



**RHODES UNIVERSITY**  
*Where leaders learn*

# Evaluation of the Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching

June 2021

Prepared by Nick Taylor

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### List of abbreviations

A	Assignments
AdvCert	Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching
CPD	Continuous professional development
CSD	Centre for Social Development
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ECDOE	Eastern Cape Department of Education
EGRS	Early Grade Reading Study
EFAL	English as a First Additional Language
Gov	Government
GGR	Group Guided Reading
FP	Foundation Phase
HL	Home Language
HOD	Head of Department
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
KPS	Knowledge and Practice Standards
LMS	Learning Management System
MCQ	Multiple Choice Question
MRTEQ	Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications
N/A	Not Applicable
NC	Northern Cape
NFTAL	National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in the African Languages in the Foundation Phase
NGO	Non-government Organisation
NRP	National Reading Panel
P	Portfolio
SA	Subject Advisor
SACE	South African Council for Educators
Uni	University
WC	Western Cape
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

# 1. History

The development of the Advanced Certificate in Foundation Phase Literacy Teaching (AdvCert) was a collaborative venture between the Centre for Social Development (CSD) at Rhodes University and Funda Wandé, a not-for-profit literacy organization. The Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDOE) was consulted on the course content and format at an early stage and the department responded with suggestions concerning a blended system of residential and on-line teaching and support. The ECDOE provided strong support to the programme, in the form of 21 bursaries for subject advisers (SAs); recruited and selected SAs to attend and, although it is not mentioned by name, there is a clear reference to the programme and its importance in training SAs in the provincial Reading Plan<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Outline of the AdvCert

The AdvCert is a 120 credit, part-time course at Level 6 on the NQF. The course is interactive, built around specially designed videos and an App, and taught bilingually in isiXhosa and English. In 2019, the CSD trialled the first 6 modules with a cohort of 67 students (Foundation Phase HODs, literacy coaches and Foundation Phase Subject Advisors). At the suggestion of the ECDOE, in the first year the programme was presented as a Short Course, since accreditation had not yet been granted by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). In 2020, 51 students proceeded to the second year, when, following accreditation, it was presented as the full Advanced Certificate and 13 students, who did not meet the entrance requirement (BEd FP), continued with Short Courses 7-12.

The course designers commissioned the evaluator to conduct a study of the programme in order to inform planning, design and delivery of the course for 2021. The evaluation was directed towards three aims:

**Component 1:** Assessing The Extent To Which The Course Is Aligned With The Printed Knowledge (PrimTEd), Practice Standards (KPS) and The National Framework For Teaching Reading In African Languages (NFTAL).

**Component 2:** Assessing The Quality Of The Course In Terms Of Its Impact On Students, Their Knowledge Of Reading And Their Practices.

**Component 3:** Investigating The Optimal Target Audience, Format, Mode Of Delivery And Language.

## 3. Terms of Reference

The Centre for Social Development (CSD) at Rhodes University, under the auspices of which AdvCert is delivered, commissioned Nick Taylor to undertake the evaluation and a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on 17 February 2021. The three Components listed above provided a framework for the study.

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1. ECDOE. (2019). ECDOE Reading Plan 2019 – 2023. Bisho: Eastern Cape Department of Education.

# 4. Method

## 4.1. What is being evaluated?

The distinction between the Intended, Implemented and Attained curricula made in an early and influential report of the Third (later Trends in) International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) provides a useful framework for understanding which parts of the curriculum cycle are covered in the present report and which are not (**Table 1**).

**Table 1.**  
Stages  
in the  
curriculum  
cycle

Curriculum component	Intended	Implemented		Attained		
	What are students expected to learn?	Who delivers instruction?	How is instruction organised?	What do students learn?	How does this affect students' practice?	How does this affect performance of their learners?
Present report	Component 1	Component 1	Component 1	Component 2	Not assessed	Not assessed

Source: Adapted from Schmidt et al, 1997

It is clear from Table 1 that the final measure of the worth of any curriculum – the attained curriculum – is only partly addressed by the study described in the present report. This is because the immediate priority for the AdvCert is to assess the strength of the design and implementation of the programme, with a view to addressing any obvious shortcomings before rollout of the 2021-22 iteration.

Furthermore, a full evaluation of the attained curriculum is a complex and expensive enterprise that would involve a longitudinal study over two or more years, incorporating classroom observations of teachers and assessing the outcomes on their learners. The present evaluation is confined to examining the first four questions listed in Table 1. Nevertheless, investigating the last two questions should remain a long-term goal of the CSD.

Component 3 contains a discussion about possible future development and deployment of the AdvCert.

## 4.2. Ethics Approval

Application for ethics clearance was made to the Ethics Committee of Rhodes University responsible for quality assuring the ethics of research conducted in the Education Faculty. Application was submitted on 4 March, recommended by the Ethics Committee on 18 March and finally approved by the Registrar on 23 April. The application number is 2021-4890-5967.

## 4.3. Data Sources

### Materials Review

In 2019 the first six modules were subject to an assessment by a team of scholars based at Harvard University<sup>2</sup>. The conclusions of the study are summarised under Component 1 of the Findings below.

2. Mason, P. & Snow, C. (2020). An Evaluation of the Reading for Meaning Course. Cambridge MA: Harvard University.
3. NFTAL was developed by DBE to assist teachers in teaching African languages. DBE. (2019). National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in the African Languages in the Foundation Phase. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
4. The KPS were developed under the auspices of the Primary Teacher Education (PrimTEd) project led by DHET and involving academics from across the country. They are available at <https://www.jet.org.za/clearinghouse/projects/primted/standards/literacy-teacher-standards>
5. Nkomo, A. (2021). Rhodes University Advanced Certificate course evaluation report 2021: Alignment of the AdvCert with the PrimTEd knowledge and practice standards and the National Framework for Teaching Reading in African Languages. Unpublished



The first step of the present evaluation was a desktop study which entailed elucidating the elements of the National Framework for the Teaching of Reading in the African Languages in the Foundation Phase (NFTAL)<sup>3</sup> and knowledge and practice standards (KPS) for literacy developed by the PrimTED project<sup>4</sup>. An analytical framework was constructed around these elements, and the contents of AdvCert examined in order to assess the extent to which they address the elements of the framework.

The alignment study was conducted by Dr Anna Nkomo, a Foundation Phase literacy teaching specialist and lecturer in the School of Education at Wits University. Her method and conclusions are also described under Component 1 of the Findings. Dr Nkomo's full report<sup>5</sup> accompanies this report.

### ***Expert Interviews***

Six literacy experts were interviewed on their views on the content, delivery and outcomes of the first iteration of AdvCert. All six interviewees had one or other connection with the programme. Interestingly, although the large majority of comments were favourable, what criticism did emerge was largely offered by those closest to the programme.

These were semi-structured interviews conducted telephonically and the schedule completed in real time during the discussion. The profiles of the interviewees and the results of the discussions are given under Component 1 below.

### ***Student Questionnaire***

A Google questionnaire, which gauged students' experiences with and perceptions of AdvCert was sent to 60 students who attended the 2019/20 course. Communication was by WhatsApp and email, and conducted by Ms Ashlyn Becorly, who had been the course administer and who thus knew and was known to the students, a set of relationships which facilitated data collection in the short time available to the evaluation.

A response rate of 60% (35 out of 60) was returned, and a descriptive report on the results of the survey is contained in the final section of Component 1 of the Findings. Student responses were collated by Google in the relevant graphical or narrative form.

### ***Student Assessment Results***

This part of the evaluation set out to assess the extent to which students have assimilated the knowledge and skills targeted by the course. Three assessment tasks are contained in each of the 12 modules comprising the AdvCert: Multiple Choice Questions (primarily for testing content knowledge), Assignments (usually in the form of essays) and Portfolios (practical tasks). This scheme was only fully implemented in year 2; in year 1 students were set only two kinds of tasks, Assignments and Tests.

Test scores were analysed separately for the 13 students who continued into 2020 on the Short Course and the 51 students who followed the AdvCert in the second year. The results are given under Component 2 in the Findings.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Component 1: Course content, organisation and delivery

This component addresses three questions: What are students expected to learn? Who delivers instruction? How is instruction organised?

These questions were illuminated by data from four sources:

- The Harvard Assessment of the first 6 modules
- The desktop study which assessed the alignment of AdvCert with KPS and NFTAL
- Interviews with six literacy experts
- Student responses to the questionnaire.

#### *The Harvard Evaluation*

The Harvard Evaluation Report notes that the materials contain many intriguing features, including a flexible design that could be used for synchronous groups or for asynchronous independent learning, lively videos, and alignment with evidence-based principles for early literacy learning. The team adopted a set of analytic dimensions to frame their evaluation of the individual modules. These were: Content, Videos, Assessments, Design, User Experience and Alignment with Nell Duke's literacy essentials<sup>6</sup>.

Reflecting on the strengths and opportunities for improvement of each module, a set of general strengths were noted. The team noted that the modules covered the most important research-based aspects of early literacy instruction, in alignment with the National Reading Panel findings. The NRP (2000)<sup>7</sup> identified five elements of effective reading instruction after reviewing a robust body of research. These elements were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The videos were found to be engaging, modelled best instructional practices, and connected directly to the teaching techniques being recommended. They provided highly interactive models of effective teaching by peer practitioners. The instructional strategies presented in the videos were appropriate to the cultural norms and the physical realities experienced by the teachers, such as classroom space and class size. The students in the videos were from schools similar to those of the teacher participants, adding to their authenticity and providing the teachers with realistic instructional modelling.

The Harvard team noted that the assessment tasks were strategically placed at important junctures within each module and provided frequent checks for understanding. They required the teachers to attend to the important learning goals for the module and highlighted the content aligned with those learning goals. The inclusion of regular assessments effectively encouraged the active engagement of the participants and reinforced the important learnings in each module. The multiple choice and true/false selected response assessment items explicitly highlighted the most important learning goals for each module.

Throughout each module the important learning goals were reinforced in engaging ways, so that they were clearly identified for the teachers. This was accomplished through varied modes of presentation, designed to keep the teachers engaged in their learning. In addition, the use of graphics and tables served to reduce the text density of the app as well as to highlight and synthesize the important learning goals in each module.

In terms of user experience, the Harvard Evaluation concluded that the App, an integral part of AdvCert, is robust and well-conceived to support professional learning. The additional resources provided for the teachers

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6. See [literacyessentials.org](http://literacyessentials.org)

7. National Reading Panel. (2000). Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

In terms of user experience, the Harvard Evaluation concluded that the App, an integral part of AdvCert, is robust and well-conceived to support professional learning. The additional resources provided for the teachers expanded their instructional repertoire and were designed to be accessible

expanded their instructional repertoire and were designed to be accessible.

Despite the many strengths of the Rhodes Course modules, the Harvard review team also noted areas in which improvements could be introduced. Some of these were relatively minor technical fixes or improvements; some were topics or domains left out (which the Report conceded, could have been addressed in modules 7-12, which they had not sight of during their evaluation); and some were slightly more substantive pedagogical proposals.

Regarding the potential for substantive improvement in the course, the Harvard team made a number of suggestions, perhaps the most important of which are:

- Integrating the CAPS module with the subsequent modules more explicitly. This would enhance the coherence of the course.
- Including additional topics, such as providing focused home language support, while not introducing English prematurely.
- Giving more attention to opportunities teachers have to engage in authentic assessment in the context of daily instruction. For example: hearing students read even a sentence or two out loud, listening in to students reading to one another in small groups, and assessing students' spelling and their free writing. These tasks all provide information for authentically assessing learners' progress.
- Noting the paucity of attractive and appropriate reading materials for beginning readers in the South African home, the Harvard team recommended that every effort should be made to identify and publicise reading resources in African languages, including on-line resources.
- Noting that the vast majority of rigorous research studies on early literacy development, instruction, and intervention have focused on English the Harvard Evaluation recommended that efforts should be made to attract more African language specialists into the field of literacy development. It is important that literacy specialists understand the particular morphological and orthographic structures of African languages, and such understanding could generate important gains in the design of AdvCert.
- Provide more varied assessment types and better feedback. The brief and regularly spaced assessments/checks for understanding included in the modules are useful in ensuring the participants pause to think. However, the true/false or multiple-choice items rarely require deep thinking. The challenge is to present somewhat more thought-provoking items that don't require human intervention to grade or provide feedback.



## Alignment Study

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the alignment study was to assess the extent to which the AdvCert conforms to current received wisdom concerning the teaching of reading in the African languages in South African schools<sup>8</sup>. The details of this ‘received wisdom’ were derived from two sources. The first is the National Framework for Teaching African Languages (NFTAL)<sup>9</sup> issued by DBE in 2019, and which seeks to help teachers and curriculum specialists understand how the reading methodologies used to teach reading in African languages differ from those most appropriate for English. Thus, the NFTAL enables teachers to utilise context-appropriate methods for teaching reading that will empower learners to acquire the skills needed to become independent readers who are able to access new knowledge through print.

The second source which the Alignment study used to condense ‘received wisdom’ concerning reading pedagogy is the knowledge and practice standards (KPS)<sup>10</sup> which describe what a competent primary school teacher should know and be able to do in relation to the teaching of language and literacy on completion of a BEd qualification. The standards focus on developing new teacher graduates’ ability to teach literacy in African languages, English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) and English as a home or first language (HL) in multilingual contexts with a special focus on reading and writing.

### THE FRAMEWORK

The KPS and NFTAL are important documents which provide guidance on the teaching of literacy and language in the Foundation Phase, curriculum development, and the assessment of the readiness of new teacher graduates to enter classrooms equipped to teach reading and writing. The essence of each document was combined to construct a curriculum framework identifying elements that require attention in the development and delivery of a comprehensive course in reading pedagogy for primary school teachers in training. To operationalise the framework, a principal question was posed against each element, and each of these in turn disaggregated into a set of questions which examine the details of the AdvCert.

The elements of the framework, together with the key question against each element are shown in Table 2. The third column of the table provides a rating which assesses the extent to which AdvCert conforms to the framework, that is, to what extent the programme follows current conventional wisdom regarding reading pedagogy in South African schools. The degree to which AdvCert is compliant with each key question was rated using a three-part scale:

8. We understand that residual echoes of the ‘reading wars’ remain in debates on reading pedagogy, both in South Africa and other parts of the world. However, there has been a distinct movement towards adopting the 5 elements underpinning the NRP’s reports, as summarized by the Harvard Evaluation described above.

9. DBE, 2019.

10. See <https://www.jet.org.za/clearinghouse/projects/printed/standards/literacy-teacher-standards>.

Emerging	Developed	Robust
AdvCert does not fully address the demands of KPS and NFTAL	AdvCert meets the requirements set by KPS and NFTAL	AdvCert goes beyond the requirements of KPS and NFTAL, providing additional explanations and resources

Element Identified	Principal question	Rating
Definition level	How well do the aims and objectives of the AdvCert align with the KPS and NFTAL in terms of knowledge, skills and competences?	Robust
Execution Level	Pedagogy - Does the AdvCert equip students to be successful FP language teachers?	Robust
Knowledge of skills and language components	To what extent does the AdvCert unpack and mediate the core reading and language components?	Robust
Knowledge of reading components	Six different methodologies for teaching reading in a balanced reading approach are listed in the NFTAL and CAPS. Does the AdvCert unpack these six core reading methodologies?	Robust
Knowledge of reading development	How well does the AdvCert, prepare students to recognise a child's stage of literacy development and provide appropriate support?	Developed
Assessment	Assessment is a skill that needs to be taught. How well does the AdvCert prepare students to make data-driven decisions about curriculum, instruction, and assessment of/for learning?	Developed
Resources	How well does the AdvCert expose students to technology and other important resources for professional and instructional purposes?	Robust
Structure	Planning for literacy - Are students made aware of when to teach the different language components and how time is allocated for each skill?	Robust
Learner Support	How well does the AdvCert prepare students to adapt or differentiate instruction for individual needs and special needs learners? Are students taught about incorporating mechanisms to support struggling or at-risk learners?	Developed
Exit conditions – (Certificate Process Satisfaction)	At the end of the AdvCert course, will the students be competent enough/ have met the standards to teach languages in the FP as stipulated in the KPS and NFTAL?	Robust
Delivery of the course: Content presentation Technology Use	Is the AdvCert course navigation clear? Is content presented in manageable units? Does course structure build logically? Is content fully developed and explained? Does content include meaningful examples and allow multiple learning paths? How well do the tools and media of the Learning Management System (LSM) used to deliver the AdvCert promote content delivery?	Robust

**Table 2.** Analysis of AdvCert against the curriculum framework

## ANALYSIS

The results of the rating exercise are shown in Table 2. AdvCert emerges from this analysis with a close-to-perfect record. On only three of the 11 elements in the framework does the course not exceed the requirements of the KPS and NFTAL, and on these three elements, the requirements are met.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the AdvCert course has been overall rated as ‘robust’, the following recommendations can be adopted to further strengthen the course and improve the students’ experiences.

- Regarding assessments, students should be accorded opportunities to design their own assessments to assess the different language skills such as assessing reading, writing, speaking, and listening throughout the course.
- Students can be also introduced to taxonomies such as the Bloom’s taxonomy of questions to further clarify what is meant by different kinds of questions and to guide students in designing their own levelled questions.
- Remediation or learner support should be dealt with in all the language components. This should not wait to be covered in detail in Module 11 (Lecture 5: Helping learners to catch up) but rather be integrated into all the modules. For example, in the NFTAL, a component/skill is presented and guidelines are provided for teachers on ‘How to identify cracks’. It is important to highlight that in the AdvCert, teacher educators should refer students to the NFTAL which is detailed on how to support struggling readers.
- There is limited evidence of online communication between the lecturers-students and student-student, through the use of online discussion boards or chat rooms. This encourages active learning and student involvement in the learning process. In addition, the teacher educators can identify students who are engaging or not engaging with the course and offer immediate support.
- A recommendation can be made for the course to include tutorial activities. Tutorial tasks/activities can be based on the prescribed readings for further reading. Tutorials are important for student’s learning because they encourage team work; assist in the preparation of students for assignments, tests and final exams; and provide opportunities for tutors or teacher educators to clarify any concepts that students might not understand and this becomes a space to actively engage with course content.

## CONCLUSION

The Alignment Study concludes that at the end of the AdvCert course<sup>11</sup> students would have knowledge of theory, skills, strategies and processes required to teach English First Additional Language (EFAL) as a subject and as the general medium of instruction and to teach isiXhosa through the use of technology. Students will be able to make their own resources and be competent in forms of assessment and providing feedback and supporting struggling children with literacy. In addition, AdvCert graduates will be able to manage a classroom effectively, apply theories of how children learn and positively impact children’s learning in their classroom.

### *Expert Interviews*

Six literacy experts were interviewed in order to gain insight into both the intended and implemented curricula. All had some or other connection with the programme, as show in Table 3. The views expressed in this section provide an insider account of the design, development and delivery of the programme. These views complement the outsider account provided by the Evaluation and the Alignment Study.

11. It needs to be borne in mind that both the Harvard Evaluation and the Alignment Study looked largely at the intended curriculum, and the conclusions made by the latter here assume that the intended curriculum is perfectly implemented. The extent to which the implemented curriculum is faithfully executed is one of the subjects informed by the Expert Interviews and Student Questionnaires, discussed in the sections that follow below.

The Alignment Study concludes that at the end of the AdvCert course students would have knowledge of theory, skills, strategies and processes required to teach English First Additional Language (EFAL) as a subject and as the general medium of instruction and to teach isiXhosa through the use of technology.

**WHO WAS INTERVIEWED?**

Profiles of the interviewees are given in Table 3.

Interviewee	Years experience	Sector	Experience	Role on AdvCert
A	1-5	Uni, NGO	Course developer Course manager	Course manager Minor role in course development
B	11-20	Gov	Curriculum development Policy	Incorporated AdvCert into EC Reading Plan. Provided bursaries for SAs to attend and encouraged participation
C	21-30	Uni	Lecturer, curriculum and materials developer, external examiner, researcher.	Course architect and developer. Course coordinator
D	21-30	Uni	Lecturer, curriculum and materials developer, external examiner, researcher.	Consultant on content and external examiner
E	11-20	Uni, NGO	Lecturer, curriculum and materials developer, researcher.	Course design and development
F	11-20	Uni, Gov	Lecturer, curriculum and materials developer, external examiner, researcher.	External examiner

**Table 3.** Profiles of the interviewees

A number of the questions were of a technical nature and required a detailed knowledge of the AdvCert and all its materials, hard and soft. Only a few interviewees met this requirement; where other respondents did not possess such detailed knowledge, an entry N/A is made in the relevant table below.

**WHAT DID THEY SAY?**

Interviewee perspectives are grouped together according to the questions in the Interview Schedule.

**Q4: Is this a good programme?**

**Q5: How does it compare to other (a) CPD (b) ITE programmes?**

Interviewee	Y/N	Explain why
A	N/A	Don't know enough about it. But ITE courses in literacy are highly variable, depending on the lecturer; at least the AdvCert is a coherent programme. Content is strong
B	Y	Currently there is little on teaching reading in Foundation BEs in South Africa. AdvCert is based on 12 modules which cover all aspects of reading pedagogy. None of the 4 HEIs in EC offering FP BEd progs did so in isiX. Now AdvCert does. It is unrealistic to expect SAs (and HODs) to follow CAPS prescriptions regarding assessment without training; this helps them
C	Y	It is a well-structured course, with very high-quality materials and excellent videos, which adopts an evidence-based approach. It is appropriate for teachers, HODs, SA and policy makers. It is demanding in terms of student work. But the course has been subject to conflicting pressures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DHET only approved it on condition that the entrance requirement is a BEd (FP); otherwise no provision for it in MRTEQ.</li> <li>• This ensured that most educators who badly need basic knowledge and skills in literacy pedagogy don't qualify, and have to register for the short courses.</li> <li>• For this reason, it would be good if it were incorporated into ITE.</li> <li>• But RU would be keen to see a return on their investment from CPD sources, and these might be threatened if the course went fully ITE.</li> <li>• Another tension is between a practical course which assists teachers with classroom routines, on one hand, and a more intellectually rigorous academic course, on the other.</li> </ul>
D	Y	Not seen all the modules in detail, but have been in discussion with the course designers since the start. Been external examiner for modules 1-6 and know them very well. This is an excellent course, evidence driven, practical and written by people who have intimate knowledge of SA classrooms. Very different to CPD programmes like the EGRS, in that the latter guides teachers on what to do, but not why it is important to do this; AdvCert does both. Although some ITE course in literacy are better than others, many are 'pie in the sky', based on notions of 'social constructivism' and the like and not helpful to students on what should be done in the classroom.
E	Y	It's a solid prog, but remember it's CPD. Gives teachers a good overview but doesn't have the space to adequately equip teachers fully. Yes, it might be better than most ITE literacy courses, but doesn't have the space. Systematic, gives people something concrete to look at, ie practical. Doesn't go deep into the debates, just gives them the dominant view: a strength, goes to the practical. Needs more focus on writing: r & w go together.
F	Y	They must focus on getting it right with present cohort, and then run with the model, as amended. Essential to implement it more broadly, for both CPD and ITE. The science of reading informs AdvCert and enables teachers to engage in evidence-based research. ITE is all over the show: not enough attention to what teachers must know. The last 10 years has produced research to tell us about how children learn to read.

**Q6: Rate the content of each of the 13 modules (including one on Computer Literacy).**

**Q7: How can the content of the individual modules be improved?**

No respondent gave a rating to the individual modules; rather, they all gave an overall rating, with comment on one or more of the modules.

**Q8: What would participants find most useful?**

Interviewee	Rating*	Comment	What would participants find most useful?	How can the content be improved?
A			N/A	
B	5	Apps are great ECDOE gave laptops to SAs who participated	Computer literacy is a precursor; all the content modules are important. Creating a culture of reading is also key. It would be beneficial to reading assistants too.	N/A
C	5	Writers worked under enormous pressure, but did a great job	You'd have to ask them. But First year is probably most useful (How do children learn to read). Can't do assessment, planning, etc unless you understand how children learn to read and write. Assessment is poorly done in schools, but it is key to good teaching.	Much to improve, but perhaps priority should be given to Assessment and Planning.
D	5	It is clear that the academic literacy skills of some students need to be improved, prior to entry. Having a number of weak students tends to lower expectations and dilute the course content	The whole programme would be very useful for teachers, HODs, SAs and policy makers.	It's very practical; covers a lot, but so much to cover: tension between too much and not enough.
E	5	All good	Good for all participants: teachers, HODs, SAs	The module on Inclusive Education could do with a bit more thought.
F	N/A	Don't know them well: did have access to them but didn't teach them. Very impressed with content, how it is scaffolded, very relevant to typical students.	Well balanced: participant not getting recipes, tips and tricks. Rather the course goes into the theory and presents activities which embody the theory and enables them to develop their own repertoire of classroom routines.	Recommend that designers spend time thinking about integrating WIL into content a bit better.

\* 1 = poor; 5 = excellent



**Q9: Rate the three types of assessment tasks: Multiple Choice (MC), Assignments (A) and Portfolios (P).**

Interviewee	Quantity			Standard			Consistent*			Clear**		
	MC	A	P	MC	A	P	MC	A	P	MC	A	P
A	N/A			Too low	Fine	Fine	N/A			C	C	C
B	N/A											
C	Perhaps more could be done?			Challenging to address full spectrum of student proficiencies. Want to introduce more reflective tasks in the WIL component. MCQs force students to make fine distinctions, can really assess their understanding, but challenging to write good MCQs.			Y	Y	Y	C	C	C
D	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Y	Y	Y	C	C	C
E	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Y	Y	Y	C	C	C
F	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Fine	Y	Y	Y	C	C	C

\*Y - yes / \*\*C - Clear

**Q9(e): Was the feedback given to students useful to them?**

**Q10: How would you improve the assessment tasks?**

Interviewee	Feedback useful?		How would you improve the assessment tasks?
	Y/N	Explain why	
A	N	Given too late	Could be more higher order thinking, but this is not unusual for university level courses. Would prefer to see the portfolio task being a practical teaching task. We are also seeing in schools that despite the training some teachers still shy away from GGR for example and perhaps more practical assessments would benefit. Expected length of essays MUST be given – no surprise that some students wrote a paragraph and thought it would be fine.
B	N/A		
C	Y	N	Markers go through responses carefully with students, but our feedback was inadequate because we didn't get it back to them in time. Assessment is most important: see if they understood, feedback on improving the course, students consolidate their knowledge. Need to give it more attention
D	Y	The tasks were generally very good, but there were some inconsistencies in the marking. For example, one student wrote an essay in favour of the 'whole language' approach, which is antithetical to the 'synthetic phonics' approach of AdvCert, yet the student got a good mark. In another case two students wrote essays of very different lengths and substance yet got similar marks. These examples illustrate a tension between wanting to be supportive of students view, and maintaining academic rigour.	
E	Y	You don't want to kill people with assessment; they're busy teachers. MCQ tests the basics, but a couple of things push them further. Assignments require application and thinking; Portfolios practical, but need much marking and no one has the time.	
F	Y	The course differentiates tasks by job function for SAs, ts, etc which makes the course unique. FB is appropriate, although everyone struggles with it. Rubrics provided to students, but students may have wanted more	Need to spend time helping s to bring theory and practice together. Maybe a short module on what reflection means, and how to reflect. Students generally regurgitated when asked to reflect. But this is weak academic literacy and academic writing. Use a reflective journal, which traces their own learning and development: assists them to grow more proficient at critical analytical practice.

Some assignments and portfolios required students to think critically and practically about language teaching.

One of the external examiners was not available to be interviewed, but had submitted a substantive Moderation Report prior to the evaluation, which discussed the tasks for each module in some detail. The course designers would do well to study these recommendations in detail. Two general comments stand out:

In general, the assignment and portfolio instructions were clear and well-articulated. However, sometimes the purpose of the assignment was unclear. Some assignments and portfolios required students to think critically and practically about language teaching. Others were good but could have challenged students a bit more by differentiating between receptive and expressive, high and low frequency and sight word vocabulary.

**Q9(f): Should the assessment tasks be set in isiXhosa, or are students coping with the bilingual approach?**

**Q11: Language of instruction (LOI) of the course.**

Interviewee	Language of assessment tasks	Language of the course
A	Ideally it should be mixed but as the course is now extending beyond the borders of the EC this might not be feasible. If students could answer in their home language that would be ideal given that they teach predominantly in their home language. This would result in more admin in terms of the hiring of markers but that shouldn't be a reason to not do it.	
B	N/A	Bilingual (status quo)
C	B. Teachers more used to doing academic tasks in E. But marking needs to be done by someone who speaks the language because many of the examples are in X (eg qs involving decoding). Unrealistic to write all materials in X: too costly and time-consuming.	
D	The LOI used is fine as is. The issue is not so much one of LOI as academic literacy on the part of students. Many students have difficulty expressing themselves, particularly in writing, in their home language, let alone English.	
E	Both fine as they are	
F	Both fine as they are	

Key: Respondents recommend: B – bilingual; X – isiXhosa; E – English

**Q12: AdvCert caters to a wide range of students (teachers, HODs, SAs, coaches). Is there anything that can be done to make it more accessible to such a spectrum of needs?**

Interviewee	Suggestions
A	A combined honours with linguistics, or a combined honours with African languages might be an interesting route. That would involve a complete overhaul of assessments. On the other hand, would all the potential students be up to an honours and the last thing we want is for the course to become elitist as we hope to reach as many FP teachers as possible
B	Face-to-face important; combination with distance is great. Could be adapted for ITE, short courses, etc. Make the course a recommendation for promotion in government.
C	Pitched quite well, in a way that most can get something good out of it. Really demanding the pace which students need to maintain to really benefit; expecting more than the basics from busy teachers is unrealistic.
D	Good to have some face-to-face interaction, since the reading proficiency of some students is weak. But this must be balanced against cost. Really weak students who could hardly write a sentence should be screened on application and put through a good, practical academic literacy programme before attempting the course.
E	If I could wave the constraints: let people do this if they don't have FP qual but do have the experience. But this raises questions about advancing up the NQF.
F	Students could record themselves, keep a journal and learn to analyse and reflect on own practice.

**Student Questionnaires**

The questionnaire was distributed to 60 students enrolled during 2019-20 and a return of 36 (60%) received.

**WHO ARE THE RESPONDENTS?**

The profiles of students who responded to the questionnaire are reflected in the following table

	Full AdvCert/ short course	Employment	Age	Qualification
Percent of sample	75%/25%	HOD: 58%; SA: 25%; t: 14%	51-60: 64%; 41- 50: 25%	Hons: 50%; Bach: 28%; Dipl: 17%

Participants were mainly from the Eastern Cape, with only one member of the sample from the Western Cape.

## WHAT DID THEY SAY?

### RATING OF MODULE CONTENT

Ratings were consistently high, with 5 (excellent) as the most common response on all but two modules (11 and 12); no ratings of 1 (poor) or 2 occurred on any module:

Module	Rating: 5 – Excellent; 0 - Poor
0. Computer Literacy	5: 53%, 4: 39%, 3: 8%
1. CAPS Reading activities	5: 64%, 4: 31%, 3: 6%
2. Emergent literacy	5: 53%, 4: 42%, 3: 6%
3. Teaching decoding	5: 56%, 4: 39%, 3: 6%
4. Teaching vocabulary	5: 72%, 4: 25%, 3: 3%
5. Teaching comprehension	5: 69%, 4: 25%, 3: 6%
6. Teaching writing and handwriting	5: 50%, 4: 39%, 3: 11%
7. Teaching EFAL in the FP – Part 1	5: 59%, 4: 36%, 3: 6%
8. Teaching EFAL in the FP – Part 2	5: 61%, 4: 33%, 3: 6%
9. Creating a culture of reading	5: 64%, 4: 36%, 3: 0%
10. Inclusive education	5: 56%, 4: 36%, 3: 8%
11. Reading assessment and remediation	5: 36%, 4: 58%, 3: 6%
12. Planning and progression	5: 47%, 4: 47%, 3: 6%

Is this distribution of ratings the result of a Hawthorne effect, with students wanting to please? Some variation in the overwhelming number of 5 and 4 ratings does occur (in 11 and 12), indicating that students are exercising some degree of judgement. If this is a valid conclusion, then course designers and presenters should look at Modules 11 and 12 in order to understand why students are not quite as enthusiastic about them as they are about all the others. But this would seem to be in the nature of a quibble rather than a sign of dissatisfaction.

### WHICH MODULE(S) IS(ARE) THE MOST USEFUL?

Each of the modules was selected at least once by a student in response to this question. Five respondents said 'All', and 12 respondents listed any number from 3 to 10 modules as the most useful. There is no clear favourite. This would indicate a consistency in the style, clarity, quality and usefulness of all the modules.

The following three examples, of responses to the request to explain why they found one or more module particularly useful, provides a sense of student voices:

*I had no idea of the different types of reading in the classroom as I was still new in the FP, by attending this course it fully equipped me on how to perform the different types of reading doing them with confidence and achieving the objectives*

*They provided depth and explanations were excellent.*

*Module 10 gave me a great idea and clear understanding of how to deal with learners with barriers and module 6 taught me. Clear understanding of how to teach writing and handwriting at the FP properly and explicitly.*

**IS THERE ANYTHING ABOUT THE COURSE CONTENT THAT NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED? PLEASE PROVIDE DETAILS.**

Here there was a clear majority (72%) saying that nothing needs to be improved. Of those who did offer suggestions, Inclusive Education was most frequently cited (by 5 respondents); others mentioned, once each, were Phonics, Reading assessment and remediation,

One said that the videos need improvement:

*Yes, videos need improvement because there were modules that were not easily understandable to me because of bad videos that were not playing*

The last comment sounds more like a problem with transmission or the respondent's connectivity, rather than the video design.

### **Assessment**

Each module contains three types of assessment task: Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ), Assignments (A) and Portfolios (P). For each type of task, students responded to four questions regarding the frequency of assessment, the difficulty of the tasks, the clarity of formulation, and whether feedback was useful or not. Responses were once again overwhelmingly positive:

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Difficulty</b>	<b>Clarity</b>	<b>Feedback</b>
Percent (combination of 3 types of task)	77-94% 'Just right'	81-94% 'Just right'	70-89% 'Clear'	92% 'Yes fb useful'

In response to the question as to how assessment could be improved, exactly half of the 36 respondents said that no changes are needed. The following random selection of student comment on this issue again illustrates a degree of variation in their respective responses.

*The assignments were sometimes tricky*

*Nothing for now*

*I don't think there are improvements needed*

*Put in more details on what is expected from students*

*By giving the learners more time to answer*

*If the assignment and portfolio tasks could be given out at the beginning of each Module student could do better on them as when going through the module they will be able to give more attention to concepts that are to be assessed and that could save time as well.*

### **MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION**

The written materials and assessment tasks are in English, while the videos are in isiXhosa. Student were asked whether they are happy with this situation, whether they would prefer the course to be entirely in isiXhosa

or exclusively in English. Responses were overwhelmingly in favour of the present arrangements, with a significant minority (33%) voting in favour of presenting the entire course in English.

	Assessment		Written materials		
	English	HL	English	HL	Combination
Percent of sample	100%	0%	33%	0%	67%

#### DELIVERY MODE

Nearly two-thirds of students are happy with the present combination of face-to-face and on-line delivery, although a significant minority (22%) prefer the course to be presented entirely in face-to-face mode.

	Prefer face-to-face	Prefer on-line	Prefer a combination
Percent of sample	22%	14%	64%

The following quotes provide some insights into student preferences:  
*Sometimes there is no [sic] much time for attending classes so online helped.*

*For me online had too much problems, due to network and data*

*Face to face allows for more interaction and work and tests can be completed during contact time*

*Its the way I prefer to learn on face to face interaction with lectures*

*Online studying gave opportunity for us to study even though we are far and one on one is also helpful as we sometimes need to be taught on site*

#### THE USE OF RUCONNECTED

Students were asked to rate the RUConnected system on three criteria: user friendliness, difficult in uploading assignment, and the extent of support in using the system.

Rating	User friendly?	Difficulty uploading?	Support sufficient?
5: Very friendly/easy/sufficient	47%	44%	61%
4	44%	36%	33%
3	3%	14%	6%
2	3%	0%	0%
1: very unfriendly/difficult/insufficient	3%	6%	0%



Here too, student views are overwhelmingly in favour of the way in which they found RUConnected accessible, navigable and useful, with ratings of 4 and 5 predominating in response to each of the three questions.

Student answers to the question ‘*What did you find most frustrating about RUConnected*’, indicate that, where problems did occur, they generally concerned connectivity, the cost of data or weak computer literacy on the part of the student, rather than a problem with the platform:

*None*

*Network sometimes*

*Connectivity was very poor*

*Nothing*

*Mostly had a problem with password and getting started*

*Unavailability of Data*

The following responses are a sample of responses to the question ‘*What (if anything) did you find most useful about using RUconnected?*’:

*It was easy for me to upload my work*

*For me using internet was not difficult*

*Easy navigation*

*It was easy to use*

*It equipped me to use computers fully with confidence*

*You can log in when ever you want*

*It makes everything easy in terms of getting modules, assignment, additional reading article and we were able to track our assignment progress.*

Clearly, most students cope well with internet-based instruction (with no face-to-face during 2020) and RUConnect serves the purpose well.

## **5.2. Component 2: Outcomes**

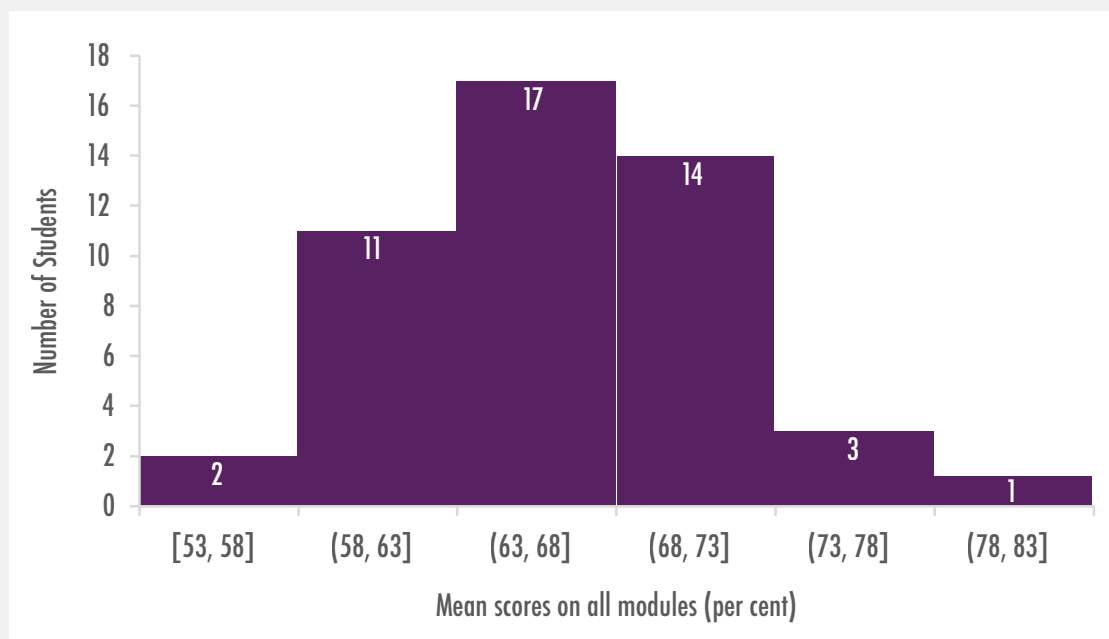
This Component examined the extent to which AdvCert impacted on participants’ knowledge of literacy pedagogy.

As noted, three assessment tasks were embedded in each module: Multiple Choice Questions (primarily for testing content knowledge), Assignments (usually in the form of essays) and Portfolios (practical tasks). This scheme was only fully implemented in year 2; in year 1 students were set only two kinds of tasks, Assignments and Tests. The scores for 51 AdvCert students and 13 Short Course students are summarised in Table 4.

		Number of students	Modules												Mean total per student
			CAPS Reading Activities	Emergent literacy	Teaching decoding	Teaching Vocabulary	Teaching Comprehension	Teaching Reading and Writing	Teaching EFAL Phase 1	Teaching EFAL Phase 2	Creating a Culture of Reading	Inclusive Education	Reading Assessment	Planning	
Route	Tasks		AT	AT	AT	AT	AT	AT	APT	APT	APT	APT	APT	APT	
<b>AdvCert</b>	<b>Av %</b>	51	65	68	63	63	68	70	65	64	63	64	61	65	67
<b>Short c</b>	<b>Av %</b>	13	70	71	63	68	70	64	64	69	64	64	64	66	66

Shown by the mean scores per module and mean total scores per student, there is not much difference between the results obtained by the AdvCert and Short Course students, respectively.

A frequency distribution plot reveals that scores for the AdvCert students approximates that of a normal bell curve (Figure 1). The distribution of Short Course students is similar but more ragged because of the low number of students (13) in this fraction. Psychometrically, there is not a strong argument for adding items which discriminate more finely at the top end, since only 4 students scored 73% or higher. However, the educational benefits of challenging students and eliciting reflective responses from them support the recommendations made by one of the external examiners, and confirmed by two of the interviewees, that additional items requiring higher-order thinking skills be included.



**Figure 1.**  
Distribution  
of Total  
Assessment  
Scores

As indicated by Figure 1, the assessment tasks discriminate across the range of performance. A few weak students scored low marks and some students did not submit some of the tasks or scored 0 on one or more of the tasks (3 AdvCert and 2 Short Course students). However, the majority did well, as the relatively high mean score for each module indicates.

### 5.3. Component 3: Future pathways for AdvCert

This part of the evaluation investigated possible future applications of AdvCert, regarding: the optimal target market for the course, how they should be delivered, and in which language. The ideas and options presented in this section drew on the thoughts of the students and literacy experts regarding the quality and relevance of AdvCert, on one hand, and the generally mediocre state of both in- and pre-service teacher education in the field of reading pedagogy, on the other. There is a great need for a comprehensive programme such as AdvCert which combines the research evidence on how children learn to read with practical teaching routines.

### ***Target audience***

An important question is: is it possible to offer the same course to FP teachers, HoDs, subject advisors and literacy coaches? Perhaps a more feasible option would be to offer:

- The AdvCert, as is, to teachers, HODs, subject advisors and coaches who meet the entrance criteria of a BEd in FP Teaching.
- A short course on the basics of literacy teaching to FP teachers who do not meet the entrance criteria for AdvCert. On graduating, these students are rewarded with SACE CPD points. Six of the 12 modules have already been accredited by SACE and application has been made to accredit the remaining six.

Perhaps the most important question with respect to target audience concerns whether the AdvCert is offered only as an in-service qualification or, in addition, as part of a BEd. Since it carries 120 credits which is considerably more than the literacy component of almost all BEd programmes currently offered, it seems well positioned to fulfill the latter function.

### ***Incentives***

The question of incentives is also pertinent to deciding how to pitch the course. The participation of a number of members of the first cohort was strongly encouraged and paid for by ECDOE. But it is doubtful that this is a sustainable strategy. In addition, students who lack intrinsic or extrinsic motivation are unlikely to take the course seriously. On the other hand, if government were serious about building the expertise required to significantly improve both the teaching of and instructional leadership for literacy, then the acquisition of the AdvCert would be made a recommendation for appointment to promotion posts (and in particular to HOD and Subject Advisors responsible for FP).

Attaching SACE CPD points to successful completion of the short course would probably provide sufficient incentive, although that would depend on how easy it might be to obtain the same number of points by means of less onerous means.

Both sets of incentives described above (CPD points and opening avenues for promotion) would depend on political will and strategic leadership on the part of SACE, DBE and DHET.

### ***Language of instruction***

The original videos were filmed in the Eastern Cape in classrooms where isiXhosa was the Home Language. However, they have English subtitles and are accessible to a broader audience. AdvCert has also started to produce videos in Sepedi. Written text and assessment tasks are in English. In 2020, COVID-19 constrained AdvCert to offer the course entirely online. This enabled the CSD to accept students from other provinces, and the course was offered in English, including the online contact sessions. This practice will continue in 2021, with an intake of Afrikaans HL and isiXhosa HL subject advisors from WCED, and the project intends to arrange for students to work in small groups in their languages of teaching. AdvCert is also pursuing some take-up in the NW and Limpopo

### **Delivery mode**

A final important issue concerns the ideal mode of presentation of the course(s). The pros and cons of offering the course(s) in face-to-face and online modalities need to be carefully considered. For example:

	<b>Face-to-face</b>	<b>Online</b>
<b>Advantages</b>	Communication and personal attention to students greatly facilitated	More cost effective Can be offered to a wider range of students across the country. This will increase the attractiveness of the programme(s) to potential donors.
<b>Disadvantages</b>	Costly	Costs increase with each additional language, in terms of both personnel and materials. More impersonal, lecturers don't get to know the students and understand their academic and personal difficulties. Poor connectivity and data costs may exclude many potential students.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the course designer, the challenge of AdvCert has been to operationalise the vision of a course that is manageable, engaging, practical and fun, on one hand, with the demands of a university qualification and the prescripts of MRTEQ, on the other. A secondary challenge was to utilise the potential of RUCConnected.

In terms of the intended curriculum AdvCert gets a resounding thumbs-up from two independent external sources: the Harvard Evaluation and the Alignment Study; the latter was part of the current evaluation. Both reports graded the programme highly on conformity with the research evidence and what is generally regarded as high-quality reading pedagogy in the world's best school jurisdictions. This view, understandably, is endorsed by the interviewees. In addition, both views provide motivation for this approach, generally expressed in terms of following a structured (systematic) and comprehensive (big 5 of the NRP, practice-oriented delivery and assessment) programme design.

Regarding improvements to the intended curriculum, a wide range of recommendations were proposed by the different data sources. In large measure, this abundance of proposals is a function of feeling obliged to respond to the question 'what can be improved?' In few of the fact that the course is extensive and demands much from dedicated students, few of these proposals need to be accommodated. In addition, attempts to address these proposals need to be balanced against the costs involved, particularly with respect to staff time and capacity.

One suggestion that did receive more prominence than most in both the interviews and student questionnaires (raised by 8% of respondents) concerns the module on Inclusive Education (IE). It seems that there is an existential question concerning the approach to IE: should it focus on assisting all children who are battling with reading, should it focus on children with special needs, or should it serve more of a psycho-social support function?

Another recommendation that found favour with the Harvard Evaluation, supported by one interviewee, is that students on the course should receive a list of suitable reading books/stories for children in both HL and FAL, and that students be encouraged to continuously build on these lists. This seems an eminently useful suggestion, given the paucity of reading material, at all levels, in African languages.

Insights into the implemented curriculum were provided primarily by student views, and these were generally supported by the interviewees. High ratings for the accessibility, clarity and usefulness of the modules were resoundingly endorsed by students. There were few specific complaints, and the only trend visible in the data are that the most frequent class of responses to questions of both lecture material and assessment tasks cluster around the response 'no change needed'. With few exceptions, which arise largely from difficulties of connectivity and data cost, the majority of students experienced no significant difficulties and found the RUCConnected platform easy to use.

Regarding the attained curriculum, the only data available to the evaluation were student test scores which interrogate the extent to which the intended curriculum is achieved: What do students learn? A frequency distribution of the scores shows that there was discrimination across the range for both AdvCert and short course students. Nevertheless, the mean scores on the three tasks for each module were high (low- to mid-sixties). Similarly, the aggregate



scores of students across all 12 modules gave a mean of 67% for AdvCert and 66% for those attending the short course.

Was the standard too low? How could the level of cognitive challenge be raised? One of the external examiners, who was not available for an interview, had previously submitted an extensive module-by-module Moderation Report, which provides a number of useful suggestions. While the examiner praises some of the assessment tasks for challenging students to think critically and practically about language teaching, they also recommend that a greater number of higher-order questions be asked on some tasks.

The evidence examined by the evaluation strongly suggests that the primary question facing AdvCert is not so much one of how to improve the programme, but what to do with it next. All the data at our disposal points to this being an excellent programme, perhaps the best currently operating in either the CPD (in-service) or ITE (pre-service) sectors. It follows that, given the poor state of ITE programmes in the field of reading pedagogy and given the limited scope for improvement effected by even the best CPD interventions, a major new focus for the AdvCert should be to advocate for the inclusion of the curriculum, either as a whole or in parts, into BEd courses for primary school (FP and IP) teachers.

However, this new direction should not detract from continuing to offer the programme, either in full AdvCert or in short course mode, perhaps for different categories of students, with educators who do not hold a BEd (FP) registering for the short course. It seems clear that students across the country are unlikely to offer significant objections to the course exactly as presently structured, both in terms of the multi-mode form of delivery and in the current languages. However, it would be preferable to offer the videos in different languages, an option which Funda Wandé has already embarked on.

Regarding incorporation of the course into BEd programmes, the leaders of AdvCert have commenced this task, and have begun conversations towards this end with teacher educators at three HEIs. We would recommend that the campaign also commence discussions with the 8 universities which offer BEd programmes specialising in isiXhosa: Walter Sisulu, Rhodes, Fort Hare and Nelson Mandela in EC; University of the Western Cape, Cape Provincial University of Technology and Stellenbosch in WC; and Sol Plaatjie in NC. Working with isiXhosa-focused programmes will obviate the need to change any of the materials, as they have been found to be effective with isiXhosa-speaking students. It would seem logical that Rhodes might be most amenable to this course and that a pilot at Rhodes could serve as a platform from which to engage with the other BEd faculties which offer isiXhosa.

# Acknowledgement

Nick Taylor is Senior Research Fellow and JET Education Services. He writes here in his personal capacity. Thanks to Anna Nkomo for undertaking the Aligment Study and to Ashlyn Becorly for managing the Student Questionnaire and Data Management.

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