

Review of: "Improving Literacy in Africa: Changes Needed in Initial Reading in African Languages, and in Learning English as a Second Language"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Although this paper is topical and various research gaps exist in this field, it is not ready for publication.

The paper still requires serious language and technical editing. The paper lacks good argumentation and logical flow. It is also not clear how this paper is contributing to new knowledge.

The title mentions "Africa," but only South Africa and Malawi are mentioned or discussed.

The methodological section and theoretical underpinning of the study need a lot of attention. It is also not clear how an English framework can be used to discuss African languages. Limited knowledge of the orthographical and morphological differences between English and other languages is evident. African languages also can't be grouped together as if they are all the same. The disjunctive and conjunctive nature also needs to be considered, as well as various other orthographical nuances.

Too many old and outdated sources are used.

"Initial Reading in African Languages" – meaning is unclear. Initial reading instruction or emergent reading skills in African languages? Again, if the SVR is the theoretical framework - how does this link?

A lot of problematic statements are made throughout the paper, for example:

"Two crucial pedagogic causes are not mentioned in the literature: Firstly, the phonics approach to reading is prescribed..." (in which language? Prescribed by whom?)

"....but African children cannot say some letter-sounds the way Europeans do, unless they learnt good English early."

What is meant by this? Meaning is unclear. Are you referring to pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds or sounds that do not exist in African languages such as the "th" and "ph"?

"The syllabic approach to reading is more suited to Africa's syllabic languages." – This is a dangerous statement as the empirical and experimental research on this is not clear yet. Also, the phonics approach has been found to be beneficial since African languages often have a transparent orthography – See work by Pretorius and Posthumus. Also, how does this align with the SVR?

Too many sweeping statements and generalisations are made in the paper. For example:

- “Secondly, children are taught reading in two languages simultaneously, confusing them with two sets of letter-sounds”
– Factually incorrect and a terrible generalisation
- “It is due to teachers’ manuals for ESL in Grade 1, e.g., SA’s untried Lesson Plan, which contradicts the Government’s policy of reading only in the HL in Grade 1 while learning ESL orally.” – Meaning is unclear. Poor language structure and again gross generalisation

The data analysis is questionable, and limited ethical considerations were discussed.