

An Analysis of a Classroom Discourse: A Case of a Selected English Class in the Eastern Cape of South Africa

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ABSTRACT This study reviews the classroom interaction discussions between the teachers and learners in a selected primary school in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The discourse analysis was used to examine verbal interaction as a significant component of teaching techniques for enhancing effective teaching of English language. The main objective of this study was to analyze the verbal communication between the teachers and pupils in the classroom during teaching and learning of materials in English language. Qualitative research design was used in this study. Data were collected through interviews. As the teaching and learning of English language develops between the teachers and pupils in the primary schools, both negative and positive factors were observed when they were communicating. The relationship between the pupils and teachers responses to the factors influencing teaching and learning the subject was critically examined. The interviews conducted confirmed some of the challenges to include the use of local words by the pupils and lack of understanding of some local isiXhosa words by their teachers. The result also shows that pupils faced different hindrances in understanding some English language vocabularies taught in the classroom. The results also revealed that the classroom interaction was successful due to good methods introduced by the teachers in transferring knowledge to the pupils. Recommendations were made on how the teaching and learning of English language could be improved by appropriate mechanism or strategies to obtain successful results.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning are the processes involve social group interacting with each other. They can be formal or informal processes (Lindsay and Knight 2006). Informal process occurs when learning and teaching take place outside the classroom. Formal process usually occurs

within the classroom when teachers are teaching the pupils and pupils are participating in the class activities or contributing in classroom activities where verbal communication is learnt (Lindsay and Knight 2006). As noted by Alidou et al. (2006), in a multilingual country like South Africa, both English and local languages are used as the medium of instruction at school environment. The study of classroom interaction provides ways to understand pupils and teachers' abilities in the classroom, their behaviour and considering their psychology as well as knowing their limitations. Classroom interaction as articulated by Turner and Meyer (2000), Hafen et al. (2015) and Praetorius et al. (2015), describes

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certain verbal behaviours of teachers and pupils as they interact with the use of facts and concepts in classroom. However, teachers who interact with pupils in English language in South Africa where local languages are also used as the medium of instruction in primary school should be endeavour to use appropriate teaching mechanism that will facilitate an effective and efficient understanding to the pupils (Alidou et al. 2006). In the same context, Gibbons and Sanderson (2002) point out that the use of both local and English languages in education by some pupils is likely to pose some problems for their teachers when explaining some lessons and transmitting knowledge to them in terms of teachers talk to pupils and pupils answering their teachers and among themselves during teaching and learning materials in classroom. For example, Lefstein and Snell (2009) and Arifin (2015) state that during the teaching and learning activities in the classroom, vocabularies can be explained verbally; question can be posed and answered.

Therefore, this study focuses on the analysis of a classroom discourse of one class in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

Research Objectives

- ♦ To examine the Impact of Spoken, Understanding and Knowledge passed across to the learners in the classroom.
- ♦ To analyse the use of mother tongue between the teachers and learners interaction in the classroom

Research Question

- ♦ Does the use of English language have an impact on the level of spoken, understanding and knowledge passed across to the pupils by the teachers?
- ♦ Does the mother tongue cause a problem between the teachers and learners when they are interacting during the classroom activities?

Problem Statement

Despite local languages have tremendously improved the indigenous or native languages in South Africa, yet the impact of local languages in improving teaching and learning have reduced

the rate of spoken English language among the learners in schools. With the fact that most of the teachers teaching in all schools are South Africans, this should not mean that all their classes should be taught in their local languages. It has been observed from some schools that most of the learners after graduated from their schools find it difficult to communicate in English language fluently. It should be noted at this moment that some learners' teachers could not be blame for the poor performance of learners alone but also some blame could attributed to their parents. More importantly, most of these parents are often not encouraging their children to communicate with English language at home; this has hampered the learning and proper understanding of English language by the learners in some schools. The sad effect of these impediments was that these various local languages have hindered the learners from speaking English language fluently, spell correctly and also slow their rate of performing excellently well in English language. Therefore, to avert all these ugly situation among the learners in South Africa as one of the African countries where education is one of the most priority in improving the quality of lives of citizens, the government should urgently come into the aid of all learners in order to improve their learning skills, writing skills, spelling and communicating in English language.

Literature Review

This section focused on teaching and learning classroom interaction and discourse analysis theory.

Teaching and Learning Classroom Interaction

The study of classroom interaction refers to rules of language use at school which includes a better understanding of the social context where communication takes place between the teacher and pupils when sharing knowledge (Kouicem 2010). In this context, Behnam and Poriran (2009) and Toumpaniari et al. (2015) confirm that communication is both spoken and written languages. It involves social group and institutions such as teachers, pupils, parents, lecturers, families, schools, universities et cetera. Many studies on classroom interaction are concerned with teaching and learning strategies than

the organisation of linguistic units. For instance, when pupils switched from teacher centered, the teachers may use strategies to achieve the goal of classroom interaction (Majanga et al. 2011).

According to Rocca (2012), many teachers have had an experience of teaching where pupils participate regularly during learning activities in the classroom and they are always being encouraged by their teachers to ensure that all pupils are involved in the classroom discussion or interactions. In order to address questions about teaching and learning, the study of classroom interaction needs a framework for analyzing verbal interactions from both pupils and teacher' abilities (Blanton et al. 2001; Downer et al. 2015; Chen et al. 2016). On the other hand, the study of subject in English language as a second language is mainly focused on the effects of the teachers and pupils' production of the target language and the answers given by the pupils (Li 2009).

As revealed from the literature dealing with teachers and pupils interacting with each other in the classroom, one of the main problems is that the teachers experience difficulties in comprehending local concepts and expressing themselves when communicating with pupils within the classroom. They taught very well in English language because they did have thorough knowledge, experience and understanding on it. In this context, teachers taught and explained their lessons very well and lead pupils to understand the subject matter. Hence, it is often observed that teachers are usually confused when pupils asked questions using their local languages. As noted by Park (2010), disseminating of information by the teachers to the pupils in global and local languages become important for successful teaching and learning achievement at all level.

Teaching with English language by the teacher as the first language (L1) in primary schools at the initial stage of learning by the pupils could be very difficult as some of them did not have enough knowledge and understanding of English language or meaning of some pronunciation and spelling of letters. It is difficult to make pupils understand lessons if they can first express themselves in their local languages and then, interpret using English language (Alidou et al. 2006). The result of the study conducted by Cheung (2009) and Luk and Lin (2015) revealed that teachers explained materials in a way

that pupils who used both English and local languages could understand lessons. The success rate of interaction between the teachers and the pupils at school was very high. In Eastern Cape Province, for example teachers and pupils cannot use isiZulu as language for spoken in classroom interaction in order to achieve effective learning goals. In such situation, Bamgbose (2011) states that English language has higher status than African languages because of its economic advantage in South Africa.

Discourse Analysis Theory

Discourse analysis as noted by Lam et al. (2009), is a theoretical framework used in many studies of classroom interactions. Discourse analysis is a method that contributed to understand the nature of pupils and teachers interactions and how learning activities take place in the classroom. For example, teacher explained the contents of the lessons and pupils asked questions (Woodward-Kron and Remedios 2007). This means that, the teacher explained the lessons and pupils contributed by answering the teachers' questions. Pupils sometimes can move away from what were given by the teachers to themselves and learnt directly on their own and repeating questions to discover answers (Wright 2011). Discourse analysis as articulated by Behnam and Poriran (2009), is the matter of oral communication in the classroom and is always different in form and function of language use in particular situations where the teachers and pupils play different role during the classroom activities. In this case, Kouicem (2010) says that discourse analysis deals with the ability to understand individual messages and to indentify all other discourse features. The features can be unequal power, relationships, turn-taking at speaking, patterns of interaction (Behnam and Poriran 2009). This study however used discourse analysis as a theoretical framework to analyse oral communication between the teacher and pupils during classroom activities. As noted by Gibbons and Sanderson (2002), discourse analysis is a method that examines knowledge in terms of the teacher speaks to pupils and pupils speak to teachers and themselves during learning materials in classroom. For example, during the classroom activities, vocabularies can be explained verbally, question can be posed and answered (Lefstein and

Snell 2009). In this current study, discourse analysis was applied to analysis the extent to which teaching and learning activities could be important in order to facilitate effective and efficient teaching in the primary schools and also analysed the difficulties encountered by the teachers while delivering their lessons.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative research design to obtain information from the respondents. A primary school was selected in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The study involved twenty pupils and two teachers selected purposively to participate in this study. The factors considered in the study include: standard and equipped teaching materials; enough English useful periods, relevant and recommended textbooks and professional qualifications. Data for the study was collected through interviews. The interview questions used contains two subdivision of questions developed for both the teachers and pupils of English language in the selected school. Questions related to the analysis of classroom discourse which is based on the effective teaching of English language are usually insightful. Participants in the study were assured strict confidentiality in order to obtain the necessary information. Responsive questions such as the name and contact addresses of the respondents were removed from the interview questions. The interview questions consisted of structured questions which made it easy for the respondents to express their views. The interview questions were well semi-structured and precise to enable responded to express their opinion on various factors influencing effective teaching of English language in primary school in Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Data collected was analysed using thematic or conceptual analysis. The pragmatic research for the study was conducted in the main analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, there are some sources of data used to answer the research questions under the qualitative method. Therefore, the analysis was presented in three stages which include the following:

Impact of Spoken, Understanding and Knowledge Passed Across to the Pupils in the Classroom

(a) "Does the use of English language have an impact on the level of spoken, understanding and knowledge passed across to the pupils by the teachers?"

Response by Teachers:

Teacher1 (T 1) pointed out that:

Some English spellings such as 'umbrella', 'pineapple' and 'beautiful' were problems to pupils to understand some lessons in the classroom.

On the same question, Teacher 2 (T 2) confirmed that:

Pronouncing some English words by the pupils during classroom interaction caused some difficulties to them.

On the same issue, the study reveals that words such as 'umbrella', 'pineapple' and 'beautiful' were difficult for eight pupils to spell as most of English alphabets are not the same. Still on the same question, eight pupils said that:

Hayi! hayi!! hayi!!! the word 'umbrella', 'pineapple' and 'beautiful' could be better pronounced as 'i-umbrella', 'i-pineapple' and 'i-beautiful'. They said further that if the alphabets are the same then, they will be able to combine the letters together and pronounce very well.

While the remaining twelve pupils in the classroom said that:

The words such as 'umbrella', 'pineapple' and 'beautiful' were not difficult for them to pronounce.

The information collected from the pupils interviewed, showed that they used the words 'hayi! hayi!! hayi!!!' which means in English language no! no!! no!!! teacher, umbrella', pineapple' and 'beautiful' could be better pronounced as 'i-umbrella', 'i-pineapple' and 'i-beautiful'. In addition, the information collected from the teachers also revealed that some pupils have difficulties in spellings and pronunciations while others spelled and pronounced very well.

The Use of Mother Tongue between the Teachers and Pupils Interaction in the Classroom

"Does the mother tongue cause a problem between the teachers and pupils when they are interacting during the classroom activities?"

The findings of the study also revealed that some lessons taught during the classroom interaction between the teacher and learners were successful while others were not. This is because when the teacher asked questions in English language, the learners were answering in Xhosa and they often say '*intoni...intoni*' or '*uthini...uthini*'? ('*intoni...intoni*'? or '*uthini...uthini*'? in English means 'what'?) by repeating many time as they did not know or have a clear understanding of the meaning of words.

Other Findings and Discussions Related to Personal Comments and Opinions of both Teachers and Pupils Gathered for the Purpose of the Study

Hence, strong emphasis was also placed on gathering personal comments and opinions directly from both the teachers and learners during the interviews interaction section. Other findings obtained for the purpose of this study are stated below as thus:

The findings revealed that learners whose mother tongue is different from English language faced a lot of problems while communicating with their teachers at school as they are often exposed to other languages at home. The most important thing in this study was for the pupils listened to their teachers in all the lessons taught in the classroom. The teachers explained the lesson to the pupils and ask question and they answered. As revealed by authors Smith et al. (2005) who confirm that the analysis of classroom interaction in this school was successful since the learners were able to work individually, understand and did what the teachers said.

By examining the lesson, the findings also revealed also that the teachers knew the subject to teach and explained very well using correct English language and built good sentences related to the lesson. Thus, the learners' perceptions were also positive. This was due to learners' curiosity and motivation to learn English language and the reliance as well as confidence that they had on their teachers. Therefore, the achievement was positive since the learners' negative responses were fewer. This shows that the teachers have been able to achieve their goal.

In addition, while examining the lessons, there were few negative attitudes from the pupils, and then, the overall achievement was

good. Therefore, the interaction is not efficient so far as the learning attitudes by the learners were weak. This means that, the minority number of pupils was unable to understand the subjects while the majority of them understood it. Finally, the finding also reveals that teachers use strategies to maintained discipline, motivated and encouraged pupils as a result of successful classroom interaction.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the classroom discourse suggests that teachers use several pedagogical strategies to promote and organise interaction during classroom activities. The strategies used include: establish an order and positive learning environment; ensure involvement and participant. For effective teaching, the study reveals that the teaching methodology provides by teachers were clearly explained. The teachers used the combination of teaching materials to bring about meaningful learning. They concentrated on lessons activities as this was probably one way of handling classes. The results undoubtedly further show that teachers were qualified English teachers but they had some difficulties in using local language when explaining the lessons to pupils. Teachers were not demoralised with these problems. It was difficult for them to answer in local language but they made several attempt to give attention to all pupils; gave them English exercises about what has been taught and they usually have classroom controlled. Finally, teachers and pupils' interaction were successful during teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The teachers established and maintained the space of the lesson; they encouraged pupils' participation and understand spoken discourse.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the view of the finding of this study, it is important that the governments and organisations that are active in the field of education must acknowledge the fact that education is intimately linked to the language factor which plays an essential role for the success of classroom interaction which again is closely linked to the language factor in education. Teachers are important contributors to learners' classroom learning success. Their roles are to explain the lessons well to learners and make them focused. When pupils experience difficulties in under-

standing English lessons during the classroom activities, teachers should encourage pupils when interacting with them.

The school should be aware of learners' learning at all levels and it should continue to support both the teachers and pupils to achieve their goals. The study recommends that each education institution should, in the context of the medium of instruction use both official language and local languages in the same level so that the local languages can be developed within the educational sector in South Africa or in Africa.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This paper focuses specifically on the analysis of a classroom discourse in a selected English class in Fort Beaufort, Eastern Cape Province of South Africa and thus, does not cover all the learners in the Eastern Cape. Studies on the analysis of a classroom discussion in other provinces were not included and as a matter of fact, the results of this paper cannot be generalised to include the whole of South Africa.

AREA FOR FURTHER STUDY

This paper investigated the analysis of a classroom discourse in a selected English class with reference to Fort Beaufort which is one of the small towns in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Further research may repeat this paper by using a large population such as all provinces or nation. In addition, future researchers could focus on the triangulation research designs which include both qualitative and quantitative research techniques in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the research problems.

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