The logic of African languages in Reading Literacy: THE SEISMIC SHIFT IN THE NEW LITERACY STRATEGY

Prof Leketi Makalela

Deputy Head of School: Wits School of Education

Director: Hub for Multilingual Education and Literacies,

University of the Witwatersrand

Department of Basic Education Technical Advisor: National Reading Strategy

Presentation outline

DBE's massive work prior to 2023

Persistent Matthew effect

Birth of new strategy

Analysis of wars considered in the strategy

Developments: from theory, practice, guidelines, lesson plans, benchmarking and pilot

Desired outcomes

Going to the moon in the next few years

Key Reading Interventions Activated (2019-2023)

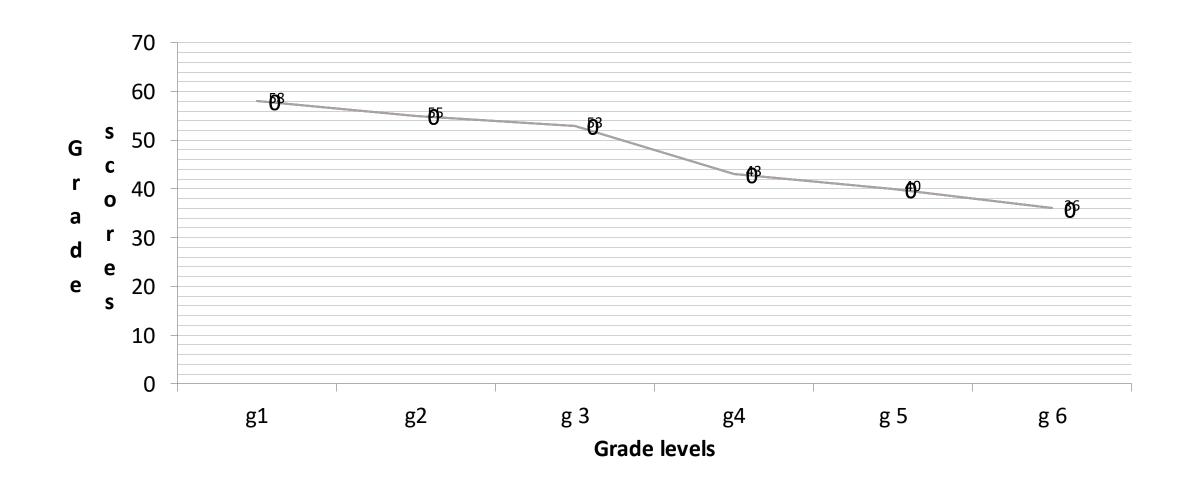|			
READING BENCHMARKS: completed for 10 languages, and 11th	**EGRS:** rigorous research to inform programme design	**PRSIP:** structured learning programme implemented at scale for Gr 1-6 teachers, SMTs and subject advisors	**Read to Lead Campaign & National Reading Coalition (NRC):** Parental, Community and Resource Mobilisation
Provisioning and Utilisation of LTSM: Provincial procurement & retention monitoring; resourcing by partners	**Teacher Development:** capacity building on Framework on teaching of African Langs., EGRS, PSRIP, EGRA, etc.	**Reading Champions & Teacher Assistants:** deployed more than 76000 to focus on reading literacy only	**Mobilising Partnerships:** NECT, NRC, UNICEF, VVOB, Room to Read, PILO, etc.

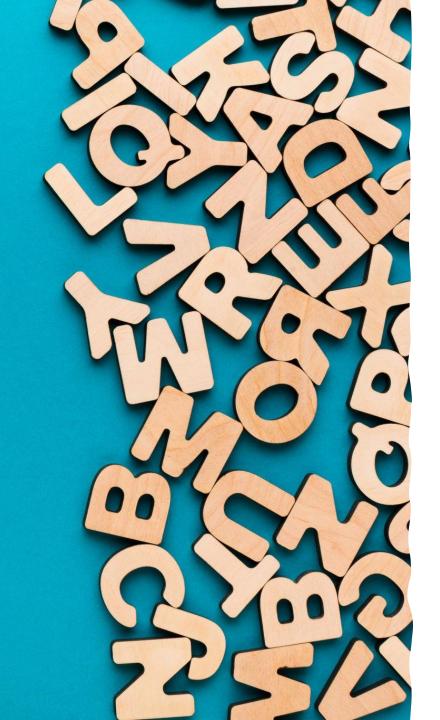# Persistent Matthew effect: the weaker getting weaker

A vision of inclusive, holistic and comprehensive literacy approach = NEW LITERACY STRATEGY 2024-2030

By 2030, South Africans should have **access** to education and training of the **highest quality**, leading to **significantly** improved learning **outcomes**. The performance of South African learners in **international** standardised tests should be **comparable** to the performance of learners from countries at a **similar** level of development and with similar levels of access.(NPD 2030)

Why don't we improve?
Supply (ITE) and demand (DBE): fitness for purpose?

- Monolingual and epistemic biases
- Overlooking the differences between English and African languages and misapplying the reading logic of English into reading packages of other languages.
- How do we know?
  - Learners: **barking at texts =Matthew effect**
  - **Teachers: preaching in the dessert**

READING WAR I: PHONICS

Bottom up approach:
Rationale:
Cognitive efficiency mechanism (linearity)

Phonics-based approach

- Relationship between sounds and their corresponding symbols (letters or letter combinations).

- Common course: <u>Early readers learn to decode words by sounding out each letter or group of letters.</u>

- Phonics is typically taught at <u>the beginning stages </u>of literacy development. Most of the reading plans of provinces reflect an overreliance on phonics. This has been donor funded in developing countries. Still our learners cannot do well.

Works *relatively* well for English, but not so well in African languages of Bantu origin

Why?

Phonics approach is Predicated on the logic of West-Germanic languages

- *Phonemic and orthographic differences (/s/*:
  - African languages = transparent; English= opaque
  - African languages use tonal sounds, which phonics-based English instruction would not account for.
- *Syllabic structure/integrity differences*
  - Many African languages from the Bantu family are primarily syllabic. (aowa); Finish in Finland
  - Polysyllabic words rather than monosyllabic words (e.g., cat, love).

War II: Whole Language Approach

Rationale: Top-down approach (assumes context rich and culturally sensitive materials)

Meaning and function of words within a larger language context, such as sentences, stories, or discussions.

Challenges of using this approach in teaching English literacy especially in the US (inconsistency).

African languages of Bantu origin have transparent orthographies- consistent relationship between letters and their pronunciations.

Once a learner understands the basic phonetic rules, they can read any new word they encounter. (associations) but cognitive overload? "Siyabonga"

Peaceful WAR III (I +II)

- Balanced approach (unbalanced? Misnomer?)
  - Parallel instead of integration (separate development)
  - Requires dynamic teachers to pull together various elements into one coherent lesson
  - Default: Phonics

WAR IV: What is in the "Science" of Reading?

Reading automated robes (threads)

Simple View of Reading (Reading= decoding + comprehension

Failure to integrate skills with social practices- (socio-cultural approach)

The BIG FIVE bias
- Phonics
- Phonological awareness
- Vocabulary
- Fluency (no. of w.p.m
- Comprehension

Questioning all the Wars (ontological, epistemological and methodological considerations)

- New Reading Literacy Strategy calls for **Epistemological rupture** and **severing umbilical cords with what doesn't work for ALs.**

- Neither phonics (I), whole language (II), balanced approach (III) nor science of reading (IV) address the epistemic questions

- <u>Solution</u>: True multilingual approach leveraging on differences (linguistic typology) as strength in literacy packaging
    - = holistic, comprehensive, and differentiated
    - = **Mother Tongue-based Reading Literacy (MTbRL)** approach (Mbude-Mehana, 2024).

The bull's eye: Epistemic shift via morphological awareness-centred approach

Integrated Theoretical Framework for morphological awareness

- **Morphological Transparency Hypothesis:** languages with a high degree of morphological transparency facilitate easier and more successful reading acquisition. Morphological transparency refers to the straightforward, predictable relationships between <u>morphemes and their corresponding sounds and meanings</u>. Transparent= positive transfer

- **Orthographic Depth Hypothesis:** posits that the ease of learning to read a written language is affected by its orthographic depth — that is, the degree of consistency between <u>spelling and pronunciation</u>. (Graphological & phonological)

CASE FOR Morphological Awareness in African Languages Packages (agglutinative languages)

Rich morphology: affixes (prefixes, infixes, and suffixes) denote grammatical features such as tense, aspect, mood, and negation. Teaching learners to recognize and understand these morphemes can greatly aid in literacy.

Word formation: Recognizing root words and how they can be modified with prefixes and suffixes can help learners guess the meaning of new words and improve their reading comprehension.

Transferable skills: Morphological awareness is not just about literacy; it also contributes to vocabulary expansion, spelling, and grammar understanding.
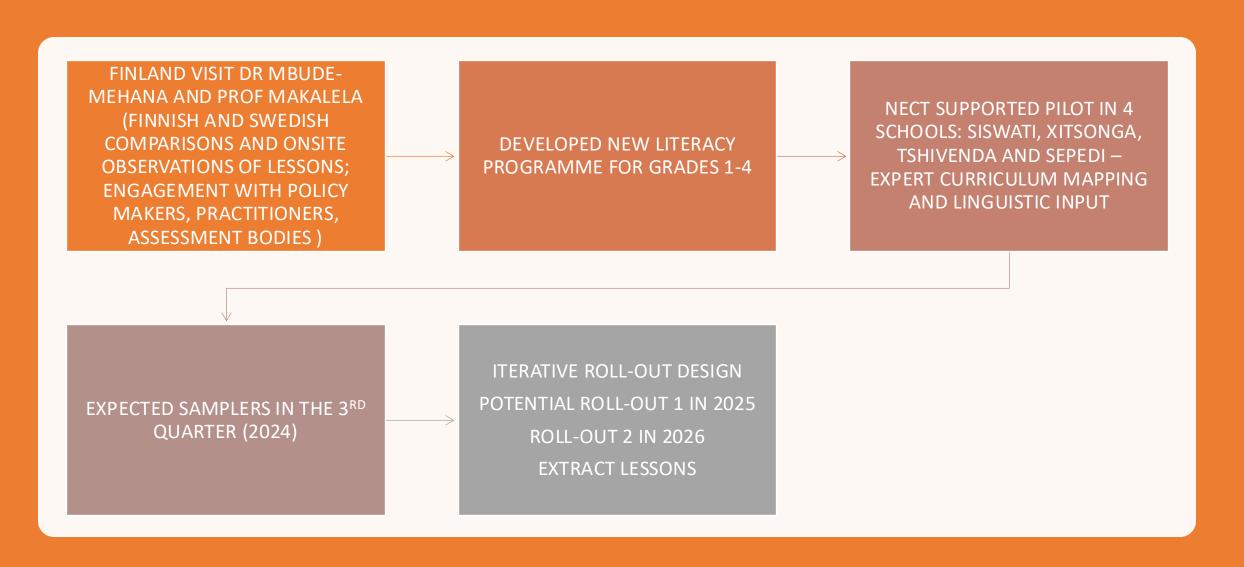
Multilingual advantage: developing morphological awareness is a valuable cross-linguistic skill, helping learners understand how different languages they speak are structured and relate to each other.

Guidelines on How to incorporate MA in the literacy packages="Inclusive/MTbRL Strategy"

- *Morphological analysis:* Encourage learners to break down unfamiliar words into their morphemes to infer their meanings.

- *Word formation exercises*: Provide exercises that let learners practice forming words from root words and affixes.

- *Integration with other components*. Combine with phonics instruction to teach about how letters and sounds correspond to morphemes. Integrate with vocabulary instruction to help learners understand the meanings of morphemes and how they combine to form word meanings.

- *Cross-linguistic awareness:* help learners understand how the languages they speak are similar and different so they transfer knowledge and skills across languages and improve their overall literacy.

- *Culturally relevant instruction:* Use examples and materials that relate to the learners' experiences and contexts, and teaching in a way that respects and values the learners' cultures and languages. Use Oracy as a springboard for literacy.

Piloting and Benchmarking the applied new MTbRL Strategy

FINLAND VISIT DR MBUDE-MEHANA AND PROF MAKALELA (FINNISH AND SWEDISH COMPARISONS AND ONSITE OBSERVATIONS OF LESSONS; ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICY MAKERS, PRACTITIONERS, ASSESSMENT BODIES)

DEVELOPED NEW LITERACY PROGRAMME FOR GRADES 1-4

NECT SUPPORTED PILOT IN 4 SCHOOLS: SISWATI, XITSONGA, TSHIVENDA AND SEPEDI – EXPERT CURRICULUM MAPPING AND LINGUISTIC INPUT

EXPECTED SAMPLERS IN THE 3RD QUARTER (2024)

ITERATIVE ROLL-OUT DESIGN

POTENTIAL ROLL-OUT 1 IN 2025

ROLL-OUT 2 IN 2026

EXTRACT LESSONS

Regularity and meaning infused Noun Class Prefix systems: Sepedi sample- morphological transparency

* Assume: letter-sound correspondence in place; *Focus: morpheme-based syllables

Singular	Plural	
1 **Mo**	2 **Ba**	*Bana ba bapala
3 Mo	**4 Me**	
5 Le	**6 Ma**	
7 Se	**8 Di**	
9 N	**10 Di**	
11 Bo	**12 Ma**	
13 Go		
14 Fa		
15 Go		
16 Mo		

LESSON PLAN: Week 1: Class 1 (Mo-) and Class 2 (Ba-)

Objective: Introduce learners to the singular and plural concept using the prefixes Mo- (singular) and Ba- (plural).

Materials: Picture cards (e.g., person - motho, people - batho), simple songs, matching games.

Activities:

1. **Introduction with Song (10 minutes):** Use a simple song or chant that includes words with Mo- and Ba-, emphasizing the change in number.

2. **Picture Card Matching (15 minutes):** Show cards depicting singular and plural objects (e.g., one person vs. a group). Have learners match the singular images with Mo- words and plural images with Ba- words.

3. **Craft Activity (15 minutes):** learners create their own flashcards, drawing a single object and a group, labeling them with Mo- and Ba- respectively.

4. **Review Game (10 minutes):** End with a fun game where learners identify whether objects or pictures should be labeled with Mo- or Ba-, reinforcing the singular and plural concept.

LESSON PLAN-Week 2: Class 3 (Mo-) and Class 4 (Me-)

Objective: Teach the distinction between another set of singular and plural prefixes, Mo- and Me-.

Materials: Storybooks, role-play props, sorting games.

Activities:

1. **Story Reading (15 minutes):** Read a story highlighting Mo- and Me- words. Discuss the different objects in the story, focusing on singular and plural forms.

2. **Role-Playing (15 minutes):** Use props for students to act out scenarios using Mo- and Me- nouns, such as Mohlare (tree) and Mehlare (trees).

3. **Sorting Game (15 minutes):** Provide students with various objects or pictures to sort based on whether they think the object is a Mo- (singular) or Me- (plural).

4. **Creative Drawing (10 minutes):** Children draw their own representations of Mo- and Me- nouns and present them to the class.

LESSON PLAN-Week 3: Class 5 (Le-) and Class 6 (Ma-)

Objective: Explore the prefixes Le- (singular) and Ma- (plural), often related to objects or abstract concepts.

Materials: Object cards, classification activities, creative storytelling.

Activities:

1. **Object Introduction (10 minutes):** Introduce Le- and Ma- using tangible objects or pictures, explaining the singular and plural aspects.

2. **Classification Activity (20 minutes):** Kids classify sets of objects or images into Le- and Ma- groups, explaining their choices.

3. **Storytelling (15 minutes):** Encourage learners to create short stories using Le- and Ma- nouns, possibly in groups to promote collaboration.

4. **Crafting Session (15 minutes):** Children make craft representations of their favourite Le- and Ma- nouns, linking the craft to the word's meaning.

ASSESSMENT Regimes

Morphological decomposition Test: evaluates a learner's ability to analyse and break down words into their constituent morphemes to understand their meaning.

Lexical inferencing task: Assesses a reader's ability to deduce the meaning of an unknown word using contextual clues and their knowledge of language structure, which includes morphology, syntax, and semantics

Severed umbilical cord: African languages (bantu origin) from West-Germanic languages

- Infused of <u>morphological awareness for African languages</u> of Bantu origin into the current reading literacy packages.
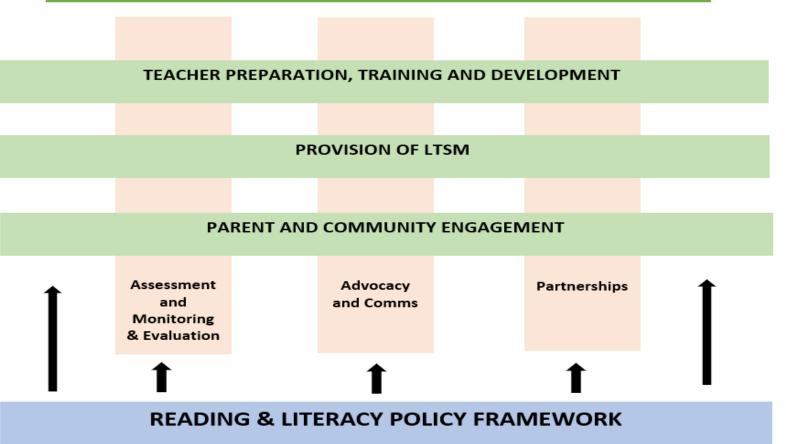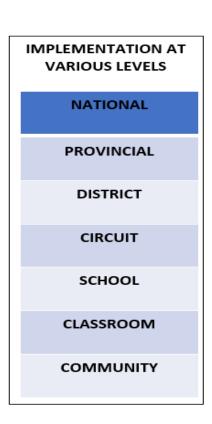
- Amplified English and Afrikaans literacy packages (esp. for 2nd language readers)

-Improved literacy outcomes

FILTER INTO THE NEW NATIONAL STRATEGY OPERATION FRAMEWORK

Let us go to the moon

Not because it is easy, but because it desirable [doing what we should do when we should do it even if we don't feel like it]

Siyabonga, re a leboga, inkomu, thank you, baie dankie

Reading is learning- all children read with meaning in all languages by age 10.