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Abstract

The study investigated implications for teachers, learners and student teachers keeping in mind that the teacher's mother tongue is not English. Learners who are not proficient in English and are receiving English as an Additional Language in a dual medium school. The study used a mixed-method research methodology. The data collection technique used was a questionnaire that was administered to learners and student teachers. A sample of 3 learners in the Intermediate Phase was selected and their language proficiency levels were determined. A sample of 3 student teachers while they were in teaching practice. A semi-structured interview was generated for teachers to prompt their responses to the challenges they encounter in the classroom and strategies for learners who are not proficient in English. The findings indicated that the learners were generally not capable of handling the requirements of the transition from grade 3 to the Intermediate Phase. The language issue is complex and cannot be explained as an isolated variable as there is a variety of other mediating factors that interact to impact the academic performance of learners with limited English language proficiency. It was recommended that the learners be guided to make optimal use of facilities, such as libraries. This could enhance the learner's language development. The instrumental case study approach was utilized in this study to provide a description, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon at the intersection of English First Additional Language learners and English First Additional Language teachers regarding proficiency. Support programmes on reading with comprehension and other support resources are insufficient to bridge the gap between learners' proficiency and the lack of support.

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Review Article**English Language Proficiency of Non-English-Speaking Learners in the Intermediate Phase of Dual-Medium Schools -Challenges and Strategies***Hubré Janice DAVIDS¹  Pule PHINDANE²  Louw JASVEREE³ **Abstract**

The study investigated implications for teachers, learners and student teachers keeping in mind that the teacher's mother tongue is not English. Learners who are not proficient in English and are receiving English as an Additional Language in a dual medium school. The study used a mixed-method research methodology. The data collection technique used was a questionnaire that was administered to learners and student teachers. A sample of 3 learners in the Intermediate Phase was selected and their language proficiency levels were determined. A sample of 3 student teachers while they were in teaching practice. A semi-structured interview was generated for teachers to prompt their responses to the challenges they encounter in the classroom and strategies for learners who are not proficient in English. The findings indicated that the learners were generally not capable of handling the requirements of the transition from grade 3 to the Intermediate Phase. The language issue is complex and cannot be explained as an isolated variable as there is a variety of other mediating factors that interact to impact the academic performance of learners with limited English language proficiency. It was recommended that the learners be guided to make optimal use of facilities, such as libraries. This could enhance the learner's language development. The instrumental case study approach was utilized in this study to provide a description, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon at the intersection of English First Additional Language learners and English First Additional Language teachers regarding proficiency. Support programmes on reading with comprehension and other support resources are insufficient to bridge the gap between learners' proficiency and the lack of support.

Keywords: Dual-medium, English proficiency, intermediate phase, bilingual, mother tongue

1. INTRODUCTION

In a multilingual country like South Africa, it is vital that learners reach high levels of proficiency in a minimum of two languages, and that they can communicate in other languages (Department of Education, 2002). Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) (DBE, 2010) for the first additional language, Grades R-3, is founded on this perspective and recommends the additive bilingual approach to the teaching of an additional language. This approach undertakes that learners start school competent in their home language and that they can use their home language to learn an additional language. However, this statement must be read with thoughtfulness and it must not influence teaching since it is concerned with assumptions and not verified facts. The CAPS is an improvement of and replaces the Revised National Curriculum Statement, Grades R-9 (NCS) of the Department of Education (2003). It states that by the end of Grade 3 learners must grasp a high level of communicative competence and be able to read well (DBE, 2010: 7-9).

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These policies imply that teachers need to be well-versed in the first additional language—in this case, English—to help learners, improve their reading and communication abilities. However, there is no reason to demonstrate that teachers are qualified to teach English given the observation of students' low communication and understanding abilities. According to this study, a competent learner can use English correctly in a variety of contexts and speaks and understands the language with assurance.

Multilingualism is defined as the ability to use more than one language (De Angelis, 2021). Has garnered increasing attention in educational and psychological research due to its cognitive, social, and academic benefits (Lin & Lei, 2020). Despite a lot of rumours and outdated assumptions about its disadvantages and dangers. With globalization and migration contributing to greater linguistic diversity, understanding the advantages of multilingualism has become a pressing issue, particularly in the context of education. Multilingualism is scientifically labelled as the capacity to use two or more languages with varying degrees of proficiency across speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (De Angelis, 2021).

According to Bialystok (2017), the fact that multilingual individuals are continuously required to switch between different languages encourages superior working memory, attention control, and cognitive flexibility. This is because switching between languages includes different regions of the brain and develops neural connections, leading to increases in cognitive performance. Research focuses on using English as a language of learning and teaching and its impact on the language development of Intermediate Phase English First Additional Language (EFAL) learners (Ntshingila, 2006 in van Rooyen & Jordaan, 2009). The continuous practice of switching between languages reinforces mental processes like attention control and task-switching, contributing to greater cognitive flexibility (Bialystok, 2021). These cognitive advantages make multilingualism mainly relevant in educational contexts, as multilingual learners often show superior problem-solving skills and improved metalinguistic awareness (dos Santos, et al, 2021; Mohanty, 2022). Recent research has shown that the use of code-switching by South African teachers that is grounded in the social circumstances in which it arises 'creates a purposeful and productive teaching strategy' (Chetty & King, 2014).

1.1. Language Learning and Proficiency of Teachers and Learners

According to Chomsky (in Mitchell & Myles, 2004: 94), the logical issue of language learning is caused by chaotic and fragmented information, which leads to abstract conceptions based on restricted instances of languages. Gass (in Bailey, 2006: 65) refers to input as the language to which the learner is exposed, either orally or visually; in other words, the language which "surrounds learners living in an English language environment". In the context of this paper, teachers are responsible for inadequate language input due to their limited English proficiency. Further, one of the most applicable theories informing this study is that of Krashen, who found that comprehensible input through teacher talk is essential for English language acquisition.

The teacher should talk on a learner's level of comprehension; that is, the learner should be able to understand what the teacher is saying Lockhart and Richards (1994).

Transference from one speaker's use of language to another speaker's use of language can be viewed as a contamination factor in the use of the English language. Where teachers' English knowledge is not on an acceptable standard for using English as the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT). Teachers have to teach English as a subject to learners as a medium of instruction and teachers' mother tongue is not English. A possible language barrier between learners and teachers can be created.

1.1.1. Academic language and children's receptive vocabulary growth

There is a link between a teacher's use of natural academic language and mental state verbs (such as think, learn, feel, observe, and want) and the vocabulary increase of Head Start preschool pupils, according to research (Barnes & Dickinson, 2017). According to Barnes and Dickinson (2017), the effects of a teacher's natural use of academic language in the classroom on the vocabulary growth

of 489 Head Start students were explored. They used video to record book-reading sessions in 52 classrooms to develop metrics for assessing the association between instructors' lexical and utterance length and students' end-of-year receptive vocabulary scores.

Children showed more substantial receptive vocabulary growth when teachers employed more lexical items in the classroom. Still, when teachers increased their utterance length, students had a detrimental influence on receptive vocabulary growth. Although longer utterances negatively influence receptive vocabulary expansion, this does not indicate that they are harmful; longer utterances should be used with minimum academic language and in certain situations until the child is familiar with them [Barnes and Dickinson \(2017\)](#).

The researchers emphasized that teachers must be aware of their students' limitations and language knowledge when structuring the length of their utterances. They must strategize practices to fit the children below the classroom average and the advanced children. This study provides a basis for teacher practices incorporating rich, academic language in shorter sounds during teacher-child interactions [Goble and Pianta \(2017\)](#).

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design and made use of phenomenological and case study approaches to obtain data. The goal of the phenomenological approach is to describe the meaning of this experience both in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced [Dickson-Swift, et al. \(2014\)](#).

The researcher has worked within the critical interpretive paradigm using both qualitative and quantitative designs. Data collection techniques consisted of a semi-structured individual interview and questionnaires. The sample five Intermediate Phase teachers: four female teachers and one male teacher, three learners in the Intermediate Phase ranging from grades 4-6 and two student teachers majoring in English. The research involved the participant's understanding of the aim of the study and provided a valid and accurate account of their perspectives.

3. FINDINGS

Results showed that teachers whose mother tongue is not English find it difficult to teach English. Interviews were conducted with dual-medium school teachers, specifically in the Intermediate Phase. Teacher's language of instruction of their desired place of study is (almost) a common cause. Teachers expressed the lack of training and support from the Department of Education.

Professional development is needed to assist teachers and learners. Support programmes on reading with comprehension and other support resources are insufficient to bridge the gap between learners' proficiency and the lack of support. Parents must understand that if a child becomes bilingual, they must first understand the benefits of mother tongue instruction before enrolling their child in a dual-medium school.

Universities are phasing out Afrikaans and are forced to study in English. English proficiency is difficult to master if your mother is not English. Student teachers whose mother tongue is not English are not yet proficient in English when entering University.

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4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

A strong bilingual LoLT policy must be implemented. It must be referred to as a two-way immersion (dual-medium) model, which involves using both First Languages and Second Language LoLTs in a dual-medium type of school.

Before the learners switch to using English exclusively as a LoLT, learners should be given more exposure to the language. This is advised to better prepare learners for the Second Language LoLT transition, which, according to research, most learners cannot handle and never fully recover from.

The study provided implications for teachers, learners and student teachers and possible strategies to assist learners who struggle with English proficiency in the classroom. Student teachers are not yet English proficient enough to teach English.

Language plays a central role in teaching and learning. Teachers use language to deliver the content that students are expected to learn, and students use it, for instance, to demonstrate the knowledge that they have developed (Lucas, 2011).

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This study found It would benefit the learners needing support if the Department of Education could ensure them and their parents or caregivers of the services of Education Support Centres consisting of adequately qualified personnel. A fully functioning Education Support Centre should be established in all the education Districts.

Ethics Committee Decision

Due to the scope and method of the study, ethics committee permission was not required.

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