



Job Title : Research Assistant

Location : Department of Basic Education, 222 Struben Street, Pretoria

Department : Reading Support Project

The position will be seconded to DBE. The incumbent will report to:
Director of Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation (DBE); and
Chief of Party Reading Support Project (FPD)

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Summary

The Department of Basic Education is expanding its research into alternative ways to strengthen the teaching and learning in Foundation Phase, through the Early Grade Reading Study (EGRS). Based on the initial impact evaluation conducted in the North West Province between 2015 and 2017, a number of key recommendations were made, and the DBE has committed to an improvement plan. Part of this improvement plan includes expanding successful components of the EGRS reading interventions in the North West Province and continuing to evaluate program effectiveness. The extension of these interventions on a larger scale in the North West Province is known as the Reading Support Project.

Motivation

The majority of South African children transition to English as language of instruction in Grade 4, therefore making a certain level of competence in English foundational to all subsequent learning. The SACMEQ study of 2007 indicates that roughly 1 in 3 South African children do not reach grade 6 having acquired even basic reading literacy in English. Yet the majority are being taught using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching from grade 4. This no doubt feeds into the substantial inequalities in educational achievement which are established early in primary school. Research also indicates that learning to read in one's home language is a vital learning foundation which enables subsequent learning, including the acquisition of a second language. Early interventions to improve both home language and English reading and literacy among poor children can, therefore, be expected to have larger effects than interventions later in the school program.

Overview of the Reading Support Project and Evaluation

There are two main components to the work planned for the North West Province in 2019 and 2020: the implementation of the Reading Support Project, and the evaluation thereof.

A number of activities are planned to strengthen the teaching and learning of home language literacy and English FAL in the Foundation Phase. These include the provision of daily lesson

plans aligned to the curriculum, additional reading support materials, the provision of on-site specialist reading coaching to teachers, and the implementation of a School Management Team support program. Altogether just under 300 non-fee schools in the districts of Ngaka Modiri Molema and Dr Kenneth Kaunda will be supported.

There will also be a number of evaluation activities to unpack the effectiveness of the various aspects of the Reading Support Project. These include quantitative surveys of reading achievement to facilitate a formal impact evaluation, classroom observation studies and detailed school case studies.

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Project administration and communication (20%)

The successful candidate will assist the EGRS project management team based in the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation unit in the DBE.

The Research Assistant will assist with coordination and communication amongst all stakeholders in the project: Donors, the data collection agency, the service provider for the interventions, schools and the provincial education departments. In addition to the logistical dimensions of project administration, there will be some monitoring of project activities to ensure the service providers are fulfilling their obligations.

Illustrative responsibilities include:

- Arranging project management meetings, steering committee meetings, and other meetings with stakeholders;
- Taking minutes of such meetings and providing other administrative support;
- Sending out invitations to meetings, booking venues for meetings, printing materials for meetings, taking minutes, etc;
- Drafting letters between stakeholders, e.g. from DBE to provincial education departments, or to school principals;
- Receiving, filing and analyzing project implementation information received from service providers, e.g. attendance registers at teacher training sessions;
- Conducting routine monitoring and evaluation of project progress by reviewing work plans and reports, conducting site visits, and maintaining ongoing contact with implementing partners. The Research Assistant will monitor program activities to ensure compliance with intended program design.

B. Monitoring of project activities in the field (20%)

The Research Assistant will make trips to project sites (schools and training venues) to monitor project activities, about 2 days a month;

C. Data cleaning and analysis (20%)

The evaluation side of the project will generate a considerable amount of learner performance data and background information about schools, teachers and parents. This will inform the

research and evaluation component of the project. The DBE in collaboration with external researchers is responsible for the data analysis and impact evaluation reports. However, support is required with the data cleaning and analysis from the Research Assistant.

Illustrative examples of tasks include:

- Transferring data between statistical packages, such as Microsoft Excel, STATA and SPSS;
- Data cleaning and verification
- Deriving new variables, such as reading test scores;
- Basic analysis of data

D. Assisting with report writing (10%)

The Research Assistant will assist in drafting project progress reports to donors, partners and the Project Management team to satisfy each organisation's particular reporting requirements.

E. Implementation of the Improvement Plan (10%)

The implementation and evaluation components are the core components of the Research Assistant position, however, in addition to these the DBE will be implementing a Cabinet approved Reading Improvement Plan which includes additional tasks and activities. Responsibilities will include providing communication and administrative support for implementing the improvement plan including components such as the coaching course and reading norms.

F. Other duties (10%)

The Research Assistant will respond flexibly to various other work-related tasks at the discretion of the supervisor. These may include, amongst other miscellaneous tasks:

- Attending meetings on behalf of the EGRS;
- Reading and summarizing literature relevant to the EGRS

G. Capacity building activities (10%)

The Research Assistant will receive training and mentoring on an informal basis through working with DBE research staff and Principal Investigators and through participating in formal sessions on research methods held regularly within the DBE.

H. Personal research output (Optional; in personal time)

The Research Assistant may, with the consent of the Research Team and subject to the Ethical Approvals and Intellectual Property agreements pertaining to the EGRS, use data and experiences from the EGRS for his/her own research work if, for example, it can be incorporated into their studies.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS:

Education:

Candidates should have completed a Bachelor's Degree or equivalent formal education qualification or be in the final year of a degree for which the completion of an internship is required. Qualifications in a field relevant to development or education will be an advantage. A postgraduate degree in a related field is highly desirable.

Prior Work Experience:

Prior work experience is not required but would be advantageous.

Language Proficiency:

Good written and oral communication skills in English are required. Proficiency in other South African official languages is desired, but not required. English language written skills will be evaluated in the initial review of an applicant's submission by a review of the Cover Letter and of the CV itself. Oral English skills will be evaluated in the interview phase. Additionally, applicants are required to submit a sample of their writing, such as a research paper or report they have written. If you do not already have a suitable piece of writing, then you may write a short essay (700 – 1000 words) expressing your opinion on the following topic: "What is the main challenge South Africa faces in providing quality education for all?"

Knowledge:

The successful candidate must demonstrate interest in understanding of the education sector in South Africa. The candidate should also be able to demonstrate interest and some understanding of social research methods such as sample surveys and impact evaluation methods.

Skills and Abilities:

The candidate should have skills sufficient to interact productively with individuals of diverse cultural, socio-economic and educational backgrounds.

The Research Assistant should have excellent administrative skills, including the ability to draft well formulated letters and emails and to manage effective and timely communication with a variety of stakeholders.

The Research Assistant must be capable of working independently on a number of tasks simultaneously with guidance from their supervisor.

The Research Assistant should have a valid driver's license and, preferably, access to their own car with which to make trips to the field for monitoring purposes. Travel costs will be compensated for.

The Research Assistant should at least have some experience working with Microsoft Office programs including Word and Excel.

Evaluation Criteria and Weights:

1. Education/Weighted 10% based on initial application review;
2. English Language Skills/Weighted 15% based on application review and interview;
3. Prior Work or Research Experience/Weighted 15% based on application review and interview;
4. Knowledge/Weighted 30% based on CV and interview; and
5. Skills and Abilities/Weighted 30% based on CV, sample of writing and interview.

Selection:

The successful candidate will be selected based upon the following:

1. A preliminary review of the applicant's submitted package (which includes the Cover Letter, sample of writing and CV) to establish that minimum educational and English writing fluency requirements are met; and
2. A personal or telephone/Skype interview; and
3. Reference checks, at least two contactable references should be provided in the CV.

For an application package to be considered complete, please submit the following:

1. Ensure that your application is accompanied by a Cover Letter,
2. Include a CV of no more than 3 pages,
3. Include a sample of your writing, such as a research paper or report. If you do not already have a suitable piece of writing, then you may write a short essay (700 – 1000 words) expressing your opinion on the following topic: "What is the main challenge South Africa faces in providing quality education for all?"

Closing date for application: 13 March 2019 at 16:00

Applications should please be submitted to recruitment@foundation.co.za or faxed to 081 680 0736.

For enquiries please contact Mr Tshililo Pharamela/ Ms Tammy Bates on 012-816- 9000.

NB: Only applicants shortlisted for interviews will be contacted. If you have not been contacted within 1 month after the closing date of this advertisement, please accept that your application was unsuccessful.