CURRICULUM VITAE – Dr Rethabile Mawela
Consultant

PERSONAL DETAILS

Dr Rethabile Mawela
South African - 02/11/67
r.mawela@ru.ac.za
Senior Researcher, ISEA, Rhodes University
Resident in South Africa
Languages: English, Sesotho, Setswana, IsiZulu, IsiXhosa, Xitsonga, Afrikaans

QUALIFICATIONS

2018	PhD, Rhodes University, RSA
2012	MEd, Solusi University, Zimbabwe
1995	BA, English, Andrews University, USA
1991	STD, University of Transkei, RSA

PROFESSIONAL BIODATA

Rethabile Mawela is a Senior Researcher at Rhodes University in South Africa. She works in the Institute for the Study of the Englishes of Africa (ISEA), which is a research institute within the Faculty of Education. Her main focus is to coordinate research in the institute. She lectures on the research module to B.Ed. (in-service) and B.Ed. Honors (part-time) students. She supervises Master's and PhD scholars. She has supervised ten MEd scholars to completion, and their research areas cover various topics on language and the teaching of language. Since the ISEA is a research institute, the degrees offered are for research purposes. A lot of research is conducted in the Primary, Secondary and High schools. One of Rethabile's responsibilities is to structure the research projects and to evaluate the impact of the interventions.

Before she became a researcher and a teacher educator, Rethabile taught English at different schools; she taught English as a second language, English as a home language, and English as a foreign language. These 17 years spent in basic education provided a rich reservoir for her regarding literacy and the struggles learners and teachers face in basic education, particularly in the South African context.

In addition, Rethabile occupied different leadership roles while she was in basic education. She was a head of department (HOD) where she administered the smooth running of the English department of the school, mentored English language teachers, and assessed their work. She was the principal of a school, and she administered the smooth running of the school. She was chairperson of various committees and the secretary of the school board of trustees.

Rethabile also has experience teaching outside of South Africa. She spent seven years teaching English as a foreign language in South Korea. This experience was an eye-opener, and it assisted her to use pedagogical approaches that accommodate learners of different cultures and abilities.

SELECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS

Rethabile's research interests are the teaching of reading and multilingualism. Three of the research projects she has conducted are summarised below.

Example 1: 2023 - 2024

Research title: Investigating the Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown on Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities and Emerging Strategies to Mitigate Against the Impact.
Participants: Intermediate and Senior phase English teachers in the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape. Also, teachers at one Primary School in Grahamstown.
Data collection tools: Interviews, focus group discussions, classroom observation, and workshops.
Output: Research paper (forthcoming)

Example 2: 2021

Research title: Exploring language teachers' attitudes towards the literacy challenges of learners.
Participants: English First Additional Language (EFAL) teachers, Sesotho Home Language (HL) teachers, Isizulu Home Language (HL) teachers.
Data collection tools: Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and a questionnaire.
Output: Conference presentation in 2022.

Example 3: 2020

Research title: Investigating Student Teachers' Understanding of Academic Writing.

Participants: BEd English Language Teaching (in-service) student teachers.

Data collection tools: Focus group discussions, interviews, documents.

Output: Book chapter

SELECTED MEL PROJECTS

Dr Rethabile Mawela's experience as a researcher and a teacher educator have afforded her the skills needed to be a monitoring and evaluation consultant. From July 2021 to March 2022, she worked with two experienced consultants on the Certificate in Online English Language Teaching (COELT) Monitoring and Evaluating Consultancy.

COELT Monitoring and Evaluation: 2021- 2022

The Certificate in Online English Language Teaching (COELT) was a 40-hour online professional development programme that was delivered to teachers in the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa. The course was implemented through a partnership between the DBE, the British Council, and The Consultants-E (TCE). Working with two other MEL consultants, Rethabile undertook the independent external evaluation of Phase 2 of COELT, which ran between July 2021 and March 2022. During this phase, a cohort of Master Trainers (MTs) first completed the course themselves (Stage 1), after which they were expected to deliver it to subsequent groups of teachers (Stages 2 and 3).

MEL Aims:

The purpose of the evaluation was to examine:

- the extent to which COELT's deliverables had been achieved
- the profile of participants on the course
- the perspectives of TCE tutors, MTs, and teachers on the value and impact of the course
- the extent to which learning from the course had been transferred into DBE classrooms
- the effectiveness of COELT's online professional learning community (PLC).

Role: MEL Consultant (working with Dr Simon Borg and Dr Nokhanyo Mdzanga) with responsibility for collecting data through project documents, such as attendance registers and Terms of Reference, semi-structured online and telephone interviews (with 4 TCE tutors, 13 MTs and 41 teachers), an online teacher survey, discussions with the Professional Learning Community (PLC) team, and Facebook analytics for the PLC.

Key findings:

The course was well-received by teachers and high-level stakeholders; however, a number of external factors, such as issues with recruitment across the various provinces, meant that some targets were unrealistic, and therefore some project deliverables were not met. In particular, the number of Stage 1 MTs who delivered courses to teachers in Stage 2 was 30% of the target, while no MTs reached Stage 3. The number of teachers completing COELT was also only about 10% of the project's target of 5,000. While the project sought to offer particular support to teachers in less advantaged provinces, this was not reflected in the selection of COELT Phase 2 MTs and teachers; again, this was primarily due to issues in recruitment, which was the remit of the government education department in each province.

Nevertheless, COELT participant groups reported positive experiences. For example:

- Stage 1 MTs found the course a positive and relevant experience, despite some challenges. Stage 2 MTs were positive about the experience of rolling out the course, learned much during the process, and felt that TCE tutor support was vital.
- TCE Tutors were positive about Stage 2, though they were required to provide high levels of support.
- Stage 2 teachers were positive about the course and benefited from it, despite several challenges.
- Close to 700 members had joined the PLC, but teacher engagement had remained low, despite substantial efforts by the PLC team.

Overall, application to the classroom of ideas from COELT had occurred in places but was generally modest due to several adverse factors, including notably that in-person teaching had resumed in DBE schools post-COVID.