ADVANCING MEASURES FOR TRANSITIONING MOTHER-TONGUE (SESOTHO) IN FOUNDATION PHASE TO ENGLISH IN INTERMEDIATE PHASE AS LANGUAGE OF LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to design measures that should be included in a framework for the use of English as a Language of Learning and Teaching in a classroom interaction approach to enhance learners’ communicative competence in the Intermediate Phase. The previous research advocates that classroom interaction activities can provide opportunities for the facilitation of the additional language, as they encourage meaningful interaction in the target language and active learner participation. Moreover, a classroom interaction approach helps learners to construct their own learning while expressing themselves in the additional language. In the English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) settings, where it is an ongoing challenge to provide learners with practical learning and interactive learning opportunities, interaction activities such as discussion, storytelling, role-play, reading aloud and debate are seen as advancing measures, albeit there is superficial implementation of some of these activities in the Intermediate Phase LoLT classrooms.

This multiple case study investigated the nature and scope of classroom interaction in teaching LoLT to enhance learners’ communicative competence. The study explored the teachers’ understanding of classroom interaction, teachers and learners’ beliefs and attitudes and the strategies used by the teachers in teaching LoLT in the classrooms. The research was undertaken at five public primary schools, but the focus was on the Intermediate Phase at Motheo District of Free State Province. It was found that most of the teachers still use the teacher-centred method while learners remain passive receivers. The study recommends that LoLT teachers should be trained to implement the classroom interaction using the interactive activities in additional language and create a conducive teaching and learning environment that permits the learners’ participation; the schools should have a parental involvement policy as a means of encouraging parents to be involved in their children’s learning; policy makers should include debate as an interactive activity in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document teaching plans in order for the teachers to fully implement it; and parents should be trained on how to assist with homework tasks and take responsibility for their children’s learning.

Keywords: English as Language of Learning and Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement, Communicative competence
1. INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that language is important for communication, learning, social interaction and identity (Golele, 2005). According to Vygotsky (1969) cited in Le Roux (1993), language is key to cognitive development and the way language is used at school; has a bearing into scholastic achievement. However, people across globe speak a variety of languages. In a multicultural society such as a Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the USA and others, language diversity exerts a powerful influence on the content, methods of instruction and outcome of school. Lemmer, (1993), postulates that in learning institutions, when language is linked to a particular race, cultural group or social class, it becomes a highly contentious issue and may affect the teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, the latest research by Barnard (2010, p. 1) upholds the notion that a sound knowledge of English opens social and economic opportunities for South African learners. Therefore, there is a need to become fluent in the English language as it plays a pivotal role in gaining access to education, the labour market, and broader social functioning (Taylor & Coetzee, 2013). This is as result that there is significant research evidence that children learn best when the first language of learning and teaching and examinations is their mother tongue (UNESCO, 1953; Benson, 2002; Brock-Utne, 2005; Clegg, 2005; UNESCO GMR, 2015). The rewards of schooling in local languages outweigh the costs, with gains in education quality and inclusion leading to reduced school-year repetition and drop-outs (Boateng, 2019). When vocabulary and literacy skills as Boateng (2019) asserts, are built in the Mother Tongue (MT), along with building oral fluency in the second language, learners can more easily access and master learning in the second language.

Notwithstanding, education planners and policymakers tackle a sundry of practical challenges in this regard. These include language choice in multilingual contexts, the optimal length of MT instruction, codifying unwritten or non-standardized language, developing MT curricular materials, and teacher development (UNESCO IIEP, 2018).

According to Clegg & Simpson (2016), Africa is one of the most linguistically diverse continents, accounting for 30% of the world’s languages while having only 15% of its population. In contrast, Europe which has just over 10% of the world’s population only accounts for only 4% of its languages. Therefore, multilingualism in Africa has been widely perceived as a threat to the economy and nation-building efforts, leading national governments to justify the use of one official, often foreign language, particularly in educational settings (Boateng, 2019). As a result, according to UNESCO & ADEA (2011), the opportunity is adversely missed to create a quality education system on the potential of most of the population, instead of a minority that masters the official language. This has partly been motivated by a belief that instruction in a language is an effective way of learning it, consistent with many other studies in the literature, though the evidence says otherwise (Milligan, Clegg & Tikly, 2016).

Language has always been a contentious issue in South African education. Therefore, its constitution guarantees learners the right to receive education in the language of their choice. However, most current research suggests that learners entering school can learn best through their mother tongue and that a second language such as English, is more easily acquired if the learner already has a firm grasp of his or her home language (Nomlomo & Vuzo, 2014).

Several studies provided evidence that when the medium of instruction was a foreign language for students and in which even the teachers were often not proficient, classroom interaction became teacher-centred and student performance seemed to be low (Williams & Mchazime, 1999; Mwinsheikhe, 2002; Bergmann et al., 2015; Rubagumya, 2003, Brock-Utne 2005). Mwinsheikhe (2002), argues that when learners were not familiar enough with the medium of instruction, teachers reverted to switching between the official medium of instruction and the language that most students are familiar with, to enhance their understanding of the subject matter and encourage participation in classroom activities. Furthermore, teachers adapted teaching practices to the low language competences of the students by reverting to repetition and memorization and leaving aside effective questioning (Rubagumya, 2003). Low performance and participation are demotivating for teachers. Unfortunately, teachers use coercive measures such as shaming, ridiculing and beating either in frustration or because they believe that their students are lazy. Research has shown that fear prevents learning and participation and leads to school disaffection (Smith, 2003). The examples of these teaching practices are a mirror of the inappropriateness of programme design and teacher training.

Thus, considering the above facts, learning English, the global first additional language, becomes inevitable.
in the South African education system. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2011, p.9) states that the cognitive level of LoLT should be such that it may be used as a language of learning and teaching. Furthermore, Rudham (2005:105) points out that language is the principal medium of learning in school and every teacher needs to cultivate it as a tool for learning in their subjects. Hence, the four interrelated and interdependent language skills which contribute to competency are: listening and speaking skills, reading and viewing skills, writing and presenting skills and language structures and conventions (DBE 2011, p.9). The DBE further explains these skills as follows:

- Listening and Speaking Skills - These skills are central to learning in all subjects as learners collect and synthesize information, construct knowledge, solve problems, and express ideas and opinions.
- Reading and Viewing Skills - Learners develop proficiency in reading and viewing a wide range of literary and non-literary texts, including visual text and become critical and creative thinkers.
- Writing and Presenting Skills – Writing allows learners to construct and communicate thoughts and ideas coherently and enables learners to communicate functionally and creatively.
- Language Structures and Conventions – Learners develop a shared language for talking about language (a metalanguage), so that they can evaluate their own and other texts critically in terms of meaning, effectiveness, and accuracy.

However, this article seeks to explore the strategies for transition to the Intermediate Phase teachers’ understanding when teaching English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). The knowledge produced from this article may be of vital importance in understanding the complexities that are encountered in the Intermediate Phase when teaching English as LoLT. The findings of this study may contribute towards the teachers’ understanding of the particular “classroom interaction that can be implemented to enhance the learners’ communicative competence in LoLT”.

2. METHODOLOGY

Methodology is an articulated, theoretically informed approach to the production of data (Ellen, 1984: 9) as cited in Rehman & Alharthi (2016). It refers to the study and critical analysis of data production techniques. It is concerned with the discussion of how a particular piece of research should be undertaken (Grix, 2004: 32 as Rehman & Alharthi (2016)). It also guides the researcher in deciding what type of data is required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the purpose of study. It is the methodological question that leads the researcher to ask how the world should be studied (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

This article employed a qualitative research methodology, which made use of a case study design. A case study can focus on describing process, individual or group behaviour in its total setting, and the sequence of events in which the behaviour occurs (Stake, 2005) as cited in Ponelis (2015). Ponelis, (2015), is of the view that the case study methods support for theory building is useful in areas where existing theoretical and conceptual frameworks are inadequate. Therefore, the data in this article were collected by means of classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis to describe the process in individual or group behaviour in the whole setting and the unfolding of events.

2.1 Participants

The data for this article were collected at some of Motheo District in the Free State Province in South Africa as a case study following a qualitative research design. Experience shows that the situation that exists at South African schools is an epitome of what happens in other African countries.

2.2 Sampling Procedure

2.2.1 Ethical considerations

This article followed standard procedures for social research, whereby permission was sought from the Free State Department of Education and granted. All participants in the study willingly agreed to participate and confidentiality of the participants was strictly observed.

2.2.2 Sampling techniques

The study involved five (5) schools purposefully selected from departments in the Free Province, fifteen (15) learners from different schools. These involved five (5) clusters each involving 3 participants who were randomly selected, whereby 15 teachers were purposefully selected and organized into five (5) clusters.
2.2.3 Instruments

Several tools were used to collect data, and these include face to face interviews, focus group discussion, and documentary analysis and direct observation. Face to face interviews were mainly administered to language teachers at Intermediate Phase because they seem to have an in-depth insight regarding areas of special language needs for their learners.

Focus group discussions involved three clusters 2 had 15 participants each and one had 3 participants. The focus group discussions were conducted to teachers to explore issues on language structure and implementation of teaching and learning strategies in the classroom situation. Documentary analyses of current curricula for Communication Skills courses. This involved a review of two curriculum documents, and which were evaluated in the light of the evaluative framework as identified by Jacobs and Farrell (2003).

2.3. Study Design and Data Analysis Method

This article followed a case study research design where data were collected from a sample of respondents from a defined population as explained above. Data were analysed using qualitative data analysis methods whereby thematic analysis approach was used.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At this juncture, the findings generated from this study provide a number of pedagogical implications. First, the learners’ motivation in learning English should be considered when designing curriculums, managing language classrooms, and teaching English. Dornyei (2018, 2019), suggested that teachers need to be aware and conscious that language learners are likely to differ in their ambitions, outlook, and motivation. Therefore, language instructors need to be adaptable and flexible with the learning environment, the content, and classroom management which would in turn serve the aim of improving learners’ motivation. Pedagogically, since the analysis of this study showed that teaching and learning activities have an influence on motivating learners to learn English, teachers should make efforts to support students in maintaining their motivational intensity such as establishing a close and reliable relationship with the learners, providing positive feedback to improve learners’ English ability, and encouraging them to set achievable goals.

Ushioda (2008) is of the view that to promote healthy interaction between social and individual processes of motivation, it might be best to incorporate classroom activities where students work together in pairs or small groups to achieve their learning goals, which can help foster cognitive and motivational interdependence among learners. According to qualitative findings of this article, the learners expressed their motivation in learning English. They also firmly believe that English competence and knowledge is essential for their future. It is acknowledged that motivational orientations and engagement are crucial in developing learners’ linguistic, socio-cultural, and psychological wealth (Noels et al., 2019). In terms of pedagogy, teachers should encourage and reinforce the expected and desirable forms of behaviour in the language teaching process by fostering and stimulating curiosity and inquisitiveness about the English language (Cook, 2000), and by providing authentic tasks and stimulating students to engage in classroom activities (Lamb & Arisandy, 2018), making full use of the English language. It should be noted that these actions should be made to fit the precise contexts and should be appropriate to the local educational culture, meet curriculum goals, and match the interests of students' needs wherever possible. Finally, given the focus of this study on learning English as Language of Learning and Teaching, future studies could integrate other factors or variables, which may yield insightful results related to motivation and provide more concrete and more refined motivation frameworks, contributing to a more comprehensive picture of the role of motivation in language learning.

On the other hand, language and communication though inseparable, the two concepts are fundamentally different. Kobo (2013) clarifies the difference between language and communications in that, ‘language is a set of systems, which interlinks with a range of social and psychological factors; the use of a set of systems in combination provide meaningful communication’. While communication on the other hand, is ‘a transfer of information from one person to another in negotiating ideas through social interaction in which language is used as a means of that interaction’ (Kobo, 2013).

Using English should not be left to the language teachers only. In addition to correcting learners’ writing
during marking their assignments, teachers in other subjects should also communicate with students in English outside classrooms and in contexts other than academia. To achieve this, teachers should change their mindset regarding students and lecturers’ roles in the classroom and outside classroom. To this end, it is clear that teachers in other subjects should realize that they have a responsibility of addressing learners’ communication problems and schools should create the learning environment where English is used in such a way that cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) could adequately be achieved among learners. Language class sessions should be more learner-centred and communicatively based. More emphasis and class time should be spent on practicing and using the language skills taught as opposed to giving teachers about language. In preparing English language teachers, it has to ascertained that student teachers are provided with a repertoire of skills, techniques, and necessary theoretical insights to enable them to make principled decisions in the best interests of the particular pupils/students they teach. Finally, the goals of Education Department should continue to influence language teachers whatever new approaches succeed it: teachers have to teach language so that learners are better able to use it in the full range of social situation.

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