ENGLISH AS A LANGUAGE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM: A CASE OF SECOND YEAR EDUCATION STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract - Cultural diversity is a valuable national asset in South Africa hence multilingualism is still a debacle in its educational setup. However, with the eleven official languages used in the country, including South African Sign Language; in the global scale, there has to be a language that will be a vehicle to communicate. Communication in the classroom is based on the meanings of thousands of words exchanged between teachers and learners, and unless the teacher and the student understand each other, communication will be fruitless. The aim of the study is to set out the challenges faced by aspiring teachers to deliver in English as a medium of instruction. According to the educational regulations of Central University of Technology as an institution, assessment is based on knowledge, insight, comprehension and ingenuity. The assessment is done in English as a language of tuition. This study is qualitative in nature and is embedded in social constructivism. It uses an interpretism paradigm. Interviews and observations were used to collect data from second year Education students at the Central University of Technology (CUT), Bloemfontein campus, Free State with a sample of 10 LNG11ES students and 6 LNG11ES class observations using a self-designed observation template. Data was analysed using multiple interpretations. The learners at this level are expected to comprehend English but it is a contrast. The study revealed that English as a second language to most learners is still a problem and has to be taught to all learners who major in other teaching subjects as well as those who major in English as a teaching subject.

Keywords - Language of Teaching and Learning, multilingual classroom, Language as vehicle, communication, hegemony

I. INTRODUCTION

Two decades in to democracy, South Africa is still lamenting the legacy left by apartheid. A big fuss is still made about the medium of instruction in schools and there are still ongoing debates on the language hegemony. Even though some are reminiscent about cultural diversity, a multilingual classroom still bears challenges of societal inequality and misunderstandings. Much as a multilingual classroom has been seen by many as a way of addressing and bridging the cultural gap, economic differences and social misunderstandings; which are a heap of debris yet to clear off from the previous regime, English as a language of tuition is still a challenge to many students. Freire & Macedo, (1987) argue that educators must develop radical pedagogical structures that provide students with the opportunity to use their own reality as a basis for literacy. This includes, obviously, the language they bring to the classroom.

II. BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Tantamount to the 1976 June 16 Soweto uprising on the language issue that brought the world's eyes to South Africa, was the 2016 Higher Education FEES MUST FALL movement where students also demanded decolonized education. The voice of the 21stcentury students echoes that of the 1976 youths but in a subtle manner. This comes at the time when academics are advocating for 'Social Justice' as a framework in order to right the wrongs of the past. It is evident that the language hegemony battle in education is far from being won. What is "hegemony"? It is a lived system of meanings and values—constitutive and constituting— which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming… It is, that is to say, in the strongest sense a 'culture'. It can therefore, be said to be a fluid process of struggle through which certain social relations are naturalized and coercively enforced, while others are made unviable and even unthinkable. Similarly, Williams (1977) describes hegemony as something that is "internalized". In addition, Kenneth quoted in Freire & Macedo, (1987) said as trying to defend the human rights of a country's language when we are driving the imperialists agenda through education:

"To do otherwise is to deny students the rights that lie at the core of the notion emancipatory literacy. The failure to base a literacy programme on the native language means that oppositional forces can neutralize the efforts of educators and political leaders to achieve decolonization of the mind. Educators and political leaders must recognise that "language is inevitably one of the major preoccupations of a society which, liberating itself from colonialism and refusing to be drawn into neo-colonialism, searches for its own recreation. In the struggle to re-create a society, the reconquest of the people of their own world becomes a fundamental factor"

Likewise, Ngugi WaThiong'o on "metaphysical empire" and English language rebuked strongly the imposition of English in Africa and said, "English is not an African language. The perpetuation of hierarchies of language have existed and continue to

exist to the extent that African writers who want to receive literary prizes have to write in English."

It is, therefore, of equal importance that we include the students' language as the primary language of instruction in literacy as top priority. It is through communications with others. Vygotsky (1962) examined how people's social environments their own language that they will be able to reconstruct their history and their culture. It is only after reconstruction that they can generate the future for them and the generations to come, in so doing, breaking the vicious circle of imperialism that is perpetuated by the academia and education system in South Africa on SouthAfricans.

Contrastingly, some scholars advocate for the improvement of understanding the language issues and elevate the matter to policy makers as they need to step up the outcomes. Reducing the language disadvantages experienced by many learners will require language policies informed by a better understanding (through further research) of the mechanisms through which language factors affect learning outcomes and of when and how the switch to English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT) should be implemented (Van der Berg, Taylor, Gustafsson, Spaull and Armstrong, 2011).

III. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is qualitative in nature. It sorts to address the socio-economic problem of language as a medium of instruction. Interaction with participants proved to be vital because they were able to give their background and the present challenges they face in their learning due to the lack of language proficiency.

Theoretical Framework

The framework guiding the study is social constructivism. Language is social constructed. Lev Vygotsky (1962), a Russian teacher and psychologist, first stated that people learn through their interactions and influenced the learning process. He suggested that learning takes place through the interactions that students have with their peers, teachers, and other experts.

Still trying to firm their feet on the ground from the apartheid regime that is characterised social imbalances and economical inequalities, Cultural capital as part of social constructivism informed the study (Bourdieu, 1977a, p. 494). South Africa still has the two notable social classes that are not only classified by the colour of their skin but also by the economic and social power they possess. Children who were exposed to English from their households and come to school with a better cultural capital and this becomes an added advantage over those who are still struggling to grasp the language.

Sample

Second year Education students at the Central University of Technology (CUT), Bloemfontein campus, Free State with a sample of 10 LNG11ES students and 6 LNG11ES lecture sessions. These particular sample was selected because this is a course where all education students are aided with pedagogical knowledge in imparting content in a proper language.

Data collection tools

Interviews were helpful as an interaction with participants gave an insight, their views and opinions on the use of English as a medium of instruction and observations were used to collect data from lectures, using a self-designed observation template to observe the students' interaction amongst themselves and the authority.

Data analysis

Data was analysed both deductive and inductive. The themes in data analysis are derived inductively from the raw data using Cartesian and Kantian reason respectively. Some themes were predetermined by the researcher when engaging with the literature and the practice as a lecturer. However, some themes emerged as the data were coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To give the participants a voice in the research the researcher used in Vivo Coding. This is where the codes, terms and phrases used by the participants themselves are presented in verbatim. Some themes and patterns came out as the researcher engaged and interpreted the data hence the constructed coding was also featured.

Ethical Issues

To conduct the study permission was sought and was granted by the Central University of Technology, Free State. The consent of the students to participate in the study as well as that of the lecturers to use their students was also sought. The students were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality with which their responses would be dealt. They were informed and assured that the aim of the study was to improve the language of teaching and learning pertaining to student-teachers and that their responses would contribute towards the achievement of that purpose.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data collected through observations corroborated that collected through interviews. During the group discussions, it was observed that different groups were made up of either the same ethnic group or students who spoke one language or dialect. This in itself allowed students to communicate in the language they all understood better. There were groups discussing the tasks in Sotho leaving the group scribe with a daunting task of translating what was discussed into English. It must

be said that this exercise was time consuming as students think in their mother-tongue, discuss in their mother-tongue and later on having to translate, which in itself was an added task.

Participants in the interviews had contradictory views on the subject. Some believed in the world as a global village and there has to be an international language that will enable them interact with their counterparts from any part of the world. They did not consider English as just a language of tuition but a commercial and business language. It was a notable number of students who had a descending view. These students uttered that English is a tool that is used to advance neo-colonialism and imperialism. In their views, they echoed former South African President Thabo Mbeki (2012), by saying it was high time they decolonised their curriculum and started giving African solutions to African problems.

Similarly, the interview responses only echoed what was observed. Students disclosed that they do their thinking in their L1 and struggle to translate their thoughts into English as they have to communicate the ideas in "this foreign language" – English. Some students displayed disharmony in the fact that English language student-teachers benefit more from this particular course because they will be actually putting to practice what they learn in this module whilst the rest of the students
will still have to face a challenge in teaching subjects like Life Science, Economics and other content subjects which do not require advanced English but elementary. They expressed their dislike of the language - a matter of attitude towards thelanguage.

DISCUSSION

Much as multilingual classrooms are aimed at fighting the social inequalities and cultural divisions, language is still a dividing factor in the same classrooms. From the findings, it is evident that students still sit in cliques of the same culture or with those of the language they can easily converse in. Previous studies show that a very few number of students in the Free State come from a background where English is the household language (Census 2011). The findings also reveal that most students only use English in the lecture halls and when they are with other students from different language backgrounds.

These proved to be a huge challenge in academic or scientific presentation of the work. One of the participants said as an aspiring teacher, she always thought she was going to teach the way she was taught. Where she came from, whenever they encountered a problem in grasping a concept, their teachers would explain in their own language – code-switching; but she saw this practice as a problem when she got to tertiary because not all lecturers could speak all languages and it they were to explain in each and every student's language that in its own created problems.

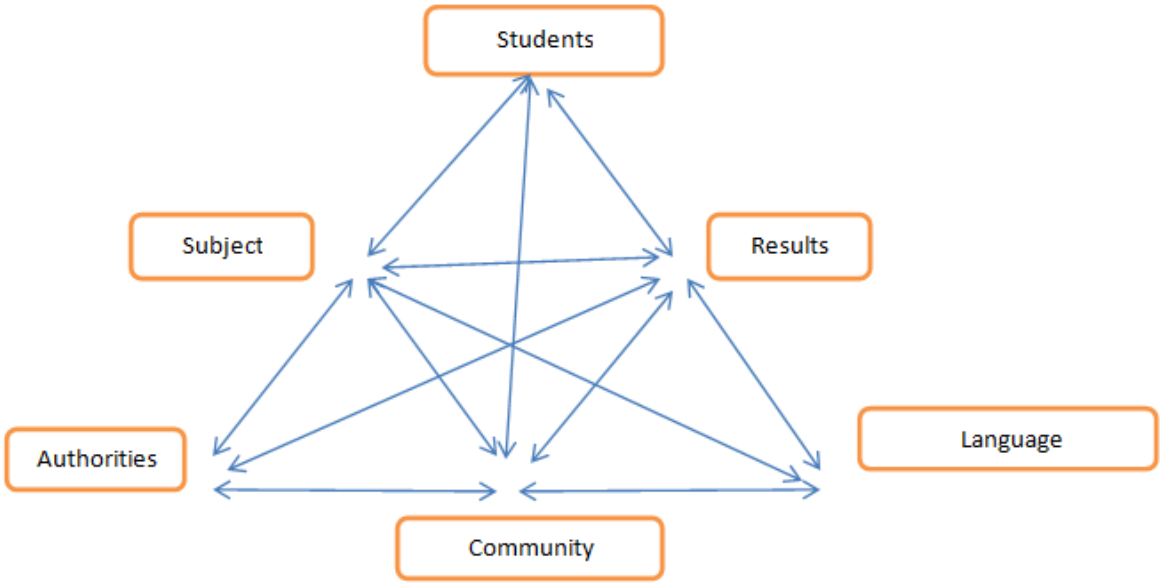


Figure 1
Interconnectedness of learning and teaching a language and results

Figure 1 demonstrates the interconnectedness of language learning and teaching and results it yields. It takes the whole community to teach students proper morals and instill in them attitudes that will push them a long way in being good communicators. The table is a representation of the vicious circle of students produced by an education system of student-teachers who cannot master a stern communication, with proper English. Failure to communicate properly in English, is a recipe for disaster as all subjects at

school are assessed in English, with but the exception of the indigenous language in the area the school is situated as all schools must do, at least two languages. The implication thereof, is creating a baseless and knowledge less teachers. This is in violation of the institution's (CUT) graduate attributes whereby students are expected at the end of their residence at CUT, amongst other attributes to be able to communicate proficiently, in oral, written, presentation, information searching and listening skills. It is effectively expected of student-teachers, more especially because they are destined to impart knowledge, to be assertive and articulate.

CONCLUSIONS

It is discovered that learners who speak English as a second-language clearly perform worse on average than their first-language English counterparts, some of the reasons are articulated in the findings as to why they perform worse. It is clearly due to linguistic disadvantage, basic school- level factors, home background, and in some, a combination of all of these factors.

It is therefore, imperative that a collective intervention by all educational stakeholders, engage in a tightened notch and instill values, attitudes and put more emphasis on the importance of language as a vehicle that can move you from one end of trajectory to changing lives as a new and inexperienced teacher, taking into consideration the type of children the world is nurturing.

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