

## **The contributions of phonological awareness and decoding on spelling in third grade isiXhosa readers**

Mikaela Daries, Tracy Probert and Maxine Schaefer

### **Abstract**

While research confirms the relationship between spelling and reading, two key literacy outcomes, (Berninger et al, 2010; Mann, 1993; Treiman, 1998; McBride-Chang, 1998; Richgels & Barnhart, 1992; Richgels, 1995; Stage & Wagner, 1992), this relationship has yet to be explored in a Southern Bantu language, such as isiXhosa. This is because literacy studies in the Southern Bantu languages have tended to focus on decoding skills, with particular emphasis on the role of phonological awareness (PA) for decoding (Schaefer, Probert & Rees, 2020). Through the use of an initial and pre-registered conceptual replication study, we examined the relations between decoding, PA, and spelling for third grade isiXhosa readers using cross-sectional, quantitative secondary data from two different projects.

The initial exploratory study describes the relationships between decoding and spelling, and PA and spelling in a sample of 49 third grade isiXhosa learners. The conceptual replication study sought to confirm the hypotheses generated from the initial study with a larger sample of 149 third grade isiXhosa learners. We expected that both decoding and PA would be related to spelling and that the strength of the relationship between decoding and spelling, and PA and spelling would vary with spelling ability, due to the changes that occur in the development of spelling. Participants completed tasks of PA, oral reading fluency (as a measure of decoding) and spelling in both studies. The findings from linear regression analyses revealed that decoding was a robust predictor of spelling for third grade isiXhosa learners, whereas PA was not a robust predictor of spelling in isiXhosa, after controlling for decoding. Our study thus confirms the association found between decoding and spelling ability in consistent orthographies using cross-sectional data.

**Keywords:** spelling; decoding; phonological awareness; literacy; isiXhosa; psycholinguistics