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**833.  Mr B B Nodada (DA) to ask the Minister of Basic Education: to ask the Minister of Basic Education:**

What (a) are the details of the Government’s position regarding the value of mother‑tongue education in the Republic and (b) percentage of schools are able to teach in mother-tongue education?

**Response**

(a) The Department of Basic Education (DBE) values mother tongue education and thus encourages learners to learn through their Home Languages wherever it is feasible and practicable. This position is in alignment with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 6 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa lists the official languages as IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, IsiNdebele, Siswati, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, English and Afrikaans. All these languages can be used as languages of learning and teaching or as subjects. Section 29(2) of the Bill of Rights provides that “everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is **REASONABLY PRACTICABLE**.”

The above are reiterated in the National Education Policy Act, the South African Schools Act and the Language in Education Policy. The South African Schools Act goes further and provides that “A recognised Sign Language has the status of an official language for purposes of learning at a public school.” Whilst waiting for the enactment of the South African Sign Language as the twelfth official language, in the education sector, it has been long that the system has been operating with 12 official languages.

In its attempts to elevate the status of the previously marginalised languages, the Department of Basic Education developed the ***National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grades 1-12***, which makes provision for equal use of all 11 official languages and the South African Sign Language in the schooling system. The National Curriculum Statement Grades 1-12 encourages learners to learn through their home language(s), particularly, though not limited, in the Foundation Phase. The policy does not restrict the use of home language instruction up to Grade 3, but emphasises the use of the home language in Grades 1-3 to reinforce the critical foundational skills of reading, writing and counting. The NCS recognises the importance for learners to learn in their home language. The Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) can be selected from any official language. The NCS and the LiEP advocate for an additive bi/multilingualism approach that encourages learners to learn through their home language as long as it is feasible, as well as to learn other languages. Additive bi/multilingualism allows maintenance of learners’ home language as they acquire additional languages as subjects or as languages of instruction.

The National Development Plan (NDP) recommends that learners’ **home language** be used as **LoLT for longer periods** and English be introduced much earlier in the foundation phase. Chapter 15 of the NDP emphasises the need to **develop African languages or mother tongue as integral to education**, science and technology, in order to develop and preserve these languages.

***Despite all these noble efforts, the reality on the ground reflects otherwise. The hegemony of English as a preferred medium of instruction and communication seems to prevail, which together with Afrikaans are still the dominant languages of learning and teaching in majority of South African schools.***

The **Eastern Cape** initiated the **Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education pilot**, wherein **2 015** schools are using **IsiXhosa** and **Sesotho** as **LoLT** **beyond Foundation Phase (up to Grade 9)**. Learners in these schools are **taught Mathematics, Natural Science and Technology** in their **home languages** IsiXhosa and Sesotho. This initiative was started in **72 Confimvaba schools in Grade 4** in 2012 and incrementally in subsequent grades and it is now being implemented up to Grade 9 in 2022. The province is planning to roll it out to all the schools where it is feasible.

The DBE is currently putting prudent plan in place to roll out African Languages Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education to the other eight provinces.

(b) As detailed under (a) English and Afrikaans are used as LoLT throughout the schooling system. African languages are used as LoLT mainly in the Foundation Phase. Only IsiXhosa and Sesotho, through the Eastern Cape Mother Tongue Based Bilingual Education are used as LoLT post the Foundation Phase.