

The Effects of Second Language as a Medium of Instruction on Pre-school Learners

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ABSTRACT Language is an important aspect for the development of every human being. The paper investigated the effects of second language as a medium of instruction on pre-school learners. The study adopted a qualitative case study design in which four pre-school teachers and four parents were sampled from four different pre-schools. Data were collected using interviews and observation schedules. Qualitative data was analysed, reduced and interpreted. The findings revealed that pre-school education is important as it encourages language development and prepares pre-school learners for school. English second language can be used as a medium of instruction because of its long-term benefits. The study concludes that pre-school learners continue to develop their abilities in languages throughout their pre-school years; they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. Pre-school teachers need to remember that language is not just part of education; it is also part of the pre-schoolers' everyday lives. Recommendations were that two languages should be introduced at an early childhood stage because both empower children.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the key to communication as pre-schoolers enter the playroom with basic language it gives them ability to listen and to speak. The Language in Education Policy (Department of Education 2002:5) makes provision for learner's home language to be used for teaching and learning. This is also stated in the Education Policy (Department of Education 1997a) which allows for linguistic choice this mandates that the medium of instruction from pre-school to Grade 3 should be the mother tongue. Thus, the premise was that through the use of mother tongue learners would manage collaborative literacy of teaching and learning.

Language is of importance for complete development of every human being. For a child to be, and to learn, he or she needs language. To learn with success at pre-school, children need to be able to know the mother tongue or second language (Kavari 2014; Singleton et al. 2013). 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 also an important milestone to reach before the child starts with formal schooling. The reasons for this are obvious; the child needs to understand the teacher and be able to talk to him or her with ease in order to learn (UNICEF and Jharkhand Tribal

Welfare Research Institute 2013; Mudzielwana 2012; Faber and Van Staden 1997).

Some pre-schools use second language (English) as a medium of instruction and not mother tongue. It is clear that it is important for learners to use their own mother tongue in the classroom throughout their education (Herath 2014; Alseweed 2012).

Pre-school learners enter the playroom in enough language to listen, to speak and to understand some basic concepts in their mother tongue. At pre-school they continue to use and develop their language skills as they learn to read and write. Everything learners do at pre-school will require them to use language. Whether they are listening to the teacher or talking to their peers, they will be using language. Based on the above, the researcher can therefore say that language is the key of learning.

Pre-school learners' success with language will have a big influence on their success at pre-school, and later in the school. If language is the key to learning, it is also key to power and success at work and in the community. So language cannot be treated simply as any other learning area, it is the foundation of learners' academic success as well as their success as citizens of South Africa and of the world.

Tsui and Tollefson in Desai (2012) showed medium of instruction as the most powerful

means of maintaining and revitalizing a language and a culture. In such a context... the medium of instruction is one variable that both reflects and interacts with patterns of power relations in the wider society to create academic failure among groups that have historically been subjected to coercive relations of power in the wider society (Dunlop 2013; Machaal 2012; Commins 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study in nature; it allows for the development of insights into the teaching of language experiences, perceptions of the teachers and made possible conclusions about aspects of language practice (Merriam 2002). The study was a case study which comprised of four pre-schools. Self-designed structured interview questions (individual interview) were used to collect data. Observation was also conducted to observe teaching and learning activities during outdoor and indoor activities.

Population

Katzenellenbogen and Karim (2007) state that population is the entire group of people that are of interest to the researcher and hence meet the criteria the researcher is interested. The population of the study were fourteen pre-schools around Sibasa area. A simple purposive sampling procedure was used to select pre-school learners from four selected pre-schools.

Sampling

Sampling is suitable for solving qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs and the relationships linking occurrences (UNICEF and Jharkhand Tribal Welfare Research Institute 2013; Merriam 1998).

From the fourteen pre-schools, the researcher selected four pre-schools in order to collect data for this research. When selecting pre-schools the researcher considered the following:

Pre-school A - a pre-school that uses mother tongue only as a medium of instruction.

Pre-school B - a pre-school that uses second language only as a medium of instruction.

Pre-school C - a pre-school that uses both mother tongue and second language as a medium of instruction.

Pre-school D - a pre-school that uses second language but the cooks and the helpers know mother tongue only.

Data Collection

Data collection as a simplified nutshell qualitative collection which involves making sense out of an enormous amount of narrative data. Structured interviews and observation schedules were used to collect data (Lee and Schallert 2014; Gay 1996). Data were collected from selected four pre-schools. These are pre-schools that used mother tongue as a medium of instruction, pre-schools that used second language only as a medium of instruction, and the pre-school that use both mother tongue and second language as well as the one that used second language. Four pre-schools teachers and four parents were interviewed. The researcher observed both indoor and outdoor activities of pre-schoolers.

Data Analysis

The data collection led to analysis in order to classify and create concepts (Karami and Nodoushan 2014; Henning et al. 2004). Data was collected through interviews and observations, reduced and interpreted. The data was categorized and analysis was presented according to the format of the interview schedule used with respondents, starting with pre-school teachers and then parents.

Trustworthiness of Data

Principles outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985: 295-331) were followed for ensuring and assessing trustworthiness. Credibility was achieved through spending time with all participants during consent form acquisition for interview. Transferability was ensured by completing description of the research method, and interpretation of research findings in the study report. Dependability was achieved by thick description of methodology. Conformability was achieved by editing the entire research document.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was sought from the Department of Education and the Department of Health and

Social Development because the pre-schools that the study based on conducted falls under the department of Social Development. Respondents were informed that all procedures would be anonymous and confidential and that their participation was voluntary. Permission was also sought from University of Venda.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings emerged as a result of the consolidation process of pre-school teachers' and parents' interview responses as well as observations.

Pre-school Teachers

Teaching Using Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction

The pre-school teacher is primarily an educator since she gets the opportunity daily to educate children (Mudzielwana 2014; Clarke 2009).

Pre-school teacher gave the following opinion about teaching in mother tongue

The reason why I taught pre-school learners in mother tongue was that I believe that pre-school learners who learn in 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. In my opinion, I want learners to learn in mother tongue.

Kreshen in Moswane (2002) indicated that mother tongue is the primary language of the family which is dominant in the immediate community. Mother tongue provides the basis for learning another language (Guvercin 2011). The researchers (Panda and Mohanty 2013, Alexander 2008; Heugh 2006) corroborate this by concluding that when children begin learning their mother tongue, they are likely to succeed and that they can learn second language easily.

Teaching Using the Second Language as Medium of Instruction

Communication among pre-school learners encourages them to develop language of instruction used in that particular pre-school, whether mother tongue or second language so that it will

be easy for them to use it when they start formal education. Some of the reasons for this include that learners who cannot use the language which they are not familiar with in the classroom, sometimes do not perform well (Benson and Kosonen 2013; Owen-Smith 2010: 16).

One teacher highlighted the following:

To me both languages are important, that is why I use them simultaneously during teaching and learning. This makes pre-school learners to acquire and understand mother tongue and second language at an early stage.

Pre-school teachers believe that indoor and outdoor activities are very important in pre-school learners' lives because this is where they develop and learn language which is used as medium of instruction.

It is important to display all areas such as books, art, fantasy, discovery, block and educational area in pre-school because pre-school teachers encourage learners to participate in these areas as they will communicate with each other using medium of instruction used in that particular pre-school and also learn new language concepts.

Parents

Parents gave the following opinion about why they sent their children to pre-school whose medium of instruction was mother tongue

I sent my child to this pre-school because of the location, and financial standing dictates choice of my children's pre-school. I am also surrounded by pre-schools whose medium of instruction are mother tongue only.

Parents gave the following opinion about why they sent their children to a pre-school whose medium of instruction was second language: The following quotation provides evidence:

What I realized was that children mixed mother tongue and second language when they start to use second language as a medium of instruction but as time goes by, they speak fluently; that is the reason why I send my child to a pre-school whose medium of instruction is second language even though it is very far; where children have to wake up early and travel long distance.

Parents felt that to learn second language first will help the pre-school learners to become more intelligent than those who learn mother tongue first and this is where they develop and

learn language. Various literatures (Shoba and Chitmbutane 2013; Jalongo 2000; Shaffer 1999; Mwamwenda 1995) in the subject also emphasize the important role played by “language” in children’s language development. Most parents want their children to attend pre-schools that use second language as medium of instruction whereas they do not communicate with their children in that language at home and these learners only use this language at pre-school.

Observations

The researchers observed that both languages, mother tongue and second language are very important to the learners as long as they know how to use them and it will be easy for them to participate in all learning area.

Pre-schools either used mother tongue or second language as medium of instruction. In pre-school A they used mother tongue as medium of instruction and participation was good. The pre-school teachers’ only experience difficulties when they want learners to memorise English rhymes. It takes time especially at the beginning of the year.

In pre-schools B and D, second language was used as the medium of instruction and participation was excellent, as learners already knew the second language including the shy learners. In pre-school C, they use both mother tongue and the second language as medium of instruction and sometimes it was not necessary for the teachers to interpret in mother tongue as most of the pre-school learners understood.

Mudzzielwana (2014) states that good communication between teachers and learners help pre-school learners to know language of instruction used in pre-schools.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that pre-school learners continue to develop their abilities in the language throughout their pre-school years; they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. Second language can be used as a medium of instruction because of its long-term benefits as in South Africa it is used for communication by various groups of people. Pre-school teachers need to remember that language is not just part of education; it is also part of the pre-schoolers’ everyday lives. Some

parents are unable to choose pre-schools of their preference because of financial constraints. Pre-schools that use second language as a medium of instruction are too expensive and some of the parents cannot afford to pay high fees. Pre-school learners mostly use mother tongue during outdoor activities even if second language is used as medium of instruction as they come to pre-school with prior knowledge of their mother tongue.

Some parents want their children to be exposed to second language because at home they communicate with them in mother tongue and they send their children to pre-schools which teach through teaching in second language.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Children should be taught in mother tongue first for better understanding then later they could be introduced to second language. Pre-school teachers should use the medium of instruction as recommended by the language policy from the Department of Education. Two languages should be introduced at an early stage because it empowers children. The recommendation also suggests that pre-schoolers need approximately more time to develop sufficient proficiency in a second language to use it as a medium of instruction.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study used individual interviews and observation as data collection strategies. Only a few pre-schools were selected for the study. Not all pre-school teachers had a chance of being included in the study; the sample was purposive and included only one teacher from each pre-school. For future studies more participants must be part of the study.

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