



Title: *The Real African Language- insights for assessments*

**Sub-theme: Ensuring Inclusive Assessment practices to
address diverse learners' abilities, talents and
competencies**

AEAA

Date: August 2025

Presenter: Shilela Nkadimeng



Outline

- Introduction
- Background
- Problem statement
- Purpose of the research
- Research questions
- Research methodology
- Terminology
- Findings
- Discussions
- Proposals
- Conclusions
- Limitations

Introduction

- Umalusi is a Quality Council mandated by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (Act No 67 of 2008) as amended and its founding Act, the GENFETQA Act (Act No 58 of 2001), as amended; to develop and manage the quality of the qualifications under the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF)
- One of Umalusi's responsibilities is to conduct research on matters relating to qualifications within the GFETQSF to ensure educational quality.
- Consequently, advise the relevant Minister on matters relating to qualifications registered on its sub-framework

Background

- The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2022) curriculum for Home Languages in the FET phase aims to achieve the following:



Language proficiency and mastery

Critical and Creative Thinking

Academic Preparedness and Lifelong Learning

Cultural Awareness and Literacy Appreciation

Social Transforming and Inclusivity

Background



Current assessment and quality assurance frameworks are often modelled from Germanic languages despite South Africa's 12 official languages and the diverse typological parameters (Sibanda and Joubert, 2024)



Language exclusion perpetuates systemic inequities in education and overlooks the rich epistemologies inherent in African languages, which afford epistemic access for speakers of African Bantu languages (Cakata, 2023)



African language-speaking learners face systemic educational disadvantages due to historical language policies, leading to poor literacy, numeracy, and cognitive development outcomes

Problem statement

- The current assessment framework for Home Languages is not suitable for African Languages in the Further Education and Training band

Purpose of the research

1. To demonstrate how the current Germanic (English) versioning of African home languages affects the assessment outcomes of African Language in the NSC
2. To identify the tenets that can be recommended to transform the framing of Assessments for African Home language curricula in the NSC to make it inclusive

Research questions

1. How does the current Germanic (English) versioning of African home languages affect the assessment outcomes of African Home Language in the NSC?
2. What tenets can be recommended to reframe the assessment of African Home language curricula in the NSC to make it inclusive?



Research Methodology

1. Qualitative research
2. Critical and comparative analysis approaches of HL
3. Common Framework of Reference for Indigenous Languages (CFRIL) to argue against versioning/translation
4. Purposive sampling: Isizulu Home language vs English Home language



Terms

Term	Definition
1. Agglutinative Language	Is a type of language in which words are formed by stringing together multiple morphemes (the smallest units of meaning), each with a distinct grammatical function. In such languages, prefixes, suffixes, infixes, or circumfixes are used extensively to modify meaning without altering the root word
2. Common Framework of Reference for Indigenous Languages (CFRIL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provides a structured approach to evaluate Indigenous languages on their own terms, rather than using Eurocentric linguistic norms• Applying it to critique the inadequacy of Germanic-based assessment methods for African languages requires a systematic approach
3. Versioning	The process of creating different versions of a text or language, which may vary based on time, audience, or purpose
4. Translation	The process of converting text or speech from one language to another while maintaining meaning

Structure of Home Language Assessments

Paper	Content Covered	Marks	Time Allocation
Paper 1: Language in Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehension (Textual Analysis) - Summary Writing - Language Structures and Conventions (Grammar, Vocabulary, Sentence Construction) 	70	2 Hours
Paper 2: Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Novel Study - Drama Study - Poetry Analysis (Prescribed and Unseen) - Literary Essay Questions 	80	2.5 Hours
Paper 3: Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Essay Writing (Narrative, Descriptive, Reflective, Argumentative, Discursive) - Transactional Writing (Letters, Reports, Speeches, Interviews, etc.) 	100	2.5 Hours
Oral Assessment (SBA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prepared Speech - Reading Aloud - Listening Comprehension - Conversation/Dialogue 	50	Ongoing (SBA Component)

Step By Step Analysis

Steps	Process
Step 1: Establish the Theoretical Basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Define Agglutinative vs. Germanic Linguistic Structures
Step 2: Identify and Critique the Mismatch in Assessment Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Critical analysis at agglutinative structure• Critical analysis at morphological level
Step 3: Propose an Indigenous-Centered Assessment Model	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop Linguistic Proficiency• Descriptors Based on CFRIL

Paper 1: Language in Context

Issue	CFRIL Critique
1. Comprehension section assumes linear, fixed-word-order sentence structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.1. Many African languages are agglutinative, where meaning is embedded in prefixes and suffixes, making rigid segmentation unnatural.• 1.2. The structure penalises students whose languages function differently
2. Grammar and language conventions focus on English-centric rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2.1. African languages rely on oral performance, idiomatic expressions, and tonal variations that cannot be reduced to English grammar norms.• 2.2. A morpheme-based approach would be more suitable
3. Summarisation techniques ignore oral storytelling traditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.1. African languages emphasise oral traditions, repetition, and contextual meaning rather than linear summarization• 3.2. The rigid summary format erases these linguistic realities

Paper 2: Eurocentric Textual Analysis vs. Indigenous Oral Traditions

Issue	CFRIL Critique
1. Literature analysis prioritises written over oral texts	1. Many African languages have rich oral literary traditions (e.g., proverbs, praise poetry, folklore) that are sidelined in favor of novel-based and European-style poetry analysis
2. Fixed literary essay structure (introduction-body-conclusion) does not align with African narrative traditions	2. African storytelling structures are non-linear, cyclical, and interactive. The rigid essay structure suppresses these alternative narrative logics
3. Western genres dominate literature selection	3. Indigenous poetic forms (e.g., izibongo, griot storytelling, and oral epics) are undervalued, reinforcing Western literary superiority

Paper 3: Writing – Imposed Rigid Writing Conventions

Issue	CFRIL Critique
<p data-bbox="123 400 1046 619">1. Essay writing follows English syntactic norms (subject-verb-object order).</p> <p data-bbox="123 703 819 948">Example: Simple Sentence: Subject: The researcher Verb: analysed Object: the data</p> <p data-bbox="123 1023 855 1203">Essay Style: <i>The researcher analyzed the data to identify patterns</i></p>	<p data-bbox="1081 400 1996 767">1. African languages often allow flexible word order and tonal emphasis to indicate meaning, which is not acknowledged in assessment</p> <p data-bbox="1081 863 1649 1070">Example: Ukufa- to die Ūkufá- Inheritance</p>

Paper 3...

Issue	CFRIL Critique
2. Lack of recognition for oral-based argumentation styles	2. African rhetorical traditions use call-and-response, repetition, and proverbs to construct arguments, unlike the structured English essay format
3. Transactional writing limits cultural linguistic expression	3. Official letters, reports, and speeches are assessed using English language norms, rather than considering African linguistic etiquette and oral forms

Oral Assessment: Reduction of Spoken Language to Eurocentric Standards

Issue	CFRIL Critique
1. Listening comprehension follows a rigid question-answer format	1. African languages prioritise interactive discourse, proverbs, and contextual storytelling rather than direct question-answer interactions
2. Western presentation norms dominate speech assessment	2. African languages use group storytelling, praise poetry, and idiomatic gestures in communication, which are not assessed or valued

Discussion

- Using Common Framework of Reference for Indigenous Languages, we can argue that the NSC Home Language structure undermines African languages in the following ways:
 1. Linguistic Mismatch: African languages are assessed using English grammatical and structural norms rather than their own morphological and syntactic systems
 2. Colonial Knowledge Hierarchies: The dominance of written over oral traditions devalues the primary modes of African linguistic expression
 3. Rigid Evaluation Methods: The assessment erases African storytelling, linguistic diversity, and oral rhetorical styles by enforcing English-centric evaluation criteria

Proposed Alternative NSC Examination Model (Aligned with CFRIL)

Paper	Current NSC Issue	CFRIL-Aligned Alternative
Paper 1: Language in Context	Assesses grammar using Eurocentric sentence structures and ignores agglutinative morphology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morphological and Tonal Analysis: Evaluate word formation through prefixes, suffixes, and tone • Cultural Pragmatics: Assess how meaning changes based on context, idioms, and proverbs
Paper 2: Literature	Prioritises written novels and Western poetic forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral Literature Assessment: Include praise poetry, folklore, and storytelling as primary literary sources. • Non-Linear Narrative Recognition: Acknowledge African storytelling's cyclical and interactive nature

Proposed Alternative NSC Examination Model (Aligned with CFRIL)...

Paper	Current NSC Issue	CFRIL-Aligned Alternative
Paper 3: Writing	Enforces rigid essay structures that do not match African rhetorical styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Argumentation Models: Recognize call-and-response, repetition, and proverbs in persuasive writing • Cultural Expressiveness: Allow creative storytelling formats beyond structured Western essays
Oral Assessment	Ignores tonal meaning, interactive speech, and indigenous discourse styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tonal & Morphological Recognition: Assess pronunciation and meaning changes based on tone • Dialogic Oral Exams: Use conversational storytelling rather than isolated speech performance.

Conclusion

- Current Model: Enforces Western linguistic norms, marginalising African languages
- Common Framework of Reference for Indigenous Languages (CFRIL)- Recognises African linguistic structures, oral traditions, and discourse styles
- Impact: Implementing CFRIL-based assessments validates African languages as systematic and complex, disrupting colonial linguistic hierarchies

Limitations

- Replication of the CFRIL to other Home Languages
- This study was structural analysis of each paper. Further studies must be conducted to critically analyse, using item analysis

THANK YOU

Shilela.Nkadimeng@umalusi.org.za

UMALUSI



Council for Quality Assurance in
General and Further Education and Training