

PREFACE

Welcome to the second issue of 2024, the year of our 40th anniversary! I would like to thank all our reviewers, language editors and, of course, the authors for their hard work. This issue includes submissions from school as well as higher education contexts, from South Africa as well as Botswana and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

The articles in this number are divided equally between school and higher education language teaching. I am very proud of the fact that we are publishing an article on the implementation of the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement for the teaching of South African Sign Language (SASL) as a home language. The curriculum was introduced in 2015, and in 2017 **Magongwa** conducted a study in which teachers' experiences with the curriculum were investigated. As is to be expected with a new curriculum, Magongwa reports positive as well as negative experiences. One of the most troubling findings of the study is that teachers' SASL language proficiency varies considerably, with many not fluent in the language. To ameliorate this situation, teaching assistants, who are fluent users of SASL, were used to do team teaching. However, none of the teaching assistants were trained as teachers. Although this situation may not seem ideal, Magongwa points out that teachers became more fluent as they interacted with their assistants, while the assistants gained insight into teaching practices. However, neither teachers nor assistants had pre-service training in teaching SASL and they had to rely on a five-day training workshop presented by the Department of Basic Education. This does seem like an area that requires higher education institutions to make strategic decisions in terms of training teachers of SASL, since there are approximately 38 schools for the deaf in South Africa.

Moving to one of our neighbouring countries, **Teane and Hughes** report on the second-language reading development of primary-school learners in Botswana, as reported by their teachers. Since reading development in a second language is heavily dependent on reading proficiency in the first language, the current policy which requires learners to switch to English-medium instruction after only one year of literacy education in Sesotho, seems to fail learners by not laying a solid foundation in the home language of the majority of learners. In addition, lack of resources, including solid teacher training in developing reading proficiency, stymies learners' ability to deal with academic English.

Moving to secondary school teaching, **Mavhiza and Nkealah** argue that the study of prescribed poetry in the curriculum for English first additional and home language requires performance pedagogy, since poetry is meant to be performed aloud. By simply reading poetry silently, or by reading it without performing the poem, the essence of poetry is lost.

The authors show how learners disengage with poetry and passively resist the teaching of poetry that is not taught and performed in a way that engages them.

The next two articles deal with the perennial problem of academic literacy in higher education institutions, specifically with regard to assessment practices. **Drennan** argues for the importance of in-house testing to supplement the National Benchmark Test (NBT) that is used to assess the preparedness of first-year students for the academic demands in higher education institutions. In their assessment of 2,292 first-year students who had been identified as at risk by scoring below 64% on the NBT, the author demonstrates that in-house tests with high validity and reliability scores can be a viable alternative measure of academic literacy. Drennan also postulates that in-house tests could offer more context-sensitive assessment opportunities.

Veldtman, Modiba, Lekota and Ngoepe demonstrate the possibilities offered by such a context-sensitive assessment in their description of a test of laboratory report-writing skills. This test was attempted with first-year Bachelor of Science students, based on an experiment that students did in their final secondary-school year (Grade 12). By focusing on the type of academic literacy that is required in their academic studies, these B Sc students are made aware of the language that is valued in the science community they are entering. The authors argue that both language support lecturers and lecturers of the various science subjects should be involved in assessing the students' reports to ensure that they (the students) master the scientific discourse of their chosen academic programme.

Our final article describes the use of key-stroke technology to assess the ability of first-year students to spell correctly without the support of the predictive text functionality on their computers and smart 'phones. **Saadi and Abdullah** show how the over-reliance on predictive text and automatic correction undermines students' ability to spell correctly. More importantly, however, students seem to lose their confidence in their own abilities. Although one can argue that students need to be taught how to use predictive text and automatic correction more responsibly, the fact remains that the spelling errors are indications of other problems, such as unfamiliarity with English spelling patterns – which may indicate lack of extensive reading – and incorrect pronunciation, which in turn affects spelling.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy this issue. It has been a pleasure and a very steep learning curve being the editor of this journal. Many challenges remain, but I am sure that future editors will take the journal to new heights.

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