



Strategies to teach IsiXhosa as a First Additional Language in former Model C schools in the Harry Gwala District of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

Lwandile Ncam¹  & Lundi Nomlala¹ 

¹ Faculty of Education and Creative Arts Education Department, Walter Sisulu University, Queenstown, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This study explored strategies for teaching IsiXhosa as a First Additional Language (FAL) in former Model C schools in the Harry Gwala District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study aimed to identify practical teaching approaches that improve linguistic diversity and improve IsiXhosa proficiency while addressing systemic challenges. A qualitative case study design was used, using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with five IsiXhosa FAL teachers in three schools. The findings revealed key strategies, including code-switching, cultural integration, collaborative learning, and the use of technology. However, challenges such as unequal language recognition, insufficient resources, and a lack of parental and administrative support hindered effective implementation. The study recommends teacher mentorship, increased resource allocation, enhanced parental involvement, and policy reforms to promote equitable language education. This research contributes to the discourse on indigenous language teaching by highlighting practical strategies and systemic barriers in multilingual educational settings.

Keywords: IsiXhosa FAL, Former Model C Schools, Teaching Strategies, Multilingual Education, Indigenous Languages.

INTRODUCTION

IsiXhosa is one of the dominant languages in South Africa, especially in the Eastern Cape and some parts of KwaZulu-Natal, particularly Kokstad in the Harry Gwala region. After 1994, the South African government encouraged all former Model C schools to include Indigenous South African languages in their programs, based on the languages commonly spoken in each province. In the Eastern Cape, the focus is on IsiXhosa, while in KwaZulu-Natal, it is IsiZulu.¹ The study was carried out in the Harry Gwala region of KwaZulu-Natal, where three former Model C schools were selected. Scholars such as Mataboge and Mahlangu refer to former Model C schools as formerly government-aided, semi-private

¹ Jeremia Lepheana, “Perceptions of Learners, Teachers and Parents on Integrating Isixhosa within Curricula and Pedagogies in Junior Secondary Schools in the Maluti District, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa,” *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 20, no. 1 (2021): 111–23.

CORRESPONDENCE – Lwandile Ncam Email: lwandilencam@gmail.com

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schools that mostly educated white learners during the apartheid era.² These schools were opened to learners of all races in the early 1990s and are now state-funded public schools with facilities and resources comparatively superior to many township or rural schools. Although Harry Gwala is in KwaZulu-Natal, some regional schools offer IsiXhosa FAL as their First Additional Language. The selected schools provide a diverse language curriculum, such as English Home Language, English First Additional Language, Afrikaans Home Language and First Additional Language, and isiXhosa Home Language and First Additional Language.

Many former Model C schools maintain English language proficiency as their main priority, although they offer multiple languages, including isiXhosa. Researchers such as Christie and McKinney explain that students in these schools are expected to adapt to English-based learning while teachers continue using traditional strategies that focus on grammar and maintain a teacher-centered approach.³ The unequal focus between isiXhosa and other subjects leads to insufficient attention for isiXhosa, which threatens its position in the curriculum. The research addresses this challenge by examining teaching methods that educators use to deliver isiXhosa FAL in former Model C schools within the Harry Gwala District. The identification of these strategies becomes vital to improve the isiXhosa teaching strategies, which support the protection and promotion of Indigenous languages.

As stated by Zeller, the South African language policy acknowledges eleven official languages, including isiXhosa, yet research shows that its implementation remains unequal.⁴ Ngcobo and Barnes demonstrate through their research that First Additional Language education faces challenges because English maintains its dominant position in educational settings.⁵ Quan, Fambasayi, and Ferreira note that African languages face disadvantages in social, economic, and political value assessments despite official recognition compared to English and Afrikaans.⁶ A lot of research has been done on multilingualism challenges in schools, but there are limited studies on isiXhosa FAL teaching strategies, especially in former Model C schools.

To address this gap, the current study seeks to examine the strategies teachers use when teaching isiXhosa FAL in former Model C schools in the Harry Gwala District of KwaZulu-Natal. The study aims to identify different approaches that promote linguistic diversity, enhance teaching effectiveness, and contribute to restoring the status and dignity in isiXhosa education. By doing that, insight into classroom practice is provided, and policy and curriculum development for indigenous languages in South Africa is informed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategies used by teachers to overcome challenges in teaching isiXhosa FAL

Since each learner has a unique learning experience, minimising barriers to learning is crucial to assisting learners to achieve. Some strategies can be applied to help teachers better support their learners and overcome learning challenges. A study conducted by Serajuddin suggests that incorporating technology, such as language learning apps, online resources, and interactive whiteboards, can make lessons more engaging and interactive.⁷ Technology offers more opportunities for practice beyond the traditional classroom setting.⁸ Collaboration among learners is encouraged through group work and pair activities, providing a supportive setting for practising language skills. Research conducted by Singh and Bhuyan revealed that collaborative tasks promote peer learning and enhance speaking and listening

² Saltiel K C Mataboge and Vimbi P Mahlangu, "Exploring The Prevalence Of Racism In Former Model C Schools In South Africa: From A Social Justice Perspective," *Social Sciences and Education Research Review* 11, no. 2 (2024): 115–23.

³ Pam Christie and Carolyn McKinney, "Decoloniality and "Model C" Schools: Ethos, Language and the Protests of 2016," *Education as Change* 21, no. 3 (2017): 1–21.

⁴ Jochen Zeller, "Language Use and Language Shift in Post-Apartheid South Africa," *English in Multilingual South Africa: The Linguistics of Contact and Change*, 2020, 288.

⁵ Mtholeni N Ngcobo and Lawrie A Barnes, "English in the South African Language-in-education Policy on Higher Education," *World Englishes* 40, no. 1 (2021): 84–97.

⁶ Gertrude Mafoa Quan, Rongedzayi Fambasayi, and Tasreeq Ferreira, "Transforming Education through Mother Tongue Language as a Language of Instruction in South Africa," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 24, no. 1 (2024): 264–91.

⁷ Mohammad Serajuddin, "Impact of Using Technology on English Language Teaching on Students' Motivation and Engagement at Classrooms of Bangladesh," *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* 10, no. 8 (2023).

⁸ Laura Mebert et al., "Fostering Student Engagement through a Real-World, Collaborative Project across Disciplines and Institutions," *Higher Education Pedagogies* 5, no. 1 (2020): 30–51.

skills.⁹ Most importantly, explicit vocabulary instruction is crucial for FAL learners. Teachers can use techniques such as word maps, flashcards, and context-based learning to enhance vocabulary acquisition.¹⁰

Teachers can implement a strategy that involves socially inclusive teaching methods. Authors such as Malebese, Mahlomaholo, and Tlali found that recognising where learners come from and their experiences is vital to creating a connection with the subject.¹¹ Therefore, isiXhosa FAL teachers can incorporate culturally relevant materials to foster inclusiveness in their classroom environment. Translanguaging methods have since been beneficial in isiXhosa classrooms. A study by Hendricks and Xeketwana noted that permitting learners to use their mother tongue together with the targeted language improves comprehension and engagement.¹² This method recognises the learners' language skills, fostering confidence and enhancing involvement in the language learning journey.

Grouping of non-isiXhosa learners

Research by Coetzer, Livingston, and Barnard found that during teaching and learning sessions, three of the seven respondents said they pair up non-isiXhosa speaking learners with isiXhosa learners.¹³ Efficient grouping can help with language acquisition by allowing learners to engage with classmates who share similar language skills, leading to greater collaborative learning.¹⁴ In support of this, Wang states that learners benefit from communicating with classmates; this benefit results in enhancing language skills through exchanging conversations and working on group assignments.¹⁵ It is, however, essential to plan grouping strategies cautiously to prevent the exclusion of non-FAL learners or positioning them in situations that make them feel inferior to their FAL classmates. As cited by Gunawardena, Bishop and Aviruppola, social interaction is an important part of learning, which means that non-FAL learners should be placed in different groups that offer both help and challenges.¹⁶ Careful grouping strategies can improve the learning environment for non-FAL learners, helping them feel included and supporting their language development.

Communication and parental involvement

To help parents help their children, parents should hold workshops. Parents should receive recommendations on how to help their children with homework, and instructors should be encouraged to hold parent meetings to gain a better understanding of the learners' backgrounds.¹⁷ If a learner has not fully absorbed a concept during class, more instruction might be given to compensate for lost time. One-on-one, during supplementary classes, this knowledge gap can be explained.¹⁸ For parents to support their isiXhosa-speaking child, homework needs to be well-designed and unambiguous.¹⁹ Parents

⁹ Aman Deep Singh and K N Bhuyan, "Collaborative Teaching-Learning in Classroom Research Based Setting and Its Impact," in *Proceedings of the 9th IAFOR International Conference on Education*, 2024, 93–105.

¹⁰ Pearl Dean Garden, "Vocabulary Instruction in the Early Grades.," *Texas Association for Literacy Education Yearbook* 9 (2022):75–82.

¹¹ Mots' elisi L Malebese, Sechaba Mahlomaholo, and Moeketsi F Tlali, "A Socially Inclusive Teaching Strategy for Fourth Grade English (Second) Language Learners in a South African School," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1–8.

¹² Monica, Hendricks and Simthembile Xeketwana, "Translanguaging for Learning in Selected English First Additional Language Secondary School Classrooms," *Reading & Writing - Journal of the Literacy Association of South Africa* 15, no. 1 (2024): 502.

¹³ Tanja Coetzer, Candice Livingston, and Elna Barnard, "Eleven Grade 1 Teachers' Understandings of Mathematical Language in a South African Context," *Reading & Writing-Journal of the Reading Association of South Africa* 14, no. 1 (2023): 409.

¹⁴ Ali A Alzubi, Mohd Nazim, and Jalal Ahamad, "Examining the Effect of a Collaborative Learning Intervention on EFL Students' English Learning and Social Interaction," *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 8, no. 2 (2024): 26–46.

¹⁵ Jia Wang, "Friendship Group Activities: Voices from Chinese EFL Learners.," *English Language Teaching* 14, no. 1 (2021): 140–51.

¹⁶ Maya Gunawardena, Penny Bishop, and Kithmini Aviruppola, "Personalized Learning: The Simple, the Complicated, the Complex and the Chaotic," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 139 (2024): 104429.

¹⁷ Ntokoza Dennis Ndwandwe, "Parental Involvement and Academic Achievement: Voices of Role-Players in Secondary Schools in Mpumalanga, South Africa.," *Research in Social Sciences and Technology* 8, no. 4 (2023): 237–56.

¹⁸ Hong Wu et al., "The Academic Performance and Upward Mobility of Students in Education Program," *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices* 6, no. 1 (2024): 137–66.

¹⁹ Tanja Kotze, Marichen Van der Westhuizen, and Emma Barnard, "Teaching Strategies to Support IsiXhosa Learners Who Receive Education in a Second/Third Language," *South African Journal of Education* 37, no. 3 (2017): 1–12.

can receive information from schools regarding programs, services, and the development of learners, as well as information on other educational issues, through letters, flyers, and social media.²⁰

A study by Salie, Moletsane, and Mukuna says that parents must prepare their isiXhosa-speaking children for the LOLT, and schools must do more to involve parents in their child's early education program.²¹ Schools should compile an inventory of community resources. Parents and learners should be informed of the accessibility of these resources, as well as their value for learning.²² As cited by Angreani, parental involvement in volunteer work, such as assisting in the classroom, supporting and attending events or performances, or working at the school with fundraising efforts, is crucial.²³

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To fully understand the strategies that teachers use when teaching isiXhosa as a First Additional Language (FAL) in former Model C schools in the Harry Gwala district of KwaZulu-Natal, this study drew on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978).²⁴ The idea emphasized in this theory is that learning mainly takes place through interaction with others, and that surroundings and culture play a crucial role in how people learn.²⁵ This theory explains how teachers scaffold learning by drawing on the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners. According to Diko, strategies like code switching between isiXhosa and English aid in the clarification of ideas, while peer teaching through group reading, shared storytelling and learners clarifying words to one another supports cooperative learning and enables more experienced learners to mentor less experienced ones.²⁶

In line with Vygotsky's socially mediated learning, these strategies help learners remember, focus and participate actively.²⁷ Even though English predominates in the classroom, isiXhosa teachers in former Model C schools adhere closely to socio-cultural principles by integrating teaching language into the learners' cultural context and strengthening cooperative problem-solving. This promotes deeper engagement and understanding.

METHODOLOGY

The study used an interpretative paradigm, which served as the appropriate research approach for studying real-life teaching strategies of isiXhosa First Additional Language teachers in former Model C schools within Harry Gwala District. The research paradigm allowed direct observation to document and analyse classroom strategies.²⁸ The researcher chose qualitative research because it allows a thorough examination of teaching methods in different multilingual educational settings.²⁹

The figure below will show the steps for the research process through a qualitative case study. The process starts with the design phase of convenience sampling of teachers, and then collects data via observations and interviews. The next stages of data processing are transcription, analysis through ongoing coding and thematic development.

²⁰ Noel E Kely and Tomoko Wakabayashi, "Family Engagement in Schools: Parent, Educator, and Community Perspectives," *Sage Open* 10, no. 4 (2020): 2158244020973024.

²¹ Maimona Salie, Mokgadi Moletsane, and Robert Kananga Mukuna, "Case Study of IsiXhosa-Speaking Foundation Phase Learners Who Experience Barriers to Learning in an English-Medium Disadvantaged Western Cape School," *South African Journal of Education* 40, no. 2 (May 31, 2020): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v40n2a1455>.

²² Rendani Mercy Makhwathana, "Inclusive Education: All Things Considered," in *Handbook of Research on Inclusive and Accessible Education* (IGI Global Scientific Publishing, 2024), 345–58.

²³ A. Vivit Angreani, "Peningkatan Kemampuan Menulis Berita Dengan Menggunakan Audiovisual Pembelajaran Online Kelas Viii Smp Negeri 35 Makassar," *Klasikal: Journal Of Education, Language Teaching And Science* 4, no. 2 (2022): 334–41.

²⁴ L.S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

²⁵ Sigit Wibowo, Muhammad Nur Wangid, and Fery Muhamad Firdaus, "The Relevance of Vygotsky's Constructivism Learning Theory with the Differentiated Learning Primary Schools.," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 19, no. 1 (2025): 431–40.

²⁶ Mlamli Diko, "Code-Switching as a Bilingual and Multilingual Linguistic Strategy in the Construction of *Amathaf'entandabuzo*," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 42, no. sup1 (December 6, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2023.2237081>.

²⁷ Din Bandhu et al., "Recycling of Agro-Industrial Waste by Fabricating Laminated Al-Metal Matrix Composites: A Numerical Simulation and Experimental Study," *International Journal on Interactive Design and Manufacturing (IJIDeM)* 19, no. 4 (2025): 2355–66.

²⁸ Tanvir C Turin, Mohammad Raihan, and Nashit Chowdhury, "Paradigms of Approaches to Research," *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Journal* 17, no. 2 (2024): e73973–e73973.

²⁹ Wajeel Daher, "Saturation in Qualitative Educational Technology Research," *Education Sciences* 13, no. 2 (2023): 98.

Research Methodology and Analytical Process

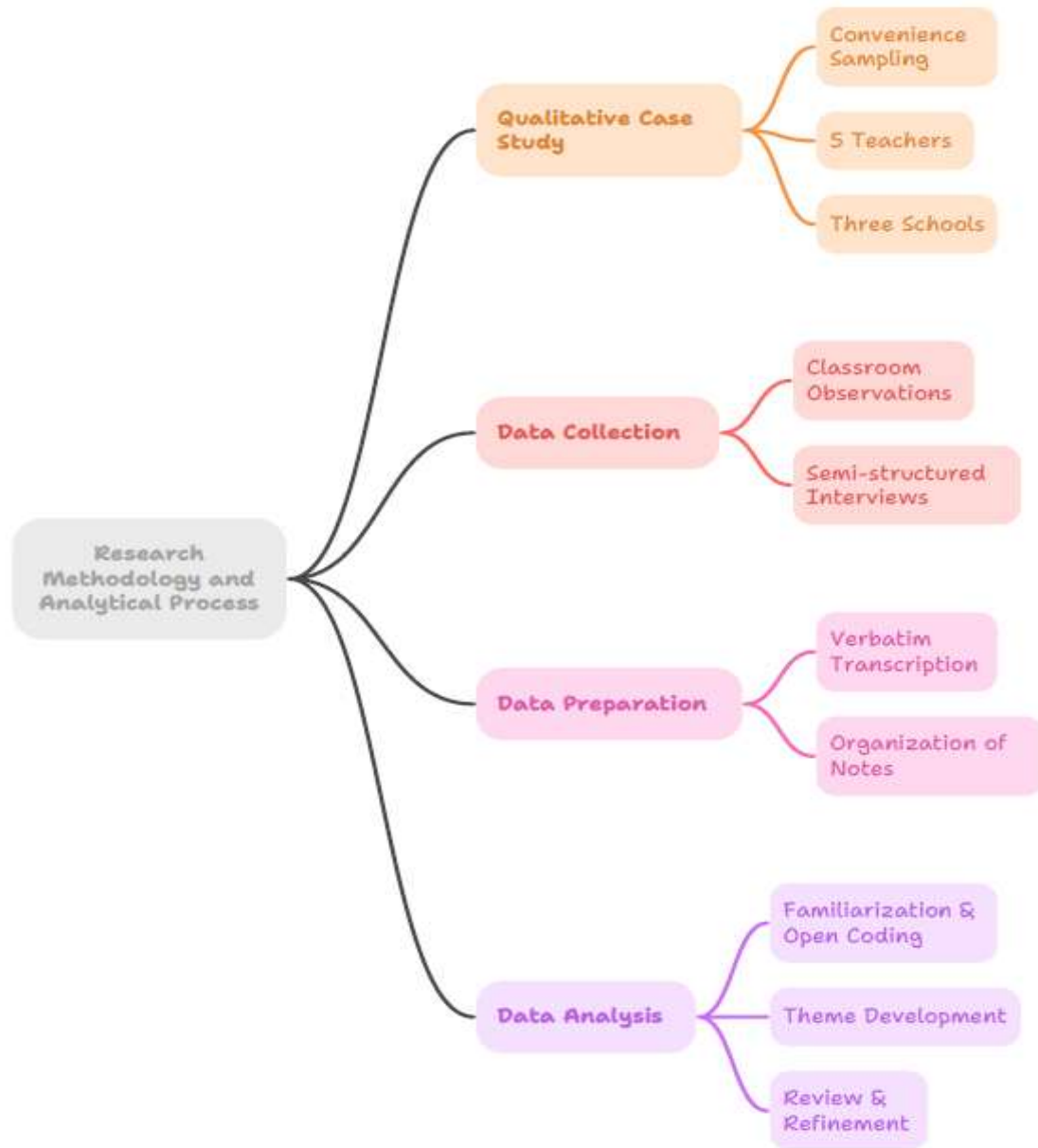


Figure 1: Research Methodology and Analytical Process³⁰

The research employed a case study design to provide specific insights about the strategies isiXhosa FAL teachers implement. The researcher selected five isiXhosa FAL teachers who were actively teaching at three former Model C schools by purposeful sampling. These individuals made up the entire pool of participants available in the particular settings used for this study. Class sizes ranged from 25 to 35 learners, while the participants' teaching experience ranged from 5 to more than 20 years. Most of the learners did not speak IsiXhosa as their home language, representing a variety of linguistic

³⁰ John W Creswell and J David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Sage publications, 2017).

profiles. The selection process ensured that participants possessed both knowledge and experience in implementing teaching strategies that matched the study's focus.³¹

The research collected data through classroom observations combined with in-person semi-structured interviews. The observation method provided direct evidence of these strategies through teacher lesson organization and teaching aid utilization and isiXhosa language activity engagement, but interviews allowed teachers to explain their specific teaching approaches.³² The thematic content analysis method was used to identify and interpret patterns and themes in instructional practices.³³ The analysis was structural: observation notes and interviews were first imported into a sorting data-keeping package. Second, the initial open coding process was performed to produce provisional codes. These codes were then collapsed into possible themes through an iterative process of reducing and categorising. Finally, the themes were reviewed, defined and labelled to ensure they captured the data appropriately and addressed the research questions. The researchers conducted a verbatim transcription of all interviews while extracting relevant data from observation notes through a detailed review process. The research followed ethical standards by obtaining informed consent from participants while maintaining confidentiality through pseudonyms. The findings demonstrated accurate representation of teaching strategies while ensuring complete protection of participant rights and privacy.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The following themes discuss the various teaching strategies that educators employ, for instance, code-switching, collaborative learning, and interactive methods, to ensure that learners are engaged and understand the material being taught. They further discuss systemic barriers, for example, irregularity in language recognition, lack of support from the school administration, and low participation of parents. Also covered is the role of technology and culture in making learning isiXhosa more accessible and relevant.

- Code switching
- Cultural integration in teaching
- The use of technology in teaching isiXhosa FAL
- Collaborative teaching, learning and group activities
- Equal recognition of languages
- Support from the school administration
- Interactive and communicative teaching
- Parental and community involvement in language learning

Code-switching as a teaching strategy

Due to learners coming from different backgrounds in former Model C schools, most isiXhosa FAL teachers who were participants in this study agreed that code switching was a suitable alternative. It was used to clarify difficult concepts and to pave the way for clear communication. For instance, teacher A stated that:

From time to time, I must first explain new isiXhosa concepts in English, then move to isiXhosa. This approach helps my learners understand the full meaning and context before they fully engage with the language.

Teacher B also said that:

I switch between English and isiXhosa, which means that, for instance, when explaining grammar rules, I can switch between the two languages. Some rules are quite complex, and people can understand them better if I explain them to them in both English and isiXhosa.

³¹ Afzal Sayed Munna and Md Abul Kalam, "Teaching and Learning Process to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness: A Literature Review," *International Journal of Humanities and Innovation (IJHI)* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1–4.

³² Moses Adeleke Adeoye, Entika Fani Prastikawati, and Yusuff Olatunji Abimbowo, "Empowering Learning: Pedagogical Strategies for Advancing 21st Century Skills and Quality Education," *Journal of Nonformal Education* 10, no.1 (2024): 10–21.

³³ Moira Maguire and Brid Delahunt, "Doing a Thematic Analysis: A Practical, Step-by-Step Guide for Learning and Teaching Scholars.," *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 3 (2017).

Teacher C added that:

In my class, during discussions, I let my learners engage in any language between isiXhosa and English, but then later I rephrase their responses in isiXhosa to reinforce their understanding, while on the other hand, I encourage them to use isiXhosa.

Teacher D reiterated that:

I use English to introduce complex words and then translate to isiXhosa. I do this mostly to learners from Afrikaans schools and those who have limited exposure to isiXhosa outside the classroom. This helps them to slowly build their vocabulary step by step.

Teacher E emphasised that:

Learners feel anxious when they must ask questions or seek clarity in class using a language they are not comfortable with. I encourage them to code-switch, to express themselves without much pressure and anxiety.

The results show that code-switching is an important teaching strategy that teachers use to meet the linguistic needs of learners and, at the same time, meet the requirements of the isiXhosa FAL curriculum. Giving the learners a chance to participate in discussions in both languages tends to build their confidence, while at the same time helping them to develop their isiXhosa language skills. In this way, the approach also reduces anxiety, particularly for those learners who are not familiar with isiXhosa. This helps them to feel comfortable as they can participate in the lesson without having to rely on the language they are not conversant with.

Cultural integration in teaching

Cultural integration in teaching isiXhosa FAL is imperative because it bridges the connection between a learner and their language beyond the classroom. Responses from teachers gave insight into many ways in which cultural elements can be incorporated into the teaching of isiXhosa FAL. They shared the following perceptions:

Teacher A from school A explained that:

I apply real-life situations with practical examples from Xhosa customs like greetings, respecting elders and traditional ceremonies to teach language structures and vocabulary in a meaningful and memorable way.

Teacher B from school A also explained:

It is important that as a teacher you do not discriminate against children, always make them feel that their cultures are important and feel free to showcase themselves in the classroom. For example, I have learners who are Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, and Coloured. At times, I organise cultural days where learners come wearing their different traditional attire, but prepare speeches in isiXhosa, participate in plays that show their customs and history. In that way, you make them feel welcomed, as different as they are, but focus on teaching them isiXhosa.

Teacher D of school B emphasised that:

I frequently teach language and understanding using traditional isiXhosa folktales and proverbs. It is important because it helps learners realise the richness of the language about Xhosa culture.

Teacher E from school C alluded to the following:

Well, I sometimes incorporate praise poetry and songs into my lessons, because learners have fun and tend to engage more. In the process, they are improving in pronunciation, expanding their vocabulary, and learning about Xhosa heritage.

The research findings revealed that using cultural elements such as idioms, storytelling, songs, and traditional practices, teachers can create more meaningful learning experiences. Some teachers strongly believe that incorporating culture as a teaching strategy cannot only help learners to understand isiXhosa but can also develop pride for the language.

The use of technology in teaching isiXhosa FAL

In the modern classroom, it has become important to use digital tools to teach isiXhosa FAL. Though this research has revealed a serious challenge in incorporating technology into teaching due to limited devices and internet connections. It is, however, evident that teachers use available resources to supplement their traditional teaching methods. The responses below describe how they try to integrate technology into their lessons.

Teacher A of school A said that:

I create WhatsApp groups, where I share notes with my learners through voice recordings, PDFs, and pictures. This is still not easy because not all learners have smartphones and access to the internet. I sometimes liaise with their parents who have smartphones to share and print the notes for them.

Teacher D from school B stated that:

Since we have a challenge of scarcity of textbooks, I resort to using online resources such as YouTube videos and apps that help in learning a language to reinforce some concepts.

Teacher E from school C asserted that:

I always urge my learners to improve their vocabulary and look for new isiXhosa words by making use of Google Translate and online dictionaries. Also, during my lessons, I play audio recordings of mother tongue speakers of isiXhosa so that learners may hear proper pronunciation and improve their speaking skills.

Responses reveal that some teachers use digital tools as a strategy to improve teaching isiXhosa FAL. These tools include WhatsApp, YouTube, and online dictionaries to overcome the challenge of a lack of physical resources. Other ways of teaching, for example, using audio clips and digital reading materials, aid in the learners' development of the listening, reading, and vocabulary skills. However, factors such as limited access to technology and internet connectivity may limit the effective use of these strategies.

Collaborative teaching, learning and group activities

Responses reveal that teachers employed teaching strategies to engage learners with one another, share knowledge and interact as they develop their language skills. Results also show that teachers engaged in collaborative projects and peer teaching to improve learners' understanding of isiXhosa FAL.

Teacher A of school A stated that:

What I normally do is that at times I ask other teachers, 'Hey, can you please tackle this topic for me?' Sometimes I do not even ask them to tackle this or that topic, but I just say, " Please choose a topic that you feel comfortable teaching. Then you come to my class. I sometimes arrange to peer-teach colleagues' classes as well. In this way, learners benefit from different teaching methods, as another teacher may explain a certain concept more effectively than I could. So, we work together.

Teacher B from school A alluded to the following:

We sometimes invite teachers from our neighbouring schools to come with their learners to share skills, have discussions, study together and do activities together. This helps learners to be able to measure themselves in a particular subject, and it motivates them.

Teacher C of school A said:

We bring learners together for collaborative reading sessions that help them improve their comprehension skills and pronunciation. They read passages, discuss their meaning, and take turns.

Teacher D from school B had this to say:

We gather learners for group debates in isiXhosa to promote fluency and critical thinking. Learners must learn to engage in meaningful debates to construct arguments and be able to defend their point of view.

Teacher E from school C added that:

No one excels in everything. For example, even here in teaching isiXhosa, you cannot excel in teaching both literature and grammar. As teachers, we know where each other falls short, and that is when we plan to help each other in what the other person excels at: For example, I asked

one to teach poetry for me, and I go to teach literature for them. We do this strongly when mid-term and end-of-year exams are approaching.

Participants indicated that collaborative teaching strategies are effective in improving the teaching and learning of isiXhosa FAL. Teachers practice peer teaching by inviting their colleagues into their classrooms to introduce topics they are good at, and as a result, the learners get to learn from different teaching styles, which in turn helps them understand the lessons better. Collaboration is not limited only to individual schools, but teachers also engage the learners in group discussions, debates, and collaborative reading sessions during inter-school learning activities to improve comprehension, fluency and critical thinking skills.

Equal recognition of languages

Most of the participants have discovered that isiXhosa is not treated as other languages, such as English and Afrikaans. Therefore, there was an outcry that it should be treated equally and as important as other languages.

Teacher A explained that:

I would recommend that isiXhosa be treated like other languages; it must be made important and be prioritized with resources like other languages.

Teacher B added that:

The problem here is that we are discriminated against. English and Afrikaans teachers get all the resources; we, isiXhosa teachers, are left out. I would be happy if this were to come to an end because it is not constructive, and it does not help children's learning.

Teacher D reiterated that:

You know, it is very sad that after 30 years of democracy, we still see things like this, our language being discriminated against as it is now. We call on the Department of Basic Education, together with principals of the schools, to intervene in this matter and treat all languages the same. Give them equal resources and treatments because it is really impacting our learners badly.

Teacher E emphasised that:

I recommend that isiXhosa be taught like other subjects or treated like other subjects. This tendency of giving extra time for maths or physics, but isiXhosa is always considered easy for learners, they have no idea that the Xhosa language is difficult, especially if it is not their mother tongue. So, what I can say is that they should be compared to other subjects, and they should be treated the same. If resources are added to other subjects, they should also be added to isiXhosa.

The results show that there is a serious problem of discrimination against isiXhosa FAL compared to other subjects, including English and Afrikaans. The perception of teachers is that the language is treated unequally, it has fewer materials and is less prioritised, which affects both teaching and learning negatively. Teachers are calling on the Department of Basic Education and school administrators to intervene to ensure equity in treatment and resources. Hence, these findings also show that there is a need to review the curriculum and policy to promote fair inclusion and development of isiXhosa FAL in former Model C schools.

Support from the school administration

The responses of the participants suggest that school administration and relevant agencies must do better to support isiXhosa FAL teachers. They responded as follows:

Teacher A stated that:

Our school must always include isiXhosa in winter classes; currently, they do not include it. There was winter recently in July, isiXhosa was not catered for, but the other so-called critical subjects like maths, physics and others are always there. If this is considered, it is one of the strategies that can be used to improve the language.

Teacher B added that:

My school and the Department of Education must employ an isiXhosa-speaking HOD, not only that, but it must also be a person who teaches the language and is qualified. Currently, I feel they do not care about isiXhosa, because my HOD is a coloured person who does not understand the language at all. If I set papers, I must give them to my colleague for peer review because my HOD cannot understand anything in my paper.

Teacher D emotionally stated her frustration as follows:

I have been telling my principal that I have a lot of work to do, and I am asking for more isiXhosa teachers, but that has not happened yet. I say that because I teach isiXhosa from grade 8 to grade 12, which makes my job very difficult because I am alone and I do not have an assistant teacher in isiXhosa, while isiXhosa has many tests, which makes the marking too much. Another issue there are no moderators; the children go and write papers with mistakes. If I mark the child wrong, but the answer is correct, no one sees the mistake. My HOD is a white person, and he does not help me with anything because he cannot read Xhosa.

The findings reveal several challenges faced by isiXhosa FAL teachers in Former Model C schools and suggest ways of solving them. IsiXhosa FAL should also be taught in winter schools like Mathematics and Physics to ensure that learners get more guidance, as stated by the teachers. Another important measure that has been proposed is the use of Heads of Department (HODS) who are mother tongue speakers of the language and are also qualified teachers, to oversee the teachers and ensure that they deliver quality. Furthermore, the need to have more isiXhosa teachers was identified.

Interactive and communicative teaching

Responses that emerged from different participants suggest different strategies they implement in their isiXhosa FAL classroom to promote interaction and communication.

Teacher A of school A said:

I introduce fun games like reading competitions and spelling BEE to make my lessons more interactive, while learners improve their vocabulary and grammar skills.

Teacher B of school A, in favour of what teacher A said, added that:

I make use of storytelling as one of the ways to teach isiXhosa FAL. I instruct learners to share a story of their choice, then we analyse the language usage as a class. This helps to make the lesson interesting, and learners participate freely and understand the cultural aspects of the language.

Teacher D from school B emphasised that another good way of encouraging learners' involvement and participation in the classroom is group discussions. She said that:

I group my learners into small groups, give them topics to discuss, and then tell them to present their findings in isiXhosa. This helps them develop teamwork, research and communication skills.

Teacher E of school C said:

I promote fluency in isiXhosa FAL by introducing debates. I give them topics, arrange them in small groups to debate in isiXhosa. This also helps in being able to build a coherent argument, support it and defend it.

The results show that teachers use interactive and engaging teaching strategies to develop and improve learners' proficiency in isiXhosa FAL. Some teachers highlighted the importance of using storytelling to improve grammar and vocabulary. While others promoted group discussions as a good option to improve communication skills, to build arguments through debates and to promote teamwork.

Parental and community involvement in language learning

From the data collected, teachers have expressed various concerns about parental and community involvement in isiXhosa FAL learning. They have stated very clearly that it plays a significant role in supporting learners' language acquisition, but were worried about the lack of involvement so far.

Teacher A of school A said:

I encourage Xhosa parents to speak the language with their children at home so that they can get used to the language and develop their vocabulary. Then, for parents who do not know isiXhosa, I ask them to try to hire tutors for their children to have extra lessons with them at home.

Teacher C from school A lamented that:

It is a sad reality that some parents just do not care about isiXhosa because, for them, if a child speaks English fluently, it is enough. Some parents take their children to former Model C schools because they want them to speak good English; hence, now isiXhosa is never prioritised.

Teacher D of school B said:

A big challenge is that when I give some of my learners isiXhosa homework, they come back to school having not completed it because parents at home do not know the language and therefore are unable to help.

Teacher E from school C said:

One of the challenges here is that the library does not have isiXhosa books; the most available books are Zulu books, so I think this is because the school is in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. IsiXhosa will not grow if children are not supported by books at the local library.

The results represent a lack of support from parents for their children in learning isiXhosa. Parents tend to give more support for English than isiXhosa. Additionally, the absence of isiXhosa books in the community library has a damaging impact on the performance of learners.

DISCUSSION

The results reveal that code switching is an essential teaching strategy that teachers rely on to fulfil the isiXhosa curriculum. It is also evident from the findings that teachers use code-switching to meet the linguistic needs of learners. In multilingual classrooms, code switching is a common linguistic method. According to Xeketwana and Robinson in isiXhosa classrooms, teachers continue to utilise English to help learners understand difficult concepts, particularly in topics where English is the primary language of teaching.³⁴ This is consistent with findings by Kumar, Nukapangu and Hassan, who claim that bilingual learners can improve their literacy in both their first and second language by using code-switching.³⁵

Code switching

Although the findings and literature reveal some significant advantages of code-switching, relying too much on it may prevent the development of proficiency in isiXhosa. A study by Munyai and Phooko warns that if indigenous languages are always mixed with English, learners will struggle to master their languages.³⁶ Comparably, Seabela and Ncanywa said that code-switching is not because of a well-planned curriculum, but it is often a temporary solution to a lack of resources in African languages.³⁷ This means that the inaccessibility of isiXhosa FAL teaching resources and the lack of training for bilingual education are responsible for the extensive use of code-switching as a last-minute solution method rather than a planned teaching method.

The use of technology in teaching isiXhosa FAL

³⁴ Simthembele Xeketwana and Maureen Robinson, "The Teaching and Learning of IsiXhosa for Communicative Purposes in Teacher Education for the Foundation Phase," *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, February 23, 2025, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2024.2357325>.

³⁵ Tribhuwan Kumar, Venkanna Nukapangu, and Ahdi Hassan, "Effectiveness of Code-Switching in Language Classroom in India at Primary Level: A Case of L2 Teachers' Perspectives," *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction* 11, no. 4 (2021): 379–85.

³⁶ Anzaniufuno Munyai and Moses Retselisitsoe Phooko, "Is English Becoming a Threat to the Existence of Indigenous Languages in Institutions of Higher Learning in South Africa?," *De Jure Law Journal* 54, no. 1 (2021): 298–327.

³⁷ Marcia M Seabela and Thobeka Ncanywa, "Code-Switching as a Pedagogical Practice for Senior Phase Teachers Teaching Content Subjects in OR-Tambo District," *African Journal of Teacher Education and Development* 3, no. 1 (2024): 39.

Teachers revealed that even though there is no support for digital teaching materials, they improvise and make use of available technology tools in their teaching of isiXhosa FAL.³⁸ They mentioned tools such as WhatsApp, YouTube and online dictionaries. Findings also show that for teachers to teach listening, reading and vocabulary skills, they make use of audio clips and available digital reading materials. Nevertheless, participants stated fearlessly that the unavailability of computers, projectors, tablets and limited access to internet connectivity may hinder a successful delivery of isiXhosa FAL content in the classroom.

Collaborative teaching, learning and group activities

Another finding of the study was that collaborative teaching was an important teaching strategy that teachers used to address a lack of curriculum support, limited teaching resources and the need for professional development. This has prompted teachers to participate in collaborative teaching where they exchange resources, teaching strategies and knowledge to improve their teaching.³⁹ Teachers revealed that they practised peer teaching, where they invited colleagues to teach a topic they may be struggling with. This approach helped learners benefit from different teaching styles and eventually helped them understand the lesson even better.

Equal recognition of languages

In the findings, it was revealed that equal recognition of language is urgent; Participants highlighted that isiXhosa FAL subject is discriminated against in schools compared to other subjects such as English and Afrikaans.⁴⁰ Participants feel that isiXhosa has limited resources and is less prioritised, and they call for urgent intervention from DBE to ensure equality when it comes to treatment and provision of resources.

Support from the school administration

The results revealed a lack of support from the school administration and the Department of Basic Education. Many participants claim that the Head of Department (HOD) does not speak or understand isiXhosa, making it impossible for them to read and review any FAL assessment in isiXhosa. According to Sibanda and Tshehla, supervisors who are not fluent in the mother tongue that is taught frequently use English to moderate teachers' assessments, leading to problems with comprehension and appropriate evaluation.⁴¹ Teachers reported that they peer review each other as subject teachers, which hinders their professional development. They also claim that winter classes always cater for subjects such as Maths, Physics, English and other 'so-called' critical subjects, but isiXhosa is always left out. In support of this, a study by Diko suggests that the omission of indigenous languages like isiXhosa from winter classes and other supplemental educational programs is a component of larger systemic problems in South Africa's educational system.⁴² Historical language policies and prevalent cultural attitudes that prioritise subjects like Science, Math, and English over indigenous languages are frequently one of the main causes of this marginalisation, which seeks to undermine indigenous languages. The Department of Basic Education is accountable together with the school administration because they are responsible for the employment of teachers.

Parental and community involvement in language learning

Many parents have found that they do not speak isiXhosa at home with their children. There are several reasons for this. Some parents do not know isiXhosa at all because their children ran away from a

³⁸ Kotze, Van der Westhuizen, and Barnard, "Teaching Strategies to Support IsiXhosa Learners Who Receive Education in a Second/Third Language."

³⁹ Þorsteinn Árnason Sürmeli, Guðrún Ragnarsdóttir, and Súsanna Margrét Gestsdóttir, "Leading the Dance. The Role of Teacher Collaboration and Collegiality during Sudden Disruptions.," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 139 (2024): 104453.

⁴⁰ Salie, Moletsane, and Mukuna, "Case Study of IsiXhosa-Speaking Foundation Phase Learners Who Experience Barriers to Learning in an English-Medium Disadvantaged Western Cape School."

⁴¹ Rockie Sibanda and Lina P. Tshehla, "From Mother Tongue to English: A Language Policy Shift at a Multilingual Township School in Gauteng," *South African Journal of Childhood Education* 15, no. 1 (February 28, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajce.v15i1.1598>.

⁴² Mlamli Diko, "Archiving of Indigenous Languages with Specific Reference to IsiXhosa.," *Mousaion* 43, no. 3 (2025).

difficult Afrikaans and crossed to isiXhosa, thinking it is easy to pass. Some parents prefer to speak English with their children, which challenges teachers at school. Similarly, Madima and Makananise highlight that indigenous languages such as isiXhosa are not used frequently at home because many parents choose to use English, as they believe that it would help their children succeed academically and at work.⁴³ This shift poses a challenge for isiXhosa FAL teachers because children's limited exposure to isiXhosa may have an impact on their language skills and involvement in class. Therefore, parental participation is important because it preserves and advances mother tongues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After some crucial findings, recommendations were made to improve teaching isiXhosa FAL in former Model C schools.

- Mentorship is recommended to support recently graduated isiXhosa teachers with some tips on good strategies they may use in their classrooms.
- Parents should speak more isiXhosa with their children at home, as this will help them fully develop their language skills and significantly help them to improve their literacy skills in isiXhosa.
- The study recommends the improvement of technology use to strengthen learners' engagement, their learning experiences, and to ameliorate their proficiency in the language.
- To address the resource gap, DBE should invest in providing quality isiXhosa FAL material such as workbooks, learners' story books, textbooks and digital devices.

CONCLUSION

The research demonstrates that effective teaching of isiXhosa FAL in former Model C schools within the Harry Gwala District depends on context-sensitive strategies, resource allocation and systemic support. Teachers use strategies such as code-switching, cultural integration, interactive, collaborative learning and technology integration to engage learners and handle linguistic diversity in their classrooms. The implementation of these strategies occurs within difficult circumstances, including insufficient resources and unequal isiXhosa treatment compared to English and Afrikaans, as well as inadequate support from administrators and departmental staff. The research demonstrates that teacher mentorship programs must support both new and experienced teachers, and peer teaching collaboration should help close knowledge gaps, while professional development opportunities should provide modern teaching strategies for isiXhosa teaching. The solution to these problems requires intentional changes in educational policies and teaching practices to establish equal recognition and support for isiXhosa throughout the school curriculum.

The study further reveals that parental and community involvement play a vital role in supporting language skills development outside of regular classroom teaching. The practice of using isiXhosa at home through reading activities and storytelling, singing, and daily conversations helps learners develop stronger literacy skills while preserving their cultural heritage. The achievement of this goal depends on better access to isiXhosa reading materials in physical and digital formats, together with the implementation of educational technology tools such as e-books, online dictionaries, and language learning applications. The Department of Basic Education, together with schools and communities, needs to work in partnership to deliver high-quality curriculum-aligned resources and qualified leadership and specific initiatives that include isiXhosa in supplementary programs like winter schools. These recommendations will lead to better isiXhosa FAL teaching, which will improve learner performance.

⁴³ Shumani Eric Madima and Fulufhelo Oscar Makananise, "Parental Involvement in Children's Learning of English Language in the Vhembe District, South Africa.," *African Journal of Development Studies* 11, no. 2 (2021).

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Lwandile Ncam is a lecturer in the Intermediate Phase at SANTS, where he specialises in isiXhosa education and teacher training. He has over five years of lecturing experience, serving as a lead isiXhosa lecturer and coordinator, with responsibilities including module development, assessment design, and academic mentorship. Prior to this, he worked as an educator in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education, teaching isiXhosa and Creative Arts. Ncam holds a Bachelor of Education and an Honours degree, and has completed a Master of Education focusing on the teaching of isiXhosa as a First Additional Language. His interests include language education, curriculum development, and teacher professional development.

Dr. Lundi Nomlala is a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Walter Sisulu University. He is teaching English-related modules such as English for Teachers and Communication Skills in English. He also teaches a research methodology module to 4th-year students. He is involved in Committees such as Faculty Research Ethics, Scholarship of teaching and learning, and Faculty Research and Innovation. Dr. Nomlala mentors emerging scholars on how to write winning manuscripts. He has successfully supervised 20 Honours and five Master's students. His area of specialization is Language Education, Curriculum Studies, and Higher Education Studies.