'It can't be business as usual': Pupils tested in African languages performed poorly - study

The Department of Basic Education has voiced concern about the poor performance of pupils tested in African home languages. The pupils were tested during the Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS) and the reading assessments.

The PIRLS in Reading Literacy Survey (Study PIRLS 2019) was launched in South Africa on Tuesday and it revealed that 4% of Grade 4 pupils in South Africa were unable to meet with meaning.

Basic education minister Angie Motshekga said South Africa had dropped to 28% nationally. The benchmark was 80%.

Motshekga said it was unacceptable that pupils who were offered the assessments in English and Afrikaans did well.

"Unfortunately, pupils who took the test in the African home languages performed much worse. This is a worrying indicator and African home languages have not engaged vastly of students," she added.

She said she had decided to allow the schools to teach multilingualism from Grade 4.

Motshekga said investment and support must go to African home languages regarding teaching and learning. We are building a reading strategy, including rolling out an early grade reading programme, incorporating proven best practices. It will start with improving academic readiness through better early childhood development provision.

She said the policy for 28% was that effective language teaching, with added support for brightness, as a first additional language.

"Starting businesses in a similar way that they understand and with strategies, we have been implementing our reading strategy, and its apparent that we need to improve the teaching and learning of African home language reading literacy at all grade levels in the emergent and early grades," she said.

Motshekga said the department’s views were that by 2020 pupils should have access to education and have attained the stage 2 in the language proficiency in their mother tongue.

"The performance of SA learners in international benchmark tests should be comparable to the performance of learners from other countries," she said.

Motshekga said the department had a plan for all future learners and would ensure that all learners in all grades benefitted.

"We have to focus on reducing the gap between learners from different socio-economic contexts. What are your thoughts?" she said.

Voting Booth

"If you want to vote for a candidate by choosing a specific candidate, stop now and after several years of research on the validity of the method, we are going to make the decision. What are your thoughts?"

I am well as before.

On the move, where are you located?

I'm in the next option to keep everyone happy.
One of the sponsors of the event, Dr. Gobi Refih, who is an associate researcher at the University of Johannesburg, said the need for increased research and knowledge sharing is critical.

"We should do more on awareness and education," Refih said. "There is a need to create a culture that embraces and celebrates diversity. We need to identify and report on our knowledge, and make training and policies accessible to all communities."

"It's important to know that if we are not aware of it, we are not being educated," he added. "We need to be proactive in ensuring everyone gets the information they need."