


# Chapter 10


## Global Partnerships in Educational Research: Exploring Multilingual Pedagogies for Reading Comprehension Improvement in Primary School Non-Readers

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores the complexities and transformative potential of supervising international PhD students through a joint educational research project. Grounded in multilingual pedagogy, the research project presented in the paper investigates reading comprehension among South African primary school non-readers, addressing the systemic mismatch between learners' linguistic realities and a predominantly English-medium education system. Subsequently reflecting on the intercultural supervision process, the authors highlight methodological insights and emotional dimensions, especially enabling the second author to emphasize her evolving identity as a 'knowledge producer'. Drawing from personal experience, this chapter underscores the value of international collaboration. It challenges romanticized narratives of global education and research, exposing the structural and emotional*

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*challenges faced by international researchers. Ultimately, the chapter reframes international PhD work as a mutually enriching process of co-creation, resilience, and academic innovation.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Navigating complexities, desires, and ambiguities is any PhD supervisor's challenge (or perk) who has decided to accept international students. The study to be discussed here represents a unique contribution and position, which require elaboration. Therefore, this contribution will begin by addressing the protagonists' positionality. Not only has the first author been supervising students from several different countries, three of which (i.e. one from Sub-Saharan Africa, one from the Middle East and one from South-East Asia) have already successfully completed their educational research and obtained doctoral status, he himself also holds official titles at four universities, spanning distinct cultural and socio-political regions. He is a Professor at the University of Antwerp in Western Europe, Chief Researcher at Kaunas University of Technology in Eastern Europe, Senior Research Associate at Rhodes University and an Extraordinary Professor at Stellenbosch University, both in Southern Africa. At the latter institution, the second author is enrolled as a doctoral student for a joint PhD project between Stellenbosch University (South Africa) and Antwerp University (Flanders, Belgium). Next to being a mother, she is an educator and multilingual literacy advocate with experience in child-centred, inclusive education across Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Namibia. The present paper will discuss her educational research project on reading, with special attention to complexities, desires, and ambiguities that may arise from international research projects. In view of the fact that the project itself is very illustrative of how the supervisor and student position themselves in relation to each other and the global contexts they are both indexical of, not only their collaboration but also the binational project proper will be presented as an example of Global Engagement in international research that sees South Africa as an ideal, for innovative, incubator for educational research on multilingual education.

Despite the linguistic diversity of learners in South Africa, many teachers continue to prioritize monolingual approaches in mainstream classrooms (Omidire & Ayob, 2022), even if the dominant content-based approach raises teachers' awareness of school language. Facilitating learning in content-based instruction does indeed imply 'integrat[ing] not only language and content but also all the languages in the learners' multilingual repertoires' (Cenoz, 2013, p 393). The aforementioned as well as international studies illustrate that current practices stimulate learning insufficiently: the latest PISA results show that since 2000 many learners' reading

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