

Request for proposals

Evaluation of the take-up and impact of the Sesotho and isiZulu Reading Project

13 December 2023



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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 PIRLS assessment (see Appendix B for detail), 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 to oversee the external evaluation of the implementation of the SIRP course by higher education institutions (HEIs).

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 design 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 HEIs offering BEd programmes in Sesotho and/or isiZulu. The next three years will see SIRP contracting a dedicated partner to provide support to the 12 HEIs in order 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 evaluation of the implementation of the SIRP course into initial teacher education (ITE) programmes offered by South African HEIs. The support to HEIs described above will be accompanied by an external evaluation, contracted to a reputable agency through competitive tender. Specific activities, implementation objectives and conditions of service for the successful bid for the evaluation component 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 the reason for the very poor progress made by learners in learning how to read 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. The versioning into both Sesotho and isiZulu will be completed by December 2023. The work is led by CALT@UJ, and the writing and versioning is being undertaken by faculty members attached to the unit, with support from academic staff at a number of the 11 other universities, listed above, which offer BEd degrees in one or both of the two target languages.

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 teachers specialising in the FP and/or IP. Considerable preparation towards this end has been done since 2019. This preparation is focused on working with individuals based at the 12 institutions, building capacity, commissioning them to write and/or version sections of the modules in English, Sesotho and isiZulu.

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

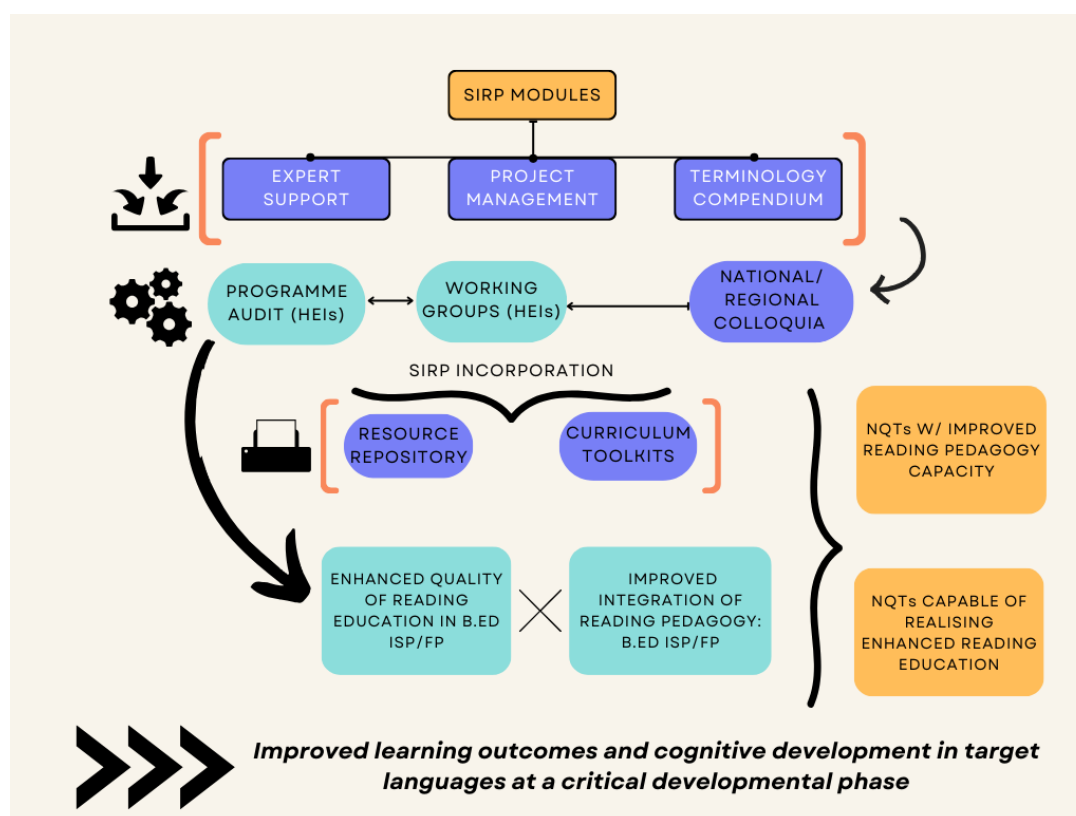
(National Reading Panel, 2000) as well as foundational work on reading and literacy conducted in South Africa’s multilingual contexts.

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 ‘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.

Figure 1: SIRP Theory of Change



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 FP/IP programmes without an integrated reading pedagogy component.

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 - a 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.

A support partner will be contracted to oversee the uptake and implementation of SIRP modules at participant institutions, providing day-to-day and structured support in curriculum reform, technical language development and pedagogic practice. A rigorous external evaluation, commissioned to an agency independent of the support partner, will assess the progress and impact of the implementation phase. The evaluation will provide important insights into the process of reading pedagogy development within teacher education for indigenous languages.

The external evaluation has three key objectives, which will entail assessing the extent to which:

- Education faculties at the 12 target institutions are incorporating parts or the whole of the SIRP programme into their BEd curricula. This component will collect data by means of interviews with faculty staff and document analysis.
- Students and lecturers find the materials accessible and useful. This component will follow a qualitative approach consisting of interviews with students and lecturers.

- BEd students are absorbing the lessons offered by the SIRP modules. This component will follow a quantitative methodology using a test to assess students' knowledge of reading pedagogy, and comparing their learning gains against those of a comparable group of students who are not receiving the SIRP programme. A service provider (Funda Wande) is currently constructing and piloting a test to be used for this purpose. The test is based on the SIRP modules and will be piloted before being finalised in preparation for baseline to be established early in 2024.

Mid-line and end-line reports should cover all three components and include recommendations for improving the design and implementation of the SIRP course, and the types of support required by faculties.

Evaluation objectives

Objective 1 is a process indicator focused on the successful uptake and integration of SIRP into the BEd programmes at target HEIs. Objective 2 assesses the extent to which lecturers and students find the SIRP course accessible and useful, a factor which impacts the depth of its uptake. Objective 3 considers the impact of SIRP-integrated curricula on the knowledge of reading pedagogy of BEd students at target HEIs. The administration of the test in the first quarter of 2024 (baseline) and in the last quarter of years 2024-26 is central to Objective 3.

Objective 1: Enhanced quality and capacity in the teaching of reading for BEd FP/IP at target HEIs

OUTCOME	ACTIVITY	DATA SOURCE	INDICATOR(S)
Contextually-sound incorporation of SIRP modules into the teacher education programmes of participant institutions	Programme audit, integration of SIRP into programme design	Curriculum and module documents; assessments, activities; survey and interview data: teacher educators	-SIRP integration aligns with programme theory and pedagogical model (document analysis) - Teacher educators have participated in a rigorous and collaborative process in making reforms
Strengthened teacher education for indigenous reading pedagogy at participant institutions	Regional and national colloquia; resource repository and compendium; integration of SIRP into programme design	Survey data: student teachers Survey and interview data: teacher educators Select interviews: head of programme/ school	- Teacher educators and faculty report specific changes/ improvements to the teaching of reading following SIRP integration. - student teachers report improved knowledge, understanding and/or practical capacity following integration.

Objective 2: Accessibility and usefulness of the SIRP course for lecturers and students

OUTCOME	ACTIVITY	DATA SOURCE	INDICATOR(S)
SIRP modules are effectively retooled and contextualised for different programmes, strengthening the	Revision of SIRP modules	Survey & interview data: teacher educators, students Document analysis: curriculum and reporting documents	- Teacher educators engage in a cumulative process of SIRP integration and contextualisation - Teacher educators and students report positive uptake

relevance and usefulness of the modules			of SIRP content and use in practice by student teachers
Student teachers find SIRP content to be accessible, and useful in their teaching; teacher educators continuously engage with the accessibility and relevance of the course during implementation.	Integration of SIRP in target programme policy and practice	Survey data: teacher educators and students.	-Students report being able to engage with SIRP content with understanding, translating this into concrete improvements in their teaching practice. - Teacher educators identify and implement useful modifications as they learn from teaching the SIRP materials within their institutional context.

Objective 3: NQTs from participant programmes are better equipped to teach reading in the target languages/ phases

OUTCOME	ACTIVITY	DATA SOURCE	INDICATOR(S)
Students possess enhanced knowledge of reading pedagogy in the target languages, compared to non-SIRP NQTs	Students taught reading pedagogy using SIRP-integrated curricula	Survey data: teacher educators and students. Assessment tool: fundamentals of reading pedagogy. Practicum feedback reports.	- NQTs demonstrate enhanced knowledge of reading pedagogy, compared to non-SIRP NQTs, in a standardised assessment tool - Teacher educators and mentor teachers report positive improvements in student teachers' demonstration of reading pedagogy knowledge

Important risk factors need to be considered in planning M&E and overseeing reporting phases. The institutions participating in the programme vary in the scope and size of their Education faculty, school or department, as well as the socio-economic profile of staff and students. UNISA, for example, has older and working students studying via distance education; yet it accounts for 40% of the teachers trained in South Africa (DHET, 2021). The institutions vary between public and private, and even within the public sector different institutions are inflected by historic, economic and academic inequities. This will need to be considered in the processes and forms of data gathering, approaches taken with different faculties, as well as the determining of timelines.

Activities and timeline

Monitoring and evaluation is built into the implementation of the support provider, 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 (i.e. this RFP). JET will serve as the overall project management office providing backend and administrative support to the successful support partner and evaluation agency, respectively.

The evaluation and support partners, respectively, will therefore need to work together from time to time, and both partners will be required to share information and updates with the PMO, especially for monitoring purposes. This may also support some changes to the envisioned activities of the

evaluating partner. Moreover, the successful bid may motivate for alternative evaluation methods that harmonise with the overall project outcomes.

Key activities of the evaluation partner include:

- Sharing access to core M&E data and materials with support partner and PMO, alongside maintaining an organised data bank of all activities and relevant communications
- Mapping indicators of performance, process and/or impact against the theory of change, in collaboration with key SIRP members
- Gathering, managing and analysing additional statistical or empirical data to support tracking against designated indicators
- Reporting on key insights, performance and improvement, as well as quality management, on a periodic basis over the project lifespan.

The evaluation timeline is set out below. While set data collection periods have been outlined, there will also be a need for ongoing collection, collation and updating of available data. This will require both a secure data log for each institution's materials, and other forms of data collection to supplement the evaluation process, alongside a master log to manage different sources.

PERIOD	ACTION
YEAR 1: 2024	<p>March-May: baseline data collection and analysis, including test administration to a sample of students in 12 HEIs and comparison group</p> <p>Sept: receive curriculum document analysis from agency providing Support to HEIs; qualitative research</p> <p>August-October: collection of practicum and academic advisor reports; test and survey of student teachers; survey of teacher educators.</p>
YEAR 2: 2025	<p>Jan: finalisation of Year 1 report; initial reflection against indicators</p> <p>August-October: collection and analysis of any updates to curriculum documents, programme documents, and course activities; qualitative research including observations at select HEIs.</p> <p>collection of practicum and academic advisor reports; test and survey of student teachers; survey of teacher educators</p>
YEAR 3: 2026	<p>Jan: finalisation of Year 2 report; year-on-year reflection against indicators; updates or changes</p> <p>August-October: collection of practicum and academic advisor reports; test and survey of student teachers; survey of teacher educators</p> <p>: collection and analysis of any updates to curriculum documents, programme documents, and course activities</p> <p>Nov-Dec: finalisation of all data sources in preparation for close-out report.</p>
2027	Jan: finalisation of Year 3 report

Expertise and implementation requirements

The successful bid should demonstrate expertise in the following fields

- Programme evaluation, including both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- The teaching of literacy at the higher education level.
- Language expertise in the three target languages

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

- Based on evidence or experience of specific methods, activities or interventions
- Able to deliver on clear indicators of improvement in the skills and pedagogical knowledge in trainee teachers
- Focused on data collection and analysis that yields rich insight for developmental and improvement purposes
- Efficient, cost-effective and sustainable
- Committed to open-source resource storage and knowledge development for wider uptake and impact

Structure and contents of proposal and budget

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 and clear explanation of the evaluation logic underpinning the workplan.
- **Proposed workplan** with tasks, responsible persons, and timeframes.
- **Budget:** a breakdown of cost allocation per reporting activity. The budget ceiling should not exceed R5million.
- **Relevant experience and appropriate qualification.** 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%.
- BBBEE: 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 to Ms Tarryn de Kock at tarryn@jet.org.za. No late submissions will be considered.

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 provide updates on key milestones, data collection and data management, and shared monitoring activities.

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 PRIMTed and 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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