
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL~DURBAN

Department Of Education

Master of Education

The reasons why rural Secondary Schools Educators of Kwazulu Natal are reluctant to use English as a medium of instruction.

BY

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Acknowledgements.

I am greatly indebted to Susan Court, my superior whose patience and understanding made it possible for me to work through this piece of work even under the most trying circumstances. I also wish to thank my family for their continued support.

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Education
(Coursework).**

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1 INTRODUCTION

From the time I was lecturing at a rural College of Education in KwaZulu Natal down to my present position as a rural secondary school principal the same province. I have noted with a growing concern that, as our schools continue to be staffed with a younger generation of teaching staff, the reluctance to use English amongst the Black teachers is on the increase. This is seen to be the case in their day-to-day conversations amongst themselves and with their pupils, as well as in the teaching of their respective lessons.

It has become common for staff meetings to be conducted in the vernacular language in an attempt to, as much as possible draw contributions that will be representative of the greater percentage of teaching staff. This is the case even with the principal's meetings as well where it has become an established procedure for meetings to be conducted largely in the medium of IsiZulu, not because an English-only meeting tends to 'leave out' a substantial number of principals. One often has to make an unpleasant guess that in some schools English is just never used.

It is common practice for our Black teachers to teach all their subjects in the medium of IsiZulu, only to swiftly over to English as soon as an authority figure passes by the window. This is done usually much to the

amusement of the learners who immediately turn their heads towards the windows to confirm the presence of such authority. It is not a rare phenomenon to hear an English teacher, almost always black in our rural schools, offer explanations to pupils in their mother tongue. Teachers often justify their behaviour by saying that learners do not understand English, and that IsiZulu is used to facilitate understanding. The result is that the sympathetic teachers, who use a wrong medium in an attempt to simplify the content, continually deprive learners who are deficient in English of a chance of exposure to, and practice of, this medium.

The pre-occupation with content and not language seems to be a dominant belief in our teachers. The issue of language teaching is regarded as the domain of the teachers' English alone. Even teachers of other languages do nothing to develop language awareness amongst learners. The result is that even teachers who have English as a major are becoming more and more reluctant to teach it because of the fear that language deficiency is always attributed to their 'poor teaching' even by their colleagues.

Teachers are told to teach through the medium of English and are warned not to translate or use the children's L1 or any other language. In practice, most teachers do switch from one language to another in the classroom at some time or other; there is probably a continuum of use from those teachers who use translation almost as a method of teaching, to those who

occasionally switch into another language. Language alternation or translation as it is known in common parlance, is still viewed very negatively in the educational context in many developing countries (Moon, 1991) (P14). This is rightful so, because it does not tend to promote bilingualism, but the one sided use of the mother tongue where learners only listen to explanations made in their own language.

Language, written language included, is learned mostly in context of use. When language is whole, relevant and functional, learners have real purposes for using language, and through their language use, they develop control over the process of language. (Moll, 1990, p. 225) Opportunities for language use are seriously lacking in rural Black schools. They only exposure to the English language for learners is the language of textbook which is mostly often merely read to them, and explained in another language. It is worse when one considers that only 20% of the learners in each class may be having a textbook.

2. Focus of the Study

This study was conducted at Khethimfundo Secondary School, where the researcher is presently working as a principal. The school is situated in the remote rural area of upper Tongaat, lying about 80km Northwest of Durban. It is situated at Esidumbini, an old mission establishment of the United

Congregational Church of Southern Africa (formerly called the American Board, whose missionaries first landed in Natal in 1835). The missionaries in fact built the neighbouring feeder school, Esidumbini Primary, and one block still stands as evidence of this.

A relatively new establishment, Khethimfundo was only founded in 1993 and start opening with only Grade 8 learners occupying three classrooms per grade each year, the reason why we have fifteen classrooms all occupied in 1998. This school will be running the first Grade 12 examinations over during October- November 1998.

The great majority of the learners come from a poor socio-economic background. Most of them have born out of wedlock and are cared for by their grandparents out of their meagre monthly pension allowance. Mothers and fathers are either unemployed or away in the towns of Tongaat, Stanger, Verulam and Durban doing unskilled labour. Not all learners can afford the school fees recently raised from R65-00 to R 85-00 per pupil per year. This inability by the pupils to pay makes this school, which is under resourced, devoid of even the basic minimum resources, such as classrooms.

Like most, if not all-rural schools, this school is built with funds collected annually from pupils. The Education Department pays out a subsidy of only

R 7 200-00 upon the completion of each single classroom. No subsidy is payable in respect of completed offices and storerooms. The above situation is well captured by the Cecily Salmon (1992) when she says: " In KwaZulu, for example, 98% of schools are community schools, meaning that the community carries the bulk of building and maintenance costs. Poor communities can only afford poor facilities and the cycle of poverty deepens" (p 8). It is even worse now that 'rand-for-rand' (As this subsidy was misleadingly, but affectingly called) has been put on hold for an indefinite period due to tight financial constraints affecting the country at the moment.

The quality of the classroom built is unavoidably below the expected standard. The number and the size of the windows are such that enough light comes. It is worse on cloudy days when pupils can hardly see what is written on the chalkboard. There are no ventilators, which makes a hot summer day one of the unfriendliness experiences the learners are subjected to. The coupled with overcrowding, is enough cause for serious concern.

This area does have a few professionals are, mostly nurses and teachers, born and bred here. Unfortunately, almost all these professional are, more by intention than default, working away from their birthplace usually in the town areas, thus depriving the area of role models. The brain drainage

deprives the area of progress and development as most of these people have bought houses of their own in urban areas. They only visit their homes in the rural areas one on many months.

Consequently all teachers at Khethimfundo are currently coming from the towns of Durban and Tongaat. Owing to poor infrastructure, for example, lack of tarred roads, electricity and fresh running water. These teachers have to travel everyday from Durban and Tongaat, and back. Over and above the fatigue caused by long distance daily travel, these teachers live under pressure of organized transport, forcing them to be at school a 07h50 and to leave minutes after the school is out. The result is that educators spend the same amount of time on school premises as the learners, allowing no time for individual consultation after hours whatsoever. The extra-mural activities also suffer tremendously because of this situation.

The morale of the learners is generally low. There is a high level absenteeism, late coming, truancy, drug abuse and even teenage pregnancy. Homes generally have no television sets and no reading material. Pupils fully rely on stationery and textbooks supplied by the Education Department. Even when this supply is not forthcoming due to financial constraints, pupils and parents are not willing or able to buy the learning material, even at a level as crucial as Grade 12.

The teaching staffs of this school consists of unqualified under qualified as well as a few qualified personnel. Their ages range from 24 years and 34 years, with the bulk falling between 24 and 29 years. About 80% of them are females. Many of our teachers are the same age, at times younger than, some of our learners who, owing to parental illiteracy and traditional beliefs, often start school at an advanced age. The teaching staff at our school is still entirely black. The school governing body members are themselves illiterate or semi-illiterate, voted in on the basis of their easy availability and traditional status as respectable elders (mostly pensioners), and not on account of their leadership record. They can hardly assist in the professional development of the school, since they are mostly illiterate. As more and more management workshops are organized to empower them, they become more frightened of the new laws and regulations and consequently abandon their membership. As a result at almost every parents' meeting held at the school, a school governing body members is substituted.

The neighbouring towns of Stanger, Tongaat, Verulam consist of almost entirely an Indian population. In these towns 'fanakalo' and little English, is used as lingua franca for commercial purposes. This is the racial group with which Black rural parents and learners come into regular contact.

2.1 Statement of the Problem.

I have been prompted to conduct this study by continuing low rate at which English is used in Black schools in rural areas. Teachers often teach in the medium of IsiZulu and if they do use English, they hardly deviate from language of the text. If examinations are still conducted in English, it is imperative that English be used as often as possible in our lessons as well as conversations with the pupils as well as among us as educators. If this is not done, as is often the case in our schools, our examination results will poorer and poorer. My hypothesis is that poor communicative competence on the part of black teachers in rural schools is the reason behind this reluctance to use the English medium.

2.2 Justification for the study

It is hoped that a study of this nature will help unfold the reasons underlying the low usage of English by Black teachers in the rural schools, and thereby open up opportunities for remedying the situation, with the ultimate aim of improving language in particular, and learning in general. Winch (1990) argues, " Either implicitly or explicitly, therefore, rationality and the use of language lie close to the major questions of intellectual achievement and particularly t educational achievement where language is very often central to the activities that are being learned" (p. 13)

Commenting on poor language proficiency amongst the American Secondary School learners, Blair (1982) says".... Of those who complete the equivalent of two years of high school language study the average level of competence attained in speaking, aural comprehension and even reading is hardly the pride of the nation." (viii). The same can be said of our Black matriculates in South African black-dominated schools, especially in the rural areas.

Such a study as this will hopefully enhance language proficiency in our rural schools and to the neighbouring ex-Indian only schools of Tongaat in search of better learning, which is always associated by black rural parents, with better proficiency in English. This study will shed some light on why; despite improved teacher qualification (from two-year to three year training in our KZN Colleges of Education from 1981) learning in our schools is increasingly becoming poorer and poorer.

2.3 Research Questions

- To what extent does one's attitude towards an L2 (particularly English) affect one's learning thereof?**

- **Can one's past experiences as a second language learner affect one's teaching of the language?**
- **Does exposure to the language by itself necessarily make a learner proficient in use thereof?**
- **What are the teacher's perceptions of the status of English as a teaching medium?**
- **To what extent does parental illiteracy affect a child's learning of the second language?**
- **What is teacher's perception of the quality of textbooks used at our schools?**
- **To what extent do learner attitude affect the teachers' use of English as a medium of instruction in the classroom?**

2.4 Research Methodology

This is a qualitative study. A questionnaire has been used to collect data from all the staff members of this school. It consists of both closed and open-ended questions. This questionnaire was followed by semi-structured interviews of a sample of staff members selected randomly. Two lessons were observed to determine the level of teacher-pupil interaction in the English language.

2.5 Limitations of the study

Since this study was conducted in one secondary school in the rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, results obtained will be limited in terms of generalisability. The length of requirement dictated by the module for which the researcher is enrolled, places further restrictions on this study. However, this being a preliminary investigation, enough light will be shed on the problems, allowing further research to ensue.

3. Literature Review

3.1 A brief historical overview of the development of Black Education In South Africa

From the beginning of the 19th Century, Black education in South Africa was the sole responsibility of the missionaries who worked laboriously, interlaying, trying to codify the variety of African languages. Jarvis (1984) has argued that missionaries used "education as an evangelising agency" (p. 23). Even after the establishment of the Union in 1910 Black education continued to be the domain of the missionaries, with the government showing little interest. For this reason African education has remained segregated and inferior from before 1910, and especially after 1948.

The result of this inequality, argues Jarvis, was a system of educational provision for Blacks, which was totally inadequate. Teachers were in short supply and the vast majority were under qualified. There were a shortage of

school buildings and there were very poorly equipped (ibid, p. 33.). Even after 1948, when Black education was given attention by the nationalist government, it was only for selfish reasons. The aim was one of Black subordination with the schools functioning to produce the sorts of workers demanded by Capitalism in general" ((ibid, P. 33) The Bantu Education Act of 1953 further provided for a system of African education that was neither systematic nor educational. Of all the areas of South Africa, the rural schools have been the most neglected in the provision of resources. Communities have almost always been entirely left to fend for themselves.

Cecily Salmon (1992) laments; "Neglect of rural areas has been the result of state policy but it has unfortunately been echoed, by default rather than intention, by more progressive political and educational forces in South Africa. (P.4)

One of the enemies of rural Black education even at present is the issue of large numbers, resulting in highly unfavourable teacher-pupil ratio: Behr (1978) cites the following ratios of the time: Whites = 1:20; Indians = 1:27; Coloureds = 1:29; Blacks = 1:48. (p.42). It is worth noting that in rural schools this situation has not changed a bit. Rodges (1971) quoted by Jarvis argues that beyond a certain upper limit to class size the quality of education must inevitably decline. Teachers are simply unable to devote, as

much individual attention to their pupils as may be necessary, overcrowding occurs and pupils lose their ability to concentrate (p.47).

Another problem facing Black education for decades is that of poorly qualified teachers, whose teaching is further weakened by the impoverished nature of the schools in which they are serving. An under qualified teacher, a product of neglected and inferior education, can only bring about inferior results. Behr (1988, p.42) says, "The lack of suitably qualified teachers in Black schools has led to what has been described as an 'unfortunate cycle' by which poorly educated persons enter teaching, and in turn produce poorly educated students so that the risk is being run 'of perpetuating mediocrity in the group whose educational improvement is essential to the development of the country'. (H.S.R.C. report of 1981)

Dr Simon Mdluli, in his article "Not much change in rural schools", argues that due to the policy of apartheid two categories of citizens have been created in south Africa; "There is on the one hand, the category of rich urbanized citizens, who enjoy the best resources the country can offer; and on the other hand the category of poor ruralized citizens who are economically and educationally marginalized. The distribution of educational resources and consequently, the educational opportunities has continued to reflect this divide in the South African society, despite the

equal opportunity ideal." (The Independent, on Saturday September 26, 1998)

Commenting on ill-qualified teachers, a common feature of our Black rural schools, P.C Luthuli (1982) has this to say; "Such a state of affairs would not be tolerated in any other profession. No doctor would be allowed to practise until he is adequately prepared for his task, yet every Tom, Dick and Harry without proper and adequate training and orientation, is allowed to guide the young en route to adulthood in Black schools. (Jarvis, 1984, p.49). The situation explained in the preceding paragraphs is till largely prevalent in our rural Black schools, more than four years after the new and democratic dispensation of 1994.

3.2 Brief review of English as medium of instruction

The problem of teaching English as a second language to Black pupils and the use of that language as a medium of instruction in their schools is indeed as old as their system of formal education. The reason for this is that when the Western system of formal education was first introduced to Black communities in South Africa by the early Christian missionary teachers, English was the predominant medium of communication. (Mwasha, 1977, p.5)

The medium of instruction is perhaps one of the most debated issues in African education. It has been felt that education through the medium of the vernacular, which as yet is not sufficiently developed to cope with modern scientific terminology, would be detrimental to advancement in a technological age. (Behr, 1978, p.177)

History has shown that although English and Afrikaans have been carrying an equal status as official languages, Black education has continually shown preference for English. The Cingo Commission of 1962 is a case in point. Given the choice of a medium of instruction from Std 3 upwards, schools in Transkei unanimously chose English. (Ibid, p.178)

The attitude of the Blacks towards the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction has always been largely negative. This is evidenced by the June 1976 uprisings, one of the causes of which was the announced enforced use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in some subjects in the then Transvaal schools. Although a language of the Colonizer, English is still regarded favourably in South Africa compared to Afrikaans.

The Buthelezi Commission (1982) acknowledged that learning would be most fascinating if the medium used was the child's own language. But to met the demands of higher learning as well as the workplace, English has to be chosen." it should be carefully noted that for those children whose

mother tongue is neither English nor Afrikaans, a medium of instruction which is not their mother tongue will have to be selected at some point in a child's education to ensure access to continuing education." (Behr, 1988, p.103). Even now that eleven official languages have been recognized as per constitution of 1993, English is still largely the official language, but also a traditional lingua franca of Black education. Blacks who speak different languages find a common medium of communication in English. "This occurs in social and public gatherings where speakers of a variety of indigenous languages come together." (Mawasha, 1977, p.4)

Mawasha comments on the reasons why the problems of teaching English are on the increase rather than on the decrease. Our schools have to make do with non-English speakers to provide an English medium unlike in the past where native English teachers often did this, the recruitment of whom was comparatively easier. Also, the idea of the introduction of English as a medium at a later stage, often done concurrently with Afrikaans in addition to mother tongue often led to a three-way interference. Further, the overcrowded nature of classrooms in Black schools, coupled with an acute shortage of suitably qualified teachers to teach English, negatively affect the attainment of proficiency in the language. Lastly, there is a lack of adequate literature to deal with the problem as it is occurring in Black schools in South Africa nowadays. (1977, pp.6-7).

It is worth noting that difficulties discussed here have persisted even though several approaches to second language teaching have evolved with an aim of enhancing proficiency in the 1920's, the Grammar-translation approach was used extensively. Language was used explicitly for purposes of translating text from the target to the first language and vice versa. Between the 1920's and the 1950's the Direct Approach was popular. The child would be completely immersed in the second language environment, where L1 was not used at all. The child had to think in the target language. The Audio-lingual method was used particularly between the 1930's and the 1970's. The child would be exposed to memorization and repetition of grammatical sentences, which would be graded from time to time. The idea was to eliminate errors in the second language. The Communicative Approach, the most recent of the above-mentioned approaches, has attempted to combine a few aspects from much approaches, and emphasized the importance of using the language. This is the approach that should be fully operative at our schools, because it emphasises the importance of learning a language by using it.

3.3 Language and learning

The primary motive for learning a language is that it provides a means of communication. A person is therefore more likely to be drawn towards learning a second language if he perceives a clear communicative need for it. (Littlewood, 1984, p.53). A second language is necessary in order that we

may have the key to what is otherwise locked against us. (Mawasha, 1977, p.3)

It is clear therefore, that language is both a tool for communication as well as a means through which the learning material is rendered penetrable. Vygotsky regards language as a means of activating the child's 'zone of proximal development'-defined as the distance between the real level of development and the potential level of development. (Moll, 1992, p.50)

Several studies have agreed that the foundation for academic success or failure depends on the child's development and use of language in early years of his life. (Soni, 1984, p.1) Learning, it is now clear, involves language not merely as a passive medium for receiving instruction, but as the essential means of forming and handling central concepts. Thus learning is not merely through language, but with language. (Morland 19, ix) Bernstein has shown that educational failure is often, in a very general and rather deep sense, language failure. (Halliday, 1973, p.18)

Considering the above-mentioned uses of language, and the fact that English is still the favoured medium of instruction in South African Black-dominated schools, including rural schools, George Sampson's famous dictum, "Every teacher is a teacher of English" (Morland, 19, pp 4-5) must be practiced in our schools.

As learners experience the wide variety of functions and forms of language, they internalise the way their society uses language to represent meaning. So they are learning a language at the same time they are using language to learn. They are also learning about language. (Goodman & Goodman in Moll, 1992, p.231). No learning is therefore imaginable apart from an understanding of a language, particularly a medium of instruction.

3.4 Motivational factors and language learning

Attitude and motivation play quite a significant role in second language learning. The attitude of the learner towards the target language often determines the extent to which he can be motivated to learn it. The same is true about his attitude towards the speakers of the target language. Even the attitude towards the culture of the speakers of the target language can either enhance or inhibit the acquisition of the target language. (Mawasha, 1977, p.3). Ryan and Gile argue; "One potential reason why attitudes are related to achievement in a second language is that they influence how seriously the individual strives to acquire the language. (1982, p.136)

Littlewood (1984) distinguishes between integrative and instrumental motivation. A learner with integrative motivation has a genuine interest in the second language community. He wants to learn their language in order

to communicate with them more satisfactorily and to gain a closer contact with them and their culture. They are more likely to achieve greater proficiency. (P.57).

A learner with instrumental motivation is more interested in how the second language can be a useful instrument towards furthering other goals, such as gaining a necessary qualification or improving employment prospects. (Ibid, p.57)

There is evidence that an authoritarian' attitude as it has been called-a tendency to elf sufficiency and prejudice against outsiders-is often reflected in poor second language achievement. (Christopherson, 1973, p.22).

Experiments have shown that students with an integrative motivation, which of course means a favourable attitude to the people whose language they are trying to learn, are more successful than those who are merely instrumentally actuated. (Ibid, p.21; Ryan & Giles, 1982, pp.134-5).

3.5 Language acquisition versus language learning

Language acquisition is the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and

understanding. Error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition... (Krashen, 1981, p.1). Klein (1986) refers to language acquisition as 'spontaneous learning' (p.20) and 'subconscious acquisition' (p.28). Ellis (1986) regards second language acquisition as the picking up of a second language through exposure (p.6). Krashen reiterates that acquisition is a subconsciously instructed process during which the L2 is internalised (p.15).

Language learning on the other hand, is a conscious knowledge of language rules, does not typically lead to conversational fluency, and is derived from formal instruction. Acquisition occurs unconsciously, does lead to conversational fluency and arises from naturalistic language use. (Oxford, 1990, p.4). Learning is a conscious process that can be influenced by formal instruction. Howatt, (1984, p.15); Ellis, (1986, p.6); Klein, (1986, p.28), regard learning as 'guided' (p.20) and 'conscious' (p.28). Conscious language learning is thought to be helped a great deal by error correction and the teaching of explicit rules. Error correction helps the learner come to the correct mental representation of the linguistic generalization.

For a second language learner therefore to have an understanding of the 'surface' as well as a "deep" structure, he needs both acquisition and learning.

3.6 Competence versus performance

Chomsky, who coined these concepts explained competence as consisting of the mental representation of linguistic rules which constitute the speaker-hearer's internalised grammar; and performance as consisting of the comprehension and production of language. (Ellis, 1986, pp.5-6). This knowledge of abstract rules (competence) has to be put into effect as behaviour. It has to be revealed through performance. Widdowson distinguishes between 'usage' and 'use', where the former refers to "... that aspect which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistic rules;" and the latter refers to ... "that which makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication." (1978, p.3). There is thus a similarity in meaning between Ferdinand de Saussure's 'langue' and 'parole', Chomsky's 'competence' and 'performance', and Widdowson's 'usage' and 'use'.

Dell Hymes, an American linguist proposed an enlargement to Chomsky's 'competence' and 'performance', to incorporate the communicative function, which includes amongst other things, the notions of 'grammaticality appropriacy' (Hymes, 1978, p.16). Knowing a language thus involves knowing how to say the right thing in the appropriate style at the right time and place. It involves complex knowledge of how to say what, to whom, when and how (Kachula and Anthonissen, 1995, p.36). This is the

ability to take all the carefully sequenced units of language taught in class and combines them in appropriate ways in order to communicate with native speakers outside the classroom. (Larsen-Freeman, 1980, p.35). The notions of 'competence' and 'performance' are about 'acceptability' and 'grammaticality' (Ibid, p.76)

While advantages have been conceded to children who are known to be able to 'pick up' the language without formal instruction (and it has been admitted by teacher that adults could do the same) it has been argued that they would be successful only to a limited degree, since without the benefit of formal instruction they would never truly master the target language. They would end up with a sort of pidginized version rather than a real command (Yalden, 1983, p.13). This leads Krashen to argue that since exposure alone is not enough to ensure proficiency, 'it would be necessary then to ensure that pupils, over and above any learning they do, be given the opportunity to engage in acquisition activities.' (Howatt, pp.15-16).

4. Empirical Investigation

4.1 How the research was conducted

A pilot study was first conducted with the educators of one of the post primary schools in the Insuze Circuit. After a few problems the questionnaire was readjusted and then administered to educators of three

other schools. Educators were asked to sit in the same room and fill in a questionnaire, which was collected as soon as they had finished. The idea was to avoid a situation where the respondents would discuss responses. A total of 30 questionnaires was administered and collected for this research.

Having analysed the data from questionnaires, the researcher then selected educators to be interviewed. Since the purpose of the research is to improve the language development at the school where the researcher is presently principal, interviews were limited to one educational institution. Seven educators were selected and interviewed. These represented all the subject fields in a school. The aim was to get responses from a representative group of the teaching personnel since English as medium of instruction cuts across the entire curriculum of a school.

A few pit-holes need to be pointed out in the research methods used. The researcher originally intended to record the interviews. After a few hesitant responses by the educators, this exercise was abandoned. The reason may have been the status of the researcher over the respondents. A hidden feeling may well have been that uh information might be used negatively elsewhere. The situation was much more relaxed in the questionnaire as no name or signature was needed.

However, the interview provided a wealth of data, which could not be procured from the questionnaire responses. The idea of being able to make a follow up to the responses for further clarification makes the interview the most valuable of all the techniques used.

Observation lessons were not one in a convincing manner. Class visits have been continually subjected to severe criticism by teacher unions and they have therefore been put on hold. The researcher would then observe the lesson from within a hearing distance on of the classroom with only the educator aware of the process, as the researcher would pretend to be going something else. Learner's responses could hardly be heard, as they were not loud enough. Their facial expressions were too far away to read. A teacher's voice, loud enough, could just have been an impression of the moment.

4.2 Analysis of data

A total of 30 questionnaires were administered to 30 educators of three different post primary schools. 18 of these educators were females and 12 were males. The age range was between 20 and 40 years. The majority falls within the age range 26 to 35 years. Only 2 educators were above 40 years, one a principal and the other a Head of Department. Heir teaching experiences range between less than one year and 15 years. The majority however, fall within the experience bracket of 2-3 years.

Only 5 educators have university degrees, 4 of these are in management positions. There is a total of 11 P.T.D.'s, 1 with H.D.E, 9 with S.T.D's and four unqualified, 2 of whom are just plain matriculates. Except for the total of 4 respondents who are in management, all other educators are on post level one, occupying substantive posts.

When listing teaching subjects in the order of preference, 4 educators rated English as choice no.1. This total is out of 6 educators who have English as a major subject in their diplomas. 2 educators rated English as choice no.2; 5 have indicated it, as choice no. 3 and the rest have not included it in their list. 3 educator got symbol "C" in English at Std 10; 8 have symbol "D's" and the rest obtained "E" symbols, which is the lowest from the list of respondents. Of the 26 qualified teachers, only one has claimed not to do English as a course at College. Only 2 educators have objected to the continued use of English as a medium of instruction. They argue that English is difficult. It is these two educators again who feel that English may not be used in staff meetings and morning assemblies. The same two respondents have argued that English is not the cause of high failure rate in matric at KwaZulu-Natal rural schools. They maintain that lack of facilities is the root cause.

Not a single school amongst those visited has a written language policy. More than half of the respondents have admitted to constantly explaining in the mother tongue in their lessons, although they have said they enjoy teaching in the medium of English and that learners do show a reasonable level of understanding of their explanations. Almost all educators have admitted that very few if at all, staff-staff; staff-learner and learner-learner interactions are ever conducted in English outside the classroom environment.

All respondents are native speakers of Zulu and have never been taught by English native speakers at secondary school. Only 2 educators have claimed that their parents ever helped them with their homework during those days.

4.3 Interpretation of data

From the research data gathered, it emerges clearly that the vast majority of the Black teachers in the rural schools of KwaZulu Natal are aware that poor communicative competence is a problem most of them have and that this affects learner progress.

Most teachers feel that constant use of English by educators themselves in their day-to-day conversations in and outside the classroom will influence the learners to use the language as well. They have admitted that this will have the double benefit of improving proficiency for both parties. Through

communication in the language of instruction, the teacher and learner are able to find one another in the classroom and together they can explore and enjoy the otherwise would be inexplicable learning content.

Clearly evident again from the data is the issue of comparatively low teacher qualifications in the rural schools. About 90% of the educators are holding college diplomas. Less than 10% have university degrees, and the majority of these are senior management positions. There is no evidence that a university degree makes the holder automatically more competent. However, inferiority complex does influence some teachers to be reluctant to use English within the hearing of someone they regard as highly educated for fear of exposing their perceived incompetence in the language.

The picture is worse when we consider that the majority of the teachers have qualifications not relevant to secondary phase. Over and above this, is the issue of unqualified teachers who have moved from Grade 12 which itself was done in the rural disadvantaged schools, straight into teaching at secondary school. These educators are therefore teaching with little or no adequate preparation for the class levels they teach. The presence of too few university graduates in the rural suggests that the majority becomes absorbed elsewhere, in the more advantaged environments. Those who land in the rural schools quickly take up positions of management having

spent a short time as educators in the classroom. The impression created is that these people are more suitable as managers than as educators.

Because of their limited experience to new skills often meet with resistance, usually from those more experienced but less qualified.

The lack of poor facilities for our rural schools is itself a problem. The absence of libraries and resource centres deprives the rural child of a chance to read and explore on his\her own. Science learners do not have a chance to use the language to describe their observations during experiments. The teacher often dictates the experiments as well as the results, to learners and this does not help with language growth. Sometimes the teacher and the learners have to read through the experiments, meaning that the language used is that of the author. There is no internalised of explanations given in one's own language. Where the urban child experiments and discusses, the rural learner has to sit, listen and jot down. Language cannot thrive in a situation where the learning content is not challenging.

Apart from being understaffed and under-resourced, rural schools are over populated and poorly built. Teachers claim that the teaching methods they learn at, Colleges become irrelevant and difficult to use in the rural environments. The educator-learner interaction, which would be ideal for language growth and development, is rendered difficult to engage. The

teacher ends up resorting to the old conventional methods and begins to teach in a routine manner just like the other experience educators who have made these approaches their daily bread. Again, language suffers as everything revolves around the language of the textbook.

The majority of qualified teachers grew up and still reside in urban environments. They have received their training in urban college, and have done their teaching practice in the semi-advantaged township schools. They only come to experience the grim realities of the rural schools for the first time when they take up posts as newly qualified teachers. They soon find themselves in an environment completely foreign to the one they have been prepared for and know. To adapt to this situation they rely on senior teachers for guidance, and ultimately have to join the crew of these seniors whose motivation is at the lowest level. Demotivated and frustrated personnel who are often subjected to harsh criticisms of poor results even by the very Department of Education that should be carrying the bigger share of the blame staff these schools.

In an effort to improve their qualifications, the under qualified and the unqualified enrol for courses that would make them meet the minimum requirement of M+3 and to specialize to avoid the pending redeployment. Sometimes private studies become so demanding that teacher truancy sets in. If they do go to class, the method used is the textbook, for its obvious

convenience to the educator. The prospect of material benefits and avoiding redeployment is so intense amongst the educators that they can do anything to get certificates. The case of 'fake qualifications' recently discovered by headcount, is a case in point. Such educators can never make a difference in the classroom. The Departments ruling that educators will be given no increment upon qualifying for senior degrees is more than welcome, as it will help minimize corruption.

The department's failure to provide such facilities such as decent educator cottages on the school premises is the reason for educators travelling to and from places as far away as Tongaat and Durban, causing them to travel between 35km and 80km respectively every single journey per day. The obvious effects of fatigue, coupled with the strain of private studies, cannot be overemphasized. The thought of a 16-seater microbus breaking down on the way to school means the school starting without the teaching personnel. This travelling robs the rural child of chance to interact closely with a teacher to discuss areas of subject content problematic to the child. Tea and lunch breaks, not long enough, cannot provide for the interaction so vital to language development and learning. There is no sense of affinity, where educators become not just the school, but also the environment and the parental community and its needs and expectations.

Unqualified and under qualified teachers are reluctant to teach higher classes such as Grades 11 and 12, even if it means teaching subject that they passed well at Grade 12. A sense of inadequacy creeps, as the teacher is expected to lead his equals who may read his poor self-concept with ease, It is usually the language that is a problem to the teacher more than the content, a reason why notes is given out to learners are more often than not the textbook as it is, word for word. A teacher who is deficient in a language ill be in no position to explain and re-explain, using his\her own language, engaging the learners in the process until the content id internalised. Without this process both the language and the content remains foreign.

Most teachers have admitted that they find it difficult to understand the level of understanding of the learners and consequently do not know what language is right for the child. The ability of the newly employed to understand learners' potentials is often frustrated by nasty labels used by senior staff to refer to individual learners and classes. It is not common to find all learners failing a particular subject. Attitude and bias do influence learner performance as well as their communicative competence.

There is a tendency for teachers to teach as they were taught. Consciously or unconsciously, educators imitate their role models. A favourite teacher who explained the content Zulu is imitated irrespective of the effects this

may have on the learners who are in a different situation. They advance the argument that if they managed to profit from the old methods, nothing will prevent learners from copying. It is arguments like these that hide a teacher's inadequacies and obscure the advantage that mother tongue explanations hold for the teacher, at the expense of the learners.

The majority of the qualified educators have enrolled for a course in English during their training days at College. One would expect a reasonable level of linguistic competence by the educators, judging also by the symbols most of them obtained at matric. Very few educators rated English as number one in their choice of teaching subjects. It is even more disturbing to note that even those who have this language as a major subject and are presently teaching it, have not rated it number one. A good guess would be that they are teaching a subject (language) they do not like. An educator whose attitude is negative can only influence learners to be negative, too. The argument they advance however is a little convincing. The whole teaching staff comes to view the development of linguistic competence in the learners as the sole duty of the teachers of English. Some teachers have openly that language is demanding on the side of the teachers, as compared to the content subjects. The above-referred attitudes demonstrate a serious lack of understanding of the role of language in education.

The researcher is not arguing for the teaching of English at the expense of the content and the skills such as effective communication that should be inculcated. Both are equally important. Skills should be acquired and transmitted through language. A language should therefore always be looked upon not just as a tool for communication, but also as a vehicle through which learning occurs.

Most educators have asserted that English should continue as a medium of instruction because it is the language of the examinations, and that it enables learners to compete internationally. This language is therefore not viewed as a luxury, but a necessity. Dr Oscar Dhlomo, once the KwaZulu Minister of Education and Culture "... submits that in a multicultural society there are basic economic reasons which should determine language policy. There are economic reasons why people should become conversant in a language through which the economy operates, where that language is not the mother tongue. While he argues in favour of mother tongue instruction in the initial stages of education for the usual reasons as specified in the 1953 UNESCO document in the vernacular, economic practicalities make it necessary that Black children in South Africa acquire the language which will most benefit them economically and in this case it is English." (Quoted in Cathleen Heugh, 1986, p.4). It is a pity that a statement as true as this was severely criticized by the then liberation movements as a way of

maintaining white capitalism and linguistic hegemony of the English language.

The democratic government has not come out clearly on the issue of a common language for all the South Africans, except to declare nine African languages as official languages alongside English and Afrikaans. African languages are in no way inferior; they are only underdeveloped. Whilst they are being upgraded and developed, a common language is needed. It is the belief of the researcher that we should follow the example of Namibia, which promotes the use of many African languages, but has retained English, as a common language. This in fact is the recommendation made by the OAU Conference of 1986 that all African countries need to do their best to promote their Black languages; or develop one common language for international communication.

A few educators have argued that English is too difficult a language as medium of instruction. It is a problem to both teachers and learners. This view is supported by Professor Charles Dlamini of the University of Zululand, who argues that some words in English are pronounced in almost the same way, but written differently and mean different things. He cites words like 'bed' and 'bird', 'sheep' and 'ship' which when used in sentences could be seriously misleading. (Colts Conference, Edgewood, Aug, 1998).

However all languages have their complex meanders. Besides, the language referred to in this research is solely for communication purposes.

Most educators believe that English is the reason for the high failure rate in rural schools. If learners cannot comprehend instructions as well as the phrasing of questions, they cannot successfully answer the examination questions. Over and above the inability to understand, they still have to struggle to write the kind of English that will be understandable to the marker. The differences between the urban and the rural learner comes to the fore here. The issue of the difficulty of learning through a foreign language is further picked up by Professor V.R Gabela also of the University of Zululand who likens this to looking through an opaque window where only non-de-script shadows can be seen. (Workshop, Appelsbosch College, Sept 1998). It is an undeniable truth that given the necessary motivation, teachers can manage to defog this misty window.

A few educators have indicated that it is not the language problem that causes the high failure rate, but the lack of resources. It is true that resources provide motivation, but these resources can never take the place of the educator. It is the work ethic of the educators that will render the resources meaningful. Professor Zulu, Vice Chancellor of the University of Natal (Durban) and currently chairman of the S.A.B.C. board, laments that the situation in black schools is growing worse. Teachers spend most of

their time on their private studies whilst principals are always away on management courses. (Daily News, November 1998). With a work ethic as low as this, facilities would still be meaningless.

One respondent has asserted that the issue of language use is not the concern of the teacher, but of the learner. Teachers should not be bothered with the issues of language because they are adults. The impression created here is that once a teacher one can never be a learner. This also creates doubts as to whether an educator with an attitude like this does ever use English when teaching, and whether any further reading beyond the prescribed textbook is ever done.

The great majority of the educators have asserted that they enjoy teaching in the medium of English. This is contrary to personal observations, though. It is inconceivable how teachers who enjoy the language of instruction could find it difficult if not impossible, to influence the learners to enjoy it, too. It is again doubtful that teachers who enjoy the language of instruction would rarely use it outside the classroom situation. This raises suspicion that some teachers' responses in this regard are not honest. If they are, the language they enjoy is strictly the language of the textbook.

It becomes even more confusing to note that whilst educators claim that their learners understand adequately explanations offered in English, They also admit to frequently using Isizulu to explain the learning content.

The educators, who believe that English is not the cause of high failure rate, argue rate learners also fail their mother tongue. There is a misconception regarding the issue of language as a medium of instruction and language done as a first language. The former is more for communication whilst the latter is more the detailed study of the grammatical nitty-gritty's of a language. The lack of understanding of the grammatical details does not automatically imply lack of proficiency.

All educators have claimed that native speakers of English at Secondary school never taught them. This is not a claim that these are the best teachers. It simply means that besides being exposed to correct English expressions, learners would have the advantage of being taught by people who did not understand their mother tongue, and who would therefore, not be tempted to explain in the learner's native language. The symbols obtained in English at Grade 12 by educators who participated range from C-E. Such educators should be displaying a high communicative competence in and outside the classroom. Lack of proficiency means that symbols cannot be used to determine fluency. One may conclude although English as a language was done, not enough opportunity was afforded the

learners to practise speaking the language. Good symbols may also have been acquired under doubtful circumstances, given the history of Black education, which was once infested with paper leakages (commonly known as 'izimbuzi'). Some educators may have benefited from this corruption and on the basis of good symbols, gained easy access to College of education and managed to scrape through.

All schools surveyed did not have written language policies. It emerged that there is little understanding of what a document like that should look like. Most of these schools simply have verbal agreements to the effect that English must be used in all interactions within a school. There are no measures for follow up to determine that a ruling is indeed put into practice. The absence of a document of this nature speaks volumes about educators, as well as school managers' attitude to language and its role in learning.

Respondents kept asking why there is emphasis on the rural schools because all schools should be afforded equal treatment irrespective of their location. Practically, urban schools are more exposed to resources and therefore more advantaged. Learners from rural areas have to compete for jobs through interviews with people who are already more linguistically competent. The role of proficiency in the interviews cannot be over-emphasized. One would be tempted to think that more jobs go to products of urban schools than those of rural ones. Simon Mdluli, retired professor

from Zululand University asserts that, "Learners in urban areas are more likely to receive education of a higher quality than their counterparts in rural areas and will more than likely occupy the top of the occupational hierarchy later." (Saturday Independent, Sept, 26, 1998). A Verwoedian philosophy seems very much alive, where rural learners can only watch from distance green pastures where they are not going to graze, at least for the foreseeable future.

The 1976 uprisings, widely regarded as a turning point in the history of Black Education in South Africa, did more good for the urban schools than for the rural ones. The Education and Training Act of 1976 was only just another wedge driven between the urban and the rural schools by the apartheid government. From then on more funds were allocated to urban schools in an attempt to contain the turbulent urban school population. The rural schools have continued to be disadvantaged.

5. Discussion of findings

5.1 Conclusions

It has become evident from this study that a great majority of educators in rural schools are aware that English, the language of instruction, is a problem to educators and consequently to learners. Many have asserted that being the language of the examinations, of the job situation as well as

of the international community, English ought to be used by both educators and learners alike to make it accessible to the great majority of the people.

The presence of under-qualified and unqualified personnel, very much the feature of rural secondary schools implies that not much change has occurred in the rural schools. The problem is almost as old as Black formal education itself and its persistence only goes to show that Black education has been taken too much for granted for far too long.

The reality stands that Black dominated rural are still largely manned by poorly qualified and poorly motivated, often incompetent personnel who can only continue to generate a product of the poorest quality. A vicious cycle has been generated, where disadvantaged learners later become educators in the same conditions. Anyone who has had some dealing with rural schools will agree that it is not yet 'uhuru' (freedom) for them.

Professor Mdluli's article, "not much change in rural schools", sums up their plight in a very precise manner.

The researcher is not advocating the dominance of English over the African languages. The point is that so long as the people of South Africa continue to choose English as a medium of instruction in their schools, then English will continue to take precedence over other languages. It was not within the scope of this research to discuss which alternative language (s) could be used.

5.2 Recommendations

The Department of Education should begin to introduce some incentives to attract teachers to work in the rural areas. The provision of decently built teachers' quarters, fully electrified with running water and 24 hour security, could be one of the benefits. Educators should stay there free of charge. Another measure could be that teacher salaries for rural school educators be taxed less.

Libraries should be erected in every post primary school and should be manned by suitably qualified personnel. Learners would be referred to these resource centres to do individual reading, make summaries or assignments in a more meaningful way than just summarizing a portion of the textbook. If laboratories cannot be erected, then at least some funds should be allocated to each post primary school every year, for learners in the science group to undertake trips to nearby universities to conduct experiments. The university staff should be motivated to help in whatever way they can to improve the plight of the rural schools.

The employment of specialist guidance counsellors in all schools would help give a sense of direction to rural learners who often are not guided. It is not uncommon to hear a learner doing commercial subjects looking

forward to being a policeman. A learner with no guidance is usually lacking in motivation. If again this proves to be too expensive for the Department, at least one such specialist per circuit should be provided to service all schools on a regular basis. This is the specialist through whom schools should organize motivational speakers to come and 'resuscitate' our pupils on a regular basis.

The private sector should stop financing the already advantaged township schools that have had good results at Grade 12. Rather, funds and facilities from this sector should be redirected to rural schools to bring them on a par with their urban counterparts. There are a few schools in the rural areas, which have performed well despite the odds, but have received very limited publicity, and there are no incentives from the private sector. Rural should begin to recruit educators from other racial groups, who would make it not just possible but also imperative that a common language be used for communication in a school.

The pass requirements must be changed and 50% should be the minimum requirement to pass all subjects at senior secondary phase. At junior phase a learner should be allowed to pass at least 90% of the subjects done by a minimum of 45%. The idea of conditional transfer needs to be thrown overboard.

The department of education ought to be holding enough to phase out the unqualified teachers for good and replace them with suitably qualified and competent personnel. The under-qualified personnel need to be re-deployed to schools with phases for which they were trained.

The S.E.A's (Superintendents of Education Advisory) should work closely with the schools to help them develop meaningful subject policies as well as language policies, together with programmes for monitoring and evaluation. It is useless for educators to be told about how the English paper will be structured, when learners are not afforded the opportunity to use the language to be ready to tackle such a paper. These S.E (A)'s should not only be content with dealing with teachers of English only, but should make an effort to visit schools and talk to the entire staff about the importance of language to the success of learning outcomes. It should be the duty of S.E (A)'s; irrespective of the subject fields they supervise, to ensure that language is treated as essential. Every educator in a school should mark the language and allocate some marks for its use, irrespective of the subject examined. If the educator uses English to teach and sets questions in English. There is no reason why English should not be considered when marking.

Campaigns such as the "Hoyozela" (Xitshonga word for 'welcome') should be taken down to the schools to make people aware of the need to speak s

many languages as possible. An attitude of acceptance of other fellow citizens is best demonstrated by an attempt at least a few words in their language.

Lastly, for optimum performance, all educators ought to become contract workers. Contracts are renewable say after every five years, depending on the job performance of each educator. Renewal should be preceded by the interview in the language, which is the medium of instruction to determine linguistic proficiency and academic competence.

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