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Are South African speech-language therapists adequately equipped to assess English additional language (EAL) speakers who are from an indigenous linguistic and cultural background? A profile and exploration of the current situation

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The South African multicultural and multilingual society is a microcosm of the diversity within the global community. This diversity is reflected in the communities that require the services of the profession of Speech Language Pathology. Furthermore, this pluralism has implications for the manner in which assessments are conducted. It is against this background that a survey was conducted on Speech-Language Therapists (SLTs) regarding current practices in the assessment of English Additional Language (EAL) speakers in South Africa. It forms part of the rationale for a broader, critically evaluates the assessment of English Additional Language (EAL) speakers who are from an indigenous linguistic and cultural background, using an English expressive language screening tool, the Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT) as an example. The cultural and linguistic relevance of this commonly used screening tool is interrogated from four different viewpoints, firstly, the perspective of the children, who are the target population of the tool; secondly, that of the parents and community, who play a significant role in the socialization of the children; thirdly, from the perspective of the academics, who provide an academic perspective of the tool; and finally, speech-language therapists (SLTs) who administer the tool and interpret the results. The results of this survey highlight the challenges of human and material resources and the dominance of English in the profession in South Africa. The findings contribute to understanding critical factors for acquiring reliable and valid assessment results with diverse populations, particularly the implications from a cultural and linguistic perspective.

Biography

Thandeka Mdlalo is a South African Speech-Language Therapist. Her area of interest is linguistic and cultural diversity and currently forms part of the Linguistic and Cultural Committee of the Health Professionals Council of South Africa. She has acquired experience and extensive training in both private and public sectors, academia as a Lecturer to Speech-Language Pathologists in training and currently works as a Speech-Language Therapist and Audiologist at a remedial school and has a private practice. She has presented papers and workshops at local and international conferences, co-authored books and published in local and international journals.

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