

Assessing the Effects of Second Language as a Medium of Instruction in Teaching Preschool Children

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ABSTRACT The issue of appropriate and useful medium of instruction in teaching learners remains a very contentious issue in education. As such, preschool teachers are pressurised by parents and guardians who expect their children to be fluent in English by the time they enter Grade 1. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of second language (English) as a medium of instruction in preschools. This was a qualitative study which was underpinned by interpretivist paradigm. The study adopted a qualitative case study design. A purposive sample of eight preschool teachers participated in the study. Data was collected through interviews, observation and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used as a method of generating data from the, teachers and parents. Four preschools were selected in this study. Data was analysed through content analysis as the responses from the participants were categorised and then coded according to the emerging themes. The findings of the study showed that maintaining the first language did not interfere with the learning of the second language. When preschoolers continued to develop their abilities in the languages throughout their preschool years, they gained a deeper understanding of language. It is recommended that preschool teachers be well equipped so that they are equal to the challenges. The study have significant implications for the teachers and other stakeholders who are directly and indirectly involved in early childhood education.

INTRODUCTION

There are many debates around on the issue of second language. People have different views and opinions on when should the second language be introduced to the preschool children. Keeves and Darmawan (2007) argued that mother tongue is learnt and subsequently a second language is learnt. This implies that there should be an adequate level of competence of mother tongue to the child before any other language is learnt. Mother tongue should first be established before any other formal learning.

The language or languages of the home that have been used since birth are the basis for developing meaningful relationships and learning about meaningful communication and interaction (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke 2000).

The learning of languages involving mother tongue and foreign language is comprised of learning the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Even though preschool children cannot read and write what is important is to encourage them to have a love for books. For example drawing, colouring, paging through books, knowing left and right when opening a book. The acquisition of language is essential not only to children's cognitive development

but also to their social development and wellbeing (Clarke 2000). This implies that the development of language involves metacognition. It is therefore critical that children should interact with the adults in order to develop language. Language is a particular set of sentences that can be generated from a particular set of rules (Chomsky 2000). In essence, language is a tool which is essential for the normal and complete development of every human being. For a child to learn he or she needs language.

To learn with success at preschool children need to be able to know the language and be able to express themselves well. Preschoolers enter the playroom with enough language skills in order to listen speak and understand some basic concepts in their home language. At preschool they will continue to use and develop their language skills as they go through various activities.

Problems Associated with the Use of a Foreign/Second Language in Teaching

Teaching at preschool can be very demanding. The teacher is the key role player in the acquisition of teaching the foreign language (NAEYC 1996). Using of foreign language when

teaching has problems attached to it. It is critical that teachers must be well conversant with the subject matter and be well prepared. The teacher must have a thorough knowledge of the language he/she is using when teaching. The teacher must keep himself/herself abreast with new challenges and improvements of the language he/she is teaching. For example a new curriculum and also reading what research says in regard to language issues. This implies that a teacher should be a regular reader to enhance his/her knowledge of that particular language and subject.

The teacher should regularly attend workshops related to teaching in that language. It is important that preschool teachers should have theoretical and practical knowledge on how to teach preschools. In addition, teachers must know which teaching strategies to employ when teaching (Viljoen and Molefe 2001: 124).

Teachers must be conscious that as they develop the foreign language, they should strike a balance or else children will lose the L1 at the expense of the L2. There is a possibility that the L2 may replace the L1 (Driscoll and Nagel 2002: 513). This implies that gradually children may lose their cultural heritage, their values and beliefs. This will have negative impact when children meet with their families. They may feel isolated and not fit in their communities.

The teacher must be aware of the developmental level of the children and take into consideration the linguistic needs of the learners when planning the activities (Cele 2001: 189).

The classroom context must be stimulating and conducive to support language development. There should be relevant resources to teach children the basic concept of the language.

Importance of Maintaining First Language/Mother Tongue Use in Learning

Preschool years are crucial for young children in developing their first language and cultural identity and it is during these early years that children build up their knowledge of the world around them.

The first language learned in the home is extremely important and forms the foundation for all later language development (Clarke 2009). The ability to use one's mother tongue competently and to communicate with ease is reached between the ages of four to six years. This is the

time when the child is in the process of developing mother tongue and mastering the concepts of their mother tongue. The child needs to understand the teacher and talk to him or her with ease in order to learn.

It is important to maintain the children's first or home languages as this has a significant role in shaping identity language development and increased cognitive development (Clarke 2009). This implies that when children start learning their first language they are mainly motivated by being engaged in enjoyable activities.

In addition knowing one language can help the child understand how other languages work. The maintenance of the first or home language is particularly important for the child's development of a positive self-concept and well-being.

Children who have the opportunity to maintain their first language can extend their cognitive development while learning English as a second language. Their level of competence in the second language will be related to the level of competence they have achieved in their first language (Cummins 1984). Children with a sound knowledge of their first language will be able to transfer skills from one language to another.

Continued development of first or home languages gives the children access to opportunities for learning in the early years by building on knowledge and competencies that the children have already developed. In the preschool through to primary level medium of instruction should be the mother tongue (Wright and Bolitho 1993). This is to give children a chance to improve/establish the language skills first of the language that they feel comfortable with before they start with the second language.

Clarke (2009: 10) provides reasons why it is important to support the continued learning of the home language or mother tongue. For example a strong first language supports the development of a positive self-concept speaking the first language well strengthen relationships within the family and continuing to speak the first language provides the opportunity to continue cognitive development while learning English as a second language.

Clarke (2009: 10) further suggests ideas on what teachers need to do to support the first language development. These are respect and support, the home language/s of the children ensure that the children's cultural background is incorporated into the program, base their planning on current knowledge of language development, create an environment which supports

natural language learning and interaction closely, observe children talking in a variety of situations to find out what they know and to access their skills in using language, establish a supportive environment which affirms children's right to use languages other than English understand and appreciate the home literacy environments of the children and assist parents to understand the value of a strong first or home language.

It is important that teachers must encourage the maintenance of the mother tongue. Various authors (Collier 1995) expressed reasons why it is important to maintain the native language. These include the ability to speak another language if properly natured by an expert (Vygotsky 1978).

The following are the areas in which a child can develop from maintaining first language:

Personal: The child first language is critical to the child's self-identity. For example if the child does not maintain his/her mother tongue there is a possibility that the child might lose the language. This is because the language can have some changes sometime. For example, words may be changed or mean something else. In addition to the above the child understands his or her culture and identity. As a result, because the child realised the inability within him/her negative self-concept develops. This can take some years to heal.

Social: Social development describes the advances young people make in their ability to interact and get along with other people. This can be applied to teaching English as a second language in a preschool context. Once teachers understand the dynamics they will be able to guide the child to become a better person in the society.

Intellectual: Even though children are young they too need to operate at an intellectual level in order to develop their mother tongue. Teachers must speak with the child also to give him/her opportunity to practice.

Educational: Students who learn English and continue to develop their native language have higher academic achievement in later years than do students who learn English at the expense of their first language.

Importance of Bilingualism in Teaching Young Learners

Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages and involve both understanding and speak-

ing not necessarily with the same degree of fluency but in either language. There are some preschools which use a second language (English) as a medium of instruction and not mother tongue. Clarke (2009: 9) contends that research has shown "that young children can learn more than one language with ease". This implies that what is important is that teachers must have knowledge base to can expose learners to good language models. There is now widespread recognition of the social, personal and cognitive benefits of bilingualism: a sound foundation in the language/s of the home increases children's self-esteem and confidence, enhances motivation for learning, increases cognition strengthens family relationships and provides a strong basis for learning the second language (Cummins 1984; Clarke and Milne 1996).

There is no significant theoretical reason to believe that learning, knowing or using two languages, jeopardise children's development (Genesee et al. 2004; Clarke 2009). This implies that teachers must create a conducive atmosphere for teaching a second language. For example learn by doing, reinforce with pictures and sounds, learn in a relaxed but challenging state learn with music and rhythm learn with lots of movement, learn by reflecting and link numbers and words in a playful way (Dryden and Rose 1995; Dryden and Vos 1997; Jensen 1994; Gardner 1983).

Preschool as a Foundation for Future Learning

Preschool years are crucial years in the lives of children. Years ago preschools were mostly viewed as a way to teach youngsters to socialize and while socialization is definitely part of the overall importance of early education, it is only one piece of the pie. Introducing preschools to numbers letters and a variety of social skills give them a lasting firm advantage in life and prepare them for entry into the formal classes. Children who are not given this opportunity have been shown to be at a definite disadvantage lagging as much as a year and a half behind in language skills and never completely catching up (Dole 2003). This implies that during preschool years the foundations for learning are laid down. It simply means that during the first few years of life children form their main learning pathways in the brain (Bloom 1964).

The importance of preschool education may be divided into two categories namely short term and long term benefits. Documented advantages include reduced referral of children to special education reduced grade retention (Mudzielwana 2012), higher rates of high school graduation and reduced level of juvenile delinquency (Durlak 2003). Long term derives from model programs that are designed according to the level of the children and as a result meets the different needs of children. Researchers (Roskos and Christie 2000) agree that early language experience in the classroom enhance children's language and reading skills. This implies that teachers must employ a mixture of teacher centred strategies and child initiated activities to produce balanced and responsible children.

Going to school for the first time is seen as one of the main events in the life of a child and therefore it is important that the child should be ready for it. The child's readiness for formal learning forms the basis for the way in which the child becomes involved in and gives meaning to the formal learning situation and also exercises an important influence on the future course of his/her learning.

Theoretical Framework

For young children interaction with adults and other children is the key to the acquisition of language. Evidence shows that young children can learn more than one language with ease as long as they are exposed to good language models and have plenty of exposure to both languages. The field of language development has been influenced a great deal by certain theoretical views. Some argue that the development of language is largely biologically determined while others contend that learning accounts for the emergence of language.

Vygotsky (1978) attributed cognitive development to the social environment of the child. He noted that children begin learning from the behaviours, attitudes, values and skills of the people around them. The social world and one's culture determine which stimuli occur and are attended to. Vygotsky emphasised the role of adults in influencing the cognitive development of children. For infants and toddlers their early interaction with parents and caregivers provide the basis for communication and learning in both the first or home language and in the second

language (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke 2000). Development is enhanced when children work cooperatively or collaboratively with adults and other children. Cognitive development proceeds from behaviours regulated by others to self-regulated behaviour (Zimmerman 1998). To help children move from a social to a personal psychological form of knowledge adults should determine the child's actual development level by learning about his capacity to solve problems when working with or without adult help.

According to Vygotsky (1978) when a child is working independently, we see the actual development level of the child. When the child is working with an adult, we see the potential development of the child under optimal circumstances while learning with a competent nurturing mediator. The difference between these two levels of functioning is referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

The area of immature but maturing processes makes up the child's ZPD. When children are faced with challenging situations they can seek help from their teachers and peers which is termed 'scaffolding' (Woolfolk 1995: 50).

Vygotsky believed that language is an important tool because it is internalised by the child to affect thinking and problem-solving (Schaffer 1996: 279). The role of the adult is to assist children to acquire language in ways that enable them to take control of their own learning (Engelbrecht and Green 2001: 84). Teachers can focus on effective communication, meaning, comprehension and respect for language in the classroom. Vygotsky's (1986) theory has implications for teaching first and second language at preschool because in facilitating learning the teacher must take the cultural context of the learners into consideration as it influences their thinking and actions. Learners can be given problem-solving activities with instructions for the task of reading comprehension. Thereafter the learner should work independently using his or her own knowledge and skills with the guidance received from the teacher.

After some time, the teacher's support is reduced and learners progress independently. Learners take turns to lead the discussion about specific parts and applying the strategy. One learner serves as the discussion leader asking questions about key ideas in the text and other learners answer the questions and ask questions of their own. The learner leader helps the group

clarify difficult words or passages that might hinder comprehension. The leader summarises the text that had just been read and predicts what might come next. In this way learners are actively involved in their own learning.

This is an important theory because in teaching a language, it is important that there should be a social interaction between teachers and children. However the teacher should play an important role of being a role model to the children.

This is an important theoretical framework because social constructivism suggests that knowledge exists in a social context and is initially shared with others instead of being represented solely in the mind of the individual.

Statement of the Problem

There are many preschool institutions around. Parents send their children to preschools that teach both mother tongue and English. Preferably, parents prefer preschools which use English as a second language in teaching children. If the preschool is far from the preschool institutions parents are sacrificing as long as English is the medium of instruction. Young children wake up early and travel by bus to where parents work, far from home in order to attend a preschool which uses English as a medium of instruction. Based on the above, this study sought to establish the effect of second language or foreign language as medium of instruction in teaching preschool children. The study sought to address the question 'What is the effect of second language as a medium of instruction among preschool learners?'

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach to the pilot study was qualitative. Qualitative research is concerned with discovering the meanings seen by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world (Denzin and Lincoln 2000). A qualitative approach allows for the development of insights into the teaching of language experiences and perceptions of teachers and made possible conclusions about aspects of language practices that are difficult to measure quantitatively (Merriam 2002).

The qualitative research design is therefore appropriate for this study as it seeks to explore and understand the way teachers give meaning to their understanding of the effect of second language teaching at preschool. Thus, not all preschools and teachers at the preschools of the Vhembe district were included in the study. Although the generalisation of results derived from a case study was an anticipated constraint (Denzin and Lincoln 2000: 439), the researcher provided a rich description of the case for applicability to other known cases (Seale 1999).

Population and Sampling

The target population of the study consisted of preschool teachers. The sample of eight participants was randomly selected. There were no male participants teaching at the selected preschools and as such only female teachers were the targets. Respondents A and B are between the ages of 20 and 30 years. Respondents C and D are between the ages of 31 and 50 years. All the teachers had more than five years teaching experience and that is one of the reasons why they were selected.

The researcher selected four preschools in order to collect data. When selecting those preschools, the researcher found that preschool A uses mother tongue only as a medium of instruction, preschool B uses second language only as a medium of instruction, preschool C uses both mother tongue and second language as mediums of instruction and preschool D – uses second language as a medium of instruction.

Preschool teachers were targeted because they are the ones who teach preschool learners in preschools. The researcher wanted to get their opinions on the effect of second language when they teach preschoolers. The aim was to assess the effects of second language as a medium of instruction when teaching preschool children.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers were targeted because the researcher wanted to examine the effect of second language as a medium of instruction to them. The researcher observed preschool learners when they were playing during outdoor and indoor activities – at different preschools with the intention of observing the effects of second language on their learning.

Preschool

Preschools were also targeted because they are the places where preschoolers and preschool teachers interact in a teaching and learning situation.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments used to attempt to answer the study's research questions, were individual interviews with teachers and classroom observations and content analysis, each of which is clarified below:

Individual Teacher Interviews

The research was conducted at four preschools. Individual interviews with eight teachers who participated in the study were conducted. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 353), the individual teachers' interview is 'a conversation, the art of asking questions and listening'. Each preschool had two classes. These eight teachers were all qualified to teach in the preschool with four of them holding diplomas. Their ages range from twenty to fifty years and their teaching experience ranged from six to twelve years in teaching in the preschools. The individual interviews gathered in-depth information about teachers' knowledge and strategies on teaching at preschools. They also provided an important level of professional reflection and increased the credibility of the classroom observation.

Classroom Observations

A naturalistic approach was adopted in studying the effects of using English as a second language in teaching preschool children. Classroom observation allowed me to observe what actually happened in the classroom pertaining to second language teaching at preschool.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were read and coded initially compared to the research literature (Braun and Clarke 2006) and refined to identify emerging themes. Themes were analysed by returning to the literature and then compared in order to identify similarities and differences in both the themes and the interpretation of data.

As an interpretive researcher the researcher used both inductive and deductive data analysis approaches. The researcher studied the authentic data gathered through the constructivist grounded theory analysis. The data from interviews, classroom observations focus group and policy document were transcribed. Concepts that emerged from all the data sources were identified, coded and then grouped together to form different themes and categories. This process helped me to understand the teachers' responses to the effect of teaching in second language at preschool.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of findings the researcher employed different procedures during the analysis of this study. The researcher analysed all the interviews and classroom observations of each teacher to acquire a clear interpretation of their expressions and perceptions in an attempt to maximise authenticity. In addition, the researcher compared the findings of certain instruments by requesting the participants' corroboration.

Ethical Issues

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained prior to the collection of data from Vhembe District Office. Written permission to conduct the research was obtained from the District, the teachers and parents. The purpose of the study was discussed. Consent to participate was negotiated verbally with the child participants. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identities of the children and their teachers.

RESULTS

Results from individual interviews with preschool teachers as well as from observations and document analysis are presented in the following themes:

Enhancement of Children's Participation in Learning

The participants had various views on how they enhance children's' participation in learning. Teacher 3 from preschool C highlighted this when she says:

IT/T3-PR- C *'It is not easy to keep them focused but I ask them to jump, sit, stand and sing rhymes and songs, but they are very busy'*.

Various authors (Mudzielwana 2012; Davin and Staden 2005) agree that preschool children learn through play. During the early years of children's progress, English as a second language is measured in three inter-related dimensions: listening and speaking, reading and writing.

Therefore the respondent believed that children must jump or stand and sing rhymes and songs in order to learn and understand the basic concepts in English. In this context, play becomes the media of learning and is mostly considered as critical for the children to understand the basic concepts. In order for the children to participate in the activities the teacher encourages children to sing along.

Understanding of the concepts is the goal of the activities. Therefore teachers must motivate children to have interest in the activities.

Enhancing Children's Interest in Learning (Motivation to Learn)

Motivation is the internal force that drives the individual (child) to move towards the goal for example the need for accomplishment (Bruner 1986). It can influence the interest purpose emotions which the child engages with the activities to improve the language ability. The motivation to listen and speak is essential for actively engaging children in the learning process. It is the fuel that lights the fire and keeps burning. Bruner (1986) values the role of motivation as important in learning and this can be applied. From the theoretical framework, adults have a role to encourage children by modelling good behaviour and giving them opportunities to learn by doing.

The following remark from teacher 2 preschool B was pertinent:

IT/T2-PRE B *'Yah, I motivate them to speak in English. I paste pictures and posters on the wall. I point at them on the wall or on the board. I read them but you must pronounce the words correctly and show them what the word means. I do it every day.'*

In this context, immersion is mostly considered as critical for the children to understand the basic concepts. This implies that when children are surrounded by or immersed in the lan-

guage by a print rich environment learning happens in a natural way. The respondent expressed that she is reading the concepts to the children. She emphasises correct pronunciation of concepts. Therefore this can enhance children's successful learning of the L2.

This was supported by teacher 4 of preschool D who shared her views in this way:

IT/T4/PRE- D *'It is important to read stories for the children every day, they like stories'. If I sit, they know that they must sit on the mat cross their legs and then all eyes on me' they love story time'*.

IT/T2, 3, 4 PRE- B and C. *'Some children may join in the singing particularly the songs that have repetition and are supported by actions'*.

From the above comments, story reading and doing actions helps children to understand the story. They can also understand what the story is all about because they will be doing actions. Liddoat (2001) suggest that complementing the traditional story book reading format in which children hear a book read aloud and see the static pictures in the book, benefit children learning. This implies that story reading is very important for children. It encourages both the listening and the speaking skills of children. It is also important for the teachers to provide a chance for children to talk about what happened in the story just read. This is to ensure children's understanding of taught concepts which will be discussed below:

Ensuring Children's Understanding of Taught Concepts

Both teachers seemed to understand that even though they learn through play they believe children must be given a chance to talk in order to show understanding of the taught concepts. Related references emerged from the interviews.

The following remark was made:

IT/T1PRE- A *'I talk constantly to accompany each of my actions with the language, it is a great amount of talk'*.

From the above statement it is clear that a preschool class should be a friendly talk environment. This implies that verbal interaction between the child and the adult facilitates learning process. For this reason the activities need to be unstructured and not fixed. Children need

opportunities to combine the meaning of the new language with the actions they observe. This kind of learning will give children feedback on future learning situations hence ZPD (Vygotsky 1986).

An important point that repeatedly emerged from the responses was that in order to ensure that children understood the concepts. If children listen to the concepts repeatedly and slowly understanding becomes automatic. For example teachers should use repetition or paraphrase to give children many chances to understand the language (Kersten et al. 2008). This implies that the more they learn the pronunciation increase their vocabulary, learn the rules of the language and distinguish subjects from objects. This happens in a natural manner.

The following remarks from teachers 2 preschool B and teacher 4 of preschool D during the interviews bear testimony:

IT/T2PRE- B *'For them to understand, you must look at them and repeat, you must repeat slowly and this can help because they must not memorise: at the end they can implement the word in their daily lives'*.

IT/T4PRE- D *'We do morning cycle, I can encourage them to talk, I encourage them that they must talk about their weekends if it is on a Monday or holiday they talk words even if they code switch but as time goes you can understand them'*.

This showed that the teachers' seemed to know the importance of repetition as a way to expand children's vocabulary and understanding of the language. It came out clearly from the above responses that teachers are well aware that children must not memorise the concept but they must understand. The teacher must look at the child point to the object and utters the word at the same time in order to underline the meaning of what they say (Liddicoat 2001). The teacher takes the child's utterance and provides a correct model by way of repeating slowly. In addition, the teacher indicated that she allows the children to code-switch and discuss concepts in their mother tongue. This can be applied in a preschool context as a strategy supported by Durlak (2003). The teacher believes that they will one day be able to communicate fluently. As learners become capable of performing a task, the guidance or scaffold can be gradually released (Vygotsky 1978).

The following theme is about the challenges that children face in learning the second language. The participating teachers highlighted during interviews. The researcher understands challenges as something that tests someone's abilities and skills. This may be true in learning second language.

Problems Children Face in Learning a Second Language

There were problems that were indicated that affect the children.

The remarks by teacher 2 and 3 from preschool Band C are critical:

IT/T2 and 3 PRE- C and D *'Some children choose to be silent the whole day and it is difficult'*

From the above statement there seem to be many factors. One may be that the child had little or no exposure to English at home. Therefore the child feels insecure in the new unfamiliar environment. This is where the issue of motivation becomes critical. The teachers need to encourage children to speak and build up a sense of trust. Other children may be timid and find trying new things difficult. Sometimes children have high expectations and so do not want to make mistakes. This had a negative effect in the new language as the child feels that he/she cannot do it. Teachers suggest that it is important for the teacher to speak in the language which the child uses at home.

During the interview teacher 1 of preschool A seemed to have an idea and this is what she expressed:

IT/T1PRE- A *'If children are in a prolonged silent period, I speak with the child using the language the child speaks at home nothing I could do'*

Teacher 2 from preschool B had this to say:

IT/T1PRE- B *'Jah, they are different, some children you see, they are not ready to join in interactions with others join and cannot speak'*

The respondent indicates that teachers are aware that they are working with learners who are not the same but different. Clarke (2009) agrees that if children learning English as a second language are reluctant to speak at all or join in interactions it is important to determine how long the child has had consistent exposure to English. This implies that teachers must give learners a chance to familiarise themselves with the new environment and create a conducive atmosphere for the children to express themselves.

Advantages of Using First Language

It is important that teachers must encourage the maintenance of the mother tongue. Participants expressed reasons why it is important to maintain the native language. The following are the comments made by some teachers:

IT/T1/PRE- A *'Children should be taught in their mother tongue because they should first know and understand their mother tongue before other languages'*.

IT/T1/PRE- D *'Preschoolers who learn in their mother tongue participate easily because they can express themselves in all learning activities done in the classroom. It also helps them to develop their mother tongue very fast as they use it at home'*.

The above statements are an indication that these teachers regard first language as important and that children should first get established and later the second language could be taught.

Advantages Using Both Languages (Bilingualism)

English has already been instituted as the second medium of instruction. Teachers believed that children who have limited English may not be ready to start school. They feel that the children's level of English will be insufficient to cope with the school environment.

Teacher 1 from preschool A had this to say:

IT/T1/PRE- A *"I think we must teach them English, it is important, what about Grade 1?"*

This implies that there are many views in regard to when to teach preschool children the second language. Some teachers and parents believe that the mother tongue should first establish before the child is introduced to second or foreign language. Some teachers expressed that they have pressure from the parents to teach in English.

The following statement bears testimony:

IT/T3/PRE-C *'I agree, if I don't teach in English the parents will withdraw their children.'*

Advantage of both languages is that experts are now beginning to understand the value of foreign language learning for young children. Beyond the obvious benefits of communication and global perspective, studies have indicated that bilingual children score better on standard-

ized tests and are better problem-solvers than their monolingual peers (Clarke and Milne 1996). This implies that teachers must adjust curriculum content in order to be culturally and developmentally appropriate.

Observation

In this study four preschools were observed. During observation the researcher also observed the outdoor and indoor activities.

The preschool classes were divided into various areas. For example, discovery, block, art, fantasy and book areas.

In preschool B in the discovery area the preschool teacher and preschoolers were talking she spoke with them and asked questions to help them to discover more things. For example in preschool D, preschoolers discovered new names of objects that are displayed in this area using the second language.

In preschools B and D there were building blocks of different colours and shapes. Preschoolers identified the shapes sizes and colours of the blocks.

In preschool A in the art area, there were pencils, paints, crayons and magazines and preschoolers were being creative doing and making things on their own. In the fantasy area learners play make-believe roles which help them to develop their communication and language skills. For example in preschool D all learners were alternated in this area.

In the book area preschoolers enjoy books and often look at favourite pictures over and over again. Their teachers asked them about the pictures that they saw and explained to them when there was a need for clarification especially with the second language books. This presented challenges on development of language that is used as a medium of instruction.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the effect of second language as medium of instruction in preschools. In each instance voices of participants are presented as evidence and this is in line with qualitative research approaches (Patton 1990; Hoepfl 1997).

The findings of the current study revealed that there were two views in regard to when and

how to introduce which language. Firstly some teachers felt that it is still early and secondly some teachers feel they should teach English at preschool. This suggests that teachers lack theoretical knowledge about the teaching of second language at preschool.

It emerged from the study that the preschool teachers only experience difficulties when they want learners to memorise English rhymes.

The present study found that in preschools B and D where the second language was used as the medium of instruction, participation was excellent as learners already knew the second language including the shy learners. In preschool C they use both mother tongue and the second language as mediums of instruction and sometimes it was not necessary for teachers to interpret in the mother tongue as most of the preschool learners understood. This means that children needed more opportunity to practice the language. What is important is that teachers have a critical role to play in modelling the language correctly. The study suggests that children can learn any language with ease. This is in consistence with the previous literature that there is no significant theoretical reason to believe that learning knowing or using two languages jeopardises children's development (Clarke 2009).

The findings of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between first and second language. It was common that where all preschoolers understand and know the language of instruction there was good communication between teachers and learners during teaching and learning activities. Some teachers felt that to learn the second language first will help the preschoolers to become more intelligent than those who learn the mother tongue first. The study suggests that mother tongue and the second language can be learned simultaneously.

It emerged from the study that a good relationship between preschool teachers and their learners encouraged them to talk more and thus they developed skills and positive attitudes to language instruction. This correlates with literature that development is enhanced when children work cooperatively or collaboratively with adults and other children. Cognitive development proceeds from behaviours regulated by others to self-regulated behaviour (Zimmerman 1998).

The current study revealed that the print rich classroom environment contribute to the promotion of language development of the preschoolers. For example in preschools B and D the wall was full of labelled pictures and they were pasted in line with the eye level of the preschoolers.

The present study found that both preschool teachers are of the opinion that preschool education is essential as it encourages language development and prepares preschoolers for school. This is consistent with literature (Bukatko and Daehner 2001: 279) who believed that language is an important tool because it is internalised by the child to affect thinking and problem-solving. It is also not surprising that the classes are full of posters and pictures for the children to interact with.

The findings showed that English as the second language and as a medium of instruction should be used because of its long-term benefits. It emerged from the study that most of the preschool teachers felt that mother tongue as the medium of instruction should be used simultaneously with the second language so that preschoolers will know both languages from preschool level. This correlates with literature that there is now widespread recognition of the so-cial personal and cognitive benefits of bilingualism (Clarke and Milne 1996).

Teachers think that it is necessary to involve children in play activities because it stimulates both mother tongue and second language development. This correlates with literature that preschool children learn through play (Davín and Staden 2005).

It emerged from the study that language development is extremely vital for preschoolers. When learners know how to use language either mother tongue or the second language it is easier for them to participate in all areas of learning.

Communication amongst preschool learners encourages them to develop the language of instruction used in that particular preschool – whether mother tongue or the second language.

There was limitation to this study that should be taken into consideration. Only four rural preschools were used as participants. This would limit the external validity. A study which includes other rural schools needs to be conducted to get a comprehensive picture of the prevalence and effect of second language in the preschools.

It is interesting to note from the study that some teachers are experiencing pressure from

parents to use English as a medium of instruction. This is inconsistent with previous study that studies have indicated that bilingual children score better on standardized tests and are better problem-solvers than their monolingual peers (Clarke and Milne 1996).

CONCLUSION

Not all preschool could be covered for the study. Although the sample was too small, looking at teachers only and suggest issues for future studies.

The current study showed that the preschool children can be taught both languages and do well provided the teacher model good behavior and encourage them to learn by doing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are being made:

- ♦ Department of Basic Education (DBE) must ensure that every preschool has a support system to help teachers to provide effective teaching to the children.
- ♦ The second language should be used so as to accommodate all preschoolers of different cultures.
- ♦ Preschool teachers should use the medium of instruction as recommended by parents.
- ♦ Preschool education should be offered because it prepares learners for school and also helps them to develop language by engaging them in various activities which help them to communicate.
- ♦ Teachers must be well equipped on the issue of code switching.
- ♦ Future research is needed to establish useful interventions that preschool may use to assist the teachers.

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