

**DESCRIBING THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF SECOND
LANGUAGE (ISIZULU) LEARNERS AT A SELECTED ENGLISH
MEDIUM SECONDARY SCHOOL**

BY

CHANDINI RABBIKISSOON

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University of Durban –Westville
Durban**

Supervisor:

Dr. Reshma Sookrajh

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DECLARATION

I, Chandini Rabbikissoon, reg. no. 9901906, hereby declare that this report is a result of my own investigation and all the sources that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged and included in the bibliography.

Chandini Rabbikissoon

(Signature)

(Date)

(Supervisor)

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners at an English medium secondary school. In carrying out this report the writer used information from school records, questionnaires to learners, parents and educators and held selected interviews with learners of different grades.

From the data gathered it is clear that learners are trained in their traditional languages in primary school, and when expected to switch to English in secondary school, which determines whether they are promoted to the next grade or not, are faced with failure.

Here, educators have to be trained so that ‘multicultural education’ is a part of every educators’ duties. Also, parents need to be made aware of their role in their children’s education and training.

The Department of Education has to ensure that learners are introduced to English in their pre-primary school phase so that the transition does not have such a drastic effect on the learners.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.

Provision of education in South Africa has proven to be an extremely complex and challenging task. In the new democracy, this task is made up of the complex equation of the education provider, the learner, parents and educators with their diverse ethnic, religious, social and linguistic backgrounds. From this background, it became obvious that a cohesive programme had to be developed to address the assimilation and growth of learners adjusting to new requirements to further their studies. The one compelling example is that of the English second language learner at an English medium school. This has certainly captured the interest of the learners and educators alike.

The issue of language in public schools is closely related to the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of South Africa. It gives everyone the right to education in the official language or languages of their choice, where practical. To ensure that learners have reasonable access to education in a language of their choice, the Bill of Rights says that the state must consider educational alternatives such as single language institutions, taking into account issues such as equity, practicality and the need for redress. This new policy aims to redress the injustice of apartheid, where two languages, English and Afrikaans, had status and privilege over all the other languages spoken (South African Education and training: Transition in a Democratic Era).

The new South African Constitution recognises eleven official languages, nine African languages, English and Afrikaans, and states that every person shall have the right to basic education and equal access to educational instruction in the language of his or her choice whenever it is reasonably practicable. However, every schools' language policy is determined by its governing body, who have to comply with the laws relating to language use, and cannot practice racial discrimination in implementing the school's language policy.

Governing bodies will also decide on matters including the schools mission and vision, goals and objectives, schools' budget priorities, subject choices and curricula.

This body should consist of members of the community wanting to serve the best interest of the community, decisions about curricula, etc. should be in the best interest of the learners.

However, this does not seem to be the case for most learners, as described by the subjects in this report. According to the learners interviewed, they were unaware of the subjects being offered at their new school. These learners only attend this school because it is the only school that accommodated them, because all schools in the area in which they live were full. The learners' are also unaware of the medium of instruction offered at the school, which was compulsory for them to pass, and for them to progress to the next grade.

This case study will address the development of English second language learners' experiences at an English first language medium school. This is an analysis of the learner's experiences from primary school and has been done in a longitudinal way through to secondary school. All data analysed, unless otherwise stated, have been obtained from the learners'.

Although this study is informed by Zuber and Skerit's (1991) perspectives of learning and teaching which is based on critical action research, this research is based on a case study, which has borrowed the position to selectively frame the schooling experiences of learners. The basic assumption of Zuber and Skerit is that learning is experimental and reflective, pupils can create knowledge on the basis of their concrete experiences, through observing and reflecting on the experience, forming abstract concepts and generalisations, and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations, which will lead to new concrete experiences, and, hence, the beginning of a new cycle.

While working with Zuber and Skerit's framework, this report will describe the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners and their interactions at an English medium secondary school. Here, the learner's voice is of crucial value, where through interviews and observations, assumptions and descriptions will be made.

2. TOPIC

The purpose of this study is to describe the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners at a selected English medium Secondary school

3. CRITICAL QUESTIONS

3.1 How do second language learners experience English learning and communication?

3.1.1 What are the attitudes of second language learners towards English?

3.1.2 What impact does the learners' experiences have on their learning?

4. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale for the study derives from a personal context within a rapidly changing schooling scenario. The provision of education in South Africa has changed since the new government came into power in 1994. The old system of racially segregated schools are a thing of the past, with all schools presently desegregated.

In the past provision of education had a direct bearing on the racial group that a person belonged to, with some education departments being favoured by the government, for example, the former so-called 'white schools'. This led to gross injustices to the so-called 'black schools' where learners suffered because the human resources provided to their schools was not adequate for them to make the transition to the now called 'open schools' (Freer: 1991)

The main issue is the language barrier that the learners face when entering such schools. Learners have been trained in their former schools in traditional languages, and as a result of this are facing tremendous problems with the handling of the different languages and communication that they encounter at their new schools.

Schools on the other hand do not consider the majority population groups to whom they provide education. The language policies need to be restructured to suit the learner population. Also educators need to be trained to meet the diverse needs of the learners`.

It was felt that research has to be conducted about the learners` past experiences, and the new and unusual challenges in language learning that the learners` face. The assumption of my research is that the learning experiences of learners are impacted by their assimilation and understanding of English.

Being an educator I have become concerned about ascertaining the effect that learning experiences have on second language learners of English in Secondary schools. Currently I am teaching at a Secondary School in Stanger, which has a majority of 75% black Second language learners` as compared to 25% Indian learners. The language profile of the black African learners is 90% isiZulu.

In engaging with these learners and having to do assessments for these second language learners has prompted me to engage in this study. Another observed development is that the learners seem to have developed a negative attitude towards their studies. Here, I feel, that it is because of the language barriers and also the fact that it is compulsory for every learner to pass their examinations and tests in the languages that they are taught in, in order for them to proceed to the next grade.

Given the above rationale it would appear that this study is driven largely by a personal concern as an educator, of second language learners of English in a context where 90% of learners are second language learners.

5.RESEARCH DESIGN.

5.0 Introduction

The research methodology employed in this study was a case study. The primary data was obtained through interviews and the secondary data through document analysis and questionnaires. The questionnaire was used to elicit information about the learners past and present educational progress. The pupil questionnaire was designed with close considerations of these factors.

5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained both open and close-ended questions. Closed-type questions yielding nominal data required factual data or objective responses. The section on general particulars included specific details relating to the individual pupil, such as name, standard, school, age, and language spoken most often at home are examples of nominal data.

The broad categories in the learner questionnaire included the learners' general particulars, their home background, their previous schooling experiences and their present experiences in their new schooling context, teacher-pupil interaction and peer-group interaction, intra-and inter-racially (amongst the African and between the Indian and African pupils respectively). These factors, when analysed, should provide insight into the cultural, social, racial and economic factors, amongst others, that influence their performance in school. Questions on the home background include information on the socio-economic conditions of the family (occupation of parents), the material conditions of the home (type of dwelling, number of rooms in the house, the family size), facilities available (such as water, electricity, television), where pupils study or do their homework. These were the closed-type questions of nominal data that merely require factual information on the learners' (Appendix A).

Questionnaires were administered to both parents of learners and all educators of the language and literacy department at the school. Some of the questions asked were about the learners' previous and present educational experiences, about subject matter taught, and the learners' grasp of the English language.

5.2. Interviews

To obtain information and complete the interviews an in-depth, unstructured approach was used. The unstructured approach used in interviewing was considered due to the language difficulties experienced by second language learners.

The interviewer was sensitive to what is construed by the learner as relevant and meaningful to his or her own related experiences. Tape-recording and note taking was limited. Verbatim notes taken were only those that reflected the essences of the learner's meaning. This was to avoid intimidation and thus a bias in the data gathered from the interview. "More usually, taking notes simultaneous with the events would be highly disruptive even when the researcher is openly acknowledged (Hammarsley, 1979: 140)".

A detailed written recording of the interviews was made after each interview was conducted. Interviews had to be conducted during lunch breaks when learners were not involved in other activities during this time. Mostly open-ended questions were used so as to generate as much as possible in contributing an elaboration to the questions asked in the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted over a period of three to four weeks. However, given the scope of the study, selected aspects of the interview have been discussed in detail.

5.3. Documentary Analysis

Secondary data from school records was used to indicate the learner's failure rate. This information serves to inform about the second language learners struggle with a language that is virtually foreign to them.

Learners' were given diaries in which to record details of events that took place in their homes in the afternoons. A table was drawn up in which this information was recorded.

6. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

6.0. Introduction

These findings respond directly to the critical questions asked in this study about the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners at an English medium school, also what are the attitudes of second language learners towards English, and the impact that the learner's experience have on their learning. Here, the learner had to respond to questions about the language most often spoken at home, among peers and friends. Also the schooling background, history and present educational experiences are described. Learners' perceptions of their responses to subject matter, teacher's explanations and teaching methods used in the school in this study were analysed. Data was also gathered from the information provided by the learners' which was recorded in their diaries.

6.1 Findings of the study

6.1.1 Questionnaire

In the questionnaire compiled for the learners, they were asked to indicate the language they spoke most often at home, whether they were assisted by their parents with schoolwork, and how much of time did they spend on language learning out of school. The intention in asking this question was to gain insight into the compatibility of the language spoken at home and that of English, the medium of instruction in the school in the present study. Here the feedback from learners indicated that they mainly communicated with their friends and families in their mother-tongue, that is, Isizulu.

6.1.2 Questionnaire to Parents

Profile of information from a parent of a second language learner. This information was in reply to a questionnaire to parents about the English use at home.

Some of the data gathered from parent with respect to the question “How did Charlotte discover English”?

‘Charlotte discovered English from school. By the time her teachers taught her how to debate, act and story tellings.’

It would appear that her difficult words were “kitchen”, “spelling”, “children”.

In reply to, “What were her first words?” (Appendix B ; question 8) the following response was received:

“good morning”, “goodbye”, “chairs”, “desk” and “teacher.” These were largely communicative language used for greeting and school related, perhaps words that were most frequently used by the learner.

How did you help Charlotte to learn English?

“It is hard for me to teach her English. All the English I know is what I learnt from my work/ my boss. When I went to school all I learnt was Zulu. Now I read Charlotte’s books and learn from them. Sometimes we struggle to know how to do her homework.”

It is clear that Zulu is the most frequently spoken language at home. In what language do you speak to your family ? *“We all speak in Zulu, but sometimes in English when the children they have homework, or when they talk about things from school.”*

6.1.3 Teachers Questionnaire

Teacher's response to learners performances

Teachers in the present study felt that because of the language disadvantage, the majority of the African learner's in the school perform below the average learners (Appendix C; question 6). Teachers were questioned about the present subject matter and the learners' past educational experiences. Their responses were clear that the conceptual background of the learners' made it difficult for them to grasp the subject matter taught, that is mainly because of the poor grounding in early schooling.

When asked about learners' response to the languages taught in their school, especially English, the following is some of the comments made by teachers:

"Because of the poor grounding in English, most of these learner's struggle to grasp even the simple literal facts. Most of the second language learner's have a poor command of the language in both comprehension and expression of thoughts and ideas. Their vocabulary is limited and the rules of grammar are not applied in written expressions".

"The learner's home language (Isizulu) impinges on the second language learners' (English), affecting proficiency/ fluency. They have problems expressing themselves in English. This could be because their former teachers' concentrated on Zulu, even during English medium lessons. These learner's perform badly, and not only in English, because they are treated as first language candidates".

"Most learner's do not speak English at home. They only learn new words and sentences at school. Once they are out of class they do not practice the new words and sentences, they do not remind themselves of the meaning of the words they have learnt".

In response to the questionnaire, most teachers commented that the African learners are performing either 'poor' or 'satisfactory' in English. They attributed this to the many problems that African learner's encounter during their schooling careers.

In response to the above, the following observations have been made by the writer:

- Most learners' do not read much during their extra time. Firstly, they do not have library facilities in the areas in which they reside. Secondly, the schools that they attend do not have resources to supply them with extra reading material.
- The learners' grasp of subject matter and the link between subject- and learners' experiences ranged from 'poor' to 'satisfactory'. Language seemed to be the major difficulty affecting learner's understanding.
- Parental guidance in the form of supervision of homework is limited. The majority of African parents consult teachers on their children's performance 'very seldom' or 'not at all'. These children lack motivation which affects their ability to perform better at school.
- Most teachers conducting extra lessons especially for Second language learners found little or no difference in learners' performance. Here, the negative attitude and absence of the learners at these classes cause them to be held only on an ad hoc basis, and a culture of consistency to bridge the gap in deficiencies is absent.
- The attendance was generally considered 'good', and 'poor' attendance in some cases was attributed to learners travelling long distances to school, and political intimidation in the areas that learners' lived in. Some of the teachers commented that parents and the community lacked a committed culture of learning, which impacts negatively on the learner's performance.

In response to the comments from teachers one has to ask the question as to why does it matter if teachers perceive learners as good or bad, intelligent or unintelligent, motivated or unmotivated? In 1955, the psychologist George Kelly offered a powerful model for human interaction, proposing that all individuals create categories that are called 'constructs' with which to understand, predict and control the world.

Although Kelley's theory has been applied as to how students learn, it would seem that constructs teachers adopt and use with respect to learners greatly influence how we look upon and deal with our students(Horwitz : 2000: p.533)

Hunt (1971) found that teachers with a higher number of constructs for students imparted more flexible and reflective teaching approaches. The question of the origin of the learner constructs thus arises. How do language teachers acquire their images of learners? To some extent, the constructs or dimensions that teachers use to understand learners are cultural, and therefore, teachers should be mindful of how their circumstances influence the way they view language learning and their relationships with learners. (Horwitz: 2000: p. 533)

6.2 Interview

In the present study, according to the learners interviewed , and information gathered from educators, 95% of the pupils attending this school speak Isizulu as their home language. Zulu is neither the medium of instruction, nor is it offered as an examination subject as a first, second or third language. This is a constraint that all learners who have Isizulu as a first language face, because the medium of instruction is not compatible to their mother-tongue language.

Some of data gathered was from learner called Charlotte (learner 1). The data provided valuable information with regard to language learning.

To the question, "how did you learn Zulu?" the following response was received:

"I learnt Zulu from my home as it was my home language. From my birth I used to talk in Zulu. My first words were "mama" and "baba". My mum and dad they talk in Zulu to us all the time. I can be angry when they can't help me with my English homework. Zulu was easy to learn because all the teachers in my primary school read the English and told us the work in Zulu."

From the above comment it is evident that parents are unable to assist learners with their homework, because of their lack of English reading and writing skills.

She was asked "what can you remember about first learning English?"

"It was hard to remember the words that my teacher and friends at school said. Sometimes the words would come to me but I am shy to speak them, also I feel that the words it not come out right, so my friends and teacher will laugh at me. At first I wished that that the teacher would talk in Zulu as my old teacher used to. Also the first English was better to talk to my friends outside the class because the friends that like me helped me to learn the right words. When I did not know all the right words I was angry and would pray to go to a school where there was Zulu."

According to Krashen(1982) a learner who is tense, angry, anxious or bored will screen out input, making it impossible for acquisition. Thus, depending on the learner's state of mind or disposition, the filter limits what is attended to and what is acquired.

The following response to the question "what language do you use in the classroom?" was recorded :

"With my Zulu friends I talk in Zulu, but to speak to my Indian friends I use English. Some of the Indian children do not understand when we Zulu children speak, and also they laugh at our mixed up English and Zulu. Also our teachers want us to only speak in English in the classroom. Sometimes they talk so fast that I do not know what they say, so this makes it hard for me to answer the questions they ask."

From the above response, it can be said that language switching is used in general communication.

From another learner Vuyo (learner 2), the following is some of the data collected.

When questioned, "Do you visit the library?" the learner replied:

"Yes the library at school, but not the one in town. It is far to walk to the library in town, also there is no library near my home. This school does not have Zulu books so there is not a lot for me to borrow."

To the question, "What books do you read?" the following response was made:

"I do not read many books beside my school books, even this I find hard to do because my family cannot help me to read. I sometimes look at the sports books that my friends bring to school, this is because I like sport and enjoy to read the books. The books with the music stars I also like to look at. Reading is hard, and I struggle to learn the words in the books."

From the above, it can be deduced that the lack of resources contributes to the idea of not reading feverishly.

Vuyo's reply to, "What is your best subject at school?" was:

"That is hard to answer because all my subject teachers speak in English, and only one teacher in Afrikaans. Even the teacher for technology and maths, my best subjects, teach in English, this I find hard. It would be good if they can tell the work in Zulu as well as in English, like my teachers from my old school."

It is evident that best subjects and best teacher are framed in the primary school. It would appear that very little bonding has happened between learner and teachers and language plays a critical role in this relationship.

When questioned about, "What do you feel when you have to speak in English?" the learner shrugged and replied that:

"I am nervous and scared, like now, to talk. It feels all wrong to say the words, especially if the teachers asks me to read. At that time, I can see the words, but to speak them is very hard, also when all the other children are waiting to listen to you. I speak very little English, only at school."

This report has been compiled with the Isizulu learner and his/her problems with the acquisition of English, however, currently in KwaZulu Natal other language issues have emerged. In an article (Daily News, November 27, 2001) languages ‘badly treated’ it has been reported to a language committee that African languages, Isizulu and seSotho are now being undermined and violated. In this article mention is made of the shortage of resources both material and human, and also has details of “teachers who are teaching Isizulu but cannot speak the language at all. They are teaching Isizulu in English and this has resulted in learners who cannot speak Isizulu but rather memorise Isizulu words”.

It is clear from the responses that the educational policies of this country are affecting learners, especially those that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, as these learners have no choice in the schools that they attend, especially when they have completed their primary school education in schools where Isizulu is the language of instruction.

6.2.1. Learners history of previous schooling

In the present educational context, it is important to consider the history of schooling to which these learners were subjected. The history of racially-segregated schooling, and the differences that existed amongst the educational departments, impacted directly upon the provision for learners who were classified into different racial groups. The learners in this study reside in farms surrounding Kwa Duguza. They attended schools that were administered by DET or KZN Department of education.

Education, in these schools, was inferior in many ways. Educational resources both human and material were inadequate. The learners interviewed stated that many of their friends had failed at least once or twice in their schooling career. Failure is common in the schools in the township and rural areas. ‘There is a sense of fatalism, hopelessness and even bitterness. The students seem to lack inspiration; they have no sense of direction and they do not take their learning seriously’ (Nxumalo, 1993: 55).

The schooling conditions and the ideology of Bantu education prevalent in these schools form a deep contrast to the school in the present study.

Another aspect of language learning that has impacted on learners is that in their former schools English was taught as a subject up to standard two, with Zulu as the medium of instruction. In standard three, the focus changed from English as a subject, to English as a medium of instruction.

The Threshold Project (1991) conducted research to look at the learning experiences of young African children when they are in Standard 3, the year when the medium of instruction changes to English. One of the questions raised was,

‘from the beginning of Standard 3, children are expected to learn as many as ten subjects through English (English as a medium of instruction). How well do the English courses which the children study from Sub B (second grade) to Standard 2 (fourth grade) prepare them for English which they are going to need when English is the medium of instruction from the beginning of Standard 3’?

In the present study, the learners interviewed stated that they were sad that they had to undergo this type of education because they are now aware of the new norms and standards for educational provision, and also the new Outcomes-Based education system that is currently being implemented in all schools in our country.

6.2.2. Learner’s perception of present school.

According to the learner interviewed (learner 2), most of her African peers that attended their schools had problems with school-work. They had difficulty in grasping the subject-matter taught, understanding teaching methods used and the interpretation of the teacher’s explanations. They also commented on the ease with which most of the Indian learner’s worked, compared to themselves and their African peers.

The learners commented that only a few of the teachers were kind, caring and helpful. They said that some of the teachers assisted learners with work not understood or even extra lessons to teach concepts that learners had not been exposed to. Despite difficulties with schooling evident in the learner's performance, these learners' found the present educational system and school beneficial to them. It could be easy to see that the learner's perceptions of the present schooling is strongly influenced by the past educational experiences and the inferior quality of educational provision that they had to endure.

6.2.3 Learner's understanding of teacher's explanations

Here the researcher probed to acquire information regarding the 'style' of the teacher in imparting knowledge to the learners. This included aspects such as tone, grammar, accent and delivery of the lesson by the teacher. The following are some of the comments made by the learners' :

Learner 1: ' The teachers' in this school talk very fast in English. Everything is in English. Here, the teachers don't know anywork in Zulu. Our teachers explain all the work that the Indian children know. That is why they always pass well. Most of our friends don't come to school anymore '.

Learner 2: ' Us African children suffer the most in the classroom. I sometimes feel that the teachers hate me because I don't do the work right. It is so hard to understand when they talk so fast in English. They teach us new words that we don't know, also they do not explain the words. You cannot know the problems we have with learning in this school, especially for English and Afrikaans. Most of the time the teachers don't know that we are learning the work for the first time '.

There is an implication of a vast difference in the standard or level of the subjects taught in the former DET and KZN administered schools compared to the school in the present study. For example, Afrikaans was introduced in standard three in DET

schools and standard one in HOD schools. General and physical science were studied with little or no practical work done as a result of a lack of facilities.

Both learners in this study indicated that the teachers in their former schools were very young, and had just finished school themselves. Here, it could be safe to imply that the teachers themselves were not adequately qualified to teach at the required standard.

For example, mathematics skills are built upon and not merely acquired as the learner progresses from one grade to the next. Many learners lack the conceptual framework on which more advanced knowledge is built. Even though the subject-matter may be difficult to grasp, the manner in which the teachers explain the subject-matter may influence their performance.

6.2.4. Learners' perceptions of schooling

From the data collected during the interview to answer the critical question about the attitudes of learners towards English, it was found that it is also possible that the learners' in this study could misinterpret teachers' attitudes towards them. One example, could be that if a learner does not understand the lesson, s/he will perceive the teacher negatively as s/he feels that the teacher is not influencing their performance positively. S/he associates poor performance in the subject with the teacher who teaches them that subject. Here, a learner's performance in school work could influence his/her overall impression of school.

The other factor affecting these learners now, is that the school system is not sensitive to the child's needs. The learner's development is negatively affected because the method of performing tasks associated with the child's own culture is not further developed by the schooling. It is also negatively affected in that the children at school do not develop new patterns and processes of thinking as people would expect them to.

When a formal education is imposed in a situation that is culturally different, the drop-out rate is a good indication of its negative effects. It indicates whether the education matches the childrens' need or not. There are certainly other factors, like the lack of money, involved in these South African rates, but the figures nevertheless can be used as a broad indicator of the number of children which schools do not successfully educate. Available figures do not show how many children never even start school, although it was estimated, (Threshold Project, 1991) that at this period in time, at least two million children were not at school.

Statistics (For the Threshold project, 1991) suggested that over the last ten years, of the African children who started school, only 77% would complete the primary phase (seven years of basic education). Of those who completed the primary phase, only 7% would make it to matric (grade 12). Of the 7% only one third would complete the year, and only one out of ten would gain a pass which would allow them to go to University.

6.3. Documentary Analysis

Learners were asked to record the details of events that took place at their homes in the afternoons. Learners were given tables to fill in. They had to fill in the number of hours they, with their parents spent on reading, writing, listening to the radio and watching television. These tables showed the first patterns of learning in their homes. All activities that related to learning were analysed and recorded.

Table of hours spent on English communication at home

		Mother Hours	Father Hours	Learner Hours
Instrumental Reading	*cooking,	1	0	0
	shopping	1	0	1
	*letters,	1	1	0
	accounts	1	1	0
New-related Reading	*newspapers	0	1	0
	*magazines	1	0	0
-Recreational Reading	*novels	1	0	1
	*comics	0	0	1
Audio/Visual Entertainment	*Radio	3	3-4	6
	*Television	2	4	6

Adapted from Heath (1983:68)

Although the above information reflects learning, it also reflects the limited number of hours spent on reading, as compared to listening to the radio and watching television. Under the section of instrumental and news related reading, the data reflects that both parents were more involved in dealing with the domestic and community issues, with minimal input from the learner.

The number of hours spent by the learners' on listening to the radio and watching television, as compared to that of their parents, differs substantially. From the above information, it is clear that the learner does learn from the activities at home, however, they are learning by watching and listening, but are not improving or promoting speaking, reading and writing, which are crucial for them to progress at school.

The first conclusion of the (Threshold Project 1991) is the wide gap between traditional, non-formal systems of education and the formal western-type schooling. Because of this gap, children do not do well at school. The second, and more important reason why schooling is not effective for the majority of the children is that most children have to learn through a language other than their own.

The following data has been collected from the information recorded for the school year 2000. Here, and examination results have been recorded. This information has a direct implication on the second language learners' results, and examination results of the entire school have been recorded and also those of one class of every grade from grade eight to eleven.

Failure rate of one class per grade of learners at M.L. Sultan Secondary

GR.	NO. IN CLASS	NO. OF ENGLISH 2 ND LANG. LEARNERS	NO. PASSED	NO. FAILED	NO. FAILED ENGLISH	NO. FAILED OTHER SUBJECTS	NO. CONDONED IN ENGLISH	NO. OF AFRICAN LEARNERS
11	34	25	15	17	12	5	2	12
10	39	27	21	16	12	4	2	12
9	40	30	25	12	12	-	3	12
8	42	30	30	8	8	-	4	8

Findings and analysis of data from M L Sultan Secondary School

It is clear from the above findings that most of the learners that were not promoted at the end of a school year were second language learners at M L Sultan Secondary School. It is also clear that all these learners failed in English. Some of these learners that failed were conditionally transferred to the next grade because English was the only language that they had failed in.

Although this data reflects that all the learners that failed in the above classes are Second language learners, it must be clarified that this is only data from one class per grade in the school, and that the other classes in the school have Indian learners that have failed in all the different grades. A summary of results of all the learners from grade 8 to 11 for the year 2000 are reflected in Appendix D.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the main findings of the Threshold Project is that children are not ready to learn up to ten subjects in English when they enter Standard 3.

They are not ready for two main reasons:

- * The children's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are poorly developed in both the first and second language learners. Any further progress that the children will make in school depends on these four skills.
- * The whole learning situation before standard 3 is too limited to prepare the children for the range of skills which they will need from Standard 3 onwards. Both teachers and children need to learn new ways of teaching and learning in order to widen the children's range of language experiences and skills.

If you were an African pupil in Standard 3, you would find that you, the other children and the teacher were suddenly all supposed to speak in English. In your Standard 2 class, you all communicated quite easily in your own language about the things you were learning. Now, in theory at least, you would be learning as many as ten subjects in English, and English would be expected to be the classroom language.

The vocabulary load also increases in Sub B. Each day the learners are expected to learn new words and the pile of textbooks grows. The content subject books are in English, about 400 pages in all. If the English teacher did his/her job properly over the last four years of schooling, learners may have a vocabulary of about 800 words. Now, in Standard 3, they will suddenly need a core of about 5000 words in English to cope with all these subjects. That supposes an increase 600%, which would be unreasonable even for first language speakers of English.

Gairns and Redman (1986), state that "it is not uncommon for learners of a foreign language to find that their lexical knowledge is rendered almost useless by their inability to make themselves intelligible whenever they speak". They further mention

that if learners are unfamiliar with correct pronunciation the result can be learners failing to understand words in connected speech that they clearly understand in written English.

The recommendation, firstly, to the above problem by the researchers was that the curriculum for the lower primary needs to focus on developing basic process (thinking) skills and concepts through experiential learning, that is, by doing things.

Secondly, the DET curriculum did not provide enough time for English in order to prepare for learning in English in Standard 3. Thirdly, the project believes that good quality instruction in the children's own language is essential for the development of their own identity, for growth of their mental capacities as well as for learning English. A thorough second-language course is equally essential. The course should be flexible enough to accommodate supporting English as the medium of instruction whenever this might be introduced.

This report outlines some of the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners at an English medium Secondary School. The attitude of the second language learners towards English and the impact of the learners' experiences on their learning have been described.

Recommendations arising from the findings will be attempted. Recommendation for and related to the data collected from learners, their parents and teachers is discussed, and also parental involvement, extra-lessons and teacher programmes on multicultural education.

Funding by the government is needed to improve and upgrade the overall educational chances of the second language learners. Here, schools in the areas where these learners' reside, books, libraries and human and material resources must be provided. The Hunter Report (1996) outlines the latest proposals on the governance and funding of education. It proposes material and financial changes in education for equal opportunities for educational outcomes.

Parents need to be educated so that they can assist their children with school- work. Adult-based-education is being provided by many community-based forums, however this form of education is not easily assessable to the majority of the illiterate parents of the learners at schools. More centres for adult education needs to be planned especially in the rural areas of our country. This will aid in combating low input from the parent as stakeholders in our educational scenario. Schools, in conjunction with the education departments could also be used as institutions for the provision of part-time education for adults, especially in the rural areas where educational venues are a rare commodity. It is my strong opinion that if the parents are educated, then the entire burden of the educational crisis in our country will be partially relieved.

In order to communicate effectively, the appropriate level of English, the medium of instruction, should be utilised. Most Second language learners use Zulu as their first language.

To introduce new concepts through the use of English as a first language produces poor outcomes, it therefore has to be introduced in conjunction with Zulu. Here, English as a medium of instruction needs to be used at a level so as to bridge the gap in understanding, which can assist the learners in experiencing English with ease.

At schools extra lessons in English, and a change in curriculum to combat the problem of the high failure rate needs to be planned. It is the duty of the teacher to familiarise him/herself with the individual needs of the learner so that effective learning, and improvement in understanding of concepts taught can take place.

The concept of 'multicultural education and training' has not been formally or officially introduced for education and training to take place effectively in the new South Africa. Educators have to be trained in this instance to be made aware of the differences in the educational experiences that learners have emerged from. A comprehensive programme in 'multicultural education' needs to be developed so that all learners facing challenges in language and communication are catered for.

8. CONCLUSION

From the findings of this report on the learning experiences of second language (Isizulu) learners at an English medium school, it is clear that these learners' experiences, for example, their cultural and social and linguistic experiences, have not been cultivated, nurtured or promoted. The poor quality of education has led to a low morale amongst learners who feel inadequate, embarrassed and angry.

The question to be asked here is whether second language learning is always going to cause the learner distress, or, are proper language policies going to be implemented soon so that all learners benefit from the educational provision?

In this battle for quality education in South Africa is the learner, especially the African learner, who has been disadvantaged because of the old policy of apartheid, which provided an inferior quality of education. From the information recorded, it is also evident that these learners are still struggling, because their new educational experiences, especially the language struggle, causes them not to be promoted to the next grade, which gives them a negative attitude towards schooling, and leads them to eventually drop-out out of school.

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APPENDIX A**PUPIL QUESTIONNAIRE**

Complete the following questionnaire by writing out responses where necessary and ticking the appropriate blocks.

GENERAL PARTICULARS

1. Name of present school: _____

2. Name and surname in full: _____

3. Present grade: _____

4. Age: _____

5. Home Language: English ☐

Afrikaans ☐

Zulu ☐

Xhosa ☐

If other state _____

HOME BACKGROUND

6. Parents occupation:

a. father: _____

b. mother: _____

7. Area in which you live: _____

8. Indicate type of home: brick single cottage ☐

flat ☐

wood and iron ☐

informal dwelling ☐

9. How many people live in your home? _____

10. Do you have the following in your home?

electricity	<input type="checkbox"/>
water – piped	<input type="checkbox"/>
telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>
water supplied by tanks	<input type="checkbox"/>
television	<input type="checkbox"/>
radio	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Where do you do your homework?

dining room	<input type="checkbox"/>
table	<input type="checkbox"/>
bedroom	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. What mode of transport do you use?

bus	<input type="checkbox"/>
car	<input type="checkbox"/>
walking	<input type="checkbox"/>
taxi	<input type="checkbox"/>
train	<input type="checkbox"/>

SCHOOL/S RECORD

13. a. Names of previous school/s _____

b. Did you fail any grades previously?

yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
no	<input type="checkbox"/>

c. If yes, which grade/s did you fail? _____

d. Tick the subjects that you are currently studying: English

English	<input type="checkbox"/>
Afrikaans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Afrikaans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Zulu	<input type="checkbox"/>
Business Economics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Typing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accounting	<input type="checkbox"/>
History/Geography	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technical Drawing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>
Home Economics	<input type="checkbox"/>

state if others : _____

e. List the subjects that you perform well in : _____

f. Name the subjects that you have not studied before: _____

g. What subjects do you have difficulty with? _____

h. Do you have any reasons why you find these subjects difficult: _____

i. Are the topics discussed in class easy to understand?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

j. Please try to explain your answer: _____

k. Teachers explanations in lessons are:

easy

☐

difficult

☐

very difficult

☐

neither easy nor difficult

☐

l. Do you think that your friends understand the lessons?

yes

☐

no

☐

only some of them do

☐

only some of them do not

☐

m. Do you find prepared worksheets and textbooks:

easy to understand

☐

very easy to understand

☐

difficult

☐

very difficult

☐

neither easy nor difficult

☐

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE TO PARENTS

Please complete the following questionnaire.

Personal particulars.

1. Name of parent: _____

2. Name of Learner: _____

3. Address: _____

4. Telephone no. : _____

5. Learner's current grade: _____

Profile of learner's educational experiences.

6. How did your child discover English? _____

7. What were his/her first and difficult words? _____

8. Where did s/he learn Zulu and what were the first words? _____

9. How did you encourage the learners to speak in English, and how did s/he respond to others around you? _____

10. In which subjects, to your knowledge does your child have difficulty in learning? _____

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE TO EDUCATORS

Fill in the questionnaire by writing out responses and ticking in the appropriate blocks where necessary.

General particulars

1. Name of school: _____

2. Name of educator: _____

3. Grades taught: _____

4. Subjects taught: _____

Learner Profile

5. The attendance of African learners is generally:

excellent ☐

good ☐

poor ☐

very poor ☐

If poor or very poor, could you suggest some reasons for this : _____

6. The second language learners understanding of English, the language of

instruction is: good ☐

average ☐

poor ☐

If average or poor, provide possible reasons for this _____

7. The link between subject matter taught to the second language learner and its relevance to their background and experience is:

excellent ☐

good ☐

satisfactory ☐

poor ☐

8. How does the second language learners home language affect his/her learning? _____

9. How often do parents consult with you regarding their children's school-

Work? **often** ☐

seldom ☐

very seldom ☐

not at all ☐

10. Learners' do their homework :

regularly ☐

seldom ☐

very seldom ☐

not at all ☐

11. There is evidence of parents assisting learners with homework:

most of the time ☐

seldom ☐

very seldom ☐

not at all ☐

**12. Is there evidence of learners visiting other general or educational places
of
interest?**

yes

☐

no

☐

If no, provide possible reasons for this _____

13. Extra lessons are conducted :

often

☐

most of the time

☐

seldom

☐

not at all

☐

Why do you conduct these lessons, if you do _____

**14. Briefly explain the impact made by these extra lesson on the learners
performance** _____

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS RECORDS

YEAR ENDING : DECEMBER : 2000 PHASE/S: 8/9/10/11SCHOOL: STANGER M. L. SULTAN SEC. PAYPOINT NO.: 066162REGION: EMPANGENI DISTRICT: LOWER TUGELA CIRCUIT: STANGERADDRESS OF SCHOOL: 2 VICTORY ROADSTANGER4450TELEPHONE (INCL. CODE): 032. 5515484 FAX: 032. 5515484

GRADE	TOTAL IN GRADE	NO. READY TO PROGRESS	NO. NOT READY TO PROGRESS	NO. TO BE CONDONED
8	247	202	26	19
9	271	189	55	27
10	335	212	109	14
11	217	141	60	16
	1070	744	250	76

STANGER

M. L. SULTAN SEC. SCHOOL

PRINCIPAL: [Signature]STANGER 4450
TEL/FAX: 032 - 5515484

SIGNATURE

J. SINGH

PRINT NAME IN FULL

30-11-2000

DATE

SUPERINTENDENT:
(CIRCUIT)J. Woodratt
SIGNATURET WOODRATT
PRINT NAME IN FULL30-11-2000
DATE