

Challenges and Support Strategies for Grade 11 Afrikaans First Additional Language Learners

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Abstract

Background: The article explores the challenges and support strategies for Grade 11 Afrikaans First Additional Language (FAL) learners. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) outlines a detailed framework for teaching all subjects in South Africa's basic education system. According to CAPS, learners in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase must study at least two official languages from the South African constitution. One of these must be the learner's home language (HL), while another official language can be taught as a first additional language. CAPS also mandates that from Grade 1, learners begin learning a second language, referred to as FAL.

Objective: This qualitative study aims to identify the challenges learners face in the Afrikaans FAL classroom, focusing on language skills and examination papers. It also seeks to explore specific areas of difficulty and offer insights to inform teaching practices and support in the classroom.

Methods: A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed, with data collected through individual and focus group interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Grade 11 Afrikaans FAL teachers and learners, using purposeful sampling for participant selection.

Findings: The findings revealed that learners faced significant challenges in mastering Afrikaans, especially in reading, writing, and speaking. These difficulties were influenced by negative transfer from their home language, limited vocabulary, and lack of exposure to Afrikaans.

Conclusion: Negative attitudes towards the language further reduced motivation and engagement, while the support provided did not adequately address learners' needs, highlighting gaps in both classroom support and resources from the Department of Basic Education (DBE).

Keywords: Acquisition; Challenges; Second Language; Support

Introduction

The teaching and learning of Afrikaans as a First Additional Language (FAL) in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase (Grades 10-12) in South African schools remains a significant part of the nation's linguistic and cultural education framework. As one of South Africa's 11 official languages, Afrikaans holds a unique place, both as a language of instruction and as a subject in many schools. However, its role in education, particularly within the FET phase, has evolved due to post-apartheid reforms and a national shift towards multilingualism and inclusivity (Makalela, 2015).

Learners studying Afrikaans FAL are expected to become proficient in both spoken and written Afrikaans, focusing on grammar, literature, and communication skills. Yet, this process faces several challenges, including limited exposure to Afrikaans in primarily non-Afrikaans-speaking homes, and socio-political complexities for many black learners (Heugh & Stroud, 2020). Teachers also often lack adequate resources and manage large, linguistically diverse classes. Despite these challenges, enhancing teaching strategies to improve learner engagement and performance in Afrikaans FAL is essential.

Learners who participated in this study speak Sesotho at home, with English as both the medium of instruction and their Home Language subject, while Afrikaans, effectively their third language, is taken as their First Additional Language subject. This research is important as the researchers needed to ascertain what the challenges of these Afrikaans learners are and what support strategies are provided to them. Based on the above aspects the study aims to answer two research questions: Which sections related to language skills and structures pose challenges for learners? What support is provided to address the challenges faced by learners?

Literature Review

Listening Skills

The primary aim of language learning is to enable learners to communicate effectively in the target language, in this case, Afrikaans. Oral language, encompassing both speaking and

listening, is fundamental to this process, with strong listening skills playing a crucial role. Listening, a vital everyday activity, facilitates the reception of input and supports grammar understanding, engagement with networks, and conversational participation (Nushi & Orouji, 2020). Jafari and Hashim (2015) note that listening accounts for over half of the time learners spend acquiring an additional language. It is also assessed as part of learners' language development, with listening comprehension forming a key evaluation component.

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for Afrikaans First Additional Language (FAL) (2011) outlines systematic development and assessment of listening skills through tasks requiring learners to listen for specific information, analyse and assess content, and appreciate communication. These tasks contribute to oral year marks and grades, with questions structured according to Barrett's Taxonomy: 40% focus on Literal Comprehension and Reorganisation, 40% on Inferential Understanding, and 20% on Evaluation and Appreciation. This design aims to help learners meet the 40% pass mark; however, many struggle. Despite its inclusion in assessments, listening is rarely formally taught, as it is often assumed to develop naturally (Sidhu & Sivaguru, 2023). Consequently, curriculum designers provide little direct instruction, leaving learners with unresolved challenges.

Barriers to listening comprehension include speech speed and limited vocabulary, which hinder learners' ability to process spoken content (Kao & Kuo, 2021). Learners cannot control the pace at which teachers deliver information, and unfamiliar vocabulary further complicates recognition, especially when words have multiple meanings or unexpected usage (Bingol et al., 2014). Additionally, pronunciation and accents impact comprehension, as speakers vary in articulation (Renukadevi, 2014). Classroom distractions further exacerbate these difficulties, obstructing the development of effective listening skills.

Speaking Skills

Listening and speaking are interdependent, as learners must first comprehend spoken language to speak effectively. Strong listening skills enhance speaking ability, enabling fluent and meaningful speech (Mahanty & Mishra, 2023). Effective communication requires learners to engage actively and draw on abilities such as recognising sounds, understanding grammar and vocabulary, and contextualising information (Habók et al., 2022).

To build speaking skills, learners need opportunities for informal and formal communication. CAPS (2011) recommends informal conversations to enable learners to communicate fluently and appropriately in diverse contexts. However, traditional oral methods often fail to foster meaningful interaction. Many classrooms rely on passive listening, limiting authentic conversation. Language acquisition requires both input and output, and teacher-led instruction alone cannot develop speaking skills (Le & Shuo, 2023). Conventional approaches often prioritise vocabulary and grammar over real-world communication.

Despite these challenges, speaking is formally assessed and contributes to learners' term and annual oral marks. Activities include informal conversations, group discussions, reading aloud, public speaking, and impromptu speeches (CAPS, 2011). However, psychological factors affect learners' willingness to speak. Ariyanti (2016) highlights that fear of making mistakes and peer criticism often lead to inhibition, restricting participation. Limited vocabulary and fear of negative feedback from teachers (Abrar et al., 2018) further hinder confidence. Creating a supportive environment that regularly exposes learners to Afrikaans is essential for developing speaking skills. Listening provides critical language input, while speaking enables learners to express themselves, engage in conversations, and communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Reading Skills

Reading is a vital skill essential for academic success. Pretorius and Murray (2019) describe reading as a cognitive process through which learners derive meaning from texts. Despite its significance, many South African learners struggle to read at their grade level (Cronje, 2021). The CAPS (2011) highlights reading as a critical outcome, requiring learners to develop the skills necessary to comprehend, analyse, and interpret various texts. Effective engagement with texts involves drawing inferences and justifying conclusions (Van Wingerden et al., 2017). Language exams often incorporate diverse text types such as comprehension passages, summaries, and cartoon strips. These tasks require learners to decode texts accurately and respond effectively in the target language.

Comprehension, however, extends beyond basic understanding of language. Chuenchaichon (2022) notes that it requires learners to structure ideas, identify the author's purpose, assess the context, and draw meaningful conclusions. Vocabulary plays a pivotal role in these processes. For tasks like summarising, learners must first understand the text thoroughly,

then convey its main ideas in their own words. Abedi (2017) emphasises that vocabulary is vital for mastering an additional language; without it, learners' reading and writing development may stagnate.

Motivation plays a crucial role in developing reading proficiency. According to Waring and Vu (2020), learners who lack interest in reading in a second language often struggle with related tasks. When learners do not value reading, they miss opportunities to enhance their skills. Ntumi (2016) highlights that learners with negative attitudes towards reading tend to disengage, avoid reading, and fall behind academically. Swanson et al. (2020) further note that multilingual learners face various reading challenges, including limited vocabulary, poor oral comprehension, working memory difficulties, weak inference-making skills, and trouble connecting with texts.

Additionally, factors such as poor proficiency in their home language, inadequate support from teachers, unhealthy reading habits, and a lack of prior knowledge also contribute to learners' struggles with reading (Rajchert et al., 2014). Phonological awareness is particularly important as it assists learners interpret written materials. Difficulties in distinguishing speech sounds and linking them to symbols can hinder pronunciation, word memory, writing, spelling, and fluency (Powell, 2017). Reading requires more than simply decoding text; it also depends on vocabulary, comprehension, motivation, and a supportive environment. Addressing these challenges is essential for enabling learners to engage effectively with texts and achieve academic success.

Writing Skills

In Grades 10–12, learners are encouraged to write for interpersonal and academic purposes, fostering creativity (e.g., writing stories) and developing cognitive abilities (e.g., composing argumentative essays) (CAPS, 2011). Writing is widely considered one of the most challenging aspects of additional language learning due to its demand for structure, strategic language use, and effective communication (Dar & Khan, 2015). Creative writing, which allows learners to express imagination and emotions through self-selected or assigned topics, is essential for cultivating writing skills. In South Africa, creative writing is introduced from Grade 1 to lay a foundation for academic writing (Mathura & Zulu, 2021).

Despite early exposure, many learners struggle with grammar in writing, even though grammar, sentence structure, and language conventions are taught. Grammar, a cornerstone of

communication, encompasses morphology (word structure) and syntax (word arrangement) (Eunson, 2020). Limited grammar knowledge often causes learners anxiety about accuracy. Similarly, vocabulary is vital for expressing ideas, yet insufficient vocabulary hampers sentence construction and meaning. Hapsari and Sukavatee (2018) assert that vocabulary reflects subject knowledge and facilitates meaningful interactions. However, limited topic knowledge often results in writing errors, particularly with pronouns, tenses, articles, and prepositions, leading to lost marks.

In South African schools, learners' challenges are compounded by using English as a second or third language, despite the Language-in-Education Policy promoting additive bilingualism and all 11 official languages (Diko, 2022). Learners often internalise content in their home language before translating it into English or Afrikaans, relying on tools like Google Translate or dictionaries. This process frequently results in errors, such as mistranslating "Go to the back of the class" into Afrikaans as "Gaan na die rug van die klas," incorrectly using the noun "rug" instead of the preposition "agter" (Mathura & Zulu, 2021).

Another significant issue is the lack of effective writing instruction for first additional language learners. Ngubane et al. (2020) note that many Afrikaans teachers lack expertise in writing processes, resulting in ineffective teaching methods. Although CAPS promotes a process-based approach, limited teacher training hampers its implementation (Dornbrack & Dixon, 2014). Practices vary: some schools identify grammatical errors in drafts for learners to correct, while others use peer editing to foster collaboration. However, time constraints and large class sizes often limit detailed feedback, leaving learners to rely on peer review. Mpiti (2016) highlights a lack of research on additional language writing in the FET phase, emphasising the need for structured support to enhance writing skills for academic success.

Method

Research Paradigm, Design and Approach

The research paradigm is crucial in conducting research as it reflects the researcher's perspective, theoretical orientation, and worldview, which influence the interpretation of findings (Khatri, 2020). An interpretive paradigm facilitates the development of new theoretical

and social concepts by focusing on understanding social processes and human behaviour through subjective interpretation. This study adopts the interpretive paradigm as its epistemological foundation, emphasising that reality and knowledge are socially constructed.

According to this paradigm, the researcher must recognise the perspectives and explanations of the participants, making the study context-specific and focused on understanding phenomena within their natural settings. A case study design, which explores a topic within its natural context, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the broader processes and characteristics involved. This study adopts an intrinsic case study design, as defined by Kekeya (2021), which is chosen for topics of specific interest to the researcher aiming to gain a detailed understanding of a specific case. In this study, the focus is on exploring the learning challenges faced by Grade 11 Afrikaans FAL learners.

Ugwu and Eze (2023) explain that qualitative research seeks to develop a thorough understanding of social phenomena within their natural contexts. A qualitative approach is chosen when the researcher aims to examine participants' perceptions, beliefs, and opinions (Chivanga, 2016). This study employs a qualitative research approach, as it is inherently subjective and relies on inductive reasoning to interpret the experiences and viewpoints of teachers and learners.

Population and Sample

In research, the concept of a population serves as a fundamental element, encompassing a group of individuals who share common characteristics within a specific geographic or institutional context (Martínez-Mesa et al., 2016). The population of this study consists of grade 11 Afrikaans FAL teachers and learners in the Lejweleputswa district, Free State, South Africa.

Andrade (2020) emphasises that researchers can explore smaller groups and still make compelling conclusions about the greater population with a sample. In other words, they are the preselected participants that will provide the researcher with rich information. Qualitative researchers select sampling options that enable them to expand their understanding of the phenomenon that is being explored. The sampling technique employed for this study is purposive sampling. Researchers deliberately select participants who are thought to be capable of responding to the research questions for a particular goal.

The sample of this study consisted of 15 participants in total. They are:

- 3 grade 11 Afrikaans FAL teachers.
- 3 groups of grade 11 Afrikaans FAL learners (each group consisting of 4 participants) categorised according to performance percentage:
 - Top achievers (learners obtaining between 61% -100%)
 - Average achievers (learners obtaining between 40% - 60%)
 - Under achievers (learners obtaining between 0-39%)

Data Collection Instruments

According to Mwita (2022), data collection is an orderly process of collecting the data to address research objectives and resolve specific research problems. The use of multiple data sources, known as triangulation, involves employing various data collection instruments to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. In this research, qualitative data is triangulated through individual and focus group interviews.

Taherdoost (2021) states that interviews are a form of social interaction in which questions are posed, and information is gathered based on the responses of interviewees. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used in all cases. Individual interviews with teachers were conducted in English, allowing them to express themselves most effectively. Given their familiarity with educational terminology, the use of English as the primary Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), and its frequent use in their professional settings, they were comfortable discussing complex educational topics in English. These interviews were audio-recorded, with additional notes taken to supplement the recordings.

Focus group interviews were conducted with Grade 11 learners, divided into three groups according to their performance in Afrikaans: top achievers (Group 1), average achievers (Group 2), and under-achievers (Group 3), each comprising four learners. This grouping was intended to ensure that learners were not intimidated by the language proficiency of others.

Data Analysis

A credible qualitative study must demonstrate rigorous, consistent, and thorough data analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). A method for analysing qualitative data, thematic analysis involves identifying and reporting patterns within the dataset, followed by interpreting these patterns to

derive meaning (Xu & Zammit, 2020). This approach enables the researcher to understand the significance of participants' feedback. In this study, participants shared data by describing their experiences in their own words, reflecting their personal viewpoints and understandings.

Once collected, the data was processed and analysed to organise and categorise the information, uncovering connections between concepts. Consequently, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis by identifying commonalities and similarities among the focused codes, which were then grouped into meaningful themes.

Ethical Considerations

Research involving human participants requires strict adherence to ethical principles. Ethics generally focus on making normative judgements about whether an action is right or wrong. In the context of research, ethics involve protecting participants' rights, preventing harm, and ensuring their well-being (Kara & Pickering, 2017). Ethical considerations are particularly important in qualitative research, where participants may share sensitive information. In this study, the following ethical guidelines were adhered to.

Informed consent: In this study, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and how their participation would unfold. Participants were asked to sign a form that indicating an understanding of the research and consent to participate.

Anonymity and confidentiality: To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were used for all participants. Prior to conducting any interviews and discussions, permission was obtained from participants to voice record the interviews.

Study approval: The study proposal was approved by the Faculty Research and Innovation Committee (FRIC) of the university. Ethical clearance was also provided. Approval was sought and received from the Free State Department of Basic Education to conduct the research in schools.

Findings

The findings from individual interviews with teachers and group interviews with learners are presented. The challenges they face in the teaching and learning of Afrikaans as a First

Additional Language are discussed first, followed by an overview of the support provided to mitigate these challenges.

Theme 1: Teaching and learning challenges - teachers

The teacher participants highlighted that certain learning challenges within the teaching and learning environment negatively impacted both processes. All three participants agreed that most learners exhibited poor communicative abilities across the four language skills that Afrikaans FAL encompasses: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Learners struggled with reading in the target language and found it difficult to express themselves both orally and in writing due to a limited vocabulary. It can be inferred that learners' reading difficulties affected their ability to expand their vocabulary, enhance comprehension, and acquire the foundational subject knowledge necessary to respond to lower-order assessment questions.

T03 noted that English predominates in the Afrikaans classroom, as learners tend to speak English more frequently than Afrikaans during Afrikaans lessons: *"Ma'am, oh, I don't know how I can say it, Ma'am – and they constantly only speak English instead of Afrikaans. Here and there they'll speak Afrikaans, but it's too little."*

According to T02, learners were hindered by the language itself since they were unable to comprehend it, making it impossible for teachers and learners to have effective verbal communication without translations. Consequently, teachers were compelled to translate in English. *"The learning barrier is basically the language itself in the Afrikaans class, because I cannot, for example, only speak Afrikaans in the class. I literally have to translate everything to English, because learners really don't have the vocabulary, and we cannot understand each other if we only communicate in Afrikaans"*. T02 further explained that many learners struggled with spontaneous or independent speaking, particularly during oral presentations or speeches. Rather than speaking freely or expressing their thoughts in their own words, most learners heavily relied on reading directly from a page. Although some attempted to speak independently, they still depended on aids such as flashcards to assist them. *"...They cannot speak on their own. There are those learners who try, but then they have flash cards. This helps, but the majority of learners would just read from a page, and that is their oral speech."*

T01 remarked that emotional and psychological factors, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, significantly impacted learners' ability to express themselves clearly, engage in discussions, or respond verbally in class. *"Any unprepared speaking that they have to do is usually the worst. Because when they speak to the teachers, they get panicked because they know they must do well..."* T01 further explained that these learners were anxious because of destructive criticism learners received from teachers: *"But because teachers criticise them a lot of the time, they start doubt themselves and it makes a big difference in their language usage."*

T02 mentioned that the learners struggled mostly with the listening skills test and even though translations were provided it did not fully address the problem as learners grappled to respond in the Afrikaans language: *"Okay, the learners perform to worst in the listening comprehension. I also try to translate this. But in the end, they still have to answer the questions in Afrikaans, and once again, they don't have the vocabulary to do this. It is also difficult for them to understand what I am reading in Afrikaans"*.

T03 stated that even with accommodations that she had provided, such as re-reading the text or reading more slowly, learners still performed poorly. However, the teacher acknowledged that her reading speed as well as the learners' lack of vocabulary and poor awareness of phonetics or poor word recognition were barriers which impeded the learners understanding in the listening skills test: *"Listening exercises. I think we make it a bit easy for them, at times. We want them to do well, but if you're going to do it according to home language – just read it once and then a second time as well – then the kids will fail completely. And then even when you make it a bit easier for them, and like re-read, they still do poorly, those that struggle to hear. I know I may read too fast at times, so I try to read slower. But some of the children don't have the vocabulary to understand what you're reading to them."*

Regarding reading skills, T01 observed that learners do not engage in reading as they perceive it to be insignificant. The main reason for their poor literacy skills was a lack of interest and motivation. Learners appeared to neither appreciate literacy nor recognise its importance, which greatly impeded their progress in this area. *"Definitely literacy. Mainly because they don't have any interest therein and can also not see the importance thereof."* T02 concurred that learners have little interest in Afrikaans and therefore will not willingly read independently or engage with the language outside of mandatory classroom activities: *"As I said before, it is not a language where they*

would go into a bookshop and choose to buy an Afrikaans book. I don't think they open their Afrikaans books on their own. I say to them we are going to read this story in class tomorrow, please work through it."

T03 believed that the lack of vocabulary impeded learners' reading comprehension. The learners lack of vocabulary made it difficult for them to comprehend what is being read to them in Afrikaans: *"But some of the children don't have the vocabulary to understand what you're reading to them."*

Oybekovna (2020) argues that learners sometimes become overly dependent on their teachers and fail to take their studies seriously. Despite the importance of reading, many learners lack both the habit and proficiency for it, as they primarily read only in preparation for examinations.

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning challenges - learners

The learners agreed that negative attitudes, lack of motivation, and poor discipline were significant obstacles to language learning. These were the responses of each group:

Focus Group 1: Learner participants pointed out that the their ill-discipline and negative attitude towards the teacher and subject posed a great barrier to effective learning: *"I think it's the discipline in our class, if my classmates never want to respect our teacher or they never do their homework, I think it makes me feel like, ag this class again, not to feel like going to class because we're lacking discipline as a class and our teacher cannot teach us what we have to know, so for me it's discipline"*

Focus Group 2: The learners concluded that ineffective learning in the Afrikaans classroom was caused by disruptions from unmotivated students. This led to wasted time and diminished curiosity due to the disorderly classroom environment: *"But if everyone is making a noise and you know disobedient to the teacher, we lose you know like teaching time and interest in what we're supposed to be learning."* Another learner stated: *"Not everyone wants to learn Afrikaans, so they make it difficult for us that want to learn the language, like they get disruptive in class, or they just don't care and don't do the work and so the teacher always has to like be on them and we just lose our time of learning."*

Participants from Group 3 explained that overcrowded classes made it challenging for the teacher to manage discipline, leading to the teacher spending more time addressing disruptive behaviour rather than concentrating on teaching and learning.: *"I'm starting with the negative, when*

we, if the class is full, the learners make noise, and they waste time for us to learn". Participants from Group 2 also noted that the large class sizes meant that some learners received less individualised attention, as the teacher had to prioritise those who needed more attention: *"I guess the whole large group of learners in class because now we don't all perform the same so a teacher has to like normally help the learners that perform the least and to the others it feels like they are not given that much attention into the whole language."*

In addition to issues with discipline, learners experienced emotional bullying. The learner participants indicated that their lack of confidence and the emotional bullying they faced made them feel incompetent and anxious about speaking in front of others. Group 1 learner participants asserted their low self-esteem in the target language prevented them from delivering their speech to the best of their ability and thus affected their academic performance undesirably: *"But because of the speeches and you're face front with people that you know might judge you, you lose the confidence to just speak freely even though you know you've done your best at the work".*

Participants from Group 2 reported that their anxiety disrupted their working memory and hindered their ability to recall and produce the content they had learned. They also lacked the linguistic flexibility to enhance their writing with varied vocabulary: *"So even though it's a prepared speech we have to prepare how to pronounce a longer or a difficult word properly and then when we get in front of class I guess anxiety you know, we get anxious and we tend to forget what we had prepared and then like it's easier in English because we would just come up with words that are linked to the topic even but in Afrikaans you can't just make up words because then the teacher won't understand what you're saying."*

Group 3 learner participants frustratingly articulated that they were afraid to engage in classroom activities as they might be emotionally bullied, implying that emotional bullying is a practice at the school: *"Like I've mentioned earlier ma'am, is that some of us are ashamed to come forward because we are ashamed that the rest of the class are going to laugh at us when we are wrong. When we get something wrong, or when we ask the questions, they're going to mock us, or ..."*

Theme 3: Teacher support

Inclusive education seeks to enhance the quality of education for all learners by requiring schools and teachers to adapt their teaching practices to cater for diverse learner needs. To

address the challenges learners faced, teachers implemented various strategies. Given that most of the learners at the identified school were Black South Africans whose home language was Sesotho, many teachers employed translation, code-switching, code-mixing, repetition, and revision as intervention methods, as learners had a limited Afrikaans FAL vocabulary.

The following responses highlight the support offered to the learners:

T01 translated the Afrikaans content into English: *"I will translate everything into English."*

T03 used code-switching: *"I regularly use English to help them to better understand it in Afrikaans. So yes, I regularly mix English and Afrikaans for the children."* T03 also reverted to revision tests, repetition of language structures and exercises to help learners master the content: *"Revision work. I will tell them, come, let's re-do this. We're going to review the questions. I will, for example, passive and active, which they struggle with all the time, or conjunctions, then we will practice it consistently. And also, consistently test them on it. Explain it to them, give examples, practice it, give feedback, until they get it right."*

T02 also stated that informal tests were not only used as indicators to identify challenging topics learners struggled with, but were also utilised to help learners grasp the topic: *"Okay, I would know, because I make use of informal assessments, for example, if they haven't mastered a certain topic, I would know, because we have written tests about the work. And then I have to teach again, and they would be retested."*

T01 said that revision activities indicated which topics learners struggled with and enabled her to provide immediate assistance to learners individually in class: *"Before the tests and exams start, we do revision exercises. Again, it is important to me that the children do it in class because I can't see what they are struggling with if they are doing it at home. And then in class I can sit with them and help them with whatever they're struggling with."*

T03 indicated that she took a proactive approach by exposing learners to similar types of questions and reading materials. The teacher believed that learners would become more comfortable with the format and content, ultimately leading to improved performance in future assessments and a reinforced skill: *"If there is a problem with a specific section of a paper or an assignment, I would find ways to improve the ability of that assignment of paper. So, let's say the learners have done badly in a comprehension test. I will then give them more comprehension tests so that they can*

become used to reading and the type of questions that go along with it. Thus, they will improve and do better in the next comprehension test."

The teachers pointed out that continuous feedback on assessments and regular class tests was performed in class as remedial action. T03 used the Error and Item analysis to indicate problem areas and mitigate them: *"I will go and look where the problem areas are, for example, if we look at question Paper 1, which is the comprehension and the summary on the language, and then I'll see okay, they're struggling the most with the comprehension test. And then I'll practice more comprehensions tests with them."*

T02 said: *"After learners have written a test and I did the item and error analysis, I will go back and reteach the things they struggled with."* When teacher participants were asked to reflect on the impact the Afrikaans Subject Improvement Plan (SIP) had on their personal results, T01 said: *"Absolutely nothing. Because teachers understand."* T03 believed the document would be of more value if it were to be utilised daily: *"For me, I think we should actually incorporate it more in our work. But it's usually just in our folders and we forget about it. So, you really should always keep it next to you and review the children, oh yes, they struggle with this work, so that you can focus on it more and see where the children truly are struggling and address those certain aspects."*

Theme 4: Learner support

Teachers who possess the necessary knowledge and skills are crucial for the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Pit-ten Cate, et al., 2018). To meet the wide range of learning needs encountered in the classroom, teachers must develop competencies such as identifying learning difficulties, assessing learners and applying diverse teaching strategies.

This theme highlighted the various support strategies participants received in addressing the learning challenges they faced, including translation (code-switching), modelling, and peer collaboration.

Translation (Code switching)

All groups indicated that code switching was used by the teacher to ensure all learners understood the content. A comment for Group 2: *"Yes she... when we read like... well with everything especially like on the stories we read in Afrikaans she normally like translates and explains what's happening in you know the story."*

Modelling

All groups stated that the teacher modelled tasks to demonstrate the new concept to the learner to enable the learners to grasp the topic. A comment from Group 1: "When it comes to speeches or the topics that we have to go through she will explain what each topic means and she will give you an example of what you can do with it."

Peer collaboration

Participants from all groups explained that classmates were given opportunities to collaborate on tasks, discuss concepts, assess one another, and seek clarification on topics they found unclear. A comment from Group 3: *"I try to like go to my friends get them to tell me what I didn't understand, and we'll actually help each other so that's what I do if I don't understand something, I go to my friends, ask them can you guys help me, I don't understand this and this and this."* A Group 2 participant clarified that when they were working on process writing a more knowledgeable classmate would monitor and rectify mistakes in their written work: *"And then another person according to you checks as well, to edit your work."*

Learner participants from Group 3 mentioned that after tasks were assigned, the teacher would mark the activities in sequence and provide feedback. *"Yes, there were corrections that was done, yes. Based on the paper we received."* These learner participants felt that the strategies employed by the teacher to address their learning challenges aided their understanding.

Discussions

Many additional language learners lack the confidence to communicate with teachers or participate in class due to a fear of making mistakes, often stemming from their limited vocabulary. The additional language often serves as a barrier to learning, with anxiety further exacerbating learners' underperformance and disinterest in the subject. High levels of language anxiety significantly impair learners' ability to produce and comprehend the target language. Research by Hu et al. (2024) demonstrates a negative correlation between additional language anxiety and academic achievement. According to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), negative emotional states act as barriers, blocking comprehensible input and hindering learning.

Teacher participants identified limited vocabulary as a key factor contributing to learners' poor performance, restricting their understanding of texts and questions. This limitation also

affected learners' ability to express themselves accurately in speech and writing, often leading to incorrect responses and word usage. Afrikaans teachers also faced challenges such as the dominance of English in classrooms and the psychological and emotional factors affecting learners. Anxiety, low self-esteem, and a lack of motivation frequently reduced learners' engagement with Afrikaans, compounded by their reluctance to read outside of class. To address these challenges, teachers often switched between English and Afrikaans to ensure learners grasped the material, subsequently focusing on building Afrikaans vocabulary. Maluleke (2019) highlights code-switching as a valuable strategy for improving learners' comprehension and engagement.

Teachers also employed strategies to identify and address specific learning difficulties, fostering an inclusive learning environment. Code-switching emerged as a vital approach, enabling teachers to translate and clarify material in a familiar language, particularly in Afrikaans as a First Additional Language classrooms. Learners found this method helpful in simplifying challenging concepts and increasing their engagement. Similarly, modelling was widely used to make abstract ideas more accessible through clear demonstrations of tasks and concepts. Hyseni and Lundberg (2022) emphasise that modelling is particularly effective for language learners, offering practical examples and boosting their confidence in completing assignments.

Peer collaboration further enhanced learning by encouraging learners to engage with one another, discuss topics, and review each other's work. Learners valued this approach, noting that it provided helpful feedback and fostered a cooperative classroom environment. Vygotsky (1978) supports collaborative learning, arguing that shared efforts often yield better results than individual work. Together with regular teacher feedback, these strategies addressed learners' challenges and created opportunities for active engagement and improved outcomes. Pardede (2024) agrees and states that in addition to developing skills and knowledge, collaboration also has positive psychological effects. Thoughts and emotions are closely connected, and when learners work with their peers, they engage directly with the learning process. This direct experience enables them to better understand and appreciate each other's growth in mastering language skills.

The cognitive and linguistic demands of learning an additional language are substantial. Teachers must ensure that linguistic accommodations are made to allow learners full access to

the core curriculum. This includes addressing learning and teaching barriers to enable learners to acquire the academic language skills necessary for success. This aligns with Dreyer (2017) who indicates that teachers should encourage active language interaction in the classroom.

Conclusion and Implication

Based on the findings, recommendations are proposed for language teachers, learners, and future researchers. Teachers can address learners' needs and weaknesses through informal assessments and revision exercises. These tools help learners consolidate their knowledge, gain practice, and familiarise themselves with the types of questions they may encounter. By using written revision activities, the school also supports learners in deepening their understanding of what they have learned, expanding their learning resources, and refining their study strategies. These activities promote a sense of responsibility and enthusiasm for learning. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on learners resisting the temptation to copy from one another in class.

Teachers must also recognise that Afrikaans is not, in fact, the learners' first additional language. To support learners more effectively, they should reduce the amount of material to be studied, allowing learners to focus on essential concepts and structures. This approach not only enhances retention but also signals to learners that their needs are understood, fostering a supportive learning environment. Furthermore, promoting a positive attitude towards learners' progress, particularly for those needing remedial support, can significantly boost their motivation and engagement. By nurturing an encouraging atmosphere, teachers can better support learners' development.

Finally, while code-switching can be a valuable strategy in the second language classroom, Afrikaans should remain the dominant language of instruction. This ensures that learners engage primarily with the target language, enhancing language acquisition and proficiency while still providing the necessary support when needed.

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