

English Second Language Pedagogy and its Effectiveness in the Rural Milieu of Namibia's Kavango East Region

Natalia S. Intja, Sitemo R. Mufenda, Bilha, K. Simuketa

Department of Intermediate and Vocational Education, University of Namibia

Abstract: After Namibia gained independence, there was a move towards an education for all. This meant that Namibians had to baptize a certain language as their official language. Namibians opted for English as the official language because it was more uniting than using a certain local language. Using a local language as the *lingua franca* would have empowered one ethnic grouping at the expense of others. In line with the adoption of English as the official language, the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture began implementing English as a medium of instruction in all state schools and schools subsidized by government. Undoubtedly this move seems promising for the Namibian education sector but bring with it several challenges, particularly in rural areas. The study employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The initial target population of this study was all learners and English language teachers in the rural milieu of Kavango East. However due to numerous constraints, the study comprised of 4 teachers from 2 rural schools of the Kavango East Region. Convenience sampling technique was ideal for this study as not all rural schools were being accessible to the researchers due to economic constraints. Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview guides were used in the study. Inductive analysis was used in the study to derive concepts from data. Collected data were descriptively analysed and interpreted question by question. Findings were reported/ presented according to emerging themes. The findings in this study should serve as a wake up for the education ministry to ensure that advisory services are provided to teachers. There is an urgent need for government to invest more into building of classrooms to reduce over crowdedness, more budgetary allocations are needed to equip schools with ICT tools that will advance teaching and learning in the rural schools of Kavango East. Finally, this study recommends capacity building workshops for English teachers at least twice a year as this may equip them with the pedagogical skills to navigate their daily English classroom challenges.

Keywords: Pedagogy, English Second Language, Rural Milieu, Kavango East Region, Namibia, *lingua franca*

I. INTRODUCTION

After Namibia gained independence, there was a move towards an education for all. This meant that Namibians had to baptize a certain language as their official language. Namibians opted for English as the official language because it was more uniting than using a certain local language. Using a local language as the *lingua franca* would have empowered one ethnic grouping at the expense of others. In line with the adoption of English as the official language, the Ministry of

Education, Arts, Sports and Culture began implementing English as a medium of instruction in all state schools and schools subsidized by government (Jansen, 1995). This directive led to a rollercoaster of emotions among Namibians since English was foreign and only a few Namibians could speak it. Majority of the teachers were expected to teach in a language that they were not fully proficient in. Namibian learners who were accustomed to their native languages were going to learn in a new language. Studies on the impact of English as the official language in Namibia have been conducted before, although recommendations were not systematically followed up and implemented. The apparent effects are being manifested by the low English language proficiency of Namibian teachers and the impact this has had on the general academic performance of learners in Grade 10 and 12 national examinations.

The English language learning has become state-mandated in many countries despite heated debates on the linguistic, economic, social and cultural benefits and drawbacks in this policy (Crystal, 2012). Undoubtedly this move seems promising for the Namibian education sector but bring with it several challenges, particularly in rural areas. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, classroom size, poor teacher training and support from stakeholders are some factors frequently associated with hampering English teaching and learning in rural schools. The situation in rural schools was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Selim and Tasneen (2016) stated that teaching English as a second language becomes more difficult and challenging to the teachers when it is done in areas where there is little background knowledge of English as a language. Thus, absence of social interactions in English outside the classroom increases the burden of English teachers in rural schools. One of the major challenges in teaching English in the rural setting is the lack of resources that stimulate learning, too often teachers depend on the inadequate materials to propel learning. The challenge of teaching and learning English is further aggravated by misconceptions of the community members who air sentiments that English is the most difficult subject in school, most learners learn English in panic mode because of such sentiments.

In recent years, Namibian national examination results have shown a decline in the number of learners that qualify to

institutions of higher learning due to bad grades in the English as a second language subject. This study seeks to identify the obstructions faced by English teachers in rural primary schools. Once such problems are identified then education stakeholders will come up with amicable solutions to put strong measures in place to groom learners in a way that promotes their general English proficiency level from primary school all the way up to university level.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In Namibia the latest study was conducted in 2013 by Lumbu. Although none of these studies were conducted at the Grade 5 level. Grade 5 is a significant grade as it serves as an intermediary between lower primary and upper primary education. Lumbu (2013) conducted a study on the constraints perceived and encountered by Grade 10 teachers in teaching English as a second language in rural combined schools of the Oshana region. A study of this magnitude needed to be undertaken in the Kavango East Region too.

A. *The Aspect of Facilities*

Igbemi (2011) a Nigerian scholar conducted a study on constraints in teacher education and effects in teaching and learning home economics and she concluded that the following were the most constraints: facilities and equipment, funding, teachers' welfare, entry qualifications into teaching training programmes and crowded classrooms. Lack of facilities and equipment hampers effective teaching, while lack of funding in institutions has left them with dilapidated and run-down structures. This study will explore the constraints in Kavango East schools and try to determine if they are related to the ones that were discovered by Igbemi.

B. *Inadequate Literature on English Pedagogy and Effectiveness in the Rural Milieu*

Nyathi (1999) conducted a study on constraints in English teaching in the Grade 11 and 12 Higher/International General Certificate of Secondary Education (H/IGSCE). While there is knowledge on constraints perceived by teachers in the Grade 10-12 level, there is no data on the constraints perceived and encountered by primary school teachers in teaching English as a second language. This study, therefore, seeks to find more information on constraints encountered and perceived by Grade 5 English as a second language teachers in rural schools.

C. *Classroom Sizes*

A study conducted by Nawala (2005) on the Strategic Plan for the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP) backs up claims that the learner-teacher ratio influences teaching and learning. Learner performance suffers when the learner-teacher ratio is extremely high. The study also discovered that in Namibia, the learner-teacher ratio is usually around 1:35, which makes it difficult for many teachers to effectively teach such large classrooms. According to the study, a small reduction in classroom size would relieve teacher stress and eventually result in effective teaching and

good results.

D. *Limited Classroom Practice in the English Language*

In a study report, Abebe & Davidson (2012), the authors noted that because students only use the daily 35-minute allotted time for English lessons to speak the language intensively, limited classroom English language practice poses additional instructional problem for English teachers. According to the authors, while students are learning other subjects, they move between languages based on which one they are most comfortable with. Additionally, the teachers of the other subjects sometimes fluctuate between using English and their native tongue, either because they are not fluent in English or to help the students comprehend the material better.

E. *English Language Proficiency Among Teachers*

The proficiency level of teachers in the specific subjects taught have an impact on the general academic performance of the learners. Kisting (2011) reports on a 2011 statewide survey undertaken by the Ministry of Education to assess Namibian teachers' English language competency. An English language exam was administered to 23000 teachers from all schools in Namibia as part of the survey. According to preliminary findings leaked to the local media, more than 70% of teachers in the senior secondary phase were unable to read and write basic English, 63% in the junior secondary phase were not sufficiently proficient in English, and 52% of lower primary teachers struggled with the subject and about 61 per cent faced English language difficulties.

Kisting (2011) coverage of the interim report expounds that 850 teachers scored between 0% and 52% ('pre-intermediate'), 10 094 scored between 53% and 74% ('intermediate'), and 4 145 scored between 75% and 92% ('advanced'). Only 561 people scored between 93 and 100 percent. The exam included a comprehension element, a language usage section, and a writing category in which teachers were required to compose four complete sentences. The test did not assess listening, speaking, or pronunciation abilities.

The report, Kisting (2011), claimed that the teachers in the 'advanced' category battled with capital letters, subject-verb agreement, singular and plural forms, articles and the use of full stops. Teachers were also reported as lacking skills in critical thinking and discourse analysis.

The report further states that "it was also apparent that those [teachers] who scored poorly in the reading and language use sections also performed poorly in the writing section" (p. 2). Kisting argued that, "there was strong evidence that this low performance of teachers and other educators overall has a negative impact on learners' performance in English and all other subjects." Some teachers, the report states, struggled "to fill in personal data required on the front of the answer sheet". The report emphasised that there was "much work to be done to upgrade teachers' English abilities, specifically reading,

comprehension, specific fossilised grammar features and punctuation errors” (p. 1-2). According to the report, younger teachers were more proficient in English than older teachers, while those who were better qualified also read, wrote and spoke better English.

Studies on the constraints regarding English pedagogy constraints have been carried out before, but only on Secondary School teachers. Lumbu’s (2013) study is the latest in Namibia. Since 2013 numerous education reforms have taken place (such as the syllabi, curriculum, the introduction of the English Language Proficiency Programme (ELPP) and the introduction of the Namibian Advanced Subsidiary Level. While there is some knowledge on constraints encountered by Secondary School teachers in the English pedagogy, there is little knowledge on the effectiveness of English pedagogy in the rural setting of Namibia. This study, therefore, sought to provide an insight of challenges perceived and faced by English teachers in the rural milieu of the Kavango East region.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Creswell & Clark (2011) state that when used in combination, quantitative and qualitative methods “complement each other and provide a more complete picture of the research problem.” The qualitative data assisted broadening understanding of the quantitative data. It enabled the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of the English as a second language pedagogy in the rural milieu from learners and teachers themselves. The initial target population of this study was all learners and English language teachers in the rural milieu of Kavango East. However due to numerous constraints, the study comprised of 4 teachers from 2 rural schools of the Kavango East Region. The 4 teachers from 2 schools were the characteristically representative of the Kavango East rural school teaching population. Convenience sampling technique was ideal for this study as not all rural schools were being accessible to the researchers due to economic constraints. The 2 Schools, 4 teachers were selected based on their accessibility to the researchers.

Questionnaire and interviews were ideal for the study. Open-ended questionnaires contained questions that were answered by the participants. Questionnaires accessed the respondents’ perceptions, opinion, views and constraints regarding English pedagogy in rural schools. Interviews too were used in this study to gather information, Semi-structured interview were utilised to gain a detailed understanding of the participants’ beliefs and perceptions about the topic under study. Interviews are believed to be an ideal source of information, Greeff (2011) stresses that semi-structured interviews give the researcher and participants much more flexibility where the researcher is able to follow up particular interesting avenues that emerge in the interview while the participant is able to give a fuller picture.

Participating teachers and learners filled in questionnaires

and answered interview questions. The researchers then collected the data collected for further analysis. Inductive analysis was used in the study to derive concepts from data. The method digs deep into understanding the data and produce findings to answer the research questions. Collected data were descriptively analysed and interpreted question by question. Findings were reported/ presented according to emerging themes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Age Category of Participants

The participants comprised of 50% male and 50% female. In terms of age, the findings showed that 75% of the participants were in the category 40 years and less, 25 % were in the age range of 41-50 years. None of the participants were above 60 years of age, meaning all participants are still in active teaching service and would share information vital for the study.

B. Teaching Experience

Data on the teaching experience of participants was collected and the results revealed that 50% of the participants had 6-10-year experience of teaching English in the rural setting. 25% of the participants had over 10-year experience while the remaining 25% only taught for 2 years or less. These results indicate that majority of the participants have experience in teaching English in the rural milieu. Ceka and Murati (2016) drew attention to the importance of teaching experience in teaching English, emphasizing that more skills are acquired as teachers gain more years of experience.

C. Level of Participants’ Educational Qualification

The data collected showed that majority (75%) of the participants held a Bachelor of Education (Honours) from the University of Namibia. Data further indicated that 25% of the participants had Diplomas from Colleges of Education (predecessor of some University of Namibia campuses). This indicates that the English language teachers in rural Kavango East are qualified enough to teach the subject and their qualifications may not be considered to impede the English pedagogy in rural schools. A study by Harris (2011) “Language in schools in Namibia: The missing link in educational achievement” indicate a similar phenomenon. In the study, Harris (2011) proved that educational qualification of teachers was not a factor to the challenges that the English teachers and learners faced in the country.

D. Lack of Resources for Teaching and Learning

The findings revealed that all study participants agreed that they encountered challenges of limited resources for teaching and learning in their specific schools. They further shared that their schools lacked adequate textbooks, reading materials, library as well as computers to integrate ICT into their lessons. This has adverse effects on the English pedagogy in rural schools as most of the teachers are unable to teach effectively. Sharing of study materials such as textbooks

during English lessons was further made impossible by Covid-19 regulations of social distancing. To overcome such impediments, more funding of resources should be done by the line ministry. Akasha (2013) stresses that English teachers should be provided with relevant teaching materials such as magazines, newspapers, as well as graphic and visual resources to aid teaching.

E. Overcrowded Classrooms

Over 75% of the participants indicated that their classrooms were overcrowded with number of learners ranging from 37 to 45. According to ETSIP (2016) The teacher-learner ratio in Namibia is 1:35. Overcrowded classrooms are a huge challenge for English teachers in rural Kavango because the inadequate learning materials are shared by a large number of learners. Large classrooms are difficult to control as Davilla (2019) revealed in his study that overcrowded classrooms are stressful, overwhelming and discouraging.

F. Lack of Support from the Ministry of Education

All participants agreed that they were not receiving adequate advisory services from the regional directorate of education. Data collected shows that subject advisors rarely visit schools to reinforce and offer guidance to teachers. Barber and King (2016) argued that a pedagogy shift has occurred due to the digital environment. Thus subject advisors are expected to offer expert advice to teachers, in areas that will enhance creativity, motivation, networking, innovation and problem solving. The participants indicated that they have not attended a workshop on English teaching in a very long time. Lack of workshops is a constraint to effective English pedagogy in rural Kavango East.

G. Learners' Lack of Motivation and Negative Attitude Towards English

Data reveals that 50% of the participants agreed that learners lack motivation in English and hence, have negative attitude towards the subject. During interviews with participants it was discovered that most of their learners lacked intrinsic and self-driven motivation to participate in class and that learners mostly participate after being coerced by teachers on multiple occasions. Mawere (2012) in a study on learning difficulties in English language, the researcher established that it is difficult for learners to master a language without maximum commitment to it. This study discovered that it is difficult for a learner to be competent in English without putting much emphasis on reading, studying and writing.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the study, it is safe to conclude that the English pedagogy in Kavango East of Namibia is faced with numerous teaching-learning challenges such as limited teaching and learning resources, overcrowded classrooms, lack of workshops, lack of adequate support such as advisory services from the regional directorate of education and learners' lack of motivation and negative attitude towards

English. Given that the study area is rural and have limited access to English language media. It will be difficult for teachers to mediate and normalise the situation on their own. The findings in this study should serve as a wake up for the education ministry to ensure that advisory services are provided to teachers. There is an urgent need for government to invest more into building of classrooms to reduce over crowdedness, more budgetary allocations are needed to equip schools with ICT tools that will advance teaching and learning in the rural schools of Kavango East. Finally, this study recommends capacity building workshops for English teachers at least twice a year as this may equip them with the pedagogical skills to navigate their daily English classroom challenges.

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