

Challenges of teaching and learning English as a Second Language in Higher Education in Africa

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Abstract - This paper discusses the resources for teaching and learning English in high Education in Africa. This includes the discussion of the social environment; the human materials – teachers and their capacities; the non-human materials - books, curricula, lectures/notes; educational policies/administration; and computer resources. All of these are supported by examples to assist the readers and other persons who may not be native English speakers to understand and develop an interest in the culture of teaching English regardless of the challenges the teachers and learners face. This paper will further address the primary role of the teachers in a multidimensional language class to establish conditions and develop activities so that the students/learners can practice the language in a meaningful context. The paper will also address the strategies' issues and relevant teaching aids to facilitate learning. The educational policies and the issue of humanizing pedagogy and 4th revolution technology will be reviewed concerning English as the language of learning and teaching. Lastly, the Chapter will address the advantages and disadvantages of using English as a medium of instruction by reviewing the relevant and recent literature.

Keywords- teaching and learning of English, Second Language Resources, teaching approaches

I. INTRODUCTION

Africa's social environment and its influence on the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language is critical. It is important to contextualise the discussion of teaching English Second Language in Africa Higher Education. Letseka & Maile (2008) highlight that learning a new language is one of the hardest things to do, and speaking in front of the class is an intimidating experience for both the teachers and learners. The teachers must bring magic to the class to make the lesson fun. This will make all the learners fully participate, gain skills and knowledge in English as their additional language, and have self-confidence, as they believe practice makes perfect.

This paper is organised into sections whereby section 11 will discuss and unpack the following: Resource availability and teaching approaches, Less Qualified Staff, and Human materials – teachers and their capacities. Section 111 will present and discuss the recommendations and the conclusion in Section IV.

II. PROPOSED RESOURCE AND TEACHING APPROACHES

A. Resource availability and teaching approaches

The classroom becomes more exciting if the teachers use sufficient and relevant resources that are properly linked to the teaching approaches, especially during the students' English class as a Second Language. This means that insufficient teaching resources may result in poor performance of the students in their academic work as English as a medium of instruction in many African countries is more commonly used, including South Africa. This affects most students from a disadvantaged background as they are confined to disadvantaged schools with no adequate resources and the majority decide to drop out due to the pattern of infrastructural investment by the government.

III. QUALIFIED STAFF

B. Less qualified Staff

Some teachers in African and South African schools are underqualified and allowed to teach any subject without being exposed or expected. For example, currently, 41% of the permanent academic Staff of South African universities have doctoral qualifications, and only 34% of the permanent Staff of public universities have master's qualifications (Center for Higher Education Trust, 2016). This is not good enough for the growth of the higher education sector and the economy.

This becomes the main challenge to schools and affects the learners' academic performances since qualifications and expertise influence students' performances in schools. Barber and Mourshed (2007) assert that the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers. Thus, the quality of teachers/lecturers is a major factor that shapes the learning and growth of students (Chong, 2009). Respectively, teacher quality has been a major concern of the South African education system authorities and the South African public in ensuring quality education.

However, several changes have occurred in the South African education system since 1994. The development of an abundance of policies for higher Education was taken care of and processed, although there is a lot that needs to be done. Mapesela and Hay (2005:113) attest to this by highlighting that acts and initiatives have been relatively slow due to the underlying democratic, participatory policy-making process characterising all spheres of South African society. However, impressive progress in South African higher education policy initiatives was promulgated in a very short time after 1994. Their voluminous nature, lack of clarity of implementation steps, the vast number of coordinating bodies, as well as the wrong assumption that institutions and academics have enough capacity and support to implement these policies have created and continue to create, among others, a stagnation in policy implementation, fears of encroachment in academics' sphere sovereignties, and sometimes animosity and resistance to change. Blamey and Mckenzie (2007:439) appropriately argue that however slow the policy process may be, over time, the cumulative increments of evaluative policy analysis are not insignificant and are indeed worth waiting for.

These changes were because of the segregated educational system along racial lines under the apartheid era. Despite governments' efforts to redress the imbalances of the apartheid system in the field of Education, and teacher education, in particular, the quality of teachers and teaching in historically disadvantaged communities are still an area of concern (Department of Education, 2007).

The continent has 54 countries, according to the United Nations statistics. In addition, Plonski, Teferra and Brady (2013) point out that 26 African countries list English as an official language. On the other hand, the literature reveals that there are approximately 2500 languages spoken in Africa (Ndhlovu, 2008). Amongst those languages, there are European and Arabic languages, which have a very long history in the continent. Due to colonialists' dominion, the European and Arabic languages became the "mother tongue, first language, or official language" (Ebonguè, & Hurst 2017, p 2). This does not imply that no mother tongue or first language existed before colonialism in Africa.

The Colonial political landscape influenced the extinction of some of the indigenous languages and diluted the languages of some of the continents' languages. As Msila (2007) contends, Education is not a neutral act, and it is always political. Thus, amongst all the languages spoken in Africa, with so much diversity, English seems to be a "global language of business" (Neeley, 2012). In its endeavour to be one of the participants in a global market, Africa has to teach English. Higher education institutions in Africa have to teach English to students whose mother tongue could be one of the indigenous languages.

University rankings indicate 1225 officially recognised African higher education institutions (Center for Higher Education Trust, 2016). These higher education institutions are in different contexts, servicing diverse students. That means, in the 1225 higher education institutions, other languages are spoken by students. Coleman (2010) reveals a link between a country's economic strategy, the attraction of foreign capital, and language education policies. Many countries in Africa seek to claim their economic space. Thus, English is used as negotiating language and must be learned. For instance, in South Africa, there are 11 official languages. In these languages, nine indigenous languages were oppressed for many years. While trying to heal the imbalances of the past, English is seen as a lingua franca that will assist in a fight for economic freedom. This is the case in many countries in Africa. However, English will remain different from the African languages. This is common in many parts of the continent.

III. HUMAN MATERIALS

C. Teachers and their capacities

The human materials in teaching English as a Second Language are very important. Setati (2010); Spaul (2012) indicate that L2 learners from townships where languages other than English are spoken face various challenges in learning both inside and outside the classroom. For example, learners attend schools with a scarcity of resources and are required to learn in an environment that is noisy and unpleasant. This generates problematic conditions for learning a new language, as learners generally experience difficulties when switching from mother-tongue instruction to English in Grade 4, which is the entry-level to the Intermediate Phase (IP). In

view of this situation, using English as the LoLT to learn the content subjects has become a serious problem in township schools.

This does not necessarily mean that monolingual teachers should not teach English as a Second Language. However, one has to lead by example. For instance, a teacher teaching in a South African higher education institution should at least know and be able to speak the basics of one or two indigenous languages, especially those spoken in the institution's environment. The teacher's knowledge of languages may assist in developing the teacher's confidence. Literature reveals that teachers' perceptions of their level of knowledge, skills, and experience have an important role in overcoming difficult situations effectively during their professional life (Sarfo, Amankwah, Sam & Konin, 2015).

Thus, it is important to capacitate teachers to possess pedagogical content knowledge relevant to teaching English as a Second Language. This will help develop the teachers' self-efficacy and belief in their capabilities. Jaggermath and Jameson-Charles (2015) conclude that teachers' beliefs are some of the most influential resources they take into the classroom. African teachers should be able to teach English as a Second Language to African students confidently. Higher Education Institution policies should strive to preserve African indigenous languages while developing students' English proficiency as a Second Language.

Additionally, African countries are dominated by rural areas, and most teachers do not use English as the medium of language during teaching. This impacts negatively on the learners' acquisition of English as a second language. However, the language policy in South Africa indicates that the learners should be taught in their mother tongue in the Foundation Phase and shift to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching in the Intermediate Phase, where learners are ready to acquire the second language. Despite the policy requirements, most teachers still teach the learners with their mother tongues regardless of the phases since they believe learners will struggle to understand and follow what has been prepared if they use English. Fleisch (2008) and Pretorius (2002) feel strongly that shifting from mother-tongue instruction (in the first two to three years of schooling) to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching compounds the problem of language confusion as the learners have not yet mastered reading in their mother tongue, much less in English.

In this regard, the English Language remains a huge challenge in African and South African Schools as most of the teachers have limited English proficiency, and this obscures and hinders the communication channel as we all know that language acts as the basic communication channel for knowledge transfer and learning from the teachers to the learners. Let alone that South Africa is a rainbow nation, and the learners should be exposed to the language so that they could be able to express themselves with other people from foreign countries. Additionally, all the teaching materials from the Intermediate Phase upwards are written in English and are expected to be assessed in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). This shows that the LoLT school policy and social language environment do not correspond. In conjunction with poor knowledge transfer and English language acquisition, an implication of home language and LoLT discrepancy where young learners are involved is that L1 and L2 are mixed. This was supported by Pretorius (2002) by indicating that these limitations contribute to poor English L2 acquisition as there is a poor language error transfer from teacher to learners.

Despite the poor situation in which teachers find themselves, Chiwome and Tondlana (1992:248) state that non-English speaking students/learners who have African languages as their first language prefer to be taught in English, particularly at university, even though it takes longer to learn in an L2. Additionally, university entrance offers an escape from the township and the possibility of upward mobility. Respondents have increasingly favored English in the South African Social Attitudes Survey when asked which language should be the main language of instruction in the first three years of school. In 2003 the response was 55% in favour of English, which increased to 65% in 2018. This is incompatible with the demographics of South Africa. In the last census, less than 10% of the population identified English as their home language.

Based on the argument above, these students are often labelled as at-risk/disadvantaged as they have to make a linguistic, cognitive and social transition when entering a university where most academics are English-speaking, making it far more challenging for them (Kapp, 2004:260-261). When learners switch to English early and receive poor teaching, they develop basic interpersonal communication skills in English, but cognitive academic language skills are not developed. These skills are required in educational settings to deal with complex concepts and literacy.

V.RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the language barriers experienced by the teachers, the school language policy should be strictly adhered to by academic and administrative Staff. Notwithstanding the ideological goals of the policy, such as functional multilingualism, accommodation of linguistic diversity and the right for students to receive their Education in the language of their choice, the throughput rate of students is still alarmingly low. The implementation should be accelerated if the policy makes provision for first-year students to be assisted by upgrading their cognitive academic language skills and by providing tuition through the medium of African languages. By implication, the Department of African Languages should facilitate the translation of course material into selected African languages.

Richards (1993:3) says that L2 teacher training programmes usually include a knowledge base that includes linguistics and language learning theory, a practical component (based on language teaching methodology) and teaching practice opportunities. Therefore, lecturers and teachers should integrate theory and relevant aspects of language teaching into the practical component to ensure effective language teaching. As Uys *et al.* (2007:77) conclude, one of the most critical factors impacting the improvement of academic literacy in South Africa is practical training in L2 for content subject teachers.

The teachers and lecturers should be workshopped more often on school language policy, and there should be monitoring and follow-ups to ensure they are coping with getting the support they need. They should also be offered more comprehensive and systematic courses than attending short courses on an ad hoc basis. The courses should also include ways of supporting ESL learners. These courses would help to change their perceptions of literacy and teaching diverse learners. Teachers' meta-cognitive awareness, reflection, introspection, and critiques improved and helped them to develop action plans. Additionally, teachers with access to computers should be encouraged to use them and be workshopped on teaching the learners using technology.

A 'one size fits all' approach to the continuous professional development of teachers to equip them for teaching in this kind of environment is not effective. A variety of models, each meeting different needs and circumstances, is required so that professional development for inclusive Education, which includes teaching and learning through English as LoLT, can be realised. Rigorous evaluation to ensure a high standard of training interventions and follow-up support are required to provide the practical application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in classrooms. The teachers should be assisted in designing course materials to facilitate the transition to English. Thus, South African learners, including those who experience language as a barrier to learning and development, can be assured of quality teaching and learning in their classrooms.

VI. CONCLUSION

Most learners face a massive challenge in the classroom due to the language barrier. The learners become disadvantaged academically as most use their mother tongue and are unlikely to perform to their best since they lack the ability and proficiency in English as the Language of Learning and Teaching. But it is not just being able to use an effective communication medium in the learning situation that is at stake. A child's self-confidence and sense of self in society are undermined if the home language cannot be used for learning, and the experience of repeated underachievement further undermines these. This disadvantage has cognitive, psychological, social, and cultural aspects, and all are manifested in our education system's ongoing failure. Thus whatever we do in Education needs a vision with at least three dimensions — a high level of academic achievement, fairness to all, and the promotion of social cohesion—multi-bilingualism as an alternative.

There must be alternatives to the academically ineffective, inequitable, and socially divisive ways our system is currently addressing language. Most of us are familiar with bilingualism as it revolves around teaching two languages as subjects, with only one being used as a communication medium (the language of learning and teaching – LoLT). On the other hand, a multi-bilingual approach treats the home language (HL) as a support LoLT across the curriculum, with many HLs being able to play this role. The three-year mother-tongue policy and the switch to English-only in grade 4 Current policy prefer children to have the first three years of schooling in their mother-tongue (HL). Still, an increasing number of schools and parents are ignoring this and opting for English as the LoLT from grade 1 in urban schools since the parents can afford to take their children to the C model schools. Whereas in rural schools, a three-year policy is being implemented.

Thus the quality of teaching is, in most cases, badly compromised by weak pedagogy and a lack of learning materials in these schools. But in any case, in grade 4, all such learners are confronted with a switch to English as the only LoLT, while their English and Afrikaans-speaking counterparts continue using their language from grade 1 to grade 12. This is gross inequity. A task team commissioned in July 2009 by Minister of Basic Education, Mrs. Angie Motshekga, to advise on the implementation of our national curriculum highlights this

transition as a critical problem area but recommends that English be introduced earlier (in grade 1), alongside the Home Language, to facilitate the transition. Learning two languages early on is indeed a sensible option. However, despite the research referred to above, the report implies that a small amount of English over three years should be sufficient for switching to English only.

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