Putting the End Point at the Beginning: Teachers' Understanding of Using a Dual Medium Approach for Teaching Literacy in Foundation Phase Classrooms

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Abstract

This article examines how teachers in selected South African foundation phase (FP) dual medium literacy classrooms understand the teaching of literacy. 'Putting the end point at the beginning' summarizes some teachers' conceptions of how to approach the teaching of literacy. They argue that since the end point is that the child should become literate in English, they should then teach literacy in English earlier than teaching it in the child's mother tongue. They believe that the earlier literacy in English is taught, the better because children will master it very well whilst they are young. The article argues that there is pedagogical and conceptual confusion in which teachers and parents expect that by initiating the end point at the beginning of schooling, learners will become biliterate in isiZulu and English. This understanding conflicts with the research of first teaching literacy in a language that learners are familiar with before teaching it in an additional language. The problem is the assumption that a dual medium approach to literacy instruction in the foundation phase can be a substitute for teaching literacy in the mother tongue. The core concern of the article is to identify what teachers understand the role and function of mother tongue literacy teaching in the foundation phase to be and to identify teachers' conceptions and understanding of the reasons for their preference for the dual medium approach in teaching literacy in the foundation phase. The study took an

action research approach conducted by post-graduate certificate in Education (PGCE) students in the foundation phase literacy class of 2008. Data was collected by student teachers from teachers practicing in the field by conducting interviews and writing field notes. The interviews were analysed and the findings synthesized showing that teachers were more in favour of an early introduction of literacy in English in the foundation phase without considering the advantages of a mother tongue based bilingual instruction. Teachers were technically in favour of the dual medium approach as long as it would allow them to teach English literacy early to the learners. The article recommends that teacher training for foundation phase teachers should begin with a focus on teaching literacy in the mother tongue in the early years of a learner's career, since a mother tongue based bilingual education is the best option. A dual medium instruction may be started at any time but should not replace the teaching of literacy in the mother tongue.

Keywords: dual medium, literacy, biliteracy, mother tongue-based bilingual education

A Definition of the Dual Medium Approach and Mother-Tongue Based Bilingual Education

Mother tongue based bilingual education (MTBBE) is *bilingual education based* on the *mother tongue with the mother tongue* as referring to a child's principal language (Alexander 2009). Furthermore, Alexander argues that in Africa the cultural-political interests of proponents of mother tongue based bilingual education intersect with the position that the status and the market value of the target language are a significant incentive to motivate the learning of the relevant additional language and that more attention should, thus, be given to the intra- and extra-mural conditions that characterize good additional language learning.

A dual medium curriculum combines teaching in a learner's home language with teaching in an additional language. It contains the pedagogical advantages of home language teaching and learning with maximal opportunities in gaining proficiency in English (Plüddemann 2002:47). The

dual medium approach is premised on mother tongue foundations. As a teaching approach, it does not need to be introduced from the first grade of schooling but can be delayed, and used after learners have gained a firm foundation in their mother tongue. It can be introduced at any time when teachers feel that learners have confidently gained adequate knowledge of their mother tongue as well as when they feel that the home language is not threatened by another language. Although some teachers are in favour of a 50/50 dual medium from grade 1, an additional language should be introduced gradually. A scaffolded dual medium approach is a better option because it supports the maintenance of the mother tongue and premises the dual medium approach on mother tongue foundations.

Background, Problem Statement and Rationale

The theme of this article is summarized in the quote, ' … pushing the boundaries and blends of 'literacy' and 'early childhood' in startling, generative directions' by Allan Luke (1990).

According to the South African Department of Education (DoE) National Curriculum Statement (NCS), mother tongue is compulsory in the foundation phase (DoE 2002; 2008a). Government interventions regarding the improvement of literacy and numeracy, since observing that South African learners in most primary schools are lacking in these skills, include the Foundations for Learning Campaign and National Reading Strategy, both introduced in 2008.

Firstly, the Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE 2008) is a four-year campaign to create a national focus to improve the reading, writing and numeracy abilities of all South African children. It seeks to provide energy as well as direction and inspiration across all levels of the education system, as well as in homes and the public domain, to ensure that all learners are able to demonstrate age appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy. The campaign is a national response to national, regional and international studies that have shown over a number of years that South African children are not able to read, write and count at expected levels, and are unable to execute tasks that demonstrate key skills associated with literacy and numeracy. The campaign will provide teachers and schools with clear directives on the Department of Education's expectations of schools and

teachers to achieve the expected levels of performance. The campaign will also ensure that support is provided towards the achievement of the campaign's objectives.

The Foundations for Learning programme aims to improve the teaching of numeracy and literacy by ensuring that all teachers in grades 1-3 actually teach reading and numeracy skills every day. Daily teacher activities during literacy and numeracy time are suggested in the Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE 2008a). For example, daily literacy time includes the teaching of oral work, reading and writing focus time, shared reading or shared writing time, word and sentence level work (comprising phonics/spelling, sight words, vocabulary and language), a combination of group, guided and independent reading/writing, handwriting, listening and speaking, and first additional language and reading for enjoyment (DoE 2008a:9).

A *second* notable literacy intervention by the government to improve literacy in schools is the National Reading Strategy (NRS), also introduced in 2008. This strategy aims to improve the reading level of all learners in the country, including those who experience barriers to learning. The government observed that language 'mismatches' make the problem worse because firstly, the language of home and school do not match in many cases. Secondly, the language of the resources at school, e.g. books, posters, generally does not match the home language of the learner. It is on this point that using a dual medium approach caters for teaching of literacy in both the home language and the first additional language. The foundation of teaching literacy in the mother tongue is still prized highly in order to establish a strong foundation for teaching the additional language.

The DoE (1997) works from the premise of maintaining the home language(s) while providing access to and the effective acquisition of additional language(s) i.e. additive bilingualism. This route is a viable approach towards multilingual education. Under-resourcing of schools, the lack of formal training of many primary school teachers and parent antipathy towards educational use of home language (Plüddemann 2002:49) were cited as circumstances mitigating against the use of mother tongue.

The Department of Education (2008a; 2008b) indicate that teacher competency and lack of exposure to reading materials are some of the problems in South Africa in the teaching of literacy. Many teachers in South

Africa have an under-developed understanding of teaching literacy, reading and writing. Too often, teachers know only one method of teaching reading, which may not suit the learning style of all learners. As a result some teachers do not know how to stimulate reading inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, the Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Survey (1999) found that the majority of schools had no access to libraries with appropriate reading materials (DoE 2008b:8).

Compounding the teachers' lack of competence in teaching reading and the lack of materials is the language mismatch between the school language and the home language of learners. The Department of Education's (2008b:9) National Reading Strategy posits that despite the Language-in-Education Policy of 1997, it is still the case that most learners in South Africa do not learn in their mother tongue. Most schools have inadequate language policies which do not address the learning needs of the learners. They do not ensure the right of learners—especially foundation phase learners—to learn in their mother tongue. This is a serious problem. The DoE further observes that foundation phase teachers are generally not taught to teach reading in the home language of African learners and the focus on literacy is shifted to English. Reasons for this anomaly are comprehensively investigated by (de Klerk 2002).

A third observation identified by student teachers in the foundation phase literacy class, which led to this action research study, was the teachers' attitudes towards using an African language such as isiZulu to teach literacy. Student teachers were frustrated during teaching practice at schools because they found that teachers were very reluctant to teach literacy in the mother tongue owing to the great demand for English. Language attitudes determine whether a language can be used effectively in education. Negative attitudes towards using indigenous African languages in education exist. Many studies repeatedly show that the low status of African languages, resulting from Bantu Education, have caused African parents to negatively view the use of African languages in education today as ploy to falsely unleash an inferior education by the educated elite. In spite of the pedagogic gains of using the mother tongue in education, parents in South Africa are uncomfortable with this recommendation. Heugh (2002) and Dyers (2000) discuss parents' attitudes within their studies. Adegbija (1994) writes that during the colonial days in Africa, the use of indigenous languages as the medium of instruction

was limited to the first few years of primary education. In the French and Portuguese territories, the use of African languages was prescribed. Such policies created, in the minds of the students and in the general public, the impression that African languages were inferior and less suitable for use at higher levels of education.

Teachers taught literacy in English and tended to ignore the government's policy for the reasons cited above. Teachers also did not have a clear conceptual understanding of the dual medium approach and pedagogic importance in teaching literacy and they focused on teaching English literacy only. However, I was encouraged by the students' understanding of ways of teaching literacy. I emphasized that they are a new generation of teachers who need to show the way with their understanding of how literacy should be taught by valuing mother tongue literacy. Students also revealed that teachers gave preference to the dual medium approach to teaching Literacy in the foundation phase over mother tongue based literacy teaching.

I explained the value of using the mother tongue in grade R-3, followed by the use of two languages of learning and teaching (LoLT)s later which would improve academic performance across the curriculum. Dual medium education thus constitutes a strong programme for bilingualism and biliteracy. During the module, action research was conducted to reveal the insights and understandings gained from using the dual medium approach. The rationale of teaching using dual medium is recognizing the importance of using the mother tongue in education and especially in the foundation phase FP. The NCS clearly states that mother tongue should be the medium of instruction in the FP in all three learning areas. The language in education policy (LiEP) also promotes mother tongue and policy framework.

The PGCE Programme is a one year pre-service capping programme in the language of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework of preparing teachers. The programme is very compact but this is one route the Department of Education (DoE) has as an initial teacher training in addition to the Bachelor of Education (BEd). There are three core modules in the PGCE FP programme (professional development of teachers, teaching approaches and methods) and three learning areas (numeracy, literacy and life skills). The core modules have a strong emphasis on school management and the design and construction of audiovisual resources, assessment and

barriers to learning. One of the three modules has a unit dealing broadly with language issues in South African classrooms. The three learning areas provide content where specific issues relating to teaching literacy, numeracy and life skills are taught in the FP. So far two FP learning areas are taught in the dual medium approach, namely life skills and literacy.

2008 was the first year in which our Faculty of Education piloted the foundation phase dual medium specialization to PGCE students at UKZN. Two academics teach the literacy module: I teach the module and I am multilingual in isiZulu, SiSwati and English and my colleague is English speaking and is monolingual. We had separate isiZulu lessons and combined lessons taught in English. We had twenty three isiZulu speaking students and eleven English home language students. The English home language students were not taught in a dual medium approach. At the end of the year we had an in-house evaluation of the dual medium approach foundation phase programme and noted some challenges and possible ways of addressing them. Effectively, the dual medium isiZulu literacy module was only taught to isiZulu speaking students. 11 students only attended the English class.

We discussed with students the aims of introducing a dual medium approach in the PGCE Foundation Phase Programme and listened to how the students felt about it. The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) was discussed briefly as students were totally new to this field. Students' awareness was drawn to the additive multilingual language in the Education policy of the Education Department. IsiZulu speaking students were initially reluctant to be in the isiZulu literacy class and wanted to study in the English Literacy class. However, when the Head of School explained the rationale and purpose behind the use of the dual medium, the students agreed. We discussed the dual medium education approach as one of the ways in which we can—and must realize our LiEP.

Theoretical Framework

In defining literacy, Cook-Gumperz (1986) says,

> Literacy refers to the ability to create and understand printed messages as well as to the changes that this ability brings about. Yet, at the same time, it connotes an assessment of the usefulness of this

> ability. We see that literacy cannot be judged apart from some understanding of the social circumstances and specific historical traditions which affect the way this ability takes root in society.

Furthermore, Bloch (2005:7) states that in terms of early literacy learning, the various methods that tend to be broadly called behaviourist, skills-based or phonics methods fall under this autonomous model. This is the hegemonic model in Africa today—it involves us in talk about 'spreading literacy' like a force of good, or 'eradicating illiteracy' as if it was a disease or even 'breaking the back of illiteracy' as if it were an evil. Bloch argues that:

> … the emergent literacy or whole language perspective sees young children constructing their own literacy in personally useful and meaningful ways as part of developmental, personal, social and cultural learning processes. In the second half of the 20th Century, international research into early language and literacy learning undertaken in a range of disciplines led to revised and powerful understandings about how young children who grow up in literate settings come to be literate (2005:7).

Bloch calls for educators and parents to utilize, teach and develop learners' emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy researchers emphasize that literacy starts way back before children reach school. They advocate that if literacy is to be made meaningful it must develop emergent literacy skills of learners. The emergent literacy model is a social model because it values home and school literacy practices also know as family literacy. Mother tongue based bilingual education and the dual medium literacy approach use the mother tongue as a springboard which should then be extended to literacy in an additional language. Bloch (2005) explains that more recently, the ideological model, within which perspectives of 'emergent' literacy that deal specifically with literacy in early childhood, has come to be situated and has influenced discussion and practice in African development programmes and education for adults and children in both formal and non-formal situations.

Gee (1990) and Street (1984; 1996), prominent figures in the New Literacy Studies' approach, conceptualize literacy not simply as a set of neutral, technical skills learnt in formal education, but as social practice,

'implicated in power relations and embedded in cultural meanings and practices' (Street 1996). Gee and Street give examples to illustrate that (a) there are many forms of literacy practices, that is, cultural ways of utilizing written language; and (b) that literacy practices are always embedded in ideological processes. Street and Gee debunk the 'literacy myth' and posit that there are the 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy. Street (1996) makes the case for an 'ideological' model of literacy, which emphasizes literacy development in a local context, by stressing the effect of the socialization process in the construction of the meaning of literacy for participants. He illustrates how literacy practices are encapsulated within internal and external structures of power and embedded in competing models and assumptions about reading and writing processes, which affect the manner in which new programmes are adopted or rejected.

According to the autonomous model, literacy is identified with being able to read and write formal expository, highly edited, content-oriented, de-contextualized and non-collaborative/individualized texts. The mastery of this form of literacy is assumed to be necessary for economic development, the development of bureaucratic institutions and government. The more widely entrenched 'autonomous' model views literacy as being unconnected to any specific context. The 'ideological' model sees literacy as social and cultural in nature and forming part of people's daily life practices. It sees people as having multiple literacies rather than any one single literacy, and these are always '… varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power' (Street 2003). Skills are learned as you use them to do something personally meaningful and/or economically useful. The focus is on what people do with literacy from particular political and ideological positions rather than on what literacy can do for people, as it is found in the autonomous model.

Literature Review

According to McGuinness (2005:410),

> Reading researchers have failed to take into account the impact of the home environment, the kinds of pre-literacy skills taught at home or in pre-school, and the type of reading instruction the child

> received. She says critical environmental factors continue to be ignored even when there is abundant and consistent evidence of their importance. Home instruction in letter-sound correspondences is a major contributor in early reading success, yet this hasn't been accounted for or controlled, even though we have know this for a decade.

McGuinness decries that the emphasis is underpinned by a belief that the deficiency is in the child and not in the environment. McGuinness' critique of the danger of teaching phonological awareness exclusively and the recommendation to replace the top down approach to teaching literacy with a bottom up approach to literacy are further evidence of the inadequacy behaviourist approach to literacy. The recommended ways of teaching literacy emphasize the need for a shift of focus from teaching mechanical reading to a focus on teaching reading for meaning-making. Luke and Freebody, (1990) postulate that for someone to become fully literate a person needs coding competence, semantic competence, pragmatic competence and critical competences. None is sufficient by itself. The ideological model of literacy brings about meaningful uses of literacy as a social process as advocated by its proponents, including Gee (1990), and Street (1984 and1996).

Cummins (1979; 1991; 1996 & 2000) proposed the 'Developmental Interdependence hypothesis' whereby language learners develop a 'common underlying proficiency' for two or more languages, and transference takes place from the academic skills learned in one language to another. Similarly, literacy skills acquired in the mother tongue transfer across languages (1996:151 - 161). Proponents of mother tongue based bilingual education argue that mother tongue literacy provides a solid foundation for learning to read in the home language as well as reading in an additional language. They argue that a child who has the ability to read in his/her language plus other necessary conditions, such as exposure to print in and out of school, will successfully manage to read in an additional language. Other research conducted by South African researchers (Matjila & Pretorious 2004:4) argue that learners should be given the opportunity to develop academic language proficiency in their home languages in order to provide a sound conceptual and linguistic basis for future learning across all content subjects.

Matjila and Pretorious further explain that reading ability is constituted by decoding and comprehension. Decoding refers to the simple identification of words or the more technical aspects of the reading activity and the latter involves the overall understanding process whereby meaning is constructed within sentence units, between adjacent sentences, and across larger units of text to the meaning of the text as a whole. Matjila and Pretorious observe that literacy is, in many instances, inadequately taught by not promoting comprehension of what is read. They argue that:

> During the foundation phase (grades 1-3), children learn the letters of the alphabet and letter sound relationships. They learn to recognize the high frequency of words and read simple texts containing language and thought processes within their experiential frame of reference. By the end of grade 1, learners are estimated to be able to read over 600 words, while they are estimated to be able to understand 4000 to 6000 in spoken language (Matjila & Pretorius 2004:5).

The theoretical framework and literature review discussed so far point out the social uses of literacy within the learner's environment. Local and international literature indicates that social conceptions and interventions of literacy are a key factor in teaching literacy. This article highlights the view that literacy should be made to work for the people in order that they can get things done for themselves, unlike when learners simply demonstrate a skill but cannot use it to solve their own social and economic problems. Furthermore, the theoretical framework points out that any language can be used to teach literacy, but it is in the learners' best interest to use their mother tongue and add an additional language by adopting a dual medium or bilingual approach in teaching literacy.

Research Methodology Adopted in the Study

The introduction of a dual medium approach and its use in the Post-graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Foundation Phase programme in 2008 was accompanied by action research conducted in my class in order to find out how the dual medium approach was understood and to find out how teachers

in the field understood the importance of the home language and additional language in teaching literacy to young learners. It was also used to identify how teachers understand the National Curricula Statement (NCS) and Departmental policies including the National Reading Strategy and the Foundations for Learning Campaign on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The respondents in the study were not the PGCE students as such, but were the teachers in schools who were mentoring the students during teaching practice. The teachers were all isiZulu speaking teachers teaching isiZulu speaking learners but taught in schools that called themselves English medium schools. The schools' language policies were conflicted because teaching happened via code-switching between English and isiZulu. IsiZulu was used simultaneously with English as a language for clarifying issues. Participation in the action research project allowed mentors and mentees to engage with the issues of teaching literacy, and information was brought back to the university which in turn facilitated discussions between language teachers. PGCE students shared their newly acquired knowledge and skills with teachers and at the same time also learnt from the qualified teachers. It was an opportunity for reflection and lifelong learning.

Action research is contextualized within a critical paradigm of research and can be both quantitative and qualitative. In the research design and methodology I included specific questions that prompted respondents to discuss pedagogic approaches and socio-cultural issues in education that affect learning of literacy. Without necessarily pushing teachers to comment of aspects of their understanding of social and cultural dimensions of teaching literacy, I hoped to discover if the teachers' pedagogic knowledge base of teaching literacy included socio-cultural understanding related to teaching literacy which the theoretical framework for the study puts forward. The theoretical framework contests the 'autonomous model' of literacy and the idea of 'putting the result of fluency in English at the beginning' by recommending that it is replaced by an ideological model (Gee 1990; Street 1984; 1996).

The methods of data collection used in the study included conducting interviews conducted by isiZulu literacy student teachers with their mentors during their teaching practice. Twenty three isiZulu speaking students were assigned to interview their mentors in the schools they were placed at and were also asked to document responses and relevant information as field

notes about teaching literacy and using isiZulu in the foundation phase. A semi-structured interview questionnaire was provided to be used during interviews. Fourteen students returned with information. Selected questions are analysed below.

The interview schedule comprised the following questions:

- What is/are the home language(s) of learners?
- What is/are the language (s) that teachers use in their classrooms to teach literacy in the foundation phase and reasons?
- What is the teachers' understanding of using two languages in the Foundation Phase?
- What are the challenges of teaching literacy faced by Foundation Phase teachers in schools using isiZulu as a language of learning and teaching LoLT?

Findings

1. Language(s) used by the teachers in their classrooms

13 out of 14 reported that learners in their classes were IsiZulu mother tongue speakers and teachers use the following languages to teach literacy:

- (7) = isiZulu and English equally
- (2) = isiZulu 70% and English 30%
- (4) = isiZulu only
- (1) = No answer
- N=14

2.1 Reasons why teachers use isiZulu and English on a 50:50 ratio in the foundation phase

Respondents indicated that teachers were using isiZulu and English equally because:

- *Both languages are important.*
- *No language should be better than the other.*
- *It would be difficult to communicate with other people who live in KwaZulu-Natal if Zulu only was used because there are those who do not know isiZulu.*

- *If a child learnt both languages it might help him/her in upper classes.*
- *It is for the good of the child to know at least two languages.*

Reasons were not related to the pedagogy of teaching and developing literacy except the one respondent who said 'if a child learnt both languages it might help him/her in upper classes'. Teachers did not refer to policy but seemed to use their discretion in deciding on the language for teaching literacy but did not follow the DoE policy guidelines in the National Curriculum Statements and Foundations for Learning Campaign (DoE 2002; 2008).

2.2 Reasons why teachers use isiZulu & English on a 70:30 ratio

- *Because the child's mother tongue should not be allowed to die.*
- *A learner needs to know more about his/her own language and should not discard his/her own language.*

Even with these teachers no clear rationale, apart from ensuring the survival of isiZulu, was cited. This shows a limited understanding of using isiZulu. These were based on a pedagogic advantage. These reasons seem to border between preservation of isiZulu and gaining knowledge in one's own language. As with the preceding question, pedagogic knowledge and the DoE guidelines were not quoted.

2.3 Reasons why teachers use isiZulu only

- *Because it is important that when a child starts school he/she first learn his/her language.*
- *Because it is easier to learn another language by comparing them with the mother tongue.*
- *It is the way learning takes place.*
- *It is good for children to be taught in their mother tongue so that they may value their language.*

The responses to the question why teachers used the specified ratios of isiZulu and English when teaching do not propose any pedagogic reason. Although responses from only four respondents may seem insignificant in a

case study, four teachers with an understanding of this nature are valuable. The four teachers' responses in question 2.3 need to be nurtured and extended to other teachers through in-service programmes such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE) programmes.

The importance of mother tongue literacy and mother tongue based bilingual education should be prioritized so as to promote biliteracy in the mother tongue and in English as this is the desire of many teachers, parents and the South African Department of Education. The knowledge gap in relation to why teachers need to teach literacy in the mother tongue was very apparent in the responses. This knowledge gap needs to be addressed through teacher training. This knowledge is specifically needed by the teachers in the province and schools where the study was conducted. A thorough knowledge of teaching literacy will guide teachers in selecting appropriate approaches and a model of teaching literacy and using it correctly.

3.1 Benefits of using isiZulu for teaching reading and writing in the foundation phase

 # 8: Kungayilimaza ingane ukuthi ifunde ngesiZulu kuphela ngoba kufanele ixhumane nabanye abantu.
 # 8: It would disadvantage the child if she learns to read only because he/she needs to communicate with people who do not speak another language.

Findings show that the long-term goals supersede the goals of teaching literacy in the FP. The title of the paper suggests that teachers were concerned with the end result. Their method of getting to the end point was by concentrating on teaching the additional language literacy. The dual medium approach was accepted but it seemed that the focus was in getting to the end point by learners gaining literacy in English even if they lost it in their mother tongue. De Klerk (2002) found similar sentiments concerning English among parents and teachers in the Eastern Cape. The findings reveal that the foundation phase is the time for teaching learners to become literate. However, it seemed that learning to read and write was only for the purpose of learning the literacy skill and not seen as social and cultural in nature and forming part of people's daily life practices. Research evidence suggests that

learning a second/additional language at a younger age does not imply more or less successful learning than when it happens at an older age. In fact, learning literacy in an additional language prematurely without a sound base of the mother tongue is very detrimental. The 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) study found that grade 6 learners in South Africa were reading below the expected level in both English and their mother tongue.

3.2 Benefits of using isiZulu and English for teaching reading and writing in the foundation phase

 # 5: Noma ekhuluma kahle isiNgisi kuhle asazi naso isiZulu ngoba uma esebenza uzozidinga zombili lezi limi. Akekho umuntu ozolokhu etolika.
 # 5: Even if someone speaks English well he/she needs to know isiZulu too because in the workplace both languages will be needed. No one is going to translate for him/her.

 # 12: Umntwana uba yingcweti ngoba yizona zilimi ezisetshenziswa kakhulu lapha KwaZulu-Natali ezindaweni zokusebenza ngisho nasemphakathini uqobo.
#12: The child will become a language expert because these are the languages predominantly used in the workplace and communities in KwaZulu-Natal.

The respondents provided valid benefits for teaching reading and writing in isiZulu and English. They argued that University Education is offered in English. They added that if reading and writing was taught in both languages children would become experts in both languages. They also hoped that teaching reading and writing in isiZulu and English would end the need for translators and would foster better communication in the workplace. In my view, translators will always be necessary because in reality South Africa is a multilingual county and it is not possible for everyone to speak all the languages of South Africa. The work of translators should not be done away with. The benefit of producing language experts was one issue that showed the teachers' focus on the end point. Not all learners will be language experts *per se*, but learners need to be fluent in their home language as well as in an

additional language. The dual medium approach may adequately facilitate literacy in both languages but to become language experts learners need to acquire additional knowledge at a tertiary institution in order to become linguists and expert language practitioners.

3.3 Benefits of using isiZulu and English for teaching reading and writing in the foundation phase

Respondents indicated, among other things, that;

#14: Umfundi ukhula azi okuningi ngezilimi nanokuthi akwazi ukuqhathanisa indlela ulimi olwakheka ngayo kuzo zombili izilimi.

 # 14: A learner who knows many languages can use them to compare the structure of the two languages

It is my understanding that the foundation phase is not primarily concerned with comparison of language structures but should be mainly concerned with teaching learners how to read, write and count. The preservation of the isiZulu language is the key thing in the FP. IsiZulu does not cause confusion as other people might think. The teachers' understanding of learning a language was learning structural correctness and the preservation of isiZulu as a language. In pedagogic terms, to minimize learners' educational problems, the individual gains from the use of two languages need further exploration with teachers. The benefits of using isiZulu and English extend beyond structural forms and foster the learning process.

4. Challenges faced by teachers when teaching reading and writing in isiZulu in the foundation phase

The following responses were identified:

 # 4 Emphakathini kunabazali abangathandi ukuthi izingane zabo zifundiswe isiZulu abacabanga ukuthi isiZulu asibalukekile.

 # 14 There are parents who do not want their children to be taught isiZulu who say it is unimportant.

Teachers in the sample had accepted what the parents wanted and colluded with them without explaining that the abandonment of mother tongue literacy

is detrimental to their children's education. Parents and teachers tend to focus on the expected end point at the beginning of schooling (foundation phase) rather than understanding how children should get there. In addition to the teachers' and parents' understanding, lack of study material, preference for the dual medium approach in the foundation phase over mother tongue instruction teaching of numeracy in the PGCE foundation phase was constrained by a shortage of staff fluent in isiZulu and English. Since numeracy is taught by a monolingual English speaking academic—therefore, an intervention in that area is needed.

Ways of Addressing the Challenges Faced in Teaching Reading and Writing in the Foundation Phase

1. Training of Bilingual Teachers

It was observed in the National Reading Strategy (NRS) that teachers are not adequately trained to teach literacy in the mother tongue and in additional languages. The respondents in the study strongly argued that the training of qualified bilingual teachers was a way of resolving the challenges stated in the preceding section. The reason was that teachers who are able to teach learners in their mother tongue or first language would alleviate the problems associated with reading and writing in the foundation phase. With findings of the study, I add that teachers who are adequately equipped to teach in the mother tongue and in an additional language will greatly improve teaching of literacy and numeracy skills. This reiterates the view that additive bilingualism is an amenable approach to resolving literacy problems, all other things being equal. Bilingual teachers are an invaluable asset because they can teach in two languages. Dual medium education and additive bilingualism add to raising the status of isiZulu by making it a language that can facilitate the acquisition of literacy skills.

2. Provision of isiZulu Learning Materials

The challenge of the lack of learning materials may be addressed through a concerted effort between the Department of Education and publishers. Local publishers have materials for teaching literacy in African languages but need

to market them vigorously. The Department of Education (DoE) must instruct schools to order these materials for them to use to teach literacy and further invite local publishers to publish teaching materials in isiZulu and support schools in acquiring those materials in isiZulu and other South African languages. Selected terminology and concepts for teaching literacy and life skills in the ECD have been translated during 2008 and 2009 through the South Africa- Norway Tertiary Education Development Program (SANTED), a funded project.

3. Correcting the Misunderstanding that the Dual Medium Approach can Replace Mother Tongue Literacy

It was noted in the findings that pedagogical and conceptual confusion exists among teachers and parents in that they expect that by imitating the end point at the beginning of schooling, learners will become biliterate in isiZulu and English. This assumption is questionable since it assumes that a dual medium approach for literacy instruction may be substituted for mother tongue instruction. Teaching English very early alongside the mother tongue at the foundation phase does not guarantee that learners will eventually become biliterate in English and isiZulu. There is no evidence that the mother tongue retards the learning of English. Instead, as maintained in the common underlying proficiency (CUP) model of the interdependence hypothesis, there is an underlying proficiency in every learner that learning an additional language can be accelerated if learners are very proficient and literate in their mother tongue. Learners develop a 'common underlying proficiency' for two or more languages, and transference takes place from the academic skills learned in one language to another. Similarly, literacy skills acquired in the mother tongue can transfer across languages (Baker 1996:151 - 161). Research indicates that the best model of teaching literacy is by teaching mother tongue literacy as the basis. The dual medium should be based on mother tongue foundations. Workshops for teachers on mother tongue based literacy instruction and campaigns in the province, in partnership with the KwaZulu-Natal Education Department, are recommended to correct the above misunderstanding.

Conclusion

Within the South African context, it has become clear that the lack of mother tongue literacy has compromised learners in ways that have led to low reading skills among learners in levels of learning including tertiary education. The lack of a solid foundation level in mother tongue literacy is detrimental for learners' future reading ability. Using our understanding of Cummins' Development Interdependence and other insights of authors such as Gee (1990), Street (1984; 1996), Cummins (1979; 1991; 1996 & 2000), McGuinness (2005), Alexander (2000 & 2009), Adegbija (1994), and Bloch (2005), there is wide consensus on the value of teaching literacy using the social contexts of learners and especially in the home language of the learners. Literacy in an additional language should also be equally and properly taught using the correct teaching methods. Data in the current study indicates that nine out of fourteen teachers taught literacy in a dual medium because of the pedagogic advantages of teaching literacy in two languages accrued to it (See Section 2.3 of this article). Cummins (1979) fully supports and explains the advantages of literacy taught in the home language and an additional language through the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (DIH). Although some teachers were aware of the advantages of literacy taught in the home language, they were in a dilemma due to the hegemony and high demand for English. However, this article argues that the demand should be accompanied with appropriate teaching of an additional language built on a firm foundation of literacy in the mother tongue. The social approach to literacy is amenable to the findings of the study and to the DIH theory.

The findings of the study concur with Alexander's 2009 insights concerning the failures of mother tongue medium teaching across all phases of education, except in a few cases, suggesting that 'mother tongue based bilingual education is the future of all education in a globalizing world'. In spite of the lack of adequate knowledge of the benefits of mother tongue literacy, teachers in the current study preferred teaching literacy in a dual medium over teaching literacy in the mother tongue. Sentiments expressed by the teachers are supported by Alexander (2009), who observes that there is growing consensus among applied language scholars that in future the English language is bound to be an inescapable component on any individual's linguistic repertoire. Dual medium education is essentially a model of attaining biliteracy desired by teachers and other applied language

scholars concerning any individual's language repertoire. The DoE is presently considering the introduction of English in grade 1 whilst also considering the strengths of mother tongue based bilingual education.

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