

Read Educational Trust

African languages & Literacy teaching



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Before I spell out how Read as an NGO is involved in the teaching of African languages , particularly in primary schools, I wish to share with you the following findings, with regard to language (s) issues.

The Pretoria News, Newspaper (dated 20.02.2009) had the following news to share with our society and the world community at large.

Indigenous languages dying out

Paris – the World has lost Manx in the Isle of Man, Ubykn in Turkey and last year Alaska’s last native speaker of Eyak, Marie Smith Jones, died taking the aboriginal language with her.

More to this was the UN’s cultural agency (UNESCO) report of 2009, which highlighted that of the 6 900 languages spoken in the world, some 2 500 are endangered.

Moreso, the latest atlas of world languages, has the following:

‘There are 199 languages in the world spoken by fewer than a dozen people:

Language	No of speakers
Karain	6 speakers in Ukraine (Russia)
Wichita	10 speakers in Oklahoma (US)
Lengilu	4 Speakers in Indonesia

Language disappearance:

More than 200 languages have become extinct over the last 3 generations.

Language	Country	Year of extinction
Aasax	Tanzania	1976
Manx	Isle of Man	1974
Ubykh	Turkey	1992

I think this brief introduction, on the status of languages in the world, may make us talk about the status of our own languages, here in South Africa.

Now my question to you is:

How many people still speak Sepedi, seTswana, seSotho, isiNdebele etc?

If you do not enforce the teaching of your languages in schools, then your languages may eventually die. The only way you can maintain the survival of your culture (Language), is through teaching it to your own children.

2.0 READ EDUCATIONAL TRUST

About the origins and mission of READ Educational Trust, I would like to refer you to READ's Website: www.read.org.za

You may also obtain the guide entitled [READ Philosophy, Principles and Practice; a successful model for outcomes-based education](#)

2.1 The extent to which READ is involved in the implementation of language policy in African languages.

2.1.0 New Heights series

Read has produced teaching and learning materials, in the form of text books and resource packs for use at Foundation Phase level (1 – 3)

This is being done in all the 11 official languages. The material consists of:

- (a) A storybook
- (b) A learner's book
- (c) A teacher's guide

The storybook is in two forms: it is in form of a Big Book and a Small Book.

- The Big Book focuses mainly on teaching - using the Shared Reading/Writing and Reading Aloud methodologies in a classroom setting.
- The Small Book enhances Group/Guided/Independent Reading.

The learner's book is for use by learners, either independently or under teacher/parent guidance. The art in the storybook and the learner's book, as well as the size of the font which is used, is meant to promote the appropriate visual literacy for a Foundation Phase learner.

The teacher's guides exposes the educator to how a Balanced Language Approach, as advocated by the NCS, can be used in all our teaching and learning transactions, at Foundation Phase level, using the READ model of teaching.

Activities are presented in comprehensions, phonics, sight word reading/writing, language structures and creative writing.

2.1.1 Literacy Foundation Phase Resource Pack(s)

Accompanying the New Heights series is a programme of five interrelated components (Foundation Phase Resource Pack).

- (a) The Classroom Display Resource Pack
- (b) The Alphabet Resource Pack
- (c) The Phonics Resource Pack
- (d) The Sight words Resource Pack, and
- (e) The Vocabulary Resource Pack

These have been developed in all of the African languages and the classroom practitioner has to use them interchangeably to enhance learner literacy skills.

2.1.2 Educator Trainers

READ has educator trainers in all provinces. These educator trainers assist by training school educators in how to use the material developed by READ. This includes working with learners during their demonstrations.

3.0 Stakeholder involvement

READ involves parents and other educational stakeholders such as universities and schools when developing its materials. Research/ educational ideas from educational authorities such as Skinner, Chomsky, Piaget, Vygotsky, Cambourne, Kohlberg, Dewey, Preire, Krashen and other scholarly models of teaching literacy, are considered during the development of the materials.

4.0 Conclusion

The success of the teaching of African languages in schools will be proof indeed of the fact African languages are now official languages. However, the failure thereof may influence their official status in a negative manner.

Let us adhere to the words of the UNESCO Deputy Director Françoise Rivière who applauded government's efforts to supporting linguistic diversity by saying '**people have to be proud to speak their languages**' to ensure they thrive.