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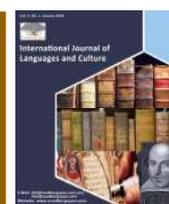
Research Paper

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The Impact of Sociocultural Theory on Teaching African Languages in the Foundation Phase

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Abstract

This article explores the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase, emphasizing the importance of social interaction and cultural context in early language learning. Despite the critical role of African languages in fostering cultural identity and cognitive development, effective instruction is hindered by limited teaching resources, inadequate teacher training, and insufficient integration of cultural practices. Using Vygotsky's concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), scaffolding, and social mediation as a theoretical framework, the study employed a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 15 Foundation Phase teachers, and focus group discussions with 30 parents from three rural schools in Limpopo, South Africa. Thematic analysis revealed that incorporating cultural practices and social interaction significantly improved learner engagement and language comprehension. However, many teachers lacked training in applying sociocultural strategies, limiting effective scaffolding and cultural mediation. The article recommends targeted teacher development programmes and the integration of locally relevant cultural content into curricula and teaching materials. Overall, the study demonstrates that sociocultural theory offers practical insights for enhancing African language instruction in the Foundation Phase, promoting both linguistic proficiency and cultural identity.

Keywords: African languages, Foundation phase, Language teaching, Cultural practices

1. Introduction

Teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase is important for helping young learners develop language skills and a strong cultural identity. The Foundation Phase is the first stage of education, where children start to build essential literacy skills that influence their understanding of language and culture. Therefore, it is important that language teaching in these early years is both academically sound and culturally meaningful. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides useful ideas on how children learn language through social interaction, cultural experiences, and support from others.

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According to Vygotsky (1978), language is best learned when children interact with others in a cultural setting and receive guidance from more knowledgeable individuals. Applying this theory to African language teaching in the Foundation Phase can help improve language learning and preserve cultural heritage.

Although African languages are important for children's cognitive growth and cultural identity, there are challenges in teaching them effectively in South African classrooms. Problems such as a lack of teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, and limited culturally relevant materials make it difficult to teach African languages successfully. These challenges are more serious in rural schools, where teachers may not have the necessary skills to include sociocultural methods in their lessons (Makoni and Pennycook, 2019). African languages are often not given enough attention in the education system, which limits the use of sociocultural strategies in teaching. It is important to explore how concepts from Vygotsky's theory, such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, can be used to overcome these challenges and improve teaching methods.

This article aims to examine the impact of sociocultural theory on teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase. It focuses on how social interaction, cultural elements, and teacher support can be included in classroom activities to create effective learning environments. Using a qualitative research approach, this article will gather information from Foundation Phase teachers and parents in rural schools where African languages are taught. The research will explore how sociocultural elements can improve student engagement, understanding, and language skills.

This article is important because it shows the need for teacher training programs that help educators apply sociocultural methods in their teaching. By promoting culturally responsive teaching, the article will contribute to improving African language education in South Africa. It will ensure that the Foundation Phase supports both language development and cultural identity for young learners.

2. Background of Study

African languages play a crucial role in shaping learners' cognitive development and cultural awareness. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a medium through which cultural values, traditions, and worldviews are transmitted from one generation to another. Despite their significance, the teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase faces numerous challenges that hinder effective instruction. These challenges include inadequate teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, and the minimal integration of cultural practices into the curriculum. In many South African schools, particularly in rural areas, there is a lack of textbooks and learning materials that reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners. This shortage limits the ability of teachers to provide meaningful and contextually relevant instruction.

Many educators lack the necessary training to implement effective language teaching strategies that incorporate cultural elements. Without sufficient professional development, teachers may struggle to create classroom environments that support meaningful interactions and scaffolded learning experiences.

The marginalization of African languages within the broader educational system also poses a significant challenge. English and other widely spoken languages are often prioritized, leading to limited support for African language instruction. This marginalization affects not only the availability of resources but also the perception of African languages as being less valuable in formal education settings. As a result, learners may experience difficulty in developing a positive attitude toward their mother tongue.

Sociocultural theory offers a valuable framework for addressing these challenges by emphasizing the importance of learning through social interactions and cultural context. According to Vygotsky (1978), language acquisition is a socially mediated process where learners develop their understanding through interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults. Key concepts such as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding provide practical strategies for teachers to support learners in their language learning journey. By integrating cultural elements and promoting collaborative learning, sociocultural approaches can enhance learners' proficiency and foster a deeper appreciation of their linguistic heritage.

The effective teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase requires a holistic approach that integrates sociocultural principles into instructional practices. Addressing the challenges related to resources, teacher training, and curriculum design will be crucial in ensuring that learners develop strong language skills while maintaining a connection to their cultural roots.

3. Problem Statement

Many teachers struggle to incorporate culturally responsive pedagogies that reflect the linguistic diversity of learners, which results in reduced engagement and limited language acquisition. The absence of structured training on sociocultural approaches prevents educators from effectively implementing teaching methods that leverage learners' cultural backgrounds and social interactions to facilitate meaningful language learning (Nkosi, 2021). These challenges contribute to a gap in the effective teaching and learning of African languages, ultimately affecting learners' proficiency and their connection to their cultural heritage.

This article seeks to investigate how sociocultural theory can provide effective solutions to these challenges by emphasizing social interaction and cultural relevance in language instruction. Sociocultural theory, particularly through its concepts of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding, offers a framework for designing instructional strategies that support learners within their cultural contexts. By exploring how teachers and learners interact in culturally meaningful ways, the article aims to identify strategies that promote deeper linguistic understanding and cultural appreciation. Addressing these issues is crucial for ensuring that African language instruction in the Foundation Phase is both effective and reflective of learners' cultural identities.

4. Aim

This article aims to explore the impact of sociocultural theory on the teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase to enhance learners' linguistic and cultural competence. To achieve this aim, the article seeks to address the following research questions:

5. Research Questions

1. How does the integration of cultural practices influence the teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase?
2. What role does scaffolding play in improving learners' proficiency in African languages?
3. How do teachers perceive the application of sociocultural strategies in teaching African languages?
4. What challenges do teachers face in implementing sociocultural approaches to language instruction?

6. Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's *sociocultural theory* serves as the theoretical framework for this article, providing valuable insights into how African languages can be effectively taught in the Foundation Phase. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is inherently a social process, and language development occurs through meaningful interactions within a learner's cultural environment. This perspective is particularly relevant to the teaching of African languages, where cultural context plays a crucial role in shaping language acquisition and use. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that children learn best when they engage in social interactions with more knowledgeable peers and adults who can guide their learning through support and encouragement.

One of the key concepts within sociocultural theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance and support (Daniels, 2020). In the context of teaching African languages, the ZPD can be utilized to identify areas where learners need assistance and to provide targeted support to help them develop linguistic proficiency. Teachers can employ instructional strategies that gradually build on learners' existing language skills, enabling them to reach higher levels of competence. By understanding the ZPD, educators can tailor their teaching approaches to meet the unique linguistic needs of their learners, ensuring that they receive appropriate support at each stage of their language development.

Scaffolding is another essential component of sociocultural theory that is relevant to this article. Scaffolding involves providing temporary support to learners until they can perform a task independently (Wood *et al.*, 1976). In African language instruction, scaffolding techniques such as modelling correct pronunciation, providing contextual examples, and encouraging peer collaboration can help learners grasp complex linguistic concepts. Effective scaffolding allows learners to gradually develop their language skills in a structured and supportive environment, ultimately leading to greater confidence and competence in using African languages.

Social mediation, another core element of sociocultural theory, highlights the importance of cultural tools and social interactions in learning (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Through social mediation, learners acquire language by engaging in

meaningful conversations with teachers, peers, and community members. This process is particularly significant in African language teaching, where storytelling, traditional songs, and cultural expressions can be used as valuable instructional tools. By incorporating culturally relevant content into the curriculum, educators can create a more engaging and meaningful learning experience for learners.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing the teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase. The concepts of the ZPD, scaffolding, and social mediation emphasize the importance of social interaction and cultural context in language acquisition. Applying these principles in the classroom can help address the challenges faced in African language instruction and foster a deeper connection between learners and their linguistic heritage.

6.1. Conceptualization of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)**, introduced by Lev Vygotsky in the early 20th century, plays a central role in the application of sociocultural theory in education, particularly in language acquisition. The ZPD refers to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with the guidance or support of a more knowledgeable individual, such as a teacher, peer, or parent (Vygotsky, 1978). It is a dynamic, context-dependent space where learning occurs most effectively, as it allows for the gradual transfer of responsibility from the teacher to the learner, ensuring the learner is both challenged and supported appropriately (Wood *et al.*, 1976).

In the context of teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase, the ZPD is especially relevant. Young learners, especially in multilingual settings, are often in the early stages of acquiring African languages, with varying levels of language proficiency. The ZPD framework allows teachers to assess learners' current language capabilities and design instruction that meets their developmental needs. This is essential for fostering the linguistic and cultural competence of learners, as it ensures that the language instruction is neither too easy nor too difficult but is scaffolded in a way that promotes growth.

Through the application of ZPD, teachers can identify which language tasks learners can perform independently and which tasks require support. This understanding enables educators to provide tailored interventions, such as guided practice, interactive discussions, or the use of appropriate resources that help bridge the gap between a learner's current abilities and their potential for learning. For instance, when teaching African languages, a teacher may start by engaging learners in basic conversational activities, providing visual aids, or using gestures to reinforce meaning. As learners' understanding grows, the teacher can introduce more complex linguistic structures, encouraging learners to take on increasing levels of responsibility in their language use (Vygotsky, 1978).

ZPD underscores the importance of social interaction in language learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory highlights that cognitive development is deeply rooted in social experiences, and language is acquired through meaningful interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). In this regard, ZPD in the Foundation Phase emphasizes the role of peers, parents, and teachers as vital collaborators in the learning process. For example, group activities or collaborative storytelling in the African language can help reinforce learners' understanding while providing opportunities for social engagement that contribute to both cognitive and linguistic development.

The concept of ZPD offers a practical framework for teaching African languages to young learners, facilitating a supportive learning environment where teachers can scaffold language development according to the learner's individual needs. By applying the principles of ZPD, educators are better equipped to enhance learners' African language proficiency, fostering not only linguistic skills but also a deeper connection to cultural identity.

7. Literature Review

7.1. Sociocultural Theory in Language Teaching

Sociocultural theory (SCT), grounded in the work of Lev Vygotsky, highlights the essential role of social interaction, cultural tools, and the community in language acquisition. In language teaching, particularly for African languages in the Foundation Phase, SCT emphasizes collaborative learning and guided participation, where learners acquire language through active engagement with others and the use of cultural and linguistic resources (Vygotsky, 1978). According to SCT, language learning is a social process that occurs through joint activity and dialogue, especially in a supportive environment where learners interact with more knowledgeable peers or adults (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). This approach aligns well with teaching young children, who benefit from social, communicative activities that enhance their language skills (Moll, 2014).

Research supports the effectiveness of SCT in African language instruction, demonstrating the benefits of collaborative learning and scaffolding. Studies such as Nyathi (2020) found that learners who engaged in scaffolding

environments, working with teachers and peers, showed improved language proficiency, engagement, and retention (Swain, 2006). Scaffolding, a core element of SCT, involves providing temporary support to help learners achieve tasks they cannot do independently, gradually reducing the assistance as learners become more capable. Techniques such as visual aids and guided practice are common in African language teaching to support learners' understanding of vocabulary and grammar (Wood, 2021).

Sociocultural theory also emphasizes the integration of cultural context in language learning. Vygotsky (1978) argued that language is a tool not only for communication but for thinking, and thus, language instruction should incorporate cultural practices that resonate with the learners' experiences. In teaching African languages, including cultural elements like storytelling, proverbs, and songs strengthens learners' connection to the language and fosters cultural understanding, which is particularly important in the Foundation Phase when children are forming their identities (Bamgbose, 2019).

However, challenges remain in applying SCT to African language teaching, including the shortage of trained teachers familiar with sociocultural principles and the limited resources, particularly in rural schools (Mkhize, 2021). Despite these obstacles, SCT offers valuable insights for enhancing language acquisition and cultural identity development in young learners. By focusing on collaborative learning, scaffolding, and cultural relevance, SCT presents a powerful approach for promoting inclusive and effective language teaching in the Foundation Phase.

7.2. Challenges in Teaching African Languages

Teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase faces several challenges that hinder effective language learning. One of the main challenges is the lack of trained teachers who are skilled in both the language and the teaching methods required for African language instruction. In many areas, teachers do not have enough knowledge of the languages they are teaching, which results in ineffective language lessons (Mkhize, 2021). This problem is especially common in rural and under-resourced schools, where there is a high need for qualified language teachers but a shortage of such educators. As a result, many teachers find it difficult to use sociocultural theory (SCT), which includes concepts like scaffolding and collaborative learning, in their teaching practices.

Another challenge is the lack of educational resources, such as books, visual aids, and digital tools, needed to apply sociocultural theory in the classroom. This shortage is especially common in rural schools, where such resources are often limited (Mkhize, 2021). (Mkhize, 2021). Without these materials, teachers are unable to provide the guided learning experiences that are essential for helping young learners develop their language skills. A key aspect of SCT, incorporating cultural context into lessons, is harder when culturally relevant materials—like stories, songs, and proverbs—are unavailable (Bamgbose, 2019). These cultural tools help connect language learning to the students' own lives and experiences, making the learning process more meaningful.

A further challenge is the social and linguistic environment in which many young learners live. In urban areas, where children may be exposed to multiple languages, African languages are often less valued compared to dominant languages like English or Afrikaans. This shift can negatively affect learners' interest and proficiency in African languages (Mkhize, 2021). Foundation Phase learners may not have many opportunities to practice their home language outside of the classroom, limiting their exposure and affecting their language development. This situation creates a barrier to applying SCT, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and integrating language learning into everyday life.

While sociocultural theory offers valuable strategies for teaching African languages, there are several challenges that limit its effectiveness. To improve African language teaching in the Foundation Phase, it is important to address the shortage of trained teachers, provide more educational resources, and create a more language-rich environment for young learners.

7.3. Scaffolding and Social Interaction in Language Learning

Scaffolding is an important concept in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT), which plays a key role in helping learners acquire language, especially in the Foundation Phase. Scaffolding refers to the support provided by teachers or more knowledgeable peers to help learners accomplish tasks that they cannot yet do on their own. In teaching African languages, scaffolding involves various methods that help learners develop language skills gradually, with less support as they become more skilled (Wood, 2021). This approach helps learners progress within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where they can learn new language skills with help but are not yet able to do it independently.

Scaffolding is crucial in the Foundation Phase, where young learners are developing language skills. Teachers can use several scaffolding strategies, such as modeling language, giving cues, repeating instructions, or using visual aids to help learners understand. Nyathi (2020) suggests that when scaffolding is used effectively, it improves learners' language skills by allowing them to practice language in real contexts. This is supported by Swain (2006), who notes that

learners benefit from collaborative dialogue, where they can discuss and clarify language concepts with their teachers and peers. These interactions help learners not only improve their language knowledge but also develop cognitive skills that enhance their understanding.

Social interaction is another important part of SCT in language learning. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that language is a tool for social interaction, and learners learn language most effectively when they engage with others. In the Foundation Phase, young children develop language skills through both instruction and social interactions with their peers. Studies show that children who work together in social settings, such as group work or cooperative tasks, are more likely to improve their language skills (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). For example, in African language classrooms, when learners work together to practice conversations, role-play, or create stories, they use the language in more meaningful ways than when working individually.

Social interaction also allows learners to practice language in real-life situations, which helps them understand and remember language structures and vocabulary. By talking to peers, learners get the chance to experiment with language, receive feedback, and refine their skills. This social aspect of language learning is in line with SCT's focus on the importance of context and collaboration in learning.

Scaffolding and social interaction are essential to teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase. Scaffolding provides learners with the necessary support to develop their language skills, while social interaction enables learners to use language in real-life contexts, promoting deeper cognitive involvement. Together, these elements create an environment that supports language acquisition, following the principles of sociocultural theory.

7.4. Cultural Context and Its Role in Language Acquisition

Cultural context is an essential factor in language acquisition, especially in the Foundation Phase, where young learners are most open to connecting language to their daily lives. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) emphasizes that learning is influenced by social and cultural factors, and language acquisition is no different. When teaching African languages, incorporating cultural elements into the learning process enhances both understanding and student engagement, making language instruction more relevant and meaningful. This aligns with SCT's focus on the relationship between language, culture, and cognition (Vygotsky, 1978).

In teaching African languages, it is important to use culturally relevant materials, such as stories, proverbs, songs, and rituals, to make connections between language and the learners' environment. According to Bamgbose (2019), African languages are not just tools for communication but are deeply linked to cultural identity, values, and traditions. By incorporating these cultural elements into the classroom, teachers can provide students with a more comprehensive language learning experience, which goes beyond just vocabulary and grammar.

Cultural context also affects how language is used in social settings. African languages often include specific ways of showing respect, distinctions based on age, and social roles, all of which influence how language is spoken. When learners engage with the language in culturally meaningful situations, they learn not only how to speak but also how to interact appropriately in different social settings. Mkhize (2021) stresses that neglecting these cultural aspects in teaching can lead to incomplete or incorrect language learning, as students may miss out on important elements like polite speech forms, addressing elders, or using formal and informal language correctly.

The cultural environment in which learners grow up can significantly impact their language development. In many urban areas, where African languages are often overshadowed by languages like English or Afrikaans, children may have fewer opportunities to practice their home languages outside of school. This lack of exposure to African languages in everyday life can create a barrier to language acquisition. As Bamgbose (2019) points out, the home environment, where language use is naturally integrated into cultural practices, plays a crucial role in reinforcing what students learn in the classroom.

Integrating cultural context into African language teaching is vital for promoting both linguistic and cognitive development in the Foundation Phase. By teaching language in a culturally relevant way, learners not only develop vocabulary and grammar but also build a deeper connection to their cultural heritage. This approach strengthens the link bet.

8. Methodology

The aricle adopted a qualitative research paradigm to explore the lived experiences of teachers and parents in teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase. A case study design was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by focusing on specific settings and participants. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the complexities surrounding African language teaching in rural schools. Data were gathered through interviews and observations, providing rich, context-specific insights into the experiences of both teachers and parents.

The data collection process involved classroom observations to understand how African languages were taught in real-time, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 15 Foundation Phase teachers. These interviews provided an opportunity to delve into the teachers' experiences, teaching strategies, challenges, and perceptions about language learning. Focus group discussions with 30 parents were conducted to capture their views and experiences related to their children's language learning at home and in school. The research targeted Foundation Phase teachers and parents in rural schools where African languages are part of the curriculum.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experience and knowledge in teaching or supporting the learning of African languages. The study was conducted in three rural schools located in the Limpopo Province, ensuring that the sample accurately reflected the context of rural education. Participants were carefully selected to represent a diverse range of perspectives, ensuring that the data captured the complexities of language teaching in these settings.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, identifying recurring patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. This analysis helped to uncover insights into how teachers and parents perceive and contribute to the language learning process. The study was delimited to three rural schools in Limpopo Province, excluding urban schools to focus specifically on rural educational settings and challenges.

To ensure the *trustworthiness of the study*, multiple strategies were employed, including triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants to validate findings, and maintaining an audit trail to document the research process. Ethical considerations were a priority throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities, informed consent was secured from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained. The research also respected cultural sensitivities, ensuring that participants' views and experiences were treated with respect and care.

9. Presentation of Findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the study, exploring key themes that emerged from the data collected through interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. The findings highlight important aspects of teaching African languages in the Foundation Phase, particularly through the lens of sociocultural theory. The analysis covers four main themes: the role of cultural practices in language acquisition, the importance of teacher training and professional development, the impact of parental involvement, and the challenges faced in implementing sociocultural approaches to language learning. These themes provide valuable insights into the factors that influence language acquisition in rural schools and offer a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in teaching African languages within this context.

Theme 1: The Role of Cultural Practices in Language Acquisition

The findings suggest that the integration of cultural stories and traditional songs into African language teaching plays a significant role in enhancing learner engagement. Participants highlighted that using culturally relevant materials made language lessons more interesting and meaningful for young learners. One teacher stated, "When we use stories from our culture, the children seem to connect better with the language. It's not just about words; it's about their identity". Another teacher shared, "Traditional songs bring the language alive, and the children are more motivated to participate". These responses reflect the importance of cultural context in language learning, which is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) assertion that language acquisition is deeply embedded in the social and cultural experiences of the learners. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that learners acquire language not only by interacting with teachers and peers but also by engaging with the broader cultural context in which they live. In this case, using cultural stories and songs as teaching tools allows students to engage more deeply with both the language and the culture, creating a more holistic learning experience.

The integration of cultural elements also facilitated more natural language use, as children could relate to the content and context. One parent mentioned, "My child talks about the stories they hear at school at home. It's not just about learning the language but about understanding our culture". This illustrates how cultural stories and songs serve not only as language learning tools but also as vehicles for passing on cultural knowledge. This view aligns with Bamgbose's (2019) argument that African languages are closely tied to cultural identity. When children learn language through culturally relevant materials, they not only gain linguistic skills but also strengthen their connection to their cultural heritage, which is a critical aspect of language learning in the African context.

These cultural practices provide a platform for meaningful social interaction, which is vital for language acquisition. As Swain (2006) suggests, language learning is most effective when learners engage in collaborative and interactive activities that allow them to negotiate meaning and use language in authentic contexts. In this article, the incorporation of cultural stories and songs allowed students to practice language in real-life, socially relevant situations. This approach

also enabled students to see the practical application of language in their daily lives, fostering deeper understanding and motivation to continue learning.

The integration of cultural stories and songs enhances both engagement and language acquisition by making lessons more relatable and grounded in the students' lived experiences. The participants' responses support the view that cultural context enriches the language learning experience, making it more meaningful and deeply connected to the learners' lives, identities, and cultural heritage. This approach not only promotes language skills but also reinforces cultural pride and identity, which are essential components of African language education.

Theme 2: Teacher Training and Professional Development

The findings indicate that a significant barrier to effective teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase is the lack of training in sociocultural strategies. Participants emphasized that without adequate professional development in this area, teachers struggle to integrate culturally relevant materials and teaching approaches into their language instruction. One teacher expressed, "We were never trained on how to use cultural stories or songs in the classroom. We just teach the basics of the language without thinking about the cultural significance." This response reflects a gap in teacher training that prevents educators from fully utilizing the sociocultural potential of African language instruction.

Another teacher echoed this concern, stating, "Cultural context is very important for language learning, but I don't have the skills to incorporate it into my lessons effectively. I need more training on how to link language to the culture." This highlights the teachers' awareness of the importance of cultural relevance but also points to their perceived inadequacy in applying these strategies due to insufficient training. This is consistent with the findings of Mkhize (2021), who argues that many teachers in rural schools lack professional development opportunities to equip them with the skills to teach African languages effectively, particularly in ways that connect language to cultural identity.

A third teacher shared a similar sentiment, saying, "We need ongoing workshops and training on how to incorporate sociocultural elements into our teaching. Without it, we can't effectively teach the children about their heritage through the language." This comment underscores the teachers' desire for professional development programs that are specifically focused on integrating cultural practices and content into their teaching strategies. Professional development in sociocultural strategies is essential for enhancing teachers' abilities to create more engaging and meaningful learning experiences for their students.

Interpretation of these findings suggests that the lack of training in sociocultural strategies leads to a gap between the potential of African languages as a tool for both language and cultural education and their actual use in the classroom. Without proper training, teachers may miss opportunities to make language learning more relevant and engaging by connecting it to the learners' cultural identities and experiences. This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the importance of cultural context in learning and language development. Teachers who lack the training to integrate sociocultural elements into their lessons may inadvertently hinder learners' ability to connect language with culture, thus limiting the full potential of language acquisition.

Lack of professional development in sociocultural strategies is a significant barrier to effective teaching of African languages. Providing teachers with the necessary training to incorporate cultural elements into their lessons can enhance student engagement and foster a deeper connection between language and cultural identity.

Theme 3: Parental Involvement in Language Learning

The findings indicate that parental involvement plays a crucial role in reinforcing language learning outside the classroom. Participants emphasized that when parents actively engage in their children's language learning, it contributes to greater language acquisition and a deeper connection to the language. One teacher stated, "When parents participate, even by telling traditional stories at home or encouraging their children to speak the language, it makes a huge difference in how well the children learn." This response highlights the value of parental involvement in reinforcing language lessons learned in school and emphasizes the importance of a collaborative approach to language acquisition between teachers and parents.

A parent also shared, "I make sure to speak the language at home, and I encourage my child to use it with their friends. I believe this helps them feel more confident and connected to the language." This statement reflects how parental actions, such as using the language at home and creating an environment where the child feels comfortable speaking, positively affect language development. This aligns with research by Bamgbose (2019), which argues that home language use is crucial for reinforcing language skills learned in school. When parents actively use the language and encourage its use, they provide children with additional exposure and practice, further supporting language acquisition.

Another parent stated, "I often attend school events where they perform traditional songs, and I encourage my child to participate. This keeps the language alive at home and at school." This response underscores the importance of not only using the language but also participating in cultural activities that reinforce the language. By attending school events and promoting the use of the language, parents create an immersive environment that enhances language learning both inside and outside the classroom.

Interpretation of these responses suggests that parental involvement in language learning provides essential reinforcement that supports and extends the learning process. When parents take an active role in the language development of their children, they offer opportunities for authentic language use in real-life contexts. This collaborative effort between home and school strengthens the connection between language, culture, and identity, enhancing the overall language acquisition process. As Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes in his sociocultural theory, learning is a social process that occurs in collaboration with others, and parental involvement plays a vital role in this collaborative learning environment.

Parental involvement is a key factor in reinforcing language learning. When parents actively engage in their children's language development, they contribute significantly to language acquisition, creating a bridge between the classroom and the home that supports and strengthens language learning.

Theme 4: Challenges in Implementing Sociocultural Approaches

The findings reveal that resource limitations and rigid curricula were significant challenges in implementing sociocultural approaches to teaching African languages. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of appropriate materials and resources to effectively integrate cultural elements into language teaching. One teacher stated, "We want to use more cultural stories and songs, but the resources are limited. There are not enough books or teaching aids that reflect our culture." This response highlights the challenge teachers face in accessing culturally relevant materials that could help integrate sociocultural strategies into their lessons. The lack of resources limits the ability to use authentic cultural content that would enrich language teaching and help learners connect with the language in a meaningful way.

A parent shared, "I wish the school could have more traditional games or cultural materials to teach my child. But, we are always told that there is not enough funding for these things." This statement underscores the financial constraints that many schools face, particularly in rural areas, where resources are often scarce. Without proper funding, schools are unable to provide the necessary materials that would facilitate the inclusion of cultural practices in language learning. According to Bamgbose (2019), the lack of resources in many African educational settings directly affects the quality and relevance of language instruction, particularly in the Foundation Phase, where exposure to culture is essential for meaningful language acquisition.

Another teacher mentioned, "Even if we want to incorporate sociocultural strategies, the curriculum is too rigid. There is too much focus on grammar and vocabulary, and not enough space for cultural practices." This comment reveals how rigid curricula can limit the integration of sociocultural approaches. Teachers are constrained by the curriculum's emphasis on standardized tests and the pressure to cover a set syllabus, which leaves little room for the incorporation of culturally relevant materials or teaching strategies. The rigidity of the curriculum, coupled with a focus on measurable outcomes, often prevents teachers from using sociocultural approaches effectively. As Swain (2006) suggests, the best language learning occurs when teaching is flexible and adaptive, allowing teachers to create an environment that encourages interaction and meaningful engagement.

These responses and findings point to a broader issue within the educational system, where resource limitations and inflexible curricula create barriers to implementing sociocultural approaches. To truly integrate these approaches into African language teaching, there needs to be a shift toward more adaptable curricula and greater investment in resources that reflect the cultural richness of the learners' backgrounds.

The lack of resources and rigid curricula hinder the successful implementation of sociocultural strategies in language teaching. To overcome these challenges, schools must be provided with the necessary resources and support to integrate cultural elements into the language learning process, and curricula should be more flexible to allow for the inclusion of culturally relevant materials.

10. Recommendations

To effectively integrate sociocultural approaches in African language teaching, teacher training programs should focus on sociocultural strategies, providing educators with the skills to incorporate cultural elements into lessons and manage diverse cultural settings. Professional development is crucial for helping teachers understand the link between culture

and language acquisition (Bamgbose, 2019). It is also important to integrate culturally relevant materials, such as indigenous stories and songs, into teaching resources to connect language learning with students' cultural backgrounds. This can improve engagement and language acquisition (Mkhize, 2021). Schools should also foster collaboration with communities and parents to extend language learning beyond the classroom, enriching the educational experience. Lastly, policy changes are needed to support sociocultural approaches, ensuring schools have the necessary resources and flexibility to implement these methods. This approach will create a more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environment.

11. Conclusion

This article emphasizes the importance of sociocultural theory in improving the teaching of African languages in the Foundation Phase. By integrating cultural practices and encouraging social interactions, educators can create a more engaging and effective language learning environment. This approach not only helps learners develop their language skills but also strengthens their connection to their cultural heritage, which plays a key role in both language acquisition and identity formation. The findings show that a teaching approach that values cultural relevance can significantly enhance student engagement and success in language learning, in line with the ideas of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978).

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