

Turning pages into voices: Supporting listening and speaking and affective growth in Intermediate Phase English

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Second language learners are often posed with the challenge of language proficiency which involves the integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Al-Bereiki & Al-Mekhlafi, 2016). Despite their status as second language learners, many South African learners are placed in English Home Language classrooms, where expectations may exceed their current proficiency levels. Learners who lack confidence in English often avoid speaking for fear of errors or peer ridicule, a difficulty frequently linked to limited vocabulary and uncertainty with spelling, as observed in Dewi et al.'s (2017) action research. Madonsela (2015) further notes that African learners in such contexts experience persistent affective barriers, including anxiety and low self-esteem, which constrain their classroom participation and language development. These realities underscore the need for innovative strategies that support learners' motivation, confidence, and engagement, and for equipping pre-service teachers to respond effectively within such demanding classroom contexts. However, there is often a disconnect between the way teacher training is delivered, and the realities pre-service teachers encounter in classrooms (Phillips & Condy, 2023). This gap needs to be addressed to better prepare future teachers for the challenges of real-world teaching.

Mind the Gap: Linguistic Disparity in South African English Education

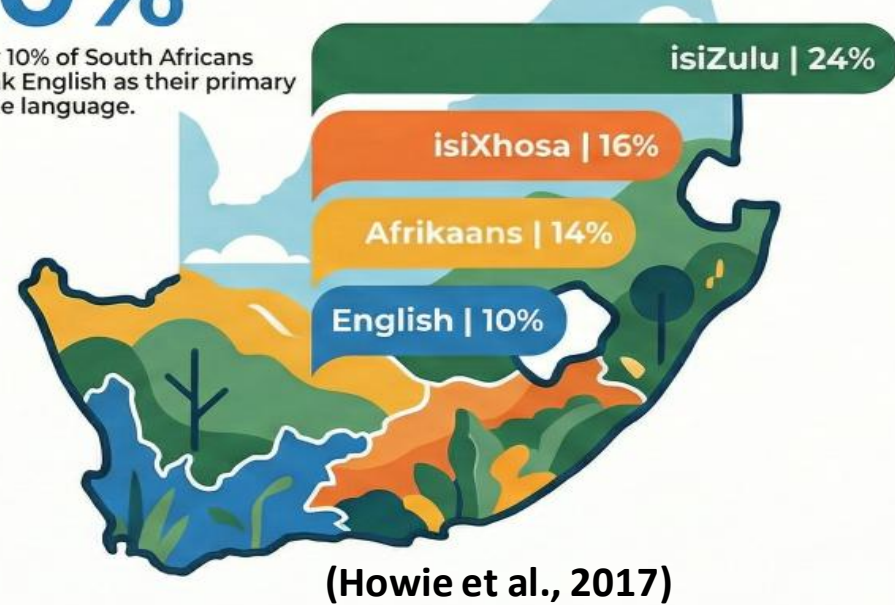
Highlighting the mismatch between South Africa's linguistic demographics and the current English curriculum structure.

The Linguistic Reality

English is a Minority Home Language

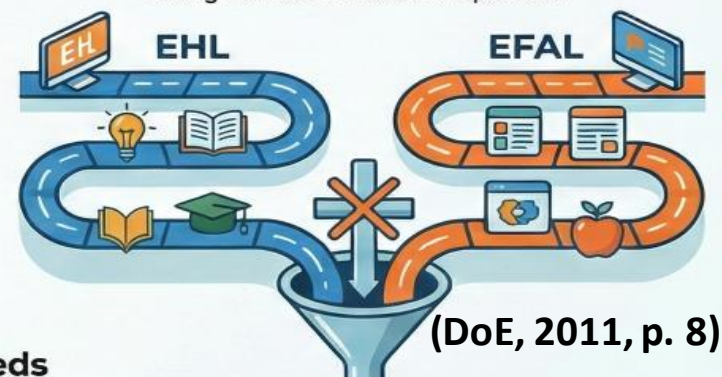
10%
Only 10% of South Africans speak English as their primary home language.

Dominant Regional Languages
isiZulu, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans are more widely spoken.



The Curriculum Challenge

Ineffective Curriculum Separation
EHL and EFAL curricula share similar objectives, failing to address access inequalities.



Overlooked Affective Needs
Learner anxiety, motivation, and confidence are currently ignored in instructional design.

Proficiency vs. Reality
"Home Language" refers to proficiency levels rather than the student's actual native tongue.



The broader study, on which this poster is based, aimed at exploring how Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers could enhance second language learners' motivation, confidence, and engagement in English Home Language classrooms through reflective practice, and by collaboratively designing interventions to address affective factors. It further investigated how participation in PALAR contributed to pre-service teachers' transformative learning and professional growth. This poster focuses on Cycle Two, the collaborative design and implementation of strategies to address affective challenges, and the impact on learners' language development and affective outcomes.

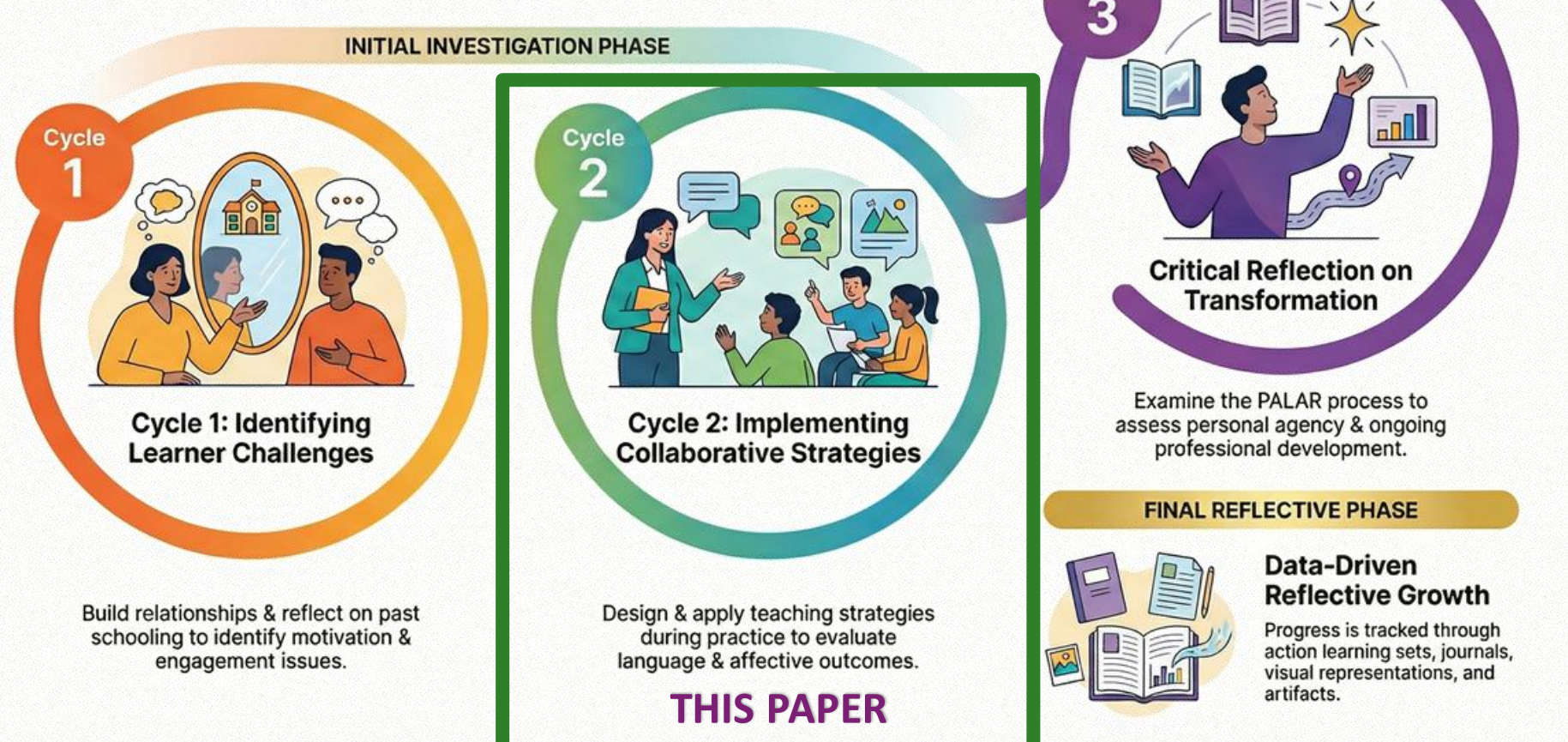
METHOD

This poster reports on Cycle Two of a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research project, investigating how pre-service English teachers integrated listening and speaking into drama reading lessons to support learner motivation, confidence, and reduce anxiety. Drawing on **Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2000)** and **Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis (1982)**, the study explored how scaffolded reading activities can transform learners' participation and encourage reflective teaching. Cycle Two progressed to collaboratively designing strategies and implementing them during Teaching Practice.

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Paradigm	Critical transformative; importance of researchers collaborating with participants as co-creators of knowledge, recognising them as active agents of change rather than passive subjects (Wood & Zuber-Skerritt, 2013).
Approach	Qualitative; prioritises depth of understanding over generalisability, allowing participants' experiences, perspectives, and meanings to be foregrounded (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Design	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) – 3 cycles (Zuber-Skerritt, 2011)
Participants	9 Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers at a South African university
Sampling	Purposive – Intermediate Phase English Home Language modules
Data Generation	Lesson plans; reflective journals; group discussion
Analysis	Thematic analysis; Atlas.ti (coding)
Ethics	Voluntary participation; independent recruitment; confidentiality; pseudonyms

The PALAR Journey:

Three Cycles of Transformative Teacher Development



RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Findings indicated that pre-service teachers viewed drama reading as providing a scaffolded environment in which oral engagement could occur safely, supporting learner participation and confidence. They reflected that learners appeared more willing to participate, remained engaged, and seemed less anxious, while the pre-service teachers themselves reported increased confidence in facilitating listening and speaking activities and a transformation from teacher-led recitation to more dialogic, interactive approaches. Although balancing curriculum pacing with extended discussion was challenging, drama reading fostered learner motivation, confidence, and reduced anxiety.

THEME 1: SCAFFOLDING ORAL ENGAGEMENT

Pre-service teachers' lesson plans were evidence of having implemented speaking and listening activities that were scaffolded (using pre-, during- and post- activities), for example an emotion activity, paired reading, group discussions, games, and role-play. In their reflective journals, the participants reported that during the lessons in Teaching Practice, after implementing scaffolded activities, learners appeared to be more confident in listening and speaking activities, and learners who were initially hesitant were more willing to participate.

THEME 2: ENHANCED PARTICIPATION AND CONFIDENCE

Lesson plans incorporated interactive, collaborative drama tasks that encouraged learners to actively participate. Pre-service teachers' reflections showed that learners enjoyed acting (Nommie; Snothi), discussing the texts (Nommie), and working with classmates (Bonnie; Lillie). The pre-service teachers noted in their reflections that learners seemed more involved, showed enthusiasm and increased confidence in speaking, especially when they were allowed time to rehearse and work together, either in pairs or groups.

THEME 3: TRANSFORMATION OF TEACHING PRACTICES

In Cycle One of the broader study, pre-service teachers lacked an understanding of how to address anxiety, motivation and confidence. Further, they did not focus on structured activities. Cycle Two showed a transformation in their practices – in the group discussion, pre-service teachers acknowledged the advantage of incorporating learner-centred methods and expressed feeling more confident in designing and implementing listening and speaking activities, using drama as a pedagogical tool. They indicated a transition away from teacher-centred reading instruction – which caused anxiety and a lack of learner participation – towards more dialogic, participatory teaching approaches.

Extracts taken from reflective journals:

There were also a lot of comments on my acting skills. This decreased learner anxiety, preparing them for the main activity. (Snothi)

The learners were paired so that they could discuss their roles and their dialogue. This made the lesson extremely fun which led to their motivation increasing. (Nommie)

A notable teaching moment occurred with a learner who is often labelled as "naughty" in other classes. During this lesson, the learner was fully engaged and well-behaved, particularly during group discussions and oral activities. (Lillie)

Allowing learners to work with their peers helped them 'get out of their shell'. (Bonnie)

The findings suggest that drama reading activities created opportunities for meaningful participation in listening and speaking activities while supporting learners' confidence and motivation. In keeping with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter hypothesis, the scaffolded and collaborative nature of the activities assisted in reducing learners' anxiety and encouraging participation. Furthermore, the reflections indicate evidence of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000), as pre-service teachers critically reflected on their practices and designed and implemented more learner-centred approaches to integrating listening and speaking within reading lessons, using drama. These findings suggest that drama reading can support both learner engagement and pedagogical transformation.

CONCLUSION

Cycle Two of the broader PALAR study reflected pre-service teachers' implementation of drama reading interventions in the Intermediate Phase English classroom. The study highlights the benefits of interactive activities that focus on learners' affective factors in enhancing listening and speaking. This study underscores how reflective, collaborative practice within PALAR can help pre-service teachers support learners' engagement and oral confidence. The importance of implementing activities during Teaching Practice is also emphasised.

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