Original Research Article

Teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade three to grade four in urban township schools in South Africa

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Abstract
According to the South African language policy the LOLT (language of learning and teaching) in the foundation phase (grades 1-3) is the learners' home language, while there is a sudden shift in the LoLT from their home language to English from grade 4 onwards. With this background in mind, this study aimed to explore teachers' views on the change in the LOLT (Language of Learning and Teaching) from isiXhosa, in grades 1-3, to English in grade 4 in South African township schools. This study used a qualitative research approach against the backdrop of a phenomenological design and an interpretivist paradigm. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with six teachers from two urban township schools, where the learners' home language was isiXhosa, but the LOLT was English. The interviews were transcribed, and the data was analysed and categorized into themes. The findings of the study indicated that teachers experienced challenges teaching learners through the medium of English in grade 4. Although some of them explored the use of code switching and translanguaging to support the learners, they felt that these strategies did not work, because the main problem was the actual change in the LOLT. While some teachers expressed the view that the LOLT should remain isiXhosa as in in grade 3, others felt that English should be the medium of instruction from grade 1.

Keywords: *Code-switching, Languages, Language of learning and teaching (LOLT), Multilingualism, translanguaging.*

INTRODUCTION

Mercer (1995) posits that language is a means of expressing thoughts and making sense of personal experiences. Thus, it is essential that, as a cultural tool, it is used to share personal experiences. Since it infers transforming our experiences into cultural knowledge it is therefore not just a means for individuals to communicate ideas but enables people to think and learn. In short, language is essential for teaching and learning, while the language used perpetuates which cultures and whose experiences are represented. McKinney (2016) alerts us to the dangers of undervaluing the linguistic resources that learners bring into the learning spaces by rejecting the languages they speak.

In South Africa there is a growing focus in the post-apartheid language education system's problematic glorification of English, which further perpetuates its dominance. According to Alexander (2012) this precludes quality education through mother tongue for the majority of learners in the country. Kioko (2015) posits that when learners use their mother tongue, they are more likely to engage in the learning processes that enable them to make suggestions, draw from prior knowledge, pose and respond to questions, and create and relate to new knowledge enthusiastically. Due to the change in the LOLT (Language of Learning and Teaching) in South African township schools from grade 3 to grade 4, first additional English language learners are faced with the challenge of having to learn English, while simultaneously having to learn complex subjects such as natural sciences in grade 4. Furthermore, teachers "are faced with a double challenge of teaching a particular subject in English while learners are still learning the language" (Shaffer 2007. p.6). According to Probyn (2004) in the Eastern Cape, while isiXhosa is the most widely spoken indigenous language and home language for the majority of the population, yet the official medium of instruction in most schools from the

beginning of grade 4 to grade 12 is English. The use of English as the LOLT for learners, whose home language is not English, leads to challenges among them. This is pointed out by Kamwangamalu (2007) and Mokiwa (2020) who posit that learners who have to transition from learning in their home language to learning through their first additional language, are hugely disadvantaged by the school as they do not benefit optimally from academic learning.

Furthermore, the transition from learning through the mother tongue to learning through the medium of English, which occurs at the beginning of grade four in South African schools, is often problematic for both teachers and learners whose home language is not English (Netshipise et.al., 2022). In support of this statement, Alexander (2005) and Sefotho (2022) argue that English as a medium of instruction is the most significant learning barrier for first additional English language learners. According to Cummins (2001) First Additional English learners need at least six to eight years of good English teaching before they can use English effectively as a LOLT. It is with this in mind that Sibanda (2017) finds it rather baffling how second language learners, after 3 to 4 years of schooling, who receive inadequate first additional level English, are expected to develop a language competence level expected of home language speakers in 5-7 years. This question, however, has not received adequate consideration from language in education policy makers in South Africa. According to McDonald (1990) learners in South Africa, whose home language is not the LOLT, do not have the necessary language skills to cope with the transition to English as LOLT nor the required vocabulary in English to comprehend the lessons or the language used in textbooks.

Learners who begin the schooling system (grade R – 3) learning through their mother tongue and later have to switch to English are subjected to higher failure rates and more challenges in their schooling, because they must transition from learning in their home language to learning in their first additional language from grade 4 onwards. Success in the intermediate phase cannot be attained without the ability to read and comprehend textual information and write competently in the subject under study. According to Taylor and Vinjervold (1999) and Netshipise et.al (2022) learners struggle to comprehend texts that are written in English due to their low levels of reading, speaking, listening and writing abilities in the language of learning and teaching. It is with this background in mind that this study aimed to explore teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4 in urban township schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole (Gqeberha) in the Eastern Cape, where isiXhosa is the learners' home language.

Theoretical framework

This study focused on the sociocultural understandings of learning based on the work of Cummins (2008), who is a leading authority in the fields of language learning and teaching, bilingual education and second language proficiency. Cummins (2008) draws a distinction between BICS and CALP.

According to Cummins (2008) BICS, which he refers to as Basic interpersonal communication skills, is conversational listening and speaking. This is the language of the playground which is "undemanding as it consists of simple grammar forms, a limited vocabulary and involves highly context situated interactions", and which takes home language learners approximately two years to acquire (Woods, 2017 p17).

CALP, on the other hand, which Cummins (2008) refers to as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency evolves from learning to read to reading to learn. According to Woods (2017) CALP is cognitively demanding as it requires abstract thinking and metaphors, symbolism, imagery and idioms. The acquisition of CALP takes approximately 5 to 7 years to develop (Woods, 2017). Consequently, the short 3 years during which learners are exposed to English as a second language is inadequate for them to have acquired CALP in the English language (from grades 1 to 3). Hence, it is crucial to consider "How second language learners, after 3 or 4 years of schooling, are expected to develop a language competence level expected of first language speakers in 5 to 7 years that has not received adequate consideration from Language in Education Policy makers (LiEP) makers" (Sibanda 2017, p.2). Cummins (2008) suggests that during the process of CALP being developed in the home language, it becomes easier to develop it in a second language. Hence, in this sense language can be viewed as a resource and not a learning barrier. Within the context of this study teachers will be able to shed light on the major challenges that they experience when having to teach through the medium of a LOLT in grade 4, which is not the learners' home language, and how the learners experience the sudden change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4.

Literature Review
Issues relating to the language of learning and teaching (LOLT)

Learners in South Africa, whose home language is not the LOLT, do not have the necessary language skills to cope with the switch to English as LOLT (Macdonald, 1990; Netshipise et, al. 2022). Furthermore, they may only have a vocabulary of 800 words in the language as opposed to the required vocabulary of 5 000 words required to cope with the vocabulary of textbooks in grades 4 and 5. Because of this limited vocabulary, which denotes limited academic language proficiency the learners' progress in school declines. Osborn (2006) posits that within a year or two of the transition to English FAL becoming the LOLT, performance in school subjects slows down and further declines to an average of

about 30% by the end of secondary school education. Assessments such as ANA (Annual National Assessments), according to Sibanda (2017), further indicate that grade 3 learners have poor literacy skills even in their Home Languages as highlighted by performance scores in these tests. Lebese and Mtapuri (2014) attribute this to the superficial teaching of literacy in the home language resulting in learners not having a solid foundation on which to build their home language further and to transfer skills to English.

Another challenge postulated by Sibanda (2017) is that little teaching and learning takes place in English in the Foundation Phase (FP) home language classrooms and that literacy development in the home language also seems to deteriorate once English takes over in the Intermediate Phase. Furthermore, as pointed out by Nel and Muller (2010) teachers provide inadequate language input due to their own limited English proficiency. The issue is further exacerbated when the tacit knowledge (BICS) learners have in their HL is regarded as adequate to warrant no further development (Sibanda, 2017). Furthermore, many of the teachers themselves in the intermediate phase do not feel competent in the use of English as a LOLT (Sibanda, 2017), since English is not their mother tongue. Although however, as pointed out by Sesati, Molefe and Langa (2008), the reason for the early transition is to expose FAL English learners to English as early as possible, neither the teachers, learners nor the parents use English as their mother tongue. Hence the transition to English as LOLT in the Intermediate Phase (IP) may be particularly unsettling for teaching and learning, especially if high quality support material does not exist and high content teacher knowledge cannot be achieved.

According to Osborn (2006) the premature transition from the home language as the LOLT to English as LOLT in grade 4, has proven to be a disadvantage to English FAL learners as it results in high failure rates and early school dropouts. This is further supported by Crusher et al. (2000) who point out that the learners' psychological security, their sense of belonging, and their general school adjustment is better when they can communicate effectively in the language of the school. The learners' insecurities in the classroom result in academic failure which forces them to drop out of school earlier. However, if the learners were taught in their home language, their ability to comprehend what was being taught would lead to them developing healthy attitudes towards school, which could lead to a decline in early school dropout rates.

In a study conducted by Mokiwa (2020) in Kwa Zulu Natal (South Africa) on teachers' perspectives on multilingualism in the classroom, he found that teachers face tremendous difficulties in ensuring that all learners understand the concepts due to the diverse levels of the learners' language proficiencies in the LoLT (which in most cases is English). Hence, he advocates for the use of learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds in the classroom to enhance their understanding of the concepts they are being taught, and suggests that professional development programmes for teachers aim to provide them with the requisite skills in innovative teaching strategies that will enable them to promote inclusivity and collaboration within multilingual teaching contexts (Mokiwa, 2020).

One of the approaches to promote multilingualism in the classroom according to Sefotho (2022) is the implementation of Ubuntu translanguaging approaches since it offers the opportunity for the use of multiple languages in the classroom. Ubuntu, which is an African philosophy that focuses on mutual respect, community, and interconnectedness, enables learners to draw on these aspects thereby contributing to enhanced learning. According to Sefotho (2022) the implementation of such an approach within multilingual classes not only promotes a sense of belonging among learners because all languages are valued, but also improves learners' language proficiency in the LOLT.

Research methodology and design

The research approach adopted for the purposes of this study was a qualitative one. According to Creswell (2013) qualitative research can be described as an emergent, interpretive, and naturalistic approach to the study of the phenomena, social situations, and processes in the natural settings of the world. The qualitative approach assumes a naturalistic setting and the use of interpretive knowledge to understand the social phenomena which, as pointed out by Conrad and Serlim (2011), reflect several important features, including a focus on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives, and thoughts of participants through various strategies of inquiry. The choice of the qualitative research method for the purposes of this study was also influenced by the research aim and the study design. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4 in urban township schools.

The paradigm adopted was an interpretivist one, since the focus was on enabling the individual to construct his or her own view of the world based on certain experiences and perceptions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994), while the design was phenomenological, since the focus of the study was on exploring teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4, implying a focus on their lived experiences, opinions and feelings.

The target population for the purposes of this study was grade 4 teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience, who must teach through the medium of English in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6) when the LOLT

changes. Since the change in the LOLT occurs in township schools the teachers were selected from these schools. Hence the criteria were that the schools had to be in an urban township in the Nelson Mandela Metropole, and the teachers had to be Intermediate Phase teachers who teach grade 4. According to Creswell (2009), sampling is the selection of participants or institutions in a research project with the purpose of making inferences about a larger group of people. The focus was on grade 4 teachers because these teachers commence teaching through the medium of English, when the LOLT changes from isiXhosa in the Foundation Phase to the Intermediate Phase where first additional language learning officially begins.

The sample comprised six teachers, who were purposively selected from two urban primary township schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole, and who volunteered to participate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 6 teachers, all of whom had the characteristics and experiences relevant to providing insights into the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4. The in-depth interviews were conducted in both English and isiXhosa, depending on the languages that the participants felt most comfortable using. According to Maree (2007), some advantages of using interviews is that as a research tool it has the highest response rate, the researcher could pose additional questions to gain clarity on issues, and questions could be explained to the respondents if they are unable to understand them. The tool allows for interaction with the respondents, which assists in eliciting the authentic meaning behind the views, statements and answers provided by respondents. Ethical principles were affected by ensuring the use of *nom du plumes* for the 6 teachers interviewed, to safeguard their anonymity and applying for ethical clearance from the University's ethics committee which was granted by the provision of the following ethics number: [H19-EDU-ERE-012].

Data analysis requires the researcher to be thorough, systematic, and meticulous. According to Gay and Airasian (2000) this enables the researcher to organise and bring meaning to a large volume of information. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) posit that after a thorough data analysis, conclusions can be drawn from which recommendations may be formulated. A thematic approach to data analysis was used, as the accumulated data was examined for common themes and patterns, which led to the following findings, based on the themes.

Findings

Since qualitative research was employed, the focus of this section will be on the presentation of the themes that emerged from the data collected from interviews conducted with the six teachers from an urban township school. Rich data was elicited from the participants through semi-structured interviews, which were voice recorded and transcribed immediately thereafter. These transcriptions were then analysed thematically.

The section below presents the findings based on themes and sub themes emerging from the interviews conducted with the six participants. Direct quotations from the transcripts are presented as evidence to support the major themes and issues identified.

Presentation of the findings

The findings emerging from this study are presented under two broad headings namely teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4 and strategies they adopted to address the challenges.

Teachers' Views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4.

All the teacher respondents were critical of the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4 citing a variety of challenges, based on their own experiences and insights. They indicated that the change in the LOLT posed more disadvantages than advantages, since the learners lacked the cognitive language proficiency skills in the changed LOLT, which was English. Their views are categorised under the mismatch between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency skills and perceived advantages and disadvantages.

Mismatch between BICS and CALP

An important view that emerged from the interviews was the mismatch between BICS and CALP (Cummins, 2000). Although the learners had a basic knowledge of English, since English was taught to them as a first additional language in grade 3, they lacked the cognitive academic language proficiency in English in grade 4, as their vocabulary in English was not adequately enhanced due to the medium of instruction.

Star expressed her view as follows (translated from isiXhosa):
> *'I have a problem with learners coming to my class with very little knowledge of the math concepts in English. The isiXhosa they learn in the foundation phase does not help them when they get to the intermediate phase.'*

She was vocal in her assertion that teaching learners Maths through the medium of IsiXhosa was hindering the learning of Maths from the intermediate phase onwards.

Desmond felt that the change in the LOLT to English resulted in some learners experiencing problems learning complex terms in the intermediate phase which he articulated as follows:

> *'The learners should rather continue with IsiXhosa throughout their intermediate phase, as this is their home language. We should promote mother tongue and create resources to teach our learners in it, just like Afrikaans people did with their language, as they struggled to understand concepts in English.'*

This view was also expressed by Teresa who was of the view that the promotion of home languages must be prioritized above the promotion of English, which she articulated as follows (Translated from isiXhosa):

> *'These learners would perform better at school if they were taught in the language that we teach them in here in the foundation phase, they must continue there in the Senior phase in isiXhosa because we teach them the concepts here in the foundation phase and they get to grade 4 they struggle because they know the work in isiXhosa.'*

Like Desmond she was critical of the change in the LOLT from isiXhosa in grade 3 to English in grade 4.

Although some teachers expressed the view that the LOLT should remain the same throughout primary school, they espoused varying views in terms of the choice of the LOLT.

Eddy, an isiXhosa male teacher, expressed his language preference as follows (Translated from isiXhosa):

> *'Learners must start grade R with being taught in English and they should continue with it throughout their schooling lives. That would erase the problems we face with the change in LOLT.'*

His sentiments mirrored Star's, who also favoured English as a LOLT from the foundation phase, which she expressed as follows (Translated from isiXhosa):

> *'The government should just realize that the isiXhosa taught in the foundation phase is the reason why learners struggle in the intermediate phase'*.

It was interesting to note that although all the teachers agreed that the LOLT should be changed and they were all isiXhosa home language speakers, they all espoused different views in terms of their language preferences. While some favoured isiXhosa, others felt that English should be used from the outset in the foundation phase until the end of secondary school.

Teachers' views on the advantages of the change in LOLT to English

Most teachers were of the view that the change in the LOLT served as an obstacle to learners' progress in the intermediate phase, however, some still expressed the view that they were glad that the LOLT changed to English.

Star for example expressed this view as follows:

> **'***I am glad that the LOLT changes to English because it means that I do not have to teach the learners in isiXhosa, isiXhosa is more complicated than English and I would struggle to teach the complex concepts of Maths if I was teaching them in isiXhosa.'*

It was interesting to note that although Star's mother tongue is isiXhosa, she still felt that it was easier to teach in English. She backed this up by saying (Translated):

> *'In College I was taught to teach in English, and so I only know how to teach Math concepts in English.'*

Flower shared the same views as that of Star's which she expressed as follows (Translated):

> *'I am an isiXhosa speaking person, yet I also struggle to translate some of the English words to isiXhosa, because isiXhosa is difficult and it is not easy to know how to describe to the learners what the English words are in isiXhosa, take gravity as an example, isiXhosa is just hard. I prefer teaching in English because it is easier to teach and explain.'*

Graca expressed the same sentiments by focusing on the level of difficulty of teaching through the medium of isiXhosa as follows:

> *'I think the reason why they have to change to English is because of the fact that Education is easier to teach in English, all concepts start in English, and then they are translated to the other languages. I think it's important that it becomes English, IsiXhosa is too difficult to learn in.'*

Eddy was also positively predisposed to using English as a medium of instruction by proclaiming (Translated from IsiXhosa):

> *'English is our universal language, if we change the LOLT to home language, we will have to make resources for too many languages as a country, all 11 official languages would have to be represented, that is not practical. Learners can speak isiXhosa at home and during Xhosa periods, not during other subjects.'*

It was interesting to note that some of the teachers felt that English should be prioritised since it is an international language and there are more resources in English compared to isiXhosa, the home language of the majority of learners in the school.

Disadvantages of the change in LOLT.

Some of the teachers identified disadvantages in the change in the LOLT, and some of them expressed the view that the LOLT should either be isiXhosa or English from grade one and not only changed in grade 4.

Desmond shared his views relating to mother tongue education as follows:

> *'I feel that the introduction of the mother tongue was an important move, the only reason it is flawed is because it only ends in the foundation phase. If it were to be continued throughout the learners' schooling and English stayed as the first additional language, Mother tongues would develop, and learners would learn more effectively.'*

Teresa backed Desmond up by saying (Translated from IsiXhosa):

> *'I believe that the learners struggle from grade 4 moving forwards because they only speak English at school, and sometimes they do not know this English that they are having to learn in. They struggle to work independently while using this language, they constantly need assistance, and they can barely work independently.'*

This view of learners struggling to work independently, was shared by most of the teachers. Star expressed this view as follows (translated):

> *'During math, it's like these learners were taught nothing in the foundation phase; they come here confused and unable to comprehend any of the concepts, it's like they were never taught some things.'*

She continued by saying (Translated):

> *'During assessments we have to help the learners every step of the way; they cannot work on their own.'*

Eddy expressed his challenges as follows (Translated):

> *'During my first two years of teaching I assumed that as a teacher I should just give the test papers to the learners and they would be able to answer the questions and finish the work, my learners' marks were very poor for those first two years. That's when I realized that it was best, I read and explain each and every single question in isiXhosa in order for them to understand.'*

Graca also added:

> *'I guess it's best the learners stick to being taught in the language their foundation was built upon, I would prefer that that foundation was English, but since it is isiXhosa, I guess they should then continue with the isiXhosa they know and understand.'*

While most of the teachers understood the challenges relating to changing the LOLT in grade 4 there were varying views in terms of their preferred LOLT.

Strategies adopted by teachers to assist learners

Strategies adopted by teachers to explain concepts to learners included code switching and translanguaging, and the completion of the curriculum without implementing any strategies, as if nothing had changed.

Code Switching and translanguaging

Some of the teachers indicated that they used code switching and translanguaging, at times, to enable the learners to understand the concepts, although they perceived it as being time consuming.

Desmond explained his approach as follows:

> *'When I teach difficult concepts in my classroom, I make it a point that I am able to use some of the main words in isiXhosa as well, as this is the language the learners are most comfortable with.'*

He went on further by saying:

> *'When teaching grade 4 in our contexts it is important, we code switch, or translate words and their meanings to the learners. It is unfortunate that, isiXhosa is not a language I am best at and so I have to use the learners, they translate words for each other.'*

Teresa also expanded on this approach as follows (Translated):

> *'The best way for learners to learn these complicated concepts is if they get translated to them while they are learning, if they are doing shapes, the grade 4 teachers must say the shapes in isiXhosa before they jump to the shapes name in English. So, they must first say 'isangqa' before they say 'circle'. This allows the learners to marry the two and see them as the same thing.'*

Graca went on further by saying:

> *'I would suggest that all intermediate phase teachers be taught how to also teach in isiXhosa in the university, so that they are able to translate difficult concepts to the learners.'*

In articulating his view on code switching in his class Desmond expressed his view as follows*:*

> *'During my teaching of Mathematics in grade 4, I have to constantly translate what I am saying to the learners, sometimes it's hard because isiXhosa is not my home language, but I try. I even ask the ones who know to translate to the ones that do not understand. It's really bad though, I have to translate all the time.'*

The difficulty in translanguaging was articulated further by Star as follows (Translated):

> *'I am isiXhosa home language speaking, but even I am struggling with some of the isiXhosa terminology, so I cannot always translate to them what I am meaning. But I try as best I can. ya, it's like we are also language teachers because I have to teach the language while teaching other subjects like natural science.'*

Eddy also said (Translated):

> *'If I did not constantly go back and forth from English to isiXhosa, I know that learners would not understand so, I always have to be switching from the two. It's not ideal but if I didn't basically teach in isiXhosa for half the time, the learners would not understand.'*

In order to address the language challenges in their classes some teachers adopted approaches such as code switching and translanguaging, although they admitted that they experienced major challenges at times due to their own lack of conceptual understanding of isiXhosa, given that they did not have advanced knowledge of the higher cognitive levels of the isiXhosa language.

Ignoring the situation and focusing on completing the curriculum

Some teachers taught the learners as if they all were on the same cognitive level, and used English as the medium of instruction without effecting any changes to their teaching approaches to accommodate the learners who did not understand. They ascribed this to the fact that they did not have adequate time to assist the learners, as they were under pressure to complete the curriculum.

This view was expressed by Eddy as follows (Translated):

> *'When I am teaching technology or Social Sciences, and I can see that the complex words are too difficult for some of the learners I am forced to move with the ones that do understand, because I only have 45min with them and not the whole day like they were used to in the foundation phase. It is a sad fact but sometimes in order to cover the content for each term I am forced to turn a blind eye to the learners who struggle with the language use and move along with the ones who show some understanding.'*

Star also referred to time constraints as follows (Translated)**:**

> *'At university I was not taught how to teach math concepts in isiXhosa and so some terms I only came across them here at school while teaching like I did not know that units in place value were called imivo in isiXhosa, so how could I possibly help learners who did not know what that was in that moment. I'm forced to explain as best I can while being aware that my period could be over at any moment and the work must be in the children's books by the end of the period.'*

This was expanded on further by Star as follows (translated):

> *'I am not going to lie, I do not always translate, I don't always have time for that, I only have a few minutes with the learners, sometimes you have to continue teaching the lesson because translating takes up way too much time. I would not meet all the curriculum deadlines.'*

Eddy was also honest in his viewpoint that he did not have enough time for translation (Translated):

> *'I am guilty of continuing while still noticing that the learners do not understand, I wish I had more time to explain the content in English and then again in isiXhosa but sometimes I move along with the English and hope that the learners will catch on. I cannot waste so much curriculum time.'*

It is clear from the above strategies adopted by teachers that they are under pressure to complete the curriculum within prescribed time frames, hence do not have extra time to reflect on and implement strategies that could assist learners academically. Furthermore, judging from some of their feedback it does appear as if they are lacking in skills to assist learners whose language is different from the LOLT, which in this case is English.

DISCUSSION

The findings, emerging from the study, indicate that teachers felt challenged by the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4, and there were mixed feelings in terms of the preferred LOLT in the Foundation and Intermediate phases. Whilst some teachers, like Star and Eddy, felt that English should be used as the medium of instruction from the Foundation Phase, Desmond and Teresa (pseudonyms) were vocal in their assertion that isiXhosa should be the medium of instruction.

Although some teachers tried to adapt their teaching approaches to support learners in the changed LOLT (from isiXhosa to English) through the use of code-switching and translanguaging, most grade 4 teachers seemed to struggle to

teach concepts in isiXhosa, although they were isiXhosa home language speakers. Hence, as a quick fix, they tended to concentrate on the delivery of the content and the completion of the curriculum without taking cognisance of learners' diverse linguistic needs, and the challenges they were experiencing with English as the LOLT. Consequently, they used teaching approaches that were teacher-centred and that focused on banking knowledge, rather than developing learners' critical and creative thinking skills. The adoption of such approaches undermined the teachers' efforts to teach and the learners' efforts to learn (Heugh and Wolff, 2006), thereby reducing learners to passive recipients of the content (Alidou, et.al., 2006).

The study confirmed that when learners are taught through the medium of their first additional language, they acquire basic interpersonal communication skills in the language, but lack the cognitive academic language proficiency skills to engage with academic concepts on higher cognitive levels, such as at the synthesis and evaluation levels of Bloom's taxonomy. It is with this in mind that Cummins (2001) opines that the level of a learner's development in the home language is a strong predictor of their second language development. Hence, if learners are provided with adequate time to develop their academic proficiency in their home language, that would result in them having higher academic achievements in English which, according to Balfour (2007), could contribute significantly to learners' success in bilingualism and multilingualism.

The study also indicated that although some teachers used code switching and translanguaging, at times, to teach their grade 4 learners, they found these strategies to be time consuming and futile, since they did not solve the bigger problem which was the change in the LOLT itself. Furthermore, some of them felt constrained as they did not have the requisite vocabulary and knowledge to translate concepts from English to isiXhosa, as the LOLT used during their teacher training was English.

Some of the teachers also expressed the view that the change in the LOLT disadvantaged learners, especially since their mother tongue was marginalised. According to Sibanda (2017) the change in the LOLT from isiXhosa to English diminishes the significance of the learners' home language as a medium for teaching and learning, given that language is the most valuable resource that a learner brings to formal schooling. This view is shared by Murray (1998) and Sefotho (2022) who opine that until English FAL learners have mastered the English language, they should be taught in their mother tongue which is one of the factors that contribute to general school achievement (Cummins, 2001).

A major finding emerging from this study is that if learners are not proficient in the LOLT, this creates a barrier in their thinking process, especially at the level where they have to think critically and formulate ideas. This barrier can be aligned to the BICS/CALP distinction which, according to Street and Hornberger (2008), was specifically developed and reinforced to demonstrate how educators and policymakers frequently confused conversational and academic dimensions of English language proficiency, which created academic difficulties for learners who were originally being taught in their home language from grade R-3. Furthermore, having to learn English as a first additional language during their transitioning to grade 4 and being taught through the medium of English, exacerbated their language challenges, as highlighted in this study as well. While BICS takes 2-3 years to develop, CALP requires 5-7 years implying that since home language speakers only encounter English at school, the requisite time frame could be extended for First Additional English speakers (Cummins, 2000). This implies that within the South African context as pointed out by Sibanda (2017) by the end of grade 3, learners are just starting to develop and acquire BICS proficiency in the First Additional Language and still need about 3 to four more years to develop CALP in the language.

The implications of this study are that the change in the LOLT from grade three to grade four has a negative impact on the development of learners' cognitive academic language proficiency skills in the new LOLT, which in most cases is English. This implies that first additional language speakers will be disadvantaged throughout their schooling, since they are not afforded opportunities to study through the medium of their mother tongue. Although their basic interpersonal communication skills in the first additional language will improve, their cognitive skills in the language will be severely impacted as CALP takes a much longer period to develop compared to BICS. This view is supported by Woods (2017), who avers that learner whose Home Language is not the LOLT, might not be on the level that they should be if they are learning subject content in a language that is not their home language.

A further implication is that the implementation of the LOLT at this late stage of the learner's schooling will stifle how they articulate their views through the medium of the new LOLT, which essentially creates a barrier to their thinking skills at the deeper levels of understanding. Furthermore, since the LOLT is only used in the teaching environment, and there are limited opportunities to practise the LOLT outside the classroom, it is unlikely that they will make any significant progress in the use of the LOLT at the CALP level. Furthermore, even their BICS will be impacted, because they will also only be able to make limited progress at this level given that they only hear it in the classroom. This view is supported by Sibanda (2017) who posits that the lack of English language infrastructure outside of the classroom accentuates learners' linguistic deprivation when English is promoted to LOLT status in grades four and onwards.

Given the nature of the linguistic challenges that learners have to contend with when they enter the Intermediate phase (in grade 4), it is imperative that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa critically reflect on how this impasse could be addressed. This implies that the current policy relating to the LOLT in South African schools and how it is implemented, needs to be systematically reviewed. It is within this context that teachers could play a significant role in not only challenging the Department of Education in its language policy in schools, but also making recommendations for the improvement of the status quo.

Another suggestion is to grant the SGB permission to change the LOLT to home language in the Intermediate phase so that learners are better predisposed to engage with complex concepts in the LOLT on a higher cognitive level, rather than just acquiring a basic understanding of the concepts.

Furthermore, teachers teaching in both the Foundation and Intermediate phases at specific schools, should meet regularly as a community of practice (COP) to discuss issues of concern relating to their experiences using the various LOLT's and how learners could be supported to enhance their skills in the use of the LOLT.

Learners could also be provided with extra language classes that would prepare them more adequately in the use of the LOLT (English) for the development of higher cognitive skills to interpret complex academic concepts which they will be exposed to in the Intermediate Phase. In addition to this the accessibility of dictionaries such as isiXhosa to English and English to isiXhosa dictionaries and glossaries that include terminology and significant concepts used in the subjects in the intermediate phase are imperative, if learners are to enhance their knowledge and skills in the use of the LOLT in the Intermediate Phase.

Conclusion

This study provided an overview of teachers' views on the change in the LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4 in urban township schools. The findings emerging from the study indicated that teachers were challenged by the change in LOLT from grade 3 to grade 4, and that most of the teachers preferred to teach in English rather than isiXhosa, as they felt more competent to do so. Furthermore, although teachers used code-switching and translanguaging in their classes to facilitate teaching and learning during this change in the LOLT, they did not feel competent to do so and found it to be time consuming. If this impasse is to be addressed it is imperative that teachers be assisted to support learners to move from BICS to CALP, so that they can achieve the higher cognitive skills to develop their skills in the LOLT.
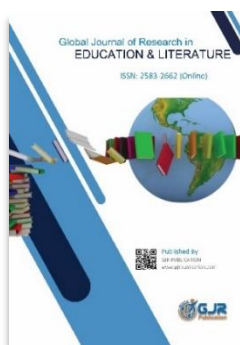
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