

Request for proposals

Support to universities implementing the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP) course on reading pedagogy

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Background

Reading is poorly taught in the majority of South African schools, as evidenced by the fact that 81% of Grade 4 learners failed to attain the lowest benchmark – literal understanding – in the 2021 iteration of the PIRLS¹ assessment. Since children first learn to read best in their mother-tongue, and since many learners speaking African languages performed poorly in the assessment, the improvement of reading in African languages is a most urgent priority. The Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project (SIRP) aims to address this need by developing a course in reading pedagogy for BEd programmes in the Foundation and Intermediate Phase, and assisting Education Faculties to incorporate it into their curricula. This document outlines the terms of reference for the service provider to be appointed as support partner in the implementation of the SIRP course by partner institutions.

SIRP is a partnership between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), JET Education Services (JET) and a number of donors (the Nedbank Foundation, Maitri Trust, Zenex Foundation and Old Mutual Life Assurance). The project is governed by a Project Steering Committee (PSC) consisting of representatives of the donors, the DHET and DBE, the University of Johannesburg, the Primary Teacher Education (PrimTEd) project, and experts in the teaching of reading, with JET acting as the project management office (PMO).

By the end of 2023 SIRP will have completed the production of a 7-module course for reading pedagogy (how to teach reading) to student teachers in three languages: Sesotho, isiZulu and English². Led by the Centre for African Language Teaching at UJ (CALT@UJ), this component has involved over 30 academics at 12 higher education institutions (HEIs) offering BEd programmes in Sesotho and/or isiZulu. The next three years will see SIRP providing support to the 12 HEIs, to advocate for and assist in the incorporation of the SIRP course, in part or whole, into the BEd programmes at these institutions.

This outline has been developed to guide the implementation of the course into initial teacher education (ITE) programmes offered by South African HEIs. It provides an indicative project plan and budget for the support services to be offered to the 12 institutions, alongside a working theory of change based on the PrimTEd standards and the key project outcomes. Specific activities, implementation objectives and conditions of service for the successful bid are also outlined.

SIRP Phase 1: Research and Development

Phase 1 of the project (2019-2023) commenced with a survey of the literacy curricula in BEd programmes in the target languages at all HEIs that train Sesotho and isiZulu teachers. Two private higher education institutions (HEIs) (Embury College, now known as Stadio, and the Independent Institute of Education) and ten public universities (Central University of Technology, North West University, Tshwane University of Technology, University of the Free State, University of Johannesburg, University of South Africa, University of Zululand, University of Kwa-Zulu/Natal, University of Pretoria, and University of the Witwatersrand) were identified as offering BEd

¹ Progress in International Reading Study, conducted every 4 years in over 40 countries.

² The three most commonly spoken African languages in South Africa are isiZulu (spoken by 22,7% of the population), isiXhosa (16%) and Sesotho (9,1%). Since Fort Hare has developed a bilingual isiXhosa/English BEd (FP), and Rhodes University has developed an in-service reading course for teachers in isiXhosa, SIRP has selected isiZulu and Sesotho as its target languages.

programmes to prospective primary school teachers intending to teach in Sesotho and/or isiZulu. The survey concluded that none of these institutions currently offers a comprehensive course in reading pedagogy to teacher education students specialising in the FP and/or IP.

This conclusion captures a key reason underlying the very poor progress made in reading by learners in the first three grades of schooling: current teacher education programmes are not adequately preparing teachers to teach reading in the two target African languages, which undermines the success of their overall efforts. Related research conducted by the Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP) (Bowie and Reed, 2016) and PrimTEd (Taylor and Mawoyo, 2022) indicates that this is also the case for English and the other African languages. This lack of attention to reading pedagogy in BEd programmes indicates the difficulty of SIRP's task in persuading and capacitating university faculties to teach student teachers how to teach reading.

The research was followed by the development of a 7-module course on reading pedagogy with the versioning into both Sesotho and isiZulu to be completed by December 2023. The work is led by the Centre for African Languages Teaching at UJ (CALT@UJ), with the writing and versioning undertaken by faculty members attached to the unit supported by academic staff at a number of the 11 other target universities.

A brief description of the modules is given in the following table:

Module	Title
1	Description of linguistic concepts underlying teaching reading
2	Oral language proficiency development, vocabulary building and motivation for reading
3	Decoding: Alphabetic knowledge, phonological awareness, phonics, morphological awareness & oral reading fluency
4	Reading comprehension
5	Children's literature and teaching reading
6	Integrating the reading components in the classroom
7	Introduction to the Development of Reading, Approaches to Reading and Emergent Literacy

SIRP Phase 2: Implementation

From the first quarter of 2024, the focus of SIRP will move to assisting the 12 partner institutions to incorporate the SIRP modules into their BEd programmes for prospective teachers specialising in the FP and/or IP. Considerable preparation towards this end has been done since 2019. This preparation has focused on working with individuals based at the 12 institutions, building capacity, and commissioning them to write and/or version sections of the modules in English, Sesotho and isiZulu. A workshop in September 2023 continued this work with the team to discuss how to proceed in 2024.

There are important policy developments currently in progress which will provide a climate conducive to the implementation phase of SIRP. These include the current DHET review of the touchstone policy for teacher education, the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), as well as the review of BEd (FP) and (IP) by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), both motivated by the poor preparation of teachers in teaching languages, reading and mathematics in primary schools. Discussions on the finalisation and implementation of Professional Teaching Standards (PTS) by SACE

are also ongoing, while PrimTed has developed standards for the teaching of languages and literacy in South African schools.

To date, the capacity building and advocacy work undertaken by SIRP has been undertaken with individuals who expressed interest in the project, but the focus will now shift to working with a faculty-wide set of academics responsible for teaching languages and literacy at the 12 institutions. The purpose of the present RFP is to secure services to provide support to faculties to assist them to institute curriculum change with respect to the teaching of reading. The selected provider will be formally contracted and on-boarded in early 2024 after a competitive tender process, and continue for the years 2024-2026. This RFP therefore provides for a contract period of three years.

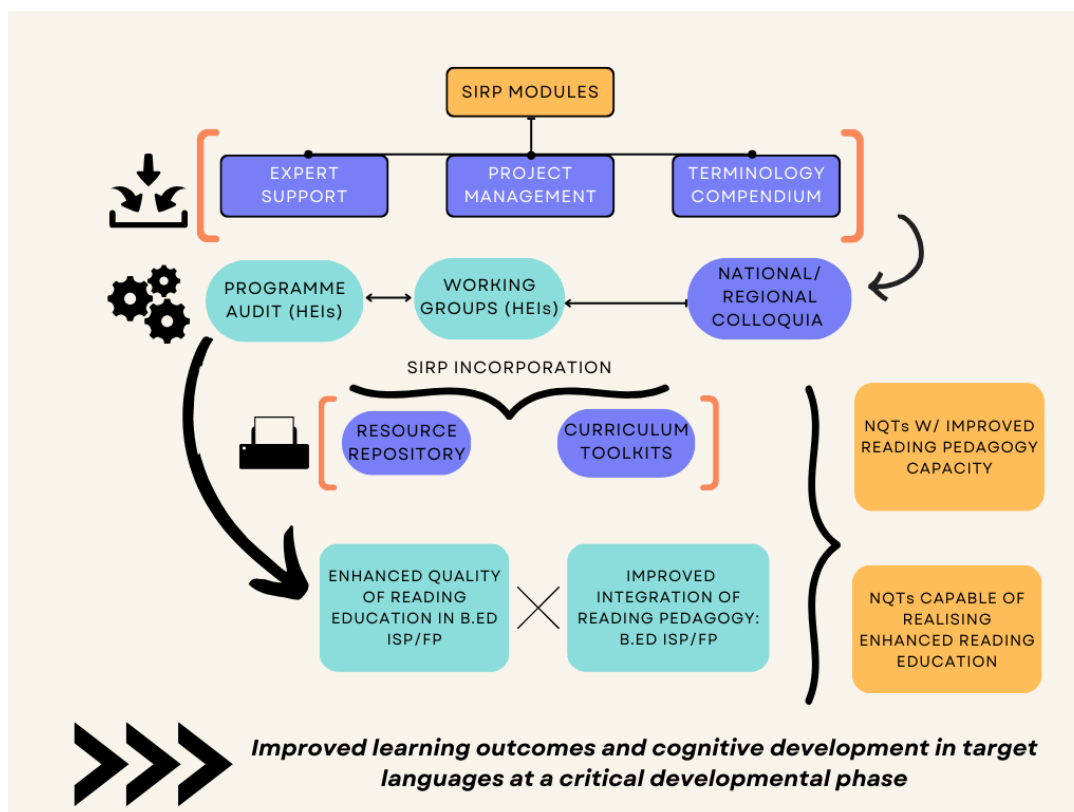
Theory of Change

SIRP emerged from the Literacy Working Group of the PrimTED project, and as such forms part of a broader, multipronged programme, led by DHET, which is geared towards the improvement of primary school education, including through the development of shared knowledge and practice standards for graduate FP and IP teachers. The development of the 7 SIRP modules was underpinned by the PrimTED standards for graduate language and literacy teachers and informed by the five central components of a good reading programme as articulated by the American National Reading Panel (National Reading Panel, 2000) as well as foundational work on reading and literacy conducted in South Africa's multilingual contexts.

PrimTED's work highlights the challenges contributing to South Africa's poor basic education outcomes, including the weak emphasis placed by BEd programmes on reading pedagogy generally, and specifically in African languages (Land et al, 2023). Significant research has pointed to the impact of a 'linguistic mismatch' on the educational attainment of learners who do not speak the language of instruction, which is regularly the case in South Africa (Desai, 2016). Efforts to deploy indigenous languages for teaching and learning have taken place since the turn to democracy in 1994, but, until quite recently, without the necessary investment, resourcing and expertise required to capacitate teachers to teach in these languages (Taylor, 2021). PrimTED's assessment of a cross-section of students in BEd programmes revealed low levels of subject knowledge in languages and mathematics, as well as limited improvement of students' existing knowledge base during the course of the BEd.

This theory of change is based on the following assumptions:

1. BEd graduates without a sound foundation in reading pedagogy will likely not be able to teach reading and writing effectively, constraining how much learners can learn.
2. Tangible reforms are required to improve the quality of reading pedagogy in BEd (FP/IP) programmes, in both English and the African languages
3. Implementing a curriculum reform process such as SIRP will require an effective support architecture that allows HEIs to drive their internal reform processes while also aligning them to shared standards of knowledge and practice.



The internal logic of the theory of change is as follows:

If a rigorous foundation course for teaching reading pedagogy at the FP/IP levels, is developed as part of a high-level collaborative process involving a consortium of teacher education stakeholders, and made available to universities;

And if partner universities audit, review, and integrate SIRP modules into their BEd programmes, as part of a wider process of sharing teaching resources and collaborative networks of practice;

Then graduate teachers educated in SIRP-integrated programmes will learn to teach reading more effectively AND will subsequently teach reading more effectively in the target language(s), than current graduates of BEd (FP/IP) programmes without an integrated reading pedagogy component.

Through dedicated programme support and regular input from literacy and language experts, participant universities will audit their BEd (FP/IP) programmes to identify avenues for integrating SIRP content. Regional working groups will be established to support knowledge-sharing across language communities, underpinned by annual national and regional colloquia to inform planning, resource development, troubleshooting and ongoing scholarship of teaching and learning.

Through the primary task of successfully integrating SIRP modules into the BEd FP/IP programmes of the 12 participant higher education institutions, the programme will deliver concrete outputs that can be shared beyond its programme network, as well as clearly demonstrable outcomes: enhanced quality of reading education in the target languages, as well as improved integration of reading

pedagogy in the BEd (FP/IP). This, in turn, will produce newly qualified teachers (NQTs) with enhanced knowledge of reading pedagogy in the target languages, capable of realising enhanced teaching in the classroom, and contributing to the knowledge base of their schools.

In the long-term, it is likely that improved teaching of reading – foundational capability in the educational process – will contribute to improvements in learning outcomes and cognitive development among learners, given the effect that weak integration of reading in Foundation and Intermediate Phase currently has on learner performance. Moreover, the programme contributes to the growing body of work advocating for more systematic and rigorous integration of indigenous languages in teaching and learning.

Activities

Support provided to 12 HEIs to reform the reading pedagogy component of their BEd FP/IP programmes constitutes the main thrust of SIRP's work in the coming years 2014-26. This RFP aims to contract, through competitive tender, a designated and reputable support partner best able to convene a strong team of teacher educators, literacy experts, materials evaluators and language experts. While responses to JET's request for proposals (RFP) will be accorded leeway to design the programme of support they envisage best able to achieve the project goals, the following activities are proposed at this stage:

- Engagement with deans and leaders of the FP and IP programmes at the 12 HEIs and providing support to drive the implementation of plans of action. The reform of university curricula is a notoriously slow process, involving both internal and external procedures, culminating in approval by DHET and CHE. Strategies will be devised to fast-track these processes.
- Analysis of the literacy curricula in the BEd (FP/IP) programmes at each of the 12 participating HEIs. This analysis will be done against the PrimTEd Language and Literacy standards and the CHE standards devised to guide the Audit of BEd (FP/IP) programmes currently underway.
- Recommendations to revise the BEd (FP/IP) curricula to address any gaps identified in the analysis
- Capacity-building and curriculum-writing workshops for literacy lecturers at participating HEIs.
- Annual national workshop to compare progress and share experiences.
- On-going support at HEI level, including advisory sessions with individual education faculties, assistance with revising curricula and training for lecturing staff.

The development of teaching and learning materials to support lecturers and students teaching and learning the revised curricula is a separate process currently underway.

Expertise and implementation

While it would be preferable for the successful bid to be granted to a single organisation able to deliver the necessary support, consideration will be given to partnerships/ consortium arrangements. In this instance, the primary service provider is responsible for the bid submission and must justify the

rationale for the working relationship, the allocation of functions, and lines of reporting and responsibility.

Given the strategic focus of SIRP on teacher preparation at this stage, the successful bid should demonstrate expertise in the following fields

- Knowledge of higher education and of the work of education faculties in particular
- The teaching of literacy at the higher education level, and scaffolding teacher knowledge with classroom practice for improved learning
- Language expertise in the three target languages

There are also a number of key considerations to be factored into the presentation of the support methodology and plan for implementation of support services. These align with the expertise that should be demonstrated. The successful bid should therefore outline how its approach will be:

- Aligned to the CAPS curriculum and relevant teacher professional standards or codes of practice³
- Based on evidence or experience of specific methods, activities or interventions
- Focused on the improvement of skills and pedagogical knowledge in trainee teachers
- Developmental and collaborative in the modelling and teaching of SIRP content
- Efficient, cost-effective and sustainable
- Considerate of managing risks related to the successful implementation and uptake of the reading pedagogy programme
- Committed to open-source resource storage and knowledge development for wider uptake and impact

Structure and contents of proposal and budget

The prospective budget should provide for one national and three regional workshops annually. It is suggested that the regional working groups be clustered provincially, with North-West and Free State institutions forming one cluster as a predominantly Sesotho-speaking region, and Gauteng and KZN, respectively, providing the locus for the other two.

Each regional group should have a coordinator who supports workshop planning as well as virtual engagements in the course of each year. Free-to-use platforms such as Google Meets or Teams are encouraged for regular check-ins and working sessions, except e.g. in cases where partners have paid Zoom licences. The prospective support partner should detail specific virtual activities to take place between in-person meetings, such as information sessions with literacy experts, lesson modelling, and assessment design.

Monitoring and evaluation is built into the implementation of the support phase, and includes formal evaluation of key performance indicators alongside snap surveys and peer feedback from workshops, virtual sessions, and meetings. Data to track implementation will be collected by the project support provider and JET, against project KPIs, while project impact will be tracked by means of an external evaluation. Simple and free survey tools (e.g. Google Forms) can offset some M&E costs which can be redirected towards paying for quality analysis and consolidation of different data sources into coherent and useful programme feedback. On-going M&E data collection will be built into the annual

³ This could be, for e.g., PrimTed standards, SACE standards, drawn from national policies or based within a specific pedagogic or theoretical rationale.

budget for Professional Services provided by JET, while the external evaluation will be planned and budgeted separately. JET will serve as the overall project management office providing backend and administrative support to the successful support partner and evaluation agency, respectively.

Interested parties should submit a proposal which contains the following components:

- **Method.** This section should form the bulk of the proposal. It should include a description of how the scope of work described above will be fulfilled, key activities and alignment or harmonisation with the current theory of change.
- **Proposed workplan** with tasks, responsible persons, and timeframes spread over three years (2024-26).
- **Budget:** a breakdown of cost allocation per reporting activity. The budget ceiling should not exceed R6 million.
- **Relevant experience and appropriate qualifications.** A brief capacity statement (2-3 pages max), highlighting why the applicant is well positioned to provide the services required. Indicate clearly who the team leader will be. Attach short biographies/CVs of key personnel who will be undertaking the work.
- **References:** Names and contact information of three referees.

Please note

- Proposals should not exceed 15 pages. CVs and reference documents should be included as annexures (exceeding the 15-page limit).
- Prices should be exclusive of VAT, but the proposal should indicate whether VAT will be charged.
- Prices quoted shall be all inclusive of all costs and shall remain fixed for the duration of the contract.

Evaluation criteria

Proposals will be evaluated against the following non-exhaustive list of criteria:

- Technical quality of the proposal, inclusive of suitability to conduct evaluations of this kind: 50%.
- Relevant experience and appropriate qualifications of the service provider to execute the assignment: 30%.
- BBEE: 10%.
- Cost 10%

JET Education Services adheres to strict procurement and tender processes to ensure affordability, efficiency, equity and sound financial governance. As the PMO for the overall SIRP project, JET will oversee the tender processes for the support partner and evaluation provider, respectively. JET's procurement standards for vendors, goods and services should also be followed by providers unless otherwise agreed.

Instructions for Participating in the RFP

In the interest of efficiency and of procedural fairness to all proposers, the following timelines will be strictly adhered to:

Date	Activity
13 December 2023	RFP advertised.
9 January 2024	Briefing to potential bidders. Please indicate attendance to tarryn@jet.org.za by 3 January 2024.
11 January 2024	Deadline for clarificatory questions from bidders, to be submitted to the email address given below.
12 January 2024	Response to questions circulated to potential bidders.
26 January 2024	Proposal submission deadline 12pm via email to ntaylor@jet.org.za AND tarryn@jet.org.za
2 February 2024	Shortlisting and due diligence (compliance) check complete.
6-9 February 2024	Virtual presentations by shortlisted candidates.
15 February 2024	Notifying selected service provider, with appointment letter.
26 February 2024	Contracting and final sign off

Submission details

Intentions to bid, questions of clarification and the full proposal all to be submitted by 12h00 midday on the days specified above by email to Nick Taylor ntaylor@jet.org.za and Tarryn de Kock tarryn@jet.org.za

Conditions and reporting requirements

The service provider will be required to submit monthly reports to the PMO indicating progress to date, and to attend regular management meetings to oversee progress, monitor changes and provide updates on key milestones and events including the workshop programme and working groups.

The service provider may be required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. The service provider will use its own office resources, equipment and materials in the execution of this assignment. The service provider's fee shall be inclusive of all office administrative costs.

Payment schedules will be negotiated as part of the contracting and will be affected according to the Payment Schedule and upon receipt of an invoice made out to JET, and upon satisfactory delivery of the key deliverables. Any deliverable submitted and not meeting the specifications must be reworked and resubmitted at no additional cost to JET.

All drafts and final documents, as well as related data collection instruments and data, will be the property of JET Education Services as the managing agent after completion or at key points and cycles in time as requested, and will be handed over with full title rights. The service provider will be acknowledged for the work done in the draft documents as well as the final document, except if the document is published as official policy or a document of PRIMTed; then the discretion to do this lies solely with PRIMTed in accordance with its policies and procedures.

The service provider shall, at all times, keep information obtained during the work assignment confidential and shall not circulate the documents, data, or any part thereof, or any reworked version thereof, at any stage, to any party without the explicit permission of JET and the PMO.

The service provider shall not publish the documents, data, or any part thereof, or any reworked version thereof, without the explicit permission of JET and the PMO, under such conditions that both parties will agree to.

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