

Concerns for the Language Skills of South African Learners and Their Teachers

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KEYWORDS English Medium of Instruction. Proficiency. Second Language. Communication

ABSTRACT The language of instruction and learner achievement is directly linked. In South Africa many English teachers lack the necessary English language skills to teach English effectively. The results of this research reveal that the average grade profile of English teachers at the ex-model C schools (schools previously attended only by white learners), regarding English literacy is that of Grade 12+ (Grade 12 is the last year of formal schooling), while the average grade profile of the teachers at the township schools is equal to Grade 9. The average Grade 12 English second language learners of the ex-model C schools have an English literacy skill profile equal to that of grade 10, while the average Grade 12 English second language learners of township schools have an English literacy skill profile equal to that of grade 8. It is clear that the language proficiency of teachers affect the language proficiency of learners.

INTRODUCTION

According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers generally talk about ‘second language competence’. However, language testers and teachers refer to ‘second language *‘proficiency’* or even *‘literacy’* (Eckstein 2013). These labels represent different understandings of the products of second language acquisition. Richards et al. (in Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005) describe competence as a learner’s internalized grammar of the language in contrast to language proficiency which is the degree of skill with which one can use a language. Taylor (in Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005) and Makihara (2013) point out that whereas the term ‘competence’ relates to what learners know, ‘proficiency’ is both what they know and their ability to use their knowledge in real communication, while literacy refer to the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication. Language competence, language proficiency and literacy are therefore used interchangeably in this paper.

According to Barry (in Rees 2000) research shows that the language of instruction and achievement is directly linked and that low lev-

els of competence in English affect the performance of learners in South Africa. According to Neeta and Klu (2013), Cheetham (2014), Fakeye (2014), and Moh (2014) the role of communication and interaction in the learning process is a critical success factor in education. De Wet (2002) argues that “...educators in traditional black schools often lack the English proficiency that is necessary for effective teaching. Educators do not have the knowledge and skills to support English language learning and to teach literacy skills across the entire curriculum”. Neeta and Klu (2013) posit that access to a language in which global knowledge and information exist is necessary and further states that English is that language. There is thus a serious need for sound English language education. However, Foley (2002) and Jordaan (2011) claim that English is on the whole being used badly by most educators. According to Rees (2000) many learners do not hear adequate and authentic English from first language speakers of the language in a register appropriate for their age or scholastic level. Dedman (in de Wet 2002) as well as Janks (2014) confirm this, arguing that a large number of African educators educate in an English dialect. This has negative consequences for the learners – learners often imitate their role models’ wrong pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Balfour (1999) and Fakeye (2014) claim that there is much evidence that where English is being taught incompetently it hampers and impairs the learning process. Learning difficulties in English are a serious problem in

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the education system in South Africa and the low levels of English proficiency among learners is not an unknown fact (Neeta and Klu 2013).

De Wet (2002) and Janks (2014) claim that a substantial number of educators lack the necessary English language skills for effective teaching and learning. Brock-Utne and Holmarsdóttir's (2001) research also suggests that teachers may overestimate their knowledge of English and found that teacher graduates are not significantly more proficient in English than those who have been teaching for some time. According to Jordaan (2011) many teachers in rural and township schools are not literate and have poor subject knowledge. Although many attempts are made to upgrade teacher's skills, these attempts are in many cases aspirational rather than practical (Janks 2014). Rees (2000) as well as Janks (2014) and Fakeye (2014) assert that language and achievement are directly linked. English proficiency and cognitive language skills are essential for the achievement of learners who are required to complete assessment tasks in English, and who use English to perform assessment tasks in other learning areas. Furthermore, Grosser and Nel (2013) state that it is well known that the majority of learners in South Africa are English second language learners and that this negatively influences their academic achievements. A national education evaluation and development unit study revealed that: 'When learners do not speak the language of instruction, they find learning difficult and academic achievement is undermined' (SAPA 2013). The researchers sought to research this imbalance in order to establish the reason why learners enter tertiary education with low language skills, since no research could be located regarding the concerns for the language skills of South African learners and their teachers.

Language Skills

Masitsa (2004) asserts that in the teaching situation, command of language is of primary importance not only for the construction of the system of knowledge but also for the development of thought. Grosser and Nel (2013) agree, stating that language, thinking and learning are 'intimately tied together'. Donald et al. (2002) argue that where children are not encouraged to interact freely and use language (spoken, read and written) in experimental and creative ways, language development will suffer.

Van Aswegen (2004) as well as Siegel (2014) state that *listening* is a communication skill. Since learners find it easier to speak than to listen, teachers have to teach the listening skill consciously. One should not confuse hearing and listening as hearing is a passive activity whereas listening requires concentration, energy, insight, understanding, a critical approach and active involvement (Siegel 2014). Wessels and Van den Berg (2002) ask if one learns to speak by imitation. If the answer is yes then there is a place for rote learning and endless language structure drills in the modern language classroom. If it is no, then rote learning and drill work should no longer bore generations of learners. Every time a young child uses a word and it is met with a positive response, a deeper understanding of the word is established (Heugh 2013). When understanding becomes an integral part of the production of *speech* sounds, then, irrespective of the immaturity of these attempts, they cannot be regarded as mere imitation. Every sentence constructed by a speaker who knows what the sentence means is an expression of the speaker's creativity, because every meaningful sentence uttered is an original one (Johari et al. 2013). The ability to speak well and express oneself adequately will prevent misunderstandings, promote harmony and create endless opportunities to establish meaningful contact with those people we meet in our daily lives.

According to Mucelli (1997); Johari et al. (2013) and Moh (2014) the ability to *read* is vital to being an awakened member of society. According to McCarthy (1999) the skills in *written* language are of most concern, as the written form is more formally bound than the spoken form. To write well, learners must have mastered the structure, spelling, punctuation and fairly large part of the vocabulary of the language in which they are writing (Siegel 2013). They need to express their thoughts in clear logical, well-constructed sentences (Wessels and Van den Berg 2002 and Kola 2014). This brings the researchers to the question of Medium of Instruction.

Medium of Instruction

"A Medium of Instruction forms the basis of all learning since everything a student learns is dependent on his/her command and control of

language” (Masitsa 2004; Neeta and Klu 2013; Cheetham 2014). The right of all learners to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where this is reasonably practicable is acknowledged by the South African Constitution (SA 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (SA 1996b). De Wet (2002) states that in accordance with the Constitution and the Schools Act the Department of Education’s language-in-Education policy (DoE 1997) and the Working group on values in education aim to promote multilingualism and the development of the official languages and to pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst learners. De Wet (2002) further claims that the home language is the most appropriate medium for imparting the skills of reading and writing, particularly in the initial years of schooling. It is a well-known fact that the right of children to receive education in their home language is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa (Van der Walt and Ruiters 2011).

According to NEPI and Webb (in De Wet 2002) in a research project, investigating preference of home language education - that was undertaken during 2000 by the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB), 90% of the participants indicated that they were in favour of home language education. Despite the aforementioned research findings and support for home language as language of learning and teaching (LOLT), the majority of South Africans opt for English and not their home language as LOLT after the first four years of schooling (Heugh 2013; Janks 2014). Balfour (1999) claims that in the majority of South African schools English is the Medium of Instruction. Research done by Donald et al. (2002) as well as Cheetham (2014) reveal that if active communication does not take place when either learners or teachers or both feel limited by a language in which they are neither fluent nor comfortable, the teaching and learning process suffers. In spite of the government’s policy of teaching English as an additional first language from grade one to grade three to ensure that learners are well-grounded in English so that they could cope with the all-English curriculum from grade four, concerns are raised because many teachers do not have the proficiency in English to teach it effectively from grade one (SAPA 2013). The researchers sought to research this imbalance, in order to establish

the reason why learners enter tertiary education with low language skills.

Based on the above discussion, the problem of this research seems to be vested in the following research questions:

- ♦ Are teachers who teach English proficient in the use of English?
- ♦ Is there a relation between the English proficiency of English teachers whose mother tongue is not English, teaching English as a subject/learning area, and the language skills of learners?

Aims of the Study

According to the South African Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) the purpose of Languages are central to our lives. We communicate and understand our world through language. Language thus shapes our identity and knowledge (DoE 2002). This study investigated the influence of English teachers’ language proficiency, using English as Medium of Instruction, on the language skills of learners.

The words ‘English teachers’ in this study refer to teachers teaching English as subject/learning area but who are not native speakers of English and ‘learners’ are those who are English second language (ESL) learners taught by these teachers.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell (2009), the immediate purpose of academic research in education, is empirical evidence for explanatory generalisations or theories about the relationships among teaching practices, learning processes and educational outcomes. In the context of English language skills, these explanatory generalisations or theories amount to knowledge about what the interactions between teaching practices, learning processes and educational outcomes mean to researchers, why these interactions take place and what effects they have on the quality of language learning.

Method of Research

An empirical investigation was conducted using the ELSA (English Literacy Skills Assessment). The aims of this study were achieved by means of:

Literature

For this study an EBSCO-Host and ERIC search of primary and secondary information sources were conducted to gain information with the aid of the following key words: English Medium of Instruction, teacher language proficiency, learner language proficiency, language skills/competence/ability, language teaching, reading skills/competence, writing skills/competence, listening skills/competence and speaking skills/competence.

Empirical Research

An empirical investigation was conducted to determine the influence of the language proficiency of English teachers who are not native speakers of English on the language skills of their learners. The research design was quantitative in nature. In general, quantitative research is used to answer questions about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting, and controlling phenomena Maree (2010). The aim of the research was operationalized into the following objectives:

- ♦ To determine how proficient/non proficient teachers of English Medium of Instruction are.
- ♦ To determine if there is a relation between the English proficiency of English teachers and the language skills of learners.

Research Instrument

For the purpose of this study the researcher made use of the ELSA (English Literacy Skills Assessment) that was administered to teachers teaching English as a subject but whose mother tongue is not English, and grade 12 learners taught by the afore mentioned teachers at schools that opted to use English as Medium of Instruction. The ELSA which is a standardized measuring instrument in compliance with the Employment Equity Bill 1998 (Horne 2002) was used to determine the language proficiency level of both the participating teachers and learners.

The ELSA has been designed and developed in South Africa to cater for the needs of Southern Africa. There are seven “sub-tests”, namely:

- Phonics Skills (Decoding/Encoding) assess if the learner is experiencing problems with the sound system of the language of learning and to what extent (Hough Horne 2006b).

- ♦ Dictation (Decoding/Encoding) determines how well the learners “hear” English and if the conventions of writing are part and parcel of the learners’ literacy skills. Spelling is also taken into account (Hough and Horne 2006b).
- ♦ Basic numeracy determines if the learner is numerate. For the purpose of this article there will not be a report on this particular sub test.
- ♦ Language and Grammar of Spatial Relation (Decoding/Encoding) identify learners who have a problem in this regard. Most second language learners whose preferred language of learning is English, have major problems with the Language and Grammar of Spatial relations. The ELSA has identified 55 concepts that often create confusion in the workplace, for instance the inability to master Technical Drawing, Machine Drawing, etc. can be related to this problem (Hough Horne 2006b).
- ♦ Reading Comprehension (Decoding/Encoding) assesses narrative writing at a relatively simple level (readability index: ± Grade 7 for English mother tongue users).
- ♦ Cloze procedure (Decoding/Encoding) determines exposure to and familiarity with English (Hough Horne 2006b).
- ♦ Vocabulary in context (Decoding) involves expository writing (Hough Horne 2006b).

The ELSA is culture fair in that it steers clear of meta language, colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions and dialectic usage (Hough Horne 2006b). The ELSA quantifies a respondent’s functional English skills performance, equating the performance level to that of an English Mother Tongue (EMT) user. The ELSA expresses a respondent’s literacy skills in terms of grades. For example, a literacy skills’ grading of 12 means equivalent 12 years of formal schooling that is Grade 12. The ELSA diagnoses an individual’s strengths and weaknesses in an English language training environment. Moreover, ELSA literacy skills levels are benchmarked against South African norms as follows:

- ♦ Literacy – equivalent to three years of formal schooling (mother tongue implied).
- ♦ Functional literacy – equivalent to eight years of formal schooling (mother tongue implied).
- ♦ Academic literacy – equivalent to ten years of formal schooling (mother tongue implied).

Population and Sample

The population for this study was comprised of all teachers teaching English as a subject/learning area whose mother tongue is not English as well as all the grade 12 learners taught by these teachers at Secondary Schools using English as Medium of Instruction, in the Sedibeng East District (D7) of the Gauteng Department of Education.

For the purpose of this study systematic sampling was used. Only the first case is selected randomly, preferably from a random table and all subsequent cases are selected according to a particular interval (Creswell 2009). The sample for this research was limited to 8 Secondary Schools in the Sedibeng East District (D7) of the Gauteng Department of Education that opted to use English as Medium of Instruction. The Sedibeng East District Office (D7) identified the 8 Secondary Schools for the use of this research, where Grade 12 learners ($n=102$) are taught English by teachers ($n=9$) who are not native speakers of English. Four of these schools are from the former model C schools and the other four schools are from the previously disadvantaged (township) schools.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The findings were dealt with as follows:

- Comparing the results of learners and teachers from the Ex Model C schools to those of the Township schools.
- ♦ Comparing the Grade Profile of learners and teachers of the eight participating schools.
- ♦ Comparing the grade profile between ex-model C schools and township schools.

Results of Learners and Teachers from the Ex Model C Schools Township Schools

The data reveals that the listening skill is not taught consciously in many schools. This supports findings of Siegel (2014) who asserts that some teachers use a range of techniques while others limit their teaching to product-based approaches. The results of the phonics 'sub-test' verify that some learners experience problems with the sound system of English. The average of participants from ex-model C schools is far above 70%, which is an adequate score for the

phonics 'sub-test'. However, the average of the participants from the township schools is below 50%, which is below par for the phonics 'sub-test'. The average score of their participating teachers is 70%, which is below par. The low score at the township schools might be ascribed to the fact that as the teachers' average score is below par, they offer inadequate opportunities to learners to practice the listening skill.

Some participants experience a problem with how well they hear English and the conventions of writing are not integrated into their literacy skills. The results of the dictation 'subtest' confirm that some participants do not 'hear' English properly and that the conventions of writing are not integrated into their literacy skills. The average for the participants of the township schools is below 50%, which is below par for the dictation 'sub-test'. Siegel (2014) argues that for many years, listening has been considered the most difficult of the four main language skills. It is a challenging skill for both learners to acquire and for teachers to teach. The finding of this research also indicate that the listening skill is not taught consciously but is disregarded in the township schools. Although the average for teachers at the township schools is relatively good (76%) for the dictation 'sub-test' it seems that they do not focus on improving on the teaching of the listening skill to the detriment of their learners.

According to Kola (2014) students are unable to use simple English structures correctly; they are quite plagued to manipulate language with boldness and competence. The academic performance of students both at secondary school and post-secondary school is worrisome. There is indeed a lot wrong with the performance in English even among University students and graduates for that matter. The above findings reveal that some participants will not be able to cope with expository writings, at a post Grade 12 level. The diagnostic report regarding the results of the participating learners of the township schools indicate that their reading comprehension compared with the educational level are inadequate, poorly developed and below par. It is however stated by Moh (2014) that good reading strategies will have a positive impact on a learner's academic achievement. The participating teacher of school 5's score for the reading comprehension compared to educational level is inadequate and is less

than the participating learners of school 5, whose average indicates their ability is below par. The results of the participating teachers show that the teachers from the ex-model C schools scored 100% except for one score of 95%. This verifies the literature finding that learners who are taught in a second language by teachers who are fully proficient in the second language learn the second language more effectively than learners who are taught by teachers with low levels of competence in the second language (Cheetham 2014).

English second language learners' exposure to and familiarity with English varies from very little to that of limited. The majority of participating learners have limited exposure to and familiarity with English according to their result for the cloze procedure 'sub-test'. This verifies the literature finding (Olwoyeye 2014) that English second language learners have very little or no opportunity to extensive input (reading and listening) or output (practice in speaking and writing) in English.

English second language learners experience major problems regarding reading processing, and they have a restricted reading vocabulary and a limited understanding of the grammar of the English language. Vocabulary has been recognized as an important factor for language learning because insufficient vocabulary knowledge leads the learners to encounter difficulties in language learning. Learners can significantly improve their language competence by developing their ability to use vocabulary learning strategies (Rakchanok 2014).

The results of the participating learners for the vocabulary in context 'sub-test' show an average of 39% and therefore verify the literature finding that English second language learners find it difficult to complete writing responses where they have to understand and interpret the question before they can recall the knowledge which then has to be formulated in the appropriate form and register. The students who enter our tertiary institutions are ill equipped to use and to understand English adequately, as they read texts laboriously and are unable to use simple English structures correctly; they are quite plagued to manipulate language with boldness and competence (Kola 2014).

The Grade Profile of Participating Teachers and Learners

The ELSA quantifies a participant's functional English skills performance, equating the per-

formance level to that of an English Mother Tongue (EMT) user. To determine the performance level of English second language 2 marks are added to get to a comparable English second language grading. The ELSA expresses a participant's literacy skills in terms of grades. For example, a literacy skills grading of 12, means an equivalent of 12 years formal schooling that is Grade 12.

Note: the grade profiles of the participating teachers equate the performance level of an English Mother Tongue user and have not been adapted to a comparable English second language user.

The data indicates that the average grade profile of the participating teachers of the ex-model C schools is that of Grade 12+ (English mother tongue users) that signifies that these teachers have a sound English literacy. The participating learners of ex-model C schools' profile is an average of grade 10 (second language) indicating that these learners' English literacy is two grades behind their academic level. A learner's language proficiency is of the utmost importance as it impacts on all other subjects/learning areas. This finding supports the argument of Fakeye (2014) and Cheetham et al. (2014) namely that learners' language proficiency has a relationship with their overall academic achievement. Language is the vehicle of instruction of all subjects and learners with low literacy skills are less successful in using their academic skills, in continuing education and will definitely impact negatively in the workplace. The average grade profile of the participating teachers of the township schools is that of Grade 9 (English mother tongue users/grade 11 English second language). This corroborates the literature finding namely that teachers lack the English proficiency that is necessary for effective teaching and do not have the knowledge and skills to support English language learning which have a negative repercussion for learners, who often copy their teachers since the learners regard teachers as role models (Mbah et al. 2014). It is not surprising that the participating learners of the township schools' profile is that of grade 8, signifying that their English literacy is 4 years behind their academic level.

The grade profiles of the participating teachers and learners of school 5 need to be singled out. The grade profile of the participating learners of school 5 equals that of grade 8, while their

teacher's profile is equal to grade 7 (Mother tongue users/grade 9 English second language). In effect the teacher of school 5's profile is just one grade higher than that of the learners, which is cause to great alarm. The low grade profile of this teacher might be due to one of many different aspects. With the ex-model C schools' English literacy skills being 2 grades behind their academic level and the township schools' English literacy skills being 4 grades behind their academic level, it can be predicted that these learners will experience difficulty at a post-matric level, whether it be in the workplace or at tertiary institutions.

The Grade Profile of Ex-Model C Schools and Township Schools

The average Grade 12 English second language learner has an English literacy skill profile of that of grade 9. The results of the participating learners of ex-model C schools are for each of the 'sub-tests' better than the results of participating learners of the township schools. This could be ascribed to the fact that the average grade profile of the participating teachers of the township schools is equal to grade 9 (first language).

The results of the ELSA show a clear correlation between teachers and learners. In the case where teachers have good scores, the learners also have good scores. However, where the teachers have poor scores the learners perform even worse. These findings corroborate with research findings of Cheetham et al. (2014) and Siegel (2014) that reveal when teachers are unfamiliar with a range of activities that can effectively develop the language proficiency of their learners, it will have negative repercussions for their learners. Although teachers have a profound impact on the language skills of their learners, it must be understood that apart from teachers, there are numerous other factors/variables (environmental influences, early stimulation, communication, auditory problems and ineffective information processing skills etc.) that could have had an impact or influence on the language abilities of the learners.

The researchers are of the opinion that after studying all the literature findings and the results of the ELSA it is hardly surprising that learners' English literacy skill is not the equivalent of the educational level grade they are.

DISCUSSION

Teachers need an in depth understanding of the cognitive academic language proficiency that is fundamental to the teaching of higher order thinking to enable learners to express their thoughts in clear, logical and well-constructed sentences in the second language. Language is regarded as the primary vehicle of communication through which people socially interact. This social interaction is the basis of cognitive development, therefore language, itself, becomes an important tool of cognitive development (Donald et al. 2002; Grosser and Nel 2013; Neeta and Klu 2013). According to Grosser and Nel (2013), teachers need an in depth understanding of the cognitive academic language proficiency that is fundamental to the teaching of higher order thinking. However, the findings of this research show that many English teachers are not proficient in the English language. It can be deduced that these teachers will not be in a position to support their learners with their cognitive development.

Macdonald, as early as 1990, and Neeta and Klu (2013) argue that the majority of learners in township schools in South Africa experience problems with the sound system of English and that the conventions of writing are not integrated into their literacy skills. The findings of this research make it clear that the legacy of the past still pervades the classrooms in South Africa. The low scores for the phonics 'sub-test' in specifically the township schools, might very well be ascribed to the teachers' average score which is below par. It was also revealed that although teachers got a good score for the dictation 'sub-test', they seem not to focus on teaching the listening skill to their learners. The conventions of writing are therefore not integrated into their literacy skills.

Learners scored very unsatisfactory in the vocabulary in context 'sub-test'. Teachers who lack English proficiency are unable to teach English effectively, for they themselves have suffered because of the vicious cycle that has developed in the education system (Masitsa 2004; Cheetham et al. 2014; Siegel 2014). This research has made it clear that many teachers still do not possess adequate proficiency in the English language for effective teaching and learning to take place. Neeta and Klu (2013) also argue that these teachers feel inadequate and un-

equipped to take charge of their English teaching. This results in a situation where learners' achievement is hampered by the lack of their teachers' English proficiency. Teachers are expected to lead the discourse in the classroom and teacher communication should contain no incorrect forms as this is the language at the learners' disposal (Mbah et al. 2014). However, the findings of this research reveal that South African English teachers do not hold up to these expectations and learners therefore take over the incorrect language habits of their teachers. Neeta and Klu (2013), Fakeye (2014) and Cheetham et al. (2014) also argue that where teacher modelling is flawed, the learners' discourse will most probably be equally flawed. The findings of this research reveal a clear correlation between the proficiency of learners and teachers. Where teachers have good scores, learners have equally good scores. Where teachers score low, learners score low. This research thus supports the research findings of De Wet (2002), Dondald et al. (2002), Jordaan (2011), Neeta and Klu (2013), Cheetham et al. (2014), Fakeye (2014) and Janks (2014).

When comparing the grade profile between ex-model C schools and township schools, significant differences are noted. The findings indicate that teachers from ex-model C schools performed better than teachers from township schools in all the sub-tests of the English Literacy Skills Assessment. The learners from ex-model C schools also performed better in all sub-tests. These findings correspond with the findings of Neeta and Klu (2013), Fakeye (2014) and Janks (2014), namely that learners' achievement is hampered by the lack of English proficiency of their teachers.

The reading comprehension of learners from township schools is also inadequate. This might be ascribed to the fact that the teachers' score is also below par. The average grade profile of these teachers is Grade 9. This supports the statement of Janks (2014) when arguing that a substantial number of teachers lack the necessary English language skills for effective teaching and learning.

The findings of this research, as in the past, again highlight the unsatisfactory levels of English language proficiency of South African teachers and learners. If this scenario continues, learners will not achieve their full potential. Therefore, the researchers make a number of recommendations in a next section of this paper.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated by means of a literature review and empirical research the influence of the language proficiency of English teachers who are not native speakers of English on the language skills of their learners. Various findings were highlighted. This research has outlined the need to upgrade English teachers' English language proficiency to eradicate the vicious circle resulting in learners' lack of English literacy skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research was to investigate the influence of the language proficiency of English teachers who are not native speakers of English on the language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of their learners. In order to realize this aim, a literature study was undertaken which served as the foundation of the empirical research. The findings of this research are incorporated in the following recommendations:

Teachers need an in depth understanding of the cognitive academic language proficiency that is fundamental to the teaching of higher order thinking to enable learners to express their thoughts in clear, logical and well-constructed sentences in the second language. Language is regarded as the primary vehicle of communication through which people socially interact. This social interaction is the very basis of cognitive development, therefore language, itself, becomes an important tool of cognitive development.

Because the majority of learners in the township schools experience problems with the sound system of English and the conventions of writing are not integrated into their literacy skills, learners must be given ample opportunity to do listening and reading comprehensions, even the 'old fashioned' spelling and dictation tests on a regular basis will most probably better their abilities. A compulsory reading period could be integrated into the school day. The school library must, as in the past, be given prominence to encourage learners to become good readers.

English second language learners have very little or no opportunity to use English in a real life situation. Through co-operative teaching, English first language learners can be grouped with English second language learners. First language speakers can assist second language speakers to remedy their problems and simulta-

neously second language speakers will have the opportunity of hearing English spoken by first language speakers. Activities, such as role play and simulation might also improve second language learners' English proficiency.

The complex problem of a multi-lingual and multi-cultural classroom situation that teachers face must be attended to at teacher training level. More emphasis must be placed on gaining a sound knowledge of linguistics and the theories underlying second language acquisition.

Teachers who lack English proficiency are unable to teach English effectively, for they themselves have suffered because of the vicious cycle that has developed in the education system. These teachers need to upgrade their ability to the level required to teach English second language. Education departments and tertiary institutions need to address this problem.

LIMITATIONS

The researchers acknowledge the following possible limitations of this research:

Owing to the fact that grade 12 learners experience a heavy workload and are in general under a lot of pressure because it is their final year at school, participants could have negative attitudes to write the ELSA. This could have influenced the findings of the research. Grade 12 is already too late to remedy a lack of literacy proficiency. Therefore it would be advisable to identify such problems at a much earlier stage, in order to have enough time to remedy literacy problems that individual learners might have.

This research also calls for a longer period of time to determine the definite influence of the teachers in question on the learners who took part in the research. The researcher acknowledges, that in the context of this study, the teachers who taught the learners, who took part in the study, prior to Grade 12 definitely also contributed to the learners' current ability or inability. The particular participating teachers might have ended up with these learners in their final year of study and might not have been able to eliminate deficiencies.

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