BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU-SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS

by

SANDHYA D MAHABEER

submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION
WITH SPECIALISATION IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF AC LESSING

NOVEMBER 2003
DECLARATION

I declare that BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU-SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

......................................................... ...........................................
SANDHYA D MAHABEER                                            DATE
To:

My Mother and Father for their unwavering support, for inspiring me to achieve and providing the opportunities to do so.

All the Zulu-speaking L2 Foundation Phase learners whose struggles in the English classroom were my inspiration to look for answers to lessen or end these struggles for you.

Kavir, Kiran, Nibha and Shreya; the joys of my life. My hope is that you receive better than I have found now.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
This study would not have been possible without the following people and my heartfelt thanks goes out to them:

- To God my Creator, for providing me with the knowledge, courage and strength to complete this study.

- Prof AC Lessing, my supervisor, for her expert guidance and patience throughout this research.

- Prof Salome Schultze for giving off her precious time, her patience and guidance in the compilation of the questionnaire and data analysis.

- Mr Emmanuel Mgqwashu, of the English Language and Academic Literacy Department, University of Natal, for the language editing.

- The respondents for sacrificing their precious time and for their invaluable contributions, without which this study would not have been possible.

- My Dad, Joe Mahabeer, for his tireless assistance in administrative matters and my Mum, Ambika, for her love, understanding and patience.

- Vishal Batchu, for his unwavering love, understanding and contributions, and for willingly being my soundingboard.

- My sisters Swadeshi, Jenetha and Raksha, and their respective families for their support.

- Shohana, Habiba, Sharon and Prelini, my dearest friends, for their continuous encouragement.

BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU-SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS
This study focuses on the barriers that hinder the Zulu-speaking English second language learner in the Foundation Phase in acquiring basic reading and spelling skills. Nine hypotheses were developed from the literature study. Emanating from this, a quantitative empirical investigation, undertaken at various Foundation Phase schools in and around the greater Durban area, examined these barriers. A questionnaire was used as the main instrument in investigating these barriers.

The study highlighted the relationships between the various variables. These relationships were, in the main, found significant. The research has indicated that contextual, language, school and intrinsic factors are significantly correlated to the problems L2 learners experience in acquiring English reading and spelling skills. The limitations of this investigation were discussed and recommendations, based on these results, were forwarded.
KEY TERMS

• Foundation Phase
• Barriers
• Basic reading skills
• Basic spelling skills
• Zulu-speaking learners
• Outcomes Based Education
• Second language learners
• Bilingual teacher training
• Multicultural education
• Low socio-economic background
• Intrinsic factors
• Cognition
• Educational resources
• Mother tongue
• Parental involvement
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Outcomes Based Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>English First Language learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Zulu-speaking English Second Language learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KZN</td>
<td>KwaZulu Natal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KZNDEC</td>
<td>KwaZulu Natal Department of Education and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAEYC</td>
<td>National Association Education of Young Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALP</td>
<td>Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSALB</td>
<td>Pan South African Language Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GICD</td>
<td>Gauteng Institute for Curriculum Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2005</td>
<td>Curriculum 2005</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1 : AN INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1. **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................ 1

2. **ANALYSIS OF THE PROBLEM** ............................................................................. 2
   1.2.1 Awareness of the problem .............................................................................. 2
   1.2.2 Preliminary literature investigation .............................................................. 4
   1.2.3 Statement of the problem .............................................................................. 9

1.3 **AIMS OF THE RESEARCH** .................................................................................. 10
   1.3.1 General aims ................................................................................................. 11
   1.3.2 Specific aims ................................................................................................. 11

1.4 **RESEARCH METHODS** ..................................................................................... 12

1.5 **DEMARCTIONS OF THE RESEARCH** ............................................................... 12

1.6 **CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS** ................................................................... 13
   1.6.1 Barriers ......................................................................................................... 13
   1.6.2 Zulu-speaking learners ................................................................................ 14
   1.6.3 English second language ............................................................................ 14
   1.6.4 Reading ......................................................................................................... 14
   1.6.5 Reading problems ......................................................................................... 15
   1.6.6 Outcomes Based Education ...................................................................... 15
1.7 RESEARCH PROGRAMME ........................................................................... 16
1.8 SUMMARY ................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER 2: BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS BY ZULU-SPEAKING FOUNDATION PHASE LEARNERS

2.1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................... 18

2.2 THE STATUS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN THE LIVES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS .............................................. 18

2.3 ACQUISITION OF A LANGUAGE VERSUS LEARNING OF A LANGUAGE

2.3.1 Acquisition .............................................................................................. 21

2.3.2 Learning ........................................................................................................ 22

2.4 THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE PROFICIENCY IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION ...................................................................................... 23

2.5 BARRIERS IN ACQUIRING BASIC ENGLISH READING AND SPELLING SKILLS .............................................................................................................. 26

2.5.1 Contextual barriers ...................................................................................... 27

2.5.1.1 Socio-economic environment .......................................................... 28

2.5.1.2 Parental involvement ....................................................................... 30

2.5.1.3 Family configuration .......................................................................... 30

2.5.1.4 Parent's educational status .............................................................. 31

2.5.1.5 Language and culture of the community ............... 32
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2</td>
<td>Language factors</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.1</td>
<td>Language structure</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.2</td>
<td>Language as a learning barrier</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.3</td>
<td>Perceptions of illiteracy</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.4</td>
<td>Readers/vocabulary</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.5</td>
<td>Cognitive academic language proficiency</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3</td>
<td>School factors</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.1</td>
<td>Educators</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.2</td>
<td>Learner-educator ratios</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.3</td>
<td>Educator training</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.4</td>
<td>OBE curriculum</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.3.5</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4</td>
<td>Intrinsic learner barriers</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.1</td>
<td>Proficiency</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.2</td>
<td>Neuropsychological perspective on age</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.3</td>
<td>Affective barriers</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.4</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.5</td>
<td>Attitude</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.6</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.4.7</td>
<td>Cognitive perspective</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 60
3.2 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM........................................ 60
3.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES..................................................... 62
3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN 64
   3.4.1 Sampling ................................................................. 64
   3.4.2 Instrument............................................................... 65
   3.4.3 Administration.......................................................... 67
   3.4.4 Pilot study 67
   3.4.5 Collection of data...................................................... 68
3.5 ANALYSIS OF DATA 68
3.6 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY.................................................. 69
   3.6.1 Validity… ................................................................. 69
      3.6.1.1 Face validity ......................................................... 69
      3.6.1.2 Content validity.................................................. 70
   3.6.2 Reliability ............................................................... 70
3.7 SUMMARY 70
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION 91

5.2 CONCLUSIONS ........................................................................................................... 91
   5.2.1 Conclusions from the literature study ....................................................... 91
      5.2.1.1 Proficiency in the mother tongue ..................................................... 92
      5.2.1.2 Factors hindering L2 learners in their acquisition of English reading and spelling skills .93
   5.2.2 Conclusions from the empirical study ....................................................... 97
   5.2.3 Conclusions from the literature study and empirical studies ................................................. 99

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ........................................................................... 101

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS ......................................................................................... 102
   5.4.1 Recommendations for schools ............................................................... 102
   5.4.2 Recommendations for parents of L2 learners ........................................ 103
   5.4.3 Recommendations to educational authorities ...................................... 103
   5.4.4 Recommendations for further research .............................................. 104

5.5 SUMMARY ........................................................................................................... 104

BIBLIOGRAPHY 106
ANNEXURE A (Questionnaire and Response Sheet) .................................................. 115

ANNEXURE B  (Letter- granting of permission to conduct survey) ........................ 128

ANNEXURE C  (Letter to school Principals) ............................................................. 129

ANNEXURE D  (Letter to respondent outlining nature of research) ...................... 130

ANNEXURE E  (Summary of variables in Questionnaire) ....................................... 131
FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Continuum of the status of English for learners in South Africa……………………………………………………………………………22
Figure 4.1 Frequency of teacher training in OBE and bilingual / multilingual teaching……………………………………………………80
Figure 4.2 Percentage of the quality of educators' proficiency in Zulu…………………………………………………………………………83
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Allocation of variable numbers to barriers</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Correlation between the variables in each of the hypotheses</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Questions from questionnaire which form the categories in the hypotheses</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Correlation between parental involvement and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>The relationship between socio-economic background and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Quantity of available prescribed literature, which includes the L2 learner's culture</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Frequency and percentages of the ability of L2 learners to converse in English</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>The correlation between the L2 learner's ability to converse in English and the quantity of the prescribed literature that includes the L2 learner's culture</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>Percentages and frequencies of the extent of L2 learner's who are proficient in English language structure</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>The correlation between the L2 learner's knowledge of English language structure and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>The proficiency of the educator in teaching the different English language structures</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>Correlation between the quality of the educator's training in OBE and bilingual/multilingual teaching and the proficiency of the educator in the English language structure</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>Correlation between the educator's proficiency in Zulu and in the teaching of English language structure</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.13  Percentages and frequencies of the need for resources to ensure the success of lessons.................................85

Table 4.14  Correlation between the availability of resources (at school, home and environment) and the L2 learner's ability to converse in English........................................86

Table 4.15  Percentages and frequencies of the fear of L2 learners to respond to tasks in English........................................87

Table 4.16  Correlation between the fear L2 learners have in responding to tasks in English and the ability of L2 learners to converse in English.................................87

Table 4.17  Correlation between knowledge of phonetic skills (decoding and encoding) and knowledge of English language structure.........................................................88