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REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS

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**REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR
CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS**

Advancing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in South Africa



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REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS

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Acronym Meaning

AL	Additional Language
DBE	Department of Basic Education
NSC	National Senior Certificate
HL	Home Language
FAL	First Additional Language
SAL	Second Additional Language
SASL	South African Sign Language
MTBBE	Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LTSM	Learning and Teaching Support Materials
PanSALB	Pan South African Language Board
FET	Further Education and Training
GET	General Education and Training
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

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REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents an analysis of the 2025 National Senior Certificate (NSC) language results, based on data supplied by the Department of Basic Education (DBE). The findings reveal a stable national performance profile characterised by high pass rates, particularly in Home Language (HL) subjects, but with persistent disparities in proficiency and distinction-level achievement. They indicate near-universal pass rates across language subjects, moderate levels of proficiency concentrated in the 50-79% band, low distinction rates in high-enrolment subjects, especially English HL and FAL, and consistent performance advantage for learners studying in their mother tongue.

A key conclusion emerging from the data is the strong positive correlation between learner performance and mother tongue alignment. Learners who study their home language as a HL subject consistently outperform those studying in a second or unfamiliar language. Conversely, misalignment between learners' linguistic backgrounds and subject offerings contributes to lower achievement, especially in First Additional Language (FAL) subjects and English HL streams.

The report therefore advances a mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTBBE) approach as a strategic pathway to strengthening multilingualism, equity, and educational outcomes in South Africa.

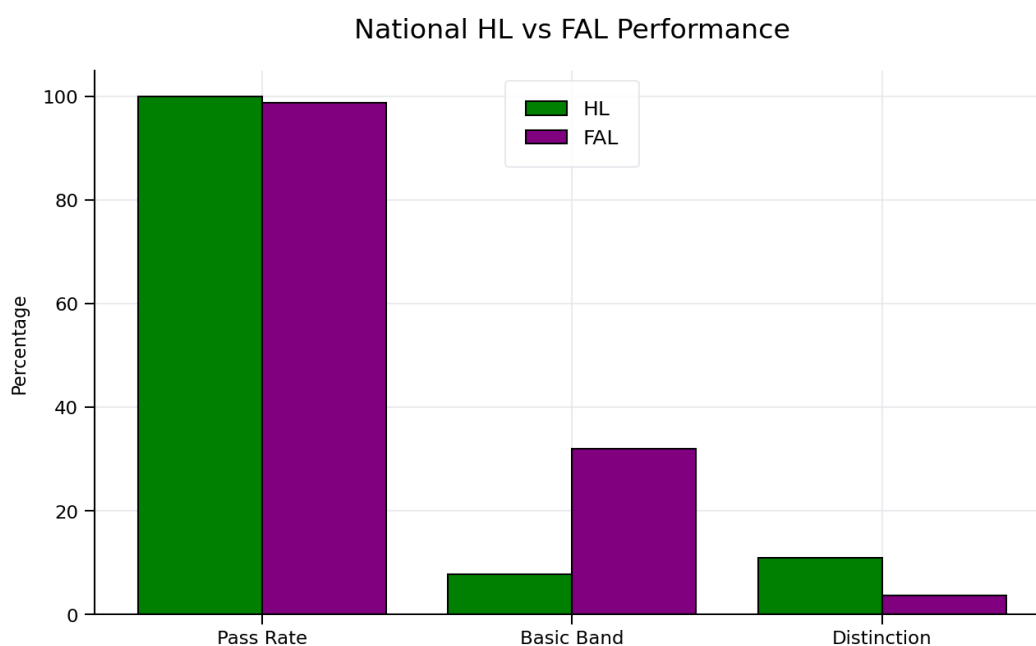
2. DATA SOURCE AND SCOPE

This report draws on official NSC 2025 language results provided by the DBE, covering all provinces and language categories (HL, FAL, Second Additional Language [SAL]). The analysis examines learner performance distributions (fail, basic, proficient, distinction), subject participation trends, provincial variations in language outcomes, and systemic constraints affecting multilingual education in South Africa.

3. NATIONAL PERFORMANCE TRENDS AND KEY INSIGHTS

Chart 1 below shows the systemic gap between HL and FAL learners. It reveals a clear and consistent pattern between HL learners who significantly outperform the FAL learners across all key performance indicators. This advantage is particularly evident in the distinction rates, where approximately 11% of HL learners achieve a distinction, compared to 3.7% of learners in FAL subjects. It is further illustrated in a lower concentration in the basic achievement band, indicating stronger foundational proficiency, and depicts the disproportionate clustering of FAL learners in the 30-49% range, which signals systemic inequality in language acquisition and academic development. These findings confirm that linguistic alignment between the learner's home language (mother tongue) and the language of assessment is a decisive factor in academic success.

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*Chart 1: National Performance Trends***3.1 High Pass Rates with Moderate Achievement Levels**

Across all provinces, language subjects demonstrate consistently high pass rates, with failure rates typically below 1% in major language subjects. However, a closer examination of achievement distributions shows that most learners are concentrated in the 50-79% “proficient” band. While this reflects functional competence, it also indicates that learners are achieving basic academic literacy without advancing to higher-order proficiency, and our education system is producing broad access to young people but limited linguistic excellence.

This pattern suggests that the basic education system is effective in ensuring minimum linguistic competency but may be less effective in promoting advanced analytical, interpretive, and expressive language skills as envisaged by the DBE Critical Language Awareness document published in September 2022.

3.2 Low Distinction Rates in High-Enrolment Subjects

The high-enrolment subjects, such as English HL and English FAL consistently record low distinction rates (generally below 5%), despite maintaining high pass rates. This disparity highlights a critical gap in higher-order linguistic competence, critical thinking, and textual analysis skills in this language. English is a requirement for academic literacy in the South African tertiary education system. The data indicate that while learners meet minimum assessment requirements, they often struggle to demonstrate advanced mastery of language, especially in academically demanding contexts like

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Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) subjects.

3.3 Strong Performance in Indigenous African Home Languages

In contrast, indigenous African HL subjects (including isiZulu, isiXhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, and Xitsonga) demonstrate consistently strong performance across all provinces. The key features of these language subject results include extremely low failure rates, often close to zero. There are high concentrations in the proficient band, frequently exceeding 85-90%. They create competitive and, in some cases, high distinction rates, allowing provinces like KwaZulu-Natal to exceed expectations to top the 2025 pass rates. The Eastern Cape has increased its pass rate by more than 25% in a decade, even though it is the worst performing province overall.

These outcomes provide compelling empirical evidence that learners achieve greater cognitive engagement and comprehension when instructed and assessed in their home language (mother tongue), and mother tongue-based instruction enhances both stability and excellence in learning outcomes.

Taken together, these trends clearly demonstrate that educational performance in South Africa is strongly shaped by the degree of alignment between the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) and learners' linguistic identity. Where such alignment exists (as in indigenous African HL subjects), the system produces higher linguistic proficiencies, greater academic stability, and improved progression toward excellent linguistic repertoire.

Conversely, where learners are required to learn in a second or unfamiliar language, such as in English FAL contexts, performance is characterised by lower distinction rates, greater clustering in lower achievement bands, and reduced access to advanced academic skills, including being ill-prepared for tertiary academic demands.

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4. PROVINCIAL PERFORMANCE TRENDS AND KEY INSIGHTS

4.1 Eastern Cape Language Performance Breakdown

The Eastern Cape results reflect a highly stabilised and mature assessment profile, characterised by strong clustering in the proficiency band and consistently low failure rates across most language subjects. When interpreted alongside the two accompanying charts, the data reveal both systemic strengths and specific areas requiring targeted intervention.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	6 970	2.84%	29.96%	61.42%	5.78%
Afrikaans HL	4 458	0.27%	44.80%	53.30%	1.64%
Afrikaans SAL	202	0.99%	52.48%	44.55%	1.98%
English FAL	96 872	1.22%	40.42%	57.49%	0.87%
English HL	10 067	0.49%	32.74%	64.76%	2.02%
isiXhosa FAL	2 427	0.16%	5.44%	89.08%	5.32%
isiXhosa HL	91 130	0.06%	2.72%	90.39%	6.83%
isiZulu HL	8	0.00%	0.00%	87.50%	12.50%
Sesotho HL	1 948	0.00%	0.72%	97.13%	2.16%
SASL HL	26	7.69%	50.00%	42.31%	0.00%

Table 1: Eastern Cape 2025 Language Pass Rate

4.1.1 Failure Rates (0-29%): Minimal but Unevenly Distributed

Failure rates across the province remain exceptionally low, reinforcing overall system stability. The highest failure rate appears in South African Sign Language (SASL) HL at 7.69%, significantly above all other subjects. Afrikaans FAL (2.84%) is the only other subject exceeding 2%, while English FAL is at 1.22%, and Afrikaans SAL remains moderate at around 1%. It should be noted that the 0.06% failure rate in isiXhosa HL and 0% failure rates in Sesotho HL and isiZulu HL demonstrate the importance of mother tongue education.

4.1.2. Basic Achievement (30-49%): A Key Pressure Zone

This category provides the clearest indication of under-prepared but passing learners, and it reveals several systemic weaknesses, such as Afrikaans SAL (53%) and SASL HL (50%), which show majority clustering in the basic band. Afrikaans HL (45%) and English FAL (41%) also have large proportions below proficiency. In contrast, isiXhosa HL (3%) and Sesotho HL (1%) show minimal vulnerability.

The second chart above highlights a visible bulge in the 30-49% range for specific subjects, particularly Afrikaans and SASL. The key concern is SASL HL: the combination of an 8% failure rate plus 50% basic achievement rate means nearly 60% of learners are below proficiency, severely limiting broader educational progression opportunities. Afrikaans HL also raises structural questions in the Eastern Cape. A relatively small cohort of learners (5%) failing, with a high basic rate performance

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rate (45%), suggest either misalignment between learner profile and subject level or possible instructional challenges in this language subject.

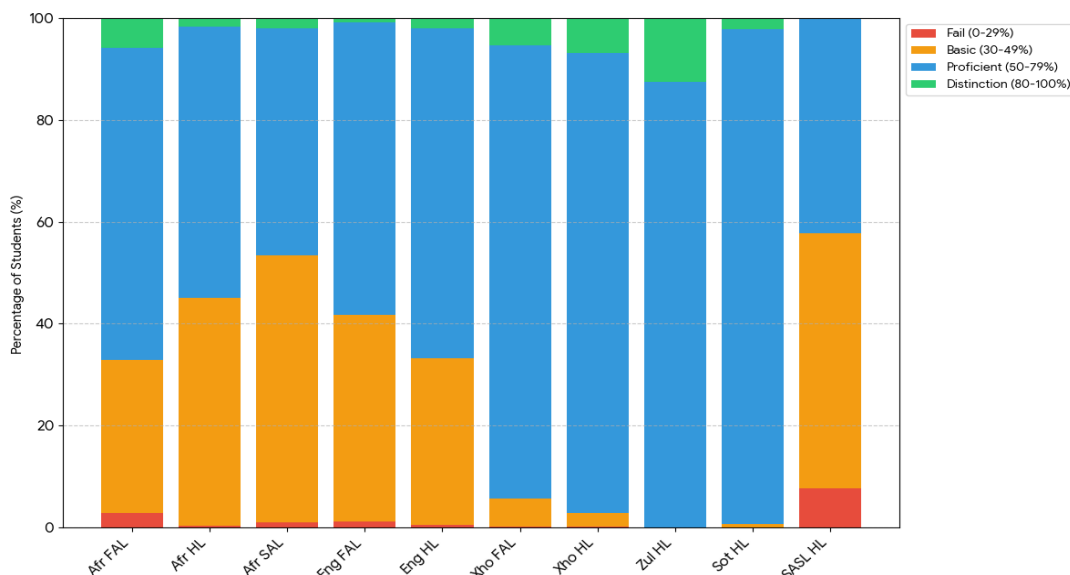


Chart 2: Eastern Cape NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.1.3. Proficiency levels (50-79%):

The performance profile of language subjects in the Eastern Cape is most clearly defined by a dominant concentration of learners within this proficiency band (50-79%), which emerges as the central characteristic of the system. This pattern is particularly pronounced in key home language subjects, with Sesotho HL (97.13%), isiXhosa HL (90.39%), and isiXhosa FAL (89.08%) showing exceptionally high clustering within this band. Even subjects that perform comparatively lower still sustain strong majorities in proficiency, including English HL (64.76%) and Afrikaans HL (53.30%).

When interpreted alongside the graphical data, both charts underscore this phenomenon, highlighting a dominant central distribution in which most learners achieve at a competent level. This suggests not merely widespread passing, but a system characterised by consistent and stable performance outcomes. Importantly, this trend strongly reinforces the value of mother tongue instruction. Subjects aligned with learners' home languages (mother tongues)—particularly isiXhosa HL and Sesotho HL—demonstrate minimal failure rates, low representation in the basic band, and significant clustering in proficiency. Such outcomes indicate a depth of conceptual understanding that extends beyond superficial achievement.

Despite this strong central performance, the distinction band (80-100%) remains relatively narrow, indicating that high-level excellence, while present, is not yet widespread. The highest proportion of

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distinctions appears in isiZulu HL (12.50%), although this figure is based on a very small cohort of eight learners. Among high-enrolment subjects, isiXhosa HL (6.83%) shows the most substantial distinction in performance.

A notable comparison also emerges within FALs, where Afrikaans FAL (5.78%) significantly outperforms English FAL (0.87%) in producing top achievers. However, the absence of distinctions in SASL HL is particularly concerning, pointing to a lack of top-end achievement in that subject.

4.1.4. Eastern Cape Interpretation

The charts visually confirm this pattern, depicting a thin but visible distinction layer, suggesting that while excellence is achievable, it is not yet broadly distributed across the system. Several cross-cutting insights deepen this analysis. Firstly, the advantage of mother tongue instruction is unmistakable. HL subjects consistently display high proficiency and low risk, whereas FALs show greater variability and, in some cases, increased vulnerability. This underscores the importance of aligning the language of instruction with learners' linguistic backgrounds to support cognitive development and academic success.

Secondly, SASL HL stands out as an area of critical concern. It exhibits a dual performance challenge, characterised by the highest failure rate, many learners below proficiency, and a complete absence of distinctions. This combination suggests systemic issues, potentially including curriculum delivery gaps, resource constraints, or limited teacher capacity, and signals an urgent need for targeted intervention.

A further complexity emerges in what can be described as the Afrikaans performance paradox. Despite relatively smaller enrolment numbers, Afrikaans HL shows a high concentration in the basic achievement band (44.80%), raising questions about whether learners are appropriately placed at HL level, or whether there may be underlying issues related to teaching quality or learner support.

Additionally, the data points to emerging concerns around language diversity. The extremely low enrolment in isiZulu HL (8 candidates) and SASL HL (26 candidates) suggests a narrowing linguistic landscape. Over time, this trend could have significant implications for linguistic representation, inclusivity, and equity within the Eastern Cape education system.

Taken together, the performance profile of the Eastern Cape can best be described as a high-stability, middle-heavy system. On the one hand, it demonstrates clear strengths: very low failure rates, a dominant proficiency band, and strong evidence of the success of mother tongue instruction. On the other hand, there are notable weaknesses, including a limited spread of distinctions, ongoing

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clustering in the basic band for certain subjects, and serious performance and participation challenges in SASL and other smaller languages.

Ultimately, the charts illustrate a system where access to passing is widely secured, but progression to high achievement remains constrained. Moving forward, improvement efforts should focus on lifting learners from basic to proficient ability, while also expanding the distinction band, ensuring that gains in excellence do not come at the expense of the system's existing stability.

4.2 FREE STATE LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for the Free State, as reflected in the accompanying charts, reveal a system characterised by strong stability and a clear concentration of learners within the middle performance range. The visual distribution across subjects confirms that most candidates are achieving at or above the required level, with relatively small proportions falling into the lower performance categories.

Subject description	Total Wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	4 455	2.47%	39.59%	53.45%	4.49%
Afrikaans HL	2 951	0.00%	16.44%	75.73%	7.83%
Afrikaans SAL	3 361	1.61%	60.37%	37.13%	0.89%
English FAL	34 048	0.11%	33.34%	65.35%	1.20%
English HL	4 899	0.06%	30.80%	66.22%	2.92%
isiXhosa HL	915	0.00%	3.06%	91.37%	5.57%
isiZulu FAL	3	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
isiZulu HL	1 247	0.00%	5.05%	94.87%	0.08%
Sesotho sa Leboa HL	19	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
Sesotho FAL	390	0.00%	26.41%	73.08%	0.51%
Sesotho HL	26 620	0.02%	2.37%	95.76%	1.85%
Sesotho SAL	199	0.00%	4.52%	78.39%	17.09%
Setswana HL	2 287	0.09%	3.89%	91.21%	4.81%
SASL HL	13	0.00%	15.38%	84.62%	0.00%
Xitsonga HL	22	0.00%	0.00%	90.91%	9.09%

Table 2: Free State Matric Results

4.2.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

Charts 4 and 5 show that the failure band is extremely narrow across almost all language subjects in the Free State, indicating that very few learners fall below the minimum achievement threshold. English FAL, which has the highest enrolment, records a failure rate of just 0.11%, while Sesotho HL, the largest HL cohort, shows an even smaller proportion at 0.02%. Several language subjects, including Afrikaans HL, isiXhosa HL, and Sesotho SAL, register no failures at all. Even Afrikaans FAL, which has the highest failure rate at 2.47%, still reflects a relatively small segment in the chart. Visually, this produces a near-absence of the failure band, confirming that the system is highly effective in ensuring that learners meet the basic passing requirement.

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4.2.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts begin to show more variation in the basic band, where learners demonstrate minimum competency but have not yet reached proficiency. Afrikaans SAL is particularly notable, with 60.37% of its learners in this category, forming a large and clearly visible block in the chart. Similarly, Afrikaans FAL at 39.59% and English FAL at 33.34% display substantial clustering in this band, indicating that a significant portion of learners in these subjects are not progressing beyond basic achievement. In contrast, Sesotho HL shows only 2.37% of learners in this range, which appears as a very thin section in the chart. This stark difference highlights the stronger performance associated with certain HL subjects, where most learners move well beyond the minimum threshold.

4.2.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most prominent feature in both charts is the dominance of the proficiency band, which clearly forms the core of the Free State's performance profile. Sesotho HL stands out, with 95.76% of its 26 620 learners achieving within this band, creating a large central block in the chart. Similar patterns are observed in isiZulu HL (94.87%), isiXhosa HL (91.37%), and Setswana HL (91.21%), where many learners are clustered within the proficient range. English HL (66.22%) and English FAL (65.35%) also show strong representation in this band, indicating that even where learners are not studying in their home language, they are still achieving at a competent level. The charts reinforce the conclusion that the Free State is a "middle-heavy" system, with most learners performing solidly above the pass mark. The particularly strong clustering in indigenous HL subjects further supports the value of mother tongue instruction in enabling consistent academic performance.

4.2.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the top end of the charts, the distinction band is present but relatively narrow, indicating that while high achievement exists, it is not widely distributed. Sesotho SAL stands out with a distinction rate of 17.09%, which appears as a noticeably larger top segment compared to other subjects. Among HLs, Afrikaans HL leads with 7.83% distinction rate, while isiXhosa HL and Setswana HL also show modest but visible distinction bands. In the FAL category, Afrikaans FAL (4.49%) performs better than English FAL (1.20%), as reflected in the difference in the size of their upper bands. However, several subjects with small enrolments, such as Sesotho sa Leboa HL and SASL HL, show no distinctions at all, which is also evident in the charts through the absence of a top band.

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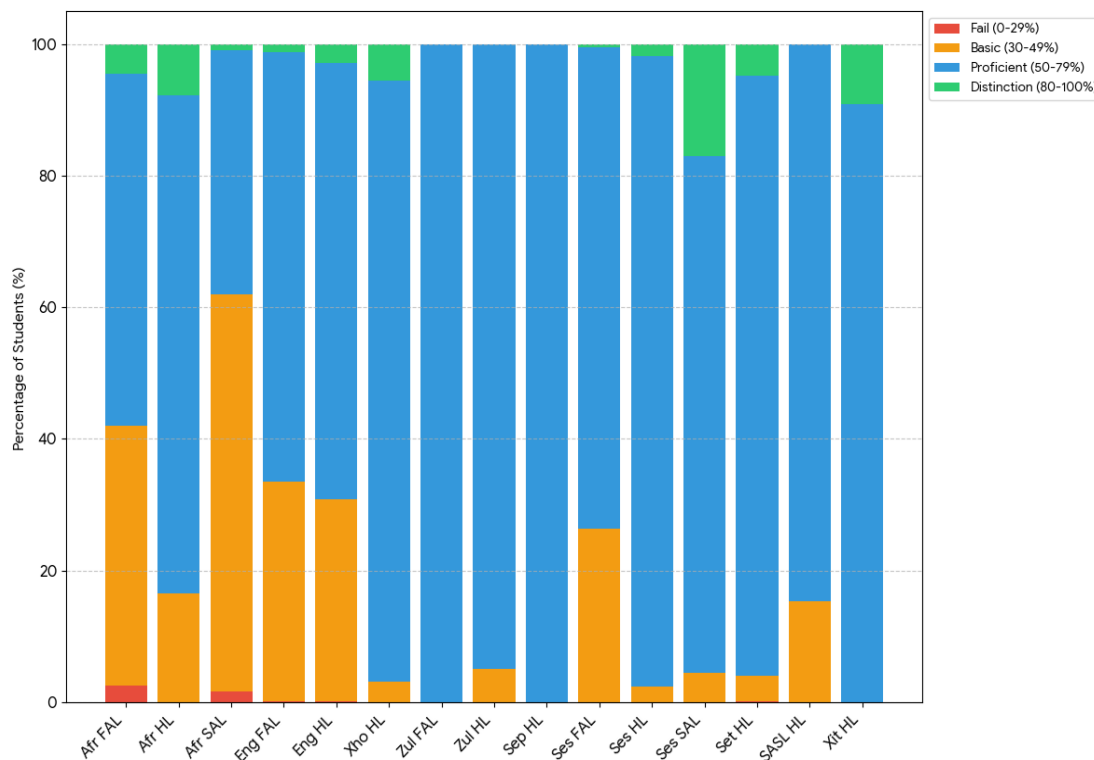


Chart 3: Free State NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.2.5 Free State Interpretation

Taken together, the charts depict a system that is both stable and effective in ensuring widespread learner success. The near absence of the failure band, combined with the overwhelming dominance of the proficiency band, indicates that most learners are achieving comfortably above the minimum standard. At the same time, the relatively thin distinction band suggests that while excellence is attainable, it is not yet widespread. Additionally, the charts highlight concerns around smaller subjects, where low enrolment and limited distinction performance point to challenges in both participation and the development of high-level achievement.

Overall, the Free State can be described as a high-performing, middle-concentrated system, where access to passing is secure and consistent, but where further progress will depend on expanding the proportion of learners who move from proficiency into distinction-level performance.

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4.3 GAUTENG LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for Gauteng, as illustrated in the accompanying charts, reflect a large and diverse system that continues to demonstrate strong overall performance, particularly through high pass rates and a dominant concentration of learners in the proficiency band. The charts visually confirm that while most learners achieve acceptable levels, there is considerable variation between subjects, especially when comparing HL and FAL streams.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	42 505	6.77%	45.93%	42.88%	4.43%
Afrikaans HL	9 009	0.02%	7.99%	77.36%	14.63%
Afrikaans SAL	815	0.61%	47.24%	48.10%	4.05%
English FAL	91 365	0.13%	25.76%	70.94%	3.17%
English HL	50 698	0.11%	24.63%	72.93%	2.34%
isiNdebele FAL	36	2.78%	0.00%	61.11%	36.11%
isiNdebele HL	41	0.00%	0.00%	48.78%	51.22%
isiXhosa FAL	25	4.00%	32.00%	64.00%	0.00%
isiXhosa HL	5 526	0.14%	3.26%	89.41%	7.18%
isiZulu FAL	6 445	0.28%	3.75%	65.35%	30.61%
isiZulu HL	30 305	0.15%	6.15%	89.89%	3.81%
isiZulu SAL	22	0.00%	4.55%	68.18%	27.27%
Sesotho sa Leboa FAL	563	0.00%	11.37%	85.61%	3.02%
Sesotho sa Leboa HL	13 769	0.32%	16.20%	82.76%	0.72%
Sesotho sa Leboa SAL	6	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%	0.00%
Sesotho FAL	226	0.44%	20.80%	77.43%	1.33%
Sesotho HL	13 247	0.15%	8.78%	90.27%	0.80%
Setswana FAL	314	0.00%	3.50%	78.03%	18.47%
Setswana HL	14 448	0.01%	3.93%	92.04%	4.01%
Setswana SAL	19	0.00%	15.79%	84.21%	0.00%
Siswati FAL	1	0.00%	0.00%	100.00%	0.00%
SASL HL	30	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%	0.00%
Tshivenda FAL	51	0.00%	0.00%	66.67%	33.33%
Tshivenda HL	1 442	0.14%	1.60%	77.25%	21.01%
Xitsonga FAL	44	0.00%	6.82%	81.82%	11.36%
Xitsonga HL	3 790	0.16%	3.01%	91.00%	5.83%

Table 3: Gauteng Language Performance

REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS**4.3.1 Failure Band (0-29%)**

The charts show that the failure band is generally very small across most Gauteng language subjects, confirming high overall pass rates. English FAL, which represents the largest cohort with more than 91 000 learners, records a minimal failure rate of 0.13%, appearing as a very thin segment in the chart. Similarly, isiZulu HL, the largest African HL group with over 30 000 candidates, has a low failure rate of 0.15%. English HL follows the same pattern, with only 0.11% of learners failing.

However, Afrikaans FAL stands out as a clear outlier in the charts, with a significantly larger failure segment at 6.77%, making it one of the few subjects where failure is visibly more pronounced. Several smaller subjects, such as isiNdebele HL and SASL HL, show no failures at all, although their small enrolment sizes limit the broader impact of this trend. Overall, the charts depict a system where the failure band is largely contained, ensuring that most learners meet the minimum requirements.

4.3.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts reveal more substantial variation in the basic band, particularly among FAL and SAL subjects. Afrikaans SAL (47.24%) and Afrikaans FAL (45.93%) display large concentrations of learners in this category, forming prominent blocks in the charts that indicate many candidates are not progressing beyond basic competency. IsiXhosa FAL (32%) also reflects a noticeable presence in this band. Among HLs, English HL shows a relatively high proportion at 24.63%, which appears as a sizeable segment compared to other HL subjects, while SASL HL records 20% in this range.

This pattern suggests that a notable group of learners is achieving only minimum pass levels in these subjects. As reflected in the charts, this raises concerns about depth of understanding and progression potential, particularly where learners may not be studying in their strongest language or where support structures may be insufficient. The consistent presence of SASL HL in this band also aligns with broader concerns regarding performance challenges in the subject.

4.3.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most striking feature in the charts is the dominant proficiency band, which forms the core of Gauteng's performance profile. Across both HL and FAL subjects, most learners are concentrated in the 50-79% range. Setswana HL leads with 92.04% of learners in this band, followed closely by Xitsonga HL (91.00%), Sesotho HL (90.27%), and isiZulu HL (89.89%). These large, central blocks in the charts highlight a consistent pattern of strong, stable performance among African home language speakers.

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English HL (72.93%) and English FAL (70.94%) also show substantial clustering in the proficiency band, indicating that even where learners are not studying in their home language, they are still achieving at a competent level. The charts reinforce the interpretation of Gauteng as a middle-heavy system, where most learners perform solidly above the pass mark. At the same time, the particularly strong outcomes in indigenous HL subjects once again point to the advantages of linguistic alignment in supporting learner achievement.

4.3.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the upper end of the charts, the distinction band is present but varies significantly across subjects. Some smaller-enrolment subjects display exceptionally high distinction rates, which appear as disproportionately large top segments in the charts. IsiNdebele HL, for instance, records a remarkable 51.22% distinction rate, while Tshivenda HL reaches 21.01%. Similarly, in the FAL category, isiNdebele FAL (36.11%), Tshivenda FAL (33.33%), and isiZulu FAL (30.61%) show unusually high proportions of distinctions.

However, these patterns must be interpreted in the context of small candidate numbers, which amplify percentage outcomes in the charts. By contrast, larger subjects such as English HL (2.34%) and English FAL (3.17%) show much thinner distinction bands, indicating that while many learners pass and perform at a proficient level, relatively few reach the highest achievement category. Afrikaans HL

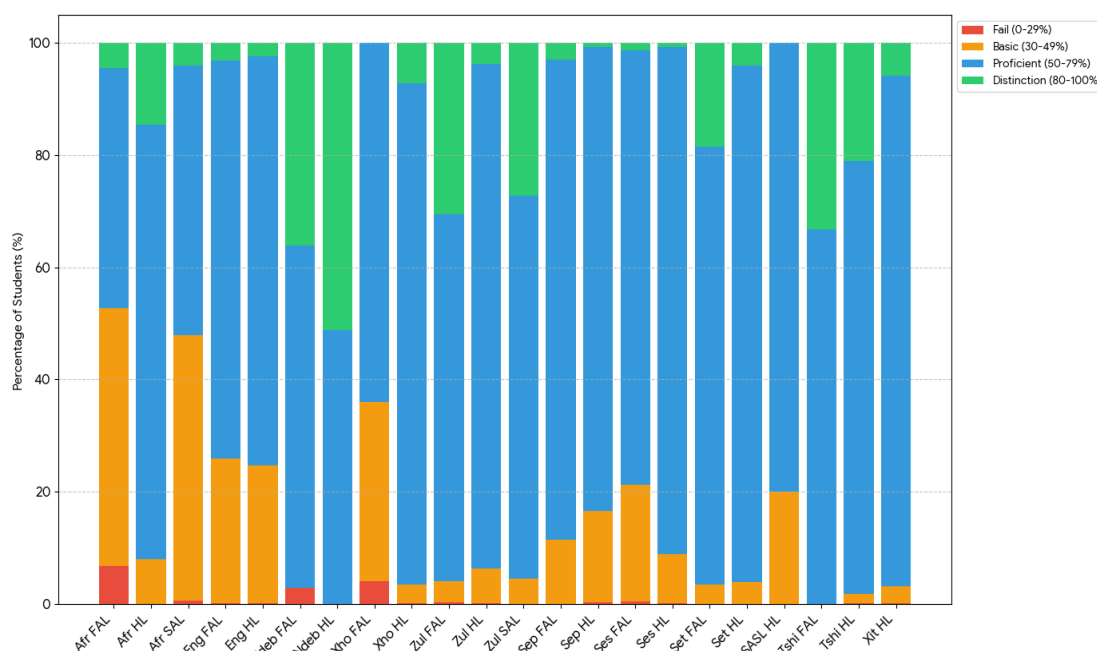


Chart 4: Gauteng NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

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stands out among larger cohorts with a stronger distinction rate of 14.63%, visible in the charts as a more substantial upper segment. At the same time, subjects such as isiXhosa FAL and SASL HL show no distinctions, reflected in the complete absence of a top band, which raises concerns about the development of high-performing learners in these areas.

4.3.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts present Gauteng as a high-performing but complex and uneven system, characterised by strong overall pass rates and a dominant proficiency band. The failure band remains minimal across most language subjects, ensuring widespread access to passing, while the basic band highlights areas where learners are not yet progressing to higher levels of achievement. The charts strongly reinforce the success of home language instruction, where learners consistently achieve high levels of proficiency with low risk.

At the same time, the data reveal important structural concerns. Afrikaans FAL stands out as a significant outlier with higher failure and basic-level clustering, suggesting possible issues related to subject availability or learner placement. Extremely low enrolments in subjects such as Siswati FAL and Sesotho sa Leboa SAL are reflected in the charts as negligible distributions, raising concerns about the sustainability of these subjects within the province. Furthermore, the absence of distinctions in subjects like SASL HL and isiXhosa FAL indicates limited opportunities for learners to reach top-level performance, which is particularly concerning in the context of equitable education outcomes.

Overall, the charts illustrate a system where success is widespread but unevenly distributed, with strong stability in the middle ranges but varying capacity to produce excellence. Future improvements will depend on strengthening progression from basic to proficient levels, while also expanding access to distinction-level achievement without undermining the system's existing stability.

4.4 KWAZULU-NATAL LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for KwaZulu-Natal, as illustrated in the accompanying charts, reveal a system marked by strong overall pass rates and a distinctive performance profile shaped by both high proficiency and notably strong distinction outcomes in certain subjects. The charts visually reflect a largely stable system, though with important variations across HL and Additional Language (AL) categories.

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Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	10 337	12.11%	40.09%	41.93%	5.87%
Afrikaans HL	496	0.00%	12.90%	81.85%	5.24%
Afrikaans SAL	1 188	3.28%	52.02%	39.48%	5.22%
English FAL	148 282	1.02%	30.75%	66.61%	1.63%
English HL	26 015	0.26%	21.23%	73.35%	5.15%
isiXhosa FAL	60	0.00%	1.67%	90.00%	8.33%
isiXhosa HL	4 056	0.00%	1.50%	88.51%	9.99%
isiZulu FAL	12 427	1.60%	3.03%	43.65%	51.73%
isiZulu HL	146 950	0.04%	0.60%	70.16%	29.20%
Sesotho HL	20	0.00%	45.00%	55.00%	0.00%
SASL HL	36	0.00%	36.11%	61.11%	2.78%

Table 4: KwaZulu-Natal Language Performance

4.4.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The charts show that the failure band in KwaZulu-Natal is generally very small across most language subjects, reinforcing the province's strong overall pass rates. English FAL, which accounts for the largest cohort with more than 148 000 learners, records a low failure rate of 1.02%, appearing as a thin segment in the chart relative to its size. IsiZulu HL, the dominant HL subject with nearly 147 000 candidates, shows an exceptionally low failure rate of just 0.04%, making the failure band almost invisible in the chart.

Several subjects, including Afrikaans HL, isiXhosa HL, and SASL HL, record no failures at all, further contributing to the minimal presence of this band. However, Afrikaans FAL stands out as a clear exception, with a significantly higher failure rate of 12.11%, which is visually prominent in the chart compared to other subjects. This suggests that while the system overall is highly effective in limiting failure, certain subjects continue to experience greater vulnerability.

4.4.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts reveal a more substantial presence in the basic performance band, particularly among AL subjects. Afrikaans SAL (52.02%) and Afrikaans FAL (40.09%) show large concentrations of learners in this category, forming prominent sections in the charts that indicate many learners are not progressing beyond minimum competency. Sesotho HL also stands out, with 45.00% of its very small cohort in this band, which suggests a need for targeted support. Among HL subjects, SASL HL (36.11%) and English HL (21.23%) show relatively large proportions of learners in the basic band, as reflected in the charts.

This pattern is significant, as it indicates that a notable group of learners is achieving only at a minimum passing level, which may limit their educational and career progression. The charts thus highlight areas where performance is stable but not yet sufficiently strong to support upward movement into higher achievement levels.

REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS**4.4.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)**

The proficiency band remains the most dominant feature in the KwaZulu-Natal charts, forming the central mass of learner achievement across most subjects. IsiXhosa FAL shows a particularly strong concentration, with 90% of learners in this range, while isiXhosa HL follows closely with 88.51%. Afrikaans HL (81.85%) and English HL (73.35%) also demonstrate substantial clustering within this band. The two largest subjects, isiZulu HL (70.16%) and English FAL (66.61%), both display large and clearly visible central blocks in the charts, confirming that most learners are achieving at competent levels well above the minimum pass mark.

This pattern reinforces the interpretation of KwaZulu-Natal as a system where performance is largely centred in the middle-to-upper range. The strong showing of HL subjects again reflects the benefit of linguistic alignment, where learners studying in their mother tongue are able to achieve consistently high levels of proficiency.

4.4.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

One of the most striking features of the KwaZulu-Natal charts is the relatively strong distinction band in several subjects, particularly within isiZulu and isiXhosa. IsiZulu HL records a notably high distinction rate of 29.20%, which appears as a substantial upper segment in the chart, especially given the very large number of candidates. Even more striking is isiZulu FAL, where 51.73% of learners achieve distinctions, creating a dominant top band in the chart. IsiXhosa HL (9.99%) and isiXhosa FAL (8.33%) also show meaningful levels of high achievement.

These patterns suggest that many learners in these categories may be studying languages closely aligned to their home language (mother tongue), enabling stronger performance at the top end. In contrast, larger subjects such as English HL (5.15%) and English FAL (1.63%) display comparatively thinner distinction bands, despite their strong overall pass and proficiency rates. Other subjects, such as Sesotho HL, show no distinctions at all, which is reflected in the absence of an upper band and highlights limited top-end achievement in smaller or less supported language groups.

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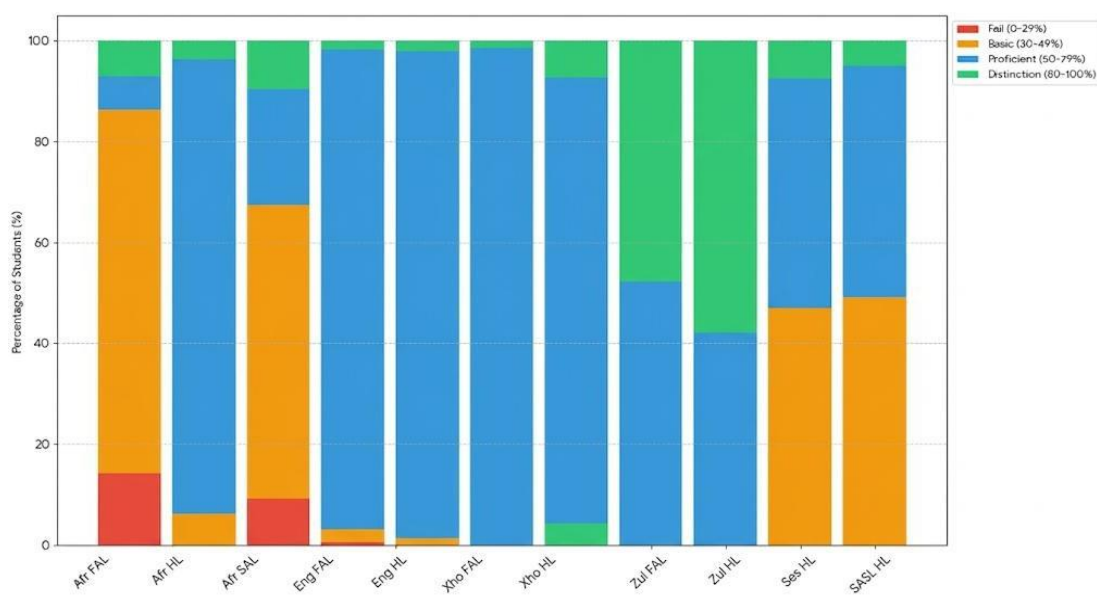


Chart 5: KZN NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.4.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts illustrate a KwaZulu-Natal system that combines strong stability with pockets of high excellence. The failure band remains minimal across most subjects, ensuring that the majority of learners meet the required standard. The proficiency band dominates the distribution, confirming that most learners are performing at a solid and consistent level. However, unlike some other provinces, KwaZulu-Natal also demonstrates significant strength in the distinction band for certain subjects, particularly isiZulu and isiXhosa, where high achievement is more widely distributed.

At the same time, the charts highlight areas of concern. Afrikaans FAL emerges as a clear outlier with a comparatively high failure rate and significant clustering in the basic band, suggesting possible issues related to subject access, learner placement, or support. Similarly, the performance of smaller subjects such as Sesotho HL, where there are no distinctions and a high proportion of learners in the basic band, points to challenges in achieving excellence in minority language offerings. The continued presence of SASL HL in the basic band, coupled with limited distinction outcomes, remains a concern in terms of equitable educational outcomes for Deaf learners.

Overall, the KwaZulu-Natal performance profile can be described as a high-performing, proficiency-driven system with strong top-end potential in selected subjects. While access to passing is firmly established, the charts suggest that future improvement should focus on reducing basic-level clustering in certain subjects while sustaining and expanding the strong distinction performance already evident in key HL and aligned FAL subjects.

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4.5 LIMPOPO LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for Limpopo, as reflected in the accompanying charts, present a system characterised by strong overall stability, very high pass rates, and a clear dominance of the proficiency band across most language subjects. The charts visually reinforce the view of Limpopo as a high-performing province in terms of consistent learner achievement, while also revealing important variations between subjects, particularly in relation to distinction performance and outcomes in smaller cohorts.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	2 458	2.24%	38.28%	53.05%	6.43%
Afrikaans HL	1 038	0.10%	9.92%	82.66%	7.32%
Afrikaans SAL	148	0.00%	61.49%	36.49%	2.03%
English FAL	98 320	0.24%	29.78%	67.99%	1.99%
English HL	2 879	0.03%	17.78%	77.42%	4.76%
isiNdebele HL	443	0.00%	0.45%	61.40%	38.15%
isiXhosa HL	87	0.00%	1.15%	94.25%	4.60%
isiZulu HL	522	0.57%	18.58%	78.35%	2.49%
Sesotho sa Leboa FAL	207	0.00%	4.83%	83.57%	11.59%
Sesotho sa Leboa HL	58 482	0.09%	7.01%	90.91%	1.99%
Setswana HL	1 020	0.20%	5.29%	92.25%	2.25%
SASL HL	13	0.00%	38.46%	61.54%	0.00%
Tshivenda FAL	66	0.00%	12.12%	65.15%	22.73%
Tshivenda HL	19 473	0.01%	0.62%	87.99%	11.38%
Xitsonga FAL	67	1.49%	0.00%	53.73%	44.78%
Xitsonga HL	17 316				

Table 5: Limpopo Language Performance

4.5.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The charts show that the failure band is extremely limited across most language subjects in Limpopo, reflecting consistently high pass rates. English FAL, which represents the largest group with more than 98 000 learners, records a failure rate of only 0.24%, appearing as a very thin segment in the chart. Similarly, Sesotho sa Leboa HL, the dominant HL subject with over 58 000 learners, has a failure rate of just 0.09%, further reinforcing the near absence of this band.

Several subjects, including isiNdebele HL, Sesotho sa Leboa FAL, and SASL HL, show no failures at all, which is evident in the charts as a complete absence of the lower band. Afrikaans FAL records a slightly higher failure rate of 2.24%, which is still relatively small but more visible compared to other major subjects. Overall, the charts illustrate a system where very few learners fall below the minimum threshold, confirming that access to passing is firmly established.

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4.5.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts reveal more variation in the basic band, particularly among AL subjects and certain HL. Afrikaans SAL (61.49%) stands out prominently, with most learners clustered in this category, forming a large and clearly visible segment in the chart. Afrikaans FAL (38.28%) also shows a significant presence in this band, indicating that many learners are achieving only the minimum proficiency level. Within the HL category, SASL HL (38.46%) presents a notable concern, as a large proportion of learners remain in the basic range, which is clearly reflected in the chart. English HL (17.78%) and isiZulu HL (18.58%) also show moderate clustering in this band.

These patterns suggest that while learners are passing, a substantial number are not progressing into higher levels of performance. The charted distribution highlights the need for targeted support, particularly for SASL HL learners, as well as for those in subjects where linguistic alignment may not be optimal. In the case of isiZulu HL, the relatively high proportion in this band raises questions about whether all learners are fully benefiting from studying this language at the HL level.

4.5.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The dominant feature of the Limpopo charts is the strong concentration of learners within the proficiency band, which forms the central mass of achievement across subjects. IsiXhosa HL leads with 94.25% of learners in this category, followed closely by Setswana HL (92.25%), Sesotho sa Leboa HL (90.91%), and Tshivenda HL (87.99%). These subjects display large, visually prominent central blocks in the charts, highlighting consistent and strong performance among learners studying in their home language (mother tongue). English HL (77.42%) and English FAL (67.99%) also demonstrate substantial clustering in the proficiency band, indicating that even where learners are not studying in their home language, performance remains solidly within the competent range. The charts strongly reinforce the pattern seen in other provinces: a “middle-heavy” system in which most learners achieve between 50% and 79%, ensuring both stability and widespread success. The particularly strong performance in indigenous HLs once again underscores the importance of mother tongue instruction in supporting sustained academic achievement.

4.5.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the upper end of the charts, the distinction band is present but unevenly distributed across subjects. Some subjects, particularly those with smaller enrolments, show very high distinction rates. IsiNdebele HL, for instance, records an impressive 38.15% distinction rate, which appears as a substantial upper segment in the chart. Tshivenda HL also shows strong top-end performance with 11.38% of students achieving distinctions. Among FALs, Xitsonga FAL (44.78%) and Tshivenda FAL (22.73%) stand out with remarkably high proportions of learners achieving distinctions, creating

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relatively large top bands in the charts. However, these results are influenced by smaller candidate numbers, which amplify percentage outcomes. In contrast, larger subjects such as English FAL (1.99%) and Sesotho sa Leboa HL (1.99%) show very narrow distinction bands, indicating that while most learners pass and perform competently, relatively few reach the highest achievement levels. Notably, SASL HL records no distinctions, which is reflected in the absence of a top band and continues to raise concerns about equity and performance opportunities for Deaf learners.

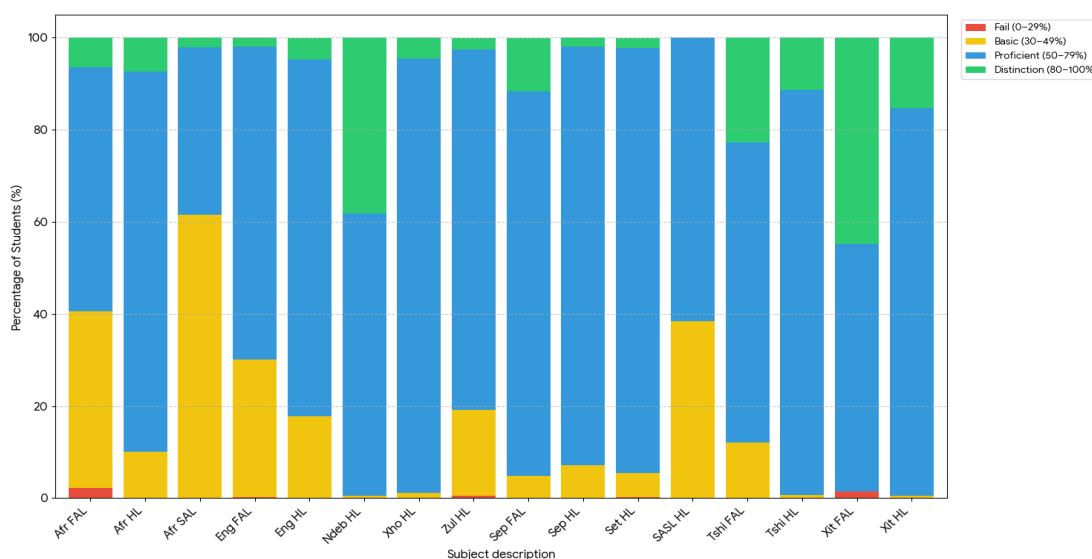


Chart 6: Limpopo NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.5.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts illustrate a system that is highly stable and strongly centred in the proficiency band, with very low failure rates and widespread access to passing. HL subjects, particularly Sesotho sa Leboa HL, Tshivenda HL, and Setswana HL, demonstrate consistently strong outcomes, reinforcing the importance of linguistic alignment in learner success.

At the same time, the charts reveal several structural concerns. Afrikaans FAL and Afrikaans SAL show significant clustering in the basic band, suggesting that some learners may not be optimally placed or supported within these subjects. The relatively high proportions of learners in the basic band for SASL HL highlight ongoing challenges for Deaf learners, particularly given the absence of distinctions. In addition, while some smaller subjects display very strong distinction performance, others show no top-end achievement at all, indicating uneven access to excellence across the system.

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Overall, the Limpopo performance profile can be understood as a high-performing, middle-concentrated system with pockets of strong excellence but uneven distribution at the top end. The charts suggest that while the province has successfully secured broad-based achievement, future improvement efforts should focus on reducing basic-level clustering in specific subjects and expanding the distinction band, ensuring that more learners can progress from competence to high achievement.

4.6 MPUMALANGA LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for Mpumalanga, as illustrated in the accompanying charts, reflect a system that is largely stable, with high overall pass rates and a strong concentration of learners in the proficiency band. At the same time, the charts reveal distinct variations across subjects, particularly in relation to performance in the basic band and the distribution of distinctions.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	5 840	3.87%	45.21%	46.61%	4.32%
Afrikaans HL	1 813	0.00%	9.71%	82.30%	7.94%
Afrikaans SAL	959	6.26%	62.88%	29.82%	1.04%
English FAL	61 834	0.72%	36.00%	61.99%	1.28%
English HL	6 434	0.06%	20.09%	77.28%	2.56%
isiNdebele HL	5 181	0.04%	0.29%	56.40%	43.27%
isiXhosa HL	79	0.00%	0.00%	98.73%	1.27%
isiZulu FAL	217	0.00%	0.46%	63.13%	36.41%
isiZulu HL	15 094	0.02%	1.85%	91.91%	6.21%
Sesotho sa Leboa HL	7 265	0.33%	12.39%	85.15%	2.13%
Sesotho HL	194	0.00%	0.00%	95.36%	4.64%
Setswana HL	1 089	0.00%	3.76%	92.29%	3.95%
Siswati FAL	322	1.86%	12.11%	77.95%	8.07%
Siswati HL	20 571	0.14%	1.14%	68.58%	30.14%
SASL HL	18	0.00%	72.22%	27.78%	0.00%
Xitsonga HL	10 483	0.59%	5.30%	89.32%	4.78%

Table 6: Mpumalanga Language Performance Breakdown

4.6.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The charts indicate that the failure band remains relatively small across most language subjects in Mpumalanga, reinforcing the province's overall high pass rate. English FAL, the largest cohort with more than 61 000 candidates, records a low failure rate of 0.72%, which appears as a narrow segment in the chart. Siswati HL, the largest African HL group with over 20 000 learners, shows an even lower failure rate of 0.14%, making the failure band almost negligible in visual terms.

Several subjects, including isiXhosa HL, isiZulu FAL, and SASL HL, register no failures at all, which is reflected in the charts by the complete absence of the lower band. However, Afrikaans SAL stands out with a higher failure rate of 6.26%, forming a more visible segment compared to other subjects. This suggests that while the system overall is effective in preventing failure, certain subjects continue

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to show pockets of vulnerability.

4.6.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts show more pronounced clustering in the basic band, particularly within AL subjects. Afrikaans SAL (62.88%) is especially prominent, with a clear majority of learners concentrated in this band, forming a large and dominant section in the chart. Afrikaans FAL (45.21%) shows a similar, though slightly smaller, pattern of clustering. Among HL subjects, SASL HL stands out most strongly, with 72.22% of learners in the basic band, which is visually striking and indicates that most candidates are achieving only minimum competency. English HL (20.09%) and Sesotho sa Leboa HL (12.39%) also display notable proportions of learners in this band, though to a lesser extent.

These patterns suggest that while many learners are passing, they are not consistently progressing into the higher performance range. The charts thus highlight particular concern for SASL HL learners, as well as questions regarding the distribution of learners across HLs such as Sesotho sa Leboa HL, where performance may be affected by linguistic misalignment.

4.6.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most dominant feature in the Mpumalanga charts is the proficiency band, which forms the core of learner performance across most subjects. IsiXhosa HL shows the strongest concentration, with 98.73% of its learners in this range, creating an almost complete central block in the chart. Similarly, Sesotho HL (95.36%), Setswana HL (92.29%), and isiZulu HL (91.91%) display very strong clustering in this band. Larger subjects such as Afrikaans HL (82.30%) and English HL (77.28%) also show substantial proportions of learners achieving at this level. The charts clearly depict Mpumalanga as a “middle-heavy” system, where most learners perform within the 50-79% range, ensuring both consistency and a strong foundation of achievement. Once again, the particularly high levels of proficiency in indigenous HL subjects reinforce the importance of studying in a language aligned to learners’ linguistic backgrounds.

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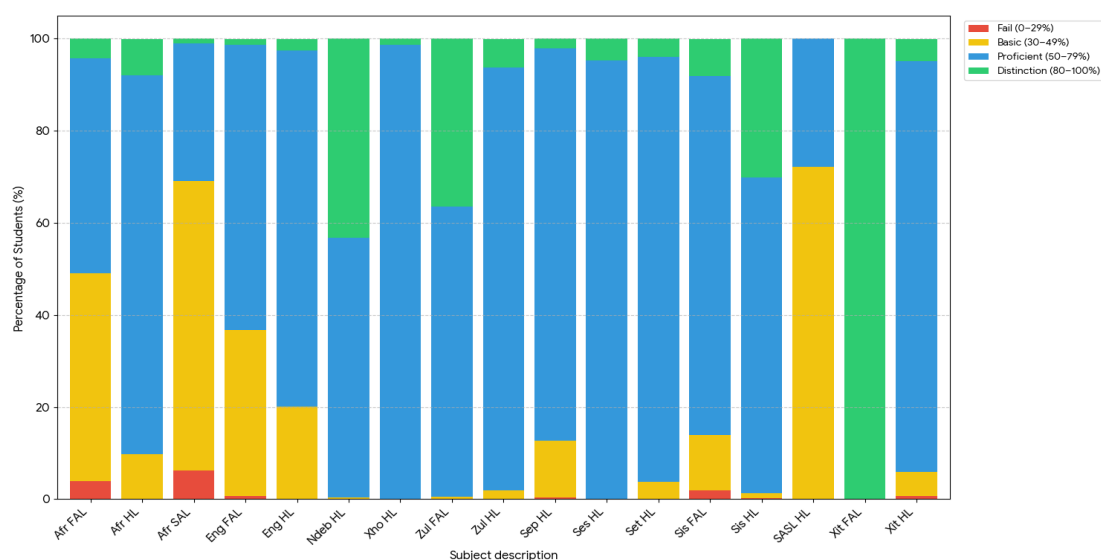


Chart 7: Mpumalanga NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.6.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the upper end of the charts, the distinction band shows significant variation between subjects. IsiNdebele HL records an exceptionally high distinction rate of 43.27%, which appears as a large and prominent top segment in the chart. Siswati HL also shows strong performance with 30.14% of learners achieving distinctions. In the FAL category, isiZulu FAL (36.41%) stands out with a similarly strong top band, indicating high levels of achievement that may be linked to linguistic familiarity among learners. In contrast, larger subjects such as English HL (2.56%) and English FAL (1.28%) display much thinner distinction bands, even though they maintain strong overall pass and proficiency rates. Notably, SASL HL shows no distinctions, which is clearly reflected in the absence of a top band in the chart and remains a significant concern in terms of equitable performance outcomes.

4.6.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts illustrate a system that is stable and strongly centred in the proficiency band, with most learners achieving comfortably above the pass mark. The failure band is minimal, ensuring broad-based success, while the dominance of the proficiency band highlights consistent performance across subjects.

However, the charts also reveal areas that require attention. The strong clustering in the basic band for subjects such as Afrikaans SAL and SASL HL suggests limited progression beyond minimum competency for certain groups of learners. The exceptionally high distinction rates in some smaller subjects, while positive, also point to uneven distribution of excellence, particularly when compared to larger subjects where distinction rates remain modest. Additionally, the absence of distinctions in

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SASL HL highlights ongoing challenges for Deaf learners, reinforcing concerns about equitable access to high-level achievement.

Overall, Mpumalanga can be characterised as a high-performing but uneven system, where stability and widespread proficiency are evident, but where progression into higher achievement levels varies significantly across subjects. The charts suggest that future improvement efforts should focus on reducing clustering in the basic band and expanding access to distinction-level performance, while maintaining the strong foundation of consistent pass rates already achieved.

4.7 NORTH WEST LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for the North West province, as reflected in the accompanying charts, present a system characterised by generally strong performance across both HL FAL subjects. The charts illustrate a stable achievement profile, with high pass rates and a dominant concentration of learners in the proficiency band, although some variation is evident across specific subjects and categories.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	4 601	3.74%	41.73%	49.94%	4.59%
Afrikaans HL	2 239	0.00%	18.54%	74.98%	6.48%
Afrikaans SAL	3 998	0.38%	61.18%	37.59%	0.85%
English FAL	36 280	0.17%	26.08%	71.49%	2.26%
English HL	4 955	0.32%	28.80%	67.71%	3.17%
isiXhosa HL	871	0.23%	6.31%	89.78%	3.67%
Sesotho HL	895	0.00%	4.25%	95.42%	0.34%
Setswana FAL	88	0.00%	2.27%	68.18%	29.55%
Setswana HL	32 612	0.05%	2.19%	90.30%	7.46%
SASL HL	8	0.00%	37.50%	62.50%	0.00%

Table 7: North West Language Performance Breakdown

4.7.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The charts show that the failure band is minimal across most language subjects in the province, confirming that most learners meet the minimum requirements for passing. English FAL, which represents one of the largest cohorts, records a failure rate of just 0.17%, appearing as a very thin segment in the chart. Similarly, Setswana HL, the dominant HL subject with more than 32 000 candidates, shows an exceptionally low failure rate of 0.05%, making the failure band almost negligible in visual terms.

Several subjects, including Afrikaans HL, Sesotho HL, and Setswana FAL, record no failures at all, which is clearly reflected in the charts through the absence of a lower band. Afrikaans FAL shows a slightly higher failure rate at 3.74%, which is more visible in comparison to other subjects, though still relatively contained. Overall, the charts depict a system where access to passing is secure, and failure is not a widespread concern.

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4.7.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The charts reveal more noticeable clustering in the basic band, particularly among AL subjects. Afrikaans SAL stands out most prominently, with 61.18% of learners in this category, forming a large and dominant section in the chart that indicates limited progression beyond minimum competency. Afrikaans FAL (41.73%) also shows a substantial presence in this band. Among HL subjects, SASL HL (37.50%) displays a relatively large basic band, which is clearly visible in the chart and signals that a significant proportion of learners are achieving only minimum levels of competence. English HL (28.80%) and Afrikaans HL (18.54%) also show notable, though smaller, clustering in this range.

These patterns suggest that while many learners are passing, a considerable proportion are not advancing into higher levels of performance. The charts, therefore, highlight areas of concern, particularly for SASL HL and certain language streams where learners may not be fully supported to move beyond basic achievement.

4.7.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most dominant feature in the North West charts is the strong central concentration within the proficiency band, which clearly defines the province's performance profile. Sesotho HL leads with an exceptional 95.42% of learners in this category, forming a large, visually dominant block in the chart. Setswana HL follows closely at 90.30%, with isiXhosa HL at 89.78%, all indicating consistently high levels of achievement among HL learners. Afrikaans HL (74.98%), English FAL (71.49%), and English HL (67.71%) also show strong clustering in this band, demonstrating that most learners across both HL and FAL categories are achieving comfortably above the pass threshold.

The charts reinforce the interpretation of the North West as a "middle-heavy" system, where most learners perform within the 50-79% range. As seen in other provinces, the particularly strong outcomes in HL subjects underscore the benefits of studying in a language aligned with learners' linguistic backgrounds.

4.7.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the top end of the charts, the distinction band is present but varies across subjects. Setswana FAL stands out with a notably high distinction rate of 29.55%, which appears as a large upper segment in the chart, although this must be interpreted in the context of a relatively small cohort. Setswana HL, with a much larger group of learners, achieves a solid distinction rate of 7.46%, which is visible as a meaningful top band. Afrikaans HL also shows steady performance with 6.48% distinctions.

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In contrast, larger subjects such as English HL (3.17%) and English FAL (2.26%) display thinner distinction bands, indicating that while most learners pass and achieve proficiency, relatively fewer reach the highest performance level. SASL HL records no distinctions, which is reflected in the absence of a top band and remains a point of concern regarding opportunities for top-end achievement.

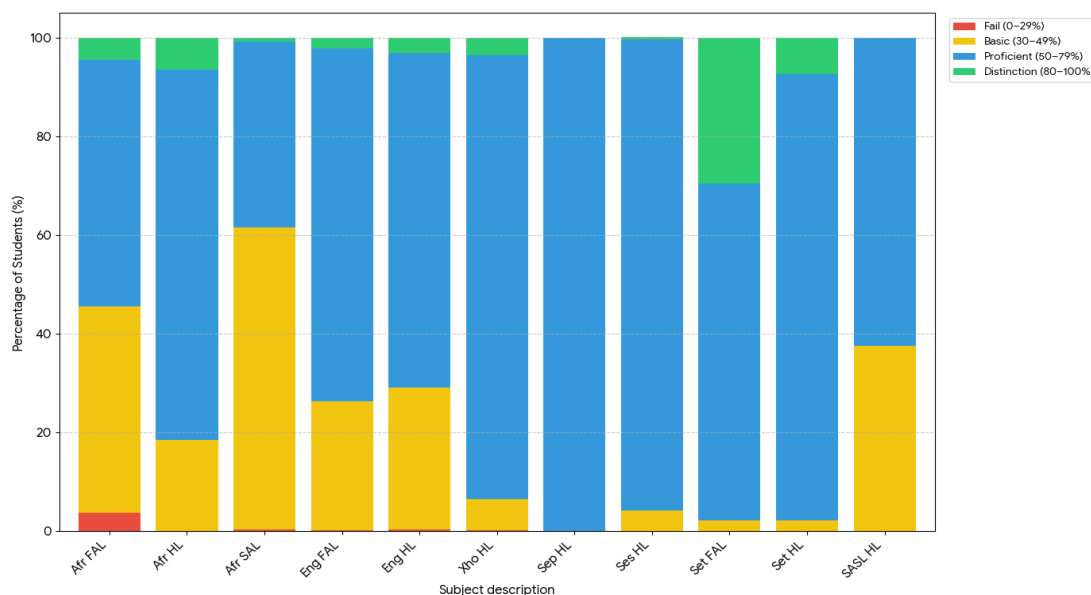


Chart 8: North West NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.7.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts illustrate a system that is stable and strongly centred around the proficiency band, with very low failure rates and widespread learner success. The visual dominance of the middle band confirms that most learners are achieving at competent levels, while the consistently strong performance in HL subjects highlights the ongoing importance of mother tongue instruction in supporting learner outcomes.

At the same time, the charts reveal areas that require attention. The significant clustering in the basic band for subjects such as Afrikaans SAL and SASL HL suggests that not all learners are progressing beyond minimum competency. Additionally, while some subjects demonstrate strong distinction performance, particularly in smaller cohorts, the overall distribution of excellence remains uneven, with larger subjects showing relatively modest top-end achievement. The low enrolment in subjects such as SASL HL also raises concerns about participation and sustainability, even though the absence of zero distinctions across most mid-sized subjects suggests a more balanced performance profile than in some other provinces.

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Overall, the North West can be described as a high-performing, middle-concentrated system with moderate but uneven development at the top end. The charts suggest that future improvement efforts should focus on supporting learners to move from basic to proficient levels, while also expanding the distinction band to ensure that a greater proportion of learners are able to achieve excellence without compromising the stability of the system.

4.8 NORTHERN CAPE LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for the Northern Cape, as illustrated in the accompanying charts, present a system characterised by very high overall pass rates and a strong concentration of learners within the proficiency band. The charts clearly reflect a stable performance profile, where most learners are achieving above the minimum threshold, although there are noticeable differences between HL and AL subjects, particularly in relation to distinction performance and the distribution of learners in the basic band.

Subject description	Total wrote	0-29% (Fail)	30-49% (Basic)	50-79% (Proficient)	80-100% (Distinction)
Afrikaans FAL	2 084	0.43%	10.84%	74.18%	14.54%
Afrikaans HL	5 756	0.03%	16.52%	80.96%	2.48%
Afrikaans SAL	523	1.15%	66.35%	31.74%	0.76%
English FAL	12 098	0.21%	39.21%	59.07%	1.51%
English HL	2 032	0.05%	21.36%	74.41%	4.18%
isiXhosa HL	611	0.00%	14.73%	79.71%	5.56%
Setswana HL	5 813	0.03%	3.58%	92.48%	3.91%

Table 8: Northern Cape Language Performance Breakdown

4.8.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The charts show that the failure band is extremely limited across almost all language subjects in the Northern Cape, reinforcing the province's strong overall pass rates. English FAL, which represents the largest cohort, records a very low failure rate of 0.21%, appearing as a thin segment in the chart. Similarly, Setswana HL and Afrikaans HL, both large HL groups, record minimal failure rates of 0.03%, making the failure band almost invisible in visual terms. Afrikaans SAL shows the highest failure rate at 1.15%, though this remains relatively small compared to other provinces and is only modestly visible in the chart. Subjects such as isiXhosa HL record no failures at all, further contributing to the near absence of this band. Overall, the charts illustrate a system where most learners successfully meet the minimum performance requirements.

REPORT ON THE 2025 NATIONAL SENIOR CERTIFICATE LANGUAGE RESULTS**4.8.2 Basic Band (30-49%)**

The charts reveal a more noticeable presence in the basic band, particularly among AL subjects. Afrikaans SAL stands out most prominently, with 66.35% of learners clustered in this category, forming a dominant segment in the chart that indicates limited progression into higher performance levels. English FAL also shows a significant proportion of learners in this range at 39.21%, which appears as a substantial section in the chart for the largest subject group. Among HLs, English HL (21.36%) and Afrikaans HL (16.52%) show visible clustering in the basic band, although these are less pronounced than in the AL streams. IsiXhosa HL, at 14.73%, also reflects some presence in this category.

These patterns suggest that while pass rates remain high, a considerable number of learners are performing at only the minimum required level, particularly in subjects that may not align closely with learners' home languages.

4.8.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most dominant feature in the Northern Cape charts is the strong central concentration within the proficiency band, which clearly defines the province's performance profile. Setswana HL leads with 92.48% of its learners in this category, forming a large and visually dominant block in the chart. Afrikaans HL (80.96%), isiXhosa HL (79.71%), and English HL (74.41%) all show similarly strong clustering, indicating that most learners in these HL subjects are achieving comfortably above the pass mark. Afrikaans FAL also demonstrates robust performance, with 74.18% of learners in this band, making it one of the stronger-performing AL subjects. In contrast, English FAL (59.07%) shows a smaller but still dominant central band, reflecting solid but more moderate levels of proficiency.

The charts clearly reinforce the interpretation of the Northern Cape as a "middle-heavy" system, where most learners achieve within the 50-79% mark range, ensuring both consistency and overall system stability.

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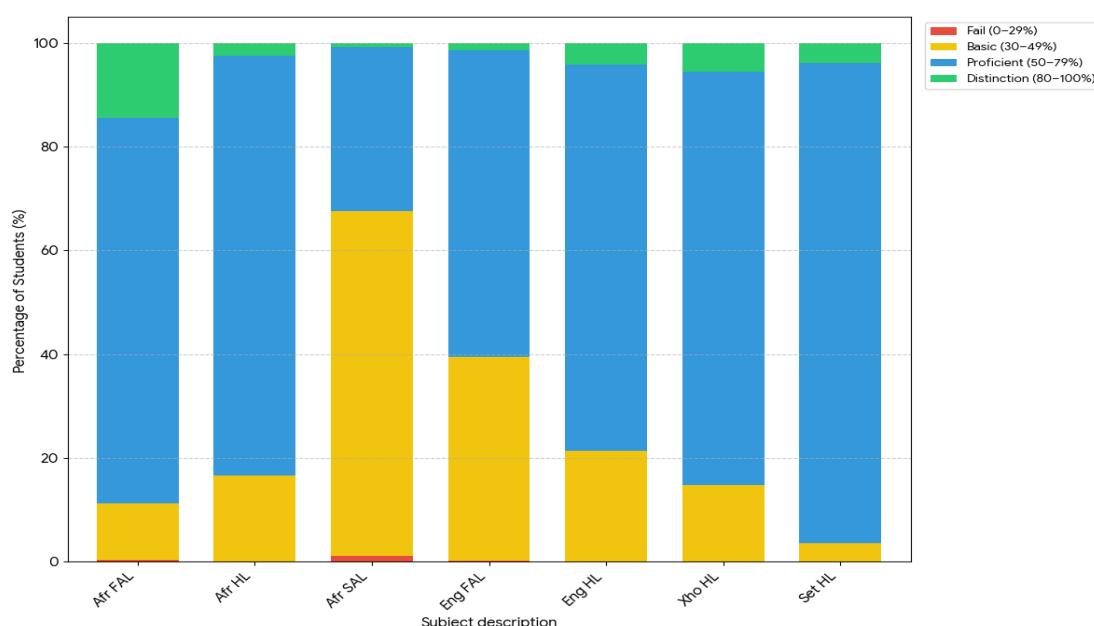


Chart 9: Northern Cape NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.8.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the top end of the charts, the distinction band is present but relatively narrow across most subjects, with a few notable exceptions. Afrikaans FAL stands out with a particularly strong distinction rate of 14.54%, which appears as a prominent upper segment in the chart. Among HL subjects, isiXhosa HL (5.56%), English HL (4.18%), and Setswana HL (3.91%) show steady but more modest levels of high achievement. Afrikaans HL, despite its strong performance in the proficiency band, shows a relatively smaller distinction rate of 2.48%. English FAL, the largest subject, records only a 1.51% distinction rate, which is reflected in a very thin upper band, indicating that while most learners pass and achieve proficiency, relatively few reach the highest performance level. The charts thus confirm that excellence exists but is not widely distributed across the system.

4.8.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the charts illustrate a system that is highly stable and strongly centred within the proficiency band, with very low failure rates and widespread learner success. The visual dominance of the middle band highlights consistent achievement across both HL and AL subjects, while the strong performance of Setswana HL and Afrikaans HL reinforces the benefits of linguistic alignment in supporting learner outcomes.

However, the charts also reveal important areas for consideration. The significant clustering in the basic band for subjects such as Afrikaans SAL and English FAL suggests that many learners are not

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progressing beyond minimum competency levels. Additionally, while Afrikaans FAL demonstrates strong distinction performance, the overall distribution of distinctions remains limited across most subjects, particularly in larger cohorts such as English FAL. The absence of distinctions in smaller subjects, including Sesotho HL and Setswana FAL, further points to uneven access to top-end achievement.

The charts also highlight broader concerns around subject participation. Extremely low enrolments in subjects such as isiZulu FAL and the absence of SASL HL in the province indicate potential gaps in linguistic access and inclusivity. These patterns suggest that, while the Northern Cape performs strongly in ensuring high pass rates, there are underlying challenges related to subject diversity and the development of excellence across a wider range of language subjects.

Overall, the Northern Cape can be described as a high-performing, middle-concentrated system with limited but emerging areas of excellence. The charts suggest that future improvements should focus on reducing the proportion of learners in the basic band and expanding the distinction band, while maintaining the strong foundation of stability and high pass rates that currently define the province's language performance profile.

4.9 WESTERN CAPE LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE BREAKDOWN

The 2025 NSC results for the Western Cape, as illustrated in the accompanying chart, present a system characterised by strong overall pass rates and a clear concentration of learners within the proficiency band. The chart visually reflects a stable performance landscape across both HL and FAL subjects, although important variations emerge in relation to the distribution of learners in the basic and distinction bands.

Subject description	Total wrote	Fail %	Basic % (30-49)	Proficient % (50-79)	Distinction % (80-100)
Afrikaans FAL	24 791	3.48%	22.17%	63.09%	11.26%
Afrikaans HL	20 794	0.05%	18.09%	74.24%	7.62%
Afrikaans SAL	374	1.60%	65.24%	32.09%	1.07%
English FAL	39 579	0.32%	32.14%	63.49%	4.05%
English HL	27 120	0.17%	21.11%	69.79%	8.93%
English SAL	4	0.00%	50.00%	50.00%	0.00%
isiXhosa FAL	1 324	0.23%	8.01%	88.07%	3.70%
isiXhosa HL	19 485	0.16%	4.58%	88.94%	6.32%
isiXhosa SAL	34	0.00%	11.76%	50.00%	38.24%
isiZulu FAL	3	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	66.67%
Sesotho FAL	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Sesotho HL	111	0.90%	7.21%	90.99%	0.90%
Setswana HL	0	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
SASL HL	11	0.00%	45.45%	54.55%	0.00%

Table 9: Language Performance Breakdown

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4.9.1 Failure Band (0-29%)

The chart shows that the failure band is relatively small across most language subjects in the Western Cape, confirming that the majority of learners successfully meet the minimum pass requirements. English FAL, which represents the largest cohort, records a low failure rate of 0.32%, appearing as a narrow segment in the chart. English HL performs even stronger, with a failure rate of 0.17%, while Afrikaans HL shows near-perfect performance at just 0.05%, making the failure band almost invisible in visual terms. Afrikaans FAL records the highest failure rate at 3.48%, which is more noticeable in the chart when compared to other subjects, though it remains relatively contained. Several smaller subjects, including isiXhosa SAL and SASL HL, show no failures at all, which is reflected in the absence of a lower band. Overall, the chart illustrates a system where failure is minimal and access to passing is firmly secured.

4.9.2 Basic Band (30-49%)

The chart reveals a more substantial presence in the basic band, particularly among AL subjects. Afrikaans SAL stands out prominently, with 65.24% of learners concentrated in this category, forming a large and dominant segment that signals limited progression beyond minimum competency. English FAL also shows a significant proportion of learners in this band at 32.14%, which is clearly visible in the chart given the size of the cohort. Within the HL category, SASL HL presents a notable concern, with 45.45% of learners in the basic band, indicating that nearly half of the candidates are not reaching proficiency. English HL (21.11%) and Afrikaans HL (18.09%) also show meaningful clustering in this range, although less pronounced. These patterns suggest that, despite high pass rates, a considerable number of learners are performing at only basic levels, which may have implications for further study and progression. The chart further highlights ongoing concerns about SASL HL performance, particularly in relation to equitable outcomes for Deaf learners.

4.9.3 Proficiency Band (50-79%)

The most dominant feature in the chart is the strong central concentration within the proficiency band, which forms the core of learner performance in the Western Cape. Sesotho HL leads with 90.99% of its learners in this category, although it represents a very small cohort. Among larger subjects, isiXhosa HL (88.94%) and isiXhosa FAL (88.07%) show substantial clustering in the proficiency band, forming large central blocks in the chart. Afrikaans HL (74.24%), English HL (69.79%), and English FAL (63.49%) all demonstrate strong performance in this range, confirming that the majority of learners achieve comfortably above the pass threshold. The chart reinforces the interpretation of the Western Cape as a “middle-heavy” system, where most learners are concentrated within the 50-79% band. The particularly strong performance of isiXhosa HL and FAL also reflects the benefits of linguistic alignment in supporting learner achievement.

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4.9.4 Distinction Band (80-100%)

At the upper end of the chart, the distinction band is present but unevenly distributed across subjects. IsiXhosa SAL stands out with an exceptionally high distinction rate of 38.24%, which appears as a large upper segment, although this is based on a very small number of learners. Among larger subjects, Afrikaans FAL shows a strong distinction rate of 11.26%, forming one of the more prominent top bands in the chart. English HL (8.93%) and Afrikaans HL (7.62%) also display solid high-level performance. In contrast, English FAL (4.05%) and isiXhosa HL (6.32%) have relatively thinner distinction bands despite their strong performance, indicating that fewer learners reach the highest achievement levels. This pattern, clearly visible in the chart, suggests that while excellence is present, it remains somewhat limited in relation to the large number of learners achieving in the middle band.

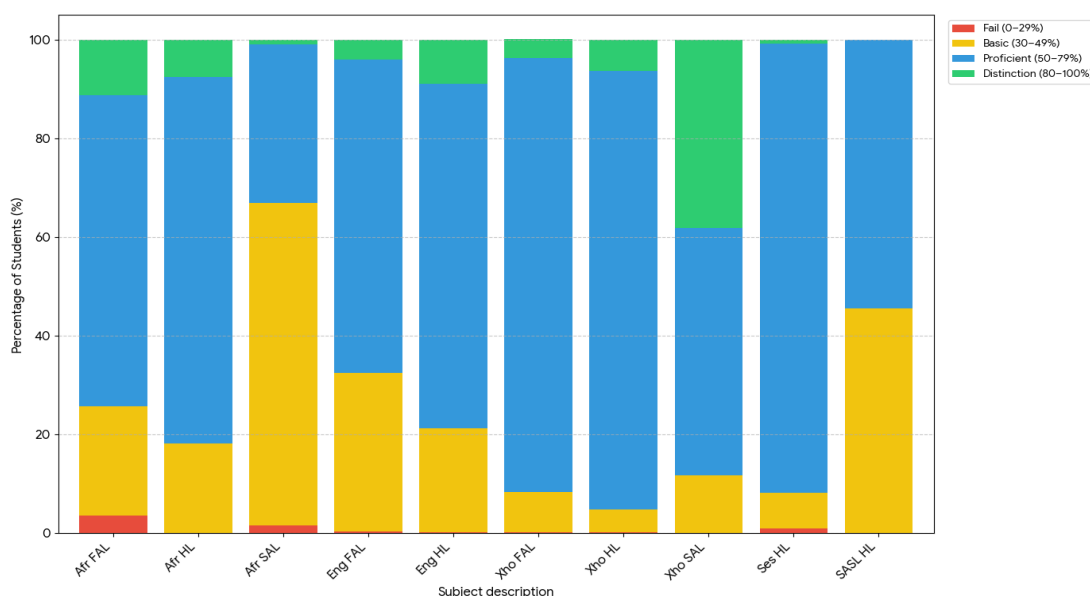


Chart 10: Western Cape NSC subject performance: Percentage distribution

4.9.5 Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the chart illustrates a system that is highly stable and strongly centred in the proficiency band, with consistently low failure rates and a solid foundation of learner achievement. The visual dominance of the middle band confirms that most learners perform at a competent level, while strong outcomes in both Afrikaans and isiXhosa highlight the importance of language alignment in supporting academic success.

However, the chart also reveals important structural concerns. The significant clustering in the basic band for Afrikaans SAL, English FAL and SASL HL suggests that many learners are not progressing beyond minimum competency. The absence of distinctions in SASL HL remains particularly

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concerning, reinforcing broader national trends regarding the performance of Deaf learners. At the same time, although some subjects demonstrate strong distinction rates, the overall distribution of high achievement remains uneven, with larger subjects showing relatively modest proportions of top performers.

The chart also highlights issues related to subject participation. The absence of enrolment in subjects such as Sesotho FAL and Setswana HL, as well as extremely low numbers in English SAL and isiZulu FAL, suggests a limited language offering shaped by provincial linguistic realities. While this may reflect the dominance of certain languages in the province, it also raises questions about inclusivity and access for speakers of less represented languages.

Overall, the Western Cape can be described as a stable, middle-concentrated system with pockets of strong excellence but uneven distribution at the top end. The chart suggests that future improvement efforts should focus on supporting learners to move from basic to proficiency, while also expanding the distinction band to ensure broader access to high-level achievement without compromising the system's existing strengths.

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5. SUMMARY AND FINAL INSIGHTS

- 5.1. The 2025 NSC language results, as reflected in the report and supported by the accompanying provincial charts, reveal a highly stable but structurally uneven national performance profile. Across provinces, the system demonstrates a strong ability to ensure learner progression and passing, yet remains constrained in consistently producing high-level academic excellence.
- 5.2. At a national level, the charts collectively illustrate a system with exceptionally low failure rates, confirming that access to passing is firmly secured. In most major subjects—particularly English FAL and large HL groups such as isiXhosa, isiZulu, and Sesotho—failure rates are frequently below 1%, making the failure band almost invisible in many of the provincial distributions. These patterns indicate a high degree of systemic stability and suggest that foundational teaching and assessment practices are largely effective in supporting minimum achievement across diverse linguistic contexts.
- 5.3. The most defining feature of the national performance profile, consistently reinforced across all provincial charts, is the dominance of the proficiency band (50-79%). Most learners in nearly every province are concentrated within this middle range, with standout examples such as Sesotho HL in the Free State, where over 95% of candidates achieved proficiency. This widespread clustering reflects a system that is middle-heavy, where learners reliably achieve competence but do not necessarily progress into advanced performance categories. While this indicates strong conceptual grounding, it also suggests a ceiling effect in which upward academic mobility is limited.
- 5.4. Despite these strengths, the charts simultaneously reveal a persistent constraint in the distinction band (80-100%), particularly among high-enrolment subjects. English HL and English FAL, which dominate nationally, consistently produce relatively low proportions of distinctions—often below 5%—despite their high overall pass rates. This pattern highlights a critical gap between access and excellence, where large numbers of learners succeed but relatively few achieve at the highest levels.
- 5.5. In contrast, smaller subjects—particularly certain indigenous languages—occasionally demonstrate exceptionally high distinction rates, such as isiNdebele HL in Gauteng, which exceeded 50%. However, as reflected in the charts, these outcomes are often linked to small and potentially selective cohorts, limiting their broader systemic impact.

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- 5.6. A key insight emerging consistently from both the data and the visual distributions is the clear advantage of mother tongue alignment. Indigenous HL subjects across provinces show strong proficiency clustering and relatively low risk, confirming that learners perform best when their HL subject aligns with their actual linguistic background. This reinforces the central importance of MTBBE as a foundation for both comprehension and academic progression. By contrast, FAL subjects—particularly Afrikaans FAL in several provinces—show greater variability, with higher concentrations in the basic band and, in some cases, elevated failure rates, suggesting structural challenges related to subject choice and access.
- 5.7. The charts also highlight systemic risks related to subject participation and language diversity. Several provinces report critically low enrolment in certain languages, including isiZulu in the Eastern Cape and Free State, as well as Siswati and Sesotho sa Leboa in other regions. These patterns point to a shrinking linguistic offering within schools, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of some languages in the curriculum. Where learners are unable to access their home language as a subject, they are often redirected into dominant languages such as English or Afrikaans, which may not align with their linguistic competence and can limit their academic performance.
- 5.8. Of particular concern, as reflected consistently across the charts, is the performance of SASL HL. The report indicates that SASL HL frequently shows higher proportions of learners in the basic band, very low or zero distinctions, and in some cases, comparatively higher failure rates. This combination signals a systemic performance crisis within the subject. The implications are especially serious given that SASL HL is the home language of Deaf learners. Persistent underperformance in this subject effectively restricts access to higher education and employment opportunities, reinforcing patterns of marginalisation.
- 5.9. A critical underlying theme emerging from the report is the interdependence between language access and teacher competence. Effective language learning requires both exposure to the language beyond the classroom and high-quality teaching within it. Where learners study in their actual home language, poor performance may point to gaps in instructional quality. However, where there is a misalignment between learners' linguistic background and their subject choices, performance challenges are more likely to reflect structural issues rather than individual or teacher shortcomings. This is particularly evident in English HL, where many learners are not first-language speakers, and in FAL subjects where access to alternative indigenous languages is limited.

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- 5.10. In the case of SASL, this challenge is further intensified by the reported practice of appointing teachers without sufficient proficiency in the language, which undermines both teaching quality and learner outcomes. This creates a cyclical disadvantage in which Deaf learners are unable to achieve the marks required for further study, thereby limiting the future pool of qualified Deaf educators.
- 5.11. Overall, the charts and data together depict a national system that can be best described as a high-stability, middle-concentrated system with constrained excellence. The strengths of the system lie in its ability to ensure low failure rates, strong proficiency outcomes, and consistent performance in mother tongue-aligned subjects. However, the limitations are equally clear: a restricted distinction band, uneven access to languages, declining participation in minority subjects, and critical performance challenges in SASL.
- 5.12. The upgraded analytical insight is therefore that South Africa's language education system has successfully secured access and stability but now faces a second-generation challenge: enabling upward mobility into high achievement while ensuring equitable linguistic access. Future interventions must focus on expanding mother tongue access, strengthening teacher capacity—particularly in SASL—and systematically supporting learners to progress from basic and proficient levels into distinction-level performance, without destabilising the strong foundational gains already achieved.

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6. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE MINISTER OF BASIC EDUCATION AND PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON BASIC EDUCATION

- 6.1. Institutionalising MTBBE requires a coordinated, system-level reform approach that integrates policy, curriculum, teacher development, and accountability mechanisms. Drawing on the findings of the 2025 NSC language results, which clearly demonstrate the strong performance advantage of learners studying in their home language, this advisory outlines how MTBBE can be effectively embedded as a core feature of South Africa's education system.
- 6.2. At the policy level, MTBBE must be formally codified as a mandatory instructional standard rather than a guiding principle. While current frameworks promote multilingualism, implementation remains inconsistent across provinces. The Minister should therefore direct the DBE to adopt a phased but compulsory MTBBE model, where home language instruction is prioritised in the early years and systematically extended through the Intermediate Phase, with structured transition strategies into the Further Education Training (FET) phase. This must be accompanied by clear compliance requirements, ensuring that schools justify deviations from MTBBE where alignment with learners' linguistic profiles is not achieved.
- 6.3. Closely linked to this is the need for curriculum and assessment alignment. Institutionalising MTBBE will only succeed if learners have access to high-quality content in their home languages across all subjects. The report confirms that strong learner outcomes in indigenous languages are directly linked to accessibility and familiarity. The DBE should therefore prioritise the development, standardisation, and distribution of Learning and Teaching Support Materials (LTSM) in all official languages, ensuring parity in quality and availability. In addition, assessment frameworks should be strengthened to support both conceptual understanding and higher-order language skills, enabling learners to progress from proficiency to distinction-level performance.
- 6.4. A central pillar of institutionalisation is teacher capacity and deployment. MTBBE cannot be successfully implemented without ensuring that teachers are both linguistically proficient and pedagogically equipped to deliver bilingual instruction. The report identifies teacher competence as a critical determinant of learner performance, particularly where language misalignment exists. It is therefore recommended that the DBE, under ministerial oversight, implement a national teacher development strategy for MTBBE, including strengthened pre-service training in bilingual pedagogy, targeted in-service training programmes, and improved teacher deployment practices to align language proficiency with classroom needs.

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- 6.5. This becomes especially critical in the context of SASL, where systemic weaknesses in teacher proficiency and support have resulted in poor learner outcomes, including higher concentrations in the basic band and limited distinctions. Institutionalising MTBBE must therefore include a dedicated SASL intervention strategy, with accelerated recruitment and training of qualified Deaf teachers, minimum language proficiency standards for all teachers of Deaf learners, and the development of specialised teaching and assessment resources. Addressing SASL is not only a pedagogical priority but a matter of equity, as current outcomes limit Deaf learners' access to post-school opportunities.
- 6.6. Another critical component is expanding subject access and reforming school-level provisioning. The report consistently highlights the constraint posed by limited language offerings, particularly in schools that provide only English and Afrikaans. To institutionalise MTBBE, the DBE must ensure that all schools offer at least one indigenous African language as an HL or FAL, supported by appropriate staffing and resources. This requires a review of the current post-provisioning model, with the introduction of a special dispensation for minority indigenous languages, ensuring that these subjects are protected from under-resourcing and potential phase-out due to low enrolment.
- 6.7. The sustainability of MTBBE is further dependent on protecting and promoting language diversity. Declining enrolments in languages such as isiZulu FAL, Siswati, and Sesotho sa Leboa in certain provinces signal systemic risks to multilingual education. The Minister should direct the DBE to conduct provincial language audits, identifying gaps between community language use and school offerings. Based on these findings, targeted interventions such as incentives for schools, dedicated teacher posts, and curriculum support should be implemented to revitalise minority indigenous African languages and ensure their continued inclusion in the curriculum.
- 6.8. Institutionalisation also requires a strong system of monitoring, evaluation, and accountability. The variability in provincial performance patterns indicates that implementation of language policy is uneven. The DBE should establish a national MTBBE monitoring framework that tracks learner enrolment against home language profiles, assesses performance across HL, FAL, and SAL subjects, and identifies schools where language misalignment is prevalent. This data must inform policy adjustments, targeted interventions, and performance management at provincial and school levels.

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- 6.9. Equally important is stakeholder engagement and advocacy. The perception that English is the primary pathway to success continues to influence language choices, often at the expense of learner performance. The evidence from the 2025 results strongly challenges this assumption, demonstrating that learners achieve better outcomes when taught in their home language. The DBE, supported by the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, should therefore implement national awareness campaigns to promote the academic and cognitive benefits of MTBBE, encouraging parents and learners to make informed language choices.
- 6.10. Finally, the DBE should adopt a knowledge-sharing and system-learning approach, leveraging best practices from high-performing subjects and provinces. The report highlights strong performance examples such as isiNdebele in Gauteng, isiZulu in KwaZulu-Natal, and Sesotho in the Free State, which demonstrate effective teaching and learning models. These should be systematically documented and used to support underperforming areas through inter-provincial collaboration, mentorship programmes, and targeted support initiatives.

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7. CONCLUSION

The 2025 NSC language results confirm that South Africa's language education system remains highly stable in ensuring access and overall success, but continues to face structural constraints in achieving equitable high-level performance across all language groups. Across provinces, achievement patterns consistently reflect the influence of linguistic alignment, subject availability, and resource distribution, with the charts and data demonstrating that learners perform most effectively when their HL subject corresponds to their actual mother tongue.

Provincial variations reinforce this central finding. The Eastern Cape remains anchored by isiXhosa HL as a dominant and stable performer, while smaller cohorts such as isiZulu HL achieve high distinction proportions. Gauteng reflects the most linguistically diverse system, where high-volume subjects coexist with exceptionally high-end performance in smaller cohorts such as isiNdebele HL. KwaZulu-Natal's profile is strongly shaped by isiZulu HL, which combines scale with relatively strong distinction outcomes, although inconsistencies in Afrikaans FAL signal underlying system pressures. The Western Cape demonstrates stability in Afrikaans and English HL, yet distinction performance is uneven, particularly among larger cohorts. The Free State and North West show consistent strength in Sesotho HL and Setswana HL, respectively, while Limpopo and Mpumalanga sustain strong proficiency in Sesotho sa Leboa, Tshivenda, and Xitsonga HL, despite ongoing challenges in low-enrolment and migrant languages. In the Northern Cape, Setswana HL and Afrikaans FAL highlight contrasting strengths in proficiency and distinction outcomes. These provincial patterns collectively illustrate a system that is contextually responsive but uneven in its capacity to produce excellence.

A consistent national trend emerging from the data is the clear performance gap between HL and FAL learners. While both groups achieve high pass rates, HL learners are stronger performers across all performance bands, with significantly fewer learners in the basic category and a substantially higher proportion achieving distinctions. In contrast, FAL learners are disproportionately clustered in the 30-49% range, indicating that many achieve only minimum competency. This pattern highlights the limitations of second-language acquisition in contexts where foundational linguistic support is insufficient.

English HL and English FAL illustrate a particularly important national trend. Although both subjects maintain very high pass rates, they produce relatively low distinction outcomes and show notable clustering in the basic and lower proficiency bands. This confirms that a significant proportion of learners enrolled in English HL are not first-language speakers and therefore face challenges in achieving advanced language proficiency. Similarly, Afrikaans demonstrates one of the clearest disparities between HL and FAL performance, with Afrikaans HL performing well while Afrikaans FAL

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shows higher failure rates and substantial basic-level clustering, suggesting structural limitations in subject choice and access.

At the same time, the data reveal an important but complex pattern within certain indigenous African languages, where FAL learners occasionally outperform HL learners in distinction rates. This is most likely attributable to smaller, more selective cohorts and higher levels of informal language exposure, rather than a systemic advantage in the FAL stream.

These findings collectively underscore the centrality of a learner's mother tongue as a determinant of educational success. The results demonstrate that learners studying in their home language achieve stronger proficiency, more stable outcomes, and greater progression into higher performance bands.

Conversely, where misalignment exists between a learner's linguistic background and their chosen subject, performance declines, conceptual understanding is weakened, and equity gaps are reinforced. This misalignment is further exacerbated by restricted access to indigenous African language options in many schools, forcing learners into English or Afrikaans streams that may not reflect their linguistic identity.

The report also highlights significant structural and systemic challenges. These include declining enrolments in several indigenous languages, placing them at risk of marginalisation, and persistent inequalities in the performance of SASL HL, where higher concentrations of learners remain in the basic band and distinction rates are often absent. This represents a critical equity issue, particularly for Deaf learners, whose access to post-school opportunities is directly affected by their performance in an HL subject.

From a broader perspective, the data align strongly with international research on multilingual education, which emphasises the importance of strong first-language foundations for cognitive development, literacy acquisition, and second-language learning. The South African results clearly support an additive bilingual model, where learners build proficiency in their home language while acquiring additional languages in a structured and supported manner.

The overarching conclusion is therefore that, while South Africa's multilingual education system is functioning effectively in ensuring high levels of participation and basic success, it is not yet optimally structured to deliver equitable excellence or sustain linguistic diversity. A system-wide shift toward MTBBE is required to address these gaps. Such a shift must ensure alignment between learners' linguistic identities and subject offerings, expand access to indigenous languages, strengthen teacher capacity, and create pathways for higher-level achievement across all language groups.

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Ultimately, the central lesson emerging from the 2025 NSC language results is clear: learners achieve best when they learn through their mother tongue and build bilingual competence from that foundation. Without fully institutionalising this principle, disparities in achievement will persist, linguistic diversity will continue to decline, and the system will remain constrained in its ability to produce high-level outcomes at scale. Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Basic Education and the Minister for Basic Education are therefore called upon to support a co-ordinated, evidence-based reform agenda that positions MTBBE at the centre of language policy implementation, ensuring that multilingualism becomes not only a constitutional commitment, but a practical driver of improved educational outcomes for all learners.

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