, and the environment in which it was located, the school decided in 1995 to bring forward the introduction of English as a medium of intstruction from Grade 5 to Grade 4. The reason given to me by the Principal, and the teachers, for this decision was the fact that parents were taking their children out of African township schools and sending them to the former coloured[49] schools because they wanted them to acquire English earlier. Themba Primary did not want to lose its quota of teachers through low pupil enrolments, and therefore decided to introduce English as a medium earlier. This meant that officially pupils would have to do all their written work in English, except in the Xhosa subject classes from Grade 4 onwards.   Another reason is that Grade 4 is the start of the intermediate phase which continues till the end of Grade Six, in terms of the revised curriculum of 2005. The school thought it more appropriate to make the switch at the start of the new phase, instead of during the intermediate phase (see Chapter Three for more information on the different phases in the schooling system).

The subjects for this study were selected from four classes at Themba Primary in Khayelitsha. The reason for selecting Themba Primary as the school for the case study was because the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) had a working relationship with the school. Firstly, Themba Primary was one of the sites where undergraduate Education students of the University of the Western Cape did their teaching practice. Secondly, I had in the past been assigned as a supervisor of teaching practice to the school and had therefore built up a relationship with the school principal and staff. It was also purposive in that Themba Primary was

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[49] Such decisions were based on the assumption (which was often correct) that children were more likely to be exposed to English speakers at schools historically set aside for those classified coloured. Also see Chapter 1 for further clarification on the racial division of South African society during the apartheid years.

a typical Western Cape primary school in an African township. The sample decided upon was indeed both purposive and convenient.

I pursued the following process in formalising the selection of this particular primary school and the particular classes in that school. Once the school had, in-principle, indicated its willingness to be part of the project, I formally applied for permission to conduct the research at Themba Primary. This involved applying in writing to the school for permission in both English and Xhosa, the home language of most staff and pupils. Informed consent was provided by the four teachers in whose classes I administered the writing tasks.[50] The teachers indicated that it was not necessary to get the permission of the pupils' parents as I was merely administering tasks with the pupils, which was regarded as part of their education. Even though I was guided by the teachers in this regard, nevertheless, with the assistance of a Xhosa-speaking colleague, I explained the nature of the research to all the pupils in Grade 4 and Grade 7 and indicated to them that their participation was voluntary. Interestingly, all the pupils were eager to participate in the tasks. Once I had the written consent of the school, I applied for permission to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) to conduct the research at Themba Primary. This permission was granted by the Research Directorate in the WCED.

The research was conducted in four classes at Themba Primary. Two of the classes were Grade 4 pupils (approximately 10 years of age) and two classes were Grade 7 pupils (approximately 14 years of age). The Grade 4 pupils (n = 73) were being taught through the medium of English for the first time, whilst the Grade 7 pupils (n = 49) had, officially, had English as a medium for more than three years. All the Grade 4 and 7 classes were involved in the study, so there was no selection involved.

Prior to administering the tasks, I sat in on two random lessons in every one of the four teachers' classes to observe the lesson and the classroom interaction between pupil and teacher, and among pupils, in the two weeks preceding the administering of

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[50] These were Teachers 4N, 4S, 7B and 7N.

the tasks, that is, in September 1998. The purpose of this arrangement was primarily to familiarise myself with the classroom dynamics in each of the four classes, so that the pupils and teachers would know me by the time the tasks were administered. From these classroom observations, it was apparent that, except for the English classes, the teachers used mainly Xhosa to convey information to the pupils, but referred them to the English in their textbooks when appropriate. Textbooks, incidentally, were all kept at the school as there were not sufficient copies available for pupils to have their own copy[51]. Despite this Xhosa-rich oral environment, pupils were still expected to express themselves in writing in English. A typical school day would consist of the teacher explaining a particular concept to the class in Xhosa, then writing some notes in English from a textbook onto the board. The pupils would then copy the notes in English from the board.

Before outlining the research process in detail, that is Sections 5.4 to 5.6 below, I thought it wise to provide the reader with a diagrammatic representation of the process followed, and instrumentation and measures used in this study, from a chronological perspective.

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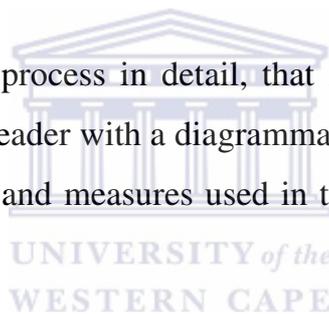
[51] Historically, there are vast differences in the provision of schooling for different groups. Although the ANC government has committed itself to addressing these inequalities, in practice they remain intact.

Figure 5.1 Research process followed

Phase 1
- Design and selection of tasks
- Translation of tasks into Xhosa

Phase 2
- Administer Tasks 1-3 to Grade 4 and 7 pupils

Phase 3
- Develop criteria to assess the writing tasks
- Reference group set up for inter-rater reliability purposes

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Phase 4
- Reference Group marking
- Marking by researcher and Xhosa-speaking colleague
- Moderation by Xhosa-speaking and English-speaking colleagues
- Overall moderation by bilingual English and Xhosa colleague from neighbouring university

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Phase 5
- Collation of data
- Analysis of data

5.4 Instrumentation and measures

Case studies generally employ a diverse range of measures or techniques. In this study, which was driven by the research question of whether there is a case for extending the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years, a range of measures were followed. It may be useful to provide the reader with a rationale for the main method employed, that is, the administration and assessment of three writing tasks in both English and Xhosa.

Much of the research on language in education in African classrooms (see Mwinsheikhe 2008; Peires 1994; Probyn 2008) has tended to focus on oral interaction in the classroom, with a particular focus on the language used by both teachers and pupils. These researchers would then comment on the fact that very little, if any, English was used in the classrooms and would therefore question whether the medium of instruction was actually an African language, rather than English. The English nature of the classroom, however, only emerged when it came to literacy practices – the texts available in class and the written work by both teachers and pupils were in English only, from Grade 4 upwards. It was customary for teachers in the former Department of Education and Training (DET) schools to teach predominantly in the relevant African language, followed by writing notes on the board, which were directly extracted from the subject-particular textbook. The pupils would then dutifully copy these notes into their books. If any subject adviser or inspector or parent were to examine the pupils' books, they would see the English required by the policy. It is for this reason that I chose writing tasks as the basis of my analysis because pupils are generally assessed on their writing abilities, and in the case of such schools, specifically on their ability to write in English.

The *first task* was a *narrative assignment* based on a set of pictures[52] in an envelope provided to pupils. They had to arrange the pictures sequentially and were then asked to write two stories, one in Xhosa and one in English, based on the six pictures. The

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[52] The pictures were from Heaton (1971).

two versions were not written on the same day, as I explain below. Task 1 was the same for both grades as it was assessing pupils' ability to write a piece of narrative prose. When I presented a paper at an international conference on the data generated by Task 1, I was criticised by some delegates for using pictures that were not 'culturally relevant' because the pictures related to an incident at an airport in England. This criticism provoked an important distinction: the value of using the pupil's mother tongue as a medium depends precisely on its greater efficiency in enabling the pupil to gain new knowledge. Mother tongue instruction is not in any way intended to limit the learning field to the culturally familiar. Nevertheless, an exercise of this kind does depend on learners having some familiarity with the phenomenon described. However, the fact that the pictures were set in England was irrelevant as airports are much the same everywhere. For the pupils at Themba Primary, airports were familiar as they lived close to Cape Town International Airport and members of the Khayelitsha community worked there. In any case, pupils' responses in Xhosa indicated that many pupils had no difficulty in understanding, or relating to the story.
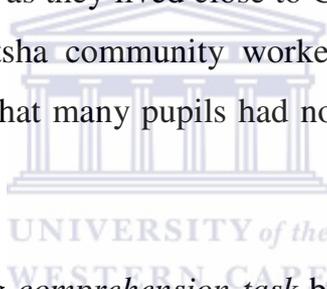
The *second task* was a *reading comprehension task* based on an extract dealing with content matter from subjects taught at the school. The Grade 4 pupils had a passage dealing with caring for their teeth from the curriculum on hygiene whilst the Grade 7 pupils were presented with an extract dealing with material about malnutrition covered in the geography syllabus. Pupils had to answer particular questions on these passages in their own words.

The *third task* was an *expository writing task* where pupils had to give their opinions on a particular topic. All tasks are attached as Appendices 1-5 to the thesis.

I deliberately used language at the level normally used in the classroom, and in the available textbooks, in designing all the tasks. All six tasks (three for each level) were translated into Xhosa, the home language of the pupils at the school, by an academic, who is also an educational translator. In terms of good pedagogical practice, however,

the language used in the English tasks may be too difficult for second language learners. However, the English-medium policy does not cater for the needs of second language learners specifically, as the textbooks used in the classroom corroborate. This study has used as its starting point the current context in which English is used as a medium in primary schools for African language speakers – a context in which there is very little support for pupils in the reading and writing of English. All tasks therefore were authentic tasks – the kind pupils are routinely exposed to and expected to cope with, regardless of whether they are English first or second language speakers.

The learning outcomes expected for the languages learning area in terms of the original (1995) and the revised national curriculum statement (RNCS) issued by the Department of Education in 2002 support this. They are as follows:

1. The learner will be able to listen for information and enjoyment, and respond appropriately and critically in a wide range of situations.
2. The learner will be able to communicate confidently and effectively in spoken language in a wide range of situations.
3. The learner will be able to read and view for information and enjoyment, and respond critically to the aesthetic, cultural and emotional values in texts.
4. The learner will be able to write different kinds of factual and imaginative texts for a wide range of purposes.
5. The learner will be able to use language to think and reason, as well as to access, process and use information for learning.
6. The learner will know and be able to use the sounds, words and grammar of the language to create and interpret texts (Department of Education 2002, pp. 6-7).

The writing tasks pupils did for this study address, in particular, outcomes 3-6 above. Despite the learning outcomes for the languages learning area mentioned above, it needs to be borne in mind that the pupils in Grade 4 and, to a lesser extent, in Grade 7 in this study were not often exposed to free writing activities that involved continuous prose – even though it was a requirement of the curriculum. It also needs to be borne in mind that very little, if any, such writing took place in Xhosa, as English was the official medium of instruction and all written work, except in the Xhosa language class, was in English. This meant that pupils had no exposure to expository text in Xhosa beyond the third year of school, that is, Grade 3.

Next, I describe the data collection process.

5.5 Data collection

I received permission from the relevant provincial authority, the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and the school to administer the tasks at Themba Primary, as indicated earlier in this chapter. I had met with the relevant teachers and the principal before I started with the tasks. I subsequently consulted the four teachers (2 in Grade 4 and 2 in Grade 7) about the tasks with regard to the level, pupils' familiarity with the work and their ability to cope with the tasks. In all respects, the teachers agreed that the tasks were suitable, even though they thought the English comprehension might be difficult for their pupils. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I would describe the tasks as authentic tasks, of the kind pupils are likely to encounter in their textbooks. In the case of English, the language used was authentic, by design, and not tailored to the needs of second language pupils. I wanted the pupils to be exposed to tasks written in the kind of language they would expect to see in their textbooks and course material.

The relevant teachers were present, as were the researcher and the translator, when the pupils did the particular tasks. The translator or the researcher answered queries of clarification raised during the writing process. All tasks were completed during the last term of the year, in October 1998. It took just under three weeks (12-30 October 1998) to collect the data, as I had to fit in with the scheduled plans of the school. I chose the last term as I wanted to assess pupils' proficiency towards the end of the year in both grades so that the tasks reflected their proficiency after almost a year of English-medium instruction in Grade 4 and after almost four years of English-medium instruction in Grade 7.

One group in each grade received the task first in Xhosa and the other first in English. I was interested to see if the pupils would perform better in the English version if they had seen the Xhosa version first. The data does not show any difference in their results. The time lapse between the tasks was not long and this probably meant that pupils could rely on their short-term memory only. I presented the same picture story

task to Grades 4 and 7, but Tasks 2 and 3 were different for each grade. I provided them with the same picture story task, as I wanted to compare the two grades' performance in the narrative writing piece, a genre that pupils tend to be more familiar with. As I administered all the tasks, I was able to control for any pedagogical differences that may have arisen if the teachers had administered them.

5.6 Procedures of analysis

The data consists of 438 Grade 4 scripts and 294 Grade 7 scripts from Themba Primary, half of which were in English and half in Xhosa. For the purposes of recording and analysing the results, I worked only with the scripts of those pupils who completed all three tasks in both languages. Altogether there were 83 pupils in Grade 4 and 56 pupils in Grade 7, but some were absent on the days when the tasks were administered. The table below illustrates this information.

Table 5.2 Pupil numbers in Grades 4 and 7 at Themba Primary

	Grade 4N	Grade 4S	Total
Total number of pupils	41	42	83
Total number who wrote all 3 tasks	35	38	73
	Grade 7B	Grade 7N	Total
Total number of pupils	27	29	56
Total number who wrote all 3 tasks	24	25	49

Before assessing the tasks, I arranged the scripts on the basis of the grade, teacher, alphabetical position in class according to surname and task. Grade 4N refers to the pupils in Teacher N's class. There were 35 pupils in this class who had completed all three tasks in both languages. The pupils were arranged alphabetically, with the first

pupil being assigned the letter A and the last I1. The pupils in Grade 4S continue the alphabet from J1 through to U2. There were 38 pupils in Teacher S's class. The Grade 7 classes were smaller with 24 pupils in Teacher B's class (A-X) and 25 in Teacher N's class (A1-Y1). See Tables 6.1 to 6.4 in this regard.

I then developed *criteria to assess the writing tasks*. The criteria used for assessing the writing tasks were:

- Form or organisation (3 marks)
- Fluency or style and ease of communication (3 marks)
- Vocabulary and grammar (3 marks), and
- Mechanics (spelling and punctuation) (1 mark).

The criteria were drawn largely from Weir (1993) and Hughes (1989). The first criterion, *form or organisation*, refers to pupils' ability to write connected prose in a narrative and an expository piece, which is coherent and addresses the topic. The second criterion, *fluency or style and ease of communication*, refers to pupils' ability to write fluently and to communicate easily. The third criterion, *vocabulary and grammar,* refers to pupils' command of vocabulary and linguistic structures. The fourth criterion focussed on the actual *mechanics* of writing, that is, knowledge and use of punctuation and spelling.

The *criteria for assessing the reading comprehension* were the following:
- Has the question been answered?
- Have pupils used their own words? (The reference group was in agreement that pupils had to use their own words, as the task was assessing pupils' understanding, as well as their ability to express that understanding in their own words.)
- Pupils were awarded one mark for answering the question and one mark for using their own words.

- How have the interpretative questions been answered? (This criterion was important as it assessed pupils' ability to think more laterally, beyond the text, as it were.)

The criteria were then put through a process of *triangulation*. Triangulation is usually defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection (Cohen & Manion 1994; Neuman 2000). According to Cohen and Manion, Denzin (1970) extended this view of triangulation to include several other types of triangulation. These he referred to as 'time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation and methodological triangulation' (as cited in Cohen & Manion 1994, p. 235). For the purposes of this study, I will be referring mainly to 'investigator triangulation' – the type employed in this study. Yin (1994, p. 92) too uses the term 'investigator triangulation' to refer to triangulation among different evaluators, or, as in the case of this study, among markers or assessors (see also Xi, 2008, in this regard).

The *triangulation employed* in this study involved the setting up of a reference group to look critically at the criteria I had developed and to alter them if necessary in the process of marking six scripts per grade. The purpose of this exercise was also to assess inter-rater reliability in terms of the marking. This reference group consisted of five language people, besides me, who had all been teachers of language in the course of their careers. Two members of the group were Xhosa-speaking, whilst two were English speakers and one was a bilingual English- Afrikaans speaker. A meeting was set up with the reference group to finalise the criteria drafted by me and to mark six scripts per grade (two per task) using these criteria. That is, each member of the reference group marked the same three tasks in English of two pupils per grade. The meeting decided not to alter the criteria till the marking began.

On marking the scripts for Tasks 1 and 3, members of the reference group felt that the categories were too cumbersome and that there was some overlap in the third and

fourth criteria above. The criteria were then streamlined into three categories. These were:

- Form or organisation (3),
- Fluency or style and ease of communication (3), and
- Mechanics which included grammar, spelling and punctuation (4).

The marking at the reference group meeting was done using the four criteria initially mentioned above. The criteria were only refined after the reference group had tried them out. In setting these criteria, we were aware that traditional writing-evaluation instruments tended to emphasize language conventions, including grammar and spelling. In the process, criteria such as organisation, development, voice, tone or mood, and audience were often overlooked and undervalued. The criteria above capture both the mechanics of writing, as well as its appropriateness to the context, function and intention of the writing, as the ability to organise material and to select appropriate registers is crucial to academic progress.

The criteria for the writing tasks were accordingly streamlined as we did not want the marking to be cumbersome and awkward, and difficult to control for inter-rater reliability purposes. The criteria for the reading comprehension were accepted by the reference group, as outlined above.

As mentioned above, all tasks were authentic and were related to work covered in content subjects pupils in Grade 4 and Grade 7 were studying. It also needs to be noted that the tasks in both languages involved the same assessment criteria and were scored in the same way. Furthermore, both the marker and the moderator of the Xhosa scripts were part of the reference group.

The marks or scores of the reference group for each task per grade for each of the pupil groups mentioned above are captured in Table 5.3 below. For each task and every individual pupil, the table first captures the scores of the five reference group

members, followed by the score allocated by me, followed by the average score for the reference group.

Table 5.3 Reference group scores

Grade and pupil	Reference group scores	Researcher score	Average score for reference group
Task 1			
4(1)	7.5/5/6/6/7	6	6.3
4(2)	2.5/3/3/4/3	3	3.1
Task 2			
4 (1)	2/2/2/2/2.5	1.5	2.1
4 (2)	3/4/4/3/3	2.5	3.4
Task 3			
4 (1)	5.5/5/4/4/5	5	4.7
4 (2)	2.5/3.5/3/4/3.5	3.5	3.3
Task 1			
7 (1)	6/5.5/4/5/5	5	5.1
7(2)	4/3.5/5/6/3.5	4	4.4
Task 2			
7 (1)	.5/1/4/1.5/1	1	1.6
7 (2)	1/3/3.5/4/2	2	2.7
Task 3			
7(1)	5/5.5/5/5/5	5	5.1
7(2)	2.5/5/3/5/6	4.5	4.3

The reference group and I discussed the scores, particularly so in the cases where there was a bigger discrepancy. It turned out that in these cases, two of the markers were actually not using the criteria, but were assigning it a global mark. The entire reference group was of the opinion that although pupils' scores were lower when the criteria were applied, it was a fairer system of assessment and led to greater inter-rater reliability.

After the process of triangulation, I marked all the English tasks using the revised criteria, while a colleague in the Education Faculty at the University of the Western Cape marked the Xhosa tasks. This colleague was also part of the reference group.

Once all the tasks were assessed, an English-speaking colleague and a Xhosa-speaking colleague moderated a *sample* of the English and Xhosa scripts respectively. These two moderators were also part of the reference group. Then, a colleague from a neighbouring university, who speaks both languages fluently, moderated the *sample* of English and Xhosa scripts. All three moderators accepted the marking as fair and legitimate and suggested minor adjustments of the marks. Copies of moderated scripts are available for inspection.

Hua and David (2008) and Yin (1994) argue that every case study project should strive to develop a formal, presentable data base, so that, in principle, other investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written reports. In their opinion, such a database increases the reliability of the entire case study. I have striven to keep such a database with a clear record of the process followed, as well as the tasks completed.

5.7 Validity and reliability

Although the concepts validity and reliability are important in both quantitative and qualitative research, the specifics of reliability and validity are applied differently in the two research approaches. In quantitative research, validity can be defined as the ability of the researcher to produce true knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. For example, with regard to data collection, does the item measure or describe what the researcher has presented it as measuring or describing? (see Henning et al 2004, in this regard).

Neuman defines the terms reliability and validity as follows:

> Reliability means dependability or consistency. It suggests that the same thing is repeated or recurs under the identical or very similar conditions. The opposite of reliability is a measurement process that yields erratic, unstable or inconsistent results.
>
> Validity suggests truthfulness and refers to the match between a construct, or the way a researcher conceptualizes the idea in a conceptual definition, and a measure (2000, p. 164).

Neuman also refers to the term 'external validity', which is used primarily in experimental research as 'the ability to generalize findings from a specific setting and small group to a broad range of settings and people' (2000, p. 172). However, a case study is a study of a singularity. As Bassey (1999) states, it is not chosen as a 'typical' example in the sense that typicality is empirically demonstrated, and so issues of external validity are not meaningful. As an alternative to reliability and validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) put forward the concept of *trustworthiness*. According to them, trustworthiness involves establishing four features:

- *credibility*, that is, confidence in the 'truth' of the findings,
- *transferability,* which implies that the findings can be applied in other contexts,
- *dependability,* which indicates that the findings are consistent and can be repeated and
- *confirmability*, which implies that the findings are supported by the data and are not pre-empted by researcher bias (1985, p. 296).

How do the terms *validity and reliability* apply to this particular study which involved the profiling of English and Xhosa language proficiencies of Grade 4 and 7 pupils in three different writing tasks? *Reliability*, in this regard, refers to two aspects: features of the task itself and the way it is scored. As far as the first feature is concerned, the tasks were carefully selected as 'authentic' tasks – that is, the kinds of tasks pupils were in fact expected to do and which were based on their learning areas and at the officially required level. The Grade 4 and 7 teachers at Themba Primary, as well as the textbooks the pupils and teachers used, confirmed this view. As for the second aspect, I have described above, in great detail, the process of scoring the tasks so that differences in scores were minimized, thus achieving inter-rater reliability. The results from the tasks are thus reasonably 'reliable' or 'trustworthy' as data for analysis.

The term *validity* in this study refers to whether the tasks measure what they are intended to measure – narrative writing skills; expository writing skills and reading comprehension of the appropriate kind and at the appropriate level. This appropriacy

depends on a match with official expectations. As I have indicated above, the expository writing task and the reading task are both based on content covered by these pupils in learning areas such as Geography. All should have been familiar with the content as well as the level. The overall purpose of the research was to establish the writing and reading ability of pupils in two grades in familiar content areas, so that their performance in the two languages, the official medium of instruction and their home language, could be compared, thereby establishing whether there was a case for extending the home language or mother tongue as medium of instruction beyond the first three grades.

5.8 Ethical considerations

This study was guided by the ethical considerations that had long been in practice in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, and recently published in a document, *Ethical guidelines for research,* issued in 2005. The guidelines and practices were adapted from the British Educational Research Association's *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2004). In the section that follows, I list the issues applying to this study and how I conformed to them. *Consent* should be voluntary and should be informed. Participants have the *right to withdraw*. The teachers and pupils at Themba Primary were provided with information on the purpose of the project and the nature of the tasks before they decided to participate. Teachers and pupils knew that they could withdraw at any time without providing any reasons. In the case of *vulnerable participants*, special care should be taken to protect them. As I was working with children, this issue was of particular concern. However, the research undertaken by me did not place the pupils in any danger. With regard to *privacy and confidentiality*, the identity of all pupils was scrupulously guarded in all the tasks administered. The identity of the teachers and the school was also kept strictly anonymous. Children have the *right to be informed* of the results of research. In this regard, all tasks were handed out to pupils after they were marked so that they could see how they had performed. Teachers too were shown the actual scores without giving them the names of pupils. My

commitment to the school and to language in education issues was maintained when the LOITASA Project started in 2002, as Themba Primary was one of the schools selected for this new research project. (See Chapter Four for more detail on the LOITASA project.)

In the next section, I address some of the limitations of this study.

5.9 Limitations of study

No research project can be perfect. There will always be further insights that could have been gained. This research study too has limitations. Before I address these limitations below, the reader needs to be reminded that this was a single case study which elicited data through administering and assessing three different writing tasks with Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils. It was driven by the research question of whether there was a case for extending the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium beyond the first three years of schooling.

Firstly, the study could be criticised for not employing more methods and relying solely on the administration and assessment of the writing tasks. For example, I could have interviewed the teachers and the pupils after the completion of the tasks. This would not have been helpful for this particular study as I was profiling pupils' *existing proficiencies* in both English and Xhosa in the three writing tasks. Interview data may have explained pupils' performance, but would not have affected their performance. Similarly, classroom observations were not required, as the focus of this study was not on pedagogy in general, but on pupils' proficiencies in the two languages.

Secondly, I could be criticised for not having done a longitudinal study measuring pupils' proficiencies over a period of time. This research study is a snapshot of what pupils in Grades 4 and 7 were able to do in English and Xhosa in three writing tasks. It provides a glimpse of what could happen if pupils were given the opportunity to write their tasks in their mother tongue in Grade 4 and Grade 7, an opportunity the

Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils at Themba Primary were not allowed. A longitudinal study also has its pitfalls. Given the complexities of school life, it is very difficult to control variables, as we discovered in the LOITASA Project (see Desai 2010a). Teachers change, principals change and timetables change.

Thirdly, one accepts that tasks and the assessment of these are subjective to a lesser or larger extent. But, as I have explained in Section 5.6 of this chapter, I developed criteria and had all the marked scripts moderated to minimise subjectivity concerning the assessment of the tasks.

In conclusion, the methodology employed in this study can, in my view, be regarded as 'fit for purpose' in relation to the main research question and purpose of the study, as outlined above.

5.10 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology used in the study to make clear the processes followed in collecting and analysing the data. In the course of describing the process, I have included the weaknesses of the case study as a research design and also looked at limitations of this study.

In the next chapter I present the data and begin the process of analysing the data.

CHAPTER SIX
PRESENTATION OF DATA

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of this study on the proficiencies of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils in English and Xhosa in three writing tasks. I comment on these results by grade according to the kind of task: narrative, reading comprehension and expository writing. Finally, I look at the data more carefully by analysing a selection of the actual scripts the pupils produced, in relation to the two languages used in the data collection, English and Xhosa. As Blaxter et al point out:

> The business of analysing the data you have collected … involves two closely related processes:
>
> - managing your data, by reducing its size and scope, so that you can report upon it adequately and usefully; and
> - analysing your managed set of data, by abstracting from it and drawing attention to what you feel is of particular importance or significance (1996, p. 183).

For example, in this study I have tried to give the reader a clear picture of pupils' proficiencies in both English and Xhosa by focussing on one task at a time per grade. I then provide an overall picture per grade, before selecting a sample of scripts which I analyse in detail. At the same time I have provided a summary of the full data so as to provide an overview of the results to the reader. The findings are based on 438 Grade 4 scripts and 294 Grade 7 scripts from Themba Primary, half of which are in English and half in Xhosa.

In the previous chapter I explained why the study focussed on writing tasks. Skehan (2003), in an article on task-based instruction, says that there are basically three groups who are interested in the use of tasks. These are researchers, testers and teachers. He proceeds to explain how researchers generally use tasks:

> Researchers, other things being equal, are likely to see tasks as convenient or necessary means to explore theoretically-motivated questions. … It is likely … that the emphasis will be on some kind of empirical study, and its level of validity, and the task that is chosen, and the way it is used will be secondary to the research questions which are being asked. It is therefore probable that the task will be fairly self-contained, and explored within a cross-

sectional research design – the task is done, possibly under non-classroom conditions, the data are gathered, the researcher leaves and analyses these data (2003, p. 2).

In Chapter Five, I described the process of collecting data for this study, where a similar procedure was followed. Drawing on Bygate, Skehan and Swain's (2001) definition of what might be an appropriate task for linguistic research, Skehan states 'A task is an activity which requires pupils to use language, with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective' (2003, p. 3).

As indicated in Chapter Five, the focus of this study was on profiling the proficiencies of Grade 4 and 7 pupils in three writing tasks in both English and Xhosa in order to compare their performance in these two languages so as to assess whether it might not be preferable for such pupils to be allowed to study through the medium of Xhosa, longer than the initial three years. In operationalising and measuring pupils' proficiencies, I have looked at criteria such as fluency, accuracy, complexity and lexical aspects of pupils' performance. These criteria, as outlined in Chapter Five, were used in assessing the tasks, the results of which are presented in this chapter. They are also used in this chapter to comment on individual samples of scripts so that it is evident that the assessment was accountable.

Below, I first present the results per grade for each task for each class in graphic form, with comments on every figure. I then provide an overall picture for each Grade 4 class before proceeding to the Grade 7s.

6.2 Grade 4 Results

In this section I present the results for each of the tasks[53] for the Grade 4s. As indicated in Chapter Five, there were two Grade 4 classes. To distinguish between them I have referred to them as 4N and 4S, drawing on the teachers' first names.

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[53] All tasks are available as Appendices 1 to 5.

6.2.1 Grade 4 Narrative Writing

As indicated in Chapter Five, the narrative task consisted of a set of pictures which pupils first had to arrange sequentially and then write the story in Xhosa and English. Below are two graphs which capture the scores of the two Grade 4 classes in this task. The graphs start with the English scores in descending order. Each graph is followed by comments highlighting particular features of the data.

Figure 6.1: Grade 4N Narrative Writing

GRADE 4N NARRATIVE WRITING GRAPH

SCORE OUT OF 10

	G1	B1	Z	Y	D	H1	L	U	O	V	B	H	A	C1	E	J	M	C	W	G	I	T	I1	E1	Q	R	K	P	X	F1	F	N	S	A1	D1
ENGLISH	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	3.5	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	1.5	1	1	1
XHOSA	7.5	8.5	8	7.5	7	7	6.5	7.5	7.5	7	7	7	6.5	6	5	5	6	4.5	8.5	7.5	6	6	4.5	8.5	7	6.5	6	6	5.5	5	7.5	5.5	5.5	5	5
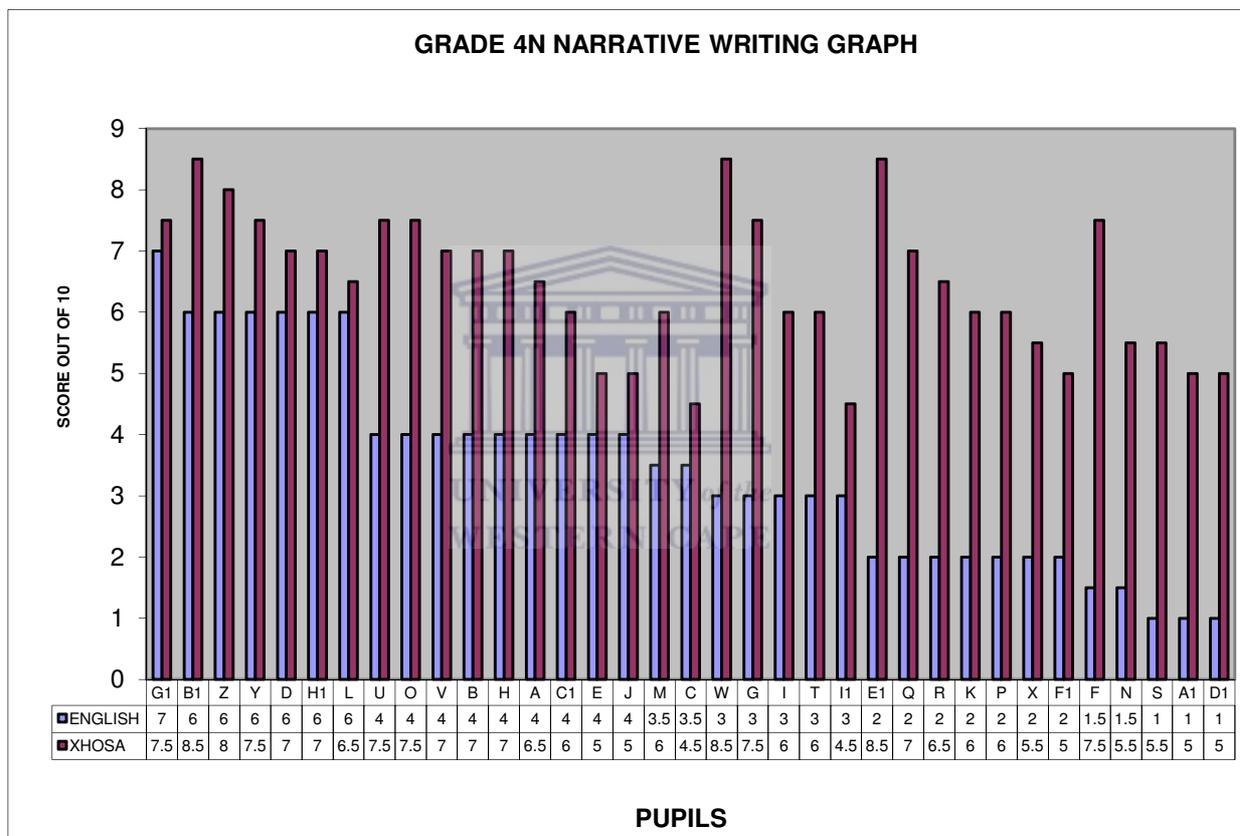
PUPILS

Grade 4N (35 in class)

The following features of the results for the narrative writing task for Grade 4N have significant implications:

1. All pupils did better in Xhosa than in English.
2. Only 7 of the 35 pupils passed the English task, that is, scored 5 or more marks.
3. Only 2 of the 35 pupils failed the Xhosa task.
4. The two pupils who failed the Xhosa task scored more than the average class mark for the English task.

5. There are a few pupils who scored very low marks in English, but did very well in Xhosa. Examples of such pupils are E1, F and W.

6. Those pupils who did well in English, also did well in Xhosa.

Figure 6.2: Grade 4S Narrative Writing

GRADE 4S NARRATIVE WRITING

SCORE OUT OF 10

	T1	U2	V1	O1	X1	J2	S2	N2	U1	M2	P1	F2	B2	P2	Q1	Y1	E2	R2	N1	Q2	O2	G2	D2	S1	H2	K1	I2	R1	K2	J1	M1	W1	Z1	T2	C2	L1	A2	L2
ENGLISH	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5	5	5	5	4.5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	2.5	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1.5	1.5	1	1	1	1	0	0	0
XHOSA	9	8.5	8	7.5	8	7.5	8	6.5	6	6	5.5	8	7.5	7.5	7	6	6	6	5	5	3.5	7	7	6	6	5	5	4	4	4.5	4.5	6	6	6	4	6	5	5
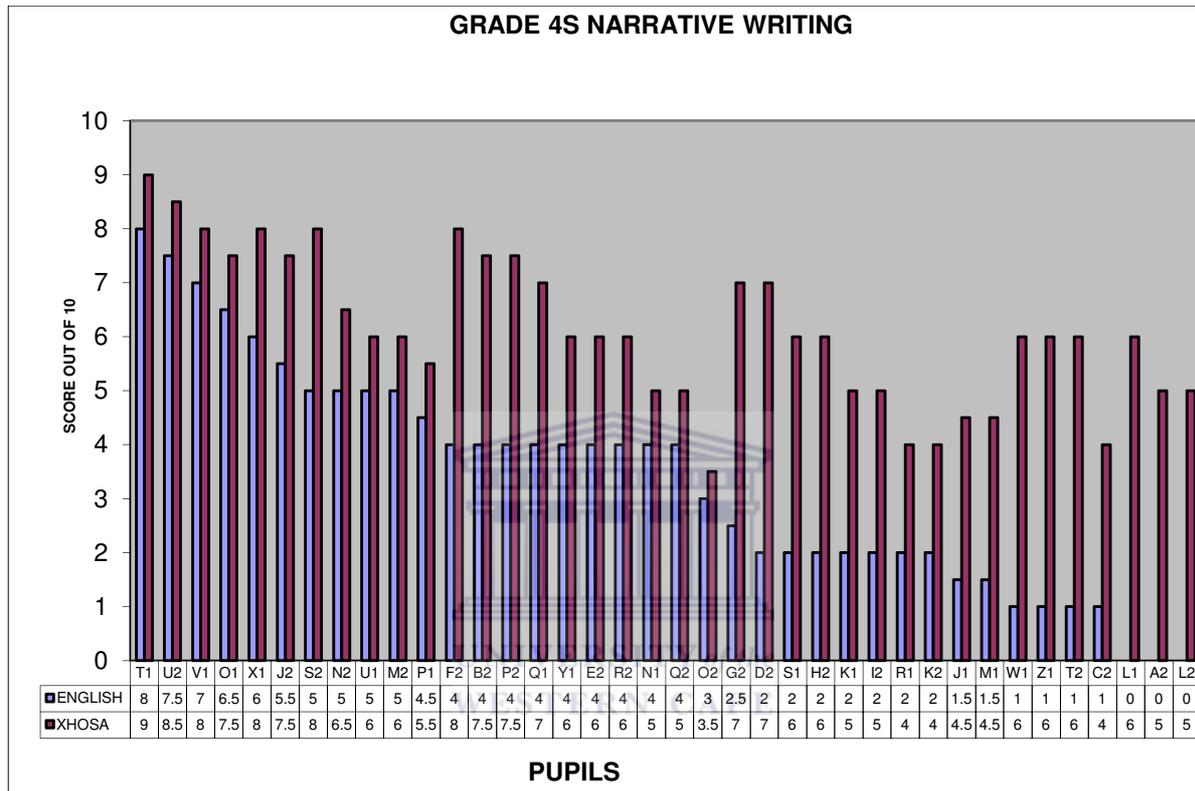
PUPILS

Grade 4S (38 in class)

The prominent features of the results for Grade 4S are:

1. The general pattern is similar to that for 4N.

2. Only 10 of the 38 pupils passed the English task.

3. Only 6 of the 38 pupils failed the Xhosa task.

4. The six pupils who failed the Xhosa task scored more than the average class mark for the English task.

5. Three pupils who obtained zero for the English task passed the Xhosa task.

6. Pupils who obtained the same mark in English showed a wide variety of competence in Xhosa. For example F2, B2, P2, Q1, Y1, E2, R2, N1, Q2 all

obtained 4 for English but the marks for Xhosa range from 8 marks for F2 to 5 marks for N1 and Q2.

7. As with 4N, those pupils who did well in English also did well in Xhosa.

The above data indicate that pupils in Grade 4 are struggling to communicate in writing in English. They do not seem to have similar problems in communicating in Xhosa. There is a correlation in the performance of the few pupils who did well in English and their performance in Xhosa. In other words, proficiency in English is enhanced by proficiency in the first language, Xhosa. The above findings are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

The second writing task focussed on pupils' reading comprehension ability. The next section focuses on Grade 4 reading comprehension scores.

6.2.2 Grade 4 Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension task consisted of an extract dealing with caring for ones teeth, which was part of the hygiene section in the Life Orientation curriculum. The next two figures show the scores of the Grade 4 pupils in the reading comprehension task. The graphs start with the English scores in descending order. They are followed by comments on particular features of the data.

Figure 6.3: Grade 4N Reading Comprehension

GRADE 4N READING COMPREHENSION

	Z	Y	F1	D	L	G1	K	A	I1	C1	V	N	P	C	R	H1	B	E	U	M	G	B1	H	O	I	W	X	A1	F	T	S	J	E1	Q	D1
ENGLISH	6	5	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	6	4	2	5	3	2	2	5	5	4	2	2	2	2	1	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	3	2	1	1

PUPILS
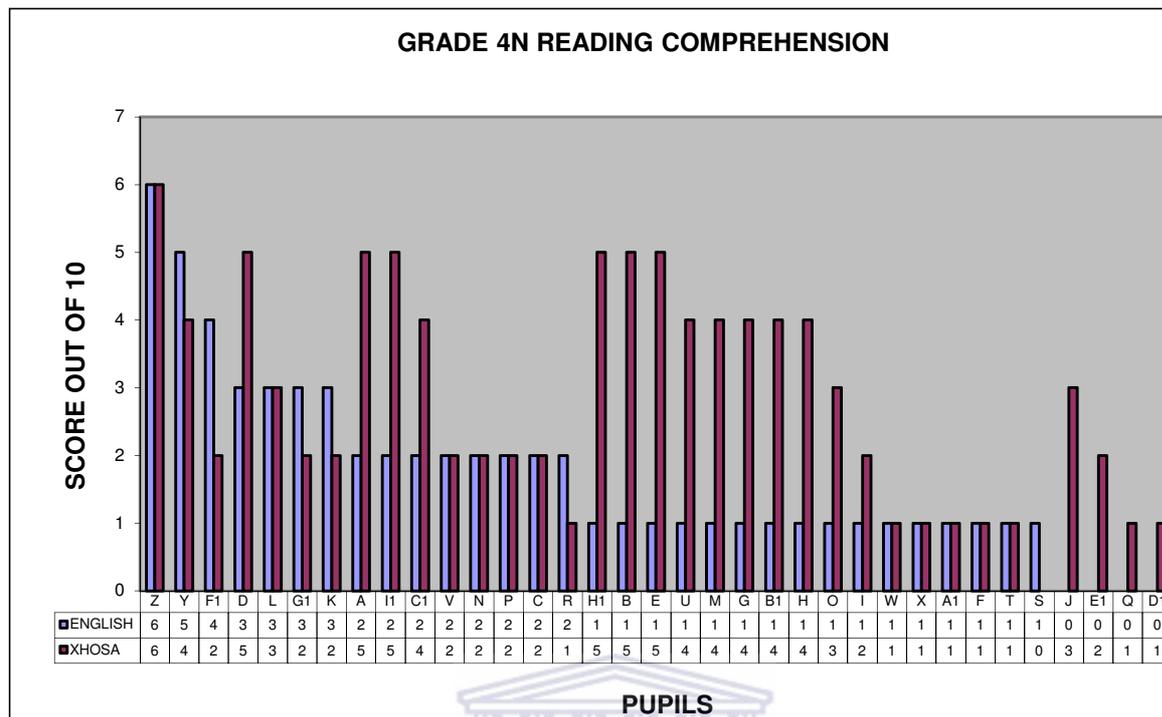
Figure 6.4: Grade 4S Reading Comprehension

GRADE 4S READING COMPREHENSION

	T1	J2	V1	N2	R2	U1	U2	O1	Y1	H2	K1	X1	M2	F2	N1	S2	G2	P1	B2	Q1	P2	Q2	R1	J1	M1	K2	Z1	C2	W1	D2	I2	T2	O2	S1	L2	L1	A2	E2
ENGLISH	8	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	7	8	7	3	3	6	5	5	6	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	6	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	5	4	4	4	3	2	2	2	1	5	4	3	2	0
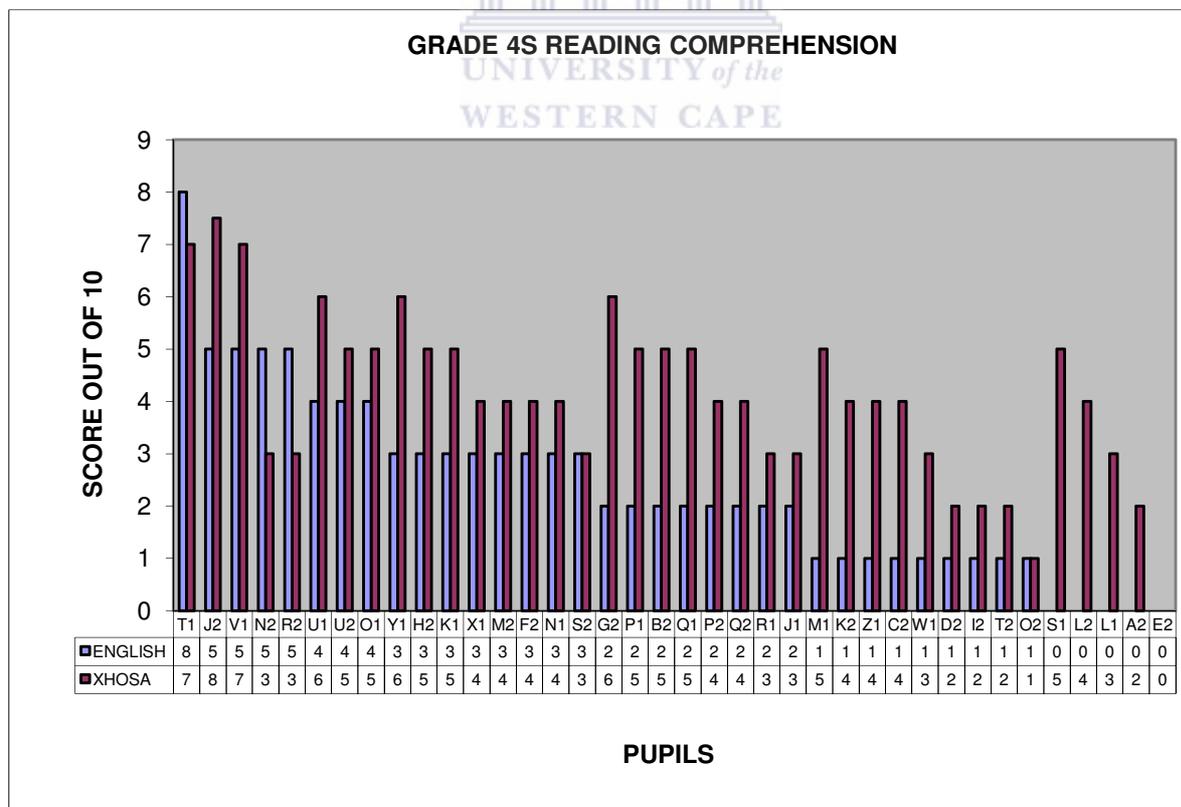
PUPILS

Below I outline the main features of the results for the reading comprehension task per class.

Grade 4N

I wish to highlight the following features of the above results for Grade 4N:

1. The majority of pupils did poorly in both the English and Xhosa tasks.

2. Six pupils performed better in their English reading task than in their Xhosa reading task, even though the difference was a marginal one.

3. For some pupils there were big discrepancies in performance between the English and Xhosa tasks. Examples of such pupils are B, E and H1.

4. Despite the average mark in both languages being below 5, the average mark in Xhosa was higher than in English.

Grade 4S

The results for Grade 4S reveal the following features:

1. The same general pattern as for Grade 4N repeats itself in Grade 4S.

2. The majority of pupils obtained poor results for reading in both English and Xhosa, compared to their results for the narrative writing task.

3. Nevertheless, more pupils still performed better in their Xhosa reading task than in their English version. The difference between the two languages was greater in Grade 4S.

4. Only 3 of the 38 pupils scored more in the English reading task than in the Xhosa one. These three pupils were amongst the top five pupils in the class for the reading task in English.

5. Four pupils who scored 0 in English still managed to obtain some marks in their Xhosa reading task. One of these pupils, pupil S1, managed to pass in Xhosa whilst scoring 0 in English.

It is clear from the above results that pupils in Grade 4 were struggling with reading in both languages. Many pupils also had difficulty in communicating what they read in

their own words. Interestingly, a few pupils managed to score higher marks in the English reading task than in the Xhosa one. Limited exposure to written texts in Xhosa may explain this.   These results are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

I now proceed to look at the third writing task. The next section looks at pupils' scores in the expository writing task.

6.2.3 Grade 4 Expository Writing

For the expository writing task, pupils were asked to write an essay giving their opinions on how to make Khayelitsha, an African township near Cape Town, a better place for children. The next two figures look at the scores for the Grade 4 expository writing task. They start off with the English scores in descending order. Each figure is followed by comments on the data.

Figure 6.5: Grade 4N Expository Writing

GRADE 4N EXPOSITORY WRITING

	Z	Y	O	A	U	M	G	D	L	G1	W	X	A1	I1	V	N	B1	F1	H1	S	E1	B	E	I	F	K	H	R	J	P	C1	T	C	Q	D1
ENGLISH	7	7	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	9	8	8	8.5	8	7	6	8	8	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7	5	7	7	7	6.5	6.5	6	6	4.5	4	7	6	5.5	7	6	5	5	5
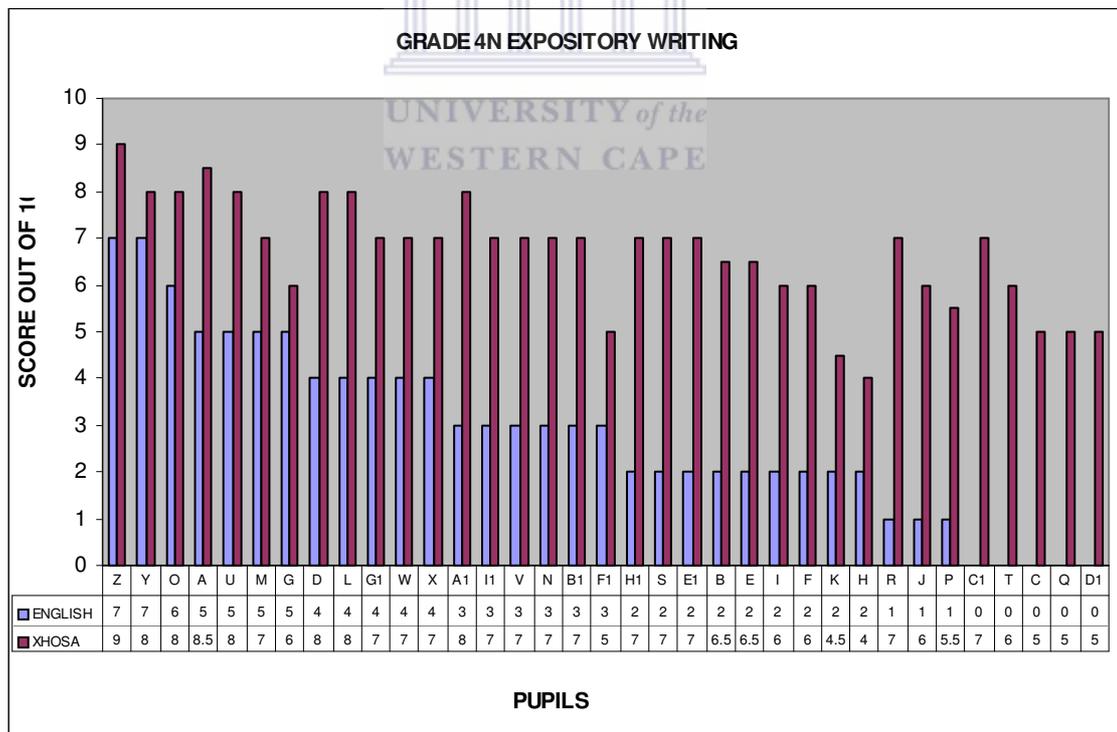
Grade 4N

I wish to highlight the following features of the results obtained by Grade 4N for the expository task:

1. 28 of the 35 pupils failed the English expository writing task.
2. Only 2 pupils failed this task in Xhosa.
3. Those pupils who passed in English, did well in Xhosa.
4. A large group of pupils who obtained poor results in English, nevertheless managed to get reasonably good results in Xhosa.

Figure 6.6: Grade 4S Expository Writing

	U2	N2	O1	Q2	T1	J2	M2	V1	Y1	H2	P2	R1	N1	S2	O2	U1	R2	F2	Q1	X1	G2	J1	M1	P1	B2	S1	K1	C2	D2	K2	T2	L1	Z1	W1	I2	A2	L2	E2
ENGLISH	7	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	9	8	8	6	8	6	5	8	7	7	7	7	6	6	5	7	5	5	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	6	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	3	2
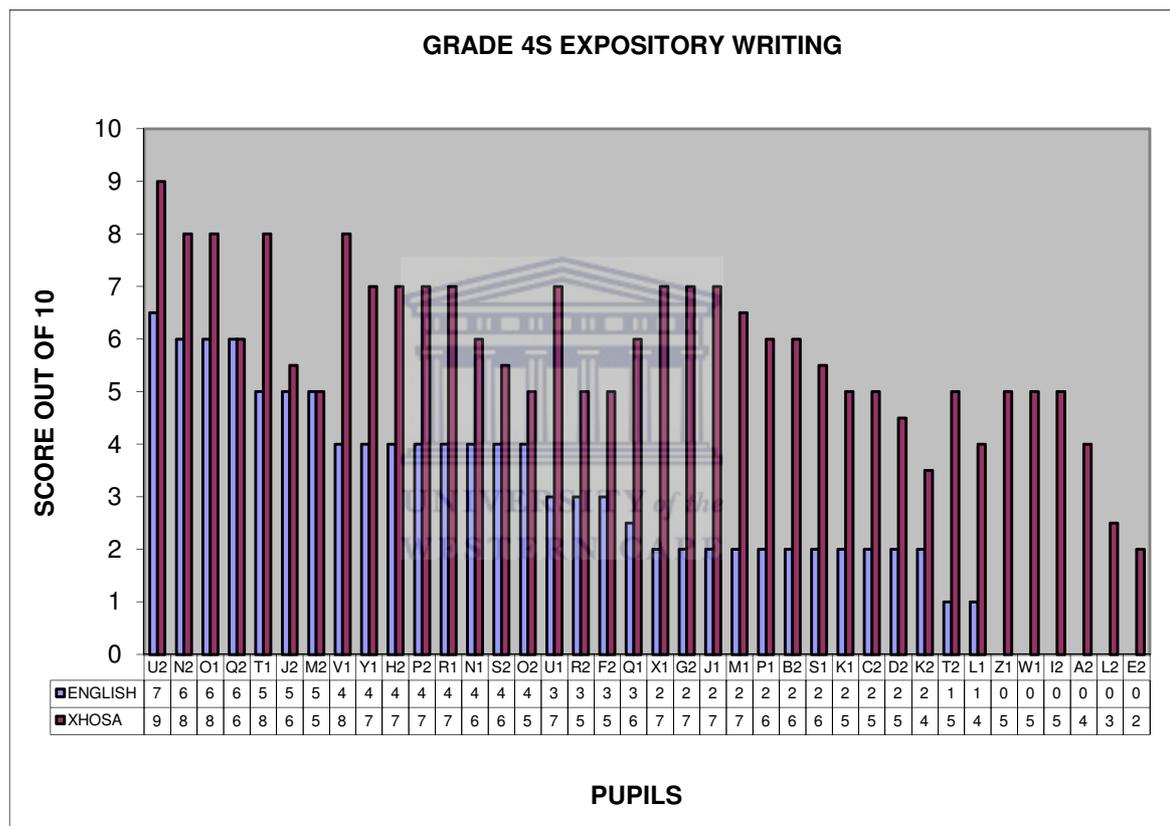
Grade 4S

The following features of the results for Grade 4S are highlighted:

1. The same general pattern as for Grade 4N repeats itself for 4S expository writing.
2. 31 of the 38 pupils failed in the English expository writing task.
3. Only 6 of the pupils failed in the Xhosa expository writing task.
4. Those pupils who passed in English did well in Xhosa.

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Pupils' performance in the expository writing task is similar to their performance in the narrative writing task. They did very poorly in the English version and had difficulty expressing themselves in English. Even though many pupils had not mastered the expository genre and were not able to write a coherent piece, their performance in the Xhosa version was much better. I discuss this further in Chapter Seven.

In the next section I provide an overview of the Grade 4 results in all three tasks, firstly by providing a composite list of marks for the two Grade 4 classes and then the average scores, and the differences in scores between the two languages, in the three tasks.

6.2.4 Full picture for Grade 4

The tables below provide the composite lists of marks for the two Grade 4 classes in alphabetical order, according to pupils' surnames. As indicated in Chapter Five, the scripts of only those pupils who completed all three tasks in both languages were included for analysis. In Grade 4N, 35 pupils completed all the tasks and in Grade 4S, 38 pupils completed all the tasks.

Table 6.1: Composite List of marks for Grade 4N

PUPIL	TASK 1		TASK 2		TASK 3	
	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa
A	4	6.5	2	5	5	8.5
B	4	7	1	5	2	6.5
C	3.5	4.5	2	2	0	5
D	6	7	3	5	4	8
E	4	5	1	5	2	6.5
F	1.5	7.5	1	1	2	6
G	3	7.5	1	4	5	6
H	4	7	1	4	2	4
I	3	6	1	2	2	6
J	4	5	0	3	1	6
K	2	6	3	2	2	4.5
L	6	6.5	3	3	4	8
M	3.5	6	1	4	5	7
N	1.5	5.5	2	2	3	7
O	4	7.5	1	3	6	8
P	2	6	2	2	1	5.5
Q	2	7	0	1	0	5
R	2	6.5	2	1	1	7
S	1	5.5	1	0	2	7
T	3	6	1	1	0	6
U	4	7.5	1	4	5	8
V	4	7	2	2	3	7
W	3	8.5	1	1	4	7
X	2	5.5	1	1	4	7
Y	6	7.5	5	4	7	8
Z	6	8	6	6	7	9
A1	1	5	1	1	3	8
B1	6	8.5	1	4	3	7
C1	4	6	2	4	0	7
D1	1	5	0	1	0	5
E1	2	8.5	0	2	2	7
F1	2	5	4	2	3	5
G1	7	7.5	3	2	4	7
H1	6	7	1	5	2	7
I1	3	4.5	2	5	3	7
Average	3.46	6.47	1.69	2.83	2.83	6.67
Percent	34.60%	64.70%	16.90%	28.30%	28.30%	66.70%

Note: The table is headed "GRADE 4N" / "ALL TASKS OUT OF TEN".

Table 6.2: Composite List of marks for Grade 4S

PUPIL	TASK 1 English	Xhosa	TASK 2 English	Xhosa	TASK 3 English	Xhosa
GRADE 4S						
ALL TASKS OUT OF TEN						
J1	1.5	4.5	2	3	2	7
K1	2	5	3	5	2	5
L1	0	6	0	3	1	4
M1	1.5	4.5	1	5	2	6.5
N1	4	5	3	4	4	6
O1	6.5	7.5	4	5	6	8
P1	4.5	5.5	2	5	2	6
Q1	4	7	2	5	2.5	6
R1	2	4	2	3	4	7
S1	2	6	0	5	2	5.5
T1	8	9	8	7	5	8
U1	5	6	4	6	3	7
V1	7	8	5	7	4	8
W1	1	6	1	3	0	5
X1	6	8	3	4	2	7
Y1	4	6	3	6	4	7
Z1	1	6	1	4	0	5
A2	0	5	0	2	0	4
B2	4	7.5	2	5	2	6
C2	1	4	1	4	2	5
D2	2	7	1	2	2	4.5
E2	4	6	0	0	0	2
F2	4	8	3	4	3	5
G2	2.5	7	2	6	2	7
H2	2	6	3	5	4	7
I2	2	5	1	2	0	5
J2	5.5	7.5	5	7.5	5	5.5
K2	2	4	1	4	2	3.5
L2	0	5	0	4	0	2.5
M2	5	6	3	4	5	5
N2	5	6.5	5	3	6	8
O2	3	3.5	1	1	4	5
P2	4	7.5	2	4	4	7
Q2	4	5	2	4	6	6
R2	4	6	5	3	3	5
S2	5	8	3	3	4	5.5
T2	1	6	1	2	1	5
U2	7.5	8.5	4	5	6.5	9
Average	3.36	6.13	2.34	4.07	2.82	5.8
Percent	33.60%	61.30%	23.40%	40.70%	28.20%	58%

The above tables provide the reader with an overview of how each pupil in Grade 4 performed in each of the tasks. The tables indicate the average mark and percentage for the class. They are also useful in looking at the performance of those pupils whose writing tasks were used as samples in Section 6.5.

The next section captures the class averages, and differences in scores between the two languages, across the tasks for each of the Grade 4 classes.

Average Percentages for Grade 4

The figures below capture the average scores, and differences in scores between the two languages, for Grades 4N and 4S.

Figure 6.7: Average percentages and differences in scores between the two languages for Grade 4N

Average percentages and differences between 2 languages for Grade 4N

	Narrative Writing	Reading Comprehension	Expository Writing
English	34.6	16.9	28.3
Xhosa	64.7	28.3	66.7
Difference	30.1	11.4	38.4
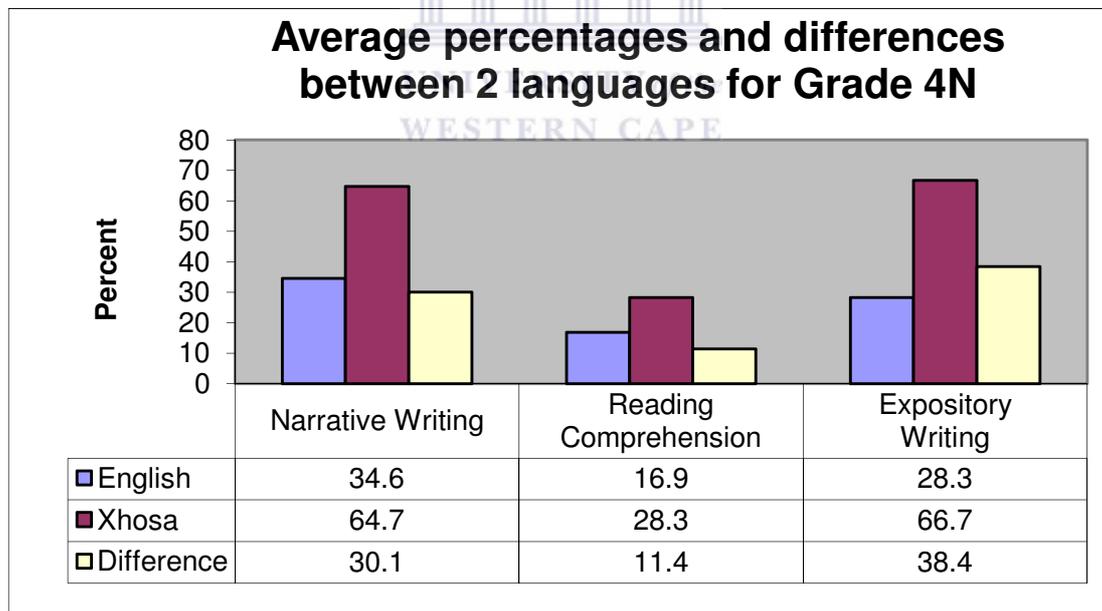
Figure 6.8: Average percentages and differences in scores between the two languages for Grade 4S

Average percentages and differences between 2 languages for Grade 4S

	Narrative Writing	Reading Comprehension	Expository Writing
English	33.6	23.4	28.2
Xhosa	61.3	40.7	58
Difference	27.7	17.3	29.8
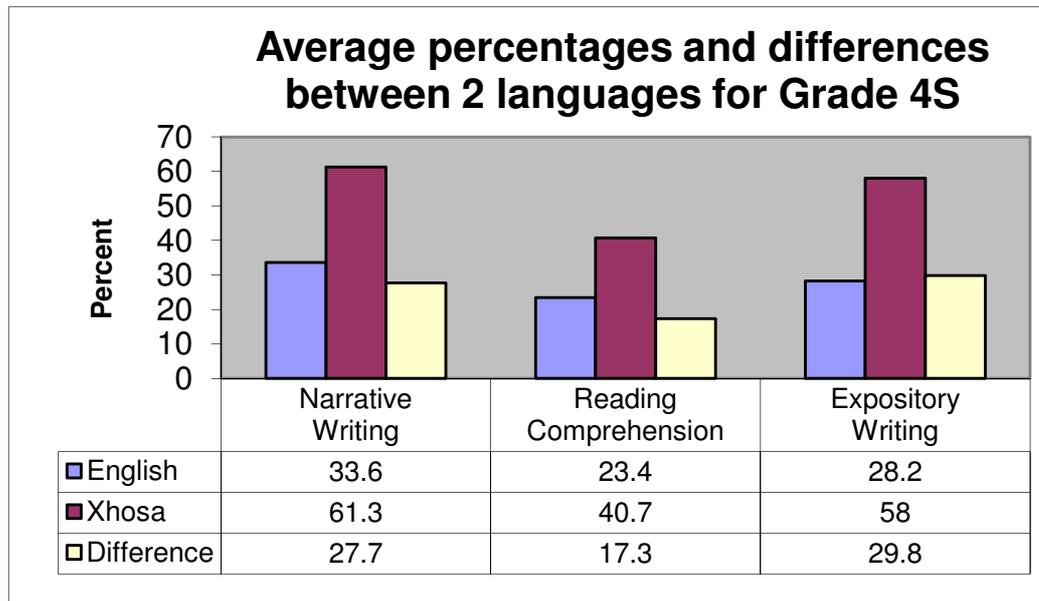
I wish to highlight the following features of the above results:

1. The average results for both the narrative and expository writing tasks in Xhosa were reasonably good.

2. The average results for reading comprehension were very weak in English and below 50% in Xhosa.

3. The average results for all the tasks performed in English were way below 50%.

There are a few unanswered questions arising from the average percentages for both Grade 4N and Grade 4S. I will merely raise them here as they are discussed further in Chapter Seven. The questions, which are related, are:

1. Why did pupils perform so poorly on average in all the English tasks?

2. Why did pupils perform so poorly on average in both the English as well as the Xhosa reading comprehension tasks?

The reader needs to bear in mind that the Grade 4 pupils had been taught through the medium of Xhosa for the previous three years. This was the first year they were

'officially' taught in English. I use the word 'officially' guardedly to indicate that despite English being the formal medium of instruction, the teachers in Grade 4 made frequent use of Xhosa whilst they were teaching.

I now proceed to look at the results of the Grade 7s who had 'officially' been taught in English for three years. The next section focuses on the Grade 7 results.

6.3 Grade 7 Results

In this section I present the results for each of the tasks for the Grade 7s. As indicated in Chapter Five, there were two Grade 7 classes. To distinguish between them, I have referred to them as 7B and 7N, drawing on the teachers' first names.

6.3.1 Grade 7 Narrative Writing

As indicated in Chapter Five, the narrative task was the same for both grades as it was assessing pupils' ability to write a narrative piece. Below are two graphs which capture the scores of the two Grade 7 classes in this task. The graphs start with the English scores in descending order. Each figure is followed by comments on the data.

Figure 6.9: Grade 7B Narrative Writing

GRADE 7B NARRATIVE WRITING

	F	R	A	V	E	D	C	H	X	W	Q	G	B	T	O	I	P	S	L	N	U	K	M	J
ENGLISH	7	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2
XHOSA	9	8	8	8	9	8	7.5	7	7	6.5	6	8	7.5	7.5	7	6.5	7	7	7	7	7	6	6	7
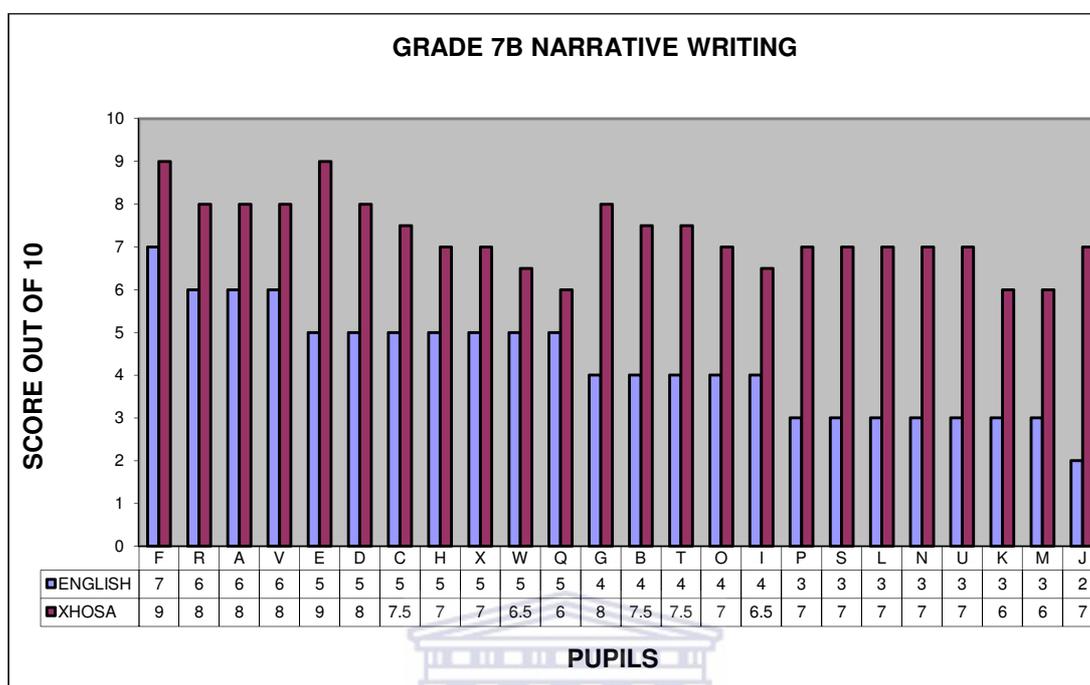
PUPILS

Grade 7B (24 pupils)

I wish to highlight the following features of the results for 7B:

1. All the pupils passed the narrative writing task in Xhosa and did so reasonably well.

2. 11 of the 24 pupils passed the same task in English, a higher percentage than those in Grade 4.

3. Those pupils who did well in English also did well in Xhosa. Those who did well in Xhosa did not necessarily do well in English, as was the case with the Grade 4s.

4. As with the Grade 4 results, the results for the narrative writing task in Grade 7 show the biggest difference in scores between the two languages.

Figure 6.10: Grade 7N Narrative Writing

	F1	Y1	W1	K1	N1	L1	U1	I1	G1	S1	X1	M1	E1	C1	A1	R1	D1	T1	H1	O1	B1	V1	Q1	J1	P1
ENGLISH	7	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2.5	2.5	2	2	2
XHOSA	8	8.5	7	7	8	8	7	7	8	8	6.5	5	9	8.5	7.5	6	5.5	5.5	5	4.5	6	5.5	7	5	4.5
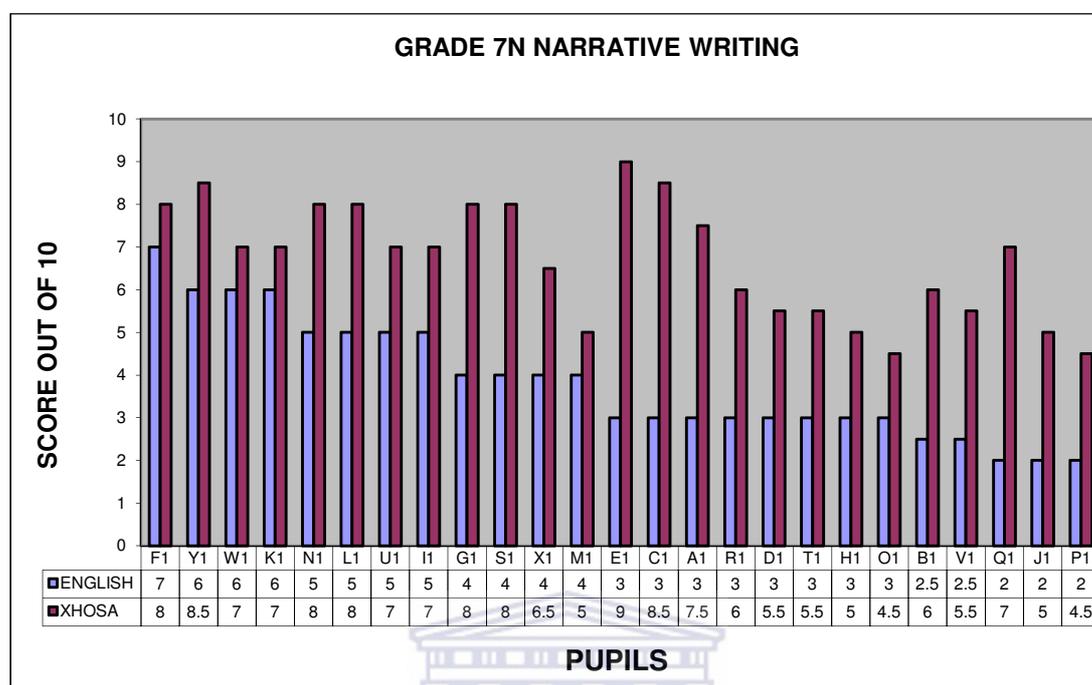
Grade 7N (25 pupils)

The results for Grade 7N tell more or less the same story as for Grade 7B. It appears that 7B performed slightly better, but not significantly so, than 7N. Two pupils failed the Xhosa narrative writing task in 7N whilst all the pupils in 7B passed the narrative writing task in Xhosa. Only 32% (8 out of 25) of the twenty-five pupils in 7N succeeded in passing the narrative writing task in English whilst almost 46% (11 out of 24) of the pupils succeeded in doing so in 7B.

I used the same task and the same marking criteria in the narrative writing task for both Grade 4 and Grade 7, but expected more sophisticated responses from the Grade 7 pupils in terms of lexical items, sentence construction and coherence. Although the Grade 7 pupils did better in both the English and the Xhosa tasks in terms of the class average, neither class scored a pass mark in the average mark for English.

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These issues are taken up in Chapter Seven which discusses the data further. The next section focuses on Grade 7 reading comprehension scores.

6.3.2 Grade 7 Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension task consisted of an extract dealing with material about malnutrition covered in the Grade 7 Geography curriculum. The next two figures show the scores of the Grade 7 pupils in the reading comprehension task. The graphs start with the English scores in descending order. As the reading comprehension for Grade 7 was out of 12, a pass mark would be 6 or more. Each figure is followed by comments on the data.

Figure 6.11: Grade 7B Reading Comprehension

GRADE 7B READING COMPREHENSION

|	C	R	K	G	P	E	Q	I	H	F	W	V	D	O	A	T	B	X	S	J	N	L	M	U
ENGLISH	4	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	4	2	4	4	4	2	2	2	1	8	6	5	5	4	3	3	1	1	1	5	4	4	3	1
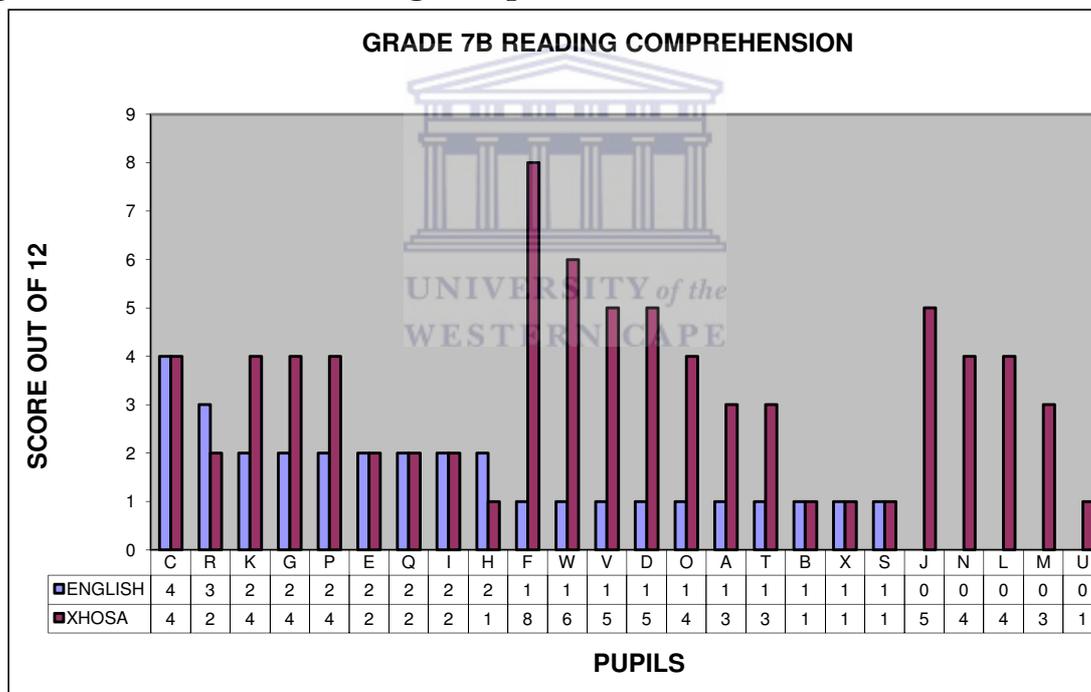
Grade 7B

1. The reading comprehension results for Grade 7B are very low.
2. The pupil who obtained the best results for the task in English in Grade 7B performed equally well in Xhosa, but failed both the English and Xhosa tasks.
3. Only two pupils managed to pass the reading comprehension task in Xhosa by scoring 6 or more. None passed the English task.

4. The link between good scores in English and Xhosa is no longer maintained.

5. There are two pupils who scored better in English. These are pupil H and pupil R.

Figure 6.12: Grade 7N Reading Comprehension

GRADE 7N READING COMPREHENSION

SCORE OUT OF 12

	F1	U1	W1	I1	N1	E1	P1	X1	L1	Q1	J1	V1	K1	Y1	A1	M1	G1	R1	O1	T1	D1	S1	H1	B1	C1
ENGLISH	6	6	5	4	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
XHOSA	7	7	5	5	4	5	4	4	7	4	4	3	2	6	3	3	2	2	5	4	4	3	2	1	0
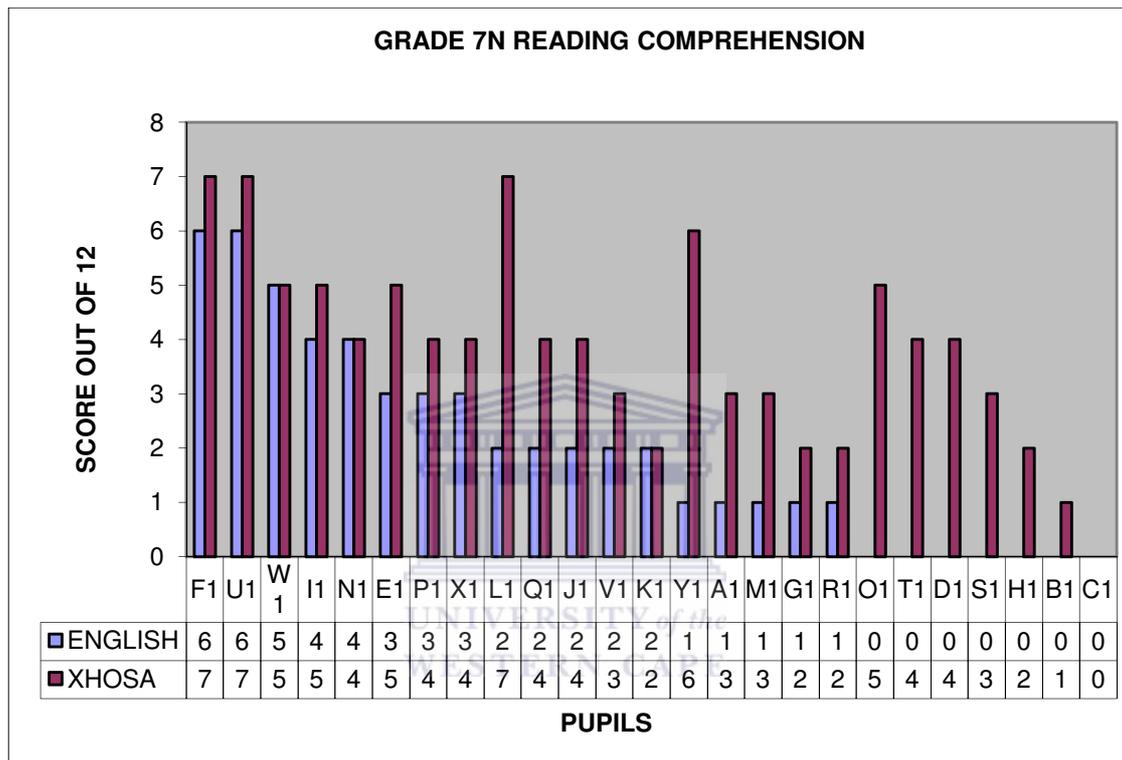
PUPILS

Grade 7N

1. The results for Grade 7N do not show exactly the same trends as in 7B.

2. The three pupils who obtained the best results in English also did well in Xhosa.

3. Two pupils managed to pass the English task in this class.

4. Four pupils passed the Xhosa task.

5. Two pupils who scored poorly in English, like L1 and Y1, managed to pass the Xhosa task.

6. None of the pupils performed better in the English task than in the Xhosa task, as was the case in 7B.

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Again, these results are discussed further in Chapter Seven. The next section looks at pupils' scores in the expository writing task.

6.3.3 Grade 7 Expository Writing

For the expository writing task, pupils were asked to write an essay on human geography, giving their opinions on population growth and the scarcity of resources, as indicated in Chapter Five. The next two figures look at the scores for the Grade 7 expository writing task. They start off with the English scores in descending order. They are followed by comments on the data from both figures.

Figure 6.13: Grade 7B Expository Writing

	B	H	V	D	A	K	E	N	M	L	I	O	W	T	J	U	C	Q	G	P	F	X	S	R
ENGLISH	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	3	2	0
XHOSA	6	6	6	6	6	5.5	5.5	5.5	4	6.5	6	6	5.5	5	5	5	4.5	4.5	4	4	5.5	5	2	5
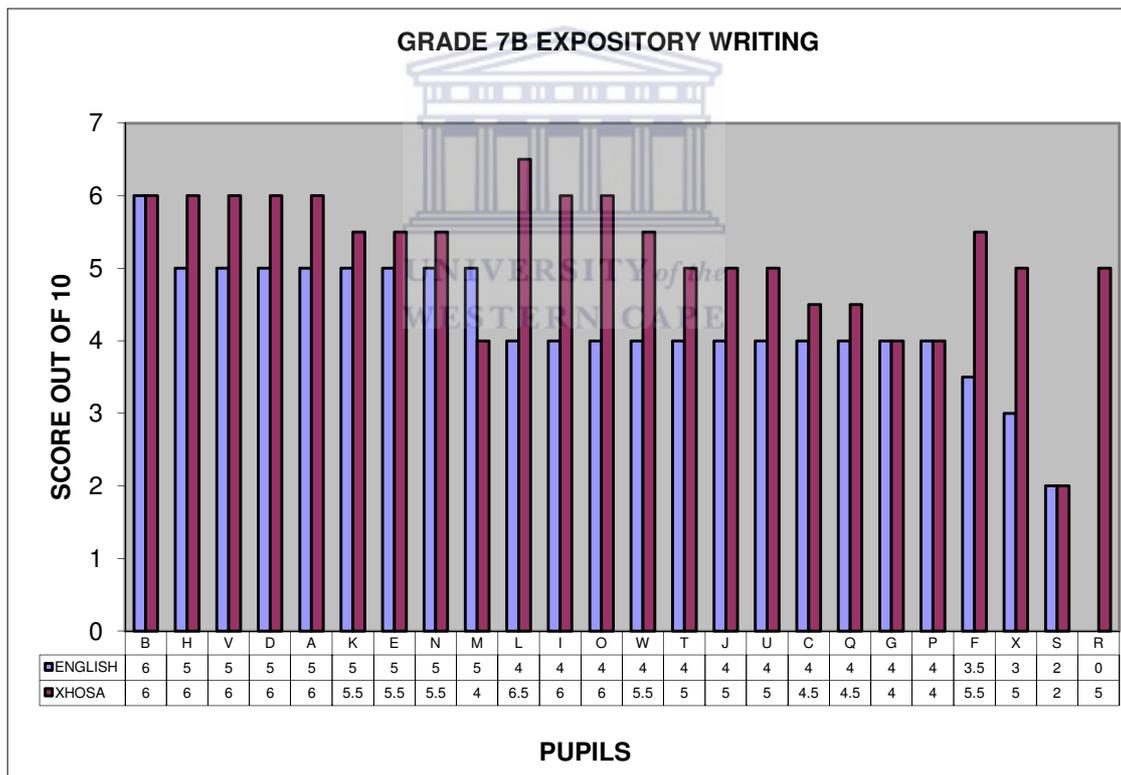
Figure 6.14: Grade 7N Expository Writing

GRADE 7N EXPOSITORY WRITING

	K1	F1	W1	N1	U1	P1	Y1	E1	H1	L1	G1	X1	I1	Q1	J1	O1	T1	S1	A1	V1	R1	D1	C1	M1	B1
ENGLISH	6.5	6	6	5	5	5	5	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	1.5	1	0
XHOSA	6.5	8	4	7.5	5	5	5	7	6	8	6	5.5	4	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	4	3.5	3	5	6	3

PUPILS (SCORE OUT OF 10)
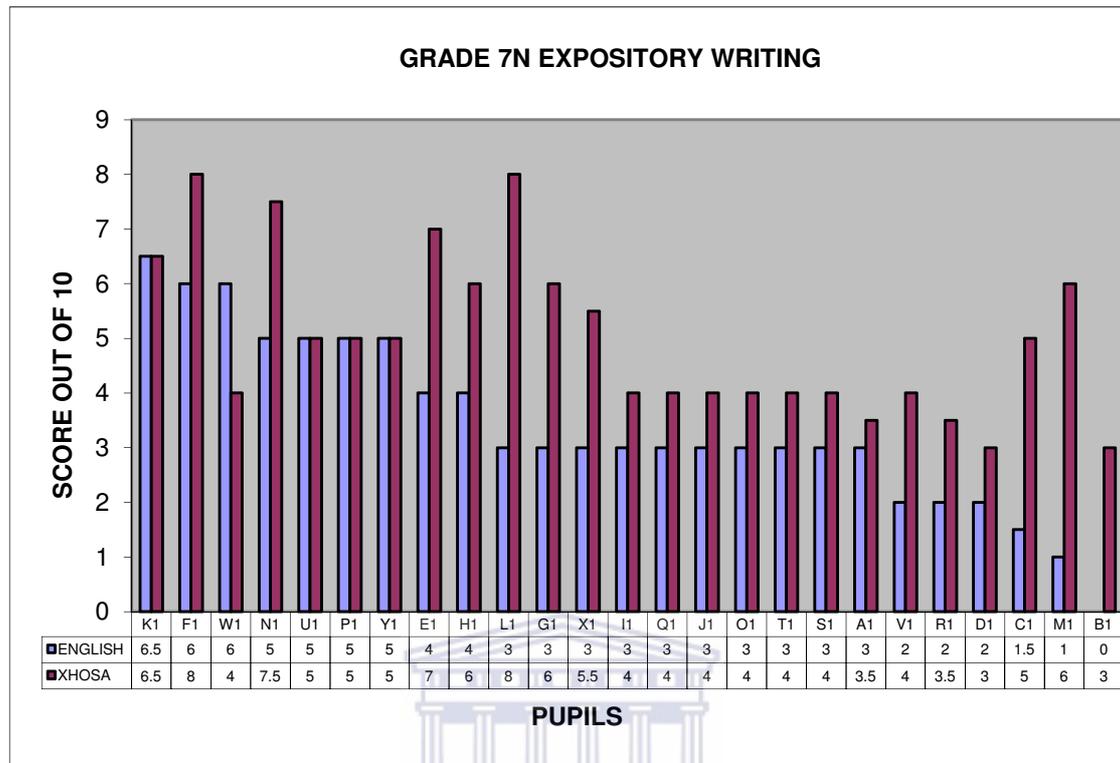
Grade 7B and 7N Expository Writing

I highlight features of the results for the expository writing task below for both Grade 7 classes:

1. Only one pupil in each of 7B and 7N managed to get better results in the English expository writing task than in the Xhosa expository writing task. The two pupils are Pupil M and Pupil W1.

2. As far as the average mark is concerned, the Grade 7 pupils performed slightly better in the English expository writing task than the Grade 4 pupils did.

3. The opposite appears to be true for the Xhosa, as the Grade 7 pupils' average mark in Xhosa is much lower than the Grade 4 average for the expository task in Xhosa.

4. Grade 7N show very similar results to Grade 7B.

5. 18 of the 24 pupils passed the Xhosa expository writing task in grade 7B.

6. Only 9 of the 24 pupils passed the English expository task in grade 7B.

7. As far as 7N is concerned, 13 of the 25 pupils passed the Xhosa task whilst only 7 managed to pass the English task.

The Grade 7 pupils' performance in the Xhosa expository task had declined compared to the performance of the Grade 4 pupils. The reader needs to bear in mind that all written work, except in the Xhosa subject class, was in English from Grade 4 onwards.

These results are probed further in Chapter Seven. In the next section I provide an overview of the Grade 7 results in all three tasks, firstly by providing a composite list of marks for the two Grade 7 classes and then showing the average scores, and differences in scores between the two languages, in the three tasks.

6.3.4 Full picture for Grade 7

The tables below provide the composite lists of marks for the two Grade 7 classes in alphabetical order, according to pupils' surnames. As indicated earlier in Chapter Five, the scripts of only those pupils who completed all three tasks in both languages are included for analysis. In Grade 7B, 24 pupils completed all three tasks and in Grade 7N, 25 pupils completed all.

Table 6.3: Composite List of Marks for Grade 7B

PUPIL	TASK 1 Narrative Writing		TASK 2 Reading Comprehension		TASK 3 Expository Writing	
	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa
A	6	8	1	3	5	6
B	4	7.5	1	1	6	6
C	5	7.5	4	4	4	4.5
D	5	8	1	5	5	6
E	5	9	2	2	5	5.5
F	7	9	1	8	3.5	5.5
G	4	8	2	4	4	4
H	5	7	2	1	5	6
I	4	6.5	2	2	4	6
J	2	7	0	5	4	5
K	3	6	2	4	5	5.5
L	3	7	0	4	4	6.5
M	3	6	0	3	5	4
N	3	7	0	4	5	5.5
O	4	7	1	4	4	6
P	3	7	2	4	4	4
Q	5	6	2	2	4	4.5
R	6	8	3	2	0	5
S	3	7	1	1	2	2
T	4	7.5	1	3	4	5
U	3	7	0	1	4	5
V	6	8	1	5	5	6
W	5	6.5	1	6	4	5.5
X	5	7	1	1	3	5
Average	4.29	7.27	1.29	3.29	4.10	5.17
Percent	42.90%	72.70%	10.70%	27.40%	41%	51.70%

Table header note: **GRADE 7B — NOTE THAT TASK 2 IS OUT OF 12, NOT 10 LIKE TASKS 1 AND 3**

Table 6.4: Composite List of Marks for Grade 7N

	TASK 1 Narrative Writing		TASK 2 Reading Comprehension		TASK 3 Expository Writing	
GRADE 7N NOTE THAT TASK 2 IS OUT OF 12, NOT 10 LIKE TASKS 1 AND 3						
PUPIL	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa	English	Xhosa
A1	3	7.5	1	3	3	3.5
B1	2.5	6	0	1	0	3
C1	3	8.5	0	0	1.5	5
D1	3	5.5	0	4	2	3
E1	3	9	3	5	4	7
F1	7	8	6	7	6	8
G1	4	8	1	2	3	6
H1	3	5	0	2	4	6
I1	5	7	4	5	3	4
J1	2	5	2	4	3	4
K1	6	7	2	2	6.5	6.5
L1	5	8	2	7	3	8
M1	4	5	1	3	1	6
N1	5	8	4	4	5	7.5
O1	3	4.5	0	5	3	4
P1	2	4.5	3	4	5	5
Q1	2	7	2	4	3	4
R1	3	6	1	2	2	3.5
S1	4	8	0	3	3	4
T1	3	5.5	0	4	3	4
U1	5	7	6	7	5	5
V1	2.5	5.5	2	3	2	4
W1	6	7	5	5	6	4
X1	4	6.5	3	4	3	5.5
Y1	6	8.5	1	6	5	5
Average	3.84	6.7	1.96	3.84	3.4	5.02
Percent	38.40%	67%	16.30%	32%	34%	50.20%

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The above tables provide the reader with an overview of how each pupil in Grade 7 performed in each of the tasks. The tables also indicate the average mark and percentage for the class. They are also useful in looking at the performance of those pupils whose writing tasks were used as samples in Section 6.6.

The next section captures the class averages, and the differences in scores between the two languages, across the tasks for each of the Grade 7 classes.

Average percentages and differences in scores between the two languages for Grade 7

The figures below capture the average scores and differences in scores between the two languages for Grades 7B and 7N.

Figure 6.15: Average percentages and differences in scores between the two languages for Grade 7B

Average percentages and differences between two languages for Grade 7B

	Narrative Writing	Reading Comprehension	Expository Writing
English	42.9	10.7	41
Xhosa	72.7	27.4	51.7
Difference	29.8	16.7	10.7

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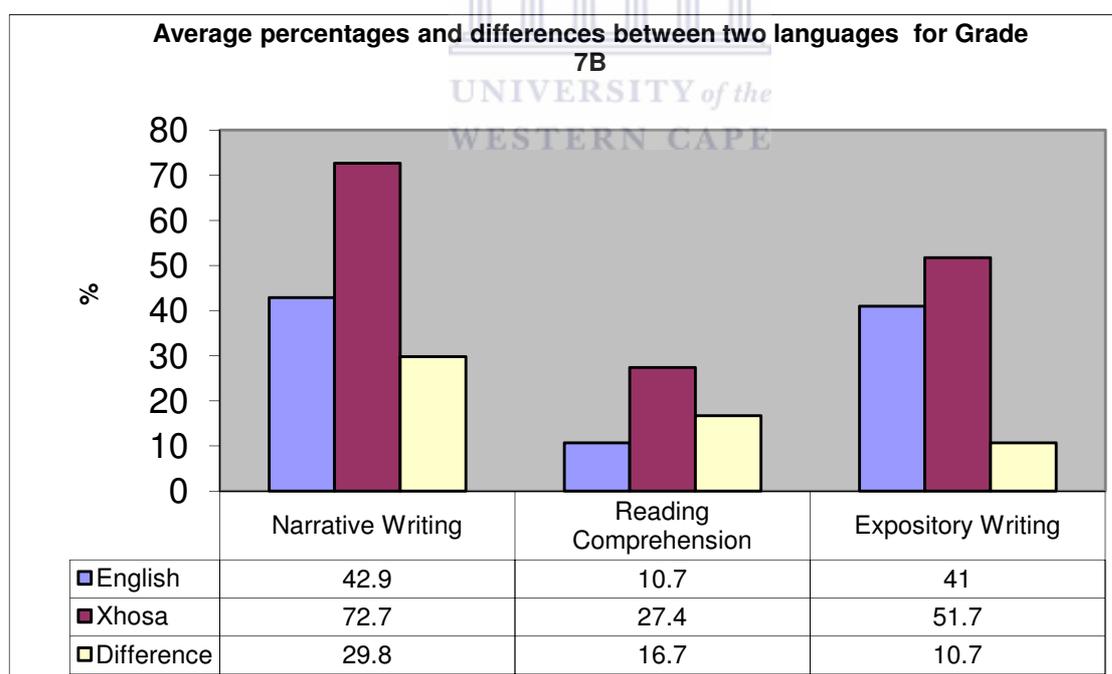
Figure 6.16: Average percentages and differences in scores between the two languages for Grade 7N

	Narrative Writing	Reading Comprehension	Expository Writing
Average percentages and diffeences between two languages for Grade 7N			
English	38.4	16.3	34
Xhosa	67	32	50.2
Difference	28.6	15.7	16.2
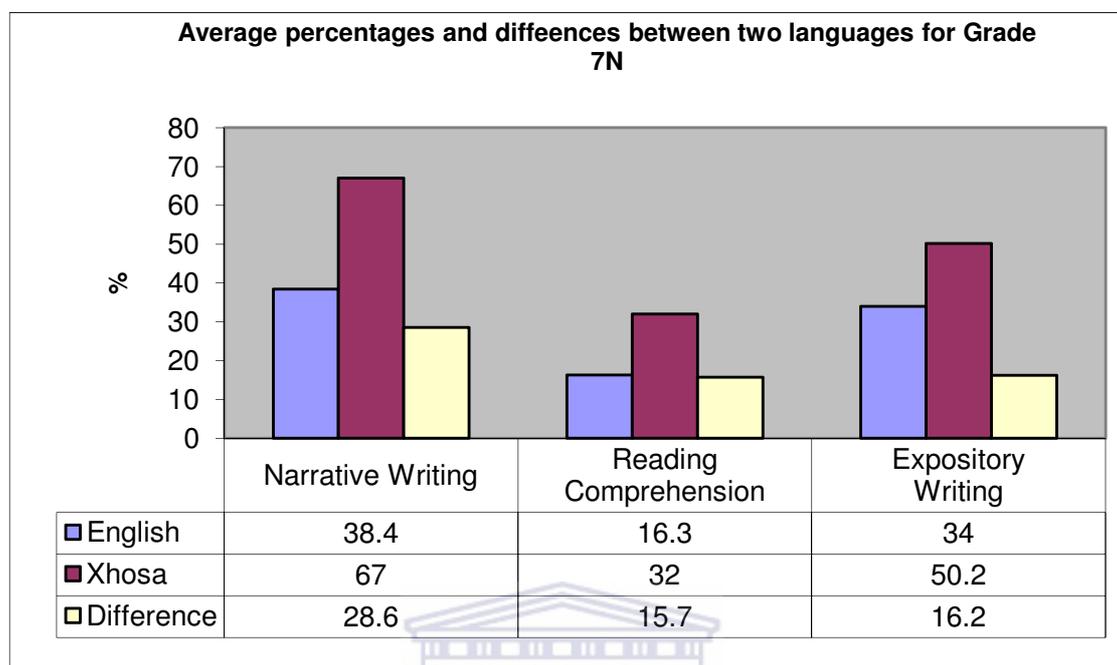
The difference between the English and Xhosa tasks in Grade 7 is greatest when it comes to the narrative tasks. The average mark in Xhosa for the expository writing task is barely a pass mark, whilst the average mark for reading is low in both languages. I offer possible explanations for this in the next chapter.

Before I take a closer look at some samples of pupils' writing, I provide a brief summary of the results.

6.4 Overview of the results

In every class the pupils as a whole performed relatively better in the Xhosa version. Pupils performed best in the narrative task but performed very poorly in the reading comprehension, in both languages. Those who did well in English also did well in Xhosa, but the converse was not often true. Pupils' performance in the expository task in Xhosa did not show any improvement on the Grade 4 results in Grade 7. On the contrary, it had declined. However, pupils' performance in English in the expository task had improved, even though the average was still below 50%. It needs

to be borne in mind though that the Grade 4 expository writing task was contextualised, whereas the Grade 7 one was not. Pupils had to draw on their knowledge of geography to answer this question, whilst the Grade 4 pupils were expected to draw on their experiential knowledge of Khayelitsha.

These findings indicate that pupils in both Grades 4 and 7 are able to communicate more effectively in Xhosa in Tasks 1 and 3. However, officially they are taught through the medium of English. On the basis of these findings, it seems as if there is a case to be made for allowing pupils at Themba Primary to continue studying *through* the medium of Xhosa beyond Grade 3. The poor reading scores in both languages indicate that prolonged exposure to written texts in both languages is needed to improve pupils' reading comprehension.

In the next section, I look more closely at some samples of pupils' writing. I have selected samples of pupils who have done well in the tasks and those who have done poorly in both languages. This is done according to grade, task and language. Each sample consists of first the pupil's Xhosa version, followed by a literal translation in English for the benefit of readers who might not understand Xhosa, and finally with the pupil's own English version.

6.5 Samples of Grade 4 writing

I start off with narrative writing samples.

Task 1: Narrative Writing

> *Sample 1*
> *Teacher N: Pupil I*
> *Xhosa version*
>
> Amasela ame emva komnye utata.
> Athatha ibhasikiti yalotata.
> Abaleka nayo.
> Lotata wabiza ipolisa.
> Akhwela imoto.
> Ayivula kwavela inyoka.
>
>
> English translation of Xhosa version
>
> The thieves are standing behind one old man.
> They take the basket of this old man.
> They ran away with it.
> This old man called a policeman.
> They got into the car.
> They opened it and a snake appeared.
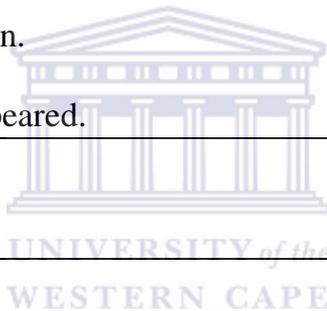
> *English version*
>
> The thieves stand back of father of velile.
> The thief take the box.
> The thief run to the car.
> The polise Bluing the Blim.
> He in the car.
> He open the box.

Comments on above sample:

As is evident from Table 6.1, Pupil I scored 6 in Xhosa and 3 in English for this task. Whilst the pupil had not yet mastered the narrative form, she nevertheless captured the essence of the story with its surprise ending in the Xhosa version. The English version, on the other hand, missed the essence of the story. There were quite a few spelling errors in the short English piece. The English version provided very little detail of the pictures. The Xhosa version showed that the pupil had understood what

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was taking place in the pictures. Despite the Xhosa sentences being short, they were all grammatically correct. There were two errors in the Xhosa version. These were incorrect word divisions of two words. They were *yalotata* instead of *yalo tata* (of this old man) in line 2 and *Lotata* instead of *Lo tata* (This old man) in line 4.

I proceed to Sample 2.

Sample 2
Teacher S: Pupil T1
Xhosa version

Ngenye imini kwakukho indoda yaye imile esikhululweni se nqwelo yomoya phambili kweebhasikithi zayo. Isela layithatha ibhasikethi xa inkwenkwe encinane ithetha nayo indoda. Babaleka nayo. Landoda yababona usogada wabetha impempe. Bangena emotweni bayambe bayivula ibhasikethi babona inyoka bafuna ukubaleka.

English translation of Xhosa version

One day there was a man he was standing at the airport in front of their basket. The thief took the basket when the small boy was talking to the man. They ran with it. The man saw them the security blew the whistle. They got into a car they went they opened the basket they saw the snake they wanted to run away.

English version

One day there was a man who was standing in front of his baskets. The thief took his basket when the little boy was talking to that man. They run away with the basket. And the man saw them the security blowed his wisil. They get in the car and go. They open the basket they saw a snake and they tray to run away.

Comments on above sample

Pupil T1 scored the highest mark in both languages out of all the Grade 4s which supports the point made earlier, that pupils who did well in the English narrative task also did well in the Xhosa task. Her mark was 9 for Xhosa and 8 for English. Unlike Pupil I, this pupil had mastered the narrative form – both her stories were coherent and in paragraph form. The use of words such as *kwakukho* in Xhosa and 'one day' in English show her sense of the genre. She made very few errors in both the English

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version and Xhosa version. Some such errors in the Xhosa version were incorrect word divisions in line 1 – *se nqwelo yomoya* instead of senqwelo yomoya or *senqwelo-moya* and *Landoda* instead of *La ndoda* in line 3 and a spelling error in line 4 – *bayambe* instead of *bahamba*. She tended to write long sentences, such as the last sentence, without the use of punctuation or conjunctions in both languages. Although the stories in both languages were fairly short, she has captured the sequence of events very accurately. Her stories were also focused on the pictures.

I now present two samples of the reading comprehension task.

Task 2: Reading Comprehension

With the reading comprehension, each answer in Xhosa is followed by the literal translation in English.

Sample 3
Teacher N: Pupil I1
Xhosa version with literal English translation included in brackets

1. Izinto ezinga ncedo amazinyo ethu lubisi, isonko samnzi.
(Things which can help our teeth are milk and cheese.)

2. Enye into endingalondoloza ngu gqira.
(Another thing I can keep is the doctor.)

3. Ukutya okungawalungelanga amazinyo yi swekile.
(Food which is not suitable for teeth is sugar.)

4.Umntu endingaya kuye ngu gqirha wamazinyo.
(Someone I can go to is the dentist.)

5. Kuba kufunekasiwalondoloze azinyethu.
(Because we have to look after our teeth.)

English version

1. Milk and chese that is healthy.
2. I would care Vitamin c and green Vegetables.
3. The food that is bad is sweets, cake, fizzy.
4. I would go to doctor and doctor tells me the things that i must eat.
5. And doctor helps me I would say jesus is the light of the wald.

Comments on above sample

As can be seen in Table 6.1, Pupil I1 scored 5 in the Xhosa version and 2 in the English version. Although both versions showed limited understanding of the passage, the pupil fared better in the Xhosa version. Her vocabulary was better in the Xhosa version – for example, the use of the word *okungawalungelanga* which means suitable in English. It is interesting to note that the pupil could not answer question 5, which expected pupils to come up with an original response not found in the passage - in both the English and the Xhosa versions. There were minor spelling errors in both languages, mainly to do with word divisions and the incorrect use of contractions in Xhosa such as *ngu gqirha* instead of *ngugqirha* in Question 4 and *azinyethu* instead of *amazinyo wethu* (our teeth) in Question 5.

 I proceed to the second sample in the reading comprehension task.

Sample 4
Teacher S: Pupil K1
Xhosa version with literal English translation included in brackets

1. Sixuwe ngebrashi nekhongeythi.
(We clean our teeth with a brush and colgate.)

2. Ukuba sitye iziqamo nemifuno.
(That we eat fruit and vegetables.)

3. Yiswekire neswits.
(Sugar and sweets.)

4. Ngugqirha wamazinyo.
(It is the dentist.)

5. Ngokuba amazinyo kuze angaboli.
(Because the teeth so that they do not decay.)

Comments on above sample

Pupil K1 scored 5 in the Xhosa reading task and 3 in the English version. The Xhosa version indicates that the pupil understood the passage and the questions, apart from Question 2. There were spelling and grammatical errors in both versions. Some of these in the Xhosa version were: *iziqamo* instead of *iziqhamo*; *yiswekire* instead of *yiswekile* and *neswits* instead of *neeswiti*. It is interesting to note that the English version and the Xhosa version had different answers. It appears as if the pupil's understanding of the passage varied with the language, or, more likely, the pupil did not have the vocabulary in English to answer the questions as she did in Xhosa.
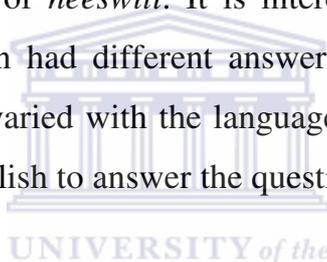
I now present two samples of the expository writing task.

Task 3: Expository Writing

Sample 5
Teacher N: Pupil I1
Xhosa version

Ndingathi Makucoceke emakhayeni Kwenzela ukuba abantwana bakhule kakuhle.
Kufuneka sakhe imatholihi kunye xa imdaka siwahlambe.
Ndingathi makucoceke nangaphandle ezitalatweni kucoceka kakhulu. Ndiphinde ndithi makwakiwe izikolo.
Makwakiwe iswiming pools, itoyileti.
Kunye xa sibadala sibenama shishini neofice.
Sibenazo ne zi parking garageg kuphela.

English translation of Xhosa version

I can say that houses should be clean so that children can grow up well.
We must build toilets together and wash them when they are dirty.
I can say it must be clean, even outside in the streets it must be very clean. I also say that schools should be built.
Swimming pools and toilets should be built.
When we grow old we must have businesses and offices.
And have these parking garages only.

English version

1. I would say people we must care Khayelitsha because we have children in this street.
2. And we must clean aware streets make it clean.
3. Plus awere children cold grow up.
4. And plus aware children would grow up very strong.
5. And if aware Khayelitsha is clean and creat I would say Jesus is the light.

Comments on above sample

Pupil I1 scored 7 in the Xhosa task and 3 in the English version. Despite the fact that both versions were not in the form of coherent paragraphs, the content of the Xhosa version was better than the English version as it raised different aspects of life in Khayelitsha that needed to be addressed. The English version was rather limited in content and focused mainly on the cleanliness aspect and the growing up of children. There were numerous spelling mistakes in the English version, whilst the Xhosa version had few errors. These were incorrect word divisions as in line 6: *sibenama shishini* instead of *sibe namashishini* and incorrect pluralization such as: *itoyileti* instead of *iithoyilethi*; *neofice* instead of *ne-ofisi* and incorrect borrowing such as *parking garageg* instead of i*garaji yokupakisha*.

I proceed to the next sample in the expository writing task.

Sample 6
Teacher S: Pupil A2
Xhosa version

1. Ndirha lelakuthengiswe igolindi.
2. Ndirha[54] bangalwi.
3. Ndirha kuthengiswe ifruthi.
4. Ndirha kuthengisweyonke ininto.
5. Ndirha abantubangahambi ehleleni.
6. Ndirha bangarobani.

English translation of Xhosa version

1. I wish that gold could be sold.
2. They may not fight.
3. Fruit could be sold.
4. Everything could be sold.
5. People could not walk on the road.
6. They cannot rob each other.

English version

1.Dow shop.
2.Dow in klinikh.
3.Dow shop shuzi.
4.Thi sokha.
5.Dow thowusi.
6.Dow ngaraji.
7.Dow tshetshi.
8.Dow bhasitop.
9.Dow ndog.
10.Dow furit.

Comments on above sample

Pupil A2 scored 0 in the English task and 4 in the Xhosa task. Similar comments as made for Pupil I1 apply to this pupil. She too has not mastered the art of writing a coherent piece with her attempt in both languages consisting of long lists. However,

---

[54] The Xhosa version of 'I wish' is 'Ndirhalela'. The pupil's first sentence is an example of incorrect word division. The sentence should have read: Ndirhalela kuthengiswe igolide. Sentences 2 to 6, on the other hand, do not display the same error. There is no such word as 'ndirha' on its own and therefore cannot be translated as 'I wish', even if that might have been the pupil's intention.

her English version made even less sense, with many words just being incomprehensible. The Xhosa version, on the other hand, did make sense. The reader can see that she applied her mind to the question and came up with a plausible response. Whilst the English version was riddled with errors, there were some errors in the Xhosa version too. These again relate to word division and spelling. The first sentence for example should have read as follows: *Ndirhalela* (I wish) *kuthengiswe* (could be sold) *igolide* (gold). Sentences 2-6 have left out part of the word. It should read *ndirhalela* not *ndirha*. Spelling errors are *ininto* instead of *into* and *ehleleni* instead of *endleleni*.

Key issues relating to the above samples are discussed further in Chapter Seven.

I now turn to samples of Grade 7 writing in all three tasks.

6.6 Samples of Grade 7 Writing

Task 1: Narrative Writing

Sample 7
Teacher B: Pupil E
Xhosa version

Abakhuthuzi Ababini

Ngenye imini kukho umntu ongutata waye se airport, waye me umcha waye lindele ukuba kufike inqwelo moya.

Wathi esame njalo kwathi gqi abafana ababini bagqiba ukuba mabathathe imantyi yalotata. Omnye wabo wayakulo tata wafika wabuza ngezinto ezibheke emacaleni. Wabuza lotata ukuba ndingaku nceda ngantoni wabe embuza ngezi zinto zingekhoya. Elinye eli isela belishiyekile lambona ukuba akamjonganga.

Wathatha omnye womthwalo walotata babaleka wakhwaza lotata efuna uncedo ncedani!! Kwabe kukho umfo ongunogada wavuthela impepe ebiza abanye onogada babe abakhuthuzi bengena emotweni yabo bemka. Bafika baya emahlahleni aba bakhuthuzi bavula lemantyi kwathi gqi inyoka eyona inkulu bothuka begqa amehlo kukoyika.
Sasiyaphe ibali lam.

English translation of Xhosa version

The Two Robbers

One day there was an old man who was at the airport, standing in a queue, waiting for the arrival of an aeroplane.

While he was standing there two young men came and they decided to take the old man's basket. One of them went to the old man and he asked him irrelevant questions. This old man asked whether I can help you and the young man continued asking him false things. The other thief saw that he was not looking at him.

He took one of the old man's luggages, and they ran away. This old man shouted for help. Help, please!! There was a security officer who blew the whistle for the attention of other security officers while the two robbers were getting into their car and went away. They went to the forest and opened this basket. A very big snake came out and they were shocked and terrified.
There ends my story.

English version

Two Robbery

Once open time the was two robbery in airport. The was a man standing few line and with he's houbor.

Two robbery come behind him and saw he's barsket. One robbery go to him and ask silly things and another one take the barsket they ran away and he shout for help. The seturity blow the wesil for calling seturity's they ran away and get into they car and drive and go to the bush.

they take out the barsket and open it inside the barsket the was a big snake they fraded. that is my end of my storie.

Comments on above sample

Pupil E scored 5 in English and 9 in Xhosa. This pupil has mastered the narrative form in both languages. Although the story line is captured in both languages, the Xhosa version is a much better one in terms of sentence construction, lexical use and narrative effect, such as the use of exclamations and building up to a climax. There are a few spelling errors in the Xhosa version. Examples of these are *umcha* in line 1

instead of *umgca*; *impepe* in line 8 instead of *impempe* and *onogada* instead of *oonogada* in the plural form. Word division remains a problem. For example, in line 1, it should read *wayese-ephothi* instead of *waye se airport*. There are a few grammatical errors such as the incorrect use of direct speech in line 5 (*ndingaku nceda* instead of *angamnceda ngantoni*) and *Sasiyaphe* instead of *Liyaphela* in the last line. The English has far more spelling errors and the vocabulary used is limited. The Xhosa version makes use of words like 'terrified' 'irrelevant' and so forth.

Below is the next sample of Grade 7 narrative writing.

Sample 8
Teacher N: Pupil G1
Xhosa version

Kwathi ngenye imini kwaku se airport. Kukhu mfananethi ekwathi gqi abantu ababini ababeyimi gulukudu caba bacinga icebo lithile ukuba mababe la bhegi yalomfo wayemile eyibeke mva kwakhe ibhegi leyo.

Waya ngaphambili omnye wancokoliso lo mhlekazi kanti omnye uya ehwekhwa ngemva ufuna ukuthatha le bhegi.

Wayithatha wachwechwa uzimela. Wayeka ukuncokola kuba weyeyibona ukuba umngani wakhe usebenzile. Wabaleka badibana bemnka. Besiya emotweni yabo.

Wakhwaza usajini owaye gadile. Wakhalisa impempe ndiyana kuba wayebiza amanye amapolisa.

Bafika nje emotweni bakhwela bemnka bayiqhuba bebaleka njalo.

Bafika kwenye inkampu omnye wayivula omnye eme ngaphambili kwathi gqi into enkulu yenyoka seyikhamisa bothuka kwawa minqwazi kunye dimasi zomnye.

English translation of Xhosa version

One day, it was at the airport. There was a young man and two robbers came and seemingly they were thinking of a plan to steal this man's bag which was behind him as he was standing.

One of them went forward to talk with this gentleman while the other one walked quietly to take the bag.

He took it he went quietly hiding. He stopped conversing because he saw that his friend had worked. He ran away and they ran away. They went to their car.

The sergeant who was on duty shouted. He blew the whistle I think he was calling other policemen.

They got into the car and drove away.

They reached a certain camp one of them opened it while the other one was standing in front a very big snake came out with its mouth wide open they were shocked and the hats and sunglasses fell off.

English version

In the next of airport there were two guys. This guys robbery. And have man that have atwo bags. So the robbery guys He want that bag is bigger than there. other guy is long one and other short guy. Short guy got to this man and speak this man.

Long guy go slowly step to the bag and take this bag slowly from the back of this man quickly.

And he running and running to the car. This man say help me my bag. The police beat the dock police.

He get in the car and go to the place that can see what is it without desteping. So short guy is back of this bag open this bag. Longman he says that oh! oh!. And hat disapear.

Comments on above sample

Pupil G1 scored 8 in the Xhosa version and 4 in the English version. Whilst the English story was confusing and did not capture the surprise ending, the Xhosa version accurately depicted the pictures in the story. The element of surprise was captured very well in the last paragraph of the Xhosa version. The story aspect was

highlighted by the use of words such as 'one day'. Lack of vocabulary and poor command of English probably explain the limited attempt of the pupil in English. For example, the pupil did not seem to know the word 'thief' hence his use of the phrase 'robbery guys'. There were a few errors in the Xhosa version. These were mainly spelling errors, such as *wancokoliso* in line 4 instead of *wancokolisa*; *ehwekhwa* instead of *echwechwa* and *bemnka* instead of *bemka*.

I now look at samples of the second task which was a reading comprehension exercise.

Task 2: Reading Comprehension

With the reading comprehension, each answer in Xhosa is followed immediately by the translation in English in brackets.

Sample 9
Teacher B: Pupil F
Xhosa version

1. Ukungondleki yindlala ethi ibekhona ebantwaneni abangaphantsi kwiminyaka esihlanu xa bethe abahoywa ngo mama baba ababazeleyo ngokutya okusempilweni.
(Malnutrition is starvation which occurs in children under the age of five years when their mothers do not provide them with nourishing food.)

2. Unobangela yimveliso ephantsi yokutya.
(The reason is the low production of food.)

3. Ngoba uninzi lwabantu baya kuhlala ezidolophini ezinkulu.
Luyekile ukuzivelisela okwalo ukutya.
(Because most of the people go to live in big cities. They have stopped to produce their own food.)

4. Ngoba abantwana basathambile bankenenkene ngoku xa bengafumani kutya kusempilweni kulula ukuba bafumane ukungondleki.
(Because children are still weak, when they don't get nourishing food it is easy for them to catch malnutrition.)

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5. Hayi akukho ukungondleki apha emzanzi afrika inxaki kukungakwazi ukutya ukusempilweni.
(No there is no malnutrition in South Africa the only problem is lack of knowledge about nourishing food.)

6. Ngokuba kufundiswe abantu basethyini ukutya okuya egazini kwaye ukutya okusempilweni ebantwaneni babo.
(By teaching females about nourishing food for their children.)

English version of Pupil F

1.Its illness that is become to the poorly development of child
2.The main problem is the low production of food
3.because in most areas the climate and soil alow
4.because the child is not health and he do not get a healthy food
5.No because the is not more hunger here in South Africa
6.The women of child must give the child the write food

Comments on above sample

Pupil F scored 8 in the Xhosa version and 1 in the English version. It is clear from his answers to the comprehension in Xhosa that he understood the passage and the questions. The answers in Xhosa were not lifted from the passage but were offered in the pupil's own words. The answer to question 4 in Xhosa, for example, showed that the pupil had thought about the question. The English answers, on the other hand, were often lifted from the passage and usually did not answer the question. Apart from a few spelling and punctuation errors, the Xhosa version was well written at a level suitable for Grade 7, whilst the English version was much weaker, and poorly expressed.

Sample 10
Teacher N: Pupil G1
Xhosa version

1. Ukungondleki kukunga fumani ukutya okungesampilo kuwe.
(Malnutrition is not to get food which is not right for your health.)

2. Ngoba xa umhlaba ungavumi ukuba makulinywe okanye izulu.
(Because when the land does not allow for cultivation or weather.)

3. Uthi ufumane isifo sephepha okanye iT.B. ayikhawulezi ukunya ngeka.
(You catch T.B. and it is not quickly cured.)

4. Ngoba abakho sempilweni tu.
(Because they are not in good health at all.)

5. Hayi, ngoba abantu apha soze uve kusithiwa kufe umntu kukulamba emzantsi Afrika.
(No, because you will never hear a case where someone dies because of starvation here in south Africa.)

6. Ngokuthi kulinywe ukutya umntwana ngamnye achaze xa engonelanga aphindwe.
(By planting food and each child tells when he needs some more food.)
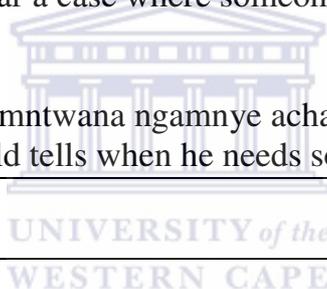
English version

1. Malnutrition is most common and severe in children onder five years of age.
2. It malnutrition is very many beouse they not plant.
3. Yes, Becouse he want their children healthy and strong and land is not virtile.
4. Because sun did not become and land.
5. No, Becouse do not people that have died with do not get enough foods.
6. To plant thier own food.

Comments on above sample

Pupil G1 did poorly in this task in both languages, scoring 2 in Xhosa and 1 in English. However, even though he did not do well in Xhosa, his answers were comprehensible and there were only a few errors relating to word division. The English answers, on the other hand, often did not make sense or were taken straight from the passage.

I now proceed to look at samples of the third task, the expository writing task.

Task 3: Expository Writing

Sample 11
Teacher B: Pupil A
Xhosa version

Ewe. Ndiyayinqina.
Kufuneka abantu babenabantwana abambalwa enzele ukwanda kwabantu kwehle.
Emzantsi Afrika sibaninzi gqitha kodwa indlala ininzi apha ebantwini abamnyama
nabo abantu abamnyama abazi ukuba ngabana bangenza njani.

Abanye abantu kufuneka babena bantwana umntu ngamnye unomtwana omnye
okanye ababini. Abantu bathi bafuna izindlu zingadibani ngokuba ukwanda
kwezindlu. Abanye abantu abazifumani Izibhedlele.

Abanye abantu bathi bafuna imisebenzi ukuze bakwazi ukondla intsaphazabo.
Akufuneki ukubanga bana ufuye imfuyo kwalapha esitalatweni kuba kwaloku
singazifumana izifo. Kufuneka ukubangabana abantu bakwazi ukufumana izinto
ngokulinganayo.

Abanye bazala abantwana abaninzi banga kwazi ukubahoya. Kodwa apha
ezidolophini baninzi abantu yaye siya sisanda. Amanzi kufuneka siwafumane
umhlaba umoya.

English translation of Xhosa version

Yes. I agree with it.
People must have few children so that human population can decrease. In south
Africa we are a big population but starvation is high with black people and black
people do not know what to do.

Some people must have children each person must have one child or two children.
People say that they want houses not be joined together because increase in houses.
Some people do not get hospitals.

Some people say that they are looking for jobs so that they can support their families.
You must not farm cattle in the street because we will catch diseases. People must get
equal shares.

Some give birth to many children and cannot support them. But here in urban areas
there are many people and we are gradually increasing. We must get water land air.

Comments on above sample

Pupil A scored 6 in Xhosa and 5 in English. It is interesting to note that she used different sets of arguments in the Xhosa and English version. In the Xhosa version she agreed that population growth should be controlled. In the English version, however, she argued for more resources and seemed to imply that over-population was not the issue. The focus in the English version was on the rural areas. Both versions were not coherently constructed in that the ideas were scattered and not well structured. There were a few spelling errors in the Xhosa version such as *ndiyayinqina* instead of *ndiyayingqina* and word division problems such as *babena bantwana* instead of *babe nabantwana* in line 4 and *ukubanga bana* instead of *ukuba ngabana* in line 8. However, there were many more spelling errors in the English version.

I now proceed to the second sample of expository writing.

Sample 12
Teacher N: Pupil G1
Xhosa version

Ewe ndiyangqinelana nentetho ethetwa apha ngumbhali.

Kaloku abanye bethu umntu kusuke azale abantwana abaninzi kakhulu umzekelo abasibhozo.

Kanti kufuneka ukuze sifumane uphuhliso ngokwandayo kufuneka umntu ngamnye azale abantwana ababini kuphela emhlabeni ngoku. Ukuze sijongane nezinto eziza nophuhliso okanye (resources) kuthi bantu. Okanye xa uzele ngaphezulu kwabantwana ababini mhlawumbi abathathu kunikwe ongenamntana omfunayo.

English translation of Xhosa version

Yes I agree with the speech spoken here by the writer. Some of us give birth to many children for example eight children.

Whereas if we want to get sufficient increasing development, each individual must give birth to two children only here on earth. So that we can attend to things that come with development or (resources) to us people. Or if you have given birth to more than two children, perhaps three, someone without children should be given a child.

English version

Many people believe that if we are to have enough resources for everyone in the future we have to do two main things. Like other countries. Each person born nine or seven children with one year. So that is why we do not get enough resources.

Sometimes other lady take a husband and devoce after the husband make a child and she go another husband again husband want to make a child. It is wrong.

What must people do must born two children or one child in one year so we can get their enough resources.

Comments on above sample

Pupil G1 scored 6 in the Xhosa version and 3 in the English version. The Xhosa version was much clearer and more focussed. The pupil has grasped the dual aspects

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of the question, that is, population control and control of resources. He made a convincing argument to link the two aspects mentioned in the question to address the problem. There were only two spelling errors in his Xhosa piece. These were *ethetwa* in line 1 instead of *ethethwa* and *ongenamntana* in the last line instead of *ongenamntwana*. The English version, on the other hand, was much more difficult to follow and did not raise a clear argument. The first sentence was lifted straight from the question. The English version displayed many errors, both in spelling, grammar and in sentence construction.

The next section summarises the main points emerging from the comments on the samples.

6.7 Summary of comments on samples of learner writing in Grades 4 and 7

Xhosa versions

What follows is a summary of the comments on pupils' writing in Xhosa. On the positive side, in Task 1, pupils were able to reflect what was happening in the pictures fairly accurately. Sentences were complex. In Grade 7 pupils' samples were also longer. There is evidence of good vocabulary, for example, 'irrelevant'; 'appeared'; 'shocked'. In Grade 7B, Pupil E's narrative showed evidence of direct speech - 'Help, please!!' There were very few grammatical and spelling errors.

On the negative side, the versions were largely in descriptive mode - pupils in both grades had not yet mastered the narrative mode. Pupils in both grades used the demonstrative pronoun 'this' inappropriately. Pupils had not yet mastered the use of cohesive devices.

With regard to the reading comprehension, there was an attempt by pupils to use their own words in the Xhosa version. However, pupils performed poorly in the reading task in both grades. Reading with understanding was a challenge to pupils in both grades, particularly in relation to texts based on their content subjects such as Task 2 in both grades. It was evident at Grade 4 level that the pupils had not had much

exposure to expository writing tasks. Despite this, the Xhosa version was often an attempt to answer the question.

English versions

Pupils were struggling to express themselves in English in Grade 4. Although there was an improvement in Grade 7, the pupils' proficiency was nowhere near the requirements for using it as sole medium of instruction. This is the situation despite English being the official medium of instruction from Grade 4 onwards. The 'story' aspect was completely lost in the English version of the narrative, particularly in Grade 4. Spelling and grammatical errors abounded and the sentences were generally very short. The samples showed that pupils had difficulty in forming sentences.

With regard to the reading comprehension task, pupils tended to extract chunks from the text in answering the questions. Often, the question was not answered. At Grade 4 level, the expository task was often in the form of a list. Although there was more varied expression in Grade 7, the pupils' average was below 50%. However, there was closer correlation between the English and Xhosa versions in Grade 7.

From the above summaries, it is evident that pupils have great difficulty expressing themselves in English. Yet English is the official medium of instruction from Grade 4. Is there not a case therefore to extend Xhosa beyond Grade 3 as a medium of instruction at schools such as Themba Primary? The discussion in Chapter Seven attempts to address this question.

6.8 Summary

In this chapter I have presented an overall picture of the results based on the administered tasks. I have tried to give the reader a glimpse into these pupils' levels of proficiency in English and Xhosa. I use the word 'glimpse' deliberately as I am fully aware of the limitations of this study which looked at proficiency from the

perspective of three writing tasks only. The 'glimpse' however, does indicate that pupils' proficiency in Xhosa is much better than their proficiency in English, even in the reading comprehension, in which pupils fared poorly in both languages.

In the next chapter, I discuss salient points emerging from the study. I relate these to the literature discussed in the theoretical chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on further analysing and discussing the data presented in Chapter Six. The data analysis is informed by the research question, the aims and objectives (see Chapter One) and the theoretical framework underlying the study (see Chapter Four), that is, the conceptual framework relating to theories on mother tongue education, (bi)multilingual education and the link between first language development and second language acquisition. This chapter intends to make sense of the data presented by analysing the task scores and interpreting the data, drawing on the theories and constructs discussed in Chapter Four.

Many authors state that qualitative research data analysis involves breaking the data up into manageable themes, patterns or trends in order to make sense of it (Henning et al 2004, p. 102; Mouton 2001, p.108). In the case of this study, the data analysis is guided by the research questions and the aims and objectives, focusing on emerging themes and questions. As indicated in Chapter One, the main research question of this study is whether there is a case for extending the mother tongue (in this case, Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years in African primary schools, such as Themba Primary. The main objectives of the study are also outlined in Chapter One. The first objective was to profile the proficiencies of pupils at Themba Primary in Grade 4 and Grade 7 in Xhosa and English in three writing tasks. The second objective was to analyse the differences in the two languages at Grade 4 and at Grade 7 level, thereby establishing whether it made sense to continue using Xhosa as a medium beyond Grade 3. In line with these objectives, I will therefore first analyse the data according to the writing task, the grade and the language used, before comparing pupils' performance at Grade 4 (when English is first introduced as a medium of instruction) and Grade 7 level (the last year of primary school and after four years of English as a medium).

I start off by discussing the narrative writing task.

7.2 Proficiencies and differences of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils in narrative writing task

The same narrative writing task was administered to both Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils. As indicated in Chapter Five, it consisted of a series of pictures which pupils had to arrange in sequence before writing the story in narrative form in both Xhosa and English. Pupils were assessed according to their ability to write a story which reflected the pictures provided (see Chapter Five for details on criteria used for assessing the tasks). The Grade 7 pupils were expected to perform better in both Xhosa and English as they had studied both Xhosa and English as subjects for a longer period from Grade 4 till Grade 7 and had also been taught through the medium of English for four years.

There are a few unanswered questions arising from the scores on the narrative tasks for both grades which I will attempt to answer in the sections below. The questions, which are related, will be discussed in clusters rather than individually. They are:

1. Why were the results so poor for the English task?
2. Why were the results so much better for the Xhosa task?
3. Why did the pupils who did well in English also do well in Xhosa?
4. Why did many pupils who fared poorly in English obtain fairly good results in Xhosa?
5. Why is the gap between the scores on the Xhosa and English narrative tasks still so big at Grade 7 level?
6. Why did the Grade 7 pupils do slightly better than the Grade 4 pupils in the English narrative task?

The ensuing discussion explores these questions, linking them to relevant literature or themes where appropriate.

7.2.1 Differences between Xhosa and English narrative writing tasks in Grade 4

The results for the narrative task show the stark contrast between Grade 4 pupils' performance in Xhosa and English. As indicated in Chapter Six, the average score for the Xhosa task was over 60% whilst the English average was just over 30%. Of the 73 pupils in Grade 4 only 8 failed, that is, scored below 5 (50%) in the task in Xhosa, whilst 56 scored below 5 in the English task. There was not much difference between the *highest scores* in the Xhosa and English tasks which ranged between a score of 9 and 8.5 for the Xhosa version and 8 and 7.5 for the English version. The difference in the *lowest scores* was greater with the lowest for the Xhosa task being 3.5 which only one pupil obtained and 0 for the English version which three pupils obtained.

What accounts for this huge discrepancy in marks in the two languages? In addressing this question, it is important to note that all the pupils were taught through the medium of Xhosa in the first three grades and that Grade 4 was the year that the switch to English happened, i.e. they were taught in English for the first time. It would be expected that they would therefore be more competent in Xhosa. In addition, pupils were exposed to the narrative genre through story telling in Xhosa during Grades 1 to 3. This is a predominantly Xhosa-speaking environment, as noted in Chapter Five, and pupils *function* mainly, if not almost entirely, in Xhosa in their daily interactions (see Skutnabb-Kangas's four criteria (2000) to define the term 'mother tongue' in Chapter One).

Given the sociolinguistic context in which pupils at Themba Primary find themselves, where English is not used much (see also Tables 4.1 and 4.2 in Chapter Four in this regard), and pupils have been taught mainly in Xhosa, it is to be expected that pupils would have difficulty writing in English. However, those who did reasonably well in English did even better in Xhosa. *Why is this so?* This is in line with Cummins' linguistic interdependence hypothesis, which posits a link between the level of development of the first language and acquisition of a second (Cummins 1979) (see

Chapter Four for detailed discussion of this). No pupil has done well in English without doing well in Xhosa in the Grade 4 narrative task as Tables 6.1 and 6.2 indicate.

7.2.2 Differences between Xhosa and English narrative writing tasks in Grade 7

As far as the Grade 7 pupils are concerned, although the average performance in the English task had increased slightly in relation to the Grade 4s, the gap between the Xhosa and English versions remained – in Grade 7B the average difference in percentage in the two languages was 29.8, whilst in Grade 7N it was 28.6. Neither class scored an average pass mark in English. The respective averages in the English task for 7B and 7N were 42.9% and 38.4%. Of the 49 pupils in Grade 7 who wrote all three tasks, only 2 failed the task in Xhosa whilst 30 failed the task in English. Interestingly, there was a bigger difference in the highest scores in Xhosa and English at Grade 7 level. The highest scores in the Xhosa task were 9 (obtained by three pupils) and 8.5 (obtained by two pupils) whilst the highest scores in the English version were 7 (obtained by two pupils) and 6 (obtained by four pupils). The lowest score in the Xhosa version was 4.5 (obtained by 2 pupils) whilst the lowest score in English was 2 (obtained by 4 pupils). The class averages for both the Xhosa and English versions of the task were slightly higher than the Grade 4 ones. *Why did they score better results in Grade 7?* This could be related to the fact that pupils get a great deal of exposure to narrative writing tasks in the course of primary school and therefore have the opportunity to improve their writing skills. Pupils tended to write more in the English versions than they did in Grade 4, but the Xhosa versions remained more detailed and coherent.

What explains the slightly better performance in English at Grade 7 level? Pupils have had longer exposure to English in the classroom, which is one of the main sources of English input, as indicated in Table 4.2. In addition, research (Cummins 2009; Thomas & Collier 2002) shows that it takes a minimum of five years (usually longer) for 'linguistic minority students to catch up to grade expectations in the

majority language' (Cummins 2009, p. 24). It is therefore to be expected that pupils in Grade 7 would do better in the narrative task in English than the Grade 4s. As with the Grade 4s, no pupil scored more in the English task than in the Xhosa version (see Tables 6.3 and 6.4).

As the samples indicate, even at Grade 7 level, pupils struggle to communicate effectively in English. The main problem seems to be lack of vocabulary and poor command of English, seen in the following quote from Sample 8 *'Long guy go slowly step to the bag … He get in the car and go to the place that can see what is it without desteping'* (see Section 6.6). In contrast, the surprise ending of the story is captured by the same pupil in the Xhosa version (translated into English) as seen in Sample 8 *'… a very big snake came out with its mouth wide open they were shocked …'* (see Section 6.6).

7.2.3 Summary

To sum up, the biggest difference between the Xhosa and English tasks was in the narrative task. As indicated above, pupils have regular exposure to narrative tasks during the course of primary school. Although pupil performance in the narrative task in English had improved at Grade 7 level, it was nowhere near the performance in Xhosa, despite English being the official medium of instruction. This could be explained by the fact that all pupils study Xhosa as a subject throughout primary school where the narrative form features prominently, hence their higher score in Grade 7 in the Xhosa narrative task. The increasing mastery of the narrative form is evident from the fact that the failure rate at Grade 4 level for the Xhosa task was 11% whilst it was only 4% at Grade 7 level. The improvement in the English narrative task at Grade 7 level is also noticeable. The failure rate declined from 77% in Grade 4 to 61% in Grade 7. Again, this probably has to do with exposure to, and familiarity with, the narrative form in both languages.

The next section analyses the scores on the reading comprehension in both Grades 4 and 7.

7.3 Proficiencies and differences of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils in the reading comprehension task

The reading comprehension tasks administered to both the Grade 4s and Grade 7s were related to particular content subjects. In the case of Grade 4, the reading extract selected was about caring for ones teeth, an aspect of the life orientation curriculum. The Grade 7s were given an extract on malnutrition, an aspect covered in human geography.

At many schools attended by children who speak an African language, it is a common practice for comprehension tasks to be formulated in such a way that pupils are able to provide the answers without really understanding what they have read. Macdonald and Burroughs (1991, pp. 16-17) provide a very telling example from their research on the Threshold Project. A passage on muscles in the human body is followed by questions, with the expectation that pupils would retrieve the answers directly from the text. Such an exercise often results in the pupils providing seemingly intelligent answers in the words of the passage, but gives little indication of whether they have understood what they have read. By contrast, one of the criteria I established for assessing the reading comprehension task (see Chapter Five) required pupils to answer in their own words – something they were largely unable to do.

There are a few questions arising from the scores on the reading comprehension tasks for both grades which I will attempt to answer in the sections below. The questions, which are related, to guide the discussion are:

1. Why did pupils perform so poorly in both grades in the reading comprehension task in both English as well as in Xhosa?
2. There were nine pupils in Grade 4, and two in Grade 7, who performed slightly better in the English version of this task. What can explain this?

3. Despite this, why is the average score better in the Xhosa task, even in Grade 7?

4. Why did pupils perform so much worse in the reading comprehension task than in the narrative task?

In addressing these questions, I start off by discussing the Grade 4 results.

7.3.1 Differences between Xhosa and English reading comprehension tasks in Grade 4

The results for the reading comprehension task are very weak. As Tables 6.1 and 6.2 illustrate, the average score for both classes in both languages was below 50%. In Grade 4N the average score for the English version was 16.9% compared to 28.3% in the Xhosa version. The score for Grade 4S was slightly better in English at 23.4% and somewhat better in Xhosa at 40.7%. Of the 73 pupils in Grade 4, 51 failed the task in Xhosa while 66 failed the task in English. The highest scores in the Xhosa version were 7.5 scored by one pupil and 7 scored by 2 pupils, whilst the highest in the English version were 8, scored by one pupil and 6, scored by one pupil. It is worth noting that the highest score was in the English version of the reading comprehension task. The lowest score was 0 in both languages with two pupils obtaining no marks in the Xhosa version and nine pupils in the English version. The gap in performance between the two languages has narrowed, but pupils have not done well in either language. *Why did pupils perform so poorly in both grades in the reading comprehension task in both English as well as in Xhosa?* How does one explain such weak performance?

As indicated earlier in Section 7.3, pupils were expected to answer the questions in their own words. They seemed to have great difficulty in doing so, particularly in English. Another explanation could be linked to the fact that the switch to English happens too early without pupils having sufficient opportunity to master the reading of academic texts in their own language, Xhosa. In addition, there are not sufficient

reading opportunities for pupils in Xhosa, as reading material is limited. As Krashen (1993) and Cummins (2000, 2009) have argued, active engagement with literacy is fundamental for pupils' academic success (see Chapter Four for further discussion on this). One also needs to bear in mind that the switch to English as medium of instruction happened in Grade 4 at Themba Primary. All content subject textbooks were available (if they were) only in English.

As far as pupils' reading comprehension in English is concerned, an aspect that has been highlighted by Macdonald (1990) and Macdonald and Burroughs (1993) in the Threshold Project, is the disjuncture between the level of English pupils are exposed to in *English as a subject* and the requirements needed for pupils to cope with *English as a medium.* Reflecting on the research findings of the Threshold Project, Macdonald and Burroughs state:
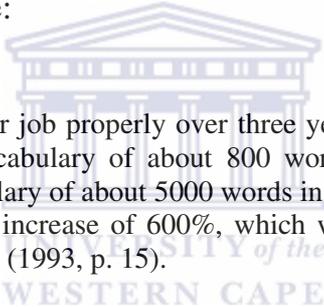
> If the English teacher did her job properly over three years of schooling (Sub B to Standard 2)[55], pupils may have a vocabulary of about 800 words. Now, in Standard 3, they will suddenly need a core vocabulary of about 5000 words in English to cope with all (the content) subjects. That supposes an increase of 600%, which would be unreasonable even for first language speakers of English (1993, p. 15).

What this implies is that it would be unreasonable to expect pupils to cope with the demands of English as a medium in Grade 4, as the gap between pupils' actual proficiency in English and the requirements to use it as a medium is huge, given the limited exposure pupils have to English by the time they reach Grade 4.

The next section looks at differences in performance between the Xhosa and English reading comprehension tasks in Grade 7.

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[55] As mentioned in Chapter Three, previously the switch to English happened after the fourth grade. It now happens after the third grade.

7.3.2 Differences between Xhosa and English reading comprehension tasks in Grade 7

Given that the Grade 7 pupils had 'officially' been taught in English for three more years than the Grade 4s, one would have expected pupils in Grade 7 to have scored higher marks in the reading comprehension. The picture, however, says the opposite. As Tables 6.3 and 6.4 indicate, the average score for both classes in both languages was way below 50%. In Grade 7B the average score for the English version was 10.7% whilst for the Xhosa version it was 27.4%. The score for Grade 7N was slightly better in both languages: it was 16.3% for the English task and 32% for the Xhosa version. Of the 49 pupils in Grade 7, 43 failed the task in Xhosa and 47 failed it in English. As with the Grade 4s, the gap in performance between the two languages narrowed, but pupils did not do well in either language. *Why have pupils done so poorly in reading comprehension at Grade 7 level* where the reading demands and expectations of the curriculum are so much greater than in Grade 4? I explore this question in the section below.
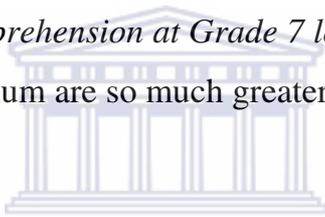
Sample 10 (see Section 6.6) shows that the pupil has not demonstrated understanding of the passage in either language. The pupil (G1) struggled to communicate his thoughts as seen in the following quotes from Sample 10:

> *'Malnutrition is not to get food which is not right for your health'* – Answer to question 1 in the Xhosa version (translated into English).
> *'Because sun did not become and land'* – Answer to question 4 in the English version.

On the other hand, answers by Pupil F to the Xhosa version (translated into English) indicate that she has understood the passage and is able to express this understanding in writing, as seen in the following quote from Sample 9:

> *'Because children are still weak, when they don't get nourishing food it is easy*
> *for them to catch malnutrition.'*

However, the English answer to the same question is: *'because the child is not health and he do not get a healthy food'*.

Possible explanations for the poor performance in reading comprehension revolve largely around two main issues. The first is the serious lack of a reading culture in schools generally, but particularly in those catering for poor children such as Themba Primary. As Cummins (2000) has indicated, 'Extensive reading is crucial for academic development since academic language is found primarily in written text' (2000, p. 98).

The poor reading comprehension skills of pupils whose first language is an African language are not peculiar to this study. The Threshold Project mentioned above produced similar results. As Macdonald states:

> On *reading* tasks, the children cannot answer low-level inference questions that demand that they go beyond the information explicitly given in the text. They also find it difficult to answer 'factual' questions, the answers to which *are* locatable in the text (1993, p. 74).

More recent data from the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) (Howie et al 2008) indicate that such problems persist. As Howie et al indicate:

> (T)he vast majority of South African pupils are not proficient readers as measured by PIRLS … South African reading performance does not compare with Grade 4 pupils internationally despite being on average 1 to 2 years older than their international counterparts. … The extremely low performance of the children writing in African languages is not a surprise given the political heritage of the country … (Howie et al 2008, no page numbers[56]).

The authors attribute the low reading literacy levels of pupils who are African language speakers to a range of factors such as:

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[56] This paper was accessed via UPSpace, the Research Repository of the University of Pretoria, and was not numbered. See bibliography for actual reference details.

(u)nderresourcing, poor teaching practices, inadequate training in reading practices and lack of available resources for the indigenous languages, a lack of motivation to alter the situation, the oral tradition of the indigenous languages… (Howie et al 2008).

The most recent results of the Annual National Assessments (ANAs) conducted by the Department of Basic Education in 2011, based on the grades pupils were in during 2010, also indicate poor reading performance at Grade 3 and 6 level as the following data illustrate:

Table 7.1 ANA 2011 Literacy results

	Grade 3 Literacy	**Grade 6 Literacy**
National average	35%	28%
Western Cape average	43%	40%

(Sourced from the Cape Times, 5 July 2011)

7.3.3 Summary

To sum up, the results for the reading comprehension task were the weakest of the three tasks in both languages and in both grades. The average score in both grades and in both languages was way below 50%. As indicated above, Howie et al (2008) provide some possible explanations for poor reading performance among pupils speaking an African language. Many of these explanations hold for Themba Primary in Khayelitsha, where the research was conducted. An additional explanation is that reading often gets associated with decoding rather than meaning making, with the result that pupils are often stuck at the 'learning to read' level instead of 'reading to learn'. As far as reading proficiency in English is concerned, I echo the concerns of Macdonald (1990) who highlights the disjuncture between the level of English pupils encounter as a subject and the language requirements of content subjects such as Science. It is no surprise therefore that reading comprehension scores at Grade 7 level remain low.

The next section analyses the scores on the expository task in both Grades 4 and 7.

7.4 Proficiencies and differences of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils in the expository writing task

The expository writing tasks administered to both the Grade 4s and Grade 7s expected pupils to write an opinion piece on particular topics of concern. In the case of the Grade 4s, pupils were asked to write an essay on how to make Khayelitsha a better place for children to grow up in. The Grade 7 pupils, on the other hand, were asked to write an essay linked to a topic in human geography, population and resource control.

It is important to note that pupils at Themba Primary, and many other schools in similar contexts, get very little, if any, exposure to expository writing tasks at primary school level. But, as indicated in Chapters One and Five, the intention of this study was to profile the proficiencies of Grade 4 and 7 pupils in the three writing tasks in English and Xhosa. The tasks were based on the requirements of the curriculum, not on existing practices at Themba Primary.

There are a few unanswered questions arising from the scores on the expository writing task for both grades. The questions to guide the discussion, which are related, are:

1. Why did pupils perform so poorly in the English expository writing task?
2. Why did those pupils who did well in the Xhosa expository writing task not also perform well in the English expository writing task?
3. Why did such a small group of pupils fail this task in Xhosa in Grade 4?
4. Why did pupils' score in the Xhosa expository task drop in Grade 7?

In addressing these questions, I start off by discussing the Grade 4 results.

7.4.1 Differences between Xhosa and English expository writing tasks in Grade 4

Grade 4 pupils did reasonably well in the Xhosa version of the expository task. The average score for Grade 4N was 66.7% and 58% for 4S. In contrast, the average score

in the English task was 28.3% for Grade 4N and 28.2% for Grade 4S. Of the 73 Grade 4 pupils who wrote both tasks, 8 failed the Xhosa task whilst 59 failed the English task. The gap in performance between the two languages is huge, similar to the narrative task in which 56 of the 73 pupils failed the English version. The highest scores in the Xhosa version ranged between a score of 9 (obtained by 2 pupils) and 8 (obtained by 10 pupils), whilst in English they ranged between 7 (obtained by 2 pupils) and 6 (obtained by 4 pupils). The difference in the lowest scores was greater with the lowest for the Xhosa task being 2 (obtained by 1 pupil) and 0 for the English task (obtained by 11 pupils).

Why did pupils do so much better in the Xhosa expository task? Possible explanations for the huge discrepancy in scores in the two languages are similar to the ones given for the narrative writing task in Section 7.2.1. These relate primarily to the sociolinguistic context in which Themba Primary is located, where English is not much used or heard, and the fact that these pupils were taught through the medium of Xhosa for the first three years of school. In such a context, despite not being exposed much to expository writing tasks, pupils in Grade 4 were able to write about the topic in Xhosa, as is illustrated in Section 6.5 captured in part of Pupil I1's response in Sample 5 below:

> *I can say that houses should be clean so that children can grow up well. We*
> *must build toilets together and wash them when they are dirty ….*
> (English translation of Xhosa version)

The same pupil (I1) writes as follows in her English response:

> *I would say people we must care Khayelitsha because we have children in this*
> *street.*
> *And we must clean aware streets make it clean …*

Gibbons suggests another way of looking at the Grade 4 performance in the Xhosa expository task when referring to the continuum between spoken and written language. She distinguishes between texts which can be described as 'more spoken-like' or 'more written-like' (2002, p. 41). According to Gibbons,

texts that are most spoken-like are often dependent for their interpretation on the situation in which they occur: they are situation-embedded. More written-like texts are not embedded in the situation itself; they must be complete enough in themselves to create their own context for the listener or reader (2002, p. 42).

In the context of Themba Primary, pupils were able to write in Xhosa about Khayelitsha easily, as it was a familiar context to them and they were able to write 'more spoken-like' about the topic. However, their limited proficiency in English made it difficult for them to write even in a 'more spoken-like' form in English.

It needs to be noted though, that pupils had not mastered the expository genre and their responses were not in the form of coherent paragraphs, but rather as separate sentences.

7.4.2 Differences between Xhosa and English expository writing tasks in Grade 7

As far as the Grade 7 pupils are concerned, the average performance in the English task had increased slightly in relation to the Grade 4s, whilst it had declined in the Xhosa task. In addition, the gap between the English and Xhosa scores had substantially narrowed in Grade 7. The average score for the Xhosa task in 7B was 51.7% and 50.2% for 7N. The respective scores in the English task were 41% and 34%. Of the 49 pupils in Grade 7 who wrote all three tasks, 18 failed the Xhosa version while 33 failed the English version. The highest scores in the Xhosa version ranged between 8 (obtained by 2 pupils) and 7 (obtained by 1 pupil). In English, the highest scores ranged between 6 (obtained by 3 pupils) and 5 (obtained by 12 pupils). The lowest score in Xhosa was 2 (obtained by 1 pupil) and in English, it was 0 (obtained by 2 pupils). As indicated in Tables 6.3 and 6.4, two pupils obtained a higher score in the English version of the expository task than in the Xhosa one. These were Pupil M in Grade 7B and Pupil W1 in Grade 7N.

Why did pupils perform slightly better in the English task at Grade 7 level and why did their Xhosa scores drop in Grade 7? As with the narrative task, pupils had longer exposure to English in the classroom. In addition, English was the medium of instruction from Grade 4 to Grade 7 for these pupils. As a consequence, pupils were

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exposed to English expository texts in the content subjects. In contrast, pupils had less exposure to Xhosa texts, as all written materials and textbooks were in English, except for the texts used in Xhosa as a subject.

Pupils had not mastered the expository genre in either language. Despite the exposure to English expository texts in their textbooks and workbooks, pupils at Themba Primary were not explicitly taught how to write different genres. Delpit (1988), writing in the context of the education of African American students in the United States, argues that the conventions of writing must be explicitly taught, as they will not automatically be picked up by students for whom the language of the school is unfamiliar. How much more so is it not the case for the pupils at Themba Primary, who did not have much exposure to English outside the classroom. These pupils were also not much exposed to expository writing in Xhosa, making the task of mastering different writing forms even more difficult.

7.4.3 Summary

To sum up, there is clear evidence that pupils at Grade 7 level are performing better in the expository task in English, although still not above the 50% threshold. As indicated above, this could be due to the greater exposure to expository texts in content subjects in English, as well as to exposure to English as a medium for the past four years. In contrast, they had minimal exposure to expository texts in Xhosa, even in Xhosa as a subject, as textbooks were not readily available in Xhosa at the time of the study. However, it needs to be noted that pupils still scored better in the Xhosa expository task at Grade 7 level, achieving a class average of just over 50%.

The reader may wonder why I have focussed on the *differences* between the performances of the pupils in English and in Xhosa, and the differences in performance in Grade 4 and Grade 7. How do these *differences* relate to my main research question? By focussing on pupils' proficiencies in the two languages (English and Xhosa) in the different writing tasks, I hope to highlight what pupils

could do in their mother tongue and what they were able to do in English. And whether there was any difference in proficiency in the two languages between Grade 4 and Grade 7. In doing so, I hope to address the main research question.

7.5 Is there a case for extending the use of the mother tongue (Xhosa) as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years?

Before addressing this central question, the reader is referred to the main objectives of the study as outlined in Chapter One, and repeated at the beginning of this chapter. The reader is also referred to the context in which the Grade 4 and 7 pupils had to learn at Themba Primary. Although English was the official medium of instruction from Grade 4, the Grade 4 and 7 teachers, but particularly the Grade 4 ones, used Xhosa in class to interact with their pupils. According to the teachers, their use of Xhosa assisted pupils to understand the lessons better. All written work, however, except in the Xhosa subject language class, was in English. Similarly, all reading materials were in English. There were very few Xhosa reading books for Xhosa as a subject in either the Grade 4 or Grade 7 classes. English was perceived as a prestigious language as it was the main language used in high domains such as parliament, the courts and education.

What does the data from this study show? It is clear from pupil scores in the three tasks that their proficiency in English was not adequate to enable them to study through the medium of English, even at Grade 7 level. There is evidence that pupils' levels of proficiency in English in the narrative and expository tasks were better in Grade 7 than at Grade 4 level, when the switch to English happens at schools such as Themba Primary. However, it was not at a level where pupils could comfortably learn through the medium of English.

There is enough evidence from the literature on bilingualism and mother tongue education to support the view that, in contexts such as the one at Themba Primary, an early transition to a second language as a medium has negative effects for pupils' language development as well as their cognitive development (see, for example,

Benson (2009); Cummins (2000, 2008, 2009); Dutcher (2004); Hakuta (1986); Heugh (2008, 2009); Heugh et al (2007, 2010); Thomas and Collier (2002) and others).

I briefly highlight some key points from the literature which corroborate my findings. Drawing on a wide range of literature, Benson (2009) proposes that educationists need to focus on a set of widely agreed principles of language learning and cognitive development. The first principle is *the importance of mother tongue development*. She argues that

> For effective development to occur, children require input and interaction with more knowledgeable speakers of the mother tongue, as well as exposure to a range of new information and experiences, like that which schools can offer. Reading, writing and cognitive development contribute significantly to this process (2009, p. 73).

The pupils at Themba Primary needed more opportunities to develop knowledge of their mother tongue, Xhosa, beyond Grade 3 so that they could use it to learn other subjects and to develop cognitively.

The second principle is the *need for L2 development if it is to be used for content instruction*. According to Benson, children require at least 'five to seven years of school-based L2 learning before they can learn academic subjects exclusively through the L2 (2009, p. 74). Samples of pupil writing in English from this study indicate that pupils have not had sufficient opportunity to develop their L2, English, in order to use it as medium.

The third principle, which refers to Cummins's (1979, 2009), *linguistic interdependence hypothesis*, is described by Benson as '*Building competence in the L1 facilitates learning of additional languages*' (2009, p. 75). She argues that 'the bilingual programmes that result in the best student performance in L1, L2 and subject areas by the end of primary school, are those that continue to invest in L1 thinking and learning' (2009, p. 75). The three case studies discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis

too support this principle (see Bamgbose, 2000; Holm & Holm, 1990; and Ramirez et al, 1991, in this regard).

Both the literature and the findings from this study indicate that there is definitely a case to be made for extending the mother tongue as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years. There is also a case to be made for thorough teaching of the L2 (English) before it can be used as a medium of instruction.

Below, I provide a short summary of the analysis and discussion in this chapter. A fuller overview of the study is provided in Chapter Eight.

7.6 Summary and conclusion

It is important to note that, in every class, the pupils as a whole performed relatively better in the Xhosa version. Pupils performed best in the narrative task. This is understandable, given that pupils were given more exposure to narrative writing in schools. Pupils performed very poorly in the reading comprehension, in both languages. Those who did well in English also did well in Xhosa, but the converse was not often true. Pupils' performance in the expository writing task in Xhosa in Grade 7 did not show any improvement from Grade 4. On the contrary, it had declined. A possible explanation for this could be that pupils were not really inducted into an academic discourse, or sufficiently exposed to decontextualised texts, such as textbooks, (see Cummins, 2000, for more on this). However, pupils' performance in English had improved in the expository task, even though scores were still below 50%. It needs to be borne in mind though that the Grade 4 expository writing task was contextualised, whereas the Grade 7 one was not. Pupils had to draw on their knowledge of geography to answer this question, whilst the Grade 4 pupils were expected to draw on their experiential knowledge of Khayelitsha.

In the next chapter, I sum up the study, then briefly look at the relevance of the study for developments in language in education in South Africa, but particularly in the

Western Cape where Themba Primary is located. I also look at shortcomings in the research study and offer possible explanations for these, as well as for any anomalies arising. I conclude by pointing the way forward towards further research, some of which I have already embarked upon.

CHAPTER EIGHT
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of the study summarising the basic research findings, which is followed by a brief discussion of the recommendations arising from this study. I then proceed to reflect on the shortcomings of, and anomalies in, the research study, for which I suggest possible reasons. In addition, I look at the relevance of this study for developments in the field of language in education policy in South Africa generally, but more specifically, for the Western Cape where Themba Primary is located. I conclude the chapter by pointing the way forward towards further research questions to be addressed, some of which I have already embarked upon.

8.2 Overview

This study was an attempt to profile the proficiencies of Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils at a primary school in Khayelitsha in the Western Cape in English and Xhosa in three written tasks which consisted of a narrative piece of writing, a reading comprehension exercise, and an expository piece of writing.

The purpose of the study was to profile the writing abilities of these pupils in both their mother tongue, Xhosa and in English, their official medium of instruction at school since Grade 4, and to examine some of the implications for educational language policy of the differences in performance in the two languages. All the tasks were authentic, in that they were based on aspects of the pupils' curriculum and written in the kind of language the pupils were expected to be exposed to in their respective grades. All the tasks were graded systematically under controlled conditions, as outlined in Chapter Five. What follows is a summary of the main

findings in relation to each task and each grade. All the tasks are attached as appendices.

As indicated in Chapter Five, the same narrative task was given to both the Grade 4 and Grade 7 pupils. It involved pupils writing a narrative piece based on a series of six consecutive pictures. Pupils were assessed on their ability to write a narrative piece based on the pictures. Grade 7 pupils were expected to have a richer vocabulary than the Grade 4s, to use more complex sentence constructions and to write a coherent story.

At Grade 4 level, the pupils did significantly better in the Xhosa version of the narrative task. In Grade 4N there was a 30% difference between the scores for Xhosa and English, whilst in Grade 4S, the difference was marginally smaller, at about 28%. Only two pupils failed the Xhosa task in Grade 4N, while six failed the Xhosa task in Grade 4S. As the pupil samples show, the Xhosa version was almost always much richer than the English version and more in line with the pictures in the story. In fact, at Grade 4 level, pupils expressed themselves with great difficulty in English. They had clearly not mastered English sufficiently to be able to write a story based on the pictures. There are possible explanations for this. One such explanation could be that English was more of a foreign language to these pupils, as they had very little exposure to it in their day-to-day lives (see Chapter Four for more detail). They were therefore able to express themselves much better in Xhosa, a language they were most familiar with outside the classroom, and which they used regularly. However, those who did reasonably well in English did even better in Xhosa. This is in line with Cummins' linguistic interdependence hypothesis (1979, 2009), which posits a link between the level of development of the first language and acquisition of a second. No pupil has done well in English without doing well in Xhosa in this task.

At Grade 7 level, although the average English performance increased slightly, the gap between the Xhosa and English versions remained virtually unchanged. In Grade 7B the average difference in percentage was 29.8%, whilst in Grade 7N it was 28.6%.

Neither class scored an average pass mark in English. The respective averages were 38.4% and 42.9%. Although the pupils tended to write more in the English versions than they did in Grade 4, the Xhosa versions remained more detailed and more coherent. The class averages for both the Xhosa and English versions of the task were slightly higher than the Grade 4 ones.

Pupils performed poorly in the reading task in both grades and in both languages. The average class score in both languages and for both grades was much below 50%. The average class scores for the two grade 4 classes in English were 17% and 23% whilst for the Xhosa version, they were 28% and 41%. The scores in the English version for Grade 7 were 11% and 16% and 27% and 32% for the Xhosa version. Nevertheless, the average mark in Xhosa was still higher than in English. The comprehension passages for both grades were based on work pupils were doing in their Health Education and Geography classes respectively.

The pattern in reading performance seemed to get worse as pupils moved up the educational ladder. The average class score for reading of Grade 7B was 11% in the English version and 28% in the Xhosa one. From this it would seem that pupils were not equipped to read the more academically demanding texts they were exposed to in Grade 7. Their basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS), to use Cummins's term, had improved, as was evident from their performance in the narrative task, but their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) still needed to be developed further. See Chapter Four and in particular, Cummins (1980, 2009) for a more detailed explanation on this feature.

Poor CALP ability was reflected in the expository task as well. However, at Grade 4 level, this applied only to the English task where both classes scored an average of 28%. Pupils did reasonably well in the Xhosa version with Grade 4N and 4S obtaining 67% and 58% respectively. At Grade 7 level the English scores had improved, but the Xhosa ones had declined. The gap between the two scores was 11% for Grade 7B and 16% for Grade 7N whilst it was 39% in Grade 4N and 30% for

Grade 4S. It needs to be noted that pupils did not get much exposure to either reading or writing academic texts in Xhosa, something that is still prevalent today. At a more basic level, as in most schools, pupils did not have access to their own textbooks in Xhosa.

In the light of the above overview, it would be appropriate to come to the following conclusions with regard to the data collected. Firstly, pupils at schools such as Themba Primary are not ready to switch to English as a medium at the beginning of Grade 4. Secondly, pupils need to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency in Xhosa so that they are able to use their mother tongue for learning. For this to happen, pupils need to be exposed to academic texts in Xhosa. Thirdly, pupils need to be exposed to regular engagement with texts in both Xhosa and English. Reading involves much more than decoding. Fourthly, pupils need frequent and regular opportunities to write various kinds of texts in order to develop their productive skills in both Xhosa and English.
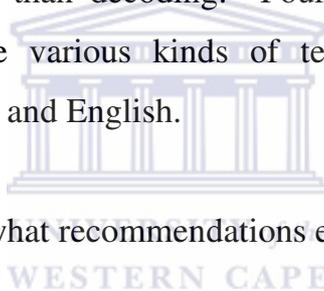
Given the conclusions above, what recommendations emerge from this study?

8.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study are an attempt to answer the question posed in the title of this thesis, *A case for mother tongue education?* Based on the data, one could argue that there is a case for extending Xhosa as a medium at least till the end of Grade 6 at schools such as Themba Primary. Grade 6 marks the end of the Intermediate Phase of compulsory schooling. The scores of the pupils for the English tasks in Grade 7 showed a slight improvement on the ones in Grade 4. This could indicate that it might be wise to postpone the use of English as a medium till the beginning of Grade 7, which is the start of the Senior Phase of General Education. The Intermediate Phase can then usefully be employed to develop pupils' CALP in Xhosa. This recommendation is in line with Cummins' research (2000, 2009), which suggests that pupils need approximately seven to eight years to develop sufficient proficiency in a

second or foreign language to use it as a medium, or as he refers to it, to develop CALP in that language.

In Chapter Three.5.4, I mention that exploratory work to extend mother tongue medium of instruction to Xhosa pupils had been mandated in the Western Cape in 2002 at the behest of the then MEC for Education in the Western Cape, Advocate Andre Gaum. As a first step, the MEC announced the appointment of a Task Team and an Advisory Committee:

> to develop a strategy for implementing home language instruction during the first 7 years of schooling in the province … in the belief that the intended strategy, if implemented, will go a long way towards ensuring effective education, bearing in mind the role of mother-tongue education (MTE) in the cognitive development of primary school children (WCED 2002, p. 4).

The Task Team submitted its report to the Minister in November 2002. The central recommendations of the team were as follows:

1.1 To implement the policy of mother-tongue based bilingual education[57] in Grades R-6 as from 2004-2005 in all primary schools of the Western Cape Province.

1.2 To institute incentives to guide all children towards electing to take (offer) the third official language of the Province as their second additional language (SAL)[58] (WCED 2002, p. 2).

The Recommended Implementation Plan accompanying the Report stated that a pilot project on mother-tongue based bilingual education be implemented at selected schools which cover all language classifications, school sizes and locations in the Western Cape (WCED 2002, p. 4). Such a pilot did happen at 15 primary schools in the Western Cape for a short period, but was subsequently abandoned before it could really be implemented. At the request of the WCED, the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape offered an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)

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[57] This term, as opposed to mother tongue education, was used to indicate that children in South Africa grow up in an inescapably multilingual situation where they need to gain a significant command of at least one of the other languages.

[58] The second recommendation of the Task Team was not the focus of this study. However, it needs to be said that part of the problems pupils experience in schools formerly set aside for those classified white or coloured in the Western Cape is that very few teachers at such schools have a working knowledge of Xhosa. This recommendation is intended to remedy such a situation so that in the long term all teachers in the Western Cape would have a working knowledge of all three of the official languages of the Western Cape.

in Language Education, with a focus on bilingual education to one teacher from each of these 15 schools from 2007 to 2008. There was talk of expanding this ACE programme to all 134 primary schools which used Xhosa as a medium for the first three years of school. However, for reasons still not apparent, the WCED decided not to fund any further intake into the ACE programme in 2009.

The *first recommendation* from the present study is the same as the one made by the WCED Task Team mentioned above, that is, to extend mother tongue instruction in Xhosa to beyond the initial three years for a further three years till the end of Grade 6. I am aware that there will be initial costs in implementing this recommendation, but the question needs to be asked whether it is more cost effective to have pupils moving through the school system without understanding much of what they are learning, as is illustrated by particularly the Grade 4 data in this study. Various measures will have to be put in place for this to happen successfully. Such measures would involve the development of academic texts in Xhosa, the training of teachers to teach through the medium of Xhosa and the training of teachers to teach English as a subject for the first six years of school. Such English language subject teaching should address the current disjuncture between the requirements for English as a subject and English as a medium of instruction. See, for example, DBE (2010) and Macdonald (1990) in this regard.

A *second recommendation* would be that serious attention has to be devoted to developing suitable reading materials for speakers of African languages so that reading becomes an activity for pleasure for pupils who speak an African language such as Xhosa as their main language. Teachers need to be educated to expose their pupils to reading for meaning, as opposed to the mechanical exercise of decoding texts.

In the course of collecting the data for this study, it became apparent that these pupils had very few opportunities for writing independently. A *third recommendation* would therefore be that such opportunities would have to be provided on a regular basis.

The *fourth recommendation*, which is linked to the third, would be that pupils should ideally be exposed to different genres in writing quite early in their school careers. The findings of this study illustrate that pupils do not have much exposure to expository writing.

The assessment by teachers of writing tasks is undoubtedly a complex matter, which should make it clear that teacher education and training institutions need to be aware of this. The *fifth recommendation* would be that clear criteria for assessing writing need to be developed so that pupils have a good idea of what they are doing correctly and what needs to improve.

The next section focuses on the limitations of this study and provides an explanation for the tentative nature of the analysis provided in Chapter Seven.

8.4 Limitations of study
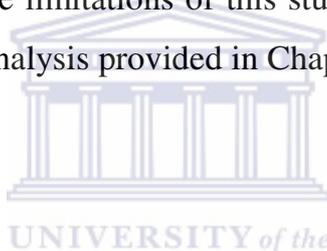
I am aware that it will not be possible to generalise on the basis of profiling the proficiencies in Xhosa and English of pupils in two grades at one school. It is not the intention of this study to do so. Given the dearth of research in South Africa which compares pupils' competence in the language of instruction (English), as well as in their mother tongue (Xhosa in this case), a case study such as this is limited to pointing the way forward, while looking at the implications of the study for further research and policy development, discussed in Section 8.5 below.

However, there are many primary schools in residential areas which were previously designated for African people that are similar to Themba Primary, in the Western Cape, and in other provinces. Some features of such schools would be that the majority of, if not all, the pupils and teachers would be mother tongue speakers of Xhosa or another African language such as Zulu. Exposure to English outside of school would be minimal in such areas. Teachers' proficiency in English would be

limited and hence make it difficult for them to use English as a sole medium of instruction. Such schools are, in addition, likely to be poorly resourced, particularly with regard to textbooks and other reading materials.

Other limitations, such as methodological ones, are discussed in Chapter Five.

In the next section, I consider the relevance of this study and outline possibilities for further research.

8.5 Relevance of study and further research

Through this case study I have attempted to highlight the importance of classroom data as an indicator of what pupils were actually able to do in English, the current medium of instruction, and in their mother tongue, Xhosa in this case. There have not been many South African studies focussing on language at school that have looked at the quality of pupils' writing. However, one such study that has to be considered is Carol Macdonald's thorough work for the Threshold Project, a five-year investigation (1985-1990) carried out in the former 'homeland', Bophuthatswana. As indicated in Chapter Seven, the Threshold Project looked at many samples of pupils' writing over the five years, but only in English, as the brief of the project was to establish what kind of problems pupils experienced when they switched to English as the medium of instruction after four years of instruction in their mother tongue. What makes my study different is that it is a comparison of pupils' writing ability in English and Xhosa.

More recently, Carole Bloch (2005, 2006), a researcher at a non-governmental organisation, the Project for Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA), has been documenting biliteracy practices at a former coloured primary school in the suburb of Wynberg in the Western Cape where the pupils come from different language backgrounds. The focus of the biliteracy project is on interactive writing as a means to develop pupils' writing abilities. Her focus, however, has not been on

formal academic writing such as the reading comprehension and expository writing tasks used in this study.

There are many aspects of the present research study that could usefully be followed up further in research projects in the field. I am currently involved in one such project, namely, the Language of Instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA) Project, as indicated in Chapter Four. The aspect of the LOITASA project relevant to this study is a longitudinal empirical study of two classes of similar abilities at two South African schools from Grade 4 to Grade 6 with a particular focus on Geography and Science in the first phase (2002-2006) and Mathematics and Science in the second phase (2007-2011). In the control group, the pupils were taught in English, the official medium of instruction whilst the experimental group were taught the two subjects in Xhosa. Pupil workbooks which were equivalent to those in English were made available in Geography, Science and Mathematics to the latter group in Xhosa and all assessment activities for these pupils were in Xhosa. The control group in turn had all workbooks in English and pupils were assessed in English. The project compared the cognitive and language development of the control group with that of the experimental group (see Brock-Utne et al (2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2010); Qorro et al (2008) and Desai et al (2010) for further information on LOITASA findings). The LOITASA project usefully augments the data collected for the present study. The WCED Report, mentioned earlier, states in its conclusion, 'Exemplars of good practice, disseminated for replication, provide an effective antidote to inclinations towards retaining the status quo' (2002, pp. 10-11). It is hoped that this study may too serve as such an antidote.

What further research can usefully follow this study (and the LOITASA Project)? Analysing the data for this study has indicated the need for more comparisons between what pupils can do in their own language and what they are able to do in a second language like English. This study focussed on three different tasks in two different grades. Useful further research could involve a series of tasks in both languages across grades on a longitudinal basis so that pupil progress across years

could be assessed within the present language in education policy framework. For example, is there a decline in pupils' proficiencies in their mother tongue from Grade 4 to Grade 7? Is there a concomitant rise in their level of proficiency in English over the same period? Or is there a decline in proficiencies in both languages? Such systematic research is required to provide evidence of pupils' performance in their mother tongue and in English. A possible ethical issue arising from this study, as well as proposed further research, is whether schools continue with existing language in education practices, even if they disadvantage pupils by not drawing on pupils' existing language strengths.

8.6 Conclusion

This study has been conducted to establish whether there is a case for extending the mother tongue as a medium of instruction beyond the initial three years, at schools catering for speakers of African languages. The research involved pupils in Grades 4 and 7 doing three writing tasks in Xhosa and English. The data show that almost all pupils have done better in all three of the Xhosa tasks in both grades. The data also show that pupils had great difficulty with the reading comprehension task in both languages and in both grades. Pupil performance in the narrative and expository writing tasks was much better in the Xhosa version, particularly at Grade 4 level. Evidence seems to point to the fact that there is a case for extending Xhosa as a medium of instruction at Themba Primary.

It is acknowledged that this case study has limitations which make it difficult to generalise on the basis of the results. However, the language situation at Themba Primary is not unique and it may therefore be possible that similar studies may produce similar results at other schools like Themba Primary.

Recommendations emanating from this research study are also made in this chapter. The recommendations do not only endorse the main research question; they also make suggestions on how to implement the main recommendation of extending the mother

tongue as medium of instruction. The chapter is concluded by suggesting further areas for research.

Children are the future of any country. We owe it to them to enable them to get meaningful access to education. This can only be achieved if they understand the language of instruction and have opportunities to develop their proficiencies in that language.

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Appendix 1a
Task 1 Narrative writing
Grade 4 and Grade 7

Picture Story
Instruction Sheet

Before you start with the activity, write down the following information on your blank sheet of paper:

Name:
Grade:
Age:
Home Language:
_____

There are six pictures in your envelope. These pictures tell a story.

1. Take the pictures from your envelope and look at them.
2. Arrange the pictures in such a way that they tell a story.
3. Number the pictures from 1 to 6 in the order that you have put them.
4. Now write a story based on these pictures on your sheet of paper.

Ibali Lemifanekiso
Iphepha Lemiyalelo

Phambi kokuba uqale ngalo msebenzi, bhala phantsi ezi nkcukacha zilandelayo kwiphepha lakho elingena nto:

Igama:
Ibanga:
Iminyaka/Ubudala:
Ulwimi oluthethayo:
_____

Kukho imifanekiso emithandathu kwimvulophu yakho. Le mifanekiso ibalisa ibali.

1. Khupha le mifanekiso kwimvulophu yakho.
2. Yimise ngendlela eyenza ukuba ibalise ibali.
3. Yinike amanani le mifanekiso ngendlela oyibeke ngayo ukusuka ku-1 ukuya ku-6.
4. Ngoku, bhala ibali ngokubhekiselele kwimifanekiso ephepheni lakho.
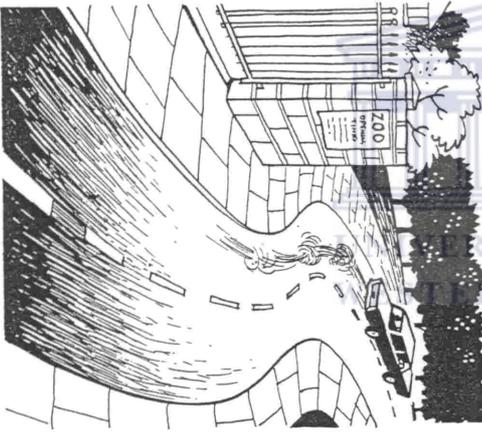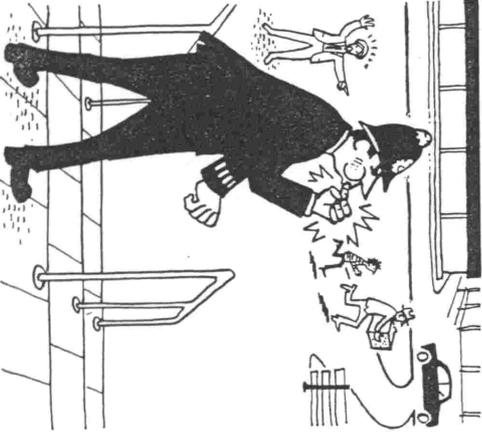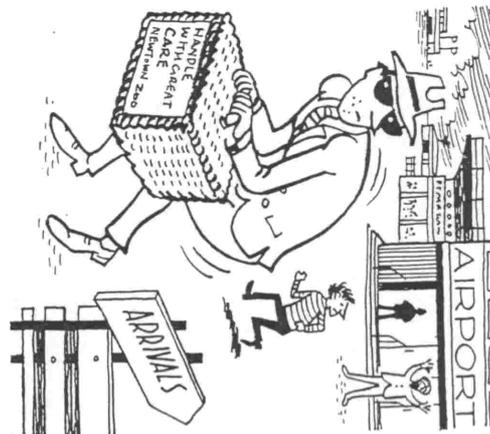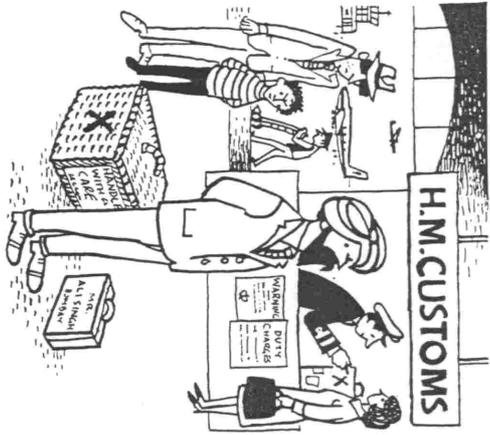
Appendix 2a
Task 2 Reading Comprehension (English)
Grade 4

READING COMPREHENSION

Before you start with the activity, write down the following information on your blank sheet of paper:

Name:
Grade:
Age:
Home Language:

_____

Read the following passage carefully, then answer the questions that follow in full sentences and in your own words, as far as possible.

Caring For Our Teeth

We must eat the right foods to keep our teeth strong and healthy.

Milk, cheese and green vegetables have calcium in them to help our teeth grow strong and healthy. Vitamin C found in fruit and green vegetables will keep our gums healthy.

Too much soft food is bad for teeth. Chewing apples, raw carrots and crusty bread keep teeth and gums healthy. We should eat fruit, raw vegetables, and nuts as snacks, not sweets, and drink fruit juice or milk to keep our teeth healthy and strong.

It is too much sugar that starts tooth decay. A lot of sugary foods are bad for teeth, especially if eaten between meals. Too many sweets, cakes, biscuits and fizzy sweet drinks are not good for our teeth.

To care for our teeth, we should brush them properly twice a day. We can protect our teeth if we use a toothpaste with fluoride in it. We should visit the dentist regularly, because he can help us to look after our teeth and gums.
[Wray, D & Lewis, M. 1997. Extending literacy. Routledge: London. p. 81]

_____

1. Name two ways in which we can keep our teeth healthy. (2)
2. Apart from eating the right food, how else would you care for your teeth? (2)
3. What kind of food is bad for your teeth? (2)
4. Who would you go to if you had a rotten tooth? (2)
5. Why do you think it is important to look after your teeth? (2)

ISICATSHULWA SOKUFUNDA NOKUVAVANYA UKUQONDA

Phambi kokuba uqale ngalo msebenzi, bhala phantsi ezi nkcukacha zilandelayo kwiphepha lakho elingena nto:

Igama:
Ibanga:
Iminyaka/Ubudala:
Ulwimi oluthethayo:

_____

Funda esi sicatshulwa ngocoselelo, uze uphendule imibuzo elandelayo ngezivakalisi ezipheleleyo. Zama ukusebenzisa awakho amazwi kangangoko unakho.

Ukulondoloza Amazinyo Wethu

Kufuneka sitye ukutya okuya egazini ukuze sigcine amazinyo wethu omelele, kwaye esempilweni.

Ubisi, isonka samasi okanye itshizi kunye nemifuno eluhlaza ziqulethe isakhi-mazinyo, ikhalsiyam, enceda amazinyo wethu ukuba akhule eqinile, enempilo. Isakhi-mzimba, uVitamin C, ofunyanwa kwiziqhamo kunye nakwimifuno eluhlaza, uya kuzigcina iintsini zisempilweni entle.

Ukutya okuthambe kakhulu akuwalungelanga amazinyo. Ukuhlafuna ii-apile, iminqathe ekrwada kunye neenkokho zesonka kugcina amazinyo

neentsini zikwimpilo entle. Kufuneka sitye iziqhamo, imifuno ekrwada, kunye neenathsi, njengokutya okukhawulezayo; singatyi iilekese, sisele nencindi yeziqhamo okanye

ubisi ukugcina amazinyo wethu esempilweni kwaye omelele.

Yiswekile eninzi ethi iqalise ukubola kwamazinyo. Ukutya okunencasa kakhulu akuwafanelanga amazinyo, ngakumbi xa kutyiwa phakathi kwamaxesha esidlo. Iilekese ezininzi, amaqebengwana, iibhiskithsi kunye neziselo ezihlwahlwazayo aziwalungelanga amazinyo.

Ukuze silondoloze amazinyo wethu, kufuneka siwacoce ngocoselelo kabini ngemini. Singawakhuwasela amazinyo wethu ngokusebenzisa intlama yamazinyo enesicoci esiyifloraydi. Kufuneka sibonane rhoqo nogqirha wamazinyo, kuba angasinceda ekulondolozeni amazinyo wethu kunye neentsini.

_____

1. Chaza iindlela zibe mbini esinokugcina ngazo amazinyo wethu esempilweni. (2)

2. Ngaphandle kokutya ukutya okuya egazini, yeyiphi enye indlela onukulondoloza ngayo amazinyo wakho? (2)

3. Kokuphi okona kutya kungawalungelanga amazinyo? (2)

4. Ukuba ubunamazinyo abolileyo, ngubani umntu obunokuya kuye? (2)

5. Kutheni ucinga ukuba kubalulekile ukuba uwalondoloze amazinyo wakho? (2)

Appendix 3
Task 3 Expository Writing
Grade 4

WRITING TASK

Before you start with the activity, write down the following information on your blank sheet of paper:

Name:
Grade:
Age:
Home Language:
_____

What would you do to make Khayelitsha a better place for children to grow up in? Write an essay in which you express your views on this topic.

UMSEBENZI OBHALWAYO

Phambi kokuba uqale ngalo msebenzi, bhala phantsi ezi nkcukacha zilandelayo kwiphepha lakho elingena nto:

Igama:
Ibanga:
Iminyaka/Ubudala:
Ulwimi oluthethayo:
_____

Ungenza ntoni ukuphucula iKhayelitsha ibe yindawo esemgangathweni yokukhulela abantwana? Bhala isincoko apho uya kuthi uvelise konke okucingayo ngesi sihloko.
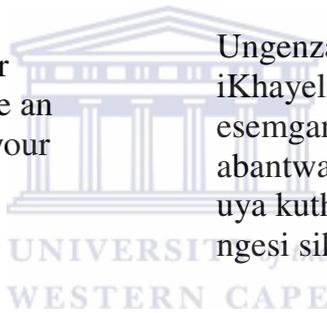
Appendix 4a
Task 2 Reading Comprehension
(English) Grade 7

READING COMPREHENSION

Before you start with the activity, write down the following information on your blank sheet of paper:
Name:
Grade:
Age:
Home Language
Read the following passage carefully, then answer the questions that follow in full sentences and in your own words, as far as possible.

Malnutrition

Many people think that eating food is simply something that is pleasant and necessary to satisfy hunger. They do not realise that a great deal of their ill health is due to eating the wrong kinds of food. The reason for this is that they do not know enough about what food is for.

In many parts of the world, notably in certain Asian countries, there is much starvation, and many people die each year because they eat insufficient food. In these countries, the main problem is the low production of food. In East Africa, however, starvation and prolonged hunger are not as common as in Asia, because in most areas the climate and soil allow the people living there to produce enough food for their needs. But food is necessary not only to satisfy hunger, but also to provide the body with certain substances to keep it healthy. Ill health due to a poor diet is known as malnutrition. In East Africa, malnutrition is due not to lack of food, but to lack of knowledge about food and the solution to the problem lies in the spreading of this knowledge.

It is important for people to realise that malnutrition causes a great deal of illness and death. Moreover, apart from the people who are obviously ill, there are many thousands who are tired or weak, or have poorly developed bodies, simply through lack of proper feeding. These people are far more likely to get common diseases such as tuberculosis than those with a good diet are, and they do not recover from such diseases quickly.

It is extraordinary how many people are unaware of the serious problem of malnutrition in their own country. Malnutrition is most common and severe in children under five years of age, and women of child-bearing age. It has been going on for years, and is likely to become more widespread as more and more people go to live in big towns, and cease to grow their own food.
[Adapted from: English Practice Students' Book 1. K.Barasa & N.Grant. 1985. Longman: Hong Kong.]

1. Explain, in your own words, what malnutrition is. (2)

2. What is its main cause in East Africa? (2)

3. The writer thinks that malnutrition is likely to become more common. What reasons does he give for this belief? (2)

4. Why do you think that young children and women of child-bearing age are more likely to suffer from malnutrition? (2)

5. Do you think malnutrition exists in South Africa? Give a reason for your answer. (2)

6. In your opinion, how can malnutrition be prevented? (2)

Appendix 4b
Task 2 Reading Comprehension
(Xhosa) Grade 7

ISICATSHULWA SOKUFUNDA
NOKUVAVANYA UKUQONDA

Phambi kokuba uqale ngalo msebenzi,
bhala phantsi ezi nkcukacha zilandelayo
kwiphepha lakho elingena nto:

Igama:
Ibanga:
Iminyaka/Ubudala:
Ulwimi oluthethayo:
_____

Funda esi sicatshulwa ngocoselelo, uze
uphendule imibuzo elandelayo
ngezivakalisi ezipheleleyo. Zama
ukusebenzisa awakho amazwi
kangangoko unakho.

Ukungondleki

Abantu abaninzi bacinga ukuba
ukufumana ukutya yinto nje
yokuzonwabisa nokugxotha indlala.
Abaqondi ukuba impilo yabo enkene-
nkene, ubukhulu becala yenziwa kukutya
okungayi gazini. Isizathu soku kukuba
abanalwazi lwaneleyo malunga
nokubaluleka kokutya.

Kwiindawo ngeendawo zelizwe jikelele,
esingakhankanya kuzo amazwe athile
ase-Asia, indlala ibomvu kwaye abantu
bayasweleka minyaka le ngenxa
yokungafumani ngokwaneleyo into
esiwa phantsi kwempumlo. Kula
mazwe, eyona ngxaki inkulu yimveliso

ephantsi yokutya. Nangona kunjalo,
kwiMpuma ye-Afrika, indlala ayigqubi
kakhulu njengase-Asia, kuba kwiindawo
ezininzi imozulu kunye nomhlaba
ziyavuma ukuba abantu abahlala
apho bavelise ukutya okwaneleyo.
Kodwa ke, ukutya oku asikutyeli ukuba
siphelise ukulamba qha, koko kunceda
umzimba ukuba ufumane izinto ezithile
ukuze uhlale usempilweni. Impilo
enkene-nkene eyenziwa kukungafumani
kutya okukuko, kuthiwa xa ibizwa
kukungondleki. Empuma ye-Afrika
ukungondleki akwenziwa
kukunqongophala kokutya, koko
kukungabi nalwazi malunga nokutya
okukuko, kwaye ukusonjuluwa kwale
ngxaki kuxhomekeke ekubeni kusasazwe
olu lwazi malunga nokutya.

Kubalulekile ukuba abantu baqonde
ukuba ukungondleki kungunobangela
wokugula nokufa. Ngaphezulu,
ngaphandle kwaba bantu balele
ngandletyananye , kukho amawaka-waka
wabo batyhafileyo okanye bankene-
nkene, okanye abo bamizinjana
ingcokochileyo ngenxa yokuqongophala
kwesondlo. Aba bantu
basemngciphekweni wokuphathwa zizifo
ezinjenge-sifo sephepha okanye iT.B.
kunabo bafumana ukutya okuya egazini,
kwaye abakhawulezi ukuphila kwezi
zifo.

Iyamangalisa into yokufumanisa ukuba abantu abaninzi abayilumkelanga le ngxaki inkulu kangaka yokungondleki elizweni labo. Ukungondleki kuxhaphakile kwaye kuxhomisa amehlo kubantwana abaminyaka ingaphantsi kwemihlanu, nakumabhinqa akwibakala lokufumana abantwana. Kudala ukungondleki kugquba iminyaka ngeminyaka, kwaye kubonakala ngathi kuya kusanda ngokwanda njengoko uninzi lwabantu lusiya kuhlala ezidolophini ezinkulu, luyekile ukuzivelisela okwalo ukutya.

_____

1. Cacisa, ngawakho amazwi ukuba yintoni na ukungondleki.   (2)

2. Yintoni unobangela wokungondleki eMpuma ye-Afrika?   (2)

3. Umbhali ucinga ukuba ukungondleki kubonakala kuza kuxhaphaka. Sesiphi isizathu asibekayo malunga nale mbono?
                                          (2)

4. Kutheni ucinga ukuba abantwana abancinane kunye nabantu ababhinqileyo abikwibakala lokufumana abantwana ngabona basemngciphekweni wokugula kukungondleki nje?   (2)

5. Ucinga ukuba ukungondleki kukhona apha eMzantsi-Afrika? Nika isizathu sempendulo yakho.   (2)

6. Ngokoluvo lwakho, kungathintelwa njani ukungondleki?   (2)